

Where the Emden Met Her Fate

Spectator Tells of Cocos Island Fight

A resident of Cocos Island, who was a spectator of the fight between the Sydney and the Emden, has sent the following interesting account to his brother in Melbourne:-

“Things were very tranquil from then till war broke out, when we were pretty certain we would be visited by the enemy, but time passed and still he did not appear until the morning of November 9.

At 6.a.m. we saw a cruiser racing through the Heads. Just at first we thought it was a Britisher with four funnels, but someone on the roof with a good pair of glasses saw that a fourth funnel was a dummy, composed of an air-chute tied to the foremast.

Then we knew it was all 'up', especially as by this time the cruiser had dropped a pinnace, which was making all speed for the jetty, towing two boats with 20 men and two maxims in each. The pinnace also carried two maxims. All the guns were trained on the island. We walked to the jetty to see them land. They split into three parties, each under an officer and doubled off in different directions, taking no notice of us.

One party arrested our native servants, and another made straight for the wireless mast. The third went towards the office, but stopped on their way on running into one of our fellows.

The officer said to him, ‘Ve haf had blenty trouble mit your wireless and cables.’

“Our man. -’Yes’

“Officer.-Vere is de vireless, if you please?”

“Our Man.- ‘Over there where the mast is.’

“Officer.-’Yes, and vere is de house of Herr Director?”

“Our man pointed it out.

“‘All ride, tanks very much.’ They then ran on and left him.

But not for long, as we were all soon mustered, some of the fellows from their beds and baths, and lined up near the office under an armed guard and counted. In the mean time the wireless party were preparing to blow up the mast, and some of our guards were told off to smash up the instrument-rooms and workshop, which they did most thoroughly.

About 7 o’clock we were ordered to go into the boatshed on the beach, to be out of the way of the falling mast. Somebody asked the first Lieutenant, von Muecke if he would make the mast fall away from the cement tennis courts, which he did.

Preparatory to their arrival on shore we had sent out distress signals by wireless and had also advised our adjacent stations by cable. We had no sooner reached the boatshed, on which the German had trained a maxim, when off went the first explosion. The mast held

until the third explosion, when 176ft. of timber toppled to the ground. A few minutes later they blew up our store, containing a little spare cable and some underrunning gear. They then set fire to the cable and gear, and it burned merrily for the rest of the day.

Wrecking the Office

The work of wrecking the office still continued, large, unwieldy axes being used. Even the clocks were destroyed. The pinnace during this time was busy trying to cut our cables about 100 yards from the beach, in full view of us. We were very amused at seeing them cut a dummy shore-end by mistake.

When they came ashore the Officer said, "Ve haf left you von cable," but he was wrong; they had only cut Perth section and a dummy.

"By this time we were feeling hot, thirsty and hungry. I had on a singlet and sarong, with a dressing gown over all. They wouldn't let us have any food, breakfastless as we were; only some water to drink. Altogether they were very good to us, and none of us lost much in the way of personal possessions.

At about 9.a.m. they let us have some coffee and sandwiches. At 20 minutes past 9 a.m., they had done their worst, and were recalled by the Emden's siren. They released us and we went to the jetty to see them off. They returned all our guns, &c., before leaving, about 10 shot-guns and a few revolvers.

I then went to look at the office. Talk about a bull in a crockery shop! Tables, instruments, chairs, electric lights, wire, glass, clocks were smashed to atoms, and the ruins lay about waist deep on the floor.

The Fight Begins

"I then went down to the West point of the island to see the Emden depart. When I got there, she had weighed anchor and was putting out to sea. She had hauled down her dummy funnel; apparently she had scented trouble. The pinnace and boats were still in the lagoon. She had not gone 500 yards before she had the German flag to the truck of each mast, and immediately afterwards I heard "boom! boom!" just like distant thunder. A few seconds later a huge spout of water shot up about a mile over the Emden. Then I realized what I had joked about before was coming true - we were going to see the "Battle of Cocos."

I ran along to the ocean side of the island so as to get a view of both ships, and there, about five miles out, I saw a four-funneled cruiser cutting out the pace at a great speed, and enveloped in dense black smoke. The Emden responded and put on speed. It was a sight to see her broadside go off - five 4.1 in. guns - all at once, as though fired by one trigger, again and again, with surprising swiftness. We thought that the Britisher

was the---, which the Germans thought was somewhere around. This probably accounts for their very hurried destruction of our office, &c..

We continued to watch the fight for some 15 minutes, when it suddenly struck us that the Germans on the boats would be returning to the island and would probably not be so genial as when they left. However, we continued to watch the fight until found by them and ordered back to the boatshed.

"The Emden's fire at first was excellent, but both the shooting and the quality of the shells fell off after a while. The British fire was very erratic at first - her main range-finder, as we afterwards learned, having been carried away during the first few minutes - but afterwards it improved.

Emden's Manoeuvres

The Emden tried to get nearer our ship, and, seeing there was no hope, she made a sudden bolt to the northward, but our ship did a fine sprint across the horizon, and headed her back, thus reversing positions - the Emden now being to windward. The Emden's manoeuvres were very easy to follow, as she was using the best Welsh coal, which made very little smoke, whereas our ship was enveloped all the time in dense black smoke, which gave one the impression that she was on fire.

When our ship got the range, we saw a funnel of the Emden's crumple up. She went away stern on, and when she manoeuvred round again we were delighted to see another funnel had gone. She made valiant attempts to get close to our ship, as our guns apparently outranged hers. A few minutes afterwards, when she was bow on to our ship, and at right angles to us, we saw a shell that seemed to hit the foot of her foremast, tear it out and topple it overboard. The Emden then swung away to port, still blazing merrily at our ship, until a shell struck her aft, and she burst into flames and dense white smoke. The ships were now a long way off, and were gradually going over the horizon. We still kept our glasses on them until recalled by the destroying party.

Martial Law

"The Germans put us in the shed again, doubled the guard, flew the German flag, and proclaimed martial law. The Germans ashore were sure that the Emden would return, but said that if she did not do so by nightfall, they would leave in the in a small schooner of 97 tons belonging to the Rosses, who own the islands. The Emden did not return, so off they went at 6 p.m., taking two months' provisions, as much water as possible, 24 dozen sodas, and five dozen hiranos. The Sydney came in next morning, having been only hit twice. One shot killed three and wounded 14. She left next day, after visiting North Keeling again and picking up the wounded Germans. The Keeling is 14 3/4 miles from us. Captain Mueller and the Kaiser's nephew were unhurt.

On November 13, the ----- came down from Columbo to look around , and on the 16th our boat the patrol came in, and is leaving on November 22. On November 18 the gunboat --- Arrived, and is staying some time to look after us and salve the Emden's gear."

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