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Marauders of the Sea, German Armed Merchant Raiders During World War I

Raiders

### *Dresden*

When war began, *Dresden*, a light cruiser of 3,664 tons, fitted with 10 by 10.5 cm guns, and some of a smaller calibre, also had 2 submerged torpedo tubes, one each on the port and starboard sides, was in company with *Karlsruhe* in the West Indies. For a period of seven months she presented problems for the British naval authorities. *Dresden* slipped down the eastern seaboard of South America, rounded Cape Horn to sail northwards along the Chilean coastline.

Eventually *Dresden* was run down by the British cruisers *Glasgow* and *Kent*, assisted by the auxiliary cruiser *Orama*, and was sunk at Juan Fernandez on March 15 1915, about 400 miles westward of Valpariso. She had claimed but four victims, totaling 12,960 tons, however this ship had succeeded in tying down British naval forces far from home, which could have been far better employed around the British Isles.

### *Leipzig*

A three funneled light cruiser with a similar armament to *Dresden*, *Leipzig* was a member of the German Far Eastern Squadron. Between the 1st. of August, and the 8th of December 1914, she dispatched four ships totaling 15,279 tons, before being sunk by ships of the Royal Navy at the Battle of Falkland Islands.

### *Nurnberg*

Another light cruiser also with three funnels, she carried the same armament as *Dresden* and *Leipzig*, but this ship had no success as a raider, and joined *Leipzig* in being sunk by the Royal Navy in the Falkland Islands. About 350 crew members including 60 Reservists who had been recruited from Germans residing in Hawaii, died in this action, leaving only twelve to be rescued from the sea, and five of these died aboard *HMS Kent*.

### **Fast passenger ships converted into Armed Merchant Ships**

This small group of ships on the 4th. of August 1914, were, either at sea, in foreign ports, or had slipped out of Germany before any blockade could be set in place.

declared war on Germany, authorities attempted to seize *Comoran*, but her crew scuttled the ship on the 7th. of April 1917, but seven crew members died as a result of this action.

### ***Geier***

A cargo ship of almost 5,000 tons, with a speed of 11.5 knots, had been owned by the British and Foreign Steam Ship Company Limited of Liverpool, and named *Saint Theodore*.

She was captured by *Moewe* on the 12th. of December 1916, and fitted out with 2 by 5.2 cm guns mounted alongside number 2 hold on the main deck, one to port, and one to starboard.

Under Kapitanleutnant Wolf, *Geier* had but a short career, accounting for the Canadian barque *Jean*, of 215 tons, and one other small sailing vessel.

This Armed Raider was scuttled off Ilha da Trinade on the 14th. of February 1916.

### ***Iltis***

Launched as *Gutenfels* in November 1905, this 5,528 ton ship of 11 knots was seized by the British in Alexandra harbour in 1914.

The following year she was sold to the Anglo Saxon Petroleum Company of London and renamed *Turritella*. On the 27th. of January 1917, the *Wolf* captured her, she was now given her third name of *Iltis*, and equipped at sea with a single 5.2 cm gun, and despatched off Aden to lay mines in the sealanes off that port.

Such are the fortunes of war, over a period of almost three years, this ship was to have been German, then British, and then back to German ownership, but this last change was only to be short lived.

When challenged by HMS *Odin*, west of Aden, *Iltis* was scuttled to prevent her ownership changing yet again, she enjoyed a life of only 12 years in all, finally coming to an ignominious end by meeting up with HMS *Odin*.

### ***Leopard***

Launched at Newcastle in UK, in 1912, as *Yarrowdale*, for the Mackill Steam Ship Company Limited of Glasgow, with a registered tonnage of 4,652 tons, and a speed of 13 knots.

*Moewe*, the Armed Merchant Raider had captured her on the 11th. of November 1916, and putting a prize crew onboard she was sailed back to Germany, to be fitted out as *Leopard*, an Armed Raider, with 5 by 15cm guns, plus two torpedo tubes, she now sailed in her new role as a very formidable fighting ship on the 16th. of March 1917, pretending to be the *Norwegian Rena*.

The Norwegian flag and NORGE were painted on both sides of her hull.

On the very first day that *Leopard* ventured to sea as a Raider, she was stopped by the cruiser *HMS Achilles*, and ordered to proceed west by south for inspection by *Dundee*, an Armed Boarding Steamer.

Commander Selwyn Day in *Dundee* carried but one 4 inch gun, and a three pounder, he sent over a boarding party, and then lengthy signals passed between the two vessels. Day became suspicious, and the Raider then launched two torpedoes, both passed astern of *Dundee*, at a range of only 1,200 yards. Day opened fire, and succeeded in destroying most of the Raider's guns, in fact, 70 shells had been fired by *Dundee*, before *Leopard* was able to reply.

*Achilles* alerted by the sound of gunfire, arrived on the scene at 0400 (4 AM) to join in the fray, and opened fire at a range of 5,300 yards, she also fired a torpedo which struck *Leopard* in the