

Historical Snapshots- Esquimalt Municipal Archives

After the Battle, H.M.S. *Kent* visits Esquimalt



H.M.S. *Kent*

On 1 November 1914, the Royal Navy suffered a major war loss to the German Far East Squadron commanded by Admiral Von Spee at Coronel in the southwest Pacific. The British ships had been silhouetted against the sun making them easy targets for the German guns. They felt that the Germans would head for the Atlantic and then make an attempt to head back to Europe. Von Spee proved their assumption correct, leaving the Pacific. He made a fatal error when he decided to attack the tiny and undefended British coaling station on East Falkland Island. Despite its small size this facility was important - the Royal Navy needed coal for their ships and were not about to allow its attack or capture.

A mere ten days after Coronel, the British took steps to deal with the perceived German threat sending major reinforcements to the South Atlantic and taking steps to defend Port Stanley .The British fleet arrived at Port Stanley on 7 December 1914, and the next morning while they were re-coaling, the lookouts on the German cruisers spotted the masts of the British Dreadnaughts. The Germans ran knowing they were badly outclassed but were soon caught - losses were heavy.

A light cruiser, the H.M.S. Kent had played a significant role in the sinking of the S.M.S. Nurnberg during the battle, and along with the H.M.S. Glasgow, another cruiser, Kent searched for the German cruiser Dresden. The latter had fled during the battle. After a lengthy search, the British ships cornered Dresden hiding amidst some islands off Cape Horn. The Germans sank their ship rather than have it captured. The Kent had suffered battle damage and badly needed more routine maintenance. Esquimalt, a `British' port with the facilities needed, though a considerable distance from Cape Horn, was a logical choice. Royal Navy ships could not enter U.S. dockyards due to that nation being neutral at this time.

Unexpectedly Esquimalt residents were soon able to see physical evidence of the battle first -hand when the H.M.S. Kent entered Esquimalt Harbour in May 1915.

This Fleming Brothers photo shows the vessel at anchor in Esquimalt Harbour. On the original print in the Esquimalt Archives collection, the battle damage is very apparent.

