

MALTA AND THE GERMAN NAVY – A POSTAL HISTORY CONNECTION

By Giovanni Bonello LL.D.

Three German warships made history during the first world war: the *Emden*, the *Goeben* and the *Breslau*. They all have an interesting Maltese connection, directly, or through a postal history linkage.

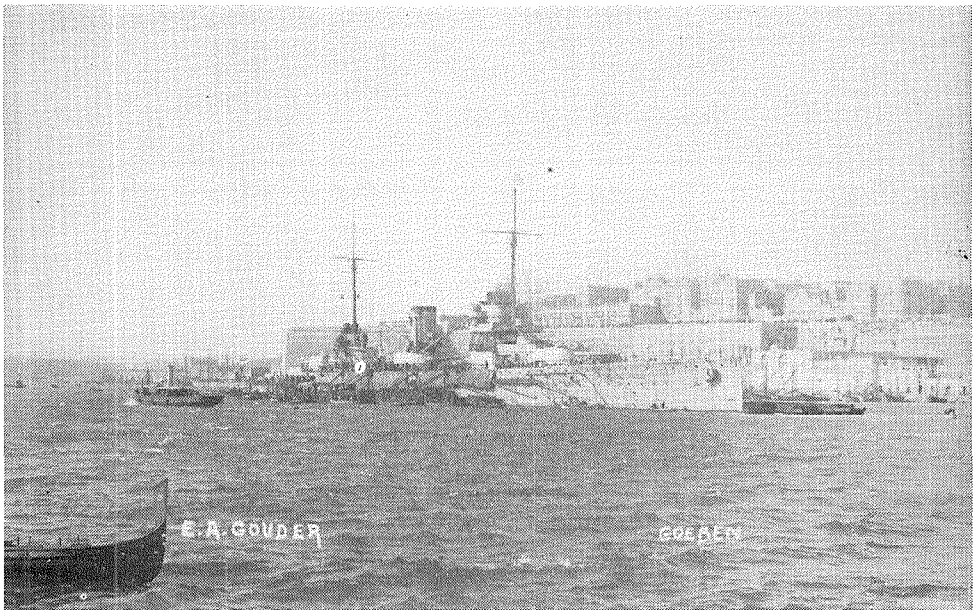


Fig.1 The Goeben coaling in the Grand Harbour on November 12, 1912

The *Breslau* arrived in Malta for coaling on November 11, 1912. She was followed the next day by the brand new *Goeben*, then on her maiden voyage. The arrival in Malta of this powerful record-breaking cruiser was greeted by thousands of British seamen and Maltese who lined the Grand Harbour to admire that new wonder of naval engineering.

I have been unable to confirm that the *Emden* ever visited Malta. Very likely she did not. Her connection with Malta is more of a postal history nature.

I am pleased to publish two rare contemporary photos of the *Goeben* and the *Breslau* in the Grand Harbour (Fig. 1 and 2) and a picture of the *Emden* taken elsewhere (Fig. 3).

After their history-making epics, the crews of these three German warships fell

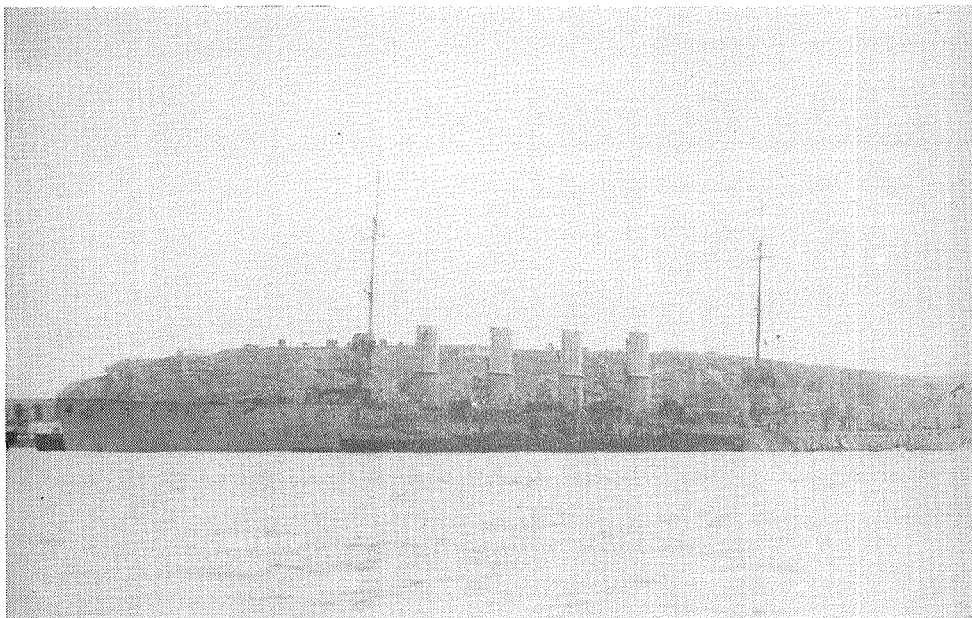


Fig.2 The Breslau coaling in the Grand Harbour on November 11, 1912

into allied hands. Those of the *Breslau* and the *Emden* were interned in Malta for the duration of the hostilities. Prisoner of War mail from Malta by the officers and men of the *Emden* and the *Breslau* are highly valued by collectors.

I am publishing a prisoner of war postcard from a crew member of the *Emden* (Fig.4) and a letter from a seaman of the *Breslau* (Fig. 5), both detained in Fort Salvatore. I do not believe that the crew of the *Goeben* was interned in Malta and I have not, personally, come across any correspondence originating in Malta from any of its crew.

Prinz Franz Joseph of Hohenzollern, a brother to the Queen of Portugal and a high ranking officer of the *Emden*, has left a vivid description of his internment in Malta and of the life here of his fellow prisoners of war from the *Emden* and *Breslau*. His memoirs were serialised in the Malta Study Circle's *Newsletter* (Vol. 9, No 6 & 9; Vol. 10 No 2; Vol. 12 No 4 & 6).

The exploits of the three German warships are to be found in every history of the Great War. The *Emden* (completed in 1912, a main armament of twelve 4.1 inch guns and a speed of 27.5 knots) left the Pacific Fleet for service in the Indian Ocean. In a fortnight she sunk 13 allied ships; in all, 70,000 tons of allied shipping in seven weeks. At Madras, India, she set fire to half a million tons of petroleum. For three months all efforts by the allied navies to catch up with her were foiled. She was eventually destroyed by the Australian cruiser *Sydney* on November 9, 1914 (Fig. 6).

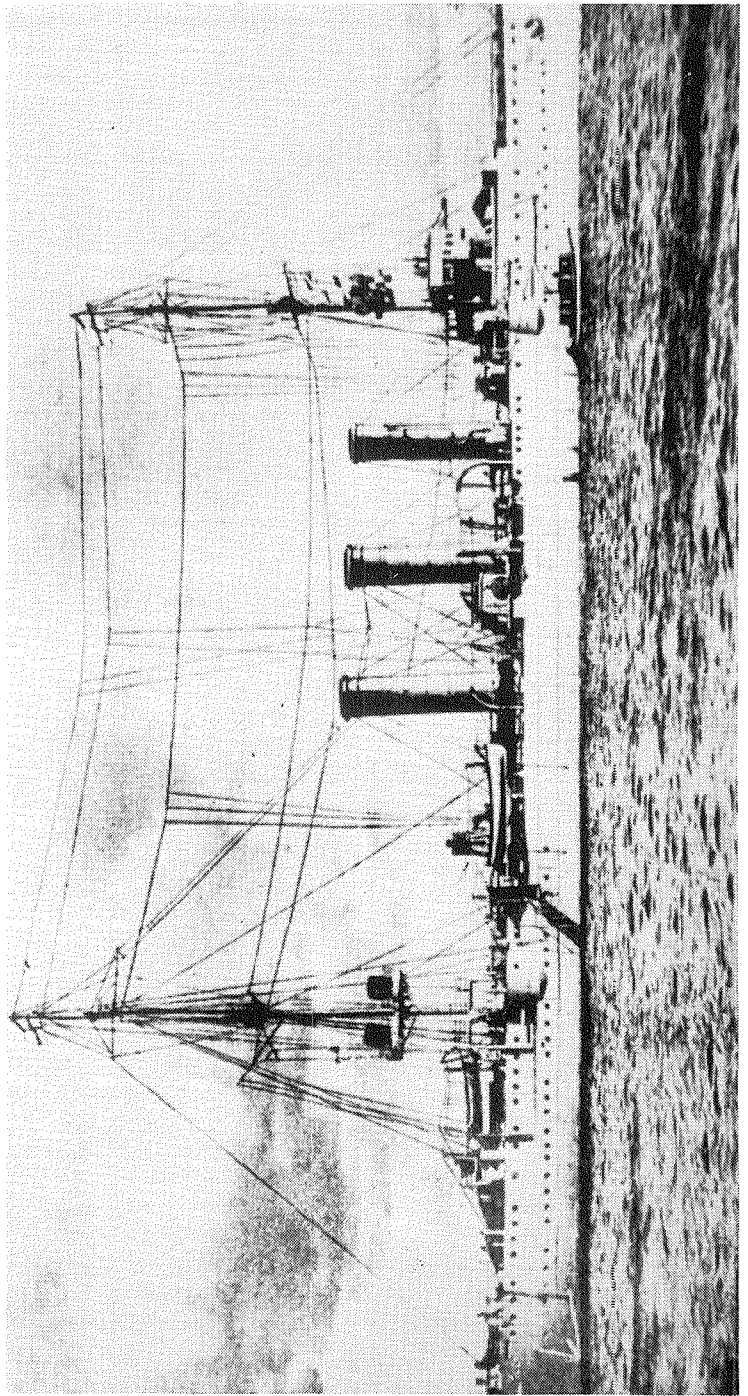


Fig. 3 *The Emden*

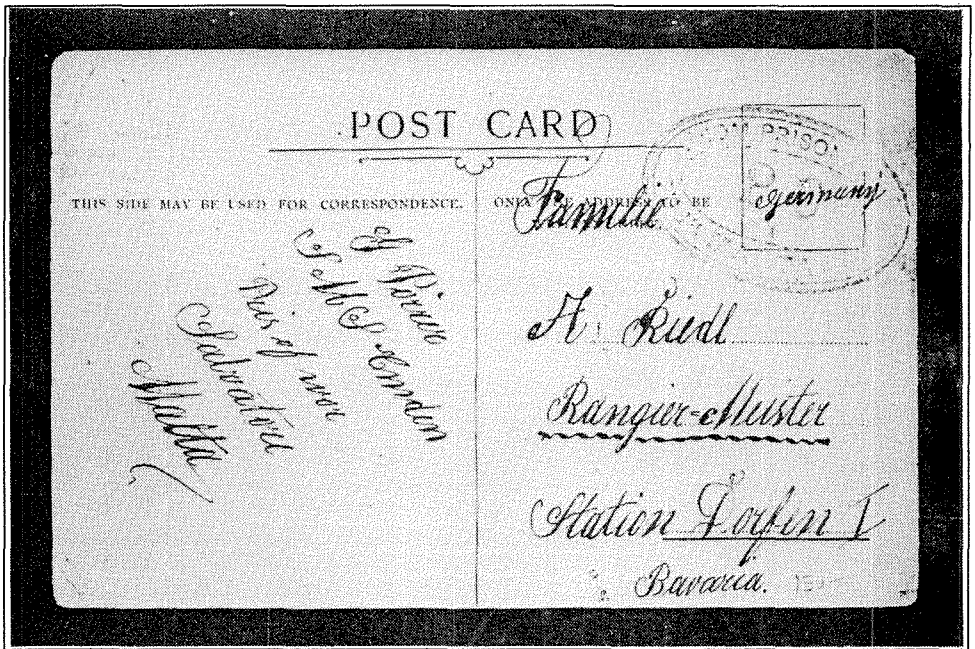


Fig. 4 An official stationery postcard sent by a member of the crew of the Emden from Fort Salvatore on November 15, 1915, stamped by POW-71

The survivors were made prisoners of war and interned in Malta where they remained until the hostilities were over, the officers in Verdala Barracks, the men in Fort San Salvatore.

The *Breslau* and the *Goeben* had an equally adventurous fate. The *Goeben* (22,600 tons, ten 11 inch guns, speed 28 knots) was the flagship of the German Mediterranean division. Together with the cruiser *Breslau* (twelve 4.1 inch guns, 27.5 knots) she was responsible for bringing Turkey into the war on the side of Germany. Despite their overwhelming superiority, the Allied fleets had failed to intercept the two German cruisers. After bombarding Bone and Philippeville and coaling in Messina, they succeeded in reaching Constantinople (fig. 7). Both the British admirals responsible for this debacle were court-marshalled.

Such was the prestige the two legendary ships acquired that public opinion in Turkey turned in favour of Germany, and Turkey's entry in the war on the side of Germany had a tremendous influence on its outcome.

The crew was dressed up in Turkish naval uniform, and on the 10th August 1914 the *Goeben* passed formally into the Turkish Navy, under the name of *Yavuz Sultan Selim*. Under its new name, this ship, one of the longest surviving battle cruisers in history, was still operational during the second world war and was only taken out of

service after 51 years, not before having also received a NATO pennant number. She was finally broken up in 1972, when an effort to retransfer this historic ship to Germany had failed.

My grateful thanks are due to Mr Victor Wickman for his informed and prompt assistance. The sketch maps are by courtesy of I. Richards, J.B. Gordon and J.A. Morris (Harrap).

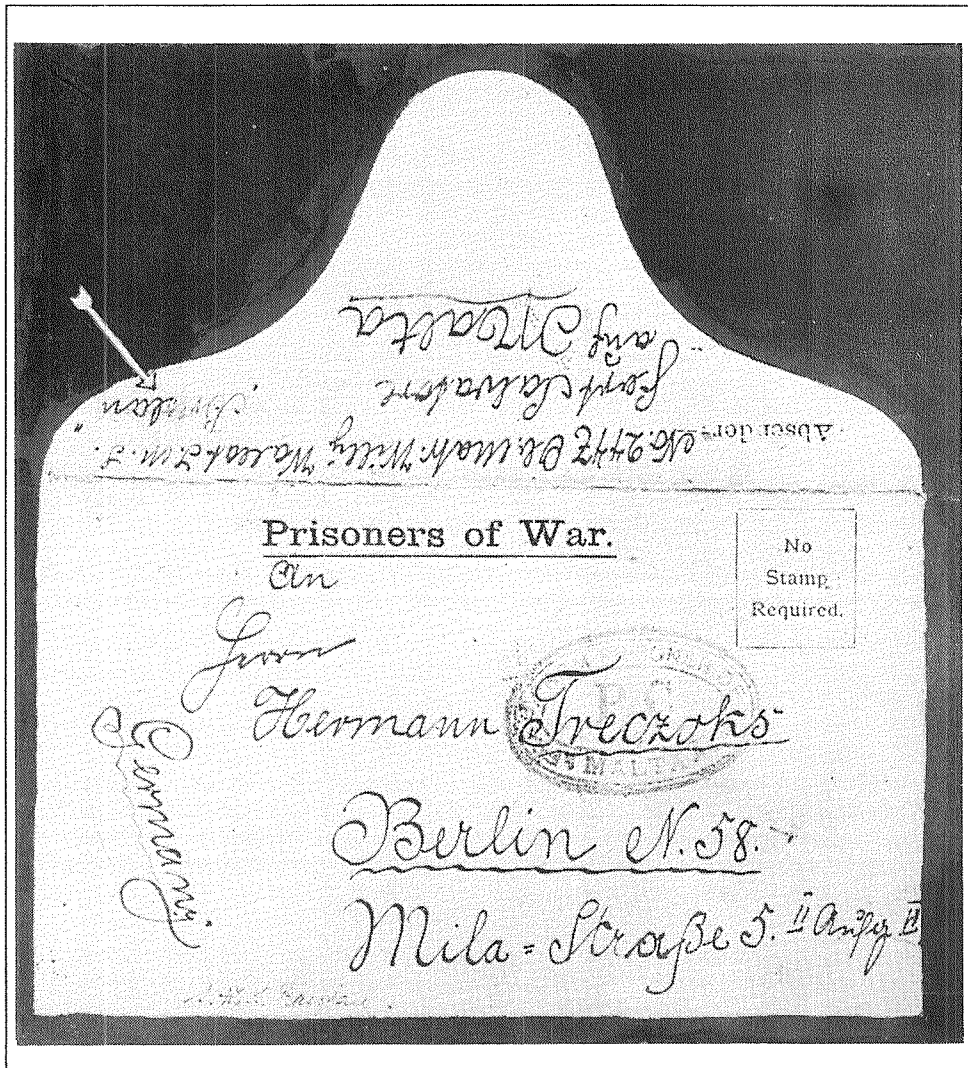


Fig.5. An official stationery folded letter (POW-S23) sent by a member of the crew of the Breslau from Fort Salvatore, stamped by POW-74

EXPLOITS OF THE 'EMDEN'

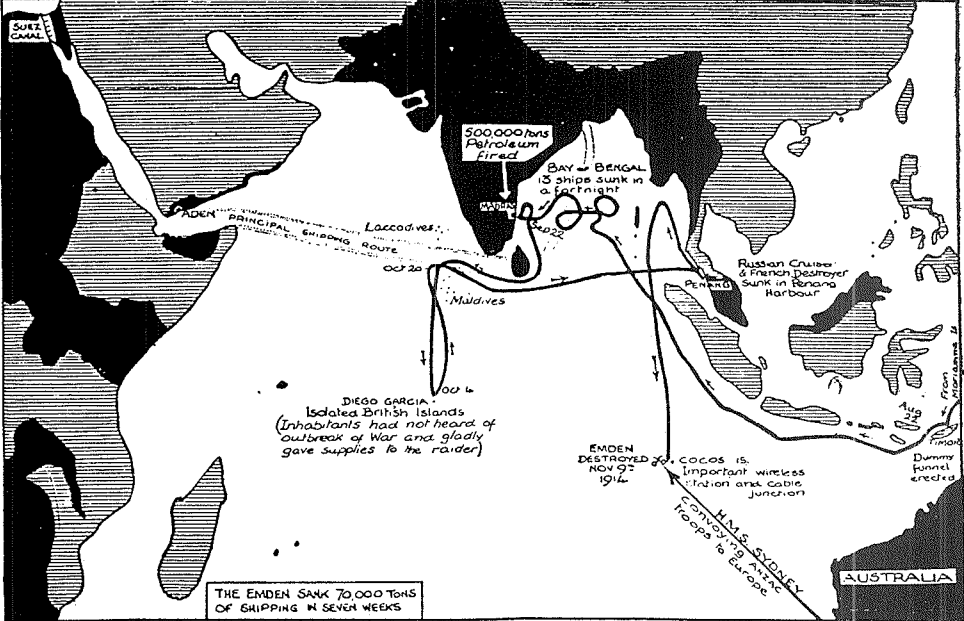


Fig. 6 The exploits of the Emden

Fig. 7. The escape of the Goeben and the Breslau

