



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

The History of the SMS Cormoran II

From Russia to Guam via Germany

March 2017; Tamuning, Guam – On Friday, April 7, 2017, the Guam Visitors Bureau (GVB) will commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the scuttling of the *SMS Cormoran II*. The vessel sailed in to Guam's Apra Harbor on December 14, 1914. She was out of coal from being chased throughout the Pacific by Japanese warships. Though the US was not involved in World War II at the time, the naval governor would not refuel the ship. The *Cormoran* and her crew remained in Guam for two and a half years, until the day the United States officially entered World War I on April 6, 1917.

The *SMS Cormoran* holds a special place in history for both Guam and the United States, which may seem unusual for a German ship. The *Cormoran* was built in Elbing, Germany in 1909 to be part of the Russian merchant fleet as a combination passenger, cargo and mail carrier, originally named the *SS Ryazan* (also spelt *Rjasan*) of Russia.

With the advent of World War I, Russia and Germany became enemies. On August 4, 1914, the *SS Ryazan* was captured by the *SMS Emden* of Germany. The ship was taken to Tsingtao in the German colony Kiautschou, located in Qingdao, China. There she was converted into an armed merchant raider by taking the armaments from a damaged ship that could no longer sail. Outfitted with her new features, the *Ryazan* was given a new name, too. She was rechristened, given the name of ship whose parts she'd been outfitted with. She was now the *SMS Cormoran II*.

On the August 10, 1914, the *SMS Cormoran II* left Tsingtao and began its voyage through the South Pacific Ocean. She was immediately targeted by Japanese warships, who relentlessly chased her throughout the Pacific until the *Cormoran* finally sailed into Apra Harbor on December 14th, nearly out of coal and with nowhere else to go.

Although the United States was not a participant in WWI at the time, relations with Germany were strained. The island also had limited amounts of coal in its stores. As a result, the US Naval Governor William J. Maxwell would only provide the *Cormoran* with a very limited amount of coal, not enough to reach any safe haven. Despite his refusal to provide her enough coal to reach another destination, Maxwell insisted the *Cormoran* either leave or be detained.

Unable to leave, the *Cormoran* remained in Apra Harbor with the crew forced to remain onboard. The standoff between Governor Maxwell and the *Cormoran's* Captain K. Adalbert Zuckschwerdt lasted for two years, until Maxwell became sick and was replaced. The new interim governor, William P. Cronan, felt the *Cormoran's* crew should be treated in a friendlier manner and allowed them to leave the ship, though he would not refuel the vessel either.

The new amicable relationship lasted for six months, with the *Cormoran* crew coming and going freely. The men of the ship achieved a minor celebrity status among the local Chamorro people. The bonds of friendship remained well and strong, until April 6, 1917, the day the United States officially entered World War I.

Now at war with Germany, the Naval Governor (Roy Smith) of Guam ordered the Cormoran's captain to surrender his ship. Rather than do so, Zuckschwerdt decided to scuttle the Cormoran and send her to the bottom of the harbor. He had instructed his crew to disembark, but unfortunately seven sailors were still onboard when she sank. All seven perished, though only six bodies were ever recovered. In spite of the wartime condition, the friendly relationship between the people of Guam and the crew ruled out thus granting the sailors a full military burial in the Agana U.S Naval Cemetery. Their graves are still well marked and surround a monument to the SMS Cormoran. The crew was sent to the United States as prisoners of war, but returned to their native Germany at war's end.

The SMS Cormoran lays in her grave at 110 feet. At the end of WWI, the US Navy conducted a salvage operation on the vessel and were able to recover her bell. The Cormoran's bell was on exhibit at the US Naval Academy Museum in Annapolis, Maryland, but sadly, was stolen. Divers have recovered many more artifacts from the Cormoran over the years. Many were donated to the National Park Service in Piti, Guam.

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NOTE:

Photo credit - Courtesy of the Guam Public Library System

Photos

1. SMS Cormoran II ship
2. Captain K. Adalbert Zuckschwerdt



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