

President Woodrow Wilson would win the 1916 Presidential election using the campaign slogan "He kept us out of war." He almost did not get to make that claim. In the spring of 1915, the war arrived in Hampton Roads in a most unexpected way.

After months of rather mundane news, the people of Hampton Roads woke up with their morning coffee on March 11, 1915, to one-inch, panic-stricken headlines in local papers. They announced that the Great War just anchored off of Newport News in the form of a German commerce raider. A two-stack cruise liner turned commerce raider by the name of *Prinz Eitel Friedrich* arrived in the region for repairs.

Friedrich's commanding officer, one Capt. Thierichens, was an enthusiastic and extremely optimistic fellow who was more than willing to talk to American reporters. After he released several hundred captured

SEA SCARRED AND RUSTY FROM SEVEN MONTHS' CRUISE, PRINZ EITEL FRIEDRICH DROPS ANCHOR IN HAMPTON ROADS

GERMAN U-12 RAMMED AND SUNK; TEN OF CREW SAVED

British Admiralty Announces That Submarine Was Prey Of Destroyer AFM!

GERMANS BEGIN NEW OFFENSIVE IN EAST

It's Another Attempt To Break Through Russian Lines In North Poland

ALLIED FLEET STILL ON THE MOVE

ELEVEN SHIPS SUNK ON LONG VOYAGE FROM CHINESE PORT

36 Passengers And 247 Crew Members From Vessel Said To Be Landed At Newport News

LOOKS LIKE GERMAN WILL BE INTERVIEWED

Commander Says He Intended Room For Urgent Supply To Overhaul Boats

ONLY PASSENGERS

After many months of dull, mundane events, the *Virginian-Pilot* dropped a bombshell on its readers on March 11, 1915. Capt. Thierichens is pictured next to his ship. (March 11, 1915 *Virginian-Pilot*)

seek out two German gunboats in Shanghai harbor to receive armaments and extra sailors. War had been declared in Europe and Thierichens was to hunt for Allied ships.

His raiding campaign began off the coast of

nearby which began to hunt for the German vessel.

Thierichens continued heading east and around Cape Horn before heading north. The Allied squadron, which consisted of

40,000 Tons of Trouble Drops Anchor in Hampton Roads

In the middle of the Great War, the German commerce raiders *Prinz Eitel Friedrich* and *Prinz Wilhelm* make heroic dashes into Hampton Roads

by Gordon Calhoun

merchantmen and their captains, he began his news conference by telling reporters of his ship's trek across the Pacific Ocean.

Thierichens' ship was one of 17 German-flagged civilian cruise liners and freighters that the German government converted into commerce raiders when the war began. It was a common practice for maritime states to turn merchant ships into commerce raiders and privateers. In the later part of the 19th century, some governments subsidized the construction of steam passenger liners for the expressed purpose of making them auxiliary cruisers during a war. The German government at the turn of the century subsidized the construction of some 25 passenger liners and freighters.

The German steam line Norddeutscher Lloyd operated the 16,000-ton *Friedrich* and she normally cruised the Far East between German settlements in China and Japan.

While making a trip to Shanghai, Kriegsmarine commanders ordered Thierichens to cancel any further trips and to

Australia in September 1914 where she joined up with fellow German auxiliary cruiser *Cormoran*. Both ships quickly discovered a major problem with using civilian cruise liners as commerce raiders. While they had excellent speed and sea keeping qualities, cruise liners consumed an enormous amount of coal. Normally they would have returned to China to refuel, but Japanese and British forces had laid siege to the German colonies.

Thierichens decided to head east into the Pacific. He lucked out as he found and joined up with Adm. Graf Spee's East Asia squadron where he was able to recoal. After he refueled, *Friedrich* separated from Spee's cruiser squadron and headed towards Cape Horn. He stopped off at mysterious Easter Island where he dropped off survivors from merchants his crew had sunk. While at Easter Island, *Friedrich* refueled again using coal taken from her victims. The ship continued to the coast of Chile where she found and sank five more ships. News of the raider's activity caught the attention of a joint Anglo-Franco cruiser squadron patrolling

six British and French cruisers, followed him. With his ship's boilers on the verge of bursting, his coal and fresh water supply short, and health conditions aboard the ship deteriorating quickly, Thierichens decided to head for the United States. He took his ship into Hampton Roads and dropped anchor off of Newport News on March 10, 1915.

Friedrich's arrival not only caused a panic among the local population, but among British sailors working on the docks of Newport News. Several British freighters were loading up horses for the French army when some of them spotted *Friedrich* and her German naval ensign rounding the Chesapeake & Ohio coal piers. A stampede ensued as sailors rushed to get to their ships. Their officers regained control of the situation when they reminded their crew that they were in a neutral port.

Once *Friedrich* dropped anchor, the captain asked Newport News Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Co. for a berth. Commerce raiders continued on page