



When sailors and civilian workers at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard began their overhaul of Prinz Friedrich in April, 1917, they cleaned out what was called "Dutch Junk." Several dozen beer kegs, many of them empty, were found in the hold of the German cruiser. (April 20, 1917 Naval Historical Center photo)

Commerce raiders continued from page 8
different reason. It came to light that Kiehne collaborated with the Germans by helping them navigate the South Atlantic and helped them to evade the Allied cruisers. He also advised them to steam for Hampton Roads for repairs.

With the crisis over, Customs officials cleared the way for the resumption of shipping traffic. No more than a few hours after the ban was lifted, 15 of the 25 British merchants trapped by the crisis left for Europe. Battleships, cruisers, and destroyers of the Atlantic Fleet returned home from Cuba the same day. Five thousand liberty hungry sailors, joined by the German sailors who were let out on restricted liberty, packed downtown Norfolk. Everything in the region began to return to normal.

Or so it seemed.

Unknown to all of the *Friedrich* participants, another German auxiliary cruiser was off the coast of the United States and had been listening to much of the wireless traffic coming out of Hampton Roads. Like *Friedrich*, the 24,900-ton SMS *Kronprinz Wilhelm* had been at sea since the fall of 1914. She was the pride of the Norddeutscher Lloyd company, the same company that operated *Friedrich*, and made passenger runs between Germany and the United States. In 1902, she won the "blue ribband" for traveling across the Atlantic in record time. The 23-knot, four-stack steamer was one of the largest

of her kind in the world and the largest in the German merchant marine.

At the outbreak of war, she received orders to leave New York and rendezvous with the cruiser SMS *Karlsruhe* off the coast of Bermuda. Armament, supplies, and extra officers and sailors transferred to the cruise liner. No more than an hour after the two ships completed their transfer, three British cruisers, HMS *Bristol*, *Suffolk*, and *Berwick*, spotted and engaged *Karlsruhe*. While *Karlsruhe* held them off, *Wilhelm* turned

"I inform you I intend to intern SMS Prinz Eitel Friedrich. The relief I expected appeared not to arrive in time so the number and force of enemy cruisers guarding the entrance to the bay makes to me impossible the dash for the open sea with any hope of success."

-Capt. Thierichens' surrender letter

south at flank speed and escaped. *Karlsruhe* fled the scene too after she damaged *Bristol*.

Safely away, *Wilhelm's* crew began their raiding in the North Atlantic and then steamed south into the South Atlantic. They captured and sank 15 British and French merchant ships before heading back north. Like *Friedrich*, *Wilhelm's* officers depended on captured coal to sustain their ship's hungry 16 boilers until a supply ship could reach them. As a result, the ex-cruise liner's music room had two big

holes knocked out of it to make way for coal chutes. *Wilhelm's* crew then used the chutes as a way of quickly transferring coal from captured ships. Extra coal was dumped anywhere there was room including first class cabins and open decks.

After being at sea for a record 255 days, Captain-Lieutenant Paul Thierfelder waited in vain for the German steamer *Odenwald* to resupply her several hundred miles east of Hampton Roads. Among the wireless messages intercepted from the *Friedrich* incident, one announced *Friedrich's* internment. A second announced that the Allied warships were going to lift their blockade of the Virginia Capes.

With only 12 hours of coal left, fresh water at a premium, and with many of his crew suffering from the lethal nutritional disease beri-beri, Thierfelder decided to act. Beri-beri (pronounced beree-beree) is a non-contagious disease that causes the victim's nervous system to stop functioning due to a lack of the vitamin Thiamin. The absence of fresh vegetables and the consumption of improperly cleaned rice were the primary reasons for the disease's presence.

Wilhelm approached the Capes at night and with no running lights. Wireless operators kept a close watch on any Allied message traffic. Through this means of intelligence gathering, *Wilhelm's* operators determined that there were still at least three British and one French cruiser in the area, but that they were at least 15 miles apart from each other. One of *Wilhelm's* officers later reported that they steamed so close to one of

the cruisers that they could hear the Allied wireless machine at work. The stealth approach worked and the next morning *Wilhelm* anchored safely off Newport News, right next to the U.S. Atlantic Fleet.

The Germans held a news conference very shortly after they arrived. The 33-year old captain was even more defiant and brash than Capt. Thierichens. "We got in without being seen by the enemy and we can get out the
Commerce raiders continued on page 14