

In October-November 1940, the German auxiliary cruiser and armed merchant raider *Pinguin*, in conjunction with the Norwegian tanker *Storstad*, which she had captured and converted into an auxiliary minelayer named *Passat*, laid a total of 230 sea mines in seven minefields off the southern and eastern coast of Australia. These mines led to several 'firsts': the first Allied vessel to be lost in Australian waters during the war; the first US merchant ship to go down; the first US merchant navy casualty; and the first ship to be lost by the Royal Australian Navy. Many of the mines were subsequently hauled in or washed ashore on Australia's beaches, one accidental

explosion then leading to the war's first victims of enemy action on Australian soil. Of all the auxiliary cruisers sent out by Germany, *Pinguin* was the most successful. In less than 12 months at sea, she sank or captured 32 ships, a total of 154,710 gross register tons, of which 52,000 tons was sent back to Germany as prizes, before she was sunk in the Arabian Sea by the British cruiser HMS *Cornwall* on May 8, 1941. This picture of her was taken in the Baltic in April 1940. (The other armed merchant cruisers active in the Indian Ocean between 1940 and 1943 were *Orion*, *Komet*, *Atlantis*, *Kormoran* (see *After the Battle* No. 141), *Thor* and *Michel*.)

PINGUIN IN AUSTRALIAN WATERS

By David Mitchelhill-Green

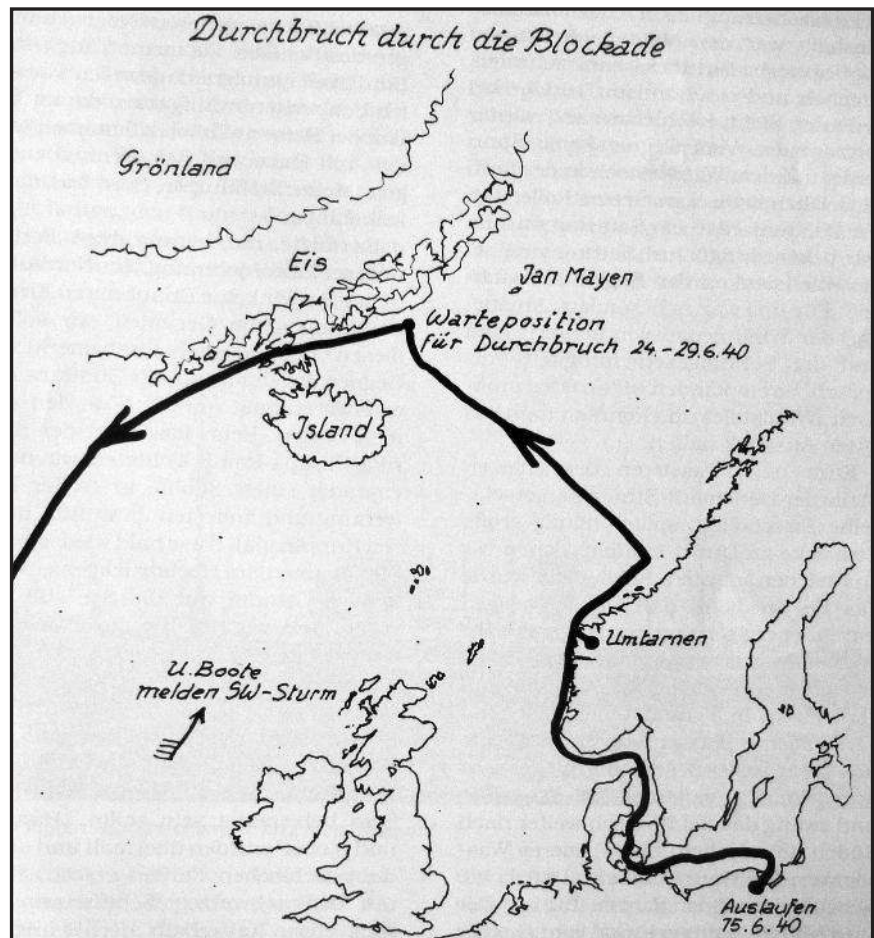
Germany's most successful surface raider during the Second World War was the auxiliary cruiser *Pinguin* (Penguin). Masquerading as an innocent, unarmed merchantman, one of her mines claimed the first US vessel lost in the war, the *City of Rayville*. In a separate tragedy, two Royal Australian Navy sailors became the first casualties of war on Australian soil when they were killed while attempting to render another mine safe.

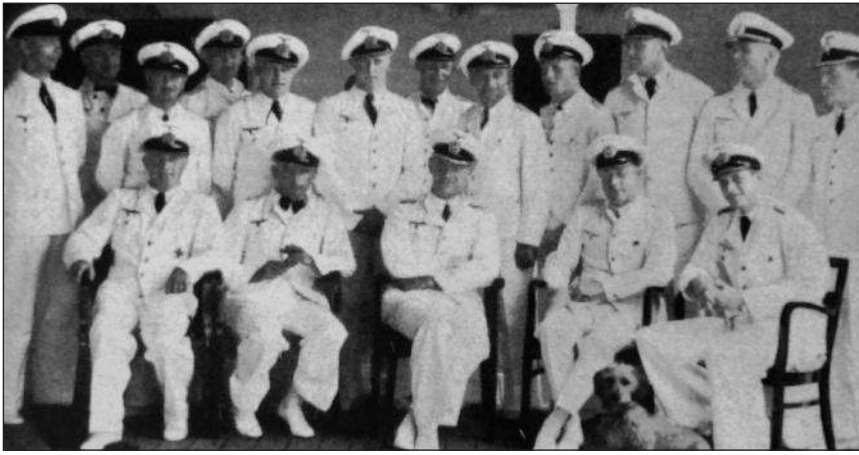
RETURN OF THE RAIDERS

The menace of German naval raiders — and minefields — to Australian waters returned after the outbreak of war in September 1939. In the weeks leading up to Germany's invasion of Poland, several German merchant vessels fled Australian ports for the safety of neutral havens such as the Netherlands East Indies (today Indonesia). No immediate danger to local shipping existed since the possible conversion of these ships into armed raiders was considered unlikely. The British Naval Attaché in Tokyo was also relieved to hear from Japanese naval authorities that the arming of German ships would constitute 'a threat to Japanese neutrality'.

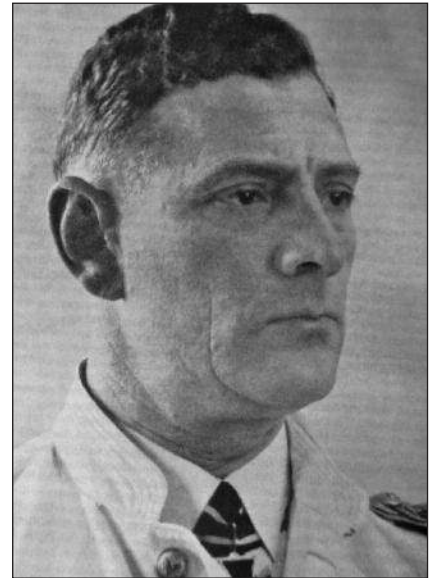
Preparations, though, were already underway in Germany to convert several fast merchantmen into *Hilfskreuzer* (auxiliary

Right. Departing from Bremen on June 15, 1940, disguised as an anonymous naval transport ship, *Pinguin* harboured in Norway's Sörgulenfjord on the 22nd to re-camouflage into the Soviet freighter *Petschura*. She then waited north of Iceland for six days (June 24-29) before breaking out through the Greenland Strait and into the Atlantic Ocean.





Pinguin's officers posing for a group portrait on the deck. Seated (L-R) Kapitänleutnant Karl Cramer (Chief Engineer), Kapitänleutnant Max Schwinne (First Officer/Deputy Commander), Kapitän zur See Ernst-Felix Krüder (Captain), seen (right) with his Knight's Cross awarded on October 12, 1940, Kapitänleutnant Wilhelm Michaelsen (Navigation Officer) and Stabsarzt Dr Harald Wentzel (Ship's Doctor).



cruisers) or *Handelsstörkreuzer* (HSK, commerce-raiding cruisers) — warships operating in the guise of innocent foreign merchantmen. Each vessel carried several tons of structural materials and paint to change its disguise via altering its silhouette and colour scheme. Rangefinders were carefully concealed while the decks were strengthened to withstand the force of firing the main armament. Specially engineered steel flaps hid an array of guns that could rapidly swing into action against an unwary foe. Several raiders also carried a large complement of contact mines. Stalking Allied merchant shipping through subterfuge, these modern-day pirate ships would close on their target before revealing their true colours at the last moment, jamming distress signals and demanding immediate surrender.

ORION AND ATLANTIS

Germany dispatched two staggered waves of auxiliary cruisers during the war. The first intimation of raider activity in Australasian waters arrived with the discovery of a minefield laid by the raider *Atlantis* (HSK 2, known to the Kriegsmarine as *Schiff 16*) off Cape Agulhas, in South Africa, on May 13, 1940. In response, Australia's Naval Board instructed merchant shipping not to use navigation lights on coastal voyages with the warning that mines may also be present in Australian waters.

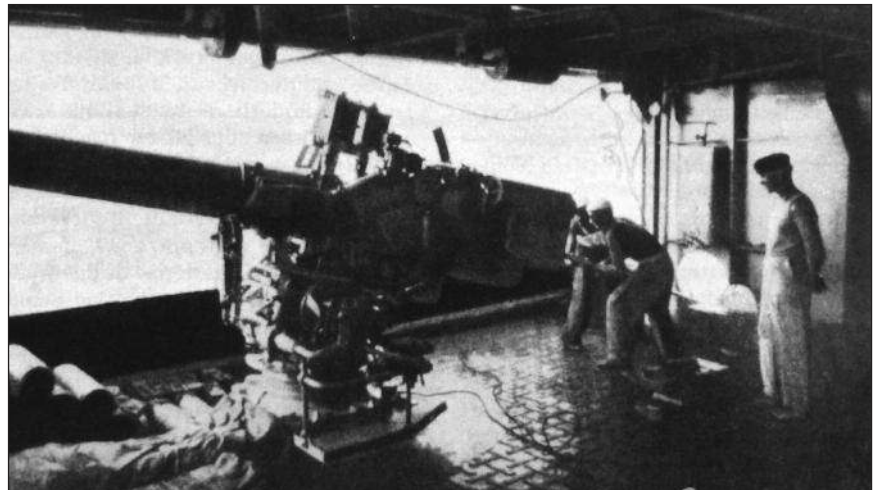
Disaster struck closer to home the following month after the trans-Pacific liner *Niagara* (13,415 tons, carrying 590 bars of gold bullion) struck two mines laid by *Orion* (HSK 1, *Schiff 36*). As the first German raider to operate in the Pacific, *Orion* laid mines off the city of Auckland in New Zealand's North Island on June 19, 1940. The discovery led to further precautions with merchant vessels ordered to sail outside the 100-fathom line in Australian waters while

Right: On July 10, while traversing the Atlantic Ocean, *Pinguin* disguised herself as the Greek freighter *Kassos*. It was in that appearance that a week later she rendezvoused with U-Boat *UA* off the Cape Verde archipelago in order to replenish that submarine and tow it closer to its operational area off the Sierra Leone coast. This picture of the commerce raider was taken from the submarine's conning tower. (*UA* was one of the Kriegsmarine's 14 so-called 'foreign U-Boats'. Originally built in the Kiel shipyards for Turkey she was not handed over to that country but seized by Germany and incorporated into the Kriegsmarine in 1939.)

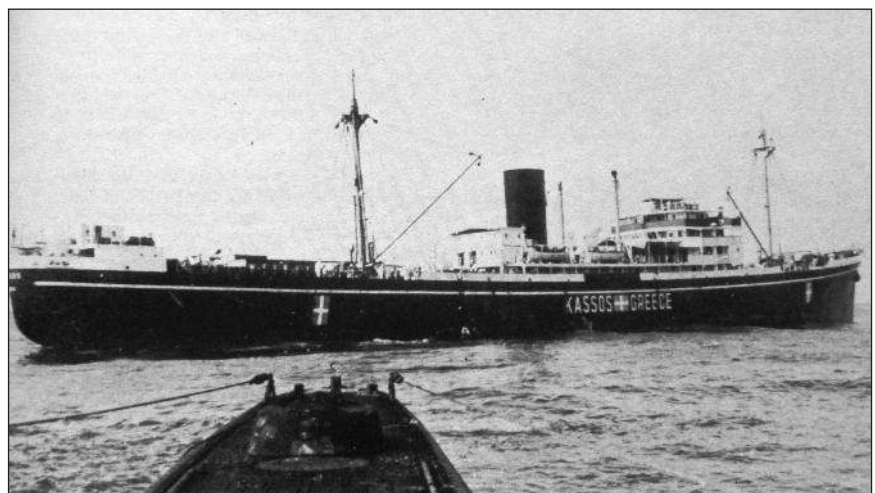
Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) aircraft searched in vain for a suspicious vessel spotted in Bass Strait. Minesweeping operations also began in southern Australian waters.

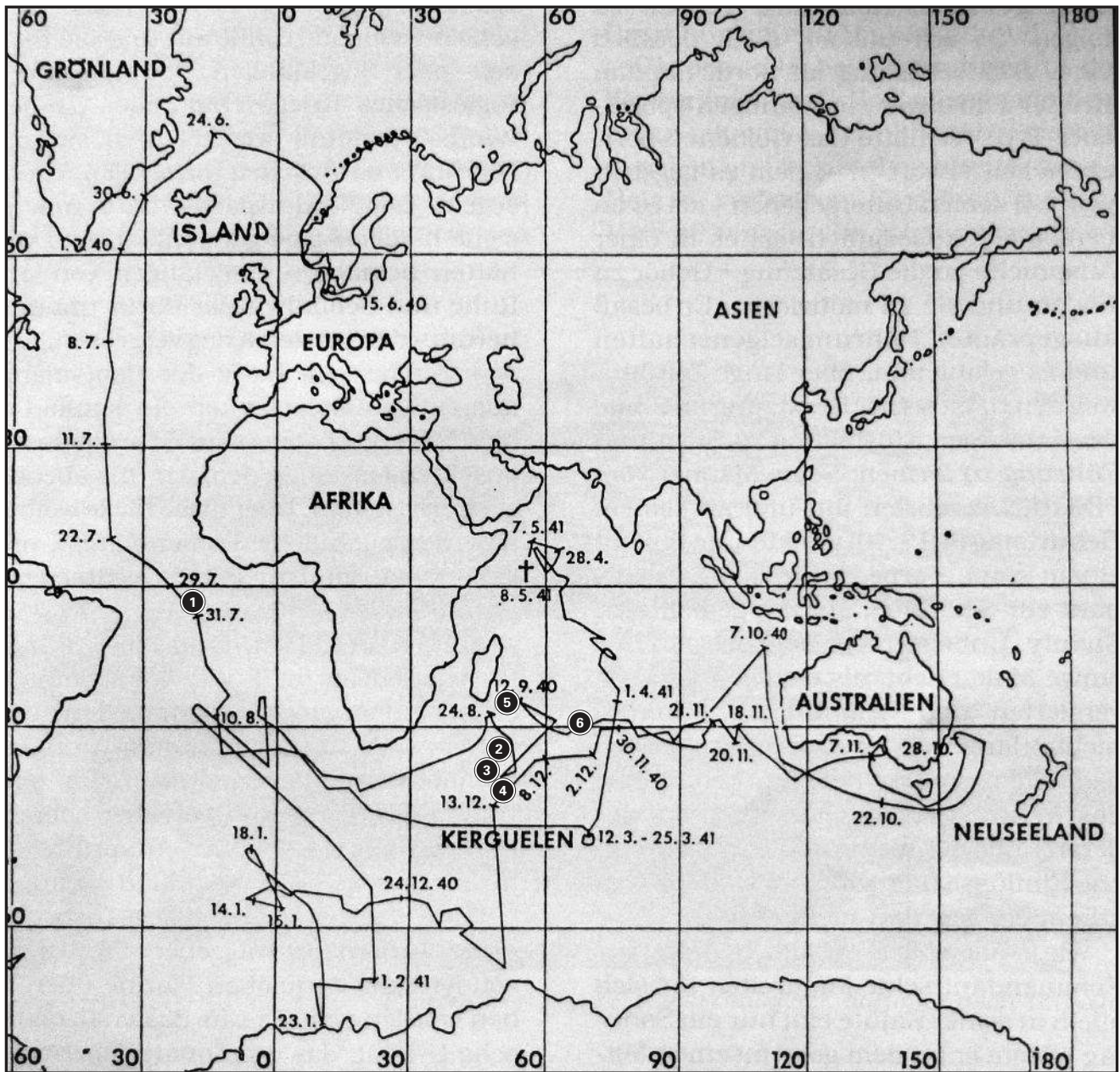
Orion in the interim had claimed two more ships in the waters around New Caledonia and Fiji (see *After the Battle* No. 96) before sailing south of Tasmania and across the Australian Bight. Crossing several shipping lanes without sighting any quarry, Kapitän zur See

Bernhard Rogge laid four dummy mines (fashioned from empty beer drums) off the coast of Albany, on the south-western tip of Australia, on September 2, 1940 in an attempt to concentrate Australian defences in this corner of the continent. A planned 'visit' to the port of Fremantle was abandoned once the ship was circled by a curious RAAF Hudson bomber, which apparently found nothing suspicious to report. Welcome foul weather



There are no known photos of *Pinguin's* hidden guns. This picture was taken aboard the Tross-Schiff (oiler and supply vessel) *Nordmark*, which had a similar 15cm gun concealed behind foldable covers.

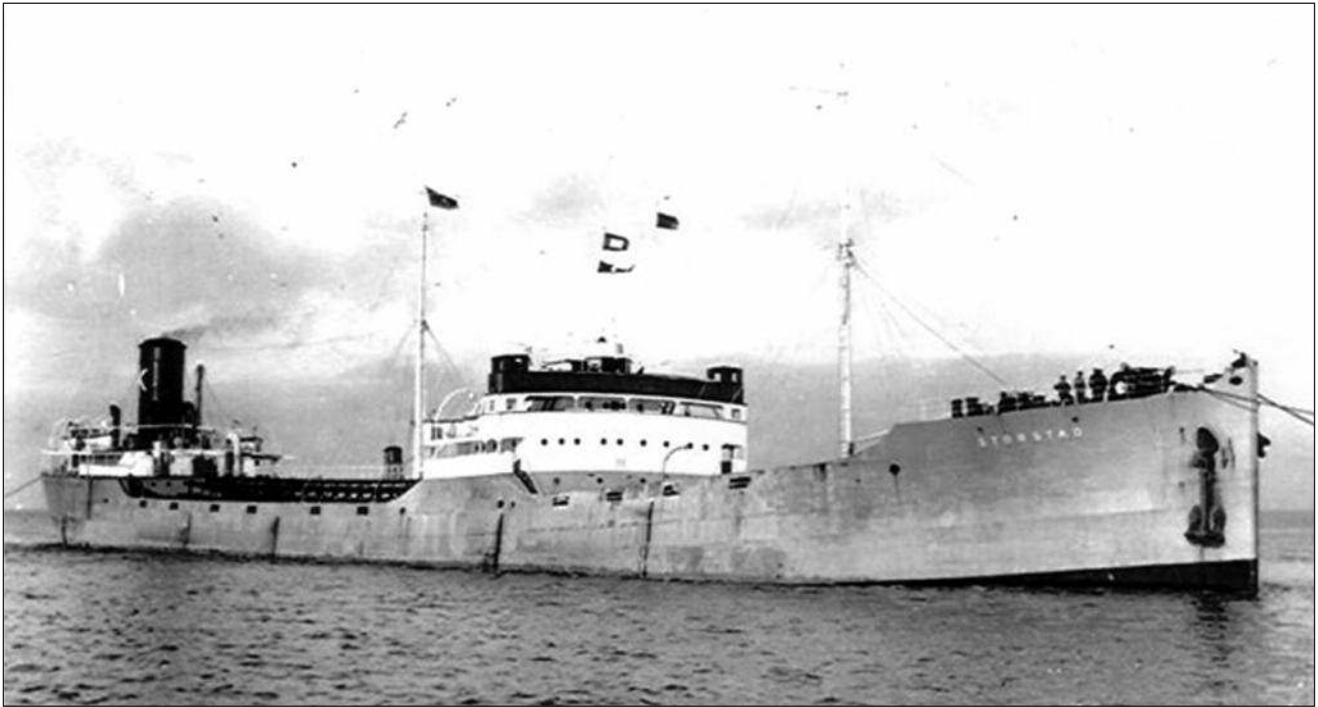




Above: As she sailed south across the Atlantic Ocean and then east into the Indian Ocean, *Pinguin* sank or captured six enemy ships: the British freighter *Domingo de Larrinaga* [1] torpedoed on July 31; the Norwegian tanker *Filefjell* [2], the British tanker *British Commander* [3] and the Norwegian freighter *Morviken* [4], all three sunk on August 27; the British freighter *Benavon* [5], sunk by gunfire on September 12, and the Norwegian freighter *Nordvard* [6], captured on September 16 and despatched to Bordeaux with 200 prisoners. Right: One of *Pinguin*'s victims, either the *British Commander*, the *Benavon* or the *British Emperor* (sunk later in the voyage, on May 5, 1941) which were the three ships set on fire before sinking.

cloaked the cruiser, as she escaped in a south-west direction as six more aircraft joined in the search. Unsuccessful in harrying the Cape Town—Australia shipping routes, *Orion* returned east below southern Australia and up through the Tasman Sea to refuel in the Marshal Islands. By this time Germany's Seekriegsleitung (Maritime Warfare Command), or SKL, had already notified Captain Rogge that another raider — *Pinguin* — was on her way to the Indian Ocean.





As they headed east across the Indian Ocean, Captain Krüder and his staff conceived a plan to lay mines in six Australian mainland and Tasmanian sea lanes, but for this they would need a second ship. On October 7, off Christmas Island, *Pinguin* stopped and captured the Norwegian motor-tanker *Storstad*,

which was on her way from British North Borneo to Melbourne with a cargo of 12,000 tons of diesel oil and 500 tons of heavy fuel oil. *Storstad* was taken to a remote spot between Java and the north-west tip of Australia and there converted into an auxiliary minelayer and re-christened *Passat*.

ENTER THE PINGUIN

The German freighter *Kandelfels* was requisitioned by the Kriegsmarine during the winter of 1939-40 for conversion at Bremen's Deschimag shipyards into a warship armed with six concealed 15cm guns (removed from the pre-Dreadnought battleship *Schlesien*), one 75mm, one twin 37mm, four 20mm anti-aircraft guns and two twin 53cm torpedo tubes. HSK 5, *Schiff* 33, also carried two Heinkel He 114A-2 floatplanes (later replaced by Arado Ar 196s) and 300 mines. Christened *Pinguin* by Kapitän zur See Ernst-Felix Krüder, the raider left Germany on June 15, 1940 for the shelter of a Norwegian fjord. Disguised as the black-hulled Soviet freighter *Petschura*, complete with Hammer and Sickle hull markings, Krüder left Norwegian waters on June 22 for the break-out to the Atlantic via the Greenland Strait. Krüder's orders were to proceed to the Indian Ocean shipping lanes, a zone which the British considered safe in the absence of U-Boats.

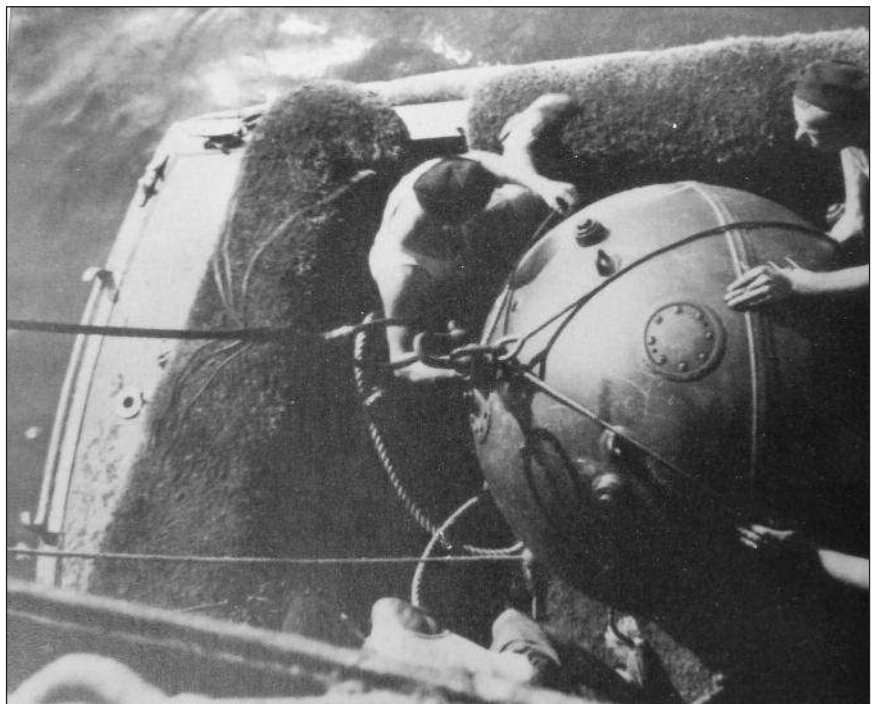
Re-camouflaged as the 5,215-ton Greek motor-ship *Kassos*, *Pinguin* sank the British freighter *Domingo de Larrinaga* before rounding the Cape of Good Hope on August 20. Four more ships fell in succession as she continued to steam east along the busy sea routes between Australia and South Africa. Krüder now changed *Pinguin's* identity to the Norwegian Wilhelmsen cargo-liner *Trafalgar*. Poring over maps with his navigator, Kapitänleutnant der Reserve Wilhelm Michaelsen, a plan was devised to mine at least six Australian shipping channels in the shortest possible time by employing a second captured vessel. Both ships would then flee Australian waters before the first mine was struck or swept.

Right: Using the motorboat that had been taken from the Norwegian freighter *Morviken* on August 27, the crew then transferred 110 of its mines to *Storstad*, a laborious and dangerous task that took two days. Mattresses were used to prevent the mines from rolling about during transfer and to protect the bottom of the boat.

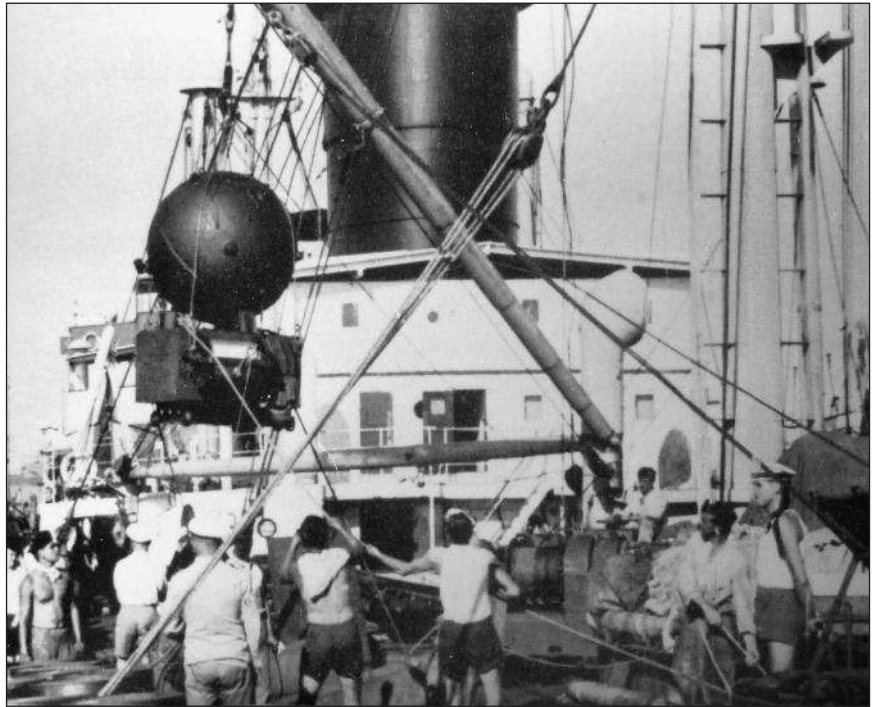
Initially to be undertaken at the end of September, planning changed after the Norwegian Lauritz Kloster motor-ship *Nordvard* was captured on September 16. Fuel, water and provisions, as well 200 prisoners, were transferred across to the valuable prize, which Leutnant zur See Hans Neumeyer sailed to Bordeaux. Krüder now headed north-east for the Sunda Strait and the busy shipping lanes between India and Australia. Some 2,800 miles of vacant ocean were searched before the perfect companion vessel was found off Christmas Island on the morning of October 7. Captain Egil Wilhelmsen of the unsuspecting, unarmed Norwegian tanker M/T *Storstad* (8,998 tons)

immediately surrendered after the 'compatriot' vessel hoisted the German ensign and fired a 75mm round across her bow. Bound for Melbourne from Borneo, *Storstad's* cargo of 12,000 tons of diesel and 500 tons of heavy fuel oil was a windfall.

Pinguin's log for October 8 reflected Krüder's thinking: 'As the ship is a tanker and therefore not likely to arouse suspicion I intend to use her in the role of auxiliary minelayer. On inspection two rooms on the after superstructure flanking the engine-room trunk, with a track leading from each, will, after the clearance of their contents and with suitable disguise, provide inconspicuous storage for about 100 mines'. Sailing in



Right: One of the mines being gently lifted from *Pinguin's* deck by means of its derrick. Note that the horns, or 'asparagus', have not been fitted yet. Developed by Dr Otto Hertz in 1868, the Hertz horn was an ingenious device for detonating a mine upon contact with a passing vessel. Each horn was effectively a dormant battery containing a bichromate solution within a glass tube. Fractured upon contact, the solution mixed with a carbon and zinc plate to form a battery cell producing approximately 1.5 volts. This was sufficient to fuse a platinum wire contained in the mercury fulminate with the detonator, which activated a primer and fired the primary explosive charge.



tandem to a secluded area above Australia's North West Cape, away from the primary shipping routes, *Storstad's* furtive transformation began.

Leutnant Erich Warning received a temporary promotion to Kapitänleutnant and command of the newest member of the German fleet, renamed *Passat*. Accompanying Warning was a German prize crew of navigation officers, eight petty officers, one engineer officer and 19 ratings. Six Norwegian crewmembers (the Second and Third Engineers, assistant, two mechanics and carpenter) also volunteered to join. Over the course of three days, *Pinguin's* crew worked to remove partitions from *Passat's* aft mess hall and engineer's quarters to create a space for the mines. Next came the delicate and time-consuming task of transferring 110 mines across from *Pinguin*. Using a motor-cutter appropriated from an earlier victim and lined with mattresses to prevent any movement of the mines, the deadly cargo was carefully manoeuvred by a derrick onto the small craft riding a lively swell, a repetitive and challenging task. *Pinguin's* log for October 9 noted: '33 mines carried across by the time darkness fell. During the night further work was undertaken on camouflaging the mine-storage rooms in the superstructure. The transfer of the remaining mines resumed the following day at daybreak — in a continuous shuttle-service 110 mines had been transferred by 1430 hours'.

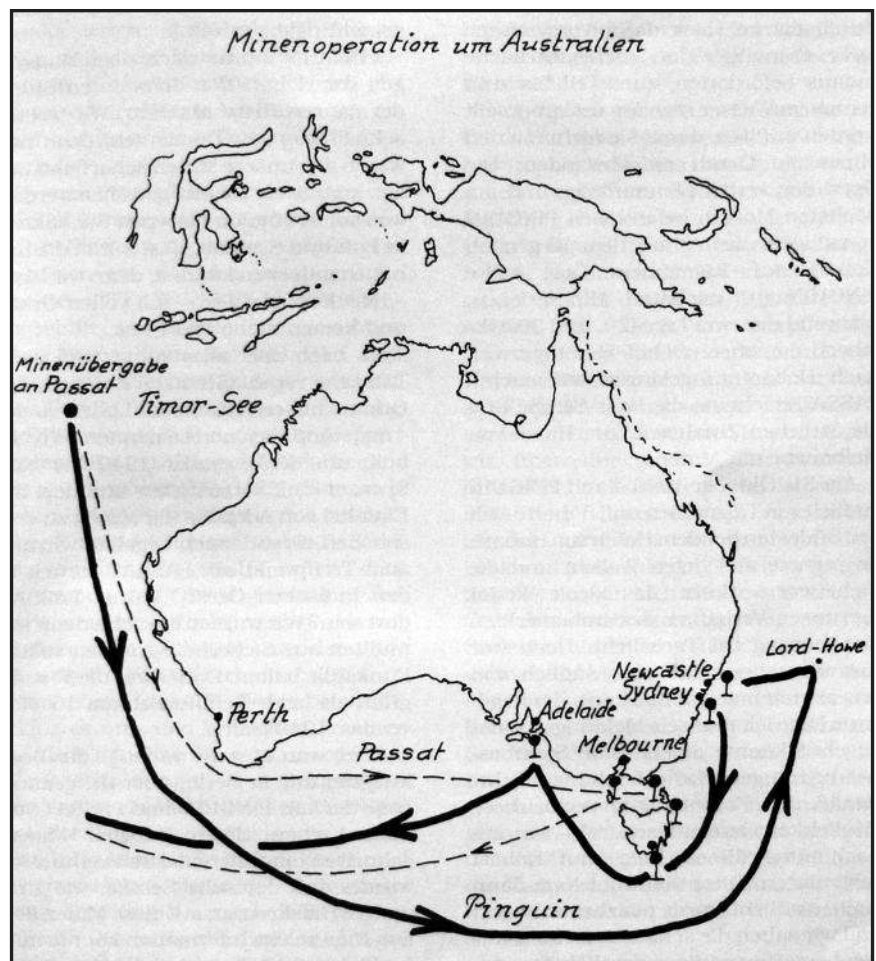
The two ships parted company at 0300 hours on October 12. Aboard *Pinguin*, a signal was received from Berlin announcing the award of the Iron Cross, First Class, to Krüder. His crew also celebrated having sailed 21,600 nautical miles, the circumference of the earth, since leaving Germany in June.

Negotiating a fierce storm during her eastward passage, *Passat* arrived in Bass Strait, the sea passage separating Tasmania from the mainland state of Victoria, where she drew little attention from passing ships and fishing boats. Aided on occasion by Australian lighthouses, which served as precise navigational beacons, *Passat* laid three minefields: 30 mines with 48-hours delayed action in Banks Strait (night of October 29/30); 40 mines with 48-hours delayed action in the eastern entrance to Bass Strait (October 30/31) and 40 mines in the western entrance to Bass Strait (October 31/November 1).

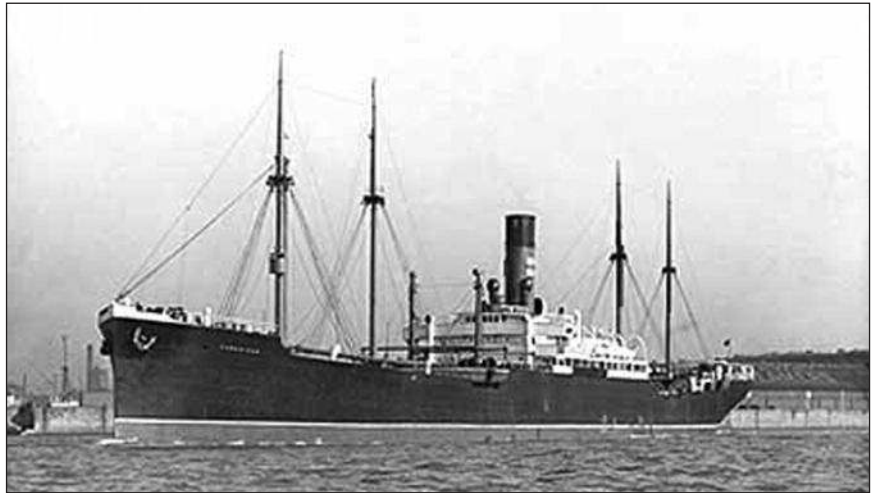
Right: On October 12, with conversion of the *Storstad* into *Passat* and transferral of mines (marked 'Minenübergabe an *Passat*' on the map) completed, the two ships went on their separate ways to Australia to mine the shipping lanes there. Between October 28 and November 7, *Passat* laid its mines in Banks Strait and in both entrances to Bass Strait, thus blocking the sea approaches to Melbourne, while *Pinguin* rolled out its deadly minefields between Sydney and Newcastle on the east coast; at the entrance to Tasmania's capital Hobart, and in the approaches to Adelaide on the south coast.

At the same time, off Australia's eastern coast and on a rising sea, *Pinguin* rolled out 40 mines from the specially built ports on both sides of the ship along the busy shipping route between Sydney and Newcastle, within range of several coastal defence batteries, on the night of October 28/29. The last mine, with a 48-hour delayed action setting, was dropped around 0200 hours. Kapitän zur See Krüder's next target was the entrance to

Hobart, Tasmania's capital city, with 40 more mines laid on the night of October 31/November 1. A final 40 mines were laid further west along Australia's southern coast, in two minefields stretching across the shipping lanes in Spencer Gulf and the Gulf of St Vincent leading to the port of Adelaide on November 6/7. In total the two vessels had successfully laid 230 mines without detection.



Right: On November 7 — less than a week after *Passat* had finished mining Bass Strait — one of her mines scored the ship's first victim when it struck the British passenger-freighter *SS Cambridge* off Wilsons Promontory, sinking it within 30 minutes. All but one of the 58-man crew was saved. Ironically, the steamer had started life as a German ship, having been built in Geestemünde, Germany, in 1916 as the *Vogtland*. Completed in 1919, she had been surrendered to the British in 1922 as part of the reparations following the First World War, sold to the Federal Steam navigation Company, Ltd, and renamed. Being the first Allied vessel to be lost in Australian waters in the Second World War, the wreck of *Cambridge* was located on May 21, 1988 by the National Safety Council vessel *Blue Nabila* using side scan sonar, and declared an historic shipwreck under the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act in 1989.



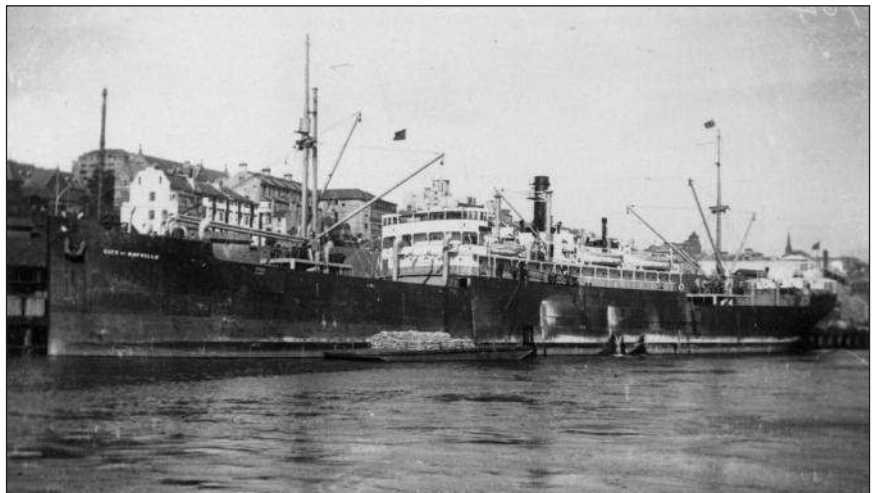
'THE WAR HAS COME TO AUSTRALIA'

Krüder was laying his final field when the *SS Cambridge* (10,846 tons) struck one of *Passat's* mines off Wilsons Promontory in Bass Strait at approximately 2300 hours on November 7, 1940. The resulting blast tore through the after end of the refrigerated British cargo ship. Her Captain, A. J. Angell, later described how 'there was a loud explosion, which sounded to me like the firing of a 4-inch gun. I was not shaken by the explosion, neither was anyone else who was amidsthips, but the stern of the ship was lifted up and started to go down immediately. It was very dark and very little could be seen, but some of the crew said afterwards that a considerable amount of water was thrown onto the deck, there was no smell and no flame. I think the explosion occurred under No. 5 hold on the centre line of the ship, near the after bulkheads of the engine-room, 350 feet from the bow. All the holds were insulated and four of these insulated beams [each weighing a ton] from No. 5 hold were thrown up onto the deck, and the hold rapidly filled with water. All the lights went out, the dynamos being situated in the after end of the engine-room'.

The damage to the dynamo prevented an SOS from being transmitted. Using electric torches, the crew took to three of the four lifeboats. One boat was caught before a chance wave washed it clear of the hull. A newspaper later reported how 'the strong smell of burnt powder after the explosion — described by one man as exactly like the smell after a heavy gun has been fired — combined with the heavy sea and the grease through which many of them had to crawl made most of the men violently sick'. The ship sank within 30 minutes of hitting the

mine. Fifty-seven survivors spent an anxious night drifting in the minefield before being rescued the following morning by the auxiliary minesweeper HMAS *Orara*. One crew-member was lost, the ship's carpenter, Jonathan Kinnair, who ill-advisedly tried to retrieve his recent winnings from gambling on the Melbourne Cup horse race and drowned.

In the meantime, the American Pioneer Line cargo steamer *City of Rayville*, emblazoned with the Stars and Stripes on her hull, had taken aboard a cargo of lead ingots at Port Pirie. En route from Adelaide to Melbourne, shortly after nightfall at 1947 hours on November 8, she unwittingly struck another one of *Passat's* mines at the western end of Bass Strait. The massive explosion lifted the

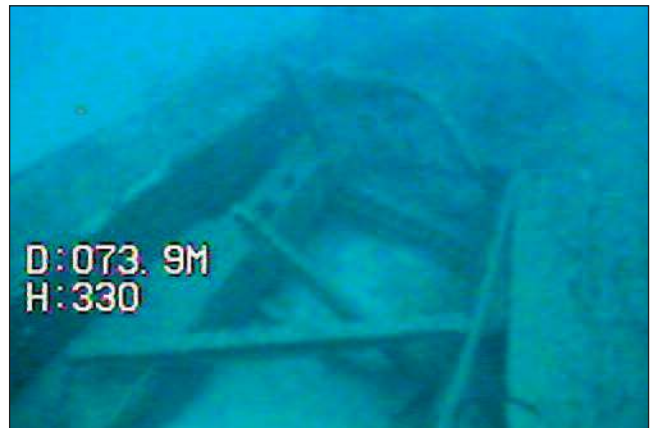


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The following day, November 8, *Passat's* mines scored a second victim when the American steam freighter *SS City of Rayville* hit a mine south of Cape Otway at the western entrance to Bass Strait, sinking within 38 minutes — the first US merchant ship lost in the Second World War. Fishing boats from Apollo Bay rescued 37 of the crew save for one man, Third Engineer Mac B. Bryan of Randleman, North Carolina, who had re-entered the vessel to find his personal items and subsequently drowned. He became the first of over 9,000 US merchant seamen who lost their lives during the war.



ANGELA MILLINE



DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

The general location of the *City of Rayville's* wreck had been known since 2002, but it was finally pinpointed in March 2009 when a research team from Deakin University led by marine

scientist Daniel Ierodiaconou (left), using multi-beam sonar imagery and remotely-operated video equipment, found the wreck about nine miles south of the Cape Otway lighthouse (right).

Right: With two ships having been sunk in so many days, Bass Strait was closed to shipping and four minesweepers commenced sweeping on November 9, HMAS *Orara* and *Durraween* off Wilsons Promontory and *Warrego* and *Swan* off Cape Otway. Here an official cameraman on board *Orara*, using a Bell and Howell Eyemo 35mm camera, films one of four German mines swept up that day, with *Durraween* in the background. Swept mines like these were destroyed and sunk by rifle fire from the minesweepers.



AWM 006948/20

ship's stern out of the water and tore out the ship's foremast. Wreckage and lead ingots were hurled towards the superstructure. From a distance, the lighthouse keeper at Cape Otway reported a sheet of flame shooting skyward out to sea while locals congregating at an Apollo Bay pub heard a loud explosion.

Captain Arthur P. Cronin directed radio operator Second Officer Fred A. Gritzer to transmit an SOS signal giving the ship's position. Within five minutes the bridge was awash. Both lifeboats were quickly lowered and launched. Mac Bryan, who was on duty at the time, became the first US merchant marine sailor casualty of the war after jumping into the icy sea without a life jacket and drowning. A rescued officer later explained how 'we dragged several [men] out, half-frozen, and then waited for the old ship to sink. She was listing heavily by the head with her propeller high out of the water. In a few minutes she put her nose down and stuck vertically out of the water, buried to the bridge. She stood like that for a time and then dived straight down with a hissing of escaping air'. Three Apollo Bay fishing boats rescued the remaining 37 crew from a 'choppy sea in complete darkness'. Brought back into the town, the men were accommodated in a local hotel. US Secretary of State Cordell Hull later wrote individual letters of thanks to all involved in the rescue from the first US vessel lost in the war, though Washington, technically, was still neutral at this time.

'The war has come to Australia', Navy Minister William 'Billy' Hughes declared while denying allegations of Fifth Columnists laying mines from fishing boats. Rumours of U-Boats also abounded.

INDIRECT VICTIMS

HMAS *Goorangai* was one of three Royal Australian Navy (RAN) minesweepers ordered to sweep Bass Strait and salvage debris in the wake of the sinkings. Heading from Port Phillip Bay to open water on November 20, the small former fishing trawler (223 tons) accidentally collided with the HMAT *Duntroon* (10,634 tons, loaded with troops and en route to Sydney). Bisected, *Goorangai* sank quickly. Despite *Duntroon* lowering her lifeboats and firing rockets to alert the lighthouse at nearby Queenscliff, wartime security regulations prevented the ship from stopping or sweeping the water with her searchlights. *Goorangai's* entire crew of 24 officers and men perished. Despite an extensive search only six bodies were ever recovered from the first Australian Navy ship lost in the war.

Another indirect victim was the interstate cargo and passenger steamer SS *Orungal* (6,000 tons), which ran ashore at Barwon Heads on the night of November 20/21 in squally weather. Attempting to enter Port

Phillip Bay, Captain Samuel Gilling was aware that a minefield had been laid and warned not to deviate from the swept channel. Fearing that a mine may have broken loose, Gilling was also uneasy about his position as he approached the entrance to the bay. Mistaking the lights at Barwon Heads for the Port Lonsdale lighthouse in the deteriorating weather, the vessel ran aground on a reef. The crew of 81 and the 17 passengers were safely ferried ashore by lifeboat.

THE TOLL CONTINUES

Penguin's minefields were less successful. Her northernmost minefield claimed its first victim on November 29 when the 1,052-ton coastal steamer *Nimbin* struck a mine off Norah Head in New South Wales. Bound for Sydney, the small vessel sank with the loss of seven of her crew of 20. Krüder's minefield in Spencer Gulf claimed its first quarry, the British steamer *Hertford* (10,923 tons), on the evening of December 7. Steaming to Melbourne from Fremantle, the former German freighter (ceded after the First World



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Left: On the evening of November 20, one of the auxiliary minesweepers engaged in searching for the enemy mines, HMAS *Goorangai*, sank after accidentally colliding with the much-larger coastal liner and troopship HMAT *Duntroon* in the mouth of Port Phillip Bay, Queenscliff, Victoria — the first ship from the Royal Australian Navy to be lost in the war. All of her 24 crewmen drowned. As the wreck posed a threat to

shipping, the sunken hull was subsequently blasted with explosives in January 1941. Declared an historic shipwreck in 1995, she now lies in pieces on the seabed off Queenscliff, where it is a popular dive site. Right: In November 1980, a memorial to *Goorangai* was erected on Hesse Street on Shortland Bluff, overlooking the sea where she perished and listing the names of all the casualties.



DAVID MITCHELL-GREEN



However, not all mines could be swept, and there were numerous instances of others that broke free from their anchored mooring lines and were eventually found washed ashore. On June 4, 1941, cray fisherman Roy McInnes noticed a floating object about four miles north-west of the port town of Robe in the Limestone Coast of South Australia. He sailed



home to report on it to Constable A. J. M. Huxley who quickly organised a fleet of fishing boats to tackle it. McInnes himself managed to lasso the mine which he then towed to Long Beach at the end of a 500-foot rope. The Navy disposal squad soon identified it as a German naval mine in full working order and successfully disarmed it.



Robe is located roughly midway between the approaches to Adelaide, where *Pinguin* laid 40 of her mines, and the western entrance to Bass Strait, where *Passat* laid 40 of hers. However, since the current along the South Australian coast is mainly



eastward, the mine most likely originated from *Pinguin*. This was the first German sea mine found on the South Australian coast, and the first indication that enemy minelayers had been active in this area too.

War as part of war reparations) struck a mine at the entrance to Spencer Gulf. Severely damaged by the 'terrific explosion', the forward holds flooded though the stricken vessel remained afloat and was towed stern first by two tug boats to Port Lincoln for temporary repairs. No lives were lost. (*Hertford* was repaired and returned to service. She was later sunk by the German submarine *U-571* on March 29, 1942, off the north-east coast of America).

The deadly corollary from *Pinguin's* incursion continued the following year. Barely a month passed without the discovery of one or more mines. Besides the sweeping operations by the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla, other detached mines were found floating at sea or washed ashore. 'Floaters' were often detonated by rifle fire while those washed

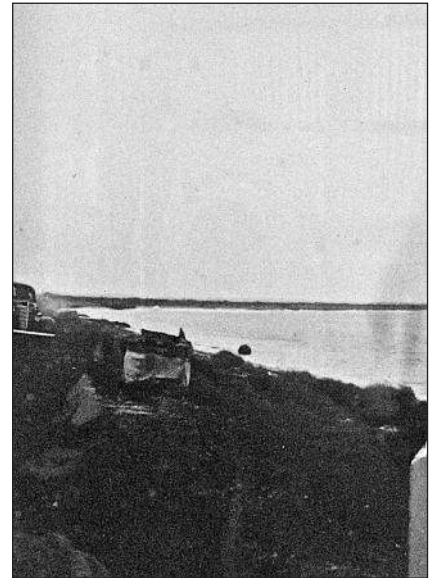
Right: The mine — or rather its iron casing — was preserved and today stands on Mundy Terrace, next to the Seafarer's Memorial, on Robe's seafront boulevard.



DAVID MITCHELL-GREEN



However, not all mine incidents ended this peacefully. On July 12 a fisherman, M. Stebhens, discovered a mine while he was trawling off Rivoli Bay near Beachport, a fishing town some 50 miles south of Robe. He reported his find to Constable R. G. McRae, who informed the Naval authorities in Adelaide, and a Rendering Mines Safe (RMS) team of three was sent to investigate. The following morning four fishing boats, belonging to Stebhens, H. Haines, D. McCourt and Corigliano Bros, went out to search for the mine. This snapshot shows the mine being hauled in by one of the fishing boats.



It was first pulled ashore between the jetty and the Lake George outlet, just 300 yards from the town. The RMS team originally wanted to dismantle the mine but on further investigation decided to explode it. The following morning, July 14, the mine was pulled back into the sea and towed about a mile across the bay where it was brought ashore at a remote beach some distance east of the piling along the road wash-out. A demolition charge was attached and connected by half a mile of cable with a battery in the vicinity of the road to the Beachport cemetery.

ashore were disabled by a RAN Rendering Mines Safe (RMS) party. A mine caught in the net of the trawler *Millimuma* (287 tons) off Broken Bay, New South Wales, exploded on March 26, 1941, killing seven of her crew including the captain. Five survivors were picked up by a passing collier.

The light cruiser HMAS *Adelaide* and RAAF aerial searches failed to locate the two German intruders, which had already escaped Australian waters for a rendezvous in the Indian Ocean on November 15, 750 miles west of Perth. SKL recognised and applauded the mining operation: 'outstanding in its planning, preparation and execution'. Grossadmiral Erich Raeder, the commander-in-chief of the Kriegsmarine, also directed Krüder to award five Iron Crosses, First Class, and 50 Second Class to select crew members.

Right: As they were working on the mine, the men felt confident enough to take a photograph of themselves up close to the lethal steel sphere.



LESS HILL COLLECTION/MOUNT GAMBIER LIBRARY



DAVID MITCHELLHILL-GREEN

Penguin sank four more ships before entering Antarctic waters in mid-January 1941 where she stalked and captured an entire Norwegian whaling fleet comprising two factory ships, a whale-oil tanker and 11 small whale catchers, one of which was renamed *Adjutant* and retained as a scouting vessel. Three more vessels were sunk over the next five months before *Penguin* was intercepted by HMS *Cornwall* and sunk in the Arabian Sea on May 8, 1941. Germany's most-successful Hilfskreuzer, during her 11-month voyage *Penguin* sank or captured 32 vessels — a combined total of 154,710 tons. *Adjutant* afterwards rendezvoused with the auxiliary cruiser HSK *Komet*, a veteran of the audacious attack on Nauru (see *After the Battle* No. 94), in the Indian Ocean. Together the two vessels sailed south of Australia to the Pacific Ocean from where *Adjutant* mined the waters off New Zealand's Godley Head (see *After the Battle* No. 149).

Left: Today just an innocuous surf beach with Beachport visible in the distance.



AWMI P08005.003

TWO NAVAL MEN KILLED

Explosion At Beachport

MINE DEMOLITION CHARGE PREMATURE

Two naval seamen were killed yesterday at Beachport, when a demolition charge, which was set

THE BORDER WATCH



AWMI P08005.002

However, shortly after this picture was taken, a wave lifted the mine up onto the beach where it fell on its detonators and exploded, killing two of the RMS team, Able Seamen Thomas Todd (left) and William Danswan (right).

TRAGEDY AT BEACHPORT

The final tragedy from *Penguin's* mine-laying operation occurred on land. Following the discovery of an enemy mine floating in Rivoli Bay on July 12, 1941, a naval RMS party was sent from HMAS *Torrens'* Port Adelaide Depot to render the mine safe or destroy it. Driving overnight, Lieutenant-Commander Arthur Greening and Able Seamen William Danswan and Thomas William Todd arrived at the coastal town of Beachport the next morning. A local fishing boat was used to locate and tow the mine to a sheltered stretch of sand, some 300 yards from the town's nearest building. Although he had never undertaken an RMS course, as the officer in charge, Greening ordered Danswan — the only qualified individual present — to keep away while he personally examined the mine. Noting that it was a standard German EMC mine, known to the Allies as a type YX, with a 'C' mechanism plate, Greening later described it as 'rusty, and marine growth and barnacles were on the lower portion'. He also found that the mooring wire was still attached and 'very, very taut'.

Drifting German mines usually presented little, if any, danger. After being dropped in water, the tension of the cable tethering it to the anchor pulls out a mooring spindle. This

action closes a safety switch, which trips the booster release lever and arms the mine. If one of the seven Hertz horns were struck, a glass vial would break and release sulphuric acid — the electrolyte in a lead-acid battery — which would generate an electric current and complete the firing circuit. Should a mine break free from its anchor, the sudden lack of tension would allow the spring-loaded spindle to fly back inside and open the firing circuit, thus preventing the mine from exploding. If the two-position self-disarming switch on the base plate, known as the 'A-E' switch, was set to 'E', then the mine would detonate upon the release of mooring tension as it broke adrift.

Observing that the arming switch was loose, Danswan inspected the mine's mechanism plate and found it set to 'A'. The protruding spindle was also found to be loose, and the safety pin hole visible. Greening judged the beached mine to be unsafe and recommended that the mooring cable be unshackled before the mine was destroyed using a demolition charge. The mine at this time was resting on the beach, the lower horns dangerously close, 'about two inches', from the sand and well above the high water mark. While Danswan suggested that the spindle could be forced home with the help

of a large hammer and a 'certain amount of force', Greening overruled him through fear that the spindle could be miss-hit.

Guarded overnight on the beach by local police and fishermen, the mine was 'skidded' back into the water the next day using a plank of wood as a sled. Floating 'quite nicely', it was moved by dinghy to a more-distant site where it could be safely detonated without damage to the town. Hauled up onto the beach to the high water mark for a second time, Danswan reported that the mine was still dangerous. With the mooring spindle still exposed, Greening decided to



DAVID MITCHELL-GREEN



Left: In October 1974 the Beachport National Trust erected a monument on the sand hills overlooking the site of the explosion to honour the two seamen who were the first victims of enemy action on Australian soil during the Second World War. Here Bob Sommerville, First Chairman of the



Trust, addresses the gathering at the dedication on October 13. Right: The memorial stands on Millicent Beachport Road on Beachport's Surf Beach. A replica mine has been added to the roof. (Pieces of the original mine are on display at the town's Old Wool and Grain Store Museum.)

ABC SOUTH EAST/KATE HILL



Left: On July 18 — just four days after the Beachport tragedy — another mine was found on the beach about six miles south of the Cape Jaffa lighthouse by William Fletcher. This location was some 25 miles north of Robe, so most likely this was again one of *Pinguin's* mines. This was successfully disarmed and today it stands preserved at the junction of Victoria Street and Smillie Street in Robe, less than a mile from the mine preserved on Mundy Terrace. **Right:** Three mines — most likely from the minefield of 40 laid by *Passat* in Bass Strait's eastern end — drifted ashore along Ninety Mile Beach, the long stretch of sandy coastline in the south-eastern part of Victoria. The first of them was



spotted by an RAAF aircraft between Seaspray and Lett's Beach in June 1941. A Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC) detachment guarded it until an RMS team arrived from Melbourne and successfully removed the detonators and explosive charge, the latter then being burned on the beach. The disarmed mine lay for many years in the garden of Bill McKenzie, one of the VDC guards, before being moved 20 miles to the inland town of Sale where McKenzie's former VDC colleague Bert Rayner ran a small private museum in his garage. It was moved several times after that but since 2004 it has been a prime exhibit at the Gippsland Armed Forces Museum in West Sale.

explode the mine using a TNT charge, the latter detonated with current from the battery of the RMS party's truck.

Electrical cable was then run from the truck, across a railway track, road and sand dune and to the mine, a distance of some 800 yards. Although the lower horns were essentially touching the sand, Greening felt that it was too soft to damage and trigger the contact horns. Small waves, in the meantime, had begun to wash around the base of the mine, pulling the wires out of the detonator. Following the missfire, the three men returned to their truck to get a new detonator. Leaving Greening behind, the two ratings set off through the scrub back to the beach. Hotelier Henry Tarrant watched the men through his binoculars as they walked 'down a sandhill near where the mine was situated'. Quite unexpectedly, he became a witness to misfortune; to his horror, the mine prematurely exploded.

'As soon as the smoke cleared I could see both men lying on the sand', Tarrant later recounted. One of the first people to arrive at the scene of the blast was local fisherman Charles Wilby. Danswan, he ascertained, was dead. Todd, however, was still breathing. 'I immediately commenced to work artificial respiration on him, and continued for about 20 minutes without success. He appeared to live for approximately 15 minutes — his injuries appeared to be excessive'.

A Court of Inquiry into the catastrophe was convened on the afternoon of July 21, 1941. Dr Richard Salts, a physician from the town of Millicent who examined the bodies — the first casualties of war on Australian soil — testified that 'life was extinct in each

case. The deceased Danswan had a perforated wound of the skull and also a perforated abdomen. The deceased Todd had a perforated wound of the skull and chest and arm injuries. The cause of death was shock in each case and the wounds in each case were sufficient to cause death'.

The Court agreed that Greening was 'handicapped by his lack of local knowledge in choosing a position for beaching the mine, and had to be guided in the choice of a landing place by a local fisherman. This resulted

in unnecessary handling of the mine'. The Naval Board was critical of his 'unnecessarily hazardous' decision to move the mine without seeking instruction from a higher authority. Danswan — the only qualified RMS individual present — should have been the first person to inspect the mine and also 'allowed to exert reasonable pressure on the spindle in an attempt to push it in and render the mine safe'. This would have been less hazardous than re-floating the mine for countermining elsewhere, a judgement later

CLEARANCE OF GERMAN SEA MINES OFF AUSTRALIA'S SHORES 1940-41

Location	Mines laid	By commerce raider	Mines cleared by:				Total
			Ship	Sweep	RMS	Rifle	
Bass Strait	80	<i>Passat</i>	2	(1940) 17 (1941) 2	13	11	45
Banks Strait	30	<i>Passat</i>	0	0	4	3	7
Sydney-Newcastle	40	<i>Pinguin</i>	2	(1941) 13	11	3	29
Hobart	40	<i>Pinguin</i>	0	(1941) 1	0	1	2
Adelaide	40	<i>Pinguin</i>	1	(1940) 1	17	3	22
Total	230		5	34	45	21	105

Of the 230 mines laid by *Pinguin* and *Passat*, 105 had been cleared by the end of 1941. Of these, one third had been swept and the other two thirds had been located drifting or ashore. By that time many of the surviving 125 mines had broken from their moorings and were outside the original minefields, floating freely around the Indian and Pacific Oceans.



DAVID MITCHELL-GREEN

Left: Mines continued to be washed ashore practically for the duration of the war. On October 26, 1943, one of them was discovered by local cray fisherman Clarrie Hammond on the beach at Port MacDonnell, the southernmost town of South Australia, located 55 miles south of Beachport. Rendered safe by



an RMS team, today it stands preserved outside the town's former customs house at the junction of Sea Parade and Charles Street. In all, between June 1941 and January 1944, 14 mines would drift ashore in South Australia. *Right:* One of the defused mines was used on a RAN recruitment drive.

rejected. It was concluded that a thorough inspection could have been made while the mine was still in the water since the sea inshore was calm.

The Board was 'regretfully of the opinion' that Greening was partially responsible for the loss of one life; had the mine exploded while only Danswan was working on it, Todd would not have died. The explosion was believed to have been caused by a rising tide that lifted the mine and allowed it to drop back on one of its lower horns, bending it and detonating the explosive. This unfortunate action would have been 'assisted by the way [in] which the mine was moored to the shore'.

Centre: One of the mines that was found and disarmed in the Adelaide area was subsequently set up outside the living quarters of Largs Battery at Fort Largs, Adelaide, where an official Army photographer pictured it in September 1944. The sign in front explains that the purpose was to discourage careless talk among the battery crewmen. *Right:* In November 1961 the Army handed over Fort Largs and it became home to the South Australia Police Academy. When that moved to a new location in 2012, the National Trust of South Australia proposed converting the fort into a heritage centre as the other option would be to sell it to property developers. The latter idea received strong opposition from civic action groups but a compromise was reached in June 2016, the National Trust undertaking to restore and preserve the historic buildings (including the barracks block) while allowing for residential development on the site. The project now awaits funding from the national government.



AWM 080115



DAVID WALSH

WW2TALK



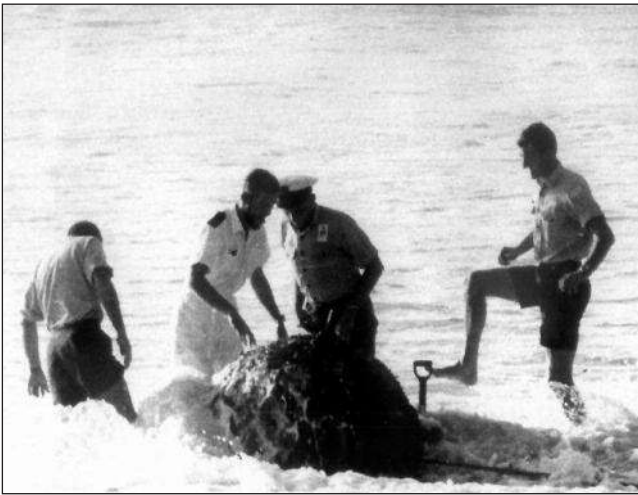
Left: On March 15, 1966 — over 35 years after it had been laid — a mine was washed ashore at Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast in Queensland, nearly 500 miles north of where *Penguin* had unrolled her East Coast minefield. Beach guests and residents in the Elkhorn Avenue and Cavill Avenue areas were



DAVID MITCHELL-HILL-GREEN

quickly evacuated and the police and the Royal Australian Navy set up a cordon around the mine. *Right:* Modern high-rise development has brought huge changes but the apartment block on the right pinpoints the spot on Esplanade beach between Staghorn and Elkhorn Avenues.

RAN CLEARANCE DIVERS ASSOCIATION



Left: A RAN bomb disposal detachment, Clearance Diving Team 2 led by Lieutenant Tom Parker, flew in from Sydney to disarm the deadly war relic. Here Parker (second from left) and his men work on the mine in the high-tide surf. *Right:* Watched by about 20,000 spectators, the mine was carefully loaded onto a sled and dragged four miles behind a bulldozer to the isolated part



RAN CLEARANCE DIVERS ASSOCIATION

of the Spit, north of Surfers Paradise, where it was carefully opened and defused, the explosives being burned on site. With the danger averted, the five RAN men — Parker, Chief Petty Officer John Dollar, Leading Seaman Paddy Turley and Able Seamen Allan Ingham and Phil Kember — were handed the keys to the city by the mayor of Cold Coast, Em Harley.

POSTSCRIPT

Penguin's mines continued to be found for years after they were first laid. As late as 1966, sunbathers at Surfers Paradise on the Queensland coast were surprised when a barnacle-encrusted mine washed ashore.

A large steel wreck found in August 1997 was identified as the *MV City of Rayville* in 2009 after a group of university researchers led by Dr Daniel Ierodiaconou used multi-beam sonar imagery and remotely-operated video equipment to investigate the watery grave. Sitting upright on its keel, listing slightly, the first American ship sunk in the war today lies in 270 feet of water, some nine miles off the Cape Otway Lighthouse. The historic wreck is listed on the Victorian Heritage Register and Australia's National Historic Shipwrecks Database.

Right: In November 2016 — 50 years after the incident — Parker, by now 79, returned to the site of his heroic exploit. The current mayor, Tom Tate (left), handed him a boomerang as a gift, quipping 'He's a bit like a boomerang to me, he came back'. Parker, who lives in the United States, had returned to Australia for a reunion of the 16th Royal Australian Navy Minesweepers Squadron.



ABC NEWS/TOM FORBES