

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 German Ship To Be Landed At Newport News

LOOKS LIKE GERMAN WILL BE INTERVIEWED

Commander Says He Intends Remain For Several Days To Overhaul Ship

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

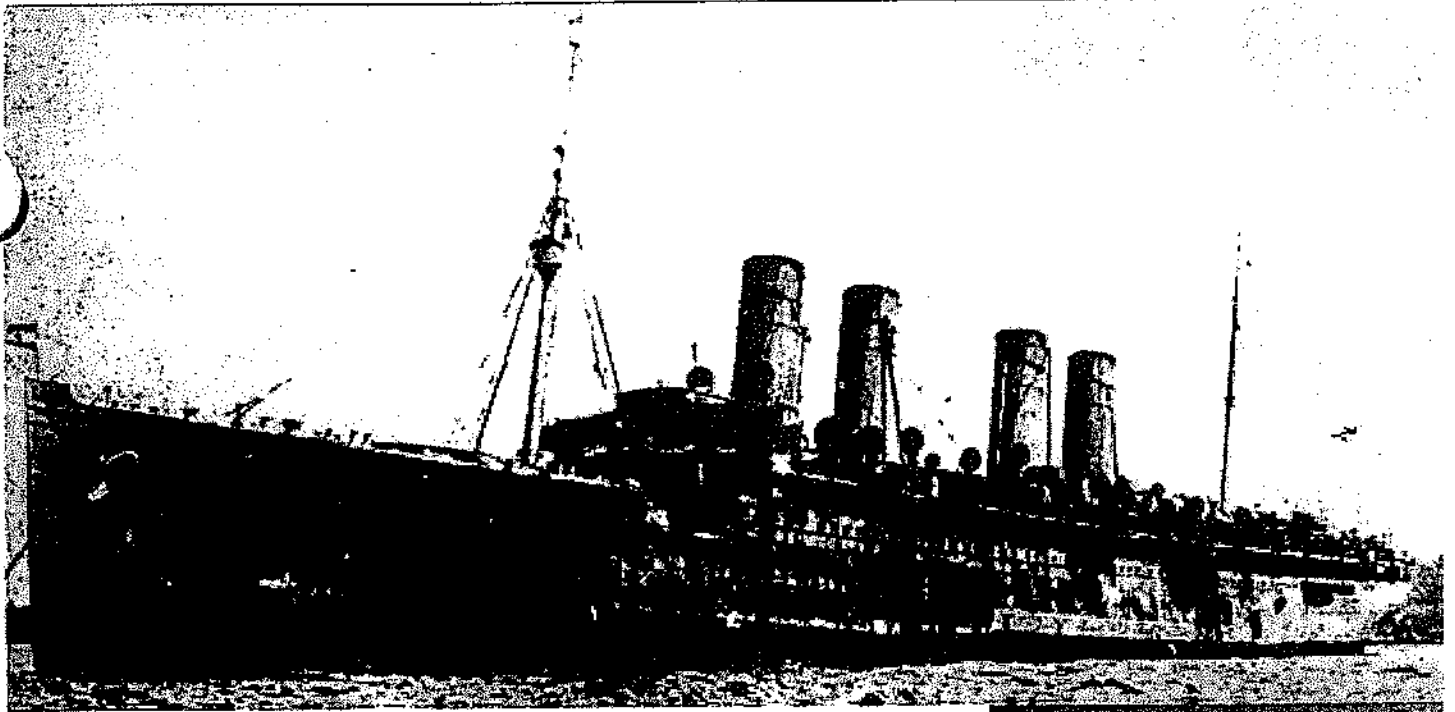
Australia in September 1914 where she joined up with fellow German auxiliary cruiser *Cormoran*. Both ships quickly discovered a major problem with using civilian cruise liners as commerce raiders. While they had excellent speed and sea keeping qualities, cruise liners consumed an enormous amount of 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 to provide a safe harbor. Commerce raiders continued on page



The Navy got to relax after taking care of Prinz Friedrich. Then a week later, the *Virginian-Pilot* took this photograph and announced that the battered and bruised auxiliary cruiser *Kronprinz Wilhelm* just dropped anchor in Hampton Roads. Before the war, the ship was the pride of the German passenger steam fleet and made runs between Germany and the United States. (April 11, 1915 photograph from the *Virginian-Pilot*)

Commerce raiders continued from page 6

to begin repairs to his vessel. The shipyard agreed and took her into one of her dry-docks. The port call in Hampton Roads was the crew's first since leaving Tsing Tsau, China in September. The *Virginian-Pilot* described the ship as "sea-scarred and rusty" with "thickgrown seaweed on her sides nearly a foot long and with grim rifles forward, amidships and aft." Thierichsen admitted to reporters that his ship was "unseaworthy at the present time." Inspectors from the shipyard looked over the vessel and said it would take at least three weeks to repair it.

Friedrich's arrival in Hampton Roads set off alarm bells in Washington as the State Department knew that Allied governments would either demand that the German raider be denied a chance to commence repairs or that the United States permanently impound her. U.S. officials became further concerned when they received the news that one of *Friedrich's* victims was an American ship, a three masted schooner named *William P. Frye*. While *Frye's* crew was unharmed, President Wilson still condemned the attack on the neutral vessel and publicly demanded that the German government pay reparations. Thierichsen scoffed at this notion as he claimed *Frye* had English cargo.

The crisis was elevated a notch when the Allied cruiser squadron caught up with the German vessel and set up a blockade off the

Virginia Capes. Local papers added to the hysteria by publishing "intercepted" Allied wireless messages. These messages said they would try to sink the German vessel at all costs.

American authorities outwardly tried to act as brave as they could. They reminded both sides that any fighting would have to be done outside American territorial waters. However, there was little to back up the bold statements. The few local forces present amounted to coast defense units at Ft. Monroe, two Coast Guard cutters, and the unfinished giant battleship *Pennsylvania* (BB-38).

The crisis became a political hot potato for Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels. The Secretary's critics had publicly attacked the ex-newspaper publisher's policies since the day he took office in 1912. The crisis in Hampton Roads only gave them more ammunition as they claimed the Navy was not prepared to handle the situation. It brewed speculation that the Germans would try to make the situation more complicated by arming their other steamers already in other American ports.

One might wonder where the U.S. Atlantic Fleet was during this crisis. For the Navy Secretary, the situation could not have come at a worse time. The entire U.S. Atlantic Fleet had left Hampton Roads in January for Guantanamo Bay and was currently



The crisis in Hampton Roads could not have come at a worse time for Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels. Already under fire for his lack of Naval expertise, there were no Naval ships ready to offer immediate assistance to the situation developing in Hampton Roads. (HRNM photograph of an official Navy painting)

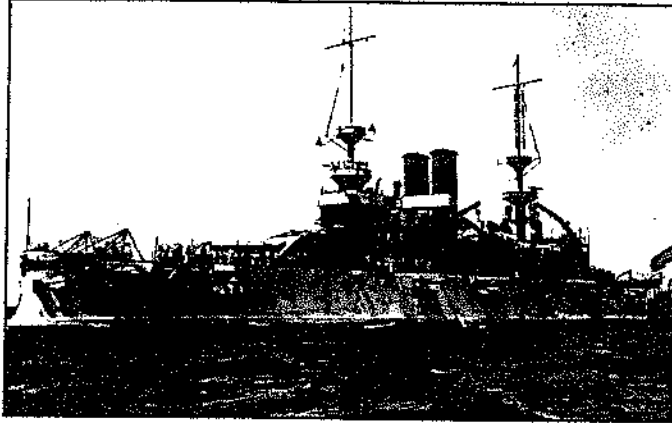
commencing winter exercises. The Navy did not expect them back in Hampton Roads until April.

Daniels responded to his critics by ordering four older battleships out of the Navy's Reserve Fleet in Philadelphia to mobilize and steam for Hampton Roads. Additionally, he also ordered a general mobilization of all available ships at East Coast ports to ensure American neutrality was upheld. The Spanish-American War veteran USS

Commerce raiders continued on page 8

Commerce raiders continued from page 7

Brooklyn (ACR-3), for example, was put on alert to keep watch over six German steam liners currently docked in Boston. Somewhat to Daniels' embarrassment, the Reserve Fleet had to pool the crews of all four battleships on to the Great White Fleet-veteran USS *Alabama* (BB-8) due to a chronic shortage of sailors. Her captain reported that they would



Secretary Daniels instructed that all four battleships of the Navy's Reserve Fleet steam from Philadelphia to Hampton Roads to act as a peacekeeping force. Due to a chronic sailor shortage, the four battleships had to pool their crews on to USS *Alabama* (BB-8) which arrived in the region in late March. (HRNM photo)

not get underway for another two weeks.

Thierichens was quite smug about the whole turn of events. He told local papers that he planned to break out of Hampton Roads with the assistance of the battlecruiser *SMS Von Der Tan* and a U-boat nearby once his ship was repaired and refueled. For Thierichens, this was wishful thinking as *Von Der Tan* was still in Germany and later fought at the Battle of Jutland.

As for the officers and crews of the ships sunk by *Friedrich*, the reaction differed from officers and the enlisted personnel. The officers were quite appreciative of how well they were treated by Capt. Thierichens. The sailors however told newspaper reporters that the Germans forced them to eat spoiled food, drink salty water, provided no heat in colder climates, and denied them fresh air while in the Tropics. They did later admit that the German sailors were working under the same conditions as they were living.

On March 15, Thierichens revised his repair request to Newport News Shipbuilding. Instead of the putting his ship into dry-dock for three weeks, he asked the shipyard only for spare parts for his ship's boilers and other machines. He would have his crew do the necessary repairs instead. The shipyard denied his request, removed the vessel from dry-dock, and placed her alongside one of the yard's piers. U.S. Custom authorities

asked Thierichens for his intentions. While he did not give any direct response to them, he remained as definite as ever to the newspapers. "Despite the changes of weather and the hazards of the cruise, we have not lost a single life and the crew we have today is the same to a man as that which left Tsing Tau many months ago and ready to take another chance," he commented to the *Virginian-Pilot*.

While British and French rotated their ships off the Virginia Capes and maintained their blockade, events in Hampton Roads got back to normal. *Friedrich's* crew began repairs to the hull and the ship's machinery for a week and caused little commotion. The Navy began to get a better handle on the situation when *Alabama* finally arrived in Hampton Roads on March 20. Welcome reinforcements in the form of six submarines arrived from their base in Connecticut soon after *Alabama's* arrival. They took station off the coast of Ft. Wool and in the Chesapeake Bay.

Troops from Ft. Monroe and sailors from the Navy Yard were placed on a 24-hour guard of *Friedrich* to ensure that no intruders would disturb the Germans. This included newspaper reporters. There was at least one incident where sailors spotted a photographer trying to snap a shot for the *Virginian-Pilot*. The sailors roughed the photographer up a bit, seized his camera, pulled out the plate, and threw it into the river.

Among foreign circles, the Navy was not winning any friends either. In an attempt to keep things under control, Navy and Customs officials instructed that no foreign ships could leave Hampton Roads and any ships coming in had to stop and be boarded. Any ship found violating the rules would be fired on. Twenty-five British ships, most loaded with horses and supplies for the French army, were held up, much to the annoyance of the British consulate and local exporters.

The consulate's attempts to remedy the situation only met with frustration. Local merchants took their case up with Virginia's congressional delegation, but with little effect. One of the reasons the British ships were kept

under lock and key was that a few of them had been caught sneaking coal and supplies out to the Allied blockade. This act violated American neutrality laws.

As the month of April rolled around, Allied cruisers maintained their blockade despite several gale force rain storms. Speculation on whether or not *Friedrich* was going to make a dash to freedom continued to circulate. Newspaper articles frequently prepped their readers for the possible battle by publishing every rumor heard and with information like water depths of the Chesapeake Bay and ship statistics.

Finally, on April 4, the State Department told *Friedrich* she had until April 6 at 4 a.m. to leave Hampton Roads. But it was still not clear whether or not the Germans would take advantage of the situation. They had passed up several opportunities to leave, particularly when the weather was bad or during moonless nights. Nonetheless, on April 6, the *Ledger-Star* reported that it looked like *Friedrich* was about to leave port and the showdown was about to begin.

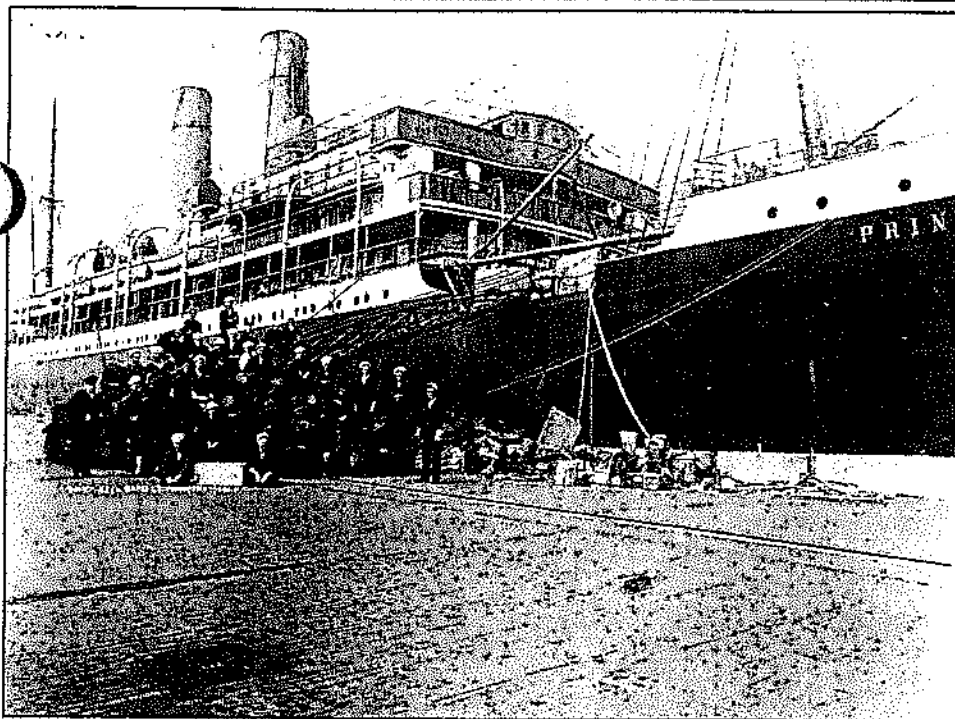
It soon became clear that Thierichens and *Friedrich* were not going to make a great dash to freedom. The German captain was well aware that his ship was in no condition to sail and that his potential opponents were too strong. His talk about a battlecruiser and U-boat coming to save him was nothing more than delusory thinking.

"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," a depressed Thierichens wrote, in broken English, to the Collector of Customs for Hampton Roads and Rear Adm. Helm, commandant of the Naval Shipyard and the senior officer in the region.

U.S. Customs officials impounded the ship on April 7. The Customs Service in turn handed the ship and her crew over to the Navy who took them both down to the Naval Shipyard.

There were still a few loose ends to tie up. The German government agreed to compensate Capt. Kiehne for the loss of *William P. Frye* as an interpretation of the treaty of friendship signed between the United States and Prussia during the American Revolution. Local papers suggested

Commerce raiders continued on page 8



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

Commerce raiders continued from page 9
 same way," he announced.

His executive officer, Lt. Warneke, had less kind words for the reporters. Warneke held learned through intercepted wireless messages why *Odenwald* failed to show up in time. American authorities had held up *Odenwald* in Puerto Rico for no particular reason. "It was the worse thing America could have done. You simply held that ship up in Puerto Rico until the British ships could come and try to catch us," he angrily remarked.

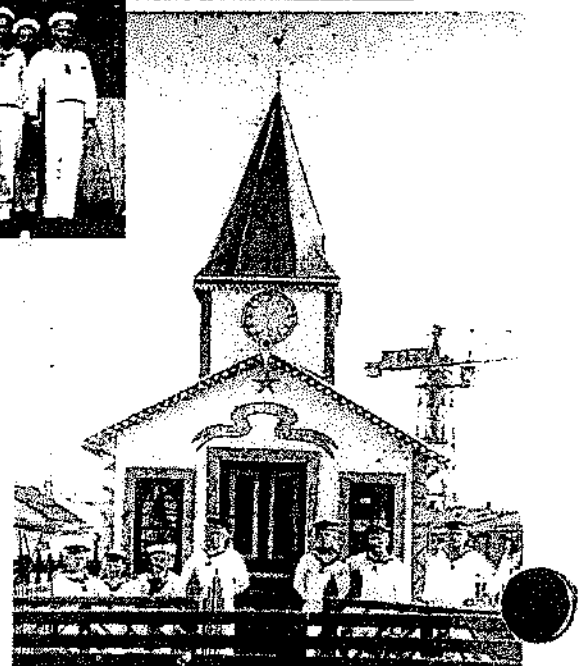
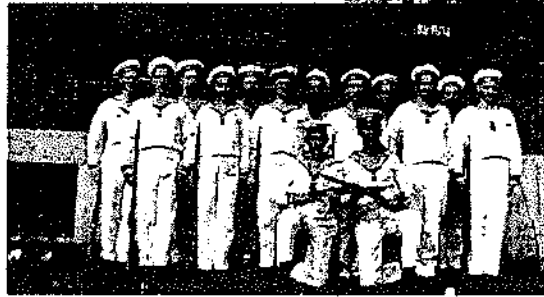
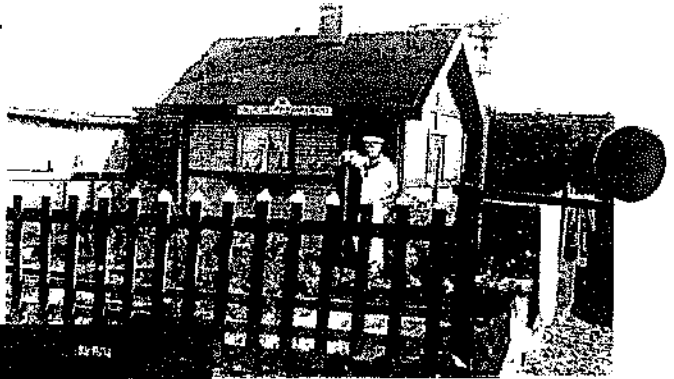
Unknown to him at the time, a second supply ship, the German steamer *Macedonia*, was within visual range of *Wilhelm*, but was captured by two British cruisers. The sight of the two cruisers caused *Wilhelm* to flee the scene before the identity of the steamer could be determined.

U.S. authorities geared up again for a possible showdown. In Washington, the State Department asked the German ambassador for *Wilhelm's* intentions. American diplomats informed both the ambassador and Capt. Thierfelder that the Germans had 24-hours to leave unless repairs were needed. The ambassador dispatched his naval attaché to Newport News to consult with Thierfelder. Even though 110 of his sailors suffered from beri-beri, the ship's boilers were lined with lead, and the Allied cruisers had returned, Thierfelder continued to insist that his ship would sail again.

In his second news conference, Thierfelder slammed his fist on his desk and announced "We must get out! The fact that ships might

handed down a series of directives and guidelines on what Naval and Customs officers should do when a belligerent ship arrived in an American port.

The guidelines led to a series of official inspections of *Wilhelm*, led by Atlantic Fleet



Greetings from "Eitel Wilhelm," VA. With little else to do, the crews of the two German cruisers received scrap materials from the Norfolk Naval Shipyard and built their own village. (Post cards courtesy of Harrell Forrest)

"We must get out! The fact that ships might sink us, that has no fear for us! Who am I? I am as nothing, nil. These men are nil [unless] we can do anything to help our country!"-Kronprinz Wilhelm's commanding officer Captain-Lieutenant Paul Thierfelder

sink us, that has no fear for us! Who am I? I am as nothing, nil. These men are nil [unless] we can do anything to help our country!" He claimed that his ship, however, would need at least three weeks of repairs.

While *Wilhelm's* arrival was not exactly a pleasant situation, it was much easier for American authorities to handle than when *Friedrich* arrived. Keeping the Allied cruiser force and the Germans apart was not a problem as the entire Atlantic Fleet was in the area. Additionally, since the *Friedrich* crisis, Secretary Daniels and his counterparts at the Treasury and State Departments had

commander Adm. Beatty, to determine if Capt. Thierfelder's repair claims were true. Beatty's inspection team found several inches of water in *Wilhelm's* hold and evidence that at least one British shell from the Bermuda cruiser battle had struck *Wilhelm's* port side. After looking at *Wilhelm's* boiler tubes, they confirmed Thierfelder's claims and endorsed his timetable of three weeks. The report cleared the way for Newport News Shipbuilding to take the ship into their largest dry-dock for repairs. However, Collector of Customs Hamilton warned Thierfelder to either commit to repairs and leave Hampton

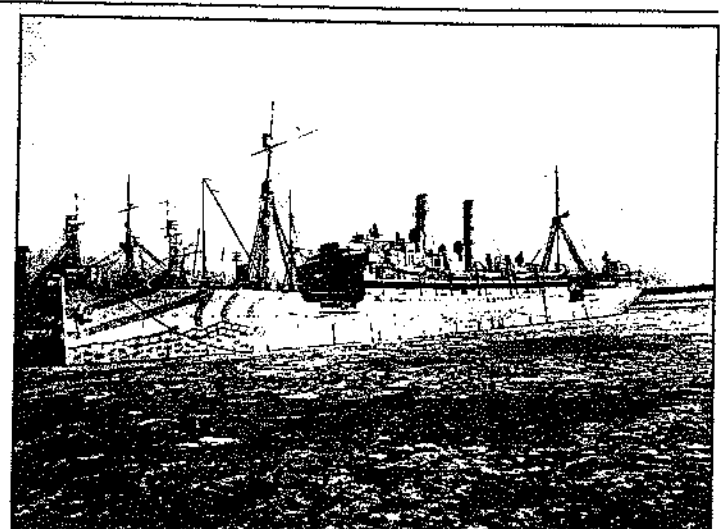
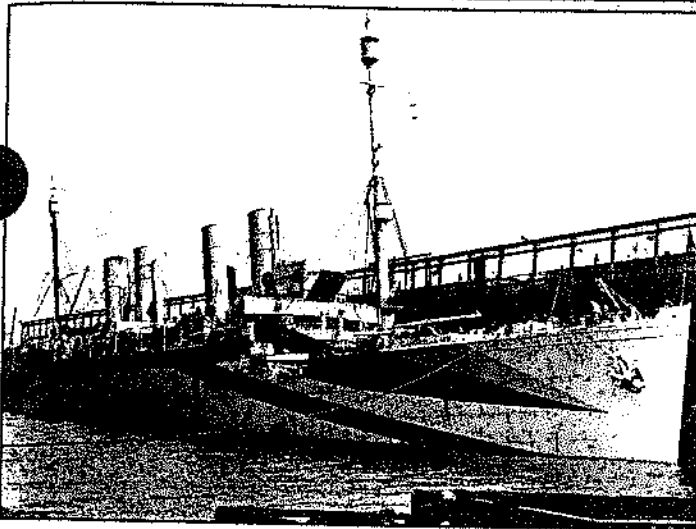
Roads or accept internment for the duration of the war by the end of the week.

Despite Thierfelder's public defiance-he held three more news conferences after the fist-pounding interview- the German captain had reasons to be concerned. Adm. Beatty's inspection team reported that the number of beri-beri cases was increasing at an alarming rate. Thirty-four more cases were reported since the German ship arrived.

This report deeply discouraged the German captain who cared very much for his crew. "You newspapers have said I was a smart fellow. Not I myself, but my crew-my men and my officers-every one of them, they are the heroes," he commented to the papers.

With great reluctance, Thierfelder changed his mind and decided to turn his ship over to American authorities. He cited the number of beri-beri cases as the primary reason for his decision. The arrival of Britain's fast-

Commerce raiders continued on page 15



What started out as a 40,000-ton headache in 1915, became a 40,000-ton gift from the Germans in 1917. Both ships are shown while they were operating under the American flag. USS Von Steuben (ex-SMS Kronprinz Wilhelm) is shown at left and USS DeKalb (ex-SMS Prinz Eitel Friedrich) is shown at right. (Naval Historical Center photos)

Commerce raiders continued from page 14

cruiser off the Virginia Capes, HMS *Glasgow*, might have also helped make up his mind. On April 28, a U.S. Navy crew boarded *Kronprinz Wilhelm* and took her down to the Norfolk Naval Shipyard for internment. The crisis of the German raiders was over.

The German sailors were allowed to stay with their ships while the vessels were tied up to the piers. With little else to do, the industrious sailors asked for and received scrap metal and other materials from the Naval Yard. They then constructed a typical German village next to their ships. The village was complete with a telegraph office, a police station, and a chapel. Named "Eitel Wilhelm," the village became a tourist attraction for the locals.

The Navy eventually moved both ships from the Norfolk Naval Shipyard up to the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard. When the United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, U.S. Custom's officials announced to the Germans that their ships were now prizes of war and their crews prisoners-of-war. The Navy ordered the Germans to take down the village and to enter a POW camp.

Workers in Philadelphia immediately set out to refurbish the cruisers as the Navy desperately needed them. When war was declared, the Navy and Congress discovered several deficiencies in the Atlantic Fleet's composition.

Among the more publicized problems was the lack of destroyers. But an equally serious problem was the lack of transport vessels. For all of the spending on battleships and building the Navy in the image of Alfred Mahan's

grand vision, the Navy had exactly two troop transports. This left the Navy and the Army scrambling to find means of transportation for the Army's newly formed American Expeditionary Force (AEF) bound for the trenches in France.

While cleaning out the ship, workers discovered several interesting items in the hold of *Friedrich*. Among them were several dozen kegs of German beer. The presence of so much alcohol might just explain both Theiren's overly positive attitude about his chances of escape from Hampton Roads and his captured captains' positive opinion of their captivity. All of the remaining beer was dumped overboard, but enthusiastic sailors piled on all the empty kegs on the pier for a portrait.

The Philadelphia Naval Shipyard completed the overhaul on both ships within two months. On May 12, 1917, the U.S. Navy commissioned *Prinz Friedrich* as USS *De Kalb*. They named her after General Baron De Kalb, a Prussian general who served as an agent to and as a senior officer in the Continental Army. *Kronprinz Wilhelm* was commissioned on June 9 as USS *Von Steuben*. Von Steuben also was a Prussian military officer who served in the Continental Army and is most remembered for bringing Prussian military discipline to the American soldiers.

While both ships were transports, they kept their designation as "auxiliary cruisers." The Cruiser and Transport Division of the Atlantic Fleet placed both ships in the First Cruiser Squadron, Third Division, joining the cruisers USS *Columbia* (C-12) and USS *Minneapolis* (C-13). Armed with 15 guns and depth charge racks, both ships had outstanding careers

during the war.

DeKalb left from New York under escort for France on June 14, 1917, carrying the first American soldiers of the AEF. Over the course of the war, *DeKalb* made 11 eastbound trips, out of both New York and Hampton Roads, to France carrying over 11,000 soldiers without incident.

Von Steuben had a significantly more busy tour under the American flag than *De Kalb*. Like *De Kalb*, *Von Steuben* made several successful trips to France. While returning back to the United States, she came across lifeboats with British sailors in them. While the American vessel approached the sailors, a submerged U-151 lined *Von Steuben* up for an attack. A common U-boat tactic was to sink one merchant ship and then attack any future rescue ship.

While the American ship picked up the sailors, U-151 pounced. *Von Steuben's* lookouts spotted a torpedo wake and the captain gave a frantic "full astern" order. The torpedo missed by only a few yards. *Von Steuben* counter-attacked with depth charges and succeeded in driving off the German submarine.

After several New York/Norfolk to Brest, France runs, *Von Steuben* was taken out of service a year after the war ended. *De Kalb* was taken out of service a couple of days earlier.

Both ships initially caused major headaches for Naval and civilian authorities due to their brash German commanders, their Allied hunters, and other diplomatic complications. But they were also a welcome gift and help fill a gap in an imbalanced World War I American Navy. 🚢