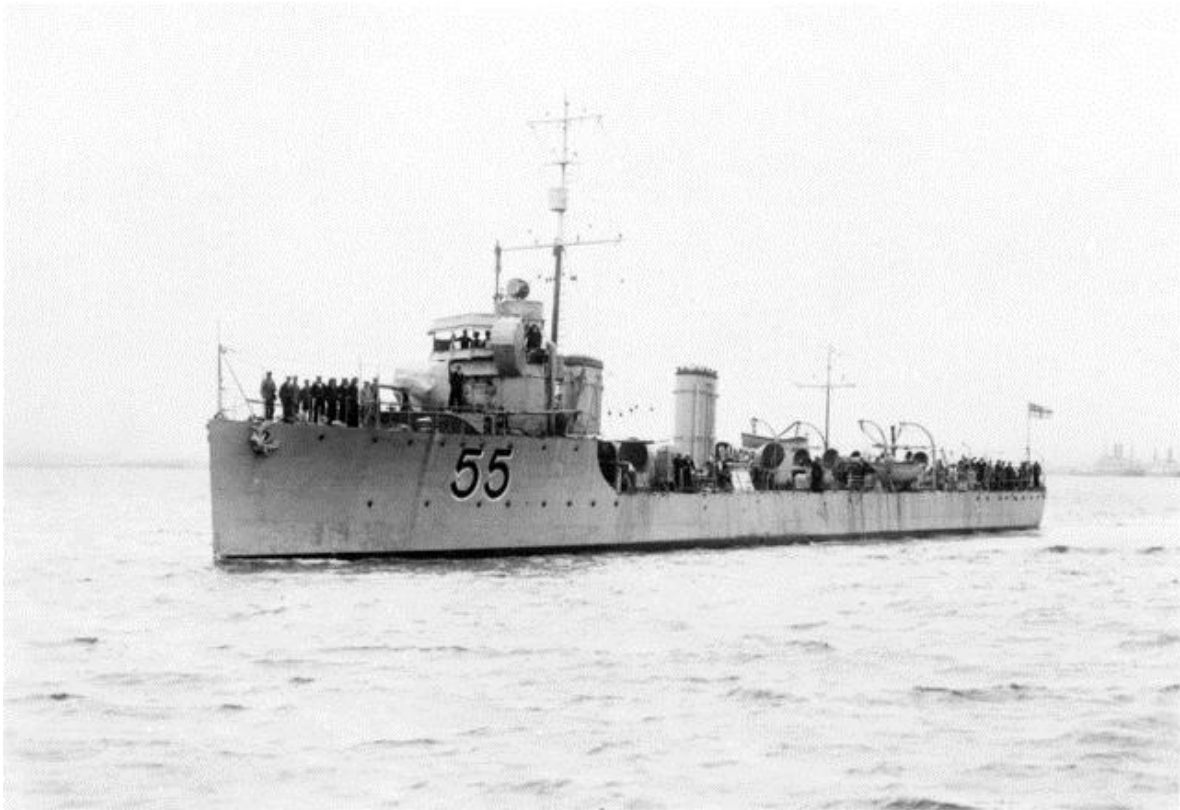


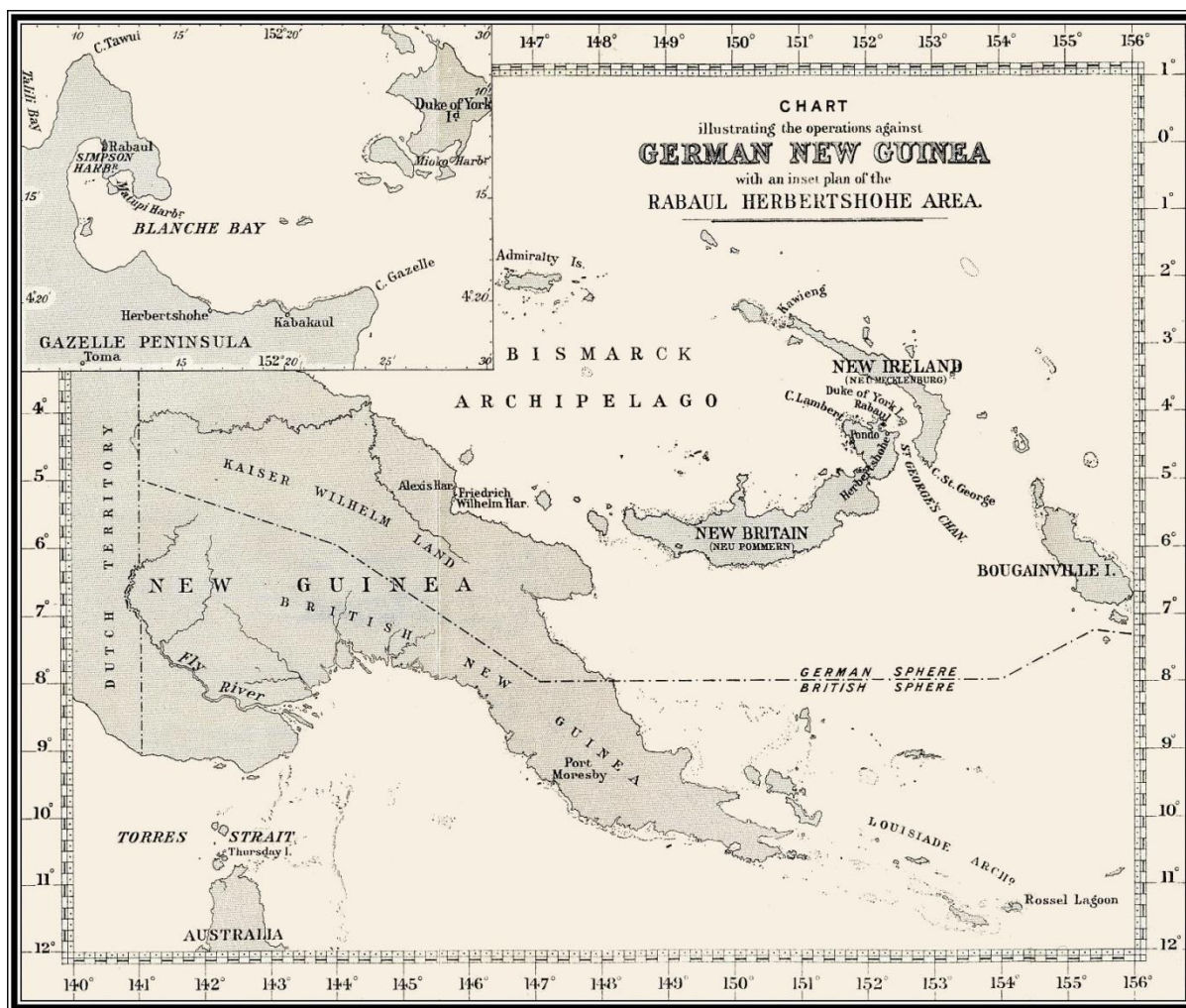
Diary of a Destroyer: The HMAS *Parramatta* in German New Guinea



1 The Royal Australian Navy torpedo boat destroyer HMAS *Parramatta*. AWM H17523

From the arid environment navigated by the Australian Light Horse, and the battlefields of Gallipoli, we bring you back much closer to home and to the tropics of Papua New Guinea and to a campaign that has earned much less attention. At the very outbreak of the war in August 1914, Britain issued a request to Australia to destroy Germany's wireless capability in the South Pacific and to capture German New Guinea. The Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (ANMEF) was formed with a 1000 strong infantry battalion, 6 companies of the Royal Australian Naval Reserve, two machine gun sections, a signals section, a medical section and a militia battalion from northern Queensland.¹

¹ D. R. Leece (2014), "Securing Australia's Neighbourhood in 1914: A Brief History of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force," *United Service*, 65(4): 21-25.



2 German New Guinea, with Inset of Rabaul ²

The infantry were transported aboard HMAS *Berrima* a refitted Peninsular and Oriental liner³ leaving Sydney on 19 August 1914, with the cruiser HMAS *Sydney* and the flagship, battle cruiser HMAS *Australia*.⁴ They were joined in September by the cruiser HMAS *Encounter*, the destroyers HMAS *Parramatta*, *Warrego* and *Yarra*, and the submarines *AE1* and *AE2*. Records left by Lieutenant Commander Cyril John Percy Hill of the *Parramatta* and Charles Suckling, stoker aboard the *AE2*, provide us with insight into the excitement, disappointment and grief that accompanied the successes of the ANMEF in the first months of the war.

² "German New Guinea with inset of Rabaul," in Corbett, *History of the Great War Naval Operations*, Volume 1, London: Longmans, Green, 1920, accessed 09/10/2015, <http://www.naval-history.net/WW1Book-RN1b.htm#286>

³ John Perryman, "Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force: First to Fight 1914," accessed 09/10/2015, <http://www.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/australian-naval-and-military-expeditionary-force-first-fight-1914>

⁴ "German New Guinea," *Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, second edition, Sydney: Oxford University Press, 234-235.

For the *Parramatta*, August seemed filled with disappointment. “Huge excitement” at the prospect of engaging with the enemy was dashed on 8 August when a vessel without lights turned out to be their oil vessel.⁵ “Huge disappointment” followed the discovery that the Germans had left Simpson Harbour where the three destroyers had been ordered to engage them; all the crew of the *Parramatta* saw were “a hundred or so natives dancing tango round fire on beach”. On being ordered to enter the harbour and shell the wireless station, “no wireless station. More disappointment.”⁶



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

H03340A

3 German Warships in Simpson Harbour, on the northern arm of Blanche Bay at Rabaul. AWM H03340A

When the *Parramatta* did capture prisoners at Herbertshohe on 12 August, a German missionary and a local man, their loyalty in the face of a “revolver down their necks”, meant that the crew of the *Parramatta* had to instead follow the telegraph wires only to find the Post Office abandoned of its German occupiers. Instead, they were forced to content themselves with cutting wires, destroying equipment and capturing “loot”, consisting of cigars, postcards and coconuts.⁷ On 17 August, a chase of a schooner earned them no further German prisoners; it turned out to be an English missionary unaware war had been declared. Nevertheless, the crew had managed to chase down a feast as the missionary handed over bananas, coconuts, yams and pumpkins, along with a blessing for the ship and her crew.⁸

However, there were minor excitements to break the monotony for the ship’s company, who spent most of August “growing whiskers.” On one occasion, the first Lieutenant slept through his watch, while the gunner who had preceded him, had also retired to bed, resulting in “copious orders in writing and threats to log” and a note from Hill on the offenders’ “tears of penitence (I don’t think).”

⁵ Cyril John Percy Hill, “Diary of Lieut. Commander CJP Hill, RN, HMS *Parramatta*, 2 August 1914- 18 February 1915,” AWM RSCDIG0000179, 56/20.

⁶ Hill, 56/21.

⁷ Hill, 56/21.

⁸ Hill, 56/22.

A shark was caught and discovered to have a straw hat inside when excitedly dissected by Chinese sailors, and a large crocodile, which Hill would later claim “must bear a charmed life,” was pleased to elude Australian guns.⁹

Although the *Paramatta* and her crew captured some trading schooners, relieving them of German weapons, ammunition and flags, they had missed one of the most eventful moments of the ANMEF campaign in New Guinea, the battle at Bita Paka, south of Kabakaul on New Britain (New Pommerania) on 11 September. As he had heard it, Hill recounted the encounter of a scout party with New Guinean troops under the command of German officers and NCOs. In response to the call for help from the RAN landing party, the destroyers landed their companies, followed by the infantry from Berrima and Australia. However, the backup could not arrive quickly enough to prevent the loss of two officers and four men of the RAN reserve, and the wounding of a further officer and three men.¹⁰

On September 14, the *Parramatta* was involved in the most tragic loss of life during the ANMEF’s involvement in the South Pacific. The *Parramatta* and the *AEI* were tasked with patrolling St George’s Channel. The destroyer and the submarine parted company as they each went to patrol different areas. At length, the *Parramatta* returned by the same course but there was no sign of the *AEI*. Thinking the submarine had returned to the harbour, the destroyer followed suit, anchoring off Herbertshohe. The *AEI* had not returned. At 2300, the *Parramatta* received the signal to join the search for the submarine. They discovered a small steamer with a German gun aflame, assumed to have been destroyed by the Germans when they had been unable to get her off an uncharted section of reef. The *Yarra* had damaged her propeller on another previously unknown reef, proving the waters to be treacherous indeed and, by the 16th of September Hill wrote that he was “very much afraid that she [the *AEI*] was a gonner.”¹¹

As the ANMEF’s mission continued, so too did Hill’s commentary on the *Parramatta*’s adventures, and lack thereof. On 20 September, reported “no sign of enemy . . . whiskers getting on splendidly,” although there was the attempted escape overboard of a German prisoner who had been “riddled with bullets from guard before he got twenty yards.”¹² More excitement was had a few days later when “by a fluke” the *Parramatta* discovered a German steamer hidden in an uncharted creek off Mioko Harbour in the Duke of York Islands. Hill professed himself to be “quite sorry” for the captain, described by Hill as a “very decent chap”; the Germans had been hiding for a fortnight and had barely any food left. The following day, they found the forty Germans who had been responsible for torching

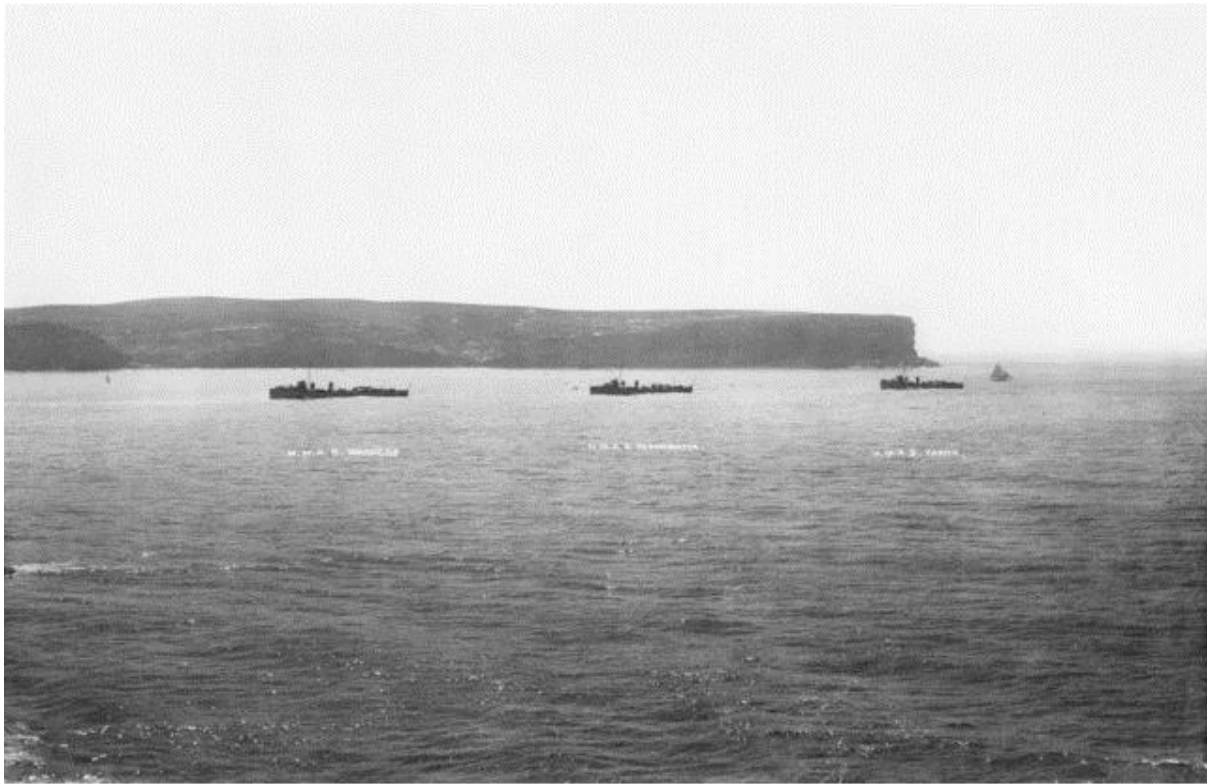
⁹ Hill, 56/22; 56/30.

¹⁰ For more on the Battle of Bita Paka see John Perryman, “Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force: First to Fight 1914,” accessed 09/10/2015, <http://www.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/australian-naval-and-military-expeditionary-force-first-fight-1914>.

¹¹ Hill, 56/27.

¹² Hill, 56/28.

and abandoning the grounded steamer. Stranded, they had taken to foot and “marched overland arriving too late to defend Herbertshohe. The charmed crocodile made another appearance but, once again, proved too adept to succumb.”¹³



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

A040738

4 The HMAS Warrego, Parramatta and Yarra entering Sydney Harbour, 4 October 1913. AWM A040738

By the end of the month however, the *Parramatta* had slipped back into frustration at lack of engagement. Hill went so far as calling the Admiral a “silly Ass” if his reason for not allowing the fleet to venture out in search of the Germans was that he thought the “enemy will dare attack Simpson Haven.” The following day on 1 October, some of the fleet were indeed sent out but, much to the chagrin of Hill and the crews of the *Parramatta*, *Warrego* and *Yarra*, it was the cruiser who left on adventures, while the “poor old destroyers” were left behind to patrol the port.¹⁴ After another relatively uneventful three months, punctuated by fights between and among Australian crews (allegedly stirred up by the French) and characterised by tinned meat and biscuits,¹⁵ the *Parramatta* left New Guinea waters with the other destroyers, returning to Australia in February 1915.¹⁶

¹³ Hill, 56/30.

¹⁴ Hill, 56/30.

¹⁵ Hill, 56/21.

¹⁶ Royal Australian Navy, “HMAS *Parramatta*”, accessed 09/10/2015, <http://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-parramatta-i>