

SMS Cöln Wreck - Scapa Flow

Nationality:	German
Launched:	5 October 1916
Commissioned:	17 January 1918
Builder:	Blohm and Voss, Hamburg
Construction number:	247
Type:	Light Cruiser
Subtype/class:	Cöln Class
Displacement (standard):	5620 tonnes
Displacement (full load):	7486 tonnes
Length overall:	115m*
Beam:	12m
Draught:	6.01 – 6.43m.
Complement:	559
Material:	Steel
Cause of loss:	Scuttled
Date lost:	21 June 1919; 13.50 hrs
Casualties (in scuttling):	0
Propulsion:	8 coal and 6 oil marine type boilers, two sets geared steam turbines, two propellers
Fuel:	1100 tonnes coal maximum, 1050 tonnes oil maximum
Range:	6000 nautical miles at 12 knots
Power:	48708 shp** maximum
Speed:	29.3 knots maximum
Armour:	ranges from 20mm – 60mm (position dependent) control tower 100mm (on the sides)
Armament:	8 x 15 cm guns, 3 x 8.8 cm anti-aircraft guns (reduced to 2 in 1918), 4 x 60cm deck mounted torpedo tubes, 200 mines

*measurements taken from the ships plans

** shp – shaft horse power

NB Two of the 15 cm guns were mounted on the forecastle of the Cöln but were on the upper deck of the Dresden.

History of the Vessel

The second SMS Cöln was a light cruiser of the former Imperial Navy. Köln is the German name for the town of Cologne, situated on the banks of the River Rhine. The German spelling for Cologne has varied over many years. In 1900 a move was made to standardise the spelling and the then Prussian Minister for Interior Affairs, issued an edict that the correct spelling for Cologne was Cöln. However, on the 1st February 1919, the mayor of Cologne, Konrad Adenauer, reversed this decision making the official spelling Köln once more.

This explains the confusion in the spelling of the ships name. SMS Cöln is the correct spelling and can be seen on the ship's bell at the Scapa Flow Visitor Centre at Lyness on Hoy. She was the replacement for the light cruiser SMS Ariadne, who on 28 August 1914 was sunk in the sea battle of Heligoland Bight. The ship was named after her predecessor SMS Cöln, which was also sunk near Heligoland on 28 August 1914.

The second SMS Cöln was launched on 5 October 1916 in Hamburg at the shipyard of Blohm and Voss. Only SMS Dresden and SMS Cöln of this class were completed during the war, and are primarily significant as the last class of light cruiser built in the World War I, demonstrating a continuing German interest in building surface warships even after failing to achieve breakout at the Battle of Jutland (May 1916). A class of ten ships was planned, two being completed, five scrapped after launching but before completion, and three scrapped on the stocks.

Structurally, SMS Cöln was the first German Light Cruiser to have the control tower and its superimposed rangefinder within the bridge structure, mimicking those of the König Class Battleships. No underwater torpedo tubes were fitted in this class, all four being deck mounted.

Due to a lack of material and personnel, the ship was not commissioned until 17 January 1918 and was assigned to the 2nd Scouting Group. The 2nd Scouting Group was made up of the modern cruisers. At its largest it was made up of 8 light cruisers, 6 of which were named after ships lost previously in the war. The 2nd Scouting Group was always positioned at the head of the line when attacks on the British coast were carried out and in all other Fleet advances. The Group suffered dearly as a result at the Battle of Jutland but this was before the Cöln was built. Except for some mining and patrolling in the German Bight, the Cöln played no major action in WWI. At war's end, she was in Wilhelmshaven.

In the Kiel sailor mutiny of October 1918, her crew remained loyal, and put to sea to escape the unrest. On 21 November 1918 the Cöln arrived in the Firth of Forth for inspection and then continued north to for internment in Scapa Flow. She reached Scapa Flow with some difficulty due to a leaking condenser.

People Associated with the Ship

- Fregattenkapitän Erich Raeder (January - October 1918)

Erich Raeder was born 24 April 1876 in Wandsbeck, the son of a schoolmaster. On completion of his education he joined the Kaiserliche Marine (Imperial Navy) in 1894. Promoted lieutenant in 1897, he subsequently attended the Marineakademie in Kiel, and in 1906 was appointed to the Signals Bureau of the Navy Department. From 1910 to 1912 Raeder served as the navigation officer on the Kaiser's yacht Hohenzollern. His career progression was relatively rapid, and in 1912 he was appointed chief-of-staff to Admiral Franz von Hipper. In 1917 he was given command of the SMS Cöln (Williamson & McGregor, 2006).

After WWI he remained in the navy and in 1928 was appointed to command the Reichsmarine in the post of Chef der Marineleitung (Chief of Naval Command). Raeder also was the author of studies on naval warfare, which resulted in him being awarded a honorary doctoral degree by the University of Kiel. Supporting the Nazi plans for German rearmament, Raeder was responsible for the construction programme that resulted in the 'pocket battleships' (super heavy cruisers) Deutschland, Admiral Graf Spee and Admiral Scheer. When the new Kriegsmarine was formed in 1935, Raeder was appointed as Oberbefehlshaber der Marine (Commander in Chief of the navy). Although he fully supported the expansion of the Navy, Raeder warned Hitler against seeking to challenge Britain's naval superiority at this early stage (Williamson & McGregor, 2006).

On the outbreak of war, as the newly promoted Grossadmiral (Grand Admiral), the highest possible rank, Raeder cautioned Hitler against risking a war on more than one front, and urged that the navy should be concentrated against Britain before turning elsewhere. He devised plans for the invasion of Denmark and Norway in 1940 and would only consider Operation Sealion (the proposed invasion of Britain) if the Luftwaffe could neutralise the RAF first. He was an opponent of the attack on the Soviet Union and the expansion of the U-boat fleet at the expense of the surface fleet (Williamson & McGregor, 2006).

He resigned following a series of failed operations including the Battle of the Barents Sea on 31 December 1942, when German surface raiders attempted to intercept a British Convoy to the Soviet

Union. The action took place in the middle of the polar night and both the German and British forces were scattered and unsure of anyone's positions. Thus the battle was confused and it was not clear who was firing on whom or even how many ships were engaged. This debacle combined with the success of the U-boat fleet led to his demotion to the rank of Admiral Inspector of the Kriegsmarine in January 1943, and formal resignation from Kriegsmarine in May 1943. After the war in 1946, he was tried and found guilty at the Nuremberg Trials on charges of waging an aggressive war and war crimes. Raeder was sentenced to life imprisonment though he was released in 1955 on grounds of ill-health, and published his memoirs the following year. He died in Kiel on 6 November 1960 (Williamson & McGregor, 2006).

- Fregattenkapitän Ludwig Kaulhausen (October - November 1918)
- Kapitänleutnant Johann Heinemann (internment) (November 1918 – June 1919)

Artefacts from the Wreck

In Lyness Museum

Tool chest and tools
Ship's bell

Material reported under RoW amnesty (2001):

A629 brass plate with handles and glass cross in centre: from seabed.
NMRS, MS/829/34.

A1683 fire alarm: from seabed
A2084 lump of coal: from bunker
A2430 brass triangle: from seabed
A3027 1 lamp: from seabed.
NMRS, MS/829/35.

A4510 brass and copper speaking tube with wooden plug, boiler room sight-glass cover surround, porthole, and electrical outlet socket.
NMRS, MS/829/77.

Photos from the SMS Cöln



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Admiral Raeder as the new commander in chief of the navy, sitting at his desk.