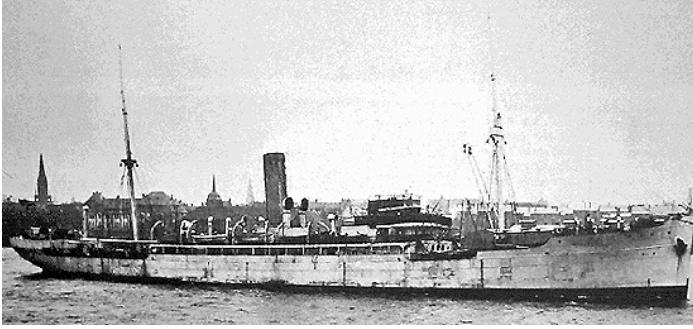


For Valour (2)



German Raider MOEWE pictured in the Kiel Canal

In the early months of WW1 the German navy suffered heavy losses and this dictated a modification in their strategic planning. In addition to stepping up the submarine building programme they converted a number of merchant vessels to “surface raiders”. Heavily armed and cleverly disguised, these vessels roamed the trade routes of the world laying mines and attacking British and Allied merchant shipping of all types. In 1914 the refrigerated cargo ship “PUNGO” was launched in Geestemuende, Germany. Designed for the refrigerated banana trade between West Africa and Germany she was 408 feet overall, had a loaded displacement of 9,800 tons and was capable of a speed of 14 knots – fast for her day.

A German Korvettenkapitan whose full title was Count Nikolaus Dohna-Schlodien had been instructed to find ships suitable for conversion to “surface raiders” and when he found “PUNGO” and her sistership he had no hesitation in recommending them for the role. Both ships were converted and “PUNGO” – under the command of the Count – was renamed “MOEWE” (Seagull, in English) and entered naval service.

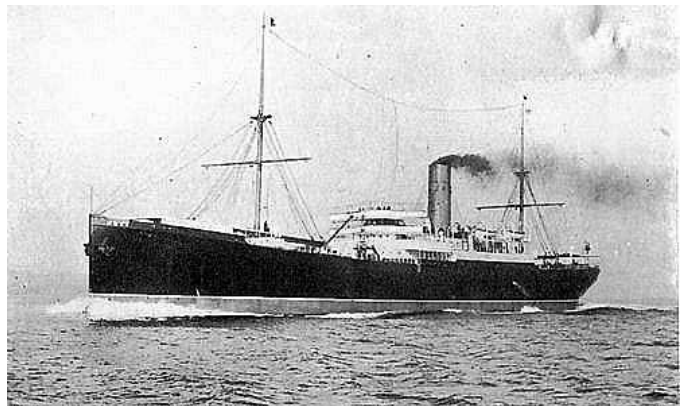
Her armament comprised four 5.9”, one 4.1” and two 22 pounder guns and her first commission was as a mine layer operating in the North Sea but, subsequently, she became an extremely successful armed merchant cruiser operating in the North and South Atlantic oceans. Undoubtedly the most successful surface raider in the German navy she sank, captured or mined some 45 ships.

The “OTAKI”, also a refrigerated cargo ship, belonged to the New Zealand Shipping Company. A ship of 9575 tons, she was “defensively” armed with a single 4.7” gun.

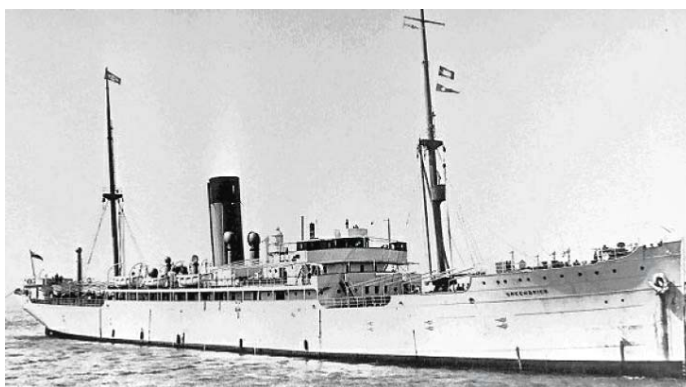
On March 10th. 1917, “OTAKI”, under the command of Captain Archibald Bisset Smith, was on passage to the United Kingdom when, in reduced visibility and heavy weather conditions, she was intercepted by the “MOEWE” and instructed to stop.

Captain Smith ignored the instruction and opened fire on the German raider from close range. A fierce but uneven duel ensued with the German vessel sustained three direct hits, one of which started a fire in her coal bunkers. The battle could have but one outcome and the heavily armed raider scored hit after hit on “OTAKI”. Realising that his command was mortally damaged Captain Smith gave the order to “abandon ship” but he elected to stay with his ship – and went down with her. He was 38 years of age; five other crew members also perished.

The gallantry of Captain Smith and his crew soon became legendary and, reputedly, even earned the admiration of the crew of the “MOEWE”. Various awards were discussed and, yet again, the Admiralty appeared to be in a quandary about awarding a Victoria Cross to a merchant seafarer. Eventually, Captain Smith was posthumously inducted into the Royal Naval Reserve as a “Temporary Lieutenant” and on May 24th. 1919 – more than two years after his death – a citation in the London Gazette announced the award of the Victoria Cross to Captain Archibald Bisset Smith - the first of two Merchant Service Masters to be awarded the supreme decoration for valour.



OTAKI



As the GREENBRIAR

The “MOEWE” survived the war and after Germany surrendered she was brought to England under war reparations, delivered to Elders & Fyffes Co.Ltd. and named “GREENBRIER”. In 1933 the Germans bought her back (when she was welcomed on her return by Count Dohna-Schlodien), renamed her “OLDENBURG” and she carried refrigerated cargo up until the outbreak of WW2. In WW2 the vessel was supporting the German campaign in Norway when, on April 17th. 1945 she was attacked by Allied aircraft armed with rockets and sank in Vadheim, Norway - where she is still clearly visible and a very considerable attraction for scuba divers.