

## The last Königsberg Gun

Courtesy of Judy Middleton [Hove in the Past: Hove Guns \(hovehistory.blogspot.com\)](http://Hove in the Past: Hove Guns (hovehistory.blogspot.com))



The seven-ton gun from SMS *Königsberg* arrived at Hove on 19 April 1928.  
(*Sussex Daily News* 20 April 1928)

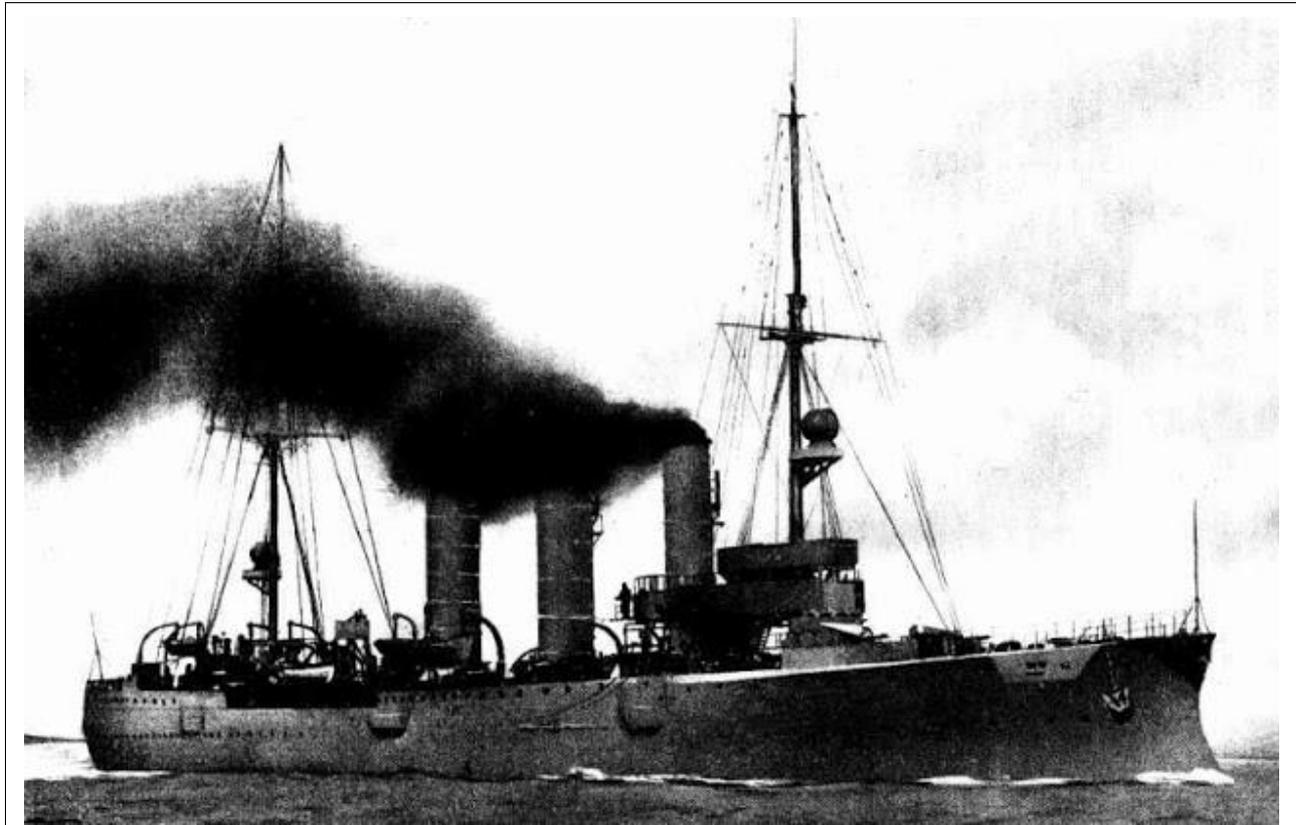
### The Königsberg Gun

There used to be two interesting German relics of the Great War on display at the old **Coastguard / RNVR depot** at Hove and they continue to spark interest to this day.

One gun was from SMS *Königsberg*, a German light cruiser. During the Great War the *Königsberg* operated as a lone wolf in the Indian Ocean, attacking allied shipping. HMS *Pegasus*, sunk by the *Königsberg*'s guns at Zanzibar, was one such victim. The British authorities were concerned enough to send Royal Navy vessels to try and track her down. The *Königsberg*, running short of coal and in need of repair, took refuge south of Dar es Salaam in the Rufiji delta, west of Mafia Island in German East Africa, now Tanzania. The Germans had charted the delta but the British vessels, without this knowledge, were unable to follow and could only blockade the delta. Unable to gauge the exact spot where she was lurking required a very modern approach – the use of spotter planes.

The planes used in this delicate task were Curtiss flying boats. By coincidence, there is a connection with Hove here. The link is Gerard Hudson (1874-1948) whose family home was at 9 The Drive, Hove. Hudson grew up to develop a passionate interest in aviation. He

emigrated to South Africa but in 1913 he travelled back to England in order to purchase two Curtiss flying boats. Unhappily for him he did not retain ownership for long because the Royal Navy requisitioned them for the war effort.



Photograph courtesy of the National Library of Australia (see citation below in 'sources')

**SMS Königsberg**

The Curtiss flying boats duly spotted the German vessel. The British then despatched HMS *Mersey* and HMS *Severn* to attack the *Königsberg*. They were able to enter the Rufiji delta because they were both shallow-draught monitor vessels and they were also equipped with 6-inch guns. These guns were first used against the German ship on 6 July 1914 but not very effectively as it happened. The second attempt was made on 11 July 1914 and this time the British guns found their target more accurately, hitting the *Königsberg* several times. The bridge was shattered, there was a fire in the magazine, and Captain Looff was injured. The order was given to scuttle the ship.

*Königsberg* was armed with a main battery of ten 10.5 centimetre (4.1 inch) guns. All ten of these were later landed so that they could be used in support of Lieutenant Colonel (later General) Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck's guerrilla campaign.

The Hove gun was moved to Dar es Salaam to provide protection for the port. The gun's manoeuvrability was vastly improved when in 1916 it was mounted on a special Krupp gun-carriage. This item of equipment was somehow smuggled in aboard the SS *Marie* although German East Africa was supposed to be under blockade.

To counter an expected British attack, the gun was moved up the coast to Bagamoyo. On 16 August 1916 the Royal Navy attacked and a landing party equipped with machine guns

soon had the German gun crew in their sights. The Germans beat a hasty retreat and they were in such a hurry that they did not follow the standard procedure of dynamiting the gun although they did remove the breech block.



**The 'Hove' gun was photographed in August 1916 at Bagamoyo, East Africa. The men are, from left to right, Sir Horace Byatt, Commander R.J.N. Watson (leader of the landing party) and Admiral Sir Edward Charlton.**

The gun then became a war trophy in very good condition and in 1918 it was shipped to London. It was put on display to curious Londoners at Admiralty Arch and then at the Imperial War Museum which, in those days, was located at the Crystal Palace. The Imperial War Museum moved to South Kensington in 1924 and the German gun became surplus to requirements.

The gun arrived at Hove on 19 April 1928 and, as can be imagined, aroused considerable attention as it was trundled down to the RNVR depot at Hove Coastguard Station and placed on the north side of the parade ground. It was claimed the gun weighed seven tons. It is interesting to read the following contemporary account.

#### ***Sussex Daily News* 21 April 1928**

"The RNVR Battery at Hove, already proud of its war relics, has been still further enriched by the addition of a gun, which played an important part in East Africa during the Great War. Through the instrumentality of Captain Viscount Curzon, the Battery has secured from the War Museums Committee possession of a 4.2 gun, which is believed to have wrought considerable havoc in the course of the destruction of the German cruiser

*Koenigsberg* in German East Africa. The ship like the notorious *Emden* found some strange hiding-places. She cruised around the Pacific\*, traversed the rivers, and hid behind the towering palms\* with which the waters in this part of the world abound, and from these secluded spots she sent raiding parties into the most unexpected quarters.

It was while in one of these obscure spots that the *Koenigsberg* was discovered, and her commander immediately decided upon an action, which must be commended for its cleverness. He had the gun – now in the safe keeping of the RNVR Battery at Hove – dismounted from the ship, placed on a gun carriage made from parts of the vessel, the wheels being portions of the engine, and transferred it to the shore for defensive purposes. One remarkable feature of the gun is it has an axle about nine inches square, encased with steel strips to ensure greater strength – a feat of engineering under difficulties very credible to the ship's crew. It is a matter of history that the *Koenigsberg* was eventually destroyed, and members of the Hove RNVR are naturally proud of this relic from a notable naval incident of the war."

\*It should be noted that the mention of the Pacific Ocean is an error and the actual sequence of events after the *Koenigsberg* was hit is different because the guns were not salvaged until after the vessel was scuttled. The hiding place was in the mangrove swamps of the Rufigi River delta

Unfortunately, the subsequent history of this historic gun has yet to come to light. It may have been removed when the RNVR / Coastguard Station became part of **HMS King Alfred** at the outbreak of the Second World War. But it instructive to note that the British tank called *Hova*, which was put on display in Hove Park in 1919 lasted until around 1937 when it was disposed off for scrap metal.

Our thanks to Judy Middleton for this fascinating account.