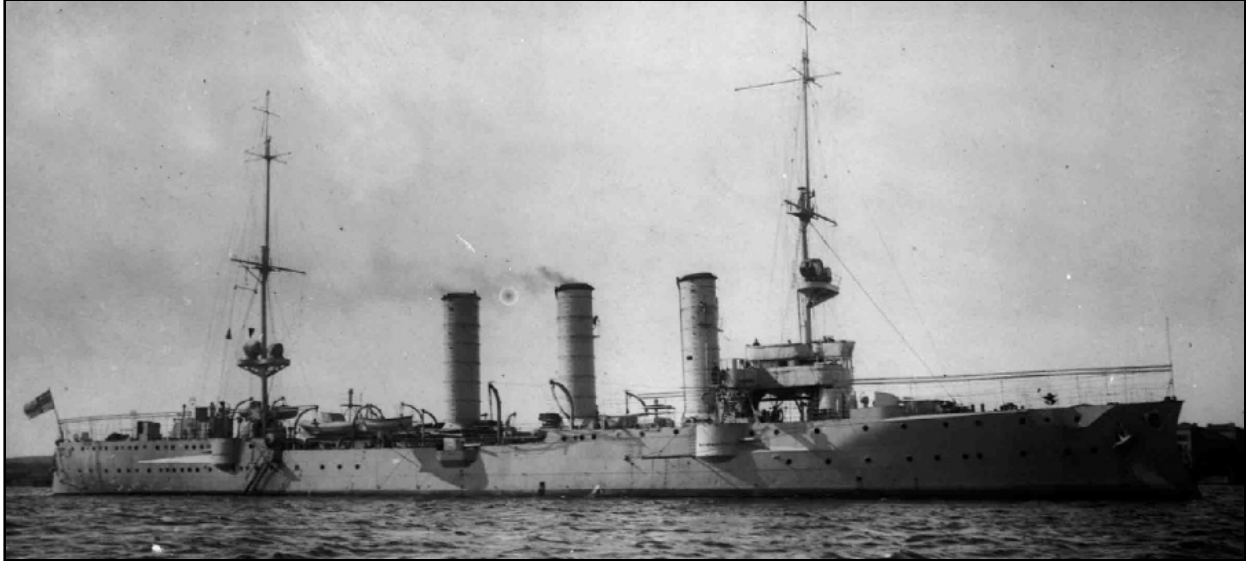


The Guns of the SMS Königsberg In German East Africa 1915-17



SMS Königsberg

The cruiser SMS Königsberg off the coast of German East Africa, 1914. Note the forward deck gun turrets and the three cupolas down the starboard side each having a 10.5cm gun. The rear turrets and port guns cannot be seen in this photograph.

Photo © Frankfurt University Koloniales Bildarchiv

On 11th July 1915 the cruiser, SMS Königsberg was destroyed in the Rufiji Delta by the British Royal Navy. Her guns were however salvaged and used on land by the Germans in East Africa during the First World War. In all there were ten 10.5cm guns and two smaller 8.8cm guns. Some were used on their naval fixed pivot mountings, some had makeshift gun carriages made in Dar Es Salaam and others had gun carriages made by Krupp in Germany. They served on various fronts in East Africa- as harbour guns at Dar Es Salaam, Tanga, Mwanza and Kigoma, as a ship's gun on the Goetzen on Lake Tanganyika, defending the Rufiji Delta and as a railway mounted gun on the Northern Front. The last two guns fell into allied hands just before the Schutztruppe left German territory to invade Portuguese East Africa. They were mostly manned by the officers and crew of the Königsberg and dragged by African porters across the rough terrain of East Africa shelling allied positions, until one by one they ran out of ammunition or were captured. All of the guns were disabled to some extent by the Germans before they fell into enemy hands. Sometimes this was simply by removing the breech block but often by dynamiting the barrel.

Four of the twelve guns on the SMS Königsberg are known to exist today. One of the 10.5cm guns now stands at the Western approach of the Union Buildings in Pretoria, South Africa, one is on display at Fort Jesus in Mombasa, Kenya and a third is at the army barracks at Jinja, Uganda. One of the smaller 8.8cm guns is on display at the [South African National Museum of Military History](#) in Johannesburg. Many of the remaining guns have been scrapped but some may still be rusting away in a remote corner of Africa.

According to the local historian Kevin Patience, "**Stories circulated for years of other guns seen in remote areas of the bush. In the 1970's the author heard the story of an abandoned gun that had been found by a game warden in a river bed in one of the Tanzanian Parks, but its inaccessibility meant that it remained where it was**".

(Quotation from "Königsberg- A German East African Raider", Zanzibar Press 2001)

We are now trying to track down all the guns and trace their histories. Much of the work is being done at the [Axis History Forum Discussion on the Guns](#). Please go there to read more and see more photos on the topic and please take part if you have any information to add. This page is very much a work in progress. We are very keen to hear new information and see new photos of the guns of the SMS Königsberg. Every clue no matter how small may help us in this quest. In the meantime, there are some great photographs to be examined. Please contact me [here](#) if you have more information or photos on this topic.

Known History of the Ten 10.5cm SMS Königsberg Guns

After being salvaged from the wreck of the SMS Königsberg, the guns were re-fitted at Dar Es Salaam then deployed on their original fixed pivot stands in coastal positions. Five overlooked the harbour at Dar Es Salaam, two were sent to Tanga, two to Kigoma and one to Mwanza. Later the guns were fitted onto carriages and moved to different fronts. This is the known history of the ten guns. For ease of reference we have numbered them in the order that they were put out of action, this is of course not an official numbering system and was not used by the Germans in wartime.

First Deployed	Later Deployments	Captured	After The War	Last Seen
1 Tanga	Kahe	Kahe Mar 1916	Displayed in Dar Es Salaam	Dar c1930s
2 Dar Es Salaam	Kondoa-Irangi	Accidentally destroyed at Kondoa-Irangi 1916	Buried in Dar Es Salaam	Dar 1916
3 Mwanza	-	Mwanza July 1916	Displayed in Uganda	Jinja 2014
4 Dar Es Salaam	Bagamoyo	Bagamoyo Aug 1916	Displayed in England	Hove c1930s
5 Dar Es Salaam	Lembeni, Korogwe, Handeni, Mlembule, Kanga, Kwedihombo, Morogoro & Mkuyuni	Mkuyuni Aug 1916	Taken to Dar Es Salaam	Dar 1918
6 SS Goetzen	Dodoma, Kondoa-Irangi, Tabora & Korogwe	Korogwe Sept 1916	Displayed in the Belgian Congo	Stanleyville 1971
7 Kigoma	Gottorp, Ussoke, Lulanguru & Tabora	Tabora Sept 1916	Presumably abandoned	Tabora 1916
8 Dar Es Salaam	Kissidju, Utete, Rufiji, Mohoro & Kibata	Kibata Jan 1917	Presumably abandoned	Kibata 1917
9 Dar Es Salaam	Utete, Liwale, Lukuledi,	Mahiwa Oct 1917	Barrel and other parts	Mahiwa 1917

	Newala, Mpotora, Lindi, Narunju & Mahiwa	possibly displayed at Mombasa
10 Tanga	Mlembule, Kwedihombo, Massassi Oct 1917 Kilossa, Kidodi, Ifakara, Saidi, Liwale & Massassi	Parts possibly displayed at Massassi 1917 Mombasa

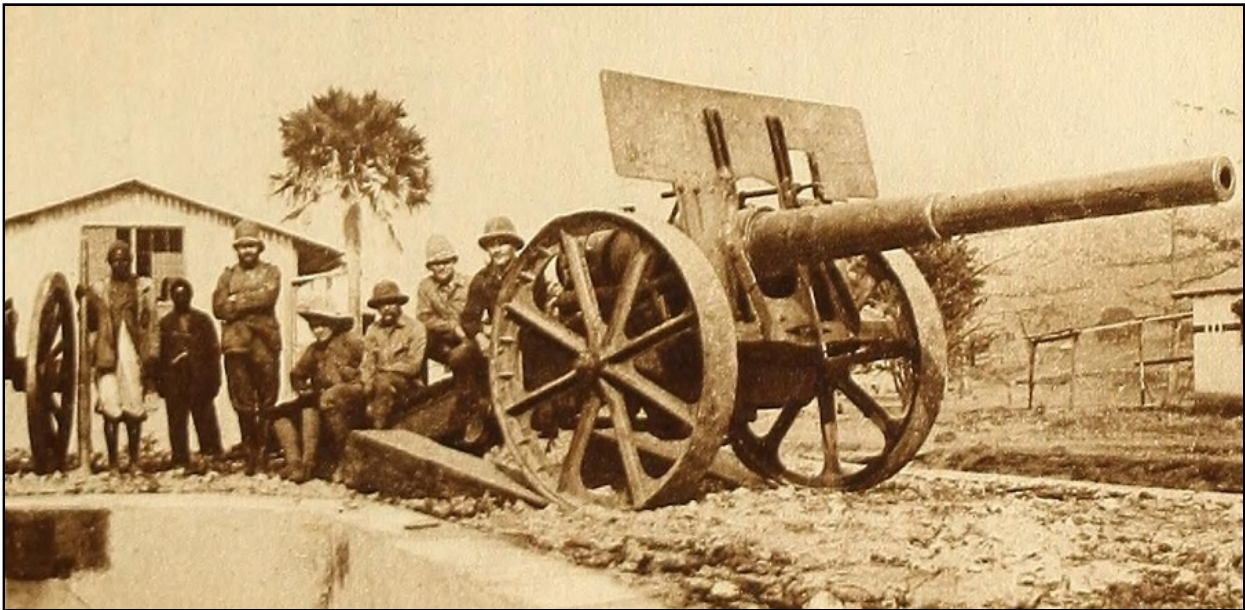
Photo Gallery



10.5cm SMS Königsberg Gun, German East Africa c1916

This gun is being moved under the supervision of German officers. It is mounted on one of the carriages made with traction engine multi-spoked wheels in Dar Es Salaam. Note the limber to the right and the start of a long line of African porters needed to tow the heavy gun. This is most likely the gun that was captured at Kibata in January 1917. It was last seen in Dar Es Salaam in 1918.

Photo © [Frankfurt University Koloniales Bildarchiv](#)



10.5cm SMS Königsberg Gun, German East Africa c1916

This photograph shows one of the Königsberg guns mounted on a Krupp gun carriage with its gun crew. The caption says it was taken at Tabora. This is then probably gun that was captured at Itaga near Tabora in September 1916 and has not been seen since.

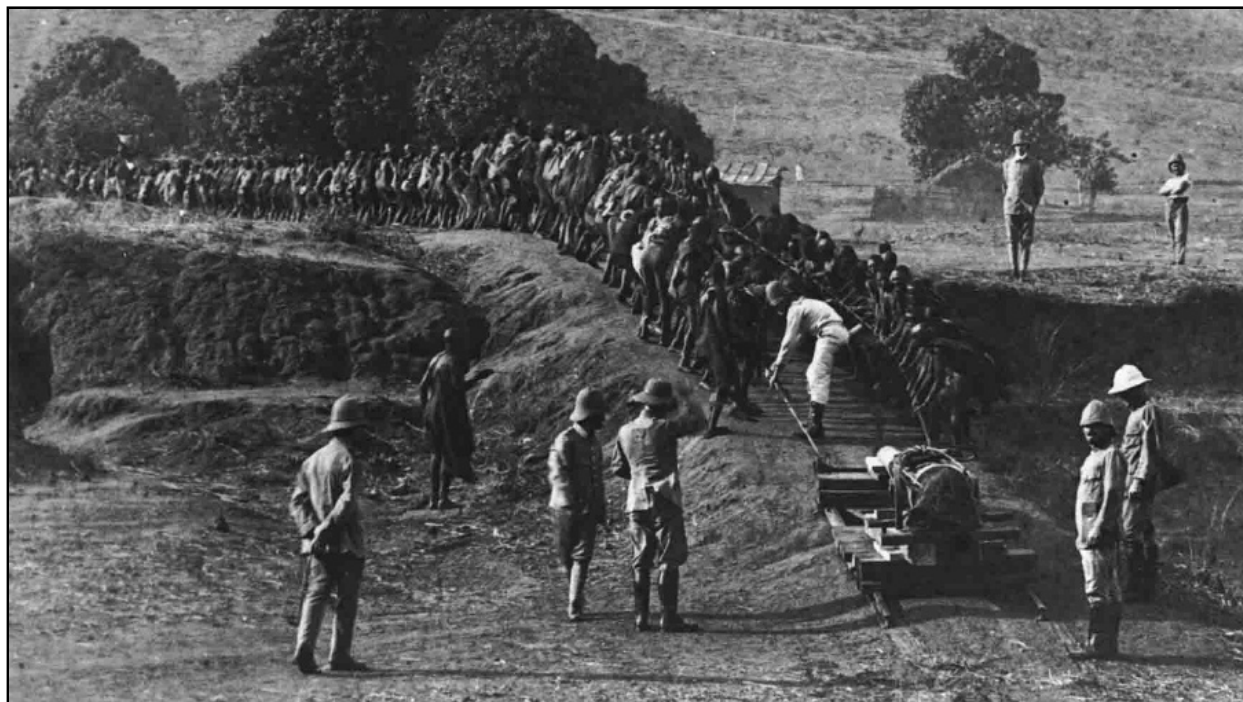
This photograph originally appeared in "Les Campagnes Belges d'Afrique 1914-17" published by the Belgian Colonial Ministry and online at [Archive.org](#)



10.5cm SMS Königsberg Gun, German East Africa c1915-16

This photograph shows one of the Königsberg guns in a fixed position at Nyamyami, south of Tanga. Note it is camouflaged by a grass hut built over its position. This gun platform was mounted on rails so it could move in and out of the hut to conceal itself. This gun was later destroyed and abandoned near Masasi in October 1917 being the last of the ten Königsberg guns to be put out of action.

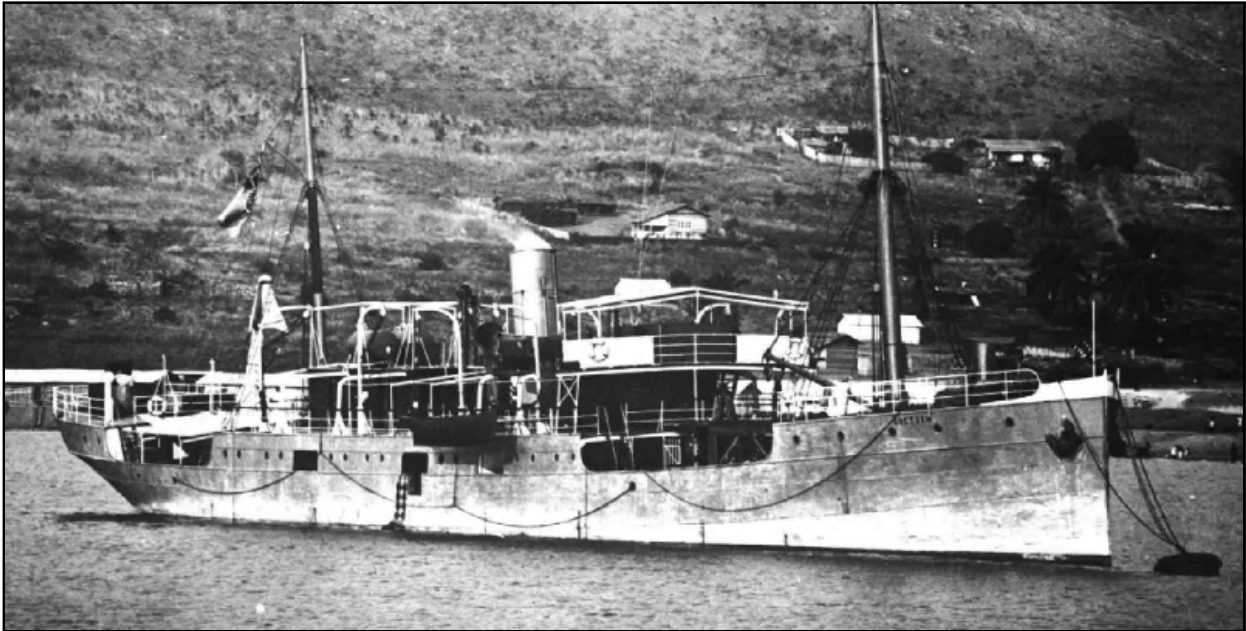
Photo © [Molteno Family](#).



10.5cm SMS Königsberg Gun, German East Africa c1915

This photograph shows one of the Königsberg guns being dragged into position at Kigoma on the shore of Lake Tanganyika. This gun was mounted on its original naval fixed pivot stand at an emplacement over looking the Lake. Again note the vast amount of African labour required to move just the barrel of the gun which weighed well over 1,000 kilos. This is the gun that was later captured at Tabora in September 1916.

Photo by Kapitän Zimmer © [Frankfurt University Koloniales Bildarchiv](#)



SS Graf von Goetzen fitted with a 10.5cm SMS Königsberg Gun on Lake Tangayika c1915-16

Note the dark turret of a 10.5cm Königsberg gun with a sunlit metallic shine can be seen on the foredeck of the ship. The gun gave the Germans an advantage in firepower against British and Belgian forces operating from the Western shore of the lake. This is the gun that was captured at Korogwe in September 1916 and was later displayed in the Belgian Congo.

Photo by Kapitän Zimmer © [Frankfurt University Koloniales Bildarchiv](http://www.frankfurt-university.de/koloniales-bildarchiv/)



10.5cm SMS Königsberg Gun, German East Africa 1916

This photograph shows one the Königsberg guns shortly after its capture at Bagamoyo, August 1916. Note the straight Krupp carriage fitting above the axle, the Krupp wheels with eight struts, the gun shield and the aiming post on its left side. All these are unique features of the Krupp carriages. The breech block has been removed by the Germans before they abandoned the gun. In the background are curious locals while an askari of the British Kings African Rifles stands guard. On the back of the photo is the hand written notes of one of the gun's captors, William Thomas Clegg. They read "German Naval 4.1 Captured by the ships company of HMS Vengeance who landed at "Bagamoyo" German East Africa after a warm reception on August 15th 1916 4am quite early and no breakfast - Rtg WT Clegg".

This photograph was in the collection of Able Seaman William Thomas Clegg RN who was a member of the Landing Party of HMS Vengeance that stormed Bagamoyo, it has kindly been shared with us by his grandson, Bob William Green. Photo © William Thomas Clegg / Bob William Green



10.5cm SMS Königsberg Gun, German East Africa 1916

This photograph shows one of the Königsberg guns as it was captured by British and African forces near Mkuyuni, August 1916 (this date is disputed as the original caption dates it as being in March 1916). Note that the Germans have clearly disabled and immobilised the gun by the use of explosive charges in the barrel and on the nearside wheel. This again is one of the gun carriages made in Dar Es Salaam with multi-spoked traction engine wheels. Note how the Dar Es Salaam carriages fitted along the axle, whereas the Krupp carriages fitted above the axle. This gun's barrel has some interesting scratch marks in the paintwork on the nearside which have helped to identify later photos of the same gun.

Photo © Lt C Dale Collection, [Imperial War Museum](http://www.imperialwarmuseum.com)



10.5cm SMS Königsberg Gun, German East Africa 1917

This photograph shows one of the Königsberg guns as it was found by British Troops near Masassi in October 1917. Note the straight Krupp gun carriage and wheels. The charges used by the retreating Germans to render the gun unusable have in this case blown the right wheel off and split the muzzle of the barrel in a quite spectacular and distinctive fashion. This gun has not been seen since. It is possible that some parts were salvaged but most likely that most of it was abandoned at Masassi.

Photo © [Imperial War Museum, London](http://www.imperialwarmuseum.com)



10.5cm SMS Königsberg Gun in Dar Es Salaam c1920s-30s

This photograph shows a captured Königsberg gun mounted on a concrete display plinth in the grounds of the British Colonial Governor's House in Dar Es Salaam. Note the large split in the breech caused by the Germans dynamiting it before it was abandoned. This is most likely the gun that was formerly mounted on a railway base at Kahe and was captured by the British there in March 1916. This photograph is one of the last known sightings of the Kahe Railway Gun.

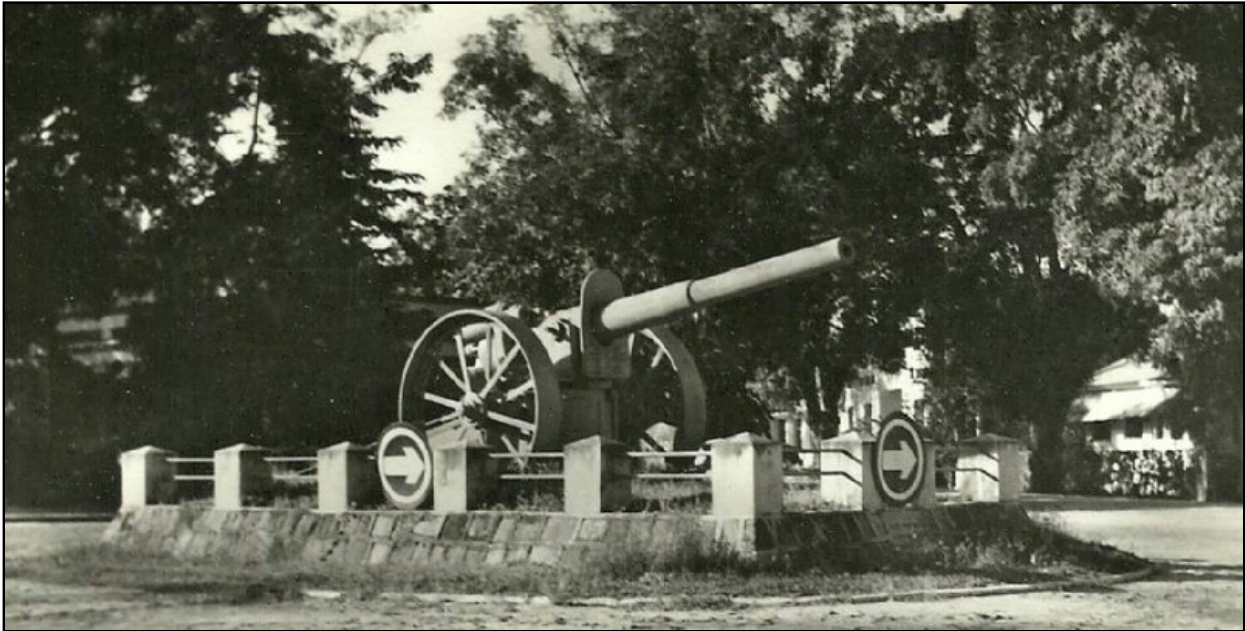
Photo © [Frankfurt University Koloniales Bildarchiv](#)



10.5cm SMS Königsberg Gun in London, England 1924

This photograph was taken when the Imperial War Museum moved its collection from its original location in Crystal Palace to its second location in South Kensington. It shows workmen manhandling one of the Königsberg guns and gives an idea of the struggle involved in moving such a heavy weapon. Note this view of the gun clearly shows the Krupp shield, with aiming hole on the gun's left side and specially widened Krupp wheels. The straight Krupp carriage can also be made out. This is most likely the same gun as captured in Bagamoyo in August 1916. It was shipped to England in 1918 for display on the Royal Mall. It then passed into the collection of the Imperial War Museum. In 1928 it was donated to the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in in Hove. It was last photographed on their parade ground in 1933 and has not been seen since. It is possible that the gun was scrapped during the Second World War,

Photo © [Imperial War Museum](#)



10.5cm SMS Königsberg Gun in Stanleyville, Belgian Congo, c1950s

This gun with its barrel mounted upside down on a Dar Es Salaam made carriage was on display in Boma, Leopoldville and finally Stanleyville in the Belgian Congo. It was last seen on this plinth of a traffic island at the Place Du Canon, Stanleyville (modern Kisangani) in about 1971. This is most likely the same gun that was formerly mounted on the SS Goetzen on Lake Tanganyika. It was then transferred to land duties on this carriage and was captured by the Belgian Force Publique at Korogwe in September 1916.

Photo © Stanleyville.be



10.5cm SMS Königsberg Gun in Jinja, Uganda 1998

Note the lack original naval fixed pivot mount. It is missing its breech block which was removed by the Germans before abandoning it. The gun's elevation handle is also missing. The green paint is a recent touch. This is the gun that was captured by British and African forces at Mwanza on Lake Victoria in July 1916. It has the serial number 362 and as such is the only gun we know the history of as well as its serial number.

(See [Jinja Gun Page](#) for more on this gun)

Photo © Bob Wagner



10.5cm SMS Königsberg Gun at Fort Jesus in Mombasa, Kenya 2012

This photograph shows a Königsberg gun on display in Mombasa. Note the straight Krupp gun carriage with widened Krupp wheels (the left one of which has been put on the wrong way around). It is not yet known where or when this gun was captured. That is one of the big mysteries we have been able to solve so far. Like the Pretoria gun, it might be a compilation of salvaged guns parts reassembled.

(See [Mombasa Gun Page](#) for more on this gun)

Photo by Kiselev D at [WikiCommons](#)



10.5cm SMS Königsberg Gun at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, South Africa 2006

This photograph shows a Königsberg gun on display in Pretoria. The gun has widened Krupp wheels and a very unusual carriage looking mostly like a British gun carriage of the period in style but with some parts roughly made. Certainly it consists of parts of at least four different guns as although the barrel is numbered 369, other parts of the gun are numbered 361, 366 and 367. A plaque on the gun claims that it was captured at Kahe in 1916 but this is unlikely as the gun captured at Kahe had a wide split in its breech which this gun does not. It is as yet unknown where this gun was actually captured and how much of the gun came from how many different sources.

(See [Pretoria Gun Page](#) for more on this gun)

Photo © MC Heunis



Sight Arm and Aiming Quadrant from one of the 10.5cm SMS Königsberg Guns

These items are on the display at the South African National Museum of Military History in Johannesburg. The serial number shows they came from gun number 368, though it is not known where and when this gun was captured.

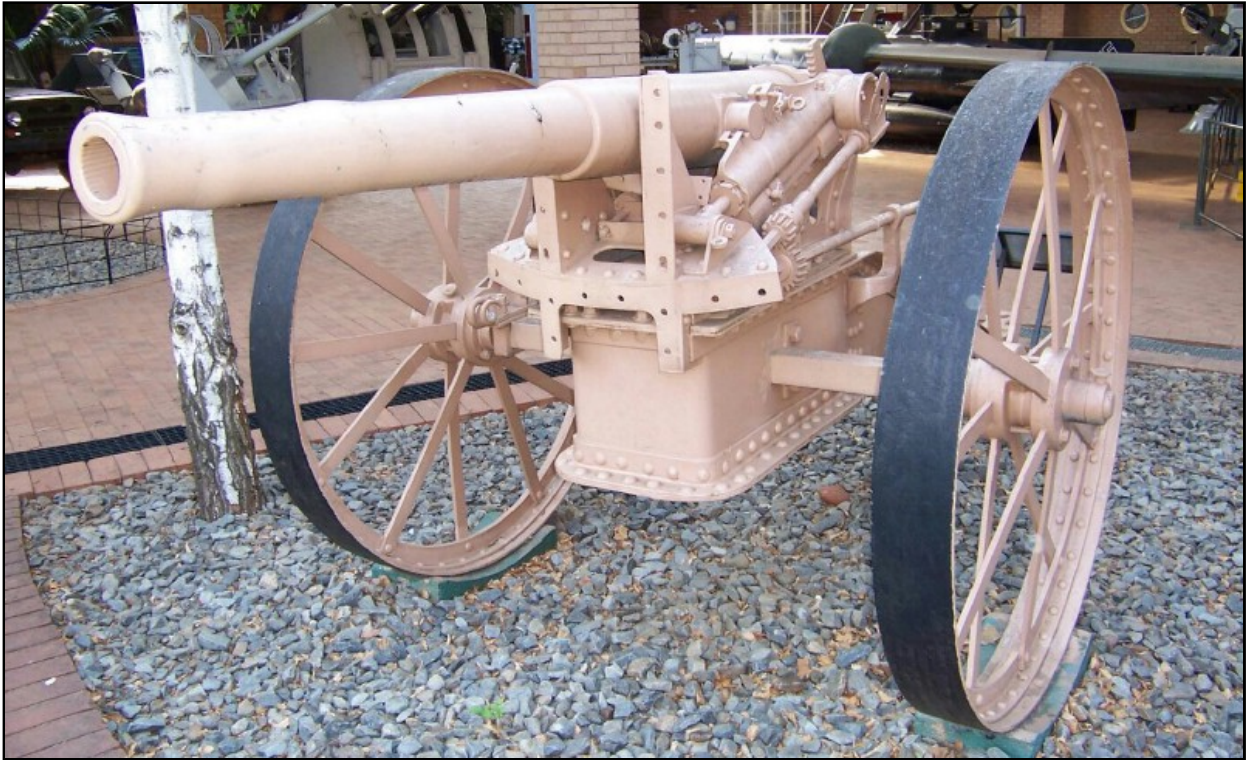
Photo © MC Heunis



Sight Arc from one of the 10.5cm SMS Königsberg Guns

This nicely mounted sight arc from is marked with the serial number 369. This is therefore part of the missing aiming mechanism from the barrel of the gun on display outside the Union Buildings in Pretoria, South Africa. This item is for sale via [Ruby Lane](#) at the Antiques Storehouse in the Historic Dockyard in Portsmouth, England.

Photos © [Antiques Storehouse](#)



8.8cm SMS Königsberg Gun at the South African Military History Museum, Johannesburg 2006

This photograph shows one of the two smaller Königsberg guns originally intended to arm a small merchant raider. Both the guns were first taken from the Königsberg to fight on an improvised raft on Lake Tanganyika, then later served on land with gun carriages. This one has a Dar Es Salaam made carriage with the axle midway through the carriage and spoked farm machinery wheels. It was captured at the Mlali Pass on 24th August 1916. The other 8.8cm gun was destroyed at Likuyu on 24th January 1917.

Photo © MC Heunis



8.8cm SMS Königsberg Gun mounted on the SS Goetzen c1915-16

This photograph shows one of the two smaller Königsberg guns mounted on fixed pivot stand on the SS Goetzen on Lake Tanganyika. Note the two assistant gunners wearing naval uniforms with Bortfeldt tropical helmets. The man aiming wears a khaki uniform with a Schutztruppe 1913 tropical helmet. He may be a naval reserve officer or NCO.

Photo from BBC News Africa

Below is the old page on the Guns of the SMS Königsberg that was added to this website in 2006. Some of the information is now out dated but the excellent photos of the Pretoria Gun by MC Heunis and other curiosities are well worth keeping. This page will hopefully be completely updated shortly when more information comes to light.

MC Heunis not only took these close-up photos seen below of the famous guns but also did the historical research for the restoration project on the 10.5cm gun. Other photos on this page are by Dietrich Köster, Bob Wagner, William Thomas Clegg AB RN and Chris Dale. Please respect their generosity in sharing these photos with us by not reproducing them without prior permission. Also below the photographs MC Heunis and Vincent Wratten tell the full story of the SMS Königsberg's guns. Photos © MC Heunis 2006 (except where otherwise stated)



The Königsberg gun at Pretoria before restoration...



...and after restoration. Note its "new" colour, a reddish brown. During restoration paint samples were taken and it was found this was the colour of the gun as seen during the First World War. The gun was mounted on its chassis at Dar-es-Salaam railway works so presumably this was the colour used on trains in German East Africa at the time.



The gun with Martin Brookes from the South African Department of Public Works who restored it. This gives some idea of the scale of the gun.



The original maker's mark- "Nr 369"- the weapon number, "Fried. Krupp" of Essen- the maker's mark, and "1905"- the date of manufacture.



The gun's breech. Note the firing block was removed, presumably by the Germans when they abandoned it, so that it didn't fall into allied hands while in working order.



A plate now fixed onto the gun identifying it as a "German Naval Gun... captured at Kahe... March 1916". There is some doubt as to whether this is the Kahe gun or another Königsberg gun, as the Kahe gun was mounted on a wooden chassis and was blown up before being abandoned.



Another surviving 10.5cm Königsberg gun. This one was captured at Bagamoyo in August 1916 and is now on display at Fort Jesus in Mombasa, Kenya. Photo © Dietrich Köster, originally from the [Colonial Voyage Website](http://www.colonialvoyage.com)



It was long thought that the Pretoria and Mombasa guns were the only surviving 10.5cm Königsberg guns. That was until Bob Wagner (seen in the photo) found this one in 1998 on a traffic island in Jinja,



The plaque on the Jinja gun, telling its story. Photo © Bob Wagner

Uganda. It had formerly been a fixed emplacement gun defending Mwanza and was captured on 14th July 1916 by a force led by the 4th Kings African Rifles.

Albert Whitwell (formerly of the Black Watch and 4th KAR) remembers the gun still being outside the guardroom of the 4th KAR in Jinji in 1956. It may be that the gun hasn't moved since then and that the guardroom as demolished and a traffic island built on the same spot.

Photo © Bob Wagner



A quadrant used with a 10.5cm Königsberg gun on display at the South African National Museum of Military History



A sight arc from one of the Königsberg 10.5cm guns on display at the South African National Museum of Military History.



A close-up view of the sight arc.



A navigational device from the SMS Königsberg on display at the Imperial War Museum in London. Just to the right of the photo can be seen a large brass tube, this is the ship's whistle also from the SMS Königsberg.



An 8.8cm gun from the SMS Königsberg on display at the South African National Museum of Military History in Johannesburg. There were two such guns on the SMS Königsberg, intended for land use or to arm a small raider. Both were landed in East Africa and used by the Schutztruppe. This one was captured at Mlali-pass on 24th August 1916, the other was destroyed at Likuyu on 24th January 1917.



Another view of the 8.8cm gun. Note the large hole in the side of the barrel.



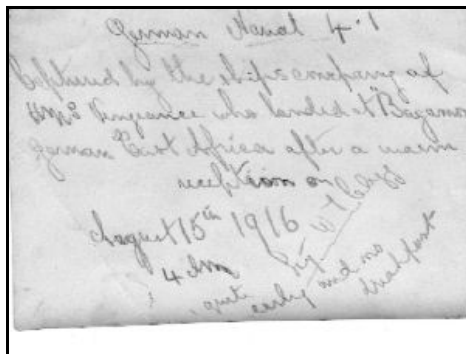
Markings on the right side of the gun. They read "8.8cm", the calibre of the gun "M.P.L.c/89" for Mittel-Pivot-Lafette" or Central Pivot Carriage model of 1889, and further down is the weight of the gun "651kg".



The maker's mark on the 8.8cm gun. It reads "Fried. Krupp Essen" the makers and "1891"- the date of manufacture.



The breech of the 8.8cm gun.



A Königsberg 10.5cm gun captured by the British Royal Navy in Bagamoyo, August 1916. This photograph was in the collection of Able Seaman William Thomas Clegg RN who served on the HMS Vengeance in East Africa during the First World War, and has kindly been shared with us by his grandson, Bob William Green.

Photo © William Thomas Clegg / Bob William Green

William Thomas Clegg's handwritten notes on the reverse of the photograph. They read "*German Naval 4.1 (the calibre of the gun in inches) Captured by the ships company of HMS Vengeance who landed at "Bagamoyo" German East Africa after a warm reception on August 15th 1916 4am quite early and no breakfast - Rtg (possibly an abbreviation of "Rating") WT Clegg.*"

Photo © William Thomas Clegg / Bob William Green

Another photograph from the collection of William Thomas Clegg, showing a German Pom-Pom gun after suffering a direct hit from one of HMS Vengeance's shells. Clegg's handwritten notes on the reverse of this photograph read "*Captured at Bagamoyo August 15th 1916 by the H.M.S Vengeance. Photo of a German Pom Pom having been struck by one of our own shells.*"

Photo © William Thomas Clegg / Bob William Green

The Story of the Königsberg's Guns

MC Heunis and Vincent Wratten
(Updated by Kevin Patience on 4 February 2007)

The story of the Königsberg is a fascinating one, and that of her main armament even more so. Not only did these guns serve on the ship in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, but also on the dusty plains and the rain forests of East Africa. Today one of these remarkable guns rests at the western approach of the Union Buildings in Pretoria.

SMS Königsberg was the first of a new class of fast well armed Town Class Cruisers (Kleiner Kreuzen) displacing 3,500 tons, built for the German Navy (Kaiserliche Marine) at the turn of the 20th century. Launched in 1905 she was a sleek, three funnelled predator, carrying a main armament of ten 10,5 cm quick firing guns (German: 10,5 cm Seekanone or 10,5 cm SK). She initially served with the Baltic Fleet where she also acted as escort to the German Kaiser's Royal Yacht Hohenzollern before being laid up at Kiel in 1912. In late 1913 the German East Africa government requested a suitable replacement for their elderly sail and steam corvette, S.M.S. Geier then on station. Four months later on 25 April 1914 a re-commissioned Königsberg commanded by Fregatten Kapitan Max Loeff left the Kiel naval base for East Africa to reaffirm German naval power in the Indian Ocean. After arriving at Dar es Salaam on 6 June, Königsberg, played host to innumerable German and African visitors in ports along the colony's coastline. Little did her crew realise that East Africa was to be, for most of them, home and headquarters for what remained of their short lives.

On 28 June 1914, the Archduke of Austria was assassinated in Sarajevo, and as the political situation in Europe slid towards open war, the Germans in East Africa began to weigh their options. Loeff's immediate goal was to ensure his ship was at sea if war came. The British were aware of the new threat on the coast, and in case of war would blockade Dar es Salaam. As the latter part of July passed, Königsberg completed a series of gunnery training exercises and steamed back into harbour for an overhaul to wartime readiness. All wood furnishings were removed, lacquered panelling stripped away and coal and supplies poured into every empty space. By July 30, all was nearly ready and Loeff spent time ashore coordinating his plans with the Colonial Army, commanded by the famous General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck. German freighters in the area had been ordered to bring in their spare coal, and two were in harbour at that stage. One of these, the 2,500 ton Somali, was pressed into service as Königsberg's seagoing supply depot. On July 31, the steamer Tabora arrived with news that the British Cape Squadron, based at Simonstown, South Africa, with their three cruisers under Vice Admiral King-Hall was due at Zanzibar the next day. There was now no more time for planning if Königsberg was to avoid being trapped in the harbour. By 4:30 that afternoon she cast off and made her way out into the Indian Ocean.

The Königsberg was ten miles out to sea and evening was falling when the officer in the foremast called down - three ships approaching! The Cape Squadron had arrived, only to see their objective steaming out to sea. All three British cruisers; H.M.S. Hyacinth, Pegasus and Astraea converged on the Königsberg and took up station around her - Astraea to port, Hyacinth astern and Pegasus ahead. If word of war came then Königsberg could hardly have been in a worse situation. Loeff considered his options and while the gunners would have been at the ready, he ordered his chief engineer to fire up all the boilers without making extra smoke. After 45 minutes the Königsberg had steam for her full speed of 24 knots and now only had to wait for whatever chance might come to use it to escape. Until such opportunity arrived, she cruised along at 10 knots, giving no sign of other plans. Not long after, a squall suddenly blew in from the southwest, and without warning Königsberg was blanketed by driving warm rain, all her "escorts" disappearing from view. Instantly orders went out and the cruiser made a 180 degree turn, churning a great knuckle of water behind her as she sped back on a reciprocal course. As she cleared the squall, Königsberg passed the Hyacinth, already making heavy smoke as she vainly tried to bring up steam for full speed. Loeff turned south for an hour and then headed out to sea at full speed for the rest of the night, consuming a large quantity of valuable coal in the process. King-Hall was left to his own fury at letting the German cruiser escape from under his nose, while Loeff was left to wait for war, in a cruiser already looking for coal to top up her bunkers.

Four days later, on August 4, the Königsberg was making her way through heavy seas off Cape Guardafui when she received a wireless code message declaring that Germany was now at war with England, France and Russia. This meant that in the vast open space of the Indian Ocean, she was now alone and hunted by a numerically superior foe. But she herself was designed to hunt, and Loeff was out for prey. After contacting as many German merchant ships as possible, to both notify them of war and ask for coal, Königsberg headed for the main shipping channel from the Red Sea to India which ran just north of the Horn of Africa. Within several hours of daylight she encountered three German steamers, the last of whom tried to evade the cruiser thinking her to be British. This short pursuit wasted more coal, and none of the steamers had any to spare. Finally, after passing a Japanese freighter, Königsberg drew her first blood when she came upon the British steamer City of Winchester. The steamer rang up all stop and prepared a welcoming party for the British cruiser she thought Königsberg to be. Only when the German officer arrived on deck did the Winchester's crew realize their dreadful mistake. This, the first British merchant ship to be taken by a German man-of-war, was also carrying most of the 1914 Ceylon tea crop, making it a double blow for the British.

After scuttling the City of Winchester at Hallaniya Island off the Oman coast, Königsberg's coal situation was even more of a concern and she turned back to the main shipping lane but found nothing. The British had reacted swiftly to the disappearance of the City of Winchester and diverted all ships away from the area. Also, the Japanese freighter had recognized the Königsberg for what she was and radioed British authorities. While the upheaval caused by his cruiser might have given Loeff some comfort, his concerns were increasingly focused on finding more coal and fresh water. Fortunately for him, the second rendezvous with the Somali at Ras Hafun on the Somaliland coast went mostly as planned, and by August 24 the Königsberg was underway again with full bunkers.

Cut off from radio contact with Dar-es-Salaam (the radio station at the capital being destroyed during a British naval shelling of the city), Loeff headed for Madagascar where he hoped to intercept French shipping. Early on the morning of August 29 the German cruiser steamed into the bay at Majunga, only to find a Red Cross station and no ships. The entire area had been evacuated. Again, the locals believed the Königsberg to be British, and only when she was steaming back out of the bay without anchoring did the local radio send out alerts that the Germans were in their harbour.

By now Königsberg's coal supply was down to 250 tons and again she met the Somali, this time at Aldabra Island, but the coaling effort was called off due to rough seas. Coal was not Loeff's only worry as the ship also required some work on her engines. With the situation becoming critical, it was decided that both ships would head for the Rufiji River Delta. The delta had recently been charted by the crew of the survey ship Möwe who discovered the river, formerly considered unnavigable, actually had several deep channels. On the morning of 3 September Königsberg passed the bar at the mouth of the Rufiji River and steamed quietly up the Simba-Uranga channel to Salale.

Once the German authorities at the nearby customs station recovered from their shock at the cruiser's unexpected arrival they quickly advised Dar es Salaam of the cruisers whereabouts and that she required coal and supplies. Loeff was also able to gather the latest news on world and local events, the most important of which came on September 19. A coast watcher reported he had seen a British cruiser steam into Zanzibar Harbour. The news was relayed to Loeff who having replenished his bunkers decided to head to Zanzibar, and destroy the lone British cruiser. Judging by the watcher's description of the British ship, it must be the Pegasus or the Astraea. In reality, it was Pegasus which had returned to Zanzibar for maintenance.

A Third Class cruiser of the Pelorus class, Pegasus had been launched in 1897 and displaced 2,135 tons, while her 4 inch guns were no match for the Krupp 4 inch guns on Königsberg. Because of a combination of boiler troubles common to the class, and the fact that she had been burning sulphurous Natal coal, she to put in at Zanzibar for desperately needed repairs. It was considered a safe move by British authorities, convinced that Königsberg was no longer in East African waters. They were wrong.

Königsberg sailed that afternoon and by late evening, was steaming for Zanzibar at her economical speed of 10 knots. Higher speeds caused sparks to shoot from her funnels, something they wished to avoid that night. By four o'clock in the morning, they were off the southern tip of Zanzibar and passing between the

reefs. The tug Helmuth on guard duty was disabled by a shell. As they approached the village of Mweni they could see Pegasus at anchor off the Eastern Telegraph Company offices at Shangani Point. At a range of five miles, Königsberg ran up her battle flags and opened fire with her five port guns. Within eight minutes Pegasus was out gunned and on fire with heavy casualties. Her captain, Commander John Ingles struck the colours and surrendered. The white flag was seen by Loeff who ordered a cease fire and departed. The Pegasus had been hit numerous times and the ship was slowly sinking. Despite efforts to beach the ship, Pegasus sank at two thirty that afternoon with a loss of 38 killed and 55 wounded. .

Leaving Zanzibar, Königsberg suffered a broken cross head on one engine and together with steam leaks caused by the bombardment, Loeff had little alternative but to postpone his plan for a return trip round the Cape to Germany, while he effected repairs in the Rufiji. Only the railway machine shops at Dar es Salaam would be able to machine the parts needed and so, twenty-four hours after her departure, Königsberg was back in the delta, the only safe place on the coast for her to lay up. The delta was bisected by numerous channels, and the Germans were the only ones who knew that several of them were navigable. In case of emergencies, Königsberg would have an escape route. In the meantime, the engine parts were sent overland to Dar-es-Salaam by ox cart. To complete her disappearance Loeff had the top masts dropped and camouflaged the remainder as trees, while some of the ship's light weapons were moved ashore to keep possible British landing parties at bay. Later they were joined by forces from the land army who garrisoned the local islands, creating a safe zone around the raider. For now, she would be safe.

Loeff was unaware of several events developing elsewhere. Two days after his attack at Zanzibar, the German cruiser Emden shelled the port of Madras in India, causing huge panic and setting some fuel tanks ablaze. This double blow to British pride was not to be stood for, not to mention the strangling effect these German actions had on shipping. The six inch gun cruiser H.M.S. Chatham was ordered to East Africa from the Red Sea to seek and destroy Königsberg. The first break for the British occurred when Chatham searched the German liner Präsident and discovered an order for shipments of coal to be delivered to the Rufiji Delta and the cruiser H.M.S. Weymouth intercepted the German tug Adjutant with a chart showing Salale. Soon, reports began trickling from locals in the Rufiji area of a German ship moored there and on the afternoon of October 20, Chatham anchored near the Kiomboni branch of the delta to send a landing party ashore. Fortunately for them, it was at a place where there were as yet no German fortifications. Chatham closed the delta mouth and spotted the Somali masts rising above the green canopy of the river delta's forests, her cover was blown.

On the morning of November 30, Chatham zeroed in on what they now knew to be the Somali's masts and fired. Somali was hit several times and soon began to burn and Loeff moved Königsberg further up the delta, out of range having suffered no damage during the day. Although the mechanical problems had been repaired, the situation was now grim. Königsberg's hiding place was blocked by three large, fast modern cruisers, and she lacked coal for a high speed run. Captain Drury-Lowe on board the Chatham had been given explicit orders to destroy the Königsberg at all costs. This was to be the start of an eight month long impasse, during which Königsberg was unable to escape from the delta, while the British were unable to get close enough to bombard her. More entrenchments were dug throughout the delta, creating a fortified zone which no British land force could hope to secure. On the British side, there were several attempts to bring aircraft in for reconnaissance and bombardment. The former worked occasionally, sometimes causing alarm when they reported Königsberg with steam up and ready to run for the open ocean. The latter never had a chance, as the aircraft were so unreliable that their main goal was to stay in the air, not dropping bombs! After a few encounters with these snooping aircraft, Loeff arrayed a series of light cannon and machine gun positions as an anti-aircraft defence. These proved effective and brought down at least one of the British planes.

On New Years Day a message was sent to Loeff from H.M.S. Fox, *"We wish you a Happy New Year and hope to see you soon."* Loeff replied, *"Thanks, same to you, if you wish to see me, I am always at home."*

In April 1915, the Kronborg, a *"Hilfschiff"* (or blockade runner) bearing supplies for Königsberg and the land army, arrived in the Indian Ocean after a long voyage from Germany. Disguised as a Danish freighter, she was carrying 1,600 tons of high grade Ruhr coal for the cruiser, as well as hundreds of rounds of ammunition for the 10.5 cm guns, machine tools, cutting torches, clothing, fresh and canned provisions and a variety of other supplies. She also carried over a million rounds of small arms ammunition, rifles and machine guns for the land army. The British however, knew of her arrival, and thanks to diligent eavesdropping on German radio transmissions, they had discovered her purpose. The ship reached Manza Bay near Tanga, when the British cruiser Hyacinth appeared from the south. The captain of the Kronborg brought his ship into the bay at full speed, and ran it aground before setting fire to the deck cargo. The Hyacinth attempted to put the fire out but retreated and shelled the ship. The Germans promptly sent messages in the clear announcing the destruction of the ship, and that they had mined the bay. This last bit of news had the effect of keeping the British away long enough to allow the salvage of the cargo in her submerged holds. By the time the British returned a few weeks later, they discovered to their dismay the Germans had salvaged everything except the coal. The logistics of moving the coal to the Rufiji would have been impossible with the facilities available.

The loss of the coal meant that Loeff and the Königsberg would be confined to the delta. By this time the ship was now burning mangrove wood cut from the surrounding swamp by local labour to maintain power. Their fear was that a second Hilfschiff would get to the Königsberg, allowing her to head back into the Indian Ocean, but the second ship Marie did not arrive until the following year. What he did not know, was that the British had begun systematically charting the delta and the complex web of defences with the help of a South African hunter, Peter Pretorius. The British Admiralty also dispatched two ex Brazilian Navy monitors, the Mersey and Severn, to East Africa where they arrived in June 1915 after a long and difficult tow from the Mediterranean. By this time the crew of the Königsberg had been reduced by a third in order to supplement the land army after convincing the navy that the crew were more valuable fighting on land, instead of resting idly in the delta. The British were unaware of these developments, but they knew Königsberg was awaiting a second Hilfschiff.

On July 6, 1915 the two monitors finally executed the operation carefully planned and rehearsed over several weeks. Severn and Mersey, supported by warships at the delta mouth, headed up the Kikunja branch of the delta. Loeff was soon aware of their arrival through his network of lookouts. At 06:23 the monitors opened fire using a spotter plane to locate the fall of shell. Königsberg's return fire was accurate, due to the network of lookouts linked by telephone who passed the monitors position to the cruiser. The British fire was inaccurate due in part to the signalling system used between the planes and monitors. At 07:40, a shell from Königsberg hit the Mersey's forward six inch gun, knocking it out and almost blowing up the ship. She was saved only by the heroic action of crewmen who threw a burning shell into the river. Near misses continued to shower the monitors with shrapnel, and after scoring only four hits on the Königsberg, the monitors retired on the falling tide. Immediately after Severn moved off, five shells from the cruiser's guns landed right where she had been moored. Had they hit her, this perfect group of shells would have wrecked or sunk the small monitor. The British counted their luck, they had fired 635 six inch shells and scored four inconclusive hits on the Königsberg. The Mersey had lost one of her two main guns and Severn missed being blown out of the water by what her captain called blind luck.

For four days all was quiet, but early on Sunday, July 11, the aircraft began circling Königsberg, announcing the renewal of a second attack. By 10:40 the monitors were in the entrance to the river and by 11:30 the Königsberg had begun firing, hitting the Mersey with two shells, putting the rear main gun out of action. With the Mersey now completely incapable of returning fire, the Königsberg switched attention to Severn, who held her fire under the rain of shells until the second spotter plane arrived at 12:30. The carefully rehearsed signal system between ship and plane worked perfectly the second time and Königsberg was severely damaged with a number of casualties and damaged guns. The loss of the telegraph line to the ship from the lookout posts meant she was firing blind and unable to keep up the same rate of fire. Within a short time, a hit from Severn ignited ammunition in the Königsberg's after magazine, causing an explosion and a fire. Other hits killed a number of the crew and damaged the bridge, injuring Loeff and all but one man present. Finally, one of the two remaining guns fired its last round of shrapnel ammunition at the spotter plane, bringing it down in the river. As shells continued to rain down, First Officer Koch rigged a torpedo head as a scuttling charge and at two o'clock that afternoon Königsberg heaved slightly as the torpedo detonated. The blast tore open the cruiser's hull and she heeled to port, sinking into the mud with her upper works just above the waterline. She had occupied the Royal Navy for nearly a year tying up twenty ships and ten aircraft and consuming nearly forty thousand tons of coal. Loeff signalled Berlin: *"Königsberg is destroyed but not conquered."*

These were prophetic words as the Königsberg, although doomed as a fighting ship, still had plenty of fight left in her. From Dar-es-Salaam the order went out to salvage everything of use from the ship. Especially her main guns which were used by the German land forces to supplement their field artillery. The heavy guns were recovered and dragged on carts through the bush to the capital. There they were cleaned and carriages constructed from boiler plate at the railway workshops. Some guns were intended for fixed defences and received no carriages. Around 1,500 shells were salvaged from the Königsberg and the Kronberg and shared out between the ten guns.

From Dar-es-Salaam, the guns were despatched to various corners of the colony where they began their second career. They were skilfully operated by sailors from the Königsberg, now facing the African jungles instead of the open seas. One was mounted on the Goetzen, the largest steamer on Lake Tanganyika but later removed for use on land. The refurbished guns gave good service to the German ground forces, being much valued for heavy artillery support. Their shortcomings were that they were heavy and not very mobile, while their armour piercing shells were not intended for land use, and often buried themselves

deep in the ground before exploding. South African troops fighting at Kondoa Irangi in July 1916, noted their satisfaction with this state of affairs. There was however some casualties to these guns and their persistent shelling were trying to the nerves.

As the war rolled on over East Africa, the Germans were forced to abandon or destroy these heavy guns. Their intrinsic lack of mobility became a liability as the Schutztruppen and their African Askari troops moved into a war of movement in the vast regions of Southern Tanzania. The Königsberg guns were abandoned or captured as follows :

1 at Kahe, March 1916
 1 at Mwanza, July 1916
 1 at Kigoma, July 1916
 1 at Bagamoyo, August 1916
 1 at Kondoa Irangi, August 1916
 1 at Tabora, September 1916
 1 at Kahima, September 1916
 1 at Mahiwa, October 1917
 1 at Massasi, October 1917.
 1 at Kibata, October 1917

Most of the guns were abandoned or destroyed after they ran out of ammunition by their crews to prevent them from falling into enemy hands. After the end of hostilities the captured Königsberg guns were distributed as trophies and the following locations are known :

1 to Pretoria, South Africa
 1 to Mombasa, Kenya
 1 to Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania
 1 to Kampala, Uganda
 1 to Leopoldville in the then Belgian Congo
 1 to Stanleyville in the then Belgian Congo

Of the Königsberg's original crew of 350 men, only 15, including Captain Loeff, survived the war to return to Germany.

Today only the two guns in Pretoria and Mombasa are known to exist, both are mounted on similar heavy wheeled field mountings, possibly being those captured in a better condition (*since this article was written a third gun has been rediscovered, seen above in Jinja, Uganda). Other items including parts of a gun and a sighting mechanism are preserved at the South African National Museum of Military History in Saxonwold, Johannesburg. In the Imperial War Museum, London is the ships steam whistle and the Inclinator is displayed at the Fleet Air Arm Museum at Yeovilton. A few shell cases are also exist in many parts of the world.

Inspection of the gun located in the grounds of the Union Buildings in Pretoria, revealed that it is inscribed with the serial number 369 as well as "FRIED KRUPP, ESSEN", identifying it as a gun made by this famous German firm. A bronze plaque attached to the carriage states that it is the gun captured at Kahe, but this can not be as the Kahe gun was fitted on a wooden mounting, not a wheeled carriage and was found blown up by the Germans before they abandoned it. The gun's naval origins are easily discernable. The long barrel and heavy cradle type recoil system were designed for shipboard use. The gun is missing its breech block pointing to the conclusion that it was abandoned by the Germans once it had used all the ammunition available. A strong sheet metal carriage supports the gun, but a closer look reveals the carriage to be very utilitarian in nature. When mounted on a cruiser the gun had a range of 12,000 metres. The shell weighed 17.4 kg and the gun muzzle velocity was 600 - 650 m/s. On land the gun would have weighed around 4,000 kg. At one time the gun was painted a dark green colour but has been since repainted in maroon. The original colour scheme would probably have been the same as on the cruiser, i.e. a light sea grey, but it is possible that it was re-painted to camouflage it during its service on land. Clearly this was a powerful and unique gun, and one which ought to be preserved not only as a reminder of the Königsberg's adventures, but also of South Africa's contribution to the First World War.

Two sidelights on this story should also be mentioned. Firstly the Königsberg also carried two smaller 8,8 cm guns (German: 8,8 cm Seekanone L/30) in her hold, probably to equip and transform a merchant vessel into an armed merchant cruiser. These guns were also used on land and one, captured in September 1916, is currently on display at the South African National Museum of Military History.

Secondly, if we cast our minds back to the Königsberg's most famous victim, the British cruiser H.M.S. Pegasus, then there is another twist in the tale. Six of the eight guns on Pegasus were also salvaged by the British and mounted on land carriages. The two opponents thus met again, this time on land. Today one of the "Peggy Guns" stands next to the Königsberg gun (the "Bagamoyo" gun) at Fort Jesus in Mombasa, Kenya - two once wartime foes now rest peacefully together.

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Links to Forums

There are two forums where these guns have been discussed extensively with many photographs-

[Axis History Forum Discussion on the SMS Königsberg Guns](#)

[Panzer Archiv Forum Discussion on the SMS Königsberg Guns in German](#)



One of the Königsberg Guns being moved across East Africa
Contemporary Illustration by W Rehfeld © Frankfurt University Koloniales Bildarchiv

External Links:

[Axis History Forum Discussion on the Guns](#)

[South African National Museum of Military History](#)

The War Times Journal- [The Königsberg Incident and the Great War in East Africa](#)

Königsberg- [A German East Africa Raider](#)

[Stanleyville.be](#) - Photos of a Königsberg gun on display in the Belgian Congo

Panzer Forum- [Discussion on Königsberg Guns](#) with several great photographs

Another [Königsberg Gun in Uganda](#)

Please contact me [here](#) if you have more information or photos on this topic.

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