

Bizarre, Fascinating, and Wacky World War I & II Secrets. The Clash of the Titans

The armed merchant cruiser H.M.S. Carmania was a British commerce raider. It was sailing off the coast of the Caribbean Island of Trinidad. The officer of the day watch yelled excitedly into his ship phone. "Captain! Captain! Come to the wheel house quickly! I just cannot believe my eyes, another ship is rapidly approaching and it looks exactly like our ship, and the name of the side reads H.M.S. Carmania!!"

The H.M.S. Carmania was launched on Feb. 21, 1905. It was one of the largest and fastest ocean luxury passenger ships in the British Cunard line. For almost nine years the Carmania sailed from Liverpool, England to New York City and back. In October of 1913, the Carmania distinguished herself by helping rescue 521 passengers. They were onboard the burning Canadian Northern ship Voltorno. However, in August of 1914, her role was drastically changed, for Kaiser Wilhelm II, the emperor of Germany, declared war on England. It is his destiny to conquer and rule the entire world! This was a very strange and surprising move for him to make. Not many people knew, but Kaiser Wilhelm II, the emperor of Germany, was closely related to the Queen of England.

So WWI, "The Great War," began and millions of people were needlessly slaughtered. The Kaiser was positive that the war would be over before Christmas, and also positive that Germany would win! "After all," he exclaimed, "the German armed forces cannot be conquered, for they are invincible!" He sounded just like a young corporal in his German army. The corporal's name was Adolf Schickle Gruber, which he later changed to Adolf Hitler!! (World War One didn't end until Nov. 11, 1918.)

The H.M.S. Carmania

was requisitioned by the British Royal Navy, and hastily converted into a warship. Sandbags were stacked around instead of armor. Then guns were hoisted on board and bolted onto the deck. Just two weeks after war was declared, she was ready for



H.M.S. Carmania

military duty! She was sent to the Caribbean to flush out German colliers (coal supply ships) and small warships. The captain knew that his ship was no match for heavily armored warships, so he decided to disguise it to look like an enemy warship. The skipper flipped through his book of warships until he came to the German warship, the SMS Cap Trafalgar. She was the same size, over 600 Ft. long, and carried about the same guns. So orders were given to repaint the Carmania to look exactly like the Cap Trafalgar. However, the German warship had three smoke stacks, while the British warship had only two. So a dummy smoke stack was constructed, and bolted down between the two real ones. Finally, on both sides, the name SMS Cap Trafalgar was carefully painted.

Now, the real SMS Cap Trafalgar was a new ship built and completed in October of 1913. She was a large German passenger ocean liner. She was built at the Agbulcan shipyard on

the Elbe River at Hamburg, Germany. The Cap Trafalgar was the scene of the famous Battle of Trafalgar of 1805. For nearly a year she sailed between the German port of Hamburg, Germany to different ports in the South American countries of Brazil and Chile.

This was to supply the large number of German immigrants who had settled there. However, as soon as Germany declared war, she was summoned to duty in the Germany Navy. Quickly sandbags were stacked for armor, guns hoisted onboard, and bolted down. Then the SMS Cap Trafalgar was given the code-name Hilfskreuzer B (auxiliary cruiser B).

Now she had been issued orders to sink British merchant shipping around Cape Horn. (The tip of South America, as the Panama Canal had not been built.) All non-essential personnel was disembarked at the Port of Montevideo, Uruguay SMA then Cap Trafalgar must rendezvous with the German gun ship SMS Eber, that transferred

Naval officers, ammunition, and supplies. The German skipper realized that a converted ocean liner could not survive with a heavily armed enemy war ship, with thick armor. So he also decided to disguise his SMS Cap Trafalgar as the British converted ocean

Trinidad. This was around 500 miles off the coast of Rio De Janeiro, Brazil.

The Cap Trafalgar is steaming along, headed for this secret supply depot when suddenly the "seaman" on watch in the wheel house shouted excitedly into his deck phone! "Achtung! Achtung! Korvetten Kapitän Wirth (lieutenant commander)! I cannot believe my own eyes! There is a large warship heading directly toward our ship! And it looks exactly like our ship! Achtung! Achtung! This strange ship even has our name painted on the side! Something is very peculiar, for there is no way to have a twin!"

The captains of both warships quickly realized that this would be a fight to the finish. For both the British warship and the German warship are the same size, with two 4" inch guns and six pom-poms (large machine guns) all are manned by experienced naval gunners mates. And top speed for both ships is around 17 knots (20 MPH). The Cap Trafalgar sent out encoded German messages that read: We are beginning a gun



SMS Cap Trafalgar

Trafalgar had to dismantle her third smoke stack in order to become the H.M.S. Carmania! The German Imperial Navy had established a small secret supply depot on the Brazilian Islands of

duel with the Carmania. Our position is 35 degrees west, 26 degrees south with a north-northwest heading. SOS! We need help immediately. SOS! Both captains positioned their ships to



by Cecil Owen

gain the best firing angle. Soon the two ships were only a few hundred yards apart. Sailors on both ships began to shoot at each other with machine guns. The battle raged for at least two hours. The Carmania was hit 79 times by the Cap Trafalgar's accurate gunners. Several holes are blown below the water line, but not critical enough for the ship to sink. The entire bridge (the control center) was blown away by shellfire. It was very difficult to bring all the fires under control before she was totally destroyed. But the next day the H.M.S. Carmania was rescued and towed into the Port of Pernambuco.

Meanwhile on the SMS Cap Trafalgar panic took over, for the German ship was blazing also and the order to abandon ship was given. A shell below the waterline had flooded several compartments and the ship was sinking rapidly.

51 sailors were killed in the battle, including the skipper. Two German Colliers (coal supply ships) are able to rescue 279 crewmen before the warship sank below the waves. They were put ashore at the port of Montevideo to try to find a way back to Germany.

This is the true story about the clash of the titans; and this is the only time in Naval history that two warships have battled their own selves!

Sources:

The Greatest War Stories Ever Told by Rick Beyer
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