

FALKLANDS 1914

DURING 1914, THE REMOTE AND WINDSWEPT FALKLANDS ISLANDS BECAME THE SITE OF ONE OF HISTORY'S MOST SAVAGE SEA BATTLES

BY JOHN PROTASIO

Oil painting by William Lionel Wyllie depicting the sinking of SMS *Leipzig*.



The 1982 war over the Falkland Islands between Argentina and Britain was not the first major conflict that has taken place in that remote, bleak part of the world. During 1914, a bloody sea battle between Germany and England would claim the lives of over 2300 sailors.

The story began on 1 November 1914. On this fateful day Adm.

Christopher Cradock was conducting a search for the German Far East Fleet. "Search and locate the enemy," his orders read. Besides the flagship HMS *Good Hope*, Cradock had with him the cruiser *Monmouth* and two light cruisers the *Glasgow* and the *Otranto*. The British Admiral had the pre-dreadnought *Canopus* under his command but that ship was too slow to keep up

with the other warships so it was dispatched to protect the colliers assigned to the fleet.

The fleet under pursuit, the German Far East Squadron, was under the skillful command of Adm. Graf von Spee. He had a formidable force with him: two cruisers and three light cruisers. They were all fairly new. The oldest ship, the *Leipzig*, was completed in 1906, four

years after Cradock's flagship. Von Spee was leaving the waters of the Far East in order to avoid battle with the imposing Japanese Navy. He decided that he would best serve the German cause by engaging in commerce raiding in South Atlantic waters.

Now on this afternoon, 1 November 1914, the two fleets were steaming along the Chilean coast near Coronel. At 4:00 pm on that



SMS *Scharnhorst* sinking (foreground) with SMS *Gneisenau* during the Battle of the Falkland Islands. Painting by Lionel Wyllie.