

Guam remembers the SMS Cormoran II at Sea

TUMON, GUAM, April 30, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Guam has celebrated the 100th anniversary of the scuttling of the SMS Cormoran II, a historic ship where the first shot fired by the US took place in World War I. The Cormoran had spent two and a half years stranded in Guam with no coal to reach another safe destination. Although not at war with Germany, the US Naval Governor of Guam had decided against refueling the Cormoran, due in part to the island's own limited supply of the fuel.

Eventually, the German sailors of the Cormoran were given permission to come and go freely from the ship. The relationship between the local people and the Navy with the Cormoran's crew was very friendly. When the US entered WWI on April 6, 1917, the relationship was forced to change.



The SMS Cormoran II Monument built in 1917 by the sailors of the SMS Cormoran at the U.S. Navy Cemetery in Hagåtña next to the six sailors' graves. Photo by Mr. Chase Weir

The Navy demanded the Cormoran's captain Adalbert Zuckschwerdt surrender his ship as their countries were now at war. Zuckschwerdt agreed to surrender himself and his crew, but not the Cormoran. Instead, he instructed his crew to leave the ship and made arrangements to scuttle her. On April 7, 1917 at 8:03 a.m., multiple explosions shook the SMS Cormoran II and she began to sink. Unfortunately, not all the sailors had left the ship and seven died that day.

Only six bodies were recovered. The six sailors were buried with full military honors in the U.S. Naval Cemetery in Hagåtña. The graves are still well marked with headstones inscribed with each sailor's name - Karl Bennershansen, Franz Blum, K. Boomerum, Rudolph Penning, Emil Reschke, and Ernes Roose. The cemetery also features a monument built by the crew for the SMS Cormoran II and her lost crew members.

On April 7, 2017, crowds gathered in the afternoon at the U.S. Naval Cemetery to honor the fallen of the SMS Cormoran II with a special Peace Tribute Commencement Ceremony. Michael Musto, a SMS Cormoran and dive professional, gave a short history of the Cormoran. The Guam National Guard conducted the presentation of colors and Guam Territorial Band performed. The sailors were honored with a special Chamorro blessing conducted by Pa'a Taotao Tano', Guam's longest performing cultural group, and Pale Eric Forbes gave a Christian blessing.

Guam's U.S. Congress representative, Congresswoman Madeleine Z. Bordallo, gave opening remarks. The Congresswoman, Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy Commander, Joint Region Marianas

Shoshana Chatfield, Guam Senator Dennis Rodriguez, Senator Joe S. San Agustin, and Milton Morinaga, Chairman of the GVB Board of Directors unveiled the commemoration plaque. Rear Admiral Chatfield also gave a speech outlining the US Navy's relationship with the Cormoran and her crew. Admiral stated, "What is the role of the sailor, what might any of us in uniform be asked to do, and I think that I can summarize that by saying that we will serve faithfully, that we will fight bravely, and that we will die honorably."

Mr. Michael Hasper, Chargé d'Affaires from the German Embassy in Manila, representing the Cormoran's native Germany was joined by Walter Runck, whose grandfather was a sailor on the Cormoran, and Maria Uhl from Sonthofen, Germany, Guam's sister city since 1988, to place a large floral wreath by the SMS Cormoran II monument. Six local German families placed small floral arrangements on the six sailors' graves.

The history of the SMS Cormoran II includes a two-month stay in Lamotrek, an atoll of Yap, part of the Federated States of Micronesia. A sailor named Paul Glaser, rescued by the Cormoran during her journey throughout the Pacific, was laid to rest in Lamotrek. The Lamotrek Association of Guam honored their connection with the SMS Cormoran II during the Peace Tribute Commencement Ceremony. Their skin oiled and colored by turmeric, a brightly colored delegation presented coconuts and sprinkled turmeric on each grave. The fruits represented the main food staple with which the people of Lamotrek were able to feed the nearly 300-person crew of the Cormoran.

The local community presented the fallen sailors with breadfruit and water. The water was carried in a New Guinean bowl to represent the thirty Cormoran crew members who were from New Guinea. The Chamorros used a medicinal fern leaf called "kahlau" to sprinkle the water on each grave and a Chinese bell was rung three times for each lost sailor. The Chinese bell represented the Chinese crew members from the SMS Cormoran II.

Following the formal presentations, the crowd was also invited to place flowers at the memorial site and on the headstones. Preserving and respecting the island's history is important in Guam, from our own Chamorro culture and history to the lives from other lands who have touched our shores and left their mark. For over 100 years the SMS Cormoran II and her crew have been a proud part of the history of Guam.

PHOTO: Dignitaries attended the Peace Tribute at the U.S. Navy Cemetery in Hagåtña, Guam. From left to right: Milton Morinaga, GVB Chairman of the Board of Directors; John A. Cruz, Mayor of Hagåtña; Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy Commander, Joint Region Marianas Shoshana Chatfield; Guam's U.S. Congress representative, Congresswoman Madeleine Z. Bordallo; Michael Hasper, Chargé d'Affaires, German Embassy in Manila, Philippines; Guam Senator Dennis Rodriguez; and Guam Senator Joe S. San Agustin. Photo by Mr. Chase Weir

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