

# 32 | The third raid of Russian cruisers and the sinking of the transport *Kinshu Maru*

After taking over command of the First Pacific Fleet, Vice Admiral Makarov slightly modified the tasks of the Vladivostok squadron, placing a special emphasis on intercepting transports sailing from Japan to Gensan.

At the same time, the commander of the cruiser squadron, Reytsenshteyn, was called back to Port Arthur. He was replaced by Rear Admiral K.P. Iessen<sup>6</sup>, who was recommended by Makarov himself. The new commander needed some time to get acquainted with his squadron. Therefore, the cruisers of the Vladivostok squadron left port only on 23<sup>rd</sup> April. Their destination was Gensan.

Meanwhile, after *Petropavlovsk's* sinking and Makarov's death, along with the damage to the battleship *Pobeda*, the range of the Port Arthur fleet's operations was seriously limited. Due to this, and taking into consideration the fact that transfer of the troops of the II

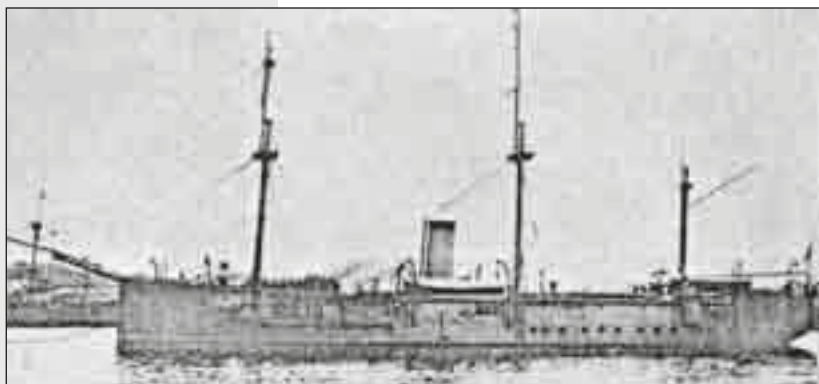
Army to Manchuria was still in progress, Vice Admiral Togo decided to detach Vice Admiral Kamimura's II Squadron and send it against the Vladivostok cruisers, to obstruct their potential attacks on Japanese units on the Japanese Sea and in the Korea Strait. Kamimura's ships were to be replaced on the Yellow Sea by Vice Admiral Kataoka's III Squadron, whose main task now was to provide direct escort for the Japanese transports. Kamimura, in turn, following his orders of 16<sup>th</sup> April, set out for Mokpho a day later. From there, on restocking, he sailed out towards the Korea Strait on 21<sup>st</sup> April, leading the II Division (*Idzumo*, *Adzuma*, *Kasuga*, *Tokiwa* and *Iwate*), the IV Division (*Naniwa*, *Takachiho*, *Tsushima* and *Niitaka*), the small cruiser *Chihaya*, the 1<sup>st</sup> Destroyer Division, auxiliary cruiser *Nikko Maru*, and the transport *Kinshu Maru*. On location, he was also joined by the cruiser *Idzumi*, and the 11<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Torpedo Boat Divisions. On 22<sup>nd</sup> April, they reached Gensan. There, the Japanese admiral

<sup>6</sup> He took over command on 16<sup>th</sup> March., Lacroix E., op.cit., part 5, TBS No 3/1968, p.228.



Russian cruiser Rossiya.

# 40 | Japanese fleet operations against Vladivostok-bound shipping



*Small Japanese cruiser Musashi. Throughout the entire war it performed patrol operations in the Tsugaru Strait.*

Preparing Vladivostok for the reception of the Second and Third Pacific Fleets, the Russian command decided to send additional supplies of ammunition and materiel, and most important of all, of coal. Dispatching the goods by trans-Siberian rail was practically impossible, as this was busy providing for the troops fighting in Manchuria (only top priority supplies, like ammunition, were transported by rail). It was decided to charter 80 ships from neutral countries, which were to deliver a total of over 400,000 tons of supplies (including 250,000 tons of coal). The first transports arrived in Vladivostok in July, 1904.

Russian preparations could not escape the attention of the Japanese. However, engaged in Port Arthur and protecting their own communication routes in the Korea Strait, they did not manage to intercept deliveries to Vladivostok. The situation changed after the fall of Port Arthur. The Japanese command immediately sent the forces at their disposal to patrol the routes along which the cargo ships tried to reach Vladivostok.

In December, 1904 the control of the Korea Strait was taken over by Vice Admiral Uriu. He was given five or six larger vessels (armoured cruisers, cruisers, and auxiliary cruisers), as well as the 11<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> Torpedo Boat

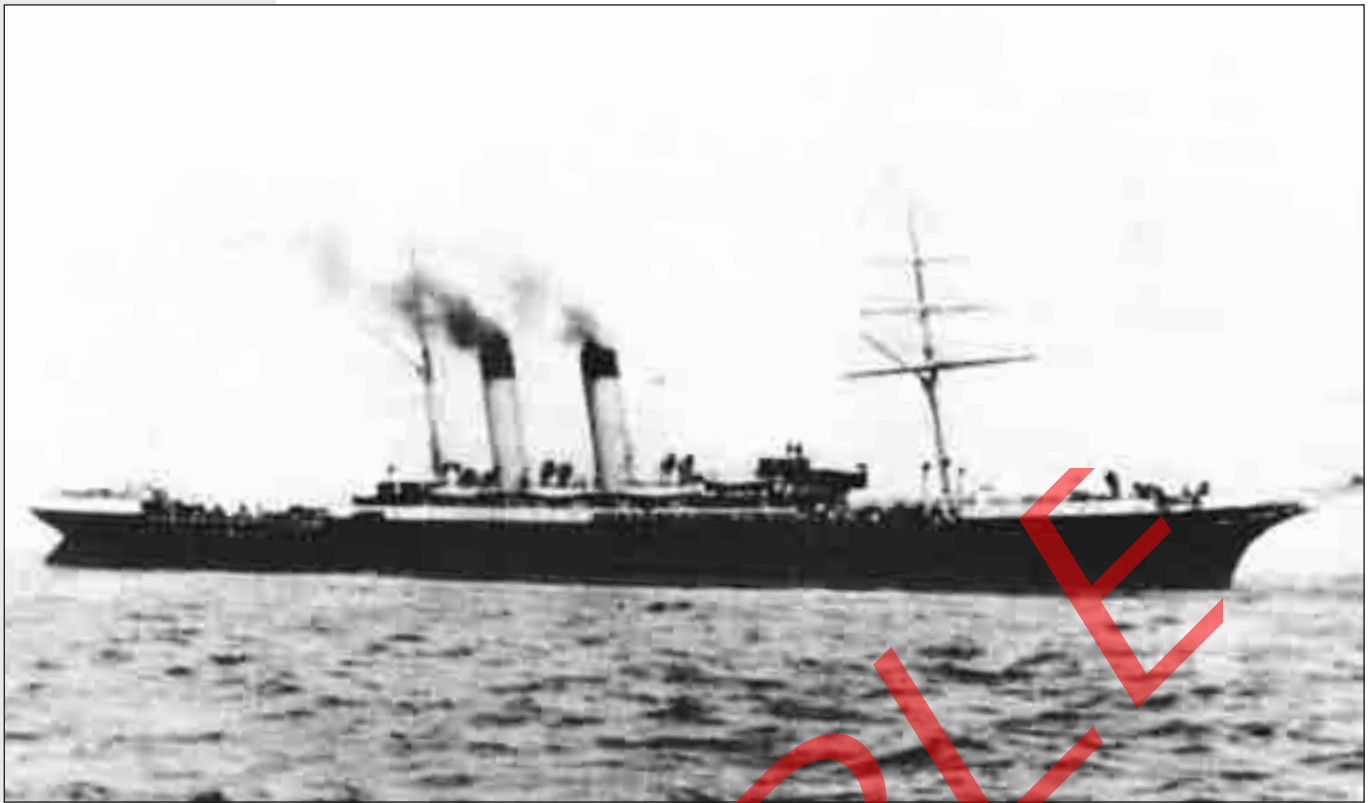
Divisions. These ships continued patrolling the area until the spring, apprehending 10 vessels.

In January, 1905, the Tsugaru Strait was taken over by Rear Admiral Mizu's detachment. He was given two armoured cruisers, Hakodate-based small cruisers *Takao* (soon transferred to the VII Division) and *Musashi*, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Torpedo Boat Division (he was additionally supported by the Ominato-based 13<sup>th</sup> Torpedo Boat Division, and later he was also reinforced by further units). Soon Mizu was promoted to the rank of Vice Admiral, and made the commander of the I Division. He was replaced by Rear Admiral Shimamura Hayao on 22<sup>nd</sup> January.

At the end of January, Shimamura's ships undertook the additional task of patrolling the Etorofu, Kunashir and Soya Straits, which had been frozen and inaccessible until then. In connection with that, his forces were strengthened by several other warships. By the beginning of April they had apprehended seven ships in the Tsugaru Strait, and eight in the Etorofu and Kunashir Straits.

At the beginning of April, the Japanese found out that Rozhstvenski's squadron had passed Singapore. As a result, Shimamura's ships were concentrated in the western part of the Tsugaru Strait and only the auxiliary cruiser *Kumano Maru* was left in the area of the Kuril Islands. In these circumstances, the patrol efficiency of Japanese ships was bound to deteriorate. After 18<sup>th</sup> April, most of Shimamura's ships were recalled from the northern waters to Sasebo, leaving only the auxiliary cruisers *Nippon Maru* and *Hongkong Maru*, the small cruiser *Musashi*, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Torpedo Boat Divisions.

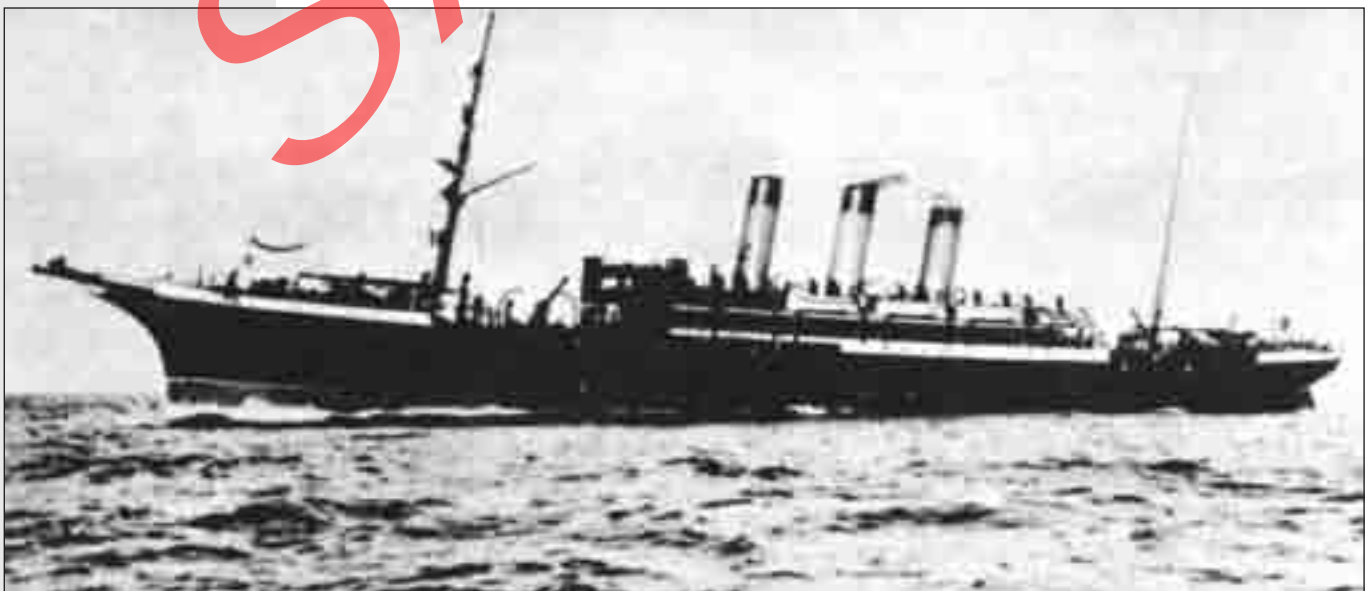
Out of 80 ships chartered by the Russians, 42 made it to Vladivostok, whilst 23 were intercepted by the Japanese.



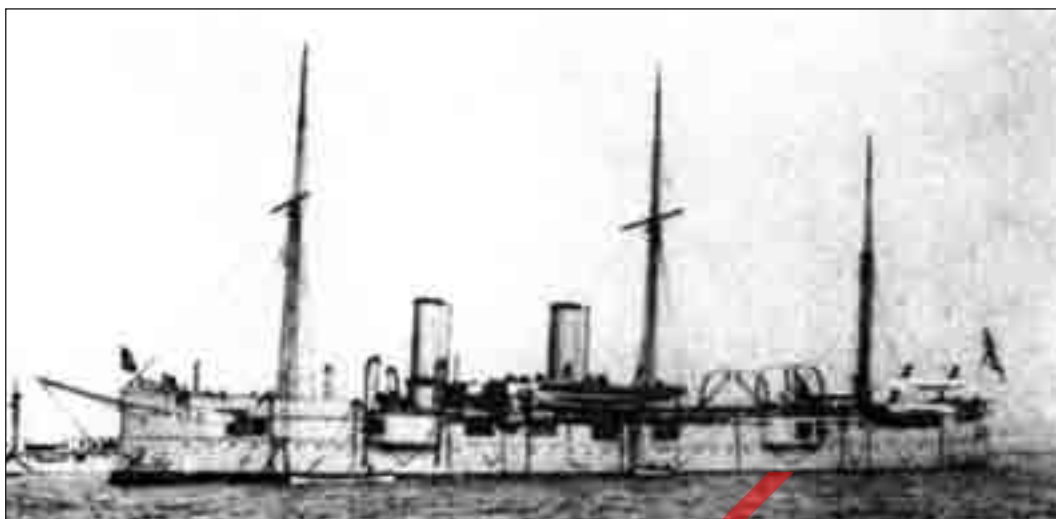
*Russian auxiliary cruiser  
Peterburg.*

The auxiliary cruiser *Terek* was no more successful. It left Libawa on 25<sup>th</sup> August and headed for the Atlantic coast of Portugal. Between 5<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> September, it inspected 15 ships around Cape St. Vincent, but apprehended none. It returned on 26<sup>th</sup> September. The last of the cruisers, *Kuban*, never made it to sea because of damage done in the Libawa dock. It was seaworthy as late as 2<sup>nd</sup> September, when the Russian command suspended all commerce raiding operations. Later all the auxiliary cruisers, apart from *Don* which required its boilers to be replaced, were incorporated into the Second Fleet, joining it off Madagascar.

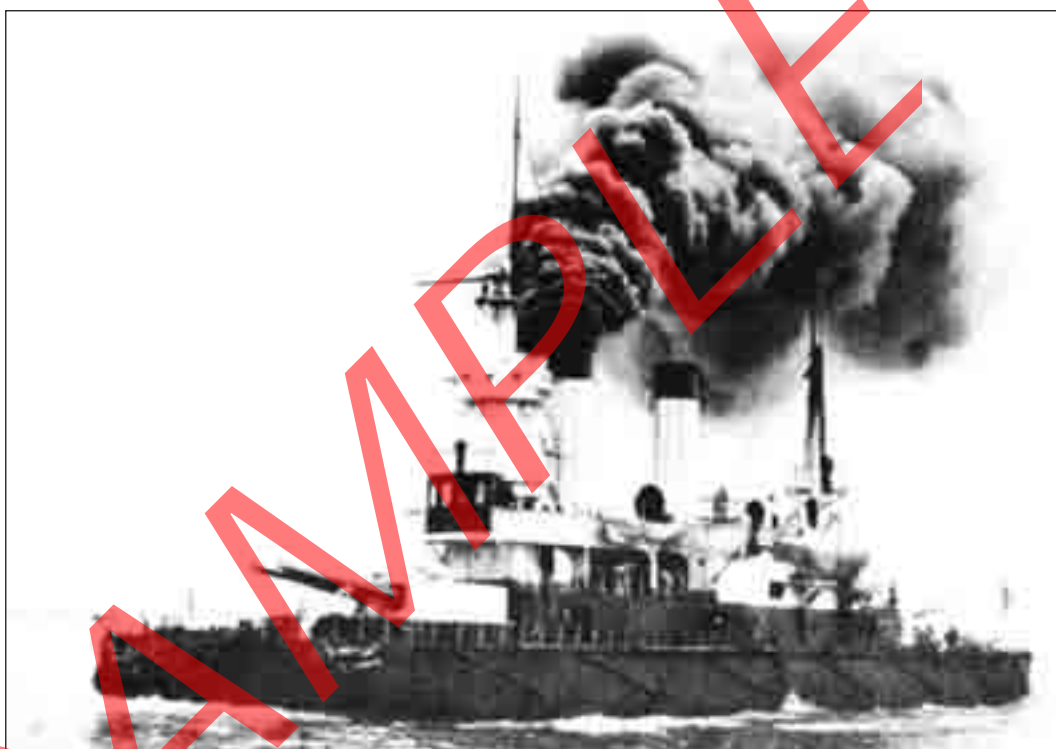
*Russian auxiliary cruiser  
Smolensk.*



*Old cruiser Vladimir Monomakh.*



*Coast defence battleship Admiral Senyavin.*



*Rear Admiral Nebogatov's squadron in the Suez Canal.*



Bringing the two squadrons together had a positive effect upon the morale of the Russian crews. Moreover, despite being made up of old vessels, or coastal units, the III Squadron covered the 11,000 sea miles from the Baltic Sea to Indochina in 83 days, without any serious breakdowns, or human losses, and was still in good condition (which testifies to Nebogatov's liberal command style, at least by Russian standards). Unfortunately Rozhstvenski, however cordial he was in welcoming Nebogatov, did not disclose to him to his plans, which would be particularly important in the light of Rear Admiral Fel'kerzam's critical health problems and his inability to continue with his command duties (he died on 24th May on board *Osl'yabya*). From that moment on, Nebogatov became Rozhstvenski's actual deputy.

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