

The final moments of a Russian cruiser

GEORGE TOWN: The Battle of Penang began in the early hours of Oct 28, 1914, at 4.30am, during a period when Penang was part of the Straits Settlements, a British Crown colony.

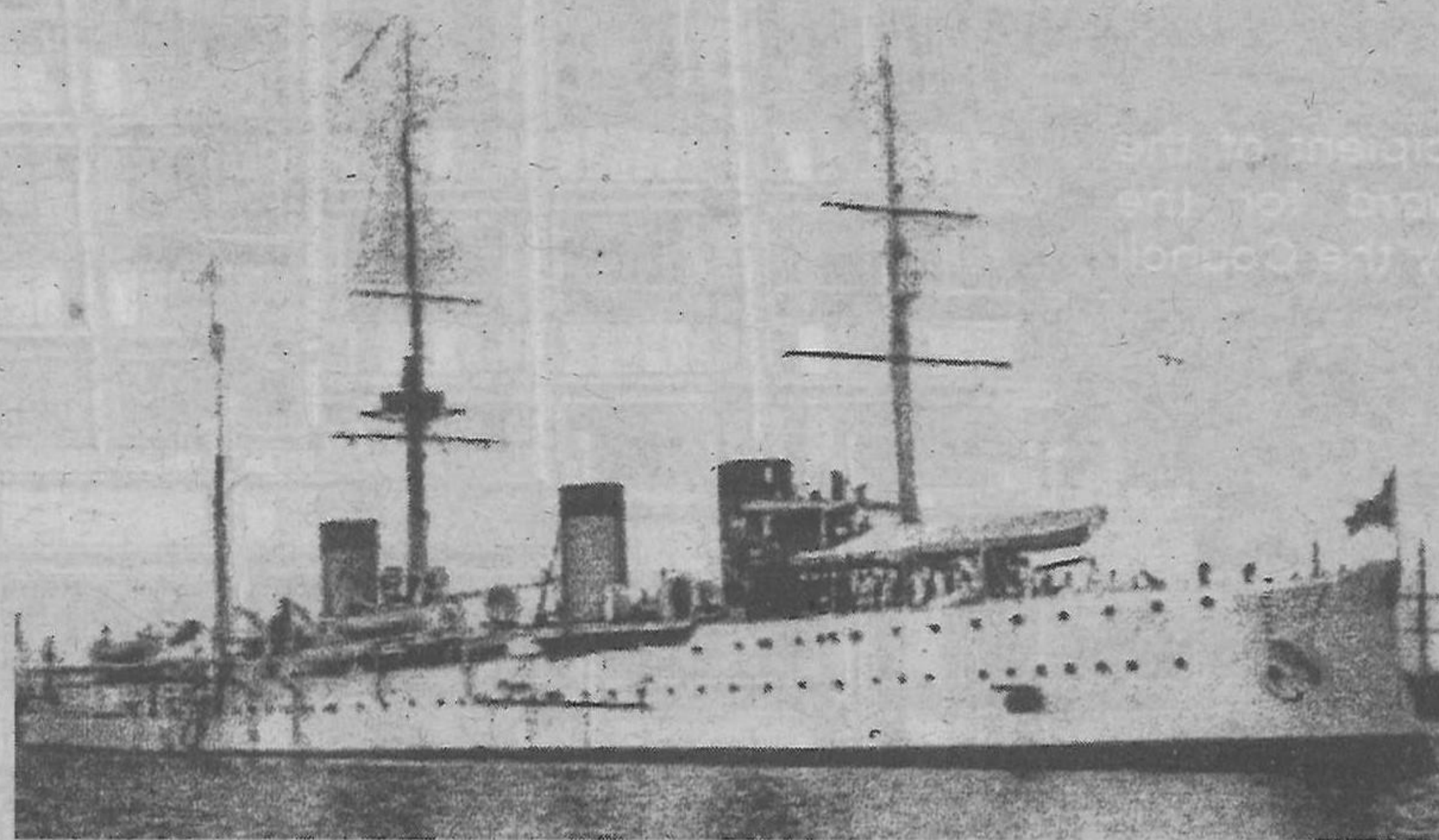
The Russian light cruiser *Zhemchug* (meaning Pearl) was in the process of maintenance in the waters off Penang, now known as Swettenham Pier.

The 3,153-tonne protected cruiser, along with other ships from Britain and France, formed part of the Allied unit that aimed to safeguard international trade routes.

The pier here was then a base for the Allied vessels.

On that fateful day, the German cruiser *SMS Emden* appeared unexpectedly from the sea to launch an assault on the harbour defence.

Captain Karl von Muller



Ill-fated ship: 'Zhemchug' taking sail shortly before its destruction.
— Photo provided by the authors of 'The Last Battle of the Cruiser Zhemchug'

skilfully disguised his ship by rigging a false smoke stack, enabling *SMS Emden* to resemble the British light cruiser

HMS Yarmouth.

It managed to slip past the watchful eyes of the French patrol vessel before approaching

Zhemchug, which was undergoing maintenance.

Once it entered the harbour, the *SMS Emden* immediately hoisted the Imperial German naval ensign, revealing its true identity.

The ship launched a couple of torpedoes, striking *Zhemchug*, which struggled to return fire.

Within minutes, the *Zhemchug* had vanished underwater, leaving 89 Russian crew dead and over 130 others wounded.

While most of their remains were buried at the Western Road Cemetery here, three others were buried in Pulau Jerejak, where their graves were discovered by chance in 2005.

The *Zhemchug* was the second of the two protected cruisers built for the Imperial Russian Navy. The other was *Izumrud* (Emerald).