

RAINBOW

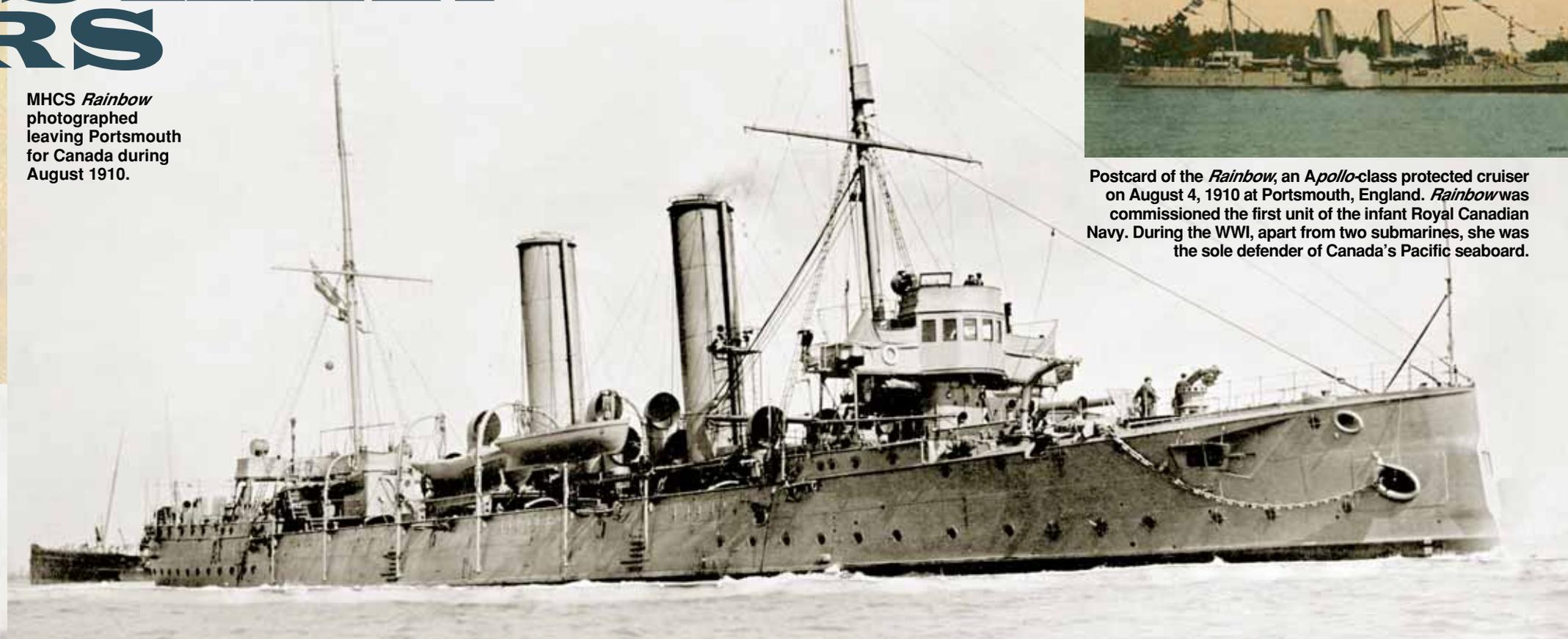
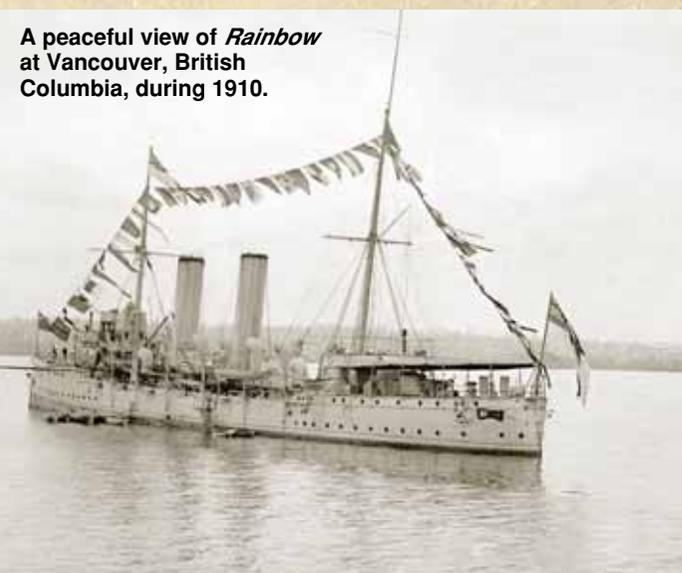
SHOWS HER COLORS

Old, tired, outclassed, outgunned, and outmanned, this Canadian Light Cruiser was already making plans to engage Germany's Far Eastern Squadron when the Great War began — HMCS *Rainbow* was Canada's only west coast warship!

BY JON D. McDERMOTT

MHCS *Rainbow* photographed leaving Portsmouth for Canada during August 1910.

A peaceful view of *Rainbow* at Vancouver, British Columbia, during 1910.



Postcard of the *Rainbow*, an Apollo-class protected cruiser on August 4, 1910 at Portsmouth, England. *Rainbow* was commissioned the first unit of the infant Royal Canadian Navy. During the WWI, apart from two submarines, she was the sole defender of Canada's Pacific seaboard.

the *Leipzig* took elaborate precautions to disguise their readiness for war. Before the *Nurnberg* left Mazatlan, she had contracted a Canadian-owned collier, *Cetriana*, skippered by a Royal Navy Reservist and crewed

mostly by Germans and Mexicans, to provide the German light cruiser with coal. When the collier arrived, officers of the *Leipzig* took over her radio so the crew of the small ship would remain unaware of the worsening situation in Europe.

PLANNING FOR A EUROPEAN WAR

Aboard the *Leipzig* on the night of 1 August, covert actions were taking place to make the ship ready for action and the *Cetriana* was ordered to be ready to proceed to sea on minimum notice.

To Canada's west coast population, the newspaper accounts of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife on 28 June 1914, were read and discounted. They seemed to have little relevance to citizenry wrapped up in peaceful Edwardian-type living. However, those connected with the Navy or upper echelon provincial politics, realized how exposed the coastal regions were to German naval attack. Rumors ran

along the coast during the early summer. German spies were supposed to be everywhere. Foreign language newspapers that played up "highly-colored stories of German naval victories" were fueling anti-German feelings.

CANADA PREPARES FOR WAR

"I must say," wrote one Canadian colonel, "that if men of distinctly foreign appearance and terribly foreign names will ask awkward questions of [officers], they must expect arrest."

During the last week of July, the man in the street started talking and worrying about the possibility of German "Big-Gun" cruisers penetrating the Strait of Juan de Fuca, a 20-mile inlet separating Canada and the United States and leading directly to Victoria and Esquimalt's naval dockyard, as well as the 300-mile long inland sea on which lay Vancouver's huge port and Nanaimo's valuable coal fields.

In government circles, there was strong belief that Adm. Graf von Spee's entire Far Eastern Squadron might be on its way. Historian Margaret Ormsby records, "an absolute certainty prevailed... that Adm. von Spee and his China squadron intended to bombard and capture Vancouver and Victoria and then, in cooperation with German residents, establish a foothold on the Pacific coast."

On 1 August, in Esquimalt, Cmdr. Walter Hose, a former Royal Navy officer who had joined the Canadian Navy at its birth in 1910, was outfitting HMCS *Rainbow* for a northern patrol to police the 1911 International Sealing Convention. Had it not been for this duty, the *Rainbow*, which had swung idly at anchor throughout 1912 and 1913 after being purchased from Britain at the inception of the Canadian Navy four-years before, would never have been ready for the opening moments of the war.

RAINBOW PREPARES FOR WAR

In Ottawa, the Canadian government received a British Admiralty message that same day asking that the *Rainbow* stand by for active duty. The Admiralty said a German cruiser — possibly two — was in the Eastern Pacific and the *Rainbow* would be needed to guard the west coast trade routes against attack.

The *Rainbow* was ready for sea, although her ability to wage war would be severely questioned. However, in Ottawa no one thought of questioning the ship's status and an order was prepared and telegraphed:

SECRET: Prepare for active service trade protection grain ships going south. German cruiser Nurnberg or Leipzig is on west coast America. Obtain all information

AN INTERNATIONAL SQUADRON OFF MEXICO

Well before the possibility of a European war clouding the horizon, civil disturbances in Mexico had caused the formation of an international naval force to protect foreign lives and vessels in that area. An American commander, R/Adm. Howard aboard USS *California*, was senior officer of the multi-nation squadron. Germany was represented by the light cruiser SMS *Nurnberg* until she was relieved on 1 July 1914 by the SMS *Leipzig*, a sister ship. Mazatlan was headquarters for the international force and when the *Leipzig* arrived, she found the flotilla made up of the *California*, USS *Albany*, the Japanese armored cruiser *Izumo*, and the British sloop HMS *Algerine*. The *Algerine's* home base was Esquimalt, far to the north. About 800-miles north, at Ensenada, on the Baja Peninsula, HMS *Shearwater*, also from Esquimalt, operated normal patrols of her assigned area.

As the world situation deteriorated, the officers of