

The Banana Boat that Sank a Battleship

Phil Schreiber (9110)
123 So. Adelaide Ave., Apt 3B
Highland Park, NJ 08904



During the early days of World War I, the German Navy requisitioned the 9800-ton freighter PUNGO which carried bananas from the Kaiser's colony in Cameroon, West Africa, to Germany. Commissioned in 1915 as the auxiliary cruiser, MOWE (Seagull) was equipped as a minelayer and armed with two torpedo tubes, four 150 mm and one 105 mm hidden deck guns. Under the command of Count Nikolaus Dohna-Schlodienshe headed for Scapa Flow, the home base of Britain's Royal Navy where she laid some mines, one of which sank the Battleship HMS KING EDWARD VII. A few days later, she laid more mines off of the French coast, sinking two more ships.

After expending her allotment of mines, MOWE cruised the Atlantic as a surface raider. In her next three months, she sank 12 ships and captured two which were brought to port with their cargoes and crews as prisoners of war. In April 1916, she returned to Germany and her officers' compliment was joined by the legendary Count Felix von Luckner, the "Sea Devil" who subsequently took command of the surface raider SEA EAGLE whose feats nearly matched those of MOWE.

Departing on her second raiding voyage in November 1916, MOWE subsequently accounted for 25 more ships, totaling 123,265 tons. In 1917, she was converted to a submarine tender, and in 1918 she was converted again to an auxiliary minelayer. Following the end of World War I, she sailed as a merchant marine freighter until World War II when she was torpedoed and sunk off of the Norwegian coast.



The post card shown here is postmarked with MOWE's World War I postmark "MARINE SCHIFFSPOST No.208" while in port in Germany following her first raiding voyage and shortly after being joined by Felix von Luckner.