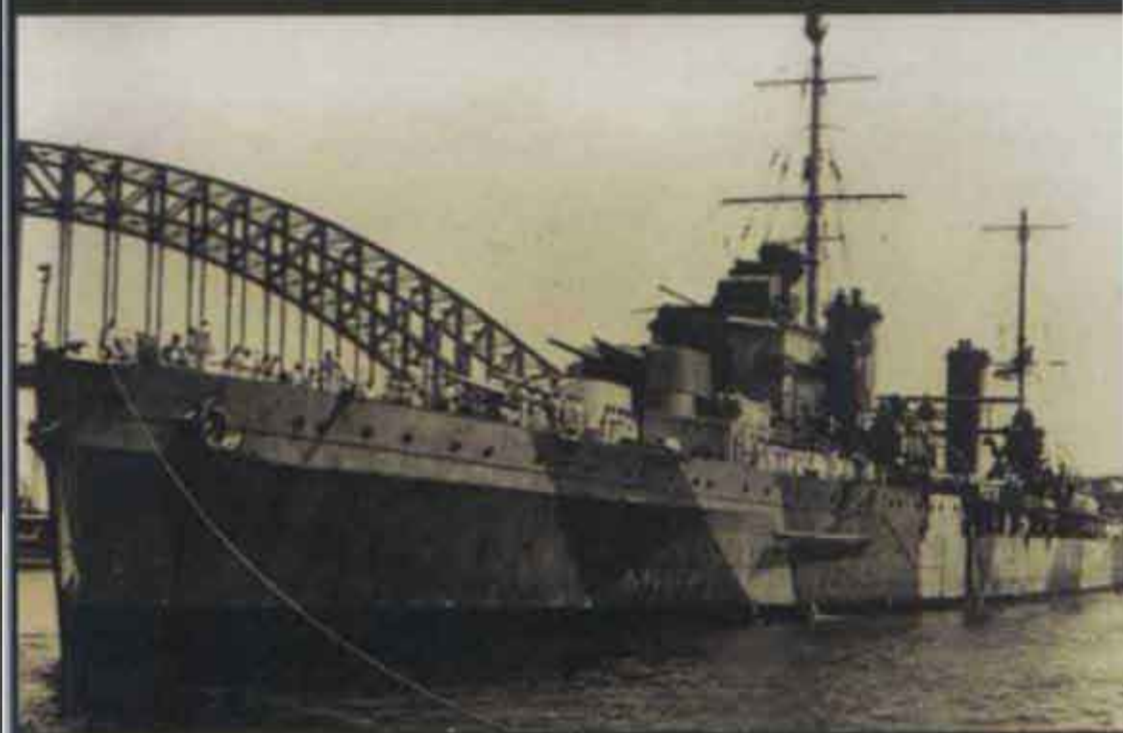


Papers in Australian Maritime Affairs No.9

HMAS *Sydney* II

The cruiser and the controversy
in the archives of the United Kingdom



Edited by Captain Peter Hore
Royal Navy



HMAS *Sydney* II

**The cruiser and the controversy in
the archives of the United Kingdom**

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RAN Sea Power Centre

**Royal Australian Navy
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The 'Papers in Australian Maritime Affairs' series is a vehicle for the distribution of substantial work by members of the Royal Australian Navy as well as members of the Australian and international community undertaking original research into regional maritime issues. Papers will be drawn generally from manuscripts not scheduled for publication elsewhere but that nonetheless merit extensive distribution. Candidates are considered by an editorial board under the auspices of the Director of the RAN Sea Power Centre.

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Notes on Author

Peter Hore served in the Royal Navy 1962-2000 and retired as a Captain. Originally a logistics specialist, his service, mainly in frigates and destroyers, included exchange service in the United States Navy, two tours of duty in NATO's Standing Naval Force Atlantic and several deployments to the Far East. He visited Australia with the RN in 1966 and 1999.

He is a linguist who has played chess and sailed for the Royal Navy (winning a gold medal in the tallships race to Oslo in 1980). During the Falklands War he was the Joint Logistics Commander on Ascension Island, and subsequently had the unique experience of heading, successively, the RN's Applied Research Program and its Non-Technical Research Program. For the last ten years in uniform he worked in central Defence appointments helping to define defence and naval strategy, and the effects of changing concepts, technology and geo-politics.

His last appointment in the RN was as Head of Defence Studies (1996-2000) during the British Government's *Strategic Defence Review* and the launch of the Royal Navy's new concept of operations, the *Maritime Contribution to Joint Operations*.

He was the founding director of the Maritime Strategic Studies Institute—conducting research into Defence doctrine and operational concepts, facilitating the exchange of views between the defence-academic community and the Defence and naval staffs, liaising with universities and institutes of higher education in the UK and overseas, and sponsoring conferences, seminars and research at centres of excellence.

Peter Hore is the author or editor of many reviews, articles and books including *Dimensions of Sea Power: the strategy of choice* (1998) and *Maritime Aviation: light and medium aircraft carriers in the 21st century* (1999) and *Sea Power Ashore: 200 years of Royal Navy operations on land* (2000). He has two other books in preparation, a biography of the Nobel Prize winner Lord Blackett and the National Maritime Museum's

History of the Royal Navy. He is associate editor and book review editor of the bi-monthly magazine *Warships International Fleet Review*, an op-ed writer on Defence and international affairs for *Newsday* in New York and an occasional correspondent for the *Sunday Telegraph*. By day he is the Chief Executive of the Cinema and Television Benevolent Fund.

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Abbreviations

AA	Anti Aircraft
ACNB	Australian Commonwealth Naval Board
AFO	Admiralty Fleet Order
AL	Admiralty Library
AMC	Armed Merchant Cruiser
AWM	Australian War Memorial
CCAC	Churchill College Archives, Cambridge
CWR	Central War Room
CZM	Commander-in-Chief Netherlands East Indies Naval Forces
DCNS	Deputy Chief of Naval Staff
DF	Direction Finding
DNC	Director of Naval Construction
DNI	Director of Naval Intelligence
DNO	District Naval Officer
FOCAS	Flag Officer Commanding the Australian Squadron
G	'Golf' time-GMT plus seven hours
GMT	Greenwich Mean Time
H	'Hotel' time-GMT plus eight hours
HMAS	His Majesty's Australian Ship
HMS	His Majesty's Ship
IWM	Imperial War Museum
K	'Kilo' time-GMT plus ten hours
MTB	Motor Torpedo Boat
NHB	Naval Historical Branch
OIC	Operational Intelligence Centre
ONI	Office of Naval Intelligence
PRO	Public Record Office, London
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RACAS	Rear Admiral Commanding the Australian Squadron
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RANR	Royal Australian Navy Reserve
RDF	Radio Direction Finding (radar)

RN	Royal Navy
UK	United Kingdom
USS	United States Ship
W/T	Wireless Telegraphy
WIR	Weekly Intelligence Report
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II
Z	Zulu (Greenwich Mean Time)

Introduction

This research was undertaken in order to find records in British archives about the disappearance of HMAS *Sydney* in November 1941 and to investigate opinion of that period which might be relevant to knowledge of the disappearance of the cruiser. These records might consist, it was thought, of orders and instructions to ships on meeting suspected raiders, intelligence reports and summaries including the so-called 'Raider Supplements', signals, damage reports, etc.

It was intended to address two specific questions raised by the March 1999 *Report on the Loss of HMAS Sydney*, by the Australian Federal Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade:

- Are there any records or indications of there having been a board of inquiry or similar investigation into the loss of HMAS *Sydney*? (Recommendation 2)
- Are there any records relating to a coronial inquiry undertaken on Christmas Island on the unknown sailor? (Recommendation 4)

In addition, research was addressed to establishing what other information may have been recorded, regarding the disappearance of HMAS *Sydney*, by senior British officials and individuals, in the Admiralty, in Admiralty departments, and in the various commands, for example:

- How was intelligence about enemy raiders disseminated, and how was the estimate that "... there is now no evidence of a raider being in the Indian Ocean ..." reached?
- What opinion of the loss of HMAS *Sydney* was held by officials, etc. after the event became known?
- How were the families of British officers and men serving in HMAS *Sydney* informed, and what were they told?
- Given that the Director of Naval Construction's (DNC) file on the loss of HMAS *Sydney* was not completed, was there any other investigation, e.g. of class vulnerability?

The research and analysis took place over nearly a year, commencing with a survey of the extant literature about the disappearance of HMAS

Sydney.¹ The survey had been started in the northern summer of 2000, and continued during 2001 as more books were published. As a crosscheck of the work being undertaken in the UK archives, the primary sources listed in the printed bibliographies of these works were examined, along with a list of files compiled by the UK Ministry of Defence in 1998. Most of these had already been identified, though it was noted that some of the primary sources listed actually bore no relevance whatever to the fate of HMAS *Sydney*.

The method of research was to consult the electronic and printed indices (where they exist) of the targeted archives, and to consult the archivists, before calling up individual and specific documents. A very large number of documents were inspected and read. Where appropriate, copies were taken and have since been forwarded to the Royal Australian Navy's Naval History Directorate in Canberra.² A reference set has also been placed in the Admiralty Library, and the author has, for the time being, kept a set himself. A schedule of these documents forms an annex to this monograph.

The largest source of documents relating to HMAS *Sydney* is at the Public Record Office, Kew (PRO), which is the repository for the national archives for England and Wales. At the PRO, William O'Hara, a professional researcher and expert in the records of the era, researched various subject headings in the electronic and printed indices, and copied the relevant files or extracts. The author studied some of the more obscure or doubtful texts, commissioned more research and ordered copying.

The Churchill College Archives, Cambridge (CCAC) are home to the papers of Sir Winston Churchill and to some 600 collections of personal papers and archives documenting the history of his era and after. Captain S.W. Roskill, RN, then a fellow of Churchill College, also collected at CCAC the papers of many naval officers, especially of the mid 20th century. The papers also include some of Roskill's notes for and drafts made while writing his official history of World War II, *The War at Sea*. Since Roskill had access to official records, and other official assistance, and circulated his drafts to senior officers and those who had participated in the events he was writing about, his notes etc and his subsequent history are probably one of the better, near-contemporary analyses of events. His papers also include Roskill's correspondence with Michael Montgomery when the later was writing his book *Who Sank the Sydney*.

The reader will detect in the narrative that I have drawn upon Roskill's *The War at Sea*. In the course of studying his papers at CCAC, the National Maritime Museum and the PRO, I acquired enormous respect for the thoroughness and objectivity of Roskill's own research and writing. He also impresses with his unfailing courtesy to others and his concern to help a younger generation of students and historians: even in the closing months of his life and at great age he continued meticulously to answer letters, and, for example, was concerned enough and had the energy to check his answers with colleagues. On the other hand, Roskill was able to write *The Secret Capture*, without disclosing, except to those very few readers-between-the-lines who already knew, that the secret capture was not the German submarine, *U-110*, but the Enigma machine and the rotors which she carried.

Another valuable resource available to the author was the archives of the Naval Historical Branch (NHB) and the Admiralty Library (AL) in London. There are no new documents or previously unknown archival material in the NHB or AL, but there is a card index, a number of duplicates of documents known to be in the PRO, and books are available off the shelf.

No relevant records were found at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich or at the Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth. Though in both cases, given the mortality of WWII veterans and the continuing accretion of records, it cannot be excluded that at some future date records might be deposited. Archivists at both places are aware of my continuing interest in the subject.

During the investigation a list was compiled of people who had participated in events at the time of the disappearance of HMAS *Sydney*, or who might have knowledge. The list included names drawn from:

- Royal Navy officers serving in the Royal Australian Navy according to the *Navy Lists* of December 1941 and February 1942. This was checked against a list provided by the RAN's Naval History Directorate.
- Who was who: the major personalities listed in appendix 3 to *The Sinking of HMAS Sydney: Guide to Commonwealth Government Records*.
- Names of individuals and ships occurring in Roskill's official history of the war at sea in WWII.

This list was then used to consult the National Register of Archives (NRA) in order to help locate any personal papers of those who may have taken part in or have had any knowledge of events concerning HMAS Sydney. (The NRA comprises indices to the papers of 150,000 corporate bodies, people and families relating to British history, with a further 100,000 connected records, the actual records being held in national and local record offices, university libraries, etc around the UK and abroad). As a result, two finds were made at the Imperial War Museum (IWM): the diary and some papers of Rear Admiral John Crace, and the unpublished autobiography of Commodore J.W. Durnford, their ranks as Royal Navy officers while serving in key appointments in the RAN during World War II.

In addition I was able to visit the National Library of Scotland and the National Archives Scotland in May 2001.

In summary:

- No new material regarding the loss of HMAS Sydney was found.
- No record of any coroner's inquiry or autopsy on Christmas Island in 1942 was found.

However, the searches did reveal that the confrontation between HMAS Sydney and the German auxiliary cruiser *Kormoran* was not unique. There were a number of meetings between HM Ships and Italian, German and, in one case, a heavily-armed, British 'Q'-ship, when British warships were placed in danger and/or damaged after approaching the enemy too closely. These incidents are described in the ensuing chapters.

I have tried, as far as possible, to present the documents, which have been copied out of the British archives, as a narrative from the perspective of London. They are arranged in thematic order, and within their themes in the chronological order in which they were received or written in London. In changing the documents from their facsimile into typescript versions, an attempt has been made to preserve the original style and layout of the documents. This includes retaining the original spellings, including commonly misspelled proper names like the name of the cruiser herself, *Sydney*, and, for example, Fremantle, Detmers and *Kormoran*. Where necessary, omissions of whole paragraphs within the document are indicated by four asterisks (****). Anything in square brackets is mine: [] have been used to clarify certain abbreviations and also to indicate, using question marks, uncertainty about some words. So too, all the footnotes are mine: in some documents this means that,

original footnotes have either been incorporated into the text (if judged significant enough), or have been omitted, and square brackets in the original have been changed to round ones. Also, almost every verb of the narrative which links the documents should be qualified by some phrase such as “it appears” or “it seems”. That they are not is only a matter of style, but the reader should bear this in mind.

No attempt has been made to retranslate German documents from the original, though in a number of places possible errors in translation or transcription have been pointed out. Similarly, no attempt has been to obtain fresh decrypts of documents. The transcriptions are intended to be accurate and as far as is humanly possible this is so: a number of people have helped with transcriptions but if there are any errors, the fault is mine and mine only. If there is any doubt, copies of the originals are, of course, available for inspection in the UK and Australia.

I wish to record my deep gratitude to friends and colleagues who have supported me during my research. What became apparent at an early stage of research was that conspiracy theories about the tragic disappearance of HMAS *Sydney* have taken deep root. Nearly everyone who knew of my interest in the subject was embarrassingly keen to contribute some half-remembered knowledge about one theory or another.

However, thanks for practical and factual help must go to Bob O'Hara who has not only been a diligent, thorough and timely researcher but, using his former experience in the Royal Navy and at GCHQ, has been able to give some invaluable insights into documents regarding the sad story of the disappearance of HMAS *Sydney*. Many other historians and archivists have been also consistently kind and helpful, especially Mathew Sheldon at the Royal Naval Museum, Alan Giddings formerly of the National Maritime Museum, Robert Crawford and all his people at the Imperial War Museum, and Dr Piers Brebbon, then Keeper of the Churchill College Archives and his people. I want too, to thank Captain Chris Page and everyone in the Naval History Branch and the Admiralty Library, especially including Jock Gardner, 'Mac' MacAloon, Jenny Wraight and last, but not least, Kate Tildesley.

I wish too to thank Malcolm Llewellyn-Jones who, while declining a joint venture with me so that he could finish his PhD, generously made available the results of his own research, David Brown of the Royal Corps of Naval Constructors who was helpful in locating the wartime

records of the DNC, and teaching me about the design of the *Leander* class cruiser. Penny Small for helping to transcribe documents and for being so excellent a muse, and Professor Barry Gough of the Wilfred Laurier University in Canada, who kindly shared his knowledge of Roskill's working methods. Finally, my thanks go to David Stevens and his people in Canberra, who had the confidence to give me the task, and helped to sustain me by supplying footnotes, news clippings, books, and general encouragement.

In many ways it has been a frustrating project. There were many false leads, so often likely looking files possessed no relevance to HMAS *Sydney's* case, and by far the larger proportion of documents which were examined yielded no results. The research amounted to proving a negative, and the author was grateful for the good humour and patience of many people, especially Bob O'Hara, when asked for more work, further documents, and yet another search.

No evidence of a board enquiry has been found, nor any explanation why there was not, as there would normally have been, a formal investigation into the disappearance of HMAS *Sydney*. Perhaps it is sufficient reason that November 1941 was a momentous month, with many grim events and serious losses at sea, leading to the sudden attack by the Japanese. By 1945, when more evidence did become available, the loss of HMAS *Sydney* must have seemed, from London, like one, relatively small, incident of the war, and an incident which had already been fully explained by the report which the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board had forwarded to the Admiralty three years earlier.

In my mind, the most telling piece of evidence is *Operationen und Taktik Volume 10*, the German naval staff account of the battle between the two ships, *Sydney* and *Kormoran*. This was written in 1943 for internal reading by the German navy when most Germans might have thought they were still winning the war, and thus the authors had little reason to lie. If the German accounts are, more or less, truthful, and if Captain Joseph Burnett did, disastrously, range his ship up alongside *Kormoran*, thus exposing her and her people to their deaths, then - as the archives show - he was neither the first nor the last experienced commanding officer who made a similar mistake.

My own conclusion is that I doubt whether there was ever a conspiracy, either by the Germans or the Australians, to hide the truth about the fight between the two ships. The interval between the various reports,

particularly in the early days as the dreadful news broke, allows no opportunity for this, and there is no sign, for example in Crace's diary, of altered documents.



Members of the ship's company of HMAS Sydney (RAN).

If, on the other hand, the truth is different to that recorded in the archives, then there were apparently, only three eyewitnesses to the whole incident. They were Commander Theodor Detmers, Chief Signalman Ahlbach and the helmsman of the *Kormoran* (whose name the British records do not disclose). Detmers, a Nazi, was ordered to use surprise and ruthless violence, but if, and, if so how, he then persuaded HMAS Sydney to close the *Kormoran*, remains a secret probably known only to these three men.

The author is only sorry that he has not been able to draw any line under the enduring mystery which surrounds the disappearance of HMAS Sydney in November 1941 and the deaths of so many brave men.

Peter G. Hore
Rotherhithe, 2001

Notes

1. Published works include:

G. Johnston, *Grey Gladiator: HMAS Sydney with the British Mediterranean Fleet* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1941).

W.H. Ross, *Stormy Petrel: the life story of HMAS Sydney* (Western Australia: Pattersons Printing Press, 1946).

Captain Theodor Detmers, *The Raider Kormoran* (London: William Kimber, 1959).

G. Scott, *HMAS Sydney* (Sydney: Horwitz, 1962).

J. Collins, *As Luck Would Have It: the reminiscences of an Australian sailor* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1965).

Vice Admiral Sir John Collins, *HMAS Sydney* (Garden Island: Naval Historical Society of Australia, 1971).

M. Montgomery, *Who Sank the Sydney* (London: Leo Cooper, 1981).

B. Winter, *HMAS Sydney: Fact, Fantasy and Fraud* (Brisbane: Boolarong, 1984).

No Survivors: HMAS Sydney (Perth: West Australian Newspapers, 1991).

T. Frame, *HMAS Sydney: Loss & Controversy* (Sydney: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993).

R. Summerrell, *The Sinking of HMAS Sydney: A Guide to Commonwealth Government Records* (Canberra: Australian Archives, 1997).

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *Report on the Loss of HMAS Sydney* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1999).

W. Olson, *Bitter Victory: The death of HMAS Sydney* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 2000).
2. Naval History Directorate, Department of Defence (Navy), CP4-1-002, Canberra, ACT 2601. Email: navyhistory@cdr.defence.gov.au.

1 German Raider Operations and *Kormoran's* Orders

German naval war plans

German naval war plans in World War II, as far as ocean warfare was concerned, were for war on merchant shipping. Instructions laid down that action, even against inferior enemy naval forces, was not an aim in itself and was not to be sought, since even slight damage could decrease the effectiveness and the cruising endurance of German merchant raiders. To help the surface ships, supply ships were sent out before the outbreak of war, and efforts made "... to establish the necessary fuel and arms supplies by means of a secret organisation, which was to be built up by German agents with the help of benevolent neutrals ...". The ocean raiders were recommended to make sudden appearances in widely separated areas, followed by "... withdrawal into the ocean wastes ...".

These too were the instructions which Commander Theodor Detmers confessed to when he was under interrogation as a prisoner-of-war after he had been captured from the wreck of the raider *Kormoran*, "... the policy was [for] a small number of regular sinkings to cause interruption to the flow of trade, while not unduly risking the existence of the raider ...". (see Chapter 4)

Kormoran was one of the most heavily armed raiders and in addition to torpedoes, one or two aircraft, and 6 x 150-mm (5.9-inch) guns, she carried ground and moored mines, plus a small, fast motorboat (called an LS Boat) to assist in minelaying operations. Her orders reflected this, as is shown by an extract from *Operationen und Taktik, Volume 10*:¹

The operation order for "Ship 41" -

Appendix III stipulated that the main field of operations would be the Indian Ocean and the Australian and African waters verging thereon, with the South Atlantic and Pacific as alternative areas. The auxiliary cruiser was provided with the following for mine laying:

Ground mines (to be laid by L.S. boats)

a) In the South African ports, and in particular Cape Town, Simonstown, Durban, Port Elizabeth and East London.

b) In the Australian and New Zealand ports and in particular Sidney, Brisbane, Freemantle, Adelaide, Melbourne, Hobart, Auckland and Wellington.

Moored mines:

In the approaches to Rangoon.

In the approaches to Calcutta.

In the approaches to Vizagapatnam (on the East Coast of India).

In the approaches to Madras.

In the Straits of "Sunda".

Alternative area: Australian coastal waters south, of 25°S.

Provision was made for the supplying of a submarine en route at a rendez-vous "Red" (7°N, 31°W). A second rendez-vous with a submarine was planned for the return journey.

Raiders, supply ships and blockade runners

Raiders included regular German navy surface ships, like the pocket-battleship *Graf Spee*, U-boats, and, of course, disguised auxiliary cruisers like the *Kormoran*. In addition, the Germans operated supply ships which serviced the raiders, and blockade runners which imported raw materials from overseas for the German war effort. In a sense all ships were blockade-runners. Moreover, as Detmers' orders reveal, ships, including auxiliary cruisers were dual-tasked. As well as preying on enemy shipping, they were expected to act as supply ships to U-boats. Similarly, the roles of supply ships and blockade-runners were interchangeable.



Commander Theodor Detmers, captain of *Kormoran* (RAN).

Orders for commerce raiding by the *Kormoran*

As a commerce raider, the policy was clearly laid down that the "... harassing of the enemy is more important to the success of the operation than a high record of sinkings. Armed clashes with enemy forces or auxiliary ships are to be avoided ...". Ominously, "If, however an encounter is unavoidable, every attempt to destroy the enemy by means of camouflage, by unexpected and ruthless use of all weapons should be made ...". In detail Detmers' orders read:

OPERATIONAL ORDER FOR "SHIP 41"

A. Advice for Commanding Officer.

The "Advice for Commanding Officers" for ships and vessels of the Navy, which are overseas, should be referred to in the event of an outbreak of war. They are in every case applicable.

B. Political Situation.

... Japan is allied to Germany and Italy by a pact which provides entire mutual assistance politically, economically and militarily, as soon as a power, not yet taking part in the European War or Chinese conflict, enters the war as an enemy of one of the partners of the Treaty. Japan has placed certain sub-marine bases at our disposal in the Pacific. Above this, cordial support within the limits of neutrality can be counted upon ...

C. The Enemy Situation.

D. Our Own Forces.

C. Tasks.

Execution of cruiser warfare in foreign waters. Minelaying according to appendix b) Combined action with U-boats according to appendix c). The crux of the operation lies in obliging enemy forces to relieve the homeland, and to damage our opponent:

- a) by forcing him to convoy and increase the protection of his shipping even in distant waters.
- b) connected with the above by increasing demands on his forces.
- c) by frightening off neutral shipping from sailing in the service of the enemy.
- d) by further disadvantageous consequences of an economically political and financial character.

A long term restriction and harassing of the enemy is more important to the success of the operation than a high record of sinkings accompanied by a rapid deterioration of the auxiliary cruiser. The means of gaining the strategical ends is the sinking of enemy shipping or neutral shipping working with the enemy.

F. Advice for Execution.

1. The enemy is continually forced to take up new positions and to increase his innumerable forces for protection of merchant shipping by our unexpected appearance on varying seas. Through this, relief on the home front is obtained, and enemy trade is hindered by the defensive measures he is required to take.

2. Camouflage and methods of attack on merchant vessels should be frequently changed. Every imaginable means should be employed using cunning and ingenuity. Whether the auxiliary cruiser can operate unrecognised for a long time in an area and can there achieve success by surprise, which obviates the possibility of warning being given to the enemy, depends on the perfection and the efficient use of the camouflage.
3. Should the presence of the auxiliary cruiser in an area become known to the enemy it should be left. On suspicion of activity, a sufficient period of time must be allowed to elapse in an area far enough removed to ensure that the defensive measures taken by the enemy will not be simultaneously effective in the new operational area.

The waiting period should be so measured that the enemy's defensive measures may be completed and not withdrawn at the start and switched to this different area on the fresh appearance of the auxiliary cruiser: temporary removal to out of the way areas even for fairly long periods can therefore have its uses. It not only removes the auxiliary cruiser from the range of the enemy's counter measures but also creates a feeling of uncertainty in him.

4. Armed clashes with enemy forces or auxiliary ships are to be avoided. If, however an encounter is unavoidable, every attempt to destroy the enemy by means of camouflage, by unexpected and ruthless use of all weapons should be made.

Armed convoys should not be operated against. Passenger ships should be avoided, as enemy passenger ships generally are superior in speed

and armament, and even in successful cases, they make a considerable burden for auxiliary cruisers owing to the strength of the crew and the number of passengers.

5. The Commanding Officer should always be conscious that the fact that the enemy knows of or occasionally suspects the presence of his ship constitutes his strongest weapon against enemy commerce. He must, therefore, by careful handling of personnel and material increase sea time of his ship as much as possible. The time thus placed at his disposal makes it possible to weaken the enemy materially and morally, without precipitating events and while avoiding set plans of action.

[Paragraphs 6 to 7 regarding termination of mission are not reproduced]

G. Operational Area.

H. Outward Voyage.

J. General Directions for war against Merchant Shipping.

Arrangements for rendezvous with supply ships

Logistic support received less attention and fewer words than other parts of Detmers' orders and arrangements were clearly of an *ad hoc* nature:

K. Supply.

1. Supply of Fuel and Provisions will only be carried out on demand of the auxiliary cruiser.

2. The demand should be made by short signal, or when the situation allows by W.T. to the Naval War Staff. In this, attention should be paid to the long time necessary for the carrying out of supply arrangements.
3. All supply arrangements are uncertain owing to the watch kept by the enemy forces and to enemy counter measures. The possibility of the enemy shadowing all supply ships leaving neutral harbours must be kept in mind.

The supply ship *Kulmerland* in Japan

Supply ships were also dual-roled, in 1940 *Kulmerland* was suspected of minelaying off Australia and of using Japanese ports as bases. In 1941 she was employed as a supply ship, supporting the *Kormoran*. If *Kormoran's* survivors carried foodstuffs with Japanese markings, these probably came from Japan via the *Kulmerland* who resupplied the *Kormoran* at the end of October 1941. The British had protested about this abuse of allegedly neutral ports in early 1941, and the evidence which the Admiralty's Director of Naval Intelligence (DNI) produced on 8 January 1941 had originally emanated from Australia via the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board (ACNB). It read as follows:¹

The "evidence" that KULMERLAND had mined Australian waters was provided, like most of the information about the raiders in the Pacific, by survivors landed at Emirau.

The report was contained in A.C.N.B.'s 2000Z/29/12, the relevant passage reading as follows:

"Germans in MANYO and TOKYO MARU (KULMERLAND) —informed captives that TOKYO MARU laid mines in Bass Straits, Spencer Gulf and off Auckland."

Mines were located in the Bass Straits on November 7th and in Spencer Gulf on December 7th. No mines have been located off Auckland since June 18th and these are known to have been laid by another raider ("A" in Admiralty 1951/4/1). Mines were, however, located off

Newcastle, N.S.W., on November 23rd, and it is possible that the survivors of the British ships, or the Germans, confused the two places.

The KULMERLAND was reported as having left Kobe on October 9th, which would have given her sufficient time to reach Australian waters, by early November, embarking mines from one of two raiders en route. Though this report was later contradicted by a statement that KULMERLAND was in a Kobe shipyard, transferred to the Japanese flag, it now seems certain that this second report was incorrect and that on October 30th the BURGENLAND, a sister ship also at Kobe, was mistaken for KULMERLAND.

It therefore appears reasonably certain that KULMERLAND was responsible for the mining of Australian waters, but it seems very doubtful whether the evidence is sufficiently strong



The supply ship *Kulmerland* (RAN).

to make a protest to the Japanese worthwhile, especially as there is no evidence at all that the mines were taken on board in a Japanese port.

The KULMERLAND has not yet returned to Japan and her present whereabouts are not known. If however she does return to Japan, there might be grounds for protest to the Japanese.

The British Ambassador's protests

Other evidence of raider and supply ship activity came from Japan and Singapore. The British Ambassador himself sent a report, presumably drafted by his naval attaché:

From JAPAN.

Decypher. Sir R. Craigie. (Tokyo),
January 1st, 1941.

D. 9.25 p.m. January 1st, 1941.

R. 11.15 a.m. January 2nd, 1941.

No. 8. IMPORTANT.

Information so far received regarding raider's activities and the fact that the original Kulmerland has apparently never left Kobe suggests the following:

- (1) There are two raiders, one a large ship with heavy armament and the other a smaller ship that may or may not be armed.
- (2) Names *Manyo* Maru and Kulmerland used by both ships according to whether they wish to be disguised or appear as German vessels. Mutual use of names and reference Kulmerland would be calculated to cause confusion.
- (3) Both raiders met E. Essberger in Marshall



Komet, Kulmerland and Orion at Emirau Island on 21 December 1940 (RAN).

Island 12th December and all three ships left 13th December, raiders for Emirau and Essberger for Japan.

On arrival at Emirau large raider was called *Manyo* Maru and small one Kulmerland.

Large raider thereafter proceeded to bombard Nauru.

(4) If Regensberg is being used in same manner as E.Essberger she may rendezvous with raider in Marshall Island about 2nd January.

(5) *A* Essberger which left Kobe 29th December

may be en route to more distant rendezvous as she left comparatively soon after Regensberg.

- (6) Oie Jacob which is understood to have brought cargo of aviation spirit to Japan may have exchanged this for fuel in Japanese port and will (there) after be used as raiders' fuel tender. If she used ports other than Kobe or Yokohama her movements cannot necessarily be reported.

- (7) Please pass to Admiralty.

Repeated to Chief of Intelligence Staff Far East Singapore No. 3 (for Commander-in-Chief No. 3) Australian Commonwealth Naval Board No. 2.

(Advance copies sent to Duty Officer, Director of Naval Intelligence).

The senior officer in Singapore contributed his intelligence:

M E S S A G E 1146Z/7th January.

SECRET.

IN.

FROM:- C.O.S. Singapore

DATE:- 9/1/41.

RECD:- 0126.

NAVAL CYPHER (C) by W/T.

ADDRESSED:-Admiralty repeated Australian Commonwealth Naval Board, New Zealand Naval Board, S.O.(II), Hong Kong.

My 0501* 5th December. Master of KUMSANG which anchored alongside German ship at Kobe 4th January states ship named KULMERLAND present. Assistant Naval Attaché now at Kobe states her form is considerably different from ship properly so named. TFIYO MARU reported to

have left 2nd January. Assistant Naval Attache is making full report.

1146Z/7.

Advance copy sent Ops, O.D., O.I.C.

- * re. whereabouts of German ships BURGENLAND, AEISBERGER and ERMLAND

These reports were synthesised into a general message, which was, in turn, eventually incorporated into a signalled forerunner of the first raider supplement:⁶

SECRET MESSAGE OUT.
1951/4th January.

TO A Message Home & Abroad. 671 A.
DATE 4.1.1941.

NAVAL CYPHER (C) Temporary,

FROM Admiralty.

BASEGRAM.

671 A. The following is a summary of Raider Appreciation for 1940, which is being included in W.I.R.

2. Five raiders with attendant supply ships still operating, responsible for all sinkings past year, one in N. Atlantic, one in South Atlantic, one in Indian Ocean, two in Pacific. SCHEER also possibly still at sea.
3. RAIDER A. Left Germany April 6th. Sank HAXBY in North Atlantic and proceeded to Pacific via Horn with tanker WINNETOU. Operated N.Z. waters in June. Spent July at Marshall Islands base. August in Tasman Sea. September and October at base. Joined by Raider 13. Left base in company in November for N.Z. where joined by Supply Ship KULMERLAND from Kobe who had mined Australian waters. December

drew the attention of Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs to-day to movements of German ships in Japanese ports which gave rise to strong suspicion that they were engaged in provisioning raider from Japan. Thus the F. Essberger had left Kobe on November 30th, returning December 25th - an absence sufficiently long to enable her to reach (?Marshall) Island which we know raider had recently visited. Furthermore the Regensburg had left Yokohama on December 20th and A. Essberger had left Kobe on December 29th and there was reason to believe that both these ships had been refuelled from Winnetou, whose activities had already been brought to His Excellency's attention (see my telegram No. 2454 paragraph four). Unless I could be given specific information in regard to movements of these German vessels, I was bound to assume that they might be engaged in provisioning German raiders at sea. If I were convinced on this point, I should feel it my duty to propose to my Government the re-establishment of our naval patrols in neighbourhood of Japan in order to deal effectively with these German raiders and supply ships. Furthermore the fact that this particular German raider had come as far north as (?Marshall) Island must raise once more the question whether shipping under allied control could safely be allowed to proceed to Japanese waters. It was in Japan's interest as much as ours to obviate this state of affairs and I therefore invoked His Excellency's assistance in the matter. In particular I asked to be informed of precise destination of Regensburg and the two Essbergers and the purpose of their voyages.

2. Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs had no information on the subject but promised to

make enquiry and let me have a reply as soon as possible after the holiday season. He said, as he had done on a previous occasion that Japanese Government had no desire to see war brought closer to Japan through activities of enemy raiders.

3. I also mentioned incidentally that this German raider appeared to be masquerading as a Japanese ship. I had no official details on this point however and I merely mentioned the fact now because I assumed that this was also an activity to which Japanese Government would take exception. In answer to His Excellency's enquiry, I said that press report indicated that raider had hoisted the German flag before opening fire on Narau Island but that I had not yet received anything definite or official on this point. I promised to inform His Excellency of any further reliable information, which I might receive.
4. Please inform Admiralty.

Repeated to Captain on Staff Singapore telegram No. 231 for Commander-in-Chief telegram No. 529.

In his second protest, the Ambassador added:

DISTRIBUTION B.

From: JAPAN

Decode. Sir R. Craigie, (Tokyo).

January 7th, 1941.

D. 11.20.p.m.

January 7th, 1941.

R. 6.40.a.m.

January 8th, 1941.

No. 29. (R). IMPORTANT.

Your telegram No. 16.

Although my last interview on the subject was with Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs I felt, in view of importance of subject, you would wish me now to take up question with Minister for Foreign Affairs who I saw this afternoon, Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, who is better acquainted with the subject, being also present. I said that subject might usefully be divided under three main heads namely (a) use of Japanese ports by German vessels for purposes of supplying German raiders; (b) use by German raiders of Japanese flag, names and markings; (c) arrival in this country of German naval ratings; and I proceeded to speak in general sense of your instructions.

2. As regards point (a) Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs stated that results of enquiries which he had made after our interview of December 31st (my telegram No. 2553) were as follows:
3. The "Regensburg" had left Yokohama on December 20th for a port outside Orient (i.e. not in Marshal Islands). "E. Essberger" had left Kobe on December 2nd for a certain port in Japanese territory and had returned to Kobe on December 25th. "E. Essberger" was still in port at Kobe. "Winnetou" had not supplied these two German vessels with oil in Japanese territorial waters.
4. I observed Their Excellencies would hardly expect me to regard this reply as excluding the possibility that Regensburg an Essberger had in fact been used to re-fuel and provision raiders at sea, since ports of destination were not specified; there was no evidence that ships had actually proceeded to ports for which they had cleared; and finally if ports in question were sufficient distance, there would be time for raiders to be

provisioned en route. Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs was not however in a position to give me any further particulars on the ground that supply of information (I gr[oup].undec[yphered].) safety of German vessels could (sic) probably be resented by German Government. I pointed out, in the absence of more definite evidence of innocent nature of these voyages, we were bound to maintain our assumption that raiders were being supplied from Japanese port - a proceeding which we could not allow to continue unchecked.

5. Turning to point (b) I gave Their Excellencies all the information in my possession in regard to use of Japanese names and markings.
6. Minister for Foreign Affairs stated categorically that it was contrary to interests of Japan that German raiders should masquerade as Japanese ships or use Japanese flag. He would be even more opposed to use of Japanese vessels as supply ships to raiders and he was confident that this could not have occurred. Matter had already been taken up by Minister of Marine with German Naval Attaché and he now undertook to address representations to German Ambassador on basis of information I had supplied. He hoped that I would furnish him with all available particulars of misuse of Japanese markings in order to strengthen his hands in putting a stop to practice. He did not deny as long as it continued we would be justified in regarding with suspicion all Japanese ships in the vicinity of raiders. As regards movements of German ships which had been sheltering in Japanese ports, difficulty was that I had not produced any conclusive evidence that actual provisioning or re-fueling of raiders had occurred and Governor of Marshal Islands, who had been consulted definitely

denied either Regensburg or E. Essberger had proceeded to these Islands. He did not contest my thesis that, if these movements of German ships to and from Japanese ports were to continue, we would be justified, under International Law, in re-establishing our patrols in order to intercept them but he earnestly hoped that we would only do this in last resource since such action must arouse Japanese opinion as in the case of Asa(ma) Mar(u). On my drawing distinction between two cases Minister for Foreign Affairs said that what would be the cause of trouble in Japan would be not to seize German ships on high seas but the hovering of British warships round coasts of Japan. I said that I was sure my government would not wish to re-establish these patrols if action of Japanese Government themselves rendered such action unnecessary, but that he would realise that we were engaged in a life and death struggle and that military necessity must prevail as against political expediency. I hoped therefore that His Excellency would find some means (?gr[oup].omit[ted].of) discouraging these German activities which were certainly not in the interests of Japan. He promised that further enquiries would be made on the point.

7. As regards point (c) Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs again denied all knowledge of arrival in Japan of German naval parties, which he said would be quite contrary to the wishes of Japanese Government. I told him that my information in regard arrival of first party of 20 was both categorical and reliable and urged that strictest watch should be kept on these activities.
8. Finally I handed to Minister for Foreign Affairs a document summarizing existing information

In regard to activities of German merchant vessels and use by German raiders of Japanese markings to serve as a basis for representations he had promised to address to the German Government.

Repeated to Captain of Staff Singapore telegram No. 11 for Commander-in-Chief telegram No. 8 and for Commander-in-Chief Far East telegram No. 1.

Cooperation with U-boats

Royal Navy experience was that raiders and supply ships alike operated with U-boats, and *Kormoran* was no exception. In her case she had orders to rendezvous in the Atlantic on her outward and homeward journeys, she was equipped as a U-boat tender, and while acting as such she was supposed to suspend her own commerce raiding. In practice, *Kormoran* supplied *U-124* in March and *U-105* in April 1941, both in the Atlantic. Her orders were silent regarding U-boat cooperation in other seas, and made no mention of cooperation with Vichy French or Japanese submarines.⁹

Instructions for Co-operation with U-Boats

With the co-operation between armed merchant cruisers and U-Boats the effect of the arrival of German merchant raiders in distant waters has been greatly increased and promises greater results through sinkings and diversions. The auxiliary cruiser makes it possible for the U-Boat to make a surprise appearance and to operate for a long time in widely scattered areas.

The U-Boat carries the armament of the armed merchant cruiser right into the enemy trade junctions.

During the combined operation the auxiliary cruiser acts as a floating submarine base. Individual measures for merchant warfare should

be held in abeyance during this time. Each vessel is to be avoided.

A. Task.

- 1) Ship 41 is equipped for the maintenance of 2 U-Boats Type IX with arms (20G7c, 867a) fuel, stores and spare parts; and in certain cases also for exchanges of personnel. No provision is made for taking over mines.
- 2) Maintenance is planned for one U-Boat while the auxiliary cruiser is stopped in the Atlantic on the outward journey as well as on the return journey.
- 3) Whether and when long range operations are carried out by a U-Boat supplied by Ship 41 depends on the given situation and the order will be given at the appropriate time by the Naval War Staff.

B. Execution.

1) The rendezvous should take place in the calmest waters possible in order to allow a smooth exchange of weapons and supplies. The only area which enters into the question is the belt of calm water at present reported south west and south of Cape Verde.

2) The following meeting points are laid down for rendezvous:

Meeting point green ... 5 Degs.30 Mins.North,
21 Degs. West.

Meeting point red ... 7 Degs.N 31 Degs.W.

Meeting point black ... 11 Degs.N 32 Degs.W.

Meeting point white ... 10 Degs.N 35 Degs.W.

Further meeting points can be requested by the armed merchant cruiser or U-Boat according to circumstances. Meeting point green is only to be used in an emergency.

- 3) To establish time and place of the meeting the U-Boat sends a request to the Naval War Staff and Flag Officer Submarines (Bd.U.) by a short signal or a W/T message. The Naval War Staff transmits this request to the auxiliary cruiser, reports delay or incidents by a short signal and states or alternatively confirms the actual time of meeting.
- 4) The rendezvous as ordered is to be taken up at 0800 and 1600 mean local time from the appointed day onwards.

In the interim period favourable courses are to be set for sea and merchant shipping communications.

- 5) The U-Boat is to report as soon as circumstances permit, that the operation has taken place, the report being made by short signal or should this not be acknowledged, by a W/T message.

C. Communications Instructions.

- 1) Exchange of news between the auxiliary cruiser and the U-boat via home stations.
- 2) For direct communication between the auxiliary cruiser and the U-Boat - long wave ground reception area wavelength 946 metres and VH/F channel 10.
- 3) All W/T traffic, with the exception of necessary short signals is forbidden within a radius of 300 sea miles from the meeting point.
- 4) Changes of recognition signals between surface

war vessels and U-boats take place according central European time.

Blockade runners between Japan and Europe

Later in her career *Kulmerland* acted as a blockade-runner.

A 29-page document in Stephen Roskill's papers in the Churchill College Archives contains only negative evidence regarding the loss of HMAS *Sydney*. The document, whose cover is missing, and whose origin is unmarked, contains an account of blockade-runners between Japan and Europe. It consists of several parts and is amended in manuscript by several hands. There is no direct reference to *Kormoran* or *Sydney* and the document is not reproduced in full here. It does, however, contain references to the operations of *Kulmerland*. There is no mention of Japanese involvement in blockade running operations prior to April 1942 and no mention of Japanese submarines cooperating with German supply ships, blockade runners or raiders. There is no mention of any operations of this kind by Vichy French submarines. On the other hand, there is some implicit evidence of poor cooperation between the Germans and Japanese. The parts of the document are:

- German Surface blockade-runners between Japan and Europe;
- German U-boats operating in Indian Ocean or as blockade runners;
- Italian Submarines as blockade-runners (the Italian Navy before capitulation and by the Germans using captured Italian submarines afterwards); and
- Japanese Submarines as blockade-runners.

Japanese submarines as blockade runners

The first reference to the use of Japanese submarines as blockade-runners is of a boat, *I-30*, which made the voyage from East to West and reads as follows:¹⁰

IV. JAPANESE SUBMARINES AS BLOCKADE RUNNERS

A. KIRSCHBLUETE [i.e. Kirschblüte or cherry blossom]
= J 30:

Description of boat: (16.4.42)

Meier bows (Meier Bug) with extended fore-castle heightened by the catapult. Hangar forward of conning-tower adjoins tower. Lookout on tower (aft) with vertical drop to flat deck aft (Achterdeck), where there is a 14 cm. gun. Hangar is 1 m. high. Catapult makes forward part of boat appear higher than aft. No net deflector forward, one aft.

Measurements: 108 m. long, 6.5 m deep (tief), appr. 11 m. beam (breit), 14 m. overall height from keel (14 m. hoch ab Kiel).

Displacement: 2,500 tons.

Crew: appr. 100 men, 10 officers.

Commander: Commander Endo.

Details of boat from Weyer & Gröner 1940

25.2.42: Japanese N.A. Yokoi suggested that large Japanese submarines should transport goods for Germany as far as the South Atlantic, where they should be transferred to German U-boats.

Then it was decided that a Japanese submarine should run right through to W. France after completing an operational trip in the Indian Ocean. This first submarine was the J 30, cover-name Kirschblüte.

11.4.42: Kirschblüte left Japan

5.8.42: Kirschblüte entered Orient.

CARGO CARRIED

and delivered 1,500 Kg. Mica (Spaltglimmer)

660 Kg. Shellac

also negatives of instructions for barrage at Singapore

Raider Supplement to Weekly Intelligence Report

The *Raider Supplement to the Weekly Intelligence Report (WIR)* of 30 May 1941 contained a description of armed merchant raiders' *modus operandi*, and what little information was given about *Raider G* was reasonably accurate:¹¹

GERMAN SURFACE RAIDERS

Since the beginning of the war German warships and auxiliary cruisers have inflicted considerable damage on British and Allied shipping. Up to the end of March, 1941, they had sunk or captured at least 102 ships totalling 589,035 tons in the Atlantic Ocean, 29 ships totalling 194,629 tons in the Indian Ocean, and 14 ships totalling 93,648 tons in the Pacific, making a grand total of 145 ships of 877,312 tons.

ARMED MERCHANT RAIDERS

Numbers

Armed Merchant Raiders have been operating continuously since April 1940, the numbers at sea varying from four to six. Though these numbers might be increased in the future, it is possible that supply and other operational difficulties will prevent the Germans from keeping more than six at sea at any one time.

Characteristics

Though differing in details, armed merchant raiders are very similar in many respects. It is possible that sister ships have been deliberately converted, to increase the difficulties of identifying them.

Size

The raiders are not big ships, the largest being about 10,000 tons, and it is unlikely that passenger liners will be used for this

purpose. Fast modern cargo or fruit ships, with a large radius of action and a comparatively small silhouette, have proved more suitable than converted liners.

Numbers and Names

All raiders are known by a number but these are not allotted consecutively, so that the fact that there is a *Number 46* does not indicate that there are 46 commerce raiders. In addition they appear to have names. These are used both as a disguise and for purposes of recognition with other raiders and supply ships. These names are frequently changed and are not, therefore, of any great value. This is all the more true since two raiders are both thought to have used the name *Narvik*.

Supplies

All the raiders are very well equipped and capable of remaining at sea for at least twelve months. With the possible exception of the Pacific, they do not appear to rely on shore bases, though they probably have definite areas at sea for rendezvous with supply ships and for resting and refits. It is also possible that they make use of islands in the Southern Indian Ocean and of anchorages on the South American coast for more extended self-refits and for a run ashore for their crews.

The lower holds, deep tanks and double bottoms enable them to carry large quantities of fuel, while most, if not all, of them operate in company with tankers, which are relieved from time to time as necessary. An additional but valuable source of supply is provided by their prizes. On the whole, fuel does not present the same problem as it did in the last war,

but there have been several reports which show that raiders have run dangerously short of provisions.

Fuelling is carried out at sea by means of a length of flexible hose stopped by canvas buckets to a seven-inch manilla, the raider usually towing the tanker at slow speed. The system does not appear always to have worked satisfactorily and in any case [is] a slow one. In consequence raiders take every opportunity of topping and keeping their tanks full.

Disguises

Great use is made of disguises. All funnels and topmasts are telescopic, and dummy funnels, ventilators, sampson posts, etc., are often rigged. This is carefully done so that the raider can be made to resemble a Swedish, Japanese or even British ship as required. In addition, false bulwarks in the well decks, false deck houses, boats and deck cargo, assist in changing the ship's appearance. Repainting is done so frequently that reports of the colours which a suspicious ship or raider is painted are quite valueless 24 hours later.

Special workshops and ratings are carried to make and manipulate these and also to carry out the extensive repairs necessitated by the long period

Crew

The crews carried are large, at least 300 and probably 400. They are mostly young regular naval ratings, but some are reservists from the merchant navy who have had peace-time experience of the waters in which the raider is to operate. This is particularly true of the officers, who are in a position to advise

the captain on types and habits of shipping likely to be encountered.

OPERATIONAL AREAS AND STRATEGY.

Each raider appears to be allotted to an operational area and there are few instances of a raider making an attack outside its own area, though in some instances raiders appear to have operated in fairly close company. No armed merchant raider is known to have made an attack in the Atlantic north of 40° N. and it is probable that this area is reserved for warships, which have more chance of escaping from or of dealing with the more numerous British forces likely to be encountered there. On the whole, merchant raiders have avoided the well-known focal areas and have been content to exact a small but steady toll of shipping using the less congested routes. Where attacks have been made in focal areas the raider has always retired as soon as his position has been compromised.

The German Admiralty appears to exercise a general control over the broad strategy and movements of the raiders, but, as in the last war, a very large measure of initiative is left to the individual captains. They do, however, appear to follow closely the general policy laid down by Admiral Raeder, namely, to be content with small gains, not to risk their ships by attacks on warships, even if of inferior strength or on defended shore objectives, and to rely on the cumulative effect of the loss of two or three ships per month and the disorganization caused to trade by our counter measures.

Raiders appear to have varied one week's slow hunting with two weeks' reconditioning, when presumably they changed their areas of

operations and altered their appearance. They have not, on the whole, tried to make a second attack in any one area if the first victim was able to make a distress message, but have steamed away at 15 or 16 knots for 12 hours or more. On the other hand, if no distress message was made, they have remained in the same area, attacking two or more ships within the space of a few days.

Importance is attached to the nuisance value of minelaying. It is not thought that many mines are ever laid at one time, as the chances of the raider being detected would be too great. It is possible that the ferocity of the raiders' attacks on ships are due to their fear of a victim scoring one lucky hit on their stock of mines.

TACTICS

The tactics employed have varied with the individual captains. When raiders first began operating they appear to have relied mainly on their innocent appearance and on merchant captains' ignorance of the existence of disguised raiders, to approach their victims on a gradually converging course. Fire would then be opened without warning in an effort to destroy the W/T room before a distress message could be made, and also to prevent resistance being offered.

This method is still scoring successes, but in many cases something more subtle has been required. One method is to locate a victim by air reconnaissance or masthead look-out during daylight, and then, lowering the telescopic topmasts and funnel, shadow until darkness enables an undetected approach to be made. Alternatively the raider may pass her victim some distance away during daylight and then,

when she is out of sight, turn and overtake during darkness.

A second method is for the raider's aircraft, which has British marking, to drop a message to the merchant ship, ordering her to steer a certain course as raiders are in the vicinity. This course, in actual fact, brings the victim straight to the raider. The aircraft may also attempt bombing to force the merchant ship to stop and not to use her W/T, but this is unlikely to be very effective. Some successes have been scored by aircraft diving low at a ship with a trailing hook device which brings down the W/T aerial; but if Admiralty instructions concerning the rigging of a jury aerial are adhered to, this danger will be overcome. Another method is for a raider to make a false SOS, but there is only one known instance of this.

Whatever the method of approaching the victim, the attack is always sudden and severe, the primary targets being the bridge, W/T room, and gun. No attempt is made to spare the crew until the destruction of these points has been achieved, and in some cases firing has continued for twenty minutes or more, both with the main armament and with pom-poms, long after it was obvious that no attempt at resistance was being made. Torpedoes are apparently only used to "finish off" a disabled vessel.

INTELLIGENCE

Raiders, particularly in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, appear to be very well informed about British and Allied shipping movements. There appears to be no doubt that they have agents in Empire and neutral ports who supply them with this information.

Another source of information is provided by their supply ships, who may be hundreds of miles away and report by W/T the position, course and speed of any ships sighted.

PRIZES

Raiders have succeeded in taking a number of prizes. Some of these have been retained for a few weeks and used as prison ships, before being sent home. Others, tankers with full cargoes of fuel oil, have been retained for longer periods, acting as supply ships, prison ships, scouts and even auxiliary minelayers. One prize returning from the South Atlantic was reported by escaped prisoners to have followed the following course:

18 S., 17 W.	10 N., 37 $\frac{1}{2}$ W.	40 N., 38 W.
15 S., 20 W.	13 N., 38 W.	43 N., 34 W.
12 S., 22 W.	18 N., 39 W.	45 N., 30 W.
10 S., 25 W.	20 N., 38 W.	46 $\frac{1}{2}$ N., 25 W.
7 S., 27 W.	26 N., 39 W.	46 $\frac{1}{2}$ N., 18 W.
4 S., 29 W.	30 N., 39 W.	46 $\frac{1}{2}$ N., 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ W.
0 S., 33 W.	33 N., 39 W.	46 N., 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ W.
3 N., 36 W.	36 N., 39 W.	thence to
7 N., 37 W.	38 $\frac{1}{2}$ N., 39 W.	the Gironde.

The positions were estimated with improvised navigational instruments but are believed to be reasonably correct. The Germans are thought to have a special route for prizes, which in the North Atlantic is to proceed roughly up the meridian of 40° W. until the latitude of Bordeaux is reached, when a course is set for the mouth the Gironde.

Bordeaux appears to be the port to which all prizes are now sent though in 1940 the *Kertosono* was sent to Lorient.

HOME BASES

Information has been received of two raiders returning home. No. 21 was reported to have been in Brest before Christmas, 1940. This port has been used by warship raiders and may well be the merchant raiders' base too; but St. Nazaire and Bordeaux would appear even more suitable. Though new raiders may leave German or Norwegian ports, it is thought that those already at sea may not undertake the passage north about back to Germany, but would use the French Atlantic ports. There is considerable evidence that their supply ships are already doing so.

No. 10 is believed to have returned to Germany in April, 1941, but probably proceeded up the English Channel to do so.

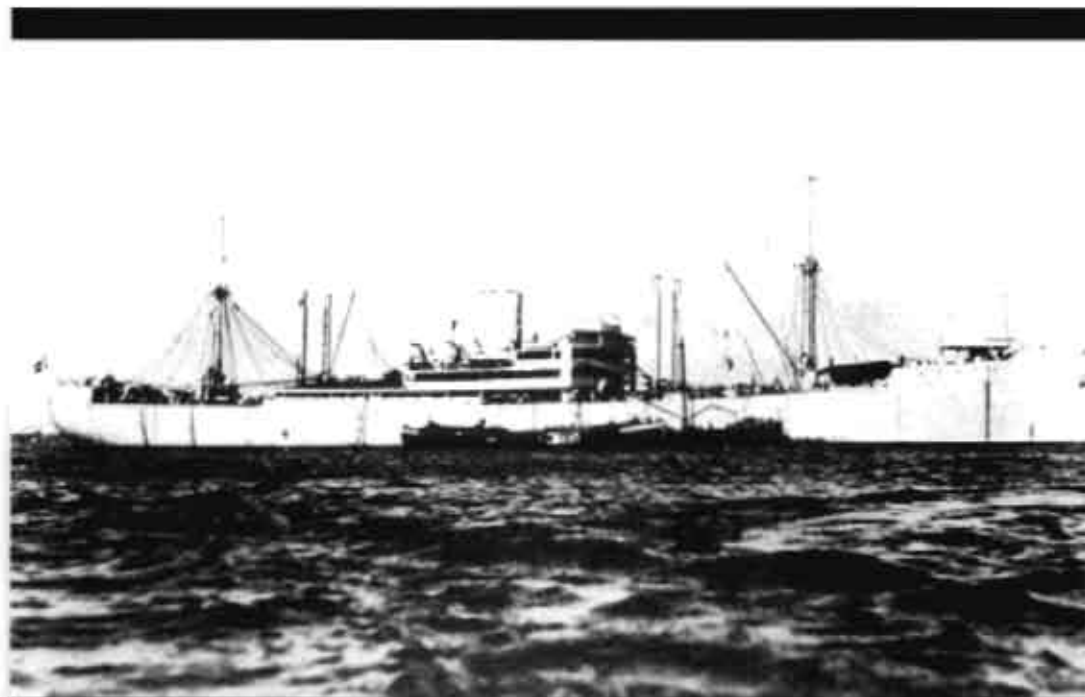
NOTE:- In the following reconstructions of raiders' cruises an asterisk indicates an assumption, as opposed to a known fact.

Here, the annexes referring to other raiders have been omitted. However, the annex which referred to *Kormoran*, gave no silhouette nor any picture, though the brief details of her superstructure, funnel and stern might have been sufficient to recognise, if she was not too heavily disguised. Even the asterisked paragraphs were, at the time of writing correct, and only the raider's number was wrongly given as 46 instead of 41, a mistake which occurs elsewhere:

RAIDER "G"

1. REAL IDENTITY. Unknown.
2. NAMES. None recorded.
3. NUMBER. 46.

4. SILHOUETTE OR PHOTOGRAPH. None.
5. APPEARANCE. Squat funnel in centre of rather high superstructure. Stern half-counter, half-cruiser type. Reported to resemble a modified *Kulmerland*.
6. DISGUISES. None recorded.
7. DIMENSIONS. Estimated 10,000 tons.
8. ENGINES. Probably Diesel.
9. ARMAMENT AND EQUIPMENT. Reported to be the only raider fitted with under-water torpedo tubes. Very completely equipped, probably on same lines as the other raiders.
10. TACTICS. Not recorded.



The German auxiliary cruiser *Kormoran* (RAN).

11. AREA OF OPERATIONS. Atlantic.
12. PRESENT LOCATION. Possibly South Atlantic.
13. CAPTAIN. Name unknown.
14. GENERAL NOTES. Only completed at the end of 1940. Reported to be the best equipped of all the raiders. There is very little information about her, and the reconstruction of her cruise is mainly conjectured.

RECONSTRUCTION OF CRUISE

- *1. Left Germany early in January, 1941.
- *2. Sank British Union by shelling and torpedo in 026°34'N., 030°58'W. during the night of 18th January. Distress message received.
- *3. Sank Afric Star in estimated position 008°N., 015°W. on 29th January. Distress message received.
- *4. In company with Raider "E" sank Eurylochus by shelling in 008°15'N., 025°14'W., on 29th January. Distress message received.
- *5. May now be operating in the South Atlantic.

Operations in the Indian Ocean

German raiders did operate off Australia and New Zealand during 1940, laying mines off North Island, off Newcastle, Sydney and Hobart. A raider had also been reported from the air off Albany. Consequently, RAN ships were tasked with the essential but unexciting duties of troop convoy escort. Then, in the Indian Ocean in November 1940, a raider, the German *Penguin*, sank three merchantships, the *Maimao*, *Port Brisbane* and *Port Wellington* in quick succession.¹² Only two ships, the RAN cruisers *Perth* and *Canberra*, were available to search for the *Penguin*, though the datum was stale (*Port Brisbane* was sunk about 800 miles west of Fremantle or nearly two days' steaming from the nearest vessel), the area to be searched huge, and the forces for the task minimal.

Nevertheless, as described in Admiral Crace's diary, the search seems to have been perfunctory.

Later, in 1941, raiders were suspected of using the French islands of Kerguelen in the Southern Ocean as a base, and as a precaution these were mined. In fact *Atlantis* (Raider C) and *Penguin* (Raider F) plus a supply ship had been to the Kerguelen Islands in January and March 1941 respectively. In addition *Orion* (Raider A), *Atlantis* (Raider C) and *Komet* (Raider B) had operated in Australian waters, or at least the Australian area of command, at some time during 1941.

There were also unaccounted losses of merchant ships in the Indian Ocean, but Commander-in-Chief (CinC) East Indies was ambivalent in his opinion about whether a raider was operating in his area of command which covered, approximately, the western two thirds of the Indian Ocean adjacent to the Australian area of command

"Nothing of interest", November 1940

Rear Admiral John Crace was Rear Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron (RACAS) when, following the sinking of *Maimao*, HMA Ships *Canberra* and *Perth* were ordered by the ACNB to conduct a search. Crace, who was born in at Gininderra in New South Wales in 1887 and educated there and at Dartmouth, had joined the Royal Navy in 1902. Promoted Rear Admiral in 1939, he served as RACAS until 1942, when he returned to Britain. As RACAS his relationship with the ACNB was at times strained, he found convoy duties dull, and there are various claims that, having insufficient to do, he had asked to be relieved.

His handwritten diary and some other papers are in the Imperial War Museum, London. In this extract from his diary, from 19 to 27 November 1940, Crace describes his personal feelings, and hints at tension between him and the ACNB. Crace was flying his flag in *Canberra*, when she and *Perth* were ordered by the ACNB to conduct a search:¹¹

Tuesday 19th Nov.

Woke with a sore throat. Calm but rainy day, opened range of convoy to 5' [miles] from dawn. Nothing of interest.

Wednesday 20th Nov.

Nothing of interest, Signal from N.B. [Naval Board] to me saying *Canberra* and *Perth* are to escort convoy to Colombo, *Canberra* to return to Fremantle without delay. This looks as if *Canberra* should not wait at Colombo but return without fuelling. To my mind this is wrong and I propose making a signal saying intend *Canberra* shall complete with fuel at Colombo. About 1800 got a raider distress signal from S.S. "Maimoa" in position 700' W of Fremantle and about 1000' from "Perth". N.B. ordered "Canberra" who had arrived Fremantle at 0800 to go to locality and search. This seems rather futile as it will take *Canberra* 40 hrs to get there. What is exercising my mind is what happens to me personally - I presume I wait at Fremantle for *Canberra* to return!

Thursday 21 Nov.

Canberra made her intentions to N.B. viz to proceed about 700' to west of Fremantle along trade route then NW for 700' then back to Fremantle - This will take about 4 days at 20 kts and it calls for some decision from N.B. as to whether *Canberra* is to escort U.S.7 [convoy] and whether my flag is to transfer. Nothing had transpired by 1630.

Sighted Rottneest [Island] about 1515 and then into searched channel at 1530.

Arrived Fremantle and secured to A wharf about 1800. Oldham^a was waiting to come on board and saw me soon after securing. He was most interesting about Singapore but very depressed about the lethargy, lack of cooperation and ineptitude there - They were very parochial and were thinking only in terms of the defence

of Malaya. He tells me that relief of *Hobart* was only considered when N.B. heard she was refitting! Also that all *Hobarts* have gone gaga and cannot concentrate.

No letter from C [Carola]¹⁵ - am very mystified as 2 mails at least have come since I left.

Friday 22nd Nov.

Called by B-S¹⁶ at 0500 with the joyful news that "Port Brisbane" had been attacked by a raider some 300' from the previous attack on *Maimoa*. Made signal to Canberra and CWR [Central War Room] (R [Repeated to]) N.B. telling *Canberra* to go to posⁿ reported then steer W at 22 kts till noon on 24th when she is to reduce to 15 and finally then to E at 2000/24 and steam 20 kts. *Perth* is to steer 270° 20 kts from Fremantle till 2000/24 when she is to turn to 90° and reduce to 15 kts. N.B. obviously thinks there is a possibility of a warship due to signal RRRR having been made - I don't think so.

Rang up C at 0745. She was very well and had addressed my letters to *Canberra*. She's heard from the agent that she is to be out of the flat on 18th Dec and wondered if she should come West. I said no that Sydney would remain headquarters.

Perth slipped at 0900. Flat calm lovely day. Rachel MacKinnon staying with C.

Saturday 23 Nov.

Not a thing has happened all day - see Wake Walker is going to C.S.1 being relieved as R.A.(M.L) by K.L Bennett. H.B. Rawlings going

to 1st B.S. and P. Wippeil as 2nd i/c and F.O.C Light Forces.

Sunday 24 Nov.

Uneventful calm day Turned 180° at 1900 and headed for Fremantle at 13 kts.

Oldham produced an organisation for D.N.O. [District Naval Officer] W.A. [Western Australia] and I've told him to draft a letter to D.N.O embodying this and telling him to adopt it in principle - N.B. to be informed and I will see how its going when I inspect the place.

Monday 25 Nov.

At 1400 signal from Navy Board saying there was no further intelligence re raider so *Canberra* was to return to Fremantle with all despatch (29 kts) and *Perth* was to arrive before her. At 29 kts *Canberra* should arrive at 1700 on Wednesday. I've told *Perth* to arrive at 0630 so we've gone on to 24 kts.

At 1700 sighted a ship - on closing her she was the Norwegian "Inhalata" - which we knew was about.

Tuesday 26 Nov.

Ship rather wet and uncomfortable.

An accident occurred this morning when exercising Boarding Boats Crews. PO Speers being stabbed in the stomach by PO Stokman with a cutlass. It went in several inches but the damage is not known.

Wednesday 27 Nov.

Sighted Rottneest at 0355 and made recognition signal at 0430. Secured in Fremantle at 0640...

The War Diary of the Commander-in-Chief East Indies

The 'War Diary', more properly called 'War Records', of the CinC East Indies, classified 'Most Secret', was completed and forwarded to the Admiralty in monthly instalments. It consisted of two parts, Part I giving a day-to-day diary of events and Part II and appendices containing a general survey and an appreciation of events during the month. The events, which concerned CinC East Indies were those in his station: events elsewhere, including those on the adjacent Australian station, which was a separate command, were of a peripheral nature. The war diary was, typically, completed months after the period to which it referred, thus the diary for September 1941 was forwarded to London in March 1942, and the diary for November 1941 was forwarded in May 1942. Though these delays would have robbed the war diary of its immediacy and usefulness, it does not appear that any significance can be attached to the timelag, nor does the war diary seem to have been written up with the benefit of hindsight. Presumably more immediate reports were sent of operational matters.

In 1941 the CinC East Indies suspected that a raider was operating in his area, though his analysis was a little hesitant. No evidence has been found that any specific notice of these suspicions was issued. Thus at the end of June 1941 the CinC East Indies recorded:¹¹

[Part II] 3. A glance at the relevant Appendices shows that the stream of men and material to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf continued unabated and the need for escorts occupied the seagoing time of most of the squadron during the month. In these circumstances, though it was found possible to carry out periodical air searches of Chagos and Saya de Malha Bank with Catalinas on passage between Ceylon, Diego Garcia and Seychelles, it was nevertheless fortunate that there were no definite signs of Raider activity on the Station during June. On the last day of the month a report was received of a possible distress message on the 26th about half way between Ceylon and Achin Head, but to date there has been no confirmation that a Raider is

actually operating there, though one possible victim (S.S. "MAREEBA") is overdue off Colombo
 ...

Possible raider activity and other events were analysed later in the diary for the same month:¹⁸

25. The British ship "CITY OF CORINTH" made a QQQQ signal on June 19th, reporting a large tanker seen moving slowly westward off COMORO Island. On June 23rd, Staff Officer (Intelligence) Capetown, reported that the description of the vessel sighted fits that of the Norwegian tanker "ARAMIS" on passage from Durban to Pladjoe, and enquiries have been set in hand to ask the Master if he was in the position of sighting on arrival at Pladjoe.

26. Overdue ships are as follows:

The British ship "KING EDWARD" which left Suez on May 30th for East African ports. This ship was not sighted passing Perim.

The "MAREEBA" which is overdue at Colombo from legal.

There was still doubt next month, even though the Admiralty had warned that *Raider 46* (see above: this was the number mistakenly given for *Kormoran* in the extant *Raider Supplement*) might be en route from the Indian Ocean to the South Atlantic via Australian waters:¹⁹

3. The matter of a possible Raider between Ceylon and Achin Head which was mentioned in my Diary for June has not been satisfactorily cleared up. There are, however, two ships overdue from that area (S.S. "MAREEBA" and "S.S. "VELEBIT") and in default of any other tenable explanation it must be assumed that a Raider was operating there. If such was the case his "bag" has been mercifully small, and this

appears to be confirmed by Intelligence received from the Admiralty that, as a result of lack of success, a Raider (apparently "No. 46") would leave the Indian Ocean area and proceed to the South Atlantic via Australia, New Zealand, Panama and Cape Horn.

It is not evident how the above information was received, whether by intercepts, or whether the words "as a result of lack of success" indicate the actual decryption of a signal, but later the CinC's war diary further analysed these events:

GENERAL.

RAIDER ACTIVITY.

15. (a). Although the evidence is not definite, it must be assumed that there was a raider operating in the vicinity of 8 degrees N, 88 degrees E on 26th June. Two ships "VELEBIT" and "MAREEBA" who were in the area about this time, are overdue.

The positions of the ships who were in that vicinity at 1130 G.M.T. on the 26th were as follows:

H.M.S. "DURBAN"	7deg.30min N.	91 deg.21min.E.
H.M.S. "GLASGOW"	6 " N.	87 " 00 " E.
"MAREEBA"	7 " 55 min N.	88 " 00 " E.
"VELEBIT"(Yugoslav).	7 " 00 " N.	87 " 00 " E.
"WESTPOINT"	7 " 00 " N.	85 " 30 " E.
"PIERRE LOTI"	1 " 00 " N.	89 " 30 " E.

"WESTPOINT" received incompletely an alleged O message and no cancellation of this was heard by anyone. H.M.S. "DURBAN" also heard an unreadable signal at 1130 G.M.T. from an unknown vessel on 500 kc/s strength 2.

On the other hand the overdue ships were old, the weather was known to have been bad at the time and they might have foundered. This, however, seems unlikely, and, on lack of further evidence it was assumed that a raider was operating in that area.

- (b) Transmissions have been heard on several occasions and bearings obtained. Indications on 17th and 21st July have been suggested as communication between a Raider and Supply ship, possibly over the arrangement of transfer of prisoners from "MAREEBA" and "VELEBIT". Indications on the 25th and 29th July suggest a German unit in the Southern Indian Ocean, probably in the KERGUÉLEN-AMSTERDAM area.

However, the diary for September 1941 recorded that:¹⁸

[Part II] 5. There was no interference with shipping by enemy activity and it is not considered that any Raider was operating on the station. The only evidence of a Raider's presence was a possible "R" distress message intercepted by Trincomalee Wireless Station, but this is not considered to have been a genuine message.

And this was amplified by the analysis that:¹⁹

Raider Report

[Appendix] 22. On 26th September, Trincomalee W/T reported what may have been sets of RRR made at 1549 G.M.T. Transmission, which was very weak, broke off before completion of third set.

A few days after, however, a ship was reported missing, though this was recorded in the succeeding monthly instalment of the war diary and no connection between the events seems to have been made.²⁰

[Part II] 8. One Greek ship was missing on passage from Mombasa to Colombo, but there is no corroborative evidence of any raider activity on the Station.

The missing Greek ship was the *Stamatios G. Embiricos* and the faint distress signal, 'RRR', almost certainly came from her. The *Kormoran* sank her on 26 September 1941 in the Indian Ocean, north east of Mombasa. The connection between "Raider G" having disappeared from the South Atlantic according to the *Raider Supplement* to WIR 64, the Admiralty warning, the disappearance of two ships in June in the Indian Ocean, and then of the *Embiricos* in September 1941, and a series of unexplained distress calls, does not seem to have been made. Accordingly, it was considered safe to send the heavy cruiser, HMAS *Australia*, on her own and apparently under a regime of radio silence to remote islands in the southern Indian Ocean:

8. [continued] H.M.A.S. "Australia" was sent towards the end of the month [October 1941] to carry out the search of Kerguelen and the Crozet Islands which had had to be cancelled in August. By Admiralty instructions, magnetic mines will be laid in likely anchorages for raiders. At the time of writing, no report has been received from the ship, which is not expected at Durban before about 15th November.

Though the evidence may have been considered slim, it would seem that a better analysis might have drawn the conclusion that an enemy raider was active in the Indian Ocean, a warning issued, and precautions taken. Instead the CinC East Indies's war diary for October 1941 recorded that:²⁵

6. ... In view of the absence of enemy activity on the Station, it was decided that, while such conditions existed, convoys from Bombay to the Persian Gulf should proceed unescorted.

The war diary for November recorded *Australia's* safe return to Durban:²⁶

5. H.M.A.S. "AUSTRALIA" returned to Durban on 11th November after completing the search of Kerguelen and Crozet Islands mentioned in my last diary. A thorough search by sea and air revealed no definite evidence of further use of these islands by enemy raiders or supply ships. Magnetic mines were laid in the Kerguelen Islands in the Gazelle Basin, Long Island Sound and Tucker Straits.

It also recorded in passing the grimmer news of *Sydney's* meeting with *Raider G*, and, belatedly, made the connection which had been missed since June. It seems that in carrying out his orders to be content with occasional sinkings for maximum disruption of the enemy's escorts, etc. Detmers had failed: by sinking so few ships, his activity had been unobserved and had no effect on the deployment of forces on the East Indies Station:²⁵

[Part II] 6. German survivors from H.M.A.S. "Sydney's" action with *Raider "G"* off the Australian coast revealed that this *Raider* had been responsible for the losses of the "MAREEBA" and "VELEBIT" (see my diaries for June and July) and the "STAMATIOS EMBIRICOS" which was the Greek ship reported as overdue in my Diary for October. Considering that this *Raider* must have been in the Indian Ocean in June and September, its sinkings were remarkably meagre.

This news seemed to prompt a lengthier comment on raiders and U-boats in an appendix to CinC East Indies's 'War Records' for November 1941.²⁶

ENEMY RAIDERS AND U. BOATS

16. On November 12th the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies informed the Admiralty that H.M.A.S. "AUSTRALIA" had visited Kerguelen Island between 1st and 4th November and the Crozet Group on the 6th and 7th November. There was

no definite evidence of further use of these island enemy raiders.

Mines were laid at Gazelle Basin (6) Long Island Sound (4) Island Harbour (2) and the Eastern entrance to Tucker Straits (6). Port Couvrex was visited from which an aerial search of all probable anchorages was made.

17. On November 21st the Admiralty announced that from reliable reports received it is known that U-Boats have been used as escorts for returning raiders, supply ships or merchant vessels.
18. The Admiralty have expressed the view that [given] recent lack of success in the Freetown area, U-Boats can be expected to operate in the Cape area in the near future.
19. An action between H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY" and an enemy raider, nicknamed KOMORANT (almost certainly the STIERMARK), took place in position 24 degrees South 111 degrees East on November 19th. The raider was sunk, and it is assumed H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY" suffered the same fate. Survivors from the raider state that she had sunk the following allied merchant ships:-

ANTONIOS.	CRAFTSMAN	VELEBIT.
AFRICA STAR.	BRITISH UNION	S.EMBRICOS.
AGNITAS.	MAREBA.	FURYLOCHUS.

Of these victims the MAREBA and VELEBIT were sunk on June 26th when the former was on passage from Tegal to Colombo and the latter on passage from Colombo to Mouline. The S.EMBRICOS left Mombasa on September 16th for Colombo and was probably sunk on September

26th. Of this raider's victims the foregoing ships were sunk within the limits of the East Indies Station.

A Vichy French submarine sails

In an otherwise unexplained entry in Grace's diary for 1941 (see chapter 3), Grace notes that the ACNB's first reaction on learning about the disappearance of *Sydney*, was to think that a Vichy French submarine had been involved. This allegation was only mentioned once and not repeated in any other source in British archives. One possible reason for the ACNB initially suspecting a Vichy submarine is an entry in the CinC East Indies's war diary. If this intelligence had been known to the ACNB, they may have had Vichy submarines on their plot of the Indian Ocean.²⁷

VICHY FRENCH NAVAL UNITS.

20. On November 13th the Chief Censor, Mauritius, reported that the "D'IBBERVILLE" had returned to Diego Saurez about November 11th. On November 16th the Naval Office-in-Charge, Aden reported that air photos revealed that a submarine previously lying at Djibouti had left between 1300 GMT, 15th and 0430 GMT 16th November; and on November 29th, Staff Officer (Intelligence) Capetown, in a report graded A.3. stated that the "VENGEUR" was the submarine recently at Djibouti, and that there are no submarines at Madagascar at the present time.

The Far East Combined Bureau Intelligence Summary

The D/F (direction finding) organisation centred on the Far East Combined Bureau (FECB) would not have supported even a tentative estimate of a raider's presence by the CinC East Indies. Despite several unexplained transmissions, the FECB in its summary dated 22 September 1941 stated that:²⁸

5. There has been no raider activity in the Indian Ocean during the period of this summary. A raider was operating in the vicinity of the

Galapagos Islands on 17th August but no D/F indication was received.²⁹

A suspicious ship

Nevertheless, there were other indicators of a raider somewhere. An entry in the Admiralty's *Naval War Diary* for 7 November 1941 records a sighting off Norfolk Island of a suspicious ship. If *Kormoran's* crew are to be believed, this could not have been her, since she had only sighted land once, and that was elsewhere:³⁰

FOREIGN STATIONS

Australia.

Suspicious ship. Ship about 8,000 to 9,000 tons approx. 15 miles east Norfolk Island at 0130Z/7 heading south. (description) Visibility poor, difficult to establish accurate data. (Administrator Norfolk Island, 0300Z/7 to Admty.)

How this intelligence was analysed and promulgated in Australia is not clear from the British archives. In London, even if the report was erroneous, a good assessment was made, but not until 23 November 1941 and too late to help *HMAS Sydney*.³¹

FOREIGN STATIONS

China [sic]

Suspicious ship	Your 2359Z/21. Vessel was not Raider "C".
6/11 [sic]	Description appears to fit Raider G, No. 41. Believed to be STEIERMARK of Hapag line 9,400 tons 524 length. (Details). Last located in South Atlantic May 1941, with Raider C.
	(D.D.I.C. 1938A/23 to Capt. D.S. Singapore).

Notes

- 1 'OPERATIONS AND TACTICS, Evaluation of important events in the naval war, Book 10', Berlin, December 1943, PG/14257. PRO: ADM 1/18899, f. 17 (page 10 of the original German document).
- 2 *ibid.*, f. 52.
- 3 Minute by DNI, 8 January 1941. 'Activities of the "Kulmerland" (renamed "Tokyo Maru") in Far Eastern Waters'. PRO: ADM 199/725.
- 4 Message from British Ambassador, 1 January 1941. *ibid.*
- 5 Message from COS Singapore, 7 January 1941. *ibid.*
- 6 Message from Admiralty, 4 January 1941. *ibid.*
- 7 Messages from British Ambassador, 31 December 1940 and 7 January 1941. *ibid.*
- 8 'OPERATIONS AND TACTICS'. PRO: ADM 1/18899, ff. 61-2.
- 9 In several instances at this place in the document 'North' is erroneously translated as 'W'; this has been corrected.
- 10 Unidentified document. CCAC: ROSK 5/28, p. 23.
- 11 *Raider Supplement to Weekly Intelligence Report No. 64, 30 May 1941*, p. 16. NHB.
- 12 *Penguin was Schiff 33 or Raider F: caught and sunk by HMS Cornwall on 8 May 1941*.
- 13 Diary of Admiral Sir John Crace, RN, IWM: IWM 69/18/1. The diary is presented as written except that where necessary ship's names are given in italics to remove any confusion with place names.
- 14 Lieutenant Commander George Oldham, RAN, Crace's Staff Officer (Operations and Intelligence).
- 15 Crace's wife.
- 16 Captain Sir Philip Bowyer-Smyth, RN, Commanding Officer HMAS Perth.
- 17 War Diary of the CinC East Indies for June 1941, pp. 427-8. NHB.
- 18 *ibid.*, pp. 454-5.
- 19 *ibid.*, for July 1941, p. 15.
- 20 *ibid.*, for September 1941, p. 89.
- 21 *ibid.*, p. 105.
- 22 *ibid.*, p. 122.
- 23 *ibid.*, p. 121.
- 24 *ibid.*, p. 159.
- 25 *ibid.*
- 26 *ibid.*, for November 1941, pp. 176-7.
- 27 Appendix IV to East Indies No. 594/E.I-03203 of 13 May 1942, p. 177. NHB.

- 28 'TECB Intelligence Summary - Far East D/F Organisation - Periodical Analysis', 16 October 1941. PRO: CAB 158/25.
- 29 This was *Komet* (*Raider B. Schiff 45*) who had entered the Pacific by the north-east passage and earlier in 1941 had sailed south of Australia to the Galapagos then home via the Atlantic. Despite this epic voyage in wartime, *Komet* was one of the least successful disguised raiders.
- 30 *Naval War Diary*, 7 November 1941. PRO: ADM 199/2233, ff. 157 and 182.
- 31 *ibid.*, 23 November 1941, f. 605.

2 Receipt of the News in London

Background events to the loss of HMAS Sydney

November and December 1941 were hectic and black months in the war. At the beginning of November the aircraft carrier HMS *Ark Royal* was lost in the Mediterranean, and at the end of the month the battleship HMS *Barham*, with severe loss of life. In the same month the Royal Navy sank a German raider and a German supply ship. The Royal Australian Navy lost HMAS *Sydney* and the sloop HMAS *Parramatta*. Then the Japanese declared war, striking at the American fleet at Pearl Harbor, and sinking the British capital ships *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales*.

HMS Devonshire sinks Raider C

The first news in London in late November 1941 about raiders was of a sinking in the Atlantic. *Goldenfels* was thought to have been fuelling a U-boat when she was attacked by HMS *Devonshire* and so the cruiser did not close the position, the Admiralty warning her to stay clear. The report on 22 November in the *Naval War Diary* kept in the Admiralty may be significant because it shows, and may have helped to set, perceptions of how raiders operated and how an action might proceed. Notably, *Devonshire* broke radio silence to report that she was engaging an enemy raider, the First Sea Lord himself was evidently monitoring the action, and he sent a personal instruction that, in view of the likely presence of a U-boat, *Devonshire* was not to close the scene. Though they are reproduced as a continuous record here, in the *Naval War Diary* entries appear on different dates and pages, which are shown in the left-hand column. The actual entries are given in the second and third columns:¹

Date/Page	Entry	
22 Nov	<u>Raider</u>	<u>South Atlantic</u>
557	<u>Sunk by</u>	DEVONSHIRE engaged and sank
	<u>DEVONSHIRE</u>	merchant ship raider thought to be GOLDENFELS (7800 tons) this morning in

approx. 4°15'S. 18°43'W. It is believed that the vessel was engaged fuelling a U-Boat when first sighted for this reason DEVONSHIRE left the survivors to boats and rafts.

About the time when the engagement took place Ascension intercepted a report of an unknown warship in approximately the above position, purporting to come from S.S. POLYPHEMUS; this report was definitely not from the genuine POLYPHEMUS which was at New York at the time.

22 Nov	<u>Ship</u>	<u>South Atlantic</u>
573	<u>Engaged.</u>	Am engaging merchant ship. (DEVONSHIRE, 1054Z/22 to C. in C. S.A.)
	<u>Blown up.</u>	Enemy ship is on fire and magazine has exploded. Request destroyers may be sent to pick up survivors. (DEVONSHIRE, 1105Z/22 to C. in C. S.A.)
	<u>Survivors.</u>	Your 1105/22. No destroyers are available. Give survivors raft. DEVONSHIRE search to westward. Return to position of survivors early tomorrow Sunday and report situation. Approximately how many survivors. (C. in C. S.A., 1106N/22 to DEVONSHIRE).

Ship sunk. My 1140Z. Ship has (? now) sunk. (DEVONSHIRE, 1118Z/22 to C. in C. S.A.)

Raider 16 (1) My 1034Z/22. After
 (?) interrogation of (?) air
Probable observer am convinced ship
U/B. was (?) raider) number 16.

She was probably fuelling a U-boat when (?) sighted). Lifeboats and rafts are in 004°13'S. 018°43'W. (ii) Your 1938N/21. Am proceeding through 004°20'S. 021° (249')W. S of A [Speed of Advance] 21 knots. No damage or casualties but one shaft (?) is out of action owing to (?) firings). Percentage of fuel remaining 40%. (Weather). (DEVONSHIRE 1201Z/22 to C. in C. S.A.)



HMS Devonshire, 1935
 (Grazebrook Collection).

My 1201Z. Raider when sighted was head to wind. On going ahead she cast adrift a boat (corrupt group) of oil drums. 2 large patches of oil were close alongside. Her manoeuvres kept her within 5000 yards of her initial position. She made a most efficient C.S. smoke screen but did not return my fire. Owing to above i did not close the boats. (DEVONSHIRE 1250Z/22).

Survivors. Your 1106/22. About 150 to 200 survivors. (DEVONSHIRE, 1301Z/ 22 to C. in C. S.A.)

DEVONSHIRE Your 1106/22. In view of para not to i of DEVONSHIRE's 1201/22 close she is not to close position survivors. of lifeboats and rafts. Send a small to rescue survivors (1st S.L. 2321A/22 to C. in C.S.A.)

Signals about HMAS Sydney

The first news in London of anything untoward regarding *Sydney* was apparently contained in a signal date-time-group (DTG) 0617Z/24 November from the ACNB to the Admiralty, though no copy of this signal has been found in the British archives (see Annex A). Several other signals have also been identified, mostly but not exclusively from references in the *Naval War Diary*, which refer to the disappearance of HMAS *Sydney*, and these have been listed in the log of signals about HMAS *Sydney*.

Entries in the *Naval War Diary* about Sydney

The signal from the ACNB (0617Z/24) appears to have been used to

compose the first entry regarding the loss of *Sydney* in the Admiralty's *Naval War Diary*. Again, dates and page numbers are in the left hand column and the *Naval War Diary* entries are given in the second and third columns:

Date/Page	Entry	H.M.A.S. SYDNEY left 007° 56'S. 104° 40'E. at 0400Z/17 for Fremantle due 20/11. SYDNEY not yet arrived. C Z M [CinC Netherlands East Indies Naval Forces] has been asked to search the area South of Sunda Strait by air (A.C.N.B. 0617Z/24 to Admty.) See also China, 1432Z/24.)
24 Nov 638	<u>SYDNEY</u> <u>Overdue.</u>	
25 Nov 665	<u>Germans in</u> <u>TROCAS,</u> <u>SYDNEY</u> <u>overdue.</u>	Concur that this is probable explanation. A.C.N.B. is organizing search with assistance from C.Z.M. (C. in C. China, 1133Z/25 to Admty.) (See also Australia). (668)
25 Nov 668-9	<u>German</u> <u>Survivors</u> <u>in TROCAS,</u> <u>SYDNEY</u> <u>still</u> <u>overdue.</u>	<u>Australia</u> My 1312Z/24, not to Admiralty. Oil tanker TROCAS reports survivors from KORMORAN sunk by cruiser. There is no further news of SYDNEY. (A.C.N.B. 0016Z/ 25 to Admty. etc.) Comment by O.I.C. Possibly KORMORAN (5,100 tons built 1938, 15 knots, last heard Hamburg 1939). A.C.N.B. 0016/25. The only explanation we can think of

is that Raider torpedoed SYDNEY before being sunk. Request your views and details of steps that you are taking to try and locate her. (1st Sea Lord 1120A/25 to A.C.N.B., C. in C. China).

My 0617Z/24.

Following censorship in force Australia publicity and communications (begins):

No reference to SYDNEY or any statement or rumour regarding alleged naval activities Australian waters (Ends). Request you will conform. (A.C.N.B. 0829Z/25 to Admty.) Admty. 1120A/25.

Agreed Admiralty's

(?statement) appears only explanation. Estimate action occurred forenoon of 21st. Following action has been taken (i) Air search to cover likely area S. of 020° S. carried out 24th, 25th. (ii) 4 Auxiliary vessels from Fremantle proceeding to search. (iii) Air Search being carried out by 6 aircraft based on Geraldton 26th. (iv) ? Catalina aircraft proceeding Port Moresby to Fremantle ready to operate 26th. (v) C.Z.M. sending Netherlands Cruiser TROMP along probable route Sunda Strait to Fremantle

and searching area N. of 020°S. by air. (vi) Merchant shipping warned to keep a good look out, 5 ships due to pass through the area. In addition to enemy survivors picked up by IRDCAS, one life boat containing 40 or 50 men sighted under sail in area. 2 life boats also containing survivors ashore 40 miles N. of Carnarvon. Land party proceeding to take them into custody. All life boats painted dark brown colour and therefore do not belong to SYDNEY. Hoped to obtain information from prisoners. You will be kept informed of developments.
(A.C.N.B., 1634Z/25 to Admty. C. in C. China).

26 Nov
696

SYDNEY
(missing.)

Summary of SYDNEY situation passed to S.O. Force 'G'. (Capt. O.S., Singapore, 0733Z/26, to Admty.)

Resumé of operations up to 26/11. Total sighted 4 lifeboats and 1 raft all at present considered to contain enemy survivors. Air search continued supported by 4 auxiliary naval vessels. Intend continuing air search in area bounded by Geraldton N.W. Cape to 108°E., 3 Naval auxiliary vessels will be in the area.

- (Originator not stated, 1646Z/26. to C. in C. China, Admty.)
- 27 Nov 732 SYDNEY. My 0829Z/25 [sic]. Leakage of information in Australia and widespread rumours consequent on notice to next of kin may impel Australian Gov. to make early statement at short notice. Beneficial for public if announcement of loss could be accompanied by statement of sinking of raider. Statement will be made on following lines. (Begins) Information has been received from the Naval Board that SYDNEY has been in action with an enemy ship which she sank by gunfire. The information was obtained from survivors from the enemy ship who were picked up some time after the action. No subsequent communication has been received from SYDNEY and it must be presumed she has been lost. (Ends) Request your very early view and or any compelling reason for deferring publication any longer. (A.C.N.B., 1519Z/27 to Admty.)
- 28 Nov 762 Raider Identity. My 1700Z/27. Consider KORMORAN was raider "G" (?number 41) namely STEIERMARK (vide C.A.F.O. 422 number 645). Second (

30 Nov
812-3

SYDNEY
Raider
action.

?[Engineer) states that ship was STEIERMARK. (A.C.N.B., 0812Z/28 to Admty etc).

When you have been able to collect from prisoners all available information regarding action between SYDNEY and raider, grateful if you would let me know what happened so that we can deduce any lessons for the future. (1st S.L. 1115A/30 to A.C.N.B.) Deepest sympathy in heavy loss of personnel which has occurred to the R.A.N. in loss of SYDNEY and PARAMATTA. (1st S.L. 1116A/30 to A.C.N.B.)

Sea and air R/C has failed to locate any survivors of SYDNEY, but a R.A.N. lifebuoy and 2 Carley floats were picked upon 29/11, 160°N.W. of Carnarvon, W.A. Ascertained from survivors of raider, now known to have been STEIERMARK, 9400 tons, that the action took place at 4 p.m. and lasted until 6.30 p.m., 19/11 some 175°S.W. of Carnarvon. Both ships were set on fire during the action. The raider blew up about midnight. SYDNEY was heavily on fire when last seen. Further search has been abandoned. (D.O.R. 30/11)

- 1 Dec
27 PARAMATTA,
 [sic]
- R.A.D. Med.s's 1914B/29.
Request advice when new[s]
can be published in
Australia. In view of advice
going to next of kin and
probability of rumours
spreading following SYDNEY
announcement considered
early publication desirable.
(A.C.N.B. 03337/1 to Admty).
- 2 Dec
61 SYDNEY
 PARAMATTA.
- Message of sympathy at loss.
SYDNEY was a most gallant
ship with a record that will
live in Naval history, and
we can find some consolation
in the fact that she ended
her career by freeing our
ocean lifelines of a serious
menace PARAMATTA's work,
too, has been of great
service to our common cause.
(1st Lord 2306A/2 to A.N.N.B
[sic]) Acknowledged 10187/2.

HMS *Dorsetshire* forces supply ship *Python* to scuttle

Meanwhile on 1 December, HMS *Dorsetshire* reported that she had chased an enemy supply ship or raider who, after warning shots from *Dorsetshire*, had scuttled herself. The enemy was identified as the supply ship *Python* and was "without doubt ... refuelling at least one or two U-boats when first sighted". In view of the submarine danger, about 500 survivors were left in 15 boats and a raft:2

Date/Page	Entry
1 Dec	<u>Raider sunk</u> One enemy supply ship or
17	<u>by</u> raider sunk in 027°53'S. <u>DORSEISHIRE</u> 003°55'W... Strongly suspect U-boat present. Do not intend to close...

Churchill's condolences

On 28 November British Prime Minister Winston Churchill wrote to the Prime Minister of Australia, John Curtin, in another context:³

3. Accept my deepest sympathy in the feared loss of the SYDNEY so close to Australian shores. We also have had a grievous blow this week in the loss of the BARHAM, which blew up as a result of a U-boat torpedo, involving the death of about seven hundred men. This is being kept strictly secret at present as the enemy do not seem to know and the event would only encourage Japan.

To which Prime Minister Curtin replied:⁴

I greatly appreciate your expression of sympathy in the loss the SYDNEY - it is a heavy blow to us. The sinking of H.M.S. BARHAM is another shock and we feel for you deeply in this loss of life and material. It is all a terrible (? group omitted) but must be borne. I am glad to read your comment that General Auchinleck is hopeful. Naturally, we follow this campaign very carefully and with hope for a happy conclusion.

Finally, may I say that we do not need any concrete demonstration, such as you instance [the sending of *Prince of Wales* to eastern waters], to make us aware of your comradeship and goodwill towards us. We know that your great work is not only for Great Britain but for all of us and we are doing and will continue to do



Vice Admiral Sir Guy Royle, RN, First Naval Member of the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board (RAN).

everything in our power to give you practical assistance.

On 7 December 1941 the Imperial Japanese Navy struck at Pearl Harbor.

Report of the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board

Dated 12 February 1942 in Melbourne, the report of the ACNB was forwarded to the Admiralty by the Secretary of the Department of the Navy:⁵

I am directed by the Australian Naval Board to forward herewith (in duplicate) report on the loss (presumed) of H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY" as a result of her encounter with the German Raider "KORMORAN" off the Coast of Western Australia on 19th November, 1941.

2. The report has been compiled from a mass of material containing the results of interrogation of Prisoners of War ex "KORMORAN".

The covering letter was date-stamped as received in London over two months later, on 22 April 1942. This report and its treatment in London, and post war examination of events, are dealt with in Chapter 6.

Notes

- 1 *Naval War Diary*. The *Goldenfels'* real identity was *Atlantis*, Raider C or *Schiff 16*. PRO: ADM 199/2233 and ADM 199/2234.
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 Prime Minister's Personal Telegram, T887, 28 November 1941. PRO: PREM 4/50/1.
- 4 Prime Minister's Personal Telegram, T897, 29 November 1941. *ibid.*
- 5 Letter, Secretary Department of the Navy to Secretary of the Admiralty, 12 February 1942. PRO: ADM 199/736.

3 Search for the *Sydney*

The First Sea Lord's request for information

Details of the fate of HMAS *Sydney* and of how she had met her end were quite *unknown* in London. Nor was any attempt made from London to organise a search or subsequently to set up any enquiry: certainly, there appears to be no other reference in the British archives to any enquiry. Rather, on 30 November 1941, the First Sea Lord in London asked the ACNB for more information:¹

When you have been able to collect from prisoners all available information regarding action between SYDNEY and raider, grateful if you would let me know what happened so that we can deduce any lessons for the future.

The air search

Apart from the second hand details in the *Naval War Diary* precisised from various signals from the ACNB, which have already been referred to in the previous chapter, few details of the search conducted by and on behalf of the Australian authorities appear to exist in British archives. By chance however, a routine monthly round up of operations contains some information about the air search:²

CYPHER TELEGRAM

SHORT DISTRIBUTION

From the Government of the
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
TO DOMINIONS OFFICE

D. 3rd December, 1941. 9.32.p.m.

R. 4th " " 9.47.a.m.

No. 765. Part 1. MOST SECRET

Repeated by air mail to New Zealand.

A. Navy.

1. His Majesty's Australian Ships.

(1) Operations.

H.M.A.S. SYDNEY left Fremantle to rendezvous H.M.A.S. ADELAIDE and the transport ZEALANDIA in the Bight and escort the latter vessel to Fremantle where they arrived 9th November. They left 11th November to rendezvous with H.M.S. DURBAN in the vicinity of Sunda Straits whence H.M.A.S. SYDNEY was to return to Fremantle.

On report that H.M.A.S. SYDNEY was overdue at Fremantle, aircraft from Pearce searched an area to the north west of Rottnest Island on the 24th November to locate the ship. Result of the search was negative. On the basis of subsequent intelligence, intensive air searches were carried out between the latitude of Gerald Matadi and Port Hedland to a maximum distance of 350 miles to seaward during the period 25th November to 29th November. H.M.A.S. SYDNEY was not located.

H.M.A.S. SYDNEY was due to arrive at Fremantle on the 20/21st November. After the ship became overdue the Departments of the Navy signalled to the SYDNEY to break wireless silence and report her position. As nothing was heard from SYDNEY, intensive air searches were instituted on the 24th November and have continued up to and including the 29th November. Ocean areas between 20 degrees S. latitude and 32 degrees latitude and extending to an average distance of 350 miles from the coast line have been thoroughly searched by Hudsons, Ansons, Wirraways and Catalinas. Normal

operational aircraft comprising Hudsons, Ansons, Wirraways at Pearce were reinforced by: 8 Ansons from No. 4 Service Flying Training School at Geraldton; 3 Hudsons from No. 13 Squadron Darwin; 2 aeroplanes from Port Moresby.

The Catalinas were ordered to move from Townsville, Port Moresby on the evening of the 24th November. Aircraft departed on the morning of the 25th November and proceed via Darwin to Fremantle, stage from Darwin to Fremantle being flown at night. Aircraft alighted at Fremantle 25¹⁷ hours and 29¹⁴ hours respectively after departure from Townsville and were available for reconnaissance within 4 hours of their arrival.

During the period of the search several lifeboats were located containing German sailors. No traces of H.M.A.S. SYDNEY were found during the air search.

Crace's diary of events in November and December 1941

As far as the enquiry into the fate of HMAS *Sydney* was concerned, Rear



HMAS Sydney (RAN).

Admiral Crace, was involved, apparently against his will, in part of the interrogation of the German prisoners-of-war. He himself was not informed about *Sydney* being overdue, or of any worry about her, until Monday 24 November, several days after the action with the *Kormoran*. Somewhat strangely (see Chapter 1), he records a rumour that a Vichy French submarine escorting a Vichy ship may have sunk her: this rumour is not repeated anywhere else in Crace's diary or the British archives. However, the disappearance of *Sydney* was not a leading subject in Crace's diary, though he did become concerned about managing the news about her loss, and about rumours which spread rapidly and widely in the city of Sydney:¹

Monday 24 Nov.

At 0705 the [Griffi?]² called for me and we picked up the Jim Dixon's and their children (David 8 and Jemima 2) in Double Bay and went off to Bondi. The sea was lovely and I thoroughly enjoyed my surf. Went in to Whites - took the Griffi in in [sic] the Barge. Lieut de vaisseau Prinelli, Captain of the *Chevreuil* called. Heard from N.B. that they are very worried about "Sydney". She should have arrived Fremantle on 21st (Friday) and is overdue - she has been called by wireless without result. N.B. think there is a possibility that a Vichy S/m escorting a Vichy ship has torpedoed her.

Farncomb³ called at 1400 and told me he had rescinded the 7pm leave restriction off his own bat. He did it in an offhand way during an address to the ship's company and I think perhaps it's for the best. I rang up Royle,⁴ as previously I'd had a message from him suggesting that I might like to reduce the sentence of [Starr?]⁵ from 42 days detention. This is the man in Perth who made a speech to the Rotary Club, Essendon, giving away composition of the fleet and information of value to the enemy. Waller and I considered courtmartialling him and then Waller wished



Captain H.B. Farncomb, RAN (RAN).

to give him 60 days. I watered it down to 42. We had rather a wordy conflict on the telephone, and I am not prepared to reduce the sentence. Later I went on board *Perth* to say goodbye and Waller strongly agrees with me.

Tuesday 25th Nov.

Heard that the tanker *Trocas* had picked up a raft with 25 Germans about 150° west of Carnarvon. The N.B. theory is that there was an action between "Sydney" and A.M.C. [Armed Merchant Cruisers] *Cormoran*, and both ships were sunk. Foley^o came in and 1st N.M. has postponed his departure from Melbourne till tomorrow. Taylor came in at noon and helped me cover the "Arabian Nights" in all leather - most interesting. Went out and bought an Australian [morocco?] skin - much coarser and thicker than English-cost 11/1. At 1730, went to D.B. [Double Bay] to pick up C and together we then went to the Doyle's C.I. [Cocktail] party on G.I. [Garden Island] We were accompanied by the Ridleys." Very sleepy after dinner - due to my early morning bathe I presume.

Wednesday 26 Nov.

Bathed at Bondi with the Griffi and Jim Dixons for the third time - Very nice. It is possible that 1st N.M. [Naval Member] will return to Melbourne tonight instead of coming on here. I had asked him to dine at the Club, but heard M-G^o has asked him first and he had accepted. As I write this, Ridley tells me he's returned to Melbourne so all is well. Little more news of Sydney. An aircraft reported having sighted a cutter (brown) with men in it, and 2 similar boats have been seen on the beaches but they are probably *Cormoran's* boats. *Tromp* [a Netherlands

cruiser] is coming down Sydney's track - Dutch A/c are searching the area N of 20°S, and our own the area S of this. 2 Catalinas have gone over.

Continued with the book bindings.

Helen came in about 1830, and she and Carola went off to play bridge with Lady Fairfax. I went and dined with [La?] and [Foley?] Stephanie being a fourth. About 1030 the office rang and told me Oldham wanted to come out, so I went home and we curtailed *Perth's* programme in Melbourne and she is to return here and go to N.Z. to trail the *Mariposa*.

C came in soon after 12.00 and asked me if it was true that *Australia* was sunk. I asked her why, and she said that Lady Fairfax had met them with a whiteface and asked if they'd heard the news. C said no, and then Lady F. didn't wish to say, but on being pressed said there was a strong rumour that "Australia" had been sunk. This I suppose is the confidence we put in the press. M-G was told by signal to see all Editors and ask them to keep the matter secret for the present. A beastly hot sticky night - people opposite were talking loudly at 0100 and neither of us slept well.

Thursday 27 Nov.

Bathed with Griffi and Dixons at Bondi - a dull heavy morning with no waves. I reported the matter of lady Fairfax and her rumour to M-G officially - I heard that Purton was asked by a train conductor if it was true that *Sydney* had been sunk and gather that the conductor knew that it was all set up in type ready for publication. Many officers wives were asked if their husbands were still in "Sydney" and if they had photographs of them!

C and I went to lunch on board *Le Triomphant*. The M-Gs were there and the rest of the party was the 1st Lieut Gilly, the Canadian Liaison officer, Schreiber and the Captain of the *Chevreuil Fourtinnie*. Quite a pleasant lunch. Captain Auboyneau proposed the toast of "The King", and I replied with "France", which I hear is the correct toast. Cdr. Little, (Security) came to see me on the instruction of the Commodore, and I suggested that he should interview Lady Fairfax and find out the source of the rumour. Home about 1800. After dinner, Little rang up and said he had his interview with Lady Fairfax, and that she was agitated by being interviewed and would not admit having said what she did. Little rang up, as he thought she might attack C or Helen. Accordingly C rang up Helen who'd already had a ring from Lady F., in which she said she'd heard the rumour in the tram.

C composed and wrote an excellent letter to Lady F., saying she was so worried by the rumour that she had asked me for confirmation. I had taken a serious view and reported the matter so that the source might be traced. C very sorry to cause distress to one who'd been so kind to her but felt it right and duty thing to do.

Signal from N.8 saying *Aguitanfa* had picked up 24, and was due tomorrow - I was to arrange to interview them.

Friday 28 Nov.

Bathed with Griffi at Bondi. Met Peter Lubbock and Air Commodore Goddard, who said he met me when Tony Blagrove was turning over to me.

Hear that Commodore is huffed that he hasn't been told to run the interrogation. Oidham

making the arrangements and suggested Farncomb should do it. Spoke to Getting¹¹ on Secraphone, and he tells me he suggested that I should do the Interrogation because I was senior, Sydney was my ship, didn't want Army butting in. Also suggested I should have a Dutch man to help, possibly Lammers of K.P.M. Line. Rang him up and he came and saw me. I hope he's trustworthy. Signal (opposite) gives the situation as it now exists.

[the signal is reproduced at the end of this transcript]

(When I got in this morning, a Mr. Evans, retired barrister who is a member of Australian Club, told me a story of two women who spoke openly about a rumoured sinking of "Australia" - also of how Frank McCabe had announced the sinking of "Sydney" in his Club and had got this from the [Cowan?] Housekeeper "an Irish Catholic(!!)". He had denied this hotly and wished to propose at a meeting that the Housekeeper should be sacked! I dissuaded him.)

About 1300, a signal came from DNO South Australia from 1st N.M. saying he considered it desirable that I should go to Fremantle and take charge of the Interrogation - Dechaineaux¹² went today. Looking up planes, I find I can't go till Sunday.

Didham tells me he thinks the reason is friction with Farquhar-Smith¹³ and Getting and that F-Smith is not doing very well.

I rang up Durnford¹⁴ to tell him I was off on Sunday, and he begged me to stay as he tells me the Far Eastern situation is most critical and war is expected any moment. Even so, I can't see that I can be of much help with only two ships here. Little came in and told me the result of his interview with Lady Fairfax.

She wanted to know how he'd heard about the business, and said an N.O.'s [Naval Officer's] wife had asked her if the "Australia" was all right and she had asked Carola, and got rather mixed up in her statements and somewhat heated. She wished to ring up the Commodore to say she had not started or repeated a rumour. Little boomed her off doing so. We had been asked to C.T.'s with the Spenders, but didn't go. We dined with the Hawkins where the party consisted of Miss Aileen Bell of Coochin Crookin, Mr. Sly Palmer and Mrs. Maclean (Mrs. Palmer had laryngitis) a Mr. and Mrs. Jeffreys (American) and a Frenchman. An excellent dinner.

At 1015, Dildham rang up to say Farncomb had finished his interrogation so I took my leave and after dropping C at home went on to Farncomb's flat and saw his advance report to N.B. Home about 2345.

Saturday 29 Nov.

Bathed with the Griff and at 0830 rang up office and was told that as a result of a signal from N.B. to 1st N.M. suggesting there was little point in my going to the West, a reply had been received saying "as present evidence is so unsatisfactory I consider FOCAS should proceed Fremantle to reinvestigate". This is a confounded nuisance, and I cannot understand what is meant as from all accounts the interrogation has been very good.

Played golf with Pilcher in p.m. C had a childrens party in the flat for Rosemary's birthday. I came in at the end of it, and after a bath and change had a dozen oysters and some beer. Ridley picked me up at 1755, and we caught the 1815 bus from Martin Place for Mascot. A fair flight, but it was rather

hot and bumpy towards the end. We arrived at Essendon 30 minutes late and didn't get to Menzies till about 2300. Getting met me at Menzies and later Durnford came in from a Scottish dinner. We discussed reasons for me being required in the West, and what information was wanted from prisoners. Bed about 0115.

Sunday 30th November:

Called at 0530 and with Ridley to catch the airliner tender. This left the office at 0615. We left Essendon soon after 0700 in a 14 seater Douglas, and had quite a comfortable passage to Adelaide having coffee and roll and marmalade en route. At Adelaide some



Captain E. Dechaineaux (left) and Commodore J. Collins (right) on the bridge of HMAS *Australia* (RAN).

passengers got out, and Mrs Singer (wife of the Gunnery Lt of *Sydney*) embarked. I found out later that she had been in Perth, where her home was, but had heard "*Sydney*" was going to Sydney to refit so was on her way there when she received the telegram that her husband was missing, so she was returning home. From Adelaide to Ceduna the last part was very bumpy and unpleasant, and nearly the whole way from Ceduna to Kalgoorlie it was extremely unpleasant and I felt far from well. At least 3 or 4 were sick, and at Kalgoorlie after I got out, I was sick. From Kalgoorlie on it was all right, and I went into the cockpit and had a long yarn with the pilot. The reason it is bumpy is the heat rising from the Nullarbor Desert, which is greater than that from wooded country. The bumps could be avoided by flying high, but this is not done going West as the prevailing wind up high is westerly. Hence going West they fly at about 5000 and going East at from 8 to 10000, and the trip East is faster in consequence.

We got in about 1910 and D.N.O's Secretary, Macklewrath,¹⁵ met me and took us to the [Weld?] Club. After a cold supper, Dechaîneaux and Salm¹⁶ came along and later Ramage¹⁷ and we discussed the whole matter.

Dechaîneaux showed me a note from Royle, which I think explains the reason of my being sent one. He was dissatisfied with the evidence of a man called Linke, the W/T operator who talked about *Sydney* being with a Convoy. All obvious lies and it was not felt necessary to give consideration to his evidence by Dechaîneaux.

Bed fairly early.

Monday, 1st December.

Woke early and got a call through to C at 0715. At 0900, Dechaîneaux and Salm met me and also Dr. Frankel, the German Jew lawyer interpreter. This little man had very narrowly escaped being put in a Concentration Camp. We drove to Swanborne 5th Brigade H.Q.s, where the 19 officers captured from the *Kormorant* are. I started interviewing with the Jew on my right questioning and Salm (with violent Halitosis) on my left writing down in English so that I could see. We did the meteorologist, Film man and a watchkeeper (Baron von ... a violent Nazi) and one of the Merchantmen used as Captain for prizes. Also the Captain Detmars [sic] and 1st Lieutenant. We could get little of real value out of them - no one definitely knew the fate of *Sydney* but we got a pretty good description of the action. We could get little about *Kormorant's* movements prior to the action, although a Chinaman captured from the *Eurytachus* was definite that the ship had fuelled and refilled in the Carolines proceeding there and back South of Tasmania.

I don't feel I can be of any real use here, and think that the Interrogations can go on with an N.O. [Naval Officer] and 2 interpreters, one of whom has a legal mind.

If I can get this going, I'm going home on Wednesday morning. Farquhar Smith is quite hopeless and doesn't know what is going on at all. Kept up late by Dechaîneaux coming with signals. Dr Seeds also there very effusive and interfering.

Ridley drafted letters of condolence which I propose writing to all relatives, 650 all told!

Tuesday 2nd Dec.

Turned out at 0530 and wrote 31 letters of condolence before breakfast.

At Swanborne all the forenoon interrogating German prisoners till 1500. We did the Captain who was much more forthcoming and stated he was quite satisfied with his and his officers treatment here. Also Greter (T.O.), a surly toad, Lien Hoop, the Surg Cdr a nice pleasant looking man, Skeries, unpleasant but talked and Brinkman (2nd G). I had Ramage and Rycroft¹⁹ and their interpreters in to see how the interrogation was conducted, and left Ramage to continue after 1500. I then went to the Depot and Dechaineaux made out instructions for Interrogation by the 2 officers. Back about 1800 - General Mackay arrived by plane - Wrote letters till 2200.

Wednesday 3rd December.

Dechaineaux and Salm left by plane for Melbourne. I turned out at 0530 and wrote letters, not very many. After breakfast, I settled down properly and completed all the West Australian (90 odd). I timed myself and was doing 17^{1/2} per hour. My fingers were so sore and my brain buzzing so much that I then went out and enquired about getting facsimile letters done. These would take 3 days and cost £3, so I chucked it and at Ridley's suggestion am going to see what printed typewritten (not [illegible]) letters look like - I shall not get them done otherwise.

At 1330, Ridley and I by car to Harvey where the German prisoners of war are in an Internment Camp, which has been in operation for one year. Mostly Italians were there before, and it is a well run place miles from anywhere in

lovely country. We passed through beautiful country, and the Government are making an irrigation scheme by running an aqueduct (open ditch) for miles, which is caused to overflow on to various properties in rotation. The farms pay a tax per acre (in the region of B/-).

I watched Rycroft (Holtman and Van Dal) doing their interrogation - The scheme is good but I think nothing of Rycroft. He tells me they can't find accommodation closer than Bunbury, which is 30' away! Came back [illegible] at 1700, having been there 1^{1/2} hours. It takes 2 hours and is 85 miles. Met Fred Heron in the Club for a second.

Bed very early (2100?).

Thursday, 4th December.

Did a few letters before breakfast and complete all those not to wives or parents by 1100. Got telegram from Bath saying "Mrs Grace advises Nicholas has won four years Scholarship at Geelong Grammar ... Bath". Sent a telegram of congratulations to him. Lunched with the President of the Club, Temperley, also Gray (Banker) and Stuart. Ridley and I completed the wives and started the parents on the printed letters. After dinner I went to the movies - "The Trial of Mary Dugan" very good.

Friday 5th December.

Out at 0530 and with Ridley completed all the printed letters leaving about 12 to do by hand. These I finished after breakfast. At 1045, Ridley and I went off by car to Harvey again, and after a puncture en route arrived at the hotel about 1300. There we lunched and had an excellent meal. I looked round the pub

afterwards, and was most surprised to find it most comfortable and up to date. Ramage, Rycroft and their staffs should stay there instead of at Bunbury, 30 miles away. Afterwards went to the Internment Camp, and found all going well there. They'd found out that the 2nd Supply ship (last) was the *Kulmerland* about a month before the action. 2 men had been insolent and were put in cells but didn't approve of this and apologised and also told of the *Kulmerland* - They expect to finish at the end of next week.

Got back to Perth at 1700 and after packing, bathing and changing went to a C.I. party the Hoads were giving (knew Sr[?] and Blanch when at Duntroon). From there Ridley picked me up and we went to a fête affair at the Freshwater Club. We were supposed to be guests, but were pretty well fleeced. Met Mrs Bagot (Ceylon), who is evacueeing here with her children (2). She started when she left Port Said (Cyphering) staying with Bagot's brother in Adelaide, but tired of that and came to Perth. We went round the various gambling games together - Ridley and I left at 2130.

Saturday 6th December

Out at 0500 and went to the aerodrome by car at 0600. Left by air at 0645. Had a very good flight all the way and very few bumps. We flew at about 8000 most of the way and arrived at Essendon at 2100 15 mins ahead of time - went to Menzies and later the Gettings turned up. As we were drinking Getting was called to the phone and he and I went to Navy Office - There we heard that a Jap convoy well escorted were steering into the Gulf of Siam. Back about 2300.

Sunday 7th December

To N.O. [Navy Office] at 1000 and had a long talk with Durnford over many subjects including the possibility of Spurgeon relieving Oldham and Oldham going to sea - I pressed that he should go to "Yarra i/c", and not as 1st Lt of *Hobart*.

Bridie and Sean lunched with me, also Sir George Julius.

Caught the 1500 plane from Essendon and arrived at Mascot at 1745. Home about 1800. C looking very tired and has had a hard time visiting the next of kin of the men lost in "Sydney".

Monday 8th December

Called by telephone at 0700 to say Japs were landing in the North of Malay peninsula. Later heard that war had been declared with Japan and later still that Japan had attacked Pearl Harbour and bombed and bombarded it - also Manila and finally Singapore. The news is very scrappy, but the papers report the "Oklahoma" sunk and 4 U.S. ships of sorts on fire or damaged in Pearl Harbour, and 2 of our Cruisers sunk in Singapore. Nothing really authentic yet.

A busy day trying to get up to date and also seeing how we can get readier than we were before. Home about 1830 to find the Paine's there. C looking very worn and tired. Nell and Sylvia (who has been very ill) arrived in Sydney. The M.G.s wanted us to go and stay at Tresco. C declined.

Tuesday 9th December.

Got a cold and nasty sore throat - Mrs Crowley came off in the Barge with me. News still very

bad and there seems no doubt the U.S.A. have taken a nasty knock. Wish they'd bomb Tokio. Home about 1830. The Popes came in. He (Capt. C.J.P.) had arrived in Mariposa on 5th Dec. - only just in time! Rather a poor kind of fish I thought, but I believe a live wire. Nell came to dinner and told us about Sylvia who is still very dicky. At 2330, Bidham rang up to say gunfire had been heard off Jervis Bay about 1930. This could not be attributed to any normal happening and therefore was suspect. I came in to the office, and we told *Perth* and *Triumphant* (who were out firing) to proceed E.S.E. at 30 kts. This would put them outside the position of a raider at 0800. Also made *Canberra* come to immediate notice, and told *Deloraine* (in Jervis Bay) to carry out Asdic patrol off Kemplia.

Bed about 0200.

Wednesday 10th Dec.

Called at 0600 to say air search had been carried out from 0430. With negative results, so brought *Canberra* to half an hour notice and at 1030 when aircraft returned reverted her to usual notice. At 0800 approx. recalled *Perth* and *Triumphant* at 20 kts.

Called on the Archbishop and complained of the bad organisation of the Memorial Service to "Sydney" and "Parramatta" on 4th when many widows were unable to get seats. The Esdailes¹¹ with Mrs Walker¹² and Mrs Moore¹³ had to stand behind the choir. He was very apologetic and I hope will bite the person responsible. Home about 1830 having been rung up by a man Benton from Mildura whose son an O.S. [Ordinary Seaman] got headaches and was seasick.

Heard on the 1900 wireless a report from London of a Tokio communique saying *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* had been sunk by aircraft attack. I didn't believe it. The M.G.s dined and Grace, whose son David Tuke who is a snotty in *P of W*, was convinced the news was true and this was confirmed at 2100. It is a ghastly calamity and it is going to make things very tricky in the Pacific when coupled with the losses incurred by the Americans. I decided to fly to Melbourne to see what the N.B. have decided as regards the policy of the Squadron. If ships are to be used as escorts I shall remain ashore if Squadron concentrates I shall hoist my flag in *Canberra*.

The signal in Crace's diary

The signal which Crace placed in his diary appears to be a copy of signal DTG 1700Z/27 November, which formed the first comprehensive report of the ACNB to the Admiralty:

To: Admiralty, CinC China, CinC E.I.,
F.O.C.A.S., N.Z.N.B. N.I. CinC.

From:- A.C.N.B.

"Kormorant" steering North in approximate position 024 111 H.M.A.S "SYDNEY" steering South at about 1600H 19th November. Raider altered course to West bringing cruiser on to Starboard quarter. Cruiser altered course to West, closed rapidly challenging with daylight lamp. Raider made no reply but opened fire when cruiser was within comparatively short range. Estimated range varying from about one to five or six miles.

One survivor stated that he could see men on deck of cruiser. First shot from raider hit bridge of cruiser and started fire. Cruiser altered course to Port. Survivor stated that

it appeared that he intended to ram. Passed close round stern of Raider and proceeded on parallel courses gradually drawing ahead on Port side of Raider. Cruiser was now heavily on fire in Bridge and midship sections. Raider also badly damaged and on fire in engine room area. Hit in engine room put electrical control out of action. Absolutely, all electrical equipment, including fire fighting, out of action. Action commenced about 1730 and lasted for about one hour.

Raider abandoned ship about 1900H, her reason that the fire could not be put out and it was certain that fire would reach ammunition stowage. Survivors stated that captain and officers were on board when they abandoned ship at about 1900. At this time cruiser was seen nevertheless heavily on fire and shortly afterwards disappeared. No violent explosion was seen or heard. They believe it was torpedoed. Suggest that torpedoes were fired by the raider one of which thought to have hit. Raider blew up about midnight.

Six 15c.m. guns four 2c.m. A.A.guns. Machine guns not used. Two above water and one submerged Torpedoes. One aeroplane of Roda type stated to have been damaged and not flown during three months and possibly more were carried. 150 to 200 mines were carried but stated none had been placed.

Complement about 400. Morale good, high opinion ship and captain. Activity:- Left Dodhausen near Danzig Dec/40 proceeded north to Atlantic and Indian Oceans via Cape of Good Hope. Ships sunk stated to be "Antonios", "Afric Star", "Agnita", "Craftsman", "British Union", "Mareba", "Velebit", "Stomatikos", "Embiricos", "Eurylochus".

In particular stated that they had not sighted land since leaving Norwegian coast. Two supply ships met with. Prisoners transferred to these, as [original is blank here]

Generally considered with few exceptions survivors spoke the truth. Name of Captain Dettmer (Commander Destroyer prior to taking up command of raider). Captain is prisoner at Carnarvon and will be questioned with other prisoners.

Censorship of the news

Crace's concern over the leakage of news about the *Sydney* and other events of the war was shared by the ACNB and, in December 1941, the Acting First Naval Member, Commodore J.W. Durnford, RN, wrote a strongly worded letter to the Prime Minister, listing occasions on which news had been prematurely released and his concerns for the security of information in Canberra:²³

GHG.VII.

the Navy.

[endorsed in red ink 19 December 1941]

My dear Prime Minister,

The Naval Board are most concerned at the leakage of information which has, over a long period, occurred at Canberra. This leakage of secret information is still occurring. The latest manifestation was in the cases of H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY" and H.M.A.S. "PARRAMATTA", and the more recent dispatch of aircraft from Australia to the Netherlands East Indies.

This leakage is no new matter. In each case it is through the same channel, the Parliamentary press representatives at Canberra. Someone

gives them an item of secret information. They telephone it to their newspapers "not for publication." Within an hour or so the story sweeps through the country like a bushfire, with the wind of rumour rising to fan the flames.

So far as Navy is concerned, a number of leakages have occurred this year. The most important I itemise here, for your information.

On 22nd February last, a secret Naval signal was received from the Commander-in-Chief East Indies, to say that a pocket battleship had been sighted in the Western Indian Ocean. This information was kept within Naval Staff and Ministerial circles. It was, however, public property to the Press within a day or so, and the Defence Roundsmen were asking questions about it at Navy Office.

On 2nd March last, a secret Naval signal was received from the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, saying that H.M.S "LEANDER" had sunk the Italian raider "RAMB I" in the Western Indian Ocean. This signal concluded: "Intend to continue to suppress news of this action." Yet two days later, on 4th March, the Sydney "Daily Telegraph" telegraphed to the "Auckland Herald" New Zealand:

"RUMOURD HERE LEANDER SUNK ITALIAN SHIP IN INDIAN OCEAN. CAN YOU VERIFY. SEND STORY."

The information was not made public until March 9th, and then only as the result of discussion between New Zealand and Australian and United Kingdom Governments, and the formation of a joint communiqué. The editor of the Sydney "Daily Telegraph" said he got his advance information from an "anonymous telephone caller."

On 4th March a secret Naval signal was received from the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies to say that H.M.A.S. "CANBERRA" and H.M.S. "LEANDER" had destroyed two enemy ships in the Western Indian Ocean. This signal concluded: "Intend to suppress news for the present." Yet on the evening of Monday, 10th March, "The Argus", Melbourne, rang Navy Office to say that their Canberra representative had telephoned the story through, and to ask for confirmation. The Melbourne "Herald" rang Navy Office next morning on the same business. The story was not officially released until Sunday, 11th May.

On Tuesday, 25th November, at 1430 hours, when the fact of the disappearance H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY" was still apparently known only to a very limited circle, the Chief Publicity Censor received instructions from the Minister of Information to issue a Censorship instruction prohibiting any mention of H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY". In order to prevent publication of anything in the afternoon press, the Chief Publicity Censor himself telephoned the Melbourne "Herald" to pass the Censorship instruction. He was then told that the "Herald" Canberra representative had already telephoned his office to say that an Australian warship had been sunk. It must, then, be H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY".

On Friday, 28th November, a secret Naval signal was received from Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, to say that H.M.A.S. "PARRAMATTA" had been sunk, extent of casualties not known. On Saturday morning two Melbourne newspapers, "The Herald" and "The Age", approached Navy Office for confirmation and comments. This leakage occurred at Canberra. At this stage the information was a close secret among higher officers at Navy

Office, and neither next-of-kin nor Censorship had been informed.

On Friday evening, 5th December, most secret orders were issued making disposition of R.A.A.F. Aircraft to the northward of Australia. Yet this information was published in the Press ("The Argus", Melbourne) on Saturday morning.

The unfortunate chain of events following the "SYDNEY" leakage is fresh in memory. It may, however, be remarked that owing to that leakage:-

- (a) next of kin notices had to be issued prematurely on Wednesday, 26th November, owing to the wild spread of rumour, at a stage when nothing was known of the fate of H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY".
- (b) Rumour got quite out of hand, and the most extravagant stories circulated throughout Australia, and continue to circulate.
- (c) As a result the Government was forced to issue an official statement at a time when it was most desirable to keep from the enemy the news that our Naval strength had been reduced so drastically, and again at a time when it was not possible to give a final picture of the happening. But for the leakage it would have been possible to have delayed the issue of notices to next of kin until such time as -
 - (i) a complete story, devoid of false hope, could have been issued.
 - (ii) strategical requirements had been satisfied.
 - (iii) the official announcement could have been made immediately next of kin notices

had been circulated, thus forestalling rumour. Much pain and anxiety would then have been spared the next of kin, and public morale would not have suffered from a surfeit of doubts and fears, as it undoubtedly did suffer.

There is no doubt that all these leakages occurred at Canberra, and the channel through which information left Canberra was the Parliamentary Press Representatives. It is not for me to suggest how such information could have reached them.

The present situation in the Pacific generally, and of Australia particularly, emphasises the grave dangers inherent in such leakages. Whereas in the past, such leakages could have caused serious disarrangement of strategical plans, and public upset in Australia, they could now strike a vital blow at our immediate security.

It is for this reason that I write this letter, to urge the necessity of maintaining the greatest secrecy and limiting the circulation of secret Naval information to within the narrowest limits; and to remark that the Parliamentary Press Representatives are at Canberra for one purpose only, to secure information-publishable or otherwise-for their papers, and that their ideas of the bounds of confidence are conditioned by this.

Acting First Naval Member.

German knowledge of events

As for keeping secret, at least from the Germans, intelligence of the loss of HMAS *Sydney*, Crace would have been alarmed to know that the Germans claimed to have known this almost as soon as he did. According to the German naval staff account of the voyage of the *Kormoran*, *Operationen und Taktik Volume 10*, published in December 1943:²⁴

Naval War Staff received the first report of a naval battle in Australian waters on 24.11. On this day the W/T station at Sydney transmitted the request of an unknown command post ashore to an unknown steamer, "Report details of battle and ship's name as gathered from survivors." The real story was only learned a few days later from an Admiralty report of 26.11, which was deciphered on 30.11. This read as follows:-

"Cruiser "Sydney" 6 days overdue in Freemantle. She was returning from escort duties. It is believed that she sank the enemy raider, but the reports on the fate of the "Sydney" are uncertain. A British tanker took off some German naval personnel from a rubber dinghy; others were seen in lifeboats of which two were reported to have landed in West Australia. It seems that the "Sydney" was burning when it was last seen by the Germans."

As at this time, 30th November, there was only one auxiliary cruiser "Ship 41", still at sea, and she was operating in the waters in question, the auxiliary cruiser mentioned as having been sunk by the Sydney could only refer to this ship.

The letters of condolence

Between 1 and 5 December, while he was in Perth, Grace wrote letters of condolence to the next of kin of every man lost in the *Sydney*. As many letters as he could were written by hand, but there were so many that in order to finish the task some were printed. Grace kept a copy in his diary:⁹

From

Rear Admiral Commanding

H.M. Australian Squadron,

c/o G.P.O. Sydney

May I, on behalf of the officers and men of the Australian Squadron, offer you my very sincere sympathy in your recent bereavement.

I know full well that in this dark hour, words cannot lessen your sorrow, but I earnestly hope that you may find some comfort in the knowledge that your husband* gave his life for his country, fighting in the cause of right.

Yours faithfully,

(Specimen letter sent to all relatives except those of officers and West Australians who had holograph letters of my own)

* Son in case of parents.

Vice Admiral Durnford's biography

Several other British officers were serving in the high command of the RAN. One, John Durnford, was born in Hampshire but had good Australian connections, his mother coming from Melbourne, and he himself had served in the RAN in the interwar years. Durnford returned to Australia as the Second Naval Member, ACNB, 1941-42. He retired in 1948 and his unpublished autobiography, and photographs, are in the Imperial War Museum. Unfortunately, in his autobiography he referred to the loss of the *Sydney* in only a few lines:²³

In the following month the cruiser Sydney was sunk with all hands by the German raider Kormoran in the Indian Ocean when returning to Fremantle after escorting a convoy to the Sunda Strait. This was a heavy blow to the R.A.N., and also to the Australian public after her brilliant record in the Mediterranean

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Notes

- 1 *Naval War Diary*, message 1st Sea Lord to ACNB, 1115A/30 November. NHB.
- 2 Telegram, Commonwealth of Australia to Dominions Office, 5 December 1941. PRO: ADM 199/738, ff. 498-500.
- 3 *Diary of Admiral Sir John Crace*. IWM: IWM 69/18/1.
- 4 The author is grateful to David Stevens for help with identifying some of the proper names in Crace's diary, but "Griffi" escapes us both.
- 5 Captain H.B. Farncomb, RAN, Crace's flag Captain.
- 6 Vice Admiral Sir Guy Royle, RN, First Naval Member, ACNB.
- 7 Captain H.M.L. Waller, RAN, Commanding Officer, HMAS *Perth*.
- 8 Paymaster Captain J.B. Foley, RAN, Secretary to First Naval Member.
- 9 Paymaster Lieutenant Commander K.T. Ridley, RAN, Crace's Secretary.
- 10 Commodore G.C. Muirhead-Gould, RN, Commodore-in-Charge, Sydney.
- 11 Captain F.E. Getting, RAN, Deputy Chief of Naval Staff.
- 12 Commander E.F.V. Dechaineaux, RAN, Staff Officer at Navy Office.
- 13 Captain C. Farquhar-Smith, RAN, DNO Western Australia.
- 14 Commodore J.W. Durnford, RN, Second Naval Member, ACNB (and sometimes Acting 1st NM).
- 15 Paymaster Lieutenant E.H. McIlwraith, RANVR, Secretary to DNO.
- 16 Captain G.B. Salm, Royal Netherlands Navy, Liaison officer.
- 17 Acting Commander V.A.T. Ramage, RAN, Deputy DNO and Intelligence Officer.
- 18 Lieutenant Commander J. L. Rycroft, RANVR, second-in-command Naval Intelligence in WA.
- 19 Acting Captain J.C.D. Eddale, RAN, Maintenance Captain.
- 20 Presumably widow of Lieutenant Commander J.H. Walker, RAN, Commanding Officer HMAS *Parramatta*.
- 21 Wife of Captain G. D. Moore, Commanding Officer HMAS *Australia*.
- 22 In the original document, the list of names has been altered in manuscript.
- 23 Letter, Acting First Naval Member to Prime Minister, December 1941. IWM: IWM 69/18/2.
- 24 'OPERATIONS AND TACTICS', PRO: ADM 1/18899, f. 42.
- 25 *Diary of Admiral Sir John Crace*. IWM: IWM 69/18/1.
- 26 *A Shellback Remembers: The Naval Autobiography of John W. Durnford, Vice Admiral*, pp. 211-12. IWM.

4 The Australian Investigation

Initial report from prisoner interrogation, 27 November 1941

The initial report of what had happened, when gleaned from the first German prisoners to be landed, concentrated on the activities of and the damage to the *Kormoran*. A copy of this signal has also survived in the Grace papers (see Chapter 3).¹

MOST SECRET MESSAGE 1700Z/27th November IN

Date 27.11.41

From A.C.N.B. Time 2219

Anglo-French by W/T and T/P

Addressed Admiralty C. in C. China C. in
C. East Indies

IMPORTANT

133

(a) KORMORAN steering north in approx. position 024 deg 111 deg H.M.A.S. SYDNEY steering south at about 1600 H 19th November. Raider altered course to westward bringing cruiser on to starboard quarter. Cruiser altered course to westward, closed rapidly challenging with daylight lamp. Raider made no reply but opened fire when cruiser was within comparatively short range.

Estimated range varies from about 1 (one) to 5 or 6 miles. ref my 1909Z 25th November to Admiralty & C. in C. China only.

1 survivor stated he could see men on deck of cruiser. First shot from raider hit bridge of the cruiser and started fire. Cruiser

modified course to port. Survivors stated that it appeared that he intended to ram. Passed close round stern of raider and proceeded on parallel courses gradually drawing ahead on port side of raider. Cruiser was now heavily on fire in bridge & midship section. Raider also badly damaged and on fire in engine room area. Hit in engine room, put electrical control out of action. Absolutely all electrical equipment, including fire fighting out of action. Action commenced at about 1730 and lasted for about 1 (one) hour.

Raider abandoned ship at about 1900H her reason that fire could not be put out and it was certain that fire would reach ammunition stowage. Survivors stated Capt. and officers were on board when they abandoned ship at about 1900. At this time cruiser was seen still heavily on fire and shortly afterwards disappeared. No violent explosion was seen or heard. They believe it was torpedoed. 3 torpedoes were fired by the raider 1 (one) off which thought to have hit. Raider blew up about midnight.

Armament 6 15 centimetre guns 4 2 centimetre A.A. guns machine guns not used 2 above water level mark and 1 (one) submerged torpedo tube. 1 (one) aeroplane of Roda type stated to have been damaged and not flown for 3 months and possibly more were carried. 150 to 200 mines were carried but stated none had been laid. Complement about 400 morale good, high opinion of ship and captain.

ACTIVITY Left Godhausen near Danzig December 1940 proceeded northabout to Atlantic and Indian Ocean via Cape of Good Hope.

Ships sunk stated as ATONIOS, AFRICA STAR,

AGNITA, CRAFTSMAN, BRITISH UNION, MAREEBA,
VELEBIT, STOMATICOS EMBIRICOS, NIKOKLIS,
(not identified)

In particular stated that they had not sighted land since leaving Norwegian coast. 2 supply ships met with. Prisoners transferred to these, as rep[orted] to RADOLITE [sic] which ship was dispatched with a prize crew.

Generally considered with few exceptions that survivor spoke the truth.

Name of Captain Dettmer (Commander of destroyer prior to taking up command of raider) Captain is prisoner at Carnarvon and will be questioned with other prisoners.

1700Z/27

Advance Copy Duty Capt. D.O.D. (F) D.O.

Note: Three groups appear in the address, which have a local significance, which doesn't appear in W.R. copies of decode.

Interim report of interrogation of prisoners, 18 December 1941

Ten days later the initial report of the action was amplified by an interim report which said more about the actions of and damage to the *Sydney*:²

SECRET MESSAGE 0700Z/7 December. IN

From: Australian Commonwealth Naval Board.

Date: 8/12/41

Recd. 1324

Anglo-French (J or R(1) By Cable.

Addressed: Admiralty; C in C. Eastern Fleet;
C in C China; C.Z.M.; New Zealand Naval Board.

219. Following is interim report of interrogation of survivors from raider number 41. Interrogation continues -

Visibility good wind south 5 sea moderate.

(i) The approach. First sighting range 15 miles. Raider's speed 15 knots altered course from 000° to 250°. H.M.A.S. SYDNEY was bearing north from number 41. H.M.A.S. SYDNEY chased and apparently made no further signal than NNJ (repeat) NNJ. Raider made no reply or hoist (corrupt group). No stop signal was received by enemy. When H.M.A.S. SYDNEY was at close range raider made STRAAD MALAKKA by light which ship she was impersonating Dutch flag flown. At 1650H 19th H.M.A.S. SYDNEY was just abaft number 41 beam distant 1-(one)-.25 miles, both ships 15 knots, course 250 degrees. Cruiser now made "Make your secret letter" in plain language.

(ii) The action. Raider immediately dropped concealed guns (corrupt group) and opened gun and torpedo fire. H.M.A.S. SYDNEY was at action stations and armament trained. She opened fire simultaneously. STEIRMARK's first salvo hit Cruiser's Bridge. H.M.A.S. SYDNEY's first salvo (corrupt group). Very early in action torpedo hit cruiser under A turret jamming A and B turret. Action lasted 25 minutes and was broken off at range of 4 miles. Number 41 stopped. H.M.A.S. SYDNEY proceeding at 5 knots. Believed H.M.A.S. SYDNEY sank due to shell and torpedo fire damage at 2300H 19th. Raider scuttled at 2359H 19th. Position of action 025° South 111° East.

(iii) Identity confirmed Number 41 STEIRMARK alias KORMORANT. Speed 18 knots. 6 15 cms. Gun. 2 7 cms. A.A. Gun. 2 above water and 1

submerged tube each side. About 250 type (? H.E.) mine of which a large number still on board when scuttled. 1 Arado seaplane with bombs. Air propelled torpedo contact pistol. Believed no repeat no Director System. Reputed to carry fast motor boat capable of laying 3 mines.

(iv) Movements. Fitted out at Gotenhafen and (corrupt group) Hamburg late in November 1940, spoke 3 U boats off coast Spain. Operated in equatorial region Atlantic until end of March. Passed well South of Cape of Good Hope met NORDMARK in south latitude then proceeded Bay of Bengal. Reported to have been surprised by an unknown ship while attempting lay mines off Madras (E.5). Then proceeded central Indian Ocean for refit (corrupt group) September in Maldive Is. and returned to central Indian Ocean where it is believed she met supply ship KULMERLAND October and early November thence to scene of action. Believe German store ships victualled Japan (B 2) stated policy to advertise presence by small number regular sinkings which is considered will have maximum effect on flow of trade. 303 prisoners including 17 officers held complement 400.

07007/7.

Advance copy sent 1st Lord, A.C.N.S.(I):

N.A. 1stS.L., D.P.O., D.of P., Ops.,

O.D., O.I.C.

ACNB's written report to the Admiralty, 12 February 1942

On 12 February 1942, the ACNB forwarded to the Admiralty in London its report on the "... (presumed) loss of H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY" as a result of her encounter with the German Raider "KORMORAN" off the coast of Western Australia on 19 November 1941..." The report was date stamped

in London as being received on 22 April 1942.³ The report had been compiled from "...a mass of material containing the results of interrogation of Prisoners of War ex "KORMORAN"..." and included sketch charts of the action between *Sydney* and *Kormoran*, and a photograph and diagram of the latter. The information in this report appears to have been the basis of the account in *Battle Summary No. 13*.⁴ The cover of this docket is also annotated:

This file is quoted as an original reference in the Official History, "The War at Sea, Vol. I"

Although the report exists in the Australian archives, it is given here again in the version which has survived in the British record:

REPORT ON LOSS OF HMAS "SYDNEY"

- A. Introduction. Information already communicated to the Admiralty. Interrogation of Prisoners.
- B. Events leading to the institution of a search.
- C. Results of Interrogation - -

- 1. The Raider and its equipment.
 - (a) The ship
 - (b) Armament
 - (c) Boats
 - (d) Mines
 - (e) The Plane
 - (f) Communications
 - (g) Disguises
 - (h) Personnel.
- 2. Previous Movements of the Raider.

- (a) The voyage of the "KORMORAN"
- (b) Further details with regard to ship encountered
- (c) Statement by the Chinese, Shu Ah Fah.

3. Supply Ships and Supplies.

4. Co-operation with other units.

5. Strategical and Tactical

- (a) Strategical
- (b) Tactical

6. Use of Neutral Ports.

7. Treatment of Prisoners.*

B. The engagement with the "Sydney".

D. Appendices:-

1. List of Prisoners of War whose evidence has proved most useful.
2. Track Chart of Raider 41. [not reproduced]
3. Track Chart (facsimile of a letter of a Prisoner-of-War with translation of relevant parts of the letter. [only translation reproduced])
4. Plan of action between "Sydney" and the Raider.
5. Diagrammatic drawing of Raider 41 compiled from drawings made by prisoners.
6. Photograph of "Steiermark"[not reproduced]
7. Instructions for Interrogating Prisoners of War.

REPORT ON LOSS OF HMAS "SYDNEY"

A. All material information has been communicated to the admiralty in the following A.C.N.B messages:-

1700Z/27th November.

0222Z/28th November. [original not located]

0604Z/28th November. [original not located]

0700Z/7th December.

1030Z/23rd December. [original not located]

Interrogation of Prisoners of War began at once, Lieutenant-Commander Rycroft being sent with an interpreter to Carnarvon on 26th November, where preliminary investigations were made. Reports were made on 28th November by Paymaster-Lieutenant A.C. Baume, R.A.N.V.R., the Officer-in-Charge, Naval Guard, M.V. "Irocas", and on 30th November by the Commanding Officer of H.M.A.S. "Yandra", Lieutenant J.A. Taplin.

The interrogation was continued when the prisoners had been accommodated on shore, and on 16th December, Captain Farquhar Smith, District Naval Officer, Western Australia, submitted to the Naval Board copies of details of interrogation of German prisoners of war ex "Kormoran." From Western Australia the prisoners were transferred to Melbourne, where they were placed in internment camp under the Military Authorities. Here the inquiry was continued by various informal methods, including listening devices, interception of letters or scraps of papers containing verse composition, casual conversations, &c., and

the information thus collected has provided a valuable check on that already obtained by the more direct interrogation which has supplied the basis of this report.

8. Events leading to the institution of a Search and its results.

On the 11th November "Sydney" escorting the "Zealandia" departed from Fremantle. At 0400Z/17 in position 07° 56(S, 104° 40(E), she handed "Zealandia" over to "Durban". The "Sydney" signalled her "E.T.A." as p.m. 19/11 or a.m. 20/11, which later was amended to read Thursday, 20th November. At 0140Z/21, D.N.O. Western Australia reported that the "Sydney" had not yet arrived, and followed this up on 23/11 with the signal that no further word had been received from the "Sydney".

Meanwhile the "Zealandia" had arrived safely at Singapore. At 1054Z/23 the "Sydney" was instructed by Naval Board to report E.T.A. Fremantle. There was no reply. At about 1200Z/23 all W/T high-power stations in Australia were instructed to call H.M.A.S. "Sydney" continuously. There was no response.

An air search carried out from Pearce on the 24th November failed to give any result.

At 0209Z/24, C.-in-C., China, was informed that "Sydney" was thirty-six hours overdue and asked for information. He replied that "Durban" had met "Sydney" and taken over "Zealandia" at 0400Z/17/11 in position 7°56(S, 104° 40(E).

At 0617Z/24 C.Z.M. was informed that "Sydney" was overdue and asked to carry out an air search as far as possible to the South to cover her probable northern advance.

At 0816Z/24 report was received by W/T from the Tanker "Trocas" that twenty-five German Naval men on a floating raft had been picked up in position 26°06(S, 111°41(E). The following action was then taken:

- (a) Six merchant ships in the area instructed to pass through the position in which the raft was recovered, and to keep a look out for survivors.
- (b) S.S. "Hermion" was instructed to proceed to the area to recover survivors and to report on the situation by wireless.
- (c) Aircraft removed from Pearce to Carnarvon and two Catalinas from the north-eastern area to Fremantle.
- (d) Four auxillary craft departed from Fremantle to contact "Trocas" and to place an armed guard on board that ship, after which they were to proceed to the area of search.

At about 2300Z/24 stations were instructed to cease calling the "Sydney". At 1805Z/24 C.Z.M. informed Naval Board that "Tromp" would pass through Sunda Straits, a.m. 25/11 for passage at twenty knots along the "Sydney's" possible track and that two Catalinas from Sourabaya would also search. "Tromp's" movement was later amended to a search as far south as 20°, then about 200 miles to the eastward thence to Sourabaya, to cover the possibility of a seriously damaged "Sydney" endeavouring to reach Sourabaya.

Further searches by aircraft were carried out daily up to 30th November. During these searches by air and local craft as well as diverted merchant ships, the following German life-saving craft were sighted:

Two boats on the beach north of Carnarvon.

Two boats about 80 miles to the North-west of Carnarvon

Two rafts.

Eventually two boats came ashore north of Carnarvon with 103 survivors; the "Koolinda" picked up one boat with 31 survivors; "Yandra" one boat with 70 Germans and 2 Chinese; "Centuar"[sic] two boats with 60 survivors. In addition survivors were picked up from two rubber rafts, 25 men by the "Trocas" and by the "Aquitania". This makes a total of six boats and two rubber rafts. The prisoners, a total of 315 and 2 Chinese, were despatched from Carnarvon by land and water transport to Fremantle where they were disposed of as follows:-

Officers	17 to Swanbourne Camp, headquarters of the 5th Garrison Brigade.
Men	19 to hospital in Fremantle. 26 to detention quarters, Fremantle. 243 to interment camp at Harvey (87 miles south of Perth). These were afterwards transferred to Melbourne where they have been interned.

C. RESULTS OF INTERROGATION.

Instructions for the Interrogation of prisoners were issued by the Flag Officer, Commanding H.M.A. Squadron, a copy of which is appended.

1. The Raider and its Equipment.

(a) The ship is stated to have been "Steiermark" prior to conversion [sic]. Her tonnage is given, as about 9,000, and her maximum speed as about 18 knots, though at the time of the action, owing to foul bottom, this cannot have been more than 15 or 16 knots.

Completed about November 1939, the ship proceeded to Hamburg where between March and October 1940 she was converted for use as a raider. She had never been used as a merchant ship. She had one funnel, two large masts and two small ones (or four in two pairs fore and aft of the funnel). At the time of action she was disguised as the "Strait Malakka"-black hull, black funnel, buff superstructure like a P. & O. liner, and flying the Dutch flag. The ship sailed as Raider No.41, and received the name "'Kormoran'" when at sea. Apparently all raiders received the name of a sea animal or sea-bird (eg. "Penguin").

(b) Armament: "Kormoran's" armament has not been positively established, but the information gained by the Naval Interrogation carried out in Western Australia points to -

- 6 15 centimetre guns.
 - 6 torpedo tubes, two on deck and one submerged on each side.
 - 2 A.A guns, 3.7 cm and possibly 2cm guns.
- Several machine guns, which could be placed as required.

There were hydrophones for A/S. search. Interrogation seemed to establish the existence of both 3.7 cm and 2cm. guns. One prisoner of war, Reiser, stated that there were only two real A.A. 3.7 cm guns, one port and one

starboard, but that there were other light guns. The same witness stated that only one 3.7 cm gun was fired in the action, that on the starboard side. This statement is supported by the action of Commander Dettmers, who, when allowed to address his men in the interment camp, called one of his men to him and said, "You were firing the 3.7 gun?" Having received an affirmative reply he continued, "I hereby award you the Iron Cross, First Class, for your bravery and excellent gunnery. It was marvellous shooting and I am proud of you."

With regard to the main armament, Army information implies 8-inch guns, though without any indication of the number, Commander Dettmers being reported as stating that his ship was armed with such guns.

Guns were apparently controlled by telephone from control position to the guns and fire gauge. Salvoes were fired.

It is reported that there were four range finders on board, one forward, one aft, and one each side of the bridge. The principal range finder operator, when questioned about range taking at night, reacted strongly, but refused to give any information.

No details have been obtained regarding the screening of the guns, which according to a seaman, Pattner, were in holds (covered) and were raised by hydraulic press, the operation taking two or three minutes. Another seaman, Dornis, stated that the guns could be ready in one minute, and he also said that they could be loaded down below, the loading arrangements being immediately below each gun.

(c) Boats. The captain of the Raider stated that there were four boats in davits, two motor boats, two boats on deck, one life-boat from the "Embircos", one big life-boat with Welin gear for about 100 men. Two boats, which were in the fore-hatch, were used after the sinking, but two in the after-hatch could not be used because the electric power had gone. According to other prisoners of war the number varied. Jorgenson gave the number as 8 life-boats (six being steel and two wood), one captured from the "Eurylochus" and one of the Greek ship "Nikolaros". There were also two or three rubber boats. In addition there was a large speedboat which was seldom if ever used. Four or five boats were lowered when the ship was abandoned. Survivors were picked up from six boats and two rafts.

(d) Mines. Mines were carried, and the number given varies from 150 to 400. The actual number was probably 200 or 250. These are described as being of two kinds, a long magnetic mine without horns, and round ones with horns. Apparently none were laid though an attempt was made to lay mines in the neighbourhood of Madras, an attempt which was interrupted by the approach of a British Auxiliary Cruiser. The mines were stowed aft, and they produced the explosion by which the raider was finally sunk after the action. One prisoner of war, Jorgenson, stated that an effort to lay mines was about to be made at the time of the appearance of the "Sydney". According to prisoner of war Schweier all mines were anchor mines, none drifting mines.

(e) The Plane. According to Albert Ruf, who belonged to the ground staff, the plane, which was housed in the after part of the ship was an Arado 196, and had for markings the Swastika

and War Cross and the name "Kolibri". All the evidence seems to show that the plane was not often used owing to the difficulty of hoisting it out and getting it aboard again unless the weather was very favourable. It had not apparently been used for two or three months before 19th November. Ruf states that the last occasion was the search for the boats of "Embirikos". The plane is reported to have had no W/T communication with the ship, communication being by means of a lamp underneath for Morse signals. There is no evidence that it was used for the location of ships, and it seems definite that the plane was not used at the time of the action with the "Sydney".

Several prisoners of war speak of parts of a second plane; only one declared that there were two planes aboard, but he stated that only one was used (Hans Natterott).

(f) Communications. According to the information from H.G. Linke, Wireless Operator, two QO messages (600m, 500kc.) were sent out before the action with "Sydney", position being given as 26°S, 111°E. They were not in regular communication with German stations, had no fixed wave-length for receiving news and messages which were obtained from various stations. Messages from captured ships were jammed with press notices, figures &c. The position of meeting with a supply ship was determined from Germany as they did not communicate directly with the ship. There was a staff of 18 operators, 4 N.C.O.'s, 1 senior P.O. and one officer.

Wireless apparatus consisted of Telefunken and Lorentz, and also small Siemens parts.

From another prisoner of war (Dummers) the statement was received that the raider communicated direct with Berlin, Kiel and Wilhelmshafen by short wave, and there were no radio bases between the ship and Germany. The wave-lengths varied from 15 to 50 metres, according to weather conditions.

The ship had eight sets for picking up news. Commands were received on various lengths; they simply tried all the sets until they found the wave-length that gave the clearest signal. No acknowledgment of signals from Germany was made through their signals were acknowledged in code from Germany. Twice a month they communicated with Germany, messages being long and short (40-100 groups of 4 letter each).

According to Sub-Lieutenant Bunjes, letters were taken home from the Atlantic by an ordinary cruiser, but the crew were not allow to send letters by the last ship to leave them. Another Prisoner of war, (Schweier) stated that they should have received mails by tankers "Standard" and "Egerland", but these were lost. According to the same witness, "Alstertor", met soon after entering the Indian Ocean, took mail home.

(g) Disguises. There were various devices on board for the disguise of the ship, e.g. A second funnel and additional masts, but these were apparently not used, the only disguise employed being achieved by the use of paint. Generally, the fact that the raider was built on Dutch lines and flew the Dutch flag provided sufficient disguise.

(h) Personnel. The ship was commanded by Fregatten-Kapitan, A.G.T. Dettmers. The total

number of the ship's company is reported to have been about 400. The number of survivors landed in Western Australia was 315, in addition to two Chinese picked up by H.M.A.S. "Yandra." The ship's company was organised into four Divisions of about 90 men each. There were two seamen divisions, one of mechanics and one of general deck hands, according to the statement of Jorgensen. The men were paid at home, only pocket money being paid on board for use in the Canteen.

The role compiled by the Military Authorities who have charge of the prisoners shows the Commander and twenty other officers, fifteen warrant officers and 357 "other rank". Of these 6 Warrant Officers and 72 of the Ship's Company were lost, apparently all but three being drowned when the ship was abandoned, the exception being three killed in the engine-room which received a hit from the "Sydney",

2. PREVIOUS MOVEMENTS.

(a) The voyage of the "Kormoran." "Kormoran" left Gotenhafen near Dantzig on 4th December 1940. Grand Admiral Raeder giving the crew a farewell address. The ship seems to have steered north along the Norwegian coast round the north of Scotland between Iceland and Greenland, and then down into the Atlantic where she operated until May, 1941. During these operations the following ships were sunk:

"Antonis"	03°S, 30°W	13th January
"British Union"	26°36'N, 30°15'W	18th January
"Africa Star"	08°N, 15°W	28th January
"Eurylochus"	8°15'N, 25°14'W	29th January
"Agnita"	04°N, 23°W	23rd March

"Craftsman"	03°S, 21°W	9th April
"Nikolaos"(D.1)	20°S, 22°W	12th April

In addition to these ships sunk, "Canadolite" (tanker) according to statements made by Sub-Lieutenant Bunjes, Dr Ilenhoop and others, was captured in 50°N, 33°W, on 27th March, and sent in to Bordeaux with a prize crew. Apparently no prisoners were sent in this ship which duly arrived at Bordeaux. Later information from Army authorities places this ship among those sunk.

The "British Union" was the only ship, which put up a fight; according to the Captain of the raider she fired four shots.

Aboard the "Eurylochus" were only a few Englishmen, but a number of Chinese. The Captain of the "Craftsman" was blinded and the Engineer badly injured as a result of the Raider's fire. The Captain was afterwards transferred to the "Admiral Scheer" which was met in February some weeks after the sinking of the "Eurylochus". Two, and perhaps three, submarines were met in the Atlantic according to some statements, off the Spanish coast, though probably further south. These received provisions and oil from the "Kormoran". Other vessels met with in the South Atlantic included the raiders "Penguin", No.33, and No.16 described by Prisoner of war Lensch as an old ship with one funnel about the same size as "Kormoran". Supply ships met with were the "Rudolph Albrecht", a small tanker from which provisions and oil were received in April, but the quantity seems to have been very small. "Nordmark" was the principal supply ship met in the Atlantic; contact with her was made twice, and on the second occasion about 200 prisoners were transferred to her.

In May "Kormoran" entered the Indian Ocean, having rendezvoused with a ship "Alsterufer" in the extreme south of the Atlantic. The evidence also implies a meeting with another ship "Alstertor" during this period, but there is considerable confusion between "Alsterufer" and "Alstertor" and sometimes between "Nordmark" and "Alsterufer".

In the Indian Ocean "Kormoran" proceeded to the Bay of Bengal. Off Madras an attempt was made to lay mines, but the appearance of what was apparently a British auxiliary cruiser forced the "Kormoran" to hurry away without laying the mines, her superior speed enabling her to avoid actual contact with the British ship. This was in June or July.

After leaving the neighbourhood of Madras two ships were sunk, the "Velebit", a Yugo-Slav ship, from which few were saved, as she tried to escape, and "Mareeba", taken the same evening, from which all the crew were saved. It was during this stage that "Kormoran" sighted the only land seen in the whole cruise, Engano Island of Sumatra near the Strait of Sunda. This is apparently the nearest that the raider came to Australian coast until the encounter with the "Sydney". A brief refit was carried out at sea somewhere in the centre of the Indian Ocean, after which Kormoran proceeded north to the neighbourhood of the Maldive Islands where "Embirikos" was sunk, and this was the last ship sunk.

In October a second refit was carried out while the ship was in the central part of the Indian Ocean out of sight of land. Following on this refit a rendezvous was made with "Kulmerland". Prisoners taken in the Indian Ocean were transferred to this ship for passage

to Germany, and there were thus no prisoners aboard at the time of the action with the Sydney.

(b) further details with regard to ships encountered.

Before sinking the first ship (the Greek ship Antonis) several neutral ships were sighted. According to Sub-Lieutenant Bunjes all the prizes were empty ships and therefore not worth taking home, though one is described as loaded with timber and therefore hard to sink. Sub-Lieutenant Bunjes also responsible for the statement that the "Embiricos", on the Mombassa-Ceylon route near the Maldives, would have escaped had she not had all her lights on. Another statement said that it was apparently the opening of the door, which showed a light and gave away the ship's position.

The loss of life aboard the "Velebit" is explained by the fact that the ship failed to stop when ordered to do so, and then, when she caught fire as the result of the raider's action, the crew lost their heads. Only one wooden boat was lowered with nine men in it, and this was picked up.

Three explanations were offered for the small number of sinkings actually carried out by the "Kormoran":

(1) That of the captain in which he stated that the policy was by a small number of regular sinkings to cause interruption to the flow of trade, while not unduly risking the existence of the raider;

(2) The necessity of letting certain ships go by so as not to disclose the presence of the raider;

(3) The difficulties caused by the efficiency of modern W/T;

(4) The effectiveness of the British convoy system.

The "Africa Star" and "Eurylochus", were sunk on the same day - or within a few hours - and according to one statement, the sinking of the "Eurylochus" was the result of a response to the distress signals of the former ship.

(c) Statement by the Chinese, Shu Ah Fah.

Four Chinese taken from the "Eurylocus", sunk by the "Kormoran" on 29th January 1941, were retained aboard the raider as laundrymen. The statement by the Chinese Shu Ah Fah contains many specific details which are not supported by other evidence. He would make the number of submarines met and refuelled by the "Kormoran" as from twenty to twenty-three, and the number of mines carried as approximately four hundred. He also tells of three other German raiders co-operating with "Kormoran" in the Indian Ocean. His story indicates regular rendezvous in turn in the Caroline Islands, the route followed from the Indian Ocean being a wide sweep to the South of Australia, returning by the same route. He spoke of a new ship which was to leave Germany about 25th December, to relieve one of the raiders operating in the Indian Ocean. This Chinese also stated that a minefield was laid in the neighbourhood of Madras and that at the time of the encounter with the "Sydney" there were no mines on board. No support for these statements can be found as the result of answer of other survivors interrogated, and it is not therefore considered that much weight can be given to them.

3. Supply Ships and supplies.

Supply ships were met both in the Atlantic and in the Indian Ocean, and the raider could ask the German Admiralty to send particular stores in their next ship. In one of the lifeboats milk bottles with Japanese characters on them gave the impression that store ships and fuel ships were loaded in Japan, though the Captain and other prisoners stated that all the supply ships were German.

The first supply ship met a small tanker "Rudolph Albrecht" from which 1,000 tons of oil was received, but the chief source of supply was the "Nordmark" which appears to have been met twice in the South Atlantic. From this ship oil was obtained and at the second meeting prisoners from the ship sunk in the Atlantic were transferred. "Alsterufer" was met either in the extreme south of the Atlantic, or in the southern part of the Indian Ocean (near Madagascar according to one witness).

The last supply ship was the "Kulmerland" or "Kummerland" which some of the prisoners confused with the "Alsterufer", and from which 4,000 tons of oil was taken aboard by means of hose pipes joined together in sections which enabled the fuelling to be done with the ship two or three hundred metres apart. The transfer of supplies was carried out during the day only, the ships moving apart at night.

The "Kummerland" took the prisoners captured in the Indian Ocean. This was on or about 19th October. These supply ships sailed under neutral flags and the "Kummerland" is reported to have had a United States flag painted on the side.

All evidence indicates that food supplies aboard the raider were plentiful as were medical stores. The men picked up after the action with the "Sydney" gave evidence of good feeding and the doctor's statement showed that the crew were kept in health by the use of vitamin tablets. No fresh vegetables were obtained during the voyage, and according to evidence obtained by the Military Authorities there was a certain amount of scurvy. Other complaints, which the doctor had to deal with were prickly heat and tonsillitis.

4. Co-operation with other Units.

It appears that "Kormoran" generally operated alone. One prisoner of war stated that the raiders all had the name of a sea-animal or sea-bird. The "Kormoran" started operations as No.41 and received her name when at sea. In the South Atlantic contact was made with a German Warship, "Admiral Scheer", and the ships were together for perhaps two days.

Soon after the "Nordmark" was met for the first time. The "Kormoran" met "Penguin" No.33, and about the same time No.16, described by one of the prisoners of war as an old ship with one funnel and about the same size as the "Kormoran", though another witness described it as somewhat smaller than the "Kormoran"; There is no indication that "Kormoran" made contact with any other raider in the Indian Ocean. Two or three U-boats were met in the Atlantic either in the neighbourhood of Spain or somewhat further South.

5. Strategical and Tactical.

(a) The Captain of the ship was guided by Admiral Raeder's instructions to make regular but comparatively small sinking in order to

advertise his presence, the policy being that the interruption to trade flow by this means would achieve the object without unduly endangering the raider. According to a statement of Commander Dettmers, the Admiral said to him, "The world is your oyster; go where you like, Arctic or Antarctic, but get results." The Commander said further that he had complete *carte blanche*, and added laughingly, "No returns. No paper War." Passenger ships were avoided owing to the difficulty of disposing of the passengers and American ships were also avoided.

(b) Tactical action when attacking a ship or any "ruse de guerre"

At ordinary times the raider wore no flag except when going into action, and then the German flag was hoisted. This was done by the man on duty, and the Captain was very strict upon this point. The procedure when a ship was encountered was for the raider, which would then be flying the Dutch flag, to overtake the ship, order her to stop, at the same time warning her master not to use his wireless, and having taken over the crew, blow her up. If the ships did not heave to when ordered, a shot was fired across the bows. Commander Dettmers stated definitely that on no occasion did he shell ships with passengers aboard.

At the time of the encounter with the "Sydney", "Kormoran" was masquerading as a Dutch ship, the "Straat Malakka", and before the action wore the Dutch flag. The German flag, unfurled, was run up to the masthead immediately before or as fire was opened.

6. Use of Neutral Ports.

All the prisoners of war insisted that they had only once sighted land from the time they left Germany to the time they came ashore on the west coast of Australia. The only time that land had been sighted was apparently Engano Island near the Strait of Sunda some time after the Raider has been interrupted off Madras in its one attempt to lay mines. While the statement was made that supply ships came from Japan and from the Caroline Islands, the prisoners of war interrogated are practically unanimous that the supply ship came from Germany, and certainly that all supply ships were German. There is no evidence of the use of neutral ports.

8. The Action.

The story of the action between the "Sydney" and the Raider was frankly told by the Captain, Fregatten Kapitän Dettmers and other prisoners, and the story as told seems to ring true, though there is no explanation on the surface as to why the "Sydney" came so close, or why she came so close before attempting to launch her aircraft.

At about 1600G/19 the raider in position approximately 26°, 111°E was proceeding northward at a speed of about ten knots (14 knots according to Sub-Lieutenant Bunjes) when what at first appeared to be a sail was sighted by the lookout to the north on the starboard bow. (About N.N.E. according to Sub-Lieutenant Bunjes) The stranger was soon identified as a cruiser and Commander Dettmers immediately turned away into the sun (250°) and increased to full speed which he estimated at 15 knots. The cruiser had obviously sighted them for

she too turned and came up on the starboard quarter at high speed, repeatedly making the signal by daylight lamp NNJ, for about half an hour, no reply being made by the "Kormoran" as the Commander was of the opinion that the use of a powerful signalling lamp would have betrayed his identity as he was at the time posing as the Dutch ship "Straat Malakka", and merchant ships did not carry such lamps. In addition, he said, he did not understand what the signal NNJ meant.

Some time before the action was joined, "Kormoran" broadcast 0000 26S, 111E, "Straat Malakka", and repeated it once. Pachmann, an operator, stated that this message was given twice, about ten minutes before the action began. It is worthy of note that a 00 message was picked up by lug "Uco", at about 1000 G.M.T. on 19th November, but the position and ship's name could not be read by the P.O. Telegraphist in "Uco." Geraldton also read a mutilated time and position message at 10057/19. No 0's were distinguished and when after ten minutes there was no repetition, a message was sent out to ships asking if there was anything to report, but no reply was received.

At a distance of about 7 miles "Sydney" made the signal by flashing, "Hoist your signal letters", in reply "Kormoran" hoisted PKQI ("Straat Malakka") on the triatic stay between the foremast and the funnel, but the funnel prevented the message being clearly seen on board the "Sydney". When "Sydney" made the signal "Hoist your signal letters clear", Ahlback the Yeoman of signals stated that he lengthened the halyard and drew it towards the starboard side. It is reasonable to suppose that this apparent inefficiency in signalling by the "Kormoran" was a "ruse de guerre" in

the hope that "Sydney" would close to investigate, for "Sydney's" signal had to be repeated continuously before it was complied with.

"Sydney" came up with the "Kormoran" with all guns and torpedo tubes bearing, and when she was approximately abeam of the Raider she asked by flags and flashing "Where bound?" According to Ahlbach this was spelt in English by flashing. "Kormoran" answered "Batavia" and "Sydney" apparently made "IK" which "Kormoran" could not understand as in the International Code this means "You should prepare for a cyclone, hurricane or typhoon", but which was in fact the two interior letters of the secret call sign "Straat Malakka" (IIKP). To this "Kormoran" made no reply.

"Sydney" then made by flashing "Show your secret sign". Having no reply to this the raider captain decided to fight, which up to this time he had tried to avoid doing. According to Ahlbach "Sydney" did not order the raider to stop, and this statement is made by other prisoners, but Captain Dettmers mentions an order to stop immediately before the signal by searchlight in plain language to give the secret call.

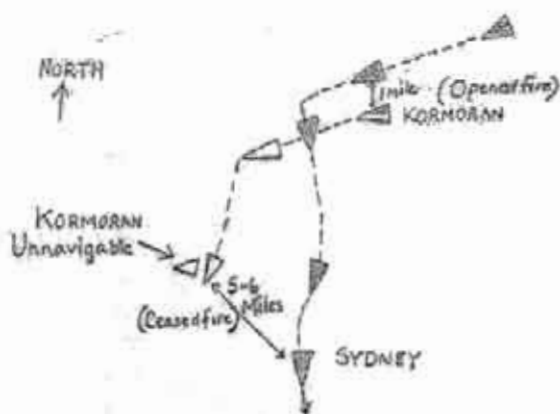
At about 1700G/19 when the two ships were proceeding on parallel courses in a westerly direction at approximately 15 knots. The "Sydney" being on the "Kormoran's" starboard beam at a distance of "somewhat more than a mile" (Commander Dettmers) (or at a distance of 1200 or 1500 metres, according to other prisoners of war), "Kormoran", dropping her gun-concealing plates and hoisting the German flag, opened fire with four of her six fifteen-centimetre guns. (The particulars obtained by the Military authorities upon further enquiry

would reduce the range still further to about 1100 metres). The first salvo hit the "Sydney's" bridge. Almost simultaneously, but probably just afterwards, "Sydney's" first salvo went over, though Sub-Lieutenant Bunjes states that "Sydney's" first salvo hit the raider amidships. Her second salvo found the raider's engine-room and fuel tanks and caused a fire. In the meantime the raider had fired two torpedoes, one of which struck the "Sydney" forward (about 20 metres from the bow according to Commander Dettmers); at the same time that a salvo struck her amidships.

The "Sydney's" forward turrets were apparently put out of action by the explosion caused by the torpedo, and the "Sydney's" aircraft, which is reported to have been warming up at the time that the engagement began, was shot to pieces. The range was so close that prisoners stated they could see men about the plane and an anti-aircraft gunner stated that the A.A. guns were used against the cruiser so that her A.A. guns and torpedoes might not be used.

"Sydney" now altered course to port across stern of the raider and continued on a slightly diverging course from the raider. She must have been very close as some of the raider's crew thought that she was going to ram. According to Ahibach (Yeoman of Signals) who was on the bridge of the "Kormoran", "Sydney" turned about 90° to port, passed close under the stern of the "Kormoran" and maintained her course in a southerly direction. At this stage apparently, though a fire was raging and could not be put out because all fire-fighting appliances had been destroyed, "Kormoran's" guns were all in action and one of her guns is stated to have fired fifty rounds while all guns fired a total of about 450 rounds.

"Sydney's" X and Y turreets [sic] were still in action. "Sydney" now fired four torpedoes, which "Kormoran" turned to meet, and three passed ahead and one astern. A torpedo fired by the raider about the same time also missed its mark. Both ships were now on fire, "Sydney" being heavily afire amidships and on the bridge, and down by the bows about six feet. The raider's bridge had been hit but not put out of action, "Sydney's" first hit had destroyed the radio and a large fire was burning in the engine room. Approximately half an hour after fire opened the action was over, "Kormoran" was stopped, "Sydney" proceeding in a south easterly direction at a speed of about five knots, and throwing out a dense cloud of smoke which some of the prisoners interrogated thought was a smoke screen, but which was probably simply result of fire. At about 1900 the Captain of the raider ordered his engine-room personnel and those of ship's company who were not required, to abandon ship, retaining aboard about 100 men and all his officers. At about 2300/19 Captain Dettmers decided to abandon his ship, which was blown up about midnight. The cruiser was still in sight distant about 10 km. when the first boats left the "Kormoran", and for some time the glow of the fire could be seen. Before midnight it had disappeared, no explosion was heard. According to Bohm (one of the survivors picked up "Trocas), three wooden lifeboats and three rubber rafts were launched first leaving one boat for those still on board. Commander Dettmers mentioned that it took three hours to get lifeboats out of a hatch because of the lack of power. The motor-boats had been destroyed and even if the big boat, which was carried, had not been destroyed, there was no power available to move it. One of the



Sketch included with a Brief Summary of Deductions From Interrogation of Survivors Ex "Kormoran" up to 6th December 1941.

floats collapsed; men jumped overboard and though a number of these were picked up by the life-boats that had been launched it would appear that about eighty were lost.

Commander Dettmers expressed the opinion that "Sydney" sank as the result of the punishment she had received, and that there could be no survivors as the whole superstructure had been so smashed, boats on deck must have been destroyed, while any boats stowed below must have been burned by the fires which were raging. At the time that Commander Dettmers was preparing to abandon ship the blaze from "Sydney" was still to be seen, but when he looked around before leaving the ship it had disappeared. This evidence is supported by other statements which go to show that "Sydney"

disappeared somewhat before midnight, and that "Kormoran's" sinking was hastened by an explosion after midnight. The weather at the time was rough, as it has been for two or three days before the encounter.

The first definite information to the outside world was received at 0816z/24th when the Tanker "Trocas" reported by W/T that twenty-five German Naval men on a floating raft had been picked up in position 26°06', 111°40'E.

D. APPENDICES.

1.

The most useful evidence in the enquiry was given by the following:-

Detmers, Anton Gunther Theodor,	Commander
Bunjes, William Christian	Sub-Lieutenant
Ruf, Albert	belonged to ground staff on the aircraft
Lensch, Rudolph Johann, Wilhelm	Over-Engineer
Kohls, Richard Emil Adolph	Chief Engineer
Kobelt, Paul	Petty Officer
Linke, Hans	Wireless Operator
Ahlbach, Erich	Signaller-Petty Officer
Juergenson or Jorgenson, Otto	Petty Officer
Koblitz, Hans	A.A. Gunner
Wiesmann, Otto	Seaman, Machine Gun A.A.
Lipinski, Edmund	Tailor

II.

Track Chart of Raider No. 41

III.

Track Chart (facsimile of a letter of a prisoner of war with translation of relevant parts of letter).

IV.

Plan of Action between "Sydney" and the Raider.

V.

Diagrammatic drawing of Raider 41 compiled from drawings made by prisoners.

VI.

Instructions for Interrogating Prisoners of War.
(ex No. 41 "Kormoran".)

This letter was written by one No. 42279 MAX NADER, Ex KORMORAN. And is to be read in conjunction with attached photograph of the original upon which has been superimposed by the writer, a sketch of the route taken by the KORMORAN since leaving GOTTENHAFEN.

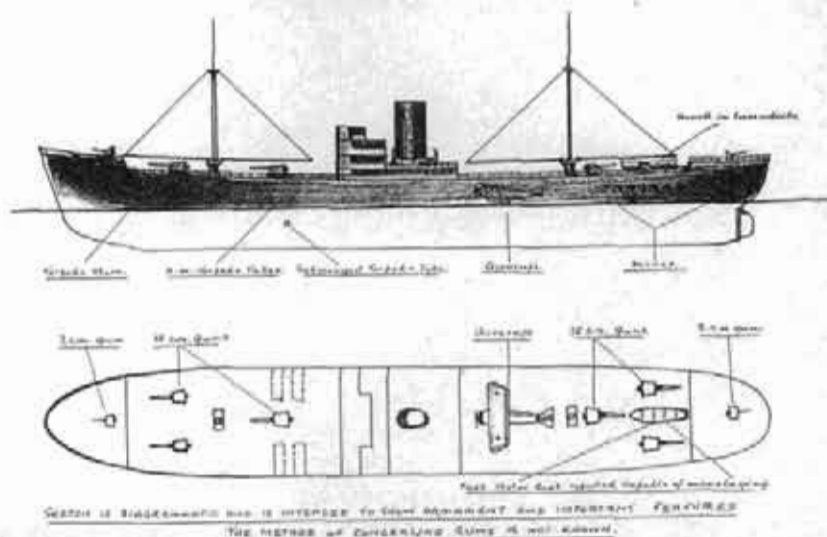
Main text of Letter

...and now to continue. On 1st January 1940, I went to Wesermunde to a Recruit Company, from ther I went to a training course at Sassnitz, as "E. Messer" (some sort of nautical surveyor) and from there on board the Auxiliary

Cruiser KORMORAN.

On the 3. 12. 1940 we set out from Gottenhafen (near Danzig) along the Norwegian coast, approx. as I have drawn it. ...it was settled in barely half an hour. (Probably this refers to the sinking of the KORMORAN, but could possibly refer to time taken to execute sketch).

We struck by an unlucky hit in the engine room, and we could not quell (the fire?) any longer. Everybody to the boats. Yes, but there were but two boats on the deck and you cannot get 400 men into 2 boats. The other lifeboats were in the hatchways under the deck. We had no electric power so that we could not get

RAIDER № 41.

Raider No. 41.

these out by means of winches. There was a danger that the ship would blow up any second, because we also had some bombs on board ... men jumped overboard, myself amongst them. After fighting the sea for 5 hours, I was pulled into a lifeboat exhausted. After being in the boat for 8 days, we were rescued by an aeroplane - I mean, the plane sent a steamer to pick us up...

(Note, this mention of an aeroplane to the rescue is confirmed by the last two lines of ABFL's poem, "AFTER"); also by a reference in special observation when discussing the story it was said,

"The aeroplane did not come back"

The footnote at the bottom of the page (see photo) beneath the arrow, reads:

ENGLISH SHIPS SUNK. 11th January,
1942

INSTRUCTIONS FOR INTERROGATING
PRISONERS OF WAR ex NO. 41

("Cormorant").

OBJECTIVE OBJECTIVE IS TO OBTAIN AS MUCH INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE ON NO. 41 AND OTHER RAIDER AND SUPPLY SHIP ACTIVITIES.

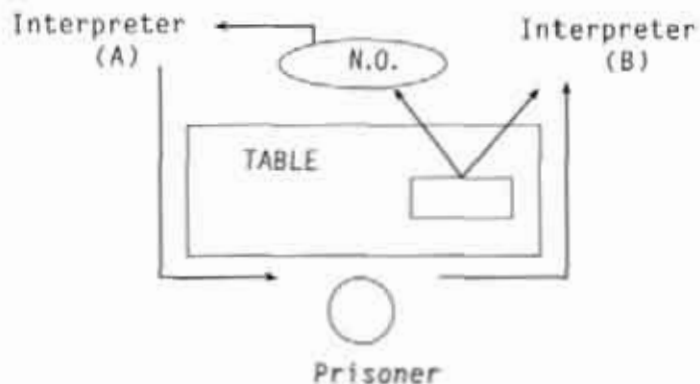
INTERROGATION ORGANISATION:

The Ratings who are all at Harvey, will be interrogated by two teams, each composed of -

1. Naval Officer (in uniform).
2. Interpreters.

The methods should be as follows:-

The Naval Officer Indicates to the Questioning Interpreter (A) the points which it is intended to cover. (A) Then in devious ways endeavour to ext-ract the answer. Direct questioning is useless. The Recording Interpreter (B) writes down for the information of the Naval Officer the brief text of the replies thus:



The success of this plan depends entirely upon the skill of the questioners, and the co-operation of the team.

INFORMATION REQUIRED:

- (a) Movements in the Indian Ocean between June and November - evidence so far shows No.41 either
 - i. Stayed in Indian Ocean.
 - ii. Went South about Australia to Pacific.It is important to clear this up.
- (b) Details of Supply Organisation.
- (c) Details of Neutral Ports used.
- (d) Strategical Policy.
- (e) Tactical action when attacking merchant ship.
- (f) Any ruse de guerre employed.
- (g) Any information of other raiders.
- (h) Confirmation of what we know at present. (Charts and Summaries available.
- (i) When, and where, mines were laid, and any special methods employed, eg. Laying from fast motor boats.

SEGREGATION.

It is of paramount importance that parties who are already segregated remains segregated until the interrogation has been completed. After interrogation there is no objection to a man returning to the same party to which he came.

LEGAL ASPECT.

- (a) Force is not to be employed.

- (b) A prisoner of war cannot be forced to give information, but on the other hand it is to be impressed on the prisoner that he is not allowed to lie.

The Army authorities are responsible for the custody and treatment of prisoners. If you get any complaints refer them to the Camp Commandant.

It is appreciated that this is a dull and laborious task. It is nevertheless most important to get all we can from the prisoners. Your effort may lead to the destruction of more than one enemy supply ship or raider.

Officers are earnestly requested to keep plugging away at the job.

Flag Officer Commanding

H.M.A. Squadron. REAR ADMIRAL.

2nd December, 1941.

Notes

- 1 See Log of Signals, Annex A.
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 "Report on Loss of H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY", enclosure to letter, Secretary Department of the Navy to Secretary of the Admiralty, 12 February 1942. PRO: ADM 199/736, 78301.
- 4 *Battle Summary No. 13 - Disguised Raiders*. PRO: ADM 234/324.
- 5 No copy of this paragraph has survived in the British record.

5 The German Accounts of the Battle

Several German accounts of the action between *Kormoran* and HMAS *Sydney* exist:

- Information gleaned from the interrogation of German prisoners of war by the RAN;
- Intelligence gained from surveillance operations by Australian military authorities of German prisoners during their captivity.

Reports based on these sources were passed by initial and interim signals to London in November and December 1941. Subsequently they were synthesised into a written report made in February 1942 by ACNB to the Admiralty in London. These reports have been addressed in Chapter 4.

After the war a number of written accounts from German sources became available. They are:

- *Volume 10* of the German Navy's *Operationen und Taktik* published in Germany in December 1943, translated then promulgated in London in August 1945, and circulated within the Admiralty on 6 September 1945.
- German newspaper account published in August 1944 in Germany, and in Australia in September 1945. An official translation of the newspaper account was made in Australia in February 1946.
- The coded action report and engine room log found on Detmers after his attempted escape in January 1945. This was circulated within the Admiralty on 7 August 1945. The document was released to the public domain first in Britain in the 1970s, and then, with its coded groups, in Australia in the 1990s.
- Detmer's account in his book, *The Raider Kormoran*, translated into English and published in London in 1959.

Die Fahrt des Hilfskreuzers "Schiff 41"

Just as the Royal Navy published battle summaries, so the German Navy published *Operationen und Taktik*, a series of publications intended to

deal "... with the activities of auxiliary cruisers [which] will keep the men at the front acquainted with the real course of events and give them the opportunity of acquiring valuable information from the experiences collected therein towards the further war effort ...". By 1943 the Germans had published four volumes of *Operationen und Taktik* concerning raiders. The volumes were: Volume 5, *The Voyage of the Auxiliary Cruiser "Ship 16" (Atlantis)*; Volume 6, *The Voyage of the Auxiliary Cruiser "Ship 33" (Pinguin)*; Volume 7, *The maiden Voyage of the Auxiliary Cruiser "Ship 10" (Thor)*; and Volume 8, *The Voyage of the Auxiliary Cruiser "Ship 21" (Widder)*.

Detmers sent his copies of his log or war diary home in instalments, and the last instalment, which reached Germany via the supply ship *Kulmerland*, was dated 24 October 1941. This instalment reached Germany sometime before 30 May 1942. However, though the Germans knew through signals intelligence what had happened to *Kormoran* and *Sydney*, they lacked sufficient information to complete the relevant volume of *Operationen und Taktik*. Then, sometime in 1943, Siebelt Habben (some accounts wrongly give his name as Hubben), who was the second surgeon of the *Kormoran*, returned from Australia to Germany under a prisoner of war exchange scheme. It was not possible to ascertain from the British archives precisely when he did so, nor whether others were also exchanged in this way. However, Habben evidently smuggled out of Australia an account of the action between the two ships, which the German naval staff used to complete their account of the voyage of the *Kormoran*.

As a doctor, Habben's action station would, presumably, have been in a sheltered position between decks and so he was not an eyewitness to the events in the report, which he carried. Habben's report, however, contained details of timings, distances and positions, which could only have been supplied by Detmers and, unless the doctor had a very good memory, Detmers must have done so in writing. The German naval staff, using Detmers' previous instalments, their own signals intelligence, Habben's report, and at least one other letter containing details of the action, which had also reached them from Australia, then completed *Volume 10*, which was published in December 1943. Since it was written for internal consumption and at a time when many Germans still believed that they were winning the war, there would seem to be no reason to lie

or fabricate within *Volume 10*, which may therefore be considered a reliable witness of the events which it describes.

Copies of *Operationen und Taktik* were captured by the British at the end of World War II and taken to London. They were subsequently returned to Germany, but microfiche copies were retained by the Naval Historical Branch. In addition, a translation of *Operationen und Taktik Volume 10* was made by three Third Officers WRNS, Rampton, Fagg and Hale and circulated by the Director of Naval Intelligence in August 1945. A copy of the original German document has been located, as well as the translation. The introductory pages and the account of the fight with *Sydney*, according to the Rampton-Fagg-Hale translation, read as follows:¹

Most Secret:

OPERATIONS AND TACTICS

Evaluation of the important events in the
naval war

Book 10

The Voyage of the auxiliary cruiser "Ship 41"
("Kormoran")

Lieutenant-Commander Detmers (Commander from
1.4.41)

Berlin, December 1943

Supreme Command of the Navy

(Department of war science)

Translated by: 3/0 Rampton

Checked by: 3/0 Fagg

3/0 Hale

Commissioning	9th October 1940
Commencement of the voyage	
a) from Gotenhafen	3rd December 1940
b) from Stavanger	9th December 1940
Sinking of the ship	19th November 1941
Duration of the voyage (from Gotenhafen)	351 days
Sank	10 merchant ships; 56,974 gross registered tons
Prize ship	1 merchant ship; 11,309 gross registered tons
Sank or captured	11 merchant ships; 68,283 gross registered tons 1 cruiser 6,830 tons

[list of contents omitted]

Preface.

The works contained in the series "Operations and Tactics" dealing with the activities of auxiliary cruisers will keep the men at the front acquainted with the real course of events and give them the opportunity of acquiring valuable information from the experiences collected therein towards the further war effort.

For the time being the presentation must principally be confined to the actual reproduction of the operation and tactical undertakings of auxiliary cruisers. A critical examination of isolated events follows, only when this was definitely possible at the time of the happenings.

A reliable final opinion, based on all the

evidence, including that of the enemy, from the critical historical point of view, must be reserved for further consideration.

Details of "Ship 41" and her armament (Formerly motor vessel "Steiermark" of the Hamburg-American line, built in 1938 by Krupps Joint Stock Co. "Germania" Shipyard.)

Tonnage: 9400 gross registered tons.

Length: 157m; Beam: 20.2m; Draught: 8.8m.

Speed: 18 knots (at the beginning of the voyage).

Driving power: Diesel-electric, two engines for two propellers.

Oil storage: 5,200 tons.

Potential range: 70,000 nautical miles (at 10 knots)

Armament:

Artillery: 6 - 15cm semi-automatic C/13.

2 - 3.7cm A.A. Guns (twin mounted)

2 - adapted 3.7 anti-tank guns.

5 - 2cm A.A. machine-guns C/30.

Torpedoes: 1 - double-tube on each side.

1 - single-tube on each side.

Mines: Ground (TMB) and moored mines (EMC)

Aircraft: 2 "Arado"

Miscellaneous: 1 L.S. Boat.

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The supply ship "Kulmerland" which had put out from Kobe on 3.9 with approximately 4,000 t. fuel oil, with lubricating oil, white metal and victuals enough for 6 months, was due to reach position "Marius" sometime after 12.10 (leaving New Zealand and Australia to the East and South) and she was then to make for the rendez-vous "Sulla" (27° 30' S. 87° 30' E.) if she had not encountered "41" after a wait of 10 days. This ship had been ordered, after supplying "Ship 41", to deliver the prisoners taken over from the same to the blockade breaker "Spreewald", and then to return to Japan. She was to rendez-vous "Spreewald", who was putting out from "Dairen" en route for Bordeaux, at the end of October at a point south of the "Friendly Isles" ("Balbo": 28° 30' S. 15° 2' W.) Nothing of note during the voyage to the place of rendez-vous. A northerly course was followed on 9th October as far as 20° south in the search of the calm weather, necessary for the cleaning of the ship's bottom. This work was completed on 12th October. The ship started on her journey to "Marius".

"Kulmerland", Captain Pfschunder [*'Pfschunder' in the original German version*], came into sight at 1000 on 16th October.

Both ships moved off to 300 nautical miles North and the delivery of oil, victuals, and stores, as well as the surrender of prisoners was started on 18th October. These were finished on 18th October. "This replenishment was very satisfactory," according to the ship's log. "we received everything that we required. Things had been provided that we had not even dared to hope for. Co-operation with "Kulmerland" was very good. Captain Pfschunder put himself heart and soul into this job, with the result that absolutely no friction occurred."

After having received 3,328t. of fuel oil, "41" had altogether 4,458t. of fuel; this means that, using 20t. per day, it would last until 1.6.42. The position as regards victuals was also assured up to the same date.

On 26th October the auxiliary cruiser announced "Kulmerland's" departure.

This was the last message received in Germany from "Ship 41".

Battle with the Cruiser "SYDNEY"

- Sinking of both ships.

The last excerpt from the ship's log, which was carried home by "Kulmerland" closed on 24.10.1941 with the following entry:

"Thanks to the rapid completion of the replenishment, I hope to be back in the operation area before the next new moon period."

From this it appears that the auxiliary cruiser returned to the area north of 20° S after "Kulmerland's" departure. In actual fact, however, the Commanding Officer had decided to lay mines off Perth, as was shown by the detailed report of the operation, given by the ship's doctor, Dr. Habben, who had only recently returned home on a P.o.w. exchange. Shortly before the carrying out of this task, however, a message had been received referring to a convoy, which was supposed to be setting out from Perth under escort of the heavy cruiser "Cornwall". This report made the C.O. decide to give up the mining operation off Perth and change his area of operations northwards to the vicinity of Sharks Bay.

In this area, in 25° 34' S and 111° E, that is about 130 nautical miles S.W. of Sharks Bay, battle was engaged between the auxiliary cruiser

and the Australian cruiser "Sydney", during the course of which both ships went down.

Naval War Staff received the first report of a naval battle in Australian waters on 24.11. On this day the W/T station at Sydney transmitted the request of an unknown command post ashore to an unknown steamer. "Report details of battle and ship's name as gathered from survivors." The real story was only learned a few days later from an Admiralty report of 26.11, which was deciphered on 30.11. This read as follows:-

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"Cruiser "Sydney" 6 days overdue in Fremantle. She was returning from escort duties. It is believed that she sank an enemy raider, but the reports on the fate of the "Sydney" are uncertain. A British tanker took off some German naval personnel from a rubber dinghy, others were seen in life-boats of which two were reported to have landed in West Australia. It seems that the "Sydney" was burning when it was last seen by the Germans."

As at this time, 30th Nov. there was only one auxillary cruiser "Ship 41", still at sea, and she was operating in the waters in question, the auxillary cruiser mentioned as having been sunk by the "Sydney" could only refer to this ship.

Here follows the text of the report, mentioned above, by Dr. Habben on the action:-

"At about 1600 hours on November 19th, 1941, in a position 26°34'S, and 111°E, the "Kormoran" steering a course of 25° at moderate speed, sighted ahead a plume of smoke out of which quickly emerged a light cruiser bearing directly on the "Kormoran".

The auxiliary cruiser turned to port on a course of 260° , and hurried away from the cruiser at high speed, steaming at 18 knots. This course was against the sun, sea and wind. The cruiser took up the chase and drew near at a speed of 25 knots. There followed a long exchange of signals during which the auxiliary cruiser hoisted the Dutch flag. All signals sent by search-light were answered by flag, as is the custom in merchant ships. The commander of the auxiliary cruiser quite consciously, and with great calmness, allowed the signal traffic to develop during which time he either hoisted the flags incompletely or else the flag "not understood" in order to gain time and allow the cruiser to close within a very short distance. The Commander, in early deliberations, had envisaged in theory a situation such as this and he now put his plan into practice.

Toward 1730, both ships were steaming at 14 knots on a course of 260° , the distance apart on the beam being 900 metres. "Sydney" was to starboard of "Kormoran". The enemy Commander apparently took the auxiliary cruiser to be completely harmless. The ship's aircraft, which previously had been swung out on its catapult, was swung back and stopped. The guns too, only seemed to be at half readiness. The only thing that was left out during the reciprocal exchange of signals was the giving of the secret callsign by the auxiliary cruiser. The answer was an order to remove camouflage which was carried out in the record time of 6 seconds. At this order the Man of War ensign and the Commander's pendant were hoisted and the Dutch flag lowered. The ensign was hardly broken before the first shot fell from the

first gun. This fell short but the second, a salvo from three guns, hit the enemy's bridge and control tower. "Sydney" fired her first salvo almost at the same time as "Kormoran's" second, but it fell far beyond the auxiliary cruiser. Kormoran's third salvo hit the enemy's second turret. The roof of which was lifted up and prevented the first turret from swinging. This meant that the enemy had only his two after turrets available. The ship's aircraft, which had just been swung out and started up, was destroyed by a direct hit. After a corresponding time a torpedo fired from the "Kormoran's" starboard above water tube hit "Sydney's" bows just in front of the first turret. The torpedo tore a great hole in the ship's side. She sank deeply by the bows and for a moment it seemed as if she were going to break up. This reduced considerably the speed of the enemy. The 3.7cm. anti-tank gun under the bridge, and the 2cm. anti-aircraft gun added considerably to the fire of the heavy guns. They hindered the enemy from loading the torpedo tubes, which was continually being attempted, and from using light weapons and evidently caused many casualties amongst the personnel on the control positions of the cruiser.

The enemy only answered our fire with single shots from the 3rd and 4th turrets. A central fire control evidently no longer existed. These turrets succeeded in registering 3 hits on the "Kormoran", which regrettably had serious consequences.

The first shell went through the funnel, exploded to leeward; the splinters penetrated the W/T room and killed two ratings.

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The second destroyed the auxiliary cruiser's boiler room and a nearby oil-bunker. The ordinary and the foam fire extinguishers were put out of action through the resultant destruction.

The third demolished the transformers of the main engine installation.

The fourth shot, a dud, wounded several ratings on the third gun, who later died from their injuries.

The results of the hits were serious. A big fire broke out in the engine with a great deal of smoke and many electrical discharges. Through the loss of the transformers the main engines stopped charging and the engines raced furiously. The first engineer, the electrical engineer and 14 engine room petty officers and ratings staked everything to fight the fire and to bring order into the machine installations again. They had to pay for this effort with their lives and never again came out of the engine room.

Sydney, who through reduction in speed had settled slightly astern,⁷ now tried to ram from astern the Kormoran who was out of control. She was prevented in her intention by well-placed fire, particularly from No.5 gun. Sydney turned round astern of the Kormoran, and steamed slowly, at about 5 or 6 knots, towards the south. In steaming away Sydney fired 4 torpedoes from the starboard tubes, all of which missed the target. The next torpedo passed Kormoran about 150m. astern.

The enemy, whose turrets remained swung round to the port side, was heavily shelled

by the artillery of the auxiliary cruiser while she was making off. Salvo after salvo hit the ship particularly on the water line, which was peppered with holes. The auxiliary cruiser's guns were shooting at the rate of 4-5 salvos per second and had, by the end of the engagement, fired 500 rounds of incendiary shells.

The auxiliary cruiser's artillery played the greatest part in wiping out the enemy.

Toward 1800 hours, as darkness fell, the enemy burning fiercely with a series of explosions on board, ran out of effective range of the cruiser's guns 104 mm on the port quarter of Kormoran and disappeared slowly over the horizon. Towards 2300 another final glare was seen. It can be assumed that this was the time that the cruiser went down.

The fire on board Kormoran had meanwhile spread, because it was impossible to fight it now that the fire extinguishers had been destroyed. The crew, except for the gun crews, were ordered by the Commander to abandon ship. As some of the lifeboats were in the part of the ship that was on fire, it was necessary to use rubber dinghies and rafts as well as life-boats as a mean of saving the crew. In the first hatchway were 2 steel life-boats, which still had to be lowered overboard. This entailed special difficulties, because there was no machinery available to raise the heavy boats. The gun crews who stayed behind succeeded with tackle and other aids in getting the boats out of the hatchway to the railing, where they were thrown overboard. The boats through their reliability, their stability

in strong sea, and their good engines, have particularly proved their worth in this rescue.

About 20 men were lost in the action. Unfortunately about a further 60 of the crew were drowned when abandoning ship, because a large and crowded rubber dinghy burst and the crew were pitched in the darkness into the rough sea.

While the ship was being abandoned the fire drew dangerously near to the cargo of mines. It was necessary for someone to find out how long personnel could remain on board until there was a danger that the ship would be blown up by its mines. Rotzin and Ordinary Seaman Schleppergrell particularly distinguished themselves in this connection. It was found that it was unjustifiable to remain any longer on board.

At 0010 on 20th November, therefore, the Commanding Officer ordered his flag and pendant to be lowered and put into the Captain's lifeboat.

At 0015 the C.O. left the ship, which at 0035 sank by the stern. Before this, in one of the magazines which could not have been properly flooded because the control had been destroyed, an explosion took place, and following on this, after the cargo of mines had detonated, the after part of the ship blew up in the air.

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This successful action on the part of Kormoran was made possible by several cardinal mistakes made by the enemy.

The enemy omitted to stop the ship, which was to be investigated. He drew altogether too close to this ship and did not use his light weapons at all. These circumstances made it easier for the Kormoran's Commander to carrying his daring plan, which was suddenly to attack the superior cruiser.

During the night the weather freshened and the boats were driven apart and made for the Australian coast in separate groups. A coastal steamer, which picked up one life-boat, gave the first news of the action. The news set in motion an extensive search by the Australian Navy and Air Force. The search had a gratifying success, in that all the life-boats and rafts of Kormoran were found. Of the Sydney not one survivor or the slightest bit of wreckage has ever been found (Footnote: The ship had a crew of 42 officers and 603 men). Kormoran's astounding success was not believed in Australia. In the opinion of Australian specialists the Kormoran was co-operating with a U-boat and it was the U-boat, which was responsible for sinking the cruiser. The crew have been well-treated in captivity by the Australians and they have kept alive in its old vigour the good spirit of the cruiser."

One of the officers writes as follows about the battle and the subsequent voyage to the Australian continent:-

"a) The climax and conclusion of our voyage came with the sinking of the Australian cruiser Sydney on 19.11.41 (Day of Prayer and Repentance). We had to abandon our

burning ship. After we had succeeded, in spite of the difficulties, in saving the survivors, including the wounded, by use of life-saving equipment, nearly everyone either reached the coast, or was picked up by ships. In the battle itself we had fortunately very few losses.

My cutter, which, like the others, was grossly overladen, landed about 80 km., north of Carnarvon (West Australia) after a dangerous voyage full of privations lasting 6 days. The boat was 8.5 metres long, 2.8 metres wide and had a crew of 57 men. That meant alternate standing and sitting, with the result that lying down was out of the question.

b) Voyage in a lifeboat in constant danger enduring the greatest mental and physical hardships: an overcrowded boat, of which the edge was only just out of the water, packed in like herrings (for 8 days, no possibility of movement, no lying down and as good as no sleep). At times, one took part in the uninterrupted job of bailing out the water, always wet through, burned by the sun by day, by night shivering with cold, on very restricted rations (a few small pieces of "Ship's" biscuits, a little bacon, a mug of liquid), so difficult to relieve oneself that the majority desisted. A stormy night and dawn, after that an unfavourable wind which drove us away from land; in danger of getting too far to the north into the desert region, where the pilot, Hans Bertram, nearly perished, (it seemed that this had occurred as we approached the coast). There were great difficulties too, in navigating; using

an improvised rudder and sailing tackle. Many of the crew were delirious. Health only suffered as a result of sunburn and as a result of privations and badly swollen feet, so that in the beginning walking was impossible for many. There were, however, only isolated cases of permanent damage to health. Danger of the delirious jumping overboard. The boat landed roughly 100km, north of Carnarvon."

After "Ship 41's" log had arrived in Germany, the Naval War Staff made the following statement about the voyage of the auxiliary cruiser (Footnote: 1/Naval War Staff 17456/42 Top Secret of 30.5.42.):

"The present ship's log gives a complete picture of the whole operation, in which only the last three weeks are missing. It will only be possible to give more details about this when the Commanding Officer and crew return from imprisonment.

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"Ship 41's" operation is an excellently carried out undertaking. The conclusion of this with the sinking of an Australian cruiser deserves special mention as this deed is probably unique in the history of the war. The Commanding Officer shows great insight in his judgement of all operational and tactical questions in the sphere of auxiliary cruiser warfare, and led his ship to great success.

The final result is: 11 ships with a total of 68,274 G.R.T. sunk as well as the Australian cruiser "Sydney", of 6,830 tons.

After the loss of ships "41" and "16" on 19 and 21.11, and after the return home of "45" on the 30.11, there were no more auxiliary cruisers in foreign waters. (Footnote: "Ship 10" set sail on her second voyage from the Gironde on 14.1.1942 as second ship of the "Second Wave" (the first was "Ship 41")). Operations in foreign waters were thus completely suspended for the time being (Footnote: The attempt of the cruiser "Lützow" to get away in July 1941 also failed, and the cruiser "Admiral Sheer" was held back on the most varied political grounds.). The reason for this was not to be found in the loss of the two aforesaid auxiliary cruisers, of which "ship 16" anyway was on the return voyage after more than 600 days at sea, but rather the fact that after the successful launching of "Ship 41" a year before (3.12.40) it was not possible to maintain a regular supply of these ships after the first auxiliary cruiser wave, on account of a repeated postponement of completion dates for auxiliary cruisers which were in process of being armed.

When *Operationen und Taktik, Volume 10* was read in the Admiralty it attracted little interest. The Director of Naval Intelligence thought "Pages 33 to 37 contain further details of the action with H.M.A.S. "SIDNEY" [sic] but do not throw a great deal more light on the matter...".¹ The Director of Gunnery read the account "with interest" but thought it added little to *Battle Summary No. 13*.² The Director of Tactical and Staff Duties thought "This is an interesting account which may be used to supplement *Battle Summary No. 13*, C. B. 3081(5) ... The Committee on Life-Saving may be interested in the remarks on the value of the steel lifeboats ... ".³ And on 6 January 1946 the docket containing *Volume 10* was downgraded from 'Secret' to 'Confidential'.

Dr Habben's newspaper story

On 13 August 1944, the *Völkischer Beobachter* published an account apparently by Habben of the action between *Kormoran* and *Sydney*. At least one copy of this newspaper was brought back to Australia by

returning Australian prisoners of war and the article was published in Australian newspapers in September 1945. Another copy was brought home by ex Prisoner of War, No. 41569, Warrant Officer Conklin, RAAF, who had purchased the paper in a German prisoner-of-war camp.⁶ It was then translated in Australia by Professor E. G. Waterhouse, and a copy forwarded to the Admiralty, where it was received on 19 December 1945. There, on 20 February 1946, P.S. Lewis, Head of MII, minuted:⁷

This does not appear to add anything to what is already known of the loss of the SYDNEY, although this story gives a slightly different account of the CORMORAN's action in showing her colours.

As noted above, Dr Habben's action station would, presumably, have



HMAS Sydney (II) entering Sydney Harbour in 1936 and sailing past the preserved tripod mast of HMAS Sydney (I) (RAN).

been in a sheltered position between decks. Certainly the internal evidence of his newspaper story indicates that he was not an eyewitness and must therefore have relied for his story on what he had learned from others after the event. Waterhouse's translation of Dr Habben's account reads:⁸

HOW THE "CORMORAN" SANK THE "SYDNEY"

The first German report of the dramatic final engagement of the auxiliary cruiser "CORMORAN".

The fight between the auxiliary cruiser "CORMORAN" and the Australian cruiser "SYDNEY" in the Indian Ocean in November, 1941, stands out amongst the feats of German raiders in this war. For the first time an auxiliary cruiser, namely a converted merchant ship (formerly the East Asia freighter "STEIERMARK") succeeded in sinking a regular cruiser, the Australian cruiser "SYDNEY" much superior in armament and speed which had had 88 engagements in the Mediterranean and had sunk an Italian cruiser and destroyer, sank with all hands under the fire of the auxiliary German cruiser. The severely damaged "CORMORAN" had to be blown up but the majority of its crew reached the Australian coast.

There the loss of the "SYDNEY" created the greatest sensation, for the cruiser was the best known ship of the Australian fleet. It carried on the tradition of the cruiser of the same name to the one which the glorious cruiser "EMDEN" succumbed in 1914. The Australians had called the new cruiser "SYDNEY" the "LUCKY SHIP" and it was now destined to succumb to the German auxiliary cruiser "CORMORAN" which for its part was connected through its name with the "EMDEN" tradition. For its predecessor "CORMORAN" had been an auxiliary cruiser converted out of the first prize ship taken by the old "EMDEN."

Only now do we have before us the first report on the dramatic final fight of the new "CORMORAN". The former second physician of the auxiliary cruiser "CORMORAN", Staff Surgeon Doctor HUBBEN [actually Habben, of course] has returned home from imprisonment in Australia owing to an exchange of prisoners of war belonging to the medical services. We here publish his report which is the first detailed account in Germany of the heroic final fight of the "CORMORAN" after almost a year's successful cruise in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean.

The "CORMORAN" had, in its operations up to date, accounted for and sunk approximately 71,000 gross tons of enemy merchant shipping besides capturing about 700 prisoners. After a short interruption of its cruise to provision and take in fuel our Commander resolved in November, 1941, on a new thrust towards the Australian coast. When on the afternoon of November the 19th we were about 130 nautical miles west of Shark Bight the not unusual siren sounded about 16 hours. Everyone automatically grasped his lifebelt and hurried to his fighting station. Judging by the ship's noises the engines were soon going at top speed. At first the word passed "funnels ahead in sight to starboard." A few minutes later a message passed through the ship from the Commander "it is a cruiser". We were thus confronted with a far superior foe. Everyone now knew it was a question of life or death. The Commander, a lean Erisian figure, issued his orders from the bridge with iron composure. His plan was clear from the beginning. He achieved everything that he had already prepared in a quiet hour for such an emergency. Meanwhile the enemy had approached to a close proximity and was now steaming a parallel course to us on the starboard side. We were steaming under camouflage.

But when the enemy asked us for the secret signal our commander had to show his true colours. This reply was a great surprise to the Australian cruiser "SYDNEY" for at the same moment by hoisting the German war flag the previously innocent looking merchant ship was transformed into a warship and with lightning speed fire was opened from our decamouflaged guns. At the very first salvo direct hits were made on the "SYDNEY's" main guns, the bridge was repeatedly severely hit and both turrets were put out of action and the aircraft which was just ready to take off were blown up. Only in the beginning was our enemy in the position to fire a complete salvo, but it was wide of its aim and passed over us. Owing to well aimed fire of light guns it was not possible for him to fire his torpedoes. On the other hand, we succeeded in the first stage of the fight in scoring a direct hit with a torpedo in the front of the ship which ripped a large hole in its side so that the front of the ship seemed almost undermined and the speed of our opponent afterwards seemed to be considerably reduced. After its firing emplacement had been put out of action the cruiser "SYDNEY" was only still able to fire single shots from its third and fourth turrets. By this means it still scored three hits on us which unfortunately made our fire extinguishing apparatus useless and soon led to an extensive fire in the engine room which later spread to the superstructure. In the further course of the fight, the "SYDNEY" in addition, attempted to ram us from behind but was prevented by well aimed fire from our guns. She now veered to port and fired another fan of four torpedoes at us but the torpedoes all passed close to our stern. The fight was then ended at the beginning of dusk as the speed of our enemy diminished.

The "SYDNEY" disappeared behind the horizon at 18 hours, burning amidships and flaring up with occasional explosions. at 23 hours the final glow was observed. It is to be assumed that this point of fire marked the end of the Australian cruiser.

According to accounts of our artillery officer the "CORMORAN" fired over four hundred shots at the enemy. It is estimated that she scored from 180 to 200 hits. Besides the large hole made in the front of the ship made with the torpedo bit, a large number of hits were scored above and below the water line so that the "SYDNEY" must have been finally almost riddled. Our gunners had fired salvos with a rapidity they never previously reached. With evident enthusiasm they fired from the barrels for all they were worth.

Meanwhile our ship could not be manoeuvred on account of a hit in the engine room and on account of the spread of the fire. The commander accordingly immediately ordered the ship to be abandoned by all except the gunners who left in the last boats. Shortly before midnight the commander ordered the ship to be blown up. After applying charges of explosive he left his ship in the last lifeboat. Ten minutes later a tremendous explosion accompanied by a gigantic column of fire rent the stern in pieces. Our proud "CORMORAN" thus sank in a few seconds with bow erect in the depths of the Indian Ocean. With our ship we lost eighty faithful comrades. The rest of our crew after a journey of 6 to 8 days in lifeboats and every conceivable adventure became prisoners of war in Australia. For definite reasons neither our commander or our enemy sent out wireless messages. Thus it is to be explained that the Australian Navy only heard of the events on the fourth day after the fight from survivors

of our crew and finally forced to [admit] that the "SYDNEY" was a total loss. Not a single piece of wreckage was found. The search of the whole of the West Australian coast resulted only in the salvage of the "CORMORAN" lifeboats containing 80% of the crew of the "CORMORAN".

The sudden disappearance of the "SYDNEY" caused great panic in Australia. At first an attempt was made to keep the affair secret as long as possible. But as soon as total loss could not be concealed the newspapers published a complete list of the crew with a photograph of the commander Captain Burnett. The crew comprised sixty officers and six hundred petty officers and crew and now an end has been made of the dream of a "Luck Ship" and the "SYDNEY-FINDEN" tradition.

No doubt the statements of our crew at first seem quite incredible to the Australians. Commander and crew of the "KORMORAN" may be proud of their victory over a far superior foe the "SYDNEY". Even if it was only an episode in the great events of the war, it was still an unique event in naval history that an auxiliary cruiser should totally destroy a valuable cruiser.

Frigate Captain DETMERS was decorated by the Fuhrer with the Iron Cross.

Detmers's 'Action Report' and the 'Engine Room Log'

In January 1945, Detmers, with some others of his crew, escaped from prisoner-of-war camp, and was on the run for a week. When he was recaptured on 18 January he was found to be carrying, coded in a German-English Dictionary, two accounts of the fight with HMAS Sydney. These were an 'Action Report', a form of log, and an 'Engine Room Log', and several copies of these documents have survived in the same place in the archives. The report and log seem to have been written up soon after the action, perhaps a few days after the event when Detmers had

learned the name of the *Sydney*. Why he kept this primitive version and why, during his years in prison, he did not write up a fuller account, is not clear. As noted above, Habben had left Australia in 1943 with a copy of this account or some similar document when he was repatriated.

Nevertheless, when these documents were read in London, once more the naval staff were unimpressed. The Director of Naval Intelligence minuted "... attached are pages 2 to 6 inclusive of a somewhat incoherent account of H.M.A.S. SIDNEY's [sic] last action which was found on the person of the Captain of the German Raider "KORMORAN" who has been captured ... ":

ACTION REPORT

26.10.41.

Detached KULMERLAND. Drew away to westward to effect alterations to engines. Exchange of nos. 1 and 2 engines.

(four figures omitted)

Midday: sighted an American, turned away. Then effected alterations. Alterations completed by (four figure omitted). Trial run without trouble. Proceeded on agent's way, as still time before new moon. Intend to be off PERTH by then. Report on CORNWALL with convoy off Cape LEEUWIN course west. Altered course to NE in consequence.

Intention: investigation of coast off SHARKS BAY.

Wednesday 19.11.

Course 25, Speed 11; 26.34 South, 111 East. SSE 3 to 4, Sea 3 medium swell from SW. Very clear.

1555

Look out JANSEN reports sailing ship in sight on port bow, bearing approx. 20° true. Report corrected currently to 2 sailing ships, several vessels, 2 smoke clouds, apparently escort.

Alarm. Turned away to port on to 260. Full speed ahead.

1600

Cruiser made out, identified as PERTH Class, on course South. Course 250 into the sun. Approach of darkness not due before 1900. Producing large quantities of smoke ourselves. Engine room reports: No. 4 engine out of order. Speed therefore approx. 14 knots.

1605

Cruiser turns towards; range over 150hm. Approaches slowly making "NNJ" repeatedly on searchlight. Hoist signal for STRAAT. Appreciate situation and make decision.

1645

No. 4 engine running again on 8 cylinders. Speed 14 maintained. At 80hm ceased measurement with three metre rangefinder, for reason of disguise, continued ranging with 1.35 metre rangefinder. Continual signalling. Cruiser approaches slowly on the starboard quarter showing narrow silhouette.

1700

Report on 600 metres QQQ STRAAT EIFS. PERTH radio repeats and requests further report if necessary.

1715

Cruiser draws away on starboard beam 90hm distant.

1725

Morse signal in (MAKS): HOIST YOUR SECRET CALL. Further delay can only make situation worse. (Cruiser) stops engines, thus has not the least suspicion. Therefore

1730

Removal of disguise. Dutch flag struck. War flag flies over from main mast. Time taken 6 seconds. Guns and torpedo given permission to fire. Enemy drops slowly astern.

2 torpedoes inclination 80, speed 14, point of aim bow and stern. Also slow alteration to 260 so as not to interfere with guns. First salvo single shot short. Gun range 13. Second salvo. Third fourth fifth, up 400. About 4 seconds later scores hit on bridge and control position, followed immediately by full salvo from enemy, over, no hits. Then approx. 2 salvos at 5 second interval. Hit amidships, aircraft, bridge. Correction for deflection left between forward turrets. A/A MG's and starboard 3.7 effective against bridge, torpedo tubes and A/A armament. Up to fifth salvo no reply, then 'C' turret well and fast. Hits in funnel and engine room. 'D' turret only two or three salvos, all of them over. 'A' and 'B' turrets no longer (firing). At about eighth or ninth salvo torpedo hit forward of 'A' and 'B' turrets. Torpedo passed short distance ahead.

[Bows]¹⁰ almost completely submerged. Course 260 maintained since torpedo tubes not manned because of A/A MG fire. Enemy turns sharply towards. Course and speed maintained to get clear. Top of 'B' turret flies overboard, further hits forward.

1735 approx.

Enemy passes astern in unfavourable position for firing his torpedoes. Thick smoke caused by fire in engine room conceals enemy from the bridge. A/A Control Officer continues with stern armament range approx. 40hm. Enemy's guns pointing to [port], his A/A is not manned.¹¹

1745 approx.

Turned away to port in order to destroy enemy completely. Shortly afterwards revolutions drop rapidly, no communication with engine room. Simultaneously four torpedo tracks. Hold course because questionable whether engines would make the turn and tracks deviate well astern. Course 240. (Torpedoes) passed short distance astern. Simultaneously engines break down. LENSCH reports engine room and all fire-extinguishing apparatus completely out of order. Order to try and get at least one engine working. From[?]

1750 approx.

Gunnery control working again from forward position with whole battery at 60hm. SIDNEY,¹² course south slow speed. On fire from bridge to after funnel. Constant further hits.

1800 approx.

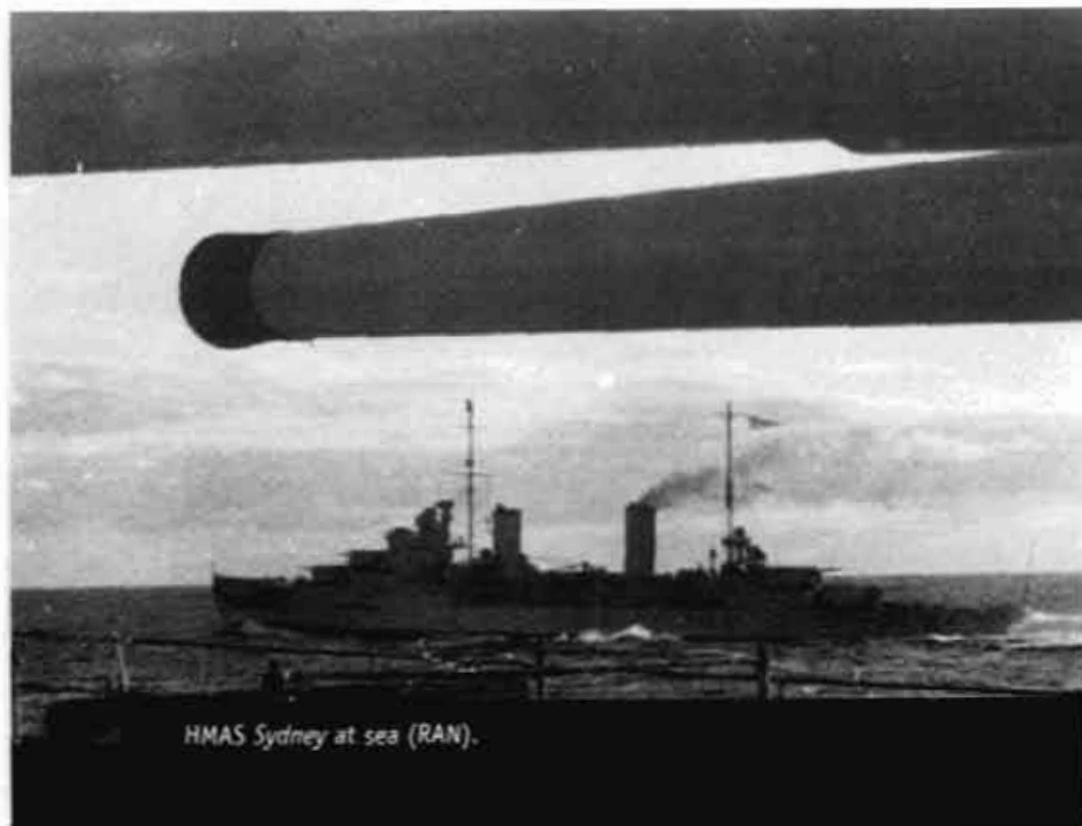
Single torpedo at 70hm inclination 80, speed 5. Miss astern.

1825

Guns check, Large range 90hm, Shots 104hm. Relatively bearing 225. Rounds fired approx. 500 base fuse, 50 nose fuse. Prepare to scuttle, Lower all boats and life-saving equipment. Impossible to reach engine room; satisfied myself personally of this. No. 2 electric installation working but useless. Enemy disappears from sight at approx. 160hm, course approx. 150. Glare visible until about 2200 then occasional flickerings.

2100 approx.

All life-saving apparatus lowered and cast off. Still 124 men on board including almost all officers. Such guns as are



HMAS Sydney at sea (RAN).

still working can thus be manned. Only small quantity of smoke in mine hold. Both boats from no. 2 hatch.

2330 approx.

Both lowered, one with 59 (men). Explosive charge in port forward oil tank.

2355

Smoke increasing heavily on mining deck.

2400

Paid off. Touched off charge, last boat cast off.

0035

Mines explode. Ship sinks rapidly stern first.

The 'Engine Room Log'

The 'Engine Room Log' appears to be largely consistent with the 'Action Report', the minor difference being that in the log the order to abandon ship seems to have been recorded rather earlier than in the 'Action Report'. This is explicable because the bulk of *Kormoran's* men were indeed given the order between 1900 and about 2100, while the guns' crews stayed until about 2330.¹¹

ENGINE ROOM LOG

19.11.41

Speed 11 knots. Nos. 1 and 4 engines on propulsion, no. 3 engine on ship's supply. On Watch Warrant Engineer LENSCH and two Stoker P.O.'s

1555

Alarm. Order from bridge: All engines ready for maximum speed. No. 2 engine turned on to propulsion.

1600

All watches at action stations:

1st Watch at working stations, Warrant Engineer NAGEL.

2nd Watch at damage control stations, Warrant Engineer LENSCH.

3rd Watch engine room action parties, Warrant Engineer MITZLAFF.

1602

Report to bridge: Engines ready for maximum speed

1604

Report to bridge: No. 4 engine out of order by reason of piston running hot, medium speed therefore approx. 14 knots.

On the attempt to increase the load of the engines, no. 4 main engine became unserviceable owing to piston 7 running hot. The engine was stopped forthwith, the damaged piston slung, the connecting rod removed and the valve gear disconnected.

1635 approx.

Engine could be put to propulsion again on 8 cylinders. Ships thus again ready for maximum speed.

1715

Damage control centre shifted from starboard gangway to port gangway, as being probably away from the firing.

1730

Order from bridge: Remove disguise.

1735 approx.

Several hits in main engine room. One shell tore the forward tank bulkhead of the engine room badly open. A thick jet of burning fuel oil poured into the room, which was rapidly filled with opaque smoke. The main fire extinguisher pipe was punctured on either side of the engine room, at the same time the whole foam extinguisher plant which had been transferred to the starboard side went out of action. An explosion on the starboard side rendered the transformers unserviceable, thereby putting the electrical excitation for main generators and propulsion motors out of action. The whole of the main engine installation was thus out of action.

Report to bridge: Engine installation unserviceable by enemy action, very heavy smoke, query may personnel leave engine room? Order from bridge: Leave engine room. By this time only no. 2 electric installation was in order. The attempt by the Chief Plumber to get pressure in the fire extinguisher pipe from the power unit in the propulsion motor room failed, as pressure dropped immediately in the damaged pipe.

1745

Senior Stoker on watch reports verbally to C.O. on the bridge. At this time the engines failed. C.O. orders to try and get one engine working at least. All attempts to penetrate into engine room failed. First Watchkeeping Officer passed order from C.O. by telephone from Damage Control Centre to Engineer Officer in

Control position. Engineer Officer replied that the order could not be carried out and crews of control position, Engineer Officer (corrupt passage) two P.O.'s and two stewards were suffocating. Shortly afterwards control position ceased to report. First Watchkeeping Officer reported to C.O.: engine room finally out of action and no further communication with control position.

Attempts to save crew of control position failed. Only one P.O., Stoker, P.O. HAHNERT, succeed in escaping from the control position. He states he saw the control position watch killed by a sudden burst of fire while trying unsuccessfully to open the hatch of the splinter grating. Order from C.O.: all hands to abandon ship.

Detmers's biography

Detmers published his own account, which was translated into English in 1959. A copy is held in the Admiralty Library in Whitehall, but it contains no marginalia (as other books in the library do) and no clue as to the librarian's view of Detmers' account.

The German timetable

The above reports have been analysed by the author and the results are tabulated in Annex B. While agreeing that other constructions with some variations and are possible, the author considers that, allowing for discrepancies which have been introduced by the process of ciphering and deciphering, and by different translators, the written German reports are probably based on the same source, and that this source is a copy of the documents found on Detmers.

However, two potentially significant discrepancies have been noted, both, apparently, the result of mistranslation or mistranscription:

- a. The English translation of Detmers' 'Action Report' in ADM 1/18899 says that at 1730 *Sydney's* "stern almost completely submerged"

but the deciphered German text before translation says "Vorsteven taucht fast voellig" i.e. in English "Stem (or bows) almost fully submerged". The corrected translation then tallies with the German naval staff's 1943 account of the battle in *Operationen und Taktik Volume 10* which says "Das Vorschiff tauchte tief ein" and this is correctly translated as "She sank deeply by the bows".

- b. Similarly, the archive copy of the decrypt of 'Action Report' contains, and nearly all subsequent analyses repeat, the mistranslation that *Sydney's* guns were pointed to starboard. If so, *Sydney's* guns would have been pointing at the enemy as she passed across its stern and, if in local control, might have been expected to blast the German from close range. However, the original German of the 'Action Report' states that *Sydney's* guns were pointing to port: in German "... Gegnergeschütze zeigen Bb ..." 'Bd' is the German abbreviation for 'Backbord', that is larboard or port: so, in English this should read "... enemy guns to port ..." This is confirmed by *Volume 10*, which says in German, "... Die Gegner, dessen Türme nach seiner Backbordseite ..." or "... the enemy, its guns pointing to his port side ..." Thus the statement, made in a number of official Australian and British analyses, that *Sydney's* X and Y turrets were still in action after she had crossed *Kormoran's* stern is doubtful.¹⁴

Notes

- 1 'OPERATIONS AND TACTICS. PRO: ADM 1/18899, ff. 10-15, 41-6.
- 2 In the German original "achteraus" and therefore, here, correctly translated.
- 3 Minute, 6 September 1945. PRO: ADM 1/18899.
- 4 Minute, 14 October 1945. *ibid.*
- 5 Minute, 8 November 1945. *ibid.*
- 6 Letter, Secretary Naval Board to Secretary of the Admiralty, December 1945. PRO: ADM 1/19442.
- 7 Minute, 20 February 1946. *ibid.*
- 8 'Cutting from German Newspaper'. *ibid.*
- 9 'Action Report', 7 August 1945. PRO: ADM 1/18899, ff. 70-1.
- 10 See last paragraph of this chapter: the English translation in ADM 1/18899 gives "stern", but the German says "Vorsteven taucht fast voellig" i.e. in English "Stem (or bows) almost fully submerged". The word changed is shown in the square brackets.
- 11 See last paragraph of this chapter: the German says "Gegnergeschutze zeigen Bd" or "enemy guns [pointing] to port". The word changed is shown in the square brackets.
- 12 The use of *Sydney's* name at this point indicates that this part of the report at least was written up some days after the event and after Detmers had learned the name of his opponent.
- 13 'Engine Room Log', 7 August 1945. PRO: ADM 1/18899, f. 72
- 14 'Report on Loss of HMAS SYDNEY', 12 February 1942, Section 8, paragraph 10. PRO: ADM 199/736.

6 London's Analysis and the Official Historian's Research

No first hand accounts of the loss of HMAS *Sydney* nor any type of enquiry into her loss have been found in the British archives. There are, however, different types of accounts, which are all second and even third hand. These accounts consist of:

- Appreciations of events based on the first signals from Australia reporting *Sydney* overdue, and subsequent wartime analysis of events (see Chapters 2 and 9).
- Reports based on the interrogation of German prisoners of war, which were analysed in and forwarded from Australia by signal and letter (see Chapter 4).
- Captured German documents postwar (see Chapter 5).
- The official historian's analysis of events written in the 1950s, and his re-visit of the subject in the 1970s.

Raider intelligence

The first widespread acknowledgement by the Admiralty that something might be seriously amiss with *Sydney* was on 25 November, the day after the first signal from ACNB about their concerns for *Sydney* and the day after the first entry in the *Naval War Diary* (see Chapter 2). The medium for this acknowledgment was in a signalled intelligence summary, with a wide internal and external distribution, concerning enemy raiders. Without giving explanation or comment, the signal gave two widely separated possible positions for *Schiff 41* or *Raider G* on 6 November 1941 and on about 20 November. Clearly at the time of writing the signal the name of *Raider G*, *Kormoran*, was not properly known:¹

MOST SECRET MESSAGE 2229A/25th November

C.in C. Home Fleet, 332. Date 25.11.41

N.S.H.Q. Ottawa, 73

New Zealand Naval Board, 736.

Britman, 587.

F.O.C. North Atlantic, 426.

C. in C. South Atlantic, 464.

N.O.f/c Simonstown, 117

R.A. South American Division. 553.

C. in C. America & West Indies, 291.

Australian Commonwealth Naval Board, 161

C. in C. China, 427.

C. in C. East Indies, 921.

ALUSNA

SPENAVO

Naval Cypher (D).

From Admiralty

NITE. AIDAC.

My 1550A/12.

1. H.M.S. DEVONSHIRE sank enemy supply ship which was similar to and may have been Raider 16 (C) in 04° 02'S. 180° 29'W. at 1105Z/22. As ship was fuelling U-Boat, survivors had to be left in rafts and lifeboats. Did not reply fire but made R distress message as from Dutch POLYPHEMUS and endeavoured to escape under very efficient smoke screen.
2. Aircraft sighted vessel course 090° off Gijon, Spain, 23/9. Ship either returning blockade runner or possibly Raider 45 (B) which she resembled, and which is not thought to have previously returned.

3. On 16/11 U.S. EXCAMBION sighted unidentified vessel in 36° 52'N. 21° 43'W course, South. Old-fashioned 3 island type straight bow counter stern but squat funnel. Deck cargo of crates, but appeared light. Possibly outward bound blockade runner or supply ship.
4. H.M.A.S.SYDNEY overdue at Fremantle since 20/11 from Sunda Straits area and her non-appearance is causing anxiety. At 0700/24 TROCAS in 24° 06'S. 111° 40'E. picked up 25 German Naval survivors from CORMORON, which they said had been sunk by a cruiser. CORMORON may be corruption for KAMERUN or possibly nickname of Raider 41 (G) last located in South Atlantic in May 1941 with Raider 16. She may have operated in Galapagos area in August.
5. U.S. ship sighted identified ship in 03°S 177°E on 6/11. Description fits Raider 41 (G).
6. Greek MARY LIVANOS made Q distress message at 1230/22 when South of Madagascar. At 2040/22 she made R distress message. Both messages cancelled, but not yet whether genuine. Ship due Lourenco Marques 25/11.
7. DLGA TOPIC arrived Iquique. Reported attack probably false.

2229A/25

D.D.I.C.

(Green Line 8)

Approved A.C.N.S. (F).

The Admiralty's first appreciation

The next acknowledgment that HMAS *Sydney* had been in any sort of action with a German raider appears to have been in a general signal on

16 December 1941 to Commanders-in-Chief and others, giving the Admiralty's appreciation of three incidents that year, one in May and two in December. This signal was later reprinted nearly verbatim as an appendix to the *Battle Summary No. 13*. The signal did not mention the fate of *Sydney*:³

Secret

Cypher Message

T.O.O.1618A./16/12/41

From Admiralty

To C-in-C.H.F. C-in-C.W.A. 981 F.D.C.N.A. 2
S.O. Force H 278 C in C. Med. 40 B 3 C-in-
E.S.A. 17 C-in-C.A.&W.I. 605 C-in-C.E.I. 314
C-in-C.E.F. 614 A.C.N.B. 333 N.Z.N.B. 820.

Cypher D

Method W/T

Originator's instructions T.O.R.0900/17/12

NITE.

Analysis of encounters with enemy merchant raiders by H.M.S. CORNWALL on 8th May 1941 in Indian Ocean; H.M.A.S. SYDNEY off west Australian Coast on 19th November and H.M.S. DEVONSHIRE in South Atlantic on 22nd November brings out the following points: -

(a) RECOGNITION

1. H.M.S. CORNWALL's raider reported herself as (LEDR) TAMERLANE who was not on station.
2. H.M.A.S. SYDNEY's raider replied to a challenge that she was steamship STRAAD MALEYKKA, who had that day left Beira.
3. H.M.S. DEVONSHIRE's raider reported

herself as S.S. (PGUS) POLYPHEMUS then in New York.

Comment: -

4. Enemy raiders will always disguise themselves and use appropriate name in any signal whether by an RRRR message on 500 kc/s or reply to a challenge.

5. In No (R) No case so far has disguise adopted been such as should have deceived Commanding Officers had they trusted the negative intelligence that information of the ships movements had not been reported to them.

6. Positive information of British Allied and U.S. Merchantmen from Admiralty or S.O.'s (I) is sufficiently accurate and positive information of neutral vessels by local war trade reporting officers should be sufficiently accurate to enable C.O.'s to be kept informed of positions of all non-enemy ships they may meet. C-in-C's should ensure that ships information and plotting table organisation can achieve this.

(b) CHALLENGE PROCEDURE

Merchant ship recognition procedure laid down in recognition manual and N.C.S.I. 371 does not appear to have been used. This is now only applicable to the Red Ensign and some Dutch ships but arrangements are in hand for its extension to the United States and all Allied shipping.

(c) TACTICS

There is a possibility the C.O.s underestimate offensive power of raiders.

They should be warned that enemy raiders are often powerfully armed with guns and

torpedoes and if fitted with modern R.D.F. may be able to open fire even at long ranges with great accuracy.

(d) U-BOATS

C.O.s should be warned that all enemy vessels throughout the world may be accompanied by U-boats and that the merchant vessel's tactics will be designed to lead British ships towards U-boats.

The warning to commanding officers

In at least one case the CinC made a précis of the Admiralty's general message and sent it out to the ships under his command. (The précis was necessary to preserve cipher security: though it was a breach of that security to file both signals together). It can be presumed that other CinCs acted likewise. Thus the CinC South Atlantic to the South Africa Squadron:²

The following facts emerge from three recent engagements between H.M. Ships and Enemy Armed Merchant Raiders,

(A) RECOGNITION.

1. Raiders must be expected to be disguised and will use a name suitable to the disguise in reply to any signal or if an RRRR message is made.
2. Disguise should be penetrated without difficulty providing information of shipping movements as received is relied upon to show that no such ship should be in position of encounter.
3. Information of movements of British Allied and Neutral shipping passed to ships is sufficiently accurate to enable merchant ship plot to be kept, which should show all merchant shipping likely to be encountered.

(B) CHALLENGING.

Challenge procedure in accordance with NCSI 371 and recognition manual was not used in these encounters. This procedure is shortly being extended to all allied shipping and should assist identification.

(C) TACTICS.

1. It must be borne in mind that every merchant raider possesses a powerful armament of both guns and torpedoes and are capable of accurate fire at long ranges.
2. It should always be suspected that U-Boats may be in company with any enemy vessel encountered and that an endeavour will be made to lead the intercepting ship towards these U-Boats.

Battle Summary No. 13 -***Actions with Enemy Disguised Raiders***

The first comprehensive British account of the action between HMAS Sydney and the *Kormoran* is contained in *Battle Summary No. 13 - Actions with Enemy Disguised Raiders*, published in 1942 (See Annex C). Several battle summaries were written during and just after WWII. They were classified 'Confidential' and distributed as *Confidential Books* or CBs, though post-war all were downgraded to 'Restricted' and recategorised as *Books of Reference* or BRs. Later in WWII, the information contained in battle summaries was extracted into another CB called *Fighting Experience*. Battle summaries were anonymous staff histories written by desk officers in the Historical Section of the Admiralty soon after the events described though, usually, with a little more knowledge than the commanders of the actions portrayed. They were intended to convey the unvarnished truth, good and bad, about various engagements, and for others to draw lessons learned from encounters with the enemy. Exceptionally, the name of the author of *Battle Summary No. 13* is known, because J. H. Lloyd Owen, from the Historical Section, Admiralty, wrote to Roskill in August 1950:⁴



Captain Joseph Burnett, RAN, Commanding Officer of HMAS Sydney (RAN).

In reply to your note of yesterday, I am able to confirm that the Captain of the Cornwall in May 1941 was P.C.W. MANWARING. When I wrote BR.1736(5) I originally included his name, but as you surmise, omitted it from the final draft on account of Admiralty criticism. As far as I remember, Manwaring said in his report, rather foolishly I think, that he had a guilty conscience for approaching to within 10,500 yards of the enemy. The C. in C. East Indies was very critical and the Admiralty echoed his criticism, but sent their remarks direct to Manwaring, instead of via his Admiral. These criticisms contrasted strangely with the C. in C. East Indies remark, quoted on page 6 of the same Battle Summary, regarding the action of the *Leander* with the R.A.M.B.1 in February 1941.

The Weekly Intelligence Review and the Raider Supplements

The *Weekly Intelligence Review* (WIR) was what it says it is, a printed weekly report often containing background information to events at sea during the war. It was issued by the Naval Intelligence Department of the Admiralty and intended to be read by all officers in "H.M. Navy" - a phrase which was intended to include all HM Ships, Australian, British, Canadian, New Zealand, etc. A small number of *Raider Supplements* to the WIR were also published. Both WIR and the supplements were classified 'Secret'. Captains in command were permitted to retain copies for reference, but less senior officers in command were required to burn their copies of WIR and the supplements before the next edition was put into circulation. So, if WIRs had been received in HMAS *Sydney*, it is likely that they would have been retained.

The *Raider Supplements* comprised several parts:

- The first, unnumbered part, dated 30 May 1941 and published with WIR 64, was also the first to mention *Raider G*, the *Kormoran* (see Chapter 1). The information given was sparse but accurate, apart from her number, which was given as 46 instead of 41. *Raider G* was said to be armed "...with underwater torpedo tubes. Very completely

equipped, probably on the same general lines as the other raiders..." but later in the report it said "the best equipped of all the raiders..."

- *Raider Supplement* Part I, dated 12 December 1941 and published with WIR number 92, contained general information about the operations of raiders, but no specific intelligence of *Raider G* and none about the loss of HMAS *Sydney*.
- *Raider Supplement* Part II, dated 6 February 1942, contained brief but generally correct information about the encounter with *Raider G* by HMAS *Sydney*. However, the report was prefixed by the caveat that:

... The following details concerning the appearance and equipment of Raider "G" are incomplete, and have not at present all been confirmed by reports from prisoners of war. They should therefore be treated with reserve. They are included as this ship was reported to be one of the best-equipped raiders.

- *Raider Supplement* Part III, dated 30 October 1942, was also the last and contained the instruction that "...Raider Supplement to WIR. No. 64 [being obsolete] ... should now be destroyed..." This part updated intelligence about raiders and their operations, and contained more detailed information about individual raiders. As far as *Kormoran* was concerned Part III gave a bald list of her operations and a chart, and concluded with a paragraph that:

... 19. Raider G was in action with H.M.A.S. Sydney in 25° S., 111° E. on 19th November 1941. Both ships were sunk.

Meanwhile, on 15 May 1942, WIR number 114 had contained in the main body of the review what was called a special contribution dealing with HMAS *Sydney* and *Raider 41*. The special contribution was a reprint from the USN's Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) *Weekly*. As far as can be determined from internal evidence this American report is based on the version of events which had been reported by ACNB to the Admiralty in London, though why a third-hand version of the loss of HMAS *Sydney* from an American source should be quoted and not a more direct version

from an Australian or British source is not clear. However, this version was subsequently used elsewhere, for example in the Director of Naval Construction's file 'War Damage: Aircraft Carriers and Cruisers ... Torpedo and Mine':

Since there were no survivors from the *Sydney*, the following description of the action was compiled from the story told by the Captain of *Raider 41*, Fregatten Kapitän Dettmers. Although there is little confirmation of its accuracy, it is believed to be a reasonably truthful account of the engagement.

At about 1600, Zone-7 time on 19th November, 1941, *Raider 41* (*Kormoran*) was in the approximate position of 26°S, 111°E., course north, speed ten knots or more, when a ship was sighted by the lookout to the north of the starboard bow, distant about 15 miles. As soon as the stranger was identified as a cruiser standing towards him, Captain Dettmers turned hard left into the sun (250°) and increased speed to full, which he estimated as about 15 knots. The *Sydney* had obviously sighted the *Kormoran*, for she changed course to starboard, and thus the approach began with the *Sydney* overhauling the *Kormoran* from the latter's starboard quarter. The cruiser repeatedly signalled with her searchlight, making the letters NNJ for about half an hour, but no reply was made by the raider as the captain was of the opinion that the use of such a signal device would betray his identity. He was at that time posing as the Dutch ship *Straat Malakka*, and merchant vessels do not carry such equipment. In addition, he said, he did not understand what the signal NNJ meant.

Some time before the action was joined, *Kormoran* broadcast "QQQQ 26°S. 111°E., *Straat Malakka*,"

and repeated it once. It is worthy of note that a QO message was picked up by a tug at about 1000 G.M.T. on 19th November, but the position and ship's name could not be read by her radio operator. A shore radio station also read a mutilated time and position message five minutes later, but no Q's were distinguished. After ten minutes, since there had been no repetition, a message was sent out to ships asking if there was anything to report, but no reply was received.

At a distance of seven miles Sydney made the signal by flashing "Hoist your signal letters." In reply *Kormoran* hoisted PKQI (*Straat Malakka*) on the triatic stay between the foremast and the funnel, but the funnel prevented the message being clearly seen aboard the cruiser. When Sydney made the signal, "Hoist your signal letters clear," the Yeoman of Signals lengthened the halyard and drew it towards the starboard side. It is reasonable to suppose that this apparent inefficiency in signalling by the raider was a *ruse de guerre* with the hope that Sydney would close to investigate, for the cruiser's signal had to be repeated continuously before *Kormoran* complied.

Sydney came up with the *Kormoran* with all guns and torpedo tubes bearing, and when she was approximately abreast the raider she answered "Batavia." Sydney then made by flashing "Show your secret sign." having no reply to this the raider captain decided to fight, which up to this time he had tried to avoid. Captain Dettmers mentioned an order from the cruiser to stop as having been given immediately before the signal to make the secret call.

At about 1700, when the two ships were

proceeding on parallel courses in a westerly direction at approximately 15 knots, the *Sydney* being on the *Kormoran's* starboard beam at a distance of a mile or less, *Kormoran*, dropping her gun-concealing plates and hoisting the German flag, opened fire with four of her six 15-centimetre guns. The first salvo hit the *Sydney's* bridge. Almost simultaneously, but probably just afterwards, the cruiser's first salvo hit the raider amidships. Her second salvo found the raider's engine-room and fuel tanks and caused a fire. In the meantime the raider had fired two torpedoes, one of which struck the cruiser forward about 20 metres from the bow at the same time that a salvo struck her amidships.

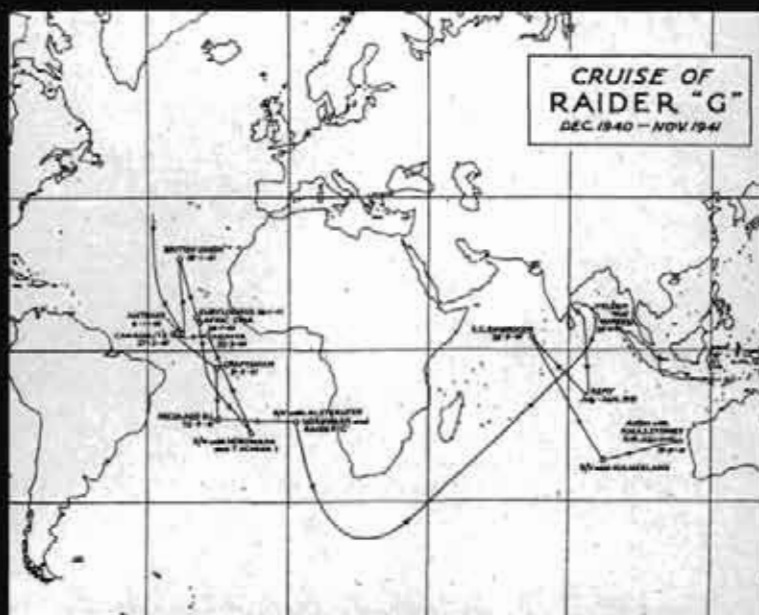
The *Sydney's* forward turrets were apparently put out of action by the torpedo's explosion, while her aircraft, which was reported to have been warming up, was shot to pieces. The range was so close that men about the aircraft could be seen. The raider's A.A. guns were used against the cruiser to prevent use of her A.A. guns and torpedoes.

Sydney now altered course to port under the stern of the raider, and then continued on a slightly diverging course on the port side. She must have been very close as the Germans thought she might be going to ram. At this stage, though a fire was raging and could not be put out because all fire-fighting appliances had been destroyed, *Kormoran's* guns were apparently all in action and one of her guns fired 50 rounds, while all guns fired a total of about 450 rounds.

Sydney's after turrets were still in action. She now fired four torpedoes which *Kormoran* turned to meet, three of them passing ahead

and one astern. A torpedo fired by the raider about the same time also missed its mark. Both ships were now on fire, the cruiser being heavily afire amidships and on the bridge, and down by the bow about six feet. The raider's bridge had been hit but not put out of action, the radio had been destroyed by the first salvo and a large fire was burning in the engine-room. Approximately half an hour after fire was opened the action was over, *Kormoran* was stopped, and *Sydney* was proceeding in a south-easterly direction at a speed of about five knots, and throwing out a dense cloud of smoke which might have been a smoke screen, but was probably the result of fire.

At about 1900 the captain of the raider ordered those of his ship's company who were not required into the boats, retaining aboard about



Cruise of RAIDER "G".

100 men and all his officers. At about 2300 Captain Dettmers decided to abandon his ship, which blew up about midnight. The cruiser was still in sight distant about ten miles when the first boats left the *Kormoran*, and for some time the glow of the fire could be seen. Before midnight it had disappeared. No explosion was heard. Three wooden lifeboats and three rubber rafts were launched first, leaving one boat for those still on board. Captain Dettmers mentioned that it took three hours to get lifeboats out of a hatch because of the lack of power. The motorboats had been destroyed, and even if the big boat which was carried had not been destroyed, there was no power available to move it. One of the floats collapsed; some men jumped overboard and though a number of these were picked up by the lifeboats that had been launched, it would appear that about 80 were lost.

Captain Dettmers expressed the opinion that the *Sydney* sank as the result of the punishment she had received, and that there could be no survivors as the whole superstructure had been so damaged that boats on deck must have been destroyed, while any boats stowed below must have been burned by the fires which were raging. At the time that Captain Dettmers was preparing to abandon ship the blaze from *Sydney* was still to be seen, but when he looked round before leaving the ship it had disappeared. His story indicates that *Sydney* disappeared somewhat before midnight, and that *Kormoran's* sinking was hastened by an explosion after midnight. The weather at the time was rough, as it had been for two or three days before the encounter.

The first definite indication to the outside world that there had been an action was received

at 0816 G.C.T. when the tanker *Tracas* reported by radio that 25 German naval men on a floating raft had been picked up in position 26° 06' S, 111° 40' E

Fighting Experience

Fighting Instructions have been a part of the Royal Navy for several centuries, a guide to the conduct of operations and tactics. In July 1942 the Royal Navy introduced *Fighting Experience* also known as C. B. 04211(2)(A). *Fighting Experience* included a section on raiders, and in this section, edited versions of various incidents were given as examples. In this one, the cruiser is clearly intended to be HMAS Sydney, the italics are as in the original printed document:⁵

Case 3

A cruiser sighted a suspicious vessel at 15 miles and gave chase. She did not order the raider to stop, but asked her name.

When in a position just abaft the raider's beam, 2,500 yards distant, steaming at the same speed and on the same course, and presumably presenting an ideal target for torpedo attack she signalled "Make your secret letter." The raider then dropped her flaps and opened fire with gun and torpedo. The first salvo hit the cruiser's bridge and immediately afterwards she was hit by a torpedo. The raider was simultaneously engaged and subsequently sunk.

Fighting Experience added that up to July 1942 there had been twelve Allied contacts with disguised enemy raiders and supply ships since the outbreak of war; sufficient "... to justify remarks upon the experience gained." These remarks were listed under a number of headings:⁶

Identification

The primary difficulty confronting H.M. ships is that of identification-and hesitations engendered by doubts have been clearly apparent

in the actions and encounters that have taken place.

It is symptomatic of the type of warfare that guilt has to be recognised through the process of deduction rather than by the evidences of positive proof. There can be no positive recognition unless the enemy blunders into an action that discloses his identity. The raider is well aware of the efficiency of his disguise, and it is certain that he will employ every artifice in throwing dust to confuse the issue, and that he will maintain the pretence until all hope of escape has faded. He has watched our methods, and can simulate an innocent merchantman, or even an A.M.C. with great accuracy.

Enemy Fallibility

The enemy has, however, shown himself to be fallible, and the following instances are good illustrations of lapses in technique:-

- (1) On being challenged a raider sent a "Raider" distress call representing himself as the Polyphemus—a ship which in Talbot Booth has a counter stern: the raider had a cruiser stern!
- (2) The Polyphemus was that day in New York.
- (3) A raider sent a distress call "RRR" instead of the more usual "RRRR."
- (4) A raider made no intelligible reply to International Code signal "NNJ" ("You should indicate your signal letters"), and his movements did not seem to be those of an innocent ship, but rather that he appeared to be trying to draw the intercepting cruiser in a certain direction.

- (5) A raider was bluffed into scuttling by a warning salvo.

Recognition

Recognition by negative means - that is, by the knowledge that no friendly or neutral ship could be in the position of encounter - could be infallible; and every endeavour is made to make it so; but the erratic movements of the laggard tramp can jeopardise the watertightness of this organisation, and doubts burst out when a ship is found in an improbable position.

These doubts can be largely eliminated by confidence in the shipping plot which - within a small margin - indicates the occupant of any place at any time. It must, however, be accepted as a principle that any ship that cannot be identified with certainty from the plot must be thoroughly investigated.

The most usual method of recognition by silhouette is hampered by the limitations of Talbot Booth and the silhouette books, which tell only half the story. Endeavours are being made to build up the library of silhouettes, and the situation in this respect will gradually improve.

Recognition by Challenge

The correct reply to the "secret call sign" challenge is not certain proof of innocence as the raider may be using the secret call sign of a ship previously sunk by him; but this method used in conjunction with appearance should give positive proof of guilt as it is most unlikely that a raider could make himself up into an exact representation of the victim whose call sign he fraudulently employs. The secret call sign method of challenge is being

extended to Norwegian, Polish, Greek, Belgian and Free French merchant ships, in addition to British Empire, U.S.A. and Dutch ships, to whom issue has already been made.

It can be taken that the enemy is aware of this method, but it should be remembered that he cannot operate it with success unless he obtains the complete list of secret call signs which is so far uncompromised.

Raider or Supply Ship

It is as well to clarify the position of "raider" and "supply" ship. Earlier in the war considerations of lost tonnage made it imperative that enemy merchant ships should be captured if at all practicable. This, however, now needs modification for, though our need for additional tonnage is by no means lessened, the enemy has shown such skill in scuttling that the chances of the successful capture of a supply ship are remote. This, in itself, would not be sufficient reason for holding back from capture, but, taken in conjunction with the fact that it is impossible to distinguish a raider from a supply ship and that either may have a submarine in company, it is obvious that great risks attend an attempt to capture, and that in the majority of cases these dangers outweigh the advantage of possible extra tonnage.

Need for Circumspection

There have, unfortunately, been cases where our ships have been led into a dangerous position by unjustifiable sanguinity, and it is as well to stress at this point that our experience has proved conclusively that enemy raiders have been found to be powerfully armed with 5.9-in. guns, torpedoes, and mines;

moreover, they are probably fitted with R.D.F. and able to open fire at long range with great accuracy. Taking the above points into consideration it is clearly advisable to regard all merchantmen with grave suspicion and to avoid being drawn into a position of tactical disadvantage. To avoid the charge of pointing the obvious it is necessary to cite specific cases in which this rule has been disregarded.

In the last war H.M.S. *Ramsey* and H.M.S. *Alicantara* were both sunk by torpedoes whilst lowering boats to examine disguised raiders. H.M.S. *Dundee*, on the other hand, approached the raider *Leopard* from astern, and on the first sign of hostile action pumped 40 rounds of 4-in. shell into her without sustaining a single casualty.

[Case 1 '*Leander v RAMBI*' and Case 2 '*Cornwall v Raider 33*' not reproduced. Case 3 '*Sydney v Kormoran*' reproduced above.]

General Experience

These three actions clearly reveal the necessity for great forethought and alertness in dealing with disguised raiders.

Generally speaking the first thing to do in meeting a suspicious ship is to stop her. She can then be approached from a suitable bearing provided there is no delay in opening fire should the necessity arise. The examining ship must be kept outside effective torpedo range and present as narrow a target as possible. If a ship refuses to stop after a signal and a warning shot she should be fired on - there have been occasions when much valuable time has been wasted, and ships endangered, by a failure to exercise this well-known belligerent right. Aircraft should, when practicable, take similar action.

A boarding party should not be sent to a suspected ship. If there are still doubts about her she should be ordered to send a boat with the ship's papers, Master, Chief Engineer and some of the crew. It will certainly be safer, and time may be saved, by ordering the suspected ship to move some distance away from her boat. In the meantime a constant alert should be maintained and ship should be ready to open fire on the first sign of hostile action.

In this connection it is of interest to know that there is strong reason to believe that German auxiliary cruisers are sailed under the British flag and, if intercepted, have orders to withhold their fire until the British warship has stopped and is lowering boats.

Communication with Suspects

A problem that perpetually arises is that of communication with a suspected ship. Though many merchant ships have shown a most satisfactory efficiency it is a hard fact that visual signalling cannot be guaranteed outside 4 miles, and many Commanding Officers have felt a great temptation to close to a satisfactory visual range after a tiresome period of frustration. If a ship is really "dumb" - and one must assume a cornered raider does not seek a conversation - there is no certain way of communication short of loud hailing. Fortunately, there are few such mutes; but there are many whose signalling borders on unintelligibility, and the raider may well play a game of this nature. Visual signalling must therefore be relegated to the role of an aid to quick identification and not regarded as a necessary procedure. To recapitulate - if communication is difficult, stop the ship by warning gunfire. If she is innocent her

tacit obedience is a helpful sign; if she is guilty the fact that Nemesis is upon her may provoke an overt act which will solve the problem once and for all.

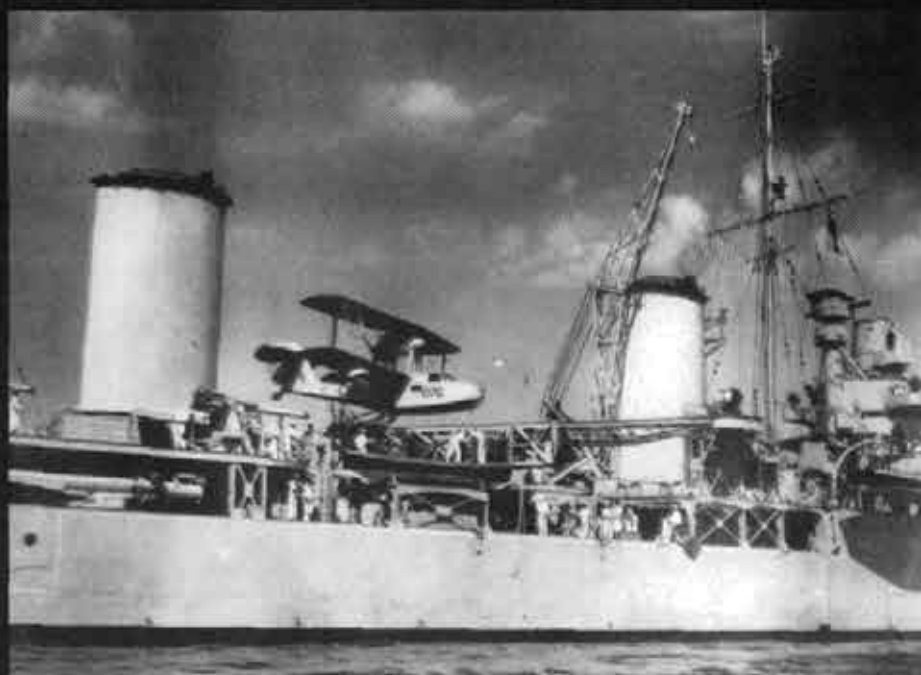
Possible Presence of U-Boats

There is always the possibility of the presence of a U-Boat - in one case it is known that an enemy supply ship had a submarine in company and was actually surprised at a moment when stores were being transferred. On this occasion the submarine dived and the supply ship was forced into scuttling, and the object was achieved; but it clearly illustrates the danger of approaching a suspect without taking all the A/S measures at one's disposal. The rescue of survivors from boats is therefore attended by considerable risk unless the raider has moved at least 15 miles from the position where she was first clearly visible, for the submarine is capable of diving at 10 knots for one hour, and remains a menace within that radius.

In poor visibility there is always the possibility that the submarine may have followed up on the surface at a higher speed, and her presence cannot be discounted even at a considerable distance from the position of first contact.

Conclusion

To summarise the foregoing remarks. Experience has shown that it is imperative to handle raiders from long range, and identification will, in all probability, have to be done by deduction. There is no rule of thumb method in this, but a thorough knowledge of the habits of merchant ships, coupled with a show of force will go far to solve the puzzle.



HMAS Sydney's walrus aircraft (RAN).

In general it has been found better to make a signal asking for information about ships in the vicinity rather than run the risks of doubt by sticking too closely to W/T silence.

The Preliminary Narrative of the War at Sea

In 1944 the Historical Section of the Tactical, Torpedo and Staff Duties Division of the Admiralty published Volume II of its *Preliminary Narrative of the War at Sea*. This narrative described itself as follows: ¹

Foreword.

(1) This Preliminary Narrative has been compiled chiefly from the daily analysis of signals contained in the War Diary of the Admiralty Historical Section. It has been amplified or amended in the light of such

Later information as is available in the Weekly Intelligence Report (W.I.R.) of the Naval Intelligence Division; the Monthly Report of the Anti-Submarine Warfare Division (C.B.04050); and the lists of British and Foreign Merchant and Fishing Vessels lost or damaged by enemy action (O.U.6553 (41) and 6353A (41)), compiled by the Statistical Section, Trade Division, Admiralty.

(2) It is essentially a preliminary narrative (inasmuch as further information may become available at a later date, its intention is to give a general survey and outline of the course of the war at sea, from the material at present available).

(3) Detailed accounts of the principal naval operations will be found in the Battle Summaries (C.B.3081) produced by the Historical Section of the Tactical Torpedo and Staff Duties Division.

(4) The arrangement of Volume II, covering the year 1941, is on similar lines to that of the first volume. The year is divided into four quarterly periods. For each of the first three quarters, there are two chapters - one dealing with the Mediterranean, in which most of the principal operations of the year took place, the other with operations elsewhere. To the last quarter of the year, four chapters have been allotted as this was the period in which the areas of conflict were materially extended by the entry into the war of Japan and the United States.

The relevant section of the narrative reads as follows:⁸

493. SYDNEY Lost in Action with Raider.
(November 19).

The Australian cruiser SYDNEY, Captain Joseph Burnett, R.A.N., left position 07.56S., 104.40E., at 0400 G.M.T. on November 17 for Fremantle, where she was due on November 20. On the 24th, the Australian Naval Board informed the Admiralty that she had not arrived, (see Battle Summary No. 13 C.B.3081(5)) and that the naval authorities in the Netherlands East Indies had been asked to search the area south of Sunda Strait by air. At 1432 on the 24th, the C. in C. China, passed a message received from the S.S. TROCAS at 0700 that day that she had picked up 25 German naval men from a floating raft, in 26.06 S., 11.40 E. Two lifeboats with 103 German survivors also got ashore 40 miles north of Carnarvon, Western Australia, and eventually 315 in all were found.

Sea and air reconnaissance failed to locate any survivors of the SYDNEY, but a R.A.N. lifebuoy and 2 Carley floats were picked up on November 29, 160 miles N.W. of Carnarvon. From the German survivors it was learnt that their ship, variously described as the KORMORAN, or the STEIERMARK, but known to the Admiralty as Raider "G", was steaming north at about 10 to 14 knots on November 19 in about 26°S., 111°E., and at about 1600 (local time) sighted the SYDNEY proceeding south at a range of 15 miles, in good visibility. The raider altered course to 250° and the SYDNEY followed, and challenged, without being given a reply. When the SYDNEY was at close range, the raider made a "Q" report (disguised raider in sight) and, signalled that she was the Dutch STRAAT MALAKKA, which she was impersonating under Dutch colours. The SYDNEY

was then about 11/4 miles from the raider, just abaft her beam, both ships steaming at about 15 knots on a course of 250°. The SYDNEY asked the raider to make her secret letters, but the latter dropped her concealed gun flaps and opened fire with guns and torpedoes. Her first salvo hit the SYDNEY's bridge. The SYDNEY, which was at action stations with her turrets already trained on the raider, opened fire simultaneously and her second salvo set the raider's fuel tanks on fire.

Early in the action, the SYDNEY was struck by a torpedo under "A" turret. Both ships were soon heavily on fire. After about 25 minutes, when the range had increased to four miles, the action was broken off. The SYDNEY was last seen about five miles away, steering southwards at 5 knots, and it was presumed she sank as a result of her damage. The raider scuttled herself at about midnight, when the fire was beyond control and would soon have reached the ammunition and mines. She had lost 25 men killed in the action, and about 400 took to the boats and rafts, of whom a large proportion reached the Australian coast.

Owing to the Far East situation and the loss of the SYDNEY, the Admiralty on December 3 ordered the AUSTRALIA to be released from the escort of convoy W.S.12 X, then between St. Helena and Capetown, and to proceed towards Fremantle. The DORSETSHIRE, from the South Atlantic Station, was ordered to replace the AUSTRALIA and escort W.S.12 X to Suez. It was hoped to send another 8-inch cruiser from home, but recent rough weather damage had put at least two out of action and the transfer could not for the moment be carried out.

The Official History

The official British history of these events was written by Captain S.W. Roskill, RN, and published in *The War at Sea*.⁹ Roskill was a retired officer, a gunnery specialist, who worked on the official history in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and who subsequently became a Cambridge don. No evidence of an earlier British enquiry into the loss of HMAS *Sydney* has been found in British archives, and thus Roskill's published history of these events is the next examination in time after Lloyd-Owen wrote *Battle Summary No. 13*. Roskill worked from the official files, before these were weeded and turned over to the PRO. His methodology was to gather sources, draft an account of events, circulate the draft to those who had participated in them or had other contemporary knowledge, and, usually, to accept the comments which he received. Some of his notes are in the Churchill Archives at Churchill College, Cambridge. Other examples of his work can be found in the PRO.

For example, Appendix N, Table I 'German Supply Ships working with Raiders and U-boats 1939-41' of *The War at Sea* exists in Roskill's notes, but in draft and with a similar title and labelled Appendix O. This draft was checked by H.C. Beaumont in the Admiralty and retyped sometime on or before 26 April 1952. Beaumont's letter to Roskill refers to three pages, though only two have survived in Roskill's notes, and Beaumont assured Roskill that "All information has been inserted". However, a comparison with the published version shows that there was still additional or later information which was yet to be added.¹⁰

Roskill studied the official files on the cruise of the *Kormoran* and her encounter with HMAS *Sydney*. His hand-written notes read:

CRUISE OF RAIDER G (KORMORAN) SCHIFF 41

'First wave' (six) all at sea by July 1940.

First ship of 'second wave' was *Kormoran*, which sailed Dec 1940.

She was Hamburg-Amerika liner STEIRMARK (9400) 17^{1/2} knots.

Assigned to Indian Ocean and adjoining African

& Aust. waters. Alternative areas S. Atlantic & Pacific.

Large outfit of mines. But none laid.

Finally sailed 3 Dec from Gotenhafen. Broke through Denmark Strait 12-13 Dec. and turned South.

6 Jan 1941 Greek ANTONIS (3721) sunk in 8 17N 23 32W

18 Jan attacked Brit BRITISH UNION (tanker 6987) Made RR and sank her.

HMS AURORA [?] observed flashes from 12', closed but missed the raider.

Then cruised between C. Verde Is and Equator 29th sank AFRIC STAR (11900) & Brit EURYLOCHUS (5723) taking aircraft to Takoradi. Made RR's (both ships).

There were both merchant & military convoys in area at the time so Norfolk ordered to cover Sl route & Devonshire to search for raider.

7th Feb met NORDMARK with DUQUESA (Brit 8,651 a prize of the Scheer captured on 18 Dec 1940) in tow. Duquesa sunk 18 Feb 1941.

25th Feb met PINGUIN in 26S 2 30W. Then moved north to supply two UB's.

Trouble with engine bearings now developed.

16 March met Scheer in 3N 31W.

Now operated just outside neutrality zone & on 21 March sank Brit AGNITA (small tanker 3552) in 3 20N 23 48W. Broke 7 weeks spell without success.

25 March 50' further south ~~sunk~~ captured Brit tanker CANDOLITE (11,309). Sent as prize to Gironde, arriving 13 April.

~~29 March~~ 5 April R/v with UB & raider supply ship Nordmark and with Rudolf Albrecht on 3rd April in 5N 35W.

Kormoran returned to area of previous successes and on 9 April sank Brit CRAFTSMAN (8022) in 0 32N 23 37W.

RR's by Candolite and Craftsman jammed by raider.

12th April sank Greek NICOLAOS.D.L. (5486) in 1st 54S 22 12W.

Made ordinary SOS and gave wrong position.

Last success in Atlantic. In 4th months achieved 8 ships of 56,708 [tons].

19 April met Atlantis with Alsterufer in 28S 12W and fuelled prior to leaving for Indian Ocean.

Rounded Agulhas Cape 2nd May & entered Indian Ocean.

Orion now operating to W of Madagascar. 9th May heard of destruction of Pinguin by Cornwall on 8th between Socotra and Seychelles.

Met Adjutant and Alsterufer in 14S 73E on 14th. Latter then left for home.

Alsterufer actually intercepted & sunk in 41 12N 13 10W on 23 June.

She was fuelled by Kormoran before departure which was good move as by time she entered Atlantic both tankers stationed there

(Lothringen and Egerland) had been sunk or captured.

20 May Kormoran reached new operational area north of 20°S and east of 80°E.

Orion and Komet now about to leave Indian Ocean for Atlantic & Pacific respectively.

For 4 weeks Kormoran cruised in her area and sighted nothing in spite of aircraft recess.

15-24 June she was 200° SE of Madras. Intended to lay mines but cancelled operation.

26 June sank Yugo Slav VELEBIT (4152) and Brit MAREEBA (3472).

2 July started self-refit in 6°S 86E till 16th

Then to SE to waters of Java Sea, Sumatra & Sunda & Lombok Straits. No success.

(2 Sep SKL [commanded?] THOR (~~second ship~~ second cruiser of second wave) to relieve Kormoran in Indian Ocean: left Kiel 29 Nov 1941 via Channel and Gironde on 14 Jan 1942).

Now back to area of Pinguin's last success. Searched from 17-23 Sept 1941.

Early on 24th Greek STAMATIOS G. EMBIRICOS (3941) intercepted & sunk.

Last success. 5 months in Indian Ocean brought 3 ships of 11,566 [tons].

Total for cruise 11 of 68,274.

29 Sept left area to R/v Kulmerland in 32 30S 17E. She from Kobe with fuel & provisions. R/v made 16 October & Kormoran fuelled and stored. Supply ship parted company 26 Oct.

Kormoran now decided to operate off Sharks Bay (W. Aust).

19 Nov met Sydney in 26 34S 111 00 E.

Story pieced together much later.

Kormoran sighted Sydney about 4 p.m. Cruiser closed & challenged raider who replied as Dutch Straat Malakka. At 5 p.m. raider made a QQ from Straat Malakka. More signals passed: Sydney now 1000⁺ [yards] off on parallel course.

1725 Sydney made 'Hoist your secret call sign' - last card. Bluff called & Kormoran opened fire. Hits obtained almost at once on bridge & A&B Turrets.

Torpedo hit under A Turret.

Sydney's after turrets (in independent) scored 4 hits and set raider on fire.

Fired torpedoes (missed). About 5.45 Kormoran's engines broke down completely but action continued till nearly 6.30 p.m. (55 minutes in all) by which time it was dark

Sydney gradually disappeared over horizon burning fiercely. Final glare seen at 10 p.m.

Kormoran in grave danger of 440 mines still aboard so she abandoned ship & scuttled at midnight. At 0035 20th Nov mines blew up.

317 303 men reached coast or were picked up out of 400.

Of Sydney only trace found was a lifebuoy & 2 Carley floats. No survivors.

Shock to Australian prestige. Reports of survivors not at first believed.

Sydney neglected elementary precautions in closing an unknown ship.

Finally, Roskill synthesised his findings into two pages of *The War at Sea* and made his own conclusions quite clear. He wrote:

... On the 19th of November she [the *Kormoran*] met the Australian cruiser *Sydney* in 26° 34' South, 111° 00' East. The story of the encounter was not pieced together until much later, for there were no survivors from the *Sydney*. But we now know that the two ships met at about 4 p.m., and that the cruiser closed and challenged the raider, who identified herself as a Dutch ship and made a wireless report purporting to come from her. The *Sydney*, with all her guns trained on the raider and apparently ready for instant action, then approached within 2,000 yards, on a parallel course, while endeavoring to establish the truth or falsity of her claimed identity. But, unlike the *Devonshire*, she never asked her shore authorities whether such a ship could be in the area at the present time. At 5.25 p.m. she told the raider to hoist her secret call sign. The raider then knew that the game was up, for she lacked the means to bluff through that demand. She therefore cast off her disguise and opened fire with all her concealed weapons. The *Sydney* replied, but the few seconds' advantage gained by the enemy's possession of the initiative proved decisive; the cruiser was heavily hit around the bridge and struck by a torpedo as well, while her return fire did not cause immediate lethal damage to her adversary. The *Sydney*'s forward turrets were put out of action but the after pair continued the fight and the *Kormoran* was soon heavily on fire. At about 5.45 the raider's engines broke down, the action continued until nearly 6.30 p.m., by which time it was dark. The

Sydney gradually disappeared over the horizon, burning fiercely, and a final glare seen at 10 p.m. may have been caused by her blowing up. Meanwhile the *Kormoran* herself was in great danger, for she still had many mines on board and was herself on fire. Her captain ordered the ship to be abandoned and scuttled and, shortly after midnight, she blew up. Of her crew of 400 no less than 315 were picked up later, or reached the Australian coast. Of the *Sydney* hardly a trace was ever found.

The story of the *Sydney's* last fight has been told in some detail because, as has been mentioned earlier, the situation in which her captain found himself was liable to occur in every contact with a suspicious ship, until a firm system of checkmating a raider's bluff by calling the shore authorities had been established. And, of course, the ability of the shore authorities confidently to tell a patrolling warship that the ship she had intercepted must be an enemy was absolutely dependent on having accurate knowledge of every true Allied merchant ship's position, all over the world, at any given time. Such knowledge was not easily amassed and kept ready for instant use in time of war, and the system was, in fact, not perfected until later. Yet, granted the difficulties of piercing raiders' disguises, the very close approach made by the *Sydney* during the exchange of signals was certainly injudicious.

Roskill's correspondence with Montgomery and Bezemer

Roskill's investigation in the early 1950s, using a wide range of sources, may be considered to be the most complete near-contemporary study of what had happened in the encounter between the *Kormoran* and HMAS *Sydney*. Once again, in the late 1970s Roskill had an opportunity

to revisit the question when Michael Montgomery, then researching his book *Who Sank the Sydney*, wrote to him.¹² Roskill's letters to Montgomery confirm the extent of access which Roskill had to the official British and German records when he was writing *The War at Sea*. He had also checked his information with the Dutch historian Karel Bezemer. The six letters in the Churchill Archives seem to show that, while curious about Montgomery's findings, Roskill does not seem to have been convinced by the emergent findings. Montgomery's letters to Roskill are also in the Churchill archives, but are not included here:¹³

- 1 -

December 7th 1978

Dear Mr. Montgomery,

Thank you for your interesting letter of 4th December about the sinking the Sydney. You will realise that it is a very long time since I tried to piece that story together and I don't much like writing about it from memory. I recall consulting the Australian naval historian about it and using what he gave me in *The War at Sea*. But of course there is often more to be discovered with the passage of time - as you certainly seem to have done.

As to your questions, I have no knowledge of Japanese submarines (or indeed any other ships) cooperating with the Germans before Japan entered the war. There probably were Japanese submarines in the Indian Ocean in November 1941 but I find it hard to believe that they were working with the Germans. You probably know that cooperation between the two countries was extremely bad - on all levels up to the highest; and it remained so virtually throughout the war. It is conceivable that Detmers met a Jap and made some private

arrangement, but I never discovered any evidence that he did so. I think this story should be checked from the Japanese records before being accepted. I gather that one can now obtain friendly help from their historical staff in Tokyo.

I never found any evidence of the Kormoran machine-gunning survivors and rather surprised that you say you have found 'proof' of her doing so. The Widder was the only raider to do that according to my recollections, and we tried her Captain for it. I know that in the case of U-Boats we received a lot of reports of such conduct from survivors but they were often unfounded. One can understand how men imagine such conduct while undergoing a dreadful ordeal.

Yes, I am sure that the Germans had our Mersigs code, and some of our secret call signs too. The Atlantis got a big haul of intelligence from the Automedon on 11th November, but it seems doubtful if the fruits reached the Kormoran by 19th. But as a general statement I am sure it is true to say that our Merchant Navy codes proved very leaky. The reason was that distribution had to be so large and it was very difficult to introduce a new code world-wide on a fixed date.

I don't think I ever found any signs that the Sydney's signals were received on shore, but I suppose it would be natural for the Aussies to be very cagey if they were received. I have already answered your last question - about the Jap submarines in the Indian Ocean in 1941.

I'm afraid that this is all too vague to be of much use to you; but I really can't do any better.

XXXXX

I look forward to reading your book very
much

Yours sincerely

Captain S.W. Ruskell CBE, DSC, Litt.D.
FBA, RN.

-2-

December 21st 1978

Dear Mr. Montgomery,

Thank you for your letter of 16th which, among other things reminds me yet again how fallible is human memory. I get your point about the encounter between the Jap submarine and Kormoran being fortuitous; but I still think you should check on the whole story from the Japanese records.

I had forgotten that I had written quite a lot about the Cormorant's inhuman actions myself, dealing with the Eurylochus in particular, in my 'Merchant Fleet in War' (Collins, 1962). If you haven't seen that book it might be worth your while to glance at it. I was lent all the Alfred Holt records to do that job, I apologise for misdating the sinking of the Automedon. Of course it was November 1940; but I think she was the first big haul of secret mail - again see my book. I think it included a lot of high level papers bound for Singapore, as I recall there was a terrific flap in the Admiralty regarding exactly what had been compromised when we learnt of her loss.

As to the lack of survivors from the Sydney I always thought that the Kormoran's people reported that they had seen her blow up on the horizon. The other cases of dreadful brutality by Detmers do I suppose justify thinking that he behaved again as on former occasions; but I would want harder evidence than you have so far found to argue that publicly.

Yes, Afric Star was also a valuable source of intelligence (and she had a large cargo of butter too I recall - which led to drastic revision of our rations). I am still a bit doubtful whether any of the captured documents could have revealed the Straat Malakka's secret call sign as ships weren't given the full list of them. But you will no doubt look closely at what the Germans claimed to have got from Automedon and Afric Star. It is a very long time but I did have the war diaries of all the raiders when I wrote the War at Sea. They have now all been returned to West Germany and are I presume in the Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte at Stuttgart or in the second war archives in Freiburg-im-Breisgau. Dr Jürgen Rohwer, who is the head of the former, would I am sure help you locate to them if you approach him as from me.

I'll be very interested to hear in due course about any more discoveries you may make.

All good wishes

Yours sincerely

etc.

-3-

January 3rd 1979

Dear Mr. Montgomery

Thank you for your letter of December 30th.

I did not know about the claim that Sydney survivors were ever held in Japan but would think it improbable though I suppose the submarine which you are trying to trace might have picked up a few; but would not others of her crew have seen that happen? I doubt Washington having more material than has survived in Japan, since all that is there is what was seized after the surrender. The relevant files have, alas now been transferred from the Navy Department's excellently run Operational Archives to the National Archives, where it is extraordinarily difficult to find what one wants.

Yes, the Chinese quartermaster of the Eurolychus would be a prize witness but the chance of tracing him is I fear remote. I am sure there was nothing about him in the Holt records.

I fully agree with what you write about the bullet damage to the Sydney's carley float. I don't suppose it has survived though from what you write it seems that it is possible. Of course the actual bullet holes would tell us a lot about the calibre of weapon used and the direction from which it was fired.

About the Cornwall's action with the Pinguin I recall the criticism of her Captain for closing to such a short range and for not

breaking wireless silence. But I can't say whether that report was circulated to other stations though I don't think it likely that the Admiralty would have circulated a criticism of a senior officer. What was given wide circulation was the periodical 'Raider Summaries' but I feel sure that you must have located them.

The question of the Straat Malakka's call sign is a puzzler. I know Karel Bezemer, the Dutch naval and merchant navy historian very well and I am sure that he will do all he can to help you if you introduce yourself to him from me. His address is -

Do please let me know the degree of success you achieve in sorting out these obscure problems - if only to satisfy my curiosity.

Yours sincerely

etc

-4-

February 26th 1979

Dear Karel,

Many thanks for your letter of 17th February, just received, and for the enclosure, which I have read with much interest.¹³ It is very good of you to have taken so much trouble to answer Mr. Montgomery's question so thoroughly as I wasn't able to give him firm answers. I was however very doubtful about his rumour of a Japanese submarine having taken part in that incident and am glad that you deny that.

any were in those waters at the time. He is a very persistent young man but is inclined to pick reports from very unreliable sources and than to go off chasing hares. Personally I don't believe there is anything significant to add to Hermon Gill's account, and I told Montgomery that I thought very unlikely that the Kormoran knew the Straat Malakka's secret call sign.

Thank you for pointing out that the Laertes was sunk by U.109 not by U.564; but I only wrote 'probably' about the latter sinking her. I have made a note of what you tell me in my records, in case it should come again; but the 'Merchant Fleet in War' has long been out of print and I see no prospect of getting it reprinted. So I cannot make a correction on that subject.

All good wishes

Yours ever

-5-

April 5th 1979

Dear Montgomery,

Many thanks for your interesting letter of 4th which certainly produces some novel, not to say startling theories about the Kormoran-Sydney story. Prima facie I admit that the 'Gneisenau' idea seems a bit far fetched; but it would be rash to say it is impossible. I would only urge you to be sure of your facts before going into print. I remember well the merchant ships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, and very fine ships they were; but I didn't find any clue to the latter having been converted

into a raider, though she certainly was of suitable type and performance for the job. I remember that I went to a great deal of trouble to sort out the story of the German disguised raiders, using the captured naval documents, and I see that I mention the encounter between the Kormoran and the Kulmerland. I wouldn't attach too much importance to the difference in appearance between the two ships shown in Detmer's book as ships could and did alter their appearance very skilfully. If the real Kulmerland did meet a U-Boat in the Atlantic in April 1942 and did get back to Germany those facts should surely be traceable in the German naval papers; but I certainly didn't find anything to that effect.

It also seems to me a bit far fetched to argue that the Germans placed such great importance in the Japanese midget submarines; but I must admit that feeling is produced in part by our later knowledge of how useless such weapons generally were.

It seems to me that, fascinating though your detective work is, we need much harder evidence before we can accept the whole of the argument which you postulate.

Good luck to you in finding it.

Yours sincerely

etc

-6-

October 10th 1980

Dear Mr. Montgomery,

Many thanks for your interesting letter of 8th October. I'm glad that you have definitely

destroyed the legend about the SS Scharnhorst and Gneisenau having anything to do with the sinking of the Sydney. It is interesting that the enemy apparently circulated the story as part of their deception plans and that it has apparently taken in various people.

As to the participation of the Japanese submarine you have done good detective work but I would want some firmer evidence than that which you quote before accepting it as gospel e.g. evidence from Japanese naval records of the actual presence of a submarine, or at least something about planning to send one out to those waters. Your deduction from the 'Salt' cartoon is clever but to me not decisive enough to prove Jap participation.

I think you are on entirely firm ground in what you write about the secret call signs; and the motive about the Kormoran having been sighted a week earlier by an RAAF aircraft and the fact suppressed is entirely new to me. I wonder what report the aircraft made on landing. Surely it couldn't have identified the ship as the Kormoran?

I look forward very much to reading your disentanglement of a complicated story when it comes out next April. It is kind of you to make an acknowledgement to me, but I can't say that I feel I have given you any very substantial help.

With all good wishes for the success of the book,

Yours sincerely

etc

Notes

- 1 Loose signal. 654A. in NHB filed with a copy of the ACNB report of the loss of HMAS *Sydney*.
- 2 Admiralty message. 1618A/16/12/41. PRO: ADM 1/12033.
- 3 CinC South Africa message, 1455Z/20/12. PRO: ADM 1/12033.
- 4 Letter Owen to Roskill, 31 August 1950. CCAC: ROSK /4/46.
- 5 *Fighting Experience*, CB 04211 (2) A, Part I-General, July 1942, p. 49. PRO: ADM 239/335.
- 6 *ibid.* pp. 47-50.
- 7 *Preliminary Narrative, The War At Sea, Vol. II January-December, 1941*, Historical Section, Tactical, Torpedo & Staff Duties Division, Naval Staff, Admiralty, 1944.
- 8 *ibid.* pp. 241-3
- 9 Captain S.W. Roskill, *The War at Sea 1939-1945, Vol. 1, The Defensive* (London: HMSO, 1954), pp. 548-9.
- 10 CCAC: ROSK/4/48.
- 11 Michael Montgomery, *Who Sank the Sydney?* (London: Leo Cooper, 1981).
- 12 CCAC: ROSK/4/46.
- 13 Neither letter nor enclosure appear to have survived in Roskill's papers at Churchill College.

7 British Special Service Freighters the 'Q' Ships of World War II

'Q' ships in World War I

Decoy or 'Q' ships had achieved some successes in World War I, the first 'Q' ship being ordered by Winston Churchill in November 1914, and eventually 180 'Q' ships were fitted out between 1914 and 1918 and credited with helping to destroy eleven U-boats. One of the most successful 'Q' ships captains was Gordon Campbell, a colourful individual and self-publicist who was awarded both the VC and DSO for his services. After the war he enjoyed popularity as an author, journalist and broadcaster, and one his books, *Mystery Ships*, which was about the 'Q' ships was published in 1928. *Mystery Ships* was translated into several foreign languages and presumably read by his former opponents, the Germans. Campbell's autobiography, *Number Thirteen*, was also published, in 1932.¹

Special service freighters in World War II

It is not widely known that the Royal Navy also operated decoy ships in World War II. They were known officially as special service freighters, though, Roskill, in *The War at Sea*, continued to refer to them as 'Q' ships as "... the older title is so well established and widely recognised ...". Some, like Roskill, doubted the wisdom of repeating in a new war a particular tactic about which the enemy was almost certainly fully informed. However, plans for special service freighters were prepared in the summer of 1939, and between October 1939 and March 1940 eight freighters were fitted out. Allegedly on Churchill's orders, Campbell was brought back from retirement and placed in overall command of decoy ship operations. The freighters were more advanced than the earlier 'Q' ships: they had torpedo tubes and depth charges, and some mounted as many as nine 4-inch guns and others 6-inch guns. The special service freighters were expected to be able to take on both U-boats and enemy surface raiders.

The first special service freighter sailed in December 1939 and the remainder in early in 1940. One cruised between Britain and Gibraltar

and on into the South Atlantic, two worked between Sierra Leone, Gibraltar and Bermuda, two more deployed to the North Atlantic, one in the Western Approaches, and two small ones were employed in home waters. None of them ever sighted a U-boat or accomplished any useful purpose at all, and two of them, *Williamette Valley* and *Cape Howe* were torpedoed and sunk, with great loss of life, in the Western Approaches in June 1940. The Germans were far too wary to be caught by a ruse, which had been so well advertised between the wars. Indeed, Admiral Dönitz, a former U-boat commander in World War I and CinC of Hitler's U-boat fleet in World War II, issued standing orders that U-boats were always to make their attacks in diving trim and to be specially beware of lone ships which straggled a convoy.

An attempt was also made to surprise enemy bombers by fitting up an anti-aircraft 'Q' Ship which, with its armament concealed, would straggle invitingly behind a convoy. The tactic was, however, worn threadbare and this freighter achieved no more success than her anti-submarine counterparts. However, the secrecy with which the special service freighters had been fitted out had been such that they were in real danger of being sunk by forces on their own side. The Royal Navy's Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, Rear Admiral T.S.V. Phillips, vetoed plans for deploying special service freighters into the South Atlantic, Red Sea and Indian Ocean, and succeeded, after an enquiry in late 1940, in getting all decoy operations stopped. Campbell never up-dated his autobiography but he left meticulous records of his World War II operations, which are in the PRO.⁵

The parallels are drawn

For the disappearance of HMAS *Sydney*, the relevance of British decoy operations in both World Wars is twofold: the lessons of WWI, which appear to have been overlooked, and the comparison which Roskill drew in *The War at Sea* between the meeting of *Sydney* and *Kormoran* and of the cruiser HMS *Neptune* and the British special service freighter *Lambridge*.

An incident in World War I

The torpedoing of the British armed boarding steamer *Ramsey* by the German disguised minelayer *Meteor* in the Moray Firth on 8 August 1915 was referred to in *Battle Summary No. 13* during WWII. Noting

that the Germans had run up their proper colours near-simultaneously with launching a torpedo attack, the author of the WWI naval staff monograph about this incident wrote that, as far as decoy operations and the *ruse de guerre* of using of false flags was concerned, "... The Germans had well assimilated the lessons taught by our own decoy ships ..." In the light of this incident, the CinC of the Grand Fleet, Admiral Jellicoe, issued an order warning ships to approach suspected vessels on the quarter and to avoid bearings on which torpedoes could be fired:¹

As regards the loss of his own ship, Lieutenant Atkins had to report that the *Ramsey* had left the Orkneys at 6 p.m., August 7, to patrol to the eastward. "At 4.30 a.m., August 8," his report continues, "we sighted a vessel which appeared to be an ordinary merchant steamer, flying the Russian ensign, which vessel we steamed after with the intention of boarding. At 5.45 a.m. we closed on the vessel, which stopped on seeing our Commercial Code signal (M.N.). We closed on the vessel to within about 80 yards, and were about to lower a boat when without the slightest warning she launched a torpedo and swept our decks with a machine gun, the same time firing a 4.5-in. Q.F. gun from her poop into our engine room. As the torpedo left the tube the vessel hauled up the German ensign and hauled down the Russian one. All her guns and torpedo tubes were absolutely concealed. Our guns were so placed that we could only fire one at a time, this gun being continually under fire, and the gun's crew all killed."

The Germans had well assimilated the lessons taught by our own decoy ships. The *Ramsey*, in fact, had been caught in a trap and the contest was soon ended; from the time she was first struck till the time she sank was only three minutes, and owing to the list she was able to get out only the two starboard boats. These

had to pull out quickly from the side of the sinking ship and most of the crew took to the water. The *Meteor* succeeded in picking up 4 officers and 39 men before shaping course for Helligoland Bight.

HMS *Neptune* and HMAS *Sydney*

The parallel which Roskill noted and wrote about in *The War at Sea* was this:

As early as January 1940 one of our own 'Q ships' whose gun and torpedo armaments were about the same as the *Kormoran's* was intercepted off Sierra Leone by the *Neptune*, a sister ship of the *Sydney*, which was unaware of her true identity. The cruiser approached, and remained for some time steaming at slow speed, within a few hundred yards of the 'Q ship', whose captain later reported to the Admiralty that, had he been a German, he 'could have disabled (the *Neptune*) with two torpedoes and swept her upper deck'. But such complete secrecy enveloped the work of the 'Q ships' that the report was never circulated to the Naval Staff and the fate from which the *Neptune* escaped actually overlook the *Sydney* more than eighteen months later. The unheeded warning of the 'Q ship' had not been the only pointer to the danger of making a close approach to a suspicious ship. The engagements between the raider *Thor* and the armed merchant cruisers *Cornarvon Castle* and *Alcantara* in July and December 1940, and the loss of the *Voltaire* in April 1941, had amply demonstrated the capacity of the enemy to hit back hard and suddenly; the Admiralty had issued several warnings to that effect. Yet, in February 1941, the *Leander* also made a close approach to a suspicious ship which, had she been a German instead of an Italian raider, might well have brought on her the *Sydney's* fate.

The truth is clear. Though a comprehensive system of plotting the positions of all friendly merchant ships and the issue to them all of secret call signs are essential to success in anti-raider operations, it will always take time to establish such measures on a world-wide basis. Meanwhile the difficulty of identifying an intercepted ship will inevitably remain. But to make a close approach to a suspicious ship, on a favourable bearing for gun and torpedo fire, is to court disaster.

Campbell's warning

After the deception of the *Neptune* by the *Lambridge*, and the appalling risks which the *Neptune* had unwittingly run, Campbell had tried to pass on a warning, writing to Phillips, the ACNS, with an extract of the report of proceedings submitted by *Lambridge*, and suggesting that a general warning should be passed on:⁹



HMS *Neptune* (Grazebrook Collection).

Room 62,

Archway Block, South II,

ADMIRALTY, S.W.1.

14th March, 1940.

SECRET

The Assistant Chief of Naval Staff

For your information, the following is an extract from Commander Brunton's Report of Proceedings. I would suggest that no names be mentioned, but general attention be called to the circumstances.

"I was challenged by H.M.S. NEPTUNE 140 miles N.W. of Sierra Leone. This ship was intensely inquisitive and fired a barrage of questions extending over half an hour. Finally he said he was satisfied and I rubbed by hands. My glee was short-lived, however, for five minutes later he made "Stop: I intend to board". I thought my number was up. But when the boarding officer arrived it was obvious that he would be easily satisfied, so it was really easy to fob him off.

This ship approached bows on with the foretop closed up and circled me at 100 yards range. He then took station a point before my beam at 500 yards, speed 8 knots. Several hundred men were on deck. If I had been a German I could have disabled him with two torpedoes and swept his upper deck. I have told the Commander-in-Chief about this incident."

(Sgd.) GORDON CAMPBELL

VICE-ADMIRAL

See Official Docket in safe in File No. 44.

In a private note covering his report of proceedings, Commander T.B. Brunton, RN, commanding officer of RFA *Lambridge*, made the point that he had already deceived other warships:⁹

When challenged by a foreign warship I found confidence was established in his mind if I made my replies in plain language & in English, instead of making a group out of the International Code. This seemed to satisfy the two French warships very quickly.

I hear NEPTUNE'S suspicions were aroused by my Red Ensign, (vide your Memorandum of 11th December '39.) If I had known for certain he was a British ship I should have hoisted the Blue. But he approached bows on, getting dusk, and I was taking no chances; I closed up the tubes' crews and hoisted the Red according to my instructions.

I hear also that he was spoken to about taking station close on the beam of an unknown vessel.

Despite Brunton's remark that the captain of *Neptune* had been "spoken to", a search of war diaries, reports of proceedings and logs, has not shown that *Neptune* was ever aware of the risk he had run, or the true nature of the ship he had boarded and investigated.

Notes

- 1 For this account of the special service freighters in World War II the author has drawn on Roskill's official history, *The War at Sea*, and on Appendix 3 to Carson Ritchie's *Q-Ships* (Lavenham: Terence Dalton, 1985).
- 2 See ADM 199/146 and 151. ADM 199/146 concerns 'Special Service Squadron of merchant vessels armed and fitted out as Admiralty Freighters for anti-submarine and anti-raider duties: sailing orders and instructions' and ADM 199/151 is 'Special Service Squadron of merchant vessels armed and fitted out as Admiralty Freighters for anti-submarine and anti-raider duties: sailing orders and instructions reports of proceedings'.
- 3 Naval Staff Monographs (Historical) Volume XIV. *Home Waters-Part V, From July to October 1915*. Monograph no. 29, pp. 125-6.
- 4 Roskill, *The War at Sea*, Vol. 1, p. 549.
- 5 Minute, Campbell to ACNS, 14 March 1940. PRO: ADM 199/148, f. 115.
- 6 Letter, Brunton to Campbell. *ibid.*, f. 113-4.

8 Close Encounters: other German Supply Ships and Disguised Raiders

Beside the encounter between HMAS *Sydney* and the German disguised raider *Kormoran*, there were several close encounters with the enemy under circumstances which might be thought to have had similar features to those which confronted *Sydney*. They included German and Italian disguised raiders, and in one case a potential 'blue-on-blue' with a British special service freighter or 'Q' ship. Only one other incident resulted in the loss of one of HM Ships, but all encounters involved difficulty in communicating with the chase, radio silence or loss of aerials, closing inside the enemy's effective gun range, etc. Many, but not all, of these incidents were detailed in *Battle Summary No. 13*, and not all of them were well handled by the British forces.

But the early lessons about raiders were clear, they were heavily armed, equipped with torpedoes, mines, and aircraft and mounted 5.9-inch guns which were capable of central control out to an effective range of about 18,000 yards.

Significantly, boards of enquiry into these cases were not always held, and, where they were held, they were local affairs conducted by the appropriate naval authorities.

British 'Q' Ship *Lambridge* v. HMS *Neptune*, 20 January 1940

This encounter has already been described in Chapter 7. Suffice it to say here that Commander Brunton's claim that he could have disabled *Neptune* with two torpedoes and swept his upperdeck, was a frightening portent of what might happen when an unsuspecting warship met a German raider. Admiral Campbell was right to try to pass on the warning, but the secrecy with which British 'Q' ships were operated in the early months of WWII may have militated against his attempts to warn the fleet.

The raider *Thor*

Thor, the fourth ship of the first wave of German raiders, made two commerce raiding cruises.¹ Yet, despite being operated aggressively by her captain in 1940-41, *Thor* was not, in terms of tonnage sunk or captured, one of the more successful raiders. However, after finding six, quick victims in the Atlantic, *Thor* was involved in three engagements with British Armed Merchant Cruisers.

Alcantara's action, 28 July 1940

In *Thor's* fight with the AMC *Alcantara*, the British ship was outranged and badly damaged. The *Thor* received minor damage and was able to repair herself at sea. As a result of this action, the Admiralty took urgent steps to increase the range of its AMCs' guns and effect other improvements, one significant recommendation being that gunshields should be fitted to all guns, to protect the gunners from blast and shrapnel.

Carnarvon Castle's action, 5 December 1940

The Admiralty's measures were not in time to help the *Carnarvon Castle* when she met the *Thor*. *Carnarvon Castle* was a large cumbersome, lightly armed liner, and she too was badly damaged, while the *Thor* was again able to withdraw and repair herself. Word of *Thor's* successes was soon passed to other German raiders who began to operate with increased confidence against British AMCs. The action also drew considerable British forces into the South Atlantic, though these were then diverted to the hunt for the regular German warship, *Admiral Scheer*.

The disappearance of the Armed Merchant Ship *Voltaire*, April 1941

The *Thor* had already engaged and escaped from two British AMCs when she fell in with a third, HMS *Voltaire*, who was not so lucky. *Voltaire*, a cumbersome liner, was out-maneuvred, out-gunned, and overwhelmed. An early hit destroyed *Voltaire's* wireless and she sank without putting out an enemy report. The British only learned that there had been an engagement through a German communiqué on 5 April 1941. On 7 April (three days after the battle), the Canadian AMC *Prince David*, who had been sent to investigate, found heavy patches of oil and an extensive area of flotsam near *Voltaire's* last known position. Meanwhile, about 200 survivors had been picked up by the *Thor* and they were sent to

spend the rest of the war as prisoners in Germany. Apparently, little more concern was felt for the *Voltaire* until on 11 April she was two days overdue at Freetown. Without the German communiqué nearly a week would have passed before any alarm was raised.

***Leander* sinks *R.A.M.B.1*, 27 February 1941**

As described in *Battle Summary No. 13*, HMS *Leander*, a cruiser largely manned by New Zealanders, was lucky not to suffer at the guns of the Italian raider *R.A.M.B.1*. *Leander* experienced difficulty identifying her chase, and closed to 3000 yards, with her guns trained fore and aft, before *R.A.M.B.1* hoisted an Italian flag, trained her guns and opened fire. It took a few minutes for *Leander* to train her guns and return fire, during which time it was fortunate that the Italian's fire was not quicker and more effective. However, five salvos at close range from *Leander* set the *R.A.M.B.1* on fire and she later blew up.

***Cornwall* sinks *Penguin*, 8 May 1941**

The *Penguin* was the second most successful of all the raiders until she met HMS *Cornwall* in May 1941.³ As noted in Chapter 6, *Cornwall* sank her, but not before the cruiser's captain had allowed the range to close to 10,500 yards and *Penguin* had scored several hits on *Cornwall*, whose guns, when ordered to fire for effect, suffered an electrical failure.



The Italian raider *R.A.M.B.1* on fire (RAN).

Cornwall soon recovered and blew up the raider and, fortunately, *Penguin's* rapid and accurate fire caused only slight damage, while shrapnel wounded only four British sailors.

In Captain Manwaring's words, after *Cornwall* had fired a second warning shot, he noticed that "... "A" and "B" turrets were not training and keeping on the target as course was altered ... The enemy could not have chosen a better moment to open fire and the next ten minutes were noisy and full of incident ... course was altered away to Port to the limit of "A" arcs, in order to open the range to one more suitable for our armament compared to that of the enemy, and to avoid the danger of torpedoes ... power to the training circuit had failed, although this was not realised at the time ... I had the annoying experience of being at effective gun range of an enemy ship and with His Majesty's Ship under my command under rapid and fairly accurate fire, frequently being straddled and the main armament pointing anywhere but at the enemy ..."¹

There were other operating errors onboard *Cornwall*, that required her to stop in the flotsam after *Penguin* had sunk and which, had the latter been in the accompany of U-boats, might have been fateful. Later, one officer died from heat stroke in the 200° heat of the engine room before electrical power could be restored.

Cornwall also learned, from interrogation of enemy prisoners, that the German commanding officer was ready with a treacherous tactic. He "...



HMS Cornwall (Grazebrook Collection).

had previously contemplated stopping when forced to and then trying to get within close gun and torpedo range for a surprise attack when picking up the boarding party ..."

Despite *Cornwall's* well-executed daylong search, the CinC, East Indies Station was not pleased. Amongst other issues, he thought that *Cornwall* should have broken radio silence to tell his CinC what he was doing, and to ask if the *Tamerlane*, the genuine merchant ship whose identity *Penguin* had adopted, was in the area. The CinC's covering letter to the Admiralty read:

No. 791/E.I.1237.

15th July, 1941.

THE SINKING OF GERMAN RAIDER NO. 33 BY H.M.S.
CORNWALL - 8th MAY, 1941

Sir,

I have the honour to forward for the information of Their Lordships the enclosed report by Captain P.C.W. Manwaring, Royal Navy, H.M.S. *CORNWALL* on the sinking of a German raider on 8th May, 1941.

2. My criticisms of the conduct of the operation in its various phases are attached as Appendix I.

NOTE: The full story of the Engine Room Department failures after the action will not be known until the findings of the Board of Enquiry ordered have been received and consequently these happenings are not commented upon in this letter.

3. Broadly speaking the faults amounted to:-
 - (a) Too rigid an adherence to W/T silence;
 - (b) A confused and incomplete appreciation of the situation leading to
 - (c) Unpreparedness for all eventualities;

- (d) Imperfect organisation and training within the ship to deal with breakdowns.
4. The cumulative effect of the errors and omissions might well have resulted in the raider escaping or CORNWALL suffering much more serious damage than she actually did. The redeeming features are that the raider was found and destroyed.
 5. Action has been taken to promulgate to the East Indies Squadron instructions regarding the breaking of W/T silence in similar circumstances.
 6. Definite identification of a suspicious ship without risk to one's own ship must always be a very difficult matter especially with an enemy so well versed in the art of deceit as the Germans. In this case, had CORNWALL kept me more informed of what was going on she would have been told that no friendly ship was expected in her immediate vicinity and that S.S. TAMERLANE was not on the Station. In any case, the failure on the part of the suspected ship to obey the signals made to her or to be influenced by warning shots was justification enough to open fire with effect. I concur generally in the approach procedure suggested in paragraph 72 of H.M.S. CORNWALL's report, and instructions on these lines have been issued.
 7. If there is good reason to suppose that the raider has captured British crews on board, I see no objection to some such signal proposed in paragraph 73 of H.M.S. CORNWALL's report being made by V/S [visual signalling] but only provided there is time to pass it without in any way prejudicing the destruction of the raider. The saving of British lives will not

of course influence the German decision and I think as a general rule if the Captain of the raider feels there is the slightest chance of doing damage to the British warship or evading her, he will not accept the terms.

8. The Commanding Officer, H.M.S. CORNWALL in paragraph 77 of his report recommends that this class of cruiser should be fitted with short range R.D/F and that boarding boats designed for the purpose should be introduced into the Service. I concur in both these suggestions.
9. Recommendations. After full consideration of the circumstances the only recommendations [for awards] of the Commanding Officer which I can fully endorse at the present moment are those in respect of Mr. William Henry Victor Loveless, Warrant Ahipwright, Royal Navy, and Mr. Frederick Charles John Weiseman, Warrant Electrician, Royal Navy (see Appendix X to H.M.S. CORNWALL's report). The temporary repairs to H.M.S. CORNWALL were certainly carried out expeditiously. The recommendations of Engine Room Department personnel must, I consider, await the outcome of the Board of Enquiry, while the recommendations in respect of good service in general and not this action in particular could more appropriately be considered in a Periodic rather than an Operational list. I am instructing Captain Manwaring accordingly.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(Signed) (R. LEATHAM)

Vice Admiral.

***Devonshire* sinks *Atlantis*, 22 November 1941**

Having failed in her search for *Kormoran* in early 1941, the cruiser HMS *Devonshire* had better luck seeking and sinking *Atlantis*.⁵ *Atlantis* had been the most successful disguised raider, sinking or capturing more tonnage even than any regular German warship. Having passed south of Australia in August 1941, *Atlantis* was detailed on her homeward journey to act as a U-boat supply ship, and was in the Atlantic just south of the equator when *Devonshire* found her. *Devonshire* was flying dusk and dawn air patrols and at first light *Atlantis* was spotted by her Walrus (the same type of aircraft as Sydney carried). The raider attempted deception by sending the warship raider report, RRR, but used groups of three letters instead of four, and gave her name (not callsign) as *Polyphemus*. Keeping outside the enemy's effective gun range, *Devonshire* broke radio silence to ask if this could be the genuine *Polyphemus*, and the moment the CinC replied in the negative, she opened fire at 17,000 yards. *Atlantis* soon blew up but, as the presence of U-boats was strongly suspected, the survivors were not picked up.

***Dorsetshire* sinks the U-boat supply ship *Python*, 1 December 1941**

HMS *Dorsetshire*'s sinking of the *Python* was another model of the correct way to do things. Captain Agar used aerial reconnaissance to augment his search and, when he found his chase, he remained well outside its gun range, and continued his anti-submarine zig-zag all the time he was near the datum. Two warning shots at long range were sufficient to persuade the *Python* to scuttle herself. *Python* was carrying 500 men, her own crew as well as some *Atlantis* survivors whom she had recovered.

***Durban* meets a ship who gives a false identity, 13 March 1942**

As noted in Chapter 6, in December 1941 the Admiralty promulgated specific advice on raider tactics and methods of positive identification using information of merchant shipping movements.⁶ Despite this advice, even some months later the endorsed system for identifying ships was not working fully. Another experienced naval officer, Captain P.G.L. Cazalet, DSC, RN, of HMS *Durban*, when criticised for allowing a merchant ship to escape by giving a false identity, pleaded in his defence that three quarters of the merchant ships encountered failed to answer correctly the signal "NNJ" - "You should make your signal letters" (the

same signal sent by HMAS *Sydney* to the *Kormoran*). In failing light, and in order to identify his chase and read its' signals, Cazalet had closed the unidentified merchant ship to 3000 yards. He also departed from the procedure laid down, viz:⁷

(B) CHALLENGING

Challenge procedure in accordance with NCSI 371 ... This procedure is shortly being extended to all allied shipping and should assist identification ...

Cazalet claimed that, "... about 50% of British Merchant Ships do not understand this procedure and the results obtained are therefore frequently inconclusive ..." The following document provides Cazalet's full explanation:⁸

Sir,

I regret to report as follows concerning the encounter of H.M.Ship under my command with a merchant vessel on Friday, 13th March, 1942 which may have been the captured British Ship SPEYBANK acting as an enemy minelayer.

2. The ship was first sighted at 1925H 13th March bearing 255°, distance 11 miles. I was then in position 35°53' South 20°10' East steering 257° at 13 knots. Paravanes were streamed. The ship appeared to be steering 090° at about 10 knots and it was estimated she would pass fairly close and that an alteration of course to intercept her would be unnecessary. I accordingly maintained my course and speed.
3. The light, which was in my favour, was falling fast and I do not consider I was sighted by her until I commenced signalling, using a red Aldis Lamp. She was then at a distance of about 6 miles. On sighting me, she appeared to make a slight alteration to starboard but soon resumed her original course.

4. I first signalled to her the international signal NNJ ("You should make your signal letters"). She did not answer this. This was in no way unusual. It is my experience that only 25% of merchant ships answer this signal correctly and in any case most merchant ships delay considerably before answering when first called. There was some light left and as the range was still considerable I now used a white Aldis Lamp and asked "What ship?" This was answered at once in conformity with usual practice but the merchant ship's signalling lamp was bad and difficulty was experienced in reading her signals. Repetition was called for and she repeated her answers more than once. Eventually the following information was obtained: "LEVERNBANK New York to Durban". Her silhouette was then compared with that in "Merchant Ships (Albat Booth)" and found to correspond. She then signalled "Good Night".
5. Throughout the whole encounter my suspicions had not been aroused for the following reasons:-
 - (a) She was sighted within 15 miles of a traffic route at dusk, within 70 miles of land. She must therefore have been comparatively close to land for many daylight hours and in easy range of air reconnaissance. Reconnaissance aircraft had been sighted during the forenoon.
 - (b) When sighted she was steering a normal course and made no suspicious movements throughout the encounter.
 - (c) She answered signals willingly although her signalling lamp was poor.
 - (d) Her silhouette corresponded exactly with that to be expected for a Bank Line ship. It was known that ships of this line might

be encountered in this area. It was also clear that she was not in any way similar to any known raider. Her name was not in any shipping intelligence lists which were then onboard but these were incomplete and her omission was not remarkable.

6. As I was not suspicious, I did not consider boarding but in any case the weather conditions at the time were unfavourable.
7. At the time of the encounter my port engine was out of action due to a leaky main steam joint and I was proceeding on the Starboard engine alone.
8. At this point I was faced with a familiar situation. In order to elicit further information, it would be necessary to close the range to 3000 yards or less. At any greater range the merchant ship's signalling lamp was very difficult to read.
9. To close on the beam of a ship which has not been positively identified is obviously unwise and the correct method would therefore appear to be:- to turn, work round ahead of the ship to a position about 3000 yards on her bow and order ship to proceed on a certain course or to stop. In most cases it takes a long time to make merchant ships understand what is required of them and the procedure itself would occupy a considerable amount of time. Moreover, in order to be practically certain of the identity of the ship concerned, it is considered that such a procedure would be necessary in the case of many merchant ships sighted during dark hours.
10. Each merchant ship so treated would be delayed and a warship making a passage along a

frequented traffic route might be considerably delayed by the necessity of making several of these identifications. I have therefore in the past considered it undesirable and impracticable when on passage to carry out this complete identification unless suspicious circumstances existed. As I had no suspicions in this case I allowed the ship to proceed.

11. The Merchant Ship Recognition Procedure was not carried out as this would have meant the alteration of course and the procedure mentioned above. It has also been my experience that about 50% of British Merchant Ships do not understand this procedure and the results obtained are therefore frequently inconclusive.
12. My failure to penetrate the disguise of this minelayer is very deeply regretted.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(P. G. J. Cazalet.)

Captain, Royal Navy

One fact, which emerged, was that, if *Durban* had asked his CinC, he would have been told that no such ship as *Leverbank* was in the area. There is more about this unsatisfactory incident in *Battle Summary No. 13*. Cazalet's explanation was recognised as being rather lame and the cover of the file is endorsed "B/E [Board of Enquiry] held 26.3.42 Captain P.G.L. Cazalet DSC RN to blame".

Notes

- 1 The *Thor* was *Raider E* or *Schiff 10*.
- 2 The *Penguin* was *Raider F* or *Schiff 33*.
- 3 'Sinking of German Raider' report by HMS *Cornwall*, 13 May 1941. NHB file (formerly M 012944/41).
- 4 Covering letter from CInC East Indies, 15 July 1941. NHB (formerly M 012944/41).
- 5 *Atlantis* was *Raider C* or *Schiff 16*. The first entry in the *Naval War Diary* gave the name *Goldenfels*.
- 6 Admiralty message, 1618A/16/12/41. PRO: ADM 1/12033.
- 7 *ibid.*
- 8 Letter from HMS *Durban*, 25 March 1942, 'Encounter with unknown ship which gave wrong name'. PRO: ADM 1/12033.

9 Lessons for the Future: Admiralty Orders for Dealing with German Disguised Raiders

Learning the lessons

As noted in Chapter 3, on 30 November 1941 the First Sea Lord in London asked the ACNB for all available information regarding the action between HMAS *Sydney* and the *Kormoran* "...so that we can deduce any lessons for the future."¹ Some of the specific lessons relating to matters of identification, approach and challenge have been illustrated already, but there were also more general implications for RN practice.

Aims early in the war

One of the declared Admiralty aims, early in WWII, was to capture enemy tonnage and to add it to the British registry. A side effect of this would be the capture of potentially valuable cargoes, and valuable intelligence. It is not clear from the documents found in the archives whether this meant intelligence in general, or whether the authors of the various minutes had some knowledge of Enigma and the operations conducted to capture cryptographic material from German weather ships and U-boats. The debate described in the following documents is peripheral to the loss of HMAS *Sydney*, except that it largely stems from a signal DTG 1618A/16 December 1941 made in the aftermath of her disappearance. Furthermore, the various minutes help to illuminate the views of senior officers in the Admiralty.

The presence of U-boats

It had been the established practice since the days of sail to board suspicious vessels. Moreover, the custom and practice of the sea, reinforced by international law, placed a responsibility on warships to ensure the safety of enemy survivors. Grand Fleet Battle Orders in WWI had already gone some way to changing these obligations, and the experience of WWII added impetus. As the war progressed the Admiralty became more convinced that:²

Now that it is the policy of the enemy to screen Merchant Ships with U boats, it is questionable whether boarding or rescue work is practicable by any of H.M. Ships without incurring an unjustifiable risk ...

The problems which this situation exposed were discussed over many months of 1943 and into 1944, and in a variety of different contexts.

Boarding disguised raiders and blockade-runners and picking up survivors

At first the debate concerned the value of intelligence to be gained and whether ships should stop to pick up survivors:

2. Means of preventing the scuttling of enemy blockade runners were given much thought during the years 1939-1941 and (inter alia) it was proposed that we should announce that we would not rescue the crews of scuttled ships but leave them to their fate. The reasons for deciding this proposal are well summarized in V.C.N.S.' minute of the 9th March, 1940, ... and War Cabinet paper of the 25th July, 1941, ... ' When the C.A.F.O. [Confidential Admiralty Fleet Order] was last issued it had been proposed to omit paragraph 3, but it was reinstated by the direction of the First Lord.
3. Since that date it has become known that in certain areas blockade runners have both close and distant screens of U-boats so that it has become extremely dangerous for ships to stop either for boarding or to pick up survivors. As a result, D.O.D.(H) issued the instruction embodied in C.A.F.O. 1021/43 to cover cruisers and above and now suggests that it be extended to all H.M. Ships.
4. In the case of cruisers and above the operational reasons in favour of abandoning attempts to board a blockade runner or save

her crew in areas known or suspected to be dangerous to U-boats are incontrovertible. Further, the operational reasons against cruisers and above stopping in all areas to pick up survivors are cogent, the more so since the reasons against abandonment set out in W.P. 41(178) are not as strong as they were with the reduction in raider activity. A threat that the U-boats who have taken their place would not pick up our merchant seamen would clearly cut no ice. M. Branch are not, however, clear that it is necessary or advisable to extend the prohibition to attempts to board in areas where the presence of U-boats is not suspected.

5. Equally, in the case of destroyers and below M. Branch doubt,

(a) whether a prohibition against boarding ought to be issued, or

(b) whether a prohibition against rescuing need apply to areas where the presence of a U-boat is not suspected.

The obvious importance of boarding is that it improves our chances of saving a cargo of, e.g. rubber, which might be of great importance to the war effort, whilst apart from humanitarian grounds the two disadvantages of a complete prohibition against rescuing survivors are,

(a) that we lose what has proved to be a very valuable source of intelligence, and

(b) that if our instructions are discovered they give the Germans almost as good an opening for anti-British propaganda as did shackling.

6. It must, however, be admitted that the abandonment of enemy crews has on occasion had useful results, e.g, in the case of H.M.S. DEVONSHIRE's raider where the crew were picked up by U-boats who had to abandon their patrol and return immediately to their bases, in some cases towing open boats. In this connection it may be remarked that the abandonment of a blockade runner crew and a subsequent return to the spot might well provide the occasion for an anti U-boat operation.
7. In these circumstances M. Branch suggest, for D.O.D.'s consideration, that the prohibition against boarding cover,

- (i) for cruisers and above, areas known to be frequented by U-boats or if which the presence of a U-boat is suspected

- (ii) for destroyers and below, areas where the presence of a U-boat is suspected,

and that the prohibition against rescue cover,

- (i) for cruisers and above, all areas

- (ii) for destroyers and below, areas known to be frequented by U-boats or where the presence of a U-boat is suspected.

for Head of M. Branch I

23 July, 1943

Concur with Head of M.

D.O.D. (H).

25th July 1943.

The capture of an enemy merchant ship, confidential papers or prisoners, are all highly desirable objectives.

A destroyer is the best offensive A/S vessel and, after a search, should be reasonably safe from a U-Boat threatening her. Certainly if weather conditions are suitable for boarding at all, the process of lowering and picking up a boarding party from a destroyer should be reasonably safe and might well result in the destruction of a U-boat into the bargain. Though the business of picking up survivors is apt to be more protracted, a destroyer should be able to ensure her own safety.

With reference to paragraph 7 above, therefore, it is suggested that destroyers and below should be permitted to board and rescue in all areas. D.A.U.D. agrees.

D.O.D.(F)

3rd August, 1943.

The Captain's discretion

After six months, the debate turned on what discretion should be given to individual commanding officers. The Director of Plans argued strongly that, since every circumstance would be different, commanding officers should be given guidance, not woolly instructions and conflicting orders, and then left to use their discretion:⁵

I confess I like this docket less each time it comes round. As D.T.S.D. says, D.O.D.(F)'s new draft will stand up to scrutiny by Goebbels, but I think it will invite adverse criticism from Senior Officers at sea.

2. Surely it is wrong for the Admiralty to tell Captains of cruisers what they "must" and

"should not" do about stopping and boarding; and worse to hedge such instructions around with provisos and saving clauses? Anyway, it is inconsistent to do so in a C.A.F.O., which begins - "The following courses of action ... are recommended".

3. The modern problem of dealing with suspected raiders is like the old one of leaving your convoy so that you may engage the enemy, which latter has been argued about since the Dutch Wars. Both present themselves in infinitely variable circumstances and therefore call for nice judgement and quick decision. It is just these qualities which a Post Captain is expected to have. If he is fit for his job he will do what he thinks best, whatever the current C.A.F.O. may say; knowing quite well that this is what he is there for, and that the Commander-in-Chief or the Admiralty, or both, will certainly call him to account if he does the wrong thing.
4. I suggest, therefore, that it is improper to instruct him, specifically in advance. At worst, let us issue a clear-cut order. But instructions which in the same breath qualify themselves by references to "normal circumstances", "being satisfied in regard to the safety of his own ship", etc. are merely read as an attempt by the Admiralty to have things both ways. The Articles of War and K.R.A.I. [King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions] lay themselves open to similar criticism on every page; but those venerable tomes are hallowed by tradition and anyway are not read in the same light as current orders. A.F.O.'s are the means whereby the Admiralty exercise day-to-day control, and anything in them which savours of being less than a square deal tends to undermine the confidence and loyalty of

the Fleet. That is why I think that the proposed C.A.F.O. is a mistake. Better occasionally to see a ship risked and, if necessary, to censure an individual C.O.

5. The above remarks have been written with the Captain of a cruiser in mind, but they apply generally to any C.O. Experience or the lack of it, is only a matter of degree.
6. What any officer is grateful for is guidance by access to the collated experience of others. Only the Admiralty can give him this. I suggest, therefore, that any previous instructions now in force be cancelled, and that this C.A.F.O. be re-drafted on the following lines:-
 - a) Statement of the problem.
 - b) Elucidation of specific points, e.g. methods of identification, position in International Law, etc.
 - c) Hints as to procedure, derived from the experience of this war.

and that it should end by declaring that, while it is hoped these notes will help, the correct course of action can only be decided by the Commanding Officer in the circumstances of the moment.

Director of Plans.

10th December, 1943

Illustrated by the fate of the *Sydney*

The drafting of an updated chapter in *Fighting Experience* dealing with these issues proceeded slowly and there are several versions in the archives, but the Director of Naval Plans appears to have won the argument:

D.T.S.D. has prepared the attached draft chapter on the treatment of Raiders, Supply Ships and Blockade Runners for C.B.04711 - "Fighting Experience"- with a view to cancelling the conflicting C.A.f.Os, and A.G.Ms., copies of which have been placed behind the draft article. The article has been considered by Staff Divisions and is now submitted to the Board.

2. As a result of experience our policy both towards the saving of enemy merchant tonnage and the lives of the crew has changed considerably. As appears from A.G.M.36A of 1st May, 1941, ... great importance was then attached to preventing the scuttling of enemy merchant ships, and Commanding Officers were informed, with War Cabinet approval, that their first consideration should be to save the ship. Since that date, however, it has become clear that, with the increased efficiency of German scuttling methods, the danger of finding that the chase is a disguised raider and the probable presence of a U-boat screen, the advantages to be gained by saving tonnage are generally outweighed by the danger to the intercepting ship - a point forcibly illustrated by the fate of the SIDNEY. The gradual change in policy is evidenced in the various Admiralty general messages issued after actions with blockade runners, and the present article, whilst leaving the matter within the discretion of the Commanding Officer, states that the primary object is to deny the ship and her cargo to the enemy, and that to bring the ship or cargo to port is subsidiary and can never be worth the loss of one of H.M. Ships.
3. It is considered that under existing conditions of Naval warfare, the change in policy is

fully justified, but 1st Lord may feel that before the article is finally approved the matter ought to be brought to the attention of the Prime Minister.

4. The question of whether or not to stop to pick up the crews of scuttled or sunk merchant vessels is difficult, but an attempt has been made to state the problem fairly, give Naval Officers the benefit of up-to-date experience, and leave them to solve it in the light of the particular circumstances confronting them. It will be observed ... that 1st Lord directed that C.A.F.O.2302/41 should contain a statement that "crews should not be left in open boats on the high seas or to drown in their ships". The present article, whilst stating the general custom, does not give categorical instructions in this sense, as Staff Division were impressed by the dangers attendant, in particular, on cruisers in stopping in waters likely to be infested by U-Boats and felt that to include a direction that crews be saved and then to hedge it around with provisos and exceptions could only lead to confusion. It is suggested that the article as drafted covers 1st Lord's point in a satisfactory manner.

5. Draft submitted as amended editorially in ink.

for Head of M.1

18 February, 1944

Practical solutions

It will be recalled that in the general message on 16 December 1941, after the disappearance of HMAS *Sydney*, the Admiralty had given an analysis of the three most recent actions with enemy raiders (see Chapter 6). As the lessons learned were assimilated and policy debated, three amplifying signals were issued. To what extent these

were based on intelligence about the action between *Kormoran* and *Sydney*, and what was based on other sources of information, is not clear.⁴

Withholding fire until stopped and boats lowered, March 1942

Based apparently on the intelligence, which *Cornwall* had gleaned from interrogation of prisoners-of-war from *Penguin*,⁵ ships were warned that the enemy might be planning to withhold his fire until there were boats in the water:⁶

1538A/14th March

Addressed: CInC Western Approaches 253
 Date 14.3.42
 F.O. Force H. 671.
 Rear Admiral West Africa
 A.I.G.13 (less N.S.H.O. Ottawa)
 (and N.O. Bombay)
 NAVAL CYPHER D.O.T.T.

From Admiralty.

NILE

Admiralty 1618A/16th December 1941.

Add paragraph C4. There is good reason to believe that enemy raiders, if stopped by British Warships, have orders to withhold fire until the British Ship is stopped and is lowering a boat. The raider will not send their own boat if they can avoid doing so.

1538A/34

D.O.D.(F) Approved V.C.N.S.

Raiders carry MTBs , June 1942

SECRET

1628B/11th June.

To "A" Message Home and Abroad 806A

Date 11.6.42

P/L BY T/P

From: Admiralty.

IMMEDIATE.

Positive evidence has been received that German raiders are carrying two or more M.T.B.'s [motor torpedo boats] armed with 2 torpedoes and depth charges. These craft are about 40 feet long speed 40 knots and are hoisted out by derrick. Usual signals are made by Raider to endeavour to persuade ships to stop and M.T.B.'s also make signals in English and may wear White Ensign in endeavour to deceive.

2. All Masters of Merchant vessels are to be warned on the lookout for this form of attack which there is reason to believe is generally delivered during dark hours. Any vessel sighted with a motorboat slung on a derrick should be considered suspicious.

1628B/11.

for D.D.I.C. (1230)

Opening fire, August 1942

Later, in August 1942, an operational order was sent out, on a wide distribution, warning commanding officers of HM Ships to be vigilant and to be prepared to open fire when in the vicinity of suspected raiders:⁹

MOST SECRET

MESSAGE

OUT

1734A/11th August

To: C. in C. Home Fleet. 223.
 Western Approaches. 981.
 Date: 11.8.42.
 Mediterranean. 66.
 Eastern Fleet. 566.

C. in C. South Atlantic. 807.

S.B.N.O. West Atlantic. 523.

R.A. West Africa 599.

F.D.C.N.A. 315.

Australian Commonwealth Naval Board 762.

New Zealand Naval Board. 961.

Naval Cypher D.O.T.P.

FROM: Admiralty

BASEGRAM.

In amplification of Admiralty Messages 1618A/16/12/41, 1538A/14/3/42, and 16288/11/6/42 the following are recommended courses of action by H.M. Ships in dealing with ships which may be disguised raiders, and Commanding Officers should be informed accordingly:-

1. State of readiness to open fire

Enemy raiders are usually powerfully armed and if fitted with modern R.D.F., will be able to open fire at long ranges with great accuracy. Before closing to establish identity of any vessel, H.M. Ships must therefore be ready to open fire instantly.

2. Identification.

If the ship cannot immediately be definitely

identified by information available and use of challenge procedure, she should be regarded as suspect. W/T silence may have to be broken to obtain confirmation of suspicions from Shore Authority. Subsequent action should be on the following lines.

3. Subsequent Action.

- (a) Stop her and warn her that she will be fired on if she moves engines.
- (b) Avoid exposure to torpedo attack. She may be armed with torpedoes and may also be accompanied by U/Boats.
- (c) Ship should not be boarded, but should be made to send a boat with all ship's papers, Master and some of the crew for interrogation.
- (d) The utmost vigilance should be observed at all times in the presence of any suspected raider, and fire opened immediately if any suspicious activity is observed.
- (e) Though it is preferable from the point of view of British shipping tonnage, to capture enemy merchant ships or supply ships, (for which purpose anti-scuttling instructions are contained in C.A.F.O.2302/41), rather than sink them, unless the Commanding Officer is satisfied that no risk is attached to process of capture, he should sink an enemy ship rather than attempt to capture her.

1734A/111

D.T.S.D. (Tel.No.169.)

Approved A.C.N.S. (F)

The Naval Prize Manual

However, the CinC Eastern Fleet spotted an inconsistency between the latest signalled operational orders and the *Naval Prize Manual*. Perhaps he was prompted by a suggestion from *Cornwall*. This led to another round of minutes in the Admiralty:¹⁷

It will be observed from paragraph 3 of the Most Secret Signal No. 1734A/11th August, 1942, that Commanding Officers have been instructed that suspected ships "should not be approached but should be made to send a boat with all ship's papers, master and some of the crew for interrogation". This instruction appears to conflict with paragraph 80 of the Naval Prize Manual which states that "he (Officer in command) should not in ordinary cases require a boat to be sent from the chase, but in exceptional circumstances, e.g., if he has no efficient boat available he may require the Master of the Merchant vessel to send a boat to convey a visiting officer to the Merchant vessel. Under no circumstances should he require the Master of the Merchant vessel to leave his ship".

Would D.I.S.D. please comment and in particular as to whether this apparent inconsistency with the Naval Prize Manual was considered in issuing this instruction. Would M. please remark from the International Law aspect.

for Head of N.I.

8th January, 1943

Admiralty Signal 1734/11 August was the outcome of T.S.D. 138/42 of 12/2/42 - Lessons of Disguised Raiders.

2. The measures recommended in it were intended to safeguard ships against sudden attack by disguised raiders as in the case of the SYDNEY

torpedoed and sunk by KOMORAN on 19th November 1941 off the West Coast of Australia.

3. The order with regard to the Master of the ship, being summoned on board followed the precedent of the order issued by C.-in-C. Grand Fleet (Admiral Jellicoe) on August 24, 1915, after the RAMSEY had been torpedoed by the disguised German ship METEOR on August 8, 1915, in the Moray Firth. The Grand Fleet Order was as follows - "If the ship has been acting suspiciously or is thought to be armed or manoeuvres for position she should be stopped with a warning gun, an offing kept and the master order[ed] to bring his papers on board." There was also the case of H.M.S. ALCANTARA being torpedoed and sunk by the raider GREIF on February 29, 1916, and the boat sent by the DUNDEE to the disguised raider LEOPARD (March 16, 1917) being sunk.
4. The Prize Manual (revised by Dr. Pearce Higgins in 1923) was not referred to specially when the telegram of August 11 1942, was drafted as its introduction states it is only for guidance. W.E.Hall's International law, 7th Edition, 1917, edited by Pearce Higgins says that 'modern usage allows the master to be summoned with his papers on board the cruiser and the regulations of the Dutch and German navies order that this shall be done.' p.799, footnote. It is to be regretted that during the interval of peace no attempt has been made to correlate the Prize Manual with the lessons, experience and practice of the last war.
5. The practice of summoning the master on board was sometimes in use in the Napoleonic wars. There is no established usage on this particular point. The Declaration of London (1909) does not mention it.

6. D.T.S.D. concurs with C.-in-C., E.F.'s proposal to amend Prize Manual and suggests therefore that Prize Manual 1923, article 80, should be deleted or have a note added to the following effect:

"As an enemy raider may be disguised as a merchant ship, if the ship cannot immediately be identified she should be regarded as suspect. The ship should not be boarded but should be required to send a boat with the master or first officer and the ships papers in order that her identity may be established."

7. It is for consideration also whether instructions should be issued stating that the Prize Manual at 1923 was only intended as a guide and, if it conflicts with any operational order issued during the war, the latter is to be followed.

DIRECTOR OF TRAINING & STAFF DUTIES DIVISION

24 January, 1943.

The delay in this paper is regretted.

Fully concur with D.T.S.D. It might have been preferred that para 3C of Admiralty's 1734/11/8 should have begun - "Notwithstanding Article 80 of the Naval Prize Manual, etc.". I doubt, however, if there is much danger of anybody thinking that a categorical Admiralty Order plainly in conflict with the provisions of the Prize Manual is over-ridden by the latter. There have been several Admiralty Orders inconsistent with the Prize Manual, and we have never had any difficulty over their execution. For example, our anti-scuttling measures and our order that all enemy merchant ships in the Atlantic may be

sunk at sight are hardly consistent with the Prize Manual.

2. I think that Article 80 should be completely deleted and replaced with something like the following:-

"Where the chase can be definitely identified as harmless, she should in general be boarded and should not be required to send a boat. It is, however, quite legitimate to summon the master on board with his papers, if there are special reasons for doing so.

In any event, if a chase cannot be immediately identified as harmless, she is to be regarded as suspect and should not be boarded. She should be ordered to send a boat with the master or first officer and the ship's papers, (in order that her identity may be established). Enemy raiders are usually disguised as merchant ships and the greatest importance is attached to observance of this procedure."

3. Concur with D.T.S.D. that there may be some advantage in calling attention to the fact that the Prize Manual serves as a guide and does not over-ride an Operational Order.

Head of M.(I).

14th February, 1943

The new Article 80

In March 1943, more than fifteen months after the *Sydney* had met and fought the *Kormoran*, an amendment to the *Naval Prize Manual* was at last agreed. The publication of the new Article 80 was, apparently, one of the last references in the British archives, however obliquely, to the loss of HMAS *Sydney*, until after the war's end. The AFO read:¹¹

A.F.O. P.173/43

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

Not to be communicated to anyone outside H.M. Service

P.173.-O.U. 5316-Naval Prize Manual-Amendment
(N.L. 521/43.-18.3.1943.)

Article 80.

Cancel and substitute:-

"Where the chase can be definitely identified as harmless, she should in general be boarded and should not be required to send a boat. It is, however, quite legitimate to summon the master on board with his papers, if there are special reasons for doing so.

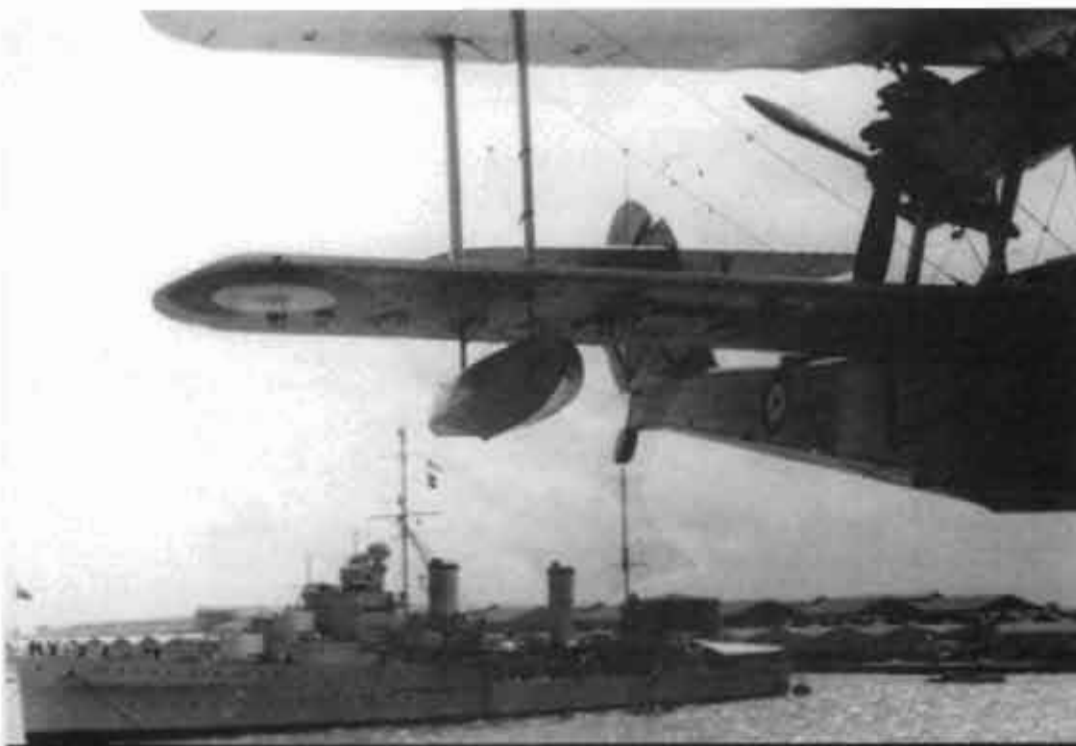
In any event if a chase cannot be immediately identified as harmless, she is to be regarded as suspect and should not be boarded. She should be ordered to send a boat with the master or first officer and the ship's papers as a first step towards establishing her identity. Enemy raiders are usually disguised as merchant ships and the greatest importance is attached to the observance of this procedure."

(N.L. 521/43.-A.F.O. P. 173/43)

(Last amendment. A.F.O. P.228/40)

Notes

- 1 Message 1st Sea Lord to ACNB, 1115A/30 November. NHB.
- 2 'Conduct of HM Ships in vicinity of Disguised Enemy Raiders and Blockade Runners', D.O.D. (H) minute, 9 June 1943. PRO: ADM 1/12883, f. 5.
- 3 Minutes, July and August 1943. *ibid.*, ff. 6-7.
- 4 Not found.
- 5 Director of Plans minute, 10 December 1943. PRO: ADM 1/12883, f. 13.
- 6 *ibid.*, ff. 37-43.
- 7 i.e. that *Penguin* "... had previously contemplated stopping when forced to and then trying to get within close gun and torpedo range for a surprise attack when picking up the boarding party ..."
- 8 PRO: ADM 1/12883, f. 41. See also Chapter 8 and Annex C. *Battle Summary No. 13*.
- 9 *ibid.* f. 37.
- 10 Minutes, January and February 1943. PRO: ADM 1/15037.
- 11 *ibid.* f. 13.



HMAS Sydney in a pre-war photograph (RAN).

10 The Material Condition of HMAS Sydney

The Director of Naval Construction

Sir Stanley Goodall, Director of Naval Construction during most of World War II, took damage to ships and their loss very seriously. At the first report of damage, usually a signal, a file would be opened and kept active till repairs were complete. Each file contained reports of proceedings, photos, notes, etc and some case interviews with survivors, by Goodall himself if the case was interesting enough. By the end of the war there were two big cupboards of such files, which were subsequently transferred to the PRO. Sometimes no further information came, and this appears to have been the case with *Sydney*: a file was opened but the only paper put in it was a typed copy of the ONI report of her loss.¹

The *Leander* Class

The design of HMAS *Sydney* was derived from the *Leander* class. HMS *Leander* herself was the lead ship, conforming to the limits set by the London Treaty of 1930. Four ships of the *Leander* class were ordered in 1930-31 for the Royal Navy, and three more ships, originally intended for the RN, were completed for the RAN in the mid 1930s. At an early stage of modification,²

... it was decided to adopt a unit system of machinery alternating boiler room, engine room, boiler room, engine room. Either boiler room could feed either engine room and there was a good chance that the ship would still be mobile with any two spaces flooded. This additional security was gained at a price; the length of the machinery spaces went up by 9ft to 188ft and the length over which the side armour extended to the upper deck was 141ft instead of 84ft in the earlier ships. The length of the ship was increased by 8ft but it was clear that they would be even more cramped than the

Leander class, and the unit system of machinery demanded even more men making matters worse ... There were four boilers instead of six and there was equal power on each shaft.

This arrangement of the machinery spaces was used in all later British cruisers which were built. While it should have greatly increased the resistance to damage, there was a very serious flaw which detracted greatly from its value. The two boilers in the after room were in line amidships to allow the outer shafts to run outboard of them. This left two small wing compartments. Calculations showed that the heel produced by flooding one of these spaces was very small. However, if the ship was torpedoed in that region two or probably three main compartments would be flooded greatly reducing the stability so that the



HMS *Leander* (Grazebrook Collection).

asymmetric buoyancy of the other wing compartment would cause a very large heel and, in all probability, capsize the ship.

In other words, while the forward shafts passed outboard of the boilers in the after boiler room leaving small wing compartments, there was no problem with the stability of *Sydney* when undamaged. Further, the designers had checked that the heel due to the flooding of one wing space would be small. However, if a torpedo explosion flooded both engine rooms, the after boiler room and one wing space, the asymmetric buoyancy of the remaining wing space would, with the loss of stability from three flooded compartments, cause very rapid capsize, perhaps in less than a minute. Though with hindsight this may be obvious, it would have been almost impossible, without a computer in the 1930s, to calculate such a condition.³

4-in ammunition

In 1941 it was believed that 4-inch ammunition would not detonate in a fire. By 1943 however Goddall's studies of the causes of the loss of ships, including HM Ships *Hood* and *Barham*, had shown that this ammunition could explode. This makes it more likely that a 4-inch ammunition explosion may have been the cause of the loss of HMAS *Sydney*.⁴

Sydney damaged in fight with the *Bartolomeo Colleoni*

In 1940, HMAS *Sydney* was best known for her famous fight with the Italian cruiser *Bartolomeo Colleoni* in the Mediterranean on 19 July 1940. Although she sank the Italian, *Sydney* was herself slightly damaged. The damage is listed on the cover of the file containing *Sydney's* report of the battle:⁵

Italian Cruiser "Bartolomeo Colleone" [sic]

Sinking of-

19-7-40 off Cape Spada Reports by H.M.A.S.
"Sydney" & ships of 2nd Destroyer Squadron

H.M.A.S "Sydney"

Gunnery Report Recommendations etc.

Admiralty remarks

Worn out Transmitters not to be retained.
Question to be investigated separately

Multiphones provided to replace voicepipe where distance is too great etc.

Admiralty instructions re gunnery procedure
(Ref A.F.O. 160/41)

Engine Room Narrative.

Damage caused by Enemy Shell in Boiler Room & Engine Room. Ref to exemplary conduct of personnel and machinery

Structural Weaknesses aggravated by Prolonged Gunfire

Report by Warrant Shipwright

Tactics of Destroyers engaged in Action

Criticism of by V-A.(D)

The engine room narrative

One of the best known photographs of *Sydney* is of her sailors grinning through a large hole in her forward funnel; damage which she received during the engagement with the Italian cruiser. Although the damage was largely cosmetic, the immediate effects of the explosion were widely felt. This is how the Engineer Officer described it:

... At 0921 an enemy shell exploded on the port of the forward funnel 10 feet below the traw. A hole 3 feet square was blown in the funnel and emerged on the starboard side. Gratings, ladders and stiffening angles inside the funnel were damaged, and many splinters were found in the boiler room, the majority being located on the preheater tube plates.

The effect of the explosion in 'A' boiler room was small. All sprayers "back flashed"



Damage to HMAS Sydney after her engagement with *Bartolomeo Colleoni* (RAN).

for a distance of approximately 2 feet, but resumed normal burning immediately. One forced draught fan tripped but was restarted immediately. Steam pressure remained steady and lighting was undamaged. No personnel were injured in the boiler room.

The effect of the explosion was felt in the Forward Engine Room through the ventilation supply trunks, the inlets of which are at the base of the forward funnel. No damage was caused in the engine room but heavy fumes poured down the ventilation supply trunks and reduced visibility to a few feet. The exhaust fans cleared the engine room in a few minutes.

Splinters from this shell stranded the Catapult Acceleration Wire and caused superficial damage to the teeth of the training rack ...

Other structural damage

Sydney also received some other damage during the fight with the Italian but, as reported by Warrant Shipwright Fuller to the Commanding Officer of *Sydney*, this does not seem to have been major. In his report Fuller refers to the aggravation of certain weaknesses in the ship's structure, due to prolonged gunfire. "... which were reported on 11th July 1940 ... " This, of course, is before the battle with the *Bartolomeo Colleoni* and presumably is a reference to *Sydney's* hard usage throughout the Mediterranean campaign. The letter of 11 July 1940 has not been found in the British archives:¹

H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY",

20th July, 1940.

Sir,

I have the honour to submit the following report on damage received during action on 19th July 1940.

2. A projectile, which burst on No.1 funnel Port

side, caused a number of jagged holes in Pinnacle No.133, Skiff No. 148 and Whaler No.506 besides causing superficial damage to the Upper Deck and Structure in this vicinity.

3. The Weaknesses in Ship's Structure due to prolonged gunfire, which were reported on 11th July 1940, were aggravated. The gas tight doors (port and starboard) to Senior Officers' Flat were blown in and the plymex bulkhead to No.15 Cabin distorted. Aluminium scuttle frames (2 in No.) to Senior Officers' Bathroom were fractured and blown in. Hatch Cover to No.3 Flooding Cabinet was distorted. All the tiles in Wardroom Galley were lifted.

With regard to paragraph 2:- The damage to Pinnacle No.133 entails the renewal of approximately 40 planks, and repairs to Bulkhead, Stern Sheets, Thwarts and Flooring. - Skiff No.148, Keel and Hog require renewal aft, Planks (9 in No), Stern Sheets and bearers require renewal, Stretchers and rubber require repair. This damage considered to be beyond the capacity of Ship's Staff and it is suggested that a local contract be called for the work. Whaler No.506 was immediately made seaworthy. Planks (4 in No) will be renewed, as early as possible.

Superficial damage is being dealt with by Ship's Staff.

With regard to paragraph 3: It is proposed to renew the scuttles in Senior Officers' Bathroom and No. 15 Cabin, but to maintain fighting efficiency, the damage is temporarily patched. Remainder of items are being dealt with by Ship's Staff.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,
 Your obedient servant,
 (J A E Fuller)
 WARRANT SHIPWRIGHT.

The Commanding Officer,
 H.M.A.S. SYDNEY

New gun mountings

There appear to be no other records in the British archives concerning the material condition of HMAS *Sydney*, neither her action damage nor her state of repair, except a record that she could not be spared from operations for new A.A. gun mountings to be fitted. This work had been contemplated on the outbreak of hostilities, but had not yet been taken in hand. Whether these mountings would have had shields is not known from the British archives:⁶

Improvement of anti-aircraft armament by fitting twin-mountings. This work has been deferred for the present as the ship cannot be spared from service.

Damage caused by *Kormoran*

According to the German accounts, the *Sydney* was very seriously damaged during the action with the *Kormoran* in November 1941. An early gun salvo from the German raider hit the bridge and gunnery director, possibly killing the command and destroying the central direction of the main armament. A torpedo hit on the port side blew a hole under "A" and "B" turrets, peeling back the roof of one turret and jamming the other. *Sydney* suffered massive flooding forward, taking up a large bow trim and losing speed.

Sydney's portside upperdeck was sprayed with medium calibre gunfire from 2 cm guns and from a 3.7 cm anti-tank gun. This destroyed the aircraft, which was on its catapult ready for flight and presumably full of fuel. Fire, fuelled by aviation spirit, burned fiercely and spread rapidly.

As and after *Sydney* crossed *Kormoran's* stern, her starboard side upperdeck was exposed to similar gunfire. According to German accounts, *Sydney's* upper deck and waterline on the starboard side were "peppered" with medium calibre gunfire. Contrary to many English language accounts

of the battle, by this stage *Sydney's* "C" and "D" turrets were jammed to port and pointing away from *Kormoran*, and she made no effective reply.

By now *Sydney* had slowed to a few knots and taken trim more by the stern, consistent either with counter flooding and/or flooding through damage of the engine rooms and/or boiler rooms. With the weather deteriorating and night falling, and fires raging along the upperdeck *Sydney* made off to the south.

By this time most of *Sydney's* boats and carley floats were probably damaged or consumed by fire.

Conclusions from the German evidence

The German evidence of the loss of HMAS *Sydney*, primarily that included in *Volume 10* written in 1943, and the initial and interim reports of the interrogation of German prisoners in 1941 indicate that the torpedo hit forward caused a large bow trim, but that this is unlikely to have had any effect on her loss. However, approximately thirty minutes later, *Sydney* was reported to have reduced speed and to have taken trim more by the stern - though when she drew away to the south she was still bows down. This suggests loss of motive power and either counterflooding to deal with the former bow trim, or major damage and uncontrolled flooding aft involving at least one boiler or engine room. *The consequence may have been flooding of sufficient spaces (see above) to cause sudden capsizes.*

Although such an occurrence is quite possible, it is inconsistent with the possibility of a single catastrophic explosion. The ACNB's initial report of interrogation of German prisoners said, "No violent explosion was seen or heard", and the ACNB's report of 12 February repeated that "No explosion was heard". However, other, German reports stated that "flare-ups" onboard the *Sydney* were allegedly seen on the horizon by the German survivors. If true, this suggests that the fires may have reached the 4-inch magazine and initiated a magazine explosion later in the night. However, whether *Sydney* was lost by flooding and capsize, or by explosion, cannot be determined from the evidence in British archives.

Notes

- 1 The author is grateful to David Brown of the Royal Corps of Naval Constructors for this information and for his assistance with this chapter. The ONI report is reproduced in Chapter 6.
- 2 Eur Ing D.K. Brown M Eng C Eng FRINA RCNC, *Nelson to Vanguard* (London: Chatham Publishing, 2000), p. 73.
- 3 Letter, D.K. Brown to the author, 28 March 2001. Author's collection.
- 4 Letter, D.K. Brown to the author, 23 April 2001. Author's collection.
- 5 PRO: ADM 1/11178.
- 6 Enclosure (iv) to Sydney's letter, 8234/40, 30 July 1940. *ibid.*
- 7 Enclosure (vi) to Sydney's letter, 8234/40, 30 July 1940. *ibid.*
- 8 Entry, 15 September 1941. PRO: ADM 199/738.

11 The Body on Christmas Island

Despite extensive searches in Admiralty, Colonial and War Office files for a reference to a coroner's inquest on the body washed ashore on Christmas Island in early 1942, no evidence or any other relevant record has been found.¹

There are, however, three documents from which it is possible to get a fairly clear picture of Christmas Island, before, during and after the Japanese occupation.

There is a *China Station Intelligence Report* dated June 1941 for many areas in the Far East. Christmas Island is described in detail, giving a snapshot of the island whilst it was still in British hands. There is also a history of the Island's administration. It became part of the Straits Settlement in 1900 and continued as such until after the Japanese occupation.²

There is also a file which contains a report by the District Officer, who was captured when the Japanese occupied the island in March 1942 and who remained on the Island throughout much of the occupation.³ The District Officer's report refers to a dispatch dated March 1942, though this has not been found.

On 25 October 1945 HMS *Rother* rendered "An account of Proceedings in Connection with the Landing on and Subsequent Re-occupation of Christmas Island". The report, signed by Lieutenant Commander B.C. Rodgers, RN, the commanding officer of HMS *Rother*, included a description of her visit and the conditions found on her arrival.⁴

HMS *Rother's* report of proceedings does mention that, in the absence of the District Officer, the register of births, marriages and deaths had been maintained by the Chinese and Malay population. There is no mention of a shipwrecked body or of any autopsy. Contrary to rumours which have been expressed to the author, there is no record in this report of anyone from HMS *Rother* having disinterred any body.

The three documents referred to above have been included in a supplementary schedule submitted to the Naval History Directorate of the Royal Australian Navy.

Notes

- 1 Files examined at the PRO include, CO 273, CO 968, WO 106, WO 203, WO 208, and WO 220.
- 2 PRO: WO 252/900.
- 3 PRO: CO 273/673/8.
- 4 PRO: ADM 1/19541.

Annex A

Log of Signals about HMAS Sydney

The following log has been compiled from signals which have been found in the British archives or to which references have been found in various documents in the British archives. Unless otherwise stated, references were found in entries in the *Naval War Diary*.

Referred to in	Present location of copy	From	DTG November & December 1941	To	Subject
ACNB 12 Feb 42		DNO Western Australia	0140Z/21	ACNB	<i>Sydney</i> has not yet arrived
ACNB 12 Feb 42		ACNB	1054Z/23	Sydney	Report your position
ACNB 12 Feb 42		ACNB	0209Z/24	CinC China	<i>Sydney</i> overdue 36 hours
		ACNB	0617Z/24	CZM	<i>Sydney</i> overdue, request search
ACNB 12 Feb 42		<i>Trocas</i>	0816Z/24		25 Germans in 26° 06' S, 111° 41' E
		ACNB	1312Z/24	Not to Admiralty	<i>Trocas</i> reports survivors

ADM 267/77	CinC China	1432Z/24		Forwarding a signal from TROCAS "received at 0700 that day"
ACNB 12 Feb 42	CZM	1805Z/24	ACNB	<i>Tromp</i> will search South of Sunda Straits
	ACNB	0016Z/25	Admiralty	No further news of Sydney
	ACNB	0829Z/25		Censorship in force
	1st Sea Lord	1120A/25	ACNB, CinC China	Raider torpedoed Sydney?
	CinC China	1133Z/25	Admiralty	Concur explanation: ACNB organising search
	ACNB	1634Z/25	Admiralty, etc	Survivors not from Sydney
ACNB 1700Z/27	ACNB	1900Z/25	Admiralty, etc	?
	AL Admiralty	2229A/25	CinC Fleet, etc	German POWs say they were sunk by Sydney who is overdue
	Singapore	0733Z/26	Admiralty	Summary of Sydney situation

		?	1646Z/26	Admiralty, etc	Summary of search operations
It is probably one of the above signals on 26 Nov that the German Navy claims to have intercepted and which, when decyphered by them four days later, informed the Germans of the loss of <i>Sydney</i> .					
		ACNB	1519Z/27	Admiralty	<i>Sydney</i> presumed lost
1. ADM 199/736	1. AL	ACNB	1700Z/27	Admiralty	Initial report of ACNB - <i>Kormoran</i> was <i>Raider G</i>
2. ACNB 12 Feb 42	2. IWM				
1. ADM 199/736		ACNB	0222Z/28		?
2. ACNB 12 Feb 42					
1. ADM 199/736		ACNB	0604Z/28		?
2. ACNB 12 Feb 42					
		ACNB	0812Z/28	Admiralty	Ship was <i>Steiermark</i>
	1st Sea Lord		1115A/30	ACNB	Request you send PoW debriefing
	1st Sea Lord		1116A/30	ACNB	Deepest sympathy on loss of <i>Sydney</i> and <i>Parramatta</i>
	1st Lord		2306A/2	ANNB [sic]	Message of sympathy

		ACNB	1018Z/2	1 st Sea Lord	Acknowledged
ACNB 12 Feb 42	AL	ACNB	0700Z/7	Admiralty, etc	Report of interrogation of POWs
	1. ADM 1/12033	Admiralty	1618A/16	CinCs etc	Analysis of encounters with raiders
	2. ADM 1/12883				
	ADM 1/12033	CinC SA	1455Z/20	SA Squadron	Precis of Admty. 1618A/16
1. ADM 199/736			1030Z/23		?
2. ACNB 12 Feb 42					
	ADM 1/12883	Admiralty	1538A/14 March 1942		Enemy raiders hold fire ... until the British ship is stopped
	ADM 1/12883	Admiralty	1628[?]/11 June 1942		German raiders carry two or more M.T.B.s
	1. ADM 1/12883	Admiralty	1734A/ 11 August 1942		Enemy raiders are usually powerfully armed
	2. ADM 1/15037				

- AL - Admiralty Library
 IWM - Imperial War Museum
 NWD - Naval War Dairy which is here produced from the carbon copy in the Admiralty Library, but which is also available in the Public Records Office.

Annex B

German Timetable of the Action between HMAS Sydney & the Disguised Raider *Kormoran*

Event	Date/time/ elapsed	Voyage of the Auxiliary Cruiser <i>Kormoran</i> , December 1943	Dr Habben's newspaper account 1944	Coded documents recovered from Detmers after his escape in 1945	<i>The Raider Kormoran</i> by Theodor Detmers published by William Kimber, London 1959
1	Nov-41		"... our Commander resolved, in November 1941, on a new thrust towards the Australian coast ..."		Naval Warfare Department informs <i>Kormoran</i> that HMS <i>Cornwall</i> escorting convoy moving westward off Cape Leeuwin
2	19 Nov pm		"... the afternoon of November the 19 we were about 130 nautical miles west of Shark Point ..."	28 34 5 111 E course 025 speed 11 kts wind SSE force 3/4 medium swell good visibility.	Force 3/4 medium swell. <i>Kormoran</i> course NE towards Shark's Bay
3	1555				Alarm. Probable sailing vessel sighted dead ahead
4			"... the not unusual siren sounded about 16 hours ..."	Alarm. Sailing ship in sight on port bow. 2 smoke clouds, apparently escort.	Two sailing ships, then a number of vessels, and behind them two clouds [columns?] of smoke.
5					Turn to port 260. full speed ahead = 16 kts

6	1600	Kormoran 26 34 S 111 E course 025 moderate speed, sights a plume of smoke out of which quickly emerged a light cruiser.	"... it is a cruiser ..."	Perth class cruiser south. Kormoran alters course 250 250 into sun. Making smoke and engine room reports No. 4 engine out of action. Speed reduced to 14 kts.	Perth class identified
7	-	Kormoran alters course 260, speed 18 kts into sun, sea and wind. Sydney chases at speed 25 kts.	"... Judging by the ship's noises the engines were soon going at top speed ..."		Increased speed Dropped lookout lookout [disacted?] and lowered cross mast. Alter course 250.
8	1605			Cruiser turns towards. Range 15000 yards.	"No. 4 engine out of action, top speed 14 kts."
9				Cruiser signals "NNJ" by light. Kormoran hoists signal for Straat.	Sydney signals "NNJ"
10					Sydney signals "What ship?" Detmers realises he has to fight.
11					Sydney 3 points on starboard bow, range 15000 yards speed 20 kts.
12	1635	A long exchange of signals during which the auxiliary cruiser hoists the Dutch flag. All signals sent by searchlight answered by flag.			No. 4 engine available (less one cylinder) speed 14 kts.
13	1645			No. 4 engine running on 8 cylinders. Kormoran speed 14 kts.	
14	-			Sydney at 8000 yards. Ceased range finding with 3 m range finder in order to maintain disguise.	3m range finder lowered. Sydney ranged with 0.75 anti aircraft range finder.

15	-		Sydney approaches slowly on starboard quarter showing narrow silhouettes.	Sydney signals "What cargo?"	
16	1700		Ezzenon sends "000" and Perth radio repeats.	Detmers orders hoist of Dutch flag and sends "000", acknowledged by Perth wireless station.	
17	-			Sydney at 1000 yards.	
18	-			Sydney closer and turns one or two points to starboard.	
19	1715		Sydney draws away, range 9000 yards.		
20	1725		Sydney signals "Give your secret call"	Sydney signals "Give your secret call"	
21	-			Sydney repeats "Give your secret call"	
22	1725	Sydney's "...aircraft previously had been swung out on its catapult, was swung back and stopped ..."	"...the enemy had approached to a close proximity and was now steaming a parallel course to us on the starboard side..."	Sydney broadside on, range 1000 yards "... the cruiser's gunnerymen in their white coats firing the calls"	
23	-	Both ships at 14 kts, course 160.		Sydney "... stops engines, this has not the least suspicion ..."	Sydney's rate of change of bearing "came practically to a standstill ..."

24	1730	Detaches orders "De-camouflage" - order carried out in record time of a sec.		Detaches orders "De-camouflage"	
25	+6 secs	Max of War flag and Commodore's pennant hoisted and Dutch flag lowered.	"... at the same moment by hoisting the German war flag the previously innocent looking merchant ship was transformed into a warship and with lightning speed fire was opened from our de-camouflaged guns ..."	German continues disguise. Dutch flag struck, war flag flies clear "... time taken 6 seconds..."	Chief Signaller reports "War flag flying"
26	-		Sydney drops slowly astern.	Karmanon "... ship's tails hoisted, camouflage covers off, hatches open, anti-aircraft guns raised, torpede flaps open and all barrels and tubes ranging on to the target ..."	
27		Kormoran's first shot from first gun falls short.		Kormoran alters slowly to course 2nd, four salvo 1200 yards. First salvo short, then hits on Sydney's bridge, control position, smokestack, aircraft, and bridge.	First shot fired by Kormoran from leading gun ..."
28	+4 secs	Salvo of three guns hits Sydney's bridge and control tower.		Further guns in action "... causing direct hits on the enemy's bridge and on his artillery position ..."	
29	-	Sydney fires first salvo - over.	"... Only in the beginning was our enemy in the position to fire a complete salvo, but it was wide of its aim and passed over us ..."	No reply from Sydney up to 5th salvo, then full salvo - over. Sydney opened fire with full salvo - over.	

30	+43 sec	<p>Kormoran's third salvo hits Sydney's "... second turret, the roof of which was lifted up and prevented the first turret from swinging. This meant that the enemy had only his two after turrets available ..."</p>	<p>"... At the very first salvo direct hits were made on the SYDNEY's main gun, the bridge was repeatedly severely hit and both turrets were put out of action and the aircraft which was just ready to take off was blown up ..."</p>	<p>Kormoran fires 8 salvos with 8 secs between each. No answering fire ... every shell we fired was a direct hit. At the same time our anti aircraft gun peppered the enemy's upperdeck and his torpedo batteries, and our army 37 mm anti aircraft pumped shells in to his bridge ..."</p>	
31		<p>Sydney's "... aircraft which had just been swung out and started up, was destroyed by a direct hit ..."</p>			
52		<p>"... a torpedo fired from the Kormoran's starboard above-water tube hit Sydney's bows just in front of the first turret. The torpedo bore a great hole in the ship's side. She sank deeply by the bows and for a moment it appeared that she was going to break up. This reduced considerably the speed of the enemy ..."</p>	<p>"... we succeeded in the first stage of the fight in scoring a direct hit with a torpedo in the front of the ship which ripped a large hole in its side so that the front of the ship reared almost undismounted and the speed of our opponent afterwards seemed to be considerably reduced ..."</p>	<p>At about 8th or 9th salvo torpedo hits forward of A and B turrets, Sydney's "... stem (stem?) almost completely submerged ..."</p>	<p>Kormoran is 200 to five torpedoes.</p>
53		<p>"... the 3.7 cm anti-tank gun under the bridge, and the 2 cm anti-aircraft gun ... hindered the enemy from loading the torpedo tubes which was continually being attempted, and from using light weapons and evidently cause many casualties amongst the personnel in the control positions of the cruises ..."</p>	<p>"... Owing to well aimed fire of light guns it was not possible for him to fire his torpedoes ..."</p>		

34	-	Sydney's after turrets in local combat inflict severe damage on Kormoran.	"... After its firing emplacement had been put out of action the cruiser "SYDNEY" was only still able to fire single shots from its third and fourth turrets. By this means it still scored three hits on an which unfortunately made our fire extinguishing apparatus useless and soon led to an extensive fire in the engine room which later spread to the superstructure ..."		
35	17.15	Sydney reduces speed, settles by the stern and tries to ram Kormoran from astern, but is prevented by "... well-placed fire, particularly from No 3 gun ..."	"... the "SYDNEY" in addition, attempted to ram us from behind but was prevented by well aimed fire from our guns ..."	Sydney passes astern.	Sydney turns towards
38				Thick smoke from Kormoran's engines; fire masks worn, but stern armament continues firing at range 4000 yards.	Kormoran's guns masked [i.e. could not see the Sydney]. No counterfire. Sydney's anti aircraft guns un-manned.
37	-	Sydney steams to the south at about 5 or 6 knots			
38	-				Kormoran's gun barrels cooled with fire hoses.
39					Kormoran's engines cease to obey telegraphs.
40	17.45	Sydney fires 4 torpedoes from her starboard tubes.	"... She now veered to port and fired another fan of four torpedoes at us but the torpedoes all passed close to our stern ..."	Sydney fires 4 torpedoes. Engine breakdown in Kormoran, course 240.	Sydney fires torpedoes.

41	1750		Sydney course south, speed slow, range 6000 yards.	
42	About 1800		Kormoran fires single torpedo, range 7000 yards.	
43	-	Sydney's turrets "... remained swung round to the port side...".		
44	-	Kormoran hits Sydney with "... salvo after salvo hit the ship particularly on the water line which was peppered with holes ... fir[ing] 500 rounds of incendiary shells ...".	"... According to accounts of our artillery officer the "CORMORAN" fired over four hundred shots at the enemy. It is estimated that she scored from 180 to 300 hits. Besides the large hole made in the front of the ship made with the torpedo hit, a large number of hits were scored above and below the water line ...".	Range opening, Sydney at 8000 yards range increasing.
45	1820		"... The fight was then ended at the beginning of dusk as the speed of our enemy diminished ...".	Kormoran ceases fire, rounds fired 500 base fuse, 50 nose fuse, last range 6000 yards. Kormoran ceases fire, Sydney at 10000 yards.
46	1900		Dusk	
47	-		Sydney disappears behind the horizon, burning amidships and flaring up with occasional explosions.	Sydney apparently on course for Perth "... we could see the glow ...".
48	-			Flames in Sydney "... flames suddenly dart up

				lowered and cast off.	even higher as though from an explosion ...".
48	with fall of darkness				force 3/4
50	2100				Boats put off from <i>Kormoran</i> .
51	About 2300	Final flare from Sydney seen.	"... at 23 hours the final glow was observed ...".		
52	2330			Two boats lowered from No. 7 hold.	Two boats from No. 1 [sic] Hatch lowered by hand.
53	2400			Last boat cast off from <i>Kormoran</i> .	
54	0010				Charges exploded in <i>Kormoran</i> .
55	0015	Detmers leaves the <i>Kormoran</i> .			
56	0035	<i>Kormoran</i> sinks by the stern.		Mines in <i>Kormoran</i> explode.	<i>Kormoran</i> sinks.
57	?				<i>Kormoran</i> learns identity of cruiser is Sydney, and gives his Australian interrogators the position 26 34 S 110 E " ... and perhaps save the lives of more of my men ...".

Annex C

Battle Summary No. 13

Actions with enemy disguised raiders: 1940-1941¹

Introduction

1. This Battle Summary deals with eight actions fought with enemy merchant ship raiders up to the end of 1941. During this period of 28 months Axis merchant ship raiders sank one British cruiser, one armed merchant cruiser, and 618,108 tons of merchant shipping (Or about 7.3 per cent of the total shipping sunk). Their own losses were three out of the seven identified during that period, and two other ships, which were probably supply ships.

These figures may be compared with those of the last war. In 1914-18, 51 months, ten armed merchant raiders sank 427,433 tons out of a total of 12,741,781 tons, or 3.3 per cent. Of the ten raiders, four were sunk, three were interned, one was wrecked, and two got back to Germany.

The action between the *Sydney* and *Kormoran* off the west coast of Australia on 19th November, 1941, may be compared with that between the *Alcantara* and *Greif* on 28th February, 1916, in the North Sea. The *Alcantara*, approaching within torpedo range, was torpedoed, but before she sank she opened a heavy fire on the *Greif* and sent her to the bottom.

The principal lesson to be drawn from the *Alcantara's* action was the necessity of keeping well out of torpedo range. After the armed boarding steamer *Ramsey* had been torpedoed by the disguised minelayer *Meteor* in the Moray Firth on 8th August, 1915, the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Jellicoe, issued an order warning ships to approach suspected vessels on the quarter and to avoid bearings on which torpedoes could be fired; also that the Master of the suspected ship should be required to bring his papers on board in his own boat (Grand Fleet Order, 24th August, 1915).

The "Alcantara's" action, 28th July 1940

2. On 15th July, 1940, HMS *Hawkins*, flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Sir Henry Harwood, K.C.B., O.B.E. Rear-Admiral South America Division, entered Montevideo for a 24-hour visit. Next day she sailed to patrol the Plate area. There had been recent indications that an enemy raider was in the North Atlantic, and on 17th July a report reached the Admiral that D/F bearings had placed a German vessel to the westward of the Cape Verde Islands on the 15th. This information, coupled with earlier reports of unidentified vessels off the coast of Ireland, indicated that a possible raider was bound for the South Atlantic. Admiral Harwood therefore ordered the armed merchant cruiser *Alcantara* (22,209 gross tons, 19 knots, Guns, eight 6-in., 14,000 yards range) Captain J.G.P. Ingham, R.N., which was patrolling the Rio de Janeiro-Santos area, to patrol off Pernambuco, while the *Hawkins* moved up to the Rio-Santos area. To protect the important focal area of the Plate against a raid the Admiral intended to move both ships back to their original patrol areas by the time that the anticipated raider would be well to the southward of Pernambuco on the assumption that she was proceeding direct to the Plate at economical speed.

Next day, 18th July, the Admiral received news of the sinking by a raider in the West Indies area, on or about 13th July, of two British ships, the *Davisian* and *King John*, and of the sailing of the German tanker *Rekum* from Teneriffe on 17th July. It seemed very probable that the oiler intended to refuel the raider, and from 19th to 21st July the *Hawkins* patrolled off Rio. By 22nd July Admiral Harwood estimated that if the raider had come south from the position given by the D/F bearing on the 15th she would be south of the latitude of Pernambuco, and shortly after 4.30 p.m. he ordered the *Alcantara*, which had reached the Pernambuco area on the 20th, to proceed south to examine Trinidad Island, as this island had occasionally been used by German raiders in the last war. She was subsequently to patrol an area south-west of Trinidad at a distance of over 250 miles from the South American coast.

On the 23rd the *Hawkins* fuelled from the *Arndale* north-east of Sao Sebastiao Island, and then patrolled the British shipping routes off the South American coast between Rio de Janeiro and the Plate.

On 25th July Admiral Harwood learned that a German submarine had sunk a Norwegian tanker near the Cape Verde Islands on the 18th. Clearly it was this submarine, and not a raider, that had been located by D/F on the 15th. Further reports from the West Indies, however, and the fact that three ships were overdue at Freetown, indicated the probability of there being one raider in the West Indies and another in the South Atlantic. During the 26th and 27th, therefore, the *Hawkins* continued patrolling the British shipping routes between Rio and the Plate.

During the forenoon of 26th July. The *Alcantara* inspected the Island of Trinidade and at noon next day was in 23° 25' S., 31° 47' W. At 10 a.m. on the 28th she was in 24° 39' S, 33° 7' W (About 600 miles east of Rio de Janeiro), steering N. 75° E. at 11^{1/2} knots, when the tops of two masts were sighted from her crow's nest, due east, fine on the starboard bow. She altered course to intercept, but when the range had closed to 23,000 yards the unknown ship turned momentarily towards her and then turned away. The *Alcantara* followed, and, as the range was opening, increased to 15 knots and then to full speed. By noon she was doing 20 knots and by 1 p.m. nearly 22. The day was fine and clear with a light breeze from the south-east. At 2 p.m., when the *Alcantara* was in 24° 3' S., 31° 56' W., the unknown vessel altered course to starboard, and, hoisting the German ensign, opened fire with a two-gun salvo at 16,000 yards, 2,000 yards beyond the extreme range of the *Alcantara's* eight 6-in. guns, followed a few seconds later by two four-gun salvos.

One shell of the two-gun salvo fell 100 yards over on the port quarter : one of the second salvo struck the *Alcantara* just abaft her dummy funnel, and another, bursting over her quarter deck by P 4 gun, killed its trainer, severed a number of fire control leads and put its range and deflection instruments out of action. It was probably this salvo that brought down her main aerial, which was shot away between 2.6 p.m. and 2.9 p.m. A shell of the third salvo hit the *Alcantara* abreast the stokers' mess deck, and another, bursting on her quarter deck, killed the Officer of Quarters. At 2.8 p.m. a hit on the water line abreast the engine room resulted in an inrush of water, which gradually reduced her speed.

Meanwhile the *Alcantara* had opened fire at extreme range at 2.1 p.m., her first salvo falling short to the right. A hail of fragments flying

around her fire control prevented the fall of her second salvo from being observed. The enemy, who was keeping up a very high rate of fire, was straddling constantly, and a number of shells bursting close overhead sent steel sherds whistling uncomfortably near. These explosions and the noise of the *Alcantara's* guns made it difficult for the sight-setters to hear, and the sights were soon out of step. Several times the *Alcantara* had to check fire to correct them for range and deflection. In spite of these delays she straddled the raider with a number of salvos, and at 2.13 p.m. observed a bright flash abreast her foremast. The enemy's foremost starboard gun fired no more, her salvos became ragged, and her rate of fire decreased.

By 2.20 p.m. the *Alcantara's* speed had dropped to 15 knots, and at 2.30 p.m. the raider turned away, dropping smoke floats and firing two stern guns. The *Alcantara* continued to reply, but the range, which had previously closed to 9,800 yards, was opening. At 2.35 p.m. the *Alcantara* turning to starboard opened fire with her port battery obtaining a hit, on the enemy's stern. The raider replied with three of her port guns, and dropped another smoke float. By this time the *Alcantara's* speed had dropped to 10 knots, and the enemy, steaming at something between 12 and 15 knots, drew rapidly away till only her topmasts were visible. The *Alcantara* continued to fire at extreme elevation, but the target was obscured by smoke. When the enemy emerged from it the *Alcantara* fired a few more rounds from her port battery at extreme range, and the raider replied with a few ragged three-gun salvos. At 3.15 p.m. the *Alcantara* was in 24° 0' 10" S., 31° 51' W. Firing had ceased except for a few desultory rounds which fell short.

For some time the *Alcantara* had been almost stopped; the raider, after altering course as though to close her, turned round and steamed away at 15 knots with a slight list to port. When last seen at 3.30 p.m., she was steering south, 29,000 yards away. Thus ended a sharp but inconclusive action, during which the *Alcantara* had fired 152 rounds.

A close examination of the effects of the enemy's fire showed that she had used only shrapnel or similar "anti-personnel" shell throughout. Some had burst in the air and eight others instantaneously on impact. Their fragmentation was very great and as many as 500 perforations and dents were found near one burst. The danger to personnel was obvious, and the *Alcantara's* reports contain the following recommendations:-

- (1) Gun shields to be fitted to all guns, not only as protection, but also to shield the sight-setters from blast.
- (2) Fire control circuits to be run below decks and given greater protection.
- (3) Steel helmets to be provided for all whose duty may require them to be in an exposed place.
- (4) Telemotor leads to be further protected.
- (5) Protection for ammunition bollard and operator.
- (6) Further supply of protective mattresses for bridge, fore control and elsewhere.
- (7) The 6-in., Mark VII guns with their 14,000 yards range, which had been outranged by the enemy raider, to be replaced by 6-in., Mark XII, or other suitable long range guns. (The *Alcantara* was subsequently rearmed with two 6-in guns, range 18,500 yards, and six 6-in. guns, range 17,700 yards).

The “Carnarvon Castle’s” action, 5th December, 1940

3. On 5th December, 1940, the armed merchant cruiser *Carnarvon Castle* (20,063 gross tons, 18 knots, guns, eight 6-in., 14,000 yards range), Captain H.W.M. Hardy, R.N., fought an action with an enemy raider in the South Atlantic very similar to the *Alcantara*’s action of 28th July, 1940. These actions emphasised the heavy handicap under which both vessels laboured owing to their large silhouettes, short range guns, and primitive fire control opposed to smaller adversaries equipped with long range guns and modern fire control systems. While the *Alcantara*’s 6-in guns were outranged by 2,000 yards the *Carnarvon Castle*’s guns were outranged by 3,000 yards, which gave her opponent 20 minutes of uninterrupted firing at a large target before she could get within range.

The following summary of the action is based largely on the *Carnarvon Castle*’s narrative. At 6.42 a.m. on the morning of 5th December, 1940, H.M.S. *Carnarvon Castle* was in 30° 52’ S., 42° 53’ W., off the east coast of South America, steering S.35° W. at 18.3 knots, with orders to arrive at Montevideo on 9th December, when she sighted a suspicious vessel at a range of 19,000 yards, the extreme limit of visibility. The stranger was steaming directly away, and the *Carnarvon Castle*, increasing speed, signalled her to stop. She did not do so, and at 7.57 a.m. the *Carnarvon*

Castle fired one round, which fell short. She replied within 30 seconds at a range of approximately 17,000 yards, with a four- or five-gun salvo. As this was 3,000 yards outside the maximum range of the *Carnarvon Castle's* eight 6-in. guns, Captain Hardy turned to port to close the range and to bring all his starboard battery to bear. The enemy also altered course to port, but soon turned back to starboard.

These changes reduced the range, after 20 minutes, to 14,000 yards, and the *Carnarvon Castle*, opening fire, claims to have hit the enemy several times, setting her on fire aft and apparently reducing her port battery temporarily to one effective gun, with which she continued the action for some time. The enemy then turned to starboard behind a smoke screen, and on reappearing reopened fire with his starboard battery in four-gun salvos.

At 8.38 a.m. the *Carnarvon Castle* sighted two torpedo tracks approaching on slightly diverging courses, but, turning under full helm to starboard, was able to steer between them, and they passed harmlessly 50 yards away on either side.

By 8.44 a.m. the range was down to 8,000 yards when the enemy, bringing his port battery once more to bear, hit the *Carnarvon Castle* repeatedly, setting her on fire in several places. At 9.11 a.m., therefore, Captain Hardy decided to open the range and get the fires under control behind a smoke screen. All the *Carnarvon Castle's* fire control communications were disabled and her guns in individual control. The haze had increased, and as the enemy was continually turning smoke on and off, spotting through the splashes of her shorts became extremely difficult and hitting a matter of luck. The *Carnarvon Castle*, however, claimed a last hit at her extreme range of 14,000 yards, the shell bursting under the enemy's bridge. The raider continued firing until the range had opened to 18,000 yards, and although the *Carnarvon Castle* altered course in an attempt to keep in touch, the enemy finally disappeared behind a smoke screen in the increasing haze, steaming at 18 knots in a north-easterly direction.

It was 11.15 a.m. before the *Carnarvon Castle* was able to extinguish all her fires and in view of her extensive damage Captain Hardy steered for Montevideo, which he reached safely at 7 p.m. on 7th December. The ship was too damaged to be of any further service, though there was no immediate need to dock her.

The enemy ship was a long, low vessel of about 10,000 tons displacement, painted a very dark grey or black, with two masts, one funnel, straight stem and cruiser stern. As in the *Alcantara's* action the enemy shell showed very high fragmentation, but in this action no shrapnel was used. The *Carnarvon Castle* had received no less than 27 direct hits: all her electrical and voicepipe communications were shot away, her engine-room telegraphs and telephones cut, her wireless aerial destroyed, all her boats, except one, were riddled, her galley completely wrecked, the main exhaust pipe from her engines extensively cut, and her fore peak was flooded. Commodore F.H. Pegram, the Commodore Commanding the South America Division, who visited her the following day, considered that she had put up a gallant and spirited action against a superior enemy.

The "Leander" sinks the "R.A.M.B.1", 27th February, 1941

4. On 27th February, 1941, HMS *Leander* (cruiser, 7,270 tons, 32.5 knots, guns, eight 6-in., eight 4-in. H.A.) New Zealand Division, Captain R.H. Bevan, R.N., fought a successful action in the Indian Ocean with the Italian raider *R.A.M.B.1*.

At 10.37 a.m. on the morning of 27th February, the *Leander* was patrolling northward off the Maldive Islands in about 10° N., 68° 30' E, at 20 knots, when she sighted a vessel steering eastward on a steady course at a comparatively high speed right ahead: she increased to 23 knots to close, and as she gradually approached her suspicions were aroused by the stranger's resemblance to the R.A.M.B. class of Italian banana freighters and by a gun on her fore-castle. She therefore went to action stations at 11.15 a.m. when the range was 11,000 yards, keeping her turrets trained fore and aft. At 11.25 a.m., when the range was down to 10,000 yards, she ordered the stranger (by lamp and flags) to hoist her colours. Four minutes later the stranger hoisted the red ensign. The *Leander* then ordered her to hoist her signal letters, and after a delay of 5 minutes she hoisted GJYD. It was then 11.34 a.m. As these letters did not appear in the "Signal Letters of British Ships" nor in the "Signal Letter Index," the *Leander*, at 11.41 a.m., made the secret challenge, to which there was no reply.

Captain Bevan therefore decided to board, and at 11.45 a.m. ordered the stranger by lamp and flags to stop instantly. She did not reply, but

at 11.50 a.m., just as the *Leander* was about to fire across her bows. She hoisted the Italian mercantile ensign (according to Captain Bevan's report in M.07842/41 she hoisted the Italian mercantile ensign, but according to C.-in-C., East Indies, in T.S.D.5459/41, page 10, she hoisted the Italian naval ensign) and started training her guns.

The *Leander* at once trained her own turrets. She was just before the stranger's beam with the stranger bearing Red 95. At 11.53 a.m., without further warning, the stranger suddenly opened fire, and the *Leander* replied immediately with a broadside at 3,000 yards. The enemy's fire was short and erratic. When the *Leander* had fired five rapid salvos Captain Bevan ceased fire and signalled to the enemy "Do you surrender?" The enemy, who had not fired more than three rounds a gun, was already on fire and abandoning ship. No crews remained at her guns, and she had struck her ensign. She had turned to starboard, and the *Leander*, stopping on her starboard quarter, lowered a boarding boat with orders to save the burning ship if possible. Two lifeboats were leaving the ship, stragglers were jumping overboard and climbing down her sides. An Italian officer in the water warned the boarding boat not to approach the burning ship as it was loaded with ammunition. The boat therefore lay off and watched the fire spread slowly aft until a heavy explosion before the bridge sent flames and smoke shooting high overhead. The raider was lying head to wind, and the fire continued to spread aft until at 12.43 p.m. a very heavy explosion, evidently of the after magazine, sent the stern hurtling into the air. Five minutes later the raider disappeared in 1° N., 68° 30' E., leaving only a patch of oil burning on the surface of the sea.

Meanwhile the *Leander* had picked up her boarding boat and 103 Italian survivors, including the captain of the *R.A.M.B.I*, who stated emphatically that he had not scuttled his ship. Steaming away from the scene of action the *Leander* passed through the floating wreckage. The Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, Vice-Admiral R. Leatham, C.B., considered that the *R.A.M.B.I* might well have become a serious menace to shipping and that the *Leander* was to be commended for ridding the seas of a potential raider before it had time to do any harm. At a range of only 3,000 yards, however, she was perhaps fortunate to escape the fate which befell the Australian cruiser *Sydney* less than nine months later.

The "Voltaire," April, 1941

5. Early in April, 1941, the British armed merchant cruiser *Voltaire*, (*Voltaire*, 13,300 tons, 14.5 knots, guns, eight 6-in., 14,000 yards range) Captain J.A.P. Blackburn, D.S.C., R.N., left Trinidad for Freetown with orders to pass through two areas west of the Cape Verde Islands on the way.

On 5th April the Commander-in-Chief, America and West Indies, Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Kennedy-Purvis, K.C.B., informed the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic, Vice-Admiral Sir Robert Raikes, K.C.B., C.V.O., D.S.O., that according to a German communique the *Voltaire* had been sunk by a German cruiser and that he had ordered the Canadian armed merchant cruiser *Prince David* to proceed along her track at her best possible speed. On 11th April Admiral Raikes informed the Admiralty that nothing had been heard of the *Voltaire* though she had been due at Freetown on the 9th.

Late on the 15th, the Commander-in-Chief, America and West Indies informed the Admiralty that the *Prince David* had sighted a patch of very heavy oil covering an area of 3 square miles, together with charred wood, clothes and newspapers in 14° 31' N., 40° 32' W., half way between the West Indies and the Cape Verde Islands, at 2.30 p.m. on 7th April. This was the *Voltaire's* estimated position on the 4th, and the Admiralty considered that it was probably her wreckage that the *Prince David* had sighted. As there were no survivors no details are available of the *Voltaire's* encounter, but it seems possible that like the *Alcantara* and *Carnarvon Castle* she was outranged and in view of her slow speed, out-maneuvred also. Nothing is definitely known about her end, nor of the identity of the vessel which destroyed her, though Admiral Raikes states that it was probably the German armed merchant ship raider *Santa Cruz*.

The "Cornwall" sinks raider No. 33, 8th May, 1941

6. On 8th May, 1941, H.M.S. *Cornwall* (cruiser, 10,000 tons, 31.5 knots, guns, eight 8-in., eight 4-in. H.A.) fought an action with an enemy raider in the Indian Ocean.

On 7th May at 5.55 a.m. the *Cornwall* was near the equator in 0° 2' S., 56° 55' E., steering 160° at 12 knots with orders to refuel at the Seychelles when a raider report reached her from the S.S. *British Emperor*.

Altering course to 340° at 6.25 am, she increased to 20 knots to close the enemy's position without an unduly heavy consumption of fuel. As this position was 500 miles away, in 8° 30' N., 56° 25' E., she anticipated a prolonged search.

A scheme for the search with the aid of aircraft was worked out on the principle of closing the enemy's "furthest on" line and then starting a Vignot search to cover before dark the largest possible variation of the enemy in speed and course. At 7.56 a.m. the *Cornwall* increased to 24 knots, but at 8.15 a.m., on receipt of a signal from the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, Vice-Admiral R. Leatham, turned north at 25^{1/2} knots to cover the gap between the Seychelles and the islands of the Chagos Archipelago to the eastward.

As Admiral Leatham was unaware of her exact position, the *Cornwall* decided to regard his signal as an instruction and proceed with her own original scheme of search as the most practical manner of complying with it.

The scheme and the *Cornwall's* movements can be best followed, by referring to the attached plan [not included] and to the record of the courses she steered. The search before dark was designed to cover the raider's courses between 144° and 190° and speeds between 13.4 and 16.6 knots.

Between 4 p.m. and 4.15 p.m. the *Cornwall* launched both her aircraft, recovering them shortly after 7 p.m. At 7 p.m. she altered course N. 15° E. to get on to the line of the main Vignot search. This was made out for a mean speed of 13 knots from one hour after the time of the raider report, on the assumption that the raider would require an hour to deal with the *British Emperor* and would then steam at high speed until dark, when she would ease down. At 9.30 p.m. the *Cornwall* altered course to 113° and reduced to 16^{1/2} knots to search on this line while the moon was up.

The direction of search was correct, but the search was unsuccessful for, though by 3.30 a.m. next morning, 8th May, the *Cornwall* was close to the enemy, who claims to have sighted her as she turned against the setting moon, several hours were to pass before she herself sighted the raider. From 3.30 a.m. until dawn the *Cornwall* steered 143° at 13 knots.

At dawn, between 6.30 and 7 a.m., she launched both aircraft to cover a variation of 3 knots on either side of the enemy's estimated speed; and at 6.35 a.m. increased to 18 knots.

At 7.7 a.m. one of the aircraft sighted a merchant ship of the suspected type steaming about 13 knots, 228°, some 65 miles westward of the *Cornwall*, but made no report before returning about 8 a.m. At 8.25 a.m. the *Cornwall* altered course to 255° to close the suspect and increased speed, at first to 20 knots and then, at 8.34 a.m., to 23 knots. It was about 9.30 a.m. when she recovered her aircraft. Though she hoped that it had not been sighted, later information proved that it had been detected, probably by R.D.F. On this as on all other occasions the aircraft approached and left the suspicious ship in the direction away from the cruiser, a ruse apparently successful in hiding the cruiser's actual position.

At 10.15 a.m. the *Cornwall* catapulted her second aircraft with instructions to close the still unidentified ship and discover, if possible, whether she were a raider or not. When the aircraft returned at 12.23 p.m. it reported that the unknown vessel was steaming at least 15 knots and had hoisted signal letters. These were identified as those of the Norwegian S.S. *Tamerlane*, which she closely resembled, though the *Tamerlane* was not in the *Cornwall's* list of expected ships.

It was then past noon and it was clear that the *Cornwall* must increase speed to get within striking distance of the suspect with plenty of daylight in hand. She accordingly increased to 26 knots and at 1 p.m. to 28 knots. At 1.45 p.m. she catapulted an aircraft with orders to keep her informed of the bearing, course, and speed of the still unidentified vessel. She estimated the suspect to be within 32 miles unless he had altered course. When the aircraft returned it was able to give an accurate bearing of the unknown ship which was in sight from the air, and a few minutes later, at 4.7 p.m., was sighted from the bridge of the *Cornwall*, bearing 282°, Green 50.

At 4.12 p.m. the *Cornwall* altered course to close, but the stranger turned away, stern on, steering 300°. At 4.19 p.m., therefore, the *Cornwall* altered course to bring her fine on the starboard bow in order to close as quickly as possible to 12,000 yards without crossing her track. At 4.30 p.m. the stranger began making "Raider reports," stating that she

was the Norwegian S.S. *Tamerlane*. The plane in the air was therefore told to inform her that the ship chasing her was a British cruiser and that she should stop engines. The *Cornwall* turned at the same time to give her a good broadside view, and then resumed the chase.

At 4.56 p.m., when the range was down to 19,000 yards. The *Cornwall* signalled three times "Heave to or I fire," and backed this up with one warning round of 8-in. over and to the left, but though the stranger disobeyed the order, the *Cornwall* refrained from opening direct fire, still thinking that she might be a normal merchant ship whose master was gallantly determined not to stop. An order was therefore given for the second aircraft to take off and drop a 250-lb. bomb close to the suspect, and, if that did not stop her, to drop the other on her fore-castle. It was some time, however, before this order reached the aircraft.

At 5.10 p.m. the *Cornwall* again signalled "Heave to or I fire," and followed this with another round of 8-in. As the range was then inside 12,000 yards, she turned to port to open it. This apparently convinced the stranger that the *Cornwall* was about to open fire in earnest, for when the 8-in. shell fell near her she turned to starboard, and then, making a large alteration to port, opened fire with five guns just before 5.15 p.m.

The enemy could hardly have chosen a better moment for starting the action. Just as the *Cornwall* turned after firing her second warning shot, her training circuit failed. Realising that she was dangerously close to the raider, she immediately turned away to port to the limit of "A" arcs to avoid danger from torpedoes and to open the range, which had closed to 10,500 yards. It opened quickly, but for a time the *Cornwall* was in grave danger. She was frequently straddled by rapid and fairly accurate gunfire while her own main armament was pointing anywhere but at the enemy. In these circumstances she turned further away, and an officer was sent from the bridge with a message to "B" turret to train on the enemy and, if necessary, to take over control of "A" turret. The necessary orders had, however, already been passed from the fore control, and as the turrets trained, the *Cornwall* turned back to starboard to open "A" arcs. As soon as they would bear, "A" and "B" turrets fired two salvos, but a 5.9-in. hit then put her fore steering gear out of action, and she swung away, closing her "A" arcs once again for a short time. The breakdown was fortunately only temporary. The after steering gear

was rapidly brought into use and the ship was out of control for a matter of seconds only. Meanwhile, unfortunately, communication between the bridge and the catapult had failed, with the result that, before the order to launch the second aircraft was received, the aircraft was put out of action by a shell splinter.

By 5.18 p.m. all the *Cornwall's* turrets were firing ("A" and "B" turrets in quarters and "X" and "Y" in group control) and her salvos straddling the enemy. The range was again outside 12,000 yards, and she was reasonably safe from torpedo attack. The enemy's fire was falling off in accuracy and volume. At 5.19 p.m. it was nearly 1,000 yards short, and the *Cornwall* turned to bring the ships on to roughly parallel courses. By this time she had received two direct hits, but although a minute or two later the raider managed to straddle her she was not hit again. The action was virtually at an end. At 5.26 p.m. a salvo hit the enemy and she blew up disappearing in a cloud of white vapour which rose vertically some 2,000 ft. and hung over the scene for many minutes. As she sank she fired an ineffective salvo which straddled the *Cornwall* 20 seconds after she herself had finally disappeared.

Although the *Cornwall* had destroyed the enemy her own troubles were not yet at an end. With one of her two aircraft out of action she was naturally anxious to recover the other before dark. She therefore decided to hoist it in before searching for survivors among the debris, which covered a wide area and which would have been dangerous to the aircraft. As she turned to recover it, however, it was suddenly realised that although an order had been given for speed to be reduced to 12 knots the *Cornwall* was still steaming very fast (At 25 knots at least). She therefore turned to pass to windward of the wreckage, ordering the aircraft to land as best it could. The *Cornwall* gradually stopped and picked it up, but, as the plane was being hoisted in, electric power failed. This breakdown brought all the fans to a standstill, the engine-room temperature rose to 200°, and for a time the engine-room had to be abandoned. (One engineer officer was fatally overcome by the heat. The failures in the engine-room were the subject of a board of enquiry)

About this time the *Cornwall's* starboard engines suddenly went half speed astern, presumably in accordance with an order given some time before. This brought her into the middle of the wreckage, and before darkness fell she was able to pick up a number of British and German

survivors clinging to it in the water. (9 British, 15 Indian and 60 German survivors were rescued)

She remained without electric power from 6.15 p.m. until 6.50 p.m. At 6.50 p.m. power was restored, but she lay stopped in the wreckage until 9.40 p.m., when, after making temporary repairs, she went ahead and steered once again for the Seychelles.

Although the *Cornwall* had found and sunk the enemy the Admiralty considered that the conduct of the operation left much to be desired. They regarded the scheme of search as well designed, but when, at 7.7 a.m., her aircraft sighted a merchant ship of the type for which it was searching, it should have reported the fact at once instead of waiting until its return to the ship at 8 a.m. As a result of this failure to make an immediate report the *Cornwall* continued to steam away from the enemy for nearly an hour, which might have been vital, while her other aircraft was kept unnecessarily in the air.

It was considered, too, that the *Cornwall* should have kept the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, informed of events and of her intentions. With the information at his disposal he could then have informed her that no friendly merchant ship was anywhere near. She appears, however, to have been unduly concerned with the possibility of her wireless being intercepted by the raider's direction finder.

The *Cornwall* was engaged on a definite raider hunt and employing, quite correctly, both aircraft for the search. When the suspicious ship was sighted by one of them it could have shadowed her while the other was recalled and refuelled in readiness to relieve the shadower, thus ensuring that the suspect would be almost constantly under observation. As it was the advantage of having two aircraft was lost (Owing to the shortage of Fleet Air Arm personnel the *Cornwell* had no qualified observer for her second aircraft) and the enemy was left unwatched from 7.25 a.m. until 11.25 a.m., and again from 11.50 a.m. until 2.10 p.m. If he had made a big alteration of course, or if the visibility had drastically decreased, the chance of finding him again would have been slender.

The Admiralty considered that during this phase the rigid adherence to wireless silence resulted in essential reports not being made from the aircraft to the *Cornwall* when the signal letters were hoisted by the

suspect, and from the *Cornwall* to the Commander-in-Chief when these had been identified as the *Tamerlane's*. In view of the nature of the operation and the obvious importance of making contact with the suspicious ship as quickly as possible, the Admiralty considered, too, that the *Cornwall* should have brought all her boilers to immediate notice at 8 a.m., the time of the aircraft's first report, instead of waiting until 12.50 p.m. when the report of the second sighting reached her.

Throughout the period between the surface sighting of the raider and the time when she opened fire, the *Cornwall* held onto the idea that the suspect might still prove to be a friendly neutral although in view of her suspicious behaviour all the evidence was very much against it. The Admiralty considered that the *Cornwall*, by allowing herself to close to a range of under 12,000 yards contrary to her expressed intentions, showed a lack of attention to the changing situation. It is quite clear from her report that this was fully appreciated at the time. The error of closing a very suspicious ship was intensified by her temporary inability to open fire, which left no alternative but to turn away and close "A" arcs at a critical moment, which might easily have resulted in the raider's escape and in much more serious damage to herself than she actually suffered.

The "Sydney's" action, 19th November, 1941

7. On 19th November 1941, HMAS *Sydney*, (Australian cruiser, 6,830 tons, 32^{1/2} knots, guns, eight 6-in., four 4-in. H.A.) Captain Joseph Burnett, R.A.N., sank the enemy raider *Kormoran* off the west coast of Australia. As the *Sydney* was herself destroyed with all hands in the encounter this account is based on the only available report of the action, that of the German survivors.

On 11th November, 1941, the *Sydney* left Fremantle escorting the S.S. *Zealandia*, and handed her over to HMS *Durban* in 7° 56' S., 104° 40' E., on the 17th. She signalled that she expected to arrive back at Fremantle on 20th November, but, early on the 21st the District Naval Officer, Western Australia, reported that she had not arrived, and followed this on the 23rd with a signal that no further word had been received from her. At 10.54 am, on the 23rd, the Australian Naval Board instructed her to report her expected time of arrival at Fremantle, and an hour later all high power wireless stations were ordered to call her

continuously. There was no reply, and an air search on 24th November gave an equally negative result.

At 8.16 that morning, 24th November, however, a report came in by wireless from the tanker *Trocas* that she had picked up 25 Germans from a raft in 26° 6' S., 111° 40' E. Eventually 103 survivors from the *Kormoran* came ashore in two boats at Carnarvon, Western Australia, the SS *Koolinda* picked a boat with 31 more. The *Aquitania* rescued 26, and HMAS *Yandra* picked up two Chinese who had been captured from the SS *Eurylochus* when the *Kormoran* sank her in 8° 15' N., 25° 14' W., on 29th January, and 70 Germans, a total of 315 Germans and two Chinese.

The story of the action between the *Sydney* and the *Kormoran* was told by the *Kormoran's* captain, Fregatten-Kapitan A.G.T. Detmers and other prisoners, and bears all the marks of a bonafide account. They could not explain why the *Sydney* came so close before opening fire or attempting to launch her aircraft, but it will be recalled that on 27th February, 1941, the *Leander* closed to within 3,000 yards of the *R.A.M.B.1* before either ship opened fire.

About 4 p.m. on 19th November the *Kormoran* was in 26° S., 111° E., steaming northwards at 10 knots when she sighted what appeared to be a sail fine on the starboard bow. Commander Detmers soon identified it as a cruiser and immediately turned west into the sun and increased to full speed, which he estimated at 15 knots. The cruiser, which proved to be the *Sydney*, at once turned and came up on the *Kormoran's* starboard quarter at high speed. For half an hour, as she approached, she repeatedly signalled NNJ, but Commander Detmers had no idea what NNJ meant and did not reply. Meanwhile the *Kormoran* was busily making the "Disguised raider in sight" signal, "QQQQ 26 S, 111 E. STRAAT MALAKKA," and it may be noted that about 10 a.m. G.M.T. on 19th November the tug *Uco* picked up a QQ message, but was unable to read the position and ship's name.

When the range had closed to 7 miles the *Sydney* ordered the *Kormoran* in plain language to hoist her signal letters and the raider hoisted PKQJ, the letters of the S.S. *Straat Malakka*, on her triatic stay between the funnel and foremast where the cruiser could not see them. It is reasonable to suppose that this was a *ruse de guerre* to induce the

Sydney to close and investigate, for her signal to the *Kormoran* to hoist the letters clear was repeated continuously before the raider complied with it.

The *Sydney* had all guns and tubes trained when she came up with the *Kormoran*. In reply to her signal "Where bound?" the *Kormoran* replied: "Batavia." The *Sydney* then apparently hoisted the letters IK, which the raider was unable to understand as in the International Code, they mean, "You should prepare for a cyclone, hurricane or typhoon." They were, in fact, the second and third letters of the *Straat Malakka's* secret call sign IIKP. The *Sydney* then ordered the *Kormoran* to show her secret letters, and Captain Detmers not knowing how to reply decided reluctantly to fight. The two ships were steaming in a westerly direction at 15 knots on parallel courses, the *Sydney* on the *Kormoran's* starboard beam. Only a mile (see Plan 5. According to some of the witnesses the range was only 1,200 metres) separated them when the *Kormoran* suddenly dropped her gun screens and, hoisting the German ensign, opened fire with four of her six 6-in. guns. Her first salvo hit the cruiser's bridge. The *Sydney* immediately replied with a salvo, which went over, but her second set the raider's fuel tanks on-fire. In the meantime the *Kormoran* had hit the *Sydney* with a torpedo which apparently put her forward turrets out of action, and with a salvo which shot her aircraft to pieces at a range so close that the men round it could be plainly seen. (The aircraft was warming up when the engagement began)

About 4.40 p.m. the *Sydney* turned to port and passed so close astern of the *Kormoran* that some of the raider's crew thought that she would ram her. Although an uncontrollable fire was raging in the *Kormoran* all her guns were still in action. The *Sydney's* after turrets, too, were firing, and at 4.50 p.m. she fired four torpedoes which missed the raider ahead and astern. The *Kormoran* replied with a torpedo, which also missed its mark. Both ships were now burning fiercely and the *Sydney* was 6 feet down by the bows.

Barely half an hour had passed since the *Kormoran* opened fire, but the action was virtually over. The *Kormoran*, which had fired 450 rounds and three torpedoes, was lying stopped with a fierce fire in her engine-room. The *Sydney* with all her superstructure smashed and her boats destroyed, was steaming slowly away in a south-easterly direction under a dense cloud of smoke. At 11 p.m. Commander Detmers decided to

abandon the *Kormoran*, and shortly after midnight an explosion hastened her end. By this time all trace of the *Sydney* had disappeared and she was never seen or heard again.

The "Devonshire's" action, 22nd November, 1941

8. On 22nd November, 1941, HMS. *Devonshire*, Captain R.D. Oliver, D.S.C., R.N., sank an enemy vessel in the South Atlantic.

At 5.20 a.m. that morning Captain Oliver despatched his Walrus aircraft to carry out an anti-submarine patrol and long range search ahead of the ship. When the Walrus returned at 7.10 a.m. it reported sighting a merchant ship in 4° 20' S., 18° 50' W. From the aircraft's description Captain Oliver suspected that the reported vessel might well be an enemy raider and he immediately altered course to close her at 25 knots.

An hour later, at 8.9 a.m., the masts of a ship came into sight bearing 160° in 4° 12' S., 18° 42' W. There was a moderate breeze (Force 4) from the south-east and a slight sea with a short slow swell. The visibility was 10 miles. The *Devonshire* at once turned east to fly off her aircraft, which was catapulted at 8.20 a.m. with orders to identify the unknown vessel if possible. By this time Captain Oliver's suspicions were thoroughly aroused by the manoeuvres and appearance of the ship, which closely resembled Raider No. 16, with the exception of moveable fittings such as ventilators and samson posts. He therefore manoeuvred the *Devonshire* at 26 knots, and kept her at a range of between 12,000 and 18,000 yards from the unknown ship to frustrate possible torpedo attack.

Immediately after the Walrus had taken off, the stranger turned 32 points to starboard and made off in a south-easterly direction. At 8.37 a.m. the *Devonshire* fired two salvos spread to right and left, intended to provoke a return fire and establish the stranger's identity as a raider beyond doubt, or to induce her to abandon ship and avoid unnecessary bloodshed, especially as she probably had a number of British prisoners on board.

The stranger at once stopped and, turning round, transmitted by wireless at 8.40 a.m. the warship raider report; "RRR RRR RRR de *Polyphemus* 4° 20' S., 18° 35' W. 0940 G.M.T." It was significant that the "R's" were in groups of three and not of four and that no signal letters were included.

Captain Oliver could not ignore the possibility that the ship might be the genuine *Polyphemus*, which was a vessel of similar appearance with a counter stern, and having been reported at Bilbao on 21st September was within reach of his position. To remove all doubts he made a signal to the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic, Vice-Admiral A.U. Willis, C.B., D.S.O., at 9.5 a.m., asking if this were the real *Polyphemus*. The aircraft was also asked what type of stern the stranger had and replied at 9.31 a.m. that she had a cruiser stern and a hull similar to the *Atlantis*. All doubts, however, were removed at 9.34 a.m. when the Commander-in-Chief signalled "No. repetition No." One minute later, at 9.35 a.m., the *Devonshire* opened fire at 17,000 yards. Her fourth salvo hit and started a fire which, she reports, eventually spread to the enemy's magazine and blew her up. The enemy put up an efficient smoke screen, but made no attempt to return the *Devonshire's* fire. (According to *Devonshire's* report the enemy abandoned ship, but she was subsequently reported to be proceeding at 15 knots. It is possible she may have been carrying ammunition supplies for submarines). By 9.39 a.m. the *Devonshire* had fired 30 salvos, and Captain Oliver checked fire and turned eastward to clear the enemy's smoke screen. He then tried indirect firing by R.D.F. range, but gun blast put the R.D.F. transmitter out of action. At 9.43 a.m. the enemy was visible once more, and according to the aircraft was maintaining a steady 15 knots. The *Devonshire* therefore reopened fire until 9.56 a.m., when the enemy was seen to be heavily on fire and down by the stern. Captain Oliver thought that she had consistently attempted to draw him to the south-eastward, and was determined to steam no further in that direction than he could help. At 10.2 a.m., however, there was a heavy explosion on board her. It was followed by another at 10.14 a.m., and two minutes later she sank.

Captain Oliver's next anxiety was to recover his aircraft, which had a damaged propeller, and he successfully picked it up at 10.40 a.m. It reported that almost certainly an enemy submarine was present. He was therefore unable to stop and rescue survivors, as he could not have done so without running a grave risk of being torpedoed. Captain Oliver had been assisted in identifying the ship by the description of Raider 16 given in a supplement of Weekly Intelligence Report, No. 65, and by a photograph in the American periodical 'Life' of 23rd June, 1941, of a Raider called 'Tamesis' or 'Atlantis.' This was the Hansa Ship 'Goldenfels' (Captain Bernhard Rogge), 7,862 tons, which left Kiel in March, 1940,

armed with seven 5.9-in. guns. Under various names she had sunk 21 ships. She was acting as a submarine supply ship and was apparently about to fuel a submarine when the *Devonshire's* aircraft came in sight, obliging the submarine to cast off and dive. After being sunk, her boats laden with survivors were met by submarines and later by the supply ship *Python* which took a number of them on board.

The "*Dorsetshire's*" action, 1st December, 1941

9. On 1st December 1941, HMS. *Dorsetshire* (cruiser, 9,975 tons, 32^{1/2} knots, guns, eight 8-in. and eight 4-in. H.A.) Captain A.W.S. Agar, V.C., D.S.O., R.N., encountered, in the South Atlantic, an enemy vessel which scuttled herself without opening fire.

The *Dorsetshire* had left Freetown on 26th November to search for enemy ships in the relatively calm area 720 miles south and west of St. Helena. At 7 a.m. on 1st December she flew off her Walrus aircraft in 26° 45' S., 6° 25' W., to reconnoitre to the south-east, but it returned without sighting anything. At 11 a.m. the *Dorsetshire* altered course to 111° and increased to 18 1/2 knots. At 3.15 p.m. the Walrus set out again on a similar patrol with orders to search to the southward for an hour and then at right angles to the *Dorsetshire's* mean line of advance for another hour before rejoining the ship.

At 4.33 p.m. the *Dorsetshire* sighted the masts of a ship bearing 032°, about 18 miles away at the extreme limit of visibility. The sea was calm with a slight swell. Although the Walrus was still out of sight to the southward, Captain Agar decided to close the unknown vessel at once and if necessary to recall the aircraft. He therefore turned to 031° and increased to 25 knots. The stranger soon began making smoke, but remained hull down. She had apparently increased to full speed on sighting the *Dorsetshire*, and was steering away from her. Captain Agar therefore increased to 30 knots and made a recall, which failed to reach the Walrus.

At 5.8 p.m. the *Dorsetshire* sighted several small patches of oil on the water, and Captain Agar, suspecting the presence of an enemy submarine, turned away to starboard. About this time he sighted an object resembling a submarine's conning tower 6 miles away on the port bow, but at 5.20 p.m. identified it as a power-boat with four or five other boats in tow. Although he could not entirely reject the possibility that

the vessel he was chasing was a British ship, which had mistaken the *Dorsetshire* for an enemy cruiser he assumed that she was an enemy raider or supply ship. To reduce the risk of attack by a submarine he kept the *Dorsetshire* moving at high speed outside a range of 16,000 yards. In these circumstances he could neither prevent the enemy from scuttling herself nor could he capture her. At 5.31 p.m. he fired two warning shots at 24,000 yards, one right and one left of the target. By this time the enemy had stopped and was lowering boats. He therefore withheld his fire in case she had any captured British merchant seamen on board, and continued zig-zagging outside her range, but inside his own.

By 5.44 p.m. the *Dorsetshire* had crossed the enemy's bows, and although the range was 17,000 yards, Captain Agar was able to see the boats moving away from her side. At 5.51 p.m. he observed that the enemy, who had a definite list to port, was on fire. The fire spread rapidly until 6.5 p.m., when a large explosion forward settled her fate. It was evident that the enemy's self destruction was certain and Captain Agar at once turned away to clear the area as quickly as possible. At 6.21 p.m. the enemy sank in 27° 50' S., 3° 55' W., leaving only a trail of smoke and a number of survivors in boats. At 7.10 p.m. the *Dorsetshire* recovered her Walrus aircraft, and Captain Agar despatched it again at 7.35 p.m. to reconnoitre the area of the boats.

In the failing light observation was difficult, but as the aircraft circled round at a height of 400 ft. it was able to establish that there were fourteen boats and two large rafts in the position where the ship had gone down. It estimated that each boat contained at least 25 survivors and that the total number of survivors was 500. The Walrus then examined the boats which the *Dorsetshire* had sighted at 5.8 p.m. They were still 4 or 5 miles from the survivors' boats and were fully loaded with packages and crates. It appears possible that they were actually transferring these stores to a submarine when the *Dorsetshire* arrived, but if so the aircraft saw nothing of it.

The *Devonshire's* and *Dorsetshire's* actions added to anti-raider tactics a problem in addition to the usual one of distinguishing friend from foe, namely, that of distinguishing between an enemy supply ship and a raider. The problem of dealing with enemy raiders hinges largely on rapid identification as such, but in neither of these cases was there any

real evidence that the enemy vessel was a raider. The fact that neither opened fire nor attempted to entice the cruisers within torpedo range appears to show that they were unarmed. Captain Agar suspected that the enemy was acting as a submarine supply ship, a duty never performed by raiders in the last war, nor, as far as is known, in this one. By scuttling herself she made her identification as a raider unnecessary, which solved the *Dorsetshire's* most difficult problem.

Raider Hunt, 4th-6th November, 1941

10. In addition to the eight actions against enemy raiders and suspected raiders, fought during 1940 and 1941, there have been a number of cases in 1942 when enemy vessels were encountered but not identified as such. There was also at least one instance in 1941 of a raider report leading to a protracted search when no enemy armed raider was present.

On 4th November, 1941, the RFA oiler *Olwen* reported a surface raider attack at 5.30 a.m. GMT. 3° 4' N, 22° 42' W. (See Plan 7) The *Dorsetshire* was at sea, and the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic, Vice-Admiral A.U. Willis, after ordering her to investigate, instructed the cruiser *Dunedin* to leave Freetown with the special service vessels *Queen Emma* and *Princess Beatrix* and join in the search.

When the *Dorsetshire*, Captain A.W.S. Agar, intercepted the *Olwen's* raider distress signal at 6 a.m. she turned east immediately to close the position, which was 600 miles away, and at 6.45 a.m. increased to 20 knots, the maximum speed of the armed merchant cruiser *Canton* which was with her. Captain Agar knew that the U.S. cruiser *Omaha* and U.S. destroyer *Somers*, being well to the north-west of the enemy's reported position, would be able to support the *Canton*, and ordered her at 7.45 a.m. to make for a position in 5° N., 27° 30' W., to intercept the raider should she steer a north-westerly course, while the *Dorsetshire* steamed south-east at 24 knots to intercept her to the southward. He was unaware that the U.S. cruiser *Memphis* was near the position given by the *Olwen*.

Admiral Willis, not knowing that the *Dorsetshire* and *Canton* had parted company, ordered them at 9.31 a.m. to search a sector to the southward of the enemy's reported position and the *Dunedin*, *Queen Emma* and *Princess Beatrix* to search a sector to the south-eastward of it.

At 3 p.m. on 5th November Admiral Willis informed the British ships that the U.S. cruiser *Memphis* and the U.S. destroyers *Davis* and *Jouett*

had searched the position of the attack without result until 7 p.m. on the 4th. He added that the U.S. cruiser *Omaha* and the U.S. destroyer *Somers* were searching for survivors before proceeding to a position in 5° S., 34° W. That evening, at 6 p.m., he signalled that if nothing further were heard of the raider by dusk on 6th November the *Dorsetshire* and *Canton* were to search on a northerly course between 26° 30' W. and 30° W. to 2° N. The *Dorsetshire* would then return to Freetown, but the *Canton* would continue on patrol. The *Dunedin*, *Queen Emma* and *Princess Beatrix* were to search on a northerly course to 5° N. before returning to Freetown.

Next morning, 6th November, a new light was shed upon the situation. At 10.30 a.m. the *Olwen* reported that the raider signal had been made when an unseen enemy, probably a submarine on the surface, had fired on her in the dawn light. At 11.33 a.m. Admiral Willis informed the *Dorsetshire*, *Canton* and *Dunedin* that as the attack had certainly not been made by a raider they were act to act forthwith on his signal of 6 p.m. on 5th November. No fewer than ten British and American warships had searched for two days for a raider with no actual existence. The search, however, was not fruitless, for at 8.45 a.m. on 6th November the *Omaha* and *Somers* captured the German supply ship *Odenwald* in 0° 35' N., 27° 45' W., and took her into an American port.

Enemy vessels sighted but not engaged, 1942

11. On 13th March, 1942, at 7.25 p.m., H.M.S. *Durban*, steaming 257°, on passage from Durban to Simonstown, at 13 knots with one engine broken down, sighted a ship in 33° 53' S., 20° E., steering east at 10 knots, 11 miles ahead. As the stranger would pass fairly close the cruiser maintained her own course and speed, and at a distance of 6 miles signalled NNJ ("You should make your secret letters"), using a red Aldis lamp in the failing light. The absence of any reply being not unusual (According to the *Durban* only 25 per cent. Of merchant ships answer the NNJ signal correctly) the *Durban* then asked "What ship?" using a white Aldis lamp. The stranger replied that she was the *Leverbank*, bound from New York to Durban, and wished the cruiser good night. Her silhouette corresponded to that of a Bank Line ship.

The weather was too rough for boarding, and the *Durban*, facing the familiar difficulty of identifying a ship in poor light without closing to a dangerously short range, allowed the stranger to proceed. There can

be little doubt, however, that the unknown ship was the ex-British ship *Speybank*, captured by the Germans in January, 1941, and probably acting as an enemy minelaying raider.

At 11.30 a.m. next day, 14th March, 1942, a bare sixteen hours after the *Durban* had allowed the spurious *Leverbank* to proceed unmolested, the armed merchant cruiser *Cheshire* was in 38° 11' S., 20° 10' E., 258 miles away to the southward, when she sighted an unknown vessel hull down. At 11.50 a.m. she turned to intercept, and the stranger after momentarily altering course towards her turned away. This, being contrary to recognition procedure, was a suspicious manoeuvre. Half an hour later, however, the stranger passed the *Cheshire* on an opposite course only 3 miles away. To the *Cheshire's* signal "What ship?" she replied that she was the *Inverbank*, bound from Montevideo to Melbourne, and convinced, from her appearance, that she was a genuine Bank Line vessel, the *Cheshire* allowed her to proceed without further question.

The real *Inverbank*, however, was on passage from Montevideo to Freetown. Though there is no proof that the vessel which falsely assumed her identity was an enemy raider, it seems possible that she was the false *Leverbank* which had deceived the *Durban* 258 miles away on the previous evening. (If so she must have covered the distance at an average speed of 16 knots). The Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic, Vice-Admiral E.C. Tait, C.B., M.V.O., thought that it may have been providential that the *Cheshire* did not make the secret recognition signal. With a possible enemy raider within 7,000 yards, and with her own ship's company quite unprepared and not even at action stations, the result might easily have been the mysterious and regrettable disappearance with all hands of one of His Majesty's valuable armed merchant cruisers.

Six weeks later, at 8.43 a.m., on 26th April, 1942, a Seafox aircraft, patrolling from the armed merchant cruiser *Pretoria Castle*, sighted an unknown vessel in 1° 17' N., 24° 34' W., steering about 287° at 8 knots.

The Seafox had left the *Pretoria Castle* at 6.45 a.m. to carry out a routine reconnaissance with orders to return at 9.15 a.m. The observer was told that so far as was known no ships were in the area, but that he was to return immediately and report any suspicious vessel sighted.

When therefore the unknown steamer came into sight at 8.43 a.m. He ordered the pilot to approach within half a mile and, circling round

before coming down for a closer view, called her up on his Aldis lamp. She replied with identification flags GSLD, but he had no means of decoding them nor of discovering her identity. The *Seafox* made a thorough inspection at close range but saw nothing suspicious. The vessel was of about 5,000 tons, with one funnel, two slightly raked masts, samson posts on fore side of mainmast, one derrick hoisted aft, but no structure on the well decks. She had normal defensive armament, but apparently no A.A. guns. The only unusual features were roundels painted on the hatch covers. At 9.10 a.m. the *Seafox* turned to rejoin the *Pretoria Castle*, 40 miles away.

When the *Pretoria Castle* failed to sight the aircraft by 9.5 a.m. she called it up and learned that it expected to be back at 9.40 a.m.; but at that hour it was still out of sight. Ten minutes later, however, just as it sighted the ship, the aircraft, running out of petrol, was forced to alight, signalling as it came down "S.O.S. 270°. 5 miles." The *Pretoria Castle* closed, but the distance proved to be 12 and not 5 miles. The sea was choppy with a heavy swell. All attempts to pick the aircraft up failed, and it was not until 12.10 p.m. that the observer could report the unknown ship which had hoisted identification letters GSLD. These belonged to the S.S. *Anglo-Canadian*, but this name was not on the *Pretoria Castle's* shipping plot, and she decided to make a further inspection. The suspect's estimated mean line of advance was roughly parallel to her own course, and to get well ahead she held on at 16 knots until 1.15 p.m. before turning to intercept. Though she anticipated that the suspect would be in sight by 5 p.m., it had not been sighted half an hour later when she turned to 107° to cross the stranger's probable track. At 5.45 p.m. she asked if the *Anglo-Canadian* were in the area only to be told that this ship had arrived at Bombay on 19th April. Further air reconnaissance was impossible as the *Pretoria Castle's* second aircraft was unserviceable, and although she continued to search till well after dark she saw nothing of the suspicious vessel.

Notes

- 1 Battle Summary No. 13 is reproduced here in typescript, without its annexes and plans (With the exception of *Sydney and Karmaran*). Some of the actions are analysed briefly in Chapter 8. The full Battle Summary is due to be published in facsimile later in 2001 by Whitehall History Publishing and Frank Cass in the series of Naval Staff Histories edited by Captain Christopher Page. RN.

Annex D

Schedule of Documents in the Archives of the United Kingdom Concerning the Loss of HMAS Sydney

Chapter or page	Reference in British archives	Title	Content
Churchill College Archives			
Ch. 6	ROSK/4/46	German Surface Raiders Operations	Correspondence in 1979-80 with Michael Montgomery and with Dutch historian Harel Bezemer
Ch. 6	ROSK/4/46	<i>Battle Summary No 13</i>	Note by J.H. Lloyd Owen, author of the Battle Summary
Ch. 6	ROSK/4/46	German Surface Raiders Operations	Roskill's notes on "Cruise of Raider G (<i>Kormoran</i>) Schiff 41"
p. 193	ROSK/4/48	German Supply Ships for raiders and U-boats	Roskill's notes corrected by Foreign Documents Section on supply ships working with raiders
pp. 23-24	ROSK/5/28	Blockade Running-German, Italian and Japanese	30 page document giving an account apparently dated 1945 and culled from captured German sources of blockade runners, including the <i>Kulmeiland</i>
p. xv	ROSK/5/48	Correspondence with M.G. Saunders	"some secrets which are still worth keeping"
Imperial War Museum			
Chs 1+3	IWM 69/18/1	Rear Admiral J.G. Grace	Extracts of his diary for Nov and Dec 1940 and 1941
pp. 85-89	IWM 69/18/2	Rear Admiral J.G. Grace	Letter from ACNB to PM
p. 27	IWM P142 and 143	Commodore J.W. Durnford	Chapter XIV of his autobiography

Chapter or page	Reference in British archives	Title	Content
Naval Historical Branch & Admiralty Library			
pp. 55-60	NHB	Naval War Diary Volumes 77 and 78	Extracts of the diary between 22 Nov and 2 Dec 1941 referring to raider operations and the loss of HMAS <i>Sydney</i> (the first entry referring directly to HMAS <i>Sydney</i> is dated 24 Nov 1941 "...due 20 Nov ... Sydney not yet arrived ...")
Ch. 1	NHB	War Diary of CinC East Indies	Extracts of CinC East Indies War Diaries between August and November 1941
pp. 177-182	NHB	Weekly Intelligence Report (WIR) No 114 dated 15 May 1942	Including reprint from the ONI Weekly by "courtesy of the Office of Naval Intelligence, US Navy Department"
Ch. 6	NHB	Weekly Intelligence Reports Raider Supplements	Numbers 64 dated 30 May 1941; 92 dated 12 Dec 1941; 100 dated 6 Feb 1942; 138 dated 30 Oct 1942; 181 dated 27 Aug 1943
Ch. 6	NHB	Report on the loss of HMAS <i>Sydney</i> 19 Nov 41	Marked "TSD 19 Jun 1942" - contains appendices but not the covering letter to ACNB's letter of Feb 1942
pp. 148-154	NHB	Newspaper report of Sinking of HMAS <i>Sydney</i> 19/11/1941	(clearer copy than in PRO) Rabben's newspaper article - "...this does not appear to add anything ..."
pp. 167-169	NHB	Signal dated 2229/25 Nov 1941	General message from Admiralty describing the action between Raider 16 (C) and HMS <i>Devonshire</i>
Ch. 6	NHB	Signal dated 2219/27 Nov 1941	General message from ACNB describing the action between <i>Kormoran</i> and HMAS <i>Sydney</i>
Ch. 6	NHB	Secret message 0700Z/7 December and received 1324/8 Dec 1941	General message from ACNB giving slightly fuller version of Serial 28B

Chapter or page	Reference in British archives	Title	Content
pp. 223-226	NHB	The sinking of <i>Raider No 33</i> by HMS <i>Cornwall</i> 8th May 1941	from C-in-C East Indies Station "...Broadly speaking the faults amounted to: (a) Too rigid adherence to W/T silence ... Unpreparedness for all eventualities" "5. Action has been taken to promulgate to the East Indies Squadron Indies regarding the breaking of W/T silence in similar circumstances..." (poor copy)
Ch. 5	NHB	<i>Operationen und Taktik ... Heft 10 Die Fahrt des Hilfskreuzers "Schiff 41" "Kormoran"</i>	German account of the operations of the German auxiliary cruiser <i>Kormoran</i>
Public Record Office			
Not copied	ADM 1/11127 1940-41	Reports on life saving rafts and marking of watertight compartments	
pp. 258-260	ADM 1/11178	HMAS <i>Sydney</i> Sinking of <i>Bartolomeo Colleone</i> . 19 July 1940	Enclosure No. (vi) to Sydney's Letter No. 8234/40, 30 July 1940, Warrant Shipwright J. Fuller, HMAS <i>Sydney</i> , 20 July 1940
pp. 227-230	ADM 1/12033	HMS <i>Durban</i> - Encounter with unknown ship which gave wrong name 13 Mar 42	Board of Enquiry held 26 Mar 42 - Captain P G L Cazalet DSC RN to blame. Includes copy of Admiralty 1618A/16 Dec and CincSA 1455Z/20 Dec 1941
Ch. 9	ADM 1/12885	Disguised Enemy Raiders and Blockade Runners - Conduct of HM Ships in vicinity of	Minuting of a draft chapter for CB on Fighting Experience, with case histories, regarding raiders, blockade runners and supply ships.
Ch. 9	ADM 1/15037	(1) Disguised Raiders - Action by HM Ships in	Minute by H. Orem, DTSD, 24 January 1943, "Admiralty Signal 1734/11 August was

Chapter or page	Reference in British archives	Title	Content
(cont)		dealing with (2) Signal from DTSD as to courses of action by HM Ships in dealing with ships which may be disguised as raiders and its bearing on	the outcome of TSD. 138/42 of 12 February 1942 - Lessons of Disguised Raiders...The measures recommended in it were intended to safeguard ships against sudden attack by disguised raiders as in the case of Sydney torpedoed and sunk by <i>Kormoran</i> on 19 November Paragraph 80 of 1941 off the West Coast of Australia..." the <i>Naval Prize Manual</i> .
pp. 249-250	ADM 1/15037 1943	Action by HMS in dealing with disguised raiders	Amendment to Article 80 of the <i>Prize Manual</i> . The date of the brief is 18 March 1943. The rest of the file is devoted to the AFD.
Ch. 5	ADM 1/18899	German Account of Action Between HMS Sydney and German Raider <i>Kormoran</i> 19 Nov 41	A translation of captured German document "Operations and Tactics - Evaluation of important events in the naval war - Book 10 - The voyage of the Auxiliary Cruiser Ship 10 (<i>Kormoran</i>)" with indices
Ch. 1	ADM 1/18899	Operational Order for Ship 41	
pp. 154-163	ADM 1/18899	Several copies dated 1945 of Action Report and Engine Room Log in German and in translation to English	
Not copied	ADM 1/18899	Wegekarte von "Schiff 41", 2 Mai-24 Oktober 1941	This is a large scale German chart showing the progress of <i>Kormoran</i> in the Indian Ocean, including the action with Sydney. [The file also contains the chart for <i>Kormoran</i> 's Atlantic Ocean operations.]

Chapter or page	Reference in British archives	Title	Content
pp. 148-154	ADM 1/19442	Report of Sinking of HMAS Sydney 19 Nov 41	"How the Cosmoran sank the Sydney", cutting from German newspaper Volkischer Beobachter dated 13 Aug 1944 written by Doctor Habben Naval Staff Surgeon
Not copied	ADM 10865 - 1940	Strengthening of naval forces in the FE	Correspondence regarding mounting Japanese aggression. British ministers are aware of raider problem, but feel they are fully stretched with dealing with Germany and Italy.
Not copied	ADM 12/1738	Index 1941-41: S-Z	Mentions telegrams to and from Australia regarding publication of information.
Ch. 7	ADM 199/148	Reports of proceedings of "Special Service Freighters"	RFA <i>Lambridge</i> also known as HMS <i>Botlea</i> meets HMS <i>Neptune</i> off Freetown in January 1940
Not copied	ADM 199/2198	War Diary various extracts between 18 Dec 39 and 20 Jan 1940	18 Dec 39 search for the Altmark; 27 Dec 39 <i>Neptune</i> remains with Force K; Force K ordered to sweep Rio to Freetown; Portuguese merchant ship <i>Guanza</i> (with wanted Germans onboard) intercepted; no mention of <i>Botlea</i> / <i>Lambridge</i>
Not copied	ADM 199/2199	War Diary extract of 18 Dec 39 and 20 Jan 1940	Nothing relevant.
p. 47	ADM 199/2233	War Diary extract of 7 and 23 Nov 41	23 Nov 41 suspicious ship believed to be Raider G/No. 41/ <i>Steiermark</i> last located in South Atlantic May 41
p. 55	ADM 199/2233	War Diary extract of Nov 41	24 Nov 41 25 German naval men [in] floating raft; 24 Nov 41 Sydney overdue; 25 Nov 41 concur ACNB's explanation that

Chapter or page	Reference in British archives	Title	Content
(cont.)			<i>Comoran/Komoran</i> torpedoed Sydney being sunk - reports of survivors "all boats painted dark brown and therefore do not belong to Sydney"
p. 80	ADM 199/2234	War Diary extract of 1 to Dec 41 and 7 Dec 41	1 Dec 41 Summary of <i>Pannormia's</i> sinking spreading following Sydney announcement; 7 Dec 41 message of sympathy "Sydney was most gallant ship ..."; 7 Dec 41 interim report of interrogation of survivors
Not copied	ADM 199/380	Report of proceedings of CinC South Atlantic dated 23 Feb 40	<i>Neptun's</i> patrol off Freetown mentioned, but not encounter with <i>Katia/Lambridge</i>
Ch. 1	ADM 199/725 (formerly M/021927/40)	Activity of Armed Merchant Raiders - Proposals for dealing with by Offensive & Evasive Measures	Circulation of minutes between DoP, DNI and Hd of M concerning intelligence of use of Japanese harbours by raiders. Messages to/from Sir R. Craigie (ambassador in Tokyo) protesting at use by <i>Kulmerland</i> and others of Japanese waters. Intelligence report.
Not copied	ADM 199/725 (formerly M/02762/41) now enclosed with above	HMS <i>Berwick</i> - Attack by German Raider 25 Dec 40 - Detailed Report	Minutes of an internal enquiry into the performance of HMS <i>Berwick</i> and signal and letter of censure
Ch. 2	ADM 199/736	Report on Loss of HMAS Sydney dated 12 Feb 1942. Date-stamped as received 22 April 1947	Report compiled from the information gathered during the interrogation of the German prisoners. The docket contains sketch charts of the action between Sydney and <i>Komoran</i> , and a photograph and diagram of the latter. This information appears to be the

Chapter or page	Reference in British archives	Title	Content
(cont)			basis of the account in ADM 234/324
p. 260	ADM 199/738 1940-42	Improvements to HMAS Sydney	Ship cannot be spaced for fitting of twin A.A. mountings
Not copied	ADM 199/738 1940-42	Monthly report of war effort by Australia, Canada and NZ	Various Summaries of naval, military and airforce activities from Jan 41-Nov 42.
Annex C	ADM 234/324	<i>Actions with Enemy Disguised Raiders, 1940-1941, Battle Summary No. 13, pages 1 to 13, plus appendices B, C and D plus index</i>	Brief descriptions of actions with raiders including action between HMAS Sydney and Kormoran, including a plan of the action and an appendix on the Kormoran.
pp. 182-189	ADM 239/335	CB 04211 (2) (A) <i>Fighting Experience</i> published September 1943	Section 12 which deals with raiders
p. 253	ADM 267/77	War Damage: Aircraft Carriers & Cruisers, Vol. 20, 3F, Torpedo & Mine	"Sydney, Torpedo & Shell, 19 November 1941"
p. 46	CAB 158/25	Far East Combined Bureau Intelligence Summary	Far East D/F Organisation - Periodical Analysis (summarised to 22nd September 1941)
pp. 61-62	PREM 4/50/15 1941-45	Australia, various, including correspondence between U.K., Australia and the US during 1941-45	Includes invitations from Australia for Churchill to visit. In a telegram dated 28th November 1941, from Churchill to Australian P.M., Curtin, Churchill writes "...accept my deepest sympathy in the feared loss of the Sydney so close to Australian shore

