



Dear Mr. Cole,

As a mature-aged, fourth generation Australian who had Navy experience in WW2 and who believes his mental processes are not yet atrophied, I submit a number of questions and observations that you might consider in connection with the disaster of Sydney.

By way of background I enclose copy of a relevant letter I wrote to Ross Stephenson on 21<sup>st</sup> Mar 08. Ross is a law graduate who hosts breakfast at one of Melbourne's commercial radio stations and who applies a little more intellectual rigour and integrity than I usually find in commercial radio. He had been questioning the alleged causes of Sydney's demise and also then current press treatment of it. So do I. I wish you well as you pursue your enquiries and I hope that you might include these questions in your pursuit.

1. What was German raider Kormoran doing on our NW coast in October 1941?

There must be a reason. The real naval warfare in Europe was largely over; the Med. was largely safe for allied shipping except for enemy aircraft and a few subs; Holland was occupied. What, I wonder, was the role then of the Dutch Navy of which Tromp, Van Ghent and De Ruyter appeared briefly in the Pacific. Were the Dutch really in control of the large Dutch East Indies and were they really in control of the oil production and distribution facilities? Perhaps the purpose of my words here is to conceal thoughts!!

2. How important were oil supplies?

These were critical. Hobart would probably have been sunk with Perth in Sunda Strait had she not run low on oil. In my memory oil was always a critical issue as tankers could not safely get into danger areas and some allied tankers eg. Neosho were sunk. From where were the Japanese subs, allegedly abundant around our coast prior to 7<sup>th</sup> Dec 1941 obtaining their oil? Who in fact was controlling D.E.I. oil at that time? Were the Indonesians in control and not unsympathetic to those opposed to the European ally's interests? The Dutch surrendered very early and Indonesia declared it's independence as early as 17<sup>th</sup> Aug 1945. Were the Indonesians assisting the Japanese in these early days? Japanese oil tankers were easy targets for our naval forces after December 1941.

3. Do we know much about the disposition of the Japanese sub fleet before December 1941?

I suspect you will find that we had little knowledge. Our concern was with Mother England and our defence forces were in Europe. How well do I recall enlistment efforts with popular vocalists in Collins Street in Melbourne singing "There'll Always be an England" and Robert Menzies concern with England and Europe. Our mainland coastline of 25,000 km was unguarded and enemies could have surveyed there with impunity. Sydney was destroyed in these unguarded waters. If you obtain access to the War Cabinet Minutes of WW2 (stored in my days in Department of Supply care at Maribyrnong) you will no doubt learn of our innocence which might explain the alleged cover up and why no significant attempts at that stage were made to dig deeper. Our leaders, of course, had other enormous challenges on their plate. As an aside, it would be interesting to contemplate Australia's position had not John Curtin become Prime Minister in 1941.

4. Were Japanese subs operating freely around our coast before Dec 1941?

I am confident they were. My old mate Wally Elliget here in Sorrento, who survived Canberra's sinking and who has had a lifetime interest in naval history tells me of the Navy publication "HMAS" reporting some 200 sinkings around Australia about which few public announcements were made. Again I have a near neighbour, Mrs. C. Moon, a solicitor, who loaned me many years ago a book about the Japanese surveying Port Phillip etc. The book claimed that Westernport and Port Phillip had been surveyed, depths, currents etc. recorded and a nominated invasion landing site declared on a sparsely populated area on the western shores of Port Phillip. Mrs. Moon recalls that a naval person wrote the book. Brigadier Bell, Chief of Staff in Southern Command, for whom I later acted as referee in his appointment as Registrar of Uni of Melbourne and with whom I sailed down here in Sorrento tells me that when he was a member of our occupation forces in Japan after 15<sup>th</sup> Aug 1945 he met a Japanese officer who had been designated as Governor of Melbourne after the proposed Japanese invasion. Then there were the publicised sightings of

Japanese subs eg. at King Island and one close to me. As trainees in the Officer Training School at Flinders Naval Depot we were required to have some sea experience on training ship, Bingera in Port Phillip. The duty watch one night reported an unidentified sub surfacing during the night. (My other memory of Bingera was when taking my turn as Officer of the Day and piping "Lights out pipe down" to the sailors up forward and being told "Piss off you---mackeroon".) I hope you will be able to learn something about Japanese subs around the Australian coast before Dec 1941 and about how they obtained their oil.

5. What evidence can you find about Sydney being sunk by Kormoran alone?

With respect, I know you will reveal your evidence if you find it. My hearsay and readings find little support. I am not always convinced of theories particularly from "academics". For example I have a verbatim of an ABC report of 26-6-08 on a proposed Memorial Day commemorating the "Battle for Australia". In it Peter Stanley, director for historical research at the National Museum of Australia, is reported as having "---written a book about Japan's plans to invade Australia. He says there was in fact no real threat". My cynicism often suggests to me that when they have no evidence of something happening academics suggest that nothing in fact did happen. Equally, I know you will earnestly seek evidence of whether Kormoran could have succeeded unaided and why no survivors. Were there, as reported by some, two raiders present at Sydney's demise? Many, many allied ships were sunk in the Pacific. My memories tell me of Canberra, Perth, Chicago, Saratoga, San Juan, Oklahoma, Vincennes, Honolulu, Lexington etc. There were many survivors of these disasters but none on Sydney. Naval ships are difficult to sink. Canberra and Lexington were sunk by allied means after their crews abandoned ship. I recall being taken to Espiritu Santo in the then New Hebrides after Hobart was torpedoed and seeing the large numbers of ships there with massive holes in their hulls mainly from enemy subs and waiting their turn in the floating dry docks. They were not sunk and went back into service.

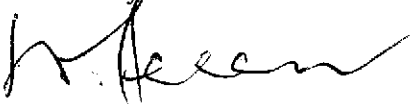
The myth that Sydney got into range of Kormoran, I believe, is nonsense. My Action Station was on the bridge of Hobart where Range was always a top priority. Captain Burnett would have had a command group around him on Sydney's bridge as did Captain Showers on Hobart. What mischief it is to impugn Burnett without evidence. A man responsible for the lives of six hundred doesn't ignore Range.

6. Was Sydney sunk by a Japanese sub?

The only "evidence" I have is from a mate on Hobart who claimed that a relative working in the internment camp in the Goulburn Valley reported that some Kormoran internees reported a Japanese sub doing the dirty deed. The more credible comment comes from Surgeon Rear Admiral Lionel Lockwood who was surgeon on Hobart. He lived quite close to us at Kooyong in his retirement and often dined with us. I recall vividly his claiming that Admiral Crace had told him of other than Kormoran being involved in Sydney's sinking. Crace's flag led the Australian ships in the Coral Sea Battle.

In conclusion, I admit that my input is not conclusive. But I submit it sincerely and honestly. I must admit too that my emphatic aim is to ensure that Sydney's brave hearts are not seen to have contributed to their downfall. I will provide CV details if required and advise that I am wheelchair bound these days.

Yours Sincerely,

  
(W. K. Allen)

Hon. Terence Cole, QC  
HMAS Sydney Enquiry  
Sydney

  
  
Dear Ross,

Failing to get you by phone at Fort Knox last week to seek to provide a snippet on Rumour File on the "mystery" of HMAS Sydney then in headlines, I now write.

Sydney, Perth and Hobart were the proud warriors of WW2---sister ships, battle cruisers with 8/6 in., 8/4 in. guns, 8 torpedo tubes etc. They truly represented the silent service with magnificent contributions in WW2 in the Atlantic, Indian, Pacific Oceans, Med., etc. Perth was sunk in the Sunda Strait in the Singapore battles. Her survivors languished for years in Jap POW camps. Sydney's fate is not yet clear. My ship, Hobart, after surviving the awful Coral Sea and Guadalcanal campaigns was torpedoed by the Japs between G and Santa Cruz on the night of 20 July 1943 after which my undistinguished navy service ended. I was at my Action Station on Hobart's bridge that night and can attest to the enormous damage that torpedo did despite our large armoured metal protection on our hull just below the water line. Jap torpedoes were believed to be vastly more powerful, reliable and accurate than the smaller Brit and US ones we used. I suggest this is of some relevance to Sydney.

The affinity between crews of the 3 cruisers was close despite their often operating in different theatres of war. They manned sister ships, they had often been together at specialist schools at Flinders Naval Depot in gunnery, engineering, electrical, seamanship, etc. and their friends and relatives ashore had links.

The commonly accepted view on Hobart was that Sydney was ordered to check a suspicious vessel on our NW coast and on locating Kormoran, challenged her, failed to receive recognition and observed K's concealed guns which began firing. Sydney then sank her. Sydney, following navy tradition was assisting K's survivors not knowing that K had been oiling a Jap sub. This was a fortnight before Pearl Harbour. The sub was believed shadowing Sydney while she helped K's survivors. Sydney, I believe, had no Asdic (sub detection device) as did Hobart. The sub had a sitting duck close target and put 2 or more large torpedoes into her before shooting all her survivors. Not one of her nearly 700 brave-hearted crew survived to tell the story.

I just can't accept that over nearly 70 years the mystery of Sydney has not been cleared up. There are few of us still around to tell tales: I believe that only 3 of Hobart's men are still around. Nor can I accept the contribution to seeming myth making and cover up in the Age's extensive report of 18-3-08. There are too many unknowns and unanswered questions. For example why no survivors from Sydney and hundreds from K?

One can envisage Sydney in Oct 1941, battle weary after her valiant efforts in the Med etc. and her incredible sinking of the large Italian battle cruiser, Bartolomeo Colleoni northwest of Crete in 1940. BC was a modern battle cruiser with abundant fire power capable of 40 knots. Recalled to Australia to face the Jap menace Sydney's crew, no doubt, were anticipating home leave but they were directed to check the suspect vessel on our NW coast. Detecting K, the heavily armed German merchantman under a Dutch flag as a spot on the horizon Sydney's crew would be at Action Stations with guns and sighting facilities at the ready as they zig-zagged at speed with constant reporting of those famous words, Range, Bearing. All watertight doors would have been closed. I can't imagine war-experienced Sydney getting within range of K before sinking her when K was unable to provide recognition and started firing. Nor can I understand the no survivors aspect. Was Sydney really sunk by an undetected Jap sub

which shot her survivors a fortnight before Japan was officially at war with us? One never knew. While the "commonly accepted views" on Hobart which I mentioned earlier may not stand up in a court of law, I believe they might stand up better than the uninformed current white wash which led the Age of 18-3 to headline that issue "HMAS SYDNEY a nation finds closure after Australia's greatest naval mystery is solved". Solved my elbow.

I don't accept without further evidence that Sydney was sunk by K. One can imagine the undetected Jap subs torpedoes blowing off Sydney's stern thus destroying her depth charge platform on the quarterdeck and disabling her steering. I note that the press reports tell of what they describe as Sydney's bow being discovered. I wonder could this be her quarterdeck? Hobart was torpedoed in 1943 between X and Y turrets with horrendous damage. Sydney, like Hobart, with their sealed watertight compartments, are difficult to sink quickly and I doubt if gunfire would do the trick.

Until I am convinced otherwise I will see the reported "Entombed 645 brave souls" as the battle hardened, battle weary, brave-hearted martyrs of the silent service, victims of one of the most evil acts of WW2. They are indeed icons of our war history. For long years 24 Oct 1941 has been revered by me. The writing of this letter on Good Friday may have prophetic significance to those following the Christian tradition.

Ross, I would be pleased if you would use this letter without attribution and please protect my anonymity unless you were to consult me. Now in my 87<sup>th</sup> year but enjoying a pint or two in the local Koonya on Friday nights, I resist situations of stress---unless the supply department here fails to replenish the holy water which my child bride of 64 years of marriage and my caring son share with me daily at about sunset. And please, Ross, never put the word "the" in front of the name of Navy ships. Peace be with you.

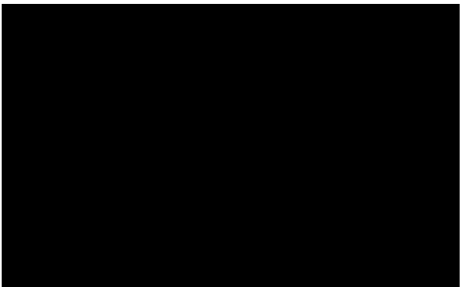
(W. K. Allen)

Mr. Ross Stephenson  


**3AW** 693  
Southern Cross

Bill Allen,

5/08



Dear Bill

Thank you for your  
informative and intelligent  
letter. As you say, this matter  
is not solved and I wonder  
whether the truth or not about  
the possible involvement of a  
Japanese sub will ever (pardon  
the pun) surface.

Trust that the keels at  
the Koonya are cold.

Best wishes

Roy Stimpert