

Doug Jennings
Retired pilot boat coxswain

Tuesday, May 20, 2008

CK 118174

Dear Mr Cole,

I was born at Albany, WA in 1930 and lived at the Albany pilot station until my marriage in July 1952.

My father Bertram Jennings was employed by the Harbour and Light Department and was bosun of the pilot crew.

1941:

I saw a warship enter King George Sound, Albany early in the morning of November 16 or 17, 1941. My father said to tell no one. Later he told me a party had been sent ashore to destroy a mine that had been washed up at Frenchman's Bay Beach.

Some weeks later after the HMAS Sydney was reported missing, the head lighthouse keeper on Eclipse Island, Mr Kitson, told my father that he was almost certain it was the Sydney that detonated the mine and afterwards was seen steaming past the island towards the Fremantle shipping lanes with a "bone in its mouth" (at full speed).

1955:

In June 1955 I took a position with the Harbour and Light Department in Bunbury on the pilot crew as engine driver deckhand.

Fred Gilmore, the then coxswain of the pilot vessel Petrel, told me that about November 17, 1941, the seaplane off the HMAS Sydney landed in the Lower Leschenault Estuary near the Parade Hotel, Bunbury. It was refueled and took off straight away.

1958:

In May 1958 while I was relieving as coxswain and assistant quarantine officer, the second German-flagged ship since the end of World War II berthed in Bunbury.

At 0800 on May 28, 1958 the Senator Hagelstein under the command of Captain J. Brunke berthed at the wooden jetty to load timber.

I went to the master's cabin to get particulars for the Quarantine Department. Other people present included shipping agent Ron Wotherspoon, harbourmaster George Palfryman and a supervisor stevedore by the surname of McEwan.

Whilst Capt. Brunke was getting my required information I asked him if it was his first time to Australia.

His reply was, "first time ashore".

I then asked what he meant by first time ashore, and he replied, "I have seen your coastline many times before during the war".

When I asked how? he replied, "German long-range submarine".

The supervisor stevedore McEwan then said, "you may know what happened to the Sydney".

Capt Brunke ignored McEwan's comment and could not be brought into talking about submarines or the war again, even on a subsequent voyage.

My personal thoughts:

Is it possible the HMAS Sydney had some information that a suspicious ship was near our coast and went full speed northwards to intercept?

Is it possible the HMAS Sydney came upon a rendezvous of the HSK Kormoran and a German submarine, and when the cover was blown, the submarine (hiding behind the Kormoran) torpedoed the Sydney, allowing the Kormoran to inflict so much devastation.

Conflicting reports from the crew of the Kormoran:

Some said a Japanese submarine torpedoed the Sydney from two miles away; knowing the distance and that Japan did not attack Pearl Harbour until December 7, 1941 makes one wonder.

Others said they heard small arms fire throughout the night. This could have been an atrocity - shooting survivors from the Sydney.

It may have been the Kormoran that attempted to sail away from the Sydney, after the Sydney sank.

Yours truly,

 20/05/08

Doug Jennings