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At the beginning of 1951 my church sent me to the Snowy Mountains area and Canberra to do chaplaincy work among the various nationalities then arriving to work for the Snowy Mountains Hydro- Electric Authority. I was chosen for this work since I was bi-lingual and soon became multi-lingual as I served also the Baltic people, Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians and Finns.

At that time 600 German survivors of the Russian front were settling in. Russian front survivors were chosen, since the Authority did not want veterans who had fought against Australian troops in the Western Desert of Africa. It was feared that there could be ill feeling between the two nationalities.

I soon found that Heinz Grossmann was the man with whom I had to deal in respect to getting those who cared to come to my services. He had cleverly worked himself into a position of leadership of the Germans, which the Authority accepted for a time. Venues had to be arranged, as well as transport, since I had a Ford Prefect at that time, which was not able to take the muddy tracks churned up by big trucks and jeeps.

On May 13, 1951 I had occasion to call on Grossmann. He was living in a tent at Jindabyne. I have never wondered why he was in a tent, when barracks were provided for the workmen. It may be that there was an overflow who had to settle for a time for tents. When I arrived about four other Germans left Grossmann's tent. The Pfarrer was not welcomed by all the hardened veterans.

During the course of the conversation the cold weather was referred to. I assume I said something like this: Not as cold as the Russian front!

Grossman had been drinking cup after cup of coffee made with three spoonful of coffee and half a cup of rum. By now he was under the influence. He stated: I was never on the Russian front. I am a sailor.

I replied that he could not be, since only men from the Russian front were contracted in that first six hundred. He then told me that in order to come to Australia he had taken the identity of his brother lost on the Russian front. His brother was Waldemar Heinz Grossman, while he was a gunnery officer (Geschuetz Officier) from the German raider, the Kormoran, Gerhard Heinz Grossmann. It is not unusual for Germans to take the second name of a relative in addition to their given name.

By now he was quite drunk and talked freely. He told his tale which I will relate later in this document. I went back the next morning and asked him if what he said was true. He was a little vague on what he had said, but he repeated his story exactly as I heard it the night before.

I had friends in Canberra, Sen. Const. Hec Holmesby and his wife Margaret. She had been my teacher in year 7 in South Australia, and I had a standing invitation to have an evening meal with them on any Thursday when in Canberra. I told Grossmann's story, after which he suggested he contact Col. Spry of "Security". I did not hear the word ASIO at that time. He phoned and Col. Spry came at once and took me into his car and asked me to repeat what Grossmann had told me.

Grossmann claimed he was a Gunnery Officer on the Kormoran. The Sydney approached to within seven nautical miles, and asked for identification. Capt Detmers tried to pass his ship off as the Straat Malacca, a Dutch ship. The Sydney drew within four miles of the Kormoran, bow on and asked for the secret sign of recognition. The Germans hoisted the German flag and fired simultaneously with

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the Sydney. Each scored hits on the other. Then there was a massive explosion as two torpedoes from a Japanese submarine hit the Sydney broadside. Grossman stated that sub. was two and a half miles from the Sydney. I have not fired torpedoes, so do not know if this degree of accuracy could have been attained.

Note how this differs from the official account. This states that the Sydney approached the the Kormoran broadside on from a distance of less than a mile. I am not a naval person, but I am sure no captain would act in this way. Yet history to this date has branded Capt. Burnett of the Sydney as incompetent for approaching so closely that it was suicidal.

Grossmann maintained this story, and his claim of the Japanese submarine's involvement. He stated that Detmers gave orders to abandon the Kormoran because she was on fire and held a number of mines. The Sydney was on fire and drifted away from the engagement, but remained afloat for three hours. There was thus ample time for the survivors to take to lifeboats.

Through the night of 19-20 November the Kormoran survivors heard small-arms fire as the Japanese submarine surfaced and turned machine gun and rifle fire on the Sydney survivors. By 10 a.m. on the 20th all was silent and the Kormoran survivors made their way to the W.A. coast and were rounded up in due course, some of them rescued from the sea by, if my memory serves me correctly, the empty troopship Aquitania. In due course the survivors (I believe he said 304 or 310) were kept together and they agreed on a story which did not involve the submarine, in case any of them could be persuaded to give more than name, rank and number. Grossmann maintained that the submarine and raider were in contact with each other, before and throughout the battle. He maintained that the number of the submarine was camouflaged. From this I deduce that there had been surface contact prior to 19th November.

Perhaps three weeks later an officer of ASIO (I will now use the term, though I knew it only as Security) called at my Canberra base at 60 McLeay St., Turner, and asked if I would meet Col. Spry on neutral ground. I suggested the YMCA office, which was on the second story of a building in Civic Centre. Hec Holmesby came with me.

In due course Spry came along together with two or three others. I am vague on the number, but two carried big black cases. I had never seen a tape recorder to that date, but it was a massive contraption compared to those of today.

Then to my surprise, Sir William Hudson, Commissioner of the Authority arrived with Grossmann. I think another person showed them to the room, but I don't think he was present during the interrogation.

I was asked some questions, which no doubt went into ASIO files, but they were inconsequential. Then Grossmann was questioned. At first he did not wish to answer, but I intervened and told him he would make a liar of me and undermine my work if he did not repeat his story, and in any case, his story could do no harm.

First a person of naval background tried to establish his bona fides by asking questions about the Kormoran, her complement, armaments, even food, position and the like. It was clear that Grossmann was what he told me, a naval person and not an infantryman. He was questioned for perhaps an hour and a half or two hours. It was clear to me that his story was accepted by ASIO. While I did not like the man, no one doubted his version of events. He seemed to revel in telling his tale after the initial reluctance.

We were separated and then Col. Spry, standing on my left, put his right hand on my right shoulder and said very conspiratorially, You won't mind signing this

document? What I signed was blank as I recall, but in due course I received a copy of the Official Secrets Declaration. I had this until shifting to the home I had built with my own hands in 1992, but it seems to have been discarded. I attached no importance to it and willingly kept silent until well after the 30 years limitation. In fact, until Anzac Day, I told the story briefly to only one person, a survivor of the Perth, who had been in captivity, also on the infamous railway. I think this was in 1989. Incidentally, Spry told me that as a civilian I was not required to sign the Official Secrets declaration, but since I received some benefits from the Authority, I might be considered a "public servant". I had no problem with this.

21st M

I had to leave the Snowy Mountains area in 1952. I was told by a successor that Grossmann was deported after failing a dictation test in Gaelic. I cannot verify this nor have I cared.

Mrs Jo
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I have in recent days learned of another theory, which I have no need to question. I will testify anywhere to what I have told above, but will try to keep other information away from what I learned in 1951.

My sole reason for telling this story which I accept as fact in every detail is that, I think on the Monday before Anzac Day I heard someone on radio condemn Capt. Burnett's seamanship and capability. I believe his reputation and that of his crew can stand proudly in the history of our servicemen and service women's record during World War 2.

Dear M

Note: After writing this in June 1997, I heard statements from "official" sources that "Grossmann" had never been heard of. I could get no information from official sources, but then requested our Lutheran Church Archives of Archer St., Nth Adelaide to search for material mentioning Grossmann during 1951. Documents, including letters to and from me, referring to Grossmann, were found and have been made available to the Inquiry. There was also a letter from the Commonwealth Department of Immigration, detailing a meeting between Grossmann, Pastor Wittmann, a German national who tried to take over my work, myself and the officer responsible for the German employees on the Snowy scheme. So much for Grossmann not known to ASIO and the Commonwealth.

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