

2/9

THE KORMORAN (GERMAN RAIDER)

C. E. GOSSETT

Extracts as taken from a Diary of a member of the Crew while a Prisoner of War at Durringile.

The KORMORAN was formerly the motor ship "STIERMARK" of the Hamburg America Line, she was built in the Deutschen Werft in Hamburg Kiel. The ship was later rebuilt at the Deutschen Werft in Hamburg during January to October 1940.

She was a vessel of 9000 tons, twin screws driven by diesel-electric engines (because of their economy on fuel) and she was capable of a great radius of action. It is worthy of note that these engines had not been previously used as they were of a new type.

She was very heavily armed, having six 15cm guns in the following positions:- two forward, midship starboard and port, 2 in the hatch under the Bridge, starboard and port, 2 astern starboard and port under cover of super structure.

In addition to these guns she had 2 57mm tank attack guns situated under the Bridge to the port and starboard, 5 30 cal. Mgs, and several 54 Cal. Mgs.

Two surface torpedo tubes had been fitted, one on the starboard side and one on the port, they were between decks a little forward of the bridge and about the height level of the swimming pool.

Two ordinary under water torpedo tubes were built in on either side of the ship.

Finally we had a Search Light mounted on the after mast.

Camouflage.

The ship was well camouflaged, the fore and aft gun positions were concealed by high collapsible out board walls while the midships armament were concealed by collapsible hatch walls. Under this arrangement it was possible for the guns to stand exposed on the open deck as and when required.

The Torpedo Tubes were hidden by a removable side plating. The Search Light and MGs were left visible as all Merchant Shipping was so armed.

In no 5 hatch we had two "ARADO" seaplanes which were used for scouting.

In no 6 hatch we had a light speed boat which was used in mine laying.

Engines.

As mentioned previously the engines were of a new type of 14000 H.P. which gave us an action radius of 14000 miles at an maximum speed of 18 knots and a cruising speed of 12 knots.

Complement.

The ships Complement consisted of 25 Officers, 1 Meteorologist and 376 Ratings.

3/9
Page Two.

"KOROMAN OFFICERS."

The following Officers were members of the
 Koroman that engaged the H.M.A.S. Cruiser Sydney.

Ships Captain.....Capt. Detmers.T.A.G.
 Executive Officer and Navigator.....Capt. Foerster.K.J.O.
 Supply Off. and Administerative.... .Capt. Bretschneider.H.
 Signals and Intelligence Off.Lieut.Commdr. Meyer.H.C.M.
 Wireless and Telegraphy Off.Lieut.Commdr.Von Malapert.R.
 GunneryOff.Lieut.Commdr.Skerries.F.J.
 Ship's Regulating Off.Lieut.Commdr.Von.Gesseln.J.
 Ships Doctor.....Surgeon..Lieut.Commdr.Lienhoop.
 Flight Off.Lieut.Commdr.Schlefer.E.B.J.
 Flight Off.Lieut. Ahl.H.F.
 Torpedo Off.Lieut. Greter.J.H.
 Adj. and ~~pt~~arser.....Lieut. Commdr. Messerschmidt.H.
 Officer in command of Aircraft Guns.....Lieut.Commdr.Brinkman.W.G.
 Meteorologist.....Major.Wagner.F.B.H.
 PropogandaOff.Lieut.List. F.H.K.
 Film Off.Lieut. Hrich.W.

Prize Officers leading boarding parties and junior Ship's
 Officers. Regulating Duties.

Lieut.....Diebitsch.J.O.E.
 Lieut.....Banjes.H.
 Lieut.... .Kube.B.H.
 Lieut.....Jensen.

4/9
PAGE THREE

We steered again on an Easterly course in the direction of Australia with the intention of using the coming new moon period for patrolling the West coast of Australia and keeping the route (Australia Sunda Atraits) under observation, the open sea offered, as it had for many months past, little or no opportunities.

Enemy shipping was compelled to leave the usual Trade Routes and had to travel the much longer but safer coastal waterways, ~~the~~ approaching dark nights promised us further opportunities, however the memorable Wednesday 19th. November arrived. The blue skies and bright sunshine promised us another quite day, in the Officers Mess sat most of the Officers with their afternoon coffee, on the Mess Deck supper was being prepared, it was 1530 hrs.

The Kormoran was on a course of 25 degrees, her present position was 1 deg. longitude East, 25 Deg. latitude South.

Shortly before 1600 Hrs. the cry echoed through the ship "Steamer in sight" and almost immediately the alarm signal sounded, the lookout on the foremast reported that the vessel could be a sailing ship, from this great distance recognition was impossible.

The Commandant (Capt. Detmers) decided to turn Westward in order to come into the sun and at the same time not allow himself to be forced towards the land.

The Steamer now appeared to have two decks, soon came the report from the lookout that the ships upper works were peculiar, the foremast seemed unusually stout, and advised that we move off with all possible speed. This we did, but after a few minutes the Engine Room reported No.4 motor to be out of action, we could only travel at 14 knots per hour.

All doubts and suppositions are at an end, the steamer comes ever nearer and reveals itself as a Cruiser.

It is 1605 Hrs. and the Cruiser turns towards us and signals us by flash light. We do not answer and hold our course (250 deg.) Ever nearer comes the doom, now it can be made out that it is an Australian Cruiser of the Sydney Class.

Escape is no longer possible, maybe we can deceive him, a glimmer of hope, though without much basis.

At 1655 Hrs. No.4 motor reported again in action but it is too late now, the Cruiser has meanwhile, without altering her course or interrupting her pursuit, asked the name of the ship. The Cruiser is still far away, but not so far that it is possible to overlook her flashlight signals.

We answer the signals by International code signal to the effect that we are the STRAAT MALAKKA and hoist the NETHERLANDS flag at the stern

All the sailors disappear from the Upper deck, the Kormoran appears empty, but at action stations, on deck and between decks, from the Commandant to the last man sweat and hold their breath. The distance between the ships is now about 8000 metres, the opponent, naturally, does not seem quite satisfied with our reply and he moves closer to us, the distance lessening minute by minute.

At 1700 Hrs. The Cruiser is about 1000 metres distant, an unbelievable short distance. We can distinguish individual men

5/9
PAGE FOUR

on her deck, her Bridge is full of Officers. She travels now at the same speed and parallel to us. They want to know more about us and ask our destination, we answer their question by flag signal.

The tension mounts to boiling point, what will he do next?

He appears as though he is satisfied with our information, we can see that he has picked up his seaplane and swung it inboard, the muzzles of his four 6 inch guns are still threateningly turned towards us.

The seconds turn to minutes, now something must happen, just at the last minute, when as though he were ready to turn away, one more question. At 1725 Hrs. comes the demand from the Cruiser "Hoist your secret call sign."

That is too much, we dont know the secret call sign allotted to the STRAAT MALAKKA and so fate takes a hand.

Now, there remains for the Commander, only one decision, to attack with surprise and speed and hope for the best.

With lightning speed comes the orders, "hoist the battle flag, load, fire orders for all guns are given and with lightning speed the orders are carried out, it takes 6 sec. to clear for action.

At 1730 Hrs. the first salvo roars out from the four starboard 15 cm guns, at the same time lighter weapons open fire, the starboard 37mm Tank Attack guns has the Bridge of the Cruiser for a target. The first salvo hits its target and is followed by another and another.

The opponent answers with a full salvo from his turrets, however he fires too wide and so far we have not suffered a hit. Suddenly his turrets fall silent. Apparently they are waiting on orders from their gunnery director, but he, as a result of well placed Tank Attack fire, is possibly knocked out.

Precious and decisive seconds pass, to our opponents cost, for our fifth salvo nearly all scored hits, evidently putting the fire control system out of action on the Cruiser for his C turret begins firing independently.

Finally he scores a hit on our funnel and the splinter effect causes a few deaths and wounds and wounds a few men on the Bridge otherwise the damage is minor. The life boat which was close to the funnel is shot away, and through the walls of the funnel comes clouds of black smoke. A third hit from their third shot went through our rigging and exploded on the port side in the water. We are firing in rapid succession from all guns, they reply on the Cruiser from turrets C and D, both the forward turrets being knocked out.

Now we sustain a hit, the poop deck, with the Officers quarters is hit and burns, the engines have also sustained a hit.

The Cruiser is now also on fire in several places.

We now attempt to quell the quickly gaining fire, but it is a hopeless task from the beginning for our fire fighting equipment is destroyed and will not produce water.

Our torpedo tubes have been displaced, both starboard tubes have emitted two dud torpedoes.

On the Cruiser there is a tremendous explosion, she has completely

6/9
PAGE FIVE

disappeared in a black fog, and as the smoke clears we can observe that her bows are slowly sinking.

Over our decks the cry goes up, "Hurrah she sinks", but this joyous cry was premature, Though she is deeper in the water and seemed totally destroyed forward turret C continues to fire.

Slowly she moves astern and her fire grows weaker.

Suddenly a discernable shock is felt on the Kormoran, from all ventilators leading to the engine room poured black fumes, obviously one of our oil bunkers has been hit.

1735 Hrs. our opponent is astern, our firing guns can only partially be directed, we must endeavor to turn the ship to bring her into a firing position, but our engines are destroyed and can function no more.

Finally the cruiser drifts away on our port quarter, the distance is now about 4000 metres, we can again open fire on his port side. However the cruiser does not reply, her guns all point away from us. Apparently she is out of control and can no longer manoeuvre for position.

Only one possibility remains for him, Torpedoes. This possibility he uses immediately, he fires a torpedoe towards us, manouevring and evasive tactics are out of the question now but luckily all torpedoes pass under our stern.

It is now 1745 Hrs. We are making very slight movement but soon even that ceases. We have sent salvo after salvo at the cruiser which is now 6000 metres away.

The cruiser is afire from stem to stern, she is in fact little more than a wreck.

At 1800 Hrs. we fire a torpedoe at about 7000 metres range, which should put the cruiser to rest, but this torpedoe misses its mark. The cruiser moves very slowly in a direction of 120 deg., and the distance between us increases.

At 1825 Hrs. the last salvo of approximately 90 rounds leaves our guns, we see in the distance only a drifting column of fire. The cruiser is a wreck.

However we have suffered badly ourselves, now we have time to think, our poop deck blazes fiercely and to extinguish it is out of the question we drift helplessly before the wind, the swell has in the meanwhile grown stronger, and darkness is closing in.

The battle has been fought, it has lasted a good hour and now we become conscious that the cruise of our auziliary cruiser has come to the end, a glorious end, surely, for a battle between a cruiser and an auxiliary cruiser, with this result, is unique in the annals of naval warfare.

PAGE SIX

179
The Kormoran in this fight has fired 500 rounds of 15 cm shells and three torpedoes at her opponent, and as we later learnt, sent this far superior ship under the water without a single man of her complement being saved.

Meanwhile it has grown dark, but we have no worries about illumination as the poop deck and midships are in bright flames. It must be about 1900 Hrs. but no one has any time to bother about the hour, at the moment the thing is to save what is to be saved.

Two boats forward can be made servicable, they are the boats from the KUMBERLAND, the NICOLOAS. (The Kumberland was the supply ship which supplied the Kormoran off Sumatra and the Nicolaoas was a vessel sunk by the Kormoran on the 17/3/41.)

Our dhingies were lowered into the water and our wounded were placed into them, they took only the barest necessities and just those things that were available. The majority of the ships compliment took to the boats and were given the order to pull away from the ship and to wait in the vicinity until daylight, when we would all assemble.

As the Kormoran carried 400 mines, much ammunition and torpedoes everyone had the feeling that they were sitting on a volcano for at any time the fire might reach the explosives.

113 men and almost all the Officers still remained on board, no more boats were available, except the two large lifeboats which were forward in No.1 hatch. This was not very hopeful for the winches did not function, being electrically operated and the source of power shut off, under normal circumstances it is quite impossible for any man to lift 1½ to 2 ton boat from a hatch. This is not very hopeful either, as all we had was man power, we shall have to attempt the impossible.

With tackle and windlass each boat was raised a few centimetres at a time, and, after hours of work, was lifted onto the deck. While this back breaking and tiresome job was going on we heard a few cries for help out of the night, this could only mean that one of the boats had capsized. Later, two men who were picked up and taken on board, reported that the large dhingy had filled with water and sank. These two men saved themselves by swimming back to the ship, the other occupants of the boat were drowned.

The two lifeboats were lowered into the water on the port side and luckily got there undamaged, of course they were full of water, but they could easily be baled out. All the men were now on deck and had taken something useful from the pantry and living quarters provisions, covers or coats, were the most important.

Deep, down in the dark guts of the ship was the main pantry, no the way to the upper deck one passed the tailors shop, with the aid of torches this journey was made several times. Behind the plates one could hear the fire crackling and roaring.

Finally it appeared time to get into the boats. Those remaining were divided into two loads. Officers and men alike. Each boat originally built to carry 40 men now carried 57 men. I climbed into the first boat, which then pulled away from the ship. The Commandent, Navigating Officer and the Purser remained on board in order to prepare the ship for demolition.

We had now left our Kormoran a floating furnace which lighted up the sea. In the flames, brightly illuminated, was our battle flag. With the aid of oars we now strove to it as great a distance as possible between us and ship, in the limited space of the boat this was difficult, but the wind helped us, for the Kormoran, with her high freeboard, drifted past us.

PAGE SEVEN

8/9

About 2400 hrs, we saw from the Kormoran and that the boat lying alongside, light signals, the last boat seemed ready to put off. We were by this time about 4000 metres from the ship, and at 0035 hrs. there was a mighty explosion, a huge column of fire climbed into the sky and formed a gigantic mushroom of smoke about 500 metres high which was strongly illuminated from below for perhaps a full minute this show lasted, and then again there was the crackling of explosives, and the drifting debris from our ship.

Then the fireworks and their gorgeous spectacle gave way to night and silence.

The Kormoran had ceased to exist.

We baled our boat, alone on the unruly sea, only the night is ours, and a wonderful starry sky above us.....

At this point the book was discovered and taken from the writer during a search by the authorities at the P.O.W. Camp which has been his home for the past 3 years.

I will now give you an outline of the lives of the Officers of the Koromoran as I have observed them at Dhurringile.

Our intelligence staff have for the past 3 years have been trying to gain information as to what did happen to the Cruiser Sydney, and they have never at any time given us a chance to gain any information that was of any importance as to the silence of the Cruiser Sydney.

After 3 years of searching for this information it was not until the 28th of Feb.45 that after searching Lieut. Commdr. Bretschinder's room that we got this information from a book that he started to write of his life on the Raider Koromoran that we knew what happened to our Cruiser, the Sydney.

The Officers of the Koromoran are quite and they dont ask any favours and dont expect any. Capt. Detmers the Captain of the Koromoran is Camp Leader of the Ps.W. at Dhurringile, I attend everyday at their Orderly Room which is held for the purpose of running the compound and other requests that they may need for the Ps.W. Capt. Detmers has always been very straight forward in all business regarding the compound and has helped us in any matter that needs attention, he is regarded by our staff as a very able leader, which by the diary as written by one of his officers explains itself.

He escaped from here on the 11 Jan.45 with 17 other Officers by the means of a tunnel, it may seem strange that they could make a tunnel without being seen, well if you could only be here like I have been you would say that their escape was well planned and they never at any time left anything undone that would give us a line that they were preparing to escape, on information we gained this tunnel took 7 months to build so you can see how clever they were to conceal it, they pitted their brains against our's this time and won perhaps next time the order will be changed and the cards against them.

9/9

Since Capt. Detmers and his officers have returned to the compound after serving 28 days detention in the Old Melbourne Jail they have been very bitter perhaps our punishment was too much for them, they cannot take it like our boys, perhaps the news that they read in our papers have stated how the Master Race is Doomed hence the quietness, they outwardly show??
at all times.

FURTHER EXTRACTS TAKEN FROM THE DIARY THAT WILL BE OF INTEREST

The following ships were sunk by the KORMORAN? IN THE South Atlantic.

Antaris of 5000 tons sunk on the 6/1/41
British Union of 7000 tons on the 12/1/41
Afric Star of 11000 tons on the 29/1/41
Eurylochus of 5700 tons on the 29/1/41
Agnita of 3500 tons on the 20/3/41
Cragman of 8000 tons on the 20/3/41
The Canadolite was captured and a Prize Crew put aboard and the ship was taken to France. The tonnage of this ship was 11200 tons.

The next list comprises ships sunk in the Indian Ocean

Nikolaos of 7000 tons sunk on the 12/4/41
Velebit of 4200 tons sunk on the 12/4/41
Unidentified vessel sunk on the 12/4/41
Mareeba of 3400 tons sunk on the 25/6/41
Stamatios of 4500 tons sunk on the 22/9/41
Sydney..... Sunk on the 19/11/41

The Supply Ships of the Kormoran were the following:-

Nord Mark
Alstertor
Alstayfer

The Raider operated under the following names:-

Russian.....Molotov.
Japanese.....N.Y.K. Sakita Maru
Dutch.....Straat Malakka under which flag he was flying when the Sydney caught up with him.

The extracts that you have read were translated by one of our staff of the Int. Dept. you will I hope, everyone of you that reads these extracts, keep in mind the bravery that our men of the Sydney displayed, they were Our' Hero's everyone of them.
