

## What may the *Sydney* wreck reveal

By Tom Lewis

If *HMAS Sydney* is ever found what will the wreck reveal about her last fight with the raider *Kormoran*? Will the discovery answer some of the mysteries of Australia's greatest naval loss?

The story, as related by the German survivors, is well known. The light cruiser closed the raider to within fatal range. The *Kormoran*, flying a false flag, struck it, hoisted her true colours, and opened fire, hitting the cruiser with her third salvo in the bridge area. *Sydney* hesitated, and then replied. The two ships fought each other for just under an hour, the *Sydney* taking a torpedo hit, and the *Kormoran* began sinking, her survivors taking to their lifeboats. The *Sydney*, on fire, and having taken a tremendous battering, moved off, probably not under effective control. The ship was never seen again, and there appear to have been no survivors from the cruiser, although a body in a Carley float, presumed from the ship, was later recovered and buried at Christmas Island. These remains have been recovered and are, at the time of writing, being analysed.

There are many controversies associated with the action. Why did the *Sydney* not stand off at the extreme range of *Kormoran* where she would have had the disguised raider under fire from her own more effective weapons? Why did she not deploy her embarked Walrus aircraft for overhead inspection? Some allegations made over the years range from the possible to the extreme. Did *Kormoran* open fire under the German flag as she should have? Were Japanese forces<sup>1</sup> involved – several weeks before they joined WWII with the Pearl Harbor attacks? Were *Sydney* survivors machine-gunned in the water to prevent their speaking out about “war rules” being broken?

To answer such questions, and also to bring closure to the relatives of the *Sydney* ship's company, there has been much pressure over the decades to find the wreck of the cruiser. But can finding the ship give any answers? Spurred on by pictures of the *Titanic* and other vessels on the ocean floor, many people seem to think the finding of *Sydney*'s remains will answer questions. But is this going to be the case?

### **Will an inspection of *Sydney* tell us much about the battle?**

In the main, we want to examine the *Sydney* wreck to see if there are any answers to questions surrounding her final moments. Will there be any clues, as to how the Australian cruiser fought the battle, from the condition of the external hull? *Sydney* engaged in a lengthy fight with a heavily-gunned raider. According<sup>1</sup> to the *Kormoran*'s gunnery officer, Lieutenant Fritz Skeries, the German initially scored:

- 5.9” armament hits on the bridge and [gunnery] director tower;
- further hits on the bridge and amidships;
- a hit on the *Sydney*'s embarked aeroplane;
- effective fire from *Kormoran*'s anti-aircraft machineguns and 3.7-cm guns against *Sydney*'s bridge, torpedo tubes and anti-aircraft batteries

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, titles such as *Who Sank the Sydney?* and *Somewhere Below*.

- a torpedo strike under *Sydney*'s A and B turrets, and then
- many more hits fired by a large number of salvos from the *Kormoran*'s main guns, causing the separation of a turret from the cruiser and setting the ship on fire.

According to Skeries, *Kormoran*, over the course of the conflict, fired 450 rounds from her main armament, and several hundred from her anti-aircraft batteries. (Sub-Lieutenant Bunjes, also on board the raider, in a rather melodramatic account, suggested "about 600" of the 5.9-inch shells;<sup>2</sup> Captain Detmers said "approx. 500 base fuze, 50 nose fuze."<sup>3</sup>) Skeries commented on the final stages of the 55 minute battle<sup>2</sup> that the Australian ship was being constantly hit by gun fire from the raider.<sup>4</sup> *Sydney*, crippled, limped off to the south-east, on fire, with "glare" and "flickerings" showing her presence until around midnight, some eight hours after the action commenced.

Will there indeed be much left of the ship at all? Given the number of hits inflicted by *Kormoran*, and the fact that the Australian vessel was on fire for a long time, we can expect a battered, twisted, charred remnant of a once-proud warship. Indeed, out of 450 rounds fired by the main guns, how many can we expect to have hit? Given that *Sydney*'s ability to manoeuvre was degrading steadily during the battle, we can expect her to receive an increasing number of strikes due to inability to avoid fire, for a period, as the battle continued, although this must be offset by the strikes *Kormoran* was receiving herself, thus reducing her firepower, and offset by the opening range.

When initial firing commenced the distance between the two ships was approximately 1,600 yards. This is an incredibly close distance when one considers that the *Sydney*, when engaged the previous year in combat with two Italian cruisers, the *Bartolomeo Colleoni* and *Giovanni dalle Bande Nere*, opened fire at 20,000 yards, and obtained a hit on one of them within six minutes.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, a German historian, commenting later on the *Kormoran* engagement, said "no guns could miss at such a range".<sup>6</sup> So the *Sydney* began receiving terribly destructive "armour-piercing delayed action fuse"<sup>7</sup> shells which exploded inside the ship.

Throughout the action the range opened, with the German vessel prudently trying to escape. At the final shot it was 6.25 pm, with the range now 11,000 yards. So how many out of at least 450 shots fired would have hit home? One WWII technical set of naval wargame rules shows that at 2,000 yards once your ship has straddled the target, you were then "on", and then two thirds of shots fired would hit at such close range. The probability of achieving hits decreases in proportion to the distance. At 12,000 yards the probability of a hit has dropped to 20% or less.<sup>8</sup>

All things considered, it seems reasonable to expect as an absolute minimum 100 rounds – or at least 25% - of 5.9" hits from the raider. A more realistic assessment is 150 strikes, and even that is being less than generous. (One survivor wrote as a prisoner of war "We suppose she must've got about 400 hits".)<sup>9</sup> It might be thought that some initial strikes at least would have been deterred by the armoured magazines and machinery spaces – the sides having 3.5-inch and three-inch plate<sup>10</sup> respectively.

<sup>2</sup> If we estimate 500 rounds over 60 minutes this is around eight rounds a minute from a broadside of four guns out of *Kormoran*'s six 15 cm/5.9" main armament; that is, each gun firing at least once every 30 seconds. This is well within reality: these weapons were capable of five to seven rounds a minute. See for explanation Naval Weapons. [http://www.navweaps.com/Weapons/WNGER\\_59-45\\_skc16.htm](http://www.navweaps.com/Weapons/WNGER_59-45_skc16.htm) 13 August 2007.

However, the design specifications for the Leander-class dictated that the magazines were to be immune to six-inch fire above 10, 000 yards, and this requirement was met by the fitting of three-inch plate.<sup>11</sup> With this sort of firepower, at such a short range, being directed against the light cruiser, the *Sydney* was doomed.

### **The face of battle – what would this have done to *Sydney*?**

What might the *Sydney*'s ordeal have caused the vessel to look like? In WWI, in the battle between the German cruiser *Emden* – coincidentally against the previous *Sydney* – the *Emden* was hit by “about 100” 6-inch shells over an hour and twenty minutes, and she was “...totally wrecked, with the hull holed at numerous points, its superstructure a blazing shambles...and steering only possible using the screws”.<sup>12</sup> Now, returning to the 1941 engagement, if we add the 3.7-cm fire and the torpedo damage it seems reasonable to presume massive damage, with the *Sydney* barely afloat – it is a tribute to the damage control expertise on board and the ship's company's determination that she was still on the surface. (In fact, naval officers in discussion today reflect surprise, that with that much punishment, the *Sydney* was afloat for as long as she was; a testimony to the characteristics of the Modified Leander class.)

### **Can the damage tell us much about the fight?**

Will the *Sydney* be a battered wreck, or will it be relatively undamaged, having engaged, as some of the “Japanese lobby” claim, in a short sharp fight with the *Kormoran*, which it won, only to be sunk by a Japanese torpedo? The cruiser should be smashed extensively on both sides. According to all *Kormoran* survivor accounts of the battle, it was only around a few minutes after battle was commenced that *Sydney* veered hard to port, and fired a salvo of four torpedoes. The course change took her astern of the *Kormoran*, and exposed her starboard side to the raider. In summary, the combat began with both ships side by side, the *Sydney* on *Kormoran*'s starboard, but then during the battle *Sydney*'s starboard side was exposed.<sup>13</sup>

So if the wreck is found, if it is damaged massively on both sides, this is significant. If a wreck examination bears this out, then the survivors' accounts are supported. Even small supporting pieces of evidence like this can be important. The examination of the wreck of the *Hood*, for example, led to two interesting findings. The first was that *Hood* was in a turn to port when she exploded; there had been some doubt for historians as to whether this turn had commenced. The second was that there was some sort of “catastrophic event” at the bow, whereas before the finding it was thought there was one explosion around the waist sections.

Of course, if the *Sydney* is only damaged on one side, or if her damage differs markedly to what may be expect from receiving over a hundred rounds of six-inch shell fire, then the *Kormoran* accounts are suspect. One<sup>14</sup> book, although based on what looks like faked sources, alleges the cruiser ran into a mine. The damage received from such an encounter is radically different than that received from shell fire; in other words if the *Sydney* does not look like a Leander-class cruiser which has been hit by shellfire and a torpedo, then this will cause the history books to be reopened.

### **Did the cruiser roll on her submergence?**

*Sydney* may have lost significant items of equipment. *Bismarck*, sunk by the Royal Navy in WWII, rolled in her sinking so that all four of her gun turrets fell out of their mounts, but then sank and righted herself so she now lies largely intact on the sea bed. The wreck has been visited many times by deep-sea submarine. Her remains, however, do not tell us much that was not already known from accounts of her last battle. If *Sydney* has lost her guns, this will give even less of a wreck to examine. But if found, the cruiser's guns should be significantly damaged. If they are, it bears out the German raider's account. If not, then there will be cause for further speculation.

Some analysis, written by Captain Peter Hore RN, of the bow compartment flooding, caused by the torpedo strike, suggests that counterflooding in the stern may have contributed to a propensity to roll during the action.<sup>15</sup> "The consequence may have been flooding of sufficient spaces...to cause sudden capsizes." Will *Sydney*'s wreck be right side up, and does that tell us anything? Probably it is a "yes" to the first question, and a "no" to the second. Observation of other battles lead to a conclusion that warships generally finally end up on an even keel. Out of twelve wrecks catalogued from the Battle of Savo Island, for example, ten are keel down; one on its side, and one upside down.<sup>16</sup> *Sydney* will probably be right side up, and inspection will be made easier.

The basic dimensions of the wreck, if she is in one piece, will be a ship of 562 feet, three inches in length, with a beam of 56 ft, 8 inches, or 171.3 metres long x 17.3 wide. Confirming features will include the two funnels and two masts of the Leander-class, and eight guns in twin turrets. The ship's Supermarine Seagull V (Walrus) single-engined aircraft was mounted between the two funnels, but little of it will remain, although the 53-foot (16 metre) launching slide and recovery crane may be located. Leanders also carried four 4-inch single guns and eight torpedo tubes in two quadruple mounts. The condition of all of these will provide further clues as to the veracity of the accounts of the ship's end.

### **Will signs of torpedo strikes be visible in the wreck of the *Sydney*?**

Probably the most controversial suggestion is that the cruiser was hit by a torpedo fired by a Japanese submarine. This damage would be additional to that caused by the *Kormoran*'s single strike with such a weapon. Torpedo damage will have caused considerable damage to the hull. Indeed, one submission to the 1999 inquiry into the loss of the ship suggested the torpedo firing resulted in: "...catching *Sydney* completely by surprise and having her bows almost severed between A & B turrets."<sup>17</sup>

What would be significant is that if there were signs of, say, five torpedo strikes, as the German raider's Captain Detmers thought only one impacted, although he may have been wrong. Even that one torpedo strike will have had a significant result. Torpedoes cause a massive explosion when they hit their target. It might be possible to see if more than one of these weapons impacted, although waterline hits from the six-inch guns will make it more difficult to analyse.

Significantly for the Japanese lobby though, it will be impossible to tell what sort of torpedo – German or Japanese – impacted the hull. Such WWII weapons simply

caused a massive hole affecting several compartments. There is, of course, not going to be traces of any weapon, which exploded, to be found in the hull. However, it may not be possible to even see whether the hull around the waterline has taken torpedo or six-inch shell impact.

Shipwrecks on an even keel invariably sink into the seabed if it is composed of sand and silt. In observations of over a hundred wrecks by the author, this seems to be the case in general. There are indeed exceptions: the wooden clipper *Star of Russia*, in Vanuatu, sits up to a degree of the upper half of her hull protruding, probably due to its composition of wood. The *SS Yongala*, now a largely empty hull, tilts to starboard on a sandy seabed off Townsville, but she remains proud of the seabed, which probably consists of rock below the sand. The submarine *I-124*, sunk with 80 crew on board outside Darwin, was for decades airtight in her bow compartments, causing the wreck to sit up off the sand to an extent sandy tunnels existed under the hull from one side the other.<sup>18</sup> But most ships, especially if they contain heavy cargoes, sink down into the sea floor to at least their Plimsoll line.

Given that the wreck, if it is sitting on an even keel, will have sunk into the seabed, it will be difficult to see if there are torpedo holes below the waterline, especially as along the sides of the hull there will also be much 5.9-inch and 3.7-inch damage. During a speech in 1994 in the NSW Parliament it was suggested that *Kormoran* "survivors estimated that she [*Sydney*] received up to 50 shell hits on the waterline".<sup>19</sup> The *Proceedings* of the 2001 Wreck Finding Seminar quoted *Jane's Fighting Ships* of 1943 as concluding the German 15-centimetre gun as "capable of defeating 5 inches of armour plate at 3,000 yards".<sup>20</sup> Given *Sydney's* lesser plate and much closer impact range, we can expect the hull of the cruiser to be much punctured and damaged, but wreck detectives should be prepared to be unable to see the complete hull.

### **Will there be human remains in the *Sydney*?**

There is often little left internally in a ship's remains which can enlighten historical analysis. Anything not made of very tough materials does not survive in a ship wreck. Paper disappears, breaking up, eaten by fish, generally dispersing. Wood becomes porous and crumbles. Human remains disappear. Human remains are dispersed by tide and fish.<sup>3</sup> While softer tissue vanishes, bones too eventually dissolve.<sup>4</sup> This takes a comparatively short time. An example is the case of *USS Peary*, sunk in battle with 91 people on board on 19 February 1942.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Section IV of William D Haglund and Marcella h. Sorg. *Forensic Taphonomy: The Postmortem Fate of Human Remains*, which discusses "Decomposition of buried and submerged bodies". Sea water is corrosive on bones below a certain depth variably depending on the salinity, temperature, and other facts.

<sup>4</sup> Bone carbonate becomes more soluble at higher water pressures, but the rates of erosion are very slow. Even at extreme depths (thousands of metres) the erosion rate is measured in the tens of micrometres per year. Thus a 1 cm thick bone at 2000 metres decaying at 100 micrometres per year would be expected to decay in about 100 years. Trials have shown variations in the rate of dissolution at deep depths from 10 micrometres per year to over 200. The *Titanic*, for example, has pairs of boots side by side as the only remaining evidence of human remains – she is deep enough for dissolution to work over the many decades that passed before she was discovered. In summary, the deeper the wreck's location the less likely it is to be that human bones will be present.

Further, sedimentation rates in many locations are fast enough so that bones in a wreck's debris field would be quickly buried in sediment, so would only be detectable by a thorough search under the seabed around *Sydney*. This is unlikely to take place for sensitivity reasons, so these bones will stay hidden. Of the ship's company inside the ship there may be remains present – many of the crew would have died at their stations deep within the ship – but wreck interior exploration is unlikely to take place, with the ship regarded by many as a grave.

References: "Calcium carbonate dissolution rates in hydrothermal vent fields of the Guaymas Basin". Richard A. Lutz; Michael J. Kennish; Alan S. Pooley; Lowell W. Fritz. *Journal of Marine Research*, Volume 52, Number 5, 1 September 1994, pp. 969-982(14). The author extends thanks to Dr Steve Cole for the reference and his clarifying remarks.

*Peary* was one of many ships in Darwin Harbour when Japanese forces launched their first attack on Australia. She fought hard but was hit by a small bomb and sank quickly by the stern. Post war her location was sought by the USA's War Graves people. Despite sinking in full view of hundreds of people, quite close to shore, she could not be found. Fourteen years later *HMAS Quadrant* found her by accident, proceeding into Darwin Harbour with her echo sounder operating. The wreck, located in a deeper than normal part of the harbour, was explored by divers, initially for the purpose of finding human remains. They located only "some human bones, specifically in the wardroom passage and the yeomen's office. Eventually these were recovered and returned to America for burial."<sup>21</sup> So after only 14 years, most of 91 sets of human remains had disappeared. So it likely be with the *Sydney*. There will be no compartment of the ship left unflooded, particularly considering the depth at which the ship lies – the tremendous pressures of the deep ocean around where she sank will ensure that. The ship will be open fully to the sea, and it is almost certain human remains will not be present.

### **Did *Kormoran* explode?**

*Kormoran* was carrying a cargo of mines, although it seems from examination of the prisoners' statements, which freely admitted the presence of several hundred, that none were ever used for their intended purpose. Instead they were wired to scuttle the ship.

McDonald, quoting Detmers' account, related that the mines exploded and the *Kormoran* began to sink. The ship's commander stated a "gigantic sheet of flame shot into the air perhaps a 1,000 feet". (McDonald interviewed another survivor who repeated the account.<sup>22</sup>) Detmers stated in his interrogation diary: "Explosive charge in port forward oil tank... touched off charge, last boat cast off. Mines explode. Ship sinks rapidly stern first."<sup>23</sup>

It seems implied that the mines were set to explode, relating that the preparations for scuttling took "five and a half hours". Frame concludes<sup>24</sup> that at 0100, a "charge" exploded; and 25 minutes later, "the mines exploded". He further quotes Heinz Messerschmidt, a specialist in underwater weapons and Detmers' secretary, as preparing the explosive charges and using the mines on board to blow up the ship.<sup>25</sup> Quite a few of the *Kormoran* survivors knew of the mines being used to destroy the vessel. Albert Ruf, an engine room rating, stated mines were carried aft and "probably were the cause of the vessel blowing up".<sup>26</sup> One survivor wrote later in a letter: "At half past 10, we blowed up (sic) our ship,"<sup>27</sup> although Oskar Marwinski thought the blowing up of the *Kormoran* may have been "accidental".<sup>28</sup> Petty Officer Paul Kobelt said, while being held as a POW, that the crew: "used the mines for blowing up the ship".<sup>29</sup>

In general, it can be concluded that the raider was destroyed, by explosion, around midnight on the 19<sup>th</sup>. The raider's Sub-Lieutenant Bunjes, in his account of the action, saw the raider explode shortly after midnight.<sup>30</sup> The summary of the account, presented to the Australian War Cabinet on 4 December, stated: "At about 1815H the raider's crew abandoned ship, and at midnight the vessel, which was scuttled, blew

up.”<sup>31</sup> This concurs with the summary of the *Kormoran* prisoners, which stated the raider was “blown up around midnight”.<sup>32</sup>

The final explosion was massive. *Kormoran* survivor Herman Ortmann related to Glenys McDonald his escape from the burning raider, where he and his fellows in the lifeboat “rowed like mad to get as far away from the *Kormoran* before it blew up thirty minutes later”, and he also described steel raining down all around them.<sup>33</sup> It may have been seen from the West Australian coast. McDonald interviewed a reliable witness who, together with her husband, heard and saw “noises and saw smoke in the north-west over Dirk Hartog Island; there were heavy booms, flashes and flares, grey and black smoke and a huge explosion, followed by silence.”<sup>34</sup> However, this account, placed by the witnesses’ surrounding description of the evening’s radio programs, seems inaccurate in time – around 6.30pm.

So will *Kormoran* be in one piece, and therefore be able to become, if found, a beginning search point for the search for the *Sydney*? We might expect the mines to have caused such massive damage that the ship is in so many pieces that she is not a complete wreck any more. It is probably more the case though, that as the mines were not distributed around the ship, that she suffered massive damage in one place.

### **Will *Sydney*’s wreck be in one place? Was there an explosion?**

Shipwrecks more often than not do not remain intact. Sometimes they break apart from the stresses engaged in the disproportionate pressures necessitated in compartments being flooded. *Titanic*, for example, although involved in a fairly simple collision – ie: no-one was killed in the initial collision with an iceberg, and she settled slowly over around three hours – finally broke in half during her sinking. Ships involved in battle suffer considerable damage which can lead to much more break up. *HMS Hood*, for example, was sunk in the Atlantic in WWII, in a brief fight with German naval units *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen*. She caught fire, and shortly afterwards exploded. The wreck, found in 2001 by Blue Water Recoveries, is scattered over three main sites, with “debris fields” nearby.

Even if the cruiser did not break apart in her dive to the bottom of the sea, she may have broken up through explosion. Did *Sydney* explode, and if she did, what are implications for the wreck? Any explosion is going to mean a further scattering of wreck fragments, although depending on the force of the blast, not necessarily to a huge extent. There are a few, but only a few, accounts of *Sydney* blowing up. Frame quotes one *Kormoran* survivor as speaking of “the cruiser exploding as they rowed towards her in the hope of being picked up”.<sup>35</sup>

Captain Detmers is on record as thinking she blew up. He said:

I had been badly hit and was making preparations to abandon my ship. Before leaving, I looked around and in the darkness, I could see *Sydney* still blazing fiercely. Then just before abandoning ship, I looked for the *Sydney* but she had gone. All was blackness...My opinion is that *Sydney* had been hit by me at a vital spot, and the fire reached the magazine and that she blew up and sank. I do not think there could have been any survivors.<sup>36</sup>

However, there are few other suggestions. The 1999 Senate Committee of Inquiry examined this theory (see Chapter Six) but concluded: “it is difficult to assess the veracity of such claims when there is no evidence, for example from interrogations, that German survivors actually witnessed *Sydney* exploding.” If there had been an explosion, there might be nothing of a wreck to find. A heavily damaged ship, which eventually explodes, might be in several small parts so that what constitutes the wreck is scattered into several pieces. Items falling to the seabed would eventually sink further into the mud or sand. However, in the light of any evidence, the explosion possibility must be largely discounted, although unverified reports<sup>37</sup> continue.

### **How quickly did the cruiser sink?**

Although we can reject an explosion, there seems ample evidence the Australian ship sank quickly. Gill thought: “It is not surprising that there were no survivors, for after the punishment she received from the shells and bullets, and the ravages of fires on board, it is unlikely that much that could float remained.”<sup>38</sup> Frame quotes *Kormoran* crewman Tymmers, who suggested “the cruiser sank at about 1930”,<sup>39</sup> and later Radio Operator Hans Linke, who when in the raider’s boats during the scuttling operations, noted that “the boats rowed towards the cruiser in the hope of being picked up; she was on fire amidships and astern, and disappeared so suddenly she was believed sunk”.<sup>40</sup>

Captain Dechaineux’s report to the Naval Board concluded “Survivors stated...at about 1900, cruiser was seen still heavily on fire and shortly afterwards disappeared. No violent explosion was seen or heard.”<sup>41</sup> Dechaineux went on to say: “Most evidence seems to show that the cruiser disappeared suddenly and most prisoners believe that she sank before midnight”.<sup>42</sup>

The interrogation of the prisoners summarized: “From darkness until about 230019, the glow of the burning “*Sydney*” could be seen about 14 or 15 miles away to the south eastward, but at a later time this glow disappeared and the raider’s crew believe that she sank.”<sup>43</sup>

Midshipman Otto Joergensen noted of he and his fellow survivors that “when in their boat they saw the fire on *Sydney* suddenly vanish having then been in their lifeboat for 1 hour. They heard no explosion.”<sup>44</sup>

Crewman Willy Tummers saw the cruiser on fire after the action and noted “burning suddenly extinguished...they think she sank about 7.30”.<sup>45</sup> However, the summary of the prisoners’ interrogation concluded “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.”<sup>46</sup>

Several *Kormoran* survivor interrogation reports noted that the cruiser, after she was hit by the torpedo, was down in the bows, most estimating by six feet.<sup>47</sup> This suggests quite heavy flooding in that area. Given evidence that the forward turrets were paralysed, there can be some conclusion that this area was heavily damaged, with damage control equipment in the area perhaps out of action. Captain Hore’s analysis above contributes to thinking that the *Sydney* may have capsized and sunk quickly.



Interestingly, a summary of the accounts above suggest that *Sydney* may not be far from the wreck of the *Kormoran*. She seems to have sunk quite quickly and still within view of the survivors in their lifeboats. Although we have suggested that the wreck of the *Kormoran* may have somewhat disintegrated, finding it will still prove useful in acting as a datum for a *Sydney* search.

### **What can the wreck of the *Sydney* tell us?**

What may we conclude is the final scene? The German raider *Kormoran* is probably only going to exist as a fragment of a ship. The *Sydney* wreck is going to be in one piece, perhaps with sections missing. She is likely to be on an even keel, but is going to be so battered that her hull exterior will be insufficient to add to the story. This was, after all, a light cruiser which was hit by hundreds of highly explosive shells, and a torpedo; was on fire “from the bridge to the after funnel”<sup>48</sup> when last seen, and was according to the experienced sailors who were abandoning *Kormoran*, to be hardly functioning. The *Sydney* wreck, if found, is going to be so badly damaged that a survey of it will tell us only a little of her final moments. The ship’s remains are now 66 years old, and upright sections will have corroded and probably fallen in on the remainder. It will be heavily covered with marine growth which will have become concretions in many parts. Many sections will not be distinguishable as parts of a ship. Penetration of the wreck is certain to be strictly forbidden, as although human remains are unlikely to be present, the site will be considered a war grave out of respect for the feelings of the families of the 645 members of the Royal Australian Navy lost with the vessel.

However, inspection of the wreck is likely to be possible to the extent that it will somewhat corroborate the *Kormoran* survivors’ account – that their ship pounded the Australian cruiser at close range on both sides extremely heavily with six-inch shell fire, a torpedo, and smaller calibre gunfire. Anything different from this will constitute further debate.

Given that this picture is the one most accepted by most historians, and that there has been no variation in it over the years from the *Kormoran* survivors, it is likely that it is the truth. It is unlikely that the wreck of *HMAS Sydney* will contribute any conclusive answers to the mystery of why this cruiser took her ship’s company to the grave. But one aspect of examining the wreck, and finding that it confirms the *Kormoran* survivors’ account, is that this will finally end alternative speculation, which in some cases has amounted to derogatory and hurtful suggestions.

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<sup>1</sup> Gill, G. Hermon. *Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942*. Melbourne: Collins, 1957. (454) Gill had access to Detmers' Action Report, which has been much reproduced – for example, see inbetween pages 45-46 of the Proceedings of the 2001 Wreck Location Seminar, where Detmers gives these numbers in his concluding paragraphs.

<sup>2</sup> Frame, Tom. *HMAS Sydney: Loss and Controversy*. (92)

<sup>3</sup> Australian Archives. (Melbourne) "Kormoran" - Translation of Diaries. B6121/398682. (4)

<sup>4</sup> Gill. (456)

<sup>5</sup> See Gill (pp. 188-190)

<sup>6</sup> Von der Porten, EP. *The German Navy in WWII*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1976. (p. 153)

<sup>7</sup> Interview with the ADC to Captain Detmers carried out by ABC TV *Rewind* program, in 2004.

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<sup>8</sup> Gill, LL. *General Quarters*. Fridley: Minn., 1975.

<sup>9</sup> Australian Archives (Melbourne) "'Kormoran'(Raider No. 41) - 'G' German AMC - Interrogation of Prisoners". B6121/164M (7). Note: this item in Australian Archives contains 491 pages, photographed from the original as jpg files. The pages are not numbered; rather the page number referred to here relates to the number ascribed by AA to the photographed page.

<sup>10</sup> Raven, Alan, and John Roberts. *British Cruisers of World War II*. London: Arms and Armour Press, 1980. (p. 416)

<sup>11</sup> Raven and Roberts. *British Cruisers of World War II*. (p. 143)

<sup>12</sup> Coulthard-Clark, Chris. *The Encyclopedia of Australia's Battles*. Melbourne: Allen and Unwin, 1998. (98)

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Frame (pp. 86-87)

<sup>14</sup> Montagu, John A. *The Lost Souls and Ghosts of HMAS Sydney II 1941*. Perth: self-published, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Hore, Captain Peter. (Ed.) *HMAS Sydney II. The cruiser and the controversy in the archives of the United Kingdom*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2001. (261)

<sup>16</sup> See pages 200-201: "The Sunken Battlefield of Iron Bottom Sound", in Ballard, Robert D. *The Lost Ships of Guadalcanal*. Ontario: Madison Books, 1993.

<sup>17</sup> Parliament of Australia. Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. Report No 87. Report on the Loss of HMAS Sydney. <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ifadt/reports.htm> 1 July 2007. Chapter 4.

<sup>18</sup> Lewis, Tom. *Sensuikan I-124*. Darwin: Tall Stories, 1997.

<sup>19</sup> NSW Parliament. Hansard recordings of 3 March 1994. Speech by Hon. RB Rowland Smith

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<sup>20</sup> Royal Australian Navy Seapower Centre. *HMAS Sydney II Proceedings of the Wreck Location Seminar*. 16 November 2001. (43)

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, Tom. *Wrecks in Darwin Waters*. Sydney: Turton and Armstrong, 1992. (32)

<sup>22</sup> McDonald, Glenys. *Seeking the Sydney*. (13)

<sup>23</sup> Australian Archives. (Melbourne) "Kormoran" - Translation of Diaries. B6121/398682. (8)

<sup>24</sup> Frame, Tom. *HMAS Sydney: Loss and Controversy*. (87)

<sup>25</sup> Frame, Tom. *HMAS Sydney: Loss and Controversy*. (90)

<sup>26</sup> Australian Archives. (Melbourne) "Interrogation of German Survivors ex Raider 41 "Kormoran"" MP1049/5/2026/19/6. (20)

<sup>27</sup> Australian Archives (Melbourne) "'Kormoran'(Raider No. 41) - 'G' German AMC - Interrogation of Prisoners". B6121/164M (7)

<sup>28</sup> Australian Archives. (Melbourne) "Interrogation of German Survivors ex Raider 41 "Kormoran"" MP1049/5/2026/19/6. (28)

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- <sup>29</sup> Australian Archives (Melbourne) "'Kormoran'(Raider No. 41) - 'G' German AMC - Interrogation of Prisoners". B6121/ 164M (27)
- <sup>30</sup> Frame, Tom. *HMAS Sydney: Loss and Controversy*. (92)
- <sup>31</sup> Frame, Tom. *HMAS Sydney: Loss and Controversy*. (85)
- <sup>32</sup> Australian Archives (Melbourne) "'Kormoran'(Raider No. 41) - 'G' German AMC - Interrogation of Prisoners". B6121/ 164M (178).
- <sup>33</sup> McDonald, Glenys, *Seeking the Sydney*. (83-84)
- <sup>34</sup> McDonald, Glenys, *Seeking the Sydney*. (43)
- <sup>35</sup> Frame, Tom. *HMAS Sydney: Loss and Controversy*. (103)
- <sup>36</sup> Australian Archives. (Melbourne) "Kormoran" - Translation of Diaries. B6121/398682. (4)
- <sup>37</sup> See, for example, "Tales of the Sea: HMAS Sydney vs. HSK Kormoran." 25 February, 2007. <http://lefarkins.blogspot.com/2006/12/tales-of-sea-hmas-sydney-vs-hsk.html> 1 July 2007, and Wikipedia's entry for *Kormoran*: "Sydney was last seen by the crew of *Kormoran* in flames on the horizon followed by some kind of explosion". 1 July 2007.
- <sup>38</sup> Gill, G. Hermon. *Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942*. Melbourne: Collins, 1957. (459)
- <sup>39</sup> Frame, Tom. *HMAS Sydney: Loss and Controversy*. (94)
- <sup>40</sup> Frame, Tom. *HMAS Sydney: Loss and Controversy*. (103)
- <sup>41</sup> Frame, Tom. *HMAS Sydney: Loss and Controversy*. (94)
- <sup>42</sup> Frame, Tom. *HMAS Sydney: Loss and Controversy*. (95)
- <sup>43</sup> Australian Archives. (Melbourne) "Interrogation of German Survivors ex Raider 41 "Kormoran"" MP1049/5/2026/19/6. (9-10)
- <sup>44</sup> Australian Archives (Melbourne) "'Kormoran'(Raider No. 41) - 'G' German AMC - Interrogation of Prisoners". B6121/ 164M (63)
- <sup>45</sup> Australian Archives (Melbourne) "'Kormoran'(Raider No. 41) - 'G' German AMC - Interrogation of Prisoners". B6121/ 164M (112)
- <sup>46</sup> Australian Archives (Melbourne) "'Kormoran'(Raider No. 41) - 'G' German AMC - Interrogation of Prisoners". B6121/ 164M (178).
- <sup>47</sup> See summary page 178. Australian Archives (Melbourne) "'Kormoran'(Raider No. 41) - 'G' German AMC - Interrogation of Prisoners". B6121/ 164M.
- <sup>48</sup> Gill (456)