

MINUTES

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ADVISORY WAR COUNCIL MEETING.

CANBERRA, 28th NOVEMBER, 1941.

PRESENT: The Hon. John Curtin, M.P., Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Co-ordination.
 The Hon. F.M. Forde, M.P., Minister for the Army.
 The Hon. H.V. Evatt, K.C., M.P., Attorney-General and Minister for External Affairs.
 The Hon. J.A. Beasley, M.P., Minister for Supply and Development.
 The Hon. H.J.C. Makin, M.P., Minister for the Navy and Minister for Munitions.
 The Hon. A.W. Fadden, M.P.
 The Rt. Hon. W.M. Hughes, C.E., K.C., M.P.
 The Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies, K.C., M.P.
 The Hon. F.C. Spender, K.C., M.P.
 The Hon. J. McEwen, M.P.

(571) H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY".

(Previous reference - Minute No. (366)).

The Minister for the Navy read the following summary of information obtained from German survivors of "Kormorant" on board the "Trossa" :-

Teleprinter Message M.2799 -

(A) Description of Action:

"Kormorant", steering north, sighted from starboard bow ship steering south at about 1600 hours 19th. Raider altered course to the westward, bringing cruiser on to starboard quarter. Cruiser altered course to the westward, closed rapidly, challenging with daylight lamp. Raider made no reply but opened fire when cruiser was within comparatively short range. Estimated range varies from about 1 to 5 or 6 miles. One survivor stated he could see men on deck of cruiser. First shot from raider hit cruiser's bridge and started fire. Cruiser altered course to port. Survivors stated that it appeared that he intended to ram. Passed close round stern of raider and proceeded on parallel course, gradually drawing ahead on port side of the raider. Cruiser was now heavily on fire in bridge and midships section. Raider also badly damaged and on fire in engine room area. Hit in engine room put electrical controls out of action. Literally all electrical equipment, including fire fighting, inoperative. Action commenced at about 1730 and lasted for about one hour.

Raider abandoned ship at about 1900 hours, her reason that fire could not be put out, and it was certain that fire would reach ammunition storage. Survivors stated captain and officers were on board when they abandoned ship at about 1900. At this time cruiser was seen still heavily on fire and shortly afterwards disappeared. No violent explosion was seen or heard. They believe she was torpedoed. Three torpedoes were fired by the raider, one of which thought to have hit. Raider blew up about midnight.

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359(2) Armament of raider:

6 15-centimetre guns;
 4 8-centimetre A.A. guns;
 Machine guns not used;
 2 above-water and 1 submarine torpedo tube besides;
 1 aeroplane . . . stated to have been damaged and not
 flown for three months, and possibly more were carried;
 150-200 mines were carried, but stated that none had been
 laid.

(3) Complement:

About 400.

(4) Activity:

Left Doshanensen near Danzig December, 1940. Proceeded
 north about to Atlantic and Indian Ocean via Cape of Good Hope.
 Ships sunk stated as -

"Antonica"
 "Africa Star"
 "Agnita"
 "Rafatan"
 "British Union"
 "Hareeba"
 "Delevit"
 "Embiricos"
 "Nikoklis"

Survivors stated they had not sighted any land since leaving
 Norwegian coast. Two supply ships met with. Prisoners trans-
 ferred to these, as also to "Hafolite" which ship was des-
 patched with a prize crew.

(5) Generally considered that, with few exceptions, survivors
 spoke the truth.

Captain's name Dettmer (commander of destroyer prior to taking
 command of raider).

Teleprinter Message M.2601 -

The raider captain confirms the previous reports with the
 addition that the action took place in latitude 28°, longitude
 111°. He states that "Sydney's" two torpedoes missed. The
 raider's torpedo hit forward and the salvo hit "Sydney" amid-
 ships. "Sydney" was badly on fire. The action began at 1600
 on 19th November and was broken off at 1830. The raider was
 struck in the engine room and was on fire. H.M.A.S. "Sydney"
 was last seen turning behind a smoke screen, turning 150° S
 from the raider and steering south at about 5 knots. The
 raider had 25 killed. The remainder of a crew of 400 in boats
 and rafts experienced bad weather.

2. The Prime Minister said that no public statement would be
 made until the Naval authorities indicated that it was opportune for
 this to be done.

(572) LOSS OF H.M.A.S. "FARRAMATTA".

The Minister for the Navy stated that advice had been re-
 ceived that H.M.A. Sloop "Farramatta" had been sunk outside Tobruk.
 It is known that there are survivors and the Admiralty have been
 asked for full information.

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It was agreed that the same procedure in regard to publicity should be followed as has been adopted in the case of the "Sydney", i.e. no public statement will be made until the Naval authorities consider it opportune for this to be done.

(373) AGENDUM No. 140/19-1 - CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN U.S.A. AND JAPAN.

The Minister for External Affairs traversed the cablegrams relating to the progress of the conversations between the United States of America and Japan, and outlined the substance of the following cablegrams, which were received subsequent to the circulation of the Agendum :-

Dominions Office cablegram M.383 of 25/11/41 - Observations of the Netherlands Government on Japanese proposals.

High Commissioner's cablegram No. 106 of 25/11/41 - Views of High Commissioner.

Sir Earle Page's cablegram No. P.7 of 25/11/41 - Views of Sir Earle Page.

Dominions Office cablegrams M.387 and M.386 of 26/11/41 - Report of United Kingdom Ambassador's interview with U.S. Secretary of State, giving latter's reactions to the United Kingdom Government's comments on the United States counter-proposals.

Australian Minister Washington's cablegram 1037 of 26/11/41 - Advice of Chinese opposition to *modus vivendi* and of action taken by U.S. Secretary of State to give to Japanese representative document of a general nature but containing no reference to *modus vivendi*.

RELAXATION OF ECONOMIC RESTRICTIONS.

2. Reference was made to Kurusu's request (cablegram 924 of 18th November from the Australian Minister, Washington) that "if Japanese were now to withdraw their troops from Indo-China could United States Government and other countries concerned ease their economic pressure to the point of sending small quantities of rice and oil far below full requirements of Japan, Japanese guaranteeing that nothing would find its way to Japanese forces."

The question whether this included edible oils as well as petroleum was discussed. A distinction exists between supplies of importance to the welfare of the Japanese civil population and those of direct importance to Japanese war potential. Edible oils come within the first category and unless they are supplied, the Japanese masses would "fall into the hands of the extremists."

POSITION OF CHINA.

3. The importance of safeguarding the interests of China was discussed and the representations of Chiang Kai Shek referred to in Mr. Casey's cablegram 1037 were noted.

4. Mr. Menzies suggested that a cablegram be sent to the Australian Minister at Chungking requesting him, in collaboration with the British Ambassador, to put to Chiang Kai Shek the following points :-

(a) Our settled policy is to do nothing to prejudice the interests of China;

Signed on page 8 :-

F. G. Shedden
Secretary

John Curtin
Prime Minister

Jan Salisbury,
Nav Cabinet Secretariat
8.7.2008