


Tel: Mail: 25th August 2008

The Secretary,
HMAS SYDNEY II,
Commission of Inquiry,
Level 18,
Defence Plaza,
270, Pitt Street,
Sydney NSW 2000
Australia

Dear Sir,

HMAS SYDNEY II COMMISSION OF INQUIRY – SUBMISSION

I understand from the Royal Australian navy website that you are the appropriate point of contact for submissions to the above inquiry. As a purely amateur naval historian with a particular interest in British-built cruisers of the Second World War era I have been following the story of SYDNEY's discovery with some interest. It is on the basis of this admittedly weak background that I wish to make a submission.

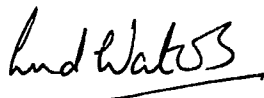
I have noted from the news coverage of SYDNEY's discovery that there is already considerable speculation that the ultimate cause of the ship's loss was the breaking away of her torpedo-damaged bow in deteriorating weather conditions. I understand that the facts that the bow section was discovered some 400 metres from the main hull section and that this remaining section hit the ocean bed stern first are key factors in this analysis. Given that this hypothesis has been presented by experts with far more professional experience and first hand knowledge than myself, it might well be the correct explanation. However, there are a number of points in this explanation that concern me, viz.

- Whilst a number of British cruisers of broadly similar design to SYDNEY lost their bows to torpedo hits during the course of the Second World War, I am not aware that this was ever the cause of one of these ships sinking. For example, HMS LIVERPOOL in 1940 and HMS ARGONAUT in 1942 were both brought into harbour after suffering very extensive forward damage as a result of torpedo hits.
- In addition, my discussions with acquaintances from the UK's Royal Corps of Naval Constructors leads me to believe that the break away of the bow section should not, in itself, have caused the ship to sink immediately – this would only have happened after subsequent failure of bulkheads in the main hull. In fact, I am told that in some circumstances the separation of the bows might have improved the stability of the remaining hull.

- Finally, by far the major cause of the sinking of British cruisers of SYDNEY's era is known to have been loss of stability/capsize due to the incorporation of wing compartments outboard of the aft machinery spaces. This design feature was introduced alongside the unit machinery arrangement first seen in the AMPHION/modified LEANDER class of which SYDNEY formed a member to provide an additional layer of protection. Whilst successful in protecting the aft boiler rooms of these cruisers to local damage, it was found that the design left them extremely vulnerable to capsize as a result of asymmetrical flooding as a result of either torpedo or shell fire damage in the machinery spaces. Given that German accounts suggest SYDNEY's propulsion system was specifically targeted in the action and published photos of the wreck show significant damage in this area, it might be worth investigating the possibility that SYDNEY was lost to partial capsize as a result of progressive flooding from shell fire damage near the waterline. Under this scenario, the damaged bow section might have broken away as a result of SYDNEY taking her death plunge rather than because of it.

It might well be that this hypothesis has already been considered and discounted on the basis of other evidence put to the Commission. However, I wanted to ensure that it was, at least, brought to the Inquiry's attention as relevant studies of the subject published in the UK might not have a similar level of profile in Australia.

Yours faithfully,



Conrad Waters