

22 Conspiracy: cover-up theories

22.1 A number of 'cover-up' theories have been advanced in relation to the search for SYDNEY and its survivors. The main advocate of such theories was GPCAPT CAV Bourne MBE, now deceased. GPCAPT Bourne made many submissions to the Parliamentary Inquiry – amounting to about 250 pages.

22.2 In summary, GPCAPT Bourne made two major allegations:

- Area Command Headquarters Fremantle knew of the loss of SYDNEY on 19 November 1941.¹
- Between 0600H and 0700H on 23 November 1941 AQUITANIA sent a signal reporting the rescue of German sailors and, it seems, details of the encounter with SYDNEY. This led to an air search on the morning of 23 November² but only by one aircraft, fortuitously manned by FLGOFF Bourne.

These allegations are serious. They are allegations that, knowing SYDNEY had been sunk, authorities left any survivors to the perils of the sea.

If the first allegation was true, it means that, knowing of the loss of SYDNEY on 19 November, military authorities did nothing to search for survivors for five days: a full search did not begin until 0800H on 24 November. If the second allegation was true, authorities did nothing about mounting a search for about 24 hours.

22.3 These allegations have been supported at various times and to varying extents by:

- Mr Michael Montgomery³
- Mr John Doohan⁴
- Ms Glenys McDonald⁵
- Dr John McArthur⁶

¹ PINQ.SUBS.019.0025

² PINQ.SUBS.005.0100 at 0107

³ WAM.008.0082_R; NHQ.001.0080; CORR.003.0032

⁴ WAM.025.0010; PINQ.SUBS.019.0028; TRAN.028.0001_R at 0016_R and 0020_R

⁵ PINQ.TRANS.004.0001 at 0024 to 0025

⁶ USQ.001.0003 at 0056

- Mr Robert Lloyd⁷
- Mr George Bell.⁸

22.4 GPCAPT Bourne alleged that there was a cover-up by Naval authorities to hide both the fact of their early knowledge of SYDNEY's loss and their failure to take action to seek survivors. He further alleged that, to effect this cover-up, various steps were taken that involved the creation of false records, the rewriting and editing of records such as the South Western Area Combined Headquarters logs, falsely reporting on interrogations, and other matters to which I refer in this chapter.

22.5 It seems that it was GPCAPT Bourne's view that this cover-up was engaged in by the Minister for the Navy, the First and Second Naval Members, and the other members of the Naval Board. He wrote:

It also adds weight to my belief that the CNS [Chief of Naval Staff] and indeed the whole Naval Board were party to the plan to cover up the fact that the Aquitania did break radio silence and a sufficient trail of documentation produced to convince future historians that she did not do so.⁹

22.6 The reason alleged for this cover-up was as follows:

Finally, I allege that all this Trocas activity was to cover up the fact that Aquitania had broken radio silence some 33 hours earlier to advise that she too had picked up a raft (see my paper HMT Aquitania 2nd Edition) and had not ordered an immediate large scale sea and air search on Sunday 23rd November 1941. This wasting and filling in of time since the actual sinking of HMAS Sydney on the evening of Wednesday 19th November 1941 is a complex issue best told by SRG [the Sydney Research Group] researcher John Doohan in his "Scenario". In brief nothing was to be seen or discovered to prevent the sailing of the Japanese Fleet on Wednesday the 26th November 1941 for the attack on Pearl Harbour which would bring the USA into World War 2 as planned by Churchill and Roosevelt.

Preservation of the secrecy of the breaking of the Japanese Main Fleet Code JN25 was paramount and absolute and remained so for all of World War 2. The sinking of HMAS Sydney was just a small hiccup in the strategic planning of these two World War 2 leaders. She and her 645 Australian crew were expendable in their eyes and in the "Grand Design" as were the 3000 men in Hawaii and the Australian 8th Division in Malaya.¹⁰

⁷ CORR.008.0090_R at 0091_R

⁸ PINQ.SUBS.016.0054

⁹ PINQ.SUBS.008.0036 at 0041

¹⁰ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0085

22.7 GPCAPT Bourne summarised his allegations in his submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry, entitled 'Deceit by the RAN Chief of Naval Staff':

It is submitted that Admiral Royle post dated his initials and comment after his return to Australia. His actions showed that he was at the centre of the vast web of deceit which the Navy Office had built up around the Aquitania to conceal the fact that her Captain Gibbons had broken radio silence at about 7.00 am WST on Sunday 23 November 1941 to report the rescue of twenty six German sailors from a raft, two nearby crowded lifeboats which apparently did not try to attract attention and a fictitious battle area 130 nms South West of Fremantle. But even more important was to cover the facts that the ACNB [Australian Commonwealth Naval Board] had taken no physical action following the W/T receipt PM hrs on Wednesday 19 November 1941 on HMAS Sydney's signals and again took no action when a second W/T signal was received from the Aquitania 4 days later indicating very clearly that a battle had taken place in which HMAS Sydney had been lost.

In an attempt to explain the delay of 5 days before the first official air search for HMAS Sydney began on Monday 24 November 1941 the ACNB conceived the plot of Aquitania maintaining radio silence about the raft rescue and only passing a visual signal to the PWSS [Port War Signal Station] on Wilson's Promontory at 1320 K/27 November 1941. Captain Gibbons was made the scapegoat for the ACNB's failure to take any earlier action after the 19th November 1941 other than to send signals.¹¹

22.8 The allegations are of asserted circumstances that are contrary to established fact.

22.9 As appears from the chronology of the search in Chapter 10:

- SYDNEY was not expected to return to Fremantle until 'P.M. Thursday' 20 November.¹²
- It was not reported to the Naval Board that SYDNEY had not yet arrived until 0940H on 21 November.¹³
- The Naval Board signalled to SYDNEY to 'Report your E.T.A. at Fremantle' at
 - 1036H on 23 November 1941¹⁴

¹¹ PINQ.SUBS.016.0007 at 0009 to 0010

¹² SPC.006.0002

¹³ NAA.026.0469

¹⁴ NAA.026.0466

- 1854H on 23 November 1941¹⁵
- 2236H on 23 November 1941.¹⁶

The notion that the Naval Board sent these signals, having been told either on 19 November or earlier than 1036H on 23 November that SYDNEY had been sunk is absurd.

22.10 The allegation that at about 0700H on 23 November AQUITANIA told the Naval Board German survivors had been picked up is also contrary to established fact.

The evidence—both from the captain of AQUITANIA and from other sources—is that AQUITANIA first advised of rescuing German survivors when passing Wilsons Promontory on 27 November 1941.¹⁷ She arrived in SYDNEY on 28 November.¹⁸ The Naval Board’s immediate response was to signal the Naval Officer Commanding (Sydney) on 29 November 1941, ‘Request you investigate reasons which guided AQUITANIA in *not* reporting by W/T recovery of enemy survivors or closing Rottneest P.W.S.S. and reporting by V/S’[emphasis added].¹⁹

The Naval Officer Commanding (Sydney), CDRE Muirhead-Gould, conducted an inquiry. On 1 December 1941 he signalled to the Naval Board the results:

Your 0724/29. Captain Gibbons “AQUITANIA” states that after interrogating German survivors about noon local time 23rd November it never occurred to him that a cruiser would sink a raider without informing Naval authorities unless there was some special reason for maintaining wireless silence. He felt strictly bound by C.A.M.S.I. number 63 in case he should interfere with some naval operation. Secondly he knew that raider carried mines and decided not to approach Rottneest in case he should take his ship into dangerous waters. Thirdly when he intercepted “TROCAS” 1700/24 in reply to A.C.N.B. 1052/24 he had already rounded Leeuwin and as he could not add any useful information decided to maintain wireless silence. A written report will be forwarded.²⁰

On 2 December 1941 CDRE Muirhead-Gould forwarded his full report on ‘the reasons which guided the Master of H.T. AQUITANIA in not

¹⁵ NAA.040.0468

¹⁶ NAA.040.0466

¹⁷ NAA.040.0300

¹⁸ NAA.070.0169

¹⁹ NAA.040.0091

²⁰ NAA.040.0070

reporting by W/T recovery of enemy survivors or closing Rottneest Port War Signals Station and reporting by V/S':

RECOVERY OF ENEMY SURVIVORS BY H.T. "AQUITANIA"

Be pleased to inform the Naval Board that, in accordance with Naval Board Message 0724/29th November, 1941, I have held an investigation into the reasons which guided the Master of H.T. "AQUITANIA" in not reporting by W/T recovery of enemy survivors or closing Rottneest Port War Signal Station and reporting by V/S. In my enquiry I had the advantage of the services of Lieutenant Commander C. F. Mills, R.A.N., my Staff Officer (Intelligence), and Lieutenant Commander (S) J. L. Bath, R.A.N., kindly lent to me by Rear-Admiral Commanding, H.M.A. Squadron.

2. Captain Gibbons stated that at the time he picked up the survivors (2230 G.M.T. on 22nd November, 1941), he had received no W/T messages of any sort indicating that an action had taken place, or that any ship was overdue, or that there was any anxiety from a Naval point of view. There were no signals about the action received in "AQUITANIA" until long afterwards. G.B.M.S. messages are received and dealt with correctly in "AQUITANIA".

3. The survivors were picked up at 2230 G.M.T. on 22nd November, 1941 (0600 local time on Sunday morning 23rd November, 1941). They were turned over to the Staff Captain for interrogation - the "AQUITANIA" proceeded on her voyage. No search was made for other rafts or wreckage as Captain Gibbons "did not know what else there might be about" (meaning that another raider might be in the vicinity).

4. It was not until nearly noon (local time) that Captain Gibbons read the results of the interrogation of the prisoners and realised that there had been an action and he says in his own words:-

"It never dawned on me that there was anything wrong with the Cruiser - I thought "Well she has sunk this German ship, and the Navy knows about it, and they have it in their scheme of things, and they know what they are going to do"".

5. Captain Gibbons referred to C.A.M.S.I. and said that he felt bound by C.A.M.S.I. 63 because:-

"There had been no distress signals, no enemy action signals, no Raider, no Submarine, no Aircraft signals or anything hostile that I could clear myself with for breaking Wireless silence. I felt that I was bound by C.A.M.S.I. No. 63 - Restriction on the use of W/T. Furthermore, I had no reason to suppose that anything out of the ordinary had happened, beyond the vital fact that a Cruiser had sunk an enemy raider."

6. The results of the interrogation did not convey to Captain Gibbons that the Cruiser had been badly hit. He knew she had been hit and two

Germans had seen fire on the Cruiser; they did not say the Cruiser was on fire. He had no reason to suppose the Cruiser had been burnt out.

7. Captain Gibbons proceeded on his voyage and then gave some consideration to taking his prisoners into Fremantle, or at least, closing Rottneest and making a report.

He knew, however, that the raider had carried mines and did not believe the Germans' story that none had been laid. He thought that Rottneest was a very likely mineable area. He still had it fixed in his mind that the Cruiser would have made a report if she wanted to, and that the Naval Authorities must know all about the action, and that therefore, he would not be justified in diverging from his route and taking his ship into a dangerous area.

8. The LEEUWIN was rounded at 0500 G.M.T. on 24th November, 1941. At 1706 G.M.T. on 24th November, 1941, the ship was in position 35° 30' S 119° E (approximately). By this time he had received a number of W/T messages as follows:-

T.O.O.	1157 G.M.T./24th November from A.C.N.B.	T.O.R.	1434.
	1052	" "	1531.
		(to "Trocas")	
	1214	" A.C.N.B.	1625.
		(to "Hermion")	
	1700	" from "Trocas"	1706.

None of these was addressed to "AQUITANIA" and "AQUITANIA" was not included in any messages which were received.

9. Message 1052/24 from A.C.N.B. to "TROCAS" and "TROCAS" reply 1700/24 (received 1706) at once gave Captain Gibbons cause for anxiety. Up to this moment he had been convinced that the Naval Authorities knew all about everything - now he suddenly realised that something was wrong and that he could have provided valuable information some 36 hours earlier. But "TROCAS", in message 1706/24, had given Navy as much information as Captain Gibbons himself possessed, and he decided therefore, still to maintain wireless silence.

"These two signals gave me some cause for anxiety whether the Naval Board knew as much as I had supposed. By this time, I knew that anything I could say would be too late, because I then knew that the Navy knew as much as I could tell them from information from the survivors."

"I couldn't tell the Navy anything that "TROCAS" hadn't told them except that I had some survivors too, and the position I had picked them up".

10. However on receipt of messages 0848/25 from District Naval Officer, Western Australia to "TROCAS" and 1144/25 and 1226/25 from Naval Board to "TROCAS" at 1732Z on 25th November, 1941, he

realised that lack of information was more than he had supposed and after discussion with the Staff Captain of "AQUITANIA", decided to break W/T silence to pass in what information he had. Adelaide Radio was then called at intervals of about two minutes on 550 k/cs. from 1938Z/25 to 2155Z/25 but no answer was received. Melbourne Radio was called instead a few times during this period and one call was made on 24 metres for Sydney Radio(VIS). No reply was received from either of these two stations. Adelaide Radio had been heard working some time before calls were made but not for at least half an hour before calls were commenced. Melbourne Radio was heard working during the period calls were made but Sydney Radio had not heard at all during the day. The ship was in approximate position 37° 00'S 133° 00' E at 2100Z/25.

11. In view of the difficulty of establishing communication, Captain Gibbons gave orders to cease calling and after one call had been made for any British Man-O'-War at 2202Z/25, calling was discontinued. The message it was intended to pass was eventually passed through Wilson's Promontory War Signal Station.

12. Mr. Parsons, senior wireless operator said that he was quite certain that the correct adjustments to the Transmitter had been made. He had not attempted to tune by wavemeter during these transmissions and it had been impossible to get a cut on his receiver to check the frequency of the transmitter since it was swamped by his own transmissions. The main aerial had been damaged while in Sydney before this particular voyage and had been cut down as a result. However, a wireless inspector had visited the ship at Wellington before the ship left on this voyage and had re-checked the adjustments for the cut down aerial.

13. Captain Gibbons made his Visual Signal to Wilson's Promontory in order to let the authorities at Sydney know that he had prisoner survivors. He knew there was always a Visual (Lloyds) Station there.

14. I should like to record that during the investigation, Captain Gibbons gave me every possible assistance and that he was, throughout, perfectly frank and sincere in all his statements.²¹

All the foregoing is inconsistent with AQUITANIA having reported her rescue of German survivors to Fremantle authorities on 23 November, as GPCAPT Bourne alleged.

Further, the first mention in the available documents of AQUITANIA rescuing German sailors is in signals dated 27 November²², when

²¹ NAA.039.0004

²² NAA.026.0300

inquiry was made of the location of the recovery²³, so that the area could be included in the search.

- 22.11 GPCAPT Bourne's allegations are also contrary to common sense. The documentary evidence makes it clear that, once it was known that SYDNEY was overdue, the Naval Board directed an extensive search.²⁴ Yet GPCAPT Bourne alleged the opposite – that, learning of the loss of SYDNEY for the first time on either of 19 November or 23 November, the Naval Board did nothing. That is nonsensical.
- 22.12 Although the allegations are contrary to both established fact and common sense, I now consider the material advanced by GPCAPT Bourne in support of each proposition.

Proposition: that ACH Fremantle knew of the loss of SYDNEY on 19 November 1941

22.13 The allegation that Area Combined Headquarters Fremantle knew of the loss of SYDNEY on 19 November 1941 is made in three papers that were provided to the Parliamentary Inquiry:

- 'ACH Fremantle knew on 19/11/41', undated but received on 21 August 1998²⁵
- 'The TROCAS cover-up', dated 12 November 1997²⁶
- 'Deceit by the RAN Chief of Naval Staff', dated 8 June 1998.²⁷

22.14 The entire thesis derives from an interpretation of part of one line in a log entry at RAAF Pearce. The log reads:

23/11/41

1630 Received message from A.C.H. Sydney 4 days overdue. Search to be instituted. (14 Squadron notified)

1735 Search ordered by A.C.H. to locate H.M.A.S. Sydney.²⁸

GPCAPT Bourne's reasoning was as follows:

At 1630 hrs WST on Sunday 23 November 1941 Area Combined Headquarters, Fremantle sent a warning message to RAAF Pearce Operations Room as shown underlined and starred in the Appendix.

²³ SPC.006.0059

²⁴ See Chapter 10

²⁵ PINQ.SUBS.019.0025

²⁶ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0083 to 0085

²⁷ PINQ.SUBS.016.0007

²⁸ PINQ.SUBS.019.0025 at 0027

This stated "Sydney 4 days overdue" ie HMAS Sydney was not 2 days overdue nor 3 days overdue but definitely 4 days overdue which dates back to Wednesday 19 November 1941 so that ACH Fremantle was aware that HMAS Sydney had been involved in a battle on that day and nothing more had been heard since and if ACH Fremantle knew then no doubt the ACNB would have been informed and would also have known. It could have been vice versa.

ACH Fremantle could only have known if signals had been received from HMAS Sydney on 19 November 1941 or if it was known that it was planned that HMAS Sydney was to intercept a German Raider on that date.²⁹

- 22.15 That thought process is not rational. Because Area Combined Headquarters had been ordered to mount a search starting at daylight on 24 November and had advised RAAF Pearce to prepare for it because 'SYDNEY 4 days overdue' does not mean that the Naval Board, ACH or anybody else knew SYDNEY had been engaged in a battle or been sunk on 19 November. It means SYDNEY was overdue and so a search for her was to be mounted.

Whether SYDNEY was four days, three days or two days overdue was not relevant: what was relevant was that she was significantly overdue, so a search was to be conducted.

To draw the conclusion, as GPCAPT Bourne did, that, because ACH said SYDNEY was overdue by a specific amount of time (four days), this meant ACH must have received a signal that amount of time (four days) before, advising that SYDNEY had been in a battle four days before, is both illogical and irrational. Yet that is the only basis for the theory.

GPCAPT Bourne's first theory—that ACH Fremantle or the Naval Board knew on 19 November that SYDNEY had been in battle that day, yet did nothing to search for her or any survivors—has no foundation in fact and derives from an impermissible interpretation of an entry in the Pearce log. I reject it entirely as being without substance.

²⁹ PINQ.SUBS.019.0025

Proposition: that AQUITANIA sent a signal at about 0700H on 23 November, reporting the rescue of German sailors

22.16 One starts with the established facts that the captain of AQUITANIA said he did not send a signal at about 0700H on 23 November reporting the rescue of German sailors, nor is there any record of any such signal being sent. There was an inquiry into why the captain had not reported the rescue, and his reasons for this were established. Yet GPCAPT Bourne asserted that the captain *did* send such a signal.

Faced with the assertions of AQUITANIA's captain, and the results of the Naval inquiry that accepted them—both inconvenient to his theory—GPCAPT Bourne's response was to assert that those matters all derived from a 'plot' conceived by the Naval Board. He wrote:

In an attempt to explain the delay of 5 days before the first official air search for HMAS Sydney began on Monday 24 November 1941 the ACNB conceived the plot of Aquitania maintaining radio silence about the raft rescue and only passing a visual signal to the PWSS on Wilson's Promontory at 1320 K/27 November 1941. Captain Gibbons was made the scapegoat for the ACNB's failure to take any earlier action after the 19th November 1941 other than to send signals.³⁰

GPCAPT Bourne advanced no evidence at all to support his allegation of such a plot.

22.17 In seeking to establish that AQUITANIA did signal Naval authorities in Fremantle at about 0700H on 23 November, GPCAPT Bourne's approach was to point to various circumstances that he alleged meant the authorities in question had information about the encounter that could only have come from German survivors. Therefore, the argument ran, the information must have come from AQUITANIA since she was the only ship that had recovered survivors. Some events that were dependent on this information occurred during the morning of 23 November, so AQUITANIA must have signalled early that morning as she passed Rottneest.

Factors said to support GPCAPT Bourne's theories

22.18 There are seven circumstances or events to which GPCAPT Bourne referred in support of his theories:

1. GPCAPT (then FLGOFF) Bourne and a Fairey Battle aircraft were sent out on a search for SYDNEY on 23 November.

³⁰ PINQ.SUBS.016.0007 at 0010

2. Mr Richard Summerell's report says there was a search on 23 November.
3. The report of Third Officer Westhoven says there was a search on 23 November.
4. FLTLT Cook had intelligence that could only have come from German survivors rescued by AQUITANIA.
5. The recovery of German survivors by TROCAS and other vessels was a 'cover-up' by the Navy to hide the fact that it did nothing after learning of the loss of SYDNEY on either 19 or 23 November.
6. CAPT Farncomb falsely reported overseeing the interrogation of survivors rescued by AQUITANIA.
7. Government authorities have admitted there was a cover-up associated with AQUITANIA.

22.19 No rational tribunal of fact could accept such circumstantial material in preference to the clear factual position established by Captain Gibbons, the inquiry of CDRE Muirhead-Gould, the documentary evidence of the signal sent by AQUITANIA as she passed Wilsons Promontory, and the absence of any record of a signal from AQUITANIA on 23 November 1941.

Nonetheless, I examine the matters advanced by GPCAPT Bourne.

The first assertion

22.20 GPCAPT Bourne asserted as follows:

- On the morning of 23 November he was sent out on a search for SYDNEY.
- On the morning of 23 November a Fairey Battle aircraft from No. 4 Service Flying Training School was sent out on a search for SYDNEY.

Thus, it is argued, it must have been known that SYDNEY was lost, and that information must have come by signal from AQUITANIA that morning. Therefore AQUITANIA did break radio silence.³¹

22.21 GPCAPT Bourne gave evidence before the Parliamentary Inquiry, although not on oath or affirmation. He said:

³¹ PINQ.TRANS.003.0001 at 0064

On the weekend of 22-23 November, my crew were on stand-by at Pearce. That morning we were told to carry out a search south of Rottneest for HMAS *Sydney* to find out her ETA Fremantle. We were not to send a negative sighting report, which is usual, if we did not find her. We were to take down any messages she might pass to us, including her ETA, and we were to pass it by secure means to the DNOWA. We were not to challenge or investigate any other shipping - which was most unusual, because we always did. We carried out that search and came back to Pearce at about 1.30 on that day, Sunday.³²

22.22 There is no record of that flight. GPCAPT Bourne was attached to No. 14 Squadron at Pearce from September 1941. The Royal Australian Air Force kept an 'Operations record book' for the squadron. Among other things, it recorded all flights and was signed at the end of each month by the squadron's commanding officer.³³

In the main part of the log there are no flights recorded for any aircraft on 23 November. The flights involved in the search for Sydney are recorded for 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29 November.

Appendix A to the operations record book is headed 'Detail of work carried out'.³⁴ It records the aircraft identification number, the crew, the duty, the 'time up' and 'time down', and remarks. It is a continuous daily record. It shows that FLGOFF Bourne engaged in searches on each of 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29 November.³⁵ There is no record of any flight on 23 November.

22.23 There were four in the crew of the Hudson. GPCAPT Bourne did not make any attempt to have other crew members corroborate his account. Nor was he able to confirm the fact of the flight from his personal pilot's flying log book: he said the log book was lost when he evacuated an airfield at Palembang, Sumatra, in February 1942.

Further, GPCAPT Bourne was interviewed by Mr Michael Montgomery in 1978 and by Dr Michael McCarthy in 1991. There is no mention of any flight on 23 November 1941 in the record of his interview with Mr Montgomery.³⁶ The first reference to such a flight is in a note of 12 August 1991 to Dr McCarthy.³⁷ A statutory declaration dated 30 January 1995, some 53 years after the alleged event also refers to it.³⁸

³² PINQ.TRANS.003.0001 at 0061

³³ RAAF.002.0001 at 0008

³⁴ RAAF.002.0001 at 0015

³⁵ RAAF.002.0001 at 0025 to 0035

³⁶ WAM.008.0082_R

³⁷ WAM.010.0196

³⁸ PINQ.SUBS.005.0100 at 0106

- 22.24 The only available conclusion from these records is that GPCAPT Bourne was mistaken in his recollection that he engaged in a flight searching for SYDNEY on 23 November. Had such a flight occurred there is no reason why it would not have been recorded in the squadron's records and every reason why it would have been recorded.
- 22.25 The second allegation said to support a search on 23 November 1941 is a flight by FLGOFF Daly and crew from Geraldton. Details of this allegation are found in GPCAPT Bourne's paper entitled 'The Fairey Battle cover-up', dated 12 November 1997.³⁹

The allegation is that the flight recorded in the unit history sheet (that being the commanding officer's monthly report) is falsely recorded because it shows that the purpose of that flight was for 'towing duty'.

The operations record book records:

23/11/41 F/O D.N. DALY, Battle aircraft L5779, crew 2, departed to PEARCE on target towing duty.

...

27/11/41 F/O D.N. DALEY, Battle aircraft L5779 returned from duty at PEARCE.⁴⁰

GPCAPT Bourne wrote, 'I unequivocally aver that these entries are false and an attempt at deliberately covering up the real purpose of this flight on this day'.⁴¹ GPCAPT Bourne asserts that in fact on 23 November the Fairy Battle L5779 was seen by both CAPT Detmers and SBLT Bunjes whilst they were in separate lifeboats. Each told interrogators they had been circled by 'a strange yellow and black aircraft'.⁴² Fairy Battle aircraft were painted yellow and black. Thus, GPCAPT Bourne asserted, the Fairy Battle L5779 of FLGOFF Daly was on 23 November engaged in a search for SYDNEY or survivors. He wrote:

The implication is that when the Aquitania stopped to pick up 26 German survivors at that position, having been thus alerted and by the use of the lookout's big binoculars, the bridge telescope and the powerful optics in its range finder, it sighted both lifeboats and broke radio silence to report their presence and South Western Area Combined Headquarters had dispatched this Fairey Battle secretly to confirm their presence in this position.⁴³

³⁹ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0081 to 0083

⁴⁰ RAAF.001.0018_E

⁴¹ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0081

⁴² PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0082

⁴³ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0082

22.26 This allegation is without foundation. SBLT Bunjes did not say that on 23 November he saw an aeroplane with black and yellow markings. He said he saw such an aeroplane on 27 November. His interrogation notes state:

On Friday morning (21st) they saw a big freighter which didn't see them. On Saturday morning a big four funnel ship, probably the "AQUITANIA", at a distance of from 7 to 8 miles, on Monday morning a bomber aeroplane circled round them, on Tuesday morning tanker passed without seeing them, and on Thursday morning another aeroplane (black and yellow marks). Boat made sign "no water" with canvas and red paint. Same day they were picked up.⁴⁴

In his book CAPT Detmers wrote that he first spotted an aeroplane on the Tuesday, which was 25 November.⁴⁵ He made no mention of a black and yellow plane.

The fact that SBLT Bunjes saw a black and yellow plane on 27 November provides no support for a finding that on the morning of 23 November such a plane was directed to search for survivors and therefore it should be inferred that AQUITANIA signalled at about 0700H that morning that she had picked up German survivors.

22.27 GPCAPT Bourne also alleged that the entries relating to 'towing duties' were incorrect, mainly because No. 14 Squadron had finished its air-to-air firing training for the month.

FLGOFF Daly did not fly his target-towing aircraft to Pearce for No. 14 Squadron's practice firing. His personal log book makes it clear that the purpose of his flight to Pearce was to provide towing targets for practice firing by No. 25 Squadron's Wirraways.⁴⁶ The log book confirms that he was at Pearce for that purpose between 23 and 27 November, when he returned in Fairey Battle L5779 to Geraldton.

22.28 There is nothing in this aspect of GPCAPT Bourne's submission to support the view that there were searches for SYDNEY on 23 November and so it should be inferred AQUITANIA signalled the recovery of German sailors at about 0700H on 23 November 1941.

⁴⁴ NAA.012.0764_BUNJES at 0765_BUNJES

⁴⁵ CORR.007.0034 at 0138

⁴⁶ PINQ.SUBS.018.0007 at 0008

The second assertion

22.29 The second assertion GPCAPT Bourne relied on to support his submission that the Naval Board knew of the loss of SYDNEY because of a signal from AQUITANIA on 23 November depends on alleged errors in documents.

First, he relied on a passage in the *Guide to Commonwealth Records* relating to the sinking of HMAS SYDNEY. Mr Summerell, from the National Archives of Australia, wrote:

In a minute to the Chief of Naval Staff dated 22 December 1941, Commander Dechaineux reported that:

the first news of German survivors, and in fact that there may have been an action, was received timed 0816Z/24 from the Commander in Chief, China [Station] and received by the Naval Board late pm local time on the 24 November.

This was a reference to the 26 men picked up from a raft by the liner *Aquitania* early on 23 November, three and a half days after the battle. Over the next four days the search for the *Sydney* recovered the remaining survivors, four groups at sea and two on the coast:

25 men were picked up from a raft by the British Tanker *Trocas* on Monday 24 November;

46 men reached the coast at 17-Mile Well north of Carnarvon on the same day;

57 men landed on the coast at Red Bluff, also north of Carnarvon on Tuesday 25 November;

31 men were recovered from a boat by the *Koolinda* on Wednesday 26 November;

60 men including the *Kormoran's* captain were rescued on the same day by the *Centaur*; and

72 men were recovered from another boat by HMAS *Yandra* on Thursday 27 November.⁴⁷

GPCAPT Bourne interpreted this to mean that Mr Summerell was speaking of two separate recoveries – that is, 26 men picked up from a raft by AQUITANIA on 23 November and 25 men picked up from a raft by TROCAS on 24 November. He then referred to the South Western Area Combined Headquarters log for 25 November and a signal from the Central War Room sent at 2102H on 24 November and relating to the TROCAS recovery. After that he referred to the Area Combined

⁴⁷ NAA.015.0001 at 0121

Headquarters report of 24 November, which also dealt with the TROCAS recovery. Then he posed the following questions:

... did C in C China [Singapore] at 0916Z/24 send two different signals one dealing with the Aquitania rescue on the 23rd November 1941 the other with the Trocas rescue on the 24th. It appears so from Sommerrell's [sic] writings on page 125 of Guide No 3. But if so how did C in C China know of Aquitania's rescue on the 23rd unless Aquitania broke radio silence on Sunday 23rd November?⁴⁸

These matters provide no support for GPCAPT Bourne's thesis for several reasons. First, no inference can be drawn from an archivist's words and conclusions written in 1997. Second, the archivist's quoted passage from CMDR Dechaineux's report makes it clear beyond argument that the first news of both survivors and thus action was received at '0816Z/24', that being 1616H on 24 November. Third, there is no evidence that Commander-in-Chief China sent two different signals, one dealing with the rescue by AQUITANIA and the other dealing with that by TROCAS. Nor is there any evidence that C-in-C China knew of the engagement until it received the signal from TROCAS at 1500H on 24 November.⁴⁹ The signals to and from C-in-C China, as set out in Chapter 10, demonstrate that C-in-C China had no knowledge of the loss of SYDNEY on 23 November 1941.

The third assertion

22.30 The third basis for asserting that there was a search for SYDNEY on 23 November and there must therefore have been a signal from AQUITANIA at about 0700H on that day is that a report by Third Officer Westhoven WRANS contains a reference to a search that began on 23 November.

The circumstances in which Third Officer Westhoven came to write her report were as follows. On 12 October 1945, after the war had ended, LCDR Rycroft, then a Staff Officer, Intelligence, wrote to the Director of Naval Intelligence:

Submitted:-

The enclosed cuttings indicate that there are still people holding out hope that some of the personnel from HMAS "SYDNEY" are alive. It is considered that such recurrent publicity can only cause distress to those who normally would have allowed the lapse of time to heal their sorrow.

⁴⁸ PINQ.SUBS.008.0036 at 0038

⁴⁹ NAA.040.0451; SPC.006.0020

A detailed account of the intense search over a very wide area for any possible survivors has never, we understand, been published, and the enclosed account prepared from our files in Fremantle, by Third Officer Westhoven, W.R.A.N.S., gives a good publishable story of the action and search and should result in completely setting at rest any rumours or speculation concerning possible survivors from the "SYDNEY".

It is suggested that this information concerning the action and search should be in the form of an official release to the press in Australia.⁵⁰

Apart from what she read in files, Third Officer Westhoven knew nothing of the battle, the signals or the recovery of survivors. She did not join the WRANS until 1943.⁵¹ In writing her report, she made an error in stating that 'and on November 23rd, an air search was carried out from Rottnest'.⁵² In fact an air search from Rottnest was *organised* on 23 November but carried out on 24 November. Her report makes it abundantly clear that there was no signal from AQUITANIA on 23 November advising of the rescue of German sailors since it states, 'On the 23rd of November, H.T. "AQUITANIA" picked up 26 Germans on a raft. However, word was not received of this until P.M. on the 27th'. And later:

The first definite news came on November 24th, when the British Tanker, M.V. "TROCAS" picked up 25 Germans from a floating raft in position 24 degrees, 06' south, 111 degrees, 40' east, which is approximately 150 miles north west of Carnarvon.⁵³

Since GPCAPT Bourne's only basis for asserting that there was a search on 23 November was information gained from a signal from AQUITANIA on that morning, Third Officer Westhoven's report offers no support for his recollection of such a search on that date.

That Third Officer Westhoven's report is in error in stating that an air search was 'carried out', rather than organised, on 23 November is further established by reference to the file on which she based her report: it makes no reference to any search on 23 November but does refer to searches beginning on 24 November.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ NAA.026.0211

⁵¹ NAA.106.0044 to 0046

⁵² NAA.026.0213 at 0214

⁵³ NAA.026.0213 at 0215

⁵⁴ NAA.096.0001 to 0091; see NAA.096.0055 at 0057 for reference to an air search being conducted on 24 November 1941

The fourth assertion

- 22.31 GPCAPT Bourne's fourth argument in support of the view that AQUITANIA signalled Fremantle on 23 November is expressed in his paper entitled 'Flight Lieutenant Cook's and the ARO's signals':

This paper is intended to focus attention on a classic joint RAAF/RAN cover up involving the information gleaned from the Germans rescued by the Aquitania early on Sunday 23 November 1941 and radioed by that ship about 7:00 am that day. It involves an attempt to attribute this intelligence to Flt Lt H. Cook when it was impossible for him to be aware of these details and in fact impossible for him to have passed this message which was given wide circulation to explain the knowledge gained earlier than that passed by the tanker Trocas on Monday 24 November 1941.⁵⁵

- 22.32 GPCAPT Bourne made two allegations. The first is that a signal recorded in the SWACH log, as received from FLTLT Cook at 2325H on 25 November and repeated in identical terms in a signal bearing the same time and date from the District Naval Officer Western Australia to the Naval Board, contained information available only from AQUITANIA (and thus AQUITANIA must have signalled on 23 November) and contained information FLTLT Cook could not have known because, although he had been sent north of Carnarvon to collect beached survivors, he would not have had time to interrogate them before sending the signal at 2325H. Therefore, GPCAPT Bourne argued, the signal 'was intended to be deceitful and I can only speculate as to who conceived this ruse'.⁵⁶ Second, there is in the SWACH log for 26 November an entry marked '1300' and appearing between '0030' and '0110'. The SWACH log records the entry as being from 'ARO Carnarvon' to the District Naval Officer Western Australia. GPCAPT Bourne alleged the information in the signal was:

... a mix of information. The Germans were still at Red Bluff and the 17 Mile Well and had not been interrogated at this stage. From whence then and from whom did this information come. I submit it came from Aquitania's interrogations.⁵⁷

He alleged that the original SWACH log had been 'rewritten and edited', resulting in a clerk or intelligence officer 'inserting this signal out of sequence'.

- 22.33 The first allegation depends on the unsubstantiated assertion that FLTLT Cook and his superior, WGCDR Lightfoot, who had collected LS

⁵⁵ PINQ.SUBS.008.0036 at 0052

⁵⁶ PINQ.SUBS.008.0036 at 0054

⁵⁷ PINQ.SUBS.008.0036 at 0055

Linke (who spoke English) from among the survivors and driven back with him for about three hours, did not question him during that period. There is no basis for such a view, and it would be contrary to human nature. The contemporary record of the SWACH log shows that FLTLT Cook did telephone RAAF Pearce, which telephoned SWACH at 2325 and reported:

Signal received by phone from Pearce. From F/Lt Cook Carnarvon. Survivors that were located not yet arrived in town number approximate 120 German they state that an engagement between them an armed raider & a 1st class cruiser commenced Wednesday last at 1900H their ship finally blew up at midnight engagement took place approximately 120 miles SW of Fremantle. They had 3 lifeboats & 2 rubber boats, when last seen the 1st class cruiser was on fire. Has given instruction that one person who can speak English is to be brought to town as soon as possible arriving at 1230 or 1am for further questioning. Main body arrive 6am will call again about 1am. Suggests that this person be brought to Pearce by a/c [aircraft].⁵⁸

The District Naval Officer Western Australia immediately conveyed the information in identical terms to the Naval Board⁵⁹, by telephone at 2359H, as both the signal and the SWACH log record. WGCDR McLean was also informed of FLTLT Cook's message at 2333H, and he came on duty at 0017H on 26 November. The Army staff officer was informed at 0015H.

There is in the message recorded from FLTLT Cook and so widely distributed nothing that FLTLT Cook could not have learnt from LS Linke. It is of note that part of FLTLT Cook's message was that the English-speaking survivor was to be brought back for 'further questioning'.

In addition, there is in FLTLT Cook's message nothing to suggest that his message was conveying information that he had not learnt from LS Linke or that could only have been derived from an AQUITANIA signal some two days earlier.

Further, the SWACH log makes it clear that FLTLT Cook intended to 'call again' after his expected arrival in Carnarvon with the English-speaking survivor 'at 1230 or 1am'. In fact, at 0250H on 26 November, his superior, WGCDR Lightfoot, telephoned Pearce, which advised SWACH as follows:

Interviewed one member of crew W/T operator named LINCKE [sic].
The ship was KOMORAN 6000 tons armament 8 inch guns and A/A

⁵⁸ NAA.016.0001 at 0051 to 0052

⁵⁹ NAA.016.0001 at 0052

guns number unspecified. Armed merchantmen newly built. Number of crew about 300. Captain of ship BETLERS. Been in Indian Ocean about six months. Last ship they sank was STOMACOS EMBIRICOS about 2 months ago. A first class cruiser 7000 tons Wed 19th Nov about 1730 hours pos 26° S 111° E the enemy vessel sighted a convoy of 5 to 7 ships escorted by this cruiser. The cruiser evidently thought that the enemy ship belonged to the convoy & it approached within half a mile. KOMORAN opened fire at 1740 hours. KOMORAN's first salvos silenced the cruiser's 8 inch guns. Gunfire continued till 1900 hours. Cruiser did not use W/T but signalled with flag. The raider was burning fiercely amidship and at midnight was blown up + the crew escaped in boats. The cruiser vanished over horizon burning amidship and astern and it is believed to have sunk.

Passed above report to CWR by phone.⁶⁰

SWACH passed the information to the Central War Room at 0355H on 26 November and recorded doing so in both the log book and a signal.⁶¹ This information was specifically based on interrogation of LS Linke, not on any signal from AQUITANIA.

- 22.34 In relation to the second assertion, the time of '1300' is obviously an error. Errors in log entry times were not unusual during wartime, as GPCAPT Bourne agreed in evidence before the Parliamentary Inquiry.⁶² The subject matter of the recorded message is information gained from men and possible arrangements for the men's movement from the beach to Carnarvon, with a possible arrival time there at 2300H on 25 November. The erroneous entry of one time in a log is no basis for suggesting the log was 're-written and edited'.
- 22.35 There is no credible evidence that Naval authorities knew of the sinking of SYDNEY on either 19 or 23 November. GPCAPT Bourne's view that the Navy was so informed is based on a misinterpretation of documents, the drawing of impermissible inferences, taking statements out of context, and faulty memory of events that he first recorded some 53 years after they occurred. The main basis of his contentions—that AQUITANIA signalled Fremantle at about 0700H on 23 November 1941—is contrary to the evidence of the master of AQUITANIA, the results of the investigation into the master's reasons for not signalling, and contemporaneous documents and signals.

⁶⁰ NAA.016.0001 at 0052

⁶¹ NAA.026.0382

⁶² PINQ.SUBS.008.0036 at 0056

The fifth assertion

22.36 A fifth aspect of GPCAPT Bourne's cover-up theory is advanced in two papers provided to the Parliamentary Inquiry: 'The Trocas cover-up', dated 12 November 1997⁶³ and 'A packet of Lucky Strikes', dated 13 November 1997.⁶⁴

In the first paper GPCAPT Bourne argues that TROCAS's 24 November rescue of a raft containing 25 Germans was not a chance encounter but occurred because TROCAS was 'forewarned by signal from the ACNB of the presence of 25 enemy in a life raft'. In the second paper GPCAPT Bourne argues that luck played no part in the interceptions and rescues of Germans on rafts and lifeboats because their up-to-the-minute exact locations were known to the Air Force and the Navy, enabling rescue ships and aircraft to 'hit the nail on the head'.

22.37 The bases of the submission that TROCAS was sent to intercept the German rafts were as follows:

- Mr John Doohan, a merchant seaman on HMAS KARUMBA, had studied a picture of a German sailor being carried from an oil tank on the TROCAS and concluded that the tank was a wing tank. TROCAS would be most unlikely to have sailed with an empty wing tank because when she sailed from Palembang her oil load would have been evenly distributed through all tanks in order to ensure stability.⁶⁵
- To have emptied an oil tank would require hundreds of tonnes of oil to be transferred by pumping to other tanks, so that the oil was evenly distributed around the ship. The tank would also have had to be thoroughly washed to remove all oil traces, and sails would have had to be placed on ventilators to allow wind to remove all toxic fumes before the Germans could enter. This, according to GPCAPT Bourne, would take 10 to 12 hours.⁶⁶

22.38 GPCAPT Bourne then alleged—somewhat inconsistently with his claims that the contrived TROCAS discovery was to cover up the Naval Board's allegedly having received signals from SYDNEY on 19 November—that:

... this Trocas activity was to cover up the fact that Aquitania had broken radio silence some 33 hours earlier to advise that she too had picked up a raft ... and had not ordered an immediate large scale sea

⁶³ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0083 to 0085

⁶⁴ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0086 to 0091

⁶⁵ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0084

⁶⁶ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0084

and air search ... In brief nothing was to be seen or discovered to prevent the sailing of the Japanese Fleet on Wednesday the 26th November 1941 for the attack on Pearl Harbour which would bring the USA into World War 2 as planned by Churchill and Roosevelt [sic].⁶⁷

22.39 GPCAPT Bourne's allegations are based on speculation, not fact. There is no evidence that German lifeboats were communicating with each other by radio. There is no evidence they had any form of radio. Nor is there any evidence that the Naval Board asked Commander-in-Chief China to send the signal referred to—or, indeed, that there ever was such a signal. The Inquiry's exhaustive examination of signal packs did not reveal any such signal.

22.40 No doubt that is because the signals that do exist make it plain that the Naval Board did not know where TROCAS was when she picked up survivors.

At 1500H on 24 November C-in-C China received a message from TROCAS, advising of having picked up 25 German survivors.⁶⁸ Earlier, at 1417H, the Naval Board had signalled C-in-C China and others, 'SYDNEY not yet arrived. C.Z.M. has been asked to search area south of Sunda Strait ...'⁶⁹ Further, the Naval Board signalled TROCAS at 0958H on 25 November:

Signal following details

- (1) Date, time and duration of action
- (2) Condition of cruiser after action⁷⁰

It is inconceivable that either signal would have been sent if the Naval Board had been told by AQUITANIA on 23 November that SYDNEY had been lost.

It is equally inconceivable that the Naval Board would have asked Commander-in-Chief Netherlands East Indies Naval Forces to send the Dutch cruiser TROMP to follow SYDNEY's probable course to Fremantle at high speed and that Dutch aircraft be sent to search from Java south to Christmas Island, as it did, if it had known, about 0700H on 23 November, that SYDNEY had been lost.

22.41 The theory embodied in the paper entitled 'The Trocas cover-up' is without substance, has no basis in fact, and is mere speculation designed to fit the cover-up conspiracy theory.

⁶⁷ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0085

⁶⁸ SPC.006.0020

⁶⁹ NAA.070.0251

⁷⁰ NAA.040.0424

22.42 'A packet of Lucky Strikes' argues that the location of the German life rafts was at all relevant times known to Naval authorities because the life rafts were communicating with each other by radio and their signals were being tracked by a secret Netherlands East Indies listening station at Carnarvon, which intercepted the lifeboats' details of location being communicated to each other. Thus, authorities were able to direct rescue planes and vessels to the precise location of such rafts and boats. Accordingly:

- (1) 23.11.41 "Aquitania" rescued a life raft.
- (2) 24.11.41 "Trocas" rescued a life raft.
- (3) 25.11.41 Flt Lt Goode sighted Gossehn's lifeboat.
- (4) 25.11.41 Flt Lt Cook sighted lifeboats ashore.
- (5) 27.11.41 "Koolinda" rescued on lifeboat.
- (6) 27.11.41 "Centaur" rescued lifeboat.
- (7) 28.11.41 "HMAS Yandra" rescued a lifeboat.⁷¹

This reasoning is not logical. The fact that AQUITANIA and TROCAS each rescued a life raft and the other five mentioned located lifeboats whilst engaged in a search does not mean the searchers knew where the objects they found were before they found them.

The AQUITANIA rescue

22.43 Undeterred by illogicality, GPCAPT Bourne wrote:

It is alleged that the Aquitania was diverted by ACNB radio to this nest of German survivors whose position was known from radio intercepts ordered to stoop and rescue the raft only. It is further alleged that the ACNB and the Aquitania were in radio communication from then on until her arrival in Sydney on the 28th November 1941.⁷²

This is unsubstantiated speculation. No evidence was advanced in support of it. It is contrary to the evidence of Captain Gibbons, Master of the AQUITANIA, that he maintained radio silence throughout the voyage to Sydney.

⁷¹ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0086

⁷² PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0087

The TROCAS rescue

22.44 GPCAPT Bourne went on to say:

It is alleged that the ACNB was in radio communication with the Trocas 10-12 hours before the rescue to enable her to make the necessary preparations for a virtually guaranteed rescue at an exact time and position. It is also submitted that this was a situation contrived with the Trocas and C in C China (Singapore) to cover-up Aquitania's breaking radio silence between 6 - 7 am WST the previous day, Sunday 23rd November 1941.⁷³

This too is unsubstantiated speculation. No evidence was advanced in support of it. There are no signals to support this speculation.

FLTLT Goode's sighting of LEUT van Gösseln's lifeboat

22.45 FLTLT Goode located LEUT van Gösseln's lifeboat in poor weather conditions. GPCAPT Bourne wrote, 'My query, at this stage, is how did Goode find a lifeboat in such bad weather conditions that he lost it again. I speculate that he was instructed to search a certain position'.⁷⁴

This is unsubstantiated speculation. No evidence was advanced in support of it.

FLTLT Cook's sighting of two lifeboats on the coast

22.46 The air logs show that a number of aircraft departed early on 25 November in search of SYDNEY. The one piloted by FLTLT Cook, however, did not depart until 0615H. Before that time a FLTLT Nicholas had arrived at Geraldton, at 0500H. GPCAPT Bourne wrote:

It is alleged that at some time during the night Gp Cpt Heffernan or Wg Cdr Lightfoot received an urgent telephone call from either Air Cdre De La Rue, Wg Cdr Mclean or Wg Cdr Fleming giving instructions that either he, Wg Cdr Lightfoot, or a Flt Cdr should await the arrival of Flt Lt Nicholas' aircraft as they were carrying special instructions which, for security reasons, could not be passed and explained over the telephone. Pure conjecture, of course, at this stage.⁷⁵

After flying for two hours and 15 minutes, FLTLT Cook saw two lifeboats on the beach. GPCAPT Bourne asserted that FLTLT Cook found them because he was given information about their location, based on the 'pure conjecture' quoted. There is then further speculation about where the speculative information might have come from.

⁷³ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0087

⁷⁴ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0088

⁷⁵ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0089

This is, as GPCAPT Bourne admitted, 'pure conjecture'. No evidence was advanced in support of it.

KOOLINDA rescues a lifeboat

22.47 PO Kuhl's lifeboat was sighted at 0734H on 26 November, at 20°14'S 112°24'E. It was picked up by KOOLINDA at 1405H at 24°07'S 112°47'E. GPCAPT Bourne wrote:

This recovery is reasonable, Kuhl's latest lifeboat position could have been calculated closely by DNOWA and Koolinda directed to it. On the other hand if it had been transmitted by radio to other German craft both the NEI Military Signals Listening Post at Carnarvon and the RAAF D/F Stations could have fixed its position exactly.⁷⁶

The speculation that the location could have been taken from intercepted signals demonstrates the length to which GPCAPT Bourne was prepared to go in interpreting known data to fit his cover-up theory, even though there was an entirely logical explanation for the data in the absence of any cover-up.

The CENTAUR lifeboat rescue

22.48 FLTLT Cook saw CAPT Detmers' lifeboat at 0648H on 26 November at 24°39'S 112°02'E. GPCAPT Bourne speculated that CAPT Detmers then did a U-turn. The lifeboat was ultimately recovered by CENTAUR at 24°39'S 112°15'E at 2230H⁷⁷, about '52½ nm west of where it was calculated to be'. He speculated that the lifeboat could have been found in the dark only if the Navy had known its location. Therefore, it was argued, CENTAUR must have been directed to it. CAPT Detmers said he fired two flares. GPCAPT Bourne rejected that evidence because two people on board CENTAUR had told him, apparently in 1997, they did not see the flares.

GPCAPT Bourne then wrote: 'Detmers' lifeboat rescue provides clear intentions of their plan to evade rescue and to capture a ship. They were thwarted by allied interception of their radio signals, which are thus confirmed'.⁷⁸

This is nonsense. It is contrary to CAPT Detmers' evidence, and no evidence was advanced in support of it or, indeed, of lifeboats having wirelasses.

⁷⁶ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0090

⁷⁷ NAA.026.0348

⁷⁸ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0091

HMAS YANDRA's rescue of a lifeboat

22.49 GPCAPT Bourne asserted that LEUT von GösseIn's lifeboat was seen by FLTLT Rooke at 1015H on 27 November at 24°04'S 112°04'E and that it was rescued by YANDRA at 1157H at 24°59'S 112°E. If both those readings were correct, GPCAPT Bourne calculated that the lifeboat with one small sail and many men on board must have changed course from that when first sighted and increased its speed to 10.06 knots in the 102 minutes between sighting and rescue. That was impossible.

GPCAPT Bourne then referred to a report by FLTLT Rooke of his 'initial sighting report at 1134H/28', which mentioned 'another small patrol vessel steering a course proximate to position'. He then theorised:

It is claimed that this small patrol vessel was in fact the German torpedo boat still afloat, which towed Gosseln's lifeboat at 10kts for 90 minutes, transferred 20-30 survivors aboard the lifeboat, and was then scuttled. Normal torpedo crews were aboard this lifeboat.⁷⁹

There is no basis for this speculation. The overwhelming evidence from German survivors is that the fast speedboat on board KORMORAN sank with her. The speculation also offends common sense: if there was a powered 'German torpedo boat' with the capacity to tow a laden lifeboat at 10 knots, surely it would have towed the lifeboat to shore. Having used the torpedo boat theory to explain the different locations of the lifeboat, GPCAPT Bourne then invented the scuttling and crew-transfer theory to avoid the difficulty of explaining what happened to the torpedo boat and its crew since YANDRA rescued only the lifeboat.

This is another example of GPCAPT Bourne inventing facts and theories in an attempt to support his speculations—the current speculation being that the German boats were communicating by radio, that their radio messages were being intercepted, and that Australian aircraft and ships were thus directed to known locations of German lifeboats.

The true situation was that the Navy and the Air Force had organised a systematic search that resulted in the finding of the life rafts.

The sixth assertion

22.50 In relation to CAPT Farncomb, GPCAPT Bourne put forward two lines of argument:

- CAPT Farncomb did not interrogate the German survivors on AQUITANIA in Sydney on 28 November 1941, nor did he

⁷⁹ PINQ.SUBS.005.0080 at 0091

interrogate them after they were taken from the ship to Liverpool Army Camp. Accordingly, the reports of 29 November and 2 December, unsigned but purporting to be by CAPT Farncomb, were the product of information gained from interrogations in Western Australia. GPCAPT Bourne wrote:

In view of the forgoing, I submit that Captain Farncomb never interrogated the German survivors on board the Aquitania on Friday 28th November 1941 and that the report of the 29th November 1941 was thus based on information already known to Navy Office through interrogations conducted in Western Australia. The fact that neither Farncomb nor Crace signed these documents is most significant.⁸⁰

- VADM Sir Guy Royle left Darwin at 0930 on 30 November 1941, on board HMS KANIMBLA for Singapore. As a consequence, his initials, with an adjacent date of '30/11', on a copy of a report on CAPT Farncomb's report of the interrogation of AQUITANIA's rescued Germans and the notation 'pre-view' could not have been placed there at that time. Therefore, GPCAPT Bourne wrote:

It is submitted that Admiral Royle post dated his initials and comment after his return to Australia. His actions showed that he was at the centre of the vast web of deceit which the Navy Office had built up around the Aquitania to conceal the fact that her Captain Gibbons had broken radio silence at about 7.00 am WST on Sunday 23 November 1941 to report the rescue of twenty six German sailors from a raft, two nearby crowded lifeboats which apparently did not try to attract attention and a fictitious battle area 130 nms South West of Fremantle. But even more important was to cover the facts that the ACNB had taken no physical action following the W/T receipt PM hrs on Wednesday 19 November 1941 on HMAS Sydney's signals and again took no action when a second W/T signal was received from the Aquitania 4 days later indicating very clearly that a battle had taken place in which HMAS Sydney had been lost.⁸¹

These assertions are made in two submissions to the Parliamentary Inquiry – 'HTM Aquitania (2nd Edition) - Postscript III' and 'Deceit by the RAN Chief of Naval Staff'.

- 22.51 The basis for the first assertion is the allegation that AQUITANIA berthed in Sydney 'early on Friday 28th November 1941'. A soldier on board, one Harry Retig, told GPCAPT Bourne, apparently some time in 1995, that he saw the prisoners taken over by the Army and driven away before he (Retig) left the ship 'mid forenoon that day; ie between

⁸⁰ PINQ.SUBS.008.0036 at 0041

⁸¹ PINQ.SUBS.016.0007 at 0009 to 0010

10 and 11am EST'. CAPT Farncomb therefore did not have time to interrogate the prisoners, it was asserted.

It is known AQUITANIA had berthed in Sydney by 1340K on 28 November.⁸² It is not known when or where CAPT Farncomb interviewed the prisoners before writing his reports of 29 November and 2 December. The recollection of Mr Retig more than half a century after the event is, however, not a basis for denying the documentary evidence that supports the finding that CAPT Farncomb did as he was directed by his superiors and interrogated the AQUITANIA prisoners.

- 22.52 In the case of the assertion that VADM Sir Guy Royle falsified the date of initialling CAPT Farncomb's report, the assertion fails on a factual level. First, the initials are not those of VADM Sir Guy Royle⁸³: they appear to be the initials of the Deputy Chief of Naval Staff.⁸⁴ Second, the date is not '30/11': although the month is not clear, the first two numerals are plainly '31'.

The seventh assertion

- 22.53 In a submission entitled 'The Lindsay Peet Paper' GPCAPT Bourne restated many of his earlier cover-up theories but added an additional one. It is that an officer of the Department of Defence, a Mr Straczek, had informed the Parliamentary Inquiry that an air search had been conducted in the afternoon of 23 November. Mr Straczek corrected this in a subsequent submission to the inquiry:

On page 1844, of Submissions Volume 8, the statement is made that the initial air search commenced on PM 23 November. This is not so, the decision to conduct the air search was made on PM 23 November. The actual air search was initiated the following day.⁸⁵

This led to GPCAPT Bourne alleging that the Parliamentary Inquiry 'aided and abetted' Mr Straczek in continuing 'this modern day cover up in 1998 by retracting his account of this first air search in his submission on page 1844 Vol 8 ...'⁸⁶

- 22.54 A person's correcting of their own error does not constitute a 'modern day cover-up'. Nor, by allowing such a correction, did the Parliamentary Inquiry 'aid and abet' Mr Straczek.⁸⁷

⁸² NAA.070.0169

⁸³ Compare the initials of Admiral Royle on NAA.076.0171; NAA.039.0001;

⁸⁴ NAA.073.0237

⁸⁵ PINQ.SUBS.010.0124

⁸⁶ PINQ.SUBS.017.0114 at 0121

⁸⁷ PINQ.SUBS.017.0114 at 0121

The submission of GPCAPT Bourne does illustrate the irrationality of his cover-up thesis and his inability to recognise the truth established by contemporaneous documentation.

A further assertion

- 22.55 A further factor said to support the cover-up is an allegedly false entry in the SWACH log at 1130H on Sunday 23 November, which was about four-and-a-half hours after it is alleged AQUITANIA broke radio silence 150 nautical miles west of Carnarvon.⁸⁸ The entry reads:

1130 Received signal from CWR-

Following unidentified ships reported by Commander in Chief Netherlands East Indies. (A) District Officer reported full lighted unknown ship eastbound sighted 1145Z/18 November near Westrel (North West Soemba) all lights extinguished on passing this point. (B) District Officer reported unknown big ship 4 funnels passed North West Alos eastbound at 0300Z/21 November = 0142Z/23.⁸⁹

GPCAPT Bourne asserted that only three large '4 funnel ships' were ever built—namely, TITANIC, MAURETANIA and AQUITANIA, of which AQUITANIA was the only one still in service in 1941. He then wrote:

What is more obvious is that this message to SWACH was part of a plot to cover up Aquitania's breaking of radio silence about 0700 H/23 November. On the 21st November 1941 the Aquitania had rounded the Leeuwin and was heading at 24.5 knots across the Great Australian Bight. The signal to SWACH indicated that the only four-funnel ship in the world at that time was off Alor, which is north of Timor on 21/11. Why this deceit?⁹⁰

- 22.56 The factual basis for GPCAPT Bourne's assertion is wrong. The log does not read 'unknown big ship 4 funnels passed North ...', as alleged. It reads 'unknown big ship 2 funnels passed North ...'⁹¹
- 22.57 There is no basis for GPCAPT Bourne's allegation of 'deceit' or for his allegation that the log entry was 'part of a plot to cover up Aquitania's breaking radio silence about 0700H/23 November'.⁹²

⁸⁸ PINQ.SUBS.005.0100 at 0118

⁸⁹ PINQ.SUBS.005.0100 at 0118

⁹⁰ PINQ.SUBS.005.0100 at 0119

⁹¹ NAA.016.0001 at 0046

⁹² PINQ.SUBS.005.0100 at 0119

Further contentions: Mr George Bell

22.58 Mr George Bell, who had been a sailor on board AQUITANIA in November 1941, submitted to the Parliamentary Inquiry that AQUITANIA had anchored off Fremantle, told 'Navy people' of German prisoners on board, and within two hours of arriving there was sent to Sydney. His submission stated:

The Captain was under the impression that the Navy would know all about the action, and the Navy people in Fremantle, on being told that we had German prisoners on board presumed that these prisoners were an intake from the Middle East as we usually did bring in prisoners from there. So at this stage no officials actually realised that the Sydney had been sunk, everyone presumed that the other knew what they were talking about.

I have done extensive research on this subject and nowhere can I find any information in any reports that documents the fact that the Aquitania actually anchored off Fremantle to put the prisoners ashore but was then sent to Sydney, with the prisoners still on board, within two hours of arrival at Fremantle. I can guarantee that we did anchor off Fremantle, and in later years I have often wondered why this was covered up. Was there a reason or was it just a big mix-up?⁹³

22.59 It is not known when Mr Bell prepared his account of his recollection of events, but it is certainly not a contemporaneous document. It is headed 'Chapter 6'.

22.60 Mr Bell is in error in his recollection. It contradicts contemporary records – in particular the following:

- In the Naval Officer Commanding (Sydney)'s report on his examination of Captain Gibbons in connection with why he had *not* informed Fremantle of his rescue of German sailors, there was no suggestion by Captain Gibbons that he had informed 'Navy people' in Fremantle, or had anchored off Fremantle to do so, or had received orders to proceed to Sydney with the prisoners.⁹⁴ Mr Bell's account is inconsistent with his captain's account of events.
- Fremantle port records do not refer to AQUITANIA anchoring off or otherwise visiting Fremantle on 23 November 1941.⁹⁵
- There are a number of internal errors and inconsistencies in Mr Bell's account. First, Mr Bell, a sailor on AQUITANIA, purports

⁹³ PINQ.SUBS.016.0054 at 0054 to 0055

⁹⁴ WAM.028.0121

⁹⁵ PINQ.SUBS.016.0054 at 0055 to 0056. See also MSC.003.0065 for the merchant ship card for AQUITANIA, which records inbound and outbound movements of AQUITANIA for Australian ports.

to know the mind of Captain Gibbons. That is improbable. Second, Mr Bell asserts that AQUITANIA always stopped in Fremantle and thus did on this occasion. He wrote, 'Another reason that I know that the Aquitania definitely went to Fremantle is that not once had she passed Fremantle without stopping since I had joined her a year previously'.⁹⁶

However, the signal from Rear Admiral Malaya to the Director of Sea Transport, the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board and the New Zealand Naval Board at 1745H on 20 November makes it clear that AQUITANIA left Singapore on '19 November due Sydney 0330 28th November'.⁹⁷ AQUITANIA had not intended to stop in Fremantle.

Third, Mr Bell said the story of the loss of SYDNEY was published about three weeks after AQUITANIA arrived in Sydney. That is incorrect: AQUITANIA arrived in Sydney on 28 November 1941, and the loss of SYDNEY was announced on 1 December and published in the press on 2 December 1941.

22.61 There is no evidence to support Mr Bell's recollection that AQUITANIA stopped at Fremantle for about two hours on either 23 or 24 November 1941. All the evidence, particularly that of her Master, Captain Gibbons, makes it clear that she did not. Indeed, in giving evidence to CDRE Muirhead-Gould about why he had not signalled Fremantle, Captain Gibbons said he had considered 'taking his prisoners into Fremantle or, at least, closing Rottneest and making a report but decided against that course for fear the Rottneest area may have been mined by KORMORAN'.

22.62 Mr Bell's contentions are without substance.

Further contentions: Mrs Glenys McDonald

22.63 Mrs Glenys McDonald supported the view that there was a search flight on 23 November 1941. In her submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry in 1998 she said:

The *Aquitania* picked up Germans on the 23rd but was never meant to have radioed; she was meant to have headed all the way to the eastern states without breaking radio silence. If we were searching on the 23rd - I have just this morning heard some evidence that we were actually searching on the 22nd - that blows that reason for the 4½-day delay out of the water, unless we were just searching because we had some

⁹⁶ PINQ.SUBS.016.0054 at 0055

⁹⁷ SPC.006.0006

concerns that *Sydney* was overdue. The point is that we have always stated that we did not search for 4 ½ days because we did not know that there was anything wrong. His point is that we must have known that something was wrong for him to be up there on the 23rd.⁹⁸

In her 2005 book *Seeking Sydney – a quest for truth* she wrote:

I tried to advance Bourne's argument, but he misunderstood. I referred to information provided by Lindsay Peet, a professional historian who located an extract from the RAAF Central War Room diary, which seemed to indicate that the first search was ordered on 22 November and commenced at 0801H on 23 November, backing up Bourne's statements. Although the area to be searched was off Rottneest (a search that occurred on 24 November, according to both the SWACH log and Bourne), there is sufficient confusion over the starting time of the search as not to discount Bourne's recollection.⁹⁹

22.64 The reference to Lindsay Peet was a reference to Mr Peet's 16 April 1998 submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry. Mr Peet purported to set out portions of the Central War Room Diary for 22 to 24 November. He wrote:

22/11/41 C 247 [signal number] 1815 [time] #29 [file number] ACH Fremantle (to Pearce)

Z6 23/11. P1/24. Search the area between bearings 270° and 340° from datum 32° 01'S 115° 27'E and to a distance of 300 miles to seaward commencing 0001Z. Object locate HMAS "SYDNEY".

[This datum is Rottneest Island and the start time is 0801H (WST) on 23/11/41.]

[SWACH does not show this signal until 24/11/41 at 0105 H.]

24/11/41 0550 #29 ACH Fremantle to Pearce

Z7 24/11. P1/25. Search the area between bearings 262° - 337° from datum 28° 00'S 114° 10'E and to a distance of 300 miles to seaward commencing at 0001Z. Object locate HMAS "Sydney".

[This datum is near Ajana, north of Geraldton, and the start time is 0801H.]

[SWACH 24/11/41 1242H?]

24/11/41 0709 #29 From ACH Fremantle

⁹⁸ PINQ.TRANS.004.0001 at 0024

⁹⁹ PUB.035.0001 at 0149

**Z8 24/11. P1/24. Completed and negative 0510Z/24.
Search conditions good.**

[This “completed and negative” time is 1310H]

[SWACH 24/11/41 1332H?]¹⁰⁰

- 22.65 The first entry to which Mr Peet ascribes the date ‘22/11/41’ is as he set out. It appears on page 23 in the continuous bound diary. The entry is, however, on 23 November, not 22 November. Entries for 22 November begin on page 21 and conclude on page 22; those for 23 November begin on page 22 and conclude on page 23, where those for 24 November begin. The signal there recorded is referred to in the SWACH log at 0105H on 24 November in the following terms: ‘Sent a signal to Pearce ordering search, and advising CWR & HMAS Sydney. P1/24 - SLZ-270-340-3201S-11527E-300-0001Z Object locate HMAS Sydney. = 1705Z/23’.¹⁰¹

This accords with the actual signal, which is timed at ‘1705Z/23’, which is 0105W24 and which read:

Z6 23/11 NODECO

P1/24 Search between the bearings 270° to 340° to a depth of 300 miles datum point Rottneest Island search to commence 0001Z. Object locate H.M.A.S. SYDNEY.¹⁰²

The signal is from SWACH to Pearce, the Central War Room and SYDNEY. Plainly, the signal was not on 22 November 1941.

- 22.66 Both Ms McDonald and Mr Peet were wrong when they asserted there were entries in the Central War Room diary on 22 November 1941 ordering a search on 23 November. The entry is on 23 November, and it orders a search at 0801H on 24 November.

It can be further noted that the entry in the Central War Room diary at 1815K is after the time at which GPCAPT Bourne asserted he had conducted his search.

- 22.67 Ms McDonald’s second contention was that the SWACH log had been ‘altered or corrected’. She asked, ‘Could this suggest that people were trying to protect themselves after things went “belly up”, or simply reflect confusion between Zulu and H?’¹⁰³ Any fair reading of the log

¹⁰⁰ PINQ.SUBS.012.0122

¹⁰¹ NAA.016.0001 at 0046

¹⁰² NAA.040.0467

¹⁰³ SUBM.005.0136 at 0220

reveals that the alteration or correction does not suggest either the objectives or the confusion suggested by Ms McDonald.

The log shows that WGCDR McLean ordered the search reflected in the signal to Pearce at 10 minutes before 1.00 am on 24 November. The log keeper wrote 1250/23. Then, realising it was now the 24th, he crossed out the '12' so the entry then read 0050 and altered the 23 to 24 (see Figure 22.1). The day 'Mon. Nov 24th 1941' was underlined above it.¹⁰⁴

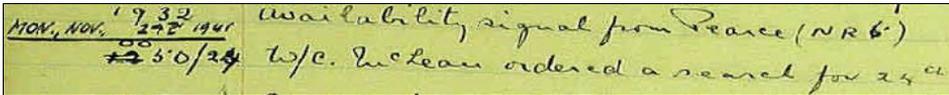


Figure 22.1 The SWACH log entry of 0050H on 24 November 1941¹⁰⁵

The entry is a simple correction of an obvious error in recording the time.

22.68 Neither of Ms McDonald's assertions has any substance. The factual basis for each is wrong. Neither gives any support for a view that a search was carried out on 23 November because at that time the Naval Board knew SYDNEY had been lost.

A Dutch listening post

22.69 Dr JA McArthur, in his thesis, wrote:

Presence of A Raider

In fact, the presence of a raider was known among the Australian naval and airforce commands at the time.¹⁰⁶

After referring to the aircraft sightings¹⁰⁷, and the supposed tracking of KORMORAN from Rose Bay and Holsworthy in New South Wales¹⁰⁸, he wrote:

It is also now known that at the remote north western town of Carnarvon, Western Australia, a secret and powerful listening station was built in mid-1941 and located in the Port Hotel ... It was a joint Anglo-Dutch facility.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ NAA.016.0001 at 0046

¹⁰⁵ NAA.016.0001 at 0046

¹⁰⁶ USQ.001.0003 at 0096

¹⁰⁷ Addressed in Chapter 22

¹⁰⁸ Addressed in Chapter 22

¹⁰⁹ USQ.001.0003 at 0105

22.70 Dr McArthur did not say that the listening station was tracking KORMORAN, but he sought to suggest yet another 'cover-up'. He wrote (at footnote 42):

The existence of the facility has been denied by the Department of Defence (Submission No. 94B, Vol.13, pp.3189ff) but the evidence produced from other sources in Submission 75A, Vol.12, pp.2926-2927 is graphic as are the photographs of the Javanese who manned the station.¹¹⁰

and

On the subject of "official" knowledge of the presence of a raider, Government and RAN circles remain silent to this day.¹¹¹

Thus, by inference and innuendo, Dr McArthur sought to infer that 'Australian naval and airforce' authorities knew of the presence of a raider (KORMORAN) before November 1941, in part because of the 'secret and powerful listening station' at Carnarvon, but had covered up that knowledge, and continued to do so. GPCAPT Bourne had made similar allegations.¹¹²

22.71 There was a Dutch listening post operating from Carnarvon, but it was not established until 1943. This is established by the following:

- a person said to have seen the listening post, a Mr Jim Richards, did not arrive in Carnarvon until 1942¹¹³
- the photographs relied on were taken by Mr G Williams, the local manager of McRobertson Miller Airlines, in 1945¹¹⁴
- according to the recollections of Colin Raymond Hopkins, an employee of the Postmaster General's Department in Carnarvon and Marble Bar, he was involved in the NIGIS (Netherlands Indies Government Information Service) operation from its commencement on 12 December 1943. Mr Hopkins recalled that NIGIS was started in Broome, but as the reception was unsatisfactory, it was relocated to Carnarvon.¹¹⁵

22.72 The listening post was not involved in tracking any raider in November 1941. Nothing was known of the location of any such raider, and there was no 'cover-up' by Government or Naval authorities.

¹¹⁰ USQ.001.0003 at 0105

¹¹¹ USQ.001.0003 at 0106

¹¹² PINQ.SUBS.014.0063 at 0067

¹¹³ PINQ.SUBS.014.0063 at 0067

¹¹⁴ PINQ.SUBS.014.0063 at 0067

¹¹⁵ PUB.011.0001 at 0009

Factual findings

22.73 The material before the Inquiry establishes beyond doubt the following:

- The Naval Board and Naval authorities did not know on 19 November 1941 that SYDNEY had been lost.
- On 23 November 1941 AQUITANIA did not signal authorities in Fremantle or otherwise advise authorities that she had picked up German survivors who had been in battle with a cruiser.
- AQUITANIA did not moor in Gage Roads off Fremantle for about two hours on either 23 or 24 November.
- After picking up KORMORAN survivors AQUITANIA proceeded without stopping directly to Sydney, first signalling by light her rescue of survivors as she passed Wilsons Promontory.
- Neither GPCAPT Bourne nor FLTLT Daly, nor any other pilot, searched for SYDNEY by air on 23 November 1941.
- On 23 November the Naval Board decided to mount a search for SYDNEY, that search to begin at 0800H on 24 November.
- A search was conducted by air and sea between 24 and 29 November.
- The records of the search have not been falsified or altered.
- When AQUITANIA arrived in Sydney early on 28 November CAPT Farncomb superintended the interrogation of German prisoners and wrote his reports of 29 November and 1 December detailing results of the interrogations.

Conclusion

22.74 To accept GPCAPT Bourne's theories that Naval authorities knew of the loss of SYDNEY from about 0700H on 23 November and knew of the location of the German lifeboats from that time because the lifeboats' position was being tracked by monitoring radio signals between them, one would need to accept the following propositions:

- Knowing the location of all German lifeboats at 0700 on 23 November, the Navy (or Commander-in-Chief China) directed AQUITANIA to pick up survivors in one lifeboat only, leaving the others to their peril. Why either would do that is unexplained.

- At least 10 to 12 hours in advance of sighting a lifeboat, TROCAS was directed by signal from the Navy or Commander-in-Chief China to prepare accommodation for survivors to be rescued.
- A powered German torpedo boat with the capacity to tow a nearby lifeboat full of sailors to shore did not do so. Instead, it waited until the lifeboat was sighted by aircraft, then towed the lifeboat for 90 minutes, transferred its own crew to the lifeboat, and scuttled the powered boat. Why anybody – particularly sailors who had been drifting at sea for seven days – would behave in such an irrational way is not explained.
- All the aircraft and ships logs and all the signals associated with the search for SYDNEY after 0700H on 23 November were false because Navy knew SYDNEY had been sunk. Why the Naval Board, which included the Minister for the Navy, the Chief of Naval Staff and senior public servants would act in such a way is unexplained.
- All the reports by Naval and Air Force personnel of their systematic searches between 24 and 29 November were a charade because it was known SYDNEY was lost, and the officers involved all prepared them while knowing they were false. In particular
 - a progress signal from the RAAF's Western Area Command to the Air Board in Melbourne, dated 26 November 1941, stating that the RAAF's involvement began with the search by six Hudsons on 24 November¹¹⁶
 - the report of Air Officer Commanding Western Area, AIRCDRE HF De La Rue DFC, of the RAAF's involvement in the search, entitled 'Air operations conducted by R.A.A.F. Western Area, 24th-29TH November, 1941, in connection with the loss of H.M.A.S. "Sydney"'¹¹⁷
 - a further secret report from AIRCDRE De La Rue to the Air Board in Melbourne, referring to 'Operations to seaward - 24th to 29th November, 1941'¹¹⁸
 - the RAAF Western Area Headquarters 'Weekly intelligence summary', dated 2 December 1941 and marked 'MOST SECRET', recording that the air searches occurred between 24 November and 29 November 1941¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ NAA.018.0294

¹¹⁷ NAA.018.0251

¹¹⁸ NAA.018.0248

¹¹⁹ NAA.023.0147

- the report of the commanding officer of RAAF Pearce (where No. 14 Squadron and a detachment from No. 25 Squadron were based), dated 4 December 1941, stating that the search began on 24 November¹²⁰
- the post-search report by WGCDR Lightfoot, Commanding Officer, No. 14 Squadron, subtitled '24th November to 28th November, 1941'¹²¹
- the first entry in the SWACH Operations room log in respect of the search for SYDNEY on 24 November 1941¹²², which contains no indication of AQUITANIA's discovery
- the reports by the Chief of Naval Staff, VADM Sir Guy Royle, to the Minister for the Navy on 24 November¹²³, to the War Cabinet on 25 November¹²⁴, and to the Governor-General, the Prime Minister and others regarding SYDNEY being overdue and being searched for

were all false, and knowingly so.

22.75 No rational person could accept those propositions. Yet acceptance of them is necessary if GPCAPT Bourne's speculations, unsupported by any evidence, are to be accepted.

22.76 GPCAPT Bourne's conjectures and assertions have no basis in fact or truth. There is no basis for his conjecture that the Navy or the Government 'covered up' knowledge of the loss of SYDNEY in order to hide the fact that it knew of the loss of SYDNEY on either 19 or 23 November 1941 but did nothing. I reject that groundless speculation in its entirety.

¹²⁰ NAA.018.0173

¹²¹ NAA.018.0210; NAA.018.0210 at 0211: The report says that the squadron conducted the search out of Geraldton and then Carnarvon. The move to Geraldton was on 24 November.

¹²² NAA.018.0259

¹²³ NAA.026.0452

¹²⁴ NAA.025.0058