

7 A chance encounter

7.1 There are some who have suggested that the encounter between HMAS SYDNEY and HSK KORMORAN on 19 November 1941 was not a matter of chance. It has been argued:

- that SYDNEY was ordered by Commander-in-Chief China to divert from her return course to Fremantle to intercept and engage KORMORAN, whose whereabouts were known¹

or

- that KORMORAN was directed to intercept either SYDNEY or AQUITANIA.²

These conjectures are discussed in detail in Volume 3 of the report.

7.2 In Chapter 4 it is established that, although the existence of German raiders was known, as was the possibility that such a raider might have been off the Western Australian coast in November 1941, Australian and British military authorities were unaware that KORMORAN was off the western coast and did not know her location and intended movements. Thus SYDNEY could not have been directed to intercept KORMORAN.

7.3 The remaining question is whether German authorities, and KORMORAN, knew the location and movements of SYDNEY or AQUITANIA. If they did not, KORMORAN could not have been directed to intercept or engage with either SYDNEY or AQUITANIA.

7.4 One starts with the circumstance that, even if the location and movements of SYDNEY or AQUITANIA, or both, were known, it is improbable that KORMORAN would have been ordered to intercept or engage either vessel. KORMORAN's orders were to avoid engagements with warships, so she would not have been ordered to engage SYDNEY.³ Nor would she have been likely to have been ordered to engage a troop ship: first, troop ships were usually accompanied by a warship; second, KORMORAN did not have the capacity to cope with a large number of survivors if she was successful in capturing or sinking such a ship; third, KORMORAN's orders were to wage economic warfare by disrupting merchant and trade vessels.

¹ TRAN.018.0001_R at 0030_R

² SUBM.001.0212_R at 0267_R; PINQ.SUBS.009.0043 at 0045; TRAN.022.0001_R at 0096_R to 0097_R

³ SPC.003.0037 at 0085

7.5 Nonetheless, the Inquiry examined the records in order to determine whether German authorities, and KORMORAN, knew of the movements of SYDNEY or AQUITANIA. If they did, it would allow the possibility of an interception order. The Inquiry also searched for any orders given to KORMORAN in November 1941.

Signal traffic between the German Navy and KORMORAN

7.6 The Inquiry comprehensively reviewed signal traffic between Seekriegsleitung (the German Naval War Staff, or Skl) and armed merchant cruisers (HSKs), with a specific focus on Ship 41 (HSK 8, or KORMORAN) for 1940 and 1941. The signals reviewed were located by inspecting files at German Military Archives, in Freiburg, and files held in the United States at the National Archives and Record Administration, in Washington, and the National Security Agency, Record Group 457, 'Historic Cryptographic Collection', which includes intelligence documents and related files of the German Navy from World War 2.

7.7 In total, the Inquiry examined more than 500 files in Germany; 172 of these were considered relevant and were copied. In Washington, from a list of 2,000 World War 2 files (organised into 790 boxes) containing cryptography-related materials captured from the Germans and other Axis powers, the Inquiry examined 50 boxes of files and made copies of relevant documents. The search for documents in Washington included a thorough review of documents in Record Group 38, 'Records of the Chief of Naval Operations – translations of German intercepts blockade runners and raiders 1940–1945'. Among these documents were decrypts of HSK *Kurzsignale* (short signals) sent using a German Naval Enigma key called 'Außerheimisch', which was used by raiders and other German units in distant waters. This Enigma key, code-named PIKE by the Allies, was not broken until 1944, and much of the PIKE material in the United States remained undeciphered until after the end of World War 2.⁴

7.8 Skl provided to the HSKs, including KORMORAN, regular updates on a range of operational intelligence matters – for example, the location of major British and Allied warships; convoy and troop ship movements; the position of, cargo carried by and intended port of destination of specific Allied merchant ships; Admiralty messages and Confidential Admiralty Fleet Orders intercepted and decrypted by German Navy Intelligence; operational orders for rendezvous positions with U-boats and supply vessels; and administrative and crew matters. The HSKs were also given advice on possible disguises, camouflage and tactics, as

⁴ PUB.069.0001 at 0664

well as intelligence briefs on British and Allied merchant ship procedures and ship movements in different regions of the world.

7.9 What follows is a summary of material documents:

- On 24 May 1941 an Skl report was sent to all German Navy units in waters abroad. It summarised parts of Ship 41's war diary, providing, among other things, a list of vessels captured, information about strategy (including daylight attacks and the jamming of enemy radio messages) and tactical information about how KORMORAN avoided making an enemy ship suspicious by changing course and then pretending to return to the previous course. It also mentioned that KORMORAN had opened fire on enemy ships from a distance of about 90 hectometres.⁵
- On 5 June 1941 Skl sent a signal to KORMORAN, advising that on 4 June 1941 at 2149 'RRR and SOS of unknown ship on 6610 Khz. Message was heard by Australian radio station Coonawarra (Northern Australia) at low volume, direction finding at 322 degrees with a deviation of 3 to 10 degrees'.⁶
- On 16 June 1941 Skl sent a signal to all HSKs, setting out the disposition of major British and Allied fleet units around the world. The intelligence briefing had been prepared on the basis of analysis by B-Dienst (Skl's radio reconnaissance service) and the report noted the presence on the Australia Station⁷ of 'Australia', 'Sidney' [sic] and 'Adelaide'.⁸
- On 17 June 1941 an operational intelligence brief was sent by wireless telegraphy to Ship 16 (ATLANTIS) and all other HSKs. Paragraph 1 of the brief provided a summary of operating areas in the world for HSKs and noted:

Success is also possible east of the Cape, between Western Australia and the Sunda Archipelago, and in pockets of the South Pacific. For the latter areas however, we only have limited knowledge on enemy shipping. In the previously mentioned areas patrolling enemy warships have to be expected.

Paragraph 5 noted, 'There is no prescribed formula for the tactics we have to use. Procedures are dependent on weather, operational areas, and traffic density'.

⁵ BUA.007.2017.0064_E (BUA.007.2017.0064). One hectometre is equivalent to 100 metres.

⁶ BUA.007.2667.0029_E (BUA.007.2667.0029)

⁷ A distinct Naval command area, the Australia Station was established in 1859, after the Crimean War.

⁸ BUA.007.2667.0098_E (BUA.007.2667.0098)

The brief also made reference to the manner in which Ship 41 successfully carried out daylight attacks on enemy shipping.⁹

- On 13 August 1941 Skl sent a signal to Ship 16 and KORMORAN, confirming re-supply of both ships by MÜNSTERLAND and KULMERLAND. KORMORAN was advised that she now had the whole of the Indian Ocean as an operating theatre, Ship 16 having crossed 120° east.¹⁰
- On 1 September 1941 Skl sent personal messages by wireless telegraphy to Ships 16, 41 and 45.¹¹
- On 6 September 1941 an Skl intelligence report showed the disposition of enemy warships, showing “Sidney” [sic], “Adelaide”, “Hobart” [and possibly] “Perth” on the Australia Station.¹²
- On 15 October 1941 an intelligence report prepared by the Chief of German Naval Intelligence noted light cruisers ‘Sydney, Adelaide, Hobart, [and possibly] Perth’ on the Australia Station.¹³
- On 21 October 1941 an intelligence report prepared by Skl summarised the operational situation in waters abroad. The source of the information was ‘Hannibal’, which was the German code word for the Italian Intelligence Service. The report described the situation with the enemy in the Indian Ocean:

Hannibal: Convoy of 21 steamers with 20,000 men, 742 officers and war material (most of it North American) from Fremantle to Telok Betong on 2 October in order to load more war material and fuel for aeroplanes; supposed to continue on 9 October, be in Colombo on 16-18 October, in Karachi on 21 October and arrive Basrah on 27 October. Men and material seem to be destined for Caucasus.¹⁴

- On 24 October 1941 an intelligence report noted, ‘According to an Abwehr [military intelligence] report based on Japanese sources, the cruiser Australia came into port at Sydney on 11 October, the cruiser Adelaide on 13 October’.¹⁵

⁹ BUA.007.2017.0132_E (BUA.007.2017.0132)

¹⁰ BUA.007.2017.0242_E (BUA.007.2017.0242)

¹¹ BUA.007.2670.0019_E at 0019_E to 0021_E (BUA.007.2670.0019 at 0019 to 0021)

¹² BUA.007.2670.0031

¹³ BUA.007.2634.0029_E at 0031_E (BUA.007.2634.0029 at 0031)

¹⁴ BUA.007.0277.0168_E (BUA.007.0277.0168)

¹⁵ BUA.007.2634.0053_E (BUA.007.2634.0053)

- A further German Navy Intelligence situation report, dated 24 October 1941, reported as follows:

Report from Attaché: 'Adelaide' and one transport ship of type 'Orange' have left Sydney on 14 October. 'Queen Mary' left and 'Queen Elizabeth' arrived on 15 [October], 'Australia' left on 16 [October.] Addendum: The message seems to be credible as all 'Adelaide' with 'Queen Mary', 'Orange' and 1 further transport ship arrived on 13 October and 'Australia' on 11 October according to previous reports; furthermore 'Queen Mary' and 'Queen Elizabeth' together with US 13 supposed to travel to the Near East at the end of October.¹⁶

- On 26 October 1941 the last signal KORMORAN sent to Germany was received at Norddeich (German radio station) at 2037. CAPT Detmers reported to Skl, 'Have discharged supply ship. 17th of forthcoming month rendezvous. Ship 41'.¹⁷ The reference to '17th of forthcoming month rendezvous' was to a rendezvous between the supply ships KULMERLAND and SPREEWALD at a position code-named 'Balbo', planned for 17 November 1941. It was *not* a reference to a rendezvous with either SYDNEY or AQUITANIA. This is made clear by several earlier signals, as follows.

By signal sent to KORMORAN on 29 September 1941 Skl advised as follows:

- 1) Attaché Tokyo has been instructed to equip the rubber transport ship 'Spreewald', departing Dairen approximately 20 October, for the taking on of 300 prisoners from 'Kulmerland'. The departure and arrival date of 'Spreewald' on Balbo will be transmitted on time to 'Ship 41' and 'Kulmerland'.
- 2) Naval War Staff expects 'Ship 41' to report [...] if no prisoners are transferred to 'Kulmerland'.
- 3) If prisoners are being handed over to 'Kulmerland', provide 'Spreewald' with an escort and a copy of the war diary. Send short signal to Attaché in Tokyo about important events, requests [and], if necessary, also send copy of war diary.¹⁸

By further signal, dated 14 October 1941, Skl updated the signal of 29 September sent to KORMORAN:

- 1) Report of arrival of 'Kulmerland' at Balbo.

¹⁶ BUA.007.0277.0173_E (BUA.007.0277.0173)

¹⁷ BUA.007.2017.0318_E (BUA.007.2017.0318)

¹⁸ BUA.007.2017.0298_E (BUA.007.2017.0298)

2) 'Spreewald's' cruising speed 10 knots. Time needed for journey from Dairen to Balbo 28 days. Departure before 22 October unlikely.

3) 'Spreewald' has order to wait for 'Kulmerland' at Balbo, to be at rendezvous position every day at 1600 local mean time. Date of departure [for] 'Spreewald' [and] necessary changes directly via radio message to 'Kulmerland'.

4) For further control of 'Spreewald', 'Kulmerland' has to transmit to Attaché Tokyo: dates on which 'Spreewald' passes positions *Spottvogel*, *Sperling*, *Specht*, *Sperber* and arrives at Bordeaux.¹⁹

It is noteworthy that Skl asked KORMORAN to 'report arrival of KULMERLAND at Balbo'.

The 14 October signal was further updated by a signal from Skl to KORMORAN on 24 October 1941:

I. Cyphered w/t (officer) to 'Ship 41'

For information: all abroad

1) 'Spreewald' departed Dairen 21 October, therefore at Balbo around 18 November. Secret call sign: LXFI. Able to stay at sea for 4 months at 10 knots. Camouflage 'Tengen Maru' (JILG), off Rio onwards as Norwegian 'Elg' (LCKU).

2) Unscheduled embarkation of a number of conscripts, amongst them 1 major, 1 doctor, 2 able seamen, 1 naval gunner. The number of guards for prisoners can therefore be kept to minimum.

3) After 'Kulmerland' has gone into port in Japan, auxiliary cruiser will be informed about 'Spreewald's' journey across Atlantic.

Naval War Staff

II Cyphered w/t to supply ship 'Kulmerland'.

'Spreewald' departed Dairen on 21 October camouflaged as 'Tengen Maru' (JILG), at Balbo on 18 November.

Naval War Staff²⁰

Thus, on 26 October 1941, in accordance with instructions, CAPT Detmers informed Skl by short signal that KULMERLAND was expected at the rendezvous position on 17 November.

¹⁹ BUA.007.2671.0085_E (BUA.007.2671.0085)

²⁰ BUA.007.2017.0316_E (BUA.007.2017.0316)

On 30 October 1941 Skl advised SPREEWALD by signal of the following:

- I. Cyphered w/t to Supply ship 'Spreewald' (Western Pacific)
- 1) 'Kulmerland' will arrive at Balbo probably on 17 November.
 - 2) Naval Attaché announced that 'Spreewald' reported she will need 25 days to proceed from *Spottvogel* to *Sperling*. Fleet Command assumes error and reckons with only 15 days. Pass on right time to 'Kulmerland'.

Naval War Staff²¹

The German Navy Intelligence situation report for 27 October 1941²² recorded the short signal report from Ship 41 confirming the discharge of KULMERLAND.

- German Navy Intelligence report number 43/1941, dated 31 October 1941, noted in relation to Australia, 'Cruiser Adelaide departed Sydney on 14 October, Australia on 16 October, together with troop transports'.²³
- On 1 November 1941 German Navy Intelligence reported its knowledge about waters abroad. For the Indian Ocean the report noted, 'Attaché report: 30,000 ton vessel went into port at Cape Town on 17 [October], departed 20 [October]. On 18 [October] a 20,000 ton vessel went into port there, departed again on 20 [October]. Both ships had Air Force personnel on board'.²⁴
- On 13 November 1941 the Chief Naval Intelligence Service of Skl advised all German Navy units abroad that with immediate effect the following signature groups were to be used for the ships listed when short signals were sent:

Python	gs				
Uckermark	fa				
Scheer	al	or	lj	or	mk
Ship 10	aq	or	lp	or	mq
Ship 16	ap	or	lo	or	mp
Ship 45	ar	or	lq	or	mr
Ship 41	as	or	lr	or	ms ²⁵

²¹ BUA.007.2017.0327_E (BUA.007.2017.0327)

²² BUA.007.0277.0177_E (BUA.007.0277.0177)

²³ BUA.007.2634.0086_E (BUA.007.2634.0086)

²⁴ BUA.007.0277.0184_E (BUA.007.0277.0184)

²⁵ BUA.007.2017.0349_E (BUA.007.2017.0349)

- On 14 November 1941 the German Navy situation report for waters abroad noted for the Pacific Ocean area:

Bx [radio reconnaissance] report: a cruiser, presumably 'Colombo' left Colombo on 3 November, arrived Bombay 7 November. A further unit left Colombo on 6 November, arrived Mauritius 12 November. A cruiser, presumably 'Cornwall', left an Australian port on 6 November, to meet a convoy west of Australia at 41 South on 11 November.²⁶

The reference to the cruiser CORNWALL was probably incorrect—it should have been to CANBERRA.

- On 14 November 1941 Skl reported in relation to the Australian region, 'Cruiser Adelaide, according to radio activity, was situated in the New Zealand area on 5 November, armed merchant cruiser Prince Henry [has been] on the American West coast since 21 October'.²⁷
- On 15 November 1941 Skl informed all HSKs that, according to Attaché Tokyo, 'Transports are leaving Australia on 25 October and 15 November'.²⁸
- On 17 November 1941 Skl advised KORMORAN of a radio transmission intercept: 'On 16 November 0921, Belconnen warned of drifting mine at 3610 South 15013.5 East'.²⁹
- On 18 November 1941 a radio message carrying crew members' personal messages was sent to Ships 16, 41 and 45.³⁰ This transmission seems to be the last documented message sent to KORMORAN before the engagement with SYDNEY on 19 November 1941.
- On 20 November 1941 the German Navy Intelligence situation report noted the disposition of enemy units in the Australian region to be 'Heavy cruiser Australia, light cruiser Sydney, Adelaide, Perth, Achilles'.³¹
- On 21 November 1941 the intelligence report noted the following for the Australian region:

²⁶ BUA.007.0277.0204_E at 0205_E (BUA.007.0277.0204 at 0205)

²⁷ BUA.007.2634.0166_E (BUA.007.2634.0166)

²⁸ BUA.007.2672.0131_E (BUA.007.2672.0131)

²⁹ BUA.007.2017.0353_E (BUA.007.2017.0353)

³⁰ BUA.007.2672.0217_E (BUA.007.2672.0217)

³¹ BUA.007.0277.0215_E at 0216_E (BUA.007.0277.0215 at 0216)

On 10 November, 0900, a drifting mine was sighted at 3834 S 14822 East (Bass Strait). On 16 November, Belconnen reported a drifting mine in the area of Sydney. According to radio activity, cruiser Achilles was situated in the Australian area on 13 November.³²

- On 22 November 1941 Skl sent a signal to KORMORAN, providing details of the movements of a number of Allied merchant ships:

Top secret
Berlin 22 November 1941

I.) Cyphered w/t (officer)
To 'Ship 41' (10th Auxiliary Mine Sweeper Group)

'Rangoon' departed: 'Nurtureton' into port at Colombo on 6 November via 1812 North about 90 East, 'Winnifred Moller' on 10 November at 10 knots via 14 North about 86 East, 8 North about 83 East into port at Colombo on 15 November. 'Barola' departed Karachi on 31 October at 8-13 knots via 22 North 67 or 68 East, 19 North 70 or 71 East, into port at Bombay on 3 November.

Naval War Staff³³

It is of note that there is not in this or any preceding signal a reference to AQUITANIA. The reports make it clear that on 22 November 1941 Skl was unaware that KORMORAN had been engaged in battle with SYDNEY on 19 November and had been sunk.

- On 26 November 1941 at 0710 Skl sent a signal to KORMORAN:

On 24 November, 1252, Sidney [sic] Radio Station transmitted the following request by an unknown shore station [sent] to unknown steamer with signal name B I W D;

Report by W/T details engagement and name [of] ship from which survivors were rescued.³⁴

- A further signal was sent to KORMORAN, for information, at 1304 on 26 November 1941. This signal was a copy of a message sent to U-boat supply ship PYTHON. It stated:

Berlin, 26 November 1941
Top Secret!

I. Cyphered w/t (officer)
To U-boat supply ship Python

³² BUA.007.2634.0214_E (BUA.007.2634.0214)

³³ BUA.007.2672.0192_E (BUA.007.2672.0192)

³⁴ BUA.007.2017.0372_E (BUA.007.2017.0372)

for information:
Ship 41

U126 has reported having carried out task.

Congratulations.

Naval War Staff³⁵

- This signal is associated with a further Skl signal sent on 29 November to KORMORAN, being a copy of a signal received by Skl from submarine U126. The signal read:

Berlin, 29 November 1941
Top secret!

I. Cyphered w/t (officer)
To U-boat supply ship Python
for information: Schiff 41

Received from U126:

1) Report: 0915 GMT London-cruiser sighted on course to rendezvous, catapults plane. Oil supply hose cut, boat dives because of plane, according to instructions from Bauer on ship. Own Arado not usable, therefore no reconnaissance. Ship tries to move away and guide enemy [into position] above [U-]boat, after that salvoes to stop at 200 hm. Stopped to entice enemy to come closer [while] under camouflage. Own speed 10 sm because of piston change. Circling plane Nanni Nanni Jota using flag signals. Answer by ship: 'Polyphemus' plus RRR message on 600 m. Waiting an hour and signal exchange with flags and [concerning] name with cruiser moving to and fro at 150 hm and with plane. Then the enemy turns away and opens fire at 165 hm; shots well placed. Third salvo achieves hit and causes fire on airplane deck. Resistance impossible since enemy beyond reach of weapons and continues to sail away at high speed. Therefore turned away at highest speed, used smoke, hoisted flag, scuttled ship with explosives in order to save most of crew. U-boat sighted by plane, had to dive, aerial bombs. Due to fire by enemy and hits only 2/3 of boats with 200 men put to water, rest swimming or on rafts. Enemy sailing away, plane circles site of sinking once. U-boat takes on 55 men under deck, 52 men on deck, rest in 6 boats that can be towed [and are] full to their limit. Until now assuming type of ship kept secret.

³⁵ BUA.007.2017.0373_E (BUA.007.2017.0373)

2) On the morning of 24 November taken over by Python which is discharged 1800. Captain and entire crew on Python, apart from 7 fallen which are known by name. First Officer seriously wounded, no danger to his life. Kasch on U126.

Naval War Staff ³⁶

- On 28 November 1941 a German Navy Intelligence report had given an intelligence assessment of the Australian region:

According to radio activity, the cruiser Adelaide was situated in the area of Australia - New Zealand on 22 November.

From 12 to 13 November the cruiser Achilles was situated in Sydney, where Perth is meant to have been for about 2 weeks (Attaché Rome).³⁷

These signals of 26 and 28 November relate to an encounter on 22 November 1941 between HMS DEVONSHIRE and the raider ATLANTIS (Ship 16), which identified herself as POLYPHEMUS. The encounter occurred at 4°20'S, 18°35'W, off the west coast of Africa in the South Atlantic.

ATLANTIS was sunk by a series of salvos from DEVONSHIRE after Commander-in-Chief South Atlantic had advised DEVONSHIRE—in response to her inquiry whether the ship POLYPHEMUS was expected to be in that location—that POLYPHEMUS was not so expected and the encountered vessel could not be POLYPHEMUS.³⁸ When first observed, the vessel that identified herself as POLYPHEMUS was in the process of refuelling a submarine. DEVONSHIRE did not stop to rescue survivors from ATLANTIS because of the known presence of a German submarine.

The submarine U126 assisted in the rescue of survivors from ATLANTIS and waited to rendezvous with U-boat supply ship PYTHON and submarines U124 and U129. Some 300 survivors were transferred to these vessels. The signal of 26 November acknowledged that the crew of ATLANTIS had been rescued. The signals thus relate to an engagement in a different ocean, some 7,400 miles away. It is not known why the information was relayed to KORMORAN.

- 7.10 By early December 1941 Skl was becoming increasingly concerned about the whereabouts of KORMORAN. This is evident in signals it sent to KORMORAN at 1003, 1110 and 1200 on 1 December. Those signals referred to an intercepted Admiralty report of 26 November:

³⁶ BUA.007.2017.0383_E (BUA.007.2017.0383)

³⁷ BUA.007.2634.0250_E (BUA.007.2634.0250)

³⁸ For an account of the battle see UKAA.010.0074.

From Admiralty report of 26 November:

1.) Cruiser 'Sidney' (sic) 6 days overdue in Fremantle. She was returning from convoy duty. It is assumed that she was sunk by enemy raider, but specific news about 'Sidney's' (sic) fate is uncertain. A British tanker has picked up German seamen from some vessel, others were sighted in life boats, two of which have been reported to have come ashore in Western Australia. There is evidence that 'Sidney' (sic) was on fire when she was last seen by the Germans.

2.) Report location no later than 10 December.

Naval War Staff³⁹

7.11 The German Navy Intelligence situation report for 1 December 1941 provided the following assessment for waters abroad:

Situation in waters abroad on 1 December 1941, 0800

I. Enemy situation

...

II. Own situation:

Bx [radio reconnaissance] report: Brit. Admiralty reports on 26 November that the cruiser Sidney [sic] has been overdue in Fremantle for 6 days. It is assumed she was sunk by an enemy raider. However, there are no further details. German sailors in lifeboats were seen and some of them were rescued. Addendum *SkI*: This can only refer to Ship 41 which seems to have been lost after a successful battle.⁴⁰

7.12 An internal *SkI* memorandum—undated but probably written on 2 December 1941—made note of an excerpt from a *B-Meldung* [radio monitoring report] dated 30 November 1941 at 1045:

HMAS "Sydney" 6 days overdue at Fremantle [sic]. She was returning from escort duty. Believed she sank an enemy raider but definite news of HMAS "Sydney's fate uncertain. British tanker has picked up German seamen from a raft, others have been sighted in lifeboats, two of which reported came ashore in Western Australia. Indications are that HMAS "Sydney" was on fire when (?) last seen by Germans.⁴¹

7.13 On 2 December 1941 Oberkommando der Marine, B-Leitstelle (German Navy High Command, Central Radio Intelligence Office) informed *SkI* of a radio monitoring report of an announcement by the Australian Government that SYDNEY had been sunk in an engagement with an

³⁹ BUA.007.2017.0387_E (BUA.007.2017.0387)

⁴⁰ BUA.007.0277.0228_E (BUA.007.0277.0228)

⁴¹ BUA.007.2017.0388

armed enemy auxiliary cruiser. The announcement had been made through Reuters at 1330 on 2 December 1941. The German report read:

Radio Report

Announcement by Australian Government that the cruiser Sydney (6830t) has had an engagement with an armed enemy auxiliary cruiser which she sunk through gunfire. There has been no later message received from Sydney and it has to be assumed that she has been lost. (Daventry 2 December/1300, Reuters: 2 December – 1030). Announcement by Australian Prime Minister Curtin that all the crew of Sydney, 42 officers and 603 men, are missing. Sydney was sunk by an armed merchant ship. (OFI 2 December 1335h).

It has become known that the armed merchant pirate which was sunk by Sydney was the Steiermark (9400t).

(Reuters 2 December 1330)

German Navy High Command

Central Radio Intelligence Office⁴²

This was in substance repeated in the German Navy Intelligence situation report for 3 December 1941.⁴³

7.14 German Navy Intelligence issued a further situation report on 4 December 1941:

Further press reports re. sinking of 'Ship 41' have become known:

Globereuter disseminates that the German ship 'Steiermark' has for some time been known as a raider. Nr. 41 and was named 'Cormoran' [sic]. Furthermore, the number of ships that were sunk by this auxiliary cruiser are announced. 2 life boats with survivors of 'Cormoran' [sic] have reached the town of Carnarvon in Western Australia. The survivors declared that their ship had immediately achieved successful hits on 'Sidney' [sic]. However, the sinking cruiser had returned fire and succeeded in setting fire to "Cormoran" [sic]. Reconnaissance planes and fishing vessels picked up several lifeboats. 'Cormoran's' captain was rescued by an Australian ship. According to the latest reports available, the number of men rescued from 'Cormoran' is at 320.

According to American observers, it was a German pocket battleship that accompanied 'Steiermark' at some of her attacks, and sank the cruiser 'Sidney'. It is doubtful that 'Steiermark' with a speed of 18

⁴² BUA.007.2017.0389_E (BUA.007.2017.0389)

⁴³ BUA.007.0277.0230_E at 0231_E (BUA.007.0277.0230 at 0231)

knots was in a position to win the battle against 'Sidney' with her 33 knots.⁴⁴

- 7.15 On 4 December 1941 at 1415 German Navy High Command informed Skl that an Admiralty report of 30 November, commenting on the loss of SYDNEY, had been intercepted. The Admiralty advice was reported as follows:

The extended search to find any survivors of cruiser Sydney has not led to any result but a Royal Australian Navy life buoy and 2 Carlecroa (?) [sic] floats were found 160 nm north west of Carnarvon, Western Australia. Survivors of the auxiliary cruiser say that she was the Steiermark (9400 t) and that the engagement in the afternoon of 19 [November] lasted 2.5 hours. The auxiliary cruiser was given up at midnight (?) and the Sydney was last seen burning heavily.⁴⁵

- 7.16 German Navy Intelligence report number 48/1941, dated 5 December 1941, remarked on the Australian area: 'On 24 November, 1252, Sydney radio station prompted an unknown vessel (probably steamer) to transmit details of a battle and the name of the vessel from which she had picked up survivors'.⁴⁶

- 7.17 On 7 December 1941 at 0800 the German Navy Intelligence situation report noted the following for waters abroad:

Australian Associated Press reports it was announced in Melbourne that the rescued crew members of the auxiliary cruiser 'Cormoran' [sic] may be treated as pirates. The Australian Government asked for a legal opinion [on the question] whether a ship is to be treated as a pirate if she starts firing before hoisting her own war ensign.

Addendum: Has to be regarded as horror propaganda or as biased reporting with the aim of belittling the achievement of the German auxiliary cruiser. According to announcement by the Australian Navy, the number of rescued [men] is 318. Hope of finding survivors of 'Sidney' [sic] was given up.⁴⁷

- 7.18 On 12 December 1941 German Navy Intelligence report number 49/1941⁴⁸ dealt with German auxiliary cruisers:

On 5 December, 1215, the British tanker J.Wolfe (12190 t) reported a suspicious ship by 'QQQ' at 1602 N 6508 W (Eastern Caribbean Ocean) and at 1458 revoked an SSS transmission.

⁴⁴ BUA.007.0277.0232_E at 0233_E (BUA.007.0277.0232 at 0233)

⁴⁵ BUA.007.2017.0390_E (BUA.007.2017.0390)

⁴⁶ BUA.007.2634.0289_E (BUA.007.2634.0289)

⁴⁷ BUA.007.0277.0237_E at 0238_E (BUA.007.0277.0237 at 0238)

⁴⁸ BUA.007.2634.0328_E (BUA.007.2634.0328)

On 19 November, cruiser Sydney, according to reports by Reuters, has sunk the German auxiliary cruiser Cormoran [sic] (Steiermark 9400 t), following a battle during which she had achieved immediate hits. The entire crew of Sydney, 42 officers and 603 men, are missing. The captain of the Cormoran and 320 men were rescued.⁴⁹

7.19 This review of the available German signal traffic establishes the following:

- KORMORAN did not know the location or movements of SYDNEY before the engagement on 19 November 1941.
- KORMORAN was not directed to intercept SYDNEY.
- KORMORAN did not know the location or movements of AQUITANIA.
- KORMORAN was not directed to intercept AQUITANIA.
- The encounter between SYDNEY and KORMORAN was a chance encounter.
- The German Navy did not know of the engagement between SYDNEY and KORMORAN until early December 1941.

Conclusion

7.20 The encounter between SYDNEY and KORMORAN was a chance encounter.

⁴⁹ BUA.007.2634.0339_E (BUA.007.2634.0339)

