

ALAISTAIR R. TEMPLETON

65 BRENTWOOD AVENUE,  
TURRAMURRA, N.S.W. 2074  
TELEPHONE: (02) 449 9435

COPY

8 March, 1994.



Mr. R.C.H.Courtney,  
Australian War Memorial,  
G.P.O. Box 345,  
Canberra. A.C.T. 2601

Dear Mr.Courtney,

The Scientific Investigation of a Carley Float

My thanks for letting me know that a report on the above was available for purchase. Couldn't get my cheque off fast enough! Your information took the form of a photocopy of your article on page 50 of some journal, and included a picture of H.M.A.S.Sydney leading the two Queens off Wilsons Promontory - a good description. Solely for the record, you just might remember my saying that the description in the Official History was inaccurate, inasmuch as it said Sydney was leading the two ships past Wilsons Promontory.

U.S.12a was a westbound convoy, yet all ships were heading generally eastward and had not at that time passed the Prom. The purpose of so doing seemed to be to have the Queens follow in our swept wake - we had bow protection paravanes streamed - before proceeding westward through shallower waters where German mines had once been laid. We had escorted one of the Queens (think Mary) down from Sydney, the other having been lurking in Twofold Bay with another escort to rendezvous with us in Bass Strait, and there form up in line ahead until through the Strait and into deep water once more, when the Queens took station a mile or so distant on each quarter. Photocopy of Official History picture attached for convenient reference.

Overall, the report has a good sense of balance, and its technical content is impressive. What a lot of painstaking work went into that. By and large it is an acceptable "conclusion" that the float could have come from "Sydney" and been blown off during the action - say, midway. If not that, where did it come from? There is no likely or plausible answer to that, which leads to a kind of negative proof.

Notwithstanding broad acceptance of the report, that acceptance is not without comment and criticism, especially on points that I feel able to take by reason of personal knowledge gained from first hand observation and/or factual conclusions forced on me over the years. Some are points of detail, and some are more fundamental. As a matter of convenience, I shall work through them in the order in which they appear in the report, using page or paragraph references as appropriate.

p. 5 -

Repainting in camouflage colours occurred again on 9.9.41 while alongside Princes Pier, Melbourne - a different pattern, designed no doubt, as more suitable for Indian Ocean work. My recollection is that the Carley floats on the quarterdeck were not repainted, merely washed down to look smarter and preserve their existing paint a bit longer. There is also the weight limitation factor.

"... sank.....after the damage she received from shells, bullets and the ravages of fires on board". Why no mention of the torpedo, when that was a significant - perhaps major - factor? The official history did refer to the torpedo hit, although the extent of the mention was, in my view, less than honest. In our own chat a year or so ago, I was impressed by your perception of the damage inflicted - and why - but do not expect a response to what can be regarded, in official circles, as hearsay. But no response, no mention? Surely deliberate. For what good reason? And the reference to "bullets" is unconvincing, though that is another matter.

p. 6 -

It is not in point to deal here with the contents of sub-paras (a) to (c), although, as I think you are aware, I have come to have no doubts about the real answers to all three questions. Only one thing is worth mentioning for the record. At Montgomery's request, I had reviewed his manuscript in November 1980, concerned mainly to tidy it up and remove some of the grosser solecisms and not having the time or inclination to care much about the substance. A few things he should have taken cognisance of were spelt out - and ignored - as any writer is free to do. The Japanese submarine question was raised by telephone. "Michael, haven't you stretched it a bit by bringing the Japanese into this?" There was a pause and some awkward shuffling before the reply. "Oh look, Alastair, you have to allow an author some latitude". It was the best answer I ever got out of him, even though I used to see him in England every now and then for some years afterwards.

Someone has probably told you ere this that the co-ordinates given for the finding of the float are those of a position somewhere north-west of Easter Island - over towards Chile. The latitude of 24 degrees 7 minutes South is O.K. The longitude should be 110 degrees 58 minutes East - not West. We all know that Canberra is the centre of the known world, but....!

p.24 -

The paragraph near the head of the page, and forming part of Section 7, refers to a cuprous projectile (Sample 2) having a very unusual alloy with more zinc than copper, and not conforming with any common copper/zinc alloy specifications, the reason for which was not established. With absolute deference to the technical people involved, may I yet raise a question? If the projectile were to have been fired by the (probably) starboard anti-tank PAK37, would it have been taken into account that tracer ammunition did get used as well as normal ammunition? To a degree, tracer shells would have had a different structure, but just how different? In London in 1987, I had enquired into the extent of penetration of the two types of shell, as

I thought then, and continue to think, that that gun's part in the action was more significant than has been generally considered. For what it may be worth, the Imperial War Museum advised me that in anti-tank usage at an optimum range of about 600 yards, certain PAK37 shells were capable of armour plate penetration of the order of 49 to 58 mm. Three types of shell were said to be used - AP shot, AP tracer, and HE tracer. I imagine the latter were for anti-aircraft use, a use not contemplated or possible for "Kormoran", which would be consistent with my being told by "Kormoran" men that "splinter" shells were used, i.e. AP shot or AP tracer. So the former type had the penetration parameters mentioned above. The latter, i.e. the tracer shells, could achieve penetration of the order of 34 to 46 mm. So how different was their composition? I have no clues, but felt some of your people might.

p.26 -

Section 9. Discussion. First paragraph, second sentence. I believe that the inference here is that "Sydney" fired at "Kormoran" with guns other than her 6 inch. If that is so, it is of course a proper thought in the context of the technical examination undertaken. In reality it is a "NoNo", for "Sydney's" secondary armament, including my old gun, did not fire a shot at any time during the action. Of that I am entirely satisfied, notwithstanding contrary statements in the Official History and elsewhere. Moreover, the secondary (gunnery) armament was not manned at any stage. The circumstances, and the reasons for my unhappy satisfaction, have no place in this letter and are to be dealt with elsewhere in due course.

The reference to German machine-gun bullets in the next paragraph is interesting. I'm afraid I have been unable, so far, to satisfy myself whether or not "Kormoran's" small arms, i.e. those of less than 20mm. calibre, were used. My general feeling, from all that I have heard and discussed over the last 7 years, is that they were not, but the wretched things keep popping up in some writings.

p.27 -

A good thought that a Lysaght logo inside the steel tubular body of the float could have been on export steel. BHP and its associate Lysaght did compete on the export market in the pre-war 1930's. Some 40 years ago, I worked my way to England in a Swedish ship built in Gothenburg of BHP steel in the late 1920's or early 30's.

I reflected, following our chat last year, on whether the number '5' on the float had any significance. You will remember that I thought there was none. I tried it out on several men who had served in the ship at the same time or earlier than me. It rang no bells with anyone.

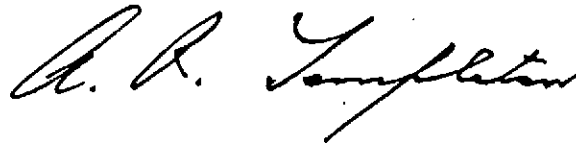
-----

Having a taste for the particular, I would have liked to see correct references to Barbara Winter's book in the footnotes, i.e. H.M.A.S. Sydney - Fact, Fantasy and Fraud, Boolarong Publications, and could have done without the visit of "apostrophe man" in the last line of the first column on p.40. In other respects, and given the slightly more substantive comments on previous pages, the task has been well carried out, and I hope all involved have found satisfaction in it. You might mention to Anne I'Ons that I would like to shake hands one day.

No response is expected, with the exception that if there was anything positive to say about my notions relating to the tracer shell, I would be interested to hear. A phone call perhaps?

With my thanks for your personal interest,

Yours sincerely,



Encl.