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Mr John Nicholas  
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Re: The Action of HMAS Sydney/Kormoran off Australia on 19 November 1941.  
With reference to: The writings of Captain (Ret'd) Reinhard R Richter, Bonn,  
Germany of 18 May 1989.

Dear Mr Nicholas

I was a member of the Artillery-Fire Division crew of the auxilliary cruiser (HSK) Kormoran and, from my post above the cruiser's helm, I could see clearly out over the whole ship and out over the sea as well. The course of events, in general, was this:

The Kormoran had begun an advance against the Carnavon-West Coast, in order to lay mines during the cover of dark. At about 3pm local time, some mastheads were spotted on the horizon. A Perth class ship was pursuing us on a westerly course and it was closing in on us very quickly. Outwardly, we were to be recognised as 'The Strait of Malacca' from Rotterdam and we were flying the Dutch merchant flag from our stern and the same colours were painted on the sides of the ship. The questioning, by signal flag and lamp, "Who?" "Where to?" and "What cargo?" was answered in an appropriately stalling manner. Meanwhile, the HMAS Sydney came closer, pointed its gun towers at us, swivelled the catapult, the aeroplane and the running propeller to 'Start'; the ship stopped, with its plane and catapult still out and in position. While

it was sailing alongside us, at a distance of about 900 metres, the Sydney asked us, in morse code, very slowly and unmistakably to "give your secret call", which we did not know. The moment had come to act. The captain (it was now about 5.30pm) gave us the order to blow our cover. The Dutch merchant flag, which was fluttering from the stern, was immediately taken down by the sailor standing there and the national colours painted along the ship's sides were covered over with a canvas. At the same time, the German naval ensign, waving freely, was hoisted up the stern mast. The sides of the ship behind the four 15cm cannons were lifted up or lowered and the cannons were put into position for firing. This all took time - it had often taken about 10 seconds in practice. I had always recorded the time it took on a stopwatch. Then Frigate Captain Detmers gave the command "Permission to fire!". After six seconds, the first volley was fired from our 15cm cannons, our single 3.7cm anti tank gun and from our four 2cm anti aircraft guns. What was happening on the Sydney? Her guns had been trained on us for a long time. One could see her officers on the bridge and the crew on deck. There was about 900 - 1000 metres between us. The changes to our ship, shown by the naval ensign before the firing of the first volley, must have been recognised by the Sydney immediately and they were responded to accordingly. A minute later, one of our torpedoes hit the Sydney; the forecastle sank deep, the bridges, the funnel and the upper deck were destroyed and the aeroplane exploded, the tower deck of the two towers shot up into the air. In spite of all this, the rear tower group managed to hit us five more times on deck and in the engine room. The Sydney turned towards us, as if she wanted to ram us, but limped off on the opposite course, shooting four more torpedoes which missed us and went far off towards the dark horizon and out of sight. A hit and a fire in our engine room and in the heart of the ship made us immobile and we had to abandon ship. We were only able to escape by drifting in the few rowing boats that were on