

Words, spoken at the grave of Captain Detmers,


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20 November, 1989

Comrades, we have gathered here at the grave of Captain Detmers to commemorate this man to whom we all owe our lives.

When we were assembled in Wilhelmshaven in 1940 we were a more or less accidentally convoked bunch of mostly young men. Though having passed a short training most of us had no practical experience in co-operating as a crew on board a warship. But we had a commanding officer who had made it his task to transform this bunch into a crew that knew their business, that could be relied upon in every situation and that would be ready for action and for sacrifices down to the last man in cases of emergency.

And when this case of emergency occurred on 19 November, 1941, when H.M.A.S. SYDNEY stopped us and at last asked the fateful question for the ~~XXXXXX~~ secret signal, when Captain Detmers had to decide the vital question, "action or scuttle", at that moment he knew that he could rely upon every single man of his crew and that gave him the inward composure and security for his decisions. And that he could do so, that was the result of our nearly one year long training on the auxiliary cruiser during which he had welded us together to a crew ready for action and sacrifices at any moment.

We all did our duty, before, during and after the engagement against the SYDNEY, every man on his place, ^{station} whether ^{and at the ~~hospitals~~} at the guns, in the engine-room, as a wireless operator or elsewhere on board our ship. But that we could do that and were willing to do that, that we owe to our commanding officer.

I think for that reason, we survivors of the auxiliary cruiser KORMORAN are greatly indebted to Captain Detmers, but this morning we can express these feelings only by laying a wreath at his grave.