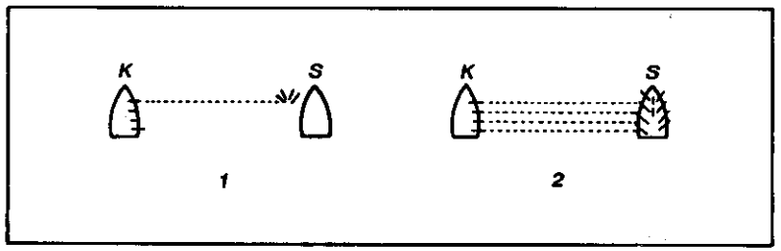

Figure 2 Drawings by von Goesseln of the fall of shot (Australian Archives)

seconds to get a round off; and secondly, why she should have shot over when at point-blank range it was standard practice to aim at the water-line in order to make absolutely sure of hitting the target. The answer seems to lie with the devastating effect that the 3.7 (which, it will be remembered, was originally an anti-tank gun) had on the *Sydney*'s bridge; Detmers told Major Schrader that he had been surprised at how it 'was blown clean apart'. If the gunnery control room, situated directly above the bridge, suffered similarly, communication with the gun crews would almost certainly have been immediately impaired, then very soon afterwards lost altogether. All her guns would thus have been reduced to independent firing at the very outset, and the impact of the torpedo beneath them might in itself have been sufficient to put A and B turrets out of commission for good (although, as will be discussed later, there are other reasons for believing that the former in fact took no part in the action at all). Detmers was later to make a public acknowledgement of the decisive advantage that this gave him, during his visit to the crew at Murchison: calling for Gunner J. Fend to come forward, he asked him: 'Were you firing the 3.7 centimetre gun?' and receiving an affirmative answer, he went on: 'I herewith award you the Iron Cross, First Class, for your bravery. It was marvellous shooting and I am proud of you, my friend, thank you, thank you!' (During his interrogation, Fend had claimed that he had been on the port gun and had taken no part in the action.[11])

The action report entry for 6.30 ends with the statement that 'the enemy turned sharply towards', and in his book

Detmers explains that 'it looked almost as though she was trying to ram us'. It seems most unlikely, however, that the *Sydney* should have attempted such a manoeuvre against a ship of the *Kormoran*'s size, especially if she had already been torpedoed in the bows; similarly, the alternative explanation that damage to her steering was responsible seems hardly more reasonable in view of the fact that up to that point she had been lying stopped in the water. This prompts the conclusion that she made no such movement, and it is borne out not only by W. Tummers's statement under interrogation that 'the cruiser remained to starboard throughout the action', but also by the plot of the action drawn by F. Treber while still on board the *Aquitania*, shown in figure 3. It is worth repeating that the absence of an officer among the men taken aboard the *Aquitania* makes the evidence of her prisoners especially valuable.[12]

Detmers next claims to have 'swept her starboard side devastatingly', but it is immediately clear from these plots that the *Sydney*'s starboard was at no stage exposed to him; his reasons for making such a claim will become apparent presently. If he had genuinely wanted to bring the *Sydney*'s starboard under fire, it can be seen that he would have done so more effectively by turning his own ship to starboard; this suggests that his turn to port was an involuntary one, and indeed he then goes on to describe how he was in the act of transmitting the order for the change of course 'when the sailor at the engine-room telegraph reported that the engine revolutions were falling away rapidly and that contact with the engine-room had been broken . . . immediately afterwards the whole ship shuddered from stem to stern owing to the failure of the engines.'[13] The Engine-room Log describes the damage done there in detail:

> Several hits in main engine-room. One shell tore the forward tank bulkhead open; a thick jet of burning fuel oil poured into the room, which was rapidly filled with thick smoke. The main fire extinguisher pipe was punctured on either side, and at the same time the whole extinguisher foam plant went out of action. An explosion on the starboard side rendered the transformers unserviceable, thereby putting the generators and the whole of the main engine installation out of service. Query to bridge: may personnel leave engine-room?