

cruiser lay *stopped* [my italics] at a distance of 11,000 yards', thus substantiating Treber's plot.

There is also a strong body of evidence pointing to the *Sydney* going down very much earlier than 10 p.m. Several of those who had been below deck on the *Kormoran* during the action stated under interrogation that they had not seen the cruiser when they came up again afterwards, but only smoke. Other statements have already been discussed, including those of the survivor picked up by the *Koolinda*, describing the *Sydney* exploding, and of the gunner picked up by the *Aquitania* insisting that he had seen the *Sydney* turn turtle. The latter is amplified by the *Sept Jours* account, which describes a big explosion on the *Sydney* as a result of a torpedo hit, whereupon she began to list, slowly at first, then faster, until she suddenly turned turtle. R. Holtham (one of the interpreters at the interrogation) recalls being told that she blew up while it was still twilight, but that flames continued to be visible from her after darkness fell. J. Gabbedy, who was serving under Commander Deschaineux (one of the interrogators) at the time, remembers the latter repeating a description given to him of the *Sydney* 'going down so quickly that her foredeck must have parted', a description that was also given to H. Iummeler by one of the *Kormoran*'s crew during his imprisonment at Murchison and that is further supported by Kitsche's statement that 'the plates on the main deck burst'. A German internee at Tatura heard of the explosion having been so devastating that it could only have been caused by a direct hit in the magazine. W. Luxton, who was a film projectionist at Wallangarra Camp, where most of the *Kormoran* survivors spent some time after the war while awaiting repatriation, was told by his opposite number among them that the action had lasted barely twenty minutes, at the end of which the *Sydney* blew up from stem to stern. Dr List's diary records that the action lasted until 7.15, when the cruiser was 'gesenkt' (sunk). In the newspaper interview already quoted G. Albers (who, by a most unfortunate coincidence, collapsed and died on the very morning that I was due to talk to him myself) went on to say: 'I could see the *Sydney* ablaze; but she was still firing back, though only from one turret and only four of her shells hit us. Suddenly there was a burst of flame. She had blown up! The

smoke on the horizon cleared. Then there was nothing at all of the cruiser except a little wreckage floating.'¹⁰

Both the volume and detail of this evidence, coming as it does also from such a variety of independent sources, would seem sufficient confirmation for the proposition not only that the *Sydney* met a sudden rather than a lingering end, but also that she must have done so before total darkness fell, that is, before 8 p.m. at the very latest.

The *Koolinda* prisoner's further statement that his lifeboat was rowing towards the *Sydney* in the hope of being picked up when she exploded also receives categorical, and startling, support from Kitsche:

When the *victorious* [my italics] guns of the *Sydney* fell silent in a chivalrous hush, the Captain of the *Kormoran* stared at her with fanatical rage. Turning to the stunned figure beside him, he said: 'Herr Oberleutnant, everyone is to abandon ship and row in the remaining boats towards the enemy as if they wanted to be picked up. As soon as the boats are clear, I will fire two torpedoes at the *Sydney* from the undamaged tubes on the main deck and then meet you with the torpedo crew in one of the remaining boats. Quickly, Herr Oberleutnant, our ship can sink under us at any moment.' 'What about our wounded, Herr Kapitän?' 'They have the honour of dying for our Fatherland and Fuehrer,' was the curt reply. 'Heil Hitler!' the Oberleutnant saluted. From the sinking *Kormoran* the overfull boats splashed into the water and rowed away over the flame-lit sea. The *Sydney* was waiting for the survivors of her victim, her midships still glowing from the fire which had destroyed her own boats and life-rafts. Suddenly two bubble-tracks marked a treacherous messenger from the deck of the raider, which was already awash. A double detonation merged into one terrific explosion; half the ocean seemed to be in the column which gushed up into the night. In the darkness a great ship split apart and disappeared, her brave crew with her.

The implication that the *Kormoran* had made a formal signal of surrender is supported by the evidence of the *Koolinda*'s Third Mate, H. Evans, who reported being categorically informed by one survivor that the white flag had been raised. Nor was Kitsche alone in his opinion that the final explosion was the work of torpedoes rather than of fire reaching the magazines; in a report on the action translated by the Director of Intelligence, R.A.A.F. in 1947, the German