

SUBMISSION No 133

PO Box 195
 BIRDWOOD SA 5234
 8 April 1998

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To the Parliamentary Committee set up to inquire into the loss of HMAS *Sydney*

Dear members,

I have studied the history of the loss of HMAS *Sydney* and have followed the recent debate in the media which has led to the formation of your Committee. The problem appears to be that a considerable number of people in Australia are not prepared to accept what appears to be the reality of the matter, that the *Sydney* was sunk by a heavily armed enemy cargo ship in what was, with hindsight, an unequal contest which should have terminated harmlessly for the Australian ship.

The clumsy action by civil and military authorities which followed that loss, served to fuel the myth that the Government had perpetrated a huge cover-up of the loss and that the facts surrounding the loss of the ship with all hands were not as presented to the public in the half century since that tragic loss.

The proponents for the cover-up theory argue that the commander of the *Sydney* was too experienced to take his ship within range of the German raider and infer that she was either sunk by a Japanese submarine or, much worse, by someone of her own side.

To counter such wild fantasies, one needs to consider the actions of other Australian 'experienced men' after which one will come to realise that Australia was ill prepared for total war at that time and further, that an efficient and enduring cover-up of anything, would have been inconsistent with the actions of the authorities.

Consider first the WWI experience of HMAS *Sydney I* in her encounter with the German light cruiser *Emden*. Although superior in speed and gunnery range, the *Sydney* got within range of the German and suffered unnecessary casualties and damage as a consequence.

Consider also the experience of the German auxiliary mine-layer *Passat* (ex Norwegian tanker *Storstad*) in October 1940. Virtually caught in the act of laying her mines in Backstairs Passage off the South Australian coast, an awkward manoeuvre embarrassed the patrol vessel's commander into breaking off his investigation, leaving the enemy to proceed unchallenged.

Many of the older generation will recall the sale of Australian scrap metal to the Japanese in June 1940, at a time when it was clear to strategists that the Japanese were heading for war in the Pacific. People still laugh about the troops referring to Japanese shelling as "Menzie's steel coming over," and the Prime Minister was frequently referred to as "Pig Iron Bob."

One could go on and make a litany of naive actions by Government and the military but the above should suffice to make the point—Australians were unschooled at that stage of the war (and for the greater part still remain so) in the desperate and cunning measures taken in the European conflicts.

That the commander of the *Sydney* believed the desperate ruse of the German raider—that she was a harmless dutch cargo vessel crewed by ill-trained personnel and off course—is as evident as the belief by the patrol vessel's commander that the unidentified tanker in Backstairs Passage must be

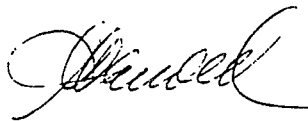
harmless. Added to this was the consideration that a heavy-handed treatment of what might have been a genuine Dutch vessel would not have been acceptable both to the commander of the *Sydney* and the authorities ashore. Any nagging doubt about the safety of approaching the unidentified ship would have been dispelled by the sure belief in ones own superiority, after all, it was unheard of that a thin-skinned cargo vessel should engage a man-of-war.

It is unlikely too, that the commander of the *Sydney* had been properly briefed about the German naval policy, dictated in effect by the Versailles Treaty after WWI— that of focussing on armour-piercing weapons rather than on heavy armour as was the British (and consequently Australian) policy. He might otherwise have been less sure of the relative weakness of the raider. This policy difference was evidenced dramatically in the engagement between the *Bismarck* and the *Hood*, where the *Hood*'s armour was pierced so effectively as to explode her magazine.

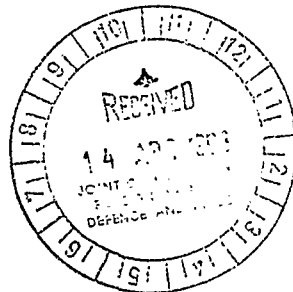
As to the reason for the lack of survivors although the ship was still afloat and under way when last seen by German survivors from the raider. Eyewitness accounts indicate that the *Sydney* vanished from the surface of the sea rather than over the horizon. There are many accounts of sailing ships from the windjammer days being 'sailed under' when proceeding in heavy seas. I suggest, the *Sydney* being heavily down by her bows and under way, she 'sailed under' with most of her crew. Of the handful of survivors who might have been able to get off at the last moment, their chance of being recovered in that vast sea was indeed slim.

I have not seen or heard any of the above historical considerations in the debate over the loss of the *Sydney* and therefore draw them to your attention. As a historian, I do not blame the commander of the *Sydney* for losing his ship under the circumstances—any fault would lie with the officer training system (which appears not to have included naval history) and the lack of appropriate military intelligence provided to operational commanders.

Yours faithfully,



Bernard J. Arnold



AMBASSADOR OF JAPAN
CANBERRA

SUBMISSION No 134


2 April, 1998

Dear Senator MacGibbon,

With regards to your letter of 21 October 1998, I am pleased to forward to you the following attachments provided by the Military History Department of the National Institute for Defence Studies in Tokyo.

- Attachment A General opinion
- Attachment B The Japanese submarine's deployment for the outbreak of war
- Attachment C-1 The approximately position of the Japanese submarines on 19 November 1941
- Attachment C-2 Wartime Organisation on 1 November 1941

Yours sincerely,



Yukio Satoh
Ambassador of Japan

Senator D J MacGibbon
Chairman
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs,
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Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

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8/4/98