



Jim&Anne

From: "David Mearns" [REDACTED]
To: "Jim&Anne" [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 25 January 2008 9:02 PM
Subject: RE: FOI Request - HMAS Sydney II

Jim,

Thank you. I will look up this file in the PRO and see what the extra two pages entail.

While I am it I will also try to find the Admiralty copy of the signal dated 23.11.41 to COIS Capt. Wylie describing Raider G. Perhaps there will be other interesting signals in the same time frame. Can you please tell me the Australian Archive reference number for your copy of the signal which will help simplify my search.

p.s. Did you circulate Demetriou's explanation below to everyone in the group? I believe you should, in case for some reason you didn't, because it fully explains how the confusion started and IMO will show that the RN/NHB are being co-operative and that Demetriou's mistake was an honest mistake which he quickly corrected. I think it is important that everyone see this and are not left with the lingering idea that the RN/NHB are being obstructive or hiding something.

Regards,

David L. Mearns
 Director

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From: Jim&Anne [mailto:[REDACTED]]
Sent: 23 January 2008 19:54
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Fw: FOI Request - HMAS Sydney II

David

This is the reply I received from my follow up letter. I believe the two pages are important and are the reason why the RN and RAN versions of the story are different. As I indicated in my last email Geoff Mason's history gives a slightly different version of the ship's movements and battle position backed up by Battle Summary No13 which shows Sydney's track to be 180 instead of 161 when the Kormoran was sighted. If the battle was 300 miles west of Carnarvon as the Mason story indicates, its then possible to see why Admiral Oxenbould deliberately mislead the Senate Board at the Inquiry. The only way the boats and rafts could have reached the coast was they had been towed. I have always maintained that this was the case.

I presume that if you obtain copies of these two pages they will be made available to us here and also to Michael Montgomery in the UK. I understand you have contacted with him at times. I have also attached my reply to him that elicited his response below

4/09/2008



cheers
Jim

Sent: Wednesday, January 23, 2008 3:06 AM
Subject: FOI Request - HMAS Sydney II

Mr Eagles,

I am now in a position to respond to your email on the sinking of the HMAS Sydney II, received early today (attached below), and your repeated request for a copy of the BOI report into the sinking.

I first have to say that the RN Navy Casualty Branch have once again searched the records contained in their archives, and confirmed again that they do not hold a copy of a BOI report into the sinking.

As I mentioned in my email earlier today, I did unfortunately misdirect you to the Australian Sea Power Centre for a copy of the report. The RN Naval Historical Branch (NHB) have now explained that when this was originally requested their automatic response was to say that, since HMAS SYDNEY was an Australian vessel, if there had been a Board of Inquiry (which as explained below is unlikely), then it would have been conducted in Australia, and would presumably be held in Australia. The Sea Power Centre was a suggestion for a place that might be asked for advice or information. This message unfortunately became somewhat scrambled as it passed through several hands and became a statement that it existed and would be held there.

The NHB have additionally provided the following summary of the documentation you have referred to, and the reasons for the, most likely, non existence of a BOI report into the sinking:

1. The file referred to by Mr Eagles as M.05540/42 is publicly available at the National Archives at Kew in ADM 199/736. ADM 199/736 is a War History Case that will consist of several documents bound together. The relevant document, M.05540/42, is entitled *Report on the Loss of HMAS Sydney*.
2. M.05540/42 was sent to the Admiralty by the Secretary of the Navy Office for the Commonwealth of Australia.
3. This document is a duplicate of the one publicly available in the National Archives of Australia in Melbourne. Its series number is MP 1185/8, and its title in Australia appears to have been recorded as *Mr Eldridge – Compilation of Report on loss of "Sydney"*.
4. The copy held by the National Archives of Australia is also available online on their website.
5. The British and Australian copies are identical, down to the poor spacing between letters. The only difference with the British copy is that it contains two additional pages with comments from the Admiralty.

When Captain Peter Hore was commissioned by the Australian Government to research the sinking of the SYDNEY in British archives he viewed ADM 199/736, a fact that was subsequently noted in his book, *HMAS Sydney II: The cruiser and the controversy in the archives of the United Kingdom* [Peter Hore ed., Papers in Australian Maritime Affairs No. 9, the Royal Australian Navy Sea Power Centre, Canberra, 2001, ISBN 0 642 29554 9].

The fact that this book does not refer to a Board of Inquiry also leads me to believe that one was never held. In wartime in the UK, Boards of Inquiry were only held by exception rather than every time a ship was lost.

I cannot comment on what the regulations and practices were in place in Australia: that would be an issue for the Australian Government.

I do appreciate the reasons for your request, and I am sorry not to be able to provide a substantive response, but in this case the report does not, as far as we are aware, exist. And I can only repeat that as far as we are aware, all information on the sinking of HMAS Sydney II, is already in the public domain. I do however hope the explanations above are of some use.

Yours sincerely

Mike Demetriou
Fleet FOI Cell

4/09/2008

From: Jim&Anne [mailto:]
Sent: 22 January 2008 00:23
To: Demetriou, Mike Mr
Cc: ; John Perryman; David Kennedy; Ean McDonald; John McArthur; Michael Montgomery; ; Kathleen Bennett; Garry Baverstock; Ross Willcock; Info-XD
Subject: Fw: FOI Request - HMAS Sydney II

Mr Demetriou

I have, since receiving your reply had contact with the Seapower Centre and they claim that they do not have a copy of the BOI report on the loss of HMAS Sydney. They claim that you are mistaken. I cannot understand how this misunderstanding about a simple FOI request can become so complicated.

As I understand it Admiralty KR & AI Fleet Order (AFO) 4131, stated that "Reports of BOI held to investigate losses of or damage to HM ships by enemy action are to be rendered to the Admiralty in duplicate". I presume this would have been carried out. I think this report also formed the basis of the File M.05540/42, which in turn is cited as the reference source for Battle Summary No 13 issued by the Admiralty in 1942, incorporating the action between HMAS Sydney and the German raider HSK Kormoran.

Therefore I cannot see that you would not hold two copies of this report, otherwise the Battle Summary would not have been able to be completed with the Sydney engagement included.

I am including the Seapower Centre in this email, so they may see that I am following this up so that the matter can be sorted out, hopefully with little delay, with the impending 5 million dollar search to be nearing its start date.

You will also notice that I have included the Australian Minister for Defence, Mr David Mearns the leader of the Sydney search and other researchers, so they may be kept informed of progress. I have also included the email address of the Director of Information Exploitation as a first step as per your email advise.

Regards

James Eagles
Information Officer,
Assoc of Family and Friends of HMAS Sydney II
[REDACTED]

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