

## HMAS SYDNEY

Theory Name: 300 Mile west of Carnarvon position.

By: James Eagles.

N°	Event	Time	Date	Lat	long	Notes
1	Rdv psn 17th	1200	17th	07.56S	104.40E	All times local ie Batavia time, Sydney departs making 18knots against wind and current of 1.5 knots resulting in forward progress averaging 16.5 knots. Sydney's economical speed was between 14-18 knots
2	Course 180 deg To turning point	1700	17th	09.10S	104.40E	16.5 k for 4 hours = 74nm
3	Course 161 deg	2400	17th	11.05S	105.20E	Midnight 17 <sup>th</sup> 16.5 k for 7 hours = 122nm
4	Course 161 deg	1200	18th	14.15S	106.30E	Noon 18 <sup>th</sup> 16.5 kt for 12 hours = 202nm
5	Course 161 deg	2400	18th	17.25S	107.45E	Midnight 18 <sup>th</sup> . 16.5 kt for 12 hours = 203 nm. Heard Gr tuning signal turns to 180 deg.
6	Course 161 deg	1100	19th	20.10S	108.54S	16.5 kt for 11 hours = 177 nm. Hears Gr tuning signal turns to 180 degs.
7	Course 180 deg	2030	19th	24.50S	108.54E	30 kt for 9 hours = 280 nm to Battle site.
8	Interrogation and battle	2030 to 2130	19th	24.50S	108.54E	Sydney leaves, 5kts for 3 hours = 15nm and sinks
9	German abandon ship	2400/ 0100	19 <sup>th</sup> /20 <sup>t</sup> h	24.50S	108.54E	Kormoran sinks in this position.
10	Sydney sinks	Appro x 0030/ 0100	20th	?	?	Psn not known but approx SE 10 to 15 nm.
11	Sydney sinks – Alternative version by Germans.	2130 or 2200	20th	?	?	Possibility Sydney sinks in the close vicinity of Kormoran at above position

Position, course and speed also available for the midnight locations for 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>

### Sydney's Movements.

### **Sydney's Movements.**

Planned rendezvous 16<sup>th</sup> was at 07.15S 104.40E but delayed for 24 hours.

Actual rendezvous on 17<sup>th</sup> was at 07.56S 104.40E approx 85 nm due south of the 16<sup>th</sup> position.

*Sydney* departed rendezvous about 17/1200 local time.

Course 180 degrees for 5 hours at 18 knots (actually 16.5 knots against a 1.5 knot current and headwind) to turning point west of Christmas Island at 11.05S 105.20E 74 nm south of the rendezvous point, arriving at 17/1600 and then turning onto course 161 degrees for next turning point at 24.39S 110.30E. *Sydney* did not reach this next turning point.

Noon position on the 18<sup>th</sup> was 14.15S 106.30E, course 161 degrees, speed averaging 16.5 knots.

At a point 700 nm (in position 20.10S 108.54E) from the Christmas Island turning point, and approx 42 hours later *Sydney* was diverted off course 161 to course 180 degrees due south at 19/1100 upon hearing a tuning signal from a German (Telefunken) transmitter. This was easily identified in *Sydney* and after a D/F bearing was taken the *Sydney* turned onto a new course of 180 degrees to investigate.

At this point and prior to her next noon position on 161 degrees, *Sydney* was at position 20.10S 108.54E, course 180, speed 30 knots.

*Sydney* increased speed to 30 knots for 9 hours to position 24.50S 108.54E arriving there at 19/2000, after dark and where she encountered *Kormoran* and the battle took place. The *Kormoran* wreck lies in this vicinity while the *Sydney*, if not close by this position would be about 10 or 15 nautical miles SE on a bearing of 250 degrees depending on which German version of the story you believe.

When *Kormoran* sent the 'Q' signal at 191000Z (1700 local time) the *Sydney* was still about 3 hours away [90nm], but smoke from the *Kormoran* may have been spotted against the horizon, it being a clear moonlit night (New Moon period). Smoke was certainly present before the battle began. The night time encounter makes a lie of the German flag story which shows little credibility. *Sydney's* expected arrival by *Kormoran* was a result of her radar which had a range of approx 12 miles and was principally a gunnery radar.

### ***Kormoran's* movements.**

*Kormoran* departed rendezvous "Marius" after replenishment from *Kulmerland*, mid October and Detmers had *Kulmerland* send a signal, stating rendezvous was for 17<sup>th</sup> day following month (i.e. November and the day *Sydney* handed over the *Zealandia*, and added that they would be in their new operational area during the New Moon period i.e. the 19<sup>th</sup> November). This indicates that the next operational area was to be contact with the *Sydney*. *Kormoran's* track is shown by Gill (Vol 1, page 455) swinging from due east to due north in a long sweep to where they met *Sydney* on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

### **Detmer's planned position.**

Using a compass and the distance between Geraldton and Carnarvon as a radius an arc cuts 111 degrees east at exactly 26.32S 111.00E, this cannot be a co-incidence, it is too precise. This position was given by Detmers as the battle site. It is too obviously wrong and was only the first step in Detmers' plan. It was obviously too close to the coast and subject to aircraft patrols. By attempting his plan that close to the coast he could be easily trapped by one or two warships, the coast limiting his chances of escape should that become necessary. Raiders like a lot of ocean to work with after an attack.

The next step in Detmers plan was to use his nominated battle site as a centre and from there to Carnarvon again as radius and draw another arc out to sea. Planning to use his 'Q' signal to lure *Sydney* to his position, he needed a D/F bearing from Geraldton to cut through his 26.32S 111.00E position and this line from Geraldton cuts his second arc 300 miles west of Carnarvon. This was far enough out to sea to be free of air patrols yet close enough to *Sydney's* track south to attract that ship to his position. Detmers made one last touch though, he was well aware of the WW I *Sydney-Emden* battle and he wished to draw his superiors attention to this by using a line from N. Keeling Island where *Emden* was driven ashore to Fremantle, *Sydney's* last port. This gave the exact position from where he would transmit his 'Q' signal. There are a large number of parallels between the WW I battle and the *Sydney-Kormoran* battle, not least of which was Detmers' wireless signal to attract *Sydney* to his position..

The Germans were reading the British Naval Code, the Naval Cipher and the Merchant ships code which *Zealandia* was using. Additionally, British traitors in Malaya had betrayed the secret callsigns, so Detmers was aware of *Sydney's* route and her course and speed could easily be worked out. All Detmers had to do was be at the correct spot, wait for the *Sydney* to arrive and provide the secret callsign when challenged to do so. All of these statements have been studied in detail and are available.

When the *Sydney* did arrive, she found a ship almost stopped in the water, smoke pouring from her superstructure [automatically a sign of distress under International Regulations]. Illuminated amidships by *Sydney's* large lights, the different stern was not readily apparent, the *Kormoran* having a cruiser stern, while the ship she was disguised as, had a counter stern. After an exchange of signals by light, passing the correct secret callsign, and then came a request for help to fight the supposed fire aboard the *Kormoran*. *Sydney's* boat crew was called away and in the process of lowering a seaboat the *Kormoran* fired her underwater torpedo. At point blank range and with only seconds to run Detmers was able to use his torpedo at a point that had no armour plating and in *Sydney's* most vital spot, right under her forward turrets. From that point on *Sydney* was outgunned and it was almost incredible that she was still able to fight back and cripple the *Kormoran* to such an extent that she was no longer able to continue her cruise and had to be abandoned.

### **Some Details of Detmers' Plan.**

Detmers used tricks that had been used previously by raiders, first the wireless signal to attract *Sydney* to her position, but *Sydney* suspecting a raider, maintained wireless silence so she would not reveal her proximity, just as *Sydney* had done with the *Emden* in WW I. Secondly, *Kormoran* was playing the part of an attacked ship,

pretending to have a fire onboard as a result of that attack, and this ruse had been employed also in WW I when a German raider pretended to be on fire and a British ship came to her aid only to be attacked and sunk. Detmers and the other WW2 raider captains had studied all of the WW I tactics of the earlier raider captains. With such assets available to him, Detmers was almost certainly always going to win, especially with the element of surprise on his side. He had ample time to plan his trap for the *Sydney*, which he has admitted to doing. He was supplied with all of the necessary information to conduct his surprise attack and he was able to succeed almost beyond his wildest expectations. It was only training, discipline and quick reactions on the part of the *Sydney* crew that allowed them to react so promptly, when almost certainly the entire command position on the bridge were taken out during the first few minutes of the attack by *Kormoran*.

#### Remarks.

It is of interest that the *Kormoran* crew claim they sank the *Sydney*, even though they say she sailed off into the night from the battle scene. They also claim the *Sydney* did not sink their ship, but they scuttled her. It is a fact, that the Germans have claimed many times they scuttled their own ships when in fact they were sunk by allied forces, the *Bismarck* is an example (this is mentioned by Captain S W Roskill in his book, *The Navy at War 1939-45*). In fact both ships sank from battle damage so the contest was equally fought out and some serving German officers, other than the crew, have published information suggesting that the *Kormoran* foundered under them and they had to jump for their lives, quite a different story to the version of the *Kormoran's* captain and the crew.

It should not be forgotten that *Kormoran* carried their own cryptanalysis staff, specialist wireless operators and were equipped with gunnery radar (denied by the Germans of course) and an argument can be made that *Kormoran* was equipped with Japanese torpedoes especially for this attack and supplied by Admiral Wenneker in Tokyo, which were twice as powerful, and much more reliable than the German torpedoes.

It also comes as no surprise, that the government has wanted to keep the location of the battle under a cloak of secrecy, however, in 1941 there was no secret initially. The Naval Board cited 300 miles west of Carnarvon (in a signal from the Naval Board decoded by the German *B-Dienst*), the Prime Minister also nominated that position to the press and radio. In fact the position of the battle is 259 nautical miles from Carnarvon, but it is 300 land miles and that is the term used by the Prime Minister, at least two Admirals, the British Admiralty, and at least three of the German crew at different times as well as some others. However, by March 1942, the real battle site was no longer publicly acknowledged by the Navy and the German captain's battle site was adopted and from then on the only one acceptable to the Navy and the Australian government.

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