

### Medium Wave Signals and W/T Reports.

#### **Guide 3, p38/39. AWM 64, 0/2 RAAF CWR OPS Diary.**

“0748Z 27/11. ACH Fremantle Z53 27/11. Following now reported.  
On 19/11 at 1003Z Tug *Uco* in position 26 degrees 45 minutes South 113 degrees 20 minutes East head faint signal QQ remainder unintelligible and at 1005Z QQQQ and unintelligible group of figures badly made possibly containing figures 110 followed by 1000 GMT (H) I.C.W. note strength 526 [this was corrected to ‘5 to ‘6 in a later signal] estimated by operator within 300 miles. Geraldton radio reports that at 1005Z 19/11 they received weak message strength 2 begins unintelligible then 7C 11115E 1000GMT ends. Could not estimate distance, No Qs distinguished, Waited 2 minutes no repetition, At 1015Z 19/11 Geraldton sent out message to ships asking if anything to report but received no reply.”

These two signals would seem to confirm the QQQQ messages were sent about 1700 local from *Kormoran*. However, there are several other interesting points in this signal report that are of interest. I have stated previously that by deliberately sending the messages corruptly the Germans could be sure that only a bearing was taken on the signal with no actual position against which the bearing could be confirmed. Winter has also pointed this out with her remarks about the *Nicolaos D.L.* : “Unless bearings had been taken, nobody would have any idea where the signal really originated.” *Sydney* would have been monitoring 500 K/cs, the distress frequency, and taken D/F bearings but would be unable to verify them except by heading for the point of origin indicated by those bearings. Just enough of the signal was readable to indicate to them that a ship was in distress and requiring aid. This is verified by the *Uco* operators’ comment “unintelligible group of figures badly made”. It wasn’t just that he was unable to read the signal because of atmospheric or other causes, but they were ‘badly made’.

As well as this the signal was I.C.W. or Interrupted Continuous Wave is rather different from normal C.W. and typical of the transmissions by morse, i.e. from some Asian ship operators. I.C.W. is a type A2 transmission whereas C.W. is type A0. C.W. gives a steady signal on a narrow frequency, whereas I.C.W. gives a rather unstable signal (being modulated at audio frequency) Being transmitted on a wider frequency band it makes it a lot harder to miss if you want someone to D/F your signal. Then there is the report of signal strength being 526 (later corrected to read 5 to 6), but any radio operator can tell you that signal strength is always only reported from 1 to 5, there is no signal strength 6 at all and the *Uco* operator had already apparently reported it as a ‘faint signal’ which would have been “QSA2 – weak and barely readable”. Finally the operator is able to estimate the signal to be within 300 miles – and must have been near or at the limit of reception because it was so weak, and Geraldton received the signal even weaker and partly unintelligible as well, obviously not as well at the *Uco*. This can be explained by the fact that *Uco*’s aerial was a shipboard one and of limited value while the Geraldton aerial was much more elaborate and directional although still weak and barely readable. If the signal had been from Detmers position at one third that distance, both stations would have received the signal at strength five and readability five (QSA5 QRK5), The 600 metre (500 K/cs) signal is a ground wave and follows the curvature of the earth with

some bounce off the ionosphere at night. At 1700 in the afternoon an I.C.W. morse signal at maximum range of 300 miles with perhaps some fading and distortion from the ionosphere towards evening and badly sent into the bargain, it is no wonder the messages were hard to read – just as the Germans expected they would be. Already having sent tuning signals with no identification earlier in the day, *Kormoran* would need to make a more interesting signal to get *Sydney* to turn off course with a second bearing. The faint QQQQ's would be the way to do it, but without sending a position they could be checked. A perfect example of this was the WW I *Sydney/Emden* battle. When the Cocos Islands operator sent his *Emden* report it was answered by the British cruiser that had earlier detached from the convoy and was on its way to South Africa and was many miles away so the *Emden* captain thought they were safe, *Sydney* being close to Cocos Island refrained from transmitting and revealing his close proximity so von Mueller went ahead and sent his raiding party ashore and we know the result.

Admiralty Raider Report No. 13, shows that *Sydney* had already turned off 161° (her usual course) and was on a course of 180° when she intercepted the *Kormoran*. If more confirmation is required, Detmers' book also shows *Sydney* on 180° coming south.

More information on the Tug *UCO*.

Commander Harstaffs' Submission 8.  
Vol 1, page 67 entry at 270630 begins:  
SWACH – On 19/11 at 1830H, Tug *Uco*... etc

Richard Summerrall, Guide 3, *HMAS Sydney*, page 38/39 begins:  
ACH Fremantle, Z53. 27/11 Following reported:  
On 19/11 at 1003Z Tug *Uco* ..... etc

This is strange because the time 1003Z is 1803H Perth time and fits with the Germans' story that they sent the first 'Q' message at 1703G, their local time. Geraldton also reported a 'Q' signal which confirms the German story.

However, the message from SWACH records, show the time as 1830H, which is in fact, 1033Z and 1733G (*Kormoran* time) not 1003Z.

*Uco* and Geraldton were both keeping Perth time locally, but all military and civilian signals traffic are sent in GMT or Z time, including those from ACH and SWACH as well as the ships. So it seems somewhere between SWACH and ACH the time may have been changed to conform with the Germans version of the story.

Having already looked at the reported signals and times associated with the *Uco*, the other interesting point is the position of the ship. It is a fact that the position given for the *Uco* on the 19<sup>th</sup> at 1003Z was almost exactly 300nm from the site of battle that I have nominated. From the battle site I have nominated to where I have indicated *Sydney* would have turned onto 180 degrees as shown in the Admiralty Battle Summary No 13, is also 300 miles and the distance to Carnarvon, where the Prime Minister said the battle took place is also 300 miles. Detmers position was only half that distance from *Uco* and Geraldton and the signal they received should have been easily read loud and clear. It was not.

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