

The following statement was made on 3 December 1941 by the Prime Minister John Curtin, in a public statement to the press and radio about the loss of HMAS Sydney.

On 3 December Mr Curtin amplified his original announcement with the following statement.

H.M.A.S. *Sydney* was on patrol 300 miles west of Carnarvon shortly before dusk on November 19th when she encountered the heavily-armed raider *Steiermark*, known also as Raider No. 41 and the *Kormoran*, which was flying the Norwegian flag. The initial advantage lay with the German, since she was disguised as a merchant ship and her identity had to be established before she could be attacked. The *Sydney*, on the other hand, was obviously a British cruiser and as such, an undoubted enemy to the raider. In the absence of direct evidence it can only be assumed that some factor prevented the *Sydney* making use of her aircraft for reconnaissance from a distance. With dusk falling, *Sydney* had to close in on the suspect to establish identity. She did this cleared for action. As soon as the raider was convinced that her identity would become known, she opened fire simultaneously with the first salvo from the *Sydney*. The raider's first salvo struck the *Sydney* full on the bridge and put her at a temporary but vital disadvantage. In addition to doing grave damage to the central control the salvo started a fire which lasted throughout the action. *Sydney* closed the range immediately and fought fiercely, probably with independent firing. She was soon on fire amidships as a result of another salvo from the raider. She had, however, crippled the enemy by a direct hit in the engine-room and set her heavily on fire also. By this time it was dark and the enemy ceased fire and abandoned the raider, which presently blew up. From their boats the Germans watched the *Sydney* disappear over the horizon. She then appeared [to be] on fire amidships. That was the last seen of her. The prisoners claim that a number of torpedoes were fired; it is not known whether any of them struck. It is possible that the fire on the *Sydney* destroyed her boats and floats which were housed amidships; it has been assumed that they were destroyed. There is nothing in the evidence to point to the *Sydney* having blown up; the last evidence of her was her disappearance, still afloat, over the horizon. The search for her has been long and wide. It has produced nothing but two empty lifebelts and a Carley float damaged by gunfire. Her actual fate, in the absence of other evidence, must remain a mystery. All we know is that she fought gallantly and successfully achieved her aim - the destruction of the enemy.'⁹