

"Was There Warning of a Raider".

A question has been raised (previously) as to whether Captain Burnett would have investigated an unidentified radio signal, or suspected a raider, with the gold onboard? I do not have any doubt he would have been under instructions to take the utmost care in delivering his valuable cargo safely. But I am equally sure that his orders would not have precluded him from rendering aid, saving of life at sea, or supplying medical aid as Sydney was under no immediate direct threat and there seemed to be not the slightest element of danger. Even Aquitania broke the hard and fast rule of not stopping at sea to rescue survivors. Sydney, on arriving at the Kormoran's position, did not see an enemy ship, she saw a merchant ship in distress, none of Sydney's actions point to her believing Kormoran was anything other than a stricken vessel requiring help, so Sydney's gold cargo was not at risk.

As for the Sydney knowing there was a raider about, can we be sure she was told of any raider? There was a great deal of confusion about raiders in 1941, but it was all in the Pacific not the Indian Ocean, and about which ships were operating where. Much of the information was wrong as well and ships responsible for sinkings mis-identified. For instance, looking at Kormoran's victims:

Nicolaos D.L. - sunk 21.4.41 sent an SOS (instead of QQQQ or RRRR), but only part of the message got through anyway. Winter writes: "Not only had Nicolaos D.L. sent an SOS instead of QQQQ or RRRR but the position had been given as 20 degs 00 mins South 22 degs 21 mins West, instead of 02 degs South. Unless bearings had been taken, nobody would have any idea where the signal really originated. Loss attributed to bad weather.

Velebit - sunk 26.4.41 - no signal sent. Loss attributed to bad weather.

Mareeba - sunk 26.4.41 - signal sent by only 88 degs 06 mins East picked up by Colombo Radio. Signal jammed by Kormoran. Sunk same day as Velebit. Loss not attributed to Kormoran.

Embiricos - sunk 26.9.41 - No signal sent - took three weeks before she was reported missing, feared lost - cause unknown. Not attributed to Kormoran.

During this period several raider reports were coming from the Pacific Ocean, From April 1941 till Kormoran met Sydney in November there were no confirmed raider reports in the Indian Ocean so that seven months had passed without Detmers fulfilling any of the directives laid down by SKL prior to sailing. The SKL briefing (as noted by Captain Hore) for Kormoran before she sailed from Germany states:

"E" Tasks

Execution of cruiser warfare in foreign waters. Minelaying according to appendix b) Combined actions with U-boats according to appendix c), The crux of the operations lies in obliging enemy forces to relieve the homeland, and to damage our opponent.

- a) by forcing him to convoy and increase the protection of his shipping even in distant waters.
- b) connected with the above by increasing demands on his forces.
- c) by frightening off neutral shipping from sailing in the services of the enemy.
- d) by further disadvantageous consequences of an economically political and financial character.

There is no doubt Detmers failed in all of the first three above and succeeded only with the last - item d) successfully, damaging England economically and financially.

In fact, Detmers had pretty well deliberately avoided causing any commotion in the Indian Ocean for several months and was complaining he couldn't find ships. Yet when the search for survivors began after the engagement, ships turned up from everywhere and Ros Page's research showing the vessels in and out of Fremantle in November 1941, it's a wonder Detmers was able to avoid them all so successfully. I think it is noteworthy that Gill, in his history of the RAN in WW2 wrote ".... after the German raider attack on Nauru Island on the 27th November 1940, the Australia Station had remained free from attack until November 1941." (Gill, Vol 1, The Australia Station, - 1941, Ch 12, p410).