

In November, 1941, Mr. Davidson, the Cape Leveque Light-house Keeper and his family were aboard the Light-house Service Boat, the Cape Otway, on their way to Geraldton.

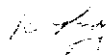
Alma and Kempston had four children .. Joy aged 18, who celebrated her 18th Birthday aboard the Cape Otway. Shirley aged 15, Sue aged 8 and Michael. Both Joy and Michael have since passed away, leaving only Sue and Shirley to tell this story. The following are their Statements regarding the Cape Otway from two days out of Carnarvon to their destination being Geraldton. These Statements are very interesting as there is nothing official on the Cape Otway's involvement in the days following the H.M.A.S. Sydney and the Kormoran engagement.

Statement from Mrs. S. Simonetti nee
Shirley Davidson.

Two days out of Carnarvon at about 9.30 p.m. Captain Bateman came to our quarters and asked if Dad would come up and have a look at a Morse-code message they had received, as he couldn't make head nor tail of it.

When Dad returned he said that the Cape Otway had been requested to pick up a Life-boat at a given position with approx. 40 people on board. When they arrived at this position they could not locate the Life-boat. After searching for some considerable time without success they continued on their way to Carnarvon. When they docked at Carnarvon they were told of the loss of H.M.A.S. Sydney and that the Life-boat they had been requested to pick up had German survivors aboard from the Kormoran and that they had been picked up off the Coast.

Shirley stated that regarding the Sydney incident, this was the only event worth a mention, furthermore there were no bodies sighted at all, and if there had been they would certainly have known about it.


D. King

It is interesting to note that the Cape Otway did not know of the loss of the Sydney until they arrived in Carnarvon, or that it was Germans in the Life-boat they were requested to pick up. One would question the message they were supposed to have received asking them to search within 5 N.M. of the Coast for survivors. Was that message sent after they had left Carnarvon?

Statement from Mrs. S. Richardson nee
Sue Davidson

In November, 1941 she was aboard the Cape Otway with her family sailing from Cape Leveque to Geraldton. Two days out of Carnarvon they received a Morse-code message requesting them to pick up a Life-boat at a given position with approx. 40 people aboard. On arrival at this given position they could not locate the Life-boat and after an unsuccessful search they continued on to Carnarvon.

Captain Bateman wasn't very pleased with this request as he said his job was maintaining the lights, not rescuing people.

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The Cape Otway normally travelled close to the Coast as most of the lights they serviced were on the coast, so it was pointless to sail out wide the have to come in to service a light.

There was no sighting of bodies and there was never any mention of this, then or years later. The First Officer from the Cape Otway kept in touch from time to time over the years and not at any time when the conversation turned to this episode was there any mention of floating bodies.

D. King
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A point worth noting here is that the Cape Otway was requested to pick up this Life-boat which they endeavoured to do, and yet nobody contacted them to advise them of its recovery.

Around about 1988, John McArthur and I were swapping notes regarding the Sydney. I didn't have much to offer at that time as I had only been researching the area around Port Gregory for about a year or so. Vic. Jefferies was also present - he is Public Relations Officer at Stirling Naval Base. John told me of his visit to Captain Hardiman, seeking information regarding what part, if any, the Cape Otway played, in the days after the Sydney-Kormoran engagement. Unfortunately the Captain was very ill and bedridden and told John he could not remember anything of 1941.

A month or two later John met Captain Hardiman's wife at a Social and she told him her husband had passed away and that prior to his death he was hallucinating about floating bodies.

Is this the foundation of the story about the Cape Otway sailing through hundreds of floating bodies ? ? ?

Michael Montgomery, in his book "Who Sank the Sydney" mentions J.H. Hazlewood on Page 191. He states that while talking to two Officers off the Cape Otway, they mentioned finding several bodies at sea when they signalled this information to Naval H.Q. they were instructed to leave them where they were.

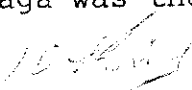
Then we have the Radio Operator who states he received or heard a message from the Cape Otway stating they were sailing through floating bodies along the Zuytdorp Cliffs. Nothing more is heard from him. Why come forward to make a statement like that and not be prepared to back it up. ? ? ?

Several years ago I met up with Ivan Boyd, who, at that time was residing here in Kalbarri. Ivan told me that he took over the position as First Officer on the Cape Otway in February, 1942 and that he knew about the page being removed from the Log, but could not explain why. He also stated that during the time he was on the Cape Otway nobody ever discussed its involvement in the Sydney-Kormoran incident.

Now ... if they had discovered hundreds of floating bodies one

would expect this would have been discussed among the crew. The Cape Otway passed the Zuytdorp Cliffs on the night of 2nd December. According to my calculations she sailed from Carnarvon at noon on the 2nd December and would have reached the Zuytdorp Point just after the moon set. With the ship under black-out conditions, visibility would have been restricted to the extent it would not be able to see floating bodies, and to count hundreds would have been impossible. We also have to take into consideration the length of time these bodies would have been in the water. If they came from the Sydney-Kormoran they would have been in the water for 13 days on the 2nd December. Bodies do not float for that length of time unless each body is supported in some way. Why were they not picked up by the R.A.A.F. when they searched the coast from Geraldton to Carnarvon? Hundreds of floating bodies would have been easily visible from the air.

After considering this latest information, I believe the Cape Otway did not encounter any bodies at all. The only part she played in the Sydney-Kormoran saga was the unsuccessful search for the Life-boat.


D. King