

Ref # 1



SUBM.005.0069

MINUTES

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WAR CABINET MEETINGMELBOURNE, 4th DECEMBER, 1941.

PRESENT: The Hon. John Curtin, M.P., Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Co-ordination.
The Hon. R.M. Forde, M.P., Minister for the Army.
The Hon. J.B. Chifley, M.P., Treasurer.
The Hon. H.V. Evatt, K.C., M.P., Attorney-General and Minister for External Affairs.
The Hon. J.A. Beasley, M.P., Minister for Supply and Development.
The Hon. N.J.O. Makin, M.P., Minister for the Navy and Minister for Munitions.
The Hon. A.S. Drakeford, M.P., Minister for Air.

(The Chief of the General Staff, the Chief of the Air Staff and the Acting Chief of the Naval Staff were also present at this meeting).

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H.M.A.S. "Sydney" - Action with German Raider. (Previous reference - Minute No. (1526)). The Acting Chief of the Naval Staff reported the results of further interrogation of German prisoners ex the "Kormoran", and read the following reconstructed account of the action :-

"The engagement took place in position 25°South 111°East on 19th November. H.M.A.S. "Sydney" on a

Excerpts from War Cabinet minute 1528/1941. This minute, a record of the War Cabinet's 'decision' of 4 December 1941, was prepared with the assistance of the handwritten notes of the meeting taken by



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bearing S.W. from the raider, made the first sighting at a range of 15 miles. The raider altered course from 000° to 250° and made no reply. At closer range the raider, which was flying the Dutch flag, made "Straad Malakka" by light.

"At 1850H the ships were on a parallel course, speed 15 knots. "Sydney" which was abaft the raider's beam, distant less than two miles, was at action stations and made 'Make your signal letters'. "Steirmark" immediately opened fire with guns and torpedoes, her first salvo hitting "Sydney's" bridge and starting a fire forward. "Sydney" opened fire simultaneously but her first salvo was over. Early in the action the cruiser was hit by a torpedo under A turret, resulting in A and B turrets being jammed. "Sydney's" torpedo tubes were hit by a further salvo, and a bad fire was started resulting in the destruction of her aircraft.

"The action was broken off after about half an hour, and "Sydney", burning fiercely and down by the bows, proceeded at 5 knots. The raider, which had received a vital hit, was now on fire amidships, with her engine room out of action. At about 1815H the raider's crew abandoned ship, and at midnight the vessel, which was scuttled, blew up.


"It is believed that "Sydney" sank at 2300H/19."

In regard to the possibility of a second German ship being present at the action, the Acting Chief of the Naval Staff stated that, in the light of investigations which had been made, the Naval authorities did not accept this view.

The Acting Chief of the Naval Staff referred to the embarrassing position in which we have been placed as a result of the premature disclosure by the United Kingdom authorities of the name and description of the raider which was in action with H.M.A.S. "Sydney". A rigorous censorship had been imposed in Australia and advice as to the nature of the restrictions was communicated to the United Kingdom authorities. These restrictions, however, had not been imposed on the B.B.C. and United Kingdom press and the broadcast of information by the B.B.C. on 2nd December and publication in the United Kingdom press forced the premature release to the Australian press of other material which it was desirable for the time being to withhold.

It was decided that representations should be made to the United Kingdom Government in the matter and their attention invited to previous instances of premature broadcast by the B.B.C. and to the assurances given that measures would be given to prevent recurrences of cases of this nature.


Secretary.


PRIME MINISTER.