

[REDACTED] (MR) W.B. WILSON, [REDACTED]

24. 10. 2008.


SUBM.006.0001LR

THE PRESIDENT,
H.M.A.S. SYDNEY II,
COMMISSION OF INQUIRY,
LEVEL 18,
DEFENCE PLAZA,
270 PITT STREET,
SYDNEY N.S.W. 2000

DEAR SIR,

1. I AM OLD ENOUGH TO REMEMBER WELL THE DISAPPEARANCE OF SYDNEY OFF OUR NORTH WEST COAST ALMOST 67 YEARS AGO.

2. LIKE MANY OTHERS I HAVE WONDERED EVER SINCE NOT SO MUCH 'HOW' BUT 'WHY'!

3. IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS THERE CAN BE NO ABSOLUTE ANSWERS AND NEVER WILL BE.

4. HOWEVER, I WOULD LIKE TO SUBMIT WHAT I THINK WOULD BE PLAUSIBLE AND RATIONAL EXPLANATION OF THE DISASTER

5. FIRSTLY, SOME OBSERVATIONS :

(CONT.)

- (i) THE SUCCESS AND SURVIVAL OF AN ARMED MERCHANT VESSEL OF PREDATORY INTENT (E.G. KORMORAN) DEPENDS LARGELY ON DECEPTION. THE GERMAN SHIP EVIDENTLY MAINTAINED THIS TO THE VERY LAST MINUTE.
- (ii) NAVAL PEOPLE HAVE TOLD ME THAT (IN WAR AND PEACE) MERCHANT SHIPS ARE NOT UNKNOWN TO DO SEEMINGLY ODD THINGS _____ PROMPTING "WHAT THE HELL IS HE UP TO?" _____ AND GETTING SOME SENSIBLE ANSWER IS DIFFICULT. A USEFUL MEANS OF DECEPTION!
- (iii) I BELIEVE THAT IN ESSENCE THE EVIDENCE OF GERMAN SURVIVORS HAS BEEN ACCURATE.
- (iv) I UNDERSTAND THAT SYDNEY'S ONLY MEANS OF COMMUNICATION AT SEA WAS BY MORSE CODE AND VISUALLY BY FLAGS. TODAY'S PEOPLE MAY NOT REALISE THAT, BUT HENCE THE SILENCE CAN BE EXPLAINED OR UNDERSTOOD.

6. DEALING WITH THE GERMAN (KORMORAN) SIDE OF THINGS:

- (i) HAVING FIRST SIGHTED H.M.A.S. SYDNEY, THEY WOULD HAVE SOON RECOGNISED A WARSHIP WITH SUPERIOR ARMAMENT TO THEIRS.
- (ii) THEY WOULD HAVE REALISED, TOO, THAT ANY ENCOUNTER WOULD MEAN "GETTING IN FIRST" IF THEY WERE TO HAVE ANY HOPE OF SURVIVAL.

(CONT.)

(iii) THE OPPORTUNITY TO "GET IN FIRST" CAME WHEN SYDNEY CLOSED IN TO A RANGE OF 900 YARDS, OR THEREABOUTS, BROAD SIDE ON _____ A PERFECT TARGET, AT NEAR BLANK RANGE. INITIAL HORRENDOUS AND IRRECOVERABLE DAMAGE WAS INFLICTED. KORMORAN'S BLUFF HAD LARGELY TRIUMPHED

7. WHY DID H.M.A.S. SYDNEY CLOSE IN AND SO PRESENT AN EASY TARGET?

8. THERE FOLLOWS AN ATTEMPT AT EXPLANATION:

(i) OBVIOUSLY, SYDNEY HAD NO PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OR INKLING OF ANY ENEMY VESSEL IN THE LOCALITY.

(ii) ALL INDICATIONS WERE LIKELY THOSE OF A "WAYWARD" BUT NOT DELIBERATELY OR MISCHIEVOUSLY SO, MERCHANT SHIP.
(SEE PARA. 5(ii))

(iii) UNABLE TO MAKE SENSE OF THE SITUATION, A BOARDING PARTY WAS A POSSIBLE SOLUTION AND THUS THE CLOSE APPROACH.

9. SOME PEOPLE HAVE ASKED "WHAT ABOUT SYDNEY'S SPOTTER PLANE (A FLOAT PLANE)?" AND "DID CAPTAIN BURNETT PERHAPS THINK HE WAS ABOUT TO TAKE THE SHIP BEFORE HIM AS A VALUABLE PRIZE?" FOR ME, THOSE QUESTIONS (AND OTHERS) PRESENT ENDLESS AND FUTILE SPECULATION.

10. FINALLY, IT WOULD BE GROSSLY UNFAIR
AND UNREASONABLE TO LAY BLAME OR
PASS JUDGEMENT ON SYDNEY'S CAPTAIN
OR HIS OFFICERS.

11. THE GODS WERE AGAINST SYDNEY THAT DAY.

YOURS ETC.
W.B. Wilson

P.S. I HOPE YOUR INQUIRY WILL HELP TO
PUT A FEW OLD MINDS AT REST.
GOOD LUCK! WBS.