

Greg Bathgate

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The Secretary  
HMAS SYDNEY II  
Commission of Inquiry  
Level 18  
Defence Plaza  
270 Pitt Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

HMAS SYDNEY II COMMISSION OF INQUIRY – SUBMISSION No 3

Course to Destruction

There is absolutely no information to confirm the movements of HMAS Sydney on the return journey from the Sunda Strait to Fremantle and her course to destruction. However, it is possible to calculate and plot the limited tracks available to Burnett, relative to the location of the battle site as shown on the attached diagram p3.

The destination of the Sydney and Zealandia to the rendezvous position of 7° 15' S, 104° 40' E was obviously derived by C in C China using the starting coordinates of 31° 30' S, 115° 00' E. This indicates that both vessels were to proceed along the Fremantle / Sunda shipping lane on the safer inshore coastal route on a course of 340° T. This means that on the return journey, when the Kormoran was first sighted, the Sydney was positioned about 37 nautical miles west of her outward track.

Had Burnett chosen to return on a more direct path to Fremantle from the actual rendezvous position with HMS Durban of 7° 56' S, 104° 40' E, he had the option of traversing the course of 159° T or 160° T. However, although he appears to have adopted a course of 161° T, each of these tracks could have led to contact with the raider he expressly believed was operating in the area. Alternatively, he had recently received information which would have enabled an interception.

Burnett was convinced there was a raider somewhere out there and he would have thought that the Sunda / Leeuwin shipping lane, the main route taken by vessels from Singapore to Australian ports and the Pacific was an ideal area for raider operations. A decision to sail 161° T would take the Sydney diagonally across this route and it would also provide Burnett with more scope for surveillance and possible detection.

In canvassing the possibilities, it is considered that if Burnett had decided to sail the unusual western course of 161° T, then the interception is most likely to have been a chance encounter. Although the other more direct tracks to Fremantle would not have resulted in an interception, a later change in course to 180° T (as depicted earlier by British sources and by the official naval historian GH Gill) should also be considered. Such an occurrence would have meant that Burnett had received signals indicating the whereabouts of a suspicious vessel and ordered to investigate.

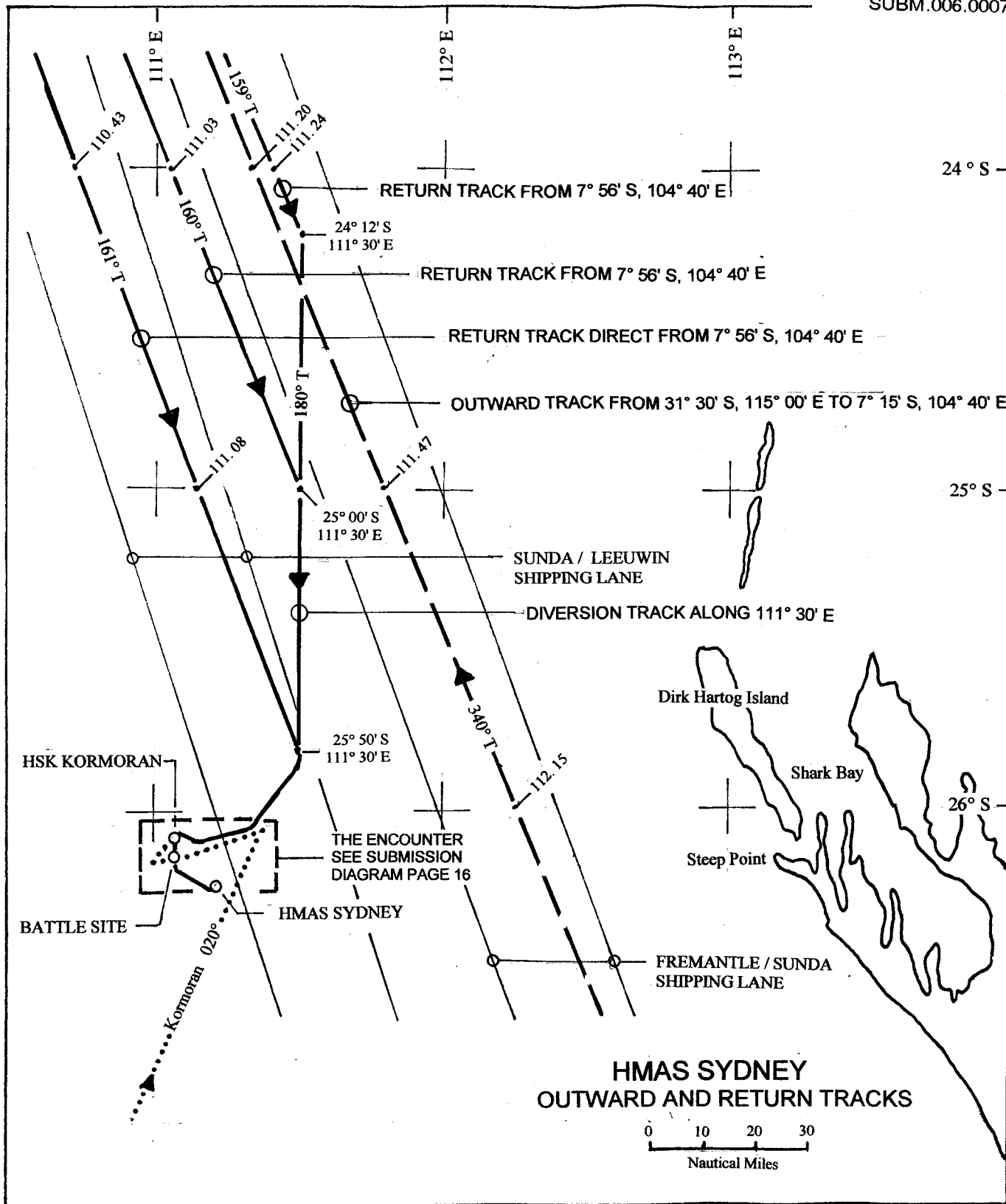


If so, those signals could only have been received from C in C China in Singapore. (HMAS Harman had no D/F tracking capability)

It should be noted that although the Sydney should have been under the control of Harman in this area (Australia Station), the warship was also at the disposition of C in C China (China Station) when undertaking escort duties to Singapore. An arranged interception should therefore be weighed in the context of evidence by the Royal Naval service history records which specifically records that the Sydney 'was ordered to intercept the Kormoran on November 18, 1941'. Strangely, no similar records have been found in Australia.

If searches for such Sydney-related material (including distress signals) are to be conducted, it would seem they would most likely be found in British archives. As it is increasingly evident that the authorities in Singapore were most likely conscious of the plight of the Sydney, it would seem prudent for the Inquiry to request perusal of Royal Navy, FECB and Admiralty files. Records for the period are thought to have been destroyed and/or embargoed, but it should not deter the Inquiry from making the necessary requests because fortunately duplicate copies of these secret files are still in existence.

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HMAS SYDNEY  
OUTWARD AND RETURN TRACKS