

28 October 2008

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

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Loss of HMAS Sydney II

I have been re reading the report of the 1999 Senate Inquiry particularly Chapter 5 Signals Submarines and Speedboats. The following questions occur to me arising from that 'evidence' which would no doubt occur also to the present inquiry:

Kormoran's QQQQ signal. It was common for merchant ships under attack by hilfskreuzer to send this signal. i.e. it was not the exclusive preserve of admiralty shipping. It had also been used by other hilfskreuzer (*Pinguin*). It was a call for assistance. It would be relatively easy to customize this signal so that it conveyed a secondary message, the spacing of the letters for example, or even QQQQ Q for *HK41*.

Robert Mason (deceased) Do his papers still survive? HMAS Harman must have been an extraordinarily lax station if a message was received that *Sydney* had found a 'quere customer', then another that it had engaged it, and a later message the content of which is unknown because the headsets were unattended! How would they know that a signal had been received if the headsets were unattended? Was there a tape or wire recorder?

David (Ron) Griffiths (deceased?) Reference to signal received at *HMAS Cerberus* passed to the WRAN in charge. Who was that WRAN? Were the signals direct or being relayed from Perth? How convenient is it that two sets of signals received in Canberra and Victoria were both 'lost' by the persons in charge when it was confirmed that *Sydney* had been sunk and nothing had been done about it for 5 days?

John Macarthur/RAN signals officer Fremantle What was the name of this officer? How did he receive a voice signal from a ship which supposedly had no voice transmission equipment? What frequency was it on?

If all of the transmission equipment on *Sydney* was destroyed, would it be possible for an amateur wireless operator to cobble together a transmitter which would broadcast across a number of frequencies such that it could be heard on (AM or shortwave) radio in the Geraldton Hotel? Could such a set be made by scrounging a tuner from a public band radio receiver, in three or four hours? In the 1940's and 1950's there were many more men who knew how to build a radio than there are today.



Since AM frequencies have limited range but 'bounce' off the ionosphere to give a secondary reception area, could this account for signals being heard in Geraldton (300km), Perth (600km) and Darwin (1500km), but not in Canberra?

Miss Marion Stevens Obviously a lady of firm opinions. Were signals from warships not encoded? How can she be so sure there was no voice transmitter on board? Did she approve the specifications of the ships? How did the ship engage in close maneuvers with other ships in port for instance? Were there any ham radio hobbyists on board?

Mrs Daphne Wright No signals were ever received at HMAS Harman. If there was no recording equipment, and the headsets were left unattended for any length of time there wouldn't be. (See above). Were there, or were there not WRANS at Cerberus in November 1941? Could there have been misidentification of the person concerned? Were they always in uniform? Could the person concerned have been a civilian?

Mrs Judy Saunders A detailed recollection of events, but then recanted. A witness would not forget listening out for the missing *Sydney* or seeing the boss rush into his office to call the Navy Board. Who talked her out of it? Is she the last Harman person telling the truth?

Alan Cohn Messages from ships were in code, but he was on only one of four shifts. He doesn't say which one; A sequence of events that ran from 4pm to midnight W.A. time would cover more than one shift at Harman. Was he on either of the critical ones?

Len Hall Heavy telephone traffic between Fremantle and RAAF Pearce on the night of 19/20 November and for 5 days after. In 1941 the RAN and the RAAF were distinct and to some extent competing government departments. What was the extent of co operation and competition?

Gordon Laffer 'Sydney calling Darwin' message in plain language. Why would *Sydney* call Darwin rather than Fremantle? Could it be that Fremantle wasn't responding?

LCDR Ean McDonald A 'similar' (how similar?) signal logged on *HMAS Perth* (about) 25 November. This evidence is of no use unless it can be shown that the signal was actually received on 19/20 November and logged some time later. How long had *Perth* been on R and R in Melbourne?

Squadron Leader Cooper As for McDonald above

Mrs Glenys McDonald Voice signals breaking into (commercial AM band or shortwave?) radio could come from a variety of sources. There was also apparently interference at the Geraldton Hotel also. This has a ring of truth, for why make up such a story? Were the signals voice, or morse code?

Dr Frame It seems to me more than possible or probable that someone in charge of a disabled and burning ship, with another enemy ship in immediate proximity firing on it, would certainly use the available wireless resources (a) to inform Fremantle of what was going on, and (b) to request any available reinforcements including particularly aircraft to assist in extracting himself from an awkward situation. It wouldn't really matter at this stage whether the signals were coded or not, but they would generate a lot of telephone traffic between RAN Fremantle and RAAF Pearce.

RAAF Pearce would be reluctant to do anything (a) because the ship was not yet overdue, (b) because the RAN had only the vaguest idea where it was, (c) because it was dark and it would not be able to identify the protagonists, and (d) it would need appropriate clearances and compensation for a search, and (c) all the hierarchy on the east coast (and most in the West) would be asleep.


The 'sensible' thing to do would be to wait until it was established that the ship was overdue, do the necessary inter departmental paperwork, get approvals for a search, then go and have a look. That would take at least 48 hours. If something odd had been reported the month before off Cape Leeuwin then at least one aircraft would be sent to that area. (Capt Bourne)

If Sydney was under power and retreating to the SSE, i.e towards Fremantle, whoever was in control was probably hoping to make the port of Geraldton. Had she been sinking after the action, and travelling initially at around 10 knots (20km/hr), it would take only about ½ -1 hour to travel 12 kilometres, and she would probably have sunk in daylight in full view of *Kormoran*.

It seems therefore that a second major and unforeseen catastrophe after dark may have sunk the still viable ship. The survivors of *Kormoran* reported a sheet of flame but no sound of an explosion. Since the Navy hierarchy was apparently parsimonious with ammunition, *Sydney* may not have been carrying much 6" ammunition, and the chief suspect would be a torpedo stored near her underwater tubes, and detonated by the fire.

Acting Director of DSD (Unnamed) This is a classic piece of public service gobbledegook. If DSD was the responsible intelligence authority, which it was not, it wouldn't record any signals from Navy ships because that isn't its job! Let's hope the predecessor to the DSD had a little more 'intelligence', and if its records haven't been examined previously, that they are now.

Yours sincerely



Howard Patterson