

December 2, 2008

Mr T. R. H. Cole, AO, RFD, QC,
President,
HMAS SYDNEY II Commission of Inquiry,
Level 8,
55 Market St,
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Cole,

Further to my discussions with CMDR John Rush QC and LEUT Matthew Vesper, I have pleasure in submitting a report on the research I have conducted into the Japanese submarine fleet in World War Two.

As you are aware, it has been suggested from time to time that a Japanese submarine may have been responsible for the sinking of *HMAS Sydney*, perhaps in association with the German raider *Kormoran*. That suggestion was given a new lease of life in the 1981 book *Who Sank the Sydney?*, by Michael Montgomery, the son of *Sydney's* navigator.

I have never taken these claims seriously. For one thing, the forces of the Imperial Japanese Navy were not ordered to open hostilities until midnight on December 8 (Japan time) 1941; that is eighteen days after *Sydney* was lost. It would have been extraordinary for the Imperial Japanese Navy, preparing as it was for a knockout surprise blow against the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, one on which the fate of the Empire depended, to put that venture at risk by attacking an Australian cruiser of no immediate relevance to the Japanese in the Indian Ocean before any declaration of war. According to the official Japanese submarine history, the first IJN submarine to sink an enemy vessel was *I-26*, which claimed the American ship *Cynthia Olson* (2,140 tons) on December 8 (Japan time), 1941.¹ It is also worth noting in this regard that the large headquarters submarine *I-10* is reported to have sighted the heavy cruiser *USS Astoria* in the Fiji Islands before Pearl Harbor.² *I-10* is said to have

¹ See *Nihon Kaigun Sensuikanshi (The History of the Imperial Japanese Submarines)*, page 424, cited in a May 29, 1991, letter from Professor Teruaki Kawano of the Military History Department, National Institute for Defence Studies, page 4. (Annex 1).

In my 1992 book *Battle Surface! Japan's Submarine War Against Australia 1942-1944*, and in my subsequent correspondence with the Japanese in 1992, I followed the practice of putting Japanese given names before the family name. Hence, "Teruaki Kawano" in referring to Professor Kawano. Although this is a common procedure and one followed by many Japanese when corresponding with people in the West, I have since adopted the Japanese practice of putting the family name ahead of the given name. To avoid confusion, in this letter I use the system adopted in *Battle Surface!*

² See Norman Polmar and Dorr B Carpenter, *Submarines of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1904-1945*, Conway Maritime Press, page 13. *I-10* left Yokosuka on November 16, 1941. No date is given for the alleged sighting. An entry in the Dictionary of American Fighting Ships, Vol. A, 1991, Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Naval History Division, Washington, D.C. (<http://www.hazegray.org/danfs/cruisers/ca34.txt>. Accessed: December 2, 2008), throws some doubt on



avoided the cruiser and sailed eastward. This, if true, would be further proof that for Japan everything hinged on Pearl Harbor.

For another thing, those making this allegation have, with only two exceptions that I know of, made no attempt to identify the Japanese submarine they believe was responsible. One exception is the 1987 claim by a retired commercial diver, Colin Sampey, that *Sydney* was sunk by a Japanese submarine called *Tiger Lily*. Sampey's claim that he came across the hulk of *Sydney* in 110 feet of water has been shown to be quite wrong. And his "identification" of the submarine is equally fanciful. IJN submarines were identified by a preliminary letter or letters (I or RO), followed by a number. They were not given names, and certainly not quaint and exotic names such as *Tiger Lily*. Another exception is John Samuels, who is said to argue in his 2005 book *Somewhere Below* that *I-58* sank *Sydney* and then shot survivors in the water.³

Finally, had there been any cooperation between the Germans and the Japanese on such a matter prior to the Pacific War it would almost certainly have come to light. The Germans and the Japanese did liaise on naval matters during the war. But there has never been any suggestion in either Japan or Germany that the two nations worked together to sink *HMAS Sydney*. Nor is there any hint of such liaison in the War Diary of Admiral Paul Wenneker, the German Naval Attache in Japan between 1939-1943.

For these reasons, in my 1992 book *Battle Surface!* I did not address the possibility that a Japanese submarine attacked *HMAS Sydney*. On June 22, 1992, Lieutenant Tom Frame, wrote to me advising that his next book would be on the subject of *Sydney's* loss (**Annex 2**). He very much doubted that a Japanese submarine was involved but said that if I could give him something quotable for his book he would be most grateful. I decided to look into the matter with an eye to producing an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, where I was Associate Editor, and passing on anything I learnt to Tom Frame. The best way to proceed, I felt, was to establish where all of Japan's ocean-going submarines were on (or about) November 19, 1941. The feature article (**Annex 3**) and an accompanying news story (**Annex 4**) appeared in the *Herald* on September 17, 1992.

When I wrote the book and the *SMH* article I was under the impression that Japan had had a force of 46 ocean-going I-Class submarines at the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941, and I worked on the basis of that figure. Indeed, the figure of 46 I-Class boats had been confirmed by Vice Admiral Kazuo Ueda on page three of his May 1991 comments and corrections to the draft Preface of *Battle Surface!* (**Annex 5**).⁴ That assumption was called into question earlier this year when I noted belatedly a small error in the feature article. In the third last paragraph I wrote that "five boats" arrived at Hainan from Japan on November 27, 1941. That should have read "six boats", and I did in fact go on in the article to identify six boats: *I-53*, *I-54*, *I-55*, *I-56*, *I-57* and *I-58*. If the figure of six is accepted, as I believe it should be, it would seem to suggest that Japan had 47 large I-Class boats, not 46, in late 1941. (In the 1992

this claim. It says that *Astoria* returned to Pearl Harbor on October 29 and made only "local patrols" in the five weeks before the Pearl Harbor attack.

³ See Frank Walker, "Bullet in sailor reopens WWII theory", *Sun-Herald*, October 22, 2006.

⁴ The IJN, Admiral Ueda noted, also had eleven RO-Class boats. In another note, which I am unable to locate, Admiral Ueda indicated there were also five "reserved boats".

Herald article, I account for 47 vessels). That assumption is supported by a table, "Submarine Force, December 1941", on page 12 of *Submarines of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1904-1945*. It lists 47 I-Class submarines.

I have not yet been able to explain satisfactorily why the figure of 46 boats has been widely used. It is possible, I suppose, that one submarine was out of commission at the time. On the other hand, when I made a thorough review of my research notes for *Battle Surface!*, I came across a statement by VADM Ueda that *I-25* was commissioned only two weeks before she sailed for Pearl Harbor (**Annex 6**).⁵ Whatever the explanation, I believe I am able to account for 47 I-Class submarines on November 17, 1941, though I would have liked more information from the Japanese on the long-range submarines *I-59* and *I-60*. The twelve-year-old *I-60* was sunk by the British destroyer *Jupiter* 25 miles west of Krakatoa, in the Sunda Strait, on January 17, 1942.⁶ The Sunda Strait is, of course, a gateway to the Indian Ocean, where *Sydney* was lost. But *I-60* was making her way to, not from, the Indian Ocean and there is no evidence that she had been in the Indian Ocean two months earlier.

It was further known that 28 of the I-Class submarines were associated in some way with the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. (The figure climbs to 30 if one includes the submarines *I-26* and *I-10*, which were sent on reconnaissance patrols in the North and South Pacific.)⁷ On pages 22-23 of *Battle Surface!* I included a map showing the positions of these 28 submarines in the period from about November 21.⁸ This was based on material I had obtained from the Japanese archives, which I had never found any reason to distrust; on interviews I had conducted with thirty or forty former members of the Imperial Japanese Navy, and on a close and wide-ranging review of the published material on the Pearl Harbor operation. It seemed obvious that none of these 28 boats could have been in the vicinity of *HMAS Sydney* on November 19, 1941. It also seemed clear that Japan's four mine-laying submarines, which were not really ocean-going vessels at all, were in the South China Sea.

⁵ The observation about *I-25* was made by VADM Ueda when commenting on page three of a draft of Chapter Ten of *Battle Surface!* *I-25* sailed from Japan on November 21, 1941.

⁶ *Submarines of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1904-1945*, pages 19 and 93.

⁷ Polmar and Carpenter argue that 30 large, first-line submarines of the First Fleet participated in the Pearl Harbor attack. See *Submarines of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1904-1945*, page 13. As noted, the number does indeed reach 30 if one includes *I-26*, which was involved in reconnaissance in the North Pacific, and *I-10*, which carried out reconnaissance in the South Pacific. The official *History of Imperial Japanese Submarines*, page 593, notes that these two boats were respectively part of the 1st and 2nd Submarine Squadrons which, together with the 3rd Squadron, consisted of 30 boats. (**Annex 6A**). Although in the *Herald* article I used the figure of 28, a case can be made for the higher number. On pages 22-23 of *Battle Surface!* I have a map showing the course taken by the 28 IJN submarines which proceeded to Hawaiian waters. In captions on the map I identify each of those submarines. I am attaching with this letter a photocopy of a map I sent VADM Ueda when I was researching the book (**Annex 7**). I wrote some questions on the map and these were answered by Admiral Ueda. (Unfortunately, he wrote in red ink and many of his comments are almost illegible on this copy, the only one I can find.) I sent a photocopy of this map, together with Admiral Ueda's comments, to Peter Sullivan when he was preparing the colour map for the book. Admiral Ueda's handwritten notes (and these ones are clearly visible) indicate that there were seven submarines in the 2nd Submarine Squadron (2SSB), four in 1SSB, five (and five midgets) in the Special Attack Force and nine in 3SSB. Although Admiral Ueda does not indicate this in his note, another three submarines were attached to the main Japanese Battle Fleet for reconnaissance.

⁸ In his book *Who Sank the Sydney?*, Michael Montgomery claims (page 188) that only twelve I-Class submarines were destined for Pearl Harbor. As noted, this is incorrect.



That accounted for 32 (or 34) of Japan's I-Class submarines. Where were the others?

While conducting research for *Battle Surface!*, I had become well acquainted with Professor Teruaki Kawano of the Military History Department of the National Institute for Defence Studies in Tokyo. I had found him extremely thorough and reliable, and extremely helpful. On August 18, 1992, I faxed a letter to Professor Kawano asking if it might be possible to establish the position of the other 14 I-Class boats on or about November 19 (**Annex 8**). He replied by fax two days later (**Annex 9**). Ten of the 14 boats, he wrote, had been at San-ya on Hainan Island in the lead-up to the Pacific War. Two others had been on reconnaissance missions in the Pacific and the final two had arrived at Davao, in the southern Philippines, from Japan.

This was helpful but it still left some questions unanswered. On August 21, I faxed five follow-up questions to Professor Kawano (**Annex 10**). I was keen to learn more about the movements of *I-10* and *I-26*, the two reconnaissance submarines. I was also keen to learn more about the movements of *I-59* and *I-60*. Finally, I wanted to be sure that the six I-Class vessels (*I-53*, *I-54*, *I-55*, *I-56*, *I-57* and *I-58*) that were said to have arrived at Hainan from Japan on October 27 had not gone on any patrols between that date and December 1 and that the four boats (*I-62*, *I-64*, *I-65* and *I-66*) that had arrived at Hainan on December 2 had come from Japan and not from somewhere else.

Professor Kawano responded by fax the same day (**Annex 11**). He confirmed published reports that *I-10* left Yokosuka for the South Pacific at 0700 on November 16, 1941. Although he did not say so at this time, the official War History notes that on November 30, 1941, the floatplane from *I-10* flew a reconnaissance mission over Suva. That ruled out any possibility that she had been in the Indian Ocean on November 19. Professor Kawano advised that *I-26* had left Yokosuka on November 19. That ruled her out.

Professor Kawano's answer to my third question, in which I asked if I would be correct in assuming that *I-59* and *I-60* were in Japan throughout November 1941, merely restated that those two boats had arrived at Davao from Japan on January 5, 1942. Given the time it takes to prepare submarines for major operations that did not seem particularly suspicious. But it did mean that the vessels were not accounted for on or about November 19.

In his answer to my fourth question, Professor Kawano said that the six vessels numbered from *I-53* to *I-58* had arrived at Hainan from Japan on *November 27*, 1941 and had left on December 1, 1941. In his earlier message, he had said they arrived at Hainan on *October 27*. That effectively ruled them out. In his answer to my fifth question, Professor Kawano said that the submarines *I-62*, *I-64*, *I-65* and *I-66* arrived at Hainan on December 2 from Japan. That ruled them out.

On August 25, I thanked Professor Kawano and asked another six questions (**Annex 12**). My first question sought details of any patrols by *I-59* and *I-60* in November 1941. Professor Kawano responded the following day, saying, inter alia, that in early November 1941 all of the IJNs operational vessels were in home ports preparing for long operations (**Annex 13**). Unfortunately, he said, the other details I sought were

not available in the Military History Department files. I thanked him in a letter of August 26 (**Annex 14**).

As Professor Kawano was leaving for a conference in Italy and as I was still not quite sure about the movements of submarines *I-59* and *I-60*, nor about those of the four mine-laying submarines, I wrote to Vice Admiral Ueda, whom I had come to know extremely well while researching *Battle Surface!* and with whom I had a voluminous correspondence (**Annex 15**). VADM Ueda wrote back on September 2, 1992 (**Annex 16**). He said that Professor Kawano would address my queries on his return to Japan. He added, in a small correction to the map on page 22 of *Battle Surface!*, that while six of the seven submarines of the 2nd Submarine Group had indeed left Yokosuka for Pearl Harbor on November 16, as shown, *I-1* had left on November 21.

On September 5, VADM Ueda wrote (**Annex 17**) to advise that one of his friends, Rear Admiral Nobuyuki Fujii, a World War II submariner whom I had also come to know, had tried to establish the location of *I-59* on November 19, 1941, but had not been able to do so. VADM Ueda said that he had himself looked into the location of *I-59* and *I-60*, but had not been able to come up with anything. He said he guessed that *I-59* and *I-60* were undergoing repairs in Japan in the period in question. RADM Fujii was able to establish that the four mine-laying submarines (*I-121*, *I-122*, *I-123* and *I-124*) advanced to "Phy-phone" (he indicated this was phonetic. Hainan? Haiphong?) Island from the dockyard in Kobe at the end of November 1941. This is corroborated by another source. According to *The History of the Imperial Japanese Submarines*, these four mine-laying submarines staged through Cam Ranh Bay in mid-December 1941.⁹ That would rule them out.

In view of all this, it seemed to me in 1992, and still seems to me now, extremely unlikely that a Japanese submarine was involved in the loss of *HMAS Sydney*.

There are three other matters that may be of interest to the Commission.

Not long after the publication of the *Herald* article on the circumstances surrounding the loss of *HMAS Sydney*, I received an undated letter (**Annex 18**) from Phyllis L. Collins (Lady Collins), the widow of Vice Admiral Sir John Collins, the former commander of *Sydney*. In this letter, Lady Collins indicated that she was in full agreement with the conclusions reached and said she knew that if her husband were alive he would have added his wholehearted approval. Admiral Collins had never had any doubt that "the *Sydney's* magazines went up". Lady Collins had no time for the Montgomery thesis and she was sure her late husband would have been glad the article had been published.

Soon after this, I received a letter (**Annex 19**) dated September 20, 1992, from F. S. Pountney, a *Herald* reader who said that in October 1941 he had sailed as an engineer in *T.S.S. Zealandia*, a troopship commissioned by the Navy. *Zealandia* had been escorted from Sydney to Fremantle and on into the Indian Ocean by *HMAS Adelaide*. Off Carnarvon, the escort duties were taken over by *HMAS Sydney*, which provided cover to the Sunda Straits. While acting as *Zealandia's* escort in the Indian Ocean, Mr

⁹ See *Nihon Kaigun Sensuikanshi (The History of the Imperial Japanese Submarines)*, pp 469-473, cited in a May 29, 1991, letter from Professor Kawano, page 4. (**Annex 1**).



Pountney claimed, "*HMAS Sydney* during the daylight hours adopted the practice of using our vessel as a decoy whilst she retired well astern on the horizon." One morning, when a merchantman approached from the opposite direction and passed close to *Zealandia*, *Sydney* steamed up at full speed from astern and "took up a position broadside on and close to the other vessel". This prompted the 4th mate to comment that the captain of the *Sydney*, by his action, was exposing the ship and his crew to grave danger, should the other ship turn hostile. While tied up in port in Singapore, the crew of *Zealandia* had heard the news that *Sydney* had been lost in action off the WA coast in the vicinity of Carnarvon. Mr Pountney said that he was now 72 years old but "the events I have described are still clear in my mind."

The final point has to do with the wartime naval liaison between Germany and Japan referred to above. In 1991 I corresponded with Vice Admiral Tatsuo Tsukudo, a former IJN submarine officer who was the executive officer in *I-25* when she sent her floatplane on reconnaissance missions over Australia and New Zealand in early 1942. In a letter dated July 18, 1991 (**Annex 20**), in which he commented on a draft of Chapter Seven of *Battle Surface!*, Admiral Tsukudo referred in passing to naval liaison between Germany and Japan (see Annex 20, page 3). After *I-25* left New Zealand waters, he wrote, she received information that a German raider had laid mines in New Zealand waters. In the event, "the informed position of [the] mines" was imprecise and the Japanese officers went ahead despite the possible risks.

I hope this material may be of some value. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Yours faithfully,

David Jenkins