

HMAS SYDNEY II – COMMISSION OF INQUIRY.

Reference the Submission by Lieutenant Colonel T. Warren Whittaker and Giles M. Whittaker

SUBM.005.0089_R

INTRODUCTION

Our submission was made at the end of October 2008. Since then, I became aware of Barbara Winter's submission in which we are invited to believe that Captain Detmers told the truth about the battle. I felt that it was important to challenge this account. I have included my comments to this document.

The Report on Technical Aspects of the Sinking of HMS *Sydney* and HSK *Kormoran* by DSTO and RINA and the evidence given by the authors was published on the Commission's Web Site on 12 and 13 January. In the short time available to me, I have made a quick examination of the documents.

REPORT ON THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS

I have made a brief study of the Report on Technical Aspects of the Sinking of HMS *Sydney* and HSK *Kormoran* by DSTO and RINA. It is an excellent and detailed account of **what happened**.

There is one fundamental difference between us. The report accepts the German version of the battle. I propose to show that the German account is not true. My aim is to show **how it happened**.

In outline, the German account has the ships sailing on parallel courses about 1,000 yards apart when *Kormoran* hoisted the German ensign, decamouflaged and opened fire with her guns and torpedoes from her deck mounted tubes. One of the torpedoes hit *Sydney* just forward of A Turret. The underwater photographs showed that the fire from four 15cm guns devastated *Sydney*. A few shells from *Sydney* put *Kormoran's* engine room out of action. As a result, she had to be abandoned and sunk.

It can be shown that Detmers used an illegal ruse to trap *Sydney*. For details, see my submission. (SUBM.006.0089_R)

By his actions, Captain Detmers has shown that he was well aware that he would be liable to the death penalty if the Australian government found out what he had done. The German account of the battle was designed to hide the truth.

Having studied the report on the Technical Aspects, I wish to make the following amendments to my submission.

AMENDMENTS

Reference “The Sinking of HMAS SYDNEY II – Evidence for the Late Captain Joseph Burnett’s Defence.”

1. **The Secret Weapon:** (My submission paragraph 5) I accept that *Kormoran*'s underwater tubes were set at an angle of 125° to the ship's centreline and that the torpedo fired from the *Kormoran*'s underwater tube was probably compressed air driven. As *Sydney* was stopped, if anyone aboard *Sydney* had seen the torpedo fired from the underwater tube approaching, it was too late to do anything about it.

2. **Time taken to bring *Kormoran*'s guns into action.** (My submission paragraph 8) I accept the conclusion that *Kormoran*'s 15cm guns could have been brought into action between 12 to 18 seconds of starting to decamouflage. As I understand it, in accordance with the standard procedures in force at the time, *Sydney* would have eight 6 inch guns trained on *Kormoran* as she approached to take her prisoner. Her Gunnery Officer would have had his finger on the button ready to fire a broadside the instant *Kormoran* made any hostile movement such as starting to decamouflage her guns. In normal circumstances, it is probable that *Sydney* would have hit *Kormoran* with a dozen or so 6 inch shells before she got a shot away from her 15cm guns. The reason *Sydney* did not open fire was that the torpedo fired from *Kormoran*'s underwater tube whilst she was still flying a white flag, hit *Sydney* just forward of A Turret putting A and B Turrets out of action. The surprise effect of this hit prevented immediate retaliation and gave time for *Kormoran* to bring all her guns into action.

DR BARBARA PONIEWIERSKI'S SUBMISSION

Dr Barbara Poniewierski (Pen name Barbara Winter) made a 291 page submission to the Commission of Inquiry in which she attempted to show that Captain Detmers told the truth about the conduct of the battle.¹ I did not see this paper until after 31 October 2008 so was unable to include an analysis of her paper in my submission.

Winter does not mention the written instructions given to Detmers by the German High Command or the preparations he made to implement these instructions if he met an enemy warship.

I have analysed Winter's paper under the following headings:

1. Instructions given to Captain Detmers Regarding the action to be taken if *Kormoran* encountered an enemy warship.
2. Workup in the Baltic.
3. Crew training.
4. Instructions given to Captain Burnett.
5. The lead up to the Battle.
6. The battle.

I attach a copy of my analysis of Winter's paper.

¹ <http://www.defence.gov.au/sydneyii/SUBM/SUBM.005.0136.pdf>

OUR SUBMISSIONS

I submitted my first submission to the Commission on 26 May 2008.²

In September 2008, I became aware that counsel had been appointed to look after the interests of the late Captain Joseph Burnett. On 23 September 2008, I made a submission "**The Sinking of HMAS SYDNEY II – Evidence that the Late Captain Burnett was a Victim of an Act of Perfidy.**"³ At this time, I was not aware of a closing date for submissions.

After 23 September, a lot of new material became available on the Commission's Web Site. With my son, Giles help, I reworked my submission. I forwarded our final submission: "**The Sinking of HMAS SYDNEY II – Evidence for the late Captain Joseph Burnett's Defence**" to the Commission 23 October 2008.⁴

CONCLUSION

These amendments and Barbara Winter's submission do not alter my conclusion that Captain Detmers that feigned surrender in order to lure *Sydney* into a trap. Detmers was well aware that, if the Australians found out what he had done, he would be liable to the death penalty.



T. W. Whittaker.
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² CORR.003.0069.

³ SUBM.004.0030_R

⁴ SUBM.005.0089_R