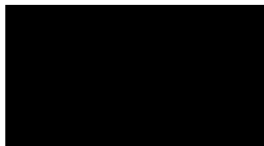




“ Ship-Ahoy !”

G.F.Ward



20/11/08- Revised and updated on 26/1/09

HMAS SYDNEY (II) COMMISSION OF INQUIRY
Office of the Chief of the Defence Force
To the Attention of the Commission Secretary
Commander **Katrina Radburn** RANR
Ref, CORR OO9 0274

Finding Sydney Foundation,
President of the Commission,, The Hon, Terence Cole, AO, RFD.QC. Perth, W.A.

Naval Support Command, Deakin Offices ACT

Letter to Commander **Katrina Radburn**, RANR,

Many thanks for sending me the information on the location of the SMS *Kormoran* and the HMAS *Sydney* (II). Before anything I should tell you that I am not ‘Navy’, my interest in the ‘battle’ between the two ships is of social interest only, I love reading and writing about sea stories. When I first read about the *Sydney* I was drawn in to getting more information on the encounter and on finding out exactly what happened, the controversy factor was intriguing, to say the least! So many people with different ideas on the subject. When Tom Frame wrote his book on the *Sydney* he stated that, “It was like looking into a kaleidoscope, you turn the barrel and the picture changes!” Then why move the barrel, leave it showing just the one picture and focus on what you see and don’t deviate from it. Of course that’s easier said than done!

Those war veteran’s that I spoke to on the subject told me that the problem was that there were no survivors from the *Sydney* to say what happened, there was only the German version and Detmers had told his crew to be evasive, and they were, very evasive! I went to the home of Hermann Ortman here in Melbourne on several occasions and took notes on what he said happened but on two points he became very evasive. Did he as an eyewitness actually see the *Sydney* sink ?-- Why were there no survivors from the *Sydney*? His answer to me was as follows, “The *Sydney* must have been well built as she sailed away over the horizon at a speed of about 12 knots as she headed back towards Perth! I was a part of the nine-man gun crew that manned No 4 - 5.9 inch gun on the SMS *Kormoran*. We fired our first round over the top of the collapsible bulwark, as too did gun No 3. On the *Sydney* they were attempting to lower a boat! We continued firing into the *Sydney*’s port side for about 10 minutes (60 shells). At such close range, 750 metres, (820 yards) every shell we fired hit the *Sydney*. At about the time we fired our 3rd or 4th round a huge explosion sent a tower of water into the air as our underwater torpedo hit her close to her forward turrets. As we came about I had to hose down the guns barrel as it was too hot to use. The *Sydney* had very little speed, she was almost dead in the water. Then we fired for a further 10 minutes into her starboard side (60 shells) and then we broke off the engagement as she sailed for Perth.” But as luck would have it another *Sydney* enthusiast living in Carnarvon W.A. had befriended another crew member off the *Kormoran* who made



regular trips to Australia to pay tribute to his lost 'friends'. He was given two war diaries, one by Lt. Heinz Messerschmidt (Messerschmidt wrote of the changing times, 'When I had been on board the *Sydney* in peace time we laughed and joked together, we were friends and I took photo's of us together', but now times were different!) and the other by Lt Commander Bretschneider, and he sent me copies. I gave mine to Gordon White to read and never got them back. Anyway they only repeated what Detmers said in his book, except Bretschneider said that when the torpedo exploded, 'The whole of the *Sydney* was blanketed in a cloud of thick black fog,!' This was not what Ortmann said exactly but then he was too busy loading No 4 gun at the time, but he did say that, 'a tower of water shot up!' Bretschneider was given the job of writing down an action report of the battle between the two ships by Detmers. This would have been a true and accurate eyewitness account of the action

I have sent to you the revised 'Battle Plan' as well as other relevant information for you to peruse through. From the 12 hours of film taken by the deep-sea vehicle it can now be ascertained as to whether or not the *Sydney* was hit by more than one torpedo and as to whether or not she was in fact hit by the amount of 5.9 inch shells Detmers and Ortmann said they fired at her. Another interesting factor will be is that, if the *Sydney* was in fact hit by some 300 shells in total, what would the ships superstructure look like? She would look more like HMS '*Pepperpot*' out from Malta! Don't you think!

Detmers was quoted as saying in later times that the action was, 'over in minutes!' Which differs from what he said in his books, but then his claim that the *Sydney* was on a course for Perth, at a speed of twelve knots, after she broke off the engagement and that she was last seen, still burning, as just a glow on the horizon, is not correct either.

From Detmers sketch of the action shown in his book Hilfskreuzer '*Kormoran*' (but for some reason was omitted from the English translation) the *Kormoran* sailed on in a westerly course for some twenty kilometers and never deviated and yet both Detmers and Hermann Ortmann said the *Kormoran* drifted for over six and a half hours and that it took nearly six hours to get the lifeboat out of the forward hatch, manually, using a block and tackle. However if we change the *Kormoran's* course to going west for ten minutes only, that is from 17.50 hours until her engines fail at around 18.00 hours, and then show her drifting for a further six and a half hours we come to the point where the *Kormoran* was located on the sea floor.

Contentious issues:

When the *Kormoran's* main engines failed both Detmers (in his book) and Ortmann claimed they could not operate anything and yet—"So an auxiliary power plant was set up in No.3 hold, and here two small diesel engines supplied the necessary power to supplement the current to the main engines." So why were they not used? If they did have power then they could have launched the fast M.T.B (L.S.3) into the water. The M.T.B was kept /stored aft in hatch No.6. Hatch No.5 was used to store the two light sea-planes.

When I asked Ortmann about the layout of the ship, sleeping quarters, where the magazines were located, what type of guns were used, general questions, he said nothing. Why? Because he had been instructed to say nothing! "If you want to know something read Detmers books, here take them both!" So I did.

((I photo-copied both I'st Editions and gave the German copy to Gordon White while I retained the English version. (Just as well I did) so if it would assist the investigation I could send it to you, on the proviso that you return it to me after the investigation. (Also enclosed would be a copy of the Secret Raiders by David



Woodward and Brennecke's Ghost Cruiser HK 33 .There would be a graph of all the German raiders comparative achievements WWI and WWII also.))

Why was the midship's door on the *Kormoran* kept closed which gave the men below no chance of escape, even though Detmers had been informed that a shell had ripped through the funnel , ruptured the pre-heater line sending burning oil down into the engine room and that at the same time the fire fighting equipment in the engine room was out of order?

And last but not least, how had Detmers souvenired the sailors cap ribbon HMAS *Sydney* that he had draped from the picture of the *Kormoran* at his home in Hamburg?

I must reiterate, that in finding the wrecks of both ships a more truthful conclusion to the *Sydney's* demise will now be forthcoming.

Yours with respect,

Graham.

P.S I hope the latitude and longitude are right on my drawings of the action as I had intended to have them checked out by the Marine Defence Dept. at Stony Point before I sent them, but then it may have been a case of, "Not you again!" These action plans have been returned to me so if any of the above departments would like copies they can be sent by return mail

By the way, the atrocities committed in WW II were not done by the Germans, they were done by the Nazis, so to be politically correct you now have to differentiate between the two.