



**The sinking of the Australian light cruiser HMAS Sydney by the Raider HSK Kormoran, German naval vessel 'Ship 41,' on 19 November 1941.**

**Sheet 2 of 2**

**Did Kapitan T. Detmers know it was HMAS Sydney?**

Yes! Though at different locations and times, both Detmers and Messersmidt had been on board the *Sydney (II)*. Messersmidt had taken several photographs while on board as a 'guest.' Detmers gave the order to 'Open Fire!' at 17.30 hours. His men had been at action stations for over 40 minutes. At 17.45 hours as the two ships crossed at a distance of less than 200 metres it would have made positive identification of the *Sydney (II)* an easy task but Detmers may have known before this. Detmers had a 'Sydney' cap band draped over a picture of the SMS *Kormoran* in the hallway of his home in Hamburg, Germany. This was discovered by the Captain of the 4,153 B.R.T freighter *Velebit*, (en-route from Bombay to Mombasa) that was badly damaged by the *Kormoran* on 26 June 1941, when he visited Detmers home after the war. This was not a friendly visit!

**Should Detmers have been more harshly treated?**

The following words PIRATE SHIP and SPY SHIP I have defined as they are relevant to the situation. So what do these words mean, by definition?

**PIRATE, PIRATE SHIP-** a person who practices piracy; especially a robber of ships on the high seas, someone who robs or does illegal violence at sea. A ship used by pirates in attacking other vessels. (In what category do we place a ship that flies a false flag from her masthead while engaging in illegal violence on the high seas?)

**SPY SHIP-** to watch or observe closely and secretly, with unfriendly purpose; someone who keeps a secret watch on the actions of others, especially in wartime; to obtain secret information for a government.

\_\_ Detmers ordered his men at times to carry out piracy duties while on other occasions to act as spies, and as captain of the ship he is responsible for their actions. This would be true if we added up all of the activities, whether totally or in part, the *Kormoran* was engaged in from the time she left port.

When Detmers made the comment in his book about 'poetic justice', what did he mean when he wrote, - As soon as we were alone after being asked by the Australian authorities about the whereabouts of the Australian cruiser *Sydney I* whistled in satisfaction and commented to my Number One, Lieutenant Foerster, - "**The Sydney, Foerster, we must have sunk her! What a coincidence! And almost in the same spot where the first Sydney destroyed the S.M.S Emden in the 1914/1918 war, that's poetic justice if you like!**" and

**"It was altogether a satisfactory business for us! In November 1914 (9 November) the Emden (The Swan of the East) had fallen victim to the more powerful Sydney (I), and now, in November 1941, the much newer and more powerful Sydney (II) had been sunk by the refitted passenger liner H S K *Kormoran*, acting as an auxiliary cruiser."**

Detmers referred to his trump card as being - 'the *Kormoran's* almost perfect disguise' and to 'the magnificent conduct of her crew.' Yet there was another factor, **her underwater torpedo tube.** When Burnett studied the outline of the *Kormoran* he would not have seen any of the *Kormoran's* guns, nor would he have had any idea that she had mounted amidships, below the waterline, a torpedo tube. The German view at that time of British naval power was **that it was formidable on top but vulnerable from below!** Detmers exemplified this when he sank the *Sydney (II)*.

One explanation for Detmers behavior in destroying the *Sydney(II)*, in its entirety, was that an injustice had occurred in the *HMAS Sydney (I)*'s destruction of the German light cruiser SMS *Emden* on 9 November 1914. Although the *Emden's* captain, Karl von Muller had run the battered hulk of his ship onto the coral reefs of the Cocos Islands and *Sydney (I)* had left

the scene and gone in pursuit of another enemy ship, when she returned the *Sydney (I)*, under orders from her Captain, John Glossop, once more fired on the *Emden*, causing further casualties. The crew of the *Emden*, on their return to Germany told and retold of the brutality of the British on firing on a ship that had surrendered. This atrocity, one day, would be avenged. You had your day in 1914, we will have ours in 1941. Professional soldiers will talk of the difference that exists between fighting against a revengeful army as against a less determined one, that their job is already difficult enough.

**What ship sank the Sydney (II) ?- "Stop engines! No wireless!"**

On 7 October 1940 the German Raider HSK *Pinguin* (Ship 33) commanded by Kapitän Felix Kruder intercepted and captured the Norwegian 8,998 B.R.T tanker *Storstad* while en-route from British North Borneo to Melbourne and Adelaide. Her cargo consisted of 12,000 tons of diesel oil and 500 tons of coal. As the *Storstad* was undamaged Kruder took her as a 'prize' and converted her over to being an auxiliary minelayer. Renamed the Hilfsminenleger *Passat* (mine-laying ship Trade Wind) and now manned with a German crew, the *Passat*, in the disguise of an allied tanker with 100 mines on board headed off to lay mines in three areas. Kruder's plan was for the *Passat* to lay mines in the shipping lanes of Banks Strait and Bass Strait from Cape Otway to Wilson's Promontory. This resulted in the sinking of the 10,855 B.R.T. British freighter *Cambridge* belonging to the Fedral Line. En-route from Melbourne to Sydney and steaming out some six miles (10 kms) east off Wilson's Promontory at 11.00 p.m. on the night of 7 November, the *Cambridge* struck a mine. The very next day the American merchant ship the *City of Rayville* also struck a mine and sank. Having taken on 1500 tons of lead at Port Pirie, Adelaide, and en-route to Melbourne, at 7.30 p.m. on 8 November while steaming on an easterly course and out south by some six miles from Cape Otway, in a sea that had ebbed, the *City of Rayville* struck a mine.

H.S.K.*Pinguin* began her minelaying activities in the shipping lanes out from Sydney, Newcastle and Hobart. *Pinguin* laid mines off the east coast of Australia on the 28 October (40 mines) and then another lay in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel (40 mines). On 6 November another lay was done in the Spencer Gulf to catch ships using the Port of Adelaide. Admiral E Raeder (Hitler's 'SKL' naval commander) awarded the two ships companies five Iron Crosses, First Class, and another fifty Second Class, for -'a job well done!'

However, in the case of the auxiliary minelayer, the ships log, course and minelaying charts were all credited as belonging to the HSK *Passat*, so it was the refitted Norwegian tanker Hilfsminenleger *Passat* acting as an auxiliary minelayer that sank these two allied ships!

As a result Bass Strait was closed to all shipping and news reports added to the losses.

The worst loss reported was the 13,480 B.R.T freighter *Niagara*. --The *Niagara* was out from Auckland, N.Z, while bound from Sydney to the U.S.A, when on 19 June she struck a mine and sank. The *Niagara* was on a secret mission to take gold bullion from several banks to the U.S.A.

The 8,706 B.R.T. *Turakina* was feared lost when wreckage came ashore on the west coast of New Zealand, 5 miles north of Dargaville. On 30 August the *Turakina*, en-route from New Zealand to Australia radioed that she was being shelled by a raider in the Tasman Sea, and nothing has been heard from her since.

The fifth ship presumed lost was the French freighter *Notou*, which was now several weeks overdue.

The HSK *Pinguin* joined with the auxiliary minelayer *Passat* on 15 November 1940 in the Indian Ocean. All 405 allied prisoners were transferred to the *Passat* and she radioed the German Naval Command that she would be returning home via the French port of Gironde. Once again the *Passat* had her name changed and so it was the German auxiliary minelayer



*Passat* acting as the Norwegian tanker *Storstad* that made the Gironde on 4 February 1941. On 8 May 1941, HSK *Penguin* was caught by the British 8 inch gun cruiser HMS *Cornwall* in the Indian Ocean and after a short exchange the *Cornwall's* gunfire became accurate and the *Penguin* suddenly exploded and sank. Of the *Penguin's* crew and her allied prisoners, only 22 allied seamen and sixty Germans were rescued!

Before Singapore surrendered to the Japanese in February 1942, the 78 feet long fishing boat *Kofuku Maru* was commandeered by the British and used to take refugees from the islands of the Rhio Archipelago to Sumatra. Previous to this she was owned and operated by a Japanese firm in Singapore and used as a fishing trawler.. In November 1942 after having spent months of service as an island ferry, the *Kofuka Maru* was then shipped from Bombay to Sydney as deck cargo on a British freighter. From here she was taken to Refuge Bay, Cairns . A new diesel engine was fitted and in her new modified form she was to become the lightly armed minelayer/ patrol boat M.V. *Krait*, out from Cairns.. Her armaments were 20 guns (hand held), fourteen revolvers, two hundred hand grenades and a box containing various types of knives. To execute the sinking of enemy ships forty -five limpet mines and 150 pounds of plastic explosive was stored below deck. Re-named the *Krait*, she was now ready for her next duty call and that was to carry her deadly cargo and a team of commandoes from Cairns to Singapore. This team of trained 'special services men' would then create havoc by attaching limpet mines to Japanese supply ships anchored in Singapore Bay. To 'encourage' the local island natives to help, fifty thousand cigarettes and 200 monies worth of gold Dutch guilders was also stowed below. At the completion of the raid, code named 'Operation *Jaywick*,' 36,000 to 40,000 tons of Japanese shipping was sunk

The credit for the sinking of the 10,000 B.R.T Japanese tanker *Sinkoku Maru* and up to six other ships was credited to the M.V.*Krait*, a refitted fishing boat acting as a lightly armed mine layer,disguised as a Japanese fishing boat. Once again her success was due to her perfect disguise, which had undergone close scrutiny from a passing Japanese destroyer and showed herself off as being nothing more than 'a Japanese fishing boat!' As part of her guise were her crew of British/ Australian commandoes, acting out as island natives.

Was it then the *Kormoran*, acting as an auxiliary cruiser that was responsible for the sinking of the light cruiser *HMAS Sydney (II)*? Or was it in her perfect disguise as the Dutch freighter *Straat Malakka*? Also as part of her guise were her German crew, acting in harmony with the Dutch ship as they showed themselves off as being nothing more than 'look at me, what do you see, only friendly allied crewmen!' Kapitan Zur See a,d Theodor.Detmers thought so to!

Detmers noted the peculiarities of allied cargo vessels and copied them. The *Kormoran* had two monkeys, Struppi the fox terrier and Senta the German sheep dog as pets. Greek ships had live animal cages on their upper decks while others had live animals( monkeys and dogs). Male prisoners taken off captured ships wearing bandanna's were, from the bridge on the *Kormoran*, mistaken by Detmers as being women taken on board.. An anti-submarine gun (wooden dummy) was mounted on her stern, another of Detmers' refinements. And of course he noted how allied signalling was done.

When the *Kormaran* fired on the 4,153 B.R.T. Yugoslav freighter *Velebit*, out from Split, because of the exchange in poor signaling, Detmers became frustrated, " Stop! Damn you stop!" "No wireless!" This was repeated again but still the *Velebit* did not stop. Detmers had in the meantime come in to a distance of only 400 yards to the enemy ship. Most times he kept out around 2000 yards, big mistake! But was this an omen of things to come? Is this why he used poor signalling as the means to lure the *Sydney II* into coming in so close? (refer to pages 116 /117 ) So what was Detmers reply when he was asked how he had managed to sink the *Sydney*, " LUCK, JUST LUCK!"

Read pages 102, 103, 104. then pages 116, 117 then pages 138 through to page 157



So now we know how, when, where and why the Sydney II was sunk and why there were no survivors!

Yours with respect,  
Graham..