

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE LOSS OF HMAS SYDNEY II

Before The Hon TRH Cole AO RFD QC

Held at residence of CDRE Smyth
[REDACTED]

Counsel Assisting: CDR John (Jack) Rush

On Thursday, 18 September 2008
(Day 16)

1 THE PRESIDENT: Today's 18 September 2008. I have come to
2 the home of CDRE Smyth [REDACTED] to
3 take his evidence. Yes, CMDR Rush.

4
5 <CDRE SMYTH, interviewed:
6

7 CMDR RUSH: Q. CDRE Smyth, if I can go directly to your
8 Naval service. When did you join the Navy?

9 A. I joined as what they called special entry Midshipman
10 in September 1940, which meant I had already left school
11 and wasn't doing the four years that the normal entry into
12 the college used to do then, so we only did six months
13 training, all Naval training at Flinders Naval Depot where
14 the college was then and then went to sea in about May 1941
15 in HMAS Australia, heavy cruiser, 8-inch guns, usually the
16 flag ship of the Australian squadron.
17

18 Q. Sir, when you joined HMAS Australia, where was she and
19 then what were --

20 A. Joined her in Sydney and we did a couple of trips
21 across to New Zealand escorting ships. Then we escorted
22 Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth and Aquitania, the three
23 biggest ships in the British Mercantile Marine from Sydney
24 and Jervis Bay, because they both couldn't fit in Sydney
25 Harbour, right around south of Tasmania, across the Bight
26 and up to take troops to the Middle East. We left them at
27 Aden and then we stayed in the Indian Ocean off the east
28 coast of Africa for the next six months, escorting ships up
29 and down the coast from Durban or East London or Capetown
30 to Aden and occasionally going off hunting German raiders
31 or Vichy French convoys.
32

33 Q. And was that the duties that were carried out until
34 the Japanese came into the war?

35 A. The Japs came in, we were still at that stage just off
36 the south coast of Africa, and we came hurtling home from
37 then on stayed.
38

39 Q. Sir, can I just ask over that period of time, the
40 Captain or Captains of your ship?

41 A. We had three Captains actually. When I first joined
42 it was a Royal Navy chap called Stewart, can't really him
43 very much, he was fairly quickly relieved by George Moore,
44 Australian, and then when we finally got back to Sydney
45 when the Japs came in, Farncomb took over and was the
46 Captain until I left the ship.
47

1 Q. You joined the ship as a Midshipman, what were your
2 initial duties on board?

3 A. Midshipman were still being trained very much at sea,
4 although they had wartime duties so we kept watch on the
5 bridge, we kept watch in the engine room to learn what went
6 on down below and, for my own part, I found myself keeping
7 watch in what we called the plot for, I can't remember,
8 about half my time I think was there which was a little
9 compartment just above the bridge, equivalent to the modern
10 operations room but much smaller. We had a mechanical
11 gadget that recorded the ship's movement and speed, and we
12 plotted it on bits of paper so that we always had a record
13 of the ship's movements, but our other main job was to
14 assist the bridge in recognition of ships met and we were
15 always meeting ships of course, sometimes convoys, but a
16 lot of individual ships sailings in those days to and fro
17 on the Indian Ocean, and our job was always to help the
18 bridge identify them, if they were friendly.

19

20 Q. So, sir, in the plot, what were the means that you had
21 to assist the bridge in relation to identification?

22 A. We had reports coming in quite regularly of all the
23 ships that were known to be in our area, be coming from
24 Australia from Navy office, or possibly from the Admiralty
25 if we were over there. Once we had got a ship's name, we
26 had a well known book Talbot-Booth which told us what the
27 ship looked like, and I'd say up the voice pipe "Yes, she
28 is in this area, somewhere, she is the Bloemfontein, and
29 she's got two masks and a funnel, if that sounds right" and
30 the bridge would say "Yes, that's her" and that would be
31 enough to say "Right, we know she's there". If I was
32 unable to say "Yes, that's in this area", in fact, even
33 worse we know that Bloemfontein is in the middle of the
34 Atlantic, it's not the Bloemfontein, and that is when the
35 bridge would get really suspicious and start doing the next
36 stage of secret call signs and so forth.

37

38 Q. Do you have any recollection of how frequently that
39 information, those signals were coming to the ship in
40 relation to merchant ships?

41 A. I don't remember I'm afraid, no. I imagine it was
42 probably weekly, possibly more often.

43

44 THE PRESIDENT: Q. The process you have referred to is
45 fine once you've got the name, the question is how you got
46 the name of the ship.

47 A. Usually by Morse but a lot of merchant ships were not

1 terribly good at operating Morse, and that's when it got a
2 bit nasty if you had to go in close, or its flags, which
3 again they weren't terribly good at. British merchant
4 ships, American, well known ones, yes, but some of the more
5 obscure ones we always had trouble with, and the bridge
6 would be standing off and trying to - sometimes even moving
7 our convoy, if we were escorting a convoy, out of the way,
8 so that you couldn't stop the ship coming on its course, if
9 you couldn't talk to it, so you had to move your own
10 convoy.

11
12 Q. The warship initially always signalled in Morse and by
13 light?

14 A. Yes, that was the first. As soon as you saw a ship on
15 the horizon, they would be ten miles away you can talk to
16 it. Very strong lights we had and the little close-up ones
17 and that was our normal means of talking to ships.

18
19 Q. Did most merchant ships respond by light, or not?

20 A. I think most did, as I remember, but as I say the more
21 obscure Panamanians, and like that, were not always very
22 good at it.

23
24 CMDR RUSH: Q. When you say "not very good at it", do you
25 have any recollection of the manner in which response would
26 be received by the ship in Morse? Was it always responded
27 to well, or --

28 A. Mostly responded to well. As I say, most of the ships
29 were Dutch or American or English and knew what to expect
30 and knew how to operate. A merchant service officer is
31 trained almost as well as a Naval officer, and one of the
32 things you learn very early in your training is Morse code.
33 Nowadays I don't think they do.

34
35 Q. Just going to what the Commissioner was asking you, if
36 there was difficulty in relation to identification of a
37 ship, would Australia stand off the ship and was there any
38 distance that you can recall, or any methodology that was
39 used in relation to standing off if there was a difficulty?

40 A. I notice in my journal which I was going through in
41 the last few days, one particular day we were escorting two
42 quite big troop ships, Nieuw Amsterdam and Mauritania from
43 Aden to Durban or vice versa and we came across three ships
44 that day, all of which I listed in my midshipman's journal,
45 and then I added that whenever a ship is met when we are
46 escorting a convoy, we make sure that the ship does not
47 approach closer than five miles to the convoy until we are

1 quite sure of its identity. So, that was obviously one of
2 the sort of simple rules. As I said earlier you might not
3 be able to turn the ship, that you are worried about, away
4 but you could turn the convey away from it until you are
5 quite sure.

6
7 Q. What about Australia itself, would it follow that
8 procedure of staying off five miles or would it be more
9 likely to approach the ship, the merchant ship?

10 A. I think in general probably up to the Captain's own
11 feelings about it. Particularly in view of your Inquiry,
12 there were obviously times when some Captains went closer
13 than others, but we never did. Our Captains were all, as I
14 remember, fairly careful to keep well away and CAPT
15 Farncomb, on the Canberra, which he had been commanding
16 before he came to us, there was the famous occasion when he
17 stood off and shelled the ship at great length and used up
18 a lot of ammunition, and it turned out then not to be a
19 German raider but a supply ship. At least he made the
20 point that you don't go in too close.

21
22 Q. If there was a problem in relation to signalling by
23 light, you have mentioned that flag would be used. What
24 was the position in relation to reading flag signals and
25 the location of ships?

26 A. You had really to be within two or three miles to be
27 able to read flag signals. It was perfect when the
28 squadron was operating and doing officer watch manoeuvres
29 and doing blue nines and turn together and all that sort
30 of thing, but you were always very close to that, so it
31 wasn't appropriate really for the situation we are talking
32 about, quizzing an unidentified ship. If you got in that
33 close you were getting too close, really.

34
35 Q. Was there any alternative if you were required to be
36 reading flag signals to being that close?

37 A. I don't think there was really. If you couldn't get
38 him to reply to Morse, you had to sort of get in closer to
39 find out who he was or what he was, but most of them - my
40 memory is a bit ropery after 70 years - I think were pretty
41 good, as I mentioned earlier the merchant service officer
42 is trained as well as a Naval officer really.

43
44 Q. Sir, just going back to ship's recognition, were you
45 aware of any secret call sign that was used between
46 warships and merchant ships?

47 A. Yes, I was. I can't remember now whether we in the

1 plot had control of that, or whether the signalman, leading
2 signalman always on the bridge with the yeoman over him,
3 whether they had control of it. It was a two-letter secret
4 signal from the challenging ship which had to be replied, I
5 think, by a two-letter reply from the ship whose call sign
6 that was.

7
8 Q. Do you now have any recollection of what would be
9 consulted on the warship in relation to a particular ship's
10 secret call sign?

11 A. I don't really, no.

12
13 Q. Again, as the Commissioner asked, before the secret
14 call sign could be used is it your understanding that the
15 ship would have to be identified, so that you could then
16 use the secret call sign of that particular ship?

17 A. Yes, but I don't think it was always used. You could
18 be satisfied with the identification if the initial request
19 "What ship where been" was answered by the quick reply of
20 what ship it was, if I in the plot was able to say "Yes,
21 she's in this area and she does look like she looks" they
22 wouldn't then necessarily use the secret call sign.

23
24 THE PRESIDENT: Q. When you speak of "she 's in this
25 area", were you told a great number of ships that might be
26 there, or were you told only ships that might be within 50
27 miles?

28 A. Greater than that. I would say a quarter of the
29 Indian Ocean we would be covering, because the ships were
30 never exactly on schedule. We would know that the Straat
31 Malakka was sailing from Fremantle to go to Simonstown, she
32 might have been five days late or something. It was just
33 really in the Indian Ocean. If we said "No, she is in the
34 Atlantic" that is when the bridge would get really
35 suspicious.

36
37 CMDR Rush: Q. Just going back, you mentioned Navy office
38 and Admiralty supplying that information.

39 A. I can't remember who it was from.

40
41 Q. Sir, in relation to the procedure of ship's
42 recognition, what's your recollection as to the action
43 stations that would be adopted, if any, during a course of
44 recognition of a merchant ship?

45 A. I don't think we very often went to action stations in
46 the Australia, because the identification was usually
47 satisfactory when the ship was still some distance away.

1 If there was any doubt about it, unfortunately I don't
2 recall it in my midshipman's journal when we went to action
3 stations. Perhaps you will be able to link it with the
4 ship's log, if you can get hold of them, which would record
5 action stations. I don't really remember how often we did
6 that.

7
8 Q. In relation to the nature of the duties of Australia,
9 in the Indian Ocean prior to the Japanese coming into the
10 war, on the day-to-day routine are you able to recall the
11 station that the ship was at, just in normal running?

12 A. What the state of armament you mean? Cruising
13 stations as opposed to action stations. Cruising stations
14 normally. Defence stations was the next one up and then
15 action station.

16
17 Q. And at cruising stations, what was the level of
18 readiness of the ship and particularly in relation to
19 manning of armament, do you recall?

20 A. Not precisely. I would think one turret, possibly
21 two. The ship would be in three watches, in effect, so you
22 would have a third of your armament manned. If you went to
23 defence stations you went to two watches. Action stations
24 everybody closed up.

25
26 THE PRESIDENT: Q. If cruising stations, would that mean
27 that the lighter guns would not be manned.

28 A. No, they would be still one-third manned or one
29 quarter. Some ships worked at sort of quarter, half and
30 full.

31
32 Q. What about torpedoes?

33 A. Same thing applies. We had two sets of torpedoes, we
34 probably have somebody on one of them who could nip across
35 to the starboard side from the portside if necessary.
36 There would always be something, somebody at every one of
37 the bits of armament we had.

38
39 CMDR RUSH: Q. What was your action stations position?

40 A. My action station was down in the TS, the thing we
41 called the transmitting station which was below the
42 waterline inside the armoured belt and that really was the
43 computer room of its day, because I was talking to the
44 people in the main armament direct, and I was the rate
45 officer at the transmitting stations computer and I would
46 feed everything into this computer - I suppose, we wouldn't
47 have called it that then - so it fed out to the guns and

1 the guns would be laid off the appropriate amount, either
2 for anti aircraft or antiship firing. I was always down out
3 of sight down below, I think for the whole of my time in
4 the Australia.

5
6 Q. Was that transmitting station at action stations
7 secured by it being watertight and the like?

8 A. Yes, people in the compartment above would close
9 watertight hatch down on us, and a bit of light relief. I
10 remember during the Battle of the Coral Sea in a bit of a
11 break from the bombing that was going on, I noticed a
12 wooden mallet hanging beside the little ladder down which
13 we came to get into this place, there were about 12 or 15
14 of us there. During this break in action, I said to the
15 gunner-in-charge "Excuse me, sir, what is that wooden
16 mallet for?". He said "A good question. You better all
17 listen to this. When we are sunk", which was a nice
18 opening, "when we are sunk the people up above will be
19 drowned and they wouldn't be able to open the hatch anyhow,
20 and we on the other hand will sit in the bottom with enough
21 air to last for an hour or two, during which some of you
22 may get a little highly excited, and I may even have to
23 knock one or two of you out".

24
25 Q. It was never used.

26 A. Never used fortunately.

27
28 Q. Sir, as I understand it, you would perform the
29 calculations in that transmitting room to enable the guns
30 to be used effectively on targets?

31 A. Yes, it was a fire-controlled table, quite complicated
32 thing with all sorts of information being fed into it, and
33 then going out automatically to the turrets.

34
35 Q. I want to ask you some questions about command and
36 control. When was your first command?

37 A. My first command was 1947, HMAS Latrobe, based on
38 Flinders Naval Depot operating as a training ship with
39 another one Gladstone, both of us corvettes operating from
40 there around to Melbourne, across to Tasmania and so forth.

41
42 Q. Was this any course that was undertaken in relation to
43 command and control? How did one --

44 A. One had worked up gradually from Midshipman to
45 sublieutenant, Lieutenant to a watch keeping position, to
46 first Lieutenant of a ship. I had been first Lieutenant of
47 two ships by then, and then out of the blue I got my first

1 command which was a great moment but no course or anything
2 then.

3

4 Q. In relation to approaching of ships and manoeuvres and
5 the like, how did one learn the manner in which to
6 undertake that sort of procedure?

7 A. That was peace time of course, so it was different to
8 what we have been talking about. Your main thing in peace
9 time is to avoid a collision or avoid a grounding. That's
10 commonsense that you have picked up from the very moment
11 you joined the Navy really.

12

13 Q. Did you undertake courses during the war?

14 A. Oh, yes. When I left the Australia in May '42, we
15 went to England. We were very much tied in with the Royal
16 Navy then and we did a series of courses in all the
17 subjects that we had already done in a lesser way at
18 Flinders Naval Depot, gunnery, torpedo, navigation, signals
19 and that took about four months, I think, in wartime, and
20 then on to the next stage as a sublieutenant.

21

22 Q. Sir, if I can go back to your time in the Indian Ocean
23 and prior to the entry of Japan into the war, as far as
24 enemy ships were concerned, what were you mainly looking
25 for in the Indian Ocean?

26 A. There was a German pocket battle ship suspected to be
27 operating and we did one or two searches for it and never
28 found it, fortunately because I think it would have won.
29 We were only 8 inch and they were 12 inch. I have in my
30 journal the track chart when we and HMAS Hawkins were doing
31 a search. That was for a Vichy French convoy escorted by
32 Vichy French warships, which was an interesting thing at
33 that time. We never knew with the French whether we were
34 fighting them or whether they were on our side, but the
35 Vichy French certainly - we didn't find that particular
36 convoy, although another one was found shortly afterwards.

37

38 Q. You mentioned the pocket battleship, was there any
39 awareness of disguised raiders in that time?

40 A. Oh yes, we were well aware that things like the
41 Kormoran existed. I don't think we knew their names. They
42 had been used in the first war, and had been, I think,
43 probably specially built. They might normally be thought
44 of as a merchant ship that has been turned into a raider,
45 but I think Kormoran might have been especially built. You
46 would know better than me. They were something - that's
47 why you were so careful with every merchant ship you met.

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Q. The use of disguise was understood?

A. Oh yes. I mean, we had done it in the first war too. My Mystery Ships by Gordon Campbell, one of my earliest books as a boy, as a school boy.

THE PRESIDENT: Q. There were reports called WIR, Weekly Intelligence Reports, put out by Admiralty and from May 1941 onwards there was a thing called a COIC which was an Australian intelligence report put out weekly. Did you ever see those as a Midshipman?

A. I think I would have in the plot, certainly. Probably when I was watch keeping on the bridge, I mightn't see them regularly. Midshipman were given a wonderful entree to everything in the ship, really. It's only now I realise how much I was made privy to everything that went on. How I found all the details for my day-to-day diary, if I had just been an ordinary seaman I wouldn't have a clue what was going on. Midshipman was well briefed. Every senior officer in the ship takes it upon himself to make sure that the Midshipman is being properly trained and properly informed. I'm sure we would have been shown those things when necessary, not as a regular thing, except when I was in the plot where I probably did.

CMDR RUSH: Just one other matter, in relation to the identification of ships, merchant ships, would the Captain be on the bridge for that process?

A. I think always, yes. Captain spends an awful lot of time on the bridge, even in peace time, and you are hearing the voice by the middle of the night, "Captain, sir" and you are on the bridge almost before the person starts telling you what it is.

Q. You mentioned - no, I don't think you did mention. Would the ship daily come to action stations?

A. Every morning at dawn. Well, half an hour before first light you would go to dawn action. Right through the war that was standard. It was before radar. We didn't have RDF, as it was called then or radar, and dawn was the most dangerous time when you might suddenly find yourself meeting a battleship or a disguised raider, so dawn action was just automatic. We even made up our own little songs about it. I hope that I shall never see dawn action in the ADP. The thought sends tremors down my spine. I would rather have your job than mine. At 5.15 I would rather be asleep far from the ADP. Funny things you remember.

1

2 THE PRESIDENT: Q. Can I just go back and tell you the
3 difficulties that I'm having. My understanding is that
4 warships particularly around the Australian coast, as a
5 result of decisions made by the Naval board and confirmed
6 by Admiralty, was that it was decided that the best
7 protection that could be given to merchant ships was to
8 take them by convoy, because the alternative was to arm the
9 merchant ships and there simply weren't enough armaments
10 for that to be done, and also the training of the merchant
11 ships with arms would be a difficult problem, so convoys
12 were the way of giving protection. So, warships were put
13 into the convoys, to take convoys, as you have described.
14 I can well understand if they meet an unidentified vessel
15 the need to identify it principally for the protection of
16 that convoy, let alone protection of the warship. Now that
17 may involve, one would think, different considerations for
18 the Captain of a ship who was guiding a convoy or ship
19 guiding a convoy to a warship standing alone. The warship
20 may take the view that it has to take particular action to
21 protect the convoy, and that may involve itself in greater
22 risk than otherwise it would want to take. Do you recall
23 any circumstances where that sort of thing was discussed?
24 I realise you are a Midshipman. Did the officers talk
25 about that?

26 A. No, I wouldn't have heard those sort of talks, I don't
27 think. If I did I don't remember. But, as I have - as my
28 journal showed, once you are escorting a convoy you do have
29 a slightly different feeling of having to protect them and
30 that is why we would keep the ship at least five miles away
31 in view of that, but that is something I hadn't remembered
32 until I read it last week in my diary.

33

34 Q. You have on board, as you said, books like
35 Talbot-Booth and you had a note given to you regularly
36 about vessels in the area. You apparently had a pretty
37 wide area. I have been told that twice daily, from Naval
38 headquarters a signal was sent to each warship, telling the
39 warship of vessels likely to be in the area. Do you have
40 any recollection of that?

41 A. No, but that is - you know, in more detail what I
42 failed to remember, but I know we were told what ships were
43 near us, and I wasn't sure whether that was an individual
44 one. Probably would have been to the Australia saying
45 this, that and the other. After all there were experts
46 here, their job was to tell us where ships were, so
47 probably was more frequent than I suggested earlier.

1
2 Q. Knowing what ships are in the area is useful
3 information to confirm that a ship that you are seeing is
4 one of those ships that you would expect to be there, but
5 that is useful only after you know what that ship's name
6 is, because unless you know its name, it would seem to me,
7 you can't go about the process of identification.

8 A. Unless it's a very unusual ship with four masts and
9 three funnels, something like that.

10
11 Q. I have also been told that each ship, and this is
12 recorded in the Lloyd's register, has its own signal
13 letters, four letters?

14 A. Yes.

15
16 Q. As I understand it, when you, the warship, are
17 approaching, you sight a vessel, you would flash letters
18 asking that vessel to identify itself and, as I understand
19 it, she would initially signal back to you her signal
20 letters, the four letters that identified her as whatever
21 the ship may be, Straat Malakka let's call it, and if you
22 once have that information, you would know that there are
23 four letters. Did you have a book on board that you could
24 look up those four letters to see which ship it was?

25 A. Oh yes, certainly. I can't remember what the book
26 was.

27
28 Q. Once you got the four letters you could then look up
29 the register and say "Okay, that ship is the Straat
30 Malakka".

31 A. Hm.

32
33 Q. Once you know its name, you can then go to
34 Talbot-Booth and you can look at its form, its silhouette,
35 and if you are close enough to see its silhouette, you can
36 confirm that looks like the particular ship you believe it
37 could be; is that the process that you went through?

38 A. Yes, I think so. Yes.

39
40 Q. All of that starts with the initial issue of being
41 sufficiently close and being able to communicate adequately
42 with the merchant vessel, so that the merchant vessel can
43 read the warship's request to identify itself, and the
44 warship can read what the merchant vessel says her name is
45 by flashing her signal letters. That has to be the first
46 step in it all it would seem.

47 A. Exactly.

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Q. Now, if the warship's normally, as you have said, signalled by lamp, there seems to be some equivocation about whether merchant vessels normally responded by lamp, or some of them didn't. What is your recollection about that?

A. Yes, I mentioned earlier on the sort of lines, I would say about 80 per cent were good at replying and 20 per cent were some Panamanian ship that didn't have a person on the bridge who could operate the Morse light and, therefore, you were having trouble getting through to them.

Q. But your recollection is that many, most indeed did respond by light?

A. Most did.

Q. By light?

A. Yes.

Q. Those that didn't, then presumably you have to go in closer to investigate.

A. I can't remember exactly what the bridge procedure would be. I was sitting in the plot most of the time, wouldn't have been told at that stage that they hadn't found out from the ship. I suppose you would have to go in closer, but only with the hope of getting them to read flag signals, which they mightn't be any good at either.

Q. The alternative, I suppose, was to stand off and tell the ship to stop, or fire a shot across its bows requiring it to stop.

A. I suppose the final situation - I don't remember our ever having to do that, but yes again telling it to stop, how do you tell it to stop if it hasn't replied to your earlier Morse signals?

Q. Do you ever recall a shot being fired across the bow of an unidentified merchant ship to try and make it stop?

A. No, I don't.

Q. As I understand from your statement, you can't ever recall going to action stations to identify the vessel, a merchant vessel?

A. I think we might have, but I can't recall --

Q. You can't remember it?

A. -- at this stage, how often or whether we did.

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Q. Was there any different process that you can recall or different approach or attitude when you were either in convoy or travelling alone around the Australian coast?

A. We never really were. We were either in the Indian Ocean or, when the Japs came in, we were up in the Coral Sea.

Q. You didn't do a lot of convoy duty around the Australian coast?

A. No, we never did. That's the difference. Sydney was operating out of Fremantle and taking ships up north or wherever they were going. We were over the other side of the Indian Ocean. I remember as we came back, after the Japs came in, we refuelled in Fremantle and we thundered around to Sydney at 31 knots and I can remember going through Bass Strait and I think I might have even commented there on the numerous ships we met in Bass Strait which I suppose we asked who they were, but we just assumed they were friendly because we were back in home waters. We were never operated around the coast really, that was, it was interesting that Sydney as a cruiser was doing that. Mainly it was perhaps the Adelaide, mainly it was corvettes and the older destroyers, those sort of people doing the local convoying.

Q. In some notes I have read of your earlier discussion with CMDR Rush you said that on the bridge there would normally be the Captain, obviously, went to action stations and the navigator, and the chief yeoman of signals and I don't know about others. What role did the navigator play?

A. Jimmy Raymond was our navigator then. He had supreme command on the bridge, even the Captain would dodge out of his way if he was trying to take a sight or something. But, basically his job was the navigation of the ship, which in action didn't do very much, except assist the Captain, I suppose. So, it was up to the individual rather what role he played. He was unfortunately killed in the kamikaze attacks later in the war. He was quite a character Jimmy Raymond. His son finished up in the Navy as a Commodore too actually.

Q. Was there anyone on the ship whose prime responsibility it was to identify the vessels? Was that the Captain's responsibility or somebody else's responsibility?

A. The final responsibility is always with the Captain,

1 but in the plot we had a school master, I think a
2 Lieutenant Commander, school master they called him. His
3 job was to not only educate the Midshipman but also various
4 ordinary seaman and people who wanted further work. He was
5 the one who ran the plot and he kept a watch there, and his
6 two extra Midshipman like us, he was the one who briefed us
7 on what our duties there were, when we first went in to
8 keep watch, and I would say he was the one who was the
9 expert in ship recognition, but purely in an advisory
10 capacity to the bridge which was the supreme final arbiter.
11

12 Q. Do you recall any discussion about raiders in the 1941
13 period?

14 A. There must have been. I didn't find that I had ever
15 had - I'm surprised it wasn't one of the subjects given to
16 us to write an essay on, for instance, because it was very
17 much in the possibility situation. Everyone knew that
18 there were raiders somewhere, and that's why every ship
19 approached had to be so carefully identified. I'm
20 surprised I didn't actually get told to write an essay on
21 the German disguised raider.
22

23 Q. Do you recall any discussion about the fighting
24 capacities of raiders?

25 A. I think we must have been told the sort of armament
26 they are likely to have and that they have the drop-down
27 flaps and how cleverly they operated. All of that was
28 something that was common knowledge really at the time.
29

30 Q. Do you remember a document called Fighting
31 Instructions?

32 A. I remember the name and I can't quite remember what it
33 looked like.
34

35 Q. It's a document issued by Admiralty in 1939, and
36 apparently went to the Australian fleet as well, as it
37 would, in those days. But, it set out the various degrees
38 of readiness that ships might assume in various situations,
39 and the first degree, or action stations, if my memory
40 serves me right, was to be gone to when there was a
41 probability of imminent enemy action. The second one was
42 where there was a possibility of imminent action. Cruising
43 stations was where there was a possibility of enemy action
44 but it wasn't thought to be imminent. And, all of that
45 seems to me to require the commanding officer, in whatever
46 situation he's in, to make some assessment about what he
47 thought the state of possible danger was. One view would

1 be that if you are approaching an unidentified vessel, and
2 you know that it might be - might only - a raider, then
3 there is an imminence about the risk of engaging the enemy,
4 and if one took that view, then you may have to say well
5 you should never be at cruising stations when you are
6 approaching an unidentified vessel. But the reality is,
7 from the logs we have looked at, that at least around the
8 Australian coast, in the great majority of circumstances
9 warships identified merchant vessels when they were at
10 cruising stations so the Captains, commanding officers must
11 have thought there was no imminence of danger, even though
12 they must have known, from all the intelligence that they
13 received, that there was a possibility, perhaps no more
14 than that, of that vessel being a raider.

15 A. It's a tremendous sort of upset to the routine of a
16 ship to go to action stations three or four times a day for
17 every ship you meet. I'm sure that would be at the back of
18 people's minds when you really know that 99 per cent of the
19 ships you meet are going to be quite all right. So, you
20 could be lulled into a sense of false security I'm sure
21 from the way you talk, and probably people were, probably
22 not going to action stations as much as perhaps they should
23 have by the rules, because of the fact of the upset it
24 would be to the ship's routine.

25
26 Q. One reality we do know is that from the outbreak of
27 war in 1939 until November 1941 no warship had ever
28 identified a raider off the Australian coast.

29 A. Off the Australian coast, yeah.

30
31 Q. Perhaps that gave people some comfort.

32 A. Well, the sense of false security too, as well as
33 comfort.

34
35 Q. But were those the sorts of things that you, as a
36 Midshipman, were told about or talked about, or those
37 decisions, the problems of command?

38 A. I'm sure we would have chatted in the gun room about
39 it. If our Captain had gone in too close we would have
40 said "I wonder why he did that? Did he know what it was?".
41 I can't really remember though, it's 70 years ago.

42
43 THE PRESIDENT: I think your memory is doing very well, if I
44 may say so. That's all?

45
46 CMDR RUSH: I don't think I have got anything else.

47

1 THE PRESIDENT: If we may borrow this wonderful
2 midshipman's journal, we will return it to you. I will put
3 it into the care and custody of CMDR Rush.

4
5 THE WITNESS: I'm glad I got it down. It was a bit of a
6 mess a year ago.

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8 INTERVIEW ADJOURNED
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