

International Law, which if proved would have relegated the *Kormoran's* survivors from the status of prisoners of war to that of common pirates liable to summary execution. Their motive in pretending to have been disguised as the *Straat Malakka* is thus finally apparent, for, as Hermon Gill pointed out, the claim that the *Sydney* signalled IK, the inner letters of the *Straat Malakka's* secret callsign, is the only corroboration that they could offer for the rest of their story.

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To have been able to demonstrate that the *Sydney* had gone through the full challenge procedure and thus left Detmers with no option but to resort to action would also have removed his exposure to accusations of breaching International Law on a further count, namely, that of having launched an unprovoked attack while still flying a false flag. In his book Detmers claims that "Within six seconds of the order to decamouflage the first shot was fired from our Number One gun"; why he should choose to put quite such a precise time on this is apparent from the Action Report, whose relevant entry reads: "Removal of disguise; Dutch flag struck, war flag flies clear from main mast. Time taken six seconds" - in other words, he is making out that he opened fire under his own flag. However, he himself describes the process of decamouflaging thus: "The ship's rails folded down, the heavy camouflage covers fore and aft were whisked away; Hatches 2 and 4 opened up to reveal their guns, the 2cm anti-aircraft guns were raised, the torpedo flaps opened, and all barrels and torpedo tubes swung on to the target" - all this, he invites us to believe, took place in the space of six seconds! Even Bunjes conceded during his later interrogation that it took a full minute after the opening of the plates concealing the Number One gun to get off the first round, while another survivor quoted a time of two to three minutes - and even then, according to both Detmers' Action Report and his Gunnery Officer, the first salvo fell short.

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Even though she was very evidently not at Action Stations, the *Sydney* would still have had one of her four gun turrets closed up, a fact borne out by the consensus among the *Kormoran* survivors that it was her X turret which inflicted all the damage on them, and which would hardly have taken a full minute to get a round off. In order to maximise the surprise of his attack, on which hung his only chance of escape, Detmers would thus have had to rely on his secondary armament