26  Cover-up: signals sent from SYDNEY, 19 November 1941

26.1 Many people have alleged that on 19 November 1941 HMAS SYDNEY sent signals that the authorities received, but that thereafter they did nothing. It is contended that military authorities knew of the loss of SYDNEY on 19 November 1941. I have already addressed GPCAPT Bourne’s allegations in this regard. The allegations made by others are, however, somewhat different.

An early statement about the signals from SYDNEY and the associated ‘cover-up’ theory is found in a 21 May 1984 letter from Mr Gordon Laffer to LCDR Ean McDonald:

This will be a long rambling account, but that is the way it was. Starting in November 1941 when off to the School of Mines one night in Kalgoorlie I met a friend who had just returned from Perth by train. He told me that the city was buzzing with a story that the Sydney had been sunk. The details as told to me were that a radio message from the Sydney had been picked up by R.A.A.F. Western Area, AirRadio Darwin, and also at a lounge party in the Esplanade Hotel. This was a week or more before P.M. Curtin made the announcement.

Three years later I was sent to Adelaide by R.A.A.F. prior to joining the bombing and navigation course at Port Pirie. While in the city I visited an aunt & uncle at Burnside, an Adelaide suburb. When I first met Aunt Amy & Uncle Norman they were not too keen on the R.A.A.F. uniform and told me that their son Peter Laffer had been the Captain’s messenger on the Sydney. They had made enquiries at the Adelaide Navy Office and had been told that the Sydney debacle was largely due to non-cooperation by the R.A.A.F.

After 8.5.1945 when the European war ended we were told that the Empire Air Training Scheme was finished and we were all sent to our home states, and became supernumeraries attached to various R.A.A.F. sections. I landed in Intelligence Section and soon met F/Lt. Gill, who was in charge, and his sergeant, Dave Laverack, they had been together in the Admiralty Islands. I asked F/Lt. Gill about the Sydney and he immediately produced the file and told me to read it. The first page was the original message received at Western Area, written in red pencil by the signals officer on duty. I remember being surprised that the message was in plain language and not in code, and that it was addressed to Darwin and not Fremantle. It went “Sydney calling Darwin” and then gave the latitude and longitude, but the last figure of the lat or long was missing, I forget which, but having been trained as a navigator, I knew that it could be plotted as a line on a
map. I think it said that the ship was on fire, but I am not sure, and it could be that the memory is of the later newspaper account.

When I took the file back to F/Lt. Gill I asked him why nobody had sent an Anson out from Geraldton to have a look, as it was only five hours flying time for the return trip. He explained that it was the Navy’s business, and when informed of the radio message [sic] they had curtly replied that the Sydney was not overdue. I remember how surprised I was to find out that the rumour that I had heard four years ago was so accurate, and the file contained interviews with the people who had been at the party in the Esplanade Hotel. I am certain that everyone who was in Perth in November 1941 knew about the radio message, as it was common knowledge, and this is why it took 38 years for me to realise that it had been forgotten.

...

Some years ago one of our week-end papers published a rehash of the story of the radio message, and I particularly remember that Elsie Plowman was interviewed. Mrs Plowman was licensee of the Esplanade Hotel during the war years. It is obvious to me that the various authors have all failed to do sufficient research in Perth, and that they have all slavishly reproduced the stuff dished out by the Navy.

The possible rescue of any survivors from the stricken Sydney hinged solely on the radio message. As it happened the scene of the battle was only 160 nautical miles from Carnarvon and only 265 nautical miles from Geraldton where the Avro Ansons of the S.F.T.S. were stationed. These aircraft were used by Coastal Command England before the advent of Sunderland flying boats.

Had the Navy taken cognisance of the radio message and knowing the probable course of the Sydney to Fremantle, then the single coordinate in the message would have fixed the position of the Sydney. Besides Ansons, Lockheed ... were also available, and searches from either Geraldton or Carnarvon could have been initiated at first light on 20th November.¹

It seems probable that the documents Mr Laffer was referring to as having been read are those relating to the South Western Area Combined Headquarters log and the two documents said to support the receipt of signals from SYDNEY at the Esplanade Hostel in Geraldton since they were among the documents he forwarded to the Western Australian Maritime Museum.² These matters are addressed when I consider the signals said to have been received at the Esplanade Hostel.

¹ WIT.023.0060_R at 0060_R to 0063_R
² WAM.008.0098_R; WAM.008.0099_R
26.2 Three types of allegations are made:

- Voice messages were received from SYDNEY.
- Messages in plain Morse—that is, un-encoded messages—were received.
- Messages were received in encoded Morse, and when they were received it was suspected that they came from SYDNEY.

I consider each type of allegation separately. In addition, there are allegations by LS Mason that he was told of signals received from SYDNEY and by LCDR McDonald that he saw messages from SYDNEY written on a pad. It is not clear how it is alleged these messages were received.

**Voice messages allegedly received**

26.3 By far the greatest number of allegations relating to messages from SYDNEY on 19 November 1941 concern voice messages. Such messages are said to have been heard:

- at the Esplanade Hostel, Geraldton, by SQNLDR Cooper and Ms Gloria Lumley
- in Fremantle by Signalman JF Ingvarson
- in Port Gregory by the Rob family
- in Tasmania by Mr Mervyn Strong
- in Singapore by Mr Arthur Lane.

26.4 The problem faced by those who argue that voice messages were received from SYDNEY is that the Inquiry established beyond doubt that SYDNEY did not have the capacity to transmit voice messages. It had the capacity to transmit only by Morse code.

It necessarily follows that each of the voice messages supposedly heard, if heard, did not come from SYDNEY.

**SYDNEY’s capacity to transmit messages**

26.5 The evidence established that in November 1941 SYDNEY had on board the following transmitters:

- one type 48 transmitter installed in the main W/T office
- one type 49 transmitter installed in the second W/T office
• one type 45 transmitter installed in the auxiliary W/T office
• one type 43A transmitter installed in the auxiliary W/T office.

The ship’s drawings show there was also space in the second W/T office for a ‘small Type 6F transmitter’, which was only able to transmit 160 miles during commissioning trials. It was not referred to by any seaman who had served on SYDNEY, including wireless telegraphist Gordon Brown, and it is thought not to have been carried in 1941.

26.6 The evidence from the Defence Science and Technology Organisation and the Royal Institution of Naval Architects was that each of the type 48, 49, 45 and 43A transmitters was ‘only capable of Continuous Wave (CW) transmission, meaning that [they] could only send Morse coded messages’. Put another way, they could not transmit voice messages.

That evidence was confirmed by Mr AG Johnston, who had been a wireless operator on SYDNEY’s sister ship HMAS HOBART and had instructed in wireless telegraphy for both the Royal Navy and the Royal Australian Navy, and by Mr SC Ruston, who served on SYDNEY as a wireless telegraphist from April 1939 to December 1940. It was also confirmed by Mr JN Brown, who served as a telegraphist on SYDNEY from 21 July 1939 to December 1940. Further, it accords with the evidence of Dr Pfennigwerth, former Director of Naval Intelligence, whose evidence was that the first radio telephony equipment fitted to RAN ships was US equipment fitted in late 1942.

26.7 There was also a transmitter carried on the Walrus aircraft, but it too was not capable of radiotelephony, all messages being transmitted by keyed Morse code.

26.8 It has been suggested that the installation in SYDNEY of an Admiralty type 60E transmitter provided voice communication capability. SYDNEY’s request for installation of such a transmitter was approved
by the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board, but the transmitter had not been installed before she was lost.\textsuperscript{11}

26.9 No voice messages were transmitted from SYDNEY on 19 November 1941.

26.10 Nonetheless, I now examine the material advanced by those who propound the theory that voice messages were sent and received.

**The Esplanade Hostel, Geraldton**

26.11 In the SWACH log for 4 December 1941 the following entries appear:

1520 \( W/A \) [illegible] phoned message received from Geraldton = Geraldton heard a call on 24.50 metres possibly from HMAS Sydney & requested Pearce to call Darwin for bearing.

... 

1543 Rd. following by telephone from W/A. : S/L. Cooper at Geraldton reports one of his operators listening on 24.5 metres heard R/T telephone signal calling Darwin or technical telegraph operator. Signals weak & operator thought it may be from HMAS “Sydney”. Later Geraldton report strength of signal increasing.

1545 On instruction from Lt/C [illegible], Naval Duty Staff Officer signalled Darwin. Immediate = Establish watch on 24.5 metres immediately Geraldton heard R/T signal calling Darwin or technical telegraph operator & thinks call possibly from Sydney = 1500Z/4.

1555 \( W/A \) phoned following received from S/P Cooper at Geraldton = Geraldton Airadio opinion call coming from Sydney Airadio in 25 metres. Following heard, “Calling Darwin or technical telegraph operator from sea. Sydney calling send carrier men in brail calling Frazer D/F Darwin cannot detect you Singapore call Darwin. This M.S.S. Sydney calling message received frequency satisfactory will put through one more. Heard at 1510Z.\textsuperscript{12}

Thus on 4 December it was thought that a message ‘possibly from HMAS Sydney’ in fact came from the city of Sydney.

\textsuperscript{11} The request for fitment of the type 60E unit pursuant to 1612 of 1940 is recorded at NAA.073.0218 and was item no. 292 in SYDNEY’s alterations and additions list. A minute from the Commodore-in-Charge of Garden Island to the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board dated 3 February 1942 records item 292 as one of the items that was not taken in hand by the dockyard before SYDNEY was lost: NAA.073.0191. Even if it had been fitted, the type 60E was not capable of voice transmission: SUBM.001.0026 _R.

\textsuperscript{12} NAA.016.0001 at 0069
Of course, by 4 December 1941 it was known that SYDNEY had been lost: a six-day search by air and sea had failed to locate her. It was also known that the German survivors’ accounts suggested that SYDNEY was likely to have sunk.

26.12 The SWACH log for the following day, 5 December, records:

0930 Rcd signal frm. Darwin = your Z126 4/12 Station identified as P.M.G. Darwin & P.M.G. Sydney telegram channel = 0230 Z/5.13

This confirmed that the signal had come from the Post Master General in the city of Sydney.

26.13 That was further confirmed by information received on 6 December 1941 from Darwin and recorded in the SWACH log as follows:

0054 Signalled CWR. = Information received from Darwin that short wave broadcast overheard on 4th of December was from P.M.G. Sydney to P.M.G. Darwin. In view of confusion caused request information whether this is a regular & authorised channel = 0054 Z/6.14

26.14 On 11 April 1988 Mr Laffer, by then Acting Secretary of the SYDNEY Research Group, had written to the Minister for Defence, the Hon. K Beazley. The minister replied on 19 August 1989 in the following terms:

I am aware that one aspect of the controversy surrounding the loss of HMAS SYDNEY is persistent allegations that plain language radio transmissions were received from her, and have since been sighted, stating that she was in action against the German raider KORMORAN. I am advised that a search of Navy and Air Force archives has been unable to substantiate any of these claims through the production of hard evidence. Air Force Office has, however, discovered a manuscript note which may have a bearing on the matter, although I am advised that the reference to “Sydney” is understood to refer to the city, rather than the ship. I have enclosed a copy of the note and an attempted transcription for your information.

I would point out that all signals received from HMAS SYDNEY which have been found in the archives are available for public access, and should further documents be discovered I do not envisage any objection to their release by my Department.15

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13 NAA.016.0001 at 0070
14 NAA.016.0001 at 0070
15 WAM.008.0100_R
On 19 September 1989 Mr Laffer again wrote to Mr Beazley:

ii. Your department minute suggesting that it was the City of Sydney referred to in the signals, indicates that it was the City sending distress calls to Darwin by Radio Telephone. Do you not agree that that event would have been most unlikely?

iii. By my own Statutory Declaration (relevant section in Enc. C) I swear that I saw a file with signals from HMAS SYDNEY during her last moments.

iv. Lt. Cdr. E. McDonald RANR Ret. saw similar signals aboard HMAS PERTH about the time that SYDNEY was in action.

v. We have a number of other authenticated references to similar signals, from widespread sources.16

Mr Beazley replied on 30 November 1989:

At the outset, I must confirm the advice in my previous reply that all signals received from HMAS SYDNEY which have been located in the Defence Archives have been passed to the Commonwealth Archives and are available for public access. Access can be obtained through either the Australian Archives or the Australian War Memorial.

Finally, I would like to assure you and your Research Group once again that all known official Defence documents relating to the loss of HMAS SYDNEY are in the public domain. They are in the custody of the Australian Archives and the Australian War Memorial where they are available for public access.17

In 1997 Mr Laffer, assisted by CMDR RJ Hardstaff RAN Rtd, presented a paper entitled ‘HMAS Sydney II: another view’. In relation to signals they wrote:

One afternoon when the three females were at a parade, and the other two males were out of the office, leaving only the CO and myself in attendance, I made the afternoon tea for F/Lt Gill, and he joined me at my work station.

…

He immediately went to his office and returned with a file labelled “HMAS SYDNEY” and instructed me to read it and form my own opinion.

The first page was a signals form with a message written in red pencil which commenced “SYDNEY calling Darwin, SYDNEY calling
Darwin. On fire fore and aft. Preparing to abandon ship.” This was followed by a latitude and longitude, but the last digit of the degrees of latitude or longitude was missing, I forget which. The next page was the start of interviews with the people who had heard the message over the short wave radio, and they confirmed that they had heard the Morse transmission and understood it. This was followed by interrogations of the survivors from the KORMORAN, which I found very dull.

I then returned the file to F/Lt Gill and asked him why aircraft at Geraldton had not been sent out at first light the next morning. He replied that the RAN had been informed of the distress signal, but had replied that the SYDNEY was not overdue. After the war was over, I heard that the file on SYDNEY and three others had been sent to Canberra.¹⁸

26.17 The matter was raised in submissions to the Parliamentary Inquiry¹⁹, which wrote in its report:

5.29 Another signal supposedly received from Sydney in Darwin (as ‘Sydney calling Darwin’) was sent in plain language (i.e. unencrypted). Mr Gordon Laffer reportedly saw a file in RAAF intelligence records, indicating a message along the lines of ‘Sydney calling Darwin. On fire fore and aft. Preparing to abandon ship…’, followed by a latitude and longitude. No record of the signal or the file can be found. The potential failure of people to properly identify signals is illustrated by an instance in which LCDR Ean McDonald RAN (Retd) advised the Committee that a similar signal was reportedly logged by HMAS Perth in Port Phillip Bay, about 25 November 1941. LCDR McDonald acknowledges that he realised later the signal could not have come from Sydney as it was some days after the ship was actually lost …

5.30 In her book The Intrigue Master, Barbara Winter cites this signal, stating that ‘the key is an entry in the South West Area Combined Headquarters Log for 1543 on 4 December 1941:

S/L (Squadron Leader) Cooper and Geraldton reports one of his operators listening on 24.5 metres heard R/T telephone sign calling Darwin or technical telegraph operator. Signals weak & operator thought it may be from HMAS Sydney. Later Geraldton report strength of signal increasing …

5.31 It has been accepted by many Sydney authors that this signal was not, as is widely believed, from HMAS Sydney, but rather, from the PMG Sydney … Mr David Kennedy has also

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¹⁸ BATT.004.0105 at 0108
¹⁹ See, for instance, submission no. 45 by LCDR E McDonald Rtd: PINQ.SUSB.003.0026 at 0034.
raised the possibility that the signal may have been ‘messages sent to wireless stations from a central authority about signals from HMAS Sydney. Basically, we appear to have Darwin and Singapore being informed of efforts to get signals from, or to, a distressed Sydney …’

5.32 Other reports of plain voice distress calls attributed to Sydney have emerged from time to time. For example, Mrs Glenys McDonald recounts the recollections of a young girl living in the Port Gregory area who ‘recalled a plain voice distress call from HMAS Sydney breaking into her evening radio programs’ … However, in regard to these and other such claims, it is relevant to note the statement by Alaistair Templeton that ‘Sydney did not even have an R/T capability, so any words heard were not from Sydney’ …

5.33 The Committee agrees with Dr Frame that:

It is also possible, and one suspects probable, that some individual on board Sydney would have attempted to send some signal during the action if the ship’s communications equipment was operational. If this individual was not a specialist radio operator, or if some or all of the ship’s communications equipment was damaged, … it is likely that signal transmission from Sydney could have been totally unsuccessful, broken and incoherent, difficult to decipher, or sent on inappropriate frequencies or by suspect methods in the hope of raising some alarm ashore …

26.18 At some stage an unsigned statement was obtained from SQNLDR E Cooper, followed by a signed statement from him dated 3 January 2002. He wrote:

1. During November 1941, I was Squadron Leader Eric Cooper, Chief Flying Instructor of No 4 Service Flying Training School (No. 4, SFTS) RAAF Geraldton West Australia.

2. On the night of Wednesday 19th November 1941 I was the Senior Officer present at the above unit when the Adjutant of that unit, Flying Officer Gerry Bogue came to me with detailed notes he had made of a telephone conversation he had just received from an RAAF Corporal Dawson.

3. Apparently Corporal Dawson with another airman was in the lounge of the Esplanade Hostel in Marine Terrace Geraldton with three ladies listening into a commercial short wave radio broadcast when he heard Transmissions in morse code which he and the other airman could read and he made notes of them.

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20 PINQ.REP.001.0001 at 0043 to 0044
4. Corporal Dawson then telephoned the Station Duty Officer that night who was Flying Officer Bogue who was also the Intelligence Officer as well as Adjutant of No 4 SFTS, and relayed this information to him.

5. As the Station Commander was not at his home and could not be contacted, Flying Officer Bogue and I then jointly composed a message from his notes to enable me to pass the information to R.A.A.F Headquarters, Western Area in Perth.

6. Later that night I telephoned HQWA and was answered by a clerk in Signals Section. I carefully dictated my message to that Signals Clerk and requested that its contacts be passed urgently to the Navy.

7. I subsequently took part in the Avro Anson air searches for lifeboats and rafts from Geraldton, Carnarvon and Onslow resulting from the battle between H.M.A.S Sydney and a German raider.

8. Many years later in 1991 in the home of Dr Ted Strachan (former Medical Officer RAAF Pearce during World War Two) in his presence and that of John McArthur and Malcolm Barker & sighted Enclosure 12A of RAAF Headquarters, Western Area file 2/18/INT which purported to be a record of the message I passed to the HQWA Signals Clerk. I was astonished and perplexed because it was not a true account of that message. In it I stressed that the signals received by Cpl Dawson were in morse code and that he and the other airman could read morse. Also that they and three ladies heard the signals from an ordinary short wave receiver at the Esplanade Hostel in Geraldton. This does not appear on Enclosure 12A. The word Aeradi does appear which I did not mention.

9. It is only recently that I have sighted photocopies of page 148 of the South Western Australia Combined Headquarters (SWACH) logbook and pages 40 and 41 of the 3rd Edition of Richard Summerells Guide No 3 “The Sinking of HMAS Sydney” A guide to Commonwealth Records and more specifically the footnotes on those pages 40 and 41.

10. The chronological sequence of events on page 41 could only have been provided by Flying Officer Bogue from the notes he wrote down from Cpl. Dawson’s telephone call on the night of 19th November 1941. I kept no record of his notes. It is obvious from the written comment at the bottom of page 41 that it was Flg. Off Bogue who passed this message by secraphone to someone (name blacked out) at 1630H hours on Friday 5th December 1941.

11. I emphatically deny that I telephoned any messages about HMAS Sydney to RAAF Headquarters Western Area on the 4th or 5th December 1941 as recorded on page 148 of the SWACH logbook and referred to in the footnotes on pages 40 and 41 of Richard Summerell’s Guide No 3 “The Sinking of HMAS Sydney” A guide to Commonwealth Records.
Summerrells 3rd Edition of Guide No. 3. Once I had passed my message to the HQWA Signals Clerk late in the evening of Wednesday 19th November I considered the matter closed.  

26.19 Figure 26.1 shows the document referred to as ‘Enclosure 12A’. The pencil notes at the top of the page read, ‘Taken over phone by Signals Clerk Western Area from S/L Cooper Geraldton’ and below that, ‘Aeradio Geraldton is under the impression coming from Aeradio Sydney’.

26.20 There can be no doubt this note on the message form is a record of the events referred to in the SWACH log for December 1941. That is clear from the following:

- Both record a message received from SQNLDR Cooper.
- Both record the ‘opinion’ or ‘impression’ that the message of ‘Geraldton Aeradio’ is coming from Sydney Aeradio.
- Both record the message to have been heard on 24.50 metres.
- Both record the following words being heard:
  - ‘Calling Darwin or technical telegraph operator’
  - ‘Call from sea’
  - ‘Sydney calling send carrier men on board’
  - ‘Calling Frazer D/F Darwin’
  - ‘Cannot detect you’
  - ‘Singapore call Darwin’
  - ‘This MSS (MS) Sydney calling’
  - ‘Message received frequency satisfactory will put thru in morse’

Heard ‘at 1510Z’ which equates to 2310H.

The SWACH log is a continuous log, and it is clear that the events recorded occurred on 4 December 1941, not 19 November 1941, as SQNLDR Cooper recalled some 60 years later.

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21 SUBM.008.0172_R; CORR.014.0001_R at 0046_R to 0047_R
22 NAA.023.0142

The Loss of HMAS SYDNEY II 135
Figure 26.1 Enclosure 12A, referred to in the 3 January 2002 statement of SQNLDR Cooper. 

23 NAA 023.0142
26.21 It is said that at the Esplanade Hostel, Geraldton, were CPL Dawson, another airman and three women. They were listening to a short-wave radio broadcast when they heard transmissions in Morse code. CPL Dawson and the other airman were able to read the Morse message.\textsuperscript{24} It is said they made notes of what they heard, but those notes have never been discovered. CPL Dawson is said to have telephoned FLGOFF Bogue and told him of this event. FLGOFF Bogue, according to SQNLDR Cooper, made ‘detailed notes’ of his telephone conversation with CPL Dawson. FLGOFF Bogue’s notes appear to be the document shown here as Figure 26.2.

26.22 The following is of note:

- The note bears the name of FLGOFF Bogue.
- The first entry, at 2140, is in substance the same as that recorded in the ‘message form’, being ‘Enclosure 12A’ referred to by SQNLDR Cooper.
- Each of Enclosure 12A and FLGOFF Bogue’s notes records:
  
  ‘Distress signal starts Leichhardt’
  
  ‘Singapore call Darwin’
  
  ‘Message received frequency satisfactory will put through in morse’

It is apparent that both documents relate to the events recorded in the SWACH log on 4 December 1941.

26.23 The contents of the documents make it clear that the messages heard and recorded did not come from SYDNEY. Both documents refer to ‘putting through’ the message in Morse, SQNLDR Cooper’s note stating ‘RT & morse’. If there was a message in ‘RT’ it could not have come from SYDNEY because she had no capacity to so transmit. Further, to suggest that SYDNEY would send a distress call in ‘RT’—even if she had had the capacity to do so—and say she would later send the same distress message in Morse makes no sense. To say in a message that it will later be put through in Morse implies that that message was not in Morse. If it was a message in ‘RT’ it did not come from SYDNEY: as noted, she could not send such a message.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{CORR.014.0001_R at 0046_R: Statement of SQNLDR Cooper}
Figure 26.2 FLGOFF Bogue’s notes of his conversation with CPL Dawson

25 NAA 023.0143
26.24 There is one other piece of evidence that demonstrates conclusively that the events recorded in the two handwritten documents occurred not on 19 November 1941 but on 4 December 1941, as the SWACH log records. The ‘message form’ written by SQNLDR Cooper bears the name ‘Palmer’. FLGOFF Palmer was one of the shift supervisors at SWACH. On 19 November 1941 he went off duty at 0830H; he resumed duty at 0830H on 22 November 1941. On 4 December 1941 he replaced FLGOFF Way on duty at 0830H and was on duty all that day. The ‘message form’ note refers to him, so the events occurred while he was on duty—on 4 December 1941.

26.25 Added to the foregoing are two entries at the foot of the notes of FLGOFF Bogue. The first appears to read, ‘Passed COIC (Wesche) per secraphone 1115 H/5/12’ and the second reads, ‘Per phone from F.O. Bogue Geraldton 1630 H/5’. These entries are confirmatory of the events recorded as having occurred on 4 December 1941, not 19 November 1941.

26.26 Whatever message CPL Dawson and his friends heard in the Esplanade Hostel, Geraldton, which was conveyed to FLGOFF Bogue, who conveyed it to SQNLDR Cooper, who conveyed it to SWACH, which recorded it in its log, four things are clearly established:

- The events occurred on 4 December 1941, not 19 November 1941.
- The message was not a distress call from SYDNEY.
- Contemporaneous investigation established that the messages were from the Post Master General in Sydney to Darwin.
- HMAS SYDNEY did not have the capacity to send voice messages over the horizon.

Mrs G Lumley

26.27 On 16 July 2007 Mrs G Lumley wrote to the Subiaco Post, which had published information about a Mr Julius Ingvarson having heard a radio report on 19 November 1941, which said, in an Australian accent, ‘Hit by torpedoes and sinking’. Mrs Lumley wrote:
I would like to tell you that I, too, heard an SOS from the SYDNEY, along with a group of other people at the Esplanade Hostel in Geraldton.

I was 12 at the time, the youngest daughter of the proprietors, Walter and Christine Willcocks.

The message I heard was “SOS, SOS, Straats Malacca”, repeated over and over.

There was more beforehand but I was on the outer of the group and didn’t hear it all.

“Straats Malacca”, I believe, may have been a code. I remember the words well as I later argued with my elder sister that it wasn’t “Straats Malacca”.

At the time, Joe Rogers, a greengrocer in Marine Terrace and resident in the hostel, told me how important it was to remember the SOS, as I was the youngest there. Everyone assumed it was an SOS from HMAS SYDNEY. From memory I don’t recall there being an accent. 32

26.28 It is not clear why anyone who heard in plain language a message ‘SOS, Straats Malacca’ would think it was a distress call from SYDNEY. Obviously it was not from SYDNEY: first, she could not transmit such a voice message; second, if SYDNEY was to send a distress call she would not identify herself as ‘Straats Malacca’.

26.29 Mrs Lumley is mistaken in her recollection of events 67 years ago.

**Mr Julius Ingvarson**

26.30 On 9 May 2001 Mr JF Ingvarson swore a statutory declaration in the following terms:

1. I am aged 86 years, born on [redacted material], in [redacted material].

2. In 1941 at the age of 20 I was conscripted into the Australian Army and trained as a radio operator. My service number was W37069. In November 1941 I held the rank of Signalman and was working for Fortress Signals, a military radio network. I was based in an office in the Artillery Barracks in Burt Street, Fremantle. The radio office was just to the west of the main Burt Street entrance.

3. At about 5pm on November 19, 1941, I was tuning the condenser of the voice radio and listening for incoming signals through headphones.

32 COJ.005.0247
4. I heard a voice with a distinct Australian accent say “Hit by torpedoes and sinking”.

5. I am positive that the accent was Australian and that the word “torpedoes” was plural, meaning more than one torpedo.

6. I tuned the transmitter to the frequency of the incoming signal and transmitted these words: “Name your ship”. I received no reply.

7. I wrote the incoming message and the date received, November 19, 1941, on a piece of paper and handed it to my immediate superior, Corporal Arnold Grogan. He read it and made no comment. I did not discuss the message with the other operators.

8. Next morning, November 20, 1941, I was walking across the Barracks parade ground at about 8am when I was approached by Corporal Grogan and Sergeant-Major Tommy Thompson.

9. They told me that on orders from our commanding officer Captain Jimmy Marshall, the message I had received the night before was classified information and that I was under strict orders to tell nobody about it.

10. They told me the ship mentioned in the message was HMAS Sydney.

11. Because of the order, I kept all this quiet for 60 years until the subject of the HMAS Sydney came up among workmates. They were dismissive of me.

12. I later visited the HMAS Sydney memorial museum in Geraldton and learned that the authorities had not made public the sinking of Sydney until 12 days after the event. That is when I told more people what I had heard.33

26.31 It is not clear how Mr Ingvarson came to swear the statutory declaration, but it is noted that he was interviewed by someone on Mr George Karlov’s behalf34, and in 2007 Mr Karlov referred the Ingvarson allegations to the then Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and the Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence35, the Hon. B Billson MP.

26.32 It is unlikely that on 19 November 1941 Mr Ingvarson heard a voice message with an Australian accent saying, ‘Hit by torpedoes and sinking’. Such a voice message could not have come from SYDNEY, yet she is the only ship known to have been hit by a torpedo on that day.

33 COI.005.0143_R
34 COI.005.0115_R
35 COI.005.0153_R
Further, the service record of CPL Grogan shows that he was not on base at that time: he was on leave between 17 and 22 November 1941. Thus Mr Ingvarson could not have handed the document he said he wrote to CPL Grogan, nor could CPL Grogan have been present on 20 November, when Mr Ingvarson says he was informed by Major Thompson and CPL Grogan that the message he had heard was from SYDNEY and was ordered to keep silent about it. Further, it was not known on 20 November that SYDNEY had been torpedoed by either one or more torpedoes.

26.33 Mr Ingvarson’s recollection of 67 years ago is flawed. Even if he did hear such a message, it did not come from SYDNEY.

The Rob Family

26.34 In her submission to the 1997 forum on HMAS SYDNEY, Ms Glenys McDonald wrote:

My oral histories also refer to signals from Sydney and by the sheer nature of them would seem to indicate a ship in total distress, seeking every means to be heard and located. The signals were voice signals and they broke into the local radio broadcast in the Port Gregory area.

The Rob family, the family who were involved in some members witnessing the naval battle, also have a memory of an interrupted radio broadcast in that timeframe. The family were listening to the radio between 6.30pm and 7pm with the lights out, as was their wartime custom, when the program of either ‘Dad and Dave’ or ‘Martin’s Corner’ was interrupted by a voice message. The message stated “Sydney calling, Sydney calling”. Unfortunately, the young people who related this message had been more intent on the program and annoyed at the interruption, therefore they do not remember any more of the message. The family felt that the local Geraldton radio station was closed down for allowing these distress calls to be relayed on air.37

In a later paper entitled: ‘Oral histories associated with sightings of flashes and gun fire off the mid west coast of WA during World War II’ Ms McDonald noted that, of the five members of the Rob family, it was only Ms Chris Webb (nee Rob) who had ‘a memory of a SYDNEY SOS interrupting an evening radio program’. The other four family members gave no account of hearing any such message.38

36 NAA.105.0013
37 WAM.032.0038 at 0054
38 WAM.041.0049 R at 0055_R
It is of note that in Ms McDonald’s recounting of the ‘oral history’ the message has transmuted from ‘Sydney calling’ in 1997 to ‘Sydney’s SOS’ in 2000.

26.35 The supposed message was a voice message, so it did not come from SYDNEY: again, she had no capacity to send such a message.

26.36 This ‘oral history’, like so many others, is based on a flawed recollection.

Mr Mervyn Strong

26.37 On 9 January 1995 Mr Mervyn Strong sent a statement to the Western Australian Maritime Museum:

When I was fourteen years old and living in Hobart Tasmania, my family had a big Stromberg Carlson Short Wave radio.

I used to come home from school and tune it in on short wave to signals coming from other places.

One day in November 1941 I arrived home from school about four P.M. switched on the radio, and heard crackles and a lot of Morse code which I could not read but then a voice sounding very very clearly came on in plain language calling “S.O.S. H.M.A.S. SYDNEY” which was repeated more than once. Then came a lot more Morse for about five minutes and then “MAYDAY H.M.A.S. SYDNEY MAYDAY “ and a lot of confused crackling and then silence.

I told my family but they all laughed at me.

About a week later we heard about the sinking of the SYDNEY.

My wife’s brother John Taylor was one of SYDNEY’s crew and was lost in her sinking.

The circumstance that influenced Mr Strong to make the statement and send it to the museum is not known.

26.38 Since the supposed message was in plain language, it was not from SYDNEY because she had no capacity to send such a message.

26.39 If SYDNEY lost her transmitting aerial early in the encounter with KORMORAN, as seems probable, she could not have sent out such a message. Mr Strong’s recollection after 54 years is faulty.
Mr Arthur Lane

On 5 June 1998 Mr Arthur Lane, an Englishman, wrote to the Daily Mail in London about the sinking of SYDNEY. In order to encourage an understanding of the fantasy to which people can resort in connection with SYDNEY, I set out here his letter in full:

WITH reference to the wartime sinking of HMAS Sydney (Letters), after Dunkirk Britain was hard-pressed financially and lacked trained servicemen.

In July 1941, Japan landed 400,000 troops in French Indo-China and Churchill was anxious to involve the U.S. in the war on Britain’s side as soon as possible.

On August 12, Churchill and Roosevelt met on a British warship and signed the Atlantic Agreement. They also set in motion a plan to provoke the Japanese into attacking American interests in the Pacific. British, Dutch, Chinese and Russian agents provocateurs were sent to Japan to ferment hatred against America and the West.

Churchill’s deal with Roosevelt was that, in return for American assistance, Britain would lease military bases to the U.S., including ones in mainland Britain, for 99 years. It also provided that, after the war, Britain would grant independence to most of the countries in the Empire.

Australian Prime Minister Menzies was worried about the defence of his own country and constantly asked Churchill for the return of Australian servicemen from the Middle East. To placate him, Churchill prepared a secret message saying he had no intention of defending any Far Eastern station apart from Singapore and hinting at the plan to bring the U.S. into the war.

The Axis powers could intercept radio messages so Churchill sent his communique to Menzies by hard copy, carried aboard HMAS Sydney.

On November 19, 19 days before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, the Sydney was attacked by the German raider Kormoran in an action which may have included a Japanese submarine.

Messages from the engagement were picked up in Tanglin barracks, Singapore (where I was on duty with the signals section of the Manchester Regiment), and transmitted to London. The reply came back: ‘Do nothing.’

As the Sydney was sinking, she was boarded by German officers who took away documents including Churchill’s communique, which was later transferred to Japanese intelligence. Was it to eradicate Japanese involvement in the sinking that all crew members of the Sydney were killed and all wreckage collected and taken to Japan? After the war, a solitary, bullet-riddled lifebelt from the Sydney was found on a beach.
When the war ended, the Americans insisted on supplying the army of occupation in Japan, hampered British efforts to search for war criminals and tried to make sure neither British nor American citizens obtained reparations. Japan was set up as the only democratic country in Asia, a buffer against Russian and Chinese communism.

In Japan, there’s a copy of an agreement signed by Churchill and Roosevelt indicating their intention of coercing Japan into attacking the Philippines.40

26.41 The letter is historical nonsense. SYDNEY had been around the Australian coastline since her return to Australia in early 1941, after the Mediterranean campaign. She could not have been carrying any ‘hard copy’ of a communiqué from Churchill to Menzies. There was frequent secret communication in code between the UK, US and Australian governments. Mr Lane’s statement that the engagement ‘may have included a Japanese submarine’ is groundless, and there is not the slightest evidence that ‘As the Sydney was sinking she was boarded by German officers who took away documents including Churchill’s communiqué, which was later transferred to Japanese intelligence’. Nor is there any evidence to support Mr Lane’s query, ‘Was it to eradicate Japanese involvement in the sinking that all crew members of the SYDNEY were killed and all wreckage collected and then taken to Japan?’ It is now known that when SYDNEY sank she was some 12 miles from KORMORAN. She was not boarded.

Mr Lane’s letter is sensationalist fantasy. It is remarkable that anyone would pay it or its author any attention.

26.42 Mr Lane did, however, receive attention from conspiracy and other theorists. In 2005 Mr John Samuels, in his book Somewhere Below, quoted Mr Lane. Mr Samuels wrote:

While we were researching this book, Arthur Lane revealed that he could clearly recall radio contact during Sydney’s final minutes. At our request he recorded the following statement.

In Australia enquires have taken place concerning the mystery attached to the sinking of HMAS Sydney. The demise of the Sydney has long been a bone of contention with me. One or two friends and associates imply that my detestation of Churchill sometimes blinds me to the facts, but having read so much concerning the man’s deceit, I don’t think so. I joined the army when I was fifteen years of age as a drummer boy. I saw service in Egypt, Cyprus, Palestine, Malaya and Singapore, in which time I was aware of and occasionally party to several acts of shall we say bending the

40 PINQ.SUBS.016.0116
rules. I remained in the drum section of the battalion as well as training as a machine gunner.

In Tanglin barracks Singapore, similar to most army barracks, each day six men are selected for a twenty four hour guard duty. Also attached to the guard is a bugler whose duty it is to sound various military calls on his bugle. There being only a small number of buglers in comparison to the number of duty men available for guard duty, I found that I was doing guard duty every ten days, which after a time becomes monotonous. So to alleviate the monotony I spent many hours sitting in the signals listening post, learning Morse code and listening to messages being intercepted in many languages by the signals operators. I can remember vividly the 19 November 1941, because we were listening to radio broadcasts concerning the war in Libya, and it was the next day that the battalion took up their own jungle war stations.

The signals section had that morning picked up a Japanese coded message, which today has become well known as the winds messages. “Higashi no Kaze Ame” (East Wind Rain) Japan American Crisis, “Kita No Kazi Kumore” (North Wind Cloudy) Japan Russia Crisis and “Nishi No Kaze Hare” (West Wind Clear) Japanese British Crisis. On the reading of any of the messages relative action should be taken. This message was intercepted and translated by one of the signallers and then relayed to India via R/T [Morse] with instructions for onward transmit to UK. The reply received later from India was “Do Nothing”.

Later that same day among other messages on the [vocal radio] was one which sounded like an Australian voice (I had not met very many Aussies at this time, so it could have been an American). The voice sounded excited as it repeated “She is going down” “She is going down”. At the same time that this was happening, he [the radio operator] informed me that a British warship had sunk a German raider which at the time meant very little to me.

It wasn’t until after the war that I learned that the ship was HMAS Sydney. It was now of some interest to me because it was just a few weeks previous to the sinking when during an off duty period I went to the small café in Botanical Gardens Singapore, where service men often went for a quiet drink (non-alcoholic) and to listen to music being played on the record player. A group of sailors from the Sydney had formed a singing group and they were singing with the music. The leader was a young man about my age named Knill, and I got him to sign my pay book just in case he became famous. My pay book is now with the Singapore history museum (check the name against the crew list, which incidentally I have never seen).
The Sydney was equipped with eight six inch and eight four inch guns, and the Kormoran with six 5.9 inch guns. The two ships began firing on each other when only 1200 yards apart, and soon both ships were very badly damaged. The Kormoran crew surrendered and began to abandon ship, making their way in lifeboats over to Sydney. But before they could reach her a torpedo struck the Sydney and burning fiercely she drifted away into the night and was never seen again. Despite the damage to the Kormoran, 318 of her crew of 390 survived, but not a single member of the Sydney’s 645 crew survived, nor was a single body ever found. Since the Kormoran was not in a fit state to fire the last torpedo, it must have come from another vessel. By 24th November the Australian Naval board was satisfied (although they had no absolute proof) that a Japanese I class submarine had been operating in conjunction with the Kormoran and had sunk the Sydney.

Arthur Lane’s testimony has never been addressed by the RAN or official inquires and is now deliberately ignored. It “doesn’t fit the mould” to allow that Sydney’s transmission was received in Singapore.41

Notable here is that there is no mention of Churchill’s communiqué, the boarding of SYDNEY by German officers, the shooting of SYDNEY’s crew or, indeed, Japanese submarines being involved in the engagement.

26.43 Mr Lane was also interviewed by Mr David Kennedy and Professor Bruce Horsfield and corresponded with Mr George Karlov, publisher of Mr Samuels’ book. In one of those interviews42 Mr Lane said he heard the words ‘She’s going down. She’s going down’ in the signals room at Tanglin Barracks, Singapore. He did not associate those words with SYDNEY until after the war, when he learnt that SYDNEY had been lost on 19 November 1941. The matter was of no significance to him until then. Mr Lane also said Churchill had arranged for the sinking of the AUTOMEDON by a German raider in order to bring Japan into the war.

Mr Lane was a prisoner of war in Changi and was on the Burma railway. It emerges from the interview that he had a deep hatred of the Japanese. He believed that a Japanese submarine had been involved in the sinking of SYDNEY and the killing of sailors. His belief was based on the statement, ‘It’s the type of thing they’d do’43, referring to the rape of Nanking. He concluded the interview by saying that all that kept him alive was his hatred of the Japanese, and that was why he had linked,
after so many years, the message he said he heard with the loss of SYDNEY.

26.44 On 31 May 2007 Mr Lane swore an affidavit. He did this for Mr Karlov. The affidavit read:

ARTHUR LANE of [redacted material]

I was a Drummer Bugler serving with the Manchester Regiment in the British Army.

In 1938, as a young man of 18, I was stationed in Singapore Tanlin Barracks. This was a well known British Government listening post.

I understand that there is a belief that we as individuals were not able to receive or send voice messages.

This is completely wrong as voice messages by WIR were a daily occurrence as that was the reason for the existence of a listening post.

Early in 1940 we had a sports day against the British merchant ship the Rawalpindi.

One month later when the ship was sailing across the Indian Ocean we received a voice message from her captain and crew, thanking us for our hospitality and enjoyable time they had.

In the Tanglin (Singapore) listening post we frequently overheard voice signals from other ships in various parts of the world.

On November 19, 1941, while in the Signals office I personally overheard an incoming transmission saying “She is going down.” This was repeated twice. The voice had an accent which I took to be either Australian or American.

Some time later when I enquired from a signalman what had happened, I was informed that a British warship had sunk a German raider.

It was only after the War I learned that the raider was the Kormoran which was attacking HMAS Sydney and that the ship had been sunk by a Japanese torpedo after the Kormoran had been sunk.44

26.45 The reality is that in 1941 Mr Lane was at Tanglin Barracks in Singapore. He has a vivid imagination. He says he heard the words ‘She is going down. She is going down’.45 It meant nothing to him. In his interview with Professor Horsfield he said the words were spoken in a matter-of-fact way. No one else in the signals room, where he was waiting until his next bugling obligation, reacted to the words in any

44 PTE.005.0069_R
45 PUB.001.0001 at 0050 to 0051
way. He knew nothing of SYDNEY until after the war. As noted, he suffered severely at the hands of the Japanese during the war and had a deep hatred of them. Later he associated the words he said he recalled with SYDNEY and the Japanese and had concluded, with no basis whatsoever, that the Japanese had been involved in sinking SYDNEY, using a torpedo from a submarine.

Mr Lane made a number of fanciful claims:

- When lost, SYDNEY was carrying a hard copy of a communiqué from Prime Minister Churchill to Prime Minister Menzies. Mr Menzies was not prime minister when SYDNEY was lost.

- The messages ‘from the engagement’ were picked up at Tanglin Barracks, Singapore, and transmitted to London, and ‘the reply came back, “Do nothing”’. Yet all Mr Lane heard was the words ‘She is going down’, with no reference being made to SYDNEY and it not being known that SYDNEY was in any engagement. He was insistent the words were heard between 1400 and 1600 Singapore time: that was before the engagement between SYDNEY and KORMORAN had begun.

- Prime Minister Churchill ‘arranged’ for the AUTOMEDON to be sunk by a German raider in order to bring Japan into the war. AUTOMEDON was sunk in November 1940, more than 12 months before Japan entered the war.

- As she was sinking, SYDNEY was boarded by German officers, who took away Churchill’s communiqué. SYDNEY was 12 miles from KORMORAN as she was sinking and was never boarded by German officers.

No credence can be attached to Mr Lane’s statements. If he heard anything at all, the words did not come from SYDNEY. They were supposedly heard before SYDNEY was engaged with or had even sighted KORMORAN, and SYDNEY had no capacity to transmit a voice message to Singapore.

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46 PTE.008.0281 at 0289
47 PINQ.SUBS.016.0116
Summary

26.47 It is noteworthy that all the plain-voice messages said to have been heard differ.

In Geraldton, at the Esplanade Hostel, it was:

“Calling Darwin or Technical Telegraph Operator” – “Call from sea … Sydney calling send Carrier, men on board” – “Calling Frazer D/F Darwin” …

R.T. Sydney calling Darwin. Distress Signal Starts (?) Leichhardt. Send Morse After 2450 DSZD.

Singapore Call Darwin. A.S. … Sydney calling 2450.

Message received Frequency satisfactory will put through in morse. 48

Mrs G Lumley said she heard, ‘SOS, Straats Malacca’. 49

Mr J Ingvarson said he heard, ‘Hit by torpedoes and sinking’. 50

Ms Chris Webb (nee Rob) said she heard, ‘Sydney’s SOS’, although this was originally reported by Ms McDonald as ‘Sydney calling’. 51

Mr Mervyn Strong said he heard, ‘S.O.S. H.M.A.S. SYDNEY’ and later ‘MAYDAY H.M.A.S. SYDNEY MAYDAY’. 52

And Mr Lane said he heard, ‘She is going down. She is going down’. 53

26.48 The only message that is in any way credible is that heard at Geraldton: it was heard on 4 December 1941 and was a message from the Post Master General in the city of Sydney to Darwin; it had nothing to do with the loss of SYDNEY.

Messages in plain Morse

26.49 The second category of messages said to have been sent by SYDNEY are those in plain—that is, un-encoded—Morse.

These are said to have been received, heard or heard of by the following:

- AB Malcolm Young and CPO Roberts

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48 WAM.008.0096_R
49 COI.005.0247
50 COI.005.0143_R
51 WAM.041.0049_R at 0055_R
52 WIT.023.0011_R
53 PTE.005.0069_R
• CPL Cecil J Ethridge
• LCDR Ean McDonald RAN Rtd
• Mrs Sybil E Tweedie.

**AB Malcolm Young and CPO Roberts**

26.50 Dr John McArthur, who obtained his PhD for his thesis on the loss of SYDNEY, believes SYDNEY sent signals. He also believes there was a cover-up. In his submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry he wrote:

**SIGNALS and SYDNEY**

Since the fateful encounter of 19 November 1941, the RAN has steadfastly denied that SYDNEY sent any signals. It is argued that the German raider blasted all the Australian’s signal stations out of action through highly accurate gunfire. It is also argued that if SYDNEY did manage to send signals, the German raider successfully jammed them. Such a position is simplistic in the extreme. SYDNEY did not rely on a single radio shack. The RAN position has been equally simplistic. If it had received signals, it would have reacted. As it did not receive signals, ergo, it did not react. A delightfully logical train of thinking predicated on a lie.54

26.51 Dr McArthur wrote that ‘Bob Mason knew of signals received by Harman’.55 That is dealt with later. In his submission Dr McArthur then wrote:

My own research put me in contact with the duty RAN signalman in Fremantle on the night of 19 November. In front of a witness he related what happened to him that night. Early in the evening watch he received a signal from SYDNEY: RRRR v SYDNEY. It meant that SYDNEY had encountered a warship. The signalman notified the Chief Petty Officer on duty, CPO Roberts. But a senior officer could not be found. For years after Roberts nursed a great bitterness about the events of that night. Sworn to secrecy he would not reveal them. But his wife remembers his anger and frustration – neither of which abated – about his experience of the night of 19 November. Roberts vowed he would commit it all to writing and have it released later in his life. Unfortunately, his death has not brought forth anything at all. His wife felt that he may have written about it but nothing was found in his effects.

But the signalman is still alive. The last signal he recalls was in clear English – no need for code. SYDNEY was “on fire, abandoning ship”. He passed the message on and waited and waited. All he can

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54 PINQ.SUBS.010.0004 at 0015
55 PINQ.SUBS.010.0004 at 0015
remember is that within a day or so he was found to be fatigued by the Naval Medical Officer, sent to a private hospital in Rockingham south of Fremantle where despite the fact that he felt no fatigue/stress whatsoever, he remained for two weeks. A bludge if ever he had one. From there he was transferred away from Fremantle.\textsuperscript{56}

Dr McArthur did not identify the signalman.

It seems CPO Roberts gave no interviews in connection with the allegation.\textsuperscript{57}

26.52 The signalman Dr McArthur failed to identify was ‘AB signalman Malcolm Young’—not a relation of PO Crawford Addison Young.\textsuperscript{58}

26.53 On 6 April 1986 a person who signed his name ‘Malcolm Young’ above a typed

(Malcolm Young)
HWM Young

Or

Malcolm H Young

wrote to LCDR McDonald a letter in which he stated:

Dear Ean

You will naturally understand that casting my memory back to duty activities in mid and late November 1941 is bound to carry with it some inaccuracy. It is so long ago. All the rumours flying around at that time and some that still are has not done much to help things. However I do remember the evening of the 19th as I was on duty in the SDO of Staff Office then situated in Cliff Street Fremantle. It was in the first watch when things started to happen. We had two teleprinters in the room, one to G.P.O. Perth and one to Applecross Radio. It is Applecross I am mentioning now. What I saw there on the sheet moving across before me made me take immediate action. I informed duty staff and all concerned and rang any off duty officers where applicable. I thought I read something to the nature of “RRRR V “Sydney” RRRR V “Sydney am engaging” ………”

I have been challenged on the veracity of that context which is natural over the lapse of time but whatever I did see put me on immediate alert. I regret I cannot recall who was on watch with me and that is indeed strange. Try how I may I really cannot recall. There was an Air

\textsuperscript{56} PINQ.SUBS.010.0004 at 0015
\textsuperscript{57} WIT.023.0007_R
\textsuperscript{58} WAM.043.0007_R at 0009_R
Force operator attached to us but I don’t know whether he was on that night.59

26.54 On 28 February 1993 LCDR McDonald and Dr McArthur interviewed Mr Young, who stated:

I had been in the Navy as a Reservist Signalman from 1939, had served at sea aboard H.M.A.S. MANOORA, and was serving in the Staff Office at H.M.A.S. LEEUWIN (Fremantle) on the 19th November 1941.

Sometime during the late night I received a signal by telephone from Applecross Radio that read “RRRR v SYDNEY” i.e. that SYDNEY had come upon an enemy Raider. I am not sure whether there was anything else in that signal.

I remember that the signal was received late at night because the Senior Staff were not on duty and the Depot was quiet.

I reported the signal to the Chief Yeoman Roly Roberts, and am not sure what happened from then.

For all the years I have kept to myself that I remember that the Senior Naval Officer had that night issued instructions that on no account was he to be disturbed during the night. I do not know why that was so. I admired and respected that Officer and have felt that I should keep that information to myself in case it should be harmful to his reputation, and I am reluctant even now to have it known.

Shortly after that time I was sent to the Naval Doctor Surgeon Commander Field Martel, who then sent me to his own hospital at Long Point for a “rest” ostensibly to be treated for a “mental breakdown”. The stated reason for the hospitalisation was that I had had an altercation with an officer. It was a fairly common action by the Doctor to send ratings to his hospital for a “nice rest”.

At the hospital I was told that I was not going back to Fremantle in these terms “You are not going anywhere like that, you are going to be sent back to sea”.

I was sent to commission H.M.A.S. JUNEE, a Corvette.60

26.55 The statement, made, as noted, on 28 February 1993, was repeated in a statutory declaration drafted by Mr John Doohan sometime in 1993.

26.56 It is to be noted that neither Mr Young’s letter nor his statement to LCDR McDonald and Dr McArthur makes any mention of the words in Dr McArthur’s submission, ‘on fire, abandoning ship’.61 Dr McArthur gave evidence to this Inquiry and would have been examined on this
matter but, having been examined for a short period—an experience he obviously did not enjoy—he became unwell. He was unable or unwilling to return for further examination.

In his thesis Dr McArthur wrote:

In Fremantle, as already stated, telegraphist Malcolm Young received a signal from the main overseas communication station at Applecross. It read “RRR v Sydney” ... Young recalled that it was during the First Watch. He reported it to the Signal Yeoman, CPO Rowley Roberts, but could not recall the subsequent action except that he stayed on and shortly after midnight received a message from Sydney that she was “on fire – abandoning ship” ... Young was never interviewed but within days and to his surprise was sent off by the naval medical officer to a private hospital in Rockingham for recuperation. Young was then sent to an observation post in Albany before being transferred to the Eastern States and to operational service. There are no records of any signal logs for either HMAS Leeuwin or DNOWA office at Fremantle for all of 1941.62

Support for the words ‘on fire, abandoning ship’ is said to be ‘M. Young to T. McArthur and E. McDonald 6 May 1992 (priv. comm.) and M. Young to E. McDonald 6 April 1986 (priv. comm.)’. There is no mention of the words in Mr Young’s 6 April 1986 letter to LCDR McDonald; nor are they mentioned in Mr Young’s interview with LCDR McDonald and Dr McArthur on 28 February 1993. Dr McArthur did not provide the other documents to the Inquiry.

26.57 It is improbable that Mr Young’s recollection is correct.

First, I do not doubt that his best recollection was that in his letter of 6 April 1984, when events were already 45 years in the past. At that time he ‘thought’ he ‘read something to the nature of RRRR v Sydney, RRRR v Sydney am engaging’.

Second, it was not the practice of warships to send out a ‘distress signal’ before or at the time of engaging the enemy. The obvious reason for that is it would alert the enemy to imminent attack.

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62 USQ.001.0003 at 0233
Third, ‘RRRR’ did not mean ‘that Sydney had come upon an enemy raider’. Admiralty Merchant Shipping Instruction 75⁶³, ‘Enemy attacks—raider signal’, provided:

Distress Signal “R” made four times is to be used only in the case of a warship raider. In the case of a disguised merchant ship raider the letter “Q” is to be used in exactly the same manner as the other distress letters as shown in D.M.S., Part 2, and Appendix “B”.⁶⁴

Had it been appropriate for SYDNEY to send out a signal of encounter with a raider, which it was not, she would have sent out ‘QQQQ’ because STRAAT MALAKKA was a disguised merchant ship raider.

Fourth, both R and Q signals were promulgated by the Admiralty Merchant Shipping Instructions. They were instructions for merchant ships, not warships.

26.58 There is no documentary or other support for Mr Young’s vague recollection of what he ‘thought he read’. It is improbable to the point of being unbelievable that a signal that—if Mr Young were to be accepted—was received at APPLECROSS and then LEEUWIN, that SYDNEY was engaging with a raider, would not have been recorded in some document or reported to some officer. The supposed signal, was not a signal SYDNEY would be likely to have sent because it would have warned the enemy of imminent attack and was, in any event, a signal to be sent by merchantmen, not warships. Any such signal, if sent, must have been seen or heard by many, but no one referred to it.

26.59 No reliance can be placed on the vague recollection of Mr Young, as related to theorists who already had a belief that such signals were sent by SYDNEY.

CPL Cecil J Etheridge

26.60 In November 1991 Mr Cecil J Etheridge, formerly a corporal in the Australian Army, wrote to Dr Michael McCarthy of the Western Australian Maritime Museum. Mr Etheridge claimed to hold a personal interest in the loss of SYDNEY because of his military service and his friendship with a Mr Les Wood, a former member of the crew of HMAS YANDRA, a ship that had been involved in the search for SYDNEY survivors and the recovery of KORMORAN survivors.

⁶³ AMSI 75 was cancelled by AMSI 475 of 26 June 1941 (see UKAA.008.0321 at 0323). AMSI 468 (see UKAA.008.0322) of 26 June 1941 states that the form in which enemy reports and distress messages were to be sent by W/T is detailed in MERSIGS (Merchant Ships Signal Book, BR 637) Articles 105 and 106 (see UKAA.016.0012 to 0019). Despite intensive, searching the Inquiry was unable to locate a 1941 edition of MERSIGS.

⁶⁴ UKAA.008.0199
26.61 In his letter Mr Etheridge stated:

As Foreman of Signals, Fremantle Fixed Defence Signals (Army), I was visiting Port-War naval signal station, then situated alongside the Fortress Command Post tower; at a time, by chance, when W/T signals were being received purporting to be from HMAS Sydney then endeavouring to identify another vessel under suspicion. The time was late afternoon approx 1430-1515 on, I firmly believe, The 18th November 1941. I know from the immediate interest shown by the naval personnel at the time DNO Fremantle would have been notified. Over the years I have not been able to comprehend how no records exist (or are available) at DNO’s messages centre Fremantle, or if further afield.?. In the past I have endeavoured to gain confirming information from Navy and the Port Authority records without success.65

26.62 Mr Etheridge’s service record does not support his contention that on 18 November 1941 he held the position of foreman of signals. On that date he was based at Fremantle, having been transferred there from Rottnest Island on 25 October 1941. On 5 December 1941 he was promoted to the rank of sergeant, and on 23 December he was detached to Rottnest. He rejoined his unit in Fremantle on 17 April 1942, before again being detached to Rottnest three days later. On 25 April Mr Etheridge was promoted to the rank of staff sergeant and assumed the duties of chief quartermaster signals, or foreman of signals.66

26.63 Mr Etheridge’s recollection is not supported by any other record of signals being heard at the Rottnest Island post on 18 November 1941 or at any other relevant time. Nor is there any record or account of any signals being received from SYDNEY on 18 November 1941.

**LCDR Ean McDonald RAN Rtd**

26.64 LCDR McDonald served aboard SYDNEY as a signalman in 1939 to 1940.67 In a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry he publicly raised his own doubts about his recollections in relation to signals from SYDNEY:

At this stage I recall my own experience at the time. I was aboard H.M.A.S. PERTH in Port Phillip Bay about the 25th November 1941, when I learned that signals were coming through, purported to be from SYDNEY.

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65 WAM.013.0175_R
66 NAA.106.0019 at 0020
67 PINQ.SUBS.003.0026 at 0027
As I was a senior Signalman/Officer Candidate I had access to the Wireless Office where I saw three signals recorded and filed in the log.

They read …

“Am engaging enemy Raider –Position … (not remembered)”

“Am on fire fore and aft”

“Aircraft on Fire. Sending from R.C.O.”

I accepted these as signals from SYDNEY in a normal action but in trouble, and I managed to convey my concerns to my Mother and sweetheart soon by mail.

…

Years later, as I began to investigate, I realised that those signals could NOT repeat NOT have come from SYDNEY. The time was about 1600 K (EST) which could have been about 1400 H (WST) whereas SYDNEY went into action about 1800 H (WST). Added to that, the day was some days after SYDNEY was actually lost.68

26.65 LCDR McDonald was interviewed by counsel assisting the Inquiry:

A: Yes. Well, it’s a matter of certain things leap out and stay with you. You may ask me about signals that I saw, which are in my record in my submission. I was aboard Perth having come back from the Mediterranean, aboard Perth as an officer candidate. I was VFC at that stage that is a fairly senior signalman and well experienced, and I was also an Officer candidate. So aboard Perth I was enabled by that peculiar situation to have access to the wireless room, which the ordinary sailor would not have had. And when I heard the buzz going around Perth, that Sydney was in trouble, I went to the radio room and saw those signals. Of course, the telling point about them was that they couldn’t possibly be coming from the Sydney.

Q: What is your recollection of those signals? You have put them in your …

A: I’ve put them in, yes. I do remember. The first signal ‘Am engaging enemy raider’ and there would have been a position, I don’t remember the position. Second signal, I think ‘On fire fore and aft’. Third signal ‘aircraft on fire, sending from the RCO’. To explain that—I just accepted that as a normal battle situation.

Q: And you saw …

A: I saw the pink slips.

Q: Hand written?

68 PINQ.SUBS.003.0026 at 0034
A: Hand written. They would have been in as the operators took them down in the wireless room. And I just went in and, I knew all the guys, and said ‘What’s happening with the Sydney?’ Oh, have a look at that! So they showed me these signals and they are clear. You see, Sydney, my first ship that’s why I saw them and noted them, because you know, I had a certain affection and interest in Sydney, and when I heard she was in trouble, naturally that’s something I did certainly remember. Now the fascinating thing further about that … about 20 years after the war, my friend Gordon Laffer—we were in close association in a number of ways—but one day Gordon said to me:

Gordon: Ean, you were navy?

Ean: Yes Gordon.

Gordon: What do you know about signals from the Sydney?

Ean: What are you talking about Gordon? Sit down.

So he sat down and ordered a coffee. I was then in the City Council. And I said:

Ean: Tell me, what are you talking about

Gordon: Well, I was in air-force intelligence in Perth at the end of the war and I was talking to my boss and I told him I’d lost a cousin aboard the Sydney and he said ‘Oh, you’d better read the file. Just a minute, I’ll go and get it.’

So he came back with a file marked in red, a manila folder titled HMAS Sydney and said you’d better read that. And in that file, and I recorded this from Gordon … In that file were signals which were almost verbatim to signals I saw. You know ‘On fire’, ‘Abandoning ship’ etcetera. So it was confirmed in my mind in an entirely different direction.

Q: I must have misunderstood you. I thought you said a few minutes ago that when you saw those signals, I thought you said they could not have been from Sydney.

A: Well they were. I didn’t think at the time I read them as coming straight from Sydney. And I just accepted that, and accepted the loss of Sydney and the loss of mates, and that was it. I mean, the war was there and that was the end of it. It wasn’t until I read Gill’s book about 15 years later and at the end of Gill’s book it said ‘Sydney signaled from Sunda Straight when she turned over the Zealandia to the Durban. And that was the last ever heard from Sydney.’ I said wait on, what about those signals I saw? So I began to research. When I looked into Perth’s logs I found that Perth actually was in Sydney dock on 19 November. So I thought ‘How the hell?’ I followed through and Perth was in Port Phillip Bay on the 24th I think, about five days later.
I remember the Port Phillip Bay clearly because we were going to go ashore and leave was cancelled. We were all going to race off to the aid of the Sydney. But it was five days after the actual event. In other words, those signals could not possibly have come from the Sydney barrack.

Q: I see. So, doing the best you can now ... your best guess is that you laid eyes on those signals on 24 November?

A: Yes. But, you know, it isn't as if they'd been lying around since the 19th, because the buzz was going around the Perth that Sydney was in trouble. That's why I went to see the signals.

Q: Obviously you saw them, and obviously they'd been written down. And you think they were written down on the 24th?

A: Yes.

Q: And where could they have come from?

A: Oh, God knows! Where did they come from? Where did Gordon Lappis' [Laffer's] similar signals come from? This is a very interesting point.69

26.66 LCDR McDonald was correct in his view that the signals he thought he saw did not and could not have come from SYDNEY and for the reason he gave—that SYDNEY had been lost some days before. In his statement to the Inquiry he referred to a meeting with Mr Laffer about '20 years after the war'. That must have been well before he prepared his submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry in 1997, in which he submitted that the signals he says he saw could not have come from SYDNEY. Something must have occurred after 1997 to cause him to change his mind from the position he held for 56 years, between 1941 and 1997. What that is is not known. LCDR McDonald is now aged 90 years and consumed by theories concerning the loss of SYDNEY.

26.67 I do not accept that LCDR McDonald saw signals from SYDNEY that were received and recorded some five days after she was sunk. It is not possible. LCDR McDonald's recollection must be at fault. He was not in error about the date because he was able to place the date by reference to the location of PERTH. He was thus in error about the contents of signals he claims, after all these years, he saw.

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69 ROI.006.0001 at 0004 to 0007
Mrs Sybil Tweedie

26.68 Before her remarriage, Mrs Sybil Tweedie was the wife of SYDNEY’s Gunnery Officer, LCDR Michael Morgan Singer RN. She remained in Australia after the war and wrote a letter to the Parliamentary Inquiry, stating:

It has been stated that no signal was received from H.M.AS Sydney on 19th November 1945 [sic].

I as the wife of her gunnery officer Michael Morgan Singer was told by Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser who was in charge of Western Approaches at that time, a personal friend of the Morgan Singer family said a signal from Sydney had been intercepted in Mombasa stating – Am under attack & giving position times etc.70

26.69 At the time of SYDNEY’s encounter with KORMORAN, ADM Fraser was Third Sea Lord and Chief of Staff of the Home Fleet. He subsequently succeeded ADM Sir Dudley Pound as Commander of the Home Fleet, in which position he won fame in sinking the German heavy cruiser SCHARNHORST. In 1944 ADM Fraser became Commander-in-Chief of the British Pacific Fleet for the remainder of the war and was stationed in Australia. He later signed the Japanese Instrument of Surrender on behalf of the United Kingdom. After the war he was ennobled, as Baron Fraser of North Cape, and became First Sea Lord. He retired in 1951 with the rank of Admiral of the Fleet.71

26.70 It is not known when it was that ADM Fraser allegedly told Mrs Tweedie of the intercepted signal. It can be assumed that ADM Fraser did not himself hear the signal: he must, at an unknown time, have been told of it. What he was told, by whom, and with what degree of accuracy is not known. It is improbable that he would have invented such an account. Mrs Tweedie’s account of being told about the message by ADM Fraser because he was a personal friend of the Morgan Singer family is likely to be correct since LCDR Singer’s father and grandfather each attained the flag rank of admiral.

26.71 It is established that Morse messages could be transmitted from the Western Australian coast to Africa.72 SYDNEY could not have sent such a message by voice.

26.72 Notwithstanding there being no forensic basis for doubting Mrs Tweedie’s veracity, I do not think her statement of a recollection, revealed in 1998, of a conversation she had with ADM Fraser at an

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70 PINQ.SUBS.017.0022
71 PUB.046.0001 at 0573; PUB.070.0001 at 0275; PUB.071.0001 at 0229 to 0247
72 AWM.002.0315
unknown time of something he recalled being told is sufficient to support a finding that SYDNEY sent a Morse message as described. Had SYDNEY done so, it is extremely likely that it would have been heard by many other stations. There is no evidence of such a message being heard or recorded.

**Encoded Morse**

26.73 Two people—Mrs Hetty Hall and Mr David Griffiths—suggested that encoded Morse messages were received from SYDNEY on 19 November 1941.

**Mrs Hetty Hall**

26.74 Mrs Hetty Hall was aged 16 years in 1941 and worked as a cypher clerk at the Royal Navy base in Singapore. Her duties included coding messages into Naval cyphers before their transmission and decoding messages received. She received the encoded message from a wireless operator and decoded it; it was then written down by a co-worker and passed to an officer. Mrs Hall recalled a message about an Australian ship, which was, in substance, ‘They had been fired upon by a disguised radar [sic]. They had been hit. They had sent up a smoke screen and were sailing away at 3 knots, and I—the message didn’t continue’. The message came through to her as an ordinary message in cypher. SYDNEY was not mentioned in the message, and Mrs Hall did not know how she knew it related to SYDNEY. She had heard nothing about SYDNEY in Singapore at that time.

Mrs Hall did not record the message she says she saw until about 30 or 35 years ago, placing it in the 1970s. She had not recalled the message before recording it.

26.75 About 35 years ago (that is, in the 1970s) a friend of Mr and Mrs Hall visited them. He was speaking of ships and mentioned SYDNEY. She said, ‘Well, I took a message about that. It stayed with me for some reason where a lot of messages wouldn’t’. After the friend left she wrote her recollection of the message on the back of an old Christmas

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73 TRAN.016.0001_R at 0032_R to 0033_R
74 TRAN.016.0001_R at 0027_R Line 40
75 TRAN.016.0001_R at 0027_R to 0028_R
76 TRAN.016.0001_R at 0029_R Line 21
77 TRAN.016.0001_R at 0029_R Line 4
78 TRAN.016.0001_R at 0028_R
79 TRAN.016.0001_R at 0029_R
80 TRAN.016.0001_R at 0029_R Line 20
card. It was only that conversation with the friend that connected the message with SYDNEY.\textsuperscript{81} She wrote:

**HMAS “SYDNEY” 1941**

**Last Message**

“Being attacked by a raider that had been disguised until they opened upon them, said they’d been hit had made smoke screen, were sailing and 3 knots & were …”

Message recd later to say loss was to be kept secret until they caught the raider - German Cormorant which they did. All that was found of the Sydney were two Farley rafts & they presumed they got a direct hit on their ammo.\textsuperscript{82}

The words ‘German Cormorant’ were written in at a later time. In interview, Mrs Hall read the words on the card ‘they presumed they’ as ‘they pursued them’, but she was not correct.\textsuperscript{83}

In relation to the ‘message rec’d later’ Mrs Hall said ‘I don’t remember it being on the same day that the second message came but I’m not positive. I can’t be positive about anything now’.\textsuperscript{84} She thought that message came from the Admiralty, saying, ‘I think it would have had identification’.\textsuperscript{85} Plainly, the balance of what she wrote was information she had learnt later.\textsuperscript{86}

Mrs Hall kept a diary. It recorded that on 19 November 1941 she worked the ‘morning watch’, which was from 0800 until noon. That entry might have been made in advance. Even if Mrs Hall had worked a double shift, that would have finished at 1600H. When interviewed by Mr David Kennedy she could not recall whether she had worked a double shift, and she said she thought the message was received at 1700. Her evidence was as follows:

Q: Can you remember what time of the day the first message was received?

A: I only know now that it was around 5 o’clock in the afternoon but I didn’t know that precisely at the time.

Q: If you started the morning shift, did they start at 8 o’clock?

A: Yes.
Q: So, it seems, even if you worked a double shift it seems you would probably finish at what, 4 o’clock in the afternoon?

A: Yes, I think it was probably an occasion where I was called back, and it really did get very busy at times. Towards the end we worked into the night more.\(^{87}\)

The problem with that explanation is that her diary recorded:

“I went with Mrs Sheaff to see Becky about a job.”

... 

“I played tennis.”

...

“I went to bed at 8 o’clock.”

...

“And Barbara came and cracked some jokes.”\(^{88}\)

She agreed she would have had dinner before going to bed:

Q: Presumably you had meals and went to bed by 8 o’clock.

A: Chances are I could have worked till 6 o’clock. I really don’t remember, but the fact the watches were written in there, I would write them ahead of time.\(^{89}\)

26.77 Regrettably, Mrs Hall’s memory is failing her. As she said, ‘I can’t be positive about anything now … it’s just not there any more’.\(^{90}\)

26.78 In summary, Mrs Hall’s evidence amounts to the following:

- It was not until the mid-1970s, some 35 years after the event, that Mrs Hall recalled a message she says she deciphered in 1941. It was one of many messages, and it made no impression on her at the time. She said:

  ‘No. I don’t think it stayed with me. We had such a volume of work, so much passed through our hands that I would go home at night and not even think about it. You had to learn to switch off, you know.’\(^{91}\)

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87 TRAN.016.0001_R at 0036_R to 0037_R
88 TRAN.016.0001_R at 0037_R
89 TRAN.016.0001_R at 0038_R Line 7
90 TRAN.016.0001_R at 0038_R to 0039_R
91 TRAN.016.0001_R at 0030_R Line 20

The Loss of HMAS SYDNEY II 163
She recalled the message for the first time in the 1970s, when a friend mentioned SYDNEY. That was the only connecting link between the message and SYDNEY because SYDNEY was not mentioned in the message as she recalled it in the 1970s, and she had no knowledge of SYDNEY in 1941.

By the time she wrote down her first recollection of the message in the 1970s, she was aware of SYDNEY and her loss because she recorded some aspects of what she had by then learnt about the loss.

In 2008 her recollection was poor. She thought, however, the message about SYDNEY was received about 5 p.m. (1700), although when interviewed by Mr Kennedy she could not recall when it was received. She also thought a second message—which she thought came from the Admiralty, although this was not recorded in her note of the mid-1970s—was received a day or two later.

Mrs Hall’s diary records that she worked the morning shift on 19 November 1941, later met and went with others in relation to a job, had a ‘good game’ of tennis, and went to bed at 8 p.m. (2000), after having dinner and apparently being with ‘Barbara’, who ‘came and cracked a few jokes’. This makes it impossible for her to have been on duty in the afternoon, the morning shift finishing at noon. Even had she worked a double shift she would have ceased work at 1600.

There could not have been any such signal from SYDNEY at that time: the engagement with KORMORAN had not begun.

The suggestion that a day or two later a message received from the Admiralty said that ‘the loss was to be kept secret until they caught the raider’ is not credible. SYDNEY was not due in Fremantle until the afternoon of 20 November and her loss was not known before 24 November 1941.

I am satisfied that Mrs Hall has elided information that by the mid-1970s she knew about the loss of SYDNEY with a faulty recollection of events that took place some 35 years previously. Her diary makes it tolerably clear that she was not on duty at the time of the SYDNEY–KORMORAN engagement, so she could not have seen any such signal. No record has been found of any such signal. Her recollection of the second signal she says she saw—the one she thought came from the Admiralty—is not credible. The signals set out in detail in Chapter 10 make it clear that there were communications between the Admiralty and the Naval Board shortly after SYDNEY’s loss, but the Admiralty
makes no mention of any signal such as Mrs Hall describes as coming from SYDNEY, or any responsive signal, as she alleges.

26.80 I am satisfied that the signals Mrs Hall alleges were received in Singapore and were deciphered by her were not received in Singapore.

Mr David Griffths

26.81 Mr David R Griffths was a telegraphist who served in the RAN between May 1941 and February 1946.\(^{92}\) In a letter dated 3 January 1996 to LCDR Ean McDonald he wrote, ‘This experience convinced me that I knew what I had heard at Flinders was a ship in trouble’.\(^{93}\)

26.82 On 1 September 1997 he was interviewed by Mr David Kennedy and Ms Glenys McDonald.\(^{94}\) In the interview he said he was on ‘the last day watch’ (1800 to 2000) in the signals office at Flinders Naval Base (later commissioned as HMAS CERBERUS). Just before being relieved at 2000 he was scanning one of the three ship-to-shore frequencies. He picked up what he referred to as parts of a message in ‘fleet code’. The fact that the message was in fleet code caused him to focus on it: because it was in that code, he believed it originated from ‘a ship in trouble’.

26.83 In the interview Mr Griffths was firm in his recollection that the events occurred on a Tuesday, before he went on early leave. Tuesday was 18 November. Mr Kennedy and Ms McDonald asserted ‘the papers’ showed it was the Wednesday, which was 19 November, the day SYDNEY was lost.

26.84 Mr Griffths said he thought he wrote the message in the log. He did not hear the preamble to the message and thus could not determine the source of the message. He variously described what he heard as follows:

... parts of a message, it was not sufficient I don’t think to get very much out of, although it is possible there would have been enough there to get perhaps a position or something like that, figures, out of it.

... very difficult to receive : it was broken up. I could only get a group + a group, then miss a bit, and get another group, quite difficult.

... [not] more than two lines in the log.\(^{95}\)

The message received was in code, and he could not decipher it without the relevant code book. He thus had no knowledge of the source of the

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\(^{92}\) NAA.102.0081

\(^{93}\) WIT.023.0040_R

\(^{94}\) ROI.010.0173

\(^{95}\) ROI.010.0173 at 0176, 0178, 0183
message or its contents. He knew only that it was a message in fleet code.

26.85 Mr Griffiths was relieved at 2000 hours by a leading WRAN telegraphist, and he said he told her he thought there was a ship in trouble. He went to the bathroom and on returning found ‘the headphones were on the desk and the WRAN was in the galley’.

26.86 It was not until after Mr Griffiths had left Flinders Naval Base that he learnt SYDNEY had been lost. He said in the interview he had heard rumours. When he gained that knowledge is not known, but there was no public announcement until the Prime Minister’s statement on 1 December 1941. It was only on learning of the loss of SYDNEY that Mr Griffiths assumed that the message he had heard—and whose origin and contents he did not know—was a message from SYDNEY. He had no basis for that assumption.

26.87 The mere fact that a message was heard in fleet code, even assuming it was heard on 19 November 1941, is no basis whatsoever for concluding that the message came from SYDNEY.

The Mason story

26.88 In November 1941 LS Robert W Mason was serving at Harman Naval Wireless Transmitting Station. He was not a telegraphist: he was a writer.

LS Mason’s role was as secretary to the then Officer-in-Charge of the W/T station, Acting Telegraphist LCDR AD McLachlan. LCDR McLachlan, like Mason, was posted to the depot ship HMAS PENGUIN (II) as a part of the Shore Wireless Service, but was borne at the Harman Station for duty. Also working at the W/T station in November 1941 were members of the first intake of 14 female telegraphists, enlisted as a part of the Women’s Emergency Signal Corps on 28 April 1941. Of those 14, Ms Marion Stevens, Ms Judy Saunders and Ms Daphne Wright have each spoken out against LS Mason’s version of events.

26.89 LS Mason’s account of the events he asserts occurred on 19 November 1941 is to be found in ‘Memoirs of R.W. Mason 1941–1981’, in the

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96 ROI.010.0173 at 0178
97 NAA.102.0047
98 NAA.102.0047; NAA.102.0049; NAA.102.0050
99 PUB.059.0001 at 0122
100 STF.001.0005; PINQ.SUBS.003.0069; PINQ.SUBS.001.0070; PINQ.SUBS.009.0004 and PINQ.SUBS.005.0122

166 The Loss of HMAS SYDNEY II
Mitchell Library, Sydney. The relevant portion is a copy of a handwritten note apparently prepared by LS Mason:

On 19 November 1941, Mason had been home for dinner with his wife and new-born baby who had just returned home from hospital. He writes:

When I arrived at the station clearly there was a ‘panic’ on, Mac had an open line to Melbourne and was speaking to someone … PO Tel. Hamilton was listening on ship-shore with a WRAN standing by and Ben Tiller was giving various directions. Ben came out of the operations room and I asked him what was happening? He replied that Sydney had bailed up a queer [sic] customer in the Indian Ocean and was trying to identify her. Mac hurried out of his office then into the operations room taking over the left hand ship-shore hand-set. Tubby Hamilton was in a standing position using the right hand head-set. Then Mac hurriedly dropped his head phones on the desk and sped back to the telephone in his office. I cannot recall the disposition of Ben Tiller or any of the others but I remained in the passageway ready, I suppose, to report to Mac.

Suddenly Tubby Hamilton rushed out of the operations room and announced in a somewhat excited tone to Mac, who was at this moment on his way back (I presumed) and just at the doorway of his office. ‘He says he is about to open fire’ Mac nearly did a blue-willy. He literally screamed at Tubby ‘Man the phones’ both dived back thought the door and picked up the headsets. But nothing more was heard from the Sydney from that point of time onwards.

There certainly was another and last message and indeed a number of people actually heard it at a distance as the head-sets lay on the desk.

Tubby Hamilton, by briefly leaving his hand-set on the desk to swiftly convey the ‘opening fire’ message to Mac left the whole ship-shore channel briefly unmonitored.

During that brief few seconds whilst both head sets were lying on the desk 3 or 4 people including a couple of WRANS heard a short message being transmitted but being several yards away could not recognise it …

… everybody was fully occupied in the continual monitoring of ship-shore and other frequencies in case a further message came through so I went to my office and then back home.

101 NLA.001.0001
102 NLA.001.0001
103 NAA.102.0045
The next morning Mac, Tubby Hamilton and Ben Tiller were in conference in Mac’s office. I expect they hadn’t closed ranks right there and then, there would have been an enquiry and a court martial and the communications service would have, as likely or not, been deprived of the services of the only real top line communications officer the Navy had. Needless to say, everybody was sworn to silence and observed it.

I was never privy to the official record of the conversations between the *Sydney* and operation Head Quarters and I never at any juncture saw a public reference to the message which I heard Tubby convey. He says he is about to open fire.

Whether it was a reference to the *Sydney* or the *Kormoran*, I never heard.

But I’ll wager that no file of papers ever recorded the fact that a message was transmitted and not received and recorded at Harman … Mac/Tubby and Neil? now dead. Perhaps it is incumbent on me to put truth on paper. The whole watch was sworn to silence. I wasn’t. I said to Neil? the next morning the *Sydney* gone hasn’t she? Neil nodded rather vaguely ‘I think so’ we both knew almost the whole 650 of the crew.

It was not until 1st December 1941 that the newspapers carried the details of the loss of the *Sydney* without survivors. We didn’t even know what had overwhelmed the ship until the story was told by the survivors of the *Kormoran*.

… the *Kormoran*’s salvos and heavy machine gun fire hit the *Sydney* in the area of the bridge and W/T Offices and presumably Petty Officer telegraphist ‘Dicey’ Gamble and his team either succumbed then or in the immediate holocaust of shelling and torpedo strike that followed.

Of course the message, had it been received, would probably have done very little other than to inform naval operations of one more step in the saga … because from the consensus of reports of the battle by the German survivors of the *Kormoran* it would never have altered the course of the battle.

However, the validity of this observation about the ‘last message’ being transmitted but lost is only valid if Harman was the only station monitoring the ship-shore channel. I understand it to be the only one.

All the historical reports based on the independent testimony of the German survivors conveying a tragic and shocking case of class stupidity by the *Sydney*’s command. That is how it seemed to us as the details began to emerge.

The official announcement of the loss of the *Sydney* was followed in a couple of days by the … (loss of?) … *Paramatta* … we were
half expecting ‘Mac’ to clear lower deck and officially announce the loss of these ships as he did when the Hood fell to the Bismarck, but he never did.104

‘Mac’ was LCDR McLachlan; Ben Tiller was CPO Telegraphist Ben Tiller; ‘Tubby’ Hamilton was PO Telegraphist Bruce Hamilton. All are now dead.

26.90 The concept being advanced by LS Mason in this account is that on 19 November 1941 two messages had been received from SYDNEY—first, she had ‘bailed up a quere [sic] customer in the Indian Ocean and was trying to identify her’ and, second, ‘he is about to open fire’—but that no further messages had been received from SYDNEY, possibly because staff in the signals room had left the receiving earphones unattended. Because of this delinquency of duty, LCDR McLachlan, CPO Tiller and PO Hamilton had agreed among themselves to keep the whole matter secret in order to avoid disciplinary proceedings. Consistent with this cover-up, all in the room were the next day sworn to secrecy, a secrecy they maintained until LS Mason spoke out.

26.91 Unsurprisingly, theorists have seized on this statement as being evidence of SYDNEY sending messages at the time of the engagement. In a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry, Mr Michael Montgomery wrote:

Final confirmation from the Navy that such signals had indeed been received only came in December 1996 with the deathbed admission of Robert Mason, who had been an operator at RAN radio HQ Harman at the time (Appendix 3).105

The Appendix 3 noted turns out to be an article published in The Australian newspaper on 11 December 1996, written by Mr David Kennedy. That article said Mr Mason had ‘this week granted The Australian his first interview about the night of November 19, 1941’.106 Mr John Doohan, another theorist, referred to this interview as Mr Mason’s ‘deathbed interview’.107

26.92 The interview was no deathbed interview. Mr Mason was interviewed sitting comfortably in an armchair. Much of the early part of the interview involved reading from a script he had apparently prepared. He went, however, much further in the interview than in his statement. In the interview he had LCDR McLachlan on the phone to CMDR Newman in Melbourne, the latter being the ‘director of signals

104 WAM.029.0149 at 0151 to 0152
105 PINQ.SUBS.003.0082 at 0083
106 PINQ.SUBS.003.0082 at 0088; for a better version see THS.001.0067.
107 PINQ.SUBS.014.0120 at 0121
communications’. Mr Mason suggests that at some time he was told of events. He then speculates that the senior Naval members, including members of the Naval Board, might have been told—and even perhaps Sir Frederick Sheddon, the Secretary of the Navy.

26.93 No evidence was advanced to support such speculation, and Mr Mason had the grace to say, ‘This is only speculations … of an old public servant’. But this material from Mr Mason has become the basis of an allegation of a cover-up of knowledge received by the Navy on 19 November 1941, that SYDNEY was engaged in a battle on that day, yet nothing was done until a search was organised on 23 November, to start on 24 November 1941.

26.94 In order that readers can form their own impression of the ‘evidence’, the objectivity of the questioning, and the quality of the material, Mr Mason’s evidence is reproduced here in full:

**Mr Mason:**  *Reads Statement he has written.*

From my own records of it:

After dinner of an evening I usually went up to my office, then located at the station, to see the commanding officer with any administrative work on hand. Sometimes we left it until after 8pm (2000 hrs rounds) but on other occasions I went up between 7 and 8 (ie 1900 to 2000 hrs) and got matters sorted before rounds. On the night of the 19th I arrived at the station to get Mac to sign something or other, what I cannot now recollect but obviously I got an armful of papers from my office, which was right outside the main entrance to the building. Now it’s possibly better to follow my diagram here. When I entered the main door and approached the open doorway into Mac’s office, Mac was on the telephone to Commander Newman, the Director of Signals and Communications at Navy Office. This was not an uncommon occurrence at any time and as usual, I picked up the identity of who he was talking to. By Mac’s mannerisms, you generally knew when he was talking to Newman or by the frequency of the Sir’s which were conveyed in very certain tones. Mac, if my recollections are correct, gave me a hush sign with his hand as I retired to the passageway.

Next, Chief Petty Officer Telegraphist Ben Tiller, who was standing in the passageway came toward me and I asked Ben: “What’s the panic about?” The term panic had a fairly wide connotation, including anything out of the ordinary. I clearly recall using those words. Ben Tiller replied “The Sydney has a queer customer”, I thought he said “baled up in the Indian Ocean and is trying to identify it”. If those were not his exact words, they were pretty close to it. I’ve always reflected that the words “baled up” were in the statement, but I suppose I could be wrong. Neil Pennicuik, my next door neighbour,
the Senior Petty Officer Telegraphist was located further up the passageway and was watching through the glass observation panel what was going on in the W/T room. I cannot recall any lengthy conversation with Ben other than to indicate I had some things for Mac to sign and I didn’t look like getting him for some time. All of this happened in a short space of time.

Suddenly I heard Mac drop the earpiece of the telephone on the desk, I know this because I saw it either then or a short time later on the way back to my own office and he started out of his office into the passageway. My eyes were on Mac at this juncture. He said something like this to me: “Not now Mason, I’m busy”. Again, as far as my memory serves me, those were his words. Just then, Petty Officer Telegraphist Tubby Hamilton (Bruce Hamilton) literally burst through the glass doors from the W/T room and entered the passageway and addressed Mac in a loud imperative voice: “He says he’s about to open fire”. At this time I could see the ship shore table through the observation panel, which ran almost the full length of the passageway, and both headsets were lying on the table unattended but a WRAN walked over from the right hand side of the W/T room and picked up the nearest handset, the right hand one, and placed one phone to her ear … Just then Mac virtually shouted to Hamilton to: “Get back to the set” and both Mac and Tubby rushed to the W/T room and took up positions on the ship shore table. I watched them grab a headset each and I’m sure the WRAN handed her headset to Mac. I think Mac occupied the right hand set and Tubby the left. Over the years I’ve assumed that the WRAN who picked up the right hand set and put the phone to her ear to be Joan Hodges, but others have told me since that Joan was not on watch that night at that time and it was probably June McLeod …

I suppose I gave up for the night and decided to grab Mac first thing in the morning. I’m sure I had no sense of alarm when I left the station, although I was conscious that the Sydney could have been in action, there was nothing novel about that in wartime. When I arrived at the station at about 7.45am the next day, Mac I thought must have been on the job all night and he was in conference with Hamilton and Tiller in his office. Later he was conferring with Hamilton only. In the normal course of events Hamilton would have been at home asleep having had the night watch and he was not very welcome and made myself scarce. At odd periods in the morning I tried to get Mac’s attention but he was preoccupied in pounding the teleprinter furiously to Newman at Navy Office. It was on the way home from lunch that I picked up the loose ends from my next-door neighbour Neil Pennicuik. I asked him what it was all about and he told me “it looks as though the Sydney had gone”. He also told me that the moment Hamilton, who had apparently been monitoring ship shore and been told to keep Mac informed of any developments whilst he was on the phone to Newman, got up to give Mac the message about somebody opening fire, another message was heard by nearby operators echoing from the headset laying on the desk, on the table unattended and it’s a very reasonable presumption that that was the message which impelled the
WRAN Telegraphist to go over and pick up the headset and place the single phone to her ear. That is consistent with what I witnessed through the glass panel. Neil then advanced the message to me that we lost it, meaning the message. Of course our resources were thinly spread and there were not many spare bodies around, however, there is a story that the last message, or the one that was lastly missed anyway, was recorded by another operator and he noted this down and still has a copy of the message in his diary. This is no part of my observations, although I will give you what I know of it later.

(Now, I don’t know whether I should speculate at all on this: what was the Government’s position in a thing like this? The PM is in a state of shock. Everything was being done to get the intelligence together. Get the information together and then decide what to do. That’s obviously what occurred. Now, I’ll read something here that I’ve written down.)

What would you do as a commanding officer if you thought such a message had inadvertently or through other causes been missed? Or similarly, would you do if you wanted to be certain that all the material relating to the matter had been accounted for, place yourself in the Government’s position too, especially what reaction would you expect from Navy Office and Newman? Make a search, of course, and as that would be an operational matter and not something of my concern, it is not unusual that I would have no knowledge of a search of every desk, waste paper basket, or bin the next morning. If I did I didn’t take much notice of it because these radio people were not infrequently searching waste paper baskets and the like. I’ve done cipher work at sea and we lost a message – it happens.

Mr Kennedy: Did you notice them looking for scraps? I think you mentioned to me on the phone that they appeared to be looking around for signals.

Mr Mason: Yes, this is what they were looking for. When we got there in the morning, several RANS, I think Dickins was one of the men, and they were all involved in searching every square inch of the place. Now, of course Harman had two functions, there was the general radio communications work for fleet, fleet work, low frequency stuff. They used to receive and transmit on creed relays and high speed stuff and quite a volume of stuff flowed through Harman and ended up at Navy Office. Now, one important point here is that where they used to carry out the secret decoding, intelligence work or the Naval Intelligence, or the Y-hut. Be careful in recording this. The Y-Hut was separately staffed and they were quite a group of skilful operators. They received the material and so-forth, but not the general run of stuff, they carried out the listening post jobs and all this sort of thing.

Mr Kennedy: Who was Dickins?

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109 NAA 111 0048 at 0049
Mr Mason: Harold Dickins? He was just one of the radio operators at Harman. I don’t know what’s happened to him. He was around when I last time I heard but I haven’t met up with him for years.

Mr Kennedy: First of all, I think it’s mentioned somewhere that you’ve gone there on your way home, had you been visiting your wife in hospital; you just had a child or something?

Mr Mason: My son was born in Queanbeyan in October.

Mr Kennedy: So that’s where the mention is.

Mr Mason: I don’t think that had much to do with, Once Japan came into the war they kicked us out of the official residences and turned them over to the RANs accommodation …

Mr Kennedy: So Japan came in December so ……..

Mr Mason: and my wife went to Adelaide.

Yes, that’s right. See the SYDNEY was sunk a month before the Japs came into the war as it were, roughly.

Mr Kennedy: Exactly, now you’ve gone to Harman and who were the people that can you remember seeing when you went in?

Mr Mason: Who were the people?

Mr Kennedy: As you went into the centre, who was there?

Mr Mason: (Shows diagram/plan) Mac was in his office there, Tiller was there, that’s me, and Pennicuik was there, and there was the W/T door and Hamilton rushed out there and met Mac there and they tore back into the station again.

Mr Kennedy: Why did you leave that evening in the middle of this flap, did you feel that you were totally extra to what was going on, that it was such a panic?

Mr Mason: Panic is a normal part of Naval life, I couldn’t get Mac, that was my function to get him to assign certain things and so forth, his not available I’ll give it up but the fact that they mentioned an action, I probably went through my mind not something as imperative.

Mr Kennedy: It could have been any action?

Mr Mason: That’s right; don’t forget that there were the Australian troops getting thrashed and all sorts of things. You accept this during war time there’s not much use getting in a …… the jobs got to go on.

Mr Kennedy: So Mac was through to Melbourne.

Mr Mason: Yeah he was onto Newman.

Mr Kennedy: How do you know he was on to Newman?
Mr Mason: By the general tone of him, Newman was his Melbourne contact. He didn’t speak to the Admirals themselves unless they wanted to speak to him, or unless it was the Secretary of the Naval Board like McCandie or someone like that ... Newman was the Director of Communications and Signals and it was an automatic open line to them and Newman took charge of it there.

Mr Kennedy: What time of the evening was this? Can you recall?

Mr Mason: I went up at around about 8 o’clock, around about quarter to 8, or something like that. Part of the action must have been on by then.

Mr Kennedy: Exactly, with the different time zones and whatever time zones they kept.

Mr Mason: We kept Zulu time and WA was keeping Zulu. Kormoran was on the other side of that. The time can lead you up a garden path, I think. The fact it was daylight, according to our time.

Mr Kennedy: You’ve since had correspondence that indicates that Harman might not have been the only station that heard signals?

Mr Mason: Well, let’s face it. The different stations that happened around were, first Jandakot, and at that particular time they were probably off for afternoon tea, they used to do this.110

Mr Kennedy: Bob, basically what correspondence have you got from Ian McDonald where he mentions the other signals?

Mr Mason: The question you should really put to me is what other stations were or could be involved? First of all Flinders Naval Depot, which was the central one for Navy Office then you have Jandakot in WA, Coonawarra at Darwin. Garden Island was another. I don’t know why Garden Island didn’t hear something. They’re absolutely negative in the whole thing.

… Continuous watch all the time, it was an integrated affair. I’m not conversant with the technical way they did this, but I do know that sometimes Garden Island was on, sometimes they weren’t, and the same thing with Flinders Naval Depot and I think this is what might have happened with some of the stuff here. There’s just a possibility that when the message was missed, which we couldn’t find, was received it wasn’t received at Flinders Naval Depot because rounds were on. Everything was stopped because of rounds. And in Western Australia it was afternoon tea, one of these human things. Harman was the centre of everything.

Mr Kennedy: How would you describe rounds?

110 PTE.008.0330_A
Mr Mason: The Captain and his first Lieutenant and others would go over the whole of the establishment, that’s what’s called rounds; they would go over the whole establishment and have a look at the works. David has probably been on rounds at different times, I’ve been on the business end of it but that’s what rounds is and the commanding officer takes time and goes through the works of the station or ship as the case may be and that’s it. This usually chews up a bit of time so it is possible that something slipped because of the incidents of rounds at Flinders Naval Depot and afternoon tea at Jandakot, just one of these types of things. Over the years I’ve kept in touch with Archie McLachlan and he wouldn’t talk about it, he’d waved his hand and he wouldn’t want to talk about it all. I expect he felt he would be subject to the Crimes Act. But he was a very straight shooter, in his early days he was a Stawell Gift winner. He was a great athlete and he took to me as an old runner and we got along alright but after he retired he got very decrepit but he wouldn’t talk about Harman at all, about this action business.

Mr Kennedy: They were virtually sworn to secrecy or they decided

Mr Mason: We all were, this was part of the Code of Conduct, but how long does that bond of secrecy last?

Mr Kennedy: The impression is that they decided not to talk about the events of that night in particular rather than generally.

Mr Mason: I would say too that there’s was a KOM Raider amongst, that they realised that Prime Ministers and others didn’t want them to talk about it so they didn’t.

Mr Kennedy: This is a question that will be asked whether the concealment was at the level of Harman or whether it was higher up.

Mr Mason: Right higher up. I would say every Prime Minister then and since has endorsed the policy that nothing further should be said on the matter. Tom Frame was given an open slather, to find out what he wanted from the records and he’s made a very thorough examination of them and yet he doesn’t find any trace of this at all. It’s very obvious that the nation doesn’t want to talk about it. It suffered an ignominious defeat in circumstances which one could hardly believe.

Mr Kennedy: What would normally have been the chain of notification if Mac had spoken to Newman, what would happen from there?

Mr Mason: Newman had direct access to the Duty Admiral. I’ve got an idea that one of the Admirals was in London, I don’t know but he would had direct – Admiral Colvin.

Mr Kennedy: Ragnar Colvin?

Mr Mason: Might have been Admiral Colvin, whoever the admiral was. No doubt the top brass of navy would have been mustered immediately the …… department of defence and so forth, shedders,
others would have been notified immediately and brought in for discussion. It looks as though we’ve lost the SYDNEY, in unusual circumstances. This is only speculations or knowledge of procedures of an old public servant.

Mr Kennedy: What duties were you actually performing for McLachlan?

Mr Mason: I was his Chief writer.

Mr Kennedy: What does a Chief writer do?

Mr Mason: I had charge of the pay and the correspondence, the secretarial work and directly responsible to him. We finally got some more offices in as the place grew but my job was to fan it out to those involved, making sure Mac knew where he stood. The usual administrative duties.

Mr Kennedy: So you were basically like an executive officer on a submarine?

Mr Mason: I don’t know about that, don’t know that one. There were all sorts of duties and you never fully prescribed or anything like that and you got on and did them. Things were desperate those days you didn’t have time to do anything and the place was growing up, it grew from about 30-something W/T operators who were chaps from the First World War virtually, or the reduction in 1922 and this type of thing some of them were pretty good. They started the station in the first place; it really opened on Christmas Day 1939. Later on this commissioning of Harman, HMAS HARMAN is a subsequent event in the whole war time history of the station. It was a Harman W/T station and it had about 450 RANS or something like that and they finally commissioned it into HMAS HARMAN. I went down to Sydney and wrote up the ledgers and got the ledgers brought up and it was the week after the Japs had sunk the KUTTABUL. That was the week, it was a part of the duties and you got on and did them.

Mr Kennedy: It’s interesting that you mention the situation at the other wireless stations because this seems to reflect the opinions of a wireless operator on the Queen Mary, Jim Delaney, who said at that stage in Australia and the Indian Ocean the monitoring of radio signals would not have been very efficient.

Mr Mason: I couldn’t really comment on that because radio was at the stage then of developing rapidly, radar, radio, the Belconnen transmitter was the latest of any of them. It was the most up to date station low frequency station that you could listen with plain language if you wanted to in the South Atlantic and hear it clearly at Harman. It was a low frequency transmitter and that was the backbone of a lot of the communications. It was quite an exercise in getting that transmitter going, the STC put it in.
Mr Kennedy: What is your understanding of the Morse language being used in the message from Sydney?

Mr Mason: I’m not a radio man at all, but I do know that if there’s an imperative, there’s a code called ship shore code specially for ship shore work, it’s a self-evident code in other words, you might get 345T and that contains a whole gamut of a message. That type of thing they put it all together, but you’d have to study it to see how it stood at the time. The bloke you want to talk to about this is John Gorr in Canberra. John was there at the time, I’ve kept in touch with John roughly over the years. John became the radio engineer for Canberra.

Mr Kennedy: ……..

Mr Mason: Mitch Frankcom was one from Tuross. Mitch is very ill …

Mr Kennedy: Sorry, what had happened? You said

Mr Mason: They had a Code of Conduct if the boss said you’re not to talk about this they don’t talk about it.

Mr Kennedy: And John Gorr was at Harman at the time?

Mr Mason: Yes that’s right he was there … He can tell you the score. he was there.

Mr Kennedy: What was your mention there of Shedden?

Mr Mason: Sir Frederick Shedden? I think he has written an official history of Navy and of this particular action, it’s his history and it reflects probably the official view and the official view only.

Mr Kennedy: Do you think he would have been aware?

Mr Mason: Aware of it, yeah from all the records available it was quite likely he was, quite likely. But I couldn’t say that’s beyond the scope of my knowledge except that he was a very influential person and he did approach us in treasury about a number of old naval things such as the strike actions, riverboats and the HMAS Adelaide when she was built and those other things. He went back over the whole scope of naval history.111

26.95 It is important to distil what LS Mason’s ‘evidence’ is:

- He, and others, were told by CPO Tiller that SYDNEY had ‘bailed up a quere customer in the Indian Ocean and was trying to identify her’. He did not say who had heard such a message or that CPO Tiller had done so.

111 PTE.008.0331_A
• PO Hamilton, who had been using earphones to listen, said to LCDR McLachlan, ‘He says he is about to open fire’.

• During the ‘few brief seconds’ whilst all headsets were abandoned, ‘3 or 4 people including a couple of WRANs heard a short message being transmitted but being several yards away could not recognise it’.

• LCDR McLachlan, CPO Tiller and PO Hamilton agreed between themselves not to disclose these events for fear of disciplinary proceedings.

• On 20 November 1941 all who had been present on the evening of 19 November 1941 were ‘sworn to secrecy’ about those events.

• LCDR McLachlan might have told CMDR Newman, who might have told his superior officers, who might have told the Naval Board, who might have told the Secretary of the Navy, Sir Frederick Sheddon.

• Nothing was ever publicly said about this matter, so there was a cover-up. If the cover-up was a high-level one it meant that the Navy, and possibly the Government, knew of SYDNEY’s engagement on 19 November 1941 but did nothing about contacting her or searching for her before 24 November 1941. This could have cost lives.

26.96 Implicit in the foregoing, but nowhere expressed, is that those present on 19 November 1941 honoured their vow or order of secrecy and said nothing. That explains their silence. If senior Naval officers and officials were informed, they were part of a cover-up. Why they would engage in such a cover-up is not made clear.

26.97 It is relevant to ask whether any of the people present on 19 November 1941 have discussed these matters since LS Mason’s allegations became public. Those people include Ms Marion Stevens, Mrs DM Wright, Mrs Judy Saunders and Mr Alan Cohn.

26.98 Consistent with the pattern of cover-up theories, there is no documentary evidence whatsoever to give the allegation any support.
Ms Marion Stevens

26.99 Ms Marion Stevens was present on the night of 19 November 1941. She worked A watch with PO Hamilton, as she always did.\textsuperscript{112}

In an interview with Mr David Kennedy she told him that Molly Snell, daughter of LCDR McLachlan, had described LS Mason’s story as ‘a pack of lies’.\textsuperscript{113} She also described his statement that LCDR McLachlan had ‘raced out’ at the same time someone had heard a message regarding a ship making ‘an opening fire or something’ as a ‘figment of somebody’s imagination because it never happened’.\textsuperscript{114}

The statement by LS Mason that LCDR McLachlan and PO Hamilton were listening on a headset and went back and forth to the phone, with the consequence that the radios were at some time left unattended, was based on a misunderstanding by LS Mason, who was not a telegraphist. There were, in fact, two receiving sets, and each had two sets of earphones. One receiving set was always manned by the A watch WRANS. The second set was available to others—in that instance, LCDR McLachlan and PO Hamilton. Their leaving that second set did not mean the receivers were unmanned.

Ms Stevens said there was no ‘panic’ on 19 November 1941. Nothing was heard from SYDNEY. It was not known she was lost. She said she was never ‘sworn to silence’.

The occasion when there was some ‘tension’ in relation to SYDNEY was on 24 November 1941, when they were instructed to call SYDNEY repeatedly using the ‘I’ method. They did so, calling SYDNEY between each message to other ships. SYDNEY was the only ship Ms Stevens had ever called in that fashion. LS Mason attended on the evening of 19 November because he was being disciplined by LCDR McLachlan for photographing within the WRANS quarters’ perimeters and having WRANS in his cottage for photography purposes.

In 1941 LS Mason had asked Ms Stevens, ‘What happened?’ to which she replied, ‘Nothing, we called the Sydney and didn’t hear anything’. He did not believe her.

26.100 Ms Stevens’ interview material with Mr Kennedy was consistent with her submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry\textsuperscript{115}, to which she wrote:

\textsuperscript{112} NAA.102.0062 at 0063
\textsuperscript{113} PTE.008.0332_A
\textsuperscript{114} PTE.008.0333_A
\textsuperscript{115} PINQ.SUBS.003.0069
Attached please find a copy of my Statutory Declaration covering events on the “first” watch at H.M.A. Naval W/T Station Harman back in 1941 when we called the H.M.A.S. SYDNEY, also copy of my first leave pass dated the 15th September (Monday) to 26th September (Friday) 1941, and a Department of Information photo of the Nr.1 Receiving Station as it was in 1941. As you can see it’s very small and if any signal had been received we’d all have known about it. **NOTHING WAS RECEIVED.**

Bob Mason was at the station because he had to report to the C.P.O. Tel as he was under punishment. He had Wrans in a cottage (to take their photographs) however it was against the direct orders of the Captain. Before we arrived in Harman the Captain made it very clear to the WRAN ratings they would be drafted to sea if caught in any of the Wrans cottages or even inside their cottage hedges. Mason was very upset when the Captain punished him. As the Captain’s Writer he seemed to consider himself above punishment. Mason could often be heard raising his voice to the Captain, no wonder the Captain wanted to get rid of him. This can be confirmed by Mrs Sue Timbury (Nee Sue Rogers – WR39).

David Kennedy did not believe me as his story based on Mason’s fiction made better copy than my facts.

Bob Mason is the only person I know of who thought something underhand was going on. He searched for over 50 years and never found anyone who could confirm his peculiar ideas. I’ve no idea where he got the idea that we were all sworn to silence, no one else I’ve ever spoken to has heard about it. I think he was mentally sick with dislike for the Captain.116

In her statutory declaration she wrote:

(a) I think someone has a vivid imagination when I read what was reported as being received. **Nothing was received.** It was such a small W/T office, if anything had been received we would all have known.117

(b) There was one operator on the ship/shore set – not two. Possibly, it was a spare set they were using if there were two operators. Mason was not a Telegraphist and had a very limited knowledge. P.O. Hamilton was the P.O. of “A” Watch and Ben Tiller was the C.P.O.Tel (Chief Petty Officer – there was only one at Harman). He was the person Mason had to report to nightly. I am surprised that he claimed he was ashore as his leave had been stopped and that was the reason he had to report to the station at night so he

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116 PINQ.SUBS.003.0069 at 0069 to 0070
117 PINQ.SUBS.003.0069 at 0071
could not go ashore after the evening meal. He had to report after the last “Liberty Boat” left.118

(c) All receivers had two “Phone-Jack connections”, so two lots of earphones could be used (for change over of operators), but I’m surprised that he claimed one person was the Captain and the other the Chief. If it had been the set used by the operator allocated to the circuit, one would have been the duty operator. I think it would have been a spare set in use. The Petty Officer of the watch (Hamilton) would always see all his sets were properly manned. The Captain was in and out of his office talking to the Navy Office. A lot of what Mason wrote was extremely exaggerated and was obviously written by someone with limited knowledge of wireless office procedures.119

(d) I never heard of anyone being sworn to silence. I’ve contacted an ex-RAN Coder on the opposite 48 regarding this and he had never heard about it. The first time I heard about it was in a book written by Mrs Barbara Winters “Intrigue Master”. We were under the Crimes Act, so why?120

(e) Bob Mason had been asking questions for over 50 years and he was only interested if you agreed with him. He decided, back in 1941, that something underhand went on and nothing would shake him. He was the only person with this peculiar idea. I avoided him and never thought he would record such exaggerated details when he could not get people to agree with him. In 1992, he was still trying to get the details confirmed when we were in Canberra for the 50th anniversary of the Commissioning of H.M.A.S. HARMAN. I was staying with Mr and Mrs John Gore (ex-RAN Telegraphist – since deceased). John drove Judy Alley and her husband over to see Bob Mason but he could not get any information he wanted so he ignored the lot. Bob asked me back in 1941 or 1942 “what happened” and when I said: “nothing”, he didn’t believe me.121

26.101 In a supplementary submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry (No. 49A) Ms Stevens made three further points:

(a) One thing that does not appear to have occurred to anyone is the probability that no CAPTAIN or any other officer would authorize a message “AM ABOUT TO OPEN FIRE”, The KORMORAN would have been monitoring the SYDNEY and a message like this would give the KORMORAN a distinct advantage to get off the first ‘shell’.122

118 PINQ.SUBS.003.0069 at 0071
119 PINQ.SUBS.003.0069 at 0071
120 PINQ.SUBS.003.0069 at 0071
121 PINQ.SUBS.003.0069 at 0072
122 PINQ.SUBS.016.0067
(b) Darwin and Perth would have monitored the same frequency as Harman for Ship/Shore traffic. **NOTHING WAS RECEIVED.** However, it is most unlikely Perth, Darwin and Harman would all have missed the same signal.123

(c) No Telegraphist (RAN or WRAN) ever left their sets unattended (to get a drink or visit the Heads). Between Schedules on Service 9/ and Rugby Broadcasts there was always a Tel. available to relieve you and if not the Petty Officer of the Watch would always do so. We had a cup of tea every two hours and it was delivered to your desk by the Coder, or anyone not working at that time (mentioned in one submission). If you were busy you may not have had time to drink it but it was necessary on Ship/Shore which was often very quiet and it helped keep people awake.124

**Ms DM Wright**

26.102 Ms DM Wright was also present at Harman on 19 November 1941 but apparently on B watch.125 In her submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry she wrote:

During the period when HMAS SYDNEY was apparently overdue, my clear recollection and experience was of receiving firm and urgent instructions from our OIC, Lieutenant Commander McLachlan, through the Petty Officer of the watch, to listen out on the designated ship-shore radio frequency for a signal from HMAS SYDNEY. To my knowledge, no one was aware at that time of the encounter of HMAS SYDNEY with an enemy ship on the 19 November in the Indian Ocean off the West Australian coast as HMAS SYDNEY did **not break W/T silence** to advise of the impending engagement. Certainly not as far as HMAS HARMAN’s reception was concerned. Also, as **no signal of distress** was received from HMAS SYDNEY at HMAS HARMAN, presumably after the fatal encounter with the enemy German raider “Kormoran”, it may be assumed that its wireless apparatus had been destroyed.

During my four and a half years wartime service in the RAN, together with the other W/T operators at HMAS HARMAN, I experienced many calls on the ship-shore radio frequency from mostly merchant ships in distress, having been attacked by our enemies. Through static noise and enemy interference we were elated when we were successful in obtaining the ships position so that any survivors could be located.126

Plainly, Ms Wright rejects LS Mason’s account, saying she had heard nothing he reported in his memoir. She confirmed in an interview with

123 PINQ.SUBS.016.0067
124 PINQ.SUBS.016.0067 at 0068
125 NAA.111.0045 at 0046
126 PINQ.SUBS.005.0122
Mr Kennedy that receivers were never left unattended and that no signals from SYDNEY were received at Harman.\textsuperscript{127} There could thus be no basis for the alleged cover-up.

**Mrs Judy Saunders**

26.103 Also present on the night of 19 November 1941 at the Harman signals room was Mrs Judith Saunders, née Alley.\textsuperscript{128} In her first submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry she wrote:

> I have been asked to make a submission by the Naval Association of Canberra regarding the sinking of HMAS SYDNEY.

Considering all this happened 56 years ago my memory is sketchy as you will realise.

I was a telegraphist on watch at HMAS Harman on 19th November. I remember the C.O. had the headphones on, which was most unusual. I cannot say if he received a message [sic] or had been called in because of one, but he put the headphones down and rushed into his office – we were told it was to ring Navy Board in Melbourne.

From then on we all kept watch on all possible channels listening for a message from the ship. Somehow we all knew it was the Sydney we were searching for.\textsuperscript{129}

She later corrected this in a supplementary submission: ‘On reflection I realise my dating of the incident which occurred at Harman could be inaccurate, especially after speaking to the two other Wrans who feel perhaps it should have been “about” 19th’.\textsuperscript{130} Her evidence is thus equivocal. Nevertheless, it does not support LS Mason’s account of the supposed messages received and publicly announced; nor does it support any concept of a cover-up.

**Mr Alan Cohn**

26.104 Mr Alan Cohn was a senior coder at Harman.\textsuperscript{131} In his submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry he wrote:

> I served in the Royal Australian Navy from 1939 to 1945. My official number on mobilisation was PM 2216, but it was later changed to 24702. At the time of the loss of H.M.A.S. Sydney I was a senior Coder in one of the four watches at Harman. As such I was the immediate assistant to the Petty Officer Telegraphist of the watch, and was privy

\begin{footnotes}
\item[127] PINQ.SUBS.005.0122
\item[128] NAA.111.0043 at 0044
\item[129] PINQ.SUBS.001.0070
\item[130] PINQ.SUBS.009.0004
\item[131] NAA.102.0079 at 0080
\end{footnotes}
to all matters which occurred during a watch on which I was on duty. It was my duty to see that all signals received were sent to Navy Office, and re-routed to other addressees. Other coders decoded signals which passed through, but signals in cypher were left for officers at navy office to decypher.

On each watch one of the telegraphists listened on the ‘Ship/shore’ wave length, which was used by ships calling Harman, and most often by a warship, having regard to radio silence, on low power, giving an expected time of arrival signal at a port.

It is my clear remembrance that for several days a call went out from Harman/Belconnen to the Sydney, using, at least part of the time, her International standard call sign, and not a coded call sign or Delivery Group, as would be used on a cypher or coded signal.

No answer was received while I was on watch. I am as certain as I can be that if any signal had been received on any of the four watches, in my position as senor Coder of the watch, I would have been told about it.

I cannot help feeling with a substantial degree of certainty that I may well be the most senior watchkeeping rating who was at Harman at the time and still alive.

It is my considered opinion that no message was received by Harman from H.M.A.S. Sydney at or after action with the German ship Kormoran.\(^{132}\)

### Summary

26.105 I reject the record of events alleged by LS Mason for the following reasons:

- It is contrary to the evidence of Ms Marion Stevens.
- It is contrary to the evidence of Mrs DM Wright.
- It is contrary to the evidence of Mr Alan Cohn.
- It is unsupported by any documentary or other material.
- Ms Stevens’ evidence provides a basis for the possible fabrication of the account by Mr Mason.
- Mr Mason’s account is contrary to common sense. No warship captain would announce by radio that he was about to open fire. To do so would be to alert the enemy, which would be assumed to be

\(^{132}\) PINQ.SUBS.013.0085
monitoring radio transmissions. It is now known that KORMORAN was monitoring SYDNEY’s transmissions, but the German survivors provided no evidence of SYDNEY sending any such message.

- No warship captain would send a signal, ‘had bailed up a quere customer in the Indian Ocean and was trying to identify her’.133

First, radio silence was ordered to be maintained. Second, if it was to be broken, the message would have been much more precise regarding location and other details. Third, warships maintained a plot, knew if ships were to be expected, and had a mandatory recognition procedure to be followed.

- The evidence is overwhelming that receivers in the signals room were not left unattended. Thus the initial factual basis for LS Mason’s cover-up theory does not exist.

- If such a signal had been sent from SYDNEY it would probably have been recorded at Fremantle and Darwin. There is no evidence of receipt of such a signal.

26.106 It is noteworthy that, to accept the material advanced by LS Mason, one has to accept that LCDR McLachlan, CPO Tiller and PO Hamilton conspired to cover up a breach of duty. If one accepts that CMDR Newman was informed of these messages (something about which there is no evidence whatsoever but something on which LS Mason was prepared to speculate) LS Mason must have been part of a different cover-up—namely, not to disclose to his superiors that SYDNEY had in fact sent signals that had been received on 19 November 1941. If, as LS Mason was prepared further to speculate, CMDR Newman informed his superiors so that ultimately the Chief of Naval Staff, the Naval Board and even the Secretary of the Navy were informed, they too must have been part of this conspiracy not to disclose the received signals.

If any of that was true, all the conduct of the Government, Navy, Air Force and Merchant Navy search for SYDNEY and all the cables passing from the Naval Board to the Admiralty and Commander-in-Chief China were knowingly based on a falsity—that SYDNEY had not been heard of since she departed Fremantle on 11 November 1941.

The notion is ridiculous, and it is all built on the unsupported evidence of a man who said he overheard statements made by two people in a room where there were others who, so far as the available evidence goes, heard no such statements.

133 NLA.001.0001 at 0003
26.107 I have no doubt that either LS Mason’s recollections are false or he fabricated his account. Only those conspiracy theorists with a preconceived commitment to a cover-up theory would give his recollections any credence. On the available material, no independent tribunal of fact, acting rationally, could accept those recollections.

**Conclusion**

26.108 SYDNEY sent no signals immediately before, during or after the engagement with KORMORAN.