3 The raider KORMORAN

The launch of STEIERMARK

3.1 HSK KORMORAN was built in 1938 and began life as STEIERMARK, built by Krupp Germaniawerft at Kiel for Hamburg-Amerikanische Packetfahrt Actien-Gesellschaft—the Hamburg–Amerika Line, or HAPAG.

HAPAG was described in the 1940 edition of Talbot-Booth’s *Merchant Ships* as ‘the world’s greatest shipping concern’. Among other things, the line offered passenger and cargo services to the Netherlands East Indies and Australia via the Cape of Good Hope. STEIERMARK was intended for the East Asia run and was described by Talbot-Booth as a motor and diesel electric–driven vessel of 9,400 tons launched in 1938.

![Photo courtesy of Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte, Stuttgart](image_url)

Figure 3.1 STEIERMARK being fitted out at Krupp Germaniawerft in Kiel

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1 PUB.023.0001 at 0007
2 PUB.023.0001 at 0007
3 PUB.023.0001 at 0013
4 PUB.023.0001 at 0003
5 PUB.014.0001 at 0101

*The Loss of HMAS SYDNEY II* 89
3.2 In 1940 STEIERMARK was requisitioned by the Kriegsmarine (the German Navy). The Kriegsmarine designated her a *Handelsschutzkreuzer*, or ‘merchant navy protection cruiser’. The abbreviation for *Handelsschutzkreuzer* was ‘HSK’, and the official name for STEIERMARK was HSK 8. For its operational purposes, the Kriegsmarine gave HSK 8 the name ‘Schiff 41’ (Ship 41).

3.3 In Germany’s official military records the Kriegsmarine classed Ship 41 as a *Sperrbrecher*, or ‘pathfinder’ ship—a ship, with a special hull and filled with cork, that was intended for steaming ahead of a convoy of merchant ships and exploding mines that would otherwise damage or destroy convoy ships.

3.4 The Allies knew Ship 41 as ‘Raider G’. It was not until October 1941 that Allied intelligence services identified Ship 41 and concluded that Raider G was probably STEIERMARK. Until that time STEIERMARK had been known to Allied intelligence as but one of some hundreds of German merchant ships that were potential raiders.
3.5 The conversion of Ship 41 took place at the Deutsche Werft Finkenwerder shipyard.\textsuperscript{12} It was carried out secretly, and the ship’s crew, who assisted with the conversion works, wore civilian clothes at the time as part of the requirement to keep the work secret.\textsuperscript{13} The refitting work was carried out under the overall supervision and design of a special department of the Seekriegsleitung, or Naval War Staff, based in Berlin.\textsuperscript{14}

3.6 The conversion of STEIERMARK into a \textit{Handelsschutzkreuzer} took from March to October 1940\textsuperscript{15} and involved the following works:

- \textit{Fitting six 15-centimetre (5.9-inch) guns}. The fitting of 15-centimetre guns to a merchant vessel posed special problems for the designers and engineers who worked on converting STEIERMARK to HSK 8. This was a general problem affecting the German raiders of World War 2, all of which were fitted with 15-centimetre guns. Muggenthaler described some of the challenges:

  First of all, the decks had to be stiffened to carry the five-ton weights and absorb the shock of the guns’ discharge, no matter where they were mounted. And their location itself was a major difficulty which had to be solved in a different manner in each ship. The 5.9s had to be free to traverse a maximum number of degrees, and their elevation could not be encumbered. Ideally, they should all have been set on the center line to permit training to both starboard and port, but that was impossible on a merchantman cluttered with deckhouses and cargo-handling gear. Never more than 30 percent of the guns could be placed in hatches with specially raised coamings. Of the rest, a few were hidden inside folding deckhouses or behind false bulwarks, but many had to be installed below the weather decks or in newly drawn decks as their positioning depended as much on the contours of the ship as it did on naval requirements. Below-deck mounts affected the arrangements of ammunition rooms and hoists, limited living and storage space, and necessitated the cutting of large apertures into the slab-sided hulls where they did not belong. A lot of ingenuity and calculations was needed before a practical system of securing the openings was devised. The flaps and hinges had to be exceptionally strong to withstand the pounding of seas that have battered oceangoing vessels to scrap, tight enough to keep out water, and indiscernible to an outsider. After many knee-to-knee, shirt-sleeve sessions and attempts with scale models, the exhausted engineers and seamen were able to draw up some promising blueprints for a contraption that

\textsuperscript{12} WIT.011.0183\_R at 0185\_R
\textsuperscript{13} WIT.011.0183\_R at 0185\_R
\textsuperscript{14} WIT.011.0183\_R at 0185\_R
\textsuperscript{15} NAA.012.0382\_LENSCH at 0384\_LENSCH
resembled an old-fashioned bread-box door. At the touch of a lever to expose the guns, the heavy steel flaps, precisely balanced, slid upward and in effortlessly.\textsuperscript{16}

Ship 41’s 15-centimetre guns were SK L/45 C/13 guns\textsuperscript{17}, which had been used as the secondary armament on Germany’s dreadnoughts and battle cruisers and as the main armament on light cruisers during World War 1.\textsuperscript{18}

Figure 3.3 shows the location of the six 15-centimetre guns fitted to STEIERMARK. From the military perspective, the limitations of using a merchant ship as a warship are apparent from the plan view. Only two of the 15-centimetre guns are on the ship’s centreline, with the ability to fire to both port and starboard.

The arrangement of the 15-centimetre guns in Ship 41 meant that she could use four of the guns in a broadside. A broadside by Ship 41 to port involved the port forward 15-centimetre gun mounted in the ship’s bow, the port aft 15-centimetre gun placed at her stern and the single 15-centimetre guns housed in her number 2 and 4 hatches. The fore and aft firing arcs of the two 15-centimetre guns housed in the number 2 and 4 hatches were limited by the ship’s superstructure and fittings.\textsuperscript{20}

CAPT Detmers noted that STEIERMARK’s No. 3 15-centimetre gun, which the German battle cruiser SEYDLITZ had used in the Battle of Jutland, had been ‘knocked around disregarded in the yards for years’ until it was put into service again on STEIERMARK, but he

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3.3.png}
\caption{Plan view of Ship 41\textsuperscript{19}}
\end{figure}
said it was still ‘first-class artillery’. He believed the 15-centimetre guns could fire accurately on targets at 10,000 metres. To put that figure in context, in SYDNEY’s famous action off Crete’s Cape Spada in July 1940 she had begun firing on the Italian cruiser BANDE NERE at 20,000 yards and on BARTOLOMEO COLLEONI at a range of 18,500 yards.

A line drawing of Ship 41 (see Figure 3.4) shows the location of the starboard 15-centimetre guns behind the side-plating in the forecastle and in the poop only by use of cutaway lines.

The 15-centimetre guns mounted in the bow and stern were hidden from view by camouflage plates, which were ‘flaps’—pieces of metal that could be swung back by use of a counterweight to allow the gun behind to be trained. The two 15-centimetre guns housed in the hatches were protected from view from abeam by the use of specially made coamings, which were lowered using a hydraulic system. In warfare, one disadvantage of housing these guns behind ‘walls [that] could be dropped around them’ was that the guns could not be depressed sufficiently for low-angle firing, making them difficult to bring to bear in heavy weather because the gun sights would be obstructed by the upper deck.

![Die STEIERMARK nach dem Umbau zur KORMORAN. J. Lewandowski](image)

*Figure 3.4 Cutaway line drawing of Ship 41 from abeam, showing the position of the 15-centimetre guns in the bow and stern*
The SK L/45 guns fired a projectile weighing 45.3 kilograms at a muzzle velocity of 835 metres per second. In comparison, SYDNEY’s main guns, the BL Mark XXIIIs, were of 6-inch calibre and fired a projectile weighing 50.8 kilograms at a muzzle velocity of 841 metres per second.

There were nine men in the gun crews for each 15-centimetre gun.

- **Fitting secondary guns.** Five 2-centimetre guns were fitted to STEIERMARK. Figure 3.3 shows their location. These guns were also camouflaged and were raised through the deck by hydraulic lift. Figure 3.5 shows a 2-centimetre gun on the raider ATLANTIS. The technical designation of these 2-centimetre guns as ‘C/30 leichte Flak’ suggests that they were included on Ship 41 for use as light anti-aircraft guns. CAPT Detmers was, however, not restricted in using these weapons against aerial targets, and in the course of KORMORAN’s raiding such weapons were occasionally used against surface targets.

Two 37-millimetre guns were fitted to STEIERMARK. One of them was installed on the port side and the other to starboard, both by the bridge. They were protected from view by metal sheets. The metal sheet was pushed down to allow the gun to fire. Figure 3.3 shows the location of these 37-millimetre guns.

The 37-millimetre guns fitted to STEIERMARK were not Naval anti-aircraft guns: such guns had been impossible to obtain. They were obtained following a conversation between LEUT Skeries, who was the gunnery officer posted to Ship 41, and men serving at a German Army artillery depot. The technical designation of these guns as 37-millimetre Panzerabwehrkanonen suggests that the guns were designed as anti-tank weapons but were subsequently modified.
Although the plans for the conversion works show that a 6-centimetre signal gun was fitted to STEIERMARK, CAPT Detmers had that gun removed after he was posted to Ship 41. He thought such a weapon a ‘waste of time’.

- **Fitting torpedo tubes.** Six torpedo tubes were fitted to STEIERMARK. Two above-water torpedo tubes were mounted in a battery to starboard and two were in a battery to port. There were also two single tubes mounted below the waterline, one to starboard and one to port.

All the torpedo tubes were serviced and operated from a single compartment that extended across the breadth of STEIERMARK. Figure 3.3 shows the location of the torpedo tubes.

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42 BUA.100.0014.0107, KORMORAN had the same guns, the remains of which can be seen in her wreck photographs—for example, FSF.006.0115.
43 BUA.100.0137.0001 at 0004
44 PUB.022.0001 at 0017
45 NAA.012.0381_LUFT at 0382_LUFT
46 TRAN.006.0001_R at 0019_R
The underwater tubes were fixed and were not fitted with modern extension sleeves. Consequently, as soon as the torpedoes left the tube they could be affected by the firing vessel’s speed, so they could be used only if the speed of the firing vessel was less than 3 knots.48 Further, since they were fixed, the ship had to be steered to a course to allow the torpedoes to bear on a target.49

In contrast, the above-water torpedo tube batteries were mounted on a cogwheel mechanism fitted with ratchets. The tube was pulled into the correct notch and the ratchet then pulled forward. When the target came into view, the torpedo was released.50

The torpedoes fitted in STEIERMARK were of the G7a type.51 They had a calibre of 533 millimetres52 and could be set at different speeds, depending on the target distance. At a range of 4,400 yards...
or less the torpedoes could be set for their maximum speed of 44 knots.\textsuperscript{53} The explosive carried in the torpedo consisted of about 660 pounds (or 300 kilograms)\textsuperscript{54} of ‘TNT/hexanite’.\textsuperscript{55}

The characteristics of the torpedoes were well known to Allied intelligence. \textit{Weekly Intelligence Report} number 29 of 27 September 1940 described the performance features and characteristics of the torpedoes.\textsuperscript{56}

- \textit{Construction of a corridor down the length of the ship}. A corridor running from stem to stern was built so that each man could reach his action station quickly and unobserved in case of sudden alarm.\textsuperscript{57}

- \textit{Creation of individual cabins for each crew member}. This was done with partitioning and timber from the holds, so that each man had his own bunk, table and cupboard. CAPT Detmers thought this important for the morale of his crew.\textsuperscript{58}

- \textit{Creation of accommodation for prisoners}. Accommodation, along with lavatories and washrooms, was built for prisoners, and there were some cells for individual prisoners.\textsuperscript{59}

- \textit{Creation of holds to store 5,200 tonnes of diesel fuel oil}. It was calculated that the 5,200 tonnes would allow STEIERMARK one year of cruising, assuming careful fuel consumption.

- \textit{Creation of facilities inside a hold to store, and from which to unload, two seaplanes for reconnaissance}.\textsuperscript{60} The seaplanes STEIERMARK carried were Arado 196s (see Figure 3.7).\textsuperscript{61} STEIERMARK did not have a catapult with which to launch aeroplanes, so relatively calm sea conditions were necessary if the crew were to move an Arado out of its hold by crane, lower it over the side of the ship and position it in the water. It took three hours to get an Arado clear, and it was often damaged in unloading or alighting.\textsuperscript{62} Although STEIERMARK carried two Arados, it appears only one of these aircraft was used, the other being held as a reserve and for spare parts.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{53} NAA.003.0141 and PUB.014.0001 at 0161
\textsuperscript{54} PUB.014.0001 at 0161
\textsuperscript{55} NAA.003.0141
\textsuperscript{56} NAA.003.0141
\textsuperscript{57} PUB.022.0001 at 0016
\textsuperscript{58} PUB.022.0001 at 0015 to 0016
\textsuperscript{59} PUB.022.0001 at 0016
\textsuperscript{60} PUB.019.0001 at 0067 and SPC.003.0037 at 0043
\textsuperscript{61} NAA.012.0379_RUF
\textsuperscript{62} NAA.012.0379_RUF
\textsuperscript{63} NAA.012.0089_WATTEROTT, NAA.012.0151_TUMMERS and NAA.012.0165_SCHWEIER at 0167_SCHWEIER
Creation of facilities inside a hold to store, and from which to unload, a special speedboat for use in laying mines.\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Leichtes Schnellboot} 3 (light speedboat 3), or LS 3, was built at the Zeppelin works at Friedrichshafen on Lake Constance and was delivered to \textit{STEIERMARK} in October 1940.\textsuperscript{66} It carried four mines—two abreast and two above those—and mounted a 2-centimetre machine cannon.\textsuperscript{67} LS 3 was 12.5 metres long and 3.46 metres wide\textsuperscript{68} and had a top speed of 22 knots and a range of 10 hours.

LEUT E Schäfer was in charge of LS 3, which was stored in Hold No. 6, just behind the aft mainmast (see Figure 3.8). The poop deck just behind Hold No. 6 greatly interfered with the launching and stowing away of LS 3—so much so that Ship 41’s crew discovered LS 3 could be launched only when the ship was making little or no way.\textsuperscript{69} LS 3 could not carry torpedoes.\textsuperscript{70}
Figure 3.8  A cutaway line drawing showing the holds in which the Arados and LS 3 were housed\textsuperscript{71}

Figure 3.9  The hoisting out of LS 2, the motor launch allocated to the raider KOMET\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{71} PUB.014.0001 at 0010
\textsuperscript{72} PUB.019.0001 at 0066
• **Fittings for the laying of mines.**\(^{73}\) **STEIERMARK** carried 360 moored mines (EMC) and 30 ground mines (TMB).\(^{74}\)

• **The addition of some armour protection for the chart house, the helm and the engine-room telegraph posts.**\(^{75}\) **STEIERMARK** had no armour protection for her bridge, hull, ship ends or crown. The guns were not enclosed in turrets and the crews that worked them had no protection against shrapnel or direct gunfire from an adversary.

• **Fitting of other equipment.** Also installed were a 3-metre rangefinder, a 1.25-metre rangefinder\(^{76}\), a searchlight that could be raised on the mast\(^{77}\), an apparatus for laying a smoke screen\(^{78}\), and compass equipment from the German survey ship PANTHER. The compass equipment consisted of a mother (or main) compass and four daughter (subsidiary) compasses, fitted one each side of the bridge as bearings compasses, one in the engine room for gunnery control and one as a reserve.

• **The removal of two pairs of samson posts.** The photographs of **STEIERMARK** in the shipyard at Kiel (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2) show that she was built with eight samson posts. Evidence given in December 1941, during the interrogation of sailors captured from **KORMORAN**, confirmed that **KORMORAN** carried two large masts and four samson posts (in pairs, with one pair fore of the funnel and one pair aft).\(^{79}\)

### Engines and propulsion

3.7 **STEIERMARK** was fitted with a diesel–electric drive and four diesel engines with a total capacity of 14,000 horsepower. Each of these engines had nine cylinders and drove a dynamo. The current was brought together at a central distributor and passed on to two electric motors that drove twin screws.\(^{80}\)

3.8 By 1941 motor or internal-combustion engines burning oil (as distinct from coal) had been adopted by about one-tenth of the world’s merchant tonnage.\(^{81}\) Steam was still the predominant source of power

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\(^{73}\) NAA.012.0380_RUF
\(^{74}\) PUB.017.0001 at 0526
\(^{75}\) PUB.022.0001 at 0015
\(^{76}\) PUB.068.0022_E
\(^{77}\) PUB.022.0001 at 0015
\(^{78}\) PUB.022.0001 at 0015
\(^{79}\) NAA.012.0141_WESTPHAL
\(^{80}\) Ship 41 had two auxiliary boilers, but these were for producing hot water and were not for propulsion. CORR.007.0034 at 0044
\(^{81}\) PUB.023.0001 at 0008
for such vessels. Coal-burning steamers could be recognised by a black ‘riband’ or by ‘gouts’ of black smoke when the boilers were being hand-fired. Oil-burning steamers usually had a whitish (light) haze above the funnel. Generally, coal-burning ships had a tall funnel, whilst the then modern motor-ship funnels were short (not more than 5 metres high), oval in section, and often very close to the navigating bridge.

3.9 STEIERMARK’s diesel–electric drive had important ramifications for the vessel’s performance as a commerce raider. It allowed her to embark on long-range cruising: she had a cruising range of 70,000 nautical miles at a speed of 10 knots. On the other hand, the diesel–electric drive provided a top speed of 17.5 or 18 knots at the beginning of STEIERMARK’s voyage; this compares with the 33 knots SYDNEY could achieve with her twin turbine–driven steam propulsion.

Fire control

3.10 STEIERMARK had fairly rudimentary fire-control mechanisms. According to CAPT Detmers, fire control without direct sight was impossible: directional and height indicators could not be obtained for trade protection cruisers. The fire-control mechanism that did exist could be hydraulically raised to a point over the bridge and on the poop deck. STEIERMARK’s guns could be directed from the signal deck above the bridge or from an aft director control station mounted in the poop deck.

Munitions

3.11 STEIERMARK carried different types of shells for use in her 15-centimetre guns: shells with a nose fuse were designed to explode on impact; shells with the fuse in their base were designed to pierce armour before exploding. She also carried 15-centimetre star shells.

Stores

3.12 When she was fully provisioned, STEIERMARK had enough food to last 500 men (the crew plus 100 prisoners) for more than a year.

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82 RAN.002.0079 at 0094
83 PUB.022.0001 at 0014
84 PUB.022.0001 at 0014
85 ROI.010.0026_R at 0031_R
86 TRAN.008.0051_R at 0056_R
87 NAA.012.0334_KOELT at 0335_KOELT
88 PUB.022.0001 at 0016
Radar

3.13 A ‘DT apparatus’—a type of radar unit having a range of less than 10,000 metres that the Kriegsmarine was trying to develop in 1940—was fitted to STEIERMARK. The unit failed to function.89

Radio rooms

3.14 STEIERMARK was fitted with two wireless rooms and carried four receivers and two transmitters. The apparatus was Telefunken and Lorenz equipment, and there were some Siemens parts. The vessel was equipped to receive messages on varying wavelengths and had the capability to use her wireless apparatus to engage in ‘piling’—that is, ascertaining the location of another ship when that ship transmitted messages on a wavelength being monitored by STEIERMARK.90

3.15 STEIERMARK transmitted messages on the 600-metre wavelength and on various wavelengths being used at various times by the Kriegsmarine.91

A hydrophone station

3.16 STEIERMARK was equipped with hydrophones to listen for sounds from submarines and other underwater noises.92

Small boats

3.17 STEIERMARK carried a number of small boats: four boats in davits, two motor boats, and one large lifeboat with Welin gear for about 100 men.93

Flags and flagpoles

3.18 STEIERMARK had a 2.5 x 3.6-metre German war ensign.94 Flags could be hoisted in two places—the ensign staff and the large aft mast.95

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89 PUB.022.0001 at 0030
90 NAA.012.0085_LINKE
91 NAA.012.0130_FUNKE
92 NAA.012.0087_GOWERT and NAA.012.0140_GEIGER
93 NAA.012.0766_DETMERS at 0768_DETMERS
94 NAA.012.0139_OTTE
95 NAA.012.0139_OTTE
Commissioning and the christening of Ship 41 as KORMORAN

3.19 STEIERMARK, by then designated Ship 41, was commissioned at Hamburg on 9 October 1940. The next day she sailed for Kiel. Direction-finding calibrations took place, artillery and torpedo munitions were taken on board, and victuals and oil supplies were loaded. Ship 41 survived an air raid on Kiel on 16 October. On 18 October she set sail for Gotenhafen (modern-day Gdynia), where four weeks were devoted to trialling and testing the ship and her systems and capabilities. The trialling and testing appear to have been conducted with the benefit of advice from CAPT Helmuth von Ruckteschell, who had put into Brest after a six-month raid with Ship 21, WIDDER.

On 20 November 1940 the Commander-in-Chief of the Kriegsmarine, ADM Raeder, inspected Ship 41 and addressed her crew. Mr Messerschmidt (formerly LEUT Messerschmidt) gave evidence to the Inquiry that it was ADM Raeder who christened Ship 41 KORMORAN and that before then the name had been kept secret. (KORMORAN had been the name given to a German auxiliary cruiser

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96 PUB.019.0001 at 0089
97 SPC.003.0037 at 0039 and 0044
98 SPC.003.0037 at 0044
99 SPC.003.0037 at 0044
100 SPC.003.0037 at 0044
101 WIT.011.0183 at 0186; SPC.003.0037 at 0045
in World War 1, and previously a gun boat of that name had operated in the South Seas.)

**KORMORAN’s personnel: Captain, officers and crew**

3.20 CAPT Theodor Detmers, born on 22 August 1908, was appointed to command HSK 8 in July 1940. At the time of his appointment he held the rank of Korvettenkapitän (commander). As the war progressed he was promoted to Fregattenkapitän (junior captain) and then Kapitän zur See (captain). I refer to him throughout as CAPT Detmers.

The appointment of CAPT Detmers was somewhat unusual: as noted, at the time of the appointment he was a commander, whereas most other commanders of the disguised surface raiders had held the rank of junior captain or captain.

3.21 CAPT Detmers had joined the Reichsmarine (as it was then known) on 1 April 1921. On 28 September 1934 he was appointed commanding officer of Torpedo Boat G11. He appears to have gained considerable experience in torpedo attacks through exercises. In 1936 he served as first lieutenant on the destroyer LEBERECHT MAASS. He was appointed commanding officer of the destroyer HERMANN SCHOEMANN on 26 October 1938, retaining that command until July 1940, except for about two months in 1939, when he worked with Naval War Staff.

CAPT Detmers commanded HERMANN SCHOEMANN during the Norwegian campaign, being part of the small Kriegsmarine flotilla that intercepted British transports involved in the evacuation of British forces from Norway. This flotilla intercepted and sank the tanker OIL PIONEER, the trawler JUNIPER and the empty troopship ORAMA; the hospital ship ATLANTIS, which the flotilla also intercepted, was released and allowed to sail back to England, as required by the Geneva Convention. CAPT Detmers was awarded the Iron Cross First Class for his part in the Norwegian action. (He was subsequently awarded the Knight’s Cross First Class—see Figure 3.11.)
3.22 Including CAPT Detmers, KORMORAN’s wardroom was made up of 26 men, 14 from the active list and 12 from the reserve list. The officers and their initial position in KORMORAN were:

- KKpt T Detmers Kommandant
- Kptlt K Foerster First Lieutenant
- Oblt zS G Oetzel Navigation Officer
- Kptlt (Ing) H Stehr Engineering Officer
- Lt zS (Ing) E von Gazen Engineering Officer (Electrical)
- Kptlt H Bretschneider Supply Officer
- Oblt zS F Skeries Artillery Officer
- Oblt zS H Messerschmidt Mine Officer
- Oblt zS J von Gösseln Duty Officer and Adjutant
- Oblt zS R von Malapert Wireless and Ciphers Officer
- Lt zS W Brinkmann Ordnance Officer
- Lt zS J Greter Torpedo Officer

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106 Photo courtesy of Dr R Habben
107 PUB.019.0001 at 0024
108 PUB.017.0001 at 0514 to 0515
• Oblt zS H Ahl  Flying Officer  
• Lt zS E Schäfer  Ordnance Officer and  
  Kommandant LS 3  
• Lt MA Dr F List  Information Officer  
• Lt MA W Hrich  Newsreel Cameraman  
• MSt Arzt Dr K Lienhoop  Medical Officer  
• MAss Arzt Dr S Habben  Assistant Medical Officer  
• Dr H Wagner  Naval Meteorologist  
• Oblt zS Henry Meyer  Prize Officer/Boarding Officer  
• Lt zS J Diebitsch  Prize Officer/Boarding Officer  
• Lt zS W Bunjes  Prize Officer/Boarding Officer  
• Lt zS R Jansen  Prize Officer/Boarding Officer  
• Lt zS B Kube  Prize Officer/Boarding Officer  
• Lt zS Berns\textsuperscript{109}  Prize Officer/Boarding Officer  
• Lt zS von Bloh  Prize Officer/Boarding Officer  

Messrs Foerster, Bretschneider and Stehr were lieutenant commanders. Messrs Skeries, Messerschmidt, von Gösseln, von Malapert, Henry Meyer and Oetzel were lieutenants. The remainder of the officers (apart from the specialist medical and meteorological officers) were sub-lieutenants. Appendix H shows German and English rank equivalents. English ranks are used throughout this report for simplicity.

3.23 LEUT Oetzel had been a HAPAG merchant marine officer and would have been in command of STEIERMARK but for the outbreak of war\textsuperscript{110}. It appears that the prize officers were ex-mercantile marine officers\textsuperscript{111}. Two officers, SBLT Hrich and SBLT List—described by CAPT Detmers in his book as ‘both from the Propaganda Department; one a war reporter and the other a film man’\textsuperscript{112}—joined KORMORAN after ADM Raeder’s inspection of the vessel.

Figures 3.12 and 3.13 show KORMORAN officers at the time of their internment at Dhurringile, Victoria.

\textsuperscript{109} Heft 10 is the only source to mention this officer. It is unclear if he indeed served in KORMORAN.  
\textsuperscript{110} PUB.022.0001 at 0022  
\textsuperscript{111} PUB.022.0001 at 0022  
\textsuperscript{112} PUB.022.0001 at 0032
Figure 3.12  KORMORAN officers at Dhurringile, Victoria. Back row, left to right: LEUT Greter, LEUT Schäfer, LCDR von Malapert, LEUT Skeries, LEUT von Gosseln, LEUT Brinkmann. Front row, left to right: LCDR Meyer, LCDR Foerster, CAPT Detmers and LEUT Messerschmidt

Figure 3.13  KORMORAN officers at Dhurringile, Victoria. Back row, left to right: SBLT Jansen, LEUT Ahl, SBLT Kube, SBLT Bunjes, SBLT List, SBLT Hrich. Front row, left to right: SBLT Diebitsch, Dr Wagner, LCDR Bretschneider, Dr Lienhoop

\[113\] PUB.060.0001 at 0192
\[114\] PUB.060.0001 at 0192
3.24 In addition to her officers, KORMORAN had a crew of 375 sailors. Many of these men were conscripted into the Kriegsmarine either during the war or in the late 1930s. A substantial number, almost 100, were ex-HAPAG men; all the engine-room men were ex-HAPAG. Appendix C lists those KORMORAN officers and crew who were lost as a consequence of the engagement with SYDNEY.

**KORMORAN’s crew: some important aspects**

**Sea lookouts**

3.25 CAPT Detmers attached particular importance to effective sea lookouts. An officer was always on station as a lookout. A typical day watch comprised one officer and one petty officer on the forward crosstrees, two lookouts on the gunnery director posts, and two lookouts on the bridge, in addition to the usual sea watch.

**Wireless operators and the onboard intelligence service**

3.26 KORMORAN’s communications and wireless complement consisted of one officer, one senior petty officer, four non-commissioned officers and 18 wireless operators.
There was a wireless intelligence service embarked and charged with identifying traffic on merchant shipping routes and the level of Allied sea and air protection needed for that traffic and contributing information (in the form of advice about the types of ships used by shipping lines in particular waters) that CAPT Detmers could use in determining what disguise to adopt for KORMORAN. The wireless intelligence service had occasional success in intercepting undeciphered wireless messages sent to British warships.

**Gun-crew training**

3.27 KORMORAN’s gunners underwent regular, detailed training, practising twice a week, on Thursdays and Fridays. The performance of the gun crews was timed during some of these exercises, and there was a special gun stowed under the main deck, devoted to training. A cartridge and shell had to be loaded and the gun had to be trained and fired all within 60 seconds. The gun crew of the bow starboard 15-centimetre gun often won these exercises; they were able to load, prime and fire a number of times within the 60-second limit.

The gun crews also practised de-camouflaging.

3.28 Occasionally KORMORAN conducted anti-aircraft practice against balloons when at sea. There were also range-finding exercises. CAPT Detmers frequently oversaw gunnery practice. This involved special exercises in case KORMORAN ever met a destroyer or a light cruiser, and these were followed by CAPT Detmers questioning the gun crews about their targeting. He regularly questioned members of the starboard 3.7-centimetre gun crew, whose specific target was the bridge of the opposing vessel.
Hoisting the battle ensign

3.29 KORMORAN also had crew members whose task at a time of battle was to hoist the German war ensign when the vessel de-camouflaged. They had been trained in this task throughout the year and could ‘hoist a flag within seconds’.133

KORMORAN’s orders

3.30 The full operational orders given to KORMORAN are set out in Appendix I. In essence, her orders were as follows:

Execution of cruiser warfare in foreign waters. Minelaying according to appendix b) Combined action with U-Boats according to appendix c). The crux of the operation lies in obliging enemy forces to relieve the homeland, and to damage our opponent:

a) by forcing him to convoy and increase the protection of his shipping even in distant waters.

b) connected with the above by increasing demands on his forces.

c) by frightening off neutral shipping from sailing in the service of the enemy.

d) by further disadvantageous consequences of an economic, political and financial character.

A long term restriction and harassing of the enemy is more important to the success of the operation than a high record of sinkings accompanied by a rapid deterioration of the auxiliary cruiser. The means of gaining the strategical ends is the sinking of enemy shipping or neutral shipping working with the enemy.134

3.31 KORMORAN was given advice on how to execute her orders. Paragraphs 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 of that advice were as follows:

1. The enemy is continually forced to take up new positions and to increase his innumerable forces for protection of merchant shipping by our unexpected appearance in varying seas. Through this, relief on the home front is obtained, and enemy trade is hindered by the defensive measures he is required to take.

2. Camouflage and methods of attack on merchant vessels should be frequently changed. Every imaginable means should be employed using cunning and ingenuity. Whether the auxiliary cruiser can operate unrecognised for a long time in an area and can there achieve success by surprise, which obviates the possibility of warning being

133 TRAN.010.0052_R at 0063_R Line 6-7
134 SPC.003.0037 at 0084
given to the enemy, depends on the perfection and the efficient use of camouflage.

...  

4. Armed clashes with enemy forces or auxiliary ships are to be avoided. If, however, an encounter is unavoidable, every attempt to destroy the enemy by means of camouflage, by unexpected and ruthless use of all weapons should be made.

Armed convoys should not be operated against. Passenger ships should also be avoided, as enemy passenger ships generally are superior in speed and armament, and even in successful cases, they make a considerable burden for auxiliary cruisers owing to the strength of the crew and the number of the passengers.\hspace{1em}135

5. The Commanding Officer should always be conscious that the fact that the enemy knows of or occasionally suspects the presence of his ship constitutes his strongest weapon against enemy commerce. He must, therefore, by careful handling of personal and material increase sea time of his ship as much as possible. The time thus placed at his disposal makes it possible to weaken the enemy materially and morally, without precipitating events and while avoiding set plans of action.

6. The correct forecasting and utilisation of weather conditions has special influence on the mission. Generally “unfavourable” weather simplifies the mission, as it restricts counter measures and facilitates a surprise attack. Consideration of the saving of crews of enemy merchant ships must be subordinated to the demands of the Navy ...\hspace{1em}136

The orders fixed KORMORAN’s operational area as the Indian Ocean and adjoining Australian and African waters, with the South Atlantic and Pacific as alternatives.\hspace{1em}137

3.32 KORMORAN thus had an explicit instruction to avoid engagement with enemy warships. Indeed, the orders were not restricted to avoiding contact with conventional enemy forces: KORMORAN was even to avoid engagement with armed merchant cruisers and passenger ships (which at that time often carried armament). It was only if action against an armed enemy ship was ‘unavoidable’ that the ‘unexpected and ruthless’ use of KORMORAN’s weapons was required.

\hspace{1em}135 SPC.003.0037 at 0084
136 SPC.003.0037 at 0085
137 SPC.003.0037 at 0045
3.33 In his book *The Raider Kormoran* CAPT Detmers expressed his understanding of his orders as follows:

> Our job, apart from sinking as much enemy tonnage as possible, was to appear as often as possible where we were least expected; and in this way to sow alarm and confusion in the enemy's shipping lanes, thus compelling him to abandon the shortest and most convenient routes and to use the longer and more circuitous routes instead, thereby wasting shipping space and fuel: for example the longer routes near the coastline, from which shipping could be afforded greater protection.

> ... 

> In other words, enemy shipping was forced to sail circuitous, time-wasting and fuel-wasting courses, which was exactly what we wanted.

We were, of course, strictly forbidden to seek any action with enemy naval units, because we were only passengers or merchant ships fitted out as warships, and not real warships. We were therefore not in a position to look for trouble with real warships, and we were instructed to avoid convoys of enemy shipping, because they were always escorted.138

3.34 CAPT Detmers' description of his task accords with his formal orders. His officers shared his understanding. In evidence LEUT Messerschmidt said:

> The main guideline was to disturb the sea traffic of our adversaries with the aim of keeping enemy warships busy protecting their trade routes. The mission of KORMORAN was to remain at sea for a very long period and disturb trade routes, rather than just sinking enemy merchant ships. The other major guideline was never to become engaged with an enemy warship. By avoiding enemy warships, KORMORAN could stay at sea for a very long time.139

3.35 This role was also understood by the British Admiralty. In May 1941, in the detailed ‘Raider supplement’ to *Weekly Intelligence Report* number 64, Allied intelligence provided the following assessment:

> The German Admiralty appears to exercise a general control over the broad strategy and movements of the raiders, but, as in the last war, a very large measure of initiative is left to the individual captains. They do, however, appear to follow closely the general policy laid down by Admiral Raeder, namely, to be content with small gains, not to risk their ships by attacks on warships, even if of inferior strength, or on defended shore objectives, and to rely on the cumulative effect of the

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138 PUB.022.0001 at 0046
139 WIT.011.0183_R at 0192_R
loss of two or three ships per month and the disorganization caused to trade by our countermeasures.\textsuperscript{140}

In relation to the tactics of surface raiders, the ‘Raider supplement’ noted, ‘[Raiders] relied mainly on their innocent appearance and on merchant captains’ ignorance of the existence of disguised raiders, to approach their victims on a gradually converging course’.\textsuperscript{141}

3.36 The alterations to KORMORAN in order to provide prisoner accommodation, and paragraph 4 of the advice on execution of orders, make it clear that KORMORAN expected to recover survivors on sinking merchant ships, subject to the ‘demands of the Navy’, as referred to in paragraph 6 of that advice.

\textbf{Wireless telegraphy}

3.37 KORMORAN was given the following general order:

Wireless silence to be observed from the moment when the Home Port is left.

Wireless silence may be broken

a) on contact with the enemy, or in the case of the ship’s position otherwise becoming known …

b) for sending short signals, should wireless traffic be necessary or useful, when the position of the ship is not known to the enemy.\textsuperscript{142}

\textbf{KORMORAN’s sinkings and captures}

3.38 In the time between leaving Germany on 3 December 1940 and the encounter with SYDNEY on 19 November 1941, KORMORAN sank 10 Allied merchant ships and captured one, as follows\textsuperscript{143}:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Ship</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>06.01.1941</td>
<td>ANTONIS</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.01.1941</td>
<td>BRITISH UNION</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.01.1941</td>
<td>AFRIC STAR</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.01.1941</td>
<td>EURYLOCHUS</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.03.1941</td>
<td>AGNITA</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.03.1941</td>
<td>CANADOLITE</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.04.1941</td>
<td>CRAFTSMAN</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.04.1941</td>
<td>NICOLAOS DL</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.06.1941</td>
<td>VELEBIT</td>
<td>Yugoslav</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.06.1941</td>
<td>MAREEBA</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.09.1941</td>
<td>STAMATIOS G EMBIRICOS</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{140} NAA.027.0036 at 0038
\textsuperscript{141} NAA.027.0036 at 0038
\textsuperscript{142} SPC.003.0037 at 0087
\textsuperscript{143} SPC.003.0037 at 0091 and 0092
3.39 In the following sections I discuss each incident. It is of note here, however, that a number of material features emerge from the nature and circumstances of the encounters:

- In every instance survivors were rescued, taken on board and held as prisoners until being transferred to other ships for passage to Germany.
- On no occasion did CAPT Detmers knowingly abandon survivors.
- On no occasion did CAPT Detmers or his crew machine-gun or otherwise shoot survivors in the water.
- Where necessary, survivors who were injured received medical treatment on board KORMORAN.
- On every occasion, before opening fire CAPT Detmers called on the merchant vessels to surrender and not use their wireless. If the order was obeyed he did not open fire. If the order was not obeyed he did.

These matters are material when considering the allegations of some commentators that the crew of KORMORAN machine-gunned survivors from SYDNEY who were in the water.

Of necessity, the descriptions of the encounters are taken from KORMORAN’s records, as sent back to Germany, and from CAPT Detmers’ book. Where survivors of the merchant ships have written of the encounters, their accounts are referred to.

3.40 In accordance with German Navy procedure, CAPT Detmers kept a Kriegstagebuch, or war diary. This was a daily record of events to which were added some explanations. It seems the war diary was written up daily. All KORMORAN’s war diaries were sent back to Germany progressively with the various German ships KORMORAN encountered and to which she transferred prisoners. This was the main way CAPT Detmers advised German Naval War Staff of his voyage and activities since, except for very brief signals, KORMORAN maintained radio silence. The last of KORMORAN’s war diaries returned to Germany with KULMERLAND, which supplied KORMORAN between 16 and 18 October 1941, having been handed over to KULMERLAND from KORMORAN on 26 October. The last entry in that war diary was dated 24 October 1941.144

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144 SPC.003.0037 at 0070
The war diaries were used by High Command of the German Navy to produce *Book 10: the voyage of the auxiliary cruiser Ship 41 (KORMORAN)* in December 1943. That book also relied on the account of the engagement with SYDNEY that Dr Habben, the Assistant Medical Officer, took back to Germany when he was repatriated in 1943. Book 10 was part of a series entitled *Operations and Tactics: evaluation of important events in the Naval war*. The preface to Book 10 reads as follows:

The works contained in the series ‘Operations and Tactics’ dealing with the activities of auxiliary cruisers will keep the men at the front acquainted with the real course of events and give them the opportunity of acquiring valuable information from the experiences collected therein towards the further war effort.

For the time being the representation must principally be confined to the actual reproduction of the operation and tactical undertakings of auxiliary cruisers. A critical examination of isolated events follows, only when this was definitely possible at the time of the happenings.

A reliable final opinion, based on all the evidence, including that of the enemy, from the critical/historical point of view, must be reserved for further consideration.145

3.41 It is obvious from Book 10 and its preface that the German Navy regarded the war diary as an accurate statement of activities involving KORMORAN since it relied on the diary when preparing Book 10 for the instruction of other German officers and sailors. I compared the war diary’s summary of each sinking with the summary of these events in Book 10. There is little material difference. I relied on the translation of Book 10 prepared by the British Admiralty. The Inquiry had the portions of the war diary dealing with each sinking translated from the original German document.

3.42 Each of the sinkings is also discussed by CAPT Detmers in *The Raider Kormoran*. There are some differences between the war diary account, written contemporaneously, and his book, written 18 years later in 1959. CAPT Detmers wrote the war diary as the official record of the activities of his ship, so there is every reason to expect that it is accurate—just as the log book and monthly reports of the Commanding Officer of SYDNEY can be regarded as accurate. The expectation of both officers would have been that their reports would be read and relied on by their superior officers. Neither of them would have expected that their contemporaneous records detailing their ships’ activities would be subjected to the scrutiny they have since received from researchers—and this Inquiry.

145 SPC.003.0037 at 0041
It is for these reasons that I rely mainly on the accounts of the sinkings in the war diary rather than later writings: those accounts were a contemporaneous statement of events intended to be relied on by CAPT Detmers’ superior officers. I also refer to material differences between the war diary and CAPT Detmers’ The Raider Kormoran. In many, but not all, instances there is a plan depicting the engagement, prepared as part of the war diary. In every deployment where KORMORAN used armaments, an ‘Artillery report’ was also prepared; this disclosed any difficulties with armaments, lighting, range-finding and accuracy, as well as the number of salvos fired and the number and type of shells expended. From these reports, the speed of KORMORAN’s firing salvos or independent firing by guns can be determined. Some artillery reports are signed by CAPT Detmers and the Gunnery Officer, LEUT Skeries.

**ANTONIS**

3.43 KORMORAN sank SS ANTONIS on 6 January 1941. Her war diary recorded:

1200 8°19’N, 27°54’W. Day’s run: 216 nm
Total run: 8257 nm.

1209 Course 280°.

1435 Steamer sighted ahead, went on collision course. Steamer has no neutrality signs and sets the Greek flag very late on.

1514 De-camouflaged guns, hoisted signal to stop. Steamer follows order, does not transmit, gets lifeboats ready.

1541 Boarding party under Sonderführer (Leutnant zur See) Diebitsch off board.

Steamer “Antonis”, 3729 tons, Greek, port of origin Oinoussei (Chios), owners Lemos & Pateras, with 4800 tons of coal under English charter from Cardiff to Rosario, armed with 3 machine guns of English origin.

Order: crew to come on board in own boats, ship to be sunk.

At first are salvaged from aboard: charts and documents, 3 machine guns with 1000 rounds of ammunition, 7 live sheep and fresh provisions, ship’s bell and flag. Since the crew left [their ship] head over heels, the boarding party also brings part of their personal belongings back with them.

1808 Set fuses on charges (one 24kg box of explosives and 3 explosive charges).

1810 Boarding party has pulled away from steamer.

1819 Explosion amidships followed by boiler blowing up.
1837  8°17’N; 28°32’W. Steamer sinks by the stern post almost without listing. 28 crew and one stowaway are taken on board … 146

3.44 ANTONIS obeyed KORMORAN’s orders, and no shots were fired. All crew were rescued; no one was injured.

3.45 In his book CAPT Detmers wrote that he signalled the Greek ship by lamp, asking her to show her flag; that she replied by lamp that she was a Greek ship and ran up the Greek flag; and that he then gave the order to de-camouflage ‘and answered by running the German Navy flag up our own mast’. 147 He also wrote that the vessel crossed ahead of KORMORAN, ‘about 3,000 yards or so away’. There is no mention of these events in the war diary.

BRITISH UNION

3.46 KORMORAN sank MV BRITISH UNION on 18 January 1941. Her war diary recorded:

1200  26°34’N; 29°32’W. Day’s run: 223 nm Total run: 10967 “
1730  26°34’N; 30°30’W. Smoke cloud at 282° true.
1745  ENE 4; sea 3-4, swell from WNW and NE, overcast, exceptionally good visibility. Engines set for ‘full speed’ (17.5 nm)
1748  Determined approximate collision course for ‘full speed’. Opponent is [visible] against the light horizon. I choose course and speed according to him remaining in the light and I approach unseen in the increasing darkness.
1817  Steamer turns away. My assumption that she would start her twilight zigzag course according to orders is confirmed. At the same time this makes it clear that she is “the enemy”. Besides, she is proceeding blacked out.
1821  Went to full speed ahead in order for the opponent not escape into the fast approaching darkness. She is identified as a medium tanker in ballast.
1829  “Alarm”.
1841  De-camouflaged. No range finding, estimation in this light very uncertain.

146 BUA.100.0137.0044_E (BUA.100.0137.0044)
147 CORR.007.0034 at 0072
“Searchlight on”. The searchlight reaches far enough indeed but cannot stay on the target the way the ship is rolling, therefore fired star shells ... Range measured at 60 hm, distance therefore underestimated.\textsuperscript{148}

Main battery opens fire, 3rd salvo hits target.

5 enclosures: 1 sketch of battle, 1 gunnery report, 3 torpedo reports

Opponent transmits: \textit{RRR British Union shelled 26°24'N, 30°58'W.} [italicised text in English in original]

Ceased firing since opponent is not shooting or sending morse signals which leads me to assume that he wants to surrender, therefore turned towards him on course 340°.

Opponent opens fire with his stern gun. Fire opened again at 34 hm. Opponent only fires 4 shots, then his poop deck is ablaze. Approached more closely, reduced speed.

Ceased firing, opponent is abandoning ship.

The fire on the poop deck more and more collapses into itself. Since empty tankers sink with difficulty, I intend to blow her up.

Boat for prize boarding party just put to water when continuous explosions start on the opponent’s poop deck. Can no longer take the responsibility for boarding the tanker.

Boat brought back on board again. Take up position to fire torpedo.

1st torpedo fired, self-detonates at end of safety distance.

2nd torpedo fired, hit at foremast level.

Morse signal from life boats: \textit{SOS boats are sinking.} [italicised text in English in original]

Rescued 28 survivors, the captain among them. All Englishmen.

Opened fire again with two guns since the tanker will not sink. Although every shot hits its target, no success, therefore fired 3rd, hit amidships. Ships turns slowly on the starboard side and capsizes very slowly.

\textsuperscript{148} Hectometre (equal to 100 metres) was the unit of distance used by the Kriegsmarine in World War 2 for the ranging of artillery weapons.
3.47 The account in CAPT Detmers’ book is materially different in the following respects:

- In his book he states that on the order to de-camouflage ‘the war flag ran up to the mast’. That is not referred to in the war diary.

- In his book he has the first salvo of shells fired after the masthead searchlight was switched on and before firing any star shells. The war diary has the artillery opening fire after the firing of star shells.

- In his book he states that, the firing of star shells having been ordered, KORMORAN had to turn away to allow her No. 3 gun firing the star shells to get ‘a line on the target’. He continues:

  During this short period I thought I saw the anti-submarine gun in the stern of our enemy fire once or twice. But then our rocket shells put a dome of light over our quarry. The range was now about 4,000 yards and from the third salvo we were dead on the target. But it was quite a while before the tanker hove to and stopped using her wireless. As soon as she did I ordered the cease fire. Our searchlight now took up the illumination, and we could see that on board the tanker they were busy lowering the boats.

  We now approached to about 2,000 yards or so, hove to and lowered our motor-boat. Before long the search party was on board and going about its business. A morse message came back to the effect that the ship was the tanker *British Union* of 6,989 B.R.T. on her way from Gibraltar to Trinidad to fetch oil.

That differs from the account in the war diary, which has events in the following order:

- BRITISH UNION firing her stern gun
- KORMORAN again opening fire at 3,400 metres
- BRITISH UNION abandoning ship at 1944 on KORMORAN ceasing fire
- KORMORAN abandoning the attempt to put a boarding party on board BRITISH UNION
- survivors being rescued after two torpedoes fired at BRITISH UNION and after Morse signals from lifeboats.
In particular, the account in the war diary has KORMORAN ceasing fire on two occasions, the second commencement of fire resulting from BRITISH UNION opening fire with her stern gun. The book account has one continuous firing by KORMORAN, cessation occurring only after the tanker ‘hove to and stopped using her wireless’.  

3.48 There is also an important difference in relation to the rescue of survivors. The war diary refers to the ship being abandoned at 1944, then the firing of two torpedoes and then a ‘Morse signal from lifeboats. SOS boats are sinking’. The book makes no reference to the ship being abandoned and there is no mention of any Morse signal from lifeboats or SOS signal that such boats were sinking. It merely states, ‘two boats came over from the tanker with twenty-eight officers and men on board’. It did say the boats were settling deep in the water as a result of being holed by shellfire but that this was only when they were alongside KORMORAN.  

3.49 There is in the war diary an entry for 0930 the following day, 19 January 1941. It is headed ‘Evaluation British Union’ and contains further details about the rescue of survivors:

Tanker “British Union”, 6987 tons, British Tanker Co. Ltd., London, in ballast from Gibraltar to Trinidad/Aruba. Presence of auxiliary cruiser in area not known, therefore proceeded on direct route, slow ship (10 nm). Auxiliary cruiser seen only when opened fire and then taken for U-boat. 28 men saved, lost 17 men, 1st and 2nd officers amongst them. Behaviour of the Englishmen in the water very good, calm, objective, showing good esprit de corps. Therefore rescue of all people sighted possible. Boats leaking due to damage by gunfire, floating on their buoyancy tanks and kept on an even keel only with difficulty. Many men scantily dressed because a boat kept ready with possessions fell when being lowered. But they brought their monkey along. As long as he does not introduce any diseases, they may keep him. While picking up the first lifeboat, cries for help were heard in the lee, night rescue buoy thrown, picked 2 men up there later, third lifeboat not sighted. The completely exhausted wireless operator was the last person to be rescued when a man of my crew jumped in after him.

It is to be noted that in the High Command of the German Navy’s Book 10 it is said, ‘The crew jumped overboard’. That is not mentioned in either the war diary or CAPT Detmers’ book.
The artillery report of the battle recorded the following:

**Deployment of battle battery:** Fire opened in starboard direction with a bow gun at a true distance of 60 hm. Since no bearings could be taken at first without lighting, an estimated range of 40 hm was ordered. The first hits fell short. Once the first bearings were taken by the light of star shells, shots could be observed reaching the target. The first hit was observed during the 5th salvo. For the duration of the entire engagement, the enemy displayed his narrow silhouette (his stern) and tried to avoid the hits. He returned the fire four times with his stern gun.

The ship turned starboard after the 10th salvo (one-gun salvo). Due to our speed, a running battle developed on port, with the distance [between the ships] decreasing. After renewed fire adjustment, several rounds were achieved using the night firing method, and a hit at the stern put the enemy’s gun out of action. A total of 5 hits were observed.

Due to the fact that this was the first time we fired under battle-like conditions, battery operation was still a bit unstable.

**Duration of battle:** 26 minutes. Last firing range: 22 hm. Towards the end of firing, the 3.7-cm modified anti-tank gun and the 2-cm M.G.C/30 were deployed with sufficient effect at the limit of their range.

**Technical malfunctions:** Battery and fire control system worked without any problems. The ammunition hoists as well, apart from the hoist for the gun which had been designated as the light battery. The star shell cartridges, which weighed less, were unable to activate the off-lever of the hoist’s supply tray. Therefore, the hoist continued to operate when the tray was full, and one of the next cartridges which could not be fitted into the tray got stuck between the frame and the belt. This malfunction was sorted out during the firing.

Ammunition fired:
- 50 rounds 15-cm nose-fused armour-piercing shells
- 11 rounds 15-cm nose-fused armour-piercing shells with tracer
- 36 rounds 15-cm star shells L/4.3 m. Z.Z. S/60.157

The artillery report was signed by CAPT Detmers.

Neither Book 10 nor CAPT Detmers’ book mentioned the use of the 3.7-centimetre anti-tank gun or the 2-centimetre machine gun.

Attached to the war diary is a battle sketch of this engagement—see Figure 3.15.

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157 BUA.100.0139.0007_E (BUA.100.0139.0001 at 0007 and 0008)
3.53 At 2300, shortly after KORMORAN’s departure from the scene of battle, HMS ARAWA arrived and rescued the survivors in the third lifeboat, which KORMORAN had not found. On board ARAWA was CMDR AI Chapman RAN. He was an intelligence officer and apparently interrogated the rescued survivors. A document produced to the Inquiry by the Western Australian Maritime Museum is entitled ‘Surface Raider Activity (Note for Mr Ware). Ref. Raider “G” (KORMORAN) Log of Operations 18.1.41 North Atlantic. Note by Commander A.I. Chapman RAN’.\(^{159}\) The note is unsigned. It does, however, bear a stamp—‘Gordon Laffer, Licensed Surveyor’. Mr Laffer is a person who has for some years evinced an interest in the loss of SYDNEY.

The ‘note’ is plainly not a contemporaneous document. It speaks of later events, including SYDNEY’s sinking 10 months later. All these circumstances need to be considered when assessing the weight to be attached to the document, which, among other things, states:

As Intelligence Officer of H.M.S. ARAWA I interrogated survivors and constructed silhouette of attacking ship which had obviously been auxiliary cruiser. Survivors stated that:-

- Raider attacked from quarter without warning.
- Several crew killed by shelling.
- One lifeboat wrecked before launching.
- Raider fired machine gun at one boat in water.
- Launched motor boat and picked up some survivors.
Survivors stated they lay in bottom of boat following machine gunning of other boat and searchlight beam from ship passed over them. Raider then withdrew. Their own boat had been holed and gradually filled up.160

A Mr Harold Hearne, who was an ARAWA crew member, wrote to the Minister for the Navy on 4 December 1941, stating that ARAWA had:

Picked up seven survivors in a boat that had been riddled by shrapnel and machine gun bullets, the survivors told us that whilst lowering the lifeboats they were machine-gunned, consequently all the contents of one boat was was all lost, such as lamp, water, compass etc, if we had not found them they certainly would of died of thirst. One man, he was the Second Officer died of wounds a few hours after being picked up it was due to shrapnel & machine gun bullets in his stomach …161

3.54 The Battye Library, in Perth, produced to the Inquiry documents touching on this. One is dated March 1990 over the typed signature of NW Finnis. Mr Finnis was an apprentice on board BRITISH UNION. The document reads:

M/V BRITISH UNION – SUNK 18th JANUARY 1941

The following notes are compiled from a precis of two statements:-

1. By Captain L Atthill O.B.E. in Head Office on 11th July 1945 on his return from prisoner of war camp.

2. By Apprentice N W Finnis in Head Office on 11th March 1941 after his return to the U.K.

There were some small discrepancies between the two which is understandable. For example the Masters position for the action was more accurate than mine (after all “I was only a junior apprentice” is my excuse) and agrees pretty well with Detmers. Mine contains some estimates of times for different phases of the action which in hindsight are pretty suspect—perhaps any time someone is being shot at seems much longer than it really is.

One thing I think is clear. The suggestion made in some quarter that the “Kormoran” machine gunned our boats is ludicrous in my view and Atthill’s comments confirm this.

N W Finnis
March 1990162

160 WAM.008.0115_R
161 NAA.073.0231 at 0232
162 BATT.007.0116
The ‘notes’ referred to are as follows:

**M/V BRITISH UNION vs KORMORAN**

The ship sailed from Gibraltar on 9/10th of January 1941 bound for Curacas in ballast.

All went well until the evening of the 18th of January when the ship was some 700 south of the Azores (Detmers position 26 - 29N, 31 - 07W).

The master was called to the bridge at about 7pm to find the ship illuminated by searchlight from a ship which appeared to be about three miles off. He immediately turned the ship stern on, went to action stations and ordered full speed. A challenge was sent on the Morse Lamp and not receiving a satisfactory reply the standard Admiralty raider W/T message was transmitted. The raider immediately opened fire with shrapnel in order to bring down the aerial, which he failed to do before a reply was received. Meanwhile the Master had ordered our own guns to open fire.

The apprentice (me) on hearing the action stations Klaxon left the Chief Stewards room – collected his steel helmet and lifebelt and proceeded to the bridge. He could see the searchlight astern, the Union was zig-zagging, heard the master ordering the after gun to open fire, heard a burst of fire from our twin Lewis guns on the upper bridge (Monkey Island) and joined the Second Mates Mack up there for the rest of the action. I heard our 4.7 open fire and each time the raider cleared the funnel as our ship zig-zagged, Mack fired bursts from our Lewis guns. Shell splashes could be seen ahead.

The raider switched off his searchlight immediately we opened fire and reverted to star shells to give him visibility. After a while (I said half an hour but it could have been less!) the raider started to score hits. A shell struck the bridge without exploding and the poop house was set on fire.

The Master decided we could do no more and ordered “Abandon Ship” after stopping the engines and allowing some way to come off the ship. As I came past wheelhouse I saw the Master preparing the secret papers in a weighted bag for throwing overboard and this was apparently done by the Second Mate. On reaching my boat (the Second Mates starboard midships) I found it lowered—the raider was by now off our starboard side and still firing—and the Second Mate was having some difficulty persuading the remainder of our boats crew to come round from the port side. I started down the boat ladder when a shell exploded nearby and I found myself being dragged into the boat from the sea between boat and ship. There were seven men in the boat and the Second Mate joined us by jumping into the water where we pulled him on board. Another shell exploded nearby seriously wounding the Second Mate, smashing the jaw of one of the AB’s and putting a few splinters into the rest of us. The boat painters
were cast off (or cut by shrapnel we never discovered which) and we drifted astern as the ship still had some headway.

The Master collected some things from his room, handed his case to the Chief Officer and went aft to see that all hands were up from below. He found some men taking cover, sent them to the boats, and returned amidships. The Second Mates boat (ours) had left and the Chief Officers boat (his) being full, he took the remainder of the crew aft and lowered a boat from there, ordering the Chief Officer to cast off. After some difficulty he and the Third Mate, Mr Chapmen, took the after boat clear of the ship. It was full of shrapnel holes and rapidly filled to the thwarts.

The Master then watched the “Kormoran” torpedo the “Union”, which by now was well on fire, and then he approached and took them on board. He then picked up the Chief Officers boat and Atthill learned that it had capsized after leaving the ship, being righted again by some of the men led by Mr McLean, electrician, who then took charge and picked up some more. The Commander of the “Kormoran” then picked up several more men which he located with his searchlight, one of his seamen going overboard three times after them. The raider then shelled our ship again complaining that she would not sink. When he eventually succeeded he made off at full speed.

Atthill conclusions, at the loss of life were that one man was killed when a shell entered the forecastle, one on the bridge deck, the remainder being drowned when the boat capsized.

We found our boat badly punctured with holes from shrapnel and after making Mack as comfortable as possible we carried on bailing and rowed away from the position in the dark. We watched the continued shelling of our ship, which was badly on fire, heard a heavy explosion, and saw a spout of water from the torpedoing and eventually she sank and left us in the dark. We made up some routine for bailing and in the early hours of the next morning saw the silhouette of a ship pass up and down. We thought she was the raider and decided to lie low but eventually, in the interests of the two men, it was decided to attract attention on the next pass which we did with our torch. At about 3am we were picked up by HMAS “Arawa”—on Armed Merchant Cruiser (ex Esperance Bay) manned by Australian crew with R.N. Captain. They were very good to us but in spite of excellent medical facilities Mack died on the evening of the 19th and was buried at sea the next day.

“Arawa” spent some time hoping to find “Kormoran” and I think we were quite relieved she did not succeed. From what we know now I am very glad she did not.
We arrived in Freetown on 26th January, were landed, and after some delay Alex Bandeen and myself were shipped home in one of Capbell’s iron ore ships, the “River Lugar”, arriving in Glasgow on the 22nd of February 1941.\textsuperscript{163}

The ‘notes’ bear a handwritten note at the top of the first page reading ‘Alex Bardeen gave me this at Kormoran reunion Nov. 1990’ and one at the foot of the second page reading ‘Last part at least—apparently written by Neville Finnis’.

I determined that the handwriting is that of Mr Bryan Clark.\textsuperscript{164} I did so after comparing that handwriting with the handwriting of Mr Clark, which appears on documents he supplied to the Battye Library.

Also in the collection is a document bearing the typed signature ‘Alexander F. Bandeen, Chief Steward’. It reads:

1941

BRITISH UNION TORPpedoed by Kormoran ApproXX 10 Months Prior to Sinking of “HMAS SYDNEY”.

We were bound for the West Indies for a cargo of fuel oil.

We were sailing alone quietly in pitch dark when all of a sudden a Star Shell came over the ship. I had just come out of the bath and put on a pair of shorts when the alarm sounded. I rushed out on deck then ran back for my Life Jacket and Steel Helmet. I heard our 4.7 gun firing constantly and also our machine guns. I came back to an alley way when a shell hit the forcastle where many men could have been trapped. I was lying flat down in an alley way midships. The monkeys which the crew took on board at Bombay as pets were screaming and frightened. Captain Atthill said it was a submarine and to keep on firing. Shells were coming heavy then there was a lull. We then prepared to abandon ship. The lifeboat were getting ready. Shelling had been on the port side where my station was and when we went to the lifeboats on the starboard side they were full. Seven of us, 2nd Officer; Neville Finnis Cadet; 2 Sailors; Greaser; Carpenter; and myself lowered the lifeboat into the water.

The searchlight from the raider which attacked us remained on us during the lowering of the lifeboat and later we had not moved from the ships side when a shell hit the Hospital area directly above us. The rope from our lifeboat was then cut or cast off. Second officer next to me said “I have been hit”. By then we were drifting helplessly as the boat was full of water. The “British Union” was now on fire from forward to aft and as we drifted passed I noticed a shell hole just in

\textsuperscript{163} BATT.007.0181. Spelling and grammar as in the original.
\textsuperscript{164} The documents come from Mr Clark’s collection of documents given to the Battye Library.
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front of the after deck. A chap was running about aft and as we shouted to him to jump he disappeared from view.

The lifeboat was leaking and full of water so we checked to see if the Bung was in, which it was, made the Second Officer as comfortable as possible, then started to bail out the water with our steel helmets to no avail. All of a sudden a torpedo hit the ship midway. There was a large explosion and a wall of water rose up before she sank. We saw a sea of debris and wreckage. It was an eerie sight and we observed no other lifeboats or men in the water. The searchlights then went out and the lifeboat was full of water. I noticed the lad forward was bleeding about the face and I thought he dead. He could not speak as he had been hit on the jaw. We got out the blankets and decided to rest but they were damp. I got a bottle of brandy out and poured a tot into a beaker, but no-one wanted some. It was impossible to row or make any headway as the lifeboat was now very low in the water and we were resigned to wait for dawn. Suddenly a ship loomed up in front of us and we thought it was the raider back. The ship manoeuvred and as we got alongside, 2–3 sailors were lowered down the ship’s side by ladder. I noticed the Red Cross on their sleeves—when they spoke it was a tremendous relief.

The ship which rescued us was the “HMAS Arawa” an Australian Merchant Cruiser. We were given hot drinks, a bath and fresh clothes. The Second Officer, who had an abdominal wound and was unconscious, died the next morning and was buried at sea. A sad sight for an excellent officer and ship mate. The lad with the jaw injury survived and I saw him in the ship’s hospital. Neville Finnis had hurt his bottom on entering the lifeboat and although he was too shy to tell the doctor, he did eventually.

We were interrogated by officers called Chapman and Hearne who reckoned we were in the lifeboat for nine hours. For nine days the “Arawa” searched for the raider. No relatives could be contacted due to radio silence. We arrived in Freetown, West Africa to join many survivors from varying ships which had been sunk. Neville Finnis and I were together in a hotel in Freetown as we were the only two picked up by the “Arawa”. Information later gathered was that the raider picked up some survivors including the Captain and they were taken to a P.O.W. Camp in Germany. The others with us in the lifeboat, picked up by the “Arawa”, were in a convoy bound for the U.K. and was sunk by the German Battleship “Hipper” with no survivors. Only Neville and I survived.

Forty years later I was browsing in the local library when I came across a book written by Alastair Montgomery called “Who sank the Sydney”. In the book he mentioned that the “Kormoran” sank the “British Union” and the “Sydney” and that there were no survivors from either boat. I contacted the author and informed him that Neville Finnis and myself (Alex Bandeen) survived from the “British Union” and were returned to the U.K. on a later convoy.

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The controversy surrounding the sinking of both ships seems to be whether the “Kormoran” shot at the survivors as they went to the lifeboats, or whether it was shrapnel injuries. The Sydney Carley boat was riddled with holes, from an unclear cause, and is now in a museum in Canberra. Similarly the “British Union” Lifeboat was found to be leaking and the injuries sustained by the crew, as it left the ships side, seems to link the cause of the damage together.

The “Kormoran” did not survive the battle with the “Sydney”. She sank later and survivors of the “Kormoran” were taken to Australia. When they arrived they had a monkey, which they had taken from the “British Union”, that was later put down.

Alexander F Bandeen
Chief Steward

3.55 I have set these documents out in full because Mr Finnis and Chief Steward Bandeen were the only survivors in the lifeboat in relation to which CMDR Chapman had apparently written, ‘Raider fired machine gun at one boat in water’. It is clear from their accounts that each of these two survivors denies such a thing happened. If NW Finnis’ note of March 1990 is correct, CAPT L Atthill OBE RN also denied the allegation. The allegation that KORMORAN machine-gunned survivors in a lifeboat from BRITISH UNION has been used by conspiracy theorists as the basis for alleging that KORMORAN machine-gunned survivors from SYDNEY while they were in the water. But Mr Finnis, who was in the lifeboat, wrote, ‘One thing I think is clear. The suggestion made in some quarter that “Kormoran” machine gunned our boats is luducrous [sic] in my view and Atthills comments confirm this’.

3.56 The statements by Mr Finnis and Chief Steward Bandeen are compelling evidence that there was no machine-gunning of lifeboats or survivors from BRITISH UNION. There is no doubt that both the 3.7-centimetre gun and the machine guns on KORMORAN were fired: the artillery report says so. That does not mean, however, that they were used against a lifeboat with survivors in it. Mr Finnis and Chief Steward Bandeen said the guns were not used. Accordingly, I am satisfied that there was no machine-gunning of survivors from BRITISH UNION.

3.57 My view is reinforced by the account in CAPT Detmers’ book stating that two KORMORAN sailors jumped into the water to rescue two British survivors. CAPT Detmers congratulated them on their efforts

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165 BATT.007.0179. Spelling and grammar as in the original.
166 PINQ.SUBS.011.0097
167 BATT.007.0116

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'but I also pointed out that, much as I approved of such chivalrous behaviour, they must not risk their own lives to save an enemy’s, because they had a job to do, and I was not in a position to replace them if they were lost'.

That conduct in rescuing survivors is inconsistent with speculation that KORMORAN machine-gunned BRITISH UNION survivors.

**AFRIC STAR**

**3.58** KORMORAN sank SS AFRIC STAR on 29 January 1941. The war diary recorded:

1305 Smoke cloud at 199° true.

1316 Quite suddenly steamer appears large out of the haze, distance 152 hm, and turns away to about 70° true. Steamer seems to be a large refrigerator ship and is making at least 15 nm. Since I cannot do much damage to her from this distance, I play the innocent and maintain course and speed.

1320 The trick succeeds, the steamer continues to turn slowly and obviously intends to return to its previous course behind our stern. Thus she is running into the range of my guns as the distance decreases. Therefore I can keep waiting.

1329 De-camouflaged, signal to stop, shot across the bow.

Went “Full Speed” on course 195°.

1330 Since nothing happens, opened fire. The 3rd salvo hits the target, distance about 90 hm.

Opponent transmits qq and position, is jammed by us.

1332 Opponent turns away to about 220° true.

1334 Opponent has stopped and ceased transmitting.

1335 Ceased firing; Signal: “Leave the ship”.

1340 Fired another round since the opponent seems to be manning the gun, then the opponent takes to the boats.

1350 Prize crew ready.

1400 Boat with boarding and scuttling party is away. The steamer has been abandoned head over heels, a mentally disturbed person has been left on board, he helps the boarding party to get on board. The ship is the “Afric Star”, 11900 tons, a

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168 CORR.007.0034 at 0078
refrigerator ship of the Blue-Star-Line, with 5709 tons of meat and 634 tons of butter from Buenos Aires to England via Sao Vicente. Since the complicated construction of the specialised ship would cause extraordinary difficulties for the prize crew, she furthermore has received serious hits and is on fire, I decide to scuttle her.

The preparation of the charges takes a lot of time, as the ship has hardly any large compartments and all bulkheads are closed hydraulically. In the meantime the crew (72 men) and four passengers (2 men, 2 women) are taken on board. They are all English.

1518  Set fuses on charges.
1529  Two explosions, ship lists towards port and is sinking.
1532  Motorboat is taken on board. Boarding party has returned on board and has brought mentally disturbed Englishman with them.
1556  Ship is not sinking any longer. She is floating on her many small compartments. Permission to fire 3.7cm anti-tank gun.
1600-1604  Individual fire from Nr. 2 gun. Every shot hits but the ship does not sink.
1606  Fired torpedo, hit in front of mizzen mast. Steamer sinks slowly by the stern.
1618  8°44'N, 24°38'W, “Afric Star” sunk.
1619  Course 225°, full speed, to get away. Although “Afric Star’s” call for help has not been understood by Freetown, a steamer in the vicinity has repeated it. Lively radio traffic in the whole area.\footnote{BUA.100.0137.0055_E at 0055_E to 0057_E (BUA.100.0137.0055 at 0055 to 0057)}

3.59 The artillery report signed by LEUT Skeries and dated 1 February 1941 reads:

a.) Visibility and observation conditions:

Visibility was approximately 160 hm. A layer of haze was above the water which could only be penetrated clearly with binoculars at a distance of less than 120 hm. The visible horizon was blurred. Observation conditions were good for the firing range in question.

b.) Range finding:

Due to the hazy visible horizon, range finding conditions were a little difficult at distances of more than 120 hm. However, they improved
during the battle due to the distance [between the ships] decreasing. The initial firing range was established correctly. An increase of approximately 10 hm occurred in the range finding after the 10th salvo which can no longer be explained and which deviated strongly from the real distance and had a negative effect on the firing.

c.) Lateral bearings:
The calculation of 1.25 did not work as the enemy had already begun to turn away before the first salvo reached its aim. This turn was only recognised with certainty after the first shots fell. Up to the 6th salvo, firing at a lateral bearing could be observed after an improvement to the right. The questionable bearings of the 8th to the 10th salvos can be explained by the fact that counter-measures after the enemy’s turn of 180° were not forceful enough. Due to the enemy’s reduced speed, the lateral bearing for the 14th to 16th salvos fell too far to the right.

d.) Range:
The auxiliary observer’s observation of hits during the 5th salvo was acted upon by increasing the range by 4 hm. At this time, the enemy was at a bearing of 90 degrees. Apart from that, there was a reasonable assumption that he would steam off at maximum speed. The subsequent shortened aim which was of questionable accuracy could not be used for further range finding. After new range finding, test firing started again in the form of fire ranging over an area. Since all salvos went over as a consequence of the range finding error mentioned under b.), this resulted in re-adjusting twice by two hm. This arc of fire inevitably had to go over as it was reported that the range was decreasing while the shots were still in the air […].

e.) Firing speed:
A salvo sequence of 11.8 sec during effective fire and otherwise of 14 sec. is sufficient.

f.) Aim and battery scattering:
The aim of the officers in charge of the guns in respect of elevation and lateral bearing was good and steady. Observed larger linear straddling by the battery could not be avoided as the guns have very different barrel loads.

g.) Malfunctions:
The guns mounted in the midships hatches malfunctioned several times due to the visibility being impaired by gunpowder smoke.
Otherwise, battery and fire control system functioned without problems.170

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170 BUA.100.0139.0007_E at 0009_E to 0010_E (BUA.100.0139.0007 at 0009 to 0010)
The report concluded with an ‘Assessment by the Commander’ signed by CAPT Detmers: ‘The firing was not easy. It led to success because of four direct hits’.

It is to be noted that in this engagement KORMORAN fired effective salvos at between 11.8- and 14.0-second intervals.

Figure 3.16 shows the battle sketch for the encounter with AFRIC STAR.

Figure 3.16  Sketch of the encounter between AFRIC STAR and KORMORAN\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{171} BUA.100.0137.0001 at 0088
3.61 On 30 January 1941 CAPT Detmers entered in the war diary his ‘Evaluation of Afric Star’.

The statements of the prisoners confirm that the captain fell for our trick and considered us harmless. Our camouflage therefore must be good. The crux is probably the fact that we have no superstructure behind which a gun could be suspected. The captured charts show nothing of significance, the charts on which there are entries will be sent to Skl [Naval War Staff]. A copy of the areal division of the oceans will be kept here. The capture of the Merchant Navy Code with Bigram Table is very advantageous for us. The table will be sent to Skl. Despite heavy hits, there were no wounded on ‘Afric Star’ except for the captain, who has burns to the face. On the bridge there was shrapnel protection similar to ours. Incidentally, the upper deck was cleared when the firing began. Armament corresponded to the list. The captain claimed not to have made any use of it because he had passengers on board. In addition, the vessel was also equipped with a paravane and smoke floats in their launch stands at the stern. Battle sketch, gunnery and torpedo report are enclosed.\(^\text{172}\)

3.62 Figure 3.17 shows AFRIC STAR, as photographed from KORMORAN. It illustrates how the silhouette of a ship can be seen and used for identification purposes. As the war diary states, KORMORAN was able to identify the ship as ‘a large refrigerator ship’ when seen at distance of about 15,200 metres.

\[\text{Photo courtesy of Bundesarchiv}\]

**Figure 3.17** AFRIC STAR, photographed from KORMORAN\(^\text{173}\)

\(^{172}\) BUA.100.0137.0055,E at 0058.0059.E (BUA.100.0137.0055 at 0058 to 0059)

\(^{173}\) BUA.100.0137.0001 at 0065
3.63 There is no material difference between the accounts recorded in the war diary and Book 10 and the account recorded in CAPT Detmers’ book in relation to the AFRIC STAR engagement, except that in his book CAPT Detmers wrote, ‘I ... gave the order to drop camouflage and run up the war flag’. That is not mentioned in the war diary or in Book 10.

3.64 Notable from this encounter were the following:

- All crew and three passengers were rescued, having approached KORMORAN in AFRIC STAR’s lifeboats.
- CAPT Detmers fired only after his order to stop and not use the wireless was ignored.
- KORMORAN fired accurately at between 9,000 and 10,000 metres.
- KORMORAN could fire salvos at 11- to 14-second intervals.
- The captain of AFRIC STAR considered KORMORAN harmless, apparently because KORMORAN’s appearance gave no indication of where armaments could be hidden.

EURYLOCHUS

3.65 About two hours after concluding the engagement with AFRIC STAR, KORMORAN engaged SS EURYLOCHUS, sinking her. The war diary recorded:

1825 Blacked out vessel in sight ahead on starboard side. By the high funnel, it could be a “Blue Funnel”.

1828 De-camouflaged. The opponent obviously does not see us.

1831 Permission to fire star shells and main battery. In the hazy air the opening distance had been overestimated, but further fire was well on target. Despite many hits the steamer is transmitting ceaselessly.

1840 Ceased firing, opponent has stopped and is no longer transmitting. Crew takes to the boats.

1851 The steamer suddenly transmits a radio message in numbers, permission to fire to main battery and 2 cm guns, until the opponent stops transmitting. The superstructure of the ship is completely shot up. Radio traffic is even livelier than with “Afric Star”. Thanks to the Merchant Navy Code with

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174 SPC.003.0037 at 0050
175 CORR.007.0034 at 0079
complete Bigram Table 7 captured from “Afric Star”, we understand that the loss of “Eurylochus” is being reported to the Air Ministry in London. Radio traffic has become so lively that I decide to sacrifice a torpedo. The crew is given time to leave the ship, then

1911 fired torpedo. Hit amidships at the level of the engine room. Steamer sinking slowly by the stern.

1939 8°19’N; 25°01’W ‘Eurylochus’ sunk. From two boats that have been shot up completely, 4 Englishmen and 39 Chinese are taken on board.176

3.66 The artillery report recorded:

Enemy armament: 1 gun, mounted at the stern.

Firing method: Independent firing.

Fire control: Control from front artillery director control stand to artillery telegraph system, elevation and lateral bearing directly, gunners.

Visibility: Dark night, hazy, enemy can be recognised as blurred shadow with fuzzy contours, no longer visible with the optics of the guns.

Lighting: by star shells.

The star shells immediately captured the target well during first flare up. During the whole approach the lighting remained sufficient apart from a short interruption due to 1st and 2nd malfunction at the gun.

Battle battery: True initial range 32 hm. Due to overestimated initial range the first salvos went over. Two bigger adjustments brought the volleys to target. Further fire covered the target well. Initially, the enemy attempted to outmaneuver the hits. He did not make use of his gun.

During the last firing range of 10 hm, the 2-cm M.G.C/30 was used with sufficient effect to counter the enemy’s wireless station.

Battery and fire control system functioned without problems.

Ammunition fired:
76 rounds 15-cm nose-fused shells
24 star shells L/3.177

3.67 Figure 3.18 shows KORMORAN’s battle sketch of its engagement with EURYLOCHUS.

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176 BUA.100.0137.0055_E at 0057_E to 0058_E (BUA.100.0137.0055 at 0057 to 0058)
177 BUA.100.0139.0011_E (BUA.100.0139.0011)
On 30 January 1941 CAPT Detmers recorded in the war diary his ‘Evaluation of Eurylochus’:

“Eurylochus”, 5723 tons, owners A. Holt and Co., Liverpool, with aircraft on the way to Takoradi on the Gold Coast. Number of aircraft not determined. A Chinese who has served on the “Donau” speaks some German. He claims there were 24. The Second Officer, as the only rescued officer, speaks of 6 heavy bombers which were to be assembled in Takoradi and flown to the front to be used against the Italians. He also claims that 4 shots were fired from the stern gun. We have not noticed this. “Eurylochus” was standing so far from land, because she wanted to avoid the U-boats off Freetown, thereby she ran straight into our arms. Not rescued are 18 Englishmen and 20 Chinese. Amongst those taken on board 3 were seriously and 2 slightly

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178 BUA.100.0137.0001 at 0089
wounded. One of the Chinese nonetheless died during the course of the night despite immediate surgery.

Firing at night with the light from star shells is the only option for us, owing to our poor gun sights. Unfortunately, we are equipped with so few star shells that we are now forced to use a different method. With our searchlight alone the illumination is too bad. Nevertheless, I always switched it on at intervals since the opponent who is not equipped with a range finder then underestimates the distance considerably. Thus “Eurylochus”, just like “British Union”, fired very short, according to the statement by the gunnery officer. When he noticed it, it was too late. Battle sketch, gunnery and torpedo report are enclosed.179

3.69 The account in Book 10 is not materially different from that in the war diary. In connection with the use of machine guns it stated, ‘In spite of many direct hits the steamer continued to transmit uninterruptedly. In order to prevent this, the 2 cm. MG/C 30s were arranged so effectively at a distance of 10 hm that the enemy stopped transmitting. The crew took to the boats’.180

3.70 The account in CAPT Detmers’ book is as follows:

We were a bit behind her and I increased speed to come abreast. As soon as we had done so I gave her a thrice-repeated and already very familiar order: “Heave to. No Wireless!” But the Eurylochus continued her course and began to use her wireless. After the unfavourable experience with our searchlight shooting at the British Union I immediately ordered rocket-shell firing and at the same time our battery opened fire. Once or twice it seemed to me that her stern gun fired at us, but then our gunners got her range with deadly accuracy. Within a few minutes the Eurylochus gave in, stopped her engines and ceased using her wireless.

I then ordered the cease-fire and switched on the searchlight. The searchlight crew had orders to illuminate the enemy’s stern, primarily in order that we could see from her wake whether she was obeying our orders to stop. She was, and her crew were now fully occupied with the lowering of the boats. The Kormoran stopped at a distance of about a thousand yards from her and we then lowered the motorboat with the usual boarding commando.

The Eurylochus was a ship of 5,723 B.R.T. on her way from Liverpool to Takoradi with sixteen heavy but engineless bombers. In Takoradi they would receive their engines and then be flown to Egypt. By preventing just that we were lending direct assistance to Rommel’s Afrika Corps, a circumstance which gave us a good deal of pleasure. From what the captain of the Eurylochus had to say to me subsequently it appeared

179 BUA.100.0137.0055_E at 0059_E and 0060_E (BUA.100.0137.0055 at 0059 and 0060)
180 SPC.003.0037 at 0050
that she had stood so far off shore in order to avoid the submarines which were operating around Freetown. In this way his ship had fallen direct into our hands.

... The lifeboats with the crew of the *Eurylochus* had pulled away from her side and they had disappeared into the darkness outside the area lit up by the searchlight, which was still focused on the ship’s stern. But after a while two boats came in sight and were ordered alongside. Both boats were waterlogged and making slow progress, so I manoeuvred to meet them. In the boats were three Englishmen and thirty-nine Chinese seamen, three of whom were seriously wounded. These latter were taken at once to the sickbay as soon as we got them on board. Eighteen Britishers and twenty Chinese seemed, according to our inquiries, to have got away in the darkness in other boats. The ship’s crew consisted almost entirely of Chinese seamen and I knew that it was nothing unusual for British shipowners to man their vessels with Chinese.

One of the officers of the *Eurylochus* declared that her gun had fired four shells at us. We had noticed a couple of flashes at the beginning of the affair, but nothing after that. Their shells probably fell short. We got all the prisoners below, our motor-boat came away from the *Eurylochus* and after a while the charges exploded. Whilst we were on the bridge watching the slowly sinking ship my wireless room reported that the wireless of the *Eurylochus* was in action again. I ordered the 2 cm anti-aircraft gun to open fire on the midships structure of the *Eurylochus*, and after a few moments the wireless activity ceased.

I didn’t think it really was the wireless of the *Eurylochus* which had been in operation again. I felt that it was more likely some ship on the lee side making towards us and using her wireless, which meant that my wireless monitor would be unable to tell the difference. However, my monitor insisted that it was the *Eurylochus* and that the signal had given the name. That was one more reason for sinking the *Eurylochus* quickly and getting away from the neighbourhood. I therefore ordered my torpedo officer to finish her off and this he did.

Just as the torpedo leapt out of its tube towards the *Eurylochus* something moved into the area of sea which was lit up by our searchlight. It was one of the ship’s boats, which had been invisible up to now in the darkness, and it was obviously heading back to the *Eurylochus*. It was already quite close to the doomed ship and would reach her about the same time as my torpedo.

I immediately gave orders for our searchlight to be switched off, and for a signal to be morse over by a blink lamp: “Torpedo away.” At the same time a handlamp was used to light up the course of the torpedo as it sped towards the *Eurylochus*. Unfortunately the time was too short for this to have any effect, and the boat arrived at the side of the *Eurylochus* at the same time as our torpedo. There was a terrific
explosion as the torpedo hit the *Eurylochus* amidships. Our searchlight lit up again immediately, but there was now no sign of the boat or of anyone in the water near the *Eurylochus*, which was now settling down rapidly. She disappeared beneath the surface at 08°19'N by 25° 01'W. We sailed around in a circle in the hope of picking up any survivors, but we found nothing, and then we set off at top speed away from the neighbourhood.\(^{181}\)

3.71 Thus, according to the book account, neither the machine gun nor the torpedo was fired until after 38 survivors from two lifeboats were taken on board. Only as the torpedo was fired did another lifeboat appear in the searchlight illuminating the ship. The book gives the impression that the lifeboat was destroyed by the explosion caused by the torpedo striking the ship and that there were no survivors from that lifeboat.

That is not the sequence of events described in the war diary. It has the crew taking to boats at 1851, then the main and machine guns firing and totally destroying the superstructure of the ship, then ‘the crew is given a little more time to leave the ship’\(^{182}\), and finally the torpedo was fired. No mention is made of a lifeboat appearing close to EURYLOCHUS as the torpedo hit or of a fruitless search for survivors from a lifeboat. It is to be noted that the machine gun was used ‘with sufficient effect to counter the enemy’s wireless station’\(^{183}\) from 1,000 metres, according to the artillery report. This is the approximate distance at which the engagement between KORMORAN and SYDNEY occurred.

3.72 The Inquiry was able to obtain two extant accounts from survivors. The first—dated 14 February 1941 and apparently made at the British Consulate in Buenos Aires, the port to which the rescuing ship, SS MONTE TEIDE, headed—is that of the Master of EURYLOCHUS, Captain AM Caird.\(^{184}\) The second—dated 31 January 1941 and apparently made by the 4th officer on board HMS BULOLO, to which ship three wounded and eight European survivors were transferred from the MONTE TEIDE at sea on 31 January\(^{185}\)—is by AC Sparks.

3.73 It appears from Captain Caird that, apart from the 43 people taken aboard KORMORAN from two of EURYLOCHUS’s boats, there were a further 28 survivors and one fatality. They were in two life rafts. The number lost in the encounter is not known, although some unidentifiable notes produced by the Battye Library suggest that inquiries made by the owners of EURYLOCHUS, Holt, Alfred & Company, indicated that there was only ‘one killed and two seriously

\(^{181}\) CORR.007.0034 at 0081 to 0083
\(^{182}\) PTE.006.0001 at 0032
\(^{183}\) BUA.100.0139.0011_E (BUA.100.0139.0001 at 0011)
\(^{184}\) WAM.008.0112_R
\(^{185}\) WAM.008.0112_R at 0113_R
injured’. That does not accord with Captain Caird’s statement. He wrote that he knew of two killed and five seriously wounded.

Both Sparks and Captain Caird suggested there were two raiders engaged in the attack on their ship; one was said to be a ‘rocket-battleship’. The KORMORAN war diary makes it clear that is not correct.

According to their accounts of the battle, KORMORAN opened fire in the dark from about 7,000 yards (Caird) or 4,000 yards (Sparks). EURYLOCHUS was hit by about the eighth salvo (Caird) or about the 12th (Sparks). By the time of the first hit, KORMORAN was about 3,000 yards distant (Caird), closing to ‘about half a mile’ (Sparks). According to Captain Caird, after being hit and with KORMORAN at 3,000 yards:

I had stopped the ship and ordered her to be abandoned and I signalled the raider, informing him that I was abandoning, which (he) acknowledged by a flash light, but he still continued to fire, his next salvo being a direct hit on the bridge, wheelhouse and chartroom. It was about now that a second raider came up on my starboard quarter and they also opened up a devastating fire, having the target illuminated by searchlights. By this time the range of the port side raider was about 3000 yards and he commenced spraying us fore and aft with machine gun tracer bullets. The machine gunning continued when we were trying to get away from the ship. Two of my boats were blown to pieces, the other two got away but I fear quite a number of lives were lost.

He also wrote, however, that ‘a few of us still remained on board’. Sparks confirmed the sending and receipt of the signal but not the effect of the machine-gunning. He wrote:

Just previous to the hit on the Bridge, the Captain had given the order to Abandon Ship, and I (signalled) abandoning ship, which was acknowledged.

On receipt of the message he re-opened fire and hit the “Eurylochus” in the way of No. 2 hatch. He then closed further and machine-gunned us, but without effect.

Sparks did not further mention machine-gun fire. Captain Caird wrote:

They were concentrating on the bridge with their devilish machine gun fire, so I fear Mr Baker [a writer in the wheelhouse] must have been killed. The whole affair was ghastly and it is evident that none of
us were intended to get out alive. It was a murderous attack and I now marvel how any one of us really did get away.\footnote{190}

3.75 This account demonstrates the damage to personnel and structures caused by shelling and machine-gun fire from KORMORAN at close range—a range similar to that at which the battle between SYDNEY and KORMORAN occurred. One can understand Captain Caird’s view that the attack on the bridge was ‘murderous’, having regard to his understanding of two dead and five seriously injured in that area and, in particular, his account that the attack occurred after it had been acknowledged that he was abandoning ship. His account does, however, contain the serious inaccuracy that there were two raiders involved, one assumed to be a pocket battleship, and, importantly, nowhere does he discuss the matter of when radio signalling ceased. He did say in his statement, ‘I got my raider alarm signal off so I hope [it] may have been the means of tracking them down’\footnote{191}, and he did say he and a few others remained on board after others had abandoned ship.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig3_19}
\caption{KORMORAN’s photograph of damage to AFRIC STAR’s bridge\footnote{192}}
\end{figure}
There is no doubt that CAPT Detmers was determined to keep attacking the vessel with all means available as long as it continued transmitting: such transmissions could disclose the fact of the attack and its location and possibly attract countermeasures by air or sea.

3.76 The available information is not sufficient to support any finding that KORMORAN continued firing on EURYLOCHUS after she ceased transmitting. It is sufficient to support a finding that KORMORAN continued firing with 15-centimetre shells and machine guns while EURYLOCHUS was transmitting, concentrating her attack on the bridge area and the personnel there. Such an attack was permissible under the rules of war.

There is no evidence that CAPT Detmers used machine guns, or other armaments, to attack survivors from EURYLOCHUS in lifeboats or in the sea.

AGNITA

3.77 On 22 March 1941 KORMORAN encountered and sank MV AGNITA. The war diary recorded:

22.3 NE by N 3-4, slight sea, NE swell, light clouds, very good visibility.

0921 Steamer in sight at 100° true.

0934 Steamer is a tanker, alarm, course 60°.

0935 went to Full Speed. Since we are just passing the border of the Neutrality Zone, I can take her on.

0937 Ship sends RR message: 3°31’N, 23°40’W (thus 20 nm outside the neutrality zone) suspicious vessel agnita/GTGP. [italicised text in English in original]

W/t jammed successfully.

0939 Distance 115 hm. De-camouflaged, signal: stop immediately.

At the same time morse signal with Varta lamp: no wireless or be shelled. [italicised text in English in original]

Both orders are followed immediately.

1008 Rudder failure. (see engine room log).

1027 Starboard motor boat to water, boarding party off board.

Ship is motor tanker Agnita, 3561 tons, Anglo-Saxon Oil Co., in ballast from Freetown to Carapito-Venezuela. Since the tanker is small, in poor condition, very badly obstructed by built-in special tanks, I decide to scuttle her.
Crew (13 Englishmen and 25 Chinese) taken on board.

Set fuses on charges (3 boxes of explosives, 4 explosive charges).

1st explosion.

2nd explosion, ship lists to starboard and sinks slowly by the stern, 1 box of explosives can still be seen on the port side, dud.

1200 3°30’N, 23°48’W.

1204 Day’s run: 322 nm. Total run: 25579 nm.

Boat taken on board. Since the ship, like all empty tankers, will not sink,

1234 nine 15 cm rounds into the waterline. Ship is burning, all tanks are open, but is still sinking very slowly.

1319 Funnel is under water. Went on 122°; 14.5 knots.

1329 Ship hangs vertically by the stem post and slowly sinks completely.\textsuperscript{193}

Figure 3.20 AGNITA, sunk by KORMORAN on 22 March 1941\textsuperscript{194}
3.78 The account in Book 10 is not materially different from that in the war diary. There being no battle, there was no artillery report.

3.79 In November 1941 CAPT CH Hill-Willis RN was First Mate on AGNITA. In 1983 he published a book entitled, *On Their Majesties’ Service*, and in it was an account of his recollection of the encounter with KORMORAN. He wrote:

At 08.20 a.m. on the morning of March 23rd 1941, when about 700 miles from Freetown, a stranger was sighted ahead on our port bow. She appeared to be on a passing course, but in accordance with standing orders I altered course to the north. I informed the Captain, and when he came on to the Bridge he asked me why I had made such a large alteration. I was watching the other ship through my binoculars, and thought that there was something familiar about her appearance. I said to the Captain—‘That vessel is not loaded, and has got her forward derricks rigged for working. She is not an Allied ship as there is no gun aft. I think that I have seen her before or one like her in the Kiel Canal.’

The Captain became very worried, and went to his cabin.

The stranger was steaming at about 17 knots. She was not making any obvious alterations of course, and would pass astern of us at a distance of two or three miles if she continued.

I instructed the Gunlayer to load both guns. I also ordered the second Officer to prepare a smoke float for dropping. The Radio Officer was given our position for transmission if necessary.

When the stranger reached a position off our port quarter he suddenly altered course directly towards us; it was a tense moment, and we watched carefully for the next move. It was not long in coming, for instantly and simultaneously the forecastle head folded down, the deckhouses of the fore and after decks vanished, No 3 hatch rolled back, and a large platform mounting a rangefinder shot up the foremast, whilst the German flag appeared at the mainmast head. This whole transformation had only taken seconds, and what seemed to be a harmless merchant ship was now a very lethal looking warship. The armament that was now displayed was very formidable, and I could only see half of it.

As the identity of the vessel was now established, I requested permission to open fire, and to drop a smoke float. He replied ‘No’ to both requests. I instructed the Radio Office to transmit RRR, and give our position. I then tied the leaded canvas bag that contained the ship’s papers and codes, and threw it overboard—it sank at once. The Chief Engineer was informed of the situation.

...
Meanwhile the Gunlayer, who had loaded the 4.9, had it trained, and ranged on the enemy. The target was the base of her funnel. He was awaiting the order to FIRE.

Time stood still for a second or two—then it was too late. There was a flash from the starboard forward gun of the Raider, and a shell screamed overhead, splashed in the sea about two hundred yards away. A daylight signalling lamp was calling, and I answered with our Aldis lamp. The message received was ‘Stop using wireless—dismiss gun crew—you have five minutes to abandon your ship’.

I asked for a repeat; there was another flash. And shell hit the sea astern of us. There was no doubt where the next one would hit if we tried more delaying tactics. The Captain, who had gone to his cabin, came back on to the Bridge, and I gave him the message. He ordered me to reply in the affirmative, and to obey the German orders. It was a dreadful moment in my life, and one that I have regretted ever since. We had lost our chance.

I replied to the signal ‘Message understood—we will obey’. I then rang ‘Finished with engines’, and ordered the Gunlayer to abandon the gun, and order the crew to Lifeboat Stations.

I then gave the order to ‘Abandon Ship’, for the Captain had gone to his cabin again to gather some private papers. In two and a half minutes the boats were waterborne, and we hoisted the sails and bore away to the westward. The daily boat drills over the previous year had well paid off, for there was no panic and nobody was injured.

The Chief Engineer reported that he had opened the sea cocks, and then broken the spindles with a hammer.

As we sailed away we observed two launches, with heavily armed sailors aboard them, go alongside our ship. After ten minutes they returned to the Raider, who then opened fire on ‘Agnita’. An explosion took place in the engine room, which blew the engine room skylight overboard. The ship was quickly a smoking wreck and sinking. Then one of the launches came after us ... The boats were then taken in tow back to the Raider. On arrival we were ordered to climb up a couple of pilot ladders at gun point. The boats were then sunk by small arms fire.

We were searched, and led forward under armed guard to the lower forecastle, and locked in. Shortly afterwards the Captain came down, and informed us that we would be properly treated, although the German Captain was not happy at the manner our gun had been trained on his ship. He said that this was inconsistent with the Geneva Convention, as we were civilians. This was my first, but by no means my last, taste of German reasoning ... It was all like a bad dream,
except that dreams only last a split second, this one was to last for four years and nearly two months.

Down in the lower forecastle, it was hot, with a minimum of ventilation—there were rows of hammocks, which turned out to be the most uncomfortable contraptions I had ever tried to sleep in. We were visited by the Torpedo Officer [Lt zS Greter] who announced that he had been detailed as our Prison Officer. He was a young man, who spoke excellent English, and behaved in a perfectly correct manner. He explained the routine that we were to follow—wash times, meal times and exercise periods. He warned against any attempts to do damage or to start a fire, and that his job was just as unpleasant to him, as our situation must be to us. The next visitor was one of the Ship’s Doctors195 to check that everyone was well. I told him that I had two men under treatment. He told me to call them and follow him. We were taken to the Ship’s Surgery, which was an excellently appointed one. It contained just about everything that could be imagined. The two men were examined, and he gave me the necessary dosages to give them. It was all done in a most friendly and understanding manner, and he visited us every day.

The food supplied us was the same as that supplied to the crew—mainly bean soup and sauerkraut, black bread and ersatz coffee. We also received a small issue of cigarettes …196

3.80 Of importance from this account are two matters:

• the independent confirmation of the rapidity with which the transformation from merchant cruiser to warship occurred. CAPT Hill-Willis wrote it ‘had taken only seconds’

• the fact that as the de-camouflaging occurred the German flag appeared at the mainmast head.

As appears in the German accounts of the battle with SYDNEY, CAPT Detmers maintained that the de-camouflaging and raising of the German flag took ‘six seconds’. CAPT Hill-Willis’ account supports that evidence.

Further, the accounts of several KORMORAN survivors suggest that, as a matter of course and as a result of training, the German war ensign was always flown at the time of de-camouflaging. CAPT Hill-Willis’ account gives support to that evidence too. It is also noted that on this and all other occasions no note is made in the war diary of any order given to fly the German flag.

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195 This could have been either Dr Lienhoop or Dr Habben, who were respectively the medical officer and assistant medical officer on KORMORAN: SPC.003.0037 at 0042.

196 PUB.008.0001 at 0070 to 0071
3.81 Additionally, it is noted that a flag signal from KORMORAN to AGNITA at 11,500 metres was ‘obeyed immediately’. This makes it clear that in conditions described in the war diary as ‘very good visibility’ flags could be read at that distance.

**CANADOLITE**

3.82 On 25 March 1941 KORMORAN encountered and took as a prize MV CANADOLITE. The war diary recorded:

N by W-E 2-4, slight to moderate sea, moderate N swell, variable cloud, isolated heavy rain, good to bad visibility.

0400 course 20°

0651 2°35’N, 23°48’W. Steamer in sight at 40° true.

0655 Alarm, course 330°. Since she is still very far, about 200 hm, I maintain the slow speed in order not to make her suspicious. Hopefully the old trick works because with the present condition of the engine I do not believe in a long chase at full speed.

0727 The trick succeeds. Now she is about 100 hm away. We take her for a medium tanker.

Hard a-starboard, engines: Full Speed ahead.

0729 De-camouflage, stop signal hoisted. I keep turning continually in order to keep my whole battery ready to fire. The tanker now shows her stern.

0736 At about 90 hm, 2 warning shots across the bow. Opponent uses radio and is jammed.

0740 Guns permission to fire. The second round lies a few metres off the target. Opponent no longer transmits, stops, takes to the boats. Therefore firing ceased.

0758 2°38’N, 23°43’W. Stopped next to opponent.

0806 Port motorboat lowered, boarding party off board.

The tanker is Canadolite, 11309 tons, of the Imperial Oil Shipping Co., port of origin Montreal, motor ship, built by Krupp, Germania Kiel. In ballast from Freetown to Venezuela.

I intend to send the ship to Bordeaux as a prize. Therefore I must get hold of the crew again who are trying to flee in their lifeboats. One of the boats has already got a fair way off. My
second motorboat tows it back to the tanker. That means losing a lot of time.\textsuperscript{197}

With the exception of the captain, chief engineer, wireless operator and leading gunner, the rest of the crew of 44 were sent with a prize crew to occupied France.

3.83 The accounts in Book 10 and CAPT Detmers’ book are not materially different. There is no artillery report.

3.84 None of the crew of CANADOLITE was lost or suffered any injury.

\textbf{CRAFTSMAN}

3.85 On 9 April 1941 KORMORAN encountered and sank SS CRAFTSMAN. The war diary recorded:

0110 SE 2-4, calm to slight sea, long SE swell, heavy clouds, good visibility. \textit{W/t} that Ship 16 can only be at RV point by 16.4.\textsuperscript{198} [16 April], therefore we have some more time.

0545 Smoke cloud in sight 327° true, hence almost exactly astern.

0555 Alarm. The ship seems to be making a fairly high speed, little can be determined yet of her silhouette, thus I have to reckon with an auxiliary cruiser.

\textsuperscript{197} BUA.100.0176.0007\_E at 0009\_E to 0010\_E (BUA.100.0176.0007 at 0009 to 0010); PTE.006.0001 at 0056 to 0057
\textsuperscript{198} PTE.008.0195

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{canadolite.jpg}
\caption{CANADOLITE, encountered by KORMORAN on 25 March 1941 and taken as a prize.}
\end{figure}
Enclosures—Battle sketch, Gunnery report, Torpedo report. Therefore I shall at first turn to starboard, in order to get out of the windward position, furthermore there is a big raincloud that provides the right background for me and potentially allows me to disappear quickly.

0601 Course 195°, Full Speed = 17 nm.

0610 Now the steamer can be recognised, ordinary freighter in ballast. Nationality signs are not recognisable, thus probably enemy. Now I must not scare her off. Since she certainly saw my turn to starboard, I decide to continue pretending to be an Englishman on zigzag course. In addition I slowly reduce speed, so that he comes closer.

0621 Course 165°, 12 nm.

0624 “156°; distance is now 125 hm.

0632 “125°.

0639 “105°; 9 nm.

0649 “85°. Distance 108 hm. The light-coloured mark on the side of the steamer is definitely not a neutrality sign. Gun on stern! Therefore English, despite the American construction type. Decision to take her on.

0651 Went to 14 knots.

0654 De-camouflaged, signal: stop immediately, with Varta lamp: no wireless or be shelled [italicised text in English in original].

0657 Opponent hoists flag; not distinguishable. Went on course 330°.

0659 Warning shot across the bow. At first nothing happens, then she turns away, I turn after her.

0704 Course 30°, guns permission to fire. Steamer sends RR message, is jammed.

0707 Opponent stops and is no longer transmitting, firing ceased.

0709 Opponent gets under way again. Guns permission to fire, several hits. Ship burning amidships.

0712 Enemy stops, I am just about to stop firing, then she transmits again. Now she is in quite a bad state.

0718 Opponent’s crew takes to the boats, firing ceased.

0728 0°32’N, 23°27’W. Ship stops beside opponent, motorboat put to water.

0734 Boarding and scuttling party off board.
0755 Life boats alongside. 46 prisoners taken on board.
Several slightly wounded, 3 seriously wounded. (Captain,
Chief Engineer, Second Officer). There are 5 dead on the
steamer.
She is the “Craftsman”. 8022 tons, from Liverpool, Harrison
Line, on the way from Rosyth to Cape Town. Ship has 1500
tons ballast and a big anti-submarine net for Cape Town.
Since the steamer is already burning fiercely amidships, she
will be blown up.

0834 Set fuse on charges.

0841 1st explosion.

0848 2nd "

0849 3rd " , 4th charge (depth charge) [(Wasserbombe)]ripped
off by the other explosions. Ship sinks to the loading mark
and then floats on the many small and large buoys of the anti-
submarine net. I have to sacrifice a torpedo and want to
combine this with the trial of my underwater tube.

0924 Torpedo away, hit at the aft edge of the midships
superstructure. Both of the aft holds are blown open by it.
The buoys float up, the ship sinks quickly over the stern post
on an even keel. When taking the motorboat on board while it
is in a hoisted position, the aft pulley slips, the front one
holds. No one hurt, some equipment is lost, amongst it 1 box
with blasting tools. The boat is saved, the forward davit is out
of alignment. The equipment is altered so that this cannot
happen again.

0930 0°32'N, 23°37'W. “Craftsman” sunk. Went on course 105° and
15 nm.199

3.86 The artillery report recorded:

Enemy armament: One 10-cm gun. Mounted at stern.
Firing method: Independent firing.
Fire control: Fire control: Control from front artillery director control
stand to artillery telegraph system, elevation and lateral bearing
directly, gunners.
Battle type: Running battle to port.
Visibility: Visibility, observation and range finding conditions were
favourable. Clear air and clear visible horizon.

199 BUA.100.0176.0022_E at 0022_E to 0024_E (BUA.100.0176.0022 at 0022 to 0024)
Deployment of batteries: Following the shot across the bow, the enemy turned off immediately and displayed his stern. It was observed that he subsequently manned his stern gun. At the same time, he transmitted an R-signal. The first salvo after permission to fire was given resulted in a direct hit at the enemy’s stern and put the gun out of action. Initial firing range 60 hm. Firing could be observed for its total duration. Several rounds were achieved by independent firing. After the first hit, the enemy reduced his speed, but subsequently he increased his speed once more as was shown through range finding. The final firing range was 62 hm. The prize crew established 12 hits.

Duration of fire: 8 minutes. Battery and fire control system functioned without problems.

Ammunition fired: 45 rounds 15-cm nose-fused shells.200

3.87 Figure 3.22 shows the battle sketch of the engagement between KORMORAN and CRAFTSMAN.

3.88 Neither Book 10 nor CAPT Detmers’ book gives a materially different account. In his book CAPT Detmers wrote, ‘I ordered de-camouflage, and as the war flag went up I sent him the usual peremptory message: “Heave to! No wireless!”’201 That signal is recorded, in English, in the war diary as ‘no wireless or be shelled’202.

3.89 Notable from this encounter are several points:

- This was the first occasion she had fired an underwater torpedo against a British ship. The conditions in which it was used were that KORMORAN was stationary in the water about 950 metres from CRAFTSMAN, which was also stationary. Figure 3.23 shows a diagram of the firing, taken from the torpedo report signed by CAPT Detmers and SBLT Greter, the torpedo officer.

- Five crew on CRAFTSMAN were killed by the shelling during the engagement. All other crew, 46 in number, including three seriously wounded, were rescued by KORMORAN without further injury. Firing ceased when the crew of CRAFTSMAN took to the boats from which they were rescued.

- KORMORAN’s 15-centimetre guns were accurate at 6,000 metres.
Figure 3.22    Sketch of the encounter between CRAFTSMAN and KORMORAN\textsuperscript{203}

\textsuperscript{203} BUA.100.0176.0001 at 0038
NICOLAOS DL

3.90 On 12 April 1941 KORMORAN encountered and sank SS NICOLAOS DL. The war diary recorded:

12.4 SE by E 3-4, slight sea, SE swell, Overcast, very good visibility
0600 1°25’S, 22°39’W. Smoke cloud in sight at 140°, i.e. 30° to port.
0606 Enclosures: battle sketch and Gunnery report. Course 225°, in order to get between Neutrality Zone and steamer.
0612 Course 200°. I want to get closer in order to see what sort of a ship this is.
0623 Course 230°. Caution! Very slender masts, funnel conspicuous.
0627 Course 180°. Modern ship, without doubt freighter.
0630 “ 170°.
0643 “ 160°.
0646 Engines: Full Speed = 17 nm.
0655 Course 150°; opponent bearing 108, distance 215 hm.
0657 Course 90°. She is meant to see the marked change of course. I am steering a good distance behind her stern, so she will think that I am trying to avoid her, for at this huge distance I must not make her suspicious.
0702 Course 95°, I turn quite slowly after her, for the distance has to become less after all.
0715 Course 100°. A test of our patience begins which is costing nerves.

0739 Opponent turns away to starboard, but she does not transmit Alarm; distance is now about 150 hm.

0740 Course 110°, maintained tactics. Under no circumstances cause her to be alarmed.

0747 Engine III out of action. (See engine room log) Went to 15 knots.

0757 Course 115°, distance 131 hm.

0804 Distance is increasing (137 hm). The situation is getting dramatic. The guy is clever. But as long as he does not use wireless, he is not yet sure of the situation. I have to get to about 100 hm in order to have a reasonable chance to catch her effectively with the guns. I count on human weakness, the captain will still want to return to his old course. Thus keep calm, it is only a test of [our] patience. She has to come to me.

0813 Course 120°

0820 " 125°

0825 " 130°

0830 " 135°, distance 151 hm. She turns to former course.

0844 We have won! Distance is constant and decreases. I am still slightly more astern than across.

0845 Course 140° distance 130 hm.

0907 Course 145° distance 118 hm.

0914 Course 150° distance 114 hm. It would be possible now. However, I still want to go a little further ahead until I am completely in the sun. Then he will not notice the attack immediately.

0931 Course 155° distance 110 hm. He has become quite trusting by now. He simply does not believe an auxiliary cruiser could travel beside him so patiently for hours without doing anything.

0953 Now it is enough. Distance 100 hm. De-camouflage

0954 Course 210° towards the opponent.

0955 1st warning shot across the bow. Stop signal hoisted.

0956 Course 220°.
2nd warning shot across bow. Opponent turns away to starboard. Does not stop.

Guns permission to open fire (Distance = 96 hm)

Opponent transmits SOS and position.

Opponent ceases transmitting. Firing stopped.

Opponent lowers boats to water.

1°54′S, 22°12′W. Stopped next to opponent. Prize crew off board.

Steamer is “Nicolaos D.L.”, port of origin Piräus, 5486 tons, property of shipping line C/N.D. Lykiardopulo, Piräus, with building timber (Oregon pine) from Vancouver to Durban.

Lifeboat from Greek ship alongside. 38 men of all nationalities taken on board.

Although the steamer is new and the cargo not unimportant, [...] she has received a direct hit on the bridge so that this including the rudder is completely out of order. Therefore I decide to scuttle her.

Set fuses on charges.

1st and 2nd explosion.

3rd explosion. Ship is sinking very slowly.

1°54′S; 22°12′W. Day’s run: 261 nm. Total run: 29798 nm

Boat taken on board.

Despite the lashings of the deck cargo being undone, the ship does not sink. She is not worth a torpedo. Over time she has to sink because the water bombs in engine and boiler room have done a good job. Therefore decide to use the guns to set fire to the deck cargo and then leave the ship to her fate.

Fired with 2 cm and anti-tank gun. The timber will not catch fire.

4 rounds 15 cm into the hull plating near No. 2 hold, waterline and deck cargo. The forward deck cargo and the midship are on fire, the stern is under water. The aft deck cargo floats off board. This has to suffice.205

3.91 Figure 3.24 shows KORMORAN’s battle sketch.

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205 BU.A.100.0176.0022_E at 0024_E to 0027_E (BU.A.100.0176.0022 at 0024 to 0027); PTE.006.0001 at 0066 to 0068
3.92 The artillery report recorded:

Firing method: Independent firing.

Fire control: Control from front artillery director control stand to artillery telegraph system, elevation and lateral bearing directly, gunners.

Battle type: Running battle to starboard.

Enemy speed according to calculation: 12 knots.

Visibility: Visibility and observation conditions were good. Clear air, visible horizon slightly blurred.

Range finding: The conditions were favorable. The initial range has been well established. However, during firing a skip occurred in

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206 BUA.100.0176.0001 at 0039 and 0040

The Loss of HMAS SYDNEY II
range-finding due to miscalculations, which had a negative effect on firing.

**Deployment of batteries:** The enemy turned away after two shots across the bow, fired from a range of 98 hm. A reduction in speed could not be observed.

After permission to fire was given, the first salvo arced to the left. Initial firing range 98 hm. An adjusted shorter aim fired to reduce the period of test firing was also questionable, apart from the last salvo, as the enemy had turned away even further in the meantime and also seemed to have reduced his speed. Renewed test firing could no longer take effect since an order to wait had subsequently been received from the ship's command.

Following renewed permission to fire, 2 rounds were achieved by independent firing. One direct hit was observed. Last firing range 91 hm.

**Duration of firing:** 5 minutes. Battery and fire control system functioned without problems.

**Ammunition fired:**
- 46 rounds 15-cm nose-fused shells
- 4 rounds 15-cm base-fused shells

3.93 The Book 10 account is not materially different from that in the war diary. In his own book, however, CAPT Detmers wrote:

Finally when I could make out nothing to suggest that it was a U.S. ship I got in touch and asked her name. It was some time before she took the trouble to answer, but finally she told me that she was the Greek steamer Nicolas de L. [sic]

As soon as I received this information I gave her the usual morsed order: ‘Heave to! No wireless!’ and when she did not obey I underlined my message with a few salvoes.

There is nothing in the war diary to suggest any such communication between KORMORAN and NICOLAOS DL before fire was opened. The diary makes it clear that KORMORAN de-camouflaged at 0953, sent the ‘stop’ signal and a warning shot across the bows at 0955, and gave permission to open fire at 0958. I accept the version in the war diary as a more reliable account.

3.94 I note the following from this encounter:

- Fifty 15-centimetre shells were fired in five minutes—a rate of 10 a minute.

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[207] BUA.100.0139.0013_E

[208] CORR.007.0034 at 0102
• The 15-centimetre guns were accurate at about 9,100 metres.

• All crew from NICOLAOS DL were rescued from the vessel’s lifeboats, apparently without loss of life or injury.

**VELEBIT**

3.95 On 26 June 1941 KORMORAN encountered and sank SS VELEBIT. The war diary recorded:

0230 SW 6-7, heavy sea. W/t: new instructions for homebound ships which are always to avoid the previous routes.

0224 Dim light in sight to starboard at 240° true. Immediately afterwards recognised silhouette.

0227 Officer of the watch turns away to port, but according to orders keeps the silhouette in sight.

0259 Shot across bow. Vessel does not stop.

0300 1 gunnery report. Guns permission to fire at about 30 hm.

0310 Although the screw is still turning ceased firing, since the steamer is burning fiercely, and the crew is leaving the ship. Steamer did not transmit. First I go past her stern in order to determine her name. Nothing can be recognised. Otherwise our guns have done a thorough job. The ship is lost. Steered towards a night rescue buoy which at that very moment goes off. Approximate area searched systematically, suddenly heard cries for help and caught a completely swamped lifeboat in the searchlight. Boat can be kept afloat only with difficulty in the rough, choppy sea.

0415 Gone alongside boat with auxiliary cruiser. 9 survivors rescued, namely 7 Yugoslavs, amongst them the 3rd engineer, 1 Indian and 1 Singhalese. Ship is the Yugoslav “VELEBIT”, 4153 tons, of the Jugoslavenska Oceanska Plodvidba d.d. from Split [,] in ballast from Bombay to Moulmein in ballast to fetch rice. Ship built in England in 1911, crew 34 men. The rescued men have not seen any more survivors. When captured, the ship was occupied with engine repairs. When shooting started, everyone fled from engine room. Not switched engine off because of immediate hits in bridge and engine room. 2nd officer was on watch and could not use Morse. Despite many hits, the ship is sinking very slowly. It is not worth any more ammunition, because it is burning out completely, has already drifted far from the Ceylon - Preparis Channel route and, if it does not sink, it must soon strand on the coral reefs of the Andamans. Therefore left to drift.
0429 Alarm ended. Course 130°, 14 knots.
0539 Burning wreck out of sight.209

3.96 The artillery report recorded:

Firing task: Night firing with artificial lighting.
Firing method: Independent firing.
Enemy armament: Not armed.

Fire control: Control from front artillery director control stand to artillery telegraph system, elevation and lateral bearing directly, gunners.

Battle type: Running battle to starboard with the enemy turning away for a short time to engage in a passing battle and subsequently returning to a running battle.

Enemy speed: Approximately 8 knots.

Visibility: Dark night (new moon), clear air, visible horizon recognisable. Even without lighting, the enemy could be recognised as a dark shadow from the director control stand as well as through the range finders.

Observation conditions: Due to the enemy turning away after he was ordered to stop by the Morse signal, it became necessary to open fire from the windward position. Wind south west 7-8, swell 7. The strong wind blew the powder smoke towards the enemy and obstructed visibility between our ship and the enemy during the whole duration of firing. Occasionally, the range finding of the gunners was badly obstructed by it, and the observation conditions from the director control stand were occasionally difficult. Basically, only direct hits could be observed clearly. Shots that went over or fell wide could barely be recognised.

Lighting: The search lights captured the target well at the start of firing. [...] During the rest of the engagement, the search light lost the target several times for a short period. This was due to powder smoke which impaired the visibility of the directional numbers. The lighting was sufficient.

Range finding: An initial bearing could not be taken due to darkness. The first salvo was fired when the search lights were switched on. From then on, powder smoke affected the vision of the range finders. Only two bearings were taken while [the guns] were firing. First bearing 20 hm, second bearing 15 hm.

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209 BUA.100.0176.0126_E (BUA.100.0176.0126); PTE.006.0001 at 0098
Deployment of battery: The enemy was at a bearing of 90 degrees when the search lights were switched on for the first time. A shot across the bow with an elevation of 20 hm and an adjustment of 40 to the right fell possibly 150 m wide to the right [...]. Since the enemy failed to stop, the whole battery opened fire with an elevation of 25 hm.

At this point, the enemy turned to port to engage in a running battle. The first salvo achieved a [direct] hit on the bridge, and probably put the wireless room out of action. The enemy did not send any wireless transmissions during the rest of the engagement either. The second salvo achieved a [direct] hit in the bow. Both hits immediately caused a heavy blaze amidships and at the foreship. Due to powder smoke which did not drift away, the salvo sequence had to be slowed down as far as 25 secs. Visibility was heavily obstructed for the gunners. Individual salvos were fired without the gunners being able to see anything at all [and they were] only guided by direction instructions phoned through from the artillery director control stand [...]. The night firing method achieved several rounds with several hits. Last firing range 15 hm. The complete length of the enemy’s ship was ablaze after the firing.

Duration of firing: 7 minutes (with two longer intervals due to captain’s orders to wait).

Ammunition fired: 29 rounds 15-cm nose-fused shells.

Malfunctions: Failure of firing of two guns [...].

3.97 The Book 10 account is not materially different from that of the war diary.

3.98 In his book CAPT Detmers wrote that after de-camouflaging:

... I asked her what ship, though this was really unnecessary—any ship that sailed without lights was an enemy. I asked three times and there was no reply, then I ordered my gunners to open fire ... She did not stop as she was ordered but kept on. After a few salvos fires were started on board her, and I ordered the cease-fire, and morsed again, and more energetically: “Stop, damn you, stop! No wireless!” She was not using her wireless but she still did not stop. I therefore ordered my gunners to open fire again and they went on firing until her screws ceased to turn. By this time she was burning fiercely in several places.

As soon as she stopped her engines we ceased fire and went within five hundred yards of her ... We searched the decks through our glasses but we could see no sign of life.

...
I … started to look for such boats as might have been lowered, and in
going round her stern I had spotted one at least … There were only
nine men in it and none of them spoke good English.211

3.99 There is no mention in the war diary of any signals to VELEBIT asking
her to identify herself. As CAPT Detmers pointed out, there was no
need for such signals since she was plainly KORMORAN’s enemy.
There was, however, a signal to stop, as appears in the artillery report,
but this was ignored.

3.100 I note the following from this encounter:

- Having given an order to stop but this being ignored, KORMORAN
kept up fire until the ship finally stopped.

- The firing was at a range of between 1,500 and 2,000 metres and
caused severe damage to and fires on board VELEBIT.

- KORMORAN searched for survivors, locating one boat containing
nine men from a crew of 34. (VELEBIT drifted with some of her
crew who remained on board to the Andaman Islands, where they
were later rescued.)

- Twenty-nine 15-centimetre shells were fired in the seven-minute
battle (‘with two longer intervals due to ship commander’s order to
wait’), the firing sequence having ‘to be slowed down to 25
seconds’ because smoke was impeding visibility.

MAREEBA

3.101 On the same day, 26 June 1941, KORMORAN encountered and sank SS
MAREEBA. Following on from the cited entries for VELEBIT, the war
diary recorded:

0547 Went to 11 knots.

1200 8°30’N; 87°47’E. Day’s run: 241 nm. Total run: 47924 nm

1528 Smoke column in sight to port, somewhat more astern than
across.

1530 To “Slow Speed”, in order to let the steamer come clear of the
horizon.

1538 Steamer at 20° true, at 205 hm, bow left.

1539 Turned to course 115°.

211 CORR.007.0034 at 0113
Range finding is all over the place, opponent’s course reckoned at about 250°, thus route 10°-Channel - Colombo. It is not going to work this way. I must get on the opposite course. However, the other must not see the turn, otherwise he will become suspicious too soon, especially with my Japanese paintwork. The distance is increasing slowly. There is a rain squall ahead behind which I will turn.

Went on course 320°, 11 knots.

After passing through the squall, steamer in sight again at 210 hm.

Went to 14.5 knots.

170 hm. Distance decreases quickly. Steamer has apparently noticed nothing. I go to 11 knots, in order for the bearing not to change too quickly.

Alarm. Measurement 128 hm. Steamer maintains her course. I pass 36 hm in front of her bow in order to get to the lee side.

De-camouflage. Hard aport.

Flag signal: stop immediately

Vessel transmits QQ and is jammed successfully.

1 gunnery report. Guns: permission to fire. 1st round [-] hit in wireless room, 3rd round 2 hits in foreship, firing stopped.

Stopped. Boarding and scuttling party off board. Steamer sinking slowly. Upon a flag signal, crew leaves the ship. All 48 men (43 English, 3 Dutch, 1 Dane and 1 Norwegian) taken on board uninjured. The ship is the “MAREEBA”, 3472 tons, of the Australasian United Steam Navig. Co, port of origin Melbourne. On the way from Batavia to Colombo with 5000 tons of raw sugar. Had instructions to go through the 10°-Channel.

Alarm ended.

Scuttling party leaves the “MAREEBA”.

Scuttling charges detonate; ship sinks quickly.

8°15’N 88°06’E. “MAREEBA” sunk.

Course 130°, 14 knots.

Went to 11 knots. 212

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212 BUA.100.0176.0126_E at 0127_E to 0128_E (BUA.100.0176.0126 at 0127 to 0128)
3.102 On 27 June the war diary recorded the ‘Evaluation: Mareeba’ as follows:

In peacetime the ship was used in Australian coastal shipping. Probably used in Indian trade because of shortage of shipping space.

First trip: Course: Route: From Fremantle course 300° to 60 nm from land, up along the coast to 19°S 111°E, then course towards Sunda Strait, from there to Singapore, Malacca Straits - Penan [sic] - Andaman Sea through the 10°-Channel to a reference point at 81°E 5°30’ N to Colombo. Noticeably large crew. Assumption that the younger seamen are volunteers for the Royal Navy suggests itself, since on one of them a reply from HMS “TAMAR” to a letter of application was found. Vessel had no radio on board. They knew nothing yet about our war with Russia.- Before we turned around, the “MAREEBA” had not yet seen us. Our disguise as “KINKA MARU” seemed quite genuine. German raiders had last been reported in the Indian Ocean about 6 weeks ago.213

Figure 3.25 MAREEBA, sunk by KORMORAN on 26 June 1941214

3.103 The artillery report recorded:

Firing task: Continuous battle to portside.

Firing method: Independent firing.

213 BUA.100.0176.0126_E at 0128_E to 0129_E (BUA.100.0176.0126 at 0128 to 0129). KORMORAN had changed her disguise to KINKA MARU on 5 June 1941.
214 PTE.008.0206

The Loss of HMAS SYDNEY II
Fire control: Control from front artillery director control stand to artillery telegraph system, elevation and lateral bearing directly, gunners.

Enemy armament: None.

Enemy speed according to calculation: 8 knots.

Visibility and observation: Visibility and observation and piling conditions were good.

Range finding: Range finding conditions were favourable. The first bearing was taken when the vessel was only just visible - long before the start of firing - and were used to establish the enemy’s speed through calculation. The range was established well.

Deployment of the battery: In response to enemy wireless transmissions, the gunners received permission to fire. Initial firing range 32 hm. Due to the forward firing direction, the midship guns could not be used because of [the ship] being turned hard-over. The first two salvos were two-shot-salvos of the bow and stern guns on one side. The first salvo covered the position and achieved a [direct] hit in the enemy wireless transmission room. There was a brief response [to the first salvo]. The second, honed salvo went over. The third three-shot-salvo – with its range decreased - achieved two [direct] hits into the waterline. Last firing range 30 hm. Battery and fire control system functioned without problems.

Duration of firing: 30 sec.

Ammunition fired: 7 rounds 15-cm base-fused shells.

3.104 I note the following about this encounter:

- The engagement was at close quarters—between 3,000 and 3,200 metres.
- In 30 seconds KORMORAN fired seven 15-centimetre shells in three salvos. Three of those shells hit, one to the wireless transmission station and at least one to the waterline.
- All those on board MAREEBA were rescued by KORMORAN and none was injured.
- As appears in the evaluation, KORMORAN learnt from documents captured from MAREEBA the course she intended to take from Fremantle to Colombo. This was generally along a usual shipping lane.
KORMORAN did not want to engage in battle with a cruiser—notably SYDNEY—which she learnt was in the area. In his book CAPT Detmers wrote:

On board the Mareeba my boarding-officer Lieutenant Diebitsch had made a very interesting discovery from the ship’s log: at 08.00 hours that morning the Mareeba had sighted the Australian cruiser Sydney in the Ten Degree Channel. In other words, the Sydney had crossed our bows only half a day ahead! Now it was quite certain that my decision not to engage the British auxiliary cruiser earlier on was correct. Had I done so she would have called up the Sydney, and then we should have had to fight them both. It was unfortunate for the enemy that the Velebit had not used her wireless. If the Sydney had picked up a call for help from her she would have raced to the spot, and then the odds against us would have been overwhelming. As it was we were well out of it, though we knew that we must get away from the neighbourhood as quickly as possible. We therefore raced off at top speed right throughout the night and up to the afternoon of the following day in order to put as much sea room as possible between us and the spot and to be out of the Bay of Bengal altogether when the British cruiser came round the Nicobars to the south and started to look for us.216

There is an account of the engagement between KORMORAN and MAREEBA in a book describing the experiences of MAREEBA crew member WA Jones, who was a prisoner on board KORMORAN and later in Germany. The book, entitled Prisoner of the Kormoran217, was, however, written by a Mr James Taylor in 1944. The 1944 preface by Mr Taylor stated:

At the moment he (Jones) is the only survivor of the S.S. Mareeba to have returned to Australia. Moreover, he is the only man taken prisoner by the raider Kormoran (which sank H.M.A.S. Sydney) yet to have reached the Commonwealth. Consequently his exciting story is unique—in the sense, at least, that no one else is in a position to tell it.218

Mr Taylor said he had told Mr Jones’ story ‘just as it was narrated by Mr “Syd” Jones’. Mr Jones was said to have a ‘phenomenal memory’; even accepting that, he could not possibly have remembered all the conversations set out in the book, which is more than 300 pages long and extends over many years. The book is written in a racy, sensational, fictional style.
I refer to this because some commentators have seized on passages in the book, attributed those passages to Mr Jones (although they are written by Mr Taylor) and used them to support the assertion that when KORMORAN attacked MAREEBA she was flying not the German ensign but the Norwegian flag and was disguised as the Japanese ship KINKA MARU.\footnote{PTE.006.0001 at 0091}

According to the Taylor/Jones book, MAREEBA was hit by six shells from KORMORAN. Plainly that was not so. It also describes Mr Jones rowing a lifeboat towards KORMORAN: ‘Not caring to speculate upon what might be in store for us we dejectedly rowed for the raider, to find that she had not only fought under false colours but under a false name’.\footnote{PUB.020.0001 at 0020}

It is not clear what is meant by these words. The authors had previously stated, ‘A quick glance through the lenses revealed a Japanese flag conspicuously painted on her side. She had the appearance of a Jap passenger liner …’\footnote{PUB.020.0001 at 0015} Shortly thereafter, according to the book, and before any firing took place, Mr Jones shouted to his shipmates, ‘I’ll tell you what, I shouted at last. ‘That’s a raider! It’s as plain as the back of your hand’.\footnote{PUB.020.0001 at 0016}

In context, the words ‘not only under false colours but under a false name’ refer to the ship being a German ship disguised as a Japanese ship, with a Japanese flag painted on her side and using a Japanese name. The passage does not refer to any flag or ensign being flown at the masthead, as some have assumed.

3.106 Taylor/Jones turned to the topic of the flag KORMORAN was flying when she engaged with SYDNEY in November 1941, five months after the attack on MAREEBA. Obviously Mr Jones was not present—he was in captivity—but he thought it appropriate to ‘recapitulate the tale of that strange engagement for though I could only speculate at the time upon what had happened, I have studied the Press reports very closely since my recent return to Australia’.\footnote{PUB.020.0001 at 0127}

In setting out their account of the battle as derived from the press, the authors wrote, ‘The raider was probably flying the Norwegian flag. Personally, I should say certainly flying the Norwegian or some other neutral flag, for she always, to my own knowledge, had neutral colours ready for instant use’.\footnote{PUB.020.0001 at 0127 to 0128} There is no logic in this statement. The fact that
KORMORAN might have had available to her neutral flags does not mean they were flown when she went into battle. CAPT Hill-Willis made it clear that when KORMORAN went into battle with AGNITA she raised the German flag on de-camouflaging.

Whatever Mr Taylor or Mr Jones might have derived from the press, their suggestion that KORMORAN was flying the Norwegian flag when she engaged with SYDNEY is unfounded speculation to be given no credence.

**A change of disguise**

On 8 July 1941 KORMORAN repainted her superstructure, crown and funnel black, removed the Japanese markings, and adopted the disguise of the STRAAT MALAKKA. CAPT Detmers recorded the reasons for the change of disguise in the war diary:

**Reason:** Cruising as Japanese is inexpedient because

a) the Japanese have only ships of an old type operating in this area,

b) at night which is comparatively bright here even during a new moon, the large amount of white shows up at a great distance.

c) a blacked-out Japanese is very suspicious.

d) in a daylight attack, maintaining the integrity of the camouflage entails keeping firmly to course and speed, a fact which makes the evasion of enemy forces impossible, or which can force de-camouflaging already at a great distance.

I have therefore come to the conclusion that the best camouflage is in any case to be as inconspicuous as possible, i.e. a ship on which one can see no armament or suspicious superstructure, and which is painted in a manner that it as well could be of a friendly nature. Representing any particular ship is not at all necessary. The times of a “Wolf” or “Seeadler” are over. The opponent is watchful and stops everything. However, if one is stopped in the first place, there is only one way out: battle.

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225 BUA.100.0176.0131_E (BUA.100.0176.0001 at 0131 to 0132)
226 BUA.100.0176.0131_E (BUA.100.0176.0001 at 0131 to 0132)
On 23 September 1941 KORMORAN encountered the SS STAMATIOS G EMBIRICOS, sinking her on 24 September. The war diary recorded:

23.9 NW 2-3; slight sea, SSE swell, over-cast, good visibility

W/T: Evaluation of War Diary of [Ship] 16. Average of achievements of U-boats very valuable for us as a comparison. Opinion of Naval War Staff that at present operational prospects in the South Atlantic are better than in the Indian Ocean corresponds with our experiences. Naval War Staff know the difficulties which have arisen through the measures taken by the enemy. Apart from the improvements mentioned, I consider it important to be equipped with a radio rangefinder for the artillery.

1200 1°34’S; 65°40’E. Day’s run: 242 nm. Total run: 65724 nm

2010 W/T: Auxiliary cruiser medal awarded for the first time to Ship 36. Great joy for us!

2228 Light in sight ahead to port at 293° true.

2239 Range increases. Went to 310°. Light is very bright and seems almost white with a slight pale green shimmer.

2243 Course 320°, High Speed. The light is now definitely green.

Only when the ship’s hull can be seen as a silhouette does the steamer’s light also appear dimly. The steamer is on an easterly course.


With Varta lamp: “Stop”. Thereupon searchlight shone on her. Steamer stops only on third command “Stop or fire”. [italicised text in English in original] She does not transmit and receives the signal: “I send a boat”. [italicised text in English in original]. Now she reports that she is on the way from Mombasa to Colombo.

2333 Boat put to water. Prize crew off board. She is the Greek steamer Stamatios G. Embiricos from Andros, 3941 tons, in ballast from Mombasa to Colombo, for order. Unfortunately, this new ship, built in 1936, was converted to coal firing 4 years ago and has coal on board for only 23 days (500 tons). Therefore she is unusable for us as mine-carrier or prison ship. She is sunk.
24.9

0053 NW 1-2, weak SE and SW swell, cloudy, good visibility. 1st blast;

0100 Shortly afterwards the 2nd, 3rd and 4th. 1 life boat containing the captain and 5 men alongside; the 2nd boat with 23 men has disappeared into the darkness.

0109 Supply boat taken on board-

0110- 0°01’S; 64°30’E. Steamer sunk.

0200 Searched in vain for 2nd lifeboat.

0205 Course 180°, 14 knots.

0300 Course 90°.

0500 Cruising speed 11 knots.

0800 Course 280° towards the location of sinking. I want to catch the 2nd cutter:

1200 0°20’S; 65°30’E

Day’s run: 262 nm. Total run: 65985 nm

1) I want to operate for a few more days in this area and don’t want it to scare away other steamers.

2) The opponent can make good use of the specialists in it (1st officer, wireless operator, chief engineer).

3) I will not give the 1st officer the satisfaction of getting away from me.227

KORMORAN launched its aircraft to find the cutter with the remaining crew. The war diary continued:

1211 Aircraft to water. Task: reconnaissance flight along limit of visibility. Secondary task: if cutter is sighted, fire white signal light.

1221 Course 280°, 11 knots.

1252 Aircraft has discovered cutter at 255° true (its first success).

1258 Turned towards it.

1305 Cutter visible from crosstree.

227 BUA.100.0176.0159_E at 0159_E to 0161_E (BUA.100.0176.1059 at 0159 to 0161)
Stopped. Cutter taken alongside. 24 men taken on board. Again there is a stowaway among them. Thus the whole crew is on board, consisting of: 16 Greeks, 3 Egyptians, 2 Norwegians, 2 Swedes, 1 Latvian, 1 Yugoslav, 2 Filipinos, 1 Portuguese, 1 Brazilian and 1 Madagascan. 228

3.109 Neither Book 10 nor CAPT Detmers’ book gave a materially different account.

3.110 It is to be noted from this encounter that all the crew of the Greek vessel were recovered uninjured, some after a search. The search was not entirely altruistic, though: the war diary recorded, ‘I will not give the 1st officer the satisfaction of getting away from me’. 229

Meeting with KULMERLAND

3.111 By arrangement, between 16 and 24 October KORMORAN met with the German supply ship KULMERLAND at 32°20’S 97°05’E and received sufficient oil and provisions to continue operations until 1 June 1942. 230

Conclusions from the sinkings

3.112 KORMORAN’s sinkings demonstrate a number of things:

- CAPT Detmers used his seamanship skills, and his patience, on many occasions to bring KORMORAN within gunnery range without attracting suspicion.

- KORMORAN’s disguise was effective, in part it seems because she appeared as a normal cargo vessel with no obvious deck structures that might house her armaments.

- Once in range of another vessel, KORMORAN could decamouflage rapidly—in a matter of seconds.

- There was independent confirmation that at the time of decamouflaging, KORMORAN hoisted the German war ensign.

- KORMORAN’s 15-centimetre gun crews could fire rapidly—in the order of four to five salvos a minute.

- KORMORAN’s guns fired with accuracy at varying distances. She frequently scored hits in critical areas with early salvos.

228 BUA.100.0176.0159_E at 0161_E (BUA.100.0176.0159 at 0161)
229 BUA.100.0176.0159_E at 0161_E (BUA.100.0176.0159 at 0161)
230 PTE.006.0001 at 0131 to 0134
• KORMORAN’s 3.7- and 2-centimetre machine guns were both accurate and very damaging to personnel and equipment when fired at comparatively close range.

• KORMORAN did not fire on ships if the orders she gave were obeyed. If they were not obeyed, she did. She ceased fire once her military objective had been achieved.

• KORMORAN always rescued all known survivors, where necessary searching for them.

• Prisoners taken on board KORMORAN were treated humanely and were given medical assistance when required.

• KORMORAN always operated alone.