

## 6 Degrees of readiness

- 6.1 There was no Admiralty direction or other Naval instruction in relation to the degree of readiness a warship was required to assume when seeking to identify a merchant vessel. There was, however, a document, issued by the Admiralty in 1939, entitled *The Fighting Instructions* (Confidential Book 04027(39)), that detailed the various degrees of readiness expected of a warship, the circumstances in which each degree should be adopted, and the condition of a ship's armaments in each degree of readiness.<sup>1</sup> The instructions, which gave guidance to commanding officers of warships, were expressed to be 'for general guidance and are not to be regarded as orders'.<sup>2</sup> Importantly, the introduction to the instructions said:

(C) In the event of war, the Fighting Instructions may be further defined by supplementary orders, which would depend on the circumstances of the war and the composition of opposing fleets.<sup>3</sup>

- 6.2 Section I of the instructions dealt with 'Factors affecting naval operations'. One such factor was the use of wireless telegraphy:

### THE USE OF W/T

10. W/T messages may be intercepted or D/F'ed by the enemy, so putting him on his guard and giving him valuable information as to the position of our forces. When in doubt in regard to making a signal by W/T, Captains should balance the advantages to be gained by rapid communication against the possible loss of surprise. The detailed instructions on this matter are contained in the Signal Manual, Chapter XVII.<sup>4</sup>

It was for this reason that, other than in exceptional circumstances, radio silence was maintained whilst at sea.<sup>5</sup>

The Fighting Instructions also dealt with the range at which to fight:

### RANGE AT WHICH TO FIGHT

20. There is always a best range at which to fight a given enemy in given conditions. By day, the main considerations are the characteristics of the opposing ships; the effects of air-spotting and

---

<sup>1</sup> UKAA.010.0198

<sup>2</sup> UKAA.010.0198 at 0200

<sup>3</sup> UKAA.010.0198 at 0200

<sup>4</sup> UKAA.010.0198 at 0206. 'D/F'ed' means 'used for direction finding'.

<sup>5</sup> CORR.004.0173\_R at 0175\_R

weather on gunfire; and the tactical situation. In general, however, a short range should be aimed at. At such a range the superior fighting qualities and stamina of the British race should tell, as they have so often in the past. It must be remembered that in closing the range an end-on target is difficult to hit; risk of damage from enemy gunfire will be reduced if frequent small alterations of course are made, while steering towards the enemy. At night, the best range is that at which ships can attack the enemy effectively and unseen.<sup>6</sup>

- 6.3 Section II was headed 'Cruising'; it provided guidance on both fleet operations and detached ships' activities and, in relation to the latter, stated:

#### **ACTION BY DETACHED SHIPS OR UNITS ON PATROL**

**123.** When a cruiser (or other type of vessel) is operating independently of the fleet and requires to examine a strange vessel, the customary signal to order her to heave to is a shot across her bows. If the vessel is suspected of being hostile and armed, the following procedure should be carried out :-

(a) After the vessel has stopped the cruiser whilst keeping end-on should close to a position about a mile ahead of her, to minimise the danger of torpedo fire.

(b) If it is decided to board, a boat should be lowered and the vessel ordered to close it.

(c) The cruiser should not remain stopped in waters where submarines may be operating, but should steam away as soon as the boat is in the water.

(d) The boat should not be recovered near the position where boarding has taken place, as a submarine in the vicinity will realise that the cruiser may return for this purpose.

(e) If the weather prevents the merchant ship towing the boat to a suitable recovery position (*e.g.*, about five miles away), the boat should be abandoned and her crew and the boarding party recovered from the merchant ship later, or the merchant ship ordered to land the crew at the nearest friendly port.

(f) As soon as possible the Captain should be warned that his ship will be sunk if heard using W/T.

(g) If boarding is impossible, the vessel should be ordered to take station astern.

---

<sup>6</sup> UKAA.010.0198 at 0207

(h) If examining a vessel at night, a searchlight should be used as little as possible. It will usually be preferable to defer boarding until daylight.<sup>7</sup>

- 6.4 During World War 2 there were four degrees of readiness required to be observed in Royal Navy and Royal Australian Navy warships. They were described in *The Fighting Instructions* in the following terms:

#### DEGREES OF READINESS FOR ACTION

##### GENERAL

**126.** The degree of readiness to be assumed must meet the following requirements :-

(a) All hostile aircraft, surface ships and submarines coming within visibility distance must be sighted and reported.

(b) All the above coming within range must be engaged immediately.

Commanding Officers are responsible that the requisite degree of readiness is assumed to meet these requirements, subject to any orders that may be given by the Senior Officer. Whatever part of the armament is manned, an enemy sighted at night or in low visibility will not be engaged immediately unless the personnel is kept thoroughly alert by exercising the armament frequently in following the director, or changing "look-out bearings."

**127.** The degrees of anti-ship and anti-aircraft readiness which may be assumed are as follows, and ships should be so organised :-

(a) Anti-ship armament - Low angle, torpedo and depth charge.

1st degree of L.A. [low-angle] readiness .. Complete readiness for action against surface craft and submarines.

2nd degree of L.A. readiness .. "Stand by" complete readiness for action against surface craft and submarines.

3rd degree of L.A. readiness .. Action against surface craft and submarines based on a two-watch organisation.

4th degree of L.A. readiness .. Anti-ship armament cleared away but hands not closed up. Anti-submarine look-outs stationed, depth charge gear and one gun manned each side.

(b) Anti-Aircraft armament

1st degree of A.A. [anti-aircraft] readiness .. Complete readiness for action against aircraft

---

<sup>7</sup> UKAA.010.0198 at 0226

2nd degree of A.A. readiness .. "Stand by" complete readiness for action against aircraft.

3rd degree of A.A. readiness .. Action against aircraft based on a two-watch organisation.

4th degree of A.A. readiness .. Action against aircraft based on a four-watch organisation.

**FIRST DEGREE OF L.A. READINESS, FIRST DEGREE OF A.A READINESS**

**128.**

(a) These require complete readiness for action in every respect. All officers and men must be at their action stations and the ship ready to open fire immediately.

(b) These degrees of readiness will be assumed if enemy movements show PROBABILITY of the enemy being encountered at any moment.

**SECOND DEGREE OF L.A. READINESS, SECOND DEGREE OF A.A READINESS**

**129.**

(a) These require that respective full action stations should be assumed but provide for some relaxation from the first degree of readiness. Limited numbers of personnel may be fallen out in turn for meals or fresh air as the circumstances permit.

(b) These degrees of readiness are to be assumed if there is a POSSIBILITY of the enemy being encountered at any moment.

(c) Proper arrangements must be made for officers and men to rest in their quarters.

**130.** The first and second degrees of readiness will be those normally required when the fleet is at sea both by day and night in accordance with Clauses **128(b)** and **129(b)**. It is recognised that during prolonged operations these degrees of readiness will not afford the requisite amount of sleep to all personnel. To meet this the Senior Officer may, when circumstances permit, detail ships as "guard ships" with the object of providing all ships in turn with periodical spells at lower degrees of readiness. This will be applicable to the anti-aircraft armament in harbour as well as at sea.

**THIRD DEGREE OF L.A. READINESS, THIRD DEGREE OF A.A READINESS**

**131.**

(a) These require the manning of half the anti-ship and/or anti-aircraft armament in two watches.

(b) These degrees of readiness may be assumed as follows:-

(i) Third degree of L.A. readiness:- By day or night when contact with enemy surface forces is possible but not imminent.

(ii) Third degree of A.A. readiness:- By day or night when considerable threat of air attack exists over a prolonged period.

(c) These degrees of readiness may be assumed when the maintenance of the first or second degrees of readiness for prolonged periods is likely to result in loss of efficiency, and by ships on detached duty or without close support, who will be unable to benefit by the presence of a "guard ship."

*Note:-* There will be occasions when in the third degree of A.A. readiness and the fourth degree of L.A. readiness it is necessary to man fully the A.A. armament. Ships should be organised so that the extra personnel required for the A.A. armament is available from the normal L.A. crews. In ships where the armament more particularly facilitates a three-watch system of defence, it may be desirable to organise the manning of the armaments on this basis.

#### **FOURTH DEGREE OF L.A. READINESS**

**132.** This degree of readiness may be assumed:-

(a) By day when the disposition of surface and/or air forces affords the necessary degree of security from surprise encounter with enemy surface forces.

(b) By ships detailed when the "guard ship" principle is in force.<sup>8</sup>

6.5 It is noteworthy that the instruction in paragraph 123, dealing with action by detached ships, applied only if the 'strange vessel' is 'suspected of being hostile and armed'. It was not applicable where there was no such suspicion. Acting reasonably, a commanding officer would require the occurrence of an event that gave rise to suspicion that a vessel was 'hostile and armed' before firing across its bows and requiring it to heave to. The mere presence of an as yet unidentified merchant vessel would not be reasonably sufficient to cause a commanding officer to take that course. The evidence before the Inquiry was that in 1941 no Australian warship operating off the Australian coast fired across a merchant vessel's bow as part of an identification process.<sup>9</sup> One can assume that was because, although Royal Australian Navy ships were required to identify all vessels encountered, none formed the suspicion in 1941 that any vessel was 'hostile and armed'.

---

<sup>8</sup> UKAA.010.0198 at 0227 to 0228

<sup>9</sup> AWM.006.0220

Moreover, it seems clear that the procedure of stopping the 'strange' vessel and, if thought necessary, ordering it to close the warship's boat was superseded by the identification procedure promulgated by the Admiralty on 25 December 1940 (see Chapter 5). This was particularly the case for operations off the Australian coast, where the high probability was that merchant vessels were friendly. Paragraph 123 of the Fighting Instructions applied only where the vessel was 'suspected of being hostile and armed', and that was not the usual assessment of vessels encountered in shipping lanes off the Australian coast.

6.6 Although, as contemporary Naval doctrine<sup>10</sup>, the Fighting Instructions contemplated that there could be different degrees of readiness for low-angle armaments (for use against ships and submarines) and high-angle (anti-aircraft) armaments, the evidence of SYDNEY sailors was that there was never any such distinction drawn in practice. When a ship was at the first degree of readiness all guns and torpedo mounts were manned.<sup>11</sup> The sailors' evidence, the logs and the reports of proceedings all make it clear that SYDNEY operated at only two degrees of readiness – the first degree (known as 'action stations') and the fourth degree (known as 'cruising stations'). Thus, when on escort duty and when cruising alone, as she was when returning from the Sunda Strait on 19 November 1941, SYDNEY would have been at the fourth degree of readiness unless she went to action stations. Although SYDNEY's 4-inch guns and machine guns were primarily designed for anti-aircraft warfare, they were available for action against an enemy ship, and that is undoubtedly why all such guns, together with the torpedoes, were manned when SYDNEY went to the first degree of readiness.

6.7 Another feature of a ship being at the first degree of readiness was that all crew members were in their allotted positions in order to assist in damage control, the provision of emergency medical assistance, fire fighting and other relief activities. Each crew member had a designated position to which he would go on the sounding of the action stations alarm. Each had a designated task to perform. In addition to manning the armaments and machinery, those tasks were mainly fire control, electrical repair, flooding control, gunnery repair, medical, and wreckage and repair control, particularly of the hull.

At the first degree of readiness all watertight doors and hatches were closed to prevent the spread of fire and flooding and to help prevent loss of buoyancy in the event of damage. Further, no personnel were stood down from their position, so there would be no one walking about on the upper deck – apart from personnel engaged in a limited

---

<sup>10</sup> SPC.014.0001 at 0099

<sup>11</sup> TRAN.014.0001\_R at 0042\_R; WIT.003.0001\_R at 0002\_R; WIT.004.0001\_R at 0005\_R; WIT.011.0022\_R at 0025\_R

number of tasks such as message running or re-supplying 4-inch shells stored in the magazine on the hold deck aft of B turret shell room.<sup>12</sup>

- 6.8 Paragraphs 128 and 129 of the Fighting Instructions required the commanding officer of a warship to make an assessment of the situation at hand when choosing the appropriate degree of readiness. If there was a 'probability of the enemy being encountered at any moment', the first degree of readiness must be assumed; if there was a 'possibility', rather than a probability, the second degree of readiness was appropriate.<sup>13</sup>
- 6.9 If by day a single warship was approaching an unidentified merchant vessel that might be a disguised enemy raider, it could never be said that 'the disposition of surface and/or air forces affords the necessary security from surprise encounter with enemy surface forces'. A disguised raider could provide that surprise. As a result, in this situation the fourth degree of readiness would not be appropriate. Nor would the third degree, because it could not be said that 'contact with the enemy surface forces is possible but not imminent' (paragraph 131(b)(i)).<sup>14</sup> That is because it could not be known whether the unidentified merchant vessel was a disguised raider. If it was, contact with enemy surface forces was imminent.

As a matter of interpretation of the Fighting Instructions, it followed that when a warship was approaching an unidentified merchant vessel during wartime the required degree of readiness was either the first or the second degree. In either state, all armaments are manned and the ship is in full damage-control mode.

- 6.10 Between the outbreak of war in September 1939 and November 1941 no warship sailing off the Australian coast had encountered a merchant vessel and identified it as a raider. In the *Review of Naval War Effort and Activities* for both December 1940 and September 1941 it was reported that there had been no enemy attack on a vessel within 700 miles of the Australian coast.<sup>15</sup> The statement in the *Review of Naval War Effort and Activities* was not correct. Material in the weekly intelligence reports suggested that Raider F had attacked the tanker STORSTAD, bound from Borneo to Melbourne, on about 19 October 1940 in an estimated position only 150 nautical miles off Cape Leeuwin.<sup>16</sup> Raider F was also

---

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 2

<sup>13</sup> UKAA.010.0198 at 0227 and 0228

<sup>14</sup> UKAA.010.0198 at 0227 and 0228

<sup>15</sup> SPC.014.0381 at 0381 and 0396

<sup>16</sup> NAA.027.0036 at 0048

suspected of placing in Australian coastal waters mines that were discovered on 4 January 1941.<sup>17</sup>

These examples suggest that, although the primary consideration for the commanding officer of a warship approaching an unidentified merchant vessel would be the safety of his ship and crew, it might not be the only factor. Wartime operations involve risk. One of a commanding officer's tasks was to minimise the risk to his ship and his crew, whilst still effectively performing the military task before him. Assessment of the amount of risk that might be acceptable is exquisitely a matter for the commanding officer in the exigencies of a specific situation.

- 6.11 If, as logic suggests, it is correct to say that when a warship was approaching an unidentified merchant vessel both the Fighting Instructions and sound seamanship required that the warship stay beyond possible weapon range until the identification procedure was completed, it follows that it should be able to be demonstrated that all warships under the command of experienced Naval officers acting conscientiously behaved in this way.
- 6.12 To test this proposition, the Inquiry examined the ship's logs and war diaries of the light cruisers HMAS SYDNEY, HMAS HOBART and HMAS PERTH for the year 1941, during which at various times each of these ships performed escort duties and patrol in waters surrounding Australia. Each of the ships was commanded by a senior officer whose service has been widely praised.

CAPT Collins, who commanded SYDNEY until 15 May 1941, was later appointed Commodore Commanding China Force and Commander of a joint Royal Australian Navy – US Navy task force.

CAPT HL Howden CBE RAN had commanded HOBART from the outbreak of war, throughout her Mediterranean campaign in the second half of 1941, and then during the Malaya campaign of early 1942 and the Battle of the Coral Sea.

PERTH operated in the Mediterranean under the command of CAPT Sir Phillip Bowyer-Smith Bt RN in the first half of 1941, returning to Sydney in August 1941, when she went into refit. CAPT Waller assumed command on 24 October 1941. After sea trials PERTH performed escort duties around Australia until deploying to Singapore in mid-February 1942. CAPT Waller, who had drawn great praise from the Royal Navy for his command of the Scrap Iron Flotilla in 1940 and 1941 in the Mediterranean, was lost with PERTH after her five-hour

---

<sup>17</sup> NAA.027.0036 at 0048

battle with overwhelming Japanese forces on the night of 28 February 1942.

The Inquiry also examined the logs and war diaries of other warships operating around the Australian coast during 1941—HMAS ADELAIDE, HMAS AUSTRALIA, HMAS CANBERRA, HMAS KANIMBLA, HMAS MANOORA and HMAS WESTRALIA.

- 6.13 The logs demonstrate unequivocally that in 1941 it was not the practice of ships on escort duty or patrol off the Australian coast to assume action stations when an unidentified merchant vessel was sighted or approached; nor was it the practice to stand off beyond possible armament range until the vessel was identified as friendly.

### **SYDNEY's log**

- 6.14 A ship's log recorded each reason that a ship changed her degree of readiness. Evidence before this Inquiry is that before dawn each day SYDNEY went to the first degree of readiness and remained in that state for between 30 and 60 minutes. This was done in order to protect the ship against any vessels that might become apparent at first light. Mr TP Fisher<sup>18</sup>, Mr FH House<sup>19</sup> and Mr GL Lavender<sup>20</sup> gave evidence to the effect that this was the practice.
- 6.15 Examination of SYDNEY's log for the period 1 January 1941 to 31 October 1941 reveals the following:
- While CAPT Collins commanded SYDNEY, from 1 January 1941 to 14 May 1941, the ship altered course to investigate unidentified vessels on 18 occasions. On four of these occasions she went to action stations; on the other 14 she did not. The logs show that on 33 occasions she identified merchant vessels without altering course; on none of these occasions did she go to action stations (see Appendix L).
  - During CAPT Burnett's command, from 15 May 1941, SYDNEY altered course to investigate unidentified merchant vessels on 12 occasions. On four of these occasions she went to action stations; on the other eight she did not.
  - On one of these four occasions, on 3 October, SYDNEY altered course to investigate a structure in the water, found it to be a floating target, and went to action stations.

---

<sup>18</sup> WIT.001.0001\_R at 0004\_R

<sup>19</sup> WIT.009.0001\_R at 0003\_R

<sup>20</sup> WIT.003.0013\_R at 0014\_R

- In addition, SYDNEY identified 20 merchant vessels apparently without altering course. There is no indication that she went to action stations on these occasions.

Appendix L provides details of all these instances. Table 6.1 shows the proportion of occasions on which Royal Australian Navy ships went to action stations when an unidentified merchant vessel was sighted in 1941.

**Table 6.1** Proportion of occasions on which Royal Australian Navy ships went to action stations on sighting an unidentified merchant vessel, 1941

Ship	Total number of ships encountered	Number of times			Percentage	
		Altered course to identify vessel	Went to action stations	Identified without any action	Altered course	To action stations
HMAS SYDNEY						
CAPT Collins	51	18	4	33	35.3	7.8
CAPT Burnett <sup>a</sup>	34	12	4	20	35.3	11.8
HMAS ADELAIDE	19	13	1	4	68.4	5.3
HMAS AUSTRALIA	33	29	0	4	87.9	0.0
HMAS CANBERRA	63	24	1	30	38.1	1.6
HMAS HOBART	28	9	1	18	32.1	3.6
HMS KANIMBLA	106	20	6	53	18.9	5.7
HMAS MANOORA <sup>b</sup>	136	23	37	81	16.9	27.2
HMAS PERTH	6	5	1	1	83.3	16.7
HMAS WESTRALIA	50	6	1	43	12.0	2.0
<b>Australian fleet</b>	<b>526</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>30.2</b>	<b>11.0</b>

a. Handover date 14 May 1941.

b. HMAS MANOORA left the Australia Station on 26 November 1941.

6.16 An explanation for this apparent anomaly might be found in HM Australian Squadron Tactical Note No. 9, issued on 2 June 1941. It appears to have reflected the then current practice around the Australian coast.

## HM Australian Squadron tactical notes

6.17 Documents called ‘tactical notes’ were issued to ships in the Australian Squadron, and copies of the notes were provided to the New Zealand Naval Board.<sup>21</sup> CAPT Burnett was, of course, familiar with the notes.<sup>22</sup> An extant copy of the tactical notes has not been located. In the light of the apparent importance of Tactical Note No. 9, the Inquiry searched for a copy of it in the archival records of Australia, the United

<sup>21</sup> THS.001.0218

<sup>22</sup> THS.001.0220

Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa and India, to no avail. As is shown shortly, Tactical Note No. 9 was introduced by Amendment Sheet No. 1 on 21 July 1941; it dealt with the 'Procedure for dealing with Merchant Vessels suspected of being raiders'.<sup>23</sup>

Amendment Sheet No. 1 was forwarded to 'the Commanding Officers HMA Cruisers' and 'the Senior Officer 20th M/S Flotilla', with a 'copy to the Secretary, Naval Board'. Apart from an amendment to the contents sheet, stating, 'Add No. 9 - Procedure for dealing with Merchant Vessels suspected of being raiders', the only notation in Amendment Sheet No. 1 is 'Insert new Tactical Note No. 9 dated 2 June, 1941'.

It is known that two copies of Amendment Sheet No. 1 dated 21 July 1941 were forwarded to the New Zealand Naval Board 'to complete copies Nos 19 and 20', which had been supplied to the New Zealand Naval Board on 10 January 1940.<sup>24</sup>

- 6.18 The Inquiry also found 'Amendment No. 2' to Australian Squadron Tactical Note No. 9; it is dated 21 September 1941. This amendment was sent to all 'Commanding Officers, HMA Cruisers' and to the New Zealand Naval Board and, specifically, to the commanding officers of the two New Zealand cruisers HMS ACHILLES and HMS LEANDER.<sup>25</sup>

Amendment No. 2 amended Tactical Note No. 9 of 21 July 1941 and read as follows:

TACTICAL NOTE NO. 9

Paragraph 4. Add, "If however, he does decide to fight, he may be expected to develop rapidly, an accurate fire up to 16,000 yards.

Paragraph 5. Insert at beginning,

"When within 10 miles of the 'Merchantman' approach as nearly bows on as practicable and at a reasonably slow speed. Normally, keep about 7-8 miles from him while carrying out the following procedure".

(a) (As at present).

(b) (As at present).

(c) for "hoisting" read "making". Delete words "of (say) 4 inch".

(d) for "4 miles" read "about 7 miles".

---

<sup>23</sup> THS.001.0214

<sup>24</sup> THS.001.0213

<sup>25</sup> HMS LEANDER served as a New Zealand ship from April 1937 to May 1944. The Royal New Zealand Navy was commissioned in September 1941 and before that was known as the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy.

- (f) add "(This must necessarily be within a Raiders effective gun range while she is picking up the boarding boat)".

Remainder as at present.

Add Paragraph 9.

9. "On the other hand, if a Raider scuttles herself and 'abandons' ship, there will be little chance of salvaging her. The possibility of a Raider, apparently abandoned, leaving her guns and torpedo tubes crews onboard to deal with a cruiser who may approach close with the object of boarding and salvaging her is, of course, an old Q ship trick. It points to the desirability of sinking apparently abandoned vessels considered to be Raiders, outright, without closing too much.<sup>26</sup>

6.19 Although a copy of Tactical Note No. 9 has not been located, the substance of the note can be discerned from a 'War Temporary Order' issued by CAPT RH Bevan RN, Commanding Officer of LEANDER, the New Zealand Leander Class cruiser. CAPT Bevan issued the War Temporary Order whilst at sea on 22 November 1941, three days after SYDNEY had been lost but before the loss was known.<sup>27</sup>

6.20 On 27 November 1941 Mr WE Parry (a New Zealand government minister) wrote to CAPT Bevan, telling him he was departing for Singapore to attend a conference held by the Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet. He wrote:

We have no details yet of "SYDNEY's" action with a raider, but it certainly looks as if she has gone down. I think this must give us to think considerably about the efficiency of our cruising stations. As far as I can make out the ships met during the middle watch, when ones vigilene [sic] is not always at its highest ebb; and I cannot help thinking that the German was more ready for the encounter than was "SYDNEY". It is also possible that the German had R.D.F. [radar]; and as far as I know the Australian Ships are not yet fitted, and even when fitted they are only fitting an A.S.V. type of set like you had when you returned to New Zealand. I would suggest that, if and when exercises permit, you should consider whether each cruising watch should not have a short night full calibre firing.<sup>28</sup>

CAPT Bevan responded on 2 December 1941:

The other two concern "SYDNEY" and "lessons learnt". A most distressing business. I am sending with this a copy of my own Orders for dealing with Merchant Shipping, which I recently re-bushed slightly on the lines of the Australian Squadron Tactical Notes, and am

---

<sup>26</sup> THS.001.0210

<sup>27</sup> NZA.001.0012 at 0014

<sup>28</sup> NZA.001.0006

also giving Barnes one. Poor old Burnett cannot possibly have been complying with these instructions, I fear.<sup>29</sup>

This seems to make it apparent that CAPT Bevan's War Temporary Orders issued on 22 November 1941 reflected the Australian Squadron Tactical Notes.

- 6.21 The subject of CAPT Bevan's orders was the 'procedure for dealing with merchant vessels suspected of being raiders', as was the subject of Australian Squadron Tactical Note No. 9. In view of their importance, the War Temporary Orders are set out here in full:

H.M.S. "LEANDER". - WAR TEMPORARY ORDERS

(CANCELS [sic] NO. 41 at present in Force.)

No. 41. ENCOUNTERS AT SEA. - POLICY TO BE FOLLOWED.

The following remarks are an indication of my general intentions and for the guidance of Control Officers and Officers of the Watch as to the action to be taken in the event of a sudden encounter when I am not on the Bridge.

THE DISGUISED RAIDER:-

2. It appears that the average disguised Raider may mount four guns of about 6" calibre on the broadside and carries in addition Pom-poms and Torpedo Tubes. The Main Armament is capable of developing a rapid and accurate fire at ranges of up to 16,000 yards. As many as three "Bombing" Aircraft have been reported.

3. Aircraft are carried in a Raider primarily for reconnaissance duties, although their use offensively against Merchant Ships has been reported. To fulfil her mission of commerce destruction, a raider will do all in her power to avoid action with a cruiser, and hence if her aircraft locate one, it is highly probable that they will return at once to the raider in order that immediate evasive action may be taken. It is possible, however, to visualise circumstances in which a raider, particularly if carrying more than one aircraft, might order them to attack a warship, and in areas where a raider is suspected, a higher degree of air defence readiness may be necessary in the future.

RAIDER TACTICS:-

4. Under the conditions of extreme visibility which frequently obtain in the Pacific Ocean, and assuming that neither ship is using Air Reconnaissance, it is to be expected that a cruiser and a raider approaching each other will sight nearly simultaneously. Assuming that the raider at once identifies the cruiser, he has two alternatives before him:-

---

<sup>29</sup> NZA.001.0010

(a) To alter away with the hope that he has not been sighted, or if sighted and chased, to impose a long chase, which if darkness is near, may allow him to escape.

(b) To continue on his course, hoping that if sighted he will not be investigated, or that if closed, his disguise will be sufficiently good to avert suspicion.

5. His choice will be governed by the prevailing conditions, but from the point of view of the patrolling cruiser it is clear that the utmost vigilance aloft is at all times required, particular attention being paid to any alteration of course by the stranger

6. In a chance encounter at night an alert raider could deliver a heavy blow before H.M.N.Z.S. "LEANDER", if unprepared, could develop her full fighting power. The fitting of the R.D.F. Equipment should however, prevent such a situation, and should confer on us the advantage of surprise.

7. The Officer of the Watch is to be responsible that the Signalman on the Bridge at once informs the Main W/T Office when a stranger is sighted in order that the transmission of a needless Alarm Signal may be detected.

8. Course and speed will be altered as necessary to intercept, until the general features of the stranger can be discerned. A good general rule for rapidly closing a ship who, when first sighted, is on a broad track (ie whose inclination is between 60 and 120), is to steer for position 30-40 degrees ahead of her.

#### CASE "A" VESSEL APPEARS INNOCENT:-

9. If, as the stranger is closed, her appearance, in conjunction with known movements of shipping, gives no cause for suspicion, the vessel will be approached until within signalling distance, when her name will be ascertained and, in the case of a British Ship, the secret challenge procedure will be carried out. In the case of a Foreign ship it will generally be desirable to ascertain her port of departure and destination, if these facts can be checked. At an early stage in the approach "LEANDER" will alter course so as to present her silhouette and ensign for a brief period: the Officer of the Watch is to ensure that a size 10 ensign is hoisted at the peak as soon as the approach commences.

#### CASE "B" VESSEL APPEARS SUSPICIOUS:-

10. If the stranger behaves in a suspicious manner or if during the approach any doubt arises as to her character, the Hands will go to Action Stations, "LEANDER" standing off until ready.

11. The approach will then be resumed, keeping the vessel on a fine bearing until within 7 to 8 miles, when the following procedure will be carried out:-

(a) Signal "W.B.A." ... "Stop to lower boats; do not use Radio; do not scuttle; if you disobey I open fire."

(b) The vessel will be ordered to steer a convenient course at a slow speed (Signal "O.B.D" ... "T.D." ...)

12. It is considered unlikely that a raider will allow himself to be boarded, and as the above orders clearly indicate that such is the intention, it is probable at this point the stranger, if a disguised Raider, will reveal her character by opening fire and commencing scuttling action.

13. If the stranger does not obey the above signals, a live round will at once be fired close to her, and if this does not produce compliance, a salvo will be fired to hit.

NOTE:- If the stranger is definitely identified as a enemy, a salvo to hit may be fired immediately after making the signal "W.B.A.", with the object of inducing a state of irresolution and thus delaying or causing the abandonment of scuttling action.

Presuming that the ship complies with the signalled orders "LEANDER" will then proceed to a position ahead and will hoist out the Boarding Boat, which the ship will then be ordered to close. H.M.N.Z.S. "LEANDER" will meanwhile manoeuvre on the lee bow in order to keep the merchantman under observation, PARTICULARLY WHILE GOING ALONGSIDE THE BOARDING BOAT. Any failure on the part of the Merchant Ship to obey orders will at once be dealt with by gunfire.

#### ACTION BY BOARDING PARTY:-

14. Instructions for the Boarding Party are contained in W.T.O.'s No. 41A and No. 42 (French Ships).

#### ENCOUNTER BY NIGHT:-

15. On R.D.F. contact being obtained (or if the vessel is sighted), "LEANDER" will be manoeuvred into a position fine of the bow.

#### CASE "A" VESSEL PROBABLY INNOCENT:-

16. If shipping intelligence indicates that an innocent ship is expected to be in the area, the armament (Manned by the Cruising Watch) will be trained on the contact bearing and the vessel closed as necessary. The normal challenge will then be made, followed by the secret challenge if the signal letters of a British Ship are made in reply. If this is answered correctly, no further action will be necessary. If the stranger replies with the signal letters of a Foreign or Allied Ship, further details will, if considered desirable, be verified as in paragraph 9.

CASE "B" VESSEL SUSPICIOUS:-

17. If no innocent ship is expected in the vicinity, Hands will go to Night Action Stations, and interrogation, as in Para. 16, will be carried out. This may be supplemented by examination with Starshell or searchlights.

18. If grounds still exist for suspecting the vessel's character, the following procedure will be carried out:-

- (a) Signal "W.B.A."
- (b) Order the vessel to burn navigation lights (Signal "I.O.Q.")
- (c) Order the vessel to proceed on a convenient course and at a suitable speed. (Signal "O.B.D." ... ".T.D." ...)

19. "LEANDER" will then cover the stranger from ahead, keeping her under observation and zig-zag as necessary until daylight, when the procedure for boarding will be carried out. Failure by the stranger to comply with the orders in paragraph 18 will be death [sic] with by gunfire.

USE OF AIRCRAFT:-

20. If the aircraft when on patrol from the ship sights a merchant ship, the following procedure is to be observed:-

CASE "A" UNEXPECTED SIGHTING:-

21. The aircraft is to report by W/T and shadow, endeavouring to remain undetected as long as endurance will admit. It may be assumed in the absence of instructions to the contrary that "LEANDER" will at once close to intercept at the best speed available.

22. If the stranger is an enemy merchant ship, it is probable that when "LEANDER" is sighted she will commence scuttling action. The aircraft should be on the alert for such action, and if the ship is seen to stop, the aircraft should close to observe more accurately, making the signal "W.B.A." If this is not complied with, the aircraft is authorised to Bomb the Bridge and to Machine Gun the Boats at the davits. In so doing, it is, however, to be borne in mind that "LEANDER" on reaching signal distance, will carry out a similar procedure, and may open fire as soon as her signal "W.B.A." is disregarded (see Paragraph 12). The aircraft must therefore by then be clear of the line of fire.

23. If reason exists for suspecting the stranger of being a disguised raider, and thus likely to show fight, the aircraft should not risk punishment, but should leave the enemy to be dealt with by "LEANDER" taking up a position for spotting and torpedo track observation as "LEANDER" closes. Alternatively, the aircraft - if ample fuel remains - may be ordered to proceed at once to search for enemy consorts or supply ships in the vicinity, or it may be necessary

to recover and re-fuel after the action before carrying out this operation.

CASE "B" EXPECTED SIGHTING:-

24. If a friendly ship is expected to be in the area, it may be desirable to identify the ship sighted. The procedure for doing so is contained in Admiralty messages 266R and 271R of 1112/29/9 and 1637/4/10 respectively. No W/T report should be made as a result of such interrogation, but a report by V/S should be made on closing "LEANDER" at the end of the patrol.<sup>30</sup>

Of course, it is not known which parts of the foregoing replicate with precision the wording of Australian Squadron Tactical Note No. 9. It does, however, seem unlikely that CAPT Bevan drafted the detail of the action referred to in paragraphs 9 and following. Those paragraphs are likely to reflect Tactical Note No. 9.

6.22 A number of observations can be made.

First, the orders emphasise the importance of having regard to knowledge of vessels expected in the area: paragraph 9, 'in conjunction with known movements of shipping', paragraph 16, 'if shipping intelligence indicates that an innocent ship is expected to be in the area' (which contrasts with paragraph 17, 'if no innocent ship is expected in the vicinity'), and paragraph 24, addressing an aircraft sighting 'if a friendly ship is expected to be in the area', all emphasise the reliance to be placed on that knowledge in deciding whether to treat a ship as 'appearing innocent' or 'appearing suspicious'. Consulting and relying on the warship's plot was crucial.

Second, a cruiser's initial response was predicated on an early decision on whether the sighted vessel appeared innocent or suspicious. If the decision was that the vessel appeared innocent, the cruiser was to approach 'within signalling distance, when her name will be ascertained, and thereafter the secret challenge procedure will be carried out'. There was no suggestion that the cruiser should go to action stations. This is reinforced by paragraphs 15 and 16 of CAPT Bevan's orders, which required that during a night encounter with a 'vessel probably innocent' the armament be trained on the vessel but that it be 'manned by the cruising watch'.

Third, it is only if doubt arose as to the character of the sighted vessel, whether because of her suspicious behaviour or otherwise, that the cruiser was to go to action stations and stand off until she was ready for action. Thereafter a cautious approach, keeping the vessel on a fine

---

<sup>30</sup> NZA.001.0012 at 0012 to 0015

bearing until within '7 to 8 miles', was required before the boarding procedure was implemented. Thus, if a vessel appeared suspicious, the cruiser was at all times to stand not closer than the extremity of a raider's anticipated firing range, 16,000 yards.

Fourth, if the vessel did 'appear innocent', the cruiser was to make known to the sighted vessel her warship identity by presenting her silhouette and ensign, thus enabling the sighted vessel to know the character and calibre of the approaching warship. This might give the merchant vessel information allowing her to decide on a future course of action, including, perhaps, any need to send a distress signal.

- 6.23 As will emerge, CAPT Burnett obviously regarded the ship he sighted as 'appearing innocent' because he followed precisely the 'Case A' procedure for approaching and identifying a vessel that had been assessed by the officers in SYDNEY as 'appearing innocent'.
- 6.24 During 1941 Australian ships operating off the Australian coast were under strict instructions to use the identification procedure 'Merchant Ships - System of Challenge and Reply'<sup>31</sup>, promulgated by the Admiralty on 25 December 1940, as were British (which then included Australian) merchant ships. From 4 April 1941 Royal Australian Navy warships were required to report to Navy Office 'all cases where merchant ships fail to carry out recognition procedure'<sup>32</sup>, referring to 'Admiralty 640A/25 December 1940'.

On 14 August 1941 Navy Office signalled:

A.N.C.S. 89 cases continue to occur where merchant vessels fail to carry out correctly recognition procedure as required by N.C.S.I. 181. N.C.S.O's are to impress upon Masters the necessity for being fully conversant with and carrying out as quickly as possible the required procedure so that unnecessary delays and risks to their vessels be avoided. Originators numbers D.N.O. V. 609, D.N.O. W.A. 63 and N.O.I.C. N.T. 677.<sup>33</sup>

- 6.25 It is implicit in the German account of signals between SYDNEY and KORMORAN as SYDNEY approached that CAPT Burnett assumed the unknown vessel understood the British recognition system—as it would if it was an 'innocent' vessel.
- 6.26 During 1941 the Admiralty recognition procedure of 25 December 1940 was extended beyond British ships to Dutch ships.<sup>34</sup> There is no

---

<sup>31</sup> NAA.010.0102; NAA.010.0094

<sup>32</sup> NAA.010.0030

<sup>33</sup> NAA.010.0067

<sup>34</sup> UKAA.007.0098 at 0100; UKAA.009.0195

documentary evidence that CAPT Burnett knew of this, but on the German account of the engagement it would seem that he did. He followed the procedure by signalling 'NNJ', that being the International Signal Code for 'You should make your signal letters'.<sup>35</sup> KORMORAN responded to this with 'PKQI', the signal letters for the merchant vessel STRAAT MALAKKA. SYDNEY then signalled 'IK', the centre two letters of STRAAT MALAKKA's secret call sign. This was in compliance with the first three signal requirements of the four-step process laid down in the Admiralty direction of 25 December 1940.<sup>36</sup> (As noted in Chapter 5, in the International Signal Code 'IK' also meant 'You should prepare for a cyclone, hurricane, typhoon'.<sup>37</sup>)

6.27 It appears that in 1941 Australian warships operating around the coast of Australia did comply with the 25 December 1940 recognition procedure and, in later months, with Tactical Note No. 9. This did not mean that on each recognition incident they went to action stations. That is apparent from the analysis of the ships' logs and war diaries of SYDNEY, ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA, CANBERRA, HOBART, KANIMBLA, MANOORA, PERTH and WESTRALIA, as set out in Table 6.1 (see also Appendix L).

6.28 Yet throughout 1941 commanding officers of warships on the Australia Station did not stay beyond '7 to 8 miles' when identifying unknown merchant vessels. The analysis shows that the identification was made at distances of as little as 1 mile. For example:

- On 9 August 1941 MANOORA closed within 1 mile to identify SS MARELLA.<sup>38</sup>
- On 3 June 1941 HOBART closed within 'three quarters of a mile' when challenging and recognising SS IRON WARRIOR.<sup>39</sup>
- On 6 March 1941 MANOORA sighted a ship at about 15 miles and altered course to intercept but did not start identification signalling until she was about 6 miles distant. The vessel failed to respond. MANOORA closed to 3 miles, when the vessel signalled 'K' and altered course towards MANOORA. The name of the ship, KAIKORAI, could then be read on the bow. The ships closed to 1 mile before KAIKORAI hoisted her signal letters.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> PUB.003.0001 at 0141 and 0205

<sup>36</sup> NAA.010.0102; NAA.010.0094

<sup>37</sup> PUB.005.0001 at 0040

<sup>38</sup> NAA.010.0063

<sup>39</sup> NAA.010.0074

<sup>40</sup> NAA.010.0086

- On 5 February 1941 ADELAIDE sighted a vessel '4 miles distant' at night. Aldis lamp signals were not responded to. ADELAIDE closed to illuminate the vessel by searchlight. She was SS MALAITA, 1 mile distant.<sup>41</sup> ADELAIDE had gone to action stations with guns loaded eight minutes before illuminating MALAITA with her searchlight.
- On 6 January 1941 HMAS SWAN passed within a mile-and-a-half of SS TALUNE before recognition procedures were initiated.<sup>42</sup>

Although these examples occurred before the introduction of Tactical Note No. 9, each commanding officer must have thought the vessels appeared 'innocent' and thus deemed it safe to approach close to the unidentified vessel whilst not at, or before going to, action stations.

- 6.29 Since September 1939 the assessments made by commanding officers of Australian ships when approaching a merchant vessel had always proved correct. Between the outbreak of war and November 1941 no warship sailing off the Australian coast had encountered a merchant vessel and identified it as a raider. It was known that mines had been laid around the Australian coast, but no disguised raider had ever been encountered.
- 6.30 If CAPT Burnett assessed the vessel sighted on 19 November 1941 as appearing 'innocent', Tactical Note No. 9 did not require SYDNEY to go to action stations.

## **Was SYDNEY at action stations as she approached KORMORAN?**

- 6.31 Evidence of whether SYDNEY was at action stations as she approached KORMORAN is available from two sources. The first is the previous practice of SYDNEY, which can be determined from:
- the evidence of sailors who sailed in SYDNEY before she left Fremantle on 11 November 1941
  - the ship's log up to 31 October 1941
  - the ship's records of proceedings up to 31 October 1941.

The ship's log for 1 November 1941 to 19 November 1941 was lost with the ship; records of proceedings were prepared monthly, so there is no record for the period after 31 October 1941.

---

<sup>41</sup> NAA.010.0092

<sup>42</sup> NAA.010.0095

If these sources established that it was CAPT Burnett's invariable practice to go to action stations on sighting an unidentified merchant vessel and remain at action stations until friendly identification had been made, that would constitute strong evidence that SYDNEY was at action stations as she approached KORMORAN.

- 6.32 The evidence of sailors who served in SYDNEY from 1939 until November 1941 does not establish that SYDNEY had an invariable practice of going to action stations on sighting a merchant vessel. Mr EW Briddick<sup>43</sup> and Mr R Radcliffe<sup>44</sup> stated that this was not standard practice. Mr KT Brown recalled that SYDNEY 'almost always went to action stations', although he could recall only one occasion of encountering an unidentified merchant ship and on that occasion the ship did not go to action stations.<sup>45</sup> He thought it was for the commanding officer to determine whether in a particular instance the ship should go to action stations.<sup>46</sup>
- 6.33 Most witnesses did not recall encounters with merchant vessels. Mr G White recalled one occasion when SYDNEY, under CAPT Collins, was called to action stations and challenged the unidentified vessel from about 8 miles with light and flags.<sup>47</sup> Mr FH House recalled two occasions when merchant vessels were encountered, and said that on both occasions SYDNEY went to action stations.<sup>48</sup> He said, presumably on the basis of that experience, that SYDNEY 'always went to action stations on sighting another ship'.<sup>49</sup> On the second occasion referred to by Mr House, the vessel was identified as the passenger liner ORONTES, which was encountered at night and finally identified using SYDNEY's searchlights.<sup>50</sup> Mr H Adams could recall only one incident during the Mediterranean campaign when SYDNEY went to action stations, the unidentified vessel being 5 miles away and being successfully identified by signal.<sup>51</sup> Mr GC Lavender could recall one occasion of being so close to a tanker that it could have been hit by throwing a potato; he thought SYDNEY was closed up and at action stations.<sup>52</sup>

This evidence is equivocal and rather uncertain and, by itself, insufficient to draw a conclusion that SYDNEY had an invariable

---

<sup>43</sup> WIT.002.0001\_R at 0002\_R; TRAN.002.0001\_R at 0045\_R to 0046\_R

<sup>44</sup> TRAN.004.0001\_R at 0003\_R

<sup>45</sup> WIT.007.0001\_R at 0005\_R

<sup>46</sup> TRAN.005.0001\_R at 0006\_R

<sup>47</sup> WIT.006.0001\_R at 0011\_R to 0012\_R

<sup>48</sup> WIT.009.0001\_R at 0004\_R

<sup>49</sup> TRAN.005.0001\_R at 0023\_R

<sup>50</sup> TRAN.005.0001\_R at 0023\_R

<sup>51</sup> WIT.010.0001\_R at 0005\_R to 0007\_R

<sup>52</sup> TRAN.003.0001\_R at 0020\_R

practice of going to action stations on sighting an unidentified merchant vessel.

- 6.34 As to SYDNEY's log, it records when SYDNEY went to or stood down from action stations. As Table 6.1 shows, the log establishes that on the great majority of occasions when a merchant vessel was encountered SYDNEY did not go to action stations.
- 6.35 SYDNEY's reports of proceedings from the beginning of the war to 31 October 1941 make no mention of procedures adopted on approaching merchant ships. They are thus of no assistance in resolving the question of whether SYDNEY was at action stations when she approached KORMORAN.
- 6.36 Taken together, the evidence of former SYDNEY sailors, the ship's log for the period 1 January 1941 to 31 October 1941 and the records of proceedings for the period to 31 October 1941 do not help to determine whether SYDNEY was at action stations as she approached KORMORAN: they fail to demonstrate a consistent pattern of a degree of readiness when approaching an unidentified merchant vessel.
- 6.37 The other source of evidence about whether SYDNEY was at action stations as she approached KORMORAN is the accounts the KORMORAN's survivors gave of what they saw on SYDNEY. Their accounts of their observations of SYDNEY's armaments and crew positions can be compared with what one would expect to observe on SYDNEY if she was at action stations.

### **Observable features on SYDNEY at action stations**

- 6.38 The following features would be observable when the crew of SYDNEY was closed up at action stations:
- All SYDNEY's guns – the 6-inch, the 4-inch and the machine guns – would be manned.<sup>53</sup> The gun crews, comprising numerous personnel, would also be observable, apart from personnel in the 6-inch turrets or supplying munitions from below decks.
  - All torpedoes would be fully manned, and the torpedo tubes would be trained outboard.<sup>54</sup> Torpedo men would be wearing anti-flash headgear, gloves, helmets, and Mae West life vests.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> TRAN.004.0001\_R at 0009\_R to 0010\_R; TRAN.005.0001\_R at 0003\_R

<sup>54</sup> WIT.001.0001\_R at 0006\_R; WIT.004.0001\_R at 0003\_R; TRAN.004.0001\_R at 0003\_R

<sup>55</sup> WIT.001.0001\_R at 0005\_R; WIT.004.0001\_R at 0004\_R; WIT.007.0001\_R at 0007\_R; WIT.009.0001\_R at 0005\_R; TRAN.004.0001\_R at 0007\_R

- On the upper deck, there would be about 12 people on the bridge, 12 on the signal or flag deck, about eight in the director control tower, and four to five men on the high-angle control tower<sup>56</sup>. Officers would be dressed in white uniforms. Other ranks would be dressed in white or blue uniforms or overalls.<sup>57</sup>
- In the case of the Walrus aircraft, the log establishes that the catapult was not always pointed outboard and nor was the aircraft's engine always started when at action stations.<sup>58</sup> The condition of the Walrus is therefore no sound indication of whether SYDNEY was at action stations.

### Who could see?

6.39 When considering KORMORAN survivors' evidence about what they saw on SYDNEY as she approached, it is important to identify who was in a position to see. Among the people who could see were those on the bridge, the signal deck above the bridge and the aft artillery director control stand. In addition, the evidence of survivors I interviewed in Germany established that, although the vessel was still camouflaged, some crew members could see through scuttles and apertures in the camouflage panels.<sup>59</sup>

6.40 The main artillery director control stand was on the signalling deck, above the bridge. Manning that position were:

- LEUT Skeries, the Chief Artillery Officer<sup>60</sup>
- LEUT Messerschmidt, who was manning the telephone between the bridge and the artillery command station<sup>61</sup>
- PO Ernst, whose role was to take into account range to target, wind speed and direction and calculate for LEUT Skeries the ranges and bearings for KORMORAN's guns to train on SYDNEY<sup>62</sup>
- WO Schneider, the senior sailor in charge of munitions<sup>63</sup>
- LS Westphal, who operated the 1.25-metre rangefinder<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> WIT.006.0001\_R at 0009\_R

<sup>57</sup> WIT.005.0001\_R at 0005\_R; WIT.006.0001\_R at 0010\_R to 0011\_R

<sup>58</sup> AWM.001.0204; NAA.014.0195 at 0198; NAA.013.0052 at 0055

<sup>59</sup> See too COI.003.0010 at 0012, referring to 'peepholes' in the camouflage plates.

<sup>60</sup> WIT.011.0183\_R at 0201\_R; NAA.012.0498; PTE.004.0218 at 0223

<sup>61</sup> WIT.011.0183\_R at 0201\_R; PTE.004.0218 at 0223

<sup>62</sup> ROI.001.0036\_R at 0041\_R to 0042\_R

<sup>63</sup> NAA.012.0065\_SCHNEIDER and COI.003.0002\_R

<sup>64</sup> ROI.001.0036\_R at 0042\_R

- AB Schleppegrell, a 'runner' who was there to carry messages to other parts of the ship in case communications broke down.<sup>65</sup>
- 6.41 At the aft director control stand, located on the poop deck and illustrated in Exhibit 21<sup>66</sup>, were the following:
- LEUT Brinkmann, the second Artillery Officer<sup>67</sup>
  - LEUT Ahl, who was spotter for the fall of shot from KORMORAN's guns<sup>68</sup>
  - AB Rönchen, whose role was to pass messages from the main director control unit to LEUT Brinkmann and messages from LEUT Brinkmann to guns 5 and 6.<sup>69</sup>
- 6.42 On the bridge were the following:
- CAPT Detmers, the Commanding Officer<sup>70</sup>
  - LCDR Meyer, the Navigation Officer<sup>71</sup>
  - CPO Jürgensen, the Assistant Navigator<sup>72</sup>
  - WO Weinig, the helmsman<sup>73</sup>
  - LEUT von Gösseln, the Officer of the Watch<sup>74</sup>
  - LEUT Schäfer, a watch officer and the commander of light speedboat 3<sup>75</sup>
  - LEUT Greter, the Torpedo Officer<sup>76</sup>
  - SBLT Diebitsch, a Prize Officer<sup>77</sup>
  - CPO Ahlbach, the Chief Signaller<sup>78</sup>
  - AB Lins, a signalman working with CPO Ahlbach<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> ROI.001.0036\_R at 0042\_R; NAA.012.0343\_SCHLEPPEGRELL

<sup>66</sup> EXH.021.0001

<sup>67</sup> TRAN.008.0051\_R at 0056\_R

<sup>68</sup> PTE.008.0293\_E at 0294\_E

<sup>69</sup> TRAN.008.0051\_R at 0056\_R

<sup>70</sup> WIT.011.0183\_R at 0202\_R

<sup>71</sup> WIT.011.0183\_R at 0202\_R; PTE.004.0218 at 0223

<sup>72</sup> WIT.011.0183\_R at 0203\_R; NAA.012.0100\_JURGENSEN at 0102\_JURGENSEN; BATT.007.0001 at 0002

<sup>73</sup> COI.004.0163 at 0167; NAA.012.0129; BATT.005.0071 at 0072

<sup>74</sup> WIT.011.0183\_R at 0202\_R; PTE.004.0218 at 0223

<sup>75</sup> NAA.012.0777\_SCHAEFER

<sup>76</sup> WIT.011.0183\_R at 0202\_R; PTE.004.0218 at 0223

<sup>77</sup> WIT.011.0183\_R at 0202\_R

<sup>78</sup> NAA.012.0096\_AHLBACH; PTE.004.0218 at 0223

<sup>79</sup> NAA.012.0093\_AHLBACH

- CPO Tümmers, telegraphist<sup>80</sup>
- LS Norikat, who manned the telephone post on the bridge<sup>81</sup>
- LS Schaumburg, the port side bridge lookout<sup>82</sup>
- LCDR von Malapert, on the bridge and in the adjacent main wireless room<sup>83</sup>
- LCDR Foerster, the First Officer, who visited the bridge at least once between when SYDNEY first intercepted KORMORAN and the outbreak of firing<sup>84</sup>
- SBLT Jansen, who moved to the bridge after he had made the first sighting of SYDNEY and then observed the first part of the engagement<sup>85</sup>
- SBLT Bunjes, who replaced SBLT Jansen in the crow's nest and made observations of SYDNEY's approach until the crow's nest was taken down.<sup>86</sup>

6.43 Some other members of KORMORAN's crew, by virtue of their battle station, were also in a position to observe parts of the engagement. Among those who were in a position to see SYDNEY when the firing opened were:

- AB Otte, a signalman<sup>87</sup>
- AB Krug, a signalman<sup>88</sup>
- SBLT Hrich, the cameraman.<sup>89</sup> KORMORAN took 30 shots of various phases of the engagement, so it is likely that SBLT Hrich observed SYDNEY's approach to KORMORAN and the subsequent battle.<sup>90</sup>

6.44 Apart from those on KORMORAN's flag deck and bridge, some sailors manning camouflaged guns were, as noted, able to observe SYDNEY's approach to a limited degree through scuttles and apertures in the

---

<sup>80</sup> NAA.012.0151\_TUMMERS. Five to seven other sailors from the wireless department, manning No. 1 radio room, might also have had the opportunity to observe the battle or parts of it.

<sup>81</sup> NAA.012.0086\_NORIKAT

<sup>82</sup> NAA.012.0082\_SCHAUMBURG

<sup>83</sup> PTE.004.0218 at 0222

<sup>84</sup> NAA.096.0029\_E and NAA.012.0402

<sup>85</sup> NAA.012.0784\_JANSEN

<sup>86</sup> COI.004.0130\_E at 0131\_E

<sup>87</sup> NAA.012.0139\_OTTE; NAA.012.0093\_AHLBACH; PTE.004.0227 at 0235

<sup>88</sup> NAA.012.0139\_OTTE; NAA.012.0093\_AHLBACH; PTE.004.0227 at 0235

<sup>89</sup> NAA.012.0766\_HRICH

<sup>90</sup> NAA.012.0752

camouflage plates before the plates were removed for action. In addition, once the camouflage plates were removed the gunners and some of the gun-crew members could see SYDNEY and the personnel on SYDNEY's bridge and decks. The evidence establishes beyond doubt that at that particular time SYDNEY was abeam of KORMORAN and about 1,000 metres distant. Among those in KORMORAN who could see from these positions, when the guns were de-camouflaged or before that through the scuttles in KORMORAN's plating were the following:

- CPO Ahsbaas, the gun captain No. 1 15-centimetre gun<sup>91</sup>
- CPO Dobileit, the gun captain No. 2 15-centimetre gun<sup>92</sup>
- CPO Kobelt, the gun captain No. 3 15-centimetre gun<sup>93</sup>
- CPO Reidt, the gun captain No. 4 15-centimetre gun<sup>94</sup>
- CPO Saalfrank, the gun captain No. 5 15-centimetre gun<sup>95</sup>
- CPO Bergmann, the gun captain No. 6 15-centimetre gun<sup>96</sup>
- LS Fend<sup>97</sup> and LS Köblitz<sup>98</sup>, manning the starboard 37-millimetre gun
- CPO Auer, LS Haas and CPO Hennig, the gun captains for three of the 2-centimetre guns<sup>99</sup>
- LS Carl<sup>100</sup>
- LS Kümmerer<sup>101</sup>
- AB König<sup>102</sup>
- LS Schulte, who was manning the forward 15-centimetre gun<sup>103</sup>
- LS Hildenbrand, manning the aft 15-centimetre gun<sup>104</sup>
- LS Treber<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> COI.004.0163 at 0167

<sup>92</sup> PTE.008.0256

<sup>93</sup> COI.004.0163 at 0167

<sup>94</sup> COI.004.0163 at 0167

<sup>95</sup> COI.004.0163 at 0167

<sup>96</sup> COI.004.0163 at 0167

<sup>97</sup> COI.004.0163 at 0167

<sup>98</sup> COI.007.0002\_E

<sup>99</sup> COI.004.0163 at 0167

<sup>100</sup> TRAN.006.0001\_R at 0014\_R to 0018\_R

<sup>101</sup> TRAN.007.0001\_R at 0009\_R and 0011\_R

<sup>102</sup> TRAN.008.0001\_R at 0008\_R and 0011\_R. AB König was not a member of a gun crew; rather, he was a sailor in KORMORAN's engineering department, but he had been able to observe SYDNEY through a porthole.

<sup>103</sup> TRAN.010.0052\_R at 0062\_R and 0065\_R

<sup>104</sup> TRAN.006.0042\_R at 0062\_R

<sup>105</sup> NAA.040.0031

- LS Schneider.<sup>106</sup>

6.45 In considering their evidence, it is to be remembered that the witnesses, as prisoners being interrogated, usually responded to questions asked of them: they did not volunteer an account of the approach or engagement. Most were not asked about SYDNEY's armaments.

## The German survivors' evidence

### The 6-inch guns

6.46 In connection with the bearing of SYDNEY's 6-inch guns as she approached KORMORAN, of the 46 possible witnesses<sup>107</sup>:

- Thirty-six made no statement about the matter.<sup>108</sup>
- Nine made statements that the guns were bearing
  - Messerschmidt – 'guns and torpedoes pointing at us'<sup>109</sup>
  - Detmers – 'directed at us'<sup>110</sup>
  - von Gössehn – 'eight murderous gun barrels are trained'<sup>111</sup>
  - Greter – 'turrets and torpedo tubes stayed aimed at us'<sup>112</sup>
  - Heinrich Carl – 'pointing at us'<sup>113</sup>
  - Kümmerer – 'pointed at us'<sup>114</sup>
  - Schulte – 'Guns were pointed at us'<sup>115</sup>
  - Bunjes – 'still point threateningly at us'<sup>116</sup>
  - Ahl – 'One can see into the gun openings like into pistol barrels'.<sup>117</sup>
- One, Hildenbrand, in uncertain evidence, said, 'They were directed straightly forward or aft to behind. They were not pointed at us, not

---

<sup>106</sup> ROI.001.0157\_R at 0160\_R

<sup>107</sup> Of the 47 people listed as being in a position to see SYDNEY, one, Dobileit, died as a result of the engagement: COI.004.0163 at 0164.

<sup>108</sup> Including Skeries, Meyer, Diebitsch, Jürgensen, Ahlbach, Schäfer, Schaumburg, von Malapert, König, Rönchen, Brinkmann and Jansen.

<sup>109</sup> WIT.011.0183\_R at 0207\_R

<sup>110</sup> CORR.007.0034 at 0131

<sup>111</sup> PUB.061.0001 at 0004

<sup>112</sup> SPC.004.0069

<sup>113</sup> TRAN.006.0001\_R at 0016\_R

<sup>114</sup> TRAN.007.0001\_R at 0013\_R

<sup>115</sup> TRAN.010.0052\_R at 0063\_R

<sup>116</sup> NAA.012.0521 at 0522

<sup>117</sup> PTE.004.0227 at 0232

all'.<sup>118</sup> In contrast, however, 'I have to lie exactly ... they turned at that point because they were also shooting them'.<sup>119</sup>

The weight of the evidence supports a finding that the 6-inch guns in all four turrets were trained on KORMORAN as SYDNEY approached.

### The 4-inch guns

6.47 In connection with the manning and bearing of the 4-inch guns, of the 46 possible witnesses:

- Forty-one made no statement about the matter.<sup>120</sup>
- Two—Messerschmidt and Schulte—said the 'guns were pointed at us'<sup>121</sup>, which, whilst not entirely clear, probably related to the 6-inch rather than the 4-inch guns.
- Detmers said the 4-inch guns were not manned.<sup>122</sup>
- Ernst said the secondary guns were not manned.<sup>123</sup>
- Ahl—'her 10.2 cm guns were not manned at all.'<sup>124</sup>

When coupled with the evidence of German witnesses that strafing of SYDNEY's deck by machine-gun fire prevented the 4-inch guns being fired<sup>125</sup>, the oral evidence supports a finding that the 4-inch guns were not manned.

### The 0.5-inch machine guns

6.48 No witness addressed the subject of the 0.5-inch machine guns. There was only one witness who gave evidence of machine-gun fire from SYDNEY<sup>126</sup>, and there were no accounts of KORMORAN personnel being killed or wounded by machine-gun fire.

It seems probable that the 0.5-inch machine guns, which were anti-aircraft guns, were not manned.

---

<sup>118</sup> TRAN.006.0042\_R at 0058\_R

<sup>119</sup> TRAN.006.0042\_R at 0060\_R

<sup>120</sup> Including Skeries, Meyer, von Gösseln, Diebitsch, Greter, Jürgensen, Ahlbach, Schäfer, Schaumburg, von Malapert, Heinrich Carl, Kümmerer, König, Rönchen, Brinkman, Jansen, Bunjes and Hildenbrand.

<sup>121</sup> TRAN.010.0052\_R at 0064\_R Line 7

<sup>122</sup> CORR.007.0034 at 0131; compare 'all guns trained' in NAA.012.0766\_DETMEERS.

<sup>123</sup> ROI.001.0036\_R at 0050\_R

<sup>124</sup> PTE.004.0227 at 0234

<sup>125</sup> Ahl's plan of the battle depicts how KORMORAN's 2 cm guns kept SYDNEY's 4-inch guns under fire: PTE.008.0121 and see too SPC.003.0037 at 0071 and PTE.004.0227 at 0234.

<sup>126</sup> NAA.012.0771\_SKERIES, but this was after SYDNEY had been torpedoed and was dipping by the bow 'shots from 1" guns of Cruiser mostly short'.

## The torpedoes

6.49 In connection with the manning and bearing of SYDNEY's torpedoes as she approached KORMORAN, of the 46 possible witnesses:

- Forty-two made no statement about the matter.<sup>127</sup>
- Three said the torpedoes were pointing at KORMORAN
  - Detmers – 'port torpedo-tube battery were all directed at us'<sup>128</sup>
  - Greter – 'trained'<sup>129</sup>
  - Schulte – 'there were these four tubes of torpedoes pointed at us'.<sup>130</sup>
- One, Messerschmidt, said the torpedoes were 'pointing at us', but he did not 'remember seeing men manning SYDNEY's torpedo tubes'<sup>131</sup> and he further said, 'I saw men running to SYDNEY's torpedo tubes being shot down'.<sup>132</sup>

The evidence from the wreckage establishes that at some time a maximum of two torpedoes were fired from SYDNEY's port battery. If SYDNEY's port battery was initially manned, one would expect the crew to have fired all four port torpedoes, particularly if SYDNEY was running a course parallel to KORMORAN. On the other hand, early casualties on SYDNEY's bridge and control tower might have meant that the necessary directions and orders to fire could not be given.

Further, it is improbable that SYDNEY's port torpedo battery would be trained outboard without the torpedo tubes being manned.

On balance, it is probable that the port torpedo tubes were manned. If they had been, one would expect them to have been fired, but it is clear that not more than two were fired because two torpedoes were discovered in the port torpedo mount in the debris field.<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>127</sup> Including Skeries, Meyer, von Gösseln, Diebitsch, Jürgensen, Ahlbach, Schäfer, Schaumburg, von Malapert, Heinrich Carl, Kümmerer, König, Rönchen, Jansen, Bunjes and Hildenbrand.

<sup>128</sup> CORR.007.0034 at 0131; NAA.012.0766\_DETHERS

<sup>129</sup> SPC.004.0069

<sup>130</sup> TRAN.010.0052\_R at 0064\_R

<sup>131</sup> WIT.011.0183\_R at 0206\_R

<sup>132</sup> WIT.011.0183\_R at 0213\_R

<sup>133</sup> DSTO.003.0001 at 0228 (see figure 198).

## The Walrus aircraft

6.50 In connection with the condition of the Walrus aircraft, of the 46 witnesses:

- Thirty-six made no statement about the matter.<sup>134</sup>
- Four said the plane had a turning propeller
  - Messerschmidt—‘swung out and I could see and hear the propellers turning’<sup>135</sup> but was then ‘swung back’<sup>136</sup>
  - Detmers—‘plane on the catapult ... probably warming up’<sup>137</sup> and ‘aircraft was warming up on the catapult, and she tried to launch it but the aeroplane was hit’<sup>138</sup>
  - Kümmerer—‘Yes, the propellers were running. It was about to start, but then it was hit by our 15-cm gun’<sup>139</sup>
  - Schulte—‘I had the impression that the propeller of the plane was running, a pilot was sitting inside’.<sup>140</sup>
- In addition to Messerschmidt, two others described the catapult being swung back.
  - Greter—‘catapult was swung back’<sup>141</sup>
  - Ahl (who was part of KORMORAN’s seaplane detachment)—‘one could observe very well that the warship had got her reconnaissance plane ready. For a while, the catapult had been pointing on the beam but had been swung back when it became obvious that the “Kormoran” could not escape’.<sup>142</sup>
- Four said the plane was stopped or its propeller was not turning
  - Bunjes—‘We observe that the engine of her plane, which has been running, is stopped and the aircraft replaced under cover’<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>134</sup>Including Skeries, Meyer, von Gösseln, Diebitsch, Jürgensen, Ahlbach, Schäfer, Schaumburg, von Malapert, König, Brinkman and Jansen.

<sup>135</sup> WIT.011.0183\_R at 0205\_R

<sup>136</sup> WIT.011.0183\_R at 0205\_R

<sup>137</sup> CORR.007.0034 at 0131

<sup>138</sup> NAA.012.0766\_DETMEERS

<sup>139</sup> TRAN.007.0001\_R at 0013\_R

<sup>140</sup> TRAN.010.0052\_R at 0063\_R

<sup>141</sup> SPC.004.0069. Note this likely to be a 1950s recollection—SPC.004.0073\_R.

<sup>142</sup> PTE.004.0227 at 0231

<sup>143</sup> NAA.012.0521 at 0522

- Carl – ‘No, it was off’<sup>144</sup>
- Rönchen – Could not see it turning. Saw shell hit it.<sup>145</sup>
- Hildenbrand – ‘Engines were not running’.<sup>146</sup>

On balance, it is probable that the Walrus had been prepared for flight and had her engines started but that a decision was taken during the approach not to launch her.

## Personnel

6.51 Of the witnesses who could see SYDNEY:

- Thirty-five made no statement regarding the subject of personnel on the bridge or deck.
- Three saw people on the bridge
  - Messerschmidt – ‘I saw a number of men moving around on the bridge ... I saw a number of men with white hats moving up the director control tower on SYDNEY’<sup>147</sup>
  - Greter – ‘many white caps on the bridge’<sup>148</sup>
  - Bunjes – ‘bridge is full of officers’.<sup>149</sup>
- Eight spoke of what they saw on the deck
  - Messerschmidt – ‘men walking slowly along the main deck ... stood at the rail watching’<sup>150</sup>
  - Detmers – ‘pantrymen in their white coats lining the rails’<sup>151</sup>
  - Greter – ‘seamen in civilian clothing with the cook in his white hat glancing every now and then out of the galley’<sup>152</sup>
  - König – ‘people moving around on deck’<sup>153</sup>
  - Schulte – ‘three or four men were running towards their guns ... That’s hard to say’<sup>154</sup>

---

<sup>144</sup> TRAN.006.0001\_R at 0028\_R

<sup>145</sup> TRAN.008.0051\_R at 0065\_R and 0077\_R to 0078\_R

<sup>146</sup> TRAN.006.0042\_R at 0058\_R

<sup>147</sup> WIT.011.0183\_R at 0210\_R

<sup>148</sup> SPC.004.0069

<sup>149</sup> NAA.012.0521 at 0522

<sup>150</sup> WIT.011.0183\_R at 0206\_R

<sup>151</sup> CORR.007.0034 at 0132

<sup>152</sup> SPC.004.0069

<sup>153</sup> TRAN.008.0001\_R at 0008\_R

<sup>154</sup> TRAN.010.0052\_R at 0065\_R

- Rönchen—saw five or six seamen dressed in white<sup>155</sup>
- Hildenbrand—‘were just a few sailors ... just a few were there on deck’<sup>156</sup>
- Ernst—‘two men in khaki uniforms with peaked caps in the aftern part’.<sup>157</sup> (SYDNEY’s Walrus crew were likely to have been wearing summer one-piece Sidcot flying suits made from khaki cotton drill.<sup>158</sup>)

6.52 Some commentators have made much of German witnesses’ accounts that ‘cooks’ or ‘pantrymen’ in white aprons were seen on deck watching KORMORAN.

Mr F Sheldon-Collins, who served in SYDNEY and had been a cook, gave evidence that cooks wore white pants, white shirts and white aprons.<sup>159</sup> He also said cooks would ‘mainly go to the spud locker in the mornings to prepare potatoes for upcoming meals and perhaps again in the evening around 1600 or later to prepare for the sailors’ evening meal (at 1900)’.<sup>160</sup> The ‘spud locker’ was just forward of the port side torpedo tube, which is where the German witnesses said they saw ‘pantrymen’. If the ship had been at action stations, the cooks would not have been in or adjacent to the spud locker watching an unknown vessel about 1,000 metres away: they would have been at their allocated action station (Mr Sheldon-Collins’ action station was in the after magazine).<sup>161</sup>

6.53 The evidence that the 4-inch guns and the machine guns were not manned, that people were standing watching KORMORAN from the rails, that a cook or pantry man was looking out at KORMORAN, and that there was sudden activity of people running on deck or quickly congregating on the bridge suggests that SYDNEY was not at action stations as she approached KORMORAN. The evidence that her 6-inch guns were trained on KORMORAN is, however, compelling.

6.54 On balance, it is probable that SYDNEY had not gone to action stations but was instead at cruising stations.

---

<sup>155</sup> TRAN.008.0051\_R at 0066\_R

<sup>156</sup> TRAN.006.0042\_R at 0057\_R

<sup>157</sup> ROI.010.0026\_R at 0037\_R

<sup>158</sup> NHQ.001.0023\_R at 0053\_R

<sup>159</sup> WIT.011.0022\_R at 0026\_R

<sup>160</sup> WIT.011.0022\_R at 0026\_R

<sup>161</sup> WIT.011.0022\_R at 0024\_R