

## COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE LOSS OF HMAS SYDNEY II

Before The Hon TRH Cole AO RFD QC

Held at residence of Mr Willi Wegfahrt  
[REDACTED] Germany

Counsel Assisting: LEUT Matthew Tyson  
LEUT Stephen Harper

On Thursday, 10 July 2008  
(Day 11)

31 THE PRESIDENT: It's 10 July and I've come to the home of  
32 Herr Willi Wegfahrt [REDACTED] in the north of Germany  
33 to take evidence in relation to the Commission of Inquiry  
34 regarding the encounter between the HMAS Sydney and  
35 Kormoran.

36  
37 Interpreter [German]: Today is the 10th of July 2008, we are at the home  
38 of Willi Wegfahrt [REDACTED] in Northern Germany. I came here on  
39 behalf of the Commission of Inquiry into the sinking of the HMAS Sydney 2  
40 in order to take Mr. Wegfahrt's statements regarding the sinking of the  
41 Sydney.

42

43 THE PRESIDENT: Herr Wegfahrt, thank you for agreeing to see us and to  
44 help us with my Inquiry. It was explained to me that you  
45 do not wish to take an oath but that you have said that you  
46 will tell me the truth?

47

1 Interpreter [German]: Mr. Wegfahrt, I would first like to thank you very  
2 much for being available for this discussion and thus for greatly helping  
3 my Commission of Inquiry. I was told that you will not make your  
4 statements under oath but that you will tell the truth and nothing but  
5 the truth anyway.

6  
7 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes, why not.

8  
9 MR WEGFAHRT: Yes, why not?

10 THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, indeed.

11

12 Interpreter [German]: Once again, thank you very much.

13

14 <HEINRICH WILHELM WEGFAHRT:

15

16 LEUT TYSON: Q. Good morning, Herr Wegfahrt. My name is  
17 Leut Matthew Tyson. I'm here with Herr Thomas, the  
18 interpreter, and I'm here with Leut Stephen Harper. Sir,  
19 can I just confirm that you've been shown the instrument of  
20 appointment dated 11 April 2008 that's been signed by the  
21 Chief of the Australian Defence Force?

22

23 Interpreter [German]: Good morning Mr. Wegfahrt, I am Matthew Tyson, and  
24 I am here together with my interpreter, Mr. Frank Thomas and with my  
25 colleague Mr. Stephen Harper. Mr. Wegfahrt, could you briefly confirm  
26 that we have given you the official Instrument of Appointment which is  
27 dated 11 April 2008 and signed by Mr. Houston, the Chief of the  
28 Australian Defence Force?

29

30 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes.

31

32 A. Yes.

33 Q. Yes? Now, sir, can we start by perhaps can you tell  
34 us your full name?

35

36 Interpreter [German]: To start the interview, could you please state your  
37 full name?

38

39 Wegfahrt [German]: Heinrich Wilhelm Wegfahrt. Like the last Emperor. In  
40 those days, everything honoured the Emperor.

41

42 A. Heinrich Wilhelm Wegfahrt.

43 Q. And, Herr Wegfahrt, can you tell us, please, your date  
44 of birth?

45

46 Interpreter [German]: Mr. Wegfahrt, could you also state your date of  
47 birth?

1

2 Wegfahrt [German]: [REDACTED]

3

4 A. That's [REDACTED]

5 Q. And, sir, can you tell us, please, your current  
6 address?

7

8 Interpreter [German]: Could you also please state your current address?

9

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Senior's residence.

11

12 Unidentified speaker [German]: [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED]

14

15 THE INTERPRETER: [REDACTED]

16 [REDACTED]

17 [REDACTED]

18

19 Wegfahrt [German]: A senior's residence.

20

21 A. Okay, that's [REDACTED] - (Not through  
22 interpreter). Senior's residence, I say.

23 LIEUT TYSON: Q. Thank you. And, sir, just before the  
24 outbreak of World War II, what was your occupation?

25

26 3 Interpreter [German]: Thank you very much Mr. Wegfahrt. What was  
27 your occupation at the onset of the Second World War?

28

29 Wegfahrt [German]: I am a trained turner. I was recruited right at the  
30 beginning of the war in September 1939.

31

32 A. I did an apprenticeship as a machinist, and at the

33

34 beginning of the war, in September 1939, I was commanded to  
35 become a member of the Navy.

36

37 ?

38 .

39

40 Q. Now, sir, on the Kormoran, what were your duties?

41

42 Interpreter [German]: What were your duties on board of the Kormoran?

43

44 Wegfahrt [German]: Engine room.

45

46 A. I was at the engine room.

47 Q. And what did you actually do in the engine room? What

1 sort of things did you do?

2

3 Interpreter [German]: Which duties did you fulfill down there in the  
4 engine room?

5

6 Wegfahrt [German]: I was working on the diesel engine. We were a diesel  
7 electro ship, we had big diesel engines, 4,000 HP, 4 of them and that is  
8 what I was trained for. I had to do my apprenticeship after all.

9

10 A. Well, I had - I was responsible for the diesel  
11 electro engine. We had four engines, each of them had  
12 4,000 horsepower, and I was trained to do this - four,  
13 4,000 horsepower engines, and I was trained to do so.

14

15 Wegfahrt [German]: There were 3 careers in the Navy: turbine, steam and  
16 then engines and electrics. And I had engines, diesel engines.

17

18 A. There's three possible careers in the Navy relating to  
19 the various types of engines. One is for the turbine  
20 engines, then we have electro engines and then we have  
21 motor engines, and I was responsible for the motor engines  
22 or trained for the motor engines.

23 Q. And, sir, were you in the Third Division under  
24 Mitelaff?

25

26 Interpreter [German]: Were you in the Third Division under the command of  
27 Mr. Mitzlaff?

28

29 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes, Mr. Mitzlaff. He was my watch officer. But he  
30 died a long time ago. He came from the mercantile marine. All our  
31 supervisors came from the mercantile marine. Most of the engineers and  
32 navigators were from the mercantile marine as well.

33

34 A. Yes, Mr Mitelaff was my watch officer also. But he  
35 died a long time ago. All our commanders and leading  
36 officers in the engine room, they were all from the  
37 Merchant Navy, as well as Mr Mitelaff.

38 Q. Now, sir, I want to ask you some questions about the  
39 encounter between Kormoran and Sydney on 19 November 1941.  
40 Do you recall the alarm ringing on that afternoon?

41

42 Interpreter [German]: I would now like to get to the questions that deal  
43 with the 19th of November 1941, when the Sydney encountered the Kormoran.  
44 Do you remember that the alarm was sounded on that afternoon?

45

46 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes, it was a public holiday. The Protestant's Penance  
47 Day. A Protestant public holiday.

1

2 A. Yes, I do, and it was also a holiday, a Protestant  
3 holiday. It was the - well, it was a Protestant holiday.  
4 (Not through interpreter). Yeah, Protestant.

5

6 Wegfahrt [German]: That was the reason why I changed shift early with  
7 someone from the engine room, I then went to the workshop. There was a  
8 younger colleague there who desperately wanted to get to see the engine.  
9 He did not have the proper full training, but he wanted to get to know  
10 the engine sometime. Therefore I had the afternoon off.

11

12 (A: I had no shift this afternoon  
13 because some young comrade wanted to work at the engine  
14 room. He was very young and he didn't - he wasn't trained  
15 properly to do the engine, but he was very eager to see how  
16 the work was on the engine, so I changed to the workshop,  
17 but at this afternoon, I had no service.

18

19 Wegfahrt [German]: I have to add that this cost him his life. He always  
20 pushed for it, he always wanted to go to the engine room and I had to  
21 cover his position and he died in the engine room.

22

23 A: I must add that he lost his life due to this because  
24 he was in the engine room and got killed there and he was  
25 very eager all the time to be in the engine room once, and  
26 I changed positions with him.

27

28 Q. Sir, do you remember roughly what time of the  
29 afternoon the alarm rang that afternoon?

30

31 Interpreter [German]: Can you remember at roughly what time the alarm was  
32 sounded on that afternoon?

33

34 Wegfahrt [German]: Between 4 and 5. We were drinking coffee, I had the  
35 afternoon off after all, I was on the daytime shift. I got out so easily  
36 because my young colleague wanted to get to know the engine and he was in  
37 the engine room, so I had the daytime shift and thus I had the afternoon  
38 off. And suddenly the alarm sounded.

39

40 1 A. It would have been 4 or 5 o'clock. It must have been  
41 2 between 4 and 5 o'clock, and I was having coffee this  
42 3 afternoon about that time the alarm rang. As I said  
43 4 before, I had a free afternoon because this other colleague  
44 5 was taking over - had taken over my job.

45 7 Q. Now, sir, can you tell us when the alarm rang, where  
46 8 did you go? What did you do?

47

1 Interpreter [German]: When the alarm went off, what did you do then?  
2 Where did you go?

3

4 Wegfahrt [German]: I went to my battle station.

5

6 9 A. I went to my action station. WEGFAHRT [ENGLISH]. Action  
7 station, yes.

8 Q. Sir, I want to show you a diagram of Kormoran and I'd  
9 ask you please, if you could, to point out where your  
10 action station was?

11 A. WEGFAHRT [ENGLISH]. Action station, yeah.

12 Here.

13

14 LIEUT TYSON: Circle, perhaps? No, sorry.

15

16 Interpreter [German]: Could you make a cross? Or a circle?

17

18 Wegfahrt [German]: Shall I make a cross? Yes, no, no. Here are the  
19 engines. And there were the mines. And up here was where you go down,  
20 because you go down where the mast is. And there was a big fire fighting  
21 pump and things like that. We were there and looked out of the scuttle.  
22 Everything happened so fast.

23 That was the fire and leaks brigade. It was the position of the other  
24 guy, I had to take his position since he went to the engine room. Then we  
25 looked. And here were the 320 mines.

26

27 (Discussion in German between interpreter and witness)

28

29 LIEUT TYSON: Frank, can you - a square?

30

31 (Discussion in German between interpreter and witness)

32

33 THE INTERPRETER: Well, I was here. Underneath there was the  
34 mine deck with 320 mines, as I have been told, and I was  
35 here at the - I was here near the mast because there when  
36 you went down from the mast on the deck, that's where the  
37 pumps were to extinguish the fire. My task was or my  
38 battle station was being part of the fire brigade and the  
39 leakage; if there was a leak in the ship, then we were  
40 responsible to solve this.

41

42 THE PRESIDENT: All right. I shall note that, on  
43 exhibit 16, Herr Wegfahrt has marked with a cross, which I  
44 will now circle, the position of his battle station.

45

46 Interpreter [German]: I have exhibit 16 where Mr. Wegfahrt indicated his  
47 battle station with a cross and again with a circle around it.

1

2 LEUT TYSON: Thank you.

3

4 Q. Now, sir, you've talked about your task being part of  
5 the fire brigade. Who was in charge of the fire-fighting  
6 unit?

7

8 Interpreter [German]: You said you were part of the fire and leak  
9 brigade ...

10

11 Wegfahrt [German]: Well that was my position. Once I had to do the  
12 control run, once I had to go through the mine deck with the lamp to  
13 check whether there was any fire there. I hurried up in there so that I  
14 could get out of there quickly.

15

16 THE PRESIDENT: Q. Just before we go on, was your battle  
17 station below the main deck?

18

19 Interpreter [German]: Before we continue – was your battle station then  
20 practically below the main deck? Or on the main deck or where else?

21

22 Wegfahrt [German]: One deck below, where the mines were stored.

23

24 A. It was one deck below where the mines were.

25 Q. Yes?

26

27 Wegfahrt [German]: There was a staircase there, and a pump as well as a  
28 big container with foam to fight fires and the like. I couldn't go all  
29 the way down. I had no business being there anyway.

30

31 A. There were stairs going down and then there was one  
32 room underneath the main deck where the tanks were that  
33 were filled with the foam for extinguishing the fire.

34 Q. Yes, thank you.

35

36 Wegfahrt [German]: There was another such staircase where you could get  
37 down more to where the workshops were. There were no crew rooms there.

38

39 A. There was only another case of stairs where you could  
40 go deeper into the ship where the workshops were. There  
41 were no crew rooms or anything like that.

42 LEUT TYSON: Q. I just wanted you to explain, if you  
43 could, the organisation of the fire-fighting parties, and  
44 in particular whether you know whether Foerster had any  
45 role in relationship to fire and damage control?

46

47 Interpreter [German]: I wanted to ask about the fire and leak brigade.

1 How was it organized internally, who was the Commander? Did Mr. Foerster  
2 have anything to do with it?

3

4 Wegfahrt [German]: That was Mart, Obermart. I did already think about who  
5 that was, since I only just came there. On the 1st of November I got the  
6 workshop position, and with the workshop came this position as well. And  
7 I never occupied this position before, it was the first time that I  
8 experienced an alarm there. You understand? I was never embarrassed that  
9 I had to go there. The one who switched with me always pushed hard to get  
10 into the engine room. And normally I should have been in the engine  
11 room, if it wasn't for that switch with the young colleague or comrade.

12

13 Interpreter [German]: Did Foerster have anything to do with it?

14

15 Wegfahrt [German]: Foerster was the First Officer.

16

17 THE INTERPRETER: Was he the first officer? He was the  
18 first?

19

20 THE WITNESS: Mmm.

21

22 THE INTERPRETER: Anyway, I'll explain this, translate  
23 this, sorry.

24

25 THE INTERPRETER: There we had a senior sailor who was  
26 responsible of the fire brigade, but I cannot remember his  
27 name because you have to see it was - that was my position  
28 from the 1st of November this year and this was the first  
29 time there was an alarm for me. So it was apparently the  
30 first time I was ever commanded to this battle station, so  
31 I don't know this name. It was all happened just because I  
32 had changed the job with this other young fellow, and this  
33 is the first - he was the first officer, but - yeah, he was  
34 the first officer.

35

36 LEUT TYSON: Q. Sir, in the period between when you got  
37 to the battle station but before the firing broke out, did  
38 you ever have any opportunity to see the warship that had  
39 been spotted by Kormoran's lookout?

40

41 Interpreter [German]: In the time between the alarm was sounded and the  
42 battle breaking out, did you have the opportunity to see the approaching  
43 warship?

44

45 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes, through a scuttle. But as I said, it wasn't like  
46 you had it in easy view, you had to go up to have a look as it was at the  
47 upper deck. When you went a deck lower then there was no view there where

1 the mines were stored. There was a deck with a staircase, there you could  
2 have a look, yes.

3

4 Interpreter [German]: So you had to go back up to the main deck to have a  
5 look?

6

7 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes, the man with the telephone was standing there.

8

9 A. Yes, I could see it through a scuttle. Well, in the  
10 actual battle station, I couldn't see anything down there,  
11 but I had just to go up one stair and then I could have a  
12 look.

13

14 THE PRESIDENT: Q. And did you have a look?

15 Interpreter [German]: And did you actually go upstairs to have a look?

16

17 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes, we were curious. We wanted to know what was going  
18 on.

19

20 A. Yes, we did, because we were curious. We wanted to  
21 know what's happening there.

22 LEUT TYSON: Q. And can you tell us what did you see  
23 when you had a look?

24

25 Interpreter [German]: And what did you see when you were up there?

26

27 Wegfahrt [German]: Well we could see something even though many wanted to  
28 look through the scuttle to have a look. I saw that the barrels and the  
29 torpedo tubes were aimed at us.

30

31 A. Yes, I did in fact see what was happening; although I  
32 must say there were many people who wanted to have a look  
33 through the scuttles, and I could see when Sydney was  
34 approaching that her Turrets as well as the torpedo tubes  
35 were pointing at us.

36

37 Wegfahrt [German]: And the aircraft was also ready, and then all of a  
38 sudden everything started. The first thing I really actively noticed was  
39 when the aircraft exploded, it was a fire ball. And then I only saw that  
40 there were 4 people at the torpedo tubes and we said to each other "well  
41 look the cooks are there" and all of a sudden they were also gone. That  
42 was the end for me as I had to go down to the mine deck to do my checks.

43

44 A. I could also see that the aeroplane was ready to be  
45 launched and I could see this very well, and then the  
46 battle started. The first thing that more or less happened  
47 is that the aeroplane exploded and was gone. Then I could

1 also see that, at the torpedo tubes, there were four  
2 people - to me they seemed like chefs - but as soon as the  
3 battle started, they had disappeared very quickly. What  
4 happened next was that I was ordered to go to the mine deck  
5 to do my control there, because that was my actual battle  
6 station.

7

8 Wegfahrt [German]: The only positive thing I can say, is that, when  
9 suddenly the aircraft was hit in a fireball, we all thought "God what are  
10 they doing, the stewards are still standing at the torpedoes" and that's  
11 the only thing and then the command already came for me to do the checks  
12 with the lamp. Through the mine deck there. And when I came back up, then  
13 the whole thing was already almost all over.

14

15 A. Well, that was one thing that happened there: the  
16 aeroplane was covered with fire. There was a big  
17 explosion, because all the fuel came out of it and  
18 exploded. And then these guys on the torpedo tubes, I told  
19 at that moment to my comrade, "My God, what are they doing;  
20 they are more or less..." But then they have gone, and I  
21 was ordered to go under deck and do my control of the mine  
22 deck, and when I came up again, the battle was more or less  
23 over.

24 Q. When you first saw Sydney through that scuttle, can  
25 you tell us roughly how far was she away from Kormoran?

26

27 Interpreter [German]: Could you tell us approximately how far away the  
28 Sydney was when you saw her for the first time through the scuttle?

29

30 Wegfahrt [German]: At that time it was said to be 1,200 m. But that was  
31 not official. Could have been more or less. It is a rumour that  
32 circulated in our group.

33

34 A. It was said it was 1,200 metres, but that's not  
35 anything official; that's just the rumour that spread in  
36 our group there. It might be that somebody said it was  
37 1,200 metres, but it's not clear.

38 Q. What we'd like to know is not what someone else told  
39 you the distance was but to get your best estimate from  
40 what you saw of the distance between the two ships.

41

42 Interpreter [German]: What we would like to get to know is not  
43 necessarily the rumours that were circulating, but rather your estimation  
44 of the approximate distance.

45

46 Wegfahrt [German]: Can you measure distances over water? Well we could  
47 see the people standing there. It was the torpedo tubes which were

1 already aiming at us and there were 4 people in white standing there, as  
2 if they were the stewards. They stood there, they probably did not take  
3 us serious. Suddenly they were hit. They were gone. Then I went to the  
4 mine deck with the lamp to check if anything was going on there.

5

6 A. Well, it's very difficult to estimate a distance on  
7 sea. Can you do that? Well, I must say we were able to  
8 see these people, they were dressed in white, these  
9 stewards at the torpedo tubes, and we also thought they  
10 were not taking us as - for full. They were - they didn't  
11 think we were a warship and - but after the first shots,  
12 they had gone, and then as I said before, I went under deck

13

14 to do this control of the mine deck with a light, with a  
15 torch.

16 THE PRESIDENT: Q. How could you tell that the aircraft  
17 was ready to be launched?

18

19 Interpreter [German]: How could you tell that the aircraft was ready for  
20 take-off?

21

22 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes because it was swung to the side. Someone in our  
23 group said that "he's switching off the engines again." Then the fireball  
24 was directly there. An aircraft is usually like that but it was like  
25 this. And the torpedo tubes were also like this. The turrets were also  
26 swung out.

27

28 A. Well, I could - I could see this because it had been  
29 swung to the side to be ready for launching because the  
30 usual position is parallel to the ship and this wasn't  
31 parallel to the ship anymore. And the torpedo tubes are  
32 also in this direction, as well as the turrets; they were  
33 all swung and pointing at us. Yes, and then I - well, one  
34 in our group, in the group of people where I was in,  
35 somebody said, "Oh, he's going to turn off the engine  
36 now" - that's the aeroplane. But right after that, the  
37 explosion came already. Yes, that's more or less it, yeah.

38

39 LEUT TYSON: Q. Did you also have the opportunity to see  
40 whether there was any activity associated with the boats  
41 along Sydney's decks?

42

43 Interpreter [German]: Could you also observe whether there were any  
44 activities in the lifeboats or the other boats onboard the Sydney?

45

46 Wegfahrt [German]: We did not see all that much, it was all just brief  
47 moments as the others also wanted to have a look and there were only one

1 or two scuttles. And ten minutes had passed by the time I was done in the  
2 engine room, from where I really wanted to get out, even [injuring] my  
3 leg. It is quite a big area to control.

4

5 A. Well, there were just seconds. I couldn't see  
6 anything, because, as I said before, we only had one or two  
7 scuttles where we could look through. My comrades also  
8 wanted to have a look at Sydney and what was happening over  
9 there. Also then I didn't have the time because I had to  
10 do this control of the mines that took - it must have taken  
11 about at least 10 minutes, and because I was hurrying up  
12 this, this activity, I even hurt very badly my leg and it  
13 took some time because there were 320 mines. That's quite  
14 a big surface I had to control.

15 Q. When you say you had to control the mines, can you  
16 please explain to us what that involved doing?

17

18 Interpreter [German]: When you say you had to go to do the checks on the  
19 mine deck, can you tell us in detail what you had to do there?

20

21 Wegfahrt [German]: I had a lamp in the mine deck and then I checked  
22 whether there was anything there, whether there was a hit or something  
23 else. I had to go all around to check with the lamp like this and like  
24 this and then I went back upstairs. Because the mines were stored very  
25 close to each other, I had to crawl between the mines. I could not do  
26 that very fast so it held me up a little.

27

28 A. Well, what I did was I had a torch with me and I  
29 looked around if there were any hits or anything else that  
30 might - any other kind of damage, and I had to do this all  
31 over the mine deck and they - all these mines were very  
32 close together and I had to walk through. That's why I  
33 wasn't very fast in doing this.

34 Q. And in the period from when you first got to your  
35 battle station till before the battle started, were there  
36 any messages that came over the ship's loudspeakers?

37

38 3 Interpreter [German]: In the time between you having been on the  
39 battle station to when the battle started, did you hear whether there  
40 were any commands given over the loudspeakers?

41

42 Wegfahrt [German]: The command communicator and the supervisor were  
43 there. And there were a total of 4 to 5 people, not more. We were there  
44 just in case there was a fire or anything in the mine deck and so on. I  
45 was there for the first time, I did not know who my supervisor was and I  
46 did not know the names of all the people there. We met there for the  
47 first time. I mean I knew them, but I did not know their individual

1 stations. After all, it was not so bad that there had finally been an  
2 alarm.

3

4 A. No, I didn't hear anything. As I also have explained  
5 before already, this was my first time at this battle  
6 station, but there was this one person who had the  
7 headphones on. He must have probably heard these messages,  
8 orders given. Then there was also somebody in command;

9

10 altogether we were four to five people, but as this was the  
11 first time, I don't even know the names today.

12

13 Wegfahrt [German]: My main responsibility was the pump. The guy who  
14 switched with me in the engine room understood more about it. My  
15 replacement came from the workshop after all. And there was the 6 piston  
16 pump as well; he would have known more about it. I was hardly in there  
17 before, never paid attention as the workshops were down there.

18

19 A. Well, this other bloke who did my other job, then he  
20 had known much better about this pump that was my actual  
21 battle station - would have known much better who these  
22 people were. We had there a pump with six pistons, but I  
23 was 19. I had never seen this thing before. It was, as I  
24 said, the first time ever there. Maybe I've seen it once  
25 when I went to the workshop, but I never really took care  
26 of these things.

27 Q. And can you tell us after you controlled the mines,  
28 what did you do after that?

29

30 Interpreter [German]: After you checked the mines, what did you do then?

31

32 Wegfahrt [German]: It was all almost over by then. Suddenly the "all  
33 hands on deck!" command came, the Sydney was abeam and then we all went  
34 into the lifeboats. We did not know that it was the Sydney, we only knew  
35 that it was a cruiser of the Sydney class.

36

37 A. Hard to say. Well, it was almost over then, the  
38 battle, and shortly after that there was - it was said,  
39 "Everybody, all hands on deck," and, hard to say, the  
40 Sydney was still parallel, but - well, we didn't know that  
41 it was the Sydney; we just knew that it was a cruiser of  
42 the Sydney class.

43 Q. Sir, do I understand that you came on deck after the  
44 mines - after your duties with controlling the mines?

45

46 Interpreter [German]: Did I understand you correctly – you went on the  
47 deck after you have checked the mines?

1

2 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes. There was this – I always called it the shed – at  
3 the bottom of the mast where the pump was, there was something like a  
4 hut, I cannot remember the English word for it at the moment. And then  
5 came the “all hands on deck” command. This took about 35 minutes, the  
6 whole affair.

7

8 Interpreter [German]: The battle lasted 35 minutes?

9

10 Wegfahrt [German]: From the alarm to that point was 35 minutes – not  
11 long. And then we went to the boats and of the 4 boats only one was  
12 working. We got a boat aft, port side. The other boats could not be  
13 lowered as a hit went through there. And then we went into the boat and  
14 lowered it.

15

16 A. I went back into this thing which we called the little  
17 hut that was there under the mast, where also the pump was  
18 and, yes, that's actually all, then it was quickly over;  
19 all the whole battle just took 35 minutes. And then later  
20 we went into the lifeboats. There were - yes, that was it,  
21 then we went into our lifeboats and there were four boats  
22 altogether on the port side. Only one of them was working.

23 Q. Herr Wegfahrt, between the period when you first saw  
24 Sydney through the scuttle and before you went into the  
25 lifeboats, did you ever see Sydney between those two times?

26

27 Interpreter [German]: Did you actually see the Sydney between the time  
28 when you looked through the scuttle and the time when you got into the  
29 lifeboat, did you see the Sydney?

30

31 Wegfahrt [German]: We were on the other side, port side, and all we saw  
32 was fire, so we had other things to do than looking where the Sydney was.  
33 I am very honest here. Everybody came out and wanted to get into the  
34 boats. That was the end. The engine was dead anyway. The hit that went in  
35 there ...

36

37 A. No, I didn't. Well - but this is mainly because we  
38 had other things to do. I have to be honest, I mean, we  
39 were trying get into our lifeboats and many people were  
40 trying to get into the lifeboats, so I didn't really take  
41 care what Sydney was doing at this time. And also because  
42 I was on the wrong side, on the port side, what I could see  
43 was that there was the ship there with a lot of fire, but  
44 that's about it. And at this point also, we had to abandon  
45 ship because our engine was not working anymore.

46 THE PRESIDENT: Q. Can you estimate how far away the  
47 Sydney was when you came back up on deck when you saw her

1 aflame?

2

3 Interpreter [German]: Can you roughly tell us how far the Sydney was away  
4 when you came back up to the deck and everything was on fire?

5

6 Wegfahrt [German]: To be honest, I did not have a look. To be very  
7 honest. It all started then, the men from the turrets and everywhere  
8 came, and all of them also wanted to get into the boats. I only know –  
9 but that is what I have heard – I do not know whether I should tell you  
10 because I did not see it. Aft were turrets 5 and 6 which were said to  
11 have weakened the Sydney. The torpedo tubes were still firing. And the  
12 people there saw afterwards that a set of 4 torpedoes passed by there.  
13 The Sydney must have had them like that [Translator's note: Source and  
14 context not clear]. But all that is grey theory. And they did not hit,  
15 how shall I say it, we have had problems with the engine repeatedly. We  
16 had piston eaters. And we had that there too. We switched off the engine,  
17 pulled up the piston, restarted the engine and sailed again on eight  
18 cylinders.

19

20 A. Honestly, I don't have any idea because. At this  
21 moment, we had other things to do, because many people,  
22 also the people from the turrets, they were trying to get  
23 into the lifeboats. But what I heard, really only what I  
24 have heard from other people, is that the Sydney turned  
25 from - what I heard from the two people in the aft or from  
26 some people who were working in the aft at the guns number  
27 5 and 6, they told me that the Sydney turned around - (Not  
28 through interpreter). Turned around, yeah - (Through  
29 interpreter) and passed behind our stern. That's also  
30 again it was told to me later that this was the time when  
31 she fired her four torpedoes, which didn't hit us. And I  
32 also have to explain that we always had trouble with our  
33 engines. The pistons didn't work very well and they got  
34 blocked every now and then. We had to repair them quite  
35 often.

36

37 Q. Sir, can you describe to us before you got into the  
38 lifeboat, what was the damage that Kormoran had sustained  
39 in this battle?

40

41 Interpreter [German]: Can you tell us about the damage that the Kormoran  
42 suffered from the battle before you got into the lifeboat?

43

44 Wegfahrt [German]: I only know that the bridge near the radio room must  
45 have been hit. Somebody there was injured, must have been due to the  
46 shrapnel from the sheet metal. And then the engine room, nobody except  
47 for one man got out of there. The hit was right into the engine room. We

1 had very big exhaust pipes in the engines, we had the big diesel engines  
2 after all, and two of those were said to have been destroyed. And the  
3 whole exhaust then went into the engine room. All that is known is that  
4 everybody in the engine room more or less suffocated to death. But I  
5 cannot confirm any of that.

6

7 A. That's also something I haven't experienced myself. I  
8 just know about it. The bridge was hit once. I think also  
9 one person was injured there, not so much by the shell  
10 itself but by the shrapnels or splinters that were flying  
11 around from the metal. And then there was another hit in  
12 the machine - in the engine room, and I think only one  
13 person survived this.

14

15

16 You must know that we had - in the engine room we had  
17 very large funnels, as these were a diesel engine, and one  
18 of these funnels got hit and fell into the engine room, and  
19 apparently, most of the people there have suffocated from  
20 the smoke coming out of the engine room without being  
21 transported through the funnel.

22

23 Wegfahrt [German]: You can imagine, these were huge exhaust pipes, 4 of  
24 them for the 4,000 HP engines, and if 2 of them are gone, it is like the  
25 exhaust going into the inside of a car, you know. So they probably all  
26 suffocated.

27

28 A: Well, we had four very  
29 huge, maybe not funnels, but "exhuminator" same as a car  
30 has, "excarburettor".

31

32 Q. Exhaust pipes?

33

34 A. Yes, exhaust pipes, four very large exhaust pipes, and they  
35 collapsed and produced all this poisonous smoke, and that's  
36 why all these people suffocated and died.

37 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes. I only heard it from them, 2 got out, they did  
38 not get out on top but they were smart and went down, stolid through the  
39 one square meter where you could crawl out. And they told us that the hit  
40 came in and everybody suffocated as a result. Oh, I have not yet told you  
41 this – suddenly the whole ship shuddered as the engines died. And  
42 suddenly it was all over.

43 A. Just two people

44 survived this because they went down underneath the engine  
45 room. That's how they survived this. That was very smart  
46 of them. And then one thing I remember personally is that  
47 the whole ship was shaking at a certain moment. That's

1 when the engines were the last - the last couple of  
2 revolutions of the engines before they completely stopped.

3

4 Q. Do you remember whether the engines had stopped while  
5 the firing was still going on or did the engines stop after  
6 the gunfire stopped?

7

8 Interpreter [German]: Can you still remember if the engines were  
9 completely stopped during the battle or only after the battle was over?

10

11 Wegfahrt [German]: You know there were bangs and flashes everywhere, you  
12 could not hear a thing. And in the engine room, you have the shift  
13 engineer, the commanding engineer and the electric engineer. They all  
14 stayed in the engine room at that time. I still remember this, it was the  
15 3 high ranking officers who were in the engine room because the engine  
16 was broken. It was the chief, the shift engineer and the electric  
17 engineer.

18

19 A. Well, there was so much flashing and sounds going  
20 around that I don't know any more what was happening.  
21 There was - you'd have to see down there in the engine  
22 room, there were the three officers in charge all died  
23 there, but when the engine stopped, I cannot tell.

24 Q. Before you abandoned ship, were you part of any  
25 fire-fighting team that tried to put out fires, or did you  
26 see fire-fighting teams operating on Kormoran?

27

28 Interpreter [German]: Before you left the ship, were you still a part of  
29 the fire brigade which tried to fight the fire?

30

31 Wegfahrt [German]: No, there was no fire where we were, near the mines.  
32 There were several fire stations there. They were all manned then. They  
33 were scattered across the ship. We had 3 watches in the engine room. One  
34 of the watches was the one that had been replaced, this was the fire  
35 watch which had to fight fires and leaks. The other watch was the battle  
36 watch, he had to go lee during a battle – do you understand?

37

38 Interpreter [German]: No, not completely ...

39

40 Wegfahrt [German]: We had 3 watches in the engine room. One post was  
41 always on shift. And during an alarm, the watch who was not on shift, for  
42 example the third watch replaced the first one who was then manning the  
43 fire watch. They had to spread over 3 stations and fight the fire. The  
44 second watch which had to replace us was the battle reserve. During a  
45 battle, they always had to be on the lee side.

46

47 Interpreter [German]: So during a battle – ah yes, ok.

1

2 Wegfahrt [German]: Well that is how it was arranged. I do not know how it  
3 all worked out.

4

5 Interpreter [German]: Have you seen other fire brigades that tried to  
6 fight any other fires?

7

8 Wegfahrt [German]: They probably got off when the ship went down. I only  
9 know ...

10

11 (Discussion in German between interpreter and witness)

12

13 THE PRESIDENT: Can you just translates what he said?

14

15 Interpreter [German]: He is just asking me to translate up to here.

16

17 THE INTERPRETER: Yes.

18

19 THE INTERPRETER: No, I didn't do it myself because, at my  
20 battle station, there wasn't any fire. I was responsible  
21 for the mines. And then I have to explain also, you know,  
22 in the engine room, there are three watches. One watch is  
23 having service, is at the station. The other watch, who's  
24 not at the station, is responsible for fire protection in  
25 case of an alarm, and then the third watch is, in case of  
26 an alarm, is the reserve for the battle and they are  
27 commanded in case of a battle to stay on the leeward side  
28 of the battle.

29

30 LEUT TYSON: Q. Accepting that you personally then were  
31 not involved in a fire-fighting team, did you see other  
32 fire-fighting teams in action on Kormoran after the battle?

33

34 Interpreter [German]: Since you yourself were not in a fire brigade, did  
35 you see other fire brigades on the Kormoran who tried to fight fires?

36

37 Wegfahrt [German]: Everybody knew that they were there, the pumps and  
38 everything else were there. During an alarm they just had to be manned.

39

40 Interpreter [German]: No, no, at that moment, did other people who did  
41 not belong to your group, other fire brigades that were still around, did  
42 they try to extinguish the fire?

43

44 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes, the ones from the ammunition store, they came  
45 out.

46

47 Interpreter [German]: They wanted to help you?

1

2 Wegfahrt [German]: No, they wanted to get into the boats, which were all  
3 gone already by that time.

4

5 Interpreter [German]: Ah no, I was thinking whether there were any fire  
6 brigades which tried to fight other fires onboard of the Kormoran, other  
7 than yourself.

8

9 Wegfahrt [German]: We have never had such a big fire until then. So it  
10 would have been the first time.

11

12 Interpreter [German]: But were you the only fire brigade there?

13

14 Wegfahrt [German]: As I said, we were aft.

15

16 (Discussion in German between interpreter and witness)

17

18 THE PRESIDENT: You just have to translate what he's  
19 saying, please.

20

21 THE INTERPRETER: Okay.

22

23 THE WITNESS: Well, it was the first time we were there at  
24 this fire station. It was the first time we had such a  
25 strong fire, and I can just remember these people coming  
26 out from the ammunition rooms and they also tried to get to  
27 the boats, and I was responsible or our group was

28

29 responsible for fires on the aft ship.

30 2

31 3 LEUT TYSON: Q. Yes, thank you, that's useful  
32 4 information, but the specific question is: did you see any  
33 5 other members of Kormoran crew actually trying to fight  
34 7 fires?

35 8

36 Interpreter [German]: Thank you very much, that was very useful  
37 information. But the question was rather whether you have seen any other  
38 persons or crew fighting the fire onboard of the Kormoran?

39

40 Wegfahrt [German]: No. I got to know about all that afterwards. They  
41 could not enter the engine room, because when they opened the door, the  
42 flames were shooting out. I have only heard about that. They wanted to go  
43 in from the top, but they immediately closed the doors, the fire must  
44 have been very intense.

45

46 A. No, but what was told to me later was that the engine  
47 room was so much under fire that they couldn't enter it any

1 more. Whenever they tried to open any of the doors, all  
2 the steam and smoke came out, that they were not able to  
3 access the engine rooms any more.

4

5 Wegfahrt [German]: Something else I wanted to mention as well: the Sydney  
6 shot another set of 4 torpedoes. I have not seen it, but the people at  
7 the two turrets saw that a set of 4 torpedoes was passing by. They told  
8 us later, of course, when it was quiet. They said yes, "we have seen that  
9 she shot another set of 4 torpedoes".

10

11 A. What I want to add, however, is that the Sydney  
12 fired - that the two turrets or people on the two guns,  
13 5 and 6, they saw how four torpedoes were shot from Sydney.  
14 That was told to me later when we were together and  
15 discussed about it.

16 Q. Herr Wegfahrt, you mentioned earlier that you got into  
17 a lifeboat. Can you please tell us how you got into the  
18 lifeboat?

19

20 Interpreter [German]: You mentioned before that you went into the  
21 lifeboat. Can you tell us precisely how you got to the lifeboat?

22

23 Wegfahrt [German]: I came upstairs and when I got there the order was to  
24 go to the lifeboats and an officer told us that we should go up. We  
25 looked, there was only the one lifeboat, at the back on the port side,  
26 which we could lower and 9 men went into it. We were 9 men, but we were  
27 busy to make sure the boat did not get damaged.

28

29 Interpreter [German]: Can I just translate this first?

30

31 A. Well, as I came up, there was this officer who told us  
32 to go into the lifeboats, and I went to the aft side of the  
33 ship on the port side and there I tried to get into the  
34 lifeboat.

35 Q. Do you remember who the officer was?

36

37 Interpreter [German]: Do you know which officer said that?

38

39 Wegfahrt [German]: No, I cannot tell you. The guys on the deck knew him  
40 better. We were busy with 9 men to lower the boat. We had surely 4 or 5  
41 and the boat was swaying back and forth, and we had to cushion her to  
42 make sure the boat was not damaged. You understand, it continuously went  
43 back and forth and then the first men already came down and one after the  
44 other got on the boat. And on our side, they were shooting the torpedoes,  
45 which you always do because of the fire danger so you don't need to sink  
46 yourself, you understand?

47

1 Interpreter [German]: Let me just translate that.

2

3 A. No, I don't know. Well, and then all together, we  
4 were nine people lowering the lifeboat and we had very  
5 heavy seas at this time, it was; they were 4 to 5, and we  
6 had to take care so that the lifeboat would not hit the  
7 hull of the Kormoran all the time. It would be destroyed  
8 there. And once the lifeboat was down, then the first  
9 people climbed down on ropes to get into the lifeboat.  
10 Once in there, I could also see that the torpedo was shot.  
11 It's something you always do because, otherwise, you  
12 would - the torpedo might sink you or might hit you and  
13 sink you.

14

15 Wegfahrt [German]: This is always done, I was told afterwards, so that  
16 there is no ammunition laying around up there. When I got up, I saw the 2  
17 cm shells

18

19 +flying around worse than during New Year's Eve. Through the fire up  
20 there. You understand, that was up there where the smokestack was, they  
21 were called skylight, "lights in the sky" or something like that. Where  
22 the engine room shaft was, up there, this skylight.

23

24 Interpreter [German]: Ah yes, skylight?

25

26 Wegfahrt [German]: And the flames were coming out and in there were the  
27 small anti-aircraft gun ammunition shells which were exploding. We were  
28 glad to be in the lifeboat.

29

30 A. Well, when I came up, there were these 2cm shells  
31 flying around and exploding up there also in the skylight.  
32 Somewhere there, there were also all these shells, shell  
33 remains from the anti-aircraft guns, and they were  
34 exploding, but we were very happy that we were in the  
35 lifeboat at this time.

36

37 THE PRESIDENT: Q. You said something in relation to

38

39 4 to 5; was that a wind force 4 to 5 or was it metres from  
40 swell, 4 to 5 metres.

41

42 Interpreter [German]: Just now you said you had seas 4 to 5, did that  
43 relate to meters or wind strength?

44 Wegfahrt [German]: No, it referred to the swell. The waves.

45

46 A. (Not through interpreter) Wave.

47 Q. Waves?

1  
2 Wegfahrt [German]: The swell means the waves. How high they were. The  
3 sailors knew something about height. It is just called 4 to 5. We had 4  
4 to 5 for the entire journey, that is why we always had to hold on tight,  
5 we kept on banging against the ship and had to hold it with 9 men.  
6  
7 A. Swell, swell of 4 or 5, but not metres.  
8 LEUT TYSON: We need to stop the tape just to change the  
9 tape.  
10  
11 : Interpreter [German]: Just changing the tape.  
12  
13 SHORT ADJOURNMENT  
14  
15 LEUT TYSON: I think the tape is now recommenced.  
16  
17 Interpreter [German]: The recording is back on again.  
18  
19 THE WITNESS: Well, it was just told me that it was the  
20 4 to 5 swell; that was told to me by the seaman. You see,  
21 I myself, I'm no seaman. I don't really know what this  
22 meant, this 4 to 5. However, it was quite strong because  
23 all the time we had to try to keep the lifeboats from  
24 slamming into the hull of the ship. And we were nine  
25 people, and the boat had a length of 8.5 metres, and when  
26 it was lowered, we had to try to keep it away from the hull  
27 of the ship, and it was the whole journey they told me that  
28 it was the swell of 4 to 5.  
29  
30 Wegfahrt [German]: We had to hold the boat with 9 men. 9 men and the boat  
31 was 8.5 meters long. We lowered it there.  
32  
33 LEUT TYSON: Q. Are you able to tell us from your memory  
34 of the waves, how high the waves were?  
35  
36 Interpreter [German]: Can you tell us from your memory as to how high the  
37 waves approximately were in your opinion?  
38  
39 Wegfahrt [German]: Sorry I cannot say that. I cannot commit to a number,  
40 I do not know it. We had to scoop out a lot of water from the boat. When  
41 we were in the boat, it was 40 of us, we had to scoop a lot of water. I  
42 only heard from the sailors that the sea was 4 to 5.  
43  
44 A. I really cannot tell you. I just know that we had to  
45 shove out the water all the time in our boat. There we  
46 were with 45 people. It's just that the sailors, the real  
47 seamen, they told me that there was a swell of 4 to 5.

1 Q. I now want to ask you, sir, you mentioned something  
2 about the need to fire a torpedo during that abandonment of  
3 the ship. Can you please tell us what you know about that?  
4

5 Interpreter [German]: Now I want to ask another question. You said before  
6 that the torpedoes were fired as you left the ship. Can you tell us the  
7 meaning again in greater detail?  
8

9 Wegfahrt [German]: This is always done. I did not know it either, but  
10 that is always done, because if the fire gets them, then they explode. I  
11 only heard that you would be sinking yourself. Only the ones on the  
12 tubes, they are emptied. I did not know it, so I asked "what are they  
13 firing at" and got as the reply "if the fire gets to them, then we will  
14 sink ourselves".  
15

16 A. Well, that's something that is always done. That was  
17 told to me by the others, because once they - once the fire  
18 reaches the torpedoes, they will explode and that would  
19 mean they would go off and sink ourselves.

20 Q. But did you ever see Greter go back to fire the  
21 torpedo or anyone, or is this just based on what others  
22 have told you?

23 Interpreter [German]: Could you see yourself if Greter or somebody else  
24 went back to fire off these torpedoes or is the whole story something  
25 that was told to you?  
26

27 Wegfahrt [German]: We did not see much. We were in the boats and the  
28 torpedoes were higher up, they shot over our heads.  
29

30 Interpreter [German]: Oh, they were above-waterline torpedoes?  
31

32 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes. I do not know what was below the waterline. The  
33 above-waterline torpedoes, the twin torpedoes, we were in the boat and  
34 they shot over our heads. I do not know who was tinkering around with  
35 them.  
36

37 A. I don't know who was there, because I couldn't see up  
38 there. We were down in the boats and also these twin  
39 torpedoes were way above us, so I couldn't see who fired  
40 them.

41 Q. Who was the most senior person in the lifeboat that  
42 you were in? Was there any officer in that boat?  
43

44 Interpreter [German]: Who was the highest ranking crew in your boat? Was  
45 there an officer in your boat?  
46

47 Wegfahrt [German]: We were the only boat without an officer. At the back

1 we had some from the mercantile marine, they ran the show, with rowing  
2 and steering and the lot. The guided the boat quite well over the waves.

3

4 A. We were the only boat without any officer. No, but  
5 what we had was a couple of people from the merchant Navy  
6 or from – the merchant marine people. They did all  
7 the rowing and the steering of the boat, to steer this  
8 lifeboat over the waves, and they did quite a good job  
9 doing that. We were the only ship - boat without any  
10 officers on board.

11 Q. Do you remember what supplies you had in that  
12 lifeboat?

13

14 Interpreter [German]: Yes. Every morning and evening we had a small glass  
15 of water and we had a dry piece of bread per day.

16

17 A. We had in the morning and the evening we had one small  
18 glass of water, like a Schnapps glass, and one piece of dry  
19 bread per day.

20 Q. Do you know whatever happened to the light speedboat,  
21 the schnell boat?

22

23 Interpreter [German]: Do you know what happened to the light speedboat?

24 Wegfahrt [German]: I never saw it. It never got out. That thing was  
25 pretty bad.

26

27 A. I've never ever seen this boat myself. It was never,  
28 ever brought out. That thing was pretty bad.

29 Q. In this period when Kormoran was being abandoned, did  
30 you ever see Capt Detmers at that time? Do you know - did  
31 you see what he was doing?

32

33 Interpreter [German]: When the Kormoran was being abandoned, did you ever  
34 see Captain Detmers? Could you see what he was doing?

35

36 Wegfahrt [German]: No, he was up there he was. We were the first boat to  
37 leave the ship. The other boats were laying on the deck. And one or two  
38 boats were under the hatches and these were closed because they were part  
39 of the, diesguise. You understand? They had to be opened first and then  
40 they had to be put in the water by hand since we did not have electricity  
41 any longer. And we were already collecting. We had 2 boats as backups, we  
42 kept them from other boats.

43

44 A. No, he was up there and I couldn't see him. I must  
45 tell that we were about the first boat to leave Kormoran.

46 The other lifeboats were still on deck or even in the holds  
47 underneath the hatches, and they had to be brought up by

1 hand and put into the water also by hand. And that was  
2 done later, but at this time we were already there  
3 collecting.

4

5 Interpreter [German]: What do you mean by "collecting"?

6

7 Wegfahrt [German]: One came floating on the dog house, another came on a  
8 sporting mat, we pulled them on board.

9

10 THE INTERPRETER: Okay, by "collecting", he meant we  
11 collected the people from the water.

12 LEUT TYSON: Q. Okay. Before you got into lifeboat, did  
13 von Goesseln or any of the other officers say what you  
14 should say if you're given an interrogation?

15

16 Interpreter [German]: Before you went into the lifeboats, did Mr. Detmers  
17 or Mr. Von Goesseln or any other officer give instructions on what to say  
18 in an interview or during questioning?

19

20 Wegfahrt [German]: No, nothing at all. The only instruction that was  
21 given was to "stay together". There were the other 4 lifeboats, and also  
22 the rubber boats. Well we tried it by using tracers, but by the next  
23 morning, all had drifted apart.

24

25

26 A. No, no such thing was said. The only thing I can  
27 remember as an instruction was to stay together, because  
28 there were these four other lifeboats and a number of  
29 rubber boats and we tried to stay together, but it didn't  
30 work, even shot our signal rockets, but it didn't work. In  
31 the morning, the next morning, we didn't - we had become  
32 separated.

33

34 Wegfahrt [German]: All that was said was to head East and 150 nautical  
35 miles to shore. That was all we got and then we got going.

36

37 Q. I want to now ask you about something that happened  
38 before the battle, something that you talked about earlier  
39 this morning. You talked about the engines, the machine  
40 room always having problems. Can you please tell us what  
41 these problems were, what was done to address them? Tell  
42 us about that, please.

43

44 Interpreter [German]: I want to get back to the time before the battle  
45 took place. You said that you always had trouble with the engines. Can  
46 you give us more details about these problems?

47

1 Wegfahrt [German]: I only know this from the men who did the repairs,  
2 they were all from the mercantile marine. They were specialists. The  
3 engines were brand new Krupp diesel engines. They were used for the first  
4 time. We were the first ship with Krupp diesel engines. They made a  
5 maximum of 250 rotations. And each engine has 3,600 HP. All that had to  
6 do with the bearing metal. And since I was a turner, I had to machine the  
7 bearings, partially. I heard that they used WM 40. WM stands for white  
8 metal. And a submarine has then brought us another 870 kg of WM 80. And  
9 then we got more white metal from Japan, somehow, and it gave us some as  
10 well.

11

12 A. Well, that's something I also know more or less from  
13 my officers or from the officers that were really the  
14 specialists for this. They all served on merchant ships  
15 and they were the real specialists for this. However, I  
16 was also responsible for repairing this and I must say that  
17 they were Krupp diesels. Krupp was the producer of these  
18 engines and they had never been used before; it was the  
19 first time they were used on a ship.  
20 They could do a maximum of revolutions of 2,500 per  
21 minute and each of the engines has ever had 3,600  
22 horsepower. What happened was that the bearings of these  
23 engines weren't very well obviously . They used white metal  
24 of number 40, which wasn't strong enough. Later one U-boat  
25 gave a supply of the white metal of the number 80, which  
26 was better, and even later we received some more supply of  
27 white metal from a Japanese production.

28

29 Q. How was that additional supply received? How was it  
30 given to Kormoran? What ship or ships did that?

31

32 Interpreter [German]: Who supplied you with the additional white metal?

33

34 Wegfahrt [German]: It came from Germany.

35

36 Interpreter [German]: And which other ship did ...

37

38 Wegfahrt [German]: Once by a submarine and once from a blockade breaker,  
39 from Japan. We supplied fuel, food and ammunition to the submarines.  
40 Otherwise they could not have sailed for that long.

41

42 A. Well, we received it once from a U-boat, and the other  
43 one was a blockade breaker from Japan who give us this  
44 white material. We also supplied the U-boats with fuel and  
45 other things so they would be able to go on for a long  
46 time.

47 THE PRESIDENT: Q. Did you get any white metal from the

1 Kulmerland?

2

3 Interpreter [German]: Did you also receive white metal from the  
4 Kulmerland?

5

6 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes, from the Kulmerland as well.

7

8 A. Yes, Kulmerland, yes.

9 Q. That's the Japanese metal to which you referred?

10

11 1 Interpreter [German]: Did you receive the Japanese white metal from the  
12 Kulmerland?

13

14 Wegfahrt [German]: Now listen: I was just a little man. I only know that,  
15 what were their names again, there were two blockade breakers, they  
16 fought their way through. We even gave fuel to one of them. We had 3,800  
17 tons of fuel on board left.

18

19 Interpreter [German]: The Kormoran?

20

21 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes, we had quite a lot, we could keep on going for 14  
22 months. But we did not have any more potatoes. We had meat because we  
23 once caught an Argentinean meat ship and helped ourselves.

24

25 A. Okay, well, I was just a very small man. You ask me  
26 questions. I don't know about this; in fact, there were  
27 two blockade breakers who we supplied also and we had still  
28 3,800 tonnes of fuel on board. We could stay 14 months on  
29 sea. Only we didn't have any potatoes left, although but  
30 we had a lot of meat. We once captured an Argentinian

31

32 merchant ship with a lot of meat, and we took it.

33 LEUT TYSON: Mr President, Counsel Assisting is going to  
34 move on to the final set of questions now.

35

36

37 THE PRESIDENT: Just a couple of things.

38

39 Q. Herr Wegfahrt, when you first saw Sydney through  
40 the scuttle and you said you were told she was about  
41 1,100 metres away, where was Sydney relative to the  
42 Kormoran - was she astern, abeam, ahead, or where?

43

44 Interpreter [German]: You said earlier that, when you first saw the  
45 Sydney through the scuttle, that she was about 1,100 meters away.

46

47 Wegfahrt [German]: They said 1,200 meters.

1

2 Interpreter [German]: Hold on, please let me finish ... can you tell me  
3 the position in which she was relative to the Kormoran. Was she astern,  
4 abeam or ahead of the Kormoran?

5

6 Wegfahrt [German]: She overtook us. Then again, I would not have been  
7 able to see her if she was ahead, thus she must, we must have been more  
8 or less at the same level. She approached us. She was fast, very fast. I  
9 do not know how fast. We were going at full steam, 18 knots, as far as I  
10 know.

11

12 A. I think she overtook us, and I also must say it was  
13 1,200 metres not 1,100, until she was parallel. That's  
14 what I think, she must have been parallel; otherwise, if  
15 she would have been abeam - sorry, ahead, I wouldn't have  
16 been able to see her, so she must have been parallel. She  
17 came, approached very quick, and then adapted her speed to  
18 ours. We were going with full speed at that time with  
19 18 knots.

20 Q. But you only saw her briefly through the scuttle on  
21 one occasion, and when you saw her, where was she in  
22 relation to the Kormoran?

23

24 Interpreter [German]: But you only actually saw her for one short moment  
25 when you looked through the scuttle – where was she at that moment when  
26 you had a look?

27

28 Wegfahrt [German]: I would say I could still see where the torpedoes  
29 were, where the stewards were, the others had a look as well. Around here  
30 was the aircraft – approximately at this position, then I was here. And  
31 then she probably moved ahead, but I do not know for sure. At about this  
32 level I would say. No, like this. The aircraft was sort of abeam. And you  
33 could look into them at an angle like this. That was about my field of  
34 view. My field of view.

35

36 Interpreter [German]: Yes, yes, this is precisely what we would like to  
37 know.

38

39 THE INTERPRETER: It was more or less this position, as he  
40 has marked now.

41

42 So that the aeroplane of Sydney was abeam of  
43 my position, which was at the aft mast of Kormoran.

44 Q. The aft mast, thank you.

45

46

47 Wegfahrt [German]: And the Sydney was said to have gone there after that,

1 and then ...

2

3 Interpreter [German]: and then she fired the torpedoes, right?

4

5 Wegfahrt [German]: The men at the turrets said that there was a set of 4  
6 torpedoes which had been fired. But they did not hit us. So that is what  
7 is more or less correct. It was in the evening, dark, half past nine,  
8 ten, when I saw as if she somehow exploded or something like that. From a  
9 great distance, she was North of us. And at half past midnight, our ship  
10 blew up. At half past midnight.

11

12

13 THE PRESIDENT: You'd better translate that.

14

15 THE INTERPRETER: He was saying again that:

16

17

18 I was told by these two people or the people  
19 on the aft guns that later the Sydney went like this and  
20 passed the stern of Kormoran, and that was when she shot  
21 her four torpedoes. And then later, between half past 9,  
22 10 o'clock, I could see how Sydney exploded - well, sort of  
23 exploded. I couldn't really see it, because it was in the  
24 northern direction, quite far away, but I saw that  
25 something happened there, just a huge fire. And then at half past 12, the  
26 same night, our ship  
27 exploded.

28

29

30 Wegfahrt [German]: But she was deliberately blown up. I heard that the  
31 bits and pieces were flying around the heads of those who were just 700  
32 or 800 meters away from the ship. Just imagine such an event, and the  
33 Captain was in the midst of it all. He was in the last boat.

34

35

36 A. Well, that was - but this was on purposely done,  
37 it was exploded by ourselves, and I just heard from the  
38 others that still 700 or 800 metres away from Kormoran,  
39 they received pieces from Kormoran that were hitting them.

40 Q. Right. Now, after you were rescued, you were asked  
41 some questions by Australian military personnel?

42

43 Interpreter [German]: After you were rescued, the Australian military  
44 asked you a few questions.

45

46 Wegfahrt [German]: We came ashore. In the morning of the sixth day we  
47 heard the surf, we came ashore with 2 boats. When we heard the surf, then

1 we ceased ...

2

3 Interpreter [German]: Sorry, what do you mean by "ceased"?

4

5 Wegfahrt [German]: Well we ceased our motion [stopped the boat]. We had  
6 to take a look to find a sandy place to land.

7

8 A. After six days we were rescued. We could hear - at  
9 night we could hear the sounds of the swell near the coast  
10 and we had to look out for a sandy spot where to land.

11

12 Q. Yes. Well, it was on the 8th -

13

14 Wegfahrt [German]: We then rushed ashore and we could not get the boat  
15 unstuck - we wanted to go back, but we could not overcome the surf. We  
16 tried but it was impossible.

17

18 A. Then we landed and couldn't go back. We tried to go  
19 back to another spot but the swell was so strong. The  
20 waves were --

21 Q. Well, then, about a couple of weeks later at Harvey on  
22 8 December, you were asked some questions by Australian  
23 military officers?

24

25 Interpreter [German]: Then, in Harvey, a few weeks later, on the 8th of  
26 December to be precise, officers of the Australian military have asked  
27 you a few questions.

28

29 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes.

30

31 A. Yes.

32 Q. Now, the officer who asked you those questions made  
33 some notes, and one of the notes he made was this: that  
34 during the fight, you were in the engine room, and that's  
35 not right, is it? What you've told me today, that note is  
36 not right.

37

38 Interpreter [German]: The officer who asked you the questions made some  
39 notes. One of the notes made by this officer states that you were in the  
40 engine room during the battle.

41

42 Wegfahrt [German]: No, not me.

43

44 Interpreter [German]: According to what you have told me today, this is  
45 not correct.

46

47 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes that was my station.

1

2 Interpreter [German]: So you were in the engine room?

3

4 Wegfahrt [German]: No, I was manning a watch, the watches were split into

5 ..

6

7 (Discussion in German between interpreter and witness)

8

9 THE PRESIDENT: Just translate what I'm saying.

10

11 Q. From what you've told me this morning, that note made  
12 by the Australian officer is not correct?

13

14 Interpreter [German]: After what you have told me today, this note by the  
15 officer cannot be correct.

16

17 Wegfahrt [German]: Let me tell you honestly: I do not think that they  
18 heard a lot of true statements there. We were told to "say nothing and if  
19 we had to say something then we were to make up stories". That is what we  
20 were told. Furthermore, the interview did not even last for 5 minutes.  
21 The officers were not with us.

22

23 A. Honestly speaking, they didn't hear much of the real  
24 truth because it was said not to tell the truth or to make  
25 up stories.

26 Q. All I'm wanting to know is whether the note that the  
27 officer made is true or not.

28

29 Interpreter [German]: What I finally want to know is whether that note of  
30 the officer is true or false.

31

32 Wegfahrt [German]: I cannot remember. I do not even remember what I told  
33 them. Everything went very fast ...

34

35 A. I don't know what - I don't know this, because I don't  
36 know what I've said during those days.

37 Q. All right, okay. Another note that was made was that  
38 you left in the second boat, but you've told me today you  
39 left on the first boat. Do you remember whether it was the  
40 first boat or the second boat?

41

42 Interpreter [German]: Another note from that time states that you said  
43 that you were in the second boat, but today you told us that you were in  
44 the first boat. Which is correct?

45

46 Wegfahrt [German]: I was in the first boat. But we came ashore in 2  
47 boats, the other boat landed a few miles ahead of us. I can also tell you

1 where we landed. I have a map here. There a farmer, a sheriff and a  
2 doctor came. They were the first to spot us.

3

4 A. No, I was on the first boat. The thing is that the  
5 second boat, another boat, landed more or less a couple of  
6 miles away from where we landed. I can even show you where  
7 we landed.

8 THE PRESIDENT: No, no, that's fine. They're the only  
9 questions that I have, thank you. Yes?

10

11 LEUT TYSON: Q. Sir, I just want to deal now with the  
12 final set of questions. As you know, there have been many  
13 theories, many books written about the encounter between  
14 Kormoran and Sydney, and the President of the Commission  
15 wants to hear what eye witnesses say in response to some of  
16 those main theories. One of the theories that has been  
17 argued is that a Japanese U-boat or Japanese submarine  
18 fired a torpedo at Sydney. Did you ever see a Japanese  
19 submarine fire a torpedo at Sydney?

20

21 Interpreter [German]: As you surely know, there are many theories on the  
22 sinking of the Sydney and on the battle between the Sydney and the  
23 Kormoran. Many books were written, many articles were published. And the  
24 Chairman of our Commission of Inquiry, the President, would like to have  
25 the opinion of the eye-witnesses on these theories.

26

27 Wegfahrt [German]: What theories are that?

28

29 Interpreter [German]: Here we go ... one of these theories is that a  
30 Japanese submarine fired a torpedo at the Sydney. Did you ever see a  
31 Japanese submarine firing a torpedo?

32

33 Wegfahrt [German]: No, we were pretending to be Japanese at one time. And  
34 we broke through the blockade pretending to be Russian. As a Russian  
35 ship. We pretended to be Japanese in the Indian Ocean, the Sakitu Maru.  
36 And here we were the Straat Malakka, Dutch we were.

37

38 A. No, I've never seen a Japanese U-boat; only the only  
39 thing I know that we were disguised - the only thing is  
40 that we were once disguised as a Japanese merchant ship.  
41 That was in the Indian Ocean. We were also disguised as a  
42 Russian ship. That's how we went through the Baltic Sea  
43 and made our way through the Baltic Sea and the North Sea  
44 through the blockade. And then when the encounter was, we  
45 were disguised as Straat Malakka, a Dutch ship. I've never  
46 seen a Japanese U-boat.

47

1 Wegfahrt [German]: We had a Japanese flag on the side. But behind the  
2 railing, there was always somebody there and they threw a canvas over it  
3 . The canvas was there, it was hanging over it like that. And if there  
4 was an alarm then it was thrown over the railing.

5

6 Interpreter [German]: So that you could not see the flag?

7

8 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes, yes. That was the only time. It was done that  
9 way. I was told so afterwards ...

10

11 Interpreter [German]: Just allow me to translate this first.

12

13 A. Well, had a Japanese flag painted on the side, and  
14 what happened we also had a cloth to cover this Japanese  
15 flag painted on the side of the ship too, which was fixed  
16 to the rail of the ship, and we could just move it over,  
17 you throw it over and then it would cover the flag painted  
18 on the side of the ship.

19 Q. But in November 1941, the Kormoran wasn't disguised  
20 as a Japanese ship at that time, was she?

21

22 Interpreter [German]: But in November 1941 the Kormoran was not  
23 camouflaged as a Japanese ship?

24

25 Wegfahrt [German]: No, then we were Dutch. The Straat Malakka.

26

27 A. No, that's when we were a Dutch ship, the Straat  
28 Malakka.

29 Q. Another set of theories argues that a German U-boat or  
30 another Naval unit assisted Kormoran. Did you see a German  
31 U-boat or another Naval U-boat - or another Naval unit fire  
32 at Sydney?

33

34 Interpreter [German]: Another theory says that a German submarine was  
35 involved in the battle, or another German marine unit – did you see  
36 another German submarine or any other German marine unit?

37

38 Wegfahrt [German]: Well, in the Southern Atlantic we supplied fuel and  
39 torpedoes to the submarines. But that was only in the Atlantic. I was in  
40 the engine room but that is what I heard. And in the Indian Ocean, how  
41 did that go again, in the Indian Ocean we pretended to be Japanese.  
42 Nothing happened there. The only thing that happened was that the war in  
43 Russia started. We were in the the Bay of Bengal, then a Russian ship was  
44 reported.

45

46 Interpreter [German]: Reported?

47

1 Wegfahrt [German]: Yes. By radio. But it later turned out to be a  
2 Yugoslavian ship.

3

4 (Discussion in German between interpreter and witness)

5

6 THE PRESIDENT: Just pause for a minute and translate

7

8 that.

9

10 THE INTERPRETER: Well, the only time we ever had anything to  
11 do with German U-boats was in the South Atlantic where we  
12 supplied them with fuel and torpedoes. When we were  
13 disguised as a Japanese merchant ship in the Indian Ocean  
14 at the beginning of our - later, we were Straat Malakka,  
15 but in the beginning we were this Japanese boat, that's -  
16 and then the war against Russia started and we met this,  
17 what we thought was a Russian merchant ship in the Gulf of  
18 Bengal, but it turned out to be a Yugoslavian ship. (Not  
19 through interpreter) Yugoslavian ship, yeah.

20

21 THE PRESIDENT: Q. But there was no German U-boat or  
22 other vessel helping the Kormoran in its battle with the  
23 Sydney?

24

25 Interpreter [German]: But there was no German submarine or another German  
26 ship which assisted the Kormoran in her battle with the Sydney?

27

28 Wegfahrt [German]: No, no. The only one around there would have been the  
29 ironclad Scheer, if it had been on the way. She got all the way around  
30 already, to my knowledge as far as Madagascar. She was a motor ship after  
31 all. Then we had to go South. We did not cross her path. But she never  
32 managed to get out of there anyway.

33

34 A. No. No, the only thing is the other, Scheer that was  
35 on its way from - towards us, but then we would have gotten  
36 out of the way from the Scheer, she was, at this point must  
37 have been somewhere near Madagascar, and it was very cold  
38 there, but she didn't get out in the end there.

39

40 LEUT TYSON: Q. But on 19 November 1941 when Kormoran  
41 met Sydney, Admiral Scheer was nowhere near that battle; is  
42 that correct?

43

44 Interpreter [German]: On 19 November 1941, the Admiral Scheer was not  
45 anywhere near the battle.

46

47 Wegfahrt [German]: No, she was gone by then. She had motors and they ran

1 badly. She was the sister ship of the Spee. We did not cross paths with  
2 her.

3

4 A. No, she had gone long by then already. Because she  
5 had engines that didn't run very well, it was a sister ship  
6 of Spee, so we didn't get in each other's way.

7

8 Q. Yes.

9

10 Wegfahrt [German]: 3 days later the Atlantis was sunk in the Southern  
11 Atlantic. That was successful as you know.

12

13 (Discussion in German between interpreter and witness)

14

15 THE PRESIDENT: Q. No, no, we're just concerned with  
16 November 1941 off the West Australian coast.

17

18 Interpreter [German]: We want to focus again on November 1941.

19

20 A. Yes.

21

22 LEUT TYSON: Q. Herr Wegfahrt, a final question: a very  
23 serious allegation has been made that, on 19 November 1941,  
24 after the battle between Sydney and Kormoran, that  
25 survivors of Sydney were shot in the water by some members  
26 of Kormoran's crew. Did you ever see anything like that  
27 happen?

28

29 Interpreter [German]: A very serious allegation has been raised that some  
30 of the crew of the Kormoran shot survivors of the Sydney whilst they were  
31 swimming in the water. What can you say about that? Have you seen any  
32 survivors of the Sydney?

33

34 Wegfahrt [German]: No, none. To be honest, the way she was burning, I do  
35 not think that anybody survived there. It would surely have been  
36 mentioned over the years. When we were in captivity, and also later  
37 during our get-togethers, it would have been raised somehow. But it was  
38 never mentioned at all.

39

40 A. No, I didn't see anything like that, and honestly  
41 speaking, with all the fire on board of Sydney, I don't  
42 think - I doubt anybody survived. And I must also say that  
43 during all these years, if there had been anything like

44

45 that, it would have been made public by somebody or we  
46 would have talked about it after all these years, but it  
47 was never, ever said - anything said like that.

1

2 LEUT TYSON: Mr President, if that's convenient to you,  
3 they're the questions on behalf of Counsel Assisting.

4

5 Interpreter [German]: Mr. President, these are all questions that I  
6 wanted to ask.

7

8 Wegfahrt [German]: We also caught an Australian ship, a steamer carrying  
9 sugar.

10

11 THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

12

13 Q. Herr Wegfahrt, thank you very much indeed for your  
14 help in giving the evidence to me today.

15

16 Wegfahrt [German]: Our Commander has been in Australia before, once in  
17 1933. Are you aware of that?

18

19 Interpreter [German]: Yes.

20

21 Wegfahrt [German]: As a Lieutenant. And he still had relations, friends  
22 there. And with Captain Skinner, the captain of this Australian steamer  
23 carrying 5,000 tons of sugar, he had actually always had a good  
24 relationship. With Captain Skinner. He was killed later on when he was  
25 supposed to go to Germany.

26

27 A. What I want to tell also, we captured an Australian  
28 ship. Mr Detmers, I don't know if you know that he was a  
29 sports Lieutenant back in 1933. That's when he first went  
30 to Australia for the first time and he met Capt Skinner.  
31 He had this ship loaded with 5,000 tonnes of sugar and they  
32 became good friends; they had a good relation, quite a good  
33 relation. However, I must say Capt Skinner died later on  
34 his way to Germany. He was sent to Germany via Kapon with  
35 a blockade breaker.

36

37 Wegfahrt [German]: He was sent with the blockade breakers to Germany via  
38 Cape Horn. I can tell you all that, it is over after all. That was really  
39 disgusting. It was said that a ship which cruises during a certain time  
40 period is not to be attacked by a German submarine. They figured it out,  
41 passing Spain, sailing to Bordeaux. And then a German submarine torpedoed  
42 him. Half of the crew of the Australian steamer went under with her. But  
43 all that is known. It was really disgusting, our Captain was enraged when  
44 we heard about it.

45

46 A. It's quite a bad story actually how this ship was sank  
47 later when it came around in the Mediterranean. I think

1 that's a bad story. It was not honest and our captain was  
2 very, very disappointed about this and about this story,  
3 how this ship of Mr Capt Skinner sank.

4

5 THE PRESIDENT: We don't have to inquire into that, so –

6

7 Interpreter [German]: Luckily this is not part of our Commission of  
8 Inquiry.

9

10 Wegfahrt [German]: No, no, I just wanted to say that that was really  
11 disgusting. It was known that they were not, after all there was  
12 something in it for us too, supplies.

13

14 LEUT TYSON: Thank you very much indeed. Thank you. You  
15 have been --

16

17 THE WITNESS: Anyway it had something for us on board, all  
18 that sugar.

19

20 THE INQUIRY ADJOURNED ACCORDINGLY

21

22

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