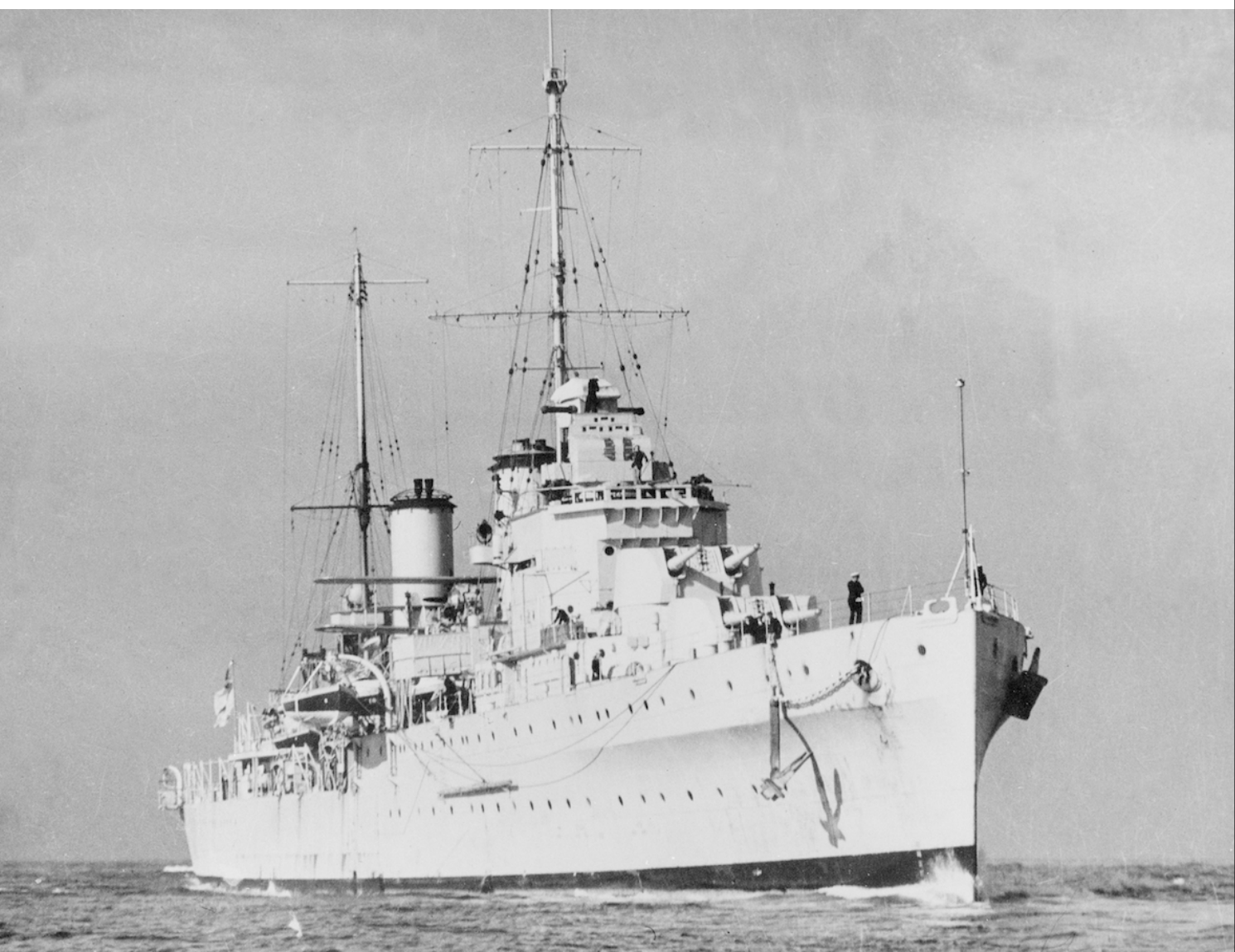


The sinking of HMAS Sydney

A guide to Commonwealth
Government records



This guide is number 3 in the series of Research Guides published by the National Archives of Australia.

The loss of HMAS Sydney almost without trace in November 1941, following an encounter with the German raider Kormoran off the Western Australian coast, remains one of the most intriguing mysteries of Australia's wartime history. The ship and its entire company of 645 were lost. Records included in this guide cover the last voyage of the Sydney, search and rescue operations, discussions of the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council, interrogation of Kormoran survivors and personnel records of the casualties.

Winner of the 1997 Mander Jones Award – Best finding aid to an archival collection (ASA)

Richard Summerrell was the Assistant Director, Reference Policy and Standards at the National Archives of Australia. He was formerly Executive Officer of the archives in the Department of Defence. He also co-authored the National Archives Research Guide Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: The Royal Commission and its Records, 1987–91.

The assistance of staff of the Archives, especially that of Ms Esther Carey and Mr Mark Brennan with research, and Mr Simon Davis with graphics and formatting is gratefully acknowledged in the preparation of this guide. The assistance of the Naval Historical Section and the RAAF Archives and Historical Section in the Department of Defence is also acknowledged.

Guides include the material known to be relevant to their subject area but they are not necessarily a complete or definitive guide to all relevant material in the collection.

The National Archives reviews its collection to confirm the value of records for research, evidential and other purposes or to identify, in consultation with agencies, records for destruction. At the time of publication all the records described in this guide were present in the Archives collection. However, it is possible that some of the records may be destroyed if they are reviewed and considered not to be of enduring value. If this occurs the guide will be revised accordingly.

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Foreword

The Sinking of HMAS Sydney – A story without end

by Tom Frame

Professor Tom Frame, who teaches theology at Charles Sturt University, is a naval historian who has researched and written extensively about the loss of HMAS *Sydney*. In this foreword he provides a brief overview of books, reports and commissions of inquiry undertaken since publication of the first edition of this guide, *The Sinking of HMAS Sydney*.

The sinking of the light cruiser HMAS *Sydney* off the Western Australian coast on 19 November 1941 stands alone in the annals of Australian naval history. Not only did the close quarters exchange with the German armed raider HSK *Kormoran* claim 645 lives, making it the nation's greatest naval loss, but also no other event has been so shrouded in mystery and surrounded in controversy. As the *Sydney* was sunk with all hands and disappeared, what could be reliably established about the ship's final engagement and subsequent sinking was frustratingly limited.

We know that the *Kormoran*, a vessel designed as the cargo ship *Steiermark* and converted for wartime raider operations, sank more than 68 000 tons of shipping in the Atlantic and Indian oceans in the 11 months after she first put to sea. On the night of 19–20 November 1941, the *Kormoran* was heading towards the Western Australian coast to lay a pattern of mines in Shark Bay. At 5.00 pm, as the sun lowered in the sky, *Sydney* was returning from the Sunda Strait where she had escorted the troopship *Zealandia*.

The Australian ship observed *Kormoran* on the horizon. While the disguised raider attempted to pass herself off as a Dutch freighter, *Sydney* closed to a range of just 1200 yards. By then the cruiser had given away a considerable tactical advantage. After a short and devastating engagement at point-blank range, both ships were mortally damaged. When *Kormoran* was scuttled six hours later, the Germans observed *Sydney* ablaze and making way slowly over the horizon to the south-west. Most of *Kormoran*'s crew was recovered from lifeboats several days later, with 314 Germans becoming prisoners of war. In tragic contrast, there were no survivors from *Sydney*.

The disappearance of HMAS *Sydney* was extremely difficult to explain to a deeply shocked Australian public, which had recently celebrated *Sydney*'s great operational achievements in the Mediterranean. The only source of information about what had occurred off Carnarvon was the *Kormoran* survivors. The nation wanted to know how such a catastrophic loss of life could have happened to such a capable ship. Surely the famous *Sydney* was not lost to a mere armed merchant raider?

Many more questions were asked in the years that followed. Some were mischievous, others were even malevolent. Eventually only two remained: What induced Captain Joseph Burnett in *Sydney* to forego his long-range gunnery

superiority when he brought his ship so near to *Kormoran*? Why was *Sydney* lost practically without trace when so many Germans had survived?

There has been no shortage of answers to these pivotal questions.

Before Commonwealth records relating to the loss of HMAS *Sydney* were made available in the 1970s, the public had to rely on the first volume of the *Official History of the Royal Australian Navy in World War II* by G Hermon Gill and on incomplete accounts produced mainly from secondary sources. When Michael Montgomery's *Who Sank the Sydney?* appeared in 1981 and Barbara Winter's *HMAS Sydney: Fact, Fantasy and Fraud* was published in 1984, attention was focused on primary source materials such as official files, secret documents and personal papers.

By the mid-1990s, the *Sydney–Kormoran* engagement had become the most examined and debated event in Australian naval history. This development was accompanied by growing concerns that records that might have been relevant to the action and its aftermath were not in the public domain because they were still subject to wartime secrecy provisions or located in files that had yet to be examined by staff of the National Archives of Australia.

The rapidly growing community of amateur and professional researchers concerned with the fate of the nation's most well known warship warmly welcomed the publication of the first edition of Richard Summerrell's *The Sinking of HMAS Sydney: A Guide to Commonwealth Government Records*. Summerrell was rightly praised for his detailed research and clear presentation. When the Australian Government decided in August 1997 to hold an inquiry into the loss of HMAS *Sydney* and several related matters, Summerrell's guide was an important resource. In its *Report on the Loss of HMAS Sydney*, published in March 1999, the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade noted the important work already completed by the National Archives. Since then, Summerrell's guide has served as a critical reference document for anyone wishing to undertake detailed primary research. The guide also provided an important impetus for further writing and publishing on the subject.

Bitter Victory: The Death of HMAS Sydney by Wesley Olson appeared in 2000. Olson concentrated on documents that helped to explain some tactical aspects of the engagement and the effect of the damage sustained by the *Sydney* during the opening phase of the battle on her ability to return fire. *Bitter Victory* provided a wealth of detailed material on the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of modified Leander-class light cruisers and measures taken by the Admiralty and the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board to deal with them.

Captain Peter Hore's edited work *HMAS Sydney II: The Cruiser and the Controversy in the Archives of the United Kingdom* was a careful and reasoned analysis that did much to advance the discussion. It was published in 2001 by the Royal Australian Navy Sea Power Centre in Canberra. Hore, a retired British naval officer, explained that his aim was:

to find records in British archives about the disappearance of HMAS *Sydney* in November 1941, and to investigate opinion of that period which might be relevant to knowledge of the disappearance of the cruiser.

After providing a summary of the action and the outstanding issues to be resolved, Hore provides extracts from a range of documents, including the text of signals and official reports, that disclose the extent of the British Government's knowledge of the engagement and the Admiralty's view of what might be learned from the action in terms of intelligence, tactics and communications. He helpfully explained that:

no first hand accounts of the loss of HMAS *Sydney* nor any type of inquiry into her loss have ever been found in British archives.

Glenys McDonald published *Seeking the Sydney: A Quest for Truth* in 2005. Her interest in the *Sydney* story was provoked when she settled in the small coastal fishing town of Port Gregory, Western Australia. She was intrigued by the claims of elderly local people that they had witnessed a great naval battle 'some time early in the war' which might have been that involving *Sydney* and *Kormoran*. McDonald then interviewed local families and found that several individuals had similar memories of an evening that appeared to be more than lightning accompanied by a thunderstorm.

Somewhere Below: The Sydney Scandal Exposed by John Samuels also appeared in 2005. Samuels does not accept the conventional accounts of the *Sydney*'s demise because the Germans were 'the enemy, with a truth to conceal'. Although noting that a 'multitude of theories has been advanced' to explain the loss of the *Sydney* and insisting they 'derive from little or no evidence and foster continuing baseless speculation', Samuels revives the Japanese submarine conspiracy theory (he actually names the *I-58* as the boat involved), with the additional claim that hundreds of bullet-ridden bodies were washed ashore and buried on Dirk Hartog Island and along the Western Australian coast. The burial of these men was apparently kept secret from the Australian people to conceal the fact of Japanese involvement.

A recent publication is *HMAS Sydney 1941: The Analysis* by Greg Bathgate (2007), a former draftsman and civil designer for the Water Corporation in Perth. Bathgate suggests that previous studies have been based on 'pre-conceived ideas' that, if eliminated, would make:

possible to assess all aspects analytically and on a logical basis in order to arrive at justifiable conclusions.

His principal aim appeared to be the identification of the most likely location of the *Sydney* wreck as the basis for a publicly funded search. It is very likely that recent events associated with HMAS *Sydney* will lead to the release of several new books, although it has been some years since genuinely new evidence has been uncovered to explain the events of Carnarvon on 19 November 1941.

The recommendations of the 1998–99 parliamentary inquiry into the loss of HMAS *Sydney* and the Australian Government's response (tabled in the Australian Parliament in 2000) focused on two main practical outcomes:

- determining whether the unknown sailor buried in Christmas Island was from the ill-fated Australian light cruiser; and
- finding the submerged wrecks and perhaps coming to some firmer conclusions about why none of the *Sydney*'s ship's company survived the engagement with the *Kormoran*.

These two activities represented the last chance to say anything new about Australia's greatest naval loss.

The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) mounted a search for the grave of the unknown sailor in 2001. No remains were found. A second search in 2006 based on some new information and a re-assessment of existing evidence led to the grave being discovered and the exhumation of human remains for forensic analysis. The RAN had no doubt that the unknown sailor was from the *Sydney* because the remains were in the only unmarked grave in an area where all the other graves were marked and because the coffin in which the man had been buried was small – 1.4 metres long and 0.8 metres wide. The coffin appears to have been specially constructed to accommodate the badly composed body, which was set in a sitting position with the left and right arms drawn around to the right hand side of the torso.

Examination of the remains disclosed evidence of injuries that were probably consistent with those sustained by most of the men who perished with the *Sydney*. It appears that the man suffered from numerous broken ribs and two head wounds that probably caused his death a few hours or days after the engagement. Initial visual examination of the skull and x-ray analysis at the University of Sydney suggested the man had been shot in the back of the head with a small calibre bullet that had been disfigured on impact.

This news rekindled speculation that the survivors from the *Sydney* were machine-gunned after their ship sank. It proved, however, to be a piece of shrapnel containing silicon and manganese, which matched the usual composition of a German high explosive shell. The then Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence, Bruce Bilson, explained in a public statement:

As the fragment does not contain either nickel or copper the War Memorial has assessed that the fragment is unlikely to come from a Japanese-manufactured projectile.

It now appears that the first injury was caused by shrapnel that struck the front of the skull and lodged in the left forehead. It also appears that the man had fallen and injured his head, possibly after receiving the initial wound. But how and when did the man receive the wound that probably caused his death? Did he manage to get into the Carley float that eventually conveyed him to Christmas Island alone or was he assisted by others?

There were no answers to these questions in any Australian files.

Equally elusive was the man's identity. At the time of writing, the name of the unknown sailor has not been established although extensive DNA testing continues. The Australian Government has accepted that the man was a member of the ship's company of HMAS *Sydney* and, in accordance with government regulations, has proposed that his remains be re-interred in the Commonwealth War Cemetery nearest to the site of the *Sydney–Kormoran* action (Geraldton). There are also plans to place a suitable memorial on Christmas Island marking the original burial site. With one mystery partly solved, attention then turned to finding the wreck of HMAS *Sydney*.

Two main theories developed as to where the search should begin. They were known simply as the 'northern' and 'southern' theories, and reflected the very different approaches taken by researchers to nominating the most likely position of the engagement and the most sensible place to search. Those who favoured the northern theory were inclined to accept the position nominated by the *Kormoran's* Commanding Officer, TA Detmers, which was 26 degrees 34 minutes S, 111 degrees E, although noting that his navigator (Meyer) mentioned 27 degrees S 111 degrees E. The 1998–99 parliamentary inquiry recommended a search at or near 26 degrees 32–34 minutes S, 111 degrees E, a position which is approximately 180 nautical miles south-west of Carnarvon. Those embracing the southern theory held that the position given by the Germans was deliberately false and that the *Sydney* was more likely to be located around 200 nautical miles to the south at a position near the Abrolhos Islands, south-west of Geraldton.

The Finding Sydney Foundation, which had received pledges of financial assistance from the Australian Government and two state governments, had conducted its own extensive research and preferred the northern position. It proposed looking within an area encompassing 1800 square nautical miles of ocean – an area 2.5 times the size of the Australian Capital Territory – in water with depths of approximately 2000 to 4000 metres at a distance of 120 nautical miles off continental Australia's most westerly point, Steep Point.

The news that the wreck of the *Kormoran* had been found was announced by the foundation on 16 March 2008, although the ship was actually detected on 12 March. The wreck was located at 26 degrees 05 minutes 49.4 seconds S, 111 degrees, 04 minutes 27.5 seconds E, 112 nautical miles off Steep Point in 2560 metres of water, four miles south of the main battle site. This was astounding news that attracted enormous media interest.

Early on the morning of Monday 17 March 2008, the Australian people woke to learn that the most enduring mystery in Australian naval history had ended. After nearly 67 years on the seabed, HMAS *Sydney* had finally been found. The identity of the wreck had been confirmed the previous evening although the *Sydney* had taken longer to positively identify than the *Kormoran*. HMAS *Sydney* was located in the 'northern position' at 26 degrees 14 minutes 37 seconds S, 111 degrees 13 minutes 3 seconds E, 12.2 nautical miles from the *Kormoran* and 10.5 nautical miles south-east of the site of the engagement. She was lying at a depth of 2468 metres. The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett, was consulted about legal protection for the site, which was immediately listed under the *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976*.

The location of the two wrecks off the Western Australian coast, their positions relative to each other and to the site of the initial engagement, and the visible battle damage sustained by both ships were entirely consistent with German accounts of the engagement in all major respects with the exception of the claim that the *Sydney* had been unprepared for a gun battle. To have been able to fire on the *Kormoran* within a very short space of time, the Australian ship needed to have been at action stations. The aspect of the main armament on the wreck shows clearly that the *Sydney* was ready for a fight with gun crews closed up and ready to execute orders to fire.

On 31 March 2008, the Australian Government announced that Justice Terrence Cole AO, RFD, QC, a former Royal Commissioner and member of the Naval Reserve Legal Panel, would head a commission of inquiry into the loss of the *Sydney* and would report his findings directly to the Chief of the Defence Force. Air Chief Marshal Houston explained that:

at the moment there is just one term of reference and that is to inquire into the circumstances that led to the loss of HMAS *Sydney* and all of her crew.

He suggested that the inquiry would take some time because 23 kilometres of archival documents had to be examined and that 'a lot of this material has not been looked into before'. He went on to say that:

we must leave absolutely no doubt as to what happened. We have to establish the facts ... because, strange as it may seem, no board of inquiry was conducted during World War II. So this is very much unfinished business and we think that this is the best way to go.

There is possibly some misunderstanding about the current status of records relating to the *Sydney–Kormoran* action and its aftermath. As this guide explains, in 1997, when publishing the first edition of this guide, the National Archives a thorough search of its collection to find all relevant records related to the loss of HMAS *Sydney* and also any records still held by the Department of Defence. An attempt was made to identify and bring before the public every known document. The Archives' staff also surveyed files with no obvious connection to the events of 19 November 1941 to ensure that no documents had been overlooked or misplaced. Researchers are entitled to have confidence in Richard Summerrell's work, which was painstaking and thorough.

Sadly, the exhumation of the unknown sailor on Christmas Island and initial examination of the wrecks of the German raider and the Australian light cruiser have not answered every question posed of the *Sydney–Kormoran* engagement. It appears that the battered *Sydney* limped away from the engagement and remained afloat for some hours before unexpectedly plunging below the waterline. But why was the ship ever endangered?

In his report released in August 2009, Commissioner Cole concluded that Captain Burnett was entitled to believe that the possibility of the suspicious ship he had encountered being a raider was remote. Although no merchant vessels were expected in the area, the information provided to warships was not always accurate. Cole considered that 'Captain Burnett assessed the sighted vessel as appearing 'innocent', did not go to action stations, and approached the vessel to

‘within signaling distance’ to ascertain her name’. He stated, however, that ‘it can never be known what influenced Captain Burnett to make the initial assessment that *Kormoran* “appears innocent”’ when the unidentified ship was not on his plot of expected sightings. Cole thought that Burnett ‘must have given weight to the fact that the ship was close to the Australian coast, was in or close to a shipping lane, and was within a day’s sailing of a focal port – as well as the circumstance that no German raider had ever been encountered in such an area’.

Nor could Cole explain why Burnett had ordered *Sydney*’s Walrus aircraft to be prepared for launch and then shut down. He concluded that Burnett believed the ship to be innocent until the action commenced although he found it ‘difficult to accept that ... there was not on *Sydney*’s bridge an appreciation that she was being drawn ever closer to the unidentified ship without being able to identify her. If the ship was a disguised raider, *Sydney* was placing herself in great danger’. Cole contended that ‘the terrible consequence of his erroneous decision was that *Sydney* did not go to action stations and approached to a position of great danger, where all her tactical advantages were negated and the advantage of surprise was given to *Kormoran*. It resulted in the loss of *Sydney*’. With respect to the many ‘frauds, theories and speculations’ that have been associated with the loss of *Sydney*, he found that ‘none has any substance whatsoever’ and he was adamant that there was no evidence of an official cover-up, either during World War II or subsequently.

Commissioner Cole’s report not surprisingly prompted a great deal of comment and some criticism from HMAS *Sydney* researchers, particularly his conclusion that *Sydney* was not at action stations prior to the engagement. The report was, however, rightly praised for its thorough research and close attention to detail.

Competing accounts of Captain Burnett’s conduct continue to be offered. There are those who believe his actions on the afternoon of 19 November 1941 were incompetent and reckless and there are those who point to evidence that previously he was a prudent and cautious commander. Why he brought his ship so close to the *Kormoran* will never be known. In one sense, it no longer matters what was in Joseph Burnett’s mind that day. He too, died with his ship and paid a heavy price for any error of judgment. Despite our longings, we will never know why the *Sydney* was lost. The answer appears to remain forever with her gallant men.

Professor Tom Frame
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Introduction

The National Archives of Australia

The National Archives of Australia is responsible for helping Australian Government agencies to create and manage their records. From this massive body of information the Archives selects, cares for and makes available to all, those records of continuing value. This collection constitutes the archives of the Australian Government – a vast and rich resource for the study of Australian history, Australian society and the Australian people.

The collection spans almost 200 years of Australian history. The main focus of the collection is material which documents Australian Government activities since Federation in 1901. The Archives also has significant holdings of nineteenth-century records about functions transferred by the colonies to the Australian Government at the time of Federation and subsequently. The records described in this guide are a small but significant part of the collection.

Access to the National Archives collection is provided free of charge in public reading rooms located in each capital city. Researchers are assisted by specialist reference staff and are provided with reference tools to help them identify and use the records in the collection. These reference tools include the RecordSearch and PhotoSearch databases, guides, publications and fact sheets. Researchers unable to visit a reading room may seek information and assistance by telephone, mail, facsimile or email.

RecordSearch and PhotoSearch provide information about agencies, persons and series, as well as descriptions of over 7.5 million individual items. Both RecordSearch and PhotoSearch are available for online searching in reading rooms located in all offices of the National Archives and at the Australian War Memorial, as well as on the Archives' website.

The National Archives' website provides extensive information about the Archives, its collection and the services it offers. A visit to the site will help researchers determine whether the Archives hold records relevant to their research. Fact sheets and online guides on various topics are also available on the Archives website.

About this guide

The loss of HMAS Sydney with its full war complement of 645 remains to this day Australia's single worst naval disaster. Until the findings of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade were tabled in 1999 (see its *Report on the Loss of HMAS Sydney*), no detailed official report on the sinking had been released. For many the loss of the *Sydney* had never been fully explained.

This guide describes all federal government archival records known to exist about the loss of HMAS Sydney. As well as describing the records in the official record

collections of the National Archives and the Australian War Memorial, the guide describes records still held by the Department of Defence and records held by the Australian War Memorial in privately donated collections. Apart from one manuscript in the National Library of Australia, details of which are also given, no other federal government agency or institution is known to hold relevant archival material.

The guide describes all records identified as dealing in any way with the sinking of the Sydney or related events. Some of the records described bear only indirectly upon the sinking, but have been included to provide a complete picture for those wishing to pursue research into any aspect of the loss or its aftermath.

This guide builds upon an earlier 'source analysis' published by the National Archives in 1991. Many records included in the 1991 source analysis have been excluded from this guide as not relevant – for example, those relating to the Sydney's construction, sea trials, repairs and refits, and wartime service in the Mediterranean. Many additional records relevant to the sinking have been identified since the 1991 source analysis was published and descriptions of these are included.

The guide's purpose is to describe in one place the range of archival material on the subject. This guide will facilitate access to all known federal government archival records.

The identification of relevant records

The records described in the guide have been identified after an extensive search conducted by the author, a former officer of the National Archives in Canberra. The author had unlimited access to all the records described.

In the compilation of the guide the search for archival material was systematic and extensive, but it is not possible to claim that all relevant records have been identified. With almost 360 shelf kilometres of records, the collection of the National Archives alone is vast. For practical reasons the search targeted the most likely sources of relevant material rather than all possible sources.

Since the guide was first published in January 1997, additional material has been identified. In the November 1997 edition the following information was added:

- A file, AWM124, 4/342, Raiders in the Pacific (described at p. 97), and PR00835, the papers of Major Roland Seymour Browne, 1940–1942 (described at p. 117), both held by the Australian War Memorial.
- The series MP1103/2, Dossiers containing reports on internees and prisoners of war held in Australian camps, 1939–45 (described at p. 137), held by the Melbourne office of the Archives.
- Descriptions of three recently located items in series A11163 (see pp. 54–55 for more information).
- A11095, 105/30/AIR attachment, Report on Search for lifeboats of HMAS Sydney and *Kormoran* (*Steiermark* – Raider G.41), 1941.
- PP345/1, 1937/41, Official log book, SS *Cape Otway*, 1937–42

- A12982, Photographic prints of document believed to be the encoded notebook confiscated from Commander TA Detmers, Captain of the HSK *Kormoran*, giving an account of the action between the *Kormoran* and HMAS *Sydney* on 19 November 1941.

This guide will be updated if additional records are identified (including the version on the Archives website, www.naa.gov.au).

At the time of the preparation of the fourth edition of this guide, the wrecks of both HMAS *Sydney* and the *Kormoran* were discovered. More information is available on the Royal Australian Navy website.

The structure of the guide

The guide is divided into an introduction and 10 chapters, each of which covers an aspect of the *Sydney's* loss and provides background to the events. To impart some of the flavour of the records, they are quoted from and referred to extensively in the introductory narratives to each chapter.

For example, chapter 1 gives an overview of the history of the release of official information about the sinking of the *Sydney*. For those unfamiliar with the story of the ship's loss, an account originally prepared in 1945 but suppressed from publication at that time by the Naval Intelligence Division of the Department of the Navy is also provided. This is followed by a summary of the information found in the records that relates to the three main areas of current research interest: whether the government had any explanation for the *Sydney's* loss other than that which it publicly disclosed; whether there was a court of inquiry into the sinking; and whether there is documentary evidence to suggest that the *Sydney* sent a distress signal either during or after the battle.

Each chapter deals with a specific subject area, except for chapter 10 'Replacing the *Sydney* and writing the official history') which brings together records of interest not adequately covered by the other chapter headings (including a description of the records of G Hermon Gill, the author of the Navy volumes of the official history of Australia in World War II¹). Supplementary information is provided in the appendixes.

Access to records in the National Archives

Many series described in this guide are listed in RecordSearch, the National Archives' online catalogue, which is available in the reading rooms of all offices of the Archives, at the Australian War Memorial and on the Archives' website (www.naa.gov.au). Indexes and inventories, available in reading rooms, may also be useful. Reference staff can assist researchers to use these lists.

Access to archival records is governed by the Archives Act 1983, which gives a right of access to most Australian Government records that are over 30 years old.

¹ Hermon Gill, G, *The Royal Australian Navy 1939-42*, vols 1 and 2 of the *Official History of Australia in the War of 1939-45*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1957.

Records over 30 years old are said to be in the 'open' period. In rare instances, the government may release records less than 30 years old, under the accelerated release provisions of the Archives Act.

Some records are exempt from these access provisions (eg court records, some parliamentary records and some records of governors-general). Researchers are able to access all other open period records, including those held by agencies, unless those records contain information that falls into certain categories, called 'exemption categories', which are defined in section 33 of the Act. There are 15 exemption categories, and information that falls within them is said to be 'exempt information'. Before the Archives releases records for public access, it examines them to ensure that they do not contain exempt information (see Fact Sheet 46).

Most records (97.5 per cent) are wholly released for public access, while 2 per cent are released with some exempt information deleted. Only 0.5 per cent of records are wholly withheld because they consist entirely of exempt information. Most exempt information is withheld to protect personal privacy, but defence, security and intelligence sensitivities are the next most common reasons for exemption.

Officers of the Archives are delegated under the Act to examine records and make decisions about whether they can be released. This is done in consultation with departments and agencies. Examination of records may often take a day or less, but if they require referral to agencies or overseas, it may take weeks or months. The Archives informs its clients of delays in this process.

If a researcher applies to see a record that is exempt from public access, the Archives will provide a written statement giving the reasons for the decision and identifying the exemption category that applies and why it applies. Details of all records containing exempt information are available on RecordSearch. The access status will show **OPEN**, **OPEN WITH EXCEPTION**, **CLOSED**, or **NOT YET EXAMINED** while the reason for restriction will show the category or categories under which the information is exempted.

A researcher may appeal against an exemption and the Archives will review its decision, but if it is confirmed, the researcher may then appeal to the independent Administrative Appeals Tribunal (see Fact Sheet 12). There is no charge for obtaining access or for applying to the Archives to review its decision, but an application fee applies for appeals to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

Regardless of the type of research they undertake at the National Archives, researchers will only be able to examine open period records (ie 30 years of age or older) that do not contain sensitive information or those released under the accelerated release provisions of the Archives Act.

RecordSearch and PhotoSearch

The National Archives has two principal electronic catalogues to assist researchers to access its collection. RecordSearch is the National Archives' collection database. It contains descriptions of 60 000 collections (called series)

and 7.5 million record items as well as details of about 9 000 creators and depositors.

The National Archives continues to add item entries to RecordSearch at a rate of several hundred thousand each year. More digital copies of records are being added daily to RecordSearch. Digital copies can be accessed from the RecordSearch item display screen by clicking on the 'R' icon. Most items listed in this guide have been digitised and can be viewed online. The database currently describes about 10 per cent of all items in the collection, so to ensure that their search is comprehensive, researchers should also contact reference staff and search other finding aids. PhotoSearch is an online catalogue containing a selection of digital images from the National Archives' photographic collections. PhotoSearch currently contains more than 200 000 online images. Several thousand images are added to PhotoSearch each year.

Record descriptions

Each entry in this guide describes a group of records maintained together as a series. A series is made up of items, which are often individual files (sometimes volumes, sets of cards, photographs and other types of media), received into custody by the National Archives from a creating agency or person. Series usually consist of many items, but occasionally they may consist of just a few items or even a single item.

The description for each series gives its content and function. The entry concludes with a list of items selected from the series. Some series may not have items listed on RecordSearch. The full description of each series is given only on its first appearance in each chapter.

The following example demonstrates how a series and its items are typically described in this guide.

❶	OFFICIAL LOG BOOKS, CAPE OTWAY (M & S 16), 1932-59	PP345/1
❷	Recorded by: Mercantile Marine Office, Fremantle	
❸	Perth	0.54 metres
❹	This series contains the official log books of the <i>Cape Otway</i> . Log books for years 1935-36 and 1949-51 are missing.	
❺	Official Log book, SS <i>Cape Otway</i>, 1937-42	PP345/1, 1937/41
❻	The merchant trading vessel <i>Cape Otway</i> was travelling down the Western Australian coast at the time of the <i>Sydney-Kormoran</i> encounter. Entries in the log book indicate that it departed Darwin on 17 November and arrived in Fremantle on 5 December 1941. The log does not record any information that might indicate the vessel saw anything relating to the <i>Sydney</i> or the <i>Kormoran</i> or that it was asked to be involved in a search for survivors.	

Key

- ❶ This is the **series title** and the date range of the records that make up the series. The **series number** is shown on the right-hand side.
- ❷ This is the **person or government agency that created the series**. It also shows the date range during which each series was created or recorded. This date range does not necessarily correspond to the contents date range of the records which appears in the series title. The CP (Commonwealth person) and the CA (Commonwealth agency) numbers are a unique identifier allocated by the National Archives to each person or agency. These numbers can be used to retrieve more information about the person or agency, and the records they created, from the National Archives' online database, RecordSearch.
- ❸ This is the **total volume of records** in the series and the **location** where the series is held. If copies of records are held in other locations, this is indicated here.
- ❹ This is a brief **description of the series**.
- ❺ This is the **title given to the item by the person or agency** that created it. The dates of the earliest and latest document on the file are shown. The **item's identifying number** appears on the right-hand side. This number must be quoted when requesting a copy of the record or access to it.
- ❻ This **describes the main contents of an item**. Note that it does not describe every document on the file.

This guide identifies and describes rather than analyses the records. Researchers must make their own assessment and place their own interpretation on the informational content of the records.

Some series are very large; however, a series may contain only one or two items that have any relevance to the Sydney. Also, series spanning a large number of years will often have been recorded (ie created) by a number of successive agencies (eg MP1074/4). If this is the case, only the agency or agencies that created records spanning the period of relevance to the Sydney's loss are given, to limit the size of the entries. In other cases (eg A5954) it has been necessary to give all the recording agency details, since they all cover the relevant period.

More detailed information about the series and items described in this guide is available on the RecordSearch, available in each of the Archives' reading rooms, at the Australian War Memorial and on the Archives website (www.naa.gov.au).

Wildcard searches and digitised records

RecordSearch allows users to search using wildcards. To search using wildcards, use the initial letters of the desired search term and add an asterisk (*). For example, 'cru*' will search and retrieve all keywords beginning with the letters 'c-r-u-i', such as 'cruiser' and 'cruising'.

Users can also search for items within series by using a wildcard – for example, a wildcard search on 'MP1049/5, 2026/*' will retrieve all items in series MP1049/5 starting with '2026/'.

Citing the records

The correct citation of archival records is important both when requesting them and when referring to them in written or published works. Using proper citations will not only help staff to locate records more readily, but will also help other researchers find cited material.

The correct form of citation for records held by the National Archives of Australia is as follows: the name 'National Archives of Australia' followed by a colon, the series number followed by a comma, and then the item number. The name 'National Archives of Australia' may be abbreviated to 'NAA' provided the full name has been used in the first citation:

National Archives of Australia: MP1049/5, 2026/19/6

NAA: MP1049/5, 2026/19/6

Citations for records in the private records collection of the Australian War Memorial should include the name 'Australian War Memorial' (AWM), the collection number and name and the item number and details. For example:

Australian War Memorial: PRR88/178. Records of Capt J L Hehir, Australian Intelligence Corps, 1941, Interrogation reports from the crew of the raider Kormoran

AWM: PRR88/178. Records of Capt J L Hehir, Australian Intelligence Corps, 1941, Interrogation reports from the crew of the raider Kormoran

Copyright

Copyright applies to many records in the Archives' collection – see Fact Sheet 8, available from National Archives' reading rooms or on the Archives website. To obtain information about copyright permission in order to use these images, please contact the National Archives by telephone (1300 886 881) or email (copyright@naa.gov.au).

Charges for copies

Viewing records at any office of the National Archives is free, but various charges apply for copying or digitising items or photographs. For a list of these charges, please refer to Fact Sheet 51, which can be viewed online. Photographic prices are available on the Imaging Services order form, which is available via a link on the PhotoSearch main page.

Locating further information

More information can be found by searching, RecordSearch. Reference inquiries can be made at any National Archives' office or by contacting the Archives' reference service by phone, fax or email. Contact details and addresses for the National Archives and other archives are found in appendix 8.

Location of records

Records described in this guide are held in 7 different locations:

National Archives National Office Canberra	ACT
National Archives Melbourne	VIC
National Archives Perth	WA
National Archives Sydney	NSW
Australian War Memorial, Canberra	AWM
Naval Historical Section, Department of Defence, Canberra	NHS
Directorate of Sailors' Career Management, Department of Defence, Canberra	DSCM
Directorate of Naval Officers' Postings, Department of Defence, Canberra	DNOP
RAAF Historical and Archives Section, Department of Defence, Canberra	RAAF
RAAF Personnel	RAAF Personnel

Records held by the Department of Defence

Where the records are held by the Naval Historical Section (NHS) or by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Historical and Archives Section in the Department of Defence requests for access to, or for copies of, these records should be directed to them.

Contact numbers and addresses for the National Archives and the other archives referred to in this guide are given in appendix 8.

Notes on time zones

In this guide four international time zones are used in the quotations and extracts taken from the records themselves. The most commonly used time is Greenwich Mean Time or GMT (also known as Zone Zulu or Z time). The Sydney and other Navy, Army and Air Force units in and around Fremantle kept H (Hotel) time, calculated as GMT + 8 hours; the eastern states of Australia kept K (Kilo) time, which is GMT + 10 hours; and the Kormoran kept G (Golf) time, which is GMT + 7 hours.

Times given in the introductory narrative to each chapter are given in local Western Australian time.

Notes on spelling

Some names are spelt in a variety of ways in the records: Cormoran, Comoran, Cormorant, and Kormorant, occur, as do Dettmers, Dietmers and Dietmars, and Straat Malakka and Straat Malacca. Except where information is being quoted

directly from the records, the spellings used in this guide are Kormoran, Detmers and Straat Malakka.

Note also that the vessel that became Kormoran was previously known as Steiermark and some records use that earlier name when referring to the Kormoran.

1 The Elements of Controversy

The release of official information about the sinking

The loss of HMAS Sydney with all hands on 19 November 1941 accounted for more than 35 per cent of Royal Australian Navy (RAN) servicemen killed in action between 1939 and 1945. The disaster was felt at two levels: the personal tragedy suffered by the families and friends of the men who died, and the sense of loss felt by the nation as a whole, for whom the Sydney, like its predecessor of the same name, held a special place.

The public sentiment was reflected at the highest levels. In a meeting of the War Cabinet soon after the sinking an unidentified minister present at the meeting, or perhaps the War Cabinet collectively, was recorded by the official notetaker as commenting, 'There'll always be a *Sydney*'.²

For the public the shock of the *Sydney*'s loss was accompanied by a sense of bewilderment that such a disaster could occur, with the only remaining evidence of the *Sydney*'s demise being a lifebelt and a Carley life float damaged by shell fire. For 12 days the Australian Government maintained the strictest secrecy, issuing no less than 11 censorship notices preventing the publication of details. Even after the Prime Minister Curtin's public statement announcing the ship's loss, the broadcasting licences of three radio stations were suspended for contravention of a 48-hour ban on broadcasting of the details.

When the Prime Minister made the first of two public announcements on 1 December 1941, he did little more than confirm the widely circulating rumours that the Sydney had been sunk. No explanation was given as to how the Sydney and her full complement had disappeared, virtually without trace, while 317 of the 397 men on board the *Kormoran*, the ship she had engaged in battle, were rescued.³

The Government was well aware of the sensitivity of this information. In a message to his Minister on 1 December the Secretary of the Department of the Navy advised that the number of survivors from the *Kormoran* should not be published 'in view of the effect on next of kin, relatives and friends of personnel of HMAS Sydney'.⁴

A suspicion that information was being deliberately concealed was strengthened by several factors: the delay in making the official announcement despite widespread public rumour; the lack of any real explanation when the announcement did come; the secrecy which surrounded the official investigation of the disaster, which continued into January 1942; and the many obvious questions which the Government failed publicly to address.

² NAA: A5954, 731/1, War Cabinet Notebooks, meeting of 1 December 1941, notes by Shedden.

³ Four of the 397 (three of those recovered) were Chinese from the *Eurylochus*, sunk by the *Kormoran* 10 months earlier.

⁴ NAA: A5954, 518/36, HMAS Sydney – Sinking. Replacement fund.

Public perception that the full story was not being told was sustained throughout the war by persistent press reports speculating about what had happened, and by privately published accounts such as that of W H Ross and J Taylor.⁵ At the conclusion of the war the Director of Naval Intelligence, Commander R B M Long, continued to prevent publication of 'the full analysis' and insisted that nothing further be published about the sinking unless the Naval Board was forced to do so by Ministerial pressure.⁶

The apparent determination of senior personnel in Navy Office not to 'resurrect' the loss of *Sydney* as a focus of public attention during the remainder of the war and thereafter had the opposite effect by intensifying perceptions that something was being hidden. The irony, strongly supported by the records, is that the reason for the official silence appears to have been the Government's own inability to explain the *Sydney's* loss. In the words of the Prime Minister, 'Her actual fate, in the absence of other evidence, must remain a mystery'.⁷

Apart from the two brief public statements by the Prime Minister on 1 and 3 December 1941, two weeks after the sinking, no further information was officially released until publication in 1957 of the official history of the Royal Australian Navy in World War II.⁸ For all practical purposes the Navy Office investigation of the *Sydney's* loss concluded in early 1942, although several limited investigations were undertaken up until the end of the war in response to claims of reported survivors and the existence of photographic evidence of the engagement hidden by one of the *Kormoran's* survivors in a cave on a beach north of Carnarvon.

The publication of the official history in 1957 did little to satisfy those seeking answers to a number of questions. For example, how was it that more than 300 survivors of the German raider were rescued while all 645 men on board the *Sydney* were lost? How could the *Sydney*, with such superior fire power and armour have been sunk by the *Kormoran*? Why did the *Sydney* send no distress signal? Why did the *Sydney's* captain seemingly expose his ship to danger by approaching the *Kormoran* at such close quarters? Why did the *Sydney* not launch her reconnaissance aircraft? With all *Sydney's* guns and torpedoes trained on the *Kormoran* how did the raider have time to remove her camouflage, hoist the German flag and still fire the first shot?

Despite the official history's assertion that the story of the *Sydney's* last action 'was pieced together through exhaustive interrogation of *Kormoran's* survivors' and that 'no room was left for doubt as to its accuracy'⁹, its failure to answer so many questions confirmed for those seeking answers the suspicion of an official cover-

⁵ Ross, W H, *Stormy Petrel: The Life Story of HMAS Sydney*, Paterson's Printing Press, Western Australia, 1943; and Taylor, J, *Prisoner of the Kormoran: WA Jones' Amazing Experiences on the German Raider, Kormoran and as a Prisoner of War in Germany*, Australasian Publishing Company, 1944.

⁶ NAA: B6121, 165P, *Sydney-Kormoran action signals*.

⁷ Prime Ministerial press statement No. 89, 3 December 1941

⁸ Hermon Gill, G, op. cit.

⁹ *ibid.*, p453

up. It did nothing to dampen these suspicions that the official history was written by Lieutenant Commander George Hermon Gill, the Navy's wartime Publicity Censorship Liaison Officer and a chief advocate of the view expressed as late as October 1945 that nothing further about the *Sydney's* engagement with the *Kormoran* should be published.

In the absence of further official releases of information, the void was filled by a number of privately published books and monographs, including that of the *Kormoran's* captain himself (1959)¹⁰, the writer Geoffrey Scott (1962)¹¹, and Vice Admiral Sir John Collins (1965 and 1971).¹²

Researchers interested in the *Sydney* were slow to take advantage of the new policy on access to Commonwealth Government records, announced by Prime Minister McMahon in 1972 (see Appendix 6). It was not until 1981 that the first substantial work based on Australian archival material was published.

Each of the three major works based on a study of the archival sources proved controversial to at least some of those still interested in the story of the *Sydney*. Montgomery (1981)¹³ was strongly convinced of an official cover-up; Winter (1984)¹⁴ was largely satisfied of the truth of the account told by the survivors of the *Kormoran*; and Frame (1993)¹⁵, while acknowledging that much of the untold story was 'unknown and unknowable', rejected the conclusions in the official history as 'seriously flawed, inconsistent and contradictory'. Frame concluded that the evidence of the *Kormoran's* survivors was not a reliable basis on which to make judgements because by silence rather than active deception the few Germans in a position to see the whole action may have succeeded in concealing facts which accounted for the otherwise inexplicable actions of the *Sydney*.

There continues to this day a lively interest in seeking an explanation for the loss of the *Sydney*. This interest is evidenced by the regular publication of articles in the press and in journals, by letters to the editor, by regular representations to Ministers and Government agencies, including calls for a complete search of Government archives, and by the sustained level of research inquiries received by the National Archives of Australia and the Australian War Memorial. At the centre of much of the continuing debate are claims that there are details of the *Sydney's* loss that continue to be suppressed, what Frame sceptically calls 'a grand conspiracy of deception within officialdom.'¹⁶ Those inclined to this view contend

¹⁰ Detmers, T and Brennecke, J, *Hilfskreuzer Kormoran*, Herford, Koehlers, 1959, republished as *The Raider Kormoran*. Kimber, London, 1975

¹¹ Scott, G, *HMAS Sydney*. Horwitz, Sydney, 1962

¹² Collins, J, *As Luck Would Have It*: Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1965, and *HMAS Sydney*. Naval Historical Society of Australia. Garden Island, NSW, 1971

¹³ Montgomery, M, *Who Sank the Sydney*. Cassell Melbourne, 1981

¹⁴ Winter, B, *HMAS Sydney. Fact, Fantasy and Fraud*. Boolarong Press, Brisbane, 1984

¹⁵ Frame, T, *HMAS Sydney. Loss and Controversy*. Hodder & Stoughton, Sydney, 1993

¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 152.

that somewhere in official Government archives there must exist documents that provide answers.

The 'unpublished' account

Those convinced of an official cover-up have pointed to the refusal of the Director of Naval Intelligence in 1945 to publish what he called a full analysis of the action between the *Sydney* and the *Kormoran*. This 'analysis', prepared by naval intelligence staff in Fremantle with a view to its publication, was in response to press reports concerning possible survivors of the *Sydney* being held in Japan.

The press reports arose from a parliamentary question in the House of Representatives on 13 September 1945 by Mr S M Falstein, MP, who asked:

Will the Minister for the Navy make a special endeavour to find out what happened to HMAS Sydney, and when the information is obtained will he arrange to have it published at the earliest possible moment?

Minister Makin, responded:

I am most anxious to secure any information that can be gathered regarding the fate of HMAS Sydney. I have had a signal sent to Commodore Collins [Commodore J A Collins, Commodore Commanding the Australian Squadron], who is now in Tokyo, asking him to make investigations with a view to gathering what information is available about this ship.¹⁷

The details of this investigation are given in Chapter 6.

In response to the publicity generated by these inquiries, Lieutenant Commander Rycroft, Staff Officer, Intelligence in Fremantle wrote to Commander R B M Long, the Director of Naval Intelligence. Rycroft noted that the recurrent publicity could 'only cause distress to those who normally would have allowed the lapse of time to heal their sorrow.' Rycroft continued:

'A detailed account of the intense search over a very wide area for any possible survivors has never, we understand, been published, and the enclosed account, prepared from our files in Fremantle, by Third Officer Westhoven, WRANS, gives a good publishable story of the action and search and should result in completely setting at rest any rumours or speculation concerning possible survivors from the Sydney. It is suggested that this information concerning the action and search should be in the form of an official release to the press in Australia.'¹⁸

Long referred the suggestion to his deputy, who advised

I cannot agree with SO(I)'s contention that to officially release this story would set the matter at rest because:

- the papers would not publish the whole;
- the account is by no means conclusive;

¹⁷ Hansard, 13 Sep 1945, pp5377–5378

¹⁸ NAA: K997, 1/15/2, HMAS *Sydney*/*Kormoran* action, November 1941.

- it would be derogatory to the Service in that it infers that the Sydney was far from being alert;
- the best course of action to put the matter at rest is to take no action. To publish would only resurrect the whole matter to no good purpose.'

Long sought the opinion of LCDR Gill, then designated NWH – Naval War Historian. Gill replied

I concur with DDNI [Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence]. My own opinion is that no action should be taken by Naval Staff in this matter. Even if the proposed account were published it would not be accepted as final. Indeed, in many minds there will never be any finality in this matter, and I imagine that Sydney will take her place with Marie Celeste... whatever is written. We should write nothing unless and until pressure is brought by the Press for a Ministerial statement.

Commander Long accepted the recommendations and advised Rycroft accordingly.¹⁹ A copy of his reply to Rycroft appears on the following page.

¹⁹ NAA: B6121, 165P, Sydney-Kormoran action signals etc.

TELETYPE UNIT:
NAVY OFFICE
VICTORIA BARRACKS
ST. KILDA ROAD
MXY 137
NAVAL BRANCHES
ALBERT PARK BARRACKS
TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS:
"NAVY MELBOURNE"



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

IN REPLY
QUOTE
No.

9855

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
NAVY OFFICE, MELBOURNE, S.C.1

23rd October, 1945.

20 OCT. 1945

The Staff Officer (Intelligence),
Naval Staff Office,
FREMANTLE W.A.

H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY" - SURVIVORS FROM

The receipt of your letter of the
12th October, 1945, is acknowledged.

2. Continuous investigation has been carried out into the facts relating to the action between H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY" and the German Raider "KORMORAN". There has now been accumulated a mass of confirmatory information which leaves no doubt that there are no survivors from H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY".

3. There are a number of reasons, however, why the full analysis should not be published, the principle that such an analysis would still not be accepted by some people as being absolute confirmation of the loss of all the "SYDNEY"s complement. It is intended not to publish anything further concerning this action, and its results, unless the Board is forced by Ministerial pressure to write a Ministerial Statement.

(R.B.M. Long)
Director of Naval Intelligence
Melbourne

The Director of Naval Intelligence's reply to Lieutenant Commander Rycroft, rejecting the proposal that an account of the *Sydney-Kormoran* action prepared by naval intelligence staff should be published.

NAA: K997, 1/15/2, HMAS Sydney/Kormoran action, November 1941.

Though by no means a complete, nor always a wholly accurate account, the entire text of Third Officer Westhoven's nine page account is quoted below both as an indication of the continuing sensitivity with which the authorities regarded the disclosure even of the most innocuous information about the *Sydney*, and as a record for those not familiar with the story of the engagement.

Westhoven wrote as follows.²⁰

The search for HMAS Sydney survivors

HMAS Sydney departed Fremantle on the 11 of November 1941, escorting HT Zealandia. And that was the last voyage of this famous cruiser, because while on this job she was sunk by the German Raider Kormoran.

There were no survivors from this ill fated engagement, and no trace of any wreckage was ever found despite an exhaustive search. Exact details of the fate of HMAS Sydney will probably never be known. A complete story of the action has been built up from interrogation of survivors of the Kormoran. But despite a thorough examination of these men, they could not, or would not, throw any light on the actual sinking of HMAS Sydney. According to them, the last that was seen of Sydney was when she disappeared over the horizon at dusk, November 19th, burning fiercely.

A chronological account of events of the days from November 21 to November 29, gives an idea of how gradually the fate of HMAS Sydney was pieced together.

When HMAS Sydney left Fremantle, she was to escort HT Zealandia to rendezvous in the vicinity of Sunda Straits at 8 o'clock on the morning of November 17. She was then to return to Fremantle. When she had not arrived on November 21, a signal was sent to Navy Board, and on November 23 [in fact November 24] an air search was carried out from Rottneest.

And from then on until November 29, when the search was abandoned, ships of the Royal Australian Navy, Royal Netherlands Navy, the Merchant Navy, and allied aircraft scoured a wide area of the Indian ocean.

On the 23 of November, HT Aquitania picked up 26 Germans on a raft. However, word was not received of this until PM on the 27. On the same day that Aquitania picked up these men, HMAS Sydney was urgently instructed to report her estimated time of arrival at Fremantle.

The first definite news came on November 24, when the British Tanker MV Trocas picked up 25 Germans from a floating raft in position 24 degrees 06 minutes South, 111 degrees 40 minutes East, which is approximately 150 miles north west of Carnarvon. They requested an armed guard. On the same day 6 Hudsons carried out an air search to a depth of 300 miles, with negative result, however.

On the same day, too, Group 53, composed of HMAS Wyrallah, HMAS Yandra and HMAS Olive Cam sailed from Fremantle. Wyrallah and Yandra with orders to intercept Trocas and search for any survivors, Olive Cam was instructed to search for survivors only. Hermion, Pan Europe, Saidja, Herstein, Sunetta and Centaur, all ships of the merchant navy, were instructed to pass through positions between 24 degrees South and 111 degrees East to search for survivors.

The next day brought more information of survivors from the Kormoran. An aircraft, in position 24 degrees 52 minutes South, 111 degrees 09 minutes East, reported a lifeboat, and Herstein was ordered to the position to locate it. Another aircraft reported 2 life boats a shore about 45 miles north of Carnarvon and a RAAF land party left to contact the boat's crew.

²⁰ Westhoven's account appears in NAA: B6121, 165P, Sydney-Kormoran action signals etc.

At the same time, the air search was continuing over an area 180 miles by 400 miles from Geraldton North West to a point beyond where the raft had been sighted. Seven Hudsons combed this area, while Wirraways searched the coast line from Shark Bay to North West Cape. One Hudson searched a 60 mile square South West of Dirk Hartog Island. MV Trocas reported her noon position and Heros received orders to intercept her and search for survivors. On the same day, RNNS Tromp left Tandjong Priok, and joined in the search.

On November 26th came the first definite news of what had happened. That was when a naval guard with Paymaster Lieutenant A C Baume, RANR in charge boarded MV Trocas. From interrogation of the prisoners it was discovered that on the 19th of November, Kormoran had engaged a cruiser of the Perth class with a name which they thought began with 'ST'. The prisoners agreed that their ship had fired three torpedoes, one of which hit the cruiser about amidships and put her controls out of action. They said that the cruiser had fired one salvo which set fire to the German ship, which was Diesel driven. It was impossible to put the fire out, they said, and there was a terrific explosion after they had abandoned ship, and they estimated that about 100 men, including the majority of the officers, were still on board. The last they had seen of the Sydney was at dusk, when she was burning just forward of amidships.

From these men it was learnt that the Kormoran, commanded by Kapt Dettmers, was an auxiliary cruiser of 9000 tons with a complement of 400 men. She had been at sea since December 1940, and from Hamburg had gone to the Indian ocean, where she had sunk 10 ships.

The exact position of the action was also established on November 26th when Staff Officer Intelligence, Fremantle, interviewed the Raider survivors at Carnarvon. These survivors gave the position of action as 26 degrees 30' south, 111 degrees east, and the time of engagement as 1700. Captain Dettmers stated that the raider attack was a surprise.

Another survivor said that the boats were rowing towards what they imagined was HMAS Perth in the hope of being picked up when the cruiser vanished over the horizon so rapidly that they believed it sunk.

On the same day that these statements were made, Koolinda picked up a lifeboat with 31 Germans in it, and Centaur took two lifeboats in tow, and proceeded to Carnarvon. The air and sea search continued.

On November 27th, MV Trocas arrived in Fremantle with prisoners, and the real work of interrogation was begun by Naval Intelligence.

From this interrogation, an almost complete picture of the action was obtained. According to the German story, Kormoran was steering north when the lookout sighted a ship on the starboard bow steering south. This was about 1600 on the 19th. The raider altered her course to westward, thus bringing the cruiser onto the starboard quarter. The cruiser altered course westward and closed rapidly, challenging with her daylight lamp. The raider made no reply but opened fire when the cruiser was in comparatively short range of about 2000 yards. The first shots from the raider hit the cruiser's bridge and started a fire.

At that, the cruiser altered course to port, and the survivors stated that it appeared she intended to ram. She passed close under the stern of the raider and gradually drew astern, on the port side of the raider. By this time the cruiser was heavily on fire, burning on the bridge and mid ship section. The raider was also badly damaged and on fire in the engine room area. The action lasted about an hour and the raider abandoned ship about 1900 because they could not put the fire out.

At this time the cruiser was seen to be still heavily on fire and shortly afterwards disappeared. No violent explosions on the cruiser were seen or heard by the raider. They believed that three torpedoes were fired by the raider, one of which is thought to have hit. The raider blew up at midnight.

It was also ascertained that the raider carried six 15-centimetre guns, 2-centimetre AA guns, unmounted machine guns, 2 above water and 1 submerged torpedo tubes on each side. Additionally, it carried one seaplane of the Arado type, but this was stated to have been damaged and not flown for three months. About 150 to 200 mines were also carried, but none of these had been laid.

While this interrogation was being carried out, the search still continued. The air search went on, and one aircraft sighted a boat containing Germans. HMAS Yandra was directed to the position of this boat, and picked up 70 Germans and 2 Chinese.

Interrogation of these survivors was carried out by the Commanding officer, HMAS Yandra, and Surgeon Lieutenant Robertson, and information was gained about an interchange of signals between the two ships.

According to one man, the cruiser was abaft the starboard beam of the raider at a distance of 1300 yards. HMAS Sydney challenged the raider, who gave the false name of Straat Malacca, Dutch nationality. After an interchange and fumbling of signals to gain time, the raider was given the order to 'Proceed'. Immediately afterwards however, she was requested to 'Hoist the secret signal'. This, of course, they were unable to do, so the captain ordered action.

During this time the two ships were proceeding on parallel courses 1300 yards apart, and all the cruiser's guns and port torpedo tubes which would bear were trained on the raider. At the order 'Action', the German flag was broken out and all the guns and tubes that would bear were trained and fired. Apparently the raider fired first. Seconds later the cruiser fired, but her first salvo missed over. The raider's first salvo struck about 'B' turret and bridge and 'Y' turret.

The German stated that all salvos appeared to hit, and the cruiser took considerable time to find gun hitting range. Also on the 27th, Centaur arrived at Carnarvon with lifeboats in tow, and an aircraft reported sighting 3 pieces of white timber. Additionally, HMAS Wyrallah picked up a RAN type life belt in position 24 degrees 22' south, 110 degrees 49' east.

The search continued next day, and HMAS Wyrallah picked up a foreign lifebelt and 2 foreign type Carley floats and one dead German in the vicinity of 24 degrees 10' south, 110 degrees 54' east. Heros picked up a RAN type Carley float damaged by gunfire in position 24 degrees 07' south, 110 degrees 58' east.

The air search continued, and a Catalina reported sighting a patch of oil 5 miles south east of the position of the engagement. That was on November 28th, and on the next day, orders were received that the search was to cease on the conclusion of operations on the 29th, unless new sightings were reported or further intelligence received.

However, interrogation of prisoners continued at Fremantle. All the prisoners were segregated at Harvey Camp, and the examination was carried out by two teams, each consisting of a naval officer and two interpreters. The information required from this interrogation was – Movements in the Indian Ocean between June and November, details of supply organisations, details of neutral ports used, strategical policy, tactical action when attacking merchant shipping, any ruse de guerre employed, information of other raiders, and every possible item of information concerning the action and fate of the Sydney and her men.

To gain this information, indirect questioning was used so that the prisoners would not realise the purport of the answers they gave. The opening questions were arranged as follows: A – Where were you when the action started?; B – What time did you leave the ship?; C – How did you get away?; and D – Did you see the British cruiser? Thus, from this interrogation it was possible to get from the Germans an almost complete picture of the action. How far this account varied from the truth, however, is something that it would be almost impossible to establish.

For instance, they were unable to give any information as to the ultimate fate of HMAS Sydney.

From a careful sifting of the information available, however, the only conclusion that could be arrived at was that this gallant ship sank in flames some hours after the action, and that such members of the crew that were alive at this time were swallowed up by the sea.'

As a result of the decision by the Director of Naval Intelligence, the above account by Third Officer Westhoven was placed on a Naval Intelligence Division file where it remained unpublished.

Given the sustained research interest in seeking explanations for the *Sydney's* loss, Gill was prescient in his belief that in many minds there would never be any finality to the story. However, the continued opposition of the naval authorities to the release of information both during and after the war (discussed further in Chapter 5) might reasonably be argued to be one of the chief reasons for the perception that important information was being withheld.

Some unanswered questions

Given the wide ranging examination of records undertaken in the writing of this guide and the identification of many records for the first time, it is reasonable to ask whether this examination has identified new evidence that throws light on the sinking or whether it simply confirms what is already known.

While much new information has been located, overwhelmingly it appears to confirm or simply add detail to the substance of what has already been published. In a number of cases it appears to pose new questions. For example: Air Force records show that the Air Board had reason to believe that the *Sydney's* reconnaissance aircraft may have been in the air at the time of the engagement, and for this reason it delayed the official presumption of death of the six Air Force personnel on board until June 1942 (see 'RAAF Personnel'); the Central War Room received intelligence suggesting 'The intelligence'); and an Advisory War Council meeting in March 1942 discussed the findings of a Naval 'Court of Enquiry' about which no other documentary evidence has been located (see 'Was there a Naval Court of Enquiry?').

A description is provided below of some of this material as it relates to three areas that seem to be the focus of current research interest. More detailed information about the records from which the material comes is provided in later chapters.

What the Government knew

No documentary evidence has been found which suggests that officials or the Government itself had any explanation for the *Sydney's* loss other than that which was publicly disclosed in the weeks after the sinking, albeit with little detail.

The records show an administration that only slowly pieced together the story of what had happened. Reliant wholly upon the accounts of the German prisoners of war, which were slow to emerge and in some respects contradictory, the reaction in official circles was one of uncertainty as to the *Sydney's* fate. Scepticism about some aspects of the prisoners' accounts on the one hand, and an inability to

provide alternative explanations on the other, led the Prime Minister to state in his second and final public announcement on 3 December 1941 that

'In releasing this information [ie a reconstructed account of the action], I emphasise that, in the absence of any information from the Sydney, one side only is given from direct evidence. Certain of the aspects on board the Sydney must remain a matter of surmise as to details. The broad canvas can, however, be taken as giving an accurate picture.'²¹

The Prime Minister's statement suggests that the uncertainty of officials about the Sydney's fate was shared by those at the very highest levels of Government. This appears to be confirmed by the notes of the official notetaker present during the meetings of the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council (these notes are transcribed in full at Appendix 2), by the intelligence provided to the Government, and by comments made by R B M Long some years after the war, in private correspondence with G Hermon Gill.

At the first meeting of the War Cabinet at which the Sydney was discussed (26 November 1941) it was thought 'inconceivable' that the Sydney would have approached a raider at such close quarters, and that it was 'most unlikely that Sydney would be escorting ships' or that an officer 'of Burnett's perspicacity' would think that a ship would join up with his 'convoy in broad daylight', as the early interrogation reports suggested. After much discussion the Prime Minister intervened, observing that much of what was being said was conjecture and concluding that the Sydney was 'gone', and later, that 'Sydney seems to be sunk'.

Some present at the meetings were opposed to informing the next of kin of the Sydney's crew because this would 'give gratuitous information to the enemy', but the Prime Minister insisted that they should be informed, because it would be a 'bad thing' if relatives should get the news by rumour, and that the 'honest thing' was to advise the next of kin that they were missing. Despite the notification to the next of kin, two days later at a meeting of the Advisory War Council the Rt. Hon. W M Hughes expressed the belief that 'there must be some survivors'. Subsequent discussions of the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council continue to reflect little more than the substance of the official briefings and further speculation by those present.

The reason for the complete censorship ban on the publication of any information concerning the Sydney appears to have been because of the Navy's belief that there may have been a second raider in the area. As late as 1 December the War Cabinet thought it possible that there were two raiders, and it continued to restrict the information it released to that contained in the Prime Minister's public statement published on 1 December. However, by 4 December it had accepted that there was no second ship trailing the *Kormoran*.²² Nevertheless, intelligence summaries prepared by the Central War Room and the Combined Operational

²¹ Prime Ministerial press statement No. 89, 3 December 1941.

²² NAA: A9240, Set 2 Vol 4, Advisory War Council notebooks, meeting of 1 December 1941.

Intelligence Centre as late as 3 December refer to the possibility of a second raider or a supply ship seeking rendezvous with the *Kormoran*.²³

Eight years after the war the former Director of Naval Intelligence R B M Long confessed his own uncertainty about the *Sydney*'s fate. In 1953, responding to an invitation from G Hermon Gill to comment on Gill's draft of the chapter in the official war history dealing with the *Sydney*, Long remarked:

You probably know that I, personally, continued for over two years, a world search and on the flimsiest stories, for some indication as to the *Sydney*'s end.

He continued by briefly recounting two of these 'stories', and concluded 'It is correct to say that "not a stone was left unturned".' Long's remarks are quoted in full in chapter 6.²⁴

These records are among a number that appear to provide new insight into the inability of the Government itself to explain the loss of the *Sydney*.

Was there a Naval Court of Inquiry?

An obvious question is why no court of inquiry was held into the loss of the *Sydney*. Nothing in the records indicates that a court of inquiry was ever suggested or considered, and no proceedings of a court of inquiry have been found.

There is, however, one puzzling reference to a 'Court of Enquiry' in the records of the Advisory War Council. This occurred at a meeting of the Council on 18 March 1942. The minutes of this meeting note that

'In reply to an enquiry by the Prime Minister, the Chief of Naval Staff said that a Court of Enquiry had investigated the circumstances surrounding the loss of HMAS *Sydney*. Its conclusions were summarised by the Chief of Naval Staff as follows...'²⁵

A copy of the minutes of this meeting appears opposite. This is the only reference to a court of inquiry found in any of the records described in this guide.

The records of both the official notetaker and the Secretary to the Advisory War Council were examined to determine whether they help explain this reference. A copy of these notes appears below. The official notetaker recorded that the Prime Minister asked about a 'Court of enquiry' into the loss of the *Sydney* and that the Chief of Naval Staff responded by outlining the findings of what he called a 'full enquiry'. The notes of Frederick Shedden, the Secretary, refer to a 'Court of Inquiry'. It is not clear whether or not the CNS was reading from a document. The notes thus refer to a 'Court of Inquiry', a 'Court of enquiry' and a 'full inquiry', while the formal minutes of the meeting refer to a 'Court of Enquiry'.

²³ Naval Historical Section: B6227, Combined Operational Intelligence Centre – Daily summary of operational intelligence, and NAA: B6121, 775W/1, Weekly summaries of operational intelligence.

²⁴ AWM: AWM69, 228, *Official History, 1939–1945 War, series 2 (Navy), vol. 1, chapter 12* [Typescript marked 'Master Copy' and some correspondence].

²⁵ NAA: A5954, 813/2, Advisory War Council minute 842, 18 March 1942.

The Prime Minister may simply have been referring to a court of inquiry in the general sense of the word 'inquiry'. By the time of the Advisory War Council's meeting almost four months had elapsed since the Sydney's loss. With the enormous workload of the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council and their preoccupation by then with the threat of invasion to Australia, it is possible that the details of the investigation had receded from the minds of senior ministers, leading them to refer to it simply as a 'court of inquiry'. Faulty recollection is suggested by the reference to '200 Germans'. There were in fact 315, and according to Captain Farquhar-Smith, the District Naval Officer, Western Australia, all prisoners of war in Western Australia except the two who were hospitalised were interrogated. The figure of '200 Germans' therefore could not have been a reference to the number of prisoners interrogated.²⁶

It is also possible that a formal court of inquiry was not seen as necessary in the absence of eyewitnesses to the events other than the German survivors, who had already been interrogated in detail. Presumably a court of inquiry would have been able to elicit no more information than had already been revealed in the interrogation reports.

Whatever the interpretation, without any documentary evidence that a court of inquiry was held such explanations can only be conjecture.

If there was no court of inquiry, the question has to be asked to what was the Chief of Naval Staff referring when he told the Advisory War Council that a 'full inquiry' had been held, the findings of which he then proceeded to summarise.

No records of anything that could be described as a 'full inquiry' have been found. A large number of consolidated reports of the searches and interrogations exist, many of which were submitted to the Naval Board, but nothing that could be considered a comprehensive review or inquiry, formal or otherwise, into all the evidence and circumstances surrounding the Sydney's loss.

The nearest to what might be called a systematic examination of the evidence is the report of a Mr F B Eldridge, a senior master on the teaching staff at the Royal Australian Naval College, who in a voluntary capacity produced a report for the Naval Intelligence Division based on his examination of the material obtained from the interrogations.

The Eldridge report was exactly that, a report rather than an inquiry or investigation. In Eldridge's words it was

'based on a sifting of material provided by the Naval Interrogation carried out in Western Australia, checked and supplemented by the later enquiries carried out by Army (Southern Command).'

The Eldridge report was submitted to the Director of Naval Intelligence on 28 January 1942, who noted in his minute of 31 January to the Chief of Naval Staff that

²⁶ NAA: K997, 1/15/2, *HMAS Sydney/Kormoran* action, November 1941.

'The report has been checked through. There appear to be no errors.' The report was approved by the Chief of Naval Staff on 6 February, who also agreed with Commander Long's recommendation that 'Mr Eldridge be commended by the Naval Board for his work in the voluntary compilation of this Report.'²⁷

The only other identified source that may be the basis of the Chief of Naval Staff's reference to a 'full inquiry' is an investigation apparently conducted by Commander Emile Dechaineux, an officer of the Directorate of Naval Intelligence who was seconded to assist with the interrogations in Western Australia.

The only material evidence for the existence of this investigation is a single page attached to a Department of the Navy minute, addressed to the Chief of Naval Staff. The minute lists as Attachment A an *Interim Report of Investigation in [sic] the loss of HMAS Sydney by Commander Dechaineux*, but only page 2 of the attachment is present. All but page 1 of the covering Department of the Navy minute is also missing, making it impossible to determine who submitted the minute and the date on which it was signed.²⁸ Nor has anything resembling the final report been found. The following pages contain copies of excerpts from Advisory War Minute No. 843 of 18 March 1942, and copies of notes from the Advisory War Council meeting of the same date.

²⁷ NAA: MP1185/8, 2026/19/6, Loss of HMAS Sydney – report by Mr F B Eldridge on interrogation of survivors of [the] Kormoran.

²⁸ NAA: MP1049/5, 2026/19/6, Interrogation of German survivors ex raider 41 Kormoran.

MINUTES

o f

ADVISORY WAR COUNCIL MEETING.CANBERRA, 18th MARCH, 1942.

PRESENT: The Hon. John Curtin, M.P., Prime Minister, Minister for Defence Co-ordination, and Acting Minister for External Affairs.
The Hon. F.M. Forde, M.P., Minister for the Army.
The Hon. J.B. Chifley, M.P., Treasurer.
The Hon. J.A. Beasley, M.P., Minister for Supply and Development, and Acting Attorney-General.
The Hon. N.J.O. Makin, M.P., Minister for the Navy, and Minister for Munitions.
The Rt. Hon. W.M. Hughes, C.H., K.C., M.P.
The Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies, K.C., M.P.
The Hon. P.C. Spender, K.C., M.P.
The Hon. J. McEwen, M.P.

(The Chief of the Naval Staff, the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, and the Chief of the Air Staff were also present at this meeting).

LOSS OF H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY".

6. In reply to an enquiry by the Prime Minister, the Chief of the Naval Staff said that a Court of Enquiry had investigated the circumstances surrounding the loss of H.M.A.S. "Sydney". Its conclusions were summarised by the Chief of the Naval Staff as follows :-

"The 'Sydney' had worked into a position approximately 1500 yards from the raider. The raider opened fire and launched two torpedoes, one of which hit the 'Sydney'. The raider had given a wrong name and was not on the daily list. The Captain of the 'Sydney' was 24 hours late in arriving at his rendezvous and had taken a risk in getting so close to the raider. In doing so he had not followed his orders.

"Further, the Gunnery Officer of the 'Sydney' was not ready. He should have been able to fire first and get in two salvos before the raider attacked."


Secretary.


PRIME MINISTER.

Excerpts from Advisory War Council Minute 842, 18 March 1942.

NAA: A5954, 813/2

The records of the Advisory War Council are described in more detail in chapter 4.

"Sydney" Logbook

Am four top engines

CNS full engines - 200 German
I have full details

Conclusions - Syd take up position

15 gas starboard quarter - Gen opened
fire 2 torpedoes one hit -
burning how got into position -Capt Bailey to get back & took up
position in this respect - Sunny off
not ready - 2 actions. Syd shot

have been able to fire first

German ship alone - Capon

has orders how to treat

Naval Council at H.E.I.

The official note taker's record of the Advisory War Council meeting on 18 March 1942. These notes were used to help draft the formal minutes of the meeting.

NAA: A9240, Set 1 Vol 2, Notes on meetings - Advisory War Council [and War Cabinet], 1942.

16 cruisers
28 destroyers
"Sydney" - Court of Enquiry held.
Conclusions - Sydney
took a position about

842
(Cont'd.)

1500 on submarine beam 542
known fired shots & torpedoes, one of which hit
ships. 24 hrs late in response.
ships had given wrong name - not on
daily list. took a mark Capt &
low officer - Commander officer not
ready - Sydney should have
been able to fire first & get in
two shots. - Capt did not
follow his orders
Mach. Verch & others - loss of
this work
to add in notes - 2 - 4 Feb

Notes of the same meeting taken by Frederick Shedden, the Secretary of the Advisory War Council.

NAA: A5954, 213/2, Advisory War Council Notes, Volume 4, 28/11/41-16/4/42.

A full transcript of all the relevant War Cabinet and Advisory War Council notebooks appears at appendix 2.

According to the author Tom Frame, Commander Dechaineux:

'bore responsibility for drafting the Naval Intelligence report, as background notes to assist in his preparation of a report for the Naval Board... Dechaineux ... produced an admirable report which attempted to draw together into a coherent narrative all that the Germans had said. It was completed on 16 January 1942.'²⁹

Frame is the only author known to have mentioned the report. Despite an extensive search, which included the records of the Naval Board held in archival custody, the Archives has failed to locate the report.

²⁹ Frame, T, op. cit., pp. 94–95. Although Frame quotes from the report, he fails to provide a citation. Despite a detailed search of the files referred to in his surrounding citations, the Archives has failed to locate the report. The files searched are NAA: B6121, 164K, B6121, 164L, B6121, 164M, B6121, 164N and MP1185/8, 2026/19/6. All these items are described later in this guide. The only possibly relevant record located was the first page of a document headed 'Report by Commander Deschaineux [sic]', which begins 'The following is a summary of the evidence collected from various sources'. Page 2 and any subsequent pages are missing (see B6121, 164M, above). What appears to be a complete copy of this document is in NAA: K997, 1/15/2 (see footnote 31). A 'dossier of further information obtained between 20th December 1941 and 16th January 1942' appears on NAA: B6121, 164M. Given the date of 16 January, this may have been an attachment to, or source of material for, Dechaineux's report.

An inquiry made of Frame in January 1997 was equally unproductive, with the author being unable to recall where he saw the report, and able to suggest only that it may have been in G. Hermon Gill's records held by the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.³⁰ A search of what appear to be the most relevant files in this series was conducted, without success. Those of Gill's papers which were found to contain any information of relevance to the Sydney are described in Chapters 6 and 10.

The portions of Dechaineux's report quoted by Frame suggest that Dechaineux's reconstruction of the action was based substantially on the interrogation of the 25 survivors picked up by the Trocas. Because the Trocas had proceeded directly to Fremantle after picking up the survivors at sea they had less chance to mingle with the other prisoners, and therefore their account was presumably given more credence. The major portion of the report quoted by Frame coincides almost word for word with the description of the action given by the survivors rescued by the Trocas. This description was telephoned to the Naval Board on 27 November by Commander Ramage, the Senior Naval Intelligence officer in Fremantle.³¹

On the basis of the unsuccessful searches undertaken by the Archives, it is possible that the report of the investigation by Commander Dechaineux completed on 16 January 1942 is not in archival custody. Evidence that official records found their way into private hands is evidenced by the papers of Captain J L Hehir, of the Australian Intelligence Corps, AIF, which were deposited with the Australian War Memorial after his death. These contain the sketches or 'cryptograms' of Dr Fritz List discovered at Murchison prisoner of war camp in early 1942, and other information obtained from the prisoners under interrogation, all of which are clearly official records.³² It is also noted that Montgomery makes reference to a report of Commander Ramage that was 'obtained privately, it having been withheld from naval archives.'³³

Did the Sydney send a distress signal?

With almost five days between the battle and the beginning of the search, the likelihood of finding survivors from the *Sydney* was significantly diminished. Had *Sydney* managed to transmit a distress signal and had this been picked up, it would possibly have resulted in the recovery of survivors.

At the first meeting of the War Cabinet to discuss the *Sydney*'s disappearance, held in Canberra on 26 November, one of the ministers present or possibly the Chief of Naval Staff conjectured that *Sydney*'s 'dynamo may have failed and couldn't send messages.' Such conjecture would suggest that no-one present at

³⁰ AWM: AWM69, Official history, 1939-45 War, series 2 (Navy): Records of G Hermon Gill.

³¹ NAA: K997, 1/15/2, *HMAS Sydney/Kormoran* action, November 1941. This file also contains a three-page 'summary of the evidence collected from various sources' prepared by Commander Dechaineux on 30 November.

³² AWM: PR88/178, *Kormoran* (2) – Interrogation reports from the crew of the raider *Kormoran*.

³³ Montgomery, op. cit., p. 122.

the meeting had any knowledge of a signal or other message having been received from the *Sydney*.

Of the records described in this guide only one suggests, inconclusively, that the *Sydney* may have sent such a message. Central War Room Weekly Summary No. WS/29 for the week ended 1 December 1941, produced by the Combined Operational Intelligence Centre, includes a five-page appendix titled *A Report on the action between HMAS Sydney and Raider Kormoran – 19 November 1941, and estimated movements of Raider*. Page 1 of the appendix states:

Subsequent intelligence suggests that HMAS *Sydney* sent out a weak and corrupt 'Q' distress message under extreme difficulties on 19/11. This is being investigated.³⁴

The record containing this reference is described in chapter 2. No further mention of the *Sydney* having sent such a signal has been identified in the records.

It is unclear why those preparing the intelligence summary should have thought that the *Sydney*, a warship, may have sent a Q message. The message referred to could possibly have been the Q message sent twice by the *Kormoran* just before the battle commenced, supposedly to confuse the *Sydney*, although a variety of interpretations have been placed on Detmers' actions in sending the signals. These messages are recorded as having been picked up by the tug *Uco* and by radio Geraldton. The archival evidence for the *Sydney* having been the source of the distress signal mentioned in the weeklies is thus inconclusive.

It is noted that the Eldridge report on the loss of the *Sydney*, concludes with the following observation:

The first definite information to the outside world was received at 0816Z/24th when the Tanker Trocas reported by W/T that twenty-five German Naval men on a floating raft had been picked up in position 25 degrees 06 minutes South, 111 degrees 40 minutes East.³⁵

One document that mentions the non-receipt of any signals is a report to the Naval Board dated 2 December 1941 from the Commodore in Charge, HMA Naval Establishments, Sydney (Commodore G C Muirhead-Gould), who interviewed the captain of the transport *Aquitania* to determine why it had not reported until four days later its recovery of the German survivors on 23 November.

The *Aquitania* had been the first to become aware of the battle. One of the reasons the *Aquitania*'s captain gave for not breaking wireless telegraphy (W/T) silence was that:

There had been no distress signals, no enemy action signals, no Raider, no Submarine, no Aircraft signals, or anything hostile that I could clear myself with for breaking Wireless silence.

³⁴ NAA: B6121, 775W/1, Combined Operational Intelligence Centre – Weekly Summaries of Operational Intelligence, 1941. 'Q' messages (or more correctly QQQQ messages) were distress signals used by merchant vessels to indicate that they were being attacked by a disguised merchant raider.

³⁵ NAA: MP1185/8, 2026/19/6, Loss of HMAS *Sydney* – report by Mr F B Eldridge on interrogation of survivors of *Kormoran*.

In his assessment of the report submitted to the Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, Commander Dechaineux observed:

the fact that no enemy action signals were heard is not significant, as HT Aquitania would not be on the same frequency as that on which action signals are made.³⁶

An Air Force intelligence file described in chapter 2, AA1969/100, 2/18/INT, Squadrons involved in Search for HMAS Sydney, contains two pages of handwritten notes that appear to substantiate claims that a message alleged to be from the *Sydney* was heard on short-wave radio at the Esplanade Hotel in Geraldton. These notes may be among those alleged to have been seen by a Mr Gordon Laffer on an official file that 'was allegedly sent to Canberra after the war'.³⁷ Images of these notes appear in Chapter 2.

Extracts of the message appear in the log book of the South West Area Combined Headquarters (SWACH), (K809, which is described in chapter 2). The date/time groups on the transcribed version of the message and the corresponding SWACH log book entries would appear to confirm that the message was transmitted over two weeks after the engagement, and that it was a transmission from the Postmaster General Sydney to PMG Darwin, inexplicable though the text of the message seems in that context.

Finally, there is nothing in the records to corroborate the claim by Chief Petty Officer Robert Mason that a signal was received from the *Sydney* by the Naval Communications Station HMAS Harman in Canberra just prior to the battle.

Mason claims that the *Sydney* made a report via ship-shore communications to the operations room at HMAS Harman that it had 'bailed up a quere [sic] customer' in the Indian Ocean and was trying to identify her, and later, that the *Sydney* was 'about to open fire'. Mason claims that:

there certainly was another and last message and indeed a number of people actually heard it at a distance as the headsets lay on the desk – the operator had briefly left the ship-shore channel unmonitored, with both headsets lying on the desk – 3 or 4 people including a couple of WRANS heard a short message being transmitted but being several yards away could not recognise it.

Mason claims that the message was not acted on because of a serious breach in operations room protocol (ie the operator having left the headsets) and that for this reason most of the staff were sworn to secrecy.³⁸ Mason thought that HMAS Harman was the only station monitoring the ship-shore channel.

If Mason's claims are true, it seems unlikely that they would be verified by official records. Nevertheless, an attempt was made in the compilation of this guide to locate the ship's log and signal log for HMAS Harman for the relevant period. Logs are held by the National Archives and the Australian War Memorial for a number of

³⁶ NAA: MP1185/8, 2026/3/453, *Recovery of survivors of Kormoran by HT Aquitania*.

³⁷ Frame, op. cit., pp. 187–191.

³⁸ *Memoirs, 1941–1981* (Manuscript MS7460), National Library of Australia, pp42–51

ships and shore establishments but not for HMAS Harman. A check has confirmed that they are not held by the Naval Historical Section in the Department of Defence or by HMAS Harman itself. Their whereabouts is not known.

2 The Sydney's last voyage

Arrivals, departures and movements

On the afternoon of Wednesday, 5 November 1941 HMAS *Sydney* rendezvoused with HMAS *Adelaide* and the troop transport *Zealandia* in the Great Australian Bight. The *Zealandia* was bound from Sydney to Singapore with almost 1000 reinforcements of the 8th Australian Division. HMAS *Sydney*'s task was to take over escort of the *Zealandia* from HMAS *Adelaide* and escort the troopship to the Sunda Strait. After leaving King George Sound on 5 November, the two ships reached Fremantle at 6.50 am on Sunday, 9 November, departing again two days later for the Sunda Strait where escort responsibility for the *Zealandia* was transferred from HMAS *Sydney* to HMS *Durban* on 17 November. Her task completed, HMAS *Sydney* sailed south again, headed for Fremantle where she was due to arrive on the afternoon or evening of Thursday, 20 November. The *Sydney* was not heard from again.

The arrival, departure and other movement details of the *Sydney* and the *Zealandia* are held in a variety of shipping registers, Royal Australian Navy (RAN) daily movement records, daily narratives, war diaries³⁹ and merchant vessel movement cards. These records are described in this chapter. Though giving little more than an outline, they provide a chronological record of the vessels' movements, and in the case of the *Sydney*, they reflect the convoy duty upon which the ship was largely engaged during her last month of service.

More interesting are records that provide some insight into aspects of the two vessels' operations during their last voyage together. For example, the industrial trouble among the crew of the *Zealandia* which delayed her departure from Sydney until 29 October continued when the transport arrived in Fremantle. The Navy Office War Diary for Tuesday, 11 November records:

HMAS Sydney sailed Fremantle 1340H [ie 1.40 pm local time], escorting Zealandia to Sunda Strait. Zealandia, owing to crew trouble, the cause of which is at present unknown, has delayed her departure from Fremantle. Six firemen left the ship yesterday and three only have been obtained to replace them, but it is anticipated that the numbers will be completed and she will depart today escorted by HMAS Sydney.⁴⁰

When she finally left Fremantle under *Sydney*'s escort on 11 November, the *Zealandia* was 13 days overdue.

While some records (such as HMAS *Sydney*'s ships' books⁴¹) remained ashore, others, such as her ledger, signal log and war diary, were carried on board.

³⁹ The *Sydney*'s last monthly war diary, for October 1941, was signed by Captain Burnett on 5 November, the day the *Sydney* took over escort of the *Zealandia* in King George Sound. It is held in the Australian War Memorial as AWM78.329/1.

⁴⁰ NAA: B6230, Navy Office War Diary, 1939–43.

⁴¹ These books, containing such details as engineering specifications, performance trials and repairs and refits, are held for each major RAN vessel by the NAA as series A4141, Her Majesty's Australian Ships' books and supplements, 1911–

Following her loss, her ledger in particular was needed in order to be able to calculate the amounts paid to each member of the ship's company, and therefore the monies that were owing to their estates. On 4 December the next of kin were advised that some time would elapse before this information was known.

Great efforts were subsequently made to reconstruct the missing ledger from other records held in Navy Office. The task was made more difficult by the fact that the last fortnightly pay for the members of the *Sydney's* company was issued at sea on 13 November, two days after they left Fremantle. In addition, a large quantity of bank notes was held on board at the time of sailing, the value of which was calculated by Navy Office to be £7900/2/3. The reconstructed ledger and the file recording how the task was undertaken are described in this chapter.

Other vessels that rendezvoused with the *Sydney* during her last voyage, or which were later to play a role in the aftermath of her loss, are also mentioned in the records described in this chapter. For example, the Navy Office Daily Narratives record that HMS *Durban* sailed from Singapore on Friday, 14 November 'to relieve HMAS *Sydney* as escort in vicinity of Sunda Strait' and that the *Aquitania* departed Singapore on 19 November. On 20 November, the day the *Sydney* was due back in Fremantle, the *Zealandia* arrived in Singapore.⁴²

Signal communications

At 1.32 pm on Tuesday, 11 November, eight minutes before she departed Fremantle with the *Zealandia* again under escort, HMAS *Sydney* transmitted her last confirmed signal. This was a routine reply to the Flag Officer Commanding the Australian Squadron (FOCAS). From then and for the duration of her voyage *Sydney* maintained normal wireless telegraphy (W/T) silence.

At 12.22 pm, just over one hour earlier, *Sydney* had advised the Commander in Chief, China Station that because of her delayed departure from Fremantle, her rendezvous with HMS *Durban* in the Sunda Strait should be revised to Monday, 17 November. In a further signal four minutes later she advised the Naval Board, FOCAS and the District Naval Officer, Western Australia to amend her estimated time of arrival back in Fremantle from Tuesday, 18 November to the afternoon or evening of Thursday, 20 November. These were among the last five signals transmitted by the *Sydney*.

A total of 10 signals were transmitted to the *Sydney* after her departure from Fremantle. The last two signals, sent on 14 November by the Naval Board, passed on personal messages to two of the *Sydney's* crew. Most poignant of these was the message to Leading Seaman Stanley Roy Davis: 'Son born both well.'

Copies of these signals are to be found in the inward and outward signal packs of the Department of Defence Co-ordination.⁴³ These signal packs, which are described in this chapter, constitute almost 200 shelf metres of records.

⁴² NHS: B6226, *Daily Narratives*, 1939–54.

⁴³ NAA: MP1074/1, Classified outward signals, 1939–64, and MP1074/4, Unclassified inward signals, 1939–64.

To identify all signal traffic passing to or from the *Sydney*, the NAA has conducted a search of these signal packs for messages sent and received between 11 and 20 November 1941 inclusive, the period during which any signals sent by the *Sydney* after her departure from Fremantle would have been transmitted. No signals either to or from the *Sydney* during this period, other than those described, have been found.

As might be expected given the large quantity of signal packs, they contain a number of other signals that relate to the search or other events that followed the *Sydney's* disappearance. However, because these were transmitted after 20 November, and therefore are unlikely to have come from the *Sydney*, signal packs after this date have not been systematically search.

The claims of a distress signal sent by the *Sydney* after her engagement with the *Kormoran* and the absence of conclusive archival evidence for this are discussed in chapter 1 of this guide. The official sources themselves, inconclusive as they are, are described in this chapter; they are:

- K809, South West Area Combined Headquarters Log Book, 1941-42 (whole series)
- AWM64, 0/2, RAAF Central War Room operations diary, 1941-42
- B6121, 775W/1, Combined Operational Intelligence Centre – weekly summaries of operational intelligence, 1941
- AA1969/100, 2/18/INT, Squadrons involved in search for HMAS Sydney, 1941-78.

The claim by Robert Mason that a signal from the *Sydney* was received by the Naval Communications Station HMAS Harman in Canberra just before the action is also discussed in chapter 1.

The remainder of this chapter describes the records associated with the *Sydney's* last voyage.

Arrivals, departures and movements

DAILY NARRATIVES, 1939–1954

B6226

Recorded by:

1939–1954 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)

NHS 0.09 metres

DAILY NARRATIVES, 1939–1954

B6226

The Daily Narratives were intelligence summaries of the previous day's naval activities on the Australia Station. Each narrative was based on intelligence received up to 9am on the day it was compiled and was submitted to the Director of Naval Intelligence. The information in the narratives is almost identical to that recorded in the Navy Office War Diary for the previous day (the War Diary is described in Chapter 3 – see series B6230). The Daily Narratives and the Navy Office War Diary provide a continuous (but brief) chronology of the events.

The narratives are typewritten carbon copies. The whereabouts of the originals is not known. Although once filed, the Naval Historical Section has had them bound in

volumes to slow their deterioration. Those dated 10 Nov to 1 Dec 1941 and 1 to 26 February 1942 were examined.

Volume: 7 September 1941 – 31 January 1942 [1.5cm] B6226, NN

Five narratives in this volume relate in some way to the *Sydney's* last voyage. The relevant extracts are given below since they are not readily accessible, still being held by the Naval Historical Section in the Department of Defence in Canberra. A further seven narratives in this volume relate to the search and rescue, but since their content is virtually identical to that of the War Diary, their text is given in chapter 3 under the description of the War Diary. Where no text is given for a particular date, it may be assumed that the narrative for that date contains nothing of relevance.

Narrative of Monday, 10 Nov 1941: *Sydney* escorting HT *Zealandia* arrived Fremantle 0830 yesterday.

Narrative of Tuesday, 11 Nov 1941: *Sydney* after escorting *Zealandia* from Fremantle to R.V. [rendezvous] intends returning to Fremantle PM 19 November or AM 20 November.

Narrative of Wednesday, 12 Nov 1941: *Sydney* sailed Fremantle 1340H/11th November, escorting *Zealandia* to Sunda Strait.

Narrative of Friday, 14 Nov 1941: HMS *Durban* sails PM today from Singapore to relieve HMAS *Sydney* as escort in vicinity of Sunda Strait, escorting *Zealandia* thence to Singapore.

Narrative of Saturday, 22 Nov 1941: *Aquitania* departed Singapore 19 November for Sydney. ETA 1300/28. *Zealandia* arrived Singapore 20 November where she proceeds Darwin to embark troops proceeding on Xmas leave.

The Navy Office War Diary, described in Chapter 3, picks up the events from 24 November.

RAN SHIP MOVEMENT SHEETS, C1910 – C1987

B6258

Recorded by:

1939–1954 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)

NHS 0.09 metres

This series records the movements of RAN ships. The information is presented in typewritten lists filed alphabetically, by ship name. Each sheet has information in chronological order under four headings: Port, Arrived, Left and Remarks. The information appears to have been obtained from other records and typed onto these movement lists at some later time. The lists are stored loosely in Bantex foolscap box files.

**RAN Ship Movement lists – HMAS Sydney (24 Sep 1935 – 11 Nov 1941)
B6258, NN**

There are 8 sheets recording the movements of HMAS *Sydney*. The final entry is recorded as 'Sunk 19/11/41 in action with raider *Kormoran*, herself sunk.'

**DAILY MOVEMENTS, HMA SHIPS AND AUXILIARIES, AUSTRALIA STATION
B6259**

Recorded by:

1939–1954 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)

NHS 0.09 metres

Daily movement forms recorded the daily location and movements of each vessel on the Australia Station as well as HMA Ships abroad. The forms were completed in typescript and were headed *Daily Movements HMA Ships and Auxiliaries Australia Station*. The movement forms are arranged in chronological order, in bound volumes.

Volume: 1 November – 31 December 1941 B6259, NN

The entries in this volume against HMAS *Sydney* beginning Tuesday, 4 November 1941 reflect the convoy duty on which the ship was engaged during her last month.

Sat 1

Fremantle. Sails today escorting *Duntroon* to 120 degrees East

Sun 2

Fremantle to 120 degrees escorting *Duntroon* and *Talabot*

Mon 3

As for Monday 3rd

Tue 4

King George Sound – escort *Zealandia*

Wed 5

No entry

Thur 6

Proceeding to Fremantle

Fri 7 – Sat 8

Escorting *Zealandia* to Fremantle

Sun 9

Escorting *Zealandia* to Fremantle – Expects to arrive AM 9th Nov

Mon 10

Fremantle

Tue 11

Fremantle – Anticipates departing today escorting *Zealandia* – Returns PM 19th Nov or AM 20th Nov

Wed 12

Sailed Fremantle 1340H/11 escorting *Zealandia*

Thur 13 – Wed 19

Escorting *Zealandia* to Sunda Strait

Thur 20

Returning to Fremantle from escorting *Zealandia*

Fri 21

Returning to Fremantle from escorting *Zealandia*

Sat 22 – Mon 24

Returning to Fremantle from escort duty

Tue 25 – Wed 26

Overdue Fremantle from escort duty

From 27 November there are no further entries for the *Sydney*. After 30 November the *Sydney's* name on each pro forma is struck through, with nothing further entered against her name.

**INWARDS AND OUTWARDS SHIPPING REGISTERS & RELATED INDEXES (FREMANTLE),
1898–1959 PP158/1****Recorded by:****1898–1959 Collector of Customs, Western Australia (CA 808)****Perth; microfilms in all offices 1.98 metres****Register of Shipping Arrivals and Departures for Port of Fremantle, 1937–1943
PP158/1, Volume 10**

This volume contains details of ships arriving at and departing from Fremantle. It records the *Sydney* arriving at 6.50 am on 9 November 1941 and departing two days later at 1.40 pm. The *Zealandia* is also recorded as arriving and departing on the same dates. Her departure time is shown as 12.35 pm, just over an hour earlier than the *Sydney*, presumably because of her slower speed. Also shown arriving and departing are a number of the naval and merchant vessels that later participated in the search and rescue operations. The microfilm copy held in each state office of the Archives has a different control number, and should be ordered as K737.

SHIPS' LEDGERS, HMA SHIPS, 1911–1956**A4624****Recorded by:****1939–1956 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Canberra 200 metres****Reconstructed ledger of HMAS Sydney for period 1/10/1941 – 20/11/1941
A4624, NN**

Sydney's ship's ledger was one of the documents carried on board. In early December 1941, after the Prime Minister's announcement that HMAS *Sydney* had been lost, the Director of Naval Accounts began reconstructing a summary of the *Sydney's* ledger. This was a necessary step in calculating the amounts owing to the ship's company and the monies due to the estates of the deceased.

The reconstructed ledger lists each member of the crew and against their name records their seniority and rank, period of full pay and entitlements, extra pay, allowances, charges, allotments, payments on account, overpayments, clothing, deferred pay, qualifications and next of kin. The item consists of 87 pages of ledger, 18 pages of summary ledger accounts and a 10-page nominal index of crew. Some insight into how the ledger was reconstructed is provided in MP151/1, 474/208/455, described below.

Please note that these ledgers are too large to be digitised.

GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE FILES, 1923–1950**MP151/1****Recorded by:****1939–1950 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Melbourne; photocopy in Canberra 132.17 metres**

This series was described in chapter 2.

**HMAS Sydney. Reconstruction of Ledger, 2 Dec 1941 – 18 Nov 1943
MP151/1, 474/208/455**

Because the Sydney's quarterly ledger commencing on 1 October was on the ship at the time of its loss, no information was available about the pay details of each member of the ship's company for the period 1 October – 19 November 1941. However, reconstructed accounts from information in Navy Office showed that for pay days 2, 16 and 30 October 1941, the ship's company had been paid a total of £2725, £2781/15/9, and £2552/18/6 respectively. The next fortnightly payment would have been issued at sea on 13 November.

This file records the details of investigations by the Director of Naval Accounts to help him reconstruct the Sydney's ledger in order to determine the amounts owing to the members of the ship's company, and the calculation of the amount of money in bank notes held on board at the time the ship sailed on 11 November.

The correspondence on the file includes inquiries to the District Naval Officer in Fremantle to ascertain whether certain documents were left in Fremantle by the Sydney prior to sailing; and approval by the Treasury in March 1942 of a recommendation by the Department of the Navy to:

- credit each member with full pay and allowances up to and including 20 November
- debit any allotments or other debits for which there was definite proof for this period
- to pay any remaining balance to the next of kin.

The Treasury agreed 'that the Commonwealth would not be justified in making any debits against the personnel for the pay day occurring at sea on 13 November.'

The file also contains approximately 80 kit lists for members of the crew of the HMAS Wallaroo, which was sunk in a collision with a merchant vessel off the coast of Western Australia on 11 June 1943. The kit lists were used to calculate the amount of reimbursement owed to the members of the ship's crew for their items of kit lost in the accident. Why the kit lists appear on this file is unknown, since there is no apparent connection between these and the other papers on the file. They are of interest in that they appear to show that white canvas shoes were an authorised kit item for RAN ratings. The significance of this is discussed in chapter 9 of this guide.

Signal communications

The signals described below in series MP1074/1 and MP1074/4 include the only signals confirmed to have been received from the Sydney. All five signals were received prior to her departure from Fremantle with the Zealandia at 1.40 pm on Tuesday, 11 November. Also described are the 10 signals sent to the Sydney after her departure, the last of which was transmitted at 7.08 pm on Friday, 14 November.

Also described are items in a further four series that suggest, or which have been used by some as a basis for suggesting, that the Sydney transmitted a distress signal at the time of her engagement with the Kormoran. The archival evidence for this is discussed on p. 30.

CLASSIFIED OUTWARD SIGNALS (CONFIDENTIAL), 1939–1964**MP1074/1****Recorded by:****1939–1942 Department of Defence Coordination (CA 37)****Melbourne 108.54 metres****Classified outward signals 12/11/1941 MP1074/1, OUT 12/11/1941**

Concerns *Sydney's* failure to report the movement of six engine room ratings and reminds the *Sydney* to comply with Navy Orders. The second signal, 0311Z, also sent by the Naval Board, sends details of the W/T instructions to be observed by *Sydney* before and after her rendezvous with HMS *Durban*.

Classified outward signals 14/11/1941 MP1074/1, OUT 14/11/1941

This pack contains two signals sent to the *Sydney* by the Naval Board. Signals 0747Z and 1108Z contain personal messages for Gunner Frank Leslie MacDonald (RN) and Leading Seaman Stanley Roy Davis.

UNCLASSIFIED INWARD SIGNALS, 1939–1964**MP1074/4****Recorded by:****1939–1942 Department of Defence Coordination (CA 37)****Melbourne 190.26 metres****Unclassified inward signals 11/11/1941 MP1074/4, IN 11/11/1941**

This pack contains five signals sent by the *Sydney* before her departure and two signals sent to the *Sydney* after her departure.

Signals sent by the *Sydney*:

- 0135Z – to Naval Board and HMAS Leeuwin – partly corrupt – concerns discharge of sailor to shore.
- 0422Z – to Commander in Chief, China Station, Naval Board, FOCAS and DNO WA notifying of revised position and time for rendezvous with HMS *Durban* on 17 November.
- 0426Z – advising Naval Board, FOCAS and DNO WA of amended ETA Fremantle now PM Thursday [20 November].
- 0530Z – advice to Naval Board that Engineer-Lieut William Anderson and Paymaster Sub-Lieut Charles Mitchell joined the *Sydney* on 9 November.
- 0532Z – reply to signal from FOCAS of 29 October.

Signals sent to the *Sydney*:

- 0752Z – request for technical information
- 0905Z – from Commander in Chief, China Station acknowledging receipt of *Sydney's* 0422Z, which notified of her revised position and time for rendezvous with HMS *Durban*.

Unclassified inward signals 12/11/1941 MP1074/4, IN 12/11/1941

Contains one signal sent by HMAS *Leeuwin* to the *Sydney*, 0345Z (concerning two Stokers sentenced to 60 days detention).

Unclassified inward signals 13/11/1941 MP1074/4, IN 13/11/1941

Contains two signals sent to the *Sydney*, 0321Z (from Commander in Chief, China Station, to HMS *Durban*, repeated to HMAS *Sydney* and Naval Board, giving Durban instructions for the time and place of rendezvous with HMAS *Sydney*); and 0409Z (concerning the proposed posting of a number of RAN ratings to an officers' training course at HMAS *Cerberus* immediately upon the *Sydney's* return to Fremantle on 20 November).

Unclassified inward signals 14/11/1941 MP1074/4, IN 14/11/1941

Contains one signal sent to the *Sydney* (and other RAN vessels) by FOCAS, 0326Z (concerning an increase in the pay of Air Force personnel by 1 shilling per day).

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE UNIT RECORDS, 1937–1961

AA1969/100

Recorded by:

1939–1961 Department of Air (CA 35)

Canberra 37.74 metres

Squadrons involved in Search for HMAS Sydney [87 pages, 8 Nov 1941 – 11 Jul 1978] AA1969/100, 2/18/INT

This file, which is held by the RAAF Historical Section in the Department of Defence, was compiled by the RAAF Intelligence Section (Headquarters, Western Area). It deals mainly with the RAAF search operations for HMAS *Sydney*, and is described in detail in Chapter 3.

The file contains two pages of handwritten notes seemingly unrelated to the search operations. These notes, images of which are reproduced in this chapter, would appear to give substance to claims that a message alleged to be from *Sydney* was heard over short wave at Geraldton, although the apparent date of the notes would appear to make this impossible. Extracts of these notes also appear in the log book of the South West Area Combined Headquarters – see series K809, described below.

RAAF FORMATION AND UNIT RECORD

AWM64

Recorded by:

1939–1960 Department of Air, Central Office (CA 35)

Australian War Memorial (AWM) 27 metres

**RAAF Central War Room operations diary [5cm, 6 Nov 1941 – 3 Apr 1942]
AWM64, O/2**

This war diary records the signal traffic passing through the Central War Room. For the dates the diary was examined (19 November to 6 December 1941, pages 23–55 inclusive) the details of many relevant messages were located. Those related to the search and rescue operations are described in Chapter 3. Of particular interest is the following message recorded in the diary for 27 November concerning the receipt of 'Q' messages by the tug *Uco* and by Geraldton radio: 0748Z 27/11. ACH Fremantle. Z53 27/11. Following now reported. On 19/11 at 1003Z Tug *Uco* in position 26 degrees 45 minutes South 113 degrees 20 minutes East heard faint

signal QQ remainder unintelligible and at 1005Z QQQQ and unintelligible group of figures badly made possibly containing figures 110 followed by 1000 GMT (H) I.C.W. note strength 526 [this was corrected to '5 to 6' in a later signal] estimated by operator within 300 miles. Geraldton radio reports that at 1005Z 19/11 they received weak message strength 2 begins unintelligible then 7C 11115E 1000GMT ends. Could not estimate distance. No Qs distinguished. Waited 2 minutes no repetition. At 1015Z 19/11 Geraldton sent out message to ships asking if anything to report but received no reply.'

HISTORICAL RECORDS FILES, 1875–ONGOING**B6121****Recorded by:****1943–73 Navy Office, Department of the Navy, Historical Section (CA 38)****National Archives, Melbourne; NHS Canberra 23.81 metres**

The records in this series cover a wide range of topics, although most relate to World War II. The series was originally compiled to provide source material for G. Hermon Gill, the author of the naval volumes in the Australian official history of World War II. Most of the material had been assembled by 1950, and reflecting Gill's own background, many of the records in the series are held in Naval Intelligence Division file covers.

In many cases the records appear to have been removed from their original departmental files without regard for preserving the provenance or original order of the material. In later years new material was added and the series grew over time as records were added by the Navy Historical Section for its own reference purposes. The records include many from different sections of the Department of the Navy, and from outside sources as well, bundled together according to subject.

Reflecting their provenance, many of the papers in series B6121 carry the file numbers of the original departmental files from which they were taken. Sometimes whole files appear to have been removed from the departmental registry system and incorporated into the series. As a consequence of the way in which the series was compiled, the content of individual files is often erratic, with little or no structure or evidence of original order.

This series was previously identified as MP1587/1. In 1996 the Archives carried out a 'serialisation' (re-cataloguing) of the series, which involved giving it the new series number B6121.

Combined Operational Intelligence Centre – weekly summaries of operational intelligence B6121, 775W/1

In addition to the daily intelligence summaries produced by the Combined Operational Intelligence Centre (see B6227 described in chapter 6), the Centre also produced a weekly intelligence summary (held in B6121). The summary for the week ended 1 December 1941 (Central War Room Weekly Summary No. WS/29) carries an item headed 'Indian Ocean – Destruction of Raider *Kormoran* (probably Raider "G" No. 41, Steiermark) by HMAS Sydney'. The main contents of the summary are described in more detail in chapter 6.

However, on page 1 of an appendix to the summary, after outlining the searches undertaken the summary states:

Subsequent intelligence suggests that HMAS Sydney sent out a weak and corrupt 'Q' distress message under extreme difficulties on 19/11. This is being investigated.

Taken over phone
by Signal Clerk
for 5 H.S.U. n.p.
from 56 Cooper
Erewhon

RAAF Form A 22 (Revised May 1941)
(RAAF Form 10A)
(LTRA (Rev) 1/3)

MESSAGE FORM

Office Serial No. _____

Call IN **24:50/metres:** No. of Groups **GR** Office Date Stamp _____

and Preface OUT *Leading General under the*

TO *interest count from A. radio Sydney.*

FROM *R/T to morse* *In Palmer (Balak)*

Calling during 2140H till 2225H

"Calling Darwin or Technical Telegraph Operator - Call from Sea"

Sydney calling send Cooper men on board - Calling Frager

D/F & Darwin - Cannot detect you - Singapore call Darwin

"This M.S. Sydney calling message received frequency satisfactory will put through morse (at 2210H) Call Darwin + Leading Gen"

Four stations transmitting in noise on same wavelength - Sydney calling Darwin Distress ship - That

This message must be sent **AS WRITTEN** and may be sent by W/T
Signature _____

This message must be sent **IN CYPER** and may be sent by W/T
Signature _____

Originator's Instructions: *Lykard* *Leichart*

Time of Origin _____

Originator to insert - R/T: If message is sent by W/T over any part of the route, indicate this line to be signed and dated.

Route	Time	Mode	Route	Time	Mode	Route	Time	Mode	Route	Time	Mode	Route	Time	Mode	Route	Time	Mode	Route	Time	Mode

The Signal Department is responsible that these details are transmitted to the appropriate portion of the message form and that all possibility of communication disturbance is avoided, this by omitting to remove their signature from the address, &c., is avoided. Return delivery of the message form details are to be transmitted to P.O.

5/1/1942 - C. 1/4/42

56 Cooper

A message taken over the phone from a Squadron Leader Cooper by an Air Force signals clerk, Western Area. The message is undated, but appears to form the basis of the SWACH log entry for 4 December 1941 (see K809 described below).

Annotations in red pencil and in a different hand subsequently appear to have been made to the time groups and to the name 'Lykard', against which has been written 'Leichart'.
NAA: AA1969/100, 2/18/INT, Squadrons involved in Search for HMAS Sydney.

No further mention of this message has been located in later summaries or in related documents. It is possible that the message referred to is the Q message received by the *Uco* or by Geraldton radio, and later believed to have come from the *Kormoran* (see AWM64, 0/2, described above).

SOUTH WESTERN AREA COMBINED HEADQUARTERS LOG BOOK, 1941–1942

K809

Recorded by:

South Western Area Combined Headquarters, WA, Australian Army (CA 6978)

Perth; microfiche in all offices, except Hobart 1.13 metres

**South Western Area Combined Headquarters log book 2 Jul 1941 – 5 May 1942
K809, 1**

It consists of a log book used for recording inwards and outwards signals of SWACH in Fremantle. Entries are chronological and show details of messages sent and received. A microfiche copy of this register is also available at the Australian War Memorial.

The log book records a number of messages sent and received relating to the search and rescue operation, but of particular interest are details of messages alleged by some to have been received from HMAS *Sydney* prior to its sinking. The description of these messages contained in the log suggests that they could have been transmitted by the *Sydney*, but this would seem to be impossible judging by the dates on which the log entries are recorded. Two handwritten notes that may have formed the basis of these log entries appear in this chapter, and are discussed in more detail under 'Some unanswered questions' (p. 23). The microfiche copy of the log book is difficult to read. Relevant extracts are therefore given below. The times given in the log appear to be Z time (ie Greenwich Mean Time, or 8 hours behind local Fremantle time).

Thu Dec 4 (page 148)

1520 – W/A [Western Area – 1 word appears to be crossed out] phoned message received from Geraldton – Geraldton heard a call on 24.50 metres possibly from HMAS *Sydney* and requested Pearce to call Darwin for bearing.

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

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

1555 – W/A phoned following received from S/L Cooper at Geraldton – Geraldton Aeradio opinion call coming from Sydney Aeradio on 25 metres. Following heard 'Calling Darwin or technical telegraph operator from sea. Sydney calling send carrier men on board calling Frazer D/F Darwin cannot detect you Singapore call Darwin. This MSS Sydney calling message received frequency satisfactory will put through one [once?] more'. Heard at 1510Z

Sat Dec 6 (page 149)

0054 – Signalled CWR [Central War Room] – Information received from Darwin that short wave broadcast overheard on 4th of December was from PMG Sydney to PMG Darwin. In view of confusion caused request information whether this a regular and authorised channel. 0054Z/6

The message of 6 December also appears in AWM64, 0/2, described earlier in this chapter.

2140 { Calling Darwin Telegraph Operator (Repeated
 Several lines). Call from C.
 Sydney calling. Send canned. men
 on board, all men on board
 Calling Tragic D.M. Darwin
 Cannot detect you. repeated
 Couple times)

2150 R.T. Sydney Calling Darwin
 Distress signal Short
 Leichardt. Send Morse
 after 2250. D S Z D.

2240 Singapore Call Darwin. A.S.
 Sydney calling 2250

2255 Message received frequency
 satisfactory will put through
 in Morse

Heard by
 3 women
 2 men
 Cpl Dawson

at Esplanade Hostel
 on ordinary short wave
 broadcast receiver
 phoned J.L. Cooper at Esplanade
 Dawson. J.L. Cooper phoned area.

Passed COIC
 (message) per aeroplane
 12.15 H/5. per phone from J/o Bogue
 1630 H/5

This appears to be a transcription by a second person of part of the message opposite, to which some annotations have subsequently been added ('B2' and 'F' in the fifth line, and 'HM' in the entry for 2240). Although the paper has become brittle and some of the information at the bottom has been lost, it is possible to make out the words 'Passed COIC [part of word or name missing] per seacophone' and a date/time group that appears to end '5/12'. The date time group

1630H/5/[remainder missing] appears on the bottom right-hand corner.

NAA: AA1969/100, 2/18/INT, Squadrons involved in Search for HMAS Sydney.

3 The Search and Rescue

'Sydney has not yet arrived'

At 9.40 am on Friday, 21 November, the day after the Sydney had been due to arrive in Fremantle, the District Naval Office (DNO), Western Australia reported by signal to the Naval Board in Melbourne:

Reference Sydney's amended ETA (0426/11), Sydney has not yet arrived.

When the *Sydney* had not reached Fremantle at her revised arrival time of 'PM' the day before, there was no immediate concern. It was assumed that the slow and erratic speed of the *Zealandia* on the Melbourne to Fremantle leg of her trip, during which her speed had ranged between 7 and 13 knots, would probably be repeated between Fremantle and the Sunda Straits.

Information from Singapore appeared to confirm the doubts about the *Zealandia's* speed. On Friday afternoon it was learned that *Zealandia* had arrived at Singapore 24 hours late, and thus it was assumed that the *Sydney* would also be 24 hours late, and would not now reach Fremantle until the afternoon or evening of 21 November. It was also thought possible that the *Sydney* had been delayed for operational reasons, perhaps having been diverted to answer a Q message or to shadow a suspicious vessel. *Sydney* would not have reported such delays, since it was unusual for a warship to break W/T silence except in an emergency.⁴⁴

Saturday, 22 November came and went without any news of the *Sydney*. The next morning, in a telephone conversation between the District Naval Office in Fremantle and the Navy Office in Melbourne, it was decided to give the *Sydney* another 12 hours (ie until after dark on Sunday, 23 November) before breaking W/T silence. That afternoon it was decided that an air search would be carried out the next morning on the assumption 'that *Sydney* had had engine trouble and did not wish to break W/T silence'.⁴⁵

Attempts to contact the *Sydney*

At 6.54 pm on Sunday the Naval Board ordered that a signal be sent instructing *Sydney* to 'Report ETA Fremantle'. At 10.36 pm the order became more insistent – 'Report your ETA at Fremantle by W/T via a commercial W/T station on 500 M/S and on 6610 M/S'.⁴⁶ Less than an hour later, at 11.33 pm, an increasingly

⁴⁴ Briefing papers submitted by the Chief of Naval Staff to the Minister for the Navy on 24 November and to the War Cabinet on 26 November show that for some reason the Naval Board mistakenly believed that the *Sydney* was due back in Fremantle on 21 November rather than 20 November.

⁴⁵ Report by DNO, WA to Naval Board, 11 December 1941, in NAA: MP1049/5, 2026/3/457, [Track chart of air searches for HMAS Sydney](#). This item has a sub-item relating to two maps/charts removed from the main item for preservation reasons.

⁴⁶ NAA: B6121, 165P – *Sydney-Kormoran* action signals etc

concerned Naval Board requested the Commander in Chief, China Station to advise the 'time and position *Sydney* parted with *Durban*'.

At 2.14 am on Monday, 24 November, with the *Sydney* now four days overdue, six RAAF Hudson bombers from No 14 Squadron at Pearce were ordered to commence a search at 8 am along *Sydney*'s probable route: 'Object – locate HMAS *Sydney*'.⁴⁷

With no response from either the *Sydney* or the Commander in Chief, China Station, at about 8.30 am all W/T high-power stations in Australia were instructed to call the *Sydney* continuously, but there was still no response. At 10.09 am the Naval Board again signalled the Commander in Chief, China Station reporting that *Sydney* was overdue and asking for information. At 12.15 pm Commander in Chief, China Station replied that *Sydney* had transferred escort of the *Zealandia* to HMS *Durban* at noon on 17 November as scheduled, and had proceeded immediately to return to Fremantle. The *Zealandia*'s late arrival in Singapore was therefore not due to a delayed rendezvous between the *Sydney* and the *Durban*.

At 2.17 pm on 24 November the Naval Board advised the Commander in Chief of the Netherlands East Indies Naval Forces (CZM) that the *Sydney* was overdue and that efforts to communicate with the cruiser had been unsuccessful. CZM was asked to conduct an air search along the route that the *Sydney* might have taken following her rendezvous off the Sunda Straits.⁴⁸ Two hours later, at 4.16 pm the British Tanker *Trocas* reported by W/T the recovery of a raft containing '25 German naval men'. Just under half an hour later, at 4.41 pm, communications stations were instructed to cease calling the *Sydney*.

On 24 November, the day the air search commenced, Admiral Royle, the Chief of Naval Staff, sent a briefing note to Norman Makin, the Minister for the Navy advising him that radio contact with the *Sydney* had been lost and that it was 'most unlikely that she has received instructions from other Naval Authorities to proceed outside Australia Station.' He promised to keep the minister informed of developments.⁴⁹ Preparations were made for a full scale air and sea search.

The search and rescue

The search that ensued over the next five days, until search operations were concluded on 29 November, involved more than 825 flying hours by RAAF aircraft and the participation of 21 naval and merchant vessels. All British and Allied merchant vessels in the area bound for Australia were ordered to pass through the

⁴⁷ AWM64, 0/2, RAAF Central War Room operations diary.

⁴⁸ Two days later, on 26 November, the Naval Board sent a signal to CZM requesting him to cover in his air searches the possibility of a severely damaged *Sydney* proceeding at slow speed to Singapore or Sourabaya where the nearest repair docks were located (AWM64, 0/2, RAAF Central War Room operations diary). The evidence for this possibility is unknown, but it may have been based on the same intelligence reported in the Central War Room's weekly summary of 1 December (No. WS/29), suggesting that HMAS *Sydney* sent out a weak and corrupt Q distress message under extreme difficulties on 19 November (NAA: B6121, 775W/1, Combined Operational Intelligence Centre – weekly summaries of operational intelligence). Had this occurred, it would have been some indication that the *Sydney* had survived the engagement but had been badly disabled.

⁴⁹ NAA: A5954, 2400/21, HMAS *Sydney* [sinking of by German raider *Kormoran*].

area where the Trocas had recovered the raft to search for survivors. One British ship outward bound from Fremantle was also ordered to the area. In addition to sea and air searches, all coast watchers were ordered to search the coast in their vicinity and report anything 'of naval interest'.

When the air search got under way, it was at times hampered by poor visibility, and the search aircraft were ordered to reduce the width of their searches if visibility was reduced to under 10 miles.⁵⁰ On occasions poor visibility meant that lifeboats sighted by aircraft could not be found by later aircraft seeking to drop water and food. To add to the confusion it was necessary to investigate a number of reported sightings; for example:

[on] '21 [Nov] 15 visitors to Dirk Hartog Island on returning today reported that at 1000 hours Thursday [20 November] a Destroyer was sighted 7 miles off steering South at high speed, throwing off smokescreen and all on fire. Report being investigated.

This was followed by a further message, advising that 'Dirk Hartog report now found to refer to 19 November when Uco was in that position'⁵¹

During the searches a total of six boats and two rubber rafts were recovered. Two German lifeboats came ashore north of Carnarvon with 103 survivors; the Koolinda recovered one boat with 31 survivors; HMAS Yandra picked up one boat with 70 Germans and two Chinese; and the Centaur picked up one boat with 60 survivors. In addition, survivors from two rubber rafts were recovered, 25 by the Trocas and 26 by the Aquitania.

Apart from the rescued survivors, the only evidence of the engagement recovered during the search and rescue operation consisted of a Royal Australian Navy Carley float badly damaged by shell fire, which contained an empty lifebelt, an inflated RAN lifebelt, a partially burnt foreign kapok lifebelt, two foreign Carley floats lashed together containing the body of a German, and a green box that appeared to be a dog kennel.

At 1.02 pm on 29 November the DNO, Fremantle received instructions from the Central War Room to cease the search on conclusion of operations that day unless new sightings were reported or further intelligence received. The search operations formally ended with a signal from Area Combined Headquarters in Fremantle at 10.48 pm on 29 November:

P7/29 completed and negative 1300Z/29 [9.00 pm]. This completes air operations in connection Sydney. No further information of fresh sighting from naval or shore sources.⁵²

The next day, Sunday 30 November, the Secretary of the Department of the Navy sent the following message to the Governor-General and the Prime Minister:

⁵⁰ AWM64, 0/2, RAAF Central War Room operations diary.

⁵¹ AWM64, 0/2, RAAF Central War Room Operations Diary, 1941–42. Montgomery claims that this could not have been the *Uco* because her log book shows her to have been elsewhere at the time, pp. 191–92, but this is disputed by Winter (see p. 235).

⁵² AWM64, 0/2.

The Naval Board regret that after intensive air and surface search of the area, no evidence of HMAS Sydney has been sighted except two RAN lifebelts and one Carley float badly damaged by gunfire. It is concluded that Sydney sank after the action and further search has been abandoned.⁵³

The records

The surviving records concerned with the search and rescue operations include detailed hour-by-hour instructions signalled to naval, air force and civilian units; chronological summaries, such as those included in daily war diaries; and consolidated post-search reports prepared by RAN and RAAF authorities, which were submitted to their chiefs of staff.

The records include operations room reports; naval and air track charts; flying, navigation and ships logs; merchant vessel movement cards; and telegrams from Customs and quarantine officials concerned about the landing of stores, a dog and a rhesus monkey from the Kormoran's lifeboats. Some records described in this chapter include reports of the earliest interrogations of the German survivors.

The records relating to the search operations are held in seven different locations – the offices of the National Archives in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne and Perth; the Australian War Memorial; and the Department of Defence (in the Naval Historical Section and the RAAF Historical and Archives Section).

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE UNIT RECORDS, 1937–1961

AA1969/100

Recorded by:

1939–1961 Department of Air, Central Office (CA 35)

Canberra 34.74 metres

Squadrons involved in Search for HMAS Sydney 8 Nov 1941 – 11 Jul 1978
AA1969/100, 2/18/INT

Aircraft of the RAAF were extensively involved in the search for HMAS Sydney.

The file consists of two distinct sections:

- Original documents filed loosely in a RAAF Intelligence Section (Headquarters Western Area) file cover bearing the title 'Loss of HMAS Sydney' and the file number 2/18/INT.
- An untitled, unnumbered manila folder containing photostat copies of the report of the RAAF search for Sydney, lodged by Air Commodore De La Rue, Air Officer Commanding Western Area. This is described in more detail below – see B6255, RAN Ships' history files, HMAS Sydney II, described below.

In addition to the report by De La Rue, the manila folder contains a four-page report by Wing Commander L J Lightfoot, Commanding Officer No. 14 Squadron, Pearce, titled 'Brief Report on Reconnaissance Operations, 24 November to 28 November 1941'. Both the Intelligence Section file and the untitled, unnumbered manila folder are secured in a spring-back folder that carries on its spine the title 'Squadrons involved in Search for HMAS Sydney'.

⁵³ NAA: A1608, S51/1/6, HMAS Sydney and HMAS Parramatta. Expressions of sympathy.

The RAAF Intelligence Section file at (1) above contains:

- requests from Air Force Intelligence in Melbourne asking that specific information be obtained from the German POWs
- signals between the Air Board, Western Area and other authorities reporting details of the RAAF searches and the recovery of POWs and summarising information obtained from the POWs
- a 'Report of Operations 24 Nov – 29 Nov 1941, ACH Fremantle', issued by COIC Fremantle, 30 November 1941
- RAAF Western Area Headquarters Weekly Intelligence Summary No. 48, on information from 1200 hours on 25 November 1941 to 1200 hours on 2 December 1941, signed by Flight Lieutenant T A F Davoren, Staff Officer Intelligence, Western Area
- notes of interrogations conducted at Fremantle Detention Barracks on 8 December 1941
- a search report based on information from aircraft operating out of Carnarvon
- two copies of the translation of Doctor Habben's newspaper article on the Sydney–Kormoran action, titled 'How the Kormoran sank the Sydney', which was published in the German newspaper Volkische Beobachter on 13 August 1944.

This file also contains two pages of handwritten notes that appear to substantiate claims that a message alleged to be from Sydney was heard on short-wave radio in Geraldton. These notes are described in chapter 2.

CORRESPONDENCE FILES, MULTIPLE NUMBER SYSTEM WITH ACTIVITY SUFFIXES A11095

Recorded by:

1941–58 RAAF Headquarters, Western Area, Perth, Western Australia (CA 8594)

Canberra 3.24 metres

HMAS Sydney – search operations, 24 Nov 1941 – 10 Feb 1942 A11095, 105/30/AIR

The papers on this RAAF file include:

- instructions to the guard party of 41 Army personnel sent to Carnarvon to recover the German POWs landed there
- cypher messages from Darwin, Townsville and Port Moresby to RAAF HQ Western Area, Perth, notifying the despatch and return of Catalina flying boats to take part in the search
- a seven-page message dated 26 November from RAAF HQ Western Area to the Air Board in Melbourne outlining RAAF search operations and details of the information obtained from the preliminary questioning of some of the POWs
- a report on the stranding of Anson and Gannet aircraft at Exmouth Gulf
- a report of search flying times, by aircraft, of all aircraft used in the search for the *Sydney* between 24 and 29 November (this was reported as 'No. 14 Squadron Hudsons 338 hrs 10 mins, No. 4 SFTS Ansons 291 hrs, No. 25 Squadron Wirraways 110 hrs, Catalinas 73 hrs 25 mins, Gannet approximately 13 hours')
- an unsigned carbon copy of the report to the Air Board by Air Commodore De La Rue, Air Officer Commanding Western Area, of the RAAF search for the *Sydney*, together with a set of RAAF Forms A91 (SWACH Operation Room Record, details of which are described in more detail below – see

series B6255, RAN Ships' history files, HMAS *Sydney II* – in which a copy of the report and forms A91 also occur)

- a report dated 3 December by the Commanding Officer of RAAF Station Pearce to RAAF HQ Western Area, reporting his dissatisfaction with the way the 'Naval Intelligence Officer' (presumably Rycroft) carried out the preliminary interrogation of the POWs.

The cover of this Air Force file carries the notation 'Track Chart in safe in SO's Room' and the file contains a minute dated 12 December from the Senior Air Staff Officer, Western Area to the DNO, Fremantle transmitting 'an aircraft track-chart of operations carried out in connection with the search for HMAS *Sydney*'. This track chart is almost certainly the chart now located in MP1049/5, 2026/3/457, described later in this chapter, and also referred to in B6255, Royal Australian Navy Ships' history files, HMAS *Sydney II* (also described below).

Report on Search for lifeboats of HMAS *Sydney* and *Kormoran* (*Steiermark* – Raider G.41), 1941 A11095, 105/30/AIR Attachment

This item contains the report prepared by RAAF Station, Pearce for RAAF Headquarters, Western Area, on the search for the *Sydney* and *Kormoran* conducted by the RAAF in the period between 24 November and 1 December 1941. It is the signed copy of the report forwarded from the RAAF Station Commanding Officer. The carbon copy is on A11163, 41/55/AIR Part A.

CORRESPONDENCE FILES, MULTIPLE NUMBER SYSTEM WITH ACTIVITY SUFFIXES, 1939–1960 A11163

Recorded by:

**1939–1952 RAAF Headquarters Station, Pearce [Western Australia] (CA 8648)
Canberra 1 metre**

Station Headquarters – Intelligence reports from Squadrons Intelligence [2cm, 1941–1942] A11163, 36/14/AIR part 2

This item includes an undated report from Wing Commander Lightfoot to SIO Pearce which reports comments by *Kormoran* survivors. One of the survivors said that on the morning of 19 November, the *Kormoran* 'sighted 5 to 7 ships escorted by a Cruiser' and that the cruiser came within * mile of the *Kormoran* because it thought *Kormoran* was part of this convoy.

Station Headquarters – Pearce – Operations – HMAS SYDNEY [0.5cm, 1941–1941] A11163, 41/55/AIR part A

**Operations Room – Search for HMAS SYDNEY [0.25cm, 1941–1942]
A11163, 41/55/AIR part B**

These two items contain various papers relating to the search for HMAS *Sydney* and evaluations of the conduct of the search by RAAF officers.

RAAF FORMATION AND UNIT RECORDS 1925–60**AWM64****Recorded by:****Department of Air (CA 35)****Australian War Memorial (AWM) 27 metres****RAAF Central War Room operations diary 6 Nov 1941 – 3 Apr 1942 AWM64, 0/2**

This war diary records the signal traffic passing through the Central War Room. The entries in the diary dated between 19 November and 6 December 1941 were examined (pp. 23–55, inclusive).

The diary includes details of many messages related to the search and rescue operations, including:

- directions to aircraft on how to drop supplies in the event that survivors were sighted
- directions to aircraft to reduce the width of their searches in conditions of poor visibility;
- instructions to naval and merchant vessels and to RAAF land parties involved in the recovery of the survivors and relics
- summaries of the results of the first interrogations.

**REPORTS OF PROCEEDINGS, HMA SHIPS AND ESTABLISHMENTS, 1939–93
AWM78****Recorded by:****1939–1973 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Australian War Memorial (AWM) 32.8 metres**

'Reports of Proceedings' (also referred to as 'Letters of Proceedings', and in the early years of World War II as 'War Diaries') were submitted monthly by RAN vessels and quarterly by naval shore establishments. They include such information as places visited, dates of arrival and departure, exercises, incidents, details of operations and the state of the ship and its company. The series is incomplete and does not include reports for all ships and establishments. The only relevant file identified for the four naval auxiliary vessels involved in the search for the *Sydney* for the *Yandra* (AWM78, 373/1, HMAS *Yandra*. Reports of Proceedings, 1940–45), but the report of proceedings for November 1941 is not on the file.

The Letters of Proceedings/War Diaries for November and December 1941 for HMAS *Leeuwin* were also searched for but were not located. The two files in which they might be expected to occur are AWM78, 382/1, HMAS *Leeuwin* – Reports of Proceedings/War Diary, 1940–45, and AWM78, 409/1, RAN Administrative Authority – DNO/NOIC, Fremantle (HMAS LEEUWIN): Reports of Proceedings.

However, on the former file the reports/war diaries jump from March to September 1940 to October to December 1942. On the latter file, they jump from March to September 1940 to March to June 1942.

NAVY OFFICE WAR DIARY, AUGUST 1939 TO 28 DECEMBER 1943

B6230

Recorded by:

1939–1950 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)

Melbourne 0.36 metres

The Navy Office War Diary, like the Daily Narrative described in chapter 2 (see NHS: B6226), were one- and two-page intelligence summaries of the day's activities on the Australia Station. The text of each day's War Diary entry is virtually identical to that of the next day's Daily Narrative.

The series commences on 22 August 1939 and ends on 28 December 1943. Each page is numbered, beginning at p. 1 and ending at p. 030. It is not known why the series ceases in 1943.

Each diary entry from Monday, 24 November to Sunday, 30 November (pp. 498–507, inclusive) contains information relating to the search for the *Sydney*. There are no entries relating to the recovery of the Carley float off Christmas Island in February 1942. The text of the relevant extracts is provided below.

Extract of War Diary for Mon 24 Nov 1941 B6230, 1 July 1941 to 31 January 1942

HMAS *Sydney* has been overdue on return to Fremantle from escort duty since pm 21 November and has not replied to instructions from Naval Board to report her ETA. The British tanker *Trocas* bound from Palembang to Fremantle reported at 1700 she had picked up 25 German Naval men on a raft in position 24° 06' S: 111° 40' E (about 115 miles WNW of Carnarvon), and requested guards, which have been despatched from Fremantle embarked in four of HMA Auxiliary vessels. Air searches over the area were ordered for tomorrow morning to locate *Sydney* or boats. All British and allied Merchant vessels in the area, bound for Australia, were ordered to proceed to the above position to search for survivors. Dutch Cruiser *Tromp* leaves Sunda Strait tomorrow morning and will proceed to Fremantle at high speed to search the probable route taken by HMAS *Sydney*.

Extract of War Diary for Tue 25 Nov 1941 B6230, 1 July 1941 to 31 January 1942

HMAS *Sydney*. One lifeboat containing about 40 men and painted brown, was sighted by aircraft am today about 120 miles to the westward of Carnarvon. Two boats painted a similar colour were beached on the coast about 70 miles North of Carnarvon. Survivors from these boats number about 110 Germans from a raider which they state commenced an engagement with a British ship PERTH class at about 1900H on 19 November. The position given was 120 miles south-west of Fremantle, but this is considered quite incorrect. They stated that at midnight the raider blew up and they had three life boats and two rubber boats. The British cruiser was on fire; the Germans say they pulled towards her, but before reaching her, the cruiser disappeared and was believed sunk, after which they turned and ran before the wind to where they landed. Police are now in charge of the prisoners. Air searches have been arranged for this morning by SWACH [South West Area Combined Headquarters] to endeavour to locate possible survivors from HMAS *Sydney* and the four HMA Auxiliary vessels from Fremantle, originally sent with armed guards for the *Trocas*, at 2000 this morning [sic]*, have been diverted to search also for *Sydney* survivors. A signal received from *Trocas* confirms the date of the action as 19 November and states that the action was of short duration, the German vessel was sunk by gunfire and that the condition of the cruiser was not known.

*Note: the departure time for the four HMA Auxiliary vessels is obviously an error. This should be 0200; the Daily Narrative to 0900 for Tuesday, 25 November states that:

Wyrallah, *Yandra*, *Olive Cam* with guards embarked, departed Fremantle 0200 this morning and are proceeding towards the tanker *Trocas*. *Heros* leaves at 0900 with the same object.

Extract of War Diary for Wed 26 Nov 1941 B6230, 1 July 1941 to 31 January 1942

Tromp (Dutch) carrying out search as ordered by CZM for HMAS *Sydney*. The position regarding HMAS *Sydney* and Raider action is still obscure. Interrogation of enemy survivors is proceeding with so far few definite facts. The approximate number of enemy survivors is 200, including the Captain (Dettmers) in a lifeboat still to arrive, and so far only one being known to be wounded (Navigator). Air searches continue tomorrow from Geraldton to North West Cape and out to longitude 108° E, three Naval Auxiliary vessels assisting. CZM is also conducting two air searches from Sourabaya and Tjilatjap. *Centaur* has a lifeboat in tow proceeding at 4 knots with 62 enemy survivors 90' West of Carnarvon at 1020H.

Extract of War Diary for Thu 27 Nov 1941 B6230, 1 July 1941 to 31 January 1942

HMAS *Sydney*. Air searches continue. Questioning of German prisoners, including those landed from SS *Centaur* at Carnarvon and from the tanker *Trocas* at Fremantle, has produced conflicting evidence, but it seems to support the following summary:—

- Engagement commenced about 1600M/19 November, when raider after being challenged by HMAS *Sydney* opened fire at a range estimated from 1 to 6 miles.
- HMAS *Sydney* hit forward by a torpedo and amidships by the first salvo, caught fire.
- The raider also caught fire and having been abandoned about 1950, blew up at midnight.
- 25 were killed aboard raider out of a complement of 400, many of whom had had previous experience in Australian waters.
- HMT *Aquitania*, on passage from Singapore to Sydney, picked up 26 Germans from a raft at 0830K/23rd November in position 24° 35' S: 110° 57' E but failed to make any report until she passed Wilson's Promontory this afternoon.
- (6) Commanders Dechaineux and Salm are proceeding to Fremantle by air tomorrow to assist with the interrogation of prisoners.

Extract of War Diary for Fri 28 Nov 1941 B6230, 1 July 1941 to 31 January 1942

HMAS *Sydney*. Extensive searches by sea and air were carried out in the area where it was assumed the action took place. The air searches produced negative results, but in the sea search HMAS *Wyrallah*, in position 160 miles North-West of Carnarvon, picked up the following:—

- (1) 1 foreign lifebelt
- (2) 2 Carley Floats (nationality being investigated)
- (3) 1 RAN lifebelt
- (4) 1 German body.

Further sea and air searches are taking place tomorrow. *Koolinda*, with 31 prisoners is due in Fremantle at 1000/29th November, *Centaur*, with 162 prisoners, and HMAS *Yandra*, with a further 72 prisoners, will arrive Fremantle 30th November. The Captain and 1st Lieutenant of the raider, proceeding by road, should reach Fremantle pm 30 November. The Raider is considered to be Raider 'G'(No. 41) the *Steiermark*. RACAS [Rear Admiral Commanding the Australian Squadron] will probably proceed to Perth in connection with investigations. HT *Aquitania* arrived Sydney at 1340.

Extract of War Diary for Sat 29 Nov 1941 B6230, 1 July 1941 to 31 January 1942

HMAS *Gunbar* sailed Fremantle 1430K for *Sydney* Search Area. RACAS is proceeding to Perth on duty and will leave Melbourne by air at 0700/30th November. Will be absent from Sydney for about one week. Identification of material picked up by *Wyrallah* and *Heros* is reported as follows:—

- 1 RAN Type Carley Float badly damaged by gunfire, picked up by *Heros*.
- 2 Carley Floats, picked up by *Wyrallah* were foreign.
- 2 RAN lifebelts.
- 1 Foreign lifebelt.

Searches in connection with HMAS *Sydney* ceased on concluding operations pm 29th November.

Extract of War Diary for Sun 30 Nov 1941 B6230, 1 July 1941 to 31 January 1942

HMAS *Sydney* loss was released to Australian press at 2100K for publication tomorrow morning. Release for broadcasting and publication outside Australia will be delayed until 2100K/2 December.

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY SHIPS' HISTORY FILES, 1872–**B6255****Recorded by:****1939–1959 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Canberra 0.09 metres**

These files are arranged alphabetically, by ship name. In some cases files are held on foreign warships that had a close association with the RAN, such as the SMS *Emden*. The types of documents to be found on these files include brief narrative histories, lists of commanding officers, newspaper cuttings, signal traffic, booklets, action reports and duplicate copies of reports of proceedings. The official documents (as distinct from press clippings, etc.) are usually copies taken from the original files held by the National Archives and the Australian War Memorial. Files are added to the series when new ships enter service.

Sydney II, 1941–c1946 B6255, SYDNEY II

This file contains photocopies of:

- a number of typed pages dealing with aspects of the history of HMAS *Sydney II*
- Operation room records of the aircraft search for the *Sydney*

The file also contains two significant original documents:

Narrative and Track Chart of Searches by Air Commodore HF De La Rue DFC, Air Officer Commanding WA Area on Air Operations Conducted by RAAF Western Area 24–29 Nov 1941, in connection with the loss of HMAS *Sydney*

This is a report to the Air Board of the RAAF search for the *Sydney* and survivors dated 3 December 1941. The report, which is a carbon copy, consists of an eight-page narrative with a three-page covering minute. The track chart is not present, but is probably the linen track chart now located on MP1049/5, 2026/3/457 described above. Accompanying the narrative are carbon copies of 20 RAAF forms A91 (South West Area Combined Operations Room Record), which document in great detail the air search for the *Sydney* between 24 and 29 November 1941 inclusive. A second carbon copy of the report, covering minute and forms A91 is located in item A11095, 105/30/AIR, described above.

HMAS *Sydney*'s War Diary for the period 3 Sep 1939 to Jul 1941

The file contains both a typed (carbon copy) and handwritten version of the War Diary. The original is held by the Australian War Memorial in AWM69, 81/6.

***Kormoran*, 1941–42 B6255, KORMORAN**

This file contains copies of a number of typed papers relating to the *Kormoran*, including information about survivors, a compiled route of the *Kormoran* in the months before the encounter with the *Sydney*, and extracts from the translated version of Captain Detmers' diary.

**MERCHANT VESSEL MOVEMENT CARDS, ALPHABETICAL BY SHIP NAME, 1939–46
B6256****Recorded by:****Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****NHS, Canberra 8.8 metres**

Cards in this series record movements of merchant shipping in Australian waters during World War II. The cards are double-sided, and the information recorded for each vessel includes the name of the ship; its owners, agents or charterers; type of vessel; port of registry; date built; net tonnage; gross tonnage; fuel; service speed; maximum sustained speed; one day's run at service speed; armaments fitted; stiffened for; recognition; and usual employment. The movement information recorded includes port, message numbers, arrival and departure dates, and remarks. The cards are arranged alphabetically by ship name.

One or more cards is held for each vessels that was in some way involved in the last voyage of, or the search for, the *Sydney* – that is, the *Zealandia*, *Aquitania*, *Centaur*, *Trocas*, *Koolinda*, *Hermion*, *Pan Europe*, *Saidja*, *Herstein*, *Sunetta*, *Zaanland*, *Evagoras*, *Nordnes*, *Ohio*, *Cape Otway* and *Islander*.

RAN SHIP MOVEMENT SHEETS, C1910–C1987**B6258****Recorded by:****1939–1954 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****NHS, Canberra 0.09 metres**

A fuller description of this series is given in chapter 2. The movement lists for the *Yandra*, *Olive Cam*, *Heros* and *Wyrallah* simply state that they were engaged in a 'search for possible Sydney survivors in Indian Ocean in late November 1941.'

**DAILY MOVEMENTS, HMA SHIPS AND AUXILIARIES, AUSTRALIA STATION
B6259****Recorded by:****1941–44 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****NHS, Canberra 0.09 metres**

The forms in this series are arranged in chronological order and have been bound in volumes. The volume for 1 November to 31 December 1941 lists the movements of the RAN vessels *Olive Cam*, *Wyrallah*, *Heros* and *Yandra*, which were engaged in the search for the *Sydney*.

The forms in this series are arranged in chronological order and have been bound in volumes. The volume for 1 November to 31 December 1941 lists the movements of the RAN vessels *Olive Cam*, *Wyrallah*, *Heros* and *Yandra*, which were engaged in the search for the *Sydney*.

From 1–24 November inclusive, the four vessels are recorded simply as located in Fremantle. On 25 November each is recorded as departing Fremantle to intercept the British tanker *Trocas*. On 26 November they are recorded as steaming from Fremantle northward, 'to search for *Sydney* survivors'. From 27 to 29 November they are recorded as continuing the search, and on 30 November as having returned to Fremantle.

**SOUTH WESTERN AREA COMBINED HEADQUARTERS LOG BOOK, 1941–42
K809****Recorded by:****South Western Area Combined Headquarters, WA, Australian Army (CA 6978)****Perth; microfiche in all offices, except Hobart 1.13 metres**

This series is described in chapter 2.

South Western Area Combined Headquarters log book, 2 July 1941 – 5 May 1942 K809, 1

The log book records many messages sent and received throughout the search and rescue operation. A fuller description of the contents of this file can be found in chapter 2.

CORRESPONDENCE FILES (GENERAL), 1923–50**MP1049/5****Recorded by:****1939–50 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Melbourne 59.82 metres**

This series contains correspondence files, some of which were part of B5573.

**Track charts of air searches for HMAS Sydney, 1941–42 MP1049/5,
2026/3/457**

This item gives an overview of the Navy and Air Force searches for the *Sydney*. This item has a sub-item relating to two maps/charts removed from the main item for preservation reasons.

The item contains a three-page report to the Secretary of the Naval Board by the DNO, Western Australia, dated 11 December 1941, on the search for the *Sydney*.

Appendix 1 to the report is a seven-page daily journal of the searches undertaken. This report is accompanied by a track chart of movements of all ships through the area from 23 to 28 November 1941.

There are also two large linen-backed track charts of the air and sea searches undertaken. The first is an RAAF track chart of the aircraft search (scale: 1" = 20 nautical miles). This is probably the chart submitted to the Air Board by the Air Officer Commanding WA Area under cover of a report dated 3 December 1941, which is described in more detail in B6255, Royal Australian Navy Ships' History Files, HMAS *Sydney* II, described above. The second chart is a chart of the search by naval vessels (no scale given).

The report considered that in view of the capabilities of the ships involved in the search and the lack of accurate information on which to base a systematic plan of search the operations 'were well carried out ... The ships ... appear to have remained at sea to the limit of their endurance.'

There is an additional report dated 30 November 1941 from the Dutch merchant vessel MS *Sunetta* on its part in the search, translated for Naval Intelligence by the Department of Information.

CLASSIFIED OUTWARD SIGNALS (CONFIDENTIAL), 1939–64**MP1074/1****Recorded by:****1939–42 Department of Defence Co-ordination (CA 37)****Melbourne 108.54 metres**

While the great majority of signals in this large series (and in series MP1074/4, described below) do not relate in any way to the *Sydney*, some transmitted after 23 November 1941 do concern the search for the cruiser, the recovery of the German survivors and subsequent events. The signals are arranged chronologically, with one signal pack for each day. Most signal packs are several centimetres in thickness. The text of some signals is not available for public access because it contains personal medical or disciplinary information about individual naval personnel. The majority of signal packs have not yet been examined and therefore will not be immediately available.

A typical signal pack is listed as follows:

Outward signals, 29 November MP1074/1, OUT 29 November 1941**UNCLASSIFIED INWARD SIGNALS, 1939–64****MP1074/4****Recorded by:****1939–1942 Department of Defence Coordination (CA 37)****Melbourne 190.26 metres**

The description of this series is the same as for MP1074/1, above.

SECRET AND CONFIDENTIAL CORRESPONDENCE FILES, 1923–50**MP1185/8****Recorded by:****1939–1950 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Melbourne 4.33 metres****HMAS Sydney, 1941 MP1185/8, 2026/3/452**

The file contains two reports to the Naval Board about the activities of the Netherlands Navy in the search for the *Sydney*, one from the British Naval Liaison Officer in Batavia (Jakarta) and the other from the RAN Liaison Officer, also in Batavia; both are dated 29 November 1941. The latter report contains six pages of signals received and sent between 24 and 27 November 1941. The reports describe joint operations between the Netherlands and Australian naval and air forces.

**Recovery of enemy survivors [of *Kormoran*] by HT Aquitania, 1941
MP1185/8, 2026/3/453**

The Transport *Aquitania* was the first ship to become aware of the action that had taken place between the *Sydney* and the *Kormoran* when, at 6 am on the 23 November, she recovered a raft with 26 German sailors about 100 nautical miles off the coast of Carnarvon. The *Aquitania*'s captain, Captain Gibbons, initially thought that the sailors may have been victims of a German raider attack and he did not radio this to the authorities because he feared a German raider might still be in the area. Once he had determined that the survivors were from a raider that had been in action with a cruiser, he assumed that the cruiser would report the action and therefore did not break wireless silence. It was not until 27 November that the *Aquitania* signalled the Wilson's Promontory Signal Station with this advice.

This file contains the three-page report from the Commodore in Charge, HMA Naval Establishment Sydney to the Secretary of the Naval Board, dated 2 December 1941, concerning the failure of the *Aquitania* to report the recovery of the Germans, and subsequent comments by naval officials on Captain Gibbons' actions.

In a report to the Deputy Chief of Naval Staff of 2 December, Commander Dechaineux was scathing in his criticism of the *Aquitania*'s master for not informing the Naval Board of the recovery and interrogation of the prisoners until 27 November. Had he done so:

36 precious hours might have been saved and some of the crew of HMAS Sydney rescued. As it is, not one man from Sydney has been saved.

Admiral Royle, the Chief of Naval Staff, cast the blame more widely, annotating Commander Dechaineux's report:

Personally I consider the NB [Naval Board] was gravely at fault in (1) not knowing that *Aquitania* was due to pass through that area (2) not informing her of the action or making any inquiries of her...

and later:

I think my reactions would have been the same as Captain of *Aquitania*.

CONFIDENTIAL TELEGRAMS TO OR FROM COLLECTOR OF CUSTOMS WA, 1939–1945 PP227/1

Recorded by:

1939–1945 Collector of Customs, Western Australia (CA 808)

Perth 0.18 metres

This series contains five telegrams of relevance, all concerned with Customs and quarantine matters and the recovery of two of the *Kormoran*'s lifeboats from beaches north of Carnarvon.

**Extra copies of all telegrams despatched by Collector from 26 Aug 1939 –
plain language, 26 Aug 1939 PP227/1, 1**

This file contains two relevant telegrams sent by the Collector of Customs in Fremantle. The text is given below.

**Decode of priority telegram to Sub-Collector Carnarvon, 5.55PM,
26 November 1941.**

Your telegram today. Military authorities will take over prisoners of war no departmental action necessary. Quarantine officer must destroy dog and monkey no forms necessary stop Proceed as soon as possible when port clear by motor to life boats and remove all you can to Carnarvon bond stop I am arranging for naval authorities to pick up lifeboats later if possible but desire that you report fully condition possibility of being removed by naval authorities. District Naval Officer agrees naval officer charge deal with Admiralty messages during your absence. Bird.

**Decode of priority telegram to Comptroller General of Customs, Canberra,
11AM, 27 November 1941.**

Secret and personal 103 Germans now prisoners of war landed from two lifeboats approximately 70 miles north of Carnarvon stop Sub-Collector instructed proceed lifeboats (one reputed to contain considerable quantity stores) protection revenue stop Further 27 prisoners of war now landing Fremantle ex Trocas stop DNO now

advises two further lifeboats containing about 63 Germans now being towed Carnarvon. Bird.

Decode of code telegrams received by Collector of Customs, Western Australia, 20 Nov 1940 – 27 Aug 1945 PP227/1, 2

This file contains three relevant telegrams received by the Collector of Customs in Fremantle. The text is given below:

Decode of priority telegram received from Customs Officer, Carnarvon, 3.55PM, 26 Nov 1941

Secret 103 German prisoners of war held Carnarvon no prohibited or dutiable goods stop Naval Officer has interviewed them today stop Is any customs action necessary advise urgently prisoners have a dog and one monkey quarantine officer suggests destruction stop What forms are necessary stop Two steel lifeboats (1 slightly damaged) are beached about 57 and 70 miles north of Carnarvon stop The undamaged lifeboat at Point Bluff contains considerable stores stop The damaged lifeboat (broken ribs) contains practically no stores stop Please advise action to be taken. Ewers.

Decode of telegram received from Customs Officer, Carnarvon, 29 Nov 1941

Centaur will arrive Fremantle seven am Sunday 44 overseas passengers including Mr and Mrs Charleux French tourists Baron and Baroness De Crombrugghe Dutch tourists and daughter schoolgirl Mr Fernhout Dutch permanent resident landing permit 3759 Miss Esther Sung Mrs B Furey Chinese tourists Mr R Dodsworth DBS stop Vessel also carries 162 prisoners of war and one sound lifeboat Ordinary passports stamped. Ewers.

Decode of priority telegram from Customs Officer, Carnarvon, telephoned from B.O.75 (Telegraphs, Perth) to T. Turner, Collector of Customs, Fremantle, 12.56AM, 3 Dec 1941

Report re lifeboats One steel air tight lifeboat 28 feet long on North side of Red Bluff in good condition can be taken off easily in calm weather by a mine sweeper with towing hawser Lifeboat gear stacked in cave behind lifeboat This lifeboat should be taken before heavy weather occurs One steel lifeboat about 24 feet long with airtight compartments on sandy beach towards northern end Courier Bay apparently in good condition with difficulty this lifeboat could be pulled off but rocky bottom off beach makes operation risky A calm sea high tide and long towing hawser will be necessary please advise urgently naval authorities as naval vessels in Carnarvon might possibly be used and it is essential lifeboats be taken almost immediately or opportunity will be lost Detailed report of stores etc following by air mail 1100Z/1. Ewers.

FLYING LOGBOOK AND NAVIGATOR'S LOG SHEETS MAINTAINED FOR THE SEARCH FOR SYDNEY AND LATER DISCOVERY OF THE GERMAN RAIDER *KORMORAN* AND LIFE BOAT WITH SURVIVORS, FLIGHT LIEUTENANT ROOKE, NOVEMBER 1939 – DECEMBER 1954 PR88/119

Recorded by:

Neville St R Rooke, Flight Lieutenant, No. 4 SFTS [4 Service Flying Training School, Geraldton], Royal Australian Air Force, born 1914, died 1988

Private Record Collection, Australian War Memorial 0.03 metres

Flight Lieutenant Rooke was the pilot of an Anson aircraft that took part in the search from Carnarvon between 26 and 29 November, which sighted one of the German lifeboats, to which it directed the HMAS *Yandra*. The item consists of 19 pages of Rooke's Navigation Log Sheets (RAAF Form A84) for the period of the search and his RAAF Flying Log Book for November 1939 to December 1954.

**LOG BOOKS OF HMC (COLONIAL) SHIPS, HM AND HMA SHIPS, 1855–1956
SP551/1****Recorded by:****1920–1956 RAN Hydrographic Services, Hydrographic Office (CA 582)****Sydney 190 metres**

Ships' Log books record information about each ship's location, weather information, daily occurrences on board and the vessel's activities. This series is not complete and includes only those log books surrendered by ships' captains to the Hydrographic Office. A search was conducted for the log books of *Heros*, *Olive Cam*, *Wyrallah*, *Yandra*, and *Uco*. The only log book found for the relevant period is that for HMAS Yandra.

Log Book HMAS Yandra, 1940–42 SP551/1, BUNDLE 696

This item consists of five separate RecordSearch items:

- SP551/1, BUNDLE 696 (Item barcode 307038)
- SP551/1, BUNDLE 696 (Item barcode 307039)
- SP551/1, BUNDLE 696 (Item barcode 307040)
- SP551/1, BUNDLE 696 (Item barcode 307041)
- SP551/1, BUNDLE 696 (Item barcode 307042)

OFFICIAL LOG BOOKS, CAPE OTWAY (M & S 16), 1932–59**PP345/1****Recorded by:****Mercantile Marine Office, Fremantle****Perth 0.54 metres**

This series contains the official log books of the *Cape Otway*. Log books for years 1935–36 and 1949–51 are missing.

Official Log book, SS Cape Otway, 1937–42 PP345/1, 1937/41

The merchant trading vessel *Cape Otway* was travelling down the Western Australian coast at the time of the *Sydney–Kormoran* encounter. Entries in the log book indicate that it departed Darwin on 17 November and arrived in Fremantle on 5 December 1941. The log does not record any information that might indicate the vessel saw anything relating to the *Sydney* or the *Kormoran* or that it was asked to be involved in a search for survivors.

4 The Discussions of the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council

The records of the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council provide an important and unique insight into the discussions of these inner Cabinet bodies through the records of the official note-takers. These notebooks were first released for public access in 1994. Cabinet notebooks are the only Commonwealth government records which remain subject to a 50-year closed period.

The notebooks contain much information which does not appear in the formal War Cabinet and Advisory War Council minutes, and in many instances reveal the comments and reactions of the Prime Minister and individual Ministers during War Cabinet and Advisory War Council meetings in which the loss of the *Sydney* was discussed. The notebooks complement the formal minute and agenda papers, which have long been available for public access.

The War Cabinet

On 26 September 1939 the Full Cabinet approved the formation of a War Cabinet to deal with the conduct of the war. Although it had originally been intended that the War Cabinet would be an executive subcommittee to the Full Cabinet, as the war progressed the War Cabinet increased in importance and authority, and the main decisions concerning the conduct of the war came to be taken by the War Cabinet, with the larger Full Cabinet left to deal with more peripheral matters.⁵⁴

The formation of the War Cabinet had been announced by Prime Minister Menzies on 15 September 1939, less than two weeks after the outbreak of war. There had not been a War Cabinet during World War I and the decision to form a War Cabinet on the outbreak of World War II was the result of planning by Defence officials to prepare for the next war.⁵⁵

In November and December of 1941 the membership of the War Cabinet consisted of eight Australian Government ministers chosen by the Prime Minister. In 1939 the Department of Defence had been separated into four departments – Defence Co-ordination, Army, Navy and Air – and each of these ministers was a member. At the time of HMAS Sydney's loss, the membership of the War Cabinet was:

- The Rt Hon. John Curtin, Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Co-ordination

⁵⁴ David Horner, *Inside the War Cabinet: Directing Australia's War Effort 1939–45*, Allen & Unwin in association with Australian Archives, Sydney, 1996, p. 5.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p2

- The Hon. Francis M Forde, Minister for the Army
- The Hon. Joseph B Chifley, Treasurer
- The Rt Hon. Herbert Vere Evatt, KC, Attorney-General and Minister for External Affairs
- The Hon. John A Beasley, Minister for Supply and Shipping
- The Hon. Norman J O Makin, Minister for the Navy and Minister for Munitions
- The Hon. Arthur S Drakeford, Minister for Air and Minister for Civil Aviation
- The Hon. John J Dedman, Minister for War Organisation of Industry (from 11 December 1941).

The Advisory War Council

The Advisory War Council was established under National Security regulations on 28 October 1940. At the general election the month before, the Menzies Government had lost several seats and retained power only through the support of independents. This led Prime Minister Menzies to invite the Australian Labor Party leader, John Curtin, to join a national government. Curtin declined and instead proposed an Australian War Council, consisting of members of both the government and the opposition, to help enhance the war and defence efforts. This proposal was accepted by Menzies.

The council, which was to be known as the Advisory War Council, consisted of the members of the War Cabinet with the addition of Curtin and three other Australian Labor Party representatives. The council's function was wide-ranging:

The Council shall consider and advise the Government with respect to such matters relating to the defence of the Commonwealth or the prosecution of the war as are referred to the Council by the Prime Minister and may consider and advise the Government with respect to such other matters so relating as it thinks fit.⁵⁶

On 3 October 1941 the Australian Labor Party came to power and John Curtin became Prime Minister. The membership of the Advisory War Council at this time was: Curtin, Forde, Beasley, Makin, Evatt, who were members of the War Cabinet; and the following non-government members:

- The Rt Hon. A W Fadden (Leader of the Opposition)
- The Rt Hon. W M Hughes, KC
- The Rt Hon. R G Menzies, KC
- The Hon. P C Spender, KC
- The Hon. J McEwen.

In December 1941 the functions of the Advisory War Council were expanded. To avoid double-handling of matters by the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council, Prime Minister Curtin suggested that because the council included five of the eight War Cabinet ministers, if they agreed to a proposal at a council meeting their decision could automatically be accepted as a War Cabinet decision. If

⁵⁶ op.cit., p22

anyone felt that a matter should go to the War Cabinet, that would be done, and there would be no voting on the matter in the council. In effect this meant in some respects that meetings of the council would take the place of War Cabinet meetings.

After the War Cabinet's business had concluded it was not uncommon for the non-government members of the Advisory War Council to join the meeting at which point the meeting formally became a meeting of the Advisory War Council. This change in arrangements was largely a reflection of the increased strain on the War Cabinet following the outbreak of war with Japan.

A War Cabinet Secretariat provided administrative support to the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council, including the preparation of minutes and agenda and the maintenance of a recordkeeping system.

The notebooks

The system of Cabinet note taking

The Secretary of the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council was Frederick (later Sir Frederick) Shedden.⁵⁷ He attended most meetings, took notes of the discussions and prepared the minutes.

As war with Japan approached the War Cabinet began to meet more frequently and by November 1941 its work had increased to such an extent that two special minute secretaries were appointed to record the discussions and decisions of the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council. The minute secretaries appointed were Vincent Quealy and Herbert Port, who were both senior officers in the Department of Defence. Shedden continued to take his own, less detailed notes of the meetings, but only one of the minute secretaries was permitted in the Cabinet room at a time.⁵⁸

The contents of the notebooks themselves were never seen by other than the notetaker himself and one or two other individuals in the War Cabinet Secretariat. The attendance of the notetakers at meetings was strictly at the discretion of the Cabinet, and was on the understanding that the absolute secrecy of the discussions would be respected by the officials. As will be seen in the examples of notebook entries which appear in this chapter and in the transcriptions in appendix 2, they contain much information that was not recorded in the typed official minutes.

The taking of notes by officials at Cabinet meetings (a practice which continues to this day) was solely to assist the accurate recording of the decisions of the War Cabinet. The notes were purely an aide memoire for the official whose responsibility it was to prepare the written decision of the Cabinet, usually in the form of a War Cabinet minute. The notebooks made it possible later for the

⁵⁷ Sir Frederick was also Secretary of the Department of Defence between 1937 and 1956.

⁵⁸ Horner, *op. cit.*, p62

notetaker to refresh his memory or clarify questions of interpretation when writing up the Cabinet decision on a particular issue. The notes are not, nor were they intended to be, a verbatim account of the War Cabinet or Advisory War Council's discussion of a particular issue.

Although the War Cabinet often met in Canberra, the headquarters of the three Services and the Department of Defence Co-ordination, the Central War Room and the Munitions and Supply and Development departments were in Melbourne. When meetings were held in Canberra it meant that the Chiefs of Staff and their immediate staff needed to spend up to two days away from Melbourne. The problems faced by the staff of the War Cabinet Secretariat when meetings were held in Canberra have been described in some detail by two former members of the Secretariat.⁵⁹

The meetings of the War Cabinet were surrounded by great secrecy and the papers prepared for and produced by the War Cabinet were handled with great concern for their security. When the War Cabinet met in Canberra, which under Prime Minister Curtin was common, the War Cabinet papers were also transported and never left the possession of War Cabinet Secretariat staff. The notebooks were among the most highly protected of the War Cabinet's papers.

The War Cabinet's discussions about the *Sydney*

The War Cabinet first discussed the loss of the *Sydney* at its meeting in Canberra on Wednesday, 26 November, two days after the first searches were ordered. This was the War Cabinet's first opportunity to discuss the issue since its last meeting had been held on 18 November.

Precisely when the Prime Minister and individual members of the War Cabinet were first informed that the *Sydney* was believed lost is unclear, but a brief minute from Frederick Shedden, Secretary of the Department of Defence Co-ordination to the Prime Minister dated 25 November appears to be the first formal advice.

The War Cabinet discussed the *Sydney* on three occasions: Wednesday, 26 November; Monday, 1 December; and Thursday, 4 December. The Advisory War Council also discussed the matter on three occasions: Wednesday, 26 November, immediately following the meeting of the War Cabinet; Friday, 28 November; and 18 March 1942.

When matters relating to the military conduct of the war were being discussed, it was usual for the three Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Services to attend meetings in an advisory capacity. The three chiefs or their deputies were present at all meetings at which the loss of the *Sydney* was discussed except for that of the Advisory War Council on 28 November and the War Cabinet on 1 December.

The notebooks for each meeting consist of Frederick Shedden's brief notes as Secretary (A5954) and Mr Quealy's more detailed notes as official notetaker

⁵⁹ Horner, op. cit., Appendix A, 'The Work of the War Cabinet Secretariat'

(series A9240). The formal records of each meeting, the agenda and minutes, are described in the next section, Minutes and Agenda.

A full transcript of all the relevant notes is provided at appendix 2.

**WAR CABINET AND ADVISORY WAR COUNCIL NOTEBOOKS, CHRONOLOGICAL SERIES,
1941-45 A9240**

Recorded by:

1941–1945 Advisory War Council (CA 495)
1941–1946 War Cabinet Secretariat (CA 1468)

Canberra; microfilm in other NAA offices	2.58 metres
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While the original notebooks are held by the National Archives, for preservation reasons they are not available for access. Each state and territory Archives office holds microfilm of the notebooks from both A5954 and A9240 and digital copies are available on RecordSearch.

War Cabinet meeting, Canberra, 26 Nov 1941 Notes by Shedden (p. 571)
A5954, 730/2

Notes by Quealy (pp. 624–27) **A9240, Set 2 Vol 4**

The discussion of the *Sydney* was item 3 on the agenda. At this meeting the Chief of Naval Staff read from an unidentified document an account of what was known up to the time of the Cabinet meeting. Some of this appears to be interspersed with conversation. The minute reflects the earliest intelligence gathered from the German prisoners who had been picked up by the *Trocas*, including their misapprehension that the *Sydney* had been escorting other vessels. The Prime Minister noted that much of what had been said was conjecture, and concluded that the *Sydney* had been lost. The notes record that the press had been told of the situation in confidence but had been instructed not to publish the details. The War Cabinet decided that there would be no public statement for the time being, other than to inform the next of kin of the *Sydney's* crew, and that the censorship ban should be maintained. The agenda for this meeting was 401/1941 and the resulting minute was 1521.

Advisory War Council meeting, Canberra, 26 Nov 1941 Notes by Shedden (p. 431) A9240, Set 2 Vol 4

Following the War Cabinet's discussion, the meeting was joined by the members of the Advisory War Council and a meeting of the council ensued. The *Sydney* was the first item discussed. The notes elaborate on the details discussed in the earlier War Cabinet meeting. The Prime Minister was keen to do 'the honest thing' and inform the relatives of the missing crew. His view prevailed despite concern expressed by Mr Hughes that to tell the next of kin was tantamount to telling the world. It was agreed that the form of notification should be such that it conveyed no useful information to the enemy (a copy of the telegram sent to the next of kin appears in chapter 7). The agenda discussed was again 401/1941 and the resulting minute was 566.

Advisory War Council meeting, Canberra, 28 Nov 1941 Notes by Shedden (p. 433) A5954, 213/2

Notes by Quealy (p. 639 and pp. 652–53) A9240, Set 2 Vol 4

The Advisory War Council met again two days later. Again discussion of the *Sydney* was first on the agenda. The discussion pieced together what little more

was known. Despite concern about rumours spreading through the community, the Prime Minister considered that there should be no public statement until this was considered appropriate by the Navy. There was no agenda for this meeting. The resulting minute was 571.

**War Cabinet meeting, Canberra, 1 Dec 1941 Notes by Shedden (p. 574)
A5954, 731/1**

Notes by Quealy (p. 654 and pp. 664–65) A9240, Set 2 Vol 4

This meeting of the War Cabinet took place on the day of release of the Prime Minister's public announcement of the *Sydney's* loss. The *Sydney* was the last item discussed. The discussion reflects the Prime Minister's concern to maintain public morale by not allowing publication of the fact that there were so many German survivors yet none from the *Sydney*. There was still a misapprehension that there may have been more than one raider, and that survivors from the *Sydney* may have been aboard one of these vessels. Evatt, the Minister for External Affairs, observed that Catalina flying boats could have been brought into the search earlier. The letters 'DW' refer to a cablegram. It was at this meeting that one of those in attendance appears to have remarked 'There'll always be a Sydney'. There was no agenda for this meeting. The resulting minute was 1526.

**War Cabinet meeting, Melbourne, 4 Dec 1941 Notes by Shedden (p. 576)
A5954, 731/1**

Notes by Quealy (pp. 676–77) A9240, Set 2 Vol 4

This was the War Cabinet's last discussion of the *Sydney's* loss. It was the ninth item discussed. The details as elicited from the German prisoners were outlined. The remainder of the discussion deals with the unauthorised disclosure of information by the British Government. The minute for this meeting was 1528.

Notes by Shedden (p. 177) A9240, Set 1 Vol 2

This was the last occasion on which the loss of the *Sydney* was discussed by the Advisory War Council. Mr Quealy's notes indicate that the Prime Minister asked a question about a 'Court of Inquiry' into the *Sydney's* loss. The Chief of Naval Staff responded by briefly outlining the findings of a 'full inquiry'. Mr Shedden's notes of the same discussion also refer to the holding of a 'Court of Inquiry', which concluded that the captain erred in getting so close to the raider and that in doing so he had not followed his orders. The reference to a court of inquiry is puzzling, since no records relating to such a court of inquiry, nor any other reference to it, have been located. There was no agenda for this meeting. The resulting minute was 842. A copy of the minute and the notes regarding the *Sydney* taken at this meeting are in appendix 2.

Minutes and agenda

Minutes

In the context of the records of the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council, a 'minute' was a decision. These minutes were not a verbatim record of the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council's discussions, but rather a statement of the decisions reached. The War Cabinet minutes were regarded as vital records. They travelled constantly with the War Cabinet Secretariat under close guard between Melbourne and Canberra and, occasionally, Sydney.

Draft minutes were written up in the Cabinet Secretariat by Mr Quealy immediately after the War Cabinet meeting from the rough notes he had taken at the meeting. The draft was approved by the Secretary to the War Cabinet, Frederick Shedden, and then typed up into its final form.

Six minutes deal with the loss of the *Sydney*. These are War Cabinet Minutes 1521 of 26 November 1941, 1526 of 1 December and 1528 of 4 December; and Advisory War Council Minutes 566 of 26 November, 571 of 28 November and 842 of 18 March 1942.

The original War Cabinet minutes and agenda are held in A5954, 803/1 to 811/2 – War Cabinet Minutes, Volumes 1 to 18. Carbon copies of these records are held in series A2673. The originals of the Advisory War Council Minutes are held in A5954, 812/1 to 815/2 – Advisory War Council Minutes, Volumes 1 to 8. Carbon copies of these are held in A2682.

Navy
No 96.

676

'Kormoran' - approx of services
Vampire - first RAN destroyer
to recapture friends to Borneo
disposition
to. about 20 ships - 'He did not know'

'Sydney'
Dir. of ops sent to Perth to investigate
German prisoners - interpreter -
now have as much info as poss -
reads out - Kormoran hit Syd
& turned away - Syd chased & flashing
German ship no answer - As Syd got
closer a.s. for secret signals
Syd has periscope on night genuine merchant
ship - put on ^{starboard side} pos of tactical
heads - ^{position} German said he was
Dutch ship Stuyt Holman -
along picking over ready to fly off -
German fired simultaneous - 1 mile
apart - 2 torpedoes - 1 hit Syd in lower
hit bridge & knocked control. (Killed Capt -
round stern - German had 15 Salvoes ^{into Syd}
1 Syd got 12 hits into German -
Syd on fire badly - also on fire
presumably cumulative effects
torpedoes & got many hits gone away
in burning slow manner

The official notetaker's record of the War Cabinet meeting 4 December, which was used to help draft the formal War Cabinet decision (minute 1528/1941; see later this chapter). The statement that the Sydney's captain was killed by one of the Kormoran's first salvos is presumably surmise, the logic being that if the bridge was destroyed, as the interrogation reports of the German prisoners of war suggested, the captain was have been killed.

NAA: A9230, Set 2 Vol 4, War Cabinet notebooks, meeting of 4 December 1941.

(See also the following page.)

677

PM - any exp. w. no survivors

Ans. early 2 life belts - action signally at 4 pm

5 pm to 5.25 pm -

capt. Thomas Dutton ship & reached
to take action -

this is the new - naval intelligence

Publicity - different - admiral

from how. report of to us

ran right across what we had

done - I sent message

to advise as to our location -

1 BBC Broadcast - over pressure

- adm. clearing everything that

normally done -

PM.

ask. for as much publicity -

no admiral as to bad tactics

Portsmouth - no more publicity

Sey.

BBC. 6' time offender &

looked protests - keep doing it

PM.

turn^{ing} to put up. a proposal to

no 2nd ship ~~trailing~~ ~~Hammer~~

accepted by Navy -

w/1 in ~~signing~~

Australia

to be sailed towards Fremantle

Not in media & Yarn in Person

Sally - only ships away

Continued from previous page.

Agenda

War Cabinet and Advisory War Council agenda were papers prepared for and discussed at each meeting. In the context of discussions about the Sydney, the agenda took the form of a chronology of events dated 25 November prepared by the Minister for the Navy and weekly progress reports submitted by the Chiefs of Staff.

It was the practice of each of the three Chiefs of Staff to regularly submit to Prime Minister Curtin as Minister for Defence Co-ordination a weekly progress report on the activities of their respective services. These reports were then submitted to the next meeting of the War Cabinet by Mr Curtin, where they became an agenda item. Of the four War Cabinet agenda papers dealing with the loss of the Sydney (401/1941, 402/1941, 408/1941 and 422/1941), the last three were weekly progress reports by the Chiefs of Staff. Each of these is described below under A2670.

Copies of the agenda papers are held in A2670 (Reference set of War Cabinet Agenda with Minutes) and A2671 (War Cabinet Agenda Files), both of which are held by the National Archives in Canberra. However, microfilm copies are held by all offices of the Archives in series A2700 and digital images of the four papers noted above are available on RecordSearch.

REFERENCE SET OF WAR CABINET AGENDA WITH MINUTES, ANNUAL SINGLE NUMBER SERIES, 1939–46 A2670

Recorded by:

1939–1946 War Cabinet Secretariat (CA 1468)

Canberra 11.88 metres

This series appears to have been maintained by the War Cabinet Secretariat for reference purposes. It consists of files, arranged in order of agendum, which contain a copy of each agendum paper, a copy of the relevant minute and, in some cases, a copy of the related Advisory War Council minute. In comparison, files in A2671 (see below) contain additional correspondence as well as the agendum and minute. This series contains copies of each of the War Cabinet agenda papers relevant to the *Sydney*, including the related War Cabinet Minutes, except for minute 1526 of 1 December 1941, for which there was no agendum (minute 1526 is held in A2671). A description of the individual agenda of relevance to the *Sydney* in A2670 is given below.

Agendum 401/1941 of 26 November 1941 – HMAS Sydney A2670, 401/1941

This agendum consists of a chronology of events dated 25 November prepared by the Minister for the Navy.

Agendum 402/1941 of 29 Nov 1941 – weekly progress reports by Chiefs of Staff – No. 96 – week ended 29 Nov 1941 A2670, 402/1941

Chiefs of Staff Weekly Report No. 96 was the first weekly report to mention the *Sydney*:

Report of the Chief of the Naval Staff – main naval activities No. 96 – [period ending] 28 November 1941

Operations HMAS *Sydney* – action with German raider.

Interrogation of rescued survivors from a German Raider indicate that she was brought to action by HMAS *Sydney* at 1730 on 19th November, in a position approximately 150 miles West-North-West of Carnarvon (WA). The Raider was sunk by gunfire, and they state that HMAS *Sydney* was set on fire and sank later. Searches by 4 HMA Ships specially despatched from Fremantle, and by numerous aircraft, have so far only led to the recovery of 1 RAN lifebelt, and no other trace of HMAS *Sydney* or her Ship's Company has been found. Approximately 300 survivors from the Raider have been rescued, and will be closely questioned. The Commander in Chief, Netherlands East Indies, is cooperating in searches by sea and air to the northward of North West Cape.

Report by Chief of the Air Staff on Activities of the Air Force – week ending 28 November 1941

Air Operations.

24 November. Aircraft from PEARCE searched the area between bearings 270 degrees and 340 degrees from datum Rottnest Island and to a distance of 300 miles to seaward.

25 November. Aircraft from PEARCE carried out reconnaissance to seaward between Geraldton and Carnarvon in order to locate surface vessels. A Catalina left both Moresby and Townsville for Perth via Darwin, flying overnight.

26 November. Two Catalinas arrived Perth AM and carried out searches PM to locate surface vessels westward of Geraldton.

Agendum 408/1941 of 6 Dec 1941 – weekly progress reports by Chiefs of Staff – No. 97 – week ended 6 Dec 1941 A2670, 408/1941

Report of the Chief of the Naval Staff – main naval activities No. 96 – [period ending] 5 December 1941

Personnel. These figures [ie the manpower statistics presented] include the missing members of the Ships' Companies of HMA Ships *Sydney* and *Parramatta* (50 Officers, 725 Ratings), who have not yet been classified as killed.

Report by Chief of the Air Staff on Activities of the Air Force – week ending 5 December 1941

Air Operations. 2 December. On completion of operation in Western Area Catalina Flying Boats A24/14 and A24/11 returned to Townsville and Port Moresby respectively.

Report by Chief of the Air Staff on Activities of the Air Force – Week ending 5 December 1941

'Air Operations. 2 December. On completion of operation in Western Area Catalina Flying Boats A24/14 and A24/11 returned to Townsville and Port Moresby respectively.'

Agendum 422/1941 of 12 Dec 1941 – weekly progress reports by Chiefs of Staff – No. 98 – week ended 12 Dec 1941 A2670, 422/1941

Report of the Chief of the Naval Staff – main naval activities No. 98 – [period ending] 12 December 1941

Personnel. The loss of the *Sydney* and *Parramatta* accounts for a drop [of 710] in numbers [of personnel borne in the Naval Forces].

MINUTES

o f

WAR CABINET MEETINGMELBOURNE, 4th DECEMBER, 1941.

PRESENT: The Hon. John Curtin, M.P., Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Co-ordination.
 The Hon. F.M. Forde, M.P., Minister for the Army.
 The Hon. J.B. Chifley, M.P., Treasurer.
 The Hon. H.V. Evatt, K.C., M.P., Attorney-General and Minister for External Affairs.
 The Hon. J.A. Beasley, M.P., Minister for Supply and Development.
 The Hon. N.J.O. Makin, M.P., Minister for the Navy and Minister for Munitions.
 The Hon. A.S. Drakeford, M.P., Minister for Air.

(The Chief of the General Staff, the Chief of the Air Staff and the Acting Chief of the Naval Staff were also present at this meeting).

H.M.A.S. "Sydney" - Action with German Raider. (Previous reference - Minute No. (1528)). The Acting Chief of the Naval Staff reported the results of further interrogation of German prisoners ex the "Kormoran", and read the following reconstructed account of the action :-

"The engagement took place in position 25°South 111°East on 19th November. H.M.A.S. "Sydney" on a bearing S.W. from the raider, made the first sighting at a range of 15 miles. The raider altered course from 000° to 250° and made no reply. At closer range the raider, which was flying the Dutch flag, made "Straad Malakka" by light.

"At 1650H the ships were on a parallel course, speed 15 knots. "Sydney" which was abaft the raider's beam, distant less than two miles, was at action stations and made 'Make your signal letters'. "Steinmark" immediately opened fire with guns and torpedoes, her first salvo hitting "Sydney's" bridge and starting a fire forward. "Sydney" opened fire simultaneously but her first salvo was over. Early in the action the cruiser was hit by a torpedo under A turret, resulting in A and B turrets being jammed. "Sydney's" torpedo tubes were hit by a further salvo, and a bad fire was started resulting in the destruction of her aircraft.

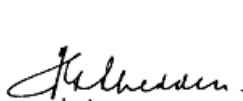
"The action was broken off after about half an hour, and "Sydney", burning fiercely and down by the bows, proceeded at 5 knots. The raider, which had received a vital hit, was now on fire amidships, with her engine room out of action. At about 1815H the raider's crew abandoned ship, and at midnight the vessel, which was scuttled, blew up.


"It is believed that "Sydney" sank at 2300H/19."

In regard to the possibility of a second German ship being present at the action, the Acting Chief of the Naval Staff stated that, in the light of investigations which had been made, the Naval authorities did not accept this view.

The Acting Chief of the Naval Staff referred to the embarrassing position in which we have been placed as a result of the premature disclosure by the United Kingdom authorities of the name and description of the raider which was in action with H.M.A.S. "Sydney". A rigorous censorship had been imposed in Australia and advice as to the nature of the restrictions was communicated to the United Kingdom authorities. These restrictions, however, had not been imposed on the B.B.C. and United Kingdom press and the broadcast of information by the B.B.C. on 2nd December and publication in the United Kingdom press forced the premature release to the Australian press of other material which it was desirable for the time being to withhold.

It was decided that representations should be made to the United Kingdom Government in the matter and their attention invited to previous instances of premature broadcast by the B.B.C. and to the assurances given that measures would be given to prevent recurrences of cases of this nature.


 Secretary.


 PRIME MINISTER.

Excerpts from War Cabinet minute 1528/1941. This minute, a record of the War Cabinet's 'decision' of 4 December 1941, was prepared with the assistance of the handwritten notes of the meeting taken by the official notetaker, a copy of which appears earlier in this chapter. NAA: A5954, 807/1, War Cabinet Minutes [Original] Volume 9.

**WAR CABINET AGENDA FILES, ANNUAL SINGLE NUMBER SERIES, 1939–46
A2671****Recorded by:****1939–1946 War Cabinet Secretariat (CA 1468)****Canberra (Sydney and Melbourne) 16.38 (9.36) metres**

As in A2670, this series has one file for each agendum. Each file contains background papers leading up to the agendum, a copy of agendum, a copy of the relevant minute, copies of related Advisory War Council minutes (in some cases) and minor correspondence and administrative notes about copies of circulated minutes.

In a number of the files, the agendum is missing. In these cases the file has a note attached saying that the agendum was issued on loan to the General Editor of the Official War History in 1947 (from whom it apparently was not returned). Presumably this copy of the agendum is to be found in the Official War Historian's papers at the Australian War Memorial.

**War Cabinet Agendum - No 401/1941 - HMAS Sydney, 1941–42 A2671,
401/1941****WAR CABINET MINUTES (CARBON COPIES), CHRONOLOGICAL SERIES, 1939–46
A2673****Recorded by:****War Cabinet Secretariat (CA 1468)****Canberra 0.72 metres**

This series consists of (unsigned) carbon copies of the War Cabinet minutes. The originals are held in A5954, 803/1 to 811/2. The minutes are arranged chronologically by meeting date and by the ongoing sequence of minute numbers. Each meeting is headed with the date and place of the meeting and the names and offices of the persons attending.

The pages of the volumes are also numbered in one continuing sequence, mirroring the same range of page numbers as the originals but are combined in only 16 volumes compared to 18 volumes of originals. The volumes correspond one-for-one except that the volume of originals numbered A5954, 806/2 is separated into two volumes in the carbon copy set (nos 7A and 8); and the last six volumes of the originals (A5954, 809/1 to 811/2) are compressed into four volumes in the carbon copy set (numbers 13 to 16). It appears that the carbon copy sets were used by the War Cabinet Secretariat for reference purposes because they have minor handwritten annotations that do not appear on the originals.

**Volume 9 – minute numbers 1456–1643, 30 Oct – 30 Dec 1941 A2673,
volume 9**

This item contains the unsigned carbon copies of War Cabinet minutes nos 1521 (p. 1058), 1526 (p. 1062) and 1528 (p. 1065).

ADVISORY WAR COUNCIL MINUTES (CARBON COPIES), 1940–45**A2682****Recorded by:****1940–1945 Advisory War Council (CA 495)****Canberra 0.72 metres**

This series consists of eight volumes of carbon copies of Advisory War Council minutes, the originals of which are in A5954, items 812/1 to 815/2. The minutes are arranged chronologically by meeting date and by the ongoing sequence of minute numbers. Each meeting is headed with the date and place of the meeting and the names and offices of the persons attending. The pages of the volumes are also numbered in one continuing sequence.

Minute numbers 449–596, 6 Aug – 12 Dec 1941**A2682, volume 3**

This item contains unsigned carbon copies of Advisory War Council minutes nos 566 (p. 355) and 571 (p. 358).

Minute numbers 597–869, 16 Dec 1941 – 26 Mar 1942**A2682, volume 4**

This item contains an unsigned carbon copy of Advisory War Council minute 842 (p. 494). A copy of the minutes of this meeting regarding the Sydney is in chapter 1.

Other records

Other records of the Advisory War Council include the draft minutes (A2683 – note that although they contain handwritten amendments and annotations, they add nothing substantial to what is reflected in the formal minutes) and the minute files (A2684 – this series contains a copy of minute 842 of 18 March without any related correspondence).

The indexes to the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council minutes are in A2674 (War Cabinet minutes index books), A2685 (Index to minutes of the Advisory War Council) and A5935 (Subject index cards for War Cabinet agenda and War Cabinet minutes).

The schedule of War Cabinet and Advisory War Council meetings showing the date and location of the meeting, those present and the agenda items discussed are found in A2675 (War Cabinet minute schedules) and A2688 (Advisory War Council minute schedules).

These records are all held by the National Archives in Canberra.

5 The Role of the Censor

The first censorship controls – 25 November

The earliest interrogation reports reaching Navy Office suggested that the ship from which the rescued Germans had come had been sunk by a cruiser. Briefing papers warned the Chief of Naval Staff and the Minister for the Navy that 'the above must be kept most secret, as enemy are probably unaware of situation'.⁶⁰ Yet 24 hours later, on 25 November, the day Frederick Shedden advised the Prime Minister in a 'most secret' minute of the Chief of Naval Staff's fears that the *Sydney* had been sunk, public rumours of the *Sydney*'s loss had already begun to spread. This was five days before the Prime Minister publicly announced the loss.

The government was well aware of the damage that would be done to national morale by disclosure of the *Sydney*'s loss. However, it appears from the records that the main reason the announcement was delayed and blanket censorship restrictions were imposed on any news of the *Sydney* was the Navy's concern that an enemy supply vessel may have scheduled a rendezvous with the *Kormoran*. It did not wish to scare off such a vessel by prematurely announcing details of the *Kormoran*'s sinking. Intelligence summaries prepared as late as 3 December still referred to the possibility of there being a supply vessel or second raider in the area.⁶¹

Despite the government's concern that nothing be disclosed, by the afternoon of 25 November the Melbourne *Herald* had heard that an Australian warship had been sunk. Earlier that day G Hermon Gill, the Navy's Publicity Censorship Liaison Officer, advised the Chief of Naval Staff that 'to issue a censorship instruction at this stage would be to start a flood of rumour throughout Press channels'. This is precisely what ensued.⁶²

Unknown to Gill, the Chief Publicity Censor in the Department of Information, E G Bonney had received instructions from the Minister for Information that day to issue a censorship instruction prohibiting any mention of HMAS *Sydney*. Accordingly, a censorship instruction was issued at 2.30 that afternoon to all newspapers and radio stations throughout Australia.

FC756: Pending further advice no reference press or broadcasting to HMAS Sydney.

To prevent publication of anything in the afternoon press, the Chief Publicity Censor himself telephoned the Melbourne *Herald* to pass on the censorship

⁶⁰ NAA: A5954, 2400/21, HMAS *Sydney* – sinking of by German raider *Kormoran*.

⁶¹ NAA: B6121, 775W/1, Combined Operational Intelligence Summary – weekly summaries of operational intelligence; and B6227, DS155, CWR Daily summary of operational intelligence, 3 December 1941 and B6227, DS157, CWR Daily summary of operational intelligence, 5 December 1941.

⁶² Unless otherwise stated, information and quotations in the introduction to this chapter can be found in AWM124, 4/224, Loss of HMAS *Sydney*.

instruction. He was told that the *Herald's* Canberra representative had already telephoned to say that an Australian warship had been sunk, and that in view of the instruction it must be HMAS *Sydney*.

It was immediately realised that the reference to HMAS *Sydney* in the censorship instruction was a mistake. Gill informed the Chief of Naval Staff that it had been issued 'without receiving any direction from Navy'.⁶³

Gill arranged for the Censor to issue a further instruction the same afternoon:

FC757: No reference whatever press or radio to any statements or rumours regarding alleged naval activity Australian waters.

The text of the two instructions was sent to publicity censors in all capital cities and Launceston, and despatched by signal to the Admiralty, the Commander in Chief China Station, the Commander in Chief East Indies, and the New Zealand Naval Board.

Informing the next of kin

On 26 November the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council decided that the spread of rumour about the *Sydney* was so great that it had little choice but to inform the next of kin. There was disagreement about this in the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council, the concern being that it would give valuable information to the enemy. The Rt Hon. William Morris Hughes was most strongly opposed to the proposal. He considered that telling the next of kin was tantamount to telling the world. With Hughes dissenting, it was agreed that the next of kin would be informed in a way that did not convey useful information to the enemy.⁶⁴ The text of the telegram sent to the next of kin reflected the government's concern to release as little information as possible. A copy of a telegram sent to the father of one of the six members of the Royal Australian Air Force on board the *Sydney* at the time of its loss appears in chapter 7.

The Navy Office had drafted a brief prime ministerial statement to be delivered, if required, on the day the next of kin were to be informed. However, the Chief of Naval Staff accepted Gill's recommendation that a public statement should not be issued because 'the fate of *Sydney* is at present unknown (and) presumably the fate of the raider is not known to Germany.' It was decided that 'complete public silence should be maintained, even though next of kin are informed' and that 'release of any statement, when made, should be simultaneous in Australia, New Zealand, Britain and Singapore.'

It was also agreed that Gill in Melbourne and the Naval Staff Officers, Intelligence in other cities would arrange to:

⁶³ The relationship of the Navy to the Chief Publicity Censor was that of adviser only. Any requests for prohibition made by the Naval Board had to be submitted, with reasons, to the Chief Publicity Censor through the Department of Information. Gill, op. cit., p. 102.

⁶⁴ NAA: A9240, Set 2 Vol 4, Advisory War Council notebooks, meeting of 28 November 1941.

communicate personally and verbally to newspaper editors, the position, and explain reasons for censorship ban...This will satisfy and quieten the Press – which is already aware of some happenings [**Gill's emphasis**] – and enlist their cooperation.

This secret briefing did not succeed in 'quietening' the press. The next day, 27 November, in response to growing demands for permission to publish details, a further censorship instruction was issued:

FC758: Prohibition in FC756 is absolute for the present stop use of name mentioned in that instruction must be avoided.

The same day the Naval Board advised the Admiralty that information leaks had already occurred in Australia and that widespread rumour following the release of information to the next of kin might force the Australian Government to make an early public statement.

The Naval Board's concern about information leaks about the *Sydney* was summarised in a minute to the Prime Minister several weeks later by the acting Chief of Naval Staff. In a letter dated 13 December 1941, Commodore Durnford observed:

The unfortunate chain of events following the Sydney leakage is fresh in memory. It may, however, be remarked that owing to that leakage:–

- (a) Next of kin notices had to be issued prematurely on Wednesday 26 November, owing to the wild spread of rumour, at a stage when nothing was known of the fate of HMAS *Sydney*.
- (b) Rumour got quite out of hand, and the most extravagant stories circulated throughout Australia, and continue to circulate.
- (c) As a result the Government was forced to issue an official statement at a time when it was most desirable to keep from the enemy the news that our Naval strength had been reduced so drastically, and again at a time when it was not possible to give a final picture of the happening.

But for the leakage, it would have been possible to have delayed the issue of notices to next of kin until such time as –

- (i) a complete story, devoid of false hope, could have been issued.
- (ii) strategical requirements had been satisfied.
- (iii) the official announcement could have been made immediately next of kin notices had been circulated, thus forestalling rumour. Much pain and anxiety would then have been spared the next of kin, and public morale would not have suffered from a surfeit of doubts and fears, as it undoubtedly did suffer.

Durnford had no doubt that this and other recent leakages of secret naval information had occurred through parliamentary press representatives in Canberra. He did not offer a view as to how they had obtained the information.

Pressure for the release of information

By 28 November the Prime Minister was receiving urgent telegrams from newspaper editors urging the release of information:

Place seething. Disturbing rumours. Urge immediate news (Daily News, Perth)

and

Disappointed we unable relieve extreme anxiety. Great number people who concerned at persistent rumours Commonwealth loss. Many stories current and our view is that immediate steps should be taken to give people authentic report. In view public uneasiness and our embarrassment at daylong and anxious enquiries we implore you consider making immediate release. Could we expect reply urgent (Telegraph, Brisbane).

That day at an Advisory War Council meeting, the Prime Minister and the other members present received first-hand evidence of these rumours from the Hon. J McEwen, who reported rumours heard by his wife.⁶⁵ The Prime Minister responded to calls by the press for a statement by saying that 'for vital strategical reasons' the Admiralty and Navy were insisting there be no release until they authorised it. However, on the same day further information was secretly released to newspaper editors, the Navy fearing that not to keep them informed would see an end to their cooperation.⁶⁶

A revised prime ministerial statement based on the latest information was drafted, but the Naval Board urged that when released the statement should be for press only, with no broadcast or release overseas for 48 hours after its release in Australia. Radio reports concerning the loss of the *Kormoran* might be picked up by the supply ship believed to be still in the area.

Such concerns appear to have been futile. Colonel Roberts, the Acting Director of Military Intelligence, reported that at about 6.30 pm that day his son had heard a broadcast from a radio station in California, giving details of the *Sydney's* loss. Gill's minute informing the Acting Chief of Naval Staff of this was annotated by the Acting CNS:

If true, this implies leakage by W/T or cable on which we are supposed to be 100 per cent efficient (or plane passenger).

It was also on 28 November that the Prime Minister ordered that copies of the full casualty lists be air-mailed to each state capital to allow 'prompt release to newspapers when release is approved'. In response to the ensuing pressure from the press for permission to publish the names of the *Sydney's* crew, a further censorship instruction was issued:

FC762: No publication any RAN personnel reported missing until official casualty list issued.

A number of additional censorship instructions were issued over the following days which prohibited the reporting of the arrival of the German prisoners in Fremantle, and a reminder to the press that the Prime Minister's statement was not to be published or broadcast before the permitted times. In all, 11 censorship instructions were issued; these remained in force until 3 December.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ NAA: A5954, 518/36, HMAS *Sydney* – sinking, replacement fund and SP109/3, 357/06, Suspension of radio stations for breaches of instructions regarding the sinking of HMAS *Sydney*.

The Prime Minister's statement – 1 December

The Prime Minister's brief statement, with two amendments suggested by the Admiralty, was officially released to newspapers late on 30 November for publication the next day. The statement bore the caveat:

Not to be broadcast by any Australian radio station. Not to be cabled outside Australia.

As requested by the Navy, a 48-hour embargo had been agreed on broadcast transmissions of the statement, to give the Navy every chance of intercepting the *Kormoran's* supply ship.

On the day of the release, three radio stations – 3AR, 3KZ and 2UW – broke the broadcasting embargo and as a consequence had their services temporarily suspended. 3KZ had broadcast extracts of the Prime Minister's statement from the morning's press, while 3AR had played the hymn *Lead Kindly Light* 'in memory of the brave boys of the Sydney'.

It could not be known at the time that all these precautions were in vain. Research papers prepared for the Official War Historian, G Hermon Gill, state that:

German Naval Authorities received the first report of the Sydney–Kormoran battle on 24 November 1941 by means of a transmission from a Sydney W/T station, which transmitted the request to a steamer at sea "Report details of battle and ship's name as gathered from survivors." As Kormoran was the only raider at sea the Naval Staff knew on 30 November, when an Admiralty report of 26th was decyphered, that Ship 41 [Kormoran] had gone down.⁶⁷

Unaware of this, the Navy continued to oppose the release of anything more than the Prime Minister had announced. His press statement had hardly been informative and rumours continued to circulate. On the day of the Prime Minister's statement, his private secretary sent a message to the Secretary of the Department of the Navy:

Rumours regarding HMAS Sydney continue to be received by press representatives here from their state offices as being current in capital cities. Latest is that Sydney has been discovered on Western Australian coast. It is realised that Prime Minister will be advised immediately anything factual of importance re Sydney is to hand and foregoing is for information.

The same morning the members of the press were already asking the Prime Minister to release more information for the afternoon papers and to approve the publication of details they had obtained in unauthorised interviews with the German prisoners. The Perth *Daily News* again sent a telegram to the Prime Minister:

Urge strongly prisoners story action publishable without disclosing enemy's name or locality. See no possible strategic or other objection. Can you help us.

Still mindful of the need to keep as much as possible from the enemy, the Prime Minister replied that 'security negates present publication of accounts emanating

⁶⁷ AWM: [AWM69, 23/64](#), Surface raider activity, part 2 (research by Mr Ware).

German sources' and asked the Chief Publicity Censor to request copies of these interviews for his scrutiny so that once censored they could be released to all newspapers. Ultimately publication was refused by the Censor.⁶⁸ The Prime Minister's statement of 3 December, giving the 'broad canvas' of what was known, was the most the government was prepared to release.

The pressure to release information was not confined to Australia. The New Zealand Government objected to the continued prohibition on publication of the details in New Zealand despite the arrival there on the afternoon of 1 December of Australian newspapers containing the details of the Prime Minister's announcement. Initially the Naval Board refused the New Zealand Government's request to permit publication of the information in New Zealand, but on 2 December agreed to release the information there, but to continue the ban on broadcasting.

The Australian Government was also embarrassed by a British Broadcasting Corporation broadcast on 2 December that gave the name and a description of the *Kormoran*, information still subject to censorship restrictions in Australia. In a cablegram to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs on 6 December, the Prime Minister protested at the Australian Government's serious embarrassment. He reported that the Australian press were 'incensed' at the restrictions imposed on them when the same restrictions were not imposed on the BBC and the British press, and said that the pressure resulting from the release, against which the Australian Government 'had no valid defence' had forced the 'premature release of other material it was desirable for the time being to withhold.'

Continued restrictions on the release of information

Throughout the remainder of the war the press continued to publish stories about the fate of the *Sydney*, sometimes against the wishes of the authorities. For example, stories about the *Sydney–Kormoran* action published in New York in March 1943 and re-published in Australian newspapers attracted the attention of Naval Intelligence. In a minute to the Chief of Naval Staff R B M Long, the Director of Naval Intelligence reported:

The attached articles published in this morning's papers [from *The Argus*, *The Sun* and *The Age*] give the true and full story of the *Sydney–Kormoran* action. Obviously there has been a leakage [the leakage was later reported by Long to have been from US naval authorities].

Long subsequently recommended to the Prime Minister's Press Secretary by telephone that the Prime Minister should try to evade answering questions from journalists about the articles because if he stated that the story was true, the press and the public would inevitably ask him why he had not released it earlier himself. On the other hand, if he said the story was unconfirmed and to be viewed with suspicion because it was coming from prisoner of war reports, the press and public 'will be entitled to reply that as he must know the full story why can he not release it.'

⁶⁸ NAA: A5954, 2400/21, HMAS *Sydney* – sinking of by German raider *Kormoran*.

Explaining why the stories were passed by the Censor, Long told the Chief of Naval Staff that they contained 'certain unimportant details not previously published in Australia', and that 'all the relevant facts' were published in Australia in December 1941. Gill, who was still the Navy's Publicity Censorship Liaison Officer, had requested the State Publicity Censor to 'completely ban':

the story from publication in Australia because

- a. it was digging up a story that had been dead for 15 months;
- b. it threw no new light on the subject;
- c. it could be harmful to morale, and hurtful to next of kin.

The press was subsequently permitted to publish the stories because the State Publicity Censor decided that Gill's reasons could not justify their suppression and his objections were therefore overridden.

Official reluctance to release additional information continued after the war, with the refusal of the Director of Naval Intelligence to publish an account of the action between the *Sydney* and the *Kormoran* prepared by Naval Intelligence staff in Fremantle. The details of this are given in chapter 1.

Records dealing mainly with aspects of the censorship of information about the *Sydney* are described on the next page.

THE SHEDDEN COLLECTION – TWO NUMBER SERIES 1901–71

A5954

Recorded by:

1937–71 Sir Frederick Geoffrey Shedden, KCMG, OBE (CP 320)
1939–42 Department of Defence Co-ordination (CA 37)
1942–71 Department of Defence (CA 46)

Canberra (smaller quantities in other Archives' offices) 201 metres

This series contains records collected by Sir Frederick Shedden during his career within the Department of Defence. It also contains material collated after his retirement in researching and writing a book on the history of Australian Defence Policy. The manuscript of this book remained unpublished at his death on 8 July 1971.

Drafts of this work are held in this series together with copies of departmental correspondence, files, reports and press cuttings. Copies of War Cabinet and Advisory War Council records are also held. This series is the major part of a larger accumulation of records the remainder of which, including the manuscript of the history, formed part of Sir Frederick Shedden's personal estate.

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HMAS Sydney, sinking of by German raider *Kormoran*, 1941 A5954,
2400/21

This item contains numerous papers, including:

- the Sydney casualty lists, which were sent to each state capital for release to the press
- a summary of information obtained from the Kormoran survivors, including information about the damage sustained by both vessels
- a brief history of the Sydney and biographical information about its senior officers
- a draft and final press statements for the Prime Minister and plans for the public release of the information in Australia on 30 November and overseas on 2 December (the press statements were subsequently refused publication by the Censor)
- rumours of the discovery of the Sydney on the Western Australian coast
- pressure on the Prime Minister by the press for the disclosure of more information
- cables from the Chief Publicity Censor to the Prime Minister's Department of 1 December quoting draft press reports prepared in Perth and proposed for publication in *The Argus* and *The Age* about the landing of the Kormoran survivors at Carnarvon on 26 November and at Fremantle on 27 November
- a request from the Prime Minister for copies of these reports for his scrutiny.

WRITTEN RECORDS, 1939–45 WAR, 1939–51**AWM54****Recorded by:****1925– Australian War Memorial (AWM) (CA 616)****Australian War Memorial (AWM) 213.5 metres**

'The Story of Carnarvon: Prisoners from the German Raider *Kormoran*', and 'The Story of Broome: The Role of the Volunteer Defence Corps' - brief narratives of the role of the Volunteer Defence Corps, 1944 AWM54, 1008/2/2

Press interest in details of the *Sydney's* loss continued throughout the war. On 5 January 1944 *The Argus* in Melbourne requested *The West Australian* in Perth to obtain 'particulars of the [unspecified] Carnarvon and Broome incidents'. On 22 January *The West Australian* responded to *The Argus* with two narratives describing these 'incidents'.

The first narrative, titled *The Story of Carnarvon: Prisoners from the German Raider Kormoran*, is a one-page typed narrative with a questionnaire, evidently completed by a member or members of the Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC) in Carnarvon. The narrative describes the role played by the Carnarvon Volunteer Defence Corps between 25 and 28 November 1941 in guarding the two boatloads of Germans from the *Kormoran* who landed north of Carnarvon. *The West Australian's* attempts to obtain the story were in vain since it was refused publication by the Censor. Why publication was prohibited is not stated.

The second narrative is titled *The Story of Broome: The Role of the Volunteer Defence Corps*. Unrelated to the loss of the *Sydney*, it gives a history of the VDC in Broome during the early stages of the war following the entry of Japan and was probably written by a member of the local VDC in Broome. Neither narrative carries a date or the author's identity. Both narratives carry handwritten annotations and corrections.

NAVAL HISTORICAL COLLECTION, 1872–1974

AWM124

Recorded by:

1943–1974 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)

Australian War Memorial (AWM) 28 metres

This series comprises original records and other material created and acquired by the RAN and collected in the Naval Historical Records Section and its successors in Navy Office.

HMAS Sydney, raider, 1941–43 AWM124, 4/224

This Naval Intelligence Division file, one of two numbered AWM124, 4/224 (see chapter 6 for a description of the second file, titled 'Loss of Sydney – duplicate') deals mainly with attempts to censor news about the *Sydney's* loss and was probably maintained by G Hermon Gill, the Navy's Publicity Censorship Liaison Officer. The file contains Gill's successful submission of 29 November to the Chief of Naval Staff that the Prime Minister's statement about the loss should be only to the press in Australia and that there should be a total ban on broadcasting and communications for a further 48 hours, thus delaying the release of the information overseas.

The file also contains copies of cablegram exchanges between the New Zealand and Australian naval boards after the Prime Minister's announcement was released on 1 December. On 6 December 1941 the New Zealand Prime Minister cabled his Australian counterpart, expressing concern that information about the loss of the *Sydney* that the New Zealand Government had been requested to withhold from publication until Wednesday, 3 December had been published in Australia by the *Sydney Morning Herald* on the day of the Prime Minister's announcement; copies of the newspaper had subsequently arrived in New Zealand by flying boat on the afternoon of 1 December.

The New Zealand Prime Minister passed on protests from the New Zealand press against what they regarded as 'useless prohibition of news which was in any case available to the public from other sources', and sought an arrangement with Australia under which Australian and New Zealand censorship authorities could release information simultaneously in both countries. The Prime Minister also complained of New Zealand's embarrassment that the Australian Prime Minister's official statement of 1 December was issued many hours before the cancellation of a censorship instruction:

received through Naval quarters...that no reference should be made to (a) the locality, (b) the time of action, (c) the prisoners landed in Australia, and (d) no speculation outside the bounds of the official statement.

He suggested that 'there might be much to be gained' by a conference between the 'Directors of Publicity of Australia and New Zealand'. [Note: These exchanges do not appear on this file.]

There are copies of newspaper cuttings from *The Age* and other papers from early December, one of which indicates that Berlin Radio broadcast details of the *Sydney's* loss on 4 December. There are details of censorship breaches by radio station 2UW.

The file includes cablegram exchanges between the Naval Board and the Admiralty in early December about the unilateral release of details of the *Sydney–Kormoran* action in the United Kingdom without arranging a simultaneous release in Australia, and exchanges between the Australian and British prime ministers concerning the embarrassment caused to Australia by the release. The approach to the British Government arose from the War Cabinet's discussion on 4 December.

The file also contains a minute dated 5 December from the Acting Chief of Naval Staff, Commodore Durnford, and a further minute from Durnford to the Prime Minister dated 13 December about leakages of secret naval information (including information about the *Sydney*), apparently through parliamentary press representatives in Canberra.

In 1979 this file was temporarily transferred by the Department of Defence to the Archives as AA1979/318, 15B, under which accession it has been cited (eg see Barbara Winter's *HMAS Sydney: Fact, Fantasy and Fraud*). In 1980 the item was again temporarily transferred to the Archives as AA1980/700. Both files are now held by the Australian War Memorial as AWM124, 4/224.

**ARMY SECRET CORRESPONDENCE FILES, MULTIPLE NUMBER SERIES (CLASS 401),
1939–45 MP729/6**

Recorded by:

Department of the Army (CA 36)

Melbourne 26.31 metres

This series comprises Army Headquarters correspondence files, with a 'secret' classification. Items cover a wide variety of subjects.

**New Zealand press complaints re news of HMAS Sydney, 1941–42
MP729/6, 55/401/25**

This item contains copies of the same cablegram exchanges between the New Zealand and Australian governments concerning censorship bans that are referred to in the description of AWM124, 4/224 above.

CORRESPONDENCE FILES (GENERAL), 1923–50 MP1049/5

Recorded by:

1939–1950 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)

Melbourne 59.82 metres

Enemy raiders, Pacific, 1940 MP1049/5, 1835/2/734

Though this item is not directly related to the sinking of the *Sydney*, it does mention raiders near Australia and indicates what information would be restricted in press messages regarding raiders in the Pacific as at December 1940.

HMAS Sydney – raider publicity 1941–42 MP1049/5, 2026/3/454

This item contains copies of correspondence from the New Zealand Prime Minister expressing concerns about censorship. There are official responses and explanations to the Prime Minister's Department from the Department of Information, Naval Intelligence and Department of the Navy concerning poor censorship procedures that led to the New Zealand complaint.

The file contains cuttings from Australian newspapers dated 2 December 1941 reporting the sinking of the *Kormoran* and rumours of the loss of the *Sydney*. There is also a copy of the cablegram dated 6 December 1941 from Prime Minister Curtin to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs in London protesting about the release of information about the *Sydney–Kormoran* action by British authorities before its release in Australia.

GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE, DEWEY DECIMAL SYSTEM, 1945–46**SP109/3****Recorded by:****1939–50 Department of Information (CA 34)****Canberra 8.46 metres**

The folios are contained in Department of Information and Department of Defence file covers; they bear headings such as 'censorship' (mostly Defence files), 'publicity', 'rehabilitation', 'exhibitions', 'shortwave' and 'photographs'.

**Complaint re official release of the names of personnel of HMAS Sydney, 1941
SP109/3, 342/14**

This file documents a complaint to the Department of Information by W R Rolph and Sons Pty Ltd of *The Examiner*, Launceston, concerning the 'serious disability' caused to *The Examiner* by the Department of the Navy's failure to release the casualty lists for HMAS Sydney in Launceston as well as in Hobart.

**Suspension of radio stations for breaches of instructions regarding the
sinking of HMAS Sydney, 1941–42 SP109/3, 357/06**

This item contains directions under the Wireless Stations Control Order, National Security (General) Regulations, ordering the temporary suspension of transmission by radio stations 3AR, 3KZ and 2UW as a penalty for contravening broadcasting censorship instructions relating to the loss of the Sydney. The file also contains details of the machinery established through the Chief of the Naval Staff for the closure of radio stations on emergency or punitive grounds.

6 Interrogations, Investigations and Intelligence

The interrogations

The first survivors of the *Kormoran* were recovered three-and-a-half days after the battle. A raft containing 26 men was found by the liner *Aquitania*, en route from Singapore to Sydney, early on Sunday 23 November. Over the following four days the remaining survivors were recovered in six separate groups: 188 men in four groups were rescued from boats and rafts at sea by the British tanker *Trocas*, the *Koolinda*, the *Centaur* and HMAS *Yandra*; and two boats containing a total of 103 men found their way to the coast, reaching land at separate locations north of Carnarvon. In all, 315 of the *Kormoran*'s crew of 393 were recovered, along with three Chinese who had been taken captive from the *Eurylochus*, which had been sunk by the *Kormoran* in the Atlantic 10 months earlier, and been forced to become laundrymen on board the *Kormoran*.

Except for survivors recovered by the *Trocas* and the 26 men picked up by the *Aquitania*, the prisoners were transported by sea and land to Carnarvon, where the first interrogations took place. These were conducted by Lieutenant Commander Rycroft, the Staff Officer (Intelligence) in Fremantle, aided by an interpreter. Both had been sent by air to Carnarvon to begin the interrogations early on 26 November. The information they obtained was supplemented by reports of the interrogations conducted on board the *Trocas* and the *Yandra*. As information emerged, it was cabled and telephoned to the Naval Board in Melbourne and then passed to the government.

The *Trocas*, with its 25 survivors, proceeded directly to Fremantle, while the *Aquitania* continued its voyage east. When it landed in Sydney, the interrogation of the 26 Germans it had recovered was undertaken by Captain Farncomb, the commanding officer of HMAS *Canberra*.

Once the prisoners from Carnarvon and from the *Trocas* arrived in Fremantle, the interrogations continued, with the officers being taken to Swanbourne Barracks, headquarters of the 5th Garrison Brigade in Perth, and the men to No. 11 Internment Camp at Harvey, south of Perth. Some interrogations were also conducted at Fremantle Detention Barracks.

To assist in coordinating the interrogations on behalf of Naval Intelligence, Commander Dechaineux and Commander G B Salm of the Royal Dutch Navy were sent to Perth on the evening of Friday, 28 November. They were followed by Admiral Crace, Rear Admiral Commanding the Australian Squadron, who was sent to Fremantle on 30 November by the Chief of Naval Staff to take charge of the interrogations.

The interrogation reports of all prisoners are to be found in the items described in this chapter.

The early instructions to the interrogators were to establish what had happened to the *Sydney*. On 25 November the Naval Board instructed the *Trocas* to signal (i) the date, time and duration of the action, and (ii) the condition of the cruiser after the action. Other intelligence was also sought. On the same day Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) intelligence asked that the German prisoners be asked 'whether supply ships carry aircraft' and whether a supply ship was responsible for air reconnaissance over Geraldton or Pearce on the night of 3 or 7 November, and, if so, why was this carried out at night and how.⁶⁹

Until 2 December the interrogations were carried out with little formal guidance and were not handled well in the view of some. In a letter dated 3 December to Headquarters Western Area, the Commanding Officer of RAAF Station Pearce reported that the 'Naval Intelligence Officer' (presumably Lieutenant Commander Rycroft) had carried out his duties in a way that:

left a certain amount to be desired ... Admittedly there were many difficulties in the way of carrying out his duties but it would appear that two simple points completely overlooked were: (i) the segregation of the separate batches of prisoners until all interrogation had been completed; and (ii) the provision of a suitable questionnaire to the Intelligence Officer to assist him in carrying out his very arduous duty.⁷⁰

The failure to segregate the prisoners in the early stages appears to have escaped the attention of Captain Farquhar-Smith, the District Naval Officer, Western Australia. In a letter to the Naval Board dated 16 December, he submitted details of the interrogations, stating that the prisoners were:

segregated from the time of arrival until interrogation was completed. This segregation proved invaluable for checking statements by prisoners. After interrogation a prisoner was not allowed to return to the batch from which he came until the whole of that batch had been interrogated.⁷¹

The *Instructions for Interrogating Prisoners of War ex No. 41* were finally issued on 2 December by Rear Admiral Crace, but by then a considerable amount of interrogation had already been undertaken. These instructions spelt out broader objectives than simply to find out what had happened to the *Sydney*. A copy of Admiral Crace's instructions to the interrogating officers appears later in this chapter.

By 9 December all the prisoners in Western Australia had been interrogated, except for two who were still hospitalised, and preparations were made for their transfer to Victoria where they were interned at Murchison prisoner of war camp, along with those rescued by the *Aquitania* and taken to Sydney. The officers were later moved from Murchison to nearby Dhurringile and in 1943 the men were transferred to a timber-felling camp at Graytown. The prisoners were finally repatriated in 1947.

⁶⁹ NAA: AA1969/100, 2/18/INT, *Squadrons involved in search for HMAS Sydney*.

⁷⁰ NAA: AA1969/100, 105/30/AIR, *HMAS Sydney – search operations*.

⁷¹ NAA: K997, 1/15/2, *HMAS Sydney/Kormoran action, November 1941*.

The investigations

The records disclose details of a range of investigations and inquiries conducted at various stages between 1941 and 1949.

On 5 December 1941 Commander Dechaineux reported to the Chief of Naval Staff:

As a result of interrogation of prisoners of war ex Raider 41, I consider that little further information can be obtained from the officers by direct or indirect questioning. There is much intelligence yet to be sought from these officers. It is considered that the installation of microphones in the room to be occupied by the more senior officers...in their permanent prisoner of war camp might well lead to the collection of valuable information.

The Chief of Naval Staff approved Dechaineux's request and wrote to Brigadier Prisk, the Deputy Adjutant-General, requesting that preparations be made before the officers arrived in Victoria for the installation of hidden microphones, a method that had provided much valuable information in the United Kingdom.⁷²

At various times throughout the remainder of the war military and naval intelligence authorities sought to extract more information from the prisoners. As well as listening devices, other methods were used to discover more information, including 'special observation', casual conversations with the prisoners, eavesdropping by German-speaking military personnel and the interception of letters. The individual prisoner of war dossiers in A7919 (described in chapter 8) contain copies of many intercepted and seized letters and documents. None of these methods succeeded in obtaining additional intelligence of any substance.

The interrogations conducted on 1 December had indicated that Leading Seaman Gerhard Keller belonged to the propaganda section of the German Navy and that he took films of the sinking of the *Kormoran's* victims, which were then sent back to Germany on supply vessels and used for propaganda. Keller claimed to have taken a film of the action with the *Sydney* that he said he had given to an 'officer for despatch to Germany', but the film was inadvertently left on board the *Kormoran* and went down with the ship.⁷³ On 8 January 1942 Detmers visited his men at Murchison camp and was overheard asking Keller what he had done with the film, to which Keller replied it had been left on board. Keller confirmed this story when interrogated again on 16 October 1945 in the presence of Lieutenant Commander Gill of Naval Intelligence.

Photographs of the battle in progress were also taken. It was learned in November 1945 that Dr Fritz List, who had landed in a steel lifeboat at Red Bluff on 25 November 1941, had taken about 30 photographs of the action with a 35mm Leica camera but upon reaching land had buried the camera and film inside a cave on the beach. An expedition including Dr List was sent to Red Bluff in an attempt to find the camera but despite a week-long search of the cave where the camera had been buried, nothing was located. It was concluded that the camera and film had

⁷² NAA: B6121, 165K, *Kormoran* – translation of diaries.

⁷³ AWM: AWM124, 4/224, Loss of *Sydney* – duplicate.

probably been washed away or destroyed by the storms and heavy seas that affect that part of the coast.

Inquiries and investigations were also pursued to determine whether any of the *Sydney's* company had survived. As well as inquiries to the International Red Cross in December 1941 and January 1942 asking whether any of the *Sydney's* crew had been taken prisoner of war, inquiries were pursued in Japan after the war.

The Minister for the Navy, responding to a question in the House of Representatives on 13 September 1945 by Mr S M Falstein, MP, undertook to have inquiries made in Tokyo with a view to gathering whatever information was available about the *Sydney*.

The Naval Board subsequently signalled Commodore J A Collins, Commodore Commanding the Australian Squadron, then in Japan, informing him that 'the rumour that crew of HMAS *Sydney* may have fallen into the hands of the Japanese has been revived here.' Collins was instructed to 'ascertain whether Japanese can give any lead as to the fate of HMAS *Sydney* and her crew'.

In his interim report to the minister dated 1 October 1945, the Chief of Naval Staff (L H K Hamilton) reported that Commodore Collins had made inquiries of the German Naval Attache in Tokyo, who knew only that the *Sydney* was sunk 'some hundreds of miles off Perth'. The attache did not know whether the ship had been torpedoed, but stated that a Japanese broadcast that *Sydney* had been towed to Japan was definitely incorrect. Collins also reported that no survivors were picked up by any Axis vessel and none was taken to Japan. The Japanese Naval Ministry stated that it knew nothing.

Though inquiries continued, Collins stated that he felt that no information was known anywhere in Japan that could support hopes that any personnel of HMAS *Sydney* were alive. In a further report dated 19 October 1945 the Chief of Naval Staff passed Collins' final advice to the minister:

All possible contacts and enquiries in Japan have been made and Japanese naval records have been inspected. Results are negative in every respect.⁷⁴

On the night of 10 January 1945 Captain Detmers and 19 other officers and other ranks escaped from their detention camp at Dhurringile. Detmers was among the last to be recaptured. When recaptured an encoded diary was found in his possession. The decryption and translation of the relevant portions were not completed until July 1945. It was found to be an action report of the *Kormoran's* deck log and engine room log.

The file containing the encrypted German plain-text and translated English versions of the logs produced by the cryptographic authorities appears in series B5823, described below. Why Captain Detmers encoded the account and then attempted to conceal it when recaptured is not known. The authorities were

⁷⁴ NAA: B6121, 165K, *Kormoran* – translation of diaries.

satisfied that the account confirmed the stories obtained by the interrogators in 1941, but others have found inconsistencies.⁷⁵ The whereabouts of the confiscated diary itself is not known. It may have been returned to Captain Detmers when he was repatriated to Germany in 1947.

Series B5823 was released for public access for the first time in 1992 but 18 pages of the diary continued to be withheld on national security grounds, causing much speculation by those interested in the story of the *Sydney* about the nature of the information being withheld. The reasons given at the time were that it was necessary to withhold the information to protect the technique that was used to decode the cypher. The 18 pages were finally released in December 1995, making the entire item available for public access.

Investigations into the loss of the *Sydney* were undertaken several years later, when in 1947 the diaries of a number of the *Kormoran*'s crew were seized by British naval intelligence authorities when the repatriated prisoners arrived in Germany in 1947. The translated diaries were found generally to corroborate the stories they had told under interrogation six years earlier.

As discussed in chapter 1, no records of a court of inquiry into the loss of the *Sydney* have been located, but an investigation does appear to have been conducted by Commander Dechaineux and completed on 16 January 1942. Similarly, no records of this investigation have been located. A report was also prepared by F B Eldridge, a senior master on the teaching staff at the Royal Australian Naval College, and submitted to the Director of Naval Intelligence on 28 January 1942. This report appears in the records described in this chapter.

Official involvement in an investigatory capacity appears to have ended in 1949 when the Naval Officer in Charge, Fremantle wrote to the Director of Naval Intelligence asking him to investigate whether a Carley float containing the body of a sailor recovered off Christmas Island in early 1942 was from the *Sydney*. This investigation is discussed in chapter 9.

An interesting postscript to the official inquiries into the loss of the *Sydney* is revealed in the correspondence of R B M Long, the former Director of Naval Intelligence, with G Hermon Gill, the official Navy war historian in 1953. It appears that Gill referred to Long for his comments copies of his draft chapters of the official war history (including chapter 12, the chapter in which Gill deals with the loss of the *Sydney*).

In Long's reply of 23 November 1953 he remarked that chapter 12 'is the best one you have done so far.' He commented favourably on Gill's treatment of the story, particularly on the conjecture about why Burnett appeared to have put the *Sydney* in a position of vulnerability:

I think you handle the subject with great tact, very fairly and with literary skill. It is a part of the History that will be closely read and as Joe Burnett's two sons are now rising in rank as Naval Officers it is important that they should be able to read that section without distress. I don't

⁷⁵ Frame, op. cit., pp. 87–88.

know who it was who said that we all make mistakes and the man who doesn't makes nothing. Burnett's mistakes and the loss of the *Sydney* of course must be his responsibility (whether he happened to be sick or dead at the time of the action is of little consequence) and his reputation must be carried by his sons, but I think that you have given such a decent slant to the matter that they need never be even embarrassed.

Commenting on other sections of the draft, Long noted:

The search for the *Kormoran* films commenced as a military expedition, certainly within six months of the *Kormoran* prisoners being put into stir. It continued intermittently until 1945... You probably know that I, personally, continued for over two years, a world search and on the flimsiest stories, for some indication as to the *Sydney*'s end. I well remember an expedition that was outfitted for me on the Gold Coast and bunged up country into Vichy/French Territory on a statement that some nine Germans, mostly officers, with two British prisoners, had gone inland from Dakar. I just can't remember the full extent of the search but I remember it also took in Kerguelan [sic] and there was a case of the 'Two Sailors' in the mountainous country back in Natal. It is correct to say that 'not a stone was left unturned'.⁷⁶

Part of Long's response appears to have been used by Gill in the official history:

Australian naval intelligence continued for some years a search for any information which would throw light on the fate of *Sydney*'s company. The flimsiest stories were followed up, and the search ranged from Central Africa to Kerguelen, but without success.⁷⁷

The intelligence

The intelligence of direct relevance to the *Sydney*'s loss appears to have been obtained entirely from the information obtained from the prisoners of war under interrogation. The only other possibly direct accounts of the action were from persons on the coast who variously reported seeing smoke, hearing sounds like distant thunder and seeing a glow over the horizon at times that coincided with the time of the battle, though this information was not found in official sources.⁷⁸ Most of the intelligence records consist of reports, analyses and summaries prepared after the event.

The one piece of apparently contemporaneous intelligence is that contained in the Central War Room intelligence summary of 1 December described in chapter 1. This reported that 'HMAS *Sydney* sent out a weak and corrupt 'Q' distress message under extreme difficulties on 19 November', but no corroboration of this has been found in other records.

The only intelligence report located that predates the battle and may be relevant is a Combined Operational Intelligence Centre summary based on Admiralty intelligence of 28 October 1941. The summary states:

It is now known that *Olivia* (Swedish) had no reason for signalling a distress message on 20 October [1941]... Admiralty state that there is now no evidence of a raider being in the Indian Ocean. *Comment* [by Australian intelligence officials]: The only outstanding report is that of S G

⁷⁶ AWM: AWM69, 228, Records of G Hermon Gill – Official History, 1939-1945 War, Series 2 (Navy): Volume 1 – chapter 12 [Typescript marked 'Master Copy' and some correspondence].

⁷⁷ Gill, op. cit., p460

⁷⁸ The reports appear in C E Munyard, *HMAS Sydney II & Dr List's Cryptographs*, C E Munyard, Ardcross, WA, 1995, p91.

Embiricos (Greek) which has been overdue at Colombo since 28 September and which it was suggested may have made Rs (presumably from the Maldives Area) heard by Trincomalee on 26 September. [The *Stamatios G Embiricos* was in fact sunk by the *Kormoran* on 26 September.]

Given that this information did not appear in the Combined Operational Intelligence Centre's daily summaries until 12 November, the day after the *Sydney's* departure from Fremantle, it is possible that the *Sydney* was aware only of earlier intelligence that suggested that there was evidence of raider activity in the Indian Ocean.

In intelligence reports received after the battle, the Admiralty thought there was the possibility of one raider still operating in the Indian Ocean and of one raider still in the Pacific.⁷⁹

Apart from these references, the daily intelligence summaries of the Central War Room and the Combined Operational Intelligence Centre contain only passing references to the *Sydney–Kormoran* action. These references, which occur in the summaries of 3 and 5 December 1941, are quoted below under the description of B6227.

In one case 'intelligence' was volunteered by a member of the public. On 3 December the Prime Minister issued his second public announcement, explaining briefly what was known of the battle and of the *Sydney's* fate, and most censorship restrictions were subsequently lifted. The next day a Mr Harold Hearne wrote to the Minister for the Navy to:

bring under your notice certain facts which may assist your department in interrogation of prisoners of the raider *Steiermark*. I was a member of the crew of HMS *Arawa*⁸⁰ and early this year...we were en route from Belfast to Freetown, West Africa, and one night gunfire was sighted at about 8.30 pm by the lookouts it was the tanker *British Union* being attacked by a raider (which by press reports was the *Steiermark*). We arrived at the scene of action at about 1 am. We were ready for action having dumped our depth charges and Benzine, and advising Admiralty by wireless of our intentions. But unfortunately the raider ran away and we cruised around the spot and picked up seven survivors in a boat that had been riddled by shrapnel and machine gun bullets, the survivors told us that while lowering the lifeboats they were machine gunned, consequently all the contents of one boat was all lost, such as lamp, water, compass, etc, if we had not found them they certainly would have died of thirst. One man, he was the Second Officer died of wounds a few hours after being picked up it was due to shrapnel and machine gun bullets in his stomach, another badly wounded man whose jaw was shot away recovered and was landed at Freetown, all of the survivors were slightly wounded, excepting the carpenter who was a man aged about 65 years. The above may help in some little way the further questioning of the prisoners in regards to the fate of members of the crews of other vessels whom they have attacked.

This statement was verified by Lieutenant Taylor, Lieutenant Sinclair and Leading Stoker Callaghan.

⁷⁹ Naval Historical Section: B6227, Combined Operational Intelligence Centre – daily summary of operational intelligence; that is, summaries DS134 of 31 October; DS141 of 12 November; DS155 of 3 December; and DS157 of 5 December.

⁸⁰ An allied armed merchant cruiser which had been fitted out in Australia and crewed mainly by Australian reservists.

The Department of the Navy responded to Mr Hearne on 24 December, reflecting the advice of Commander Dechaineux provided on 18 December that:

Propose to thank Mr Hearne for his information and to state that his information has been substantiated by the evidence of the prisoners though, of course, they deny having machine gunned the boats.⁸¹

Mr Hearne's claims and the evidence of this incident provided by other accounts are discussed by Montgomery, Winter and Frame.⁸²

Records part 1

NAVAL HISTORICAL COLLECTION, 1872–1974

AWM124

Recorded by:

1943–1974 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)

Australian War Memorial (AWM) 28 metres

This series comprises original records and other material created and acquired by the RAN and collected in the Naval Historical Records Section and its successors in Navy Office.

Loss of *Sydney* – duplicate, 1941–44 AWM124, 4/224

This Naval Intelligence Division file (one of two controlled as AWM124, 4/224 – see chapter 5 for a description of the other file, titled 'HMAS *Sydney* – raider') contains reports of 29 November and 1 December of two rounds of interrogation of the German prisoners of war on board the *Aquitania*, including sketches of the action based on rough sketches supplied by prisoner Treber, an Ordnance Able Seaman, and another rating. Treber claimed to have been stationed at one of the 5.9 inch-guns during the action and to have had a clear view of what occurred. The file includes a chronology of events between 21 and 25 November, and carbon copies of a minute from the Chief of Naval Staff to the Minister for the Navy dated 24 November 1941, briefing the minister on the situation.

Appendix II to the interrogation report of 1 December 1941 includes a report on Leading Seaman Gerhard Keller, who took a film of the battle with the *Sydney*. The film was inadvertently left on board the *Kormoran* when it sank. (See also item B6121, 165K, which contains the report on the unsuccessful attempt to recover the Leica camera allegedly hidden by Sub-Lt Fritz List in a cave at Red Bluff north of Carnarvon before his capture.)

In 1979 these two items were temporarily transferred by the Department of Defence to the Archives as AA1979/318, item 15B, under which accession they have been cited (eg see Barbara Winter's *HMAS Sydney: Fact, Fantasy and Fraud*). In 1980 they were again transferred as AA1980/700. Both files are now held by the Australian War Memorial as AWM124, 4/224.

Raiders in the Pacific, 1941–42 AWM124, 4/342

This file contains numerous copies of cypher messages between Australian, New Zealand and other naval authorities concerning alleged sightings of raiders in the Pacific and related activities. Included are ACNB message of 17 Oct 1941 advising

⁸¹ NAA: [MP151/1, 429/201/363](#), German raider *Steiermark*.

⁸² Montgomery, op. cit., pp143–144, 188; Winter, op. cit., pp40–42; Frame, op. cit., pp138–139

that 'a raider operating in the Pacific may possibly be Raider G (*Steiermark*)'; and SOI Wellington to HMS *Achilles* of 25 Nov 1941 indicating that a vessel sighted on 6 November was thought to have been Raider G.

**VOLUME OF TECHNICAL RECORDS RELATING TO NAVAL CODES AND CYPHERS OF
1940–45 B5554**

Recorded by:

1946–46 Fleet Radio Unit, Melbourne (CA 7137)

Melbourne 0.27 metres

**Volume of technical records containing details of codes and cyphers, 1940–46
B5554, Whole series**

This item consists of one large bound volume of 375 typewritten sheets of details of enemy naval codes and cyphers analysed and decrypted by FRUMEL during World War II.

FRUMEL, the Fleet Radio Unit in Melbourne, was a joint Australian–United States signal facility that also included some minor New Zealand and British elements. It was set up to study Japanese naval and related communications during World War II.

At the beginning of the volume is a one-page list of personnel who served with FRUMEL, followed by a brief summary of its cryptographic activities during the war. This summary includes one reference to the encyphered message of Captain Detmers passed to FRUMEL by the censorship authorities for decryption (see B5823 below). The rest of the volume consists of detailed technical descriptions and analyses of each of the enemy naval codes and cyphers analysed by FRUMEL and the manner in which they were decyphered, arranged by cypher name. The descriptions deal solely with the technical characteristics of each of the cyphers and the method by which they were decoded. The descriptions do not include or refer to the text of Detmers' code or the text of any of the other messages that were analysed, but purely to their technical characteristics.

The provenance of the volume is not completely clear, but from its language it appears to have been prepared by former officers of FRUMEL after the war ended, based upon the wartime experiences of the organisation.

The only reference in the volume to HMAS *Sydney* occurs on p. 372. The text, which is entirely open for public access, is as follows:

From time to time, material intercepted by the local Censorship Authorities was passed to this Unit [FRUMEL] for examination. Several were documents suspected of being in code or cypher, but examination showed that they were not. A domestic letter in code was read without difficulty. A document in cypher taken from a recaptured German prisoner of war escapee was broken down by Lieut. Comdr Miller into German plain language. It was translated by an interpreter from Censorship and proved to be a copy of the deck and engine room logs of the German raider *Kormoran*, covering the period of its encounter with HMAS *Sydney*, which resulted in the loss of both ships.

**FOLDER OF DOCUMENTS TITLED: DIETMAR'S DIARY – ACCOUNT OF ACTION
BETWEEN KORMORAN AND SYDNEY – DECODE AND TRANSLATIONS, 1941
B5823**

Recorded by:

1941–1941 Fleet Radio Unit, Melbourne (CA 7137)

Melbourne 39 pages

Dietmar's [Detmers'] diary – account of action between *Kormoran* and HMAS *Sydney* – decode and translations [Folder of papers containing encrypted German plain-text and translated English versions of the deck log and engine room log of HSK *Kormoran*, c1941]

Dietmar's [Detmers'] diary — account of action between Kormoran and HMAS Sydney — decode and translations [Folder of papers containing encrypted, German plain-text and translated English versions of the deck log and engine room log of HSK Kormoran] [39 pages, c.1941] B5823, Whole series

This item consists of loosely filed foolscap pages inside a single Military Board folder carrying the handwritten title 'Dietmar's Diary – Account of Action Between Kormoran and Sydney. Decode and Translations.'

The folder does not contain any document resembling a diary, but rather is a set of cryptographic worksheets and a cryptographic analysis of a German World War II cypher. The original cypher was found in a notebook in Captain Detmers' possession when he was recaptured after escaping from Dhurringile prisoner of war camp in January 1945. The notebook was confiscated and photographed by the Commonwealth Security Service and referred to the Navy. Using technical details of the German cypher received from overseas, a member of FRUMEL produced a German language plain text version which was then translated. The item contains the following documents:

- One page with the title 'Cypher, in German, used by Captain Dietmar'. This folio is dated 20 July 1945 and is headed Naval Section Intelligence Memorandum No. 76. Action Report of Action Between German Raider 'Kormoran' and HMAS Sydney. The page briefly describes the technical details of the cypher used by Captain Detmers – see (iii) below – and appears to have been prepared as a covering note for (ii) and (iii) (below).
- Two pages of cryptographic worksheets containing alphabetic code, written in pencil.
- Fifteen pages of cryptographic worksheets (originally 16 but the first worksheet is missing) containing a cypher and its corresponding plain-text in German. Each letter of the decyphered German is written adjacent to its corresponding symbol in the cypher. Both the cypher and the German are written in pencil. This material comprises what purports to be the 'deck log' and the 'engine room log' of the *Kormoran*. The whereabouts of the missing worksheet is unknown, although the translations at (iv) below appear to include a translation of it.
- A 10-page translation and an 11-page translation (both in English) of the logs described in (iii) above. The translations are in handwriting and are copies only. The location of the originals is unknown. Part of the second translation appears to contain the same handwriting as the first translation, the remainder being in a different handwriting.

HISTORICAL RECORDS FILES, 1875–**B6121****Recorded by:****1944–1973 Navy Office, Department of the Navy, Historical Section (CA 38)****Melbourne; NHS Canberra 23.81 metres**

This series is described in chapter 2

German raiders – Admiralty summary NID 1/GP/3, 1945 B6121, 165D

This file consists of a survey by the Directorate of Naval Intelligence, derived from 'German naval sources', of German raiders converted from merchant ships during the war, including background information and an individual sheet on each raider, including the *Kormoran*. The entry consists of one page listing the raider's main features.

Kormoran – Translation of Diaries, 1941–47 B6121, 165K

This item contains:

- Translations of an 'Action Report' and 'Engine Room Log', described in a handwritten annotation dated '15/7' on the document itself as 'Translation of parts of diary of Captain Dettmars regarding the *Sydney–Kormoran* action'. This may be a translation of the decoded document recovered from Captain Detmers in 1945 following his failed escape attempt, which is described in B5823 above.
- A three-page report of the interrogation of Captain Detmers dated 7 January 1942.
- Interrogation reports and three copies of a chart of the action drawn after interrogation of the survivors; a proposal in December 1941 to gather further intelligence from the German prisoners of war by using hidden microphones.
- Ten pages of correspondence regarding a report dated December 1945 (prepared following the interrogation of Sub Lt Fritz List on 3 November 1945) about the existence of photographs of the *Sydney–Kormoran* action, and unsuccessful attempts in 1946 to reclaim the camera hidden by List on the Western Australian coast in 1941.
- Records of interrogations of survivors, including Dr Habben, dated 16 January 1942.
- Sixteen pages dealing with official inquiries to Japan between September and December 1945, following rumours that Australian survivors of the *Sydney* may have been taken to Japan as prisoners of war.
- Sketches made by List, and a four-page intelligence report on interpretations of the sketches (undated).
- Intelligence reports from the Royal Navy on German raiders' gunfire capabilities and raider activities, dated 27 November 1943.
- Translations of extracts from the diaries of various of the *Kormoran*'s crew, which were confiscated by the Admiralty's Director of Naval Intelligence in London upon the arrival of the Germans at Cuxhaven on the SS *Orontes* following their repatriation in January 1947. These include extracts from the diaries of Captain Detmers, Lt-Comdr Herbert Bretschneider (two different translations), Heinz Gustav Schott, C Rademacher, Kapt-Lt Reinhold von Malapert, Otto Jurgensen and Sub-Lt Johannes Diebitsch. Note that Schott's diary is held in his prisoner of war dossier in A7919, described in chapter 8.

Kormoran: (Raider No. 41) 'G' – German AMC [Armed Merchant Cruiser], 1941–c1947 B6121, 164L

This item consists of a file with one folder of attachments. The file contains:

- a photograph of the original appearance of Raider 'G' (annotated 'Cormoran' and 'Kormoran') and a drawing of its possible appearance in 1941
- three photographs (one dated 10 July 1941 and two possibly reproduced from newspaper cuttings) of the SS *Straat Malakka*
- a chart of the cruise of Raider 'G' from December 1940 to November 1941
- six pages of reports dated 2 December 1941 and 9 December 1941 on the *Aquitania*'s recovery of the 26 German survivors on 23 November and its response
- three pages of handwritten notes on the locating of survivors
- two pages of notes for the naval historian (undated, possibly 1947), about surface raider activity prior to the Sydney engagement, including action by the *Kormoran* in January 1941 in the Atlantic.

The folder of attachments contains 11 charts of cruises of other raiders: five charts of Raider A (*Orion*) between 31 March 1940 and 23 August 1941; one chart of Raider B (*Komet*) between August 1940 and November 1941; one chart of Raider C (*Atlantis*) between March and November 1940; one of Raider D (*Widder*) between May and November 1940; two charts of Raider E (*Thor*) one covering the period June 1940 to April 1941, and the other from January to November 1942; and one of the cruise of Raider F (*Pinguin*), June 1940 to May 1941.

***Kormoran* (Raider No. 41) 'G' – German AMC – interrogation of survivors, 1941–47) B6121, 164M**

This item consists of a file with three folders of attachments. A fourth folder with the title 'Sydney report: Rough notes' is empty. The file contains:

- extensive notes of interrogation of the survivors of the *Kormoran* during early December 1941, including nominal rolls of crew, lists of survivors, and lists of POW survivors held at different locations (these papers combined constitute most of the file)
- the first page only of a 'summary of evidence collected from various sources by Commander Dechaineux' (note that the entire three-page report, dated 30 November 1941 appears on item K997, 1/15/2, described below)
- a 13-page report by Mr F B Eldridge (undated, unsigned) on the loss of the HMAS *Sydney* (the signed and dated copy of this report is in MP1185/8, 2026/19/6, described in detail below)
- a dossier of further information obtained between 20 December 1941 and 16 January 1942
- translations of poems about the action written by the survivors
- a copy of the published newspaper article described in B6121, 164L above
- translations of extracts from diaries of members of the *Kormoran*'s crew covering the action with the *Sydney*, including the diaries of Captain Detmers, Karl Hines, C Rademacher and Lt Bunjes
- an undated three page report on the recovery of the survivors of the *Kormoran*.
- The folders of attachments contain:
 - handwritten drafts of the Eldridge report
 - three situation reports on the search for the *Sydney*
 - a copy of a report dated 28 November 1941 from the officer in charge of the naval guard on board the MV *Trocas* to the District Naval Officer, Western Australia, concerning the boarding of the *Trocas* at sea on 26 November and the guarding and questioning of the survivors up to the time of the vessel's arrival in Fremantle (the original of this report is on K997, 1/15/2)
 - a report by the sergeant in charge of the survivors picked up by the *Aquitania*
 - extracts from censored mail of the German prisoners of war
 - duplicate copies of notes of interrogations

- notes on the interrogation of Shu Ah Fah, one of the three Chinese survivors of the *Kormoran*; a report of Captain Detmers' visit to his crew at Murchison prisoner of war camp on 8 January 1942.

Some of the reports in the attachments are to the Director of Naval Intelligence; others do not specify from whom or to whom they are directed.

Sydney-Kormoran action signals etc, 1941–1945 B6121, 165P

This item consists of a file with three folders of attachments. It contains:

- an undated three-page report from the Secretary of the Naval Board to Secretary, Department of Navy on HMAS Sydney, its history, previous officers and its officers at the time of the engagement
- a two-page report (and draft) dated 27 November 1941 from the Secretary of the Naval Board prepared for the Governor-General, Prime Minister and Minister for the Navy on the events known and the search efforts to that date
- a two-page summary of information obtained from the Kormoran survivors picked up by the Trocas, dated 27 November 1941
- approximately 120 signals and cablegrams covering the period 27 November to 3 December 1941 about matters such as the search for survivors of the two ships, censorship considerations and the first reports from the interrogation of survivors.

The file also contains a copy of a draft prime ministerial statement for release to the public, dated 28 November 1941, and Prime Minister Curtin's statement to the press and broadcast dated 3 December 1941; copies of statements made on 23 November 1941 by the Kormoran survivors picked up by the *Aquitania*, and two reports, dated 29 November and 2 December 1941, based on this information.

The folders of attachments contain:

- two pages of questions asked by the Director of Naval Intelligence and the Director of Military Intelligence dated 24 October 1945, concerning the possible survival of relevant documents or photographs (the answers are also present)
- approximately 240 signals and cablegrams covering the period from 21 to 28 November 1941, reporting Sydney as overdue, the details of the search, the recovery of the Kormoran survivors, summaries of information received, and censorship considerations
- 10 signals and cablegrams covering the period 27 November – 12 December 1941 detailing an inquiry about the Sydney–Kormoran action from the First Lord of the Admiralty in London, and information passed to the Admiralty
- Australian press cuttings dated 6 October and 27 October 1945, the latter reporting the events as recorded in a German survivor's diary
- Third Officer Westhoven's nine-page report giving an account of the Sydney–Kormoran action, and details of the refusal by the Director of Naval Intelligence to publish it
- a draft statement dated 26 November 1941 for the Prime Minister to inform the House of Representatives of the loss of the Sydney in the event that this was considered desirable
- a one-page memorandum (and draft) to the Minister for the Navy from the Chief of Naval Staff dated 24 November 1941 on the events known to date and a two-page update dated 25 November 1941
- a nominal roll of the crew of the Kormoran
- press cuttings dated 3 December 1941 (source missing).

Combined Operational Intelligence Centre – weekly summaries of operational intelligence, 1941 B6121, 775W/1

In addition to the daily intelligence summaries produced by the Combined Operational Intelligence Centre (see B6227, described below), the centre also produced a weekly intelligence summary. Central War Room Weekly Summary No. WS/29 for the week ended 1 December 1941 carries as its first item a one-paragraph entry headed *Indian Ocean – Destruction of Raider Kormoran (probably Raider "G" No. 41, Steiermark) by HMAS Sydney*. The summary notes the fear that 'HMAS Sydney has been lost with all hands'. A further entry under the heading *Raiders* speculates about the *Kormoran's* possible movements in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Attached to the summary is a five-page appendix titled 'A Report on the action between HMAS Sydney and Raider *Kormoran* – 19 November 1941 and estimated movements of Raider'. The appendix gives a summary of the *Sydney's* last voyage, the result of the searches, a description of the action 'deduced so far from the various reports of the prisoners of war', and a description and track chart of the *Kormoran* and her movements, which was 'compiled from information gleaned from Raider's survivors, November 1941'.

The appendix to the summary refers to a distress message possibly sent by the *Sydney* at the time of the battle. This is described in chapter 2.

Records part 2

COMBINED OPERATIONAL INTELLIGENCE CENTRE – DAILY SUMMARY OF OPERATIONAL INTELLIGENCE, 1941–45 B6227**Recorded by:****Combined Operational Intelligence Centre (CA 8386)****Canberra 0.09 metres**

The Combined Operational Intelligence Centre was formed following a meeting of the three Directors of Service Intelligence in November 1940 to discuss ways in which delays could be avoided in the collation and assessment of operational intelligence affecting more than one service, and to ensure the complete distribution of this intelligence in Defence Headquarters.

Essentially, the COIC pooled and assessed operational intelligence received through the intelligence organisations of the three services. For example, it received a copy of each operational signal that passed through Naval Intelligence, Army Intelligence and Air Intelligence, and Area Combined Headquarters. It then analysed this intelligence and distributed its assessments and appreciations to the appropriate authorities.

Though the COIC evolved throughout the war, initially it comprised the three Directors of Service Intelligence and their staff, and was located adjacent to the Central War Room. As well as the centre in Melbourne, there were also COICs in Perth, Darwin and Townsville. From 11 March 1941 until 18 December 1941, the Director of the COIC was Commander R B M Long, the Director of Naval Intelligence. In 1942 the COIC was absorbed into General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area.

The records in this series are the original daily operational intelligence summaries prepared by the COIC (carbon copies are held by the Australian War Memorial for the period 14 June to 6 December 1941 in AWM54, 423/11/1). The summaries are held by the Naval Historical Section and are arranged in chronological order.

The summaries for the period searched consisted of one, two or three pages and the information was organised in three main sections headed 'Australia Station', 'Adjacent Areas' and 'Japan's Southward Advance'. The source of each item of information is indicated in the left-hand margin (eg, signals, other intelligence bodies, 'most secret sources' etc.).

From 3 December 1941 the summaries were titled 'CWR [Central War Room] Daily Summary of Operational Intelligence', but the format and numbering system remained unchanged, and the 'DS' numbering sequence of each summary is unbroken.

The summaries were searched for the period from 18 November 1941 to 6 December 1941. Only two summaries were found to contain information of relevance to the *Sydney–Kormoran* action, and neither of these relates directly to the engagement.

CWR Daily summary of operational intelligence, 3 December 1941 B6227, DS155

The first reference occurs in summary DS/155 of Wednesday 3 December 1941. On 1 December the auxiliary vessel *Coolebar* reported sighting a white aircraft navigation light approximately 30 miles off Cape Bouvard, 50 miles south of Fremantle. The following comment is made against this report:

The fact of the report of scudding clouds and strong wind makes the sighting of a star a very likely explanation, but in view of the sighting of smoke from a westbound unidentified vessel off Storm Bay [Tasmania] on 20/11 the possibility of a raider or supply ship seeking rendezvous with the raider *Kormoran* cannot be overlooked.

Central War Room Weekly Summary No. WS/29 (described earlier in this chapter under B6121, 775W/1) also refers to the possibility of there being a supply ship in the area, stating:

It is possible that the sighting off Storm Bay on 20/11 was an enemy supply ship or even the Pacific Raider moving westward to rendezvous with raider *Kormoran* while the 2 suspicious sightings in the NEI [Netherlands East Indies] on 18/11 and 21/11 must also be regarded as possible supply ships.

CWR Daily summary of operational intelligence, 5 December 1941 B6227, DS157

The second reference is more substantial and occurs in summary DS/157 of 5 December 1941. Under item 4 (Raider *Kormoran* (G) No. 41 ex *Steiermark*), the following report is made:

In reporting on the activities of this raider Admiralty refer to a rendezvous with the supply ship *Nordmark* in the Atlantic before attacking *Craftsman* on 9 May and later a rendezvous with Raider (C) No. 16 and the supply ship *Alsterufer* (2729 tons) about May 19th in the South Atlantic. It has now been ascertained from the interrogation of survivors that the raider made another rendezvous with the *Alsterufer* in the Indian Ocean about 8 weeks before the action with HMAS *Sydney* when 200 British prisoners and bags of mail were transferred and the *Alsterufer* sailed for Germany. Some prisoners claim the *Alsterufer* came from Japan and this is supported by the report that Japanese milk bottles were found in the lifeboats.

The comment made in the summary against this report is:

Alsterufer and *Alstertor* were two sister supply ships which were to operate as supply ships for the *Bismarck* and were considered to have left Germany at approx that time. The *Alstertor* was intercepted and scuttled 220 miles south west of Cape Kallundborg on June 23rd. The *Alsterufer* was not reported on again until the mention of the rendezvous with No. 16 and *Kormoran* in south Atlantic on May 19. There has been no other intelligence to confirm that this vessel has visited Japan although she may have been the unidentified 3000 ton vessel which departed Yokohama on 5th July and which therefore could fit in as regards time but which

was described as a tanker type. (*Alsterufer* is not a tanker type but the tonnage is approximately correct.) Alternatively, the *Alsterufer* may have provisioned from (a) a Japanese ship at sea; (b) in the Japanese mandates.

Daily summaries were not always prepared daily. For example, they jump from Saturday, 22 November (summary DS/149) to Wednesday 26 November (DS/150). There are other examples of this, but in each case DS numbers retain an unbroken sequence.

Summaries for the period from 3 to 6 February 1942 were searched for any reference to the recovery of the Carley float off Christmas Island, without success. Copies of these summaries are also held in B6121, 775F, Combined Operational Intelligence Centre – daily summaries of operational intelligence, 1941, and in AWM54, 423/11/1, Combined Operational Intelligence Centre – daily summary of operational intelligence, Australia Station, 14 June 1941 – 6 December 1941.

CORRESPONDENCE FILES (NOCWA), MULTIPLE NUMBER SERIES

K997

Recorded by:

1972–1991 Naval Officer Commanding Western Australia Area (CA 5607)

Perth 4.14 metres

HMAS Sydney-Kormoran action, 1941–45 K997, 1/15/2

The information on this file is substantial, and includes the main papers (including the shipping and interrogation reports) from Western Australia. The item includes the following:

- a report to the District Naval Officer, Western Australia (DNO WA) by the master of the MV Koolinda on the 31 Germans it recovered from a life boat on Wednesday 26 November (this report notes that among their few provisions were 'a few bottles of milk which were bottled in Japan, this was sour')
- two pages of notes of interrogation of German prisoners Boehm, Schulte, Roderics and Ruf conducted at Fremantle Detention Barracks on 29 November by commanders Dechaineux, RAN and Salm, Royal Dutch Navy
- a report dated 28 November 1941 from the officer in charge of the naval guard on board the MV Trocas to the DNO WA concerning the boarding of the Trocas at sea on 26 November and the guarding and questioning of the survivors up to the time of the vessel's arrival in Fremantle (a copy of this report is also on item B6121, 164M, described earlier in this chapter)
- messages communicating the early findings of the interrogations
- a message dated 30 November from FOCAS (ie Admiral Crace, Flag Officer Commanding the Australian Squadron, by then in Western Australia to oversee the interrogations) to the Naval Board summarising the information obtained at the conclusion of the interrogations
- a 14-page report by the Combined Operations Intelligence Centre, dated 30 November, detailing the operations of Area Combined Headquarters, Fremantle between 24 and 29 November (this report gives a detailed chronological description of the searches conducted by sea and air, including coordinates).

The item also contains various reports of interrogation, some of which are noted as having been telephoned to the Naval Board on 27 November. These include:

- reports from Lieutenant Commander Rycroft, Staff Officer, Intelligence, Fremantle, dated 27, 28 and 30 November
- a report of the result of interrogation of the prisoners rescued by the Trocas prepared by her engineer officers (indicating that Lensch, after being brought on board unconscious, stated while still semi-conscious that

- he had been told that the cruiser had lowered a boat before the battle commenced, but he refused to repeat this when questioned about it later)
- reports of the result of interrogation of the prisoners rescued by the Yandra
 - a three-page summary of the evidence collected from various sources by Commander Dechaineux, dated 30 November
 - a memorandum dated 11 December 1941 from Captain Farquhar-Smith, DNO WA, to Admiral Crace, RACAS, forwarding a three-page summary of deductions made from the interrogations
 - a three-page report of interrogation by the commanding officer of HMAS Yandra, dated 28 November 1941
 - two pages of instructions from Admiral Crace for interrogating the prisoners of war at Harvey, dated 2 December
 - the timetable and arrangements for transferring the first batch of 134 prisoners of war (one officer and 133 men) from No. 11 Internment Camp, Harvey in Western Australia to Murchison in Victoria by train, leaving Harvey on 27 December.

This file also contains the original copy of the letter from the Director of Naval Intelligence rejecting the suggestion of Staff Officer (Intelligence) Rycroft that Third Officer Westhoven's account of the Sydney–Kormoran action be published.

GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE FILES, 1923–50**MP151/1****Recorded by:****1939–1950 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Melbourne; photocopy in Canberra 132.17 metres****German raider *Steiermark*, 4–24 Dec 1941 MP151/1, 429/201/363**

The day after the Prime Minister issued details of the battle and most censorship restrictions were lifted, a Mr Harold C Hearne wrote to the Minister for the Navy recounting the story of his ship, HMS *Arawa*, going to the aid of the tanker *British Union* which had been sunk by the *Kormoran*. Mr Hearne's letter states that the survivors of the *British Union* said that 'while lowering the lifeboats they were machine gunned'. The contents of his letter are described in more detail in this chapter's introduction.

Records part 3

CORRESPONDENCE FILES (GENERAL), 1923–50**MP1049/5****Recorded by:****1939–1950 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Melbourne 59.82 metres****Interrogation of German survivors ex raider *Kormoran*, 1941 MP1049/5, 2026/19/6**

This item deals mainly with the information obtained from the German prisoners of war before they were transported from Perth to Victoria where they were interned. The file includes:

- a three-page summary by the DNO, Western Australia dated 12 December 1941, of deductions from the interrogation of the survivors of the *Kormoran* up to 6 December 1941

- a 19-page copy of notes of interrogations of a number of the survivors on board the *Trocas* and statements by officers of the *Trocas* dated 16 December 1941
- an undated and unsigned five-page report on the loss of the *Sydney*
- page one only of an unsigned, undated Department of Navy minute to the Chief of Naval Staff listing the following attachments:
 - A Interim Report of Investigation in the loss of HMAS *Sydney* by Commander Dechaineux (page two only present)
 - B Summary of Interrogations of German Prisoners of War (present)
 - C Summary of Interrogations of German Prisoners of War (present)
 - D Track charts of action and sketch of raider (not present)
 - E Track charts of movements compiled by the Admiralty (not present, but may be the same track chart of movements attached to the report of the District Naval Officer, Western Australia dated 11 December 1941, described in MP1049/5, 2026/3/457 – see chapter 3)
 - F A file containing information already passed to the Admiralty (not present). The file also contains telegrams from the Naval Board to the Admiralty dated 23 December 1941 advising of lessons learned from the *Sydney–Kormoran* action.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR INTERROGATING PRISONERS OF WAR ex No. 41
(*"Cormorant"*).

OBJECTIVE IS TO OBTAIN AS MUCH INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE ON No. 41
AND OTHER RAIDER AND SUPPLY SHIP ACTIVITIES.

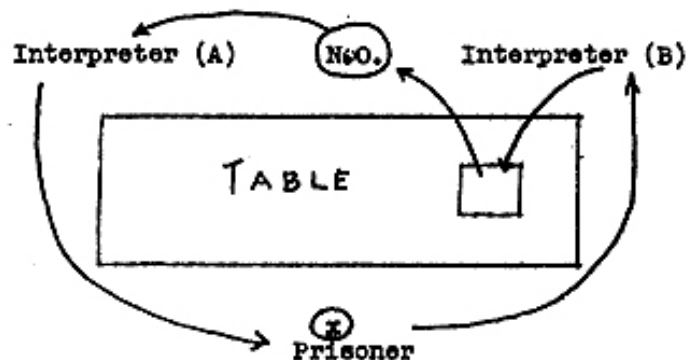
INTERROGATION ORGANISATION:

The Ratings, who are all at Harvey will be interrogated by two teams, each composed of -

1. Naval Officer (in uniform).
2. Interpreters.

The method should be as follows:-

The Naval Officer indicates to the Questioning Interpreter (A) the points which it is intended to cover. (A) then in devious ways endeavours to extract the answer. Direct questioning is useless. The Recording Interpreter (B) writes down for the information of the Naval Officer the brief text of the replies thus -



The success of this plan depends entirely upon the skill of the questioner, and the co-operation of the team.

INFORMATION REQUIRED:

- (a) Movements in the Indian Ocean between June and November - Evidence so far shows No. 41 either
 - i. Stayed in Indian Ocean;
 - ii. Went South about Australia to Pacific.

It is important to clear this up.

- (b) Details of Supply Organisation.
- (c) Details of Neutral Ports used.
- (d) Strategic Policy.
- (e) Tactical action when attacking merchant ship.

The instructions issued by Admiral Crace (Rear Admiral Commanding the Australian Squadron) to those undertaking the interrogations which were issued following his arrival in Fremantle on 30 November to take charge of the interrogations. By the time the instructions were issued many of the prisoners had already been interrogated and allowed to mingle.

NAA: K997, 1/15/2 - HMAS Sydney/Kormoran action, November 1941.

FREMANTLE, W. A.
11/12/1941.

Dear Admiral Grace,

I enclose a brief summary of deductions from interrogations which were concluded yesterday. Copies have been forwarded to Naval Board, to whom complete statements of all P.O.W.s are being forwarded. Unfortunately no light has been thrown on what the final fate of SYDNEY was. My own view is that she sank in flames about 8300H, or earlier, and that such of her gallant crew who were alive at this time were swallowed up by the sea. The action ended in daylight. If there was any attempt by SYDNEY to abandon ship before dark, and if they had any boats in which to do this, I can only assume that the ruthless Hun shot them up. The remark in REIZER's diary that "we should remember the words of the Captain, 'For every German we shall kill a thousand Englishmen'" indicates that they would not be beyond such brutality.

The lesson for all to learn is that even when the odds are against him the Hun knows the value of bluff and surprise. His sending out the QQ- undoubtedly allayed B's suspicions.

In general the crew were a mixed crowd. A few arrogant ones were easily tamed by a night in cells without food or bedding, and the old Diggers revelled in firing a few shots near the cells at dusk or dawn. Some of the older men were quite willing to talk of past activities, and outline particulars of their ship. To obtain a clear picture of the whole action was impracticable, mainly, I think, because they were so surprised at their own comparatively good fortune.

If you would care for a complete copy of all interrogation please ask Ridley to write me for it. Have had a spare copy made. Am writing to you personally as I think it desirable that though most N.O's probably realise that SYDNEY was taken by surprise, the details should be confined to as few as possible.

Segregation of batches of prisoners has proved most valuable. Any new point, e.g. last supply ship being KULMERLAND disguised as American LUCHENBACH with American colours painted on side, could be ascertained by re-interrogating a suitable man from a batch who could have had no contact with informer since abandoning ship.

Have just heard with joy that Tennant is among 8,000 survivors from REPULSE and P. of W.

Yours sincerely,

Grace, Rear Admiral Commanding the Australian Squadron, was sent to Fremantle on 30 November by the Chief of Naval Staff to take overall responsibility for the interrogations. This letter to Grace from an interrogation officer whose signature is indistinct (possibly that of Commander Ramage, the senior naval intelligence officer in Western Australia) reflects a view of the events not apparent in other official accounts.

NAA: K997, 1/15/2, HMAS Sydney/Kormoran action, November 1941.

SECRET AND CONFIDENTIAL CORRESPONDENCE FILES, 1923–50

MP1185/8

Recorded by:

1939–1950 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)

Melbourne 4.33 metres

Loss of HMAS Sydney – report by Mr F B Eldridge on interrogation of survivors of *Kormoran*, 1941–43 MP1185/8, 2026/19/6

This item contains instructions for interrogating the POWs from the *Kormoran*, dated 2 December 1941 and issued by the Flag Officer Commanding HMA Squadron; the nominal roll of other ranks of the *Kormoran*; and notes dated 20 December 1941 on officers rescued from the *Kormoran*, including where and how each was rescued, their command of English, decorations and qualifications.

The file also contains copy no. 5 of the report on the loss of HMAS Sydney by F B Eldridge, submitted to the Director of Naval Intelligence on 28 January 1942. Eldridge states that the report was compiled from:

the large mass of material provided by the Naval interrogation carried out in Western Australia and later checked and supplemented by enquiries carried out by Military Intelligence, Southern Command.

The report consists of 18 pages and has seven appendixes. Not all the appendixes are present (Long's covering minute submitting the report to the Chief of Naval Staff on 31 January 1942 states 'the material for the Report is being retained in NID [Naval Intelligence Division].')

The major headings in the report are: 'Events Leading to the Institution of a Search and its Results', 'Results of Interrogation', 'Previous Movements [of the *Kormoran*]' and 'The Action'.

The seven appendixes are:

- List of prisoners of war whose evidence has proved most useful (present).
- A track chart of the *Kormoran*'s movements from the time it left Gothenhafen, Danzig in December 1940 (present).
- Facsimile of a letter of a prisoner of war with translation of relevant parts of letter (present – note that the original of this letter is in the papers of Captain J L Hehir, – AWM, PR88/178, described below – with whom Eldridge notes he had 'two conferences').
- A sketch of the plan of action of the *Sydney–Kormoran* battle (present).
- A diagrammatic drawing of the *Kormoran* (not present).
- A photograph of *Steiermark* (not present).
- Instructions for interrogating the Prisoners of War ex-*Cormorant* [sic] (not present).
- The file contains correspondence recording the distribution of copies of the report to various Australian and foreign authorities.

This file seems to be closely related to file MP1049/5, 2026/19/6, described earlier, which appears to contain some of the background papers used in the compilation of the Eldridge report. For unknown reasons, these background papers may have been separated from MP1185/8, 2026/19/6 while still with Navy Office and transferred to file MP1049/5, 2026/19/6. B6121, 164M, described above, also appears to contain background papers.

**WEEKLY INTELLIGENCE REPORTS, SINGLE NUMBER SERIES, 1940–45
MP1580/1****Recorded by:****1939–1950 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Melbourne 0.9 metres**

Weekly intelligence reports were published by the Naval Intelligence Division of the Admiralty in London, for the information of 'all officers in HM Navy'. Each report is bound and measures 21 x 13.5cm. The copies held in series MP1580/1 were passed to the Australian Department of the Navy for information.

Weekly Intelligence Report, issued 5 December 1941 MP1580/1, 91

This report contains a single paragraph on page 2 under 'current events' that records that HMAS *Sydney* was in action with an unnamed German raider on 19 November at 26 degrees 31 minutes South, 111 degrees East. It reports the sinking of the raider and the rescue of a large number of survivors but says that there is no news of the *Sydney*, which is presumed to have sunk soon after the action.

WIR (Raider Supplement No. 2, Part 1), 1941 MP1580/1, 92

This supplement, dated 12 December 1941, includes only general information about raiders.

Weekly intelligence report, issued 19 Dec 1941 MP1580/1, 93

A four-paragraph report on pp. 31–32 describes the action based on the account of the survivors of the *Kormoran*. The report notes that while there is no confirmation of the accuracy of the information, it is believed to be a reasonably truthful account of the engagement.

**AUSTRALIAN STATION INTELLIGENCE REPORTS (WAR EDITION), 1939–45
MP1582/7****Recorded by:****Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Melbourne 0.36 metres****Australian Station Intelligence Summaries 1941 MP1582/7, 1941**

This item consists of bound copies of summaries of all daily naval intelligence reports for 1941, prepared by the Naval Intelligence Division in Melbourne. The subject index at the front has entries under 'Raiders' and 'Shipping – Australian – HMAS *Sydney*', which both lead to the one entry on pp. 158–60 titled '*Kormoran* – German Raider's encounter with HMAS *Sydney*'. The entry consists of intelligence information available as at 18 December 1941. [Note: a copy of the subject index appears on a file held by the Australian War Memorial, AWM123, 682 – Australia Station intelligence summaries 1939–1941 but the summary itself does not appear on the item, the last summary being number 20 dated 16 July 1940.]

PHILIP JAY – NOTES REGARDING THE SINKING OF HMAS SYDNEY BY THE KORMORAN IN 1941
PR88**Recorded by:****Philip S. Jay, former Chief Petty Officer, RAN, 14349, born 1908, died 1995****Private Record Collection, Australian War Memorial 3 pages****[Philip Jay – Notes made in about 1988 regarding the sinking of HMAS Sydney by the Kormoran in 1941] PR88/026**

This item is held in the AWM's personal records collection. The notes consist of Mr Jay's wartime recollections. His typewritten statement relates the story of a Major Young of Army Intelligence, as told to him by the major in 1945. Young claims to have been despatched to Carnarvon to assist in the interrogation of the German prisoners. He stated that he was involved in the interrogations both during the prisoners' transport to POW camps in the Eastern states and during their period of internment. Based upon Young's account, Mr Jay states that he is convinced of the truth of the official version of events.

HEHIR, JOHN LESLIE (CAPTAIN, AUSTRALIAN INTELLIGENCE CORPS, AIF (1941–1942)
PR88**Recorded by:****John Leslie Hehir, former Captain, Australian Intelligence Corps, AIF, born 1906, died 1988****Private Record Collection, Australian War Memorial 0.02 metres**

This item consists of two folders of official papers that appear to have been retained by Captain Hehir following his retirement and deposited with the Australian War Memorial after his death. In a covering letter to his report on the loss of HMAS Sydney submitted to DNI on 28 February 1942, Mr F B Eldridge noted that in preparing the report he had two conferences with Captain Hehir and had access to his 'Dossier of Information'. Presumably this 'Dossier' consists of the two folders described here.

One folder is titled 'General (1)', the other 'Kormoran (2)'. Within each folder the papers on each topic have been fastened together and a note has been attached, probably by the depositor, explaining the nature of the papers within. Many of the documents are water-damaged. A note on the item, presumably added by the depositor, states that the documents were damaged 'in the 1974 floods in Wangaratta.'

Interrogation reports from the crew of the raider Kormoran (56& pages, 8 photographs) PR88/178, Kormoran (2) PR88/178, Kormoran (2)

This item contains the originals of the five 'cryptogram' sketches by Fritz List, which were discovered at Murchison prisoner of war camp in 1942 and which were believed by some to contain shorthand messages, and a further faded (and almost illegible) sheet of notes which appears to be in German. These sketches and the notes are all recorded on sheets of toilet paper. Photographic copies of these sketches and notes have been made by the AWM and appear on the file. There are also 15 pages containing notes of suggested interpretations of the sketches, the author of which is not identified.

Under a covering page headed 'German Raider HSK Kormoran, General Investigation. Dossier of Information Obtained from 20 December 1941 to 16 January 1942', the item contains:

- a typewritten carbon copy of a report of interview with the Kormoran's wireless operator at C Compound, 13 POW Group Murchison, by Sgt E Carminer on 16 January 1942 (six pages)
- a typewritten carbon copy of a one-page report of conversation with an unidentified German POW, ex-Kormoran, by Sgt E Thompson on 16 January 1942, at the same location
- three pages of translations of poems written by ex-Kormoran POW Edmund Abel (42169), undated
- a two-page carbon copy of handwritten notes of interrogation of 'Commander Detmers' on 24 February 1942
- one carbon copy typewritten page of the results of eavesdropping on ex-Kormoran POWs at Murchison POW Camp, dated 1 January 1942, and the first page of a typed annotated report of information obtained 'by special observation', and by contact with and interrogation of the German medical officers, addressed to GSO (MI) HQ Southern Command and dated 5 January 1942
- a nine-page carbon copy of translations from Lieutenant Commander Herbert Bretschneider's diary
- a carbon copy of a letter (probably from Hehir) to 'The Colonel' of 31 December 1941, providing information obtained from intercepted letters of the POWs and a one-page minute dated 26 February 1942 from Captain Hehir, Intelligence Section, to Naval Intelligence, passing on a statement obtained from Captain Detmers about the Spreewald and Mareeba
- six pages of carbon copy translations of extracts from intercepted POW letters, all dated January 1942
- a one-page (two-sided), undated letter in German, from one of the Kormoran's crew (unidentified) showing a map of the Kormoran's course from when she left Germany. It indicates general rendezvous points in the South Atlantic and two in the Indian Ocean, and concludes with a sketch of a burning ship off the Western Australian coast. On page two of the letter is a map, possibly of Murchison camp.

BROWNE, ROLAND SEYMOUR (MAJOR), 1940–42

PR00835

Recorded by:

Roland Seymour Browne, former Major, Australian Army and an Inspector in the Commonwealth Investigation Branch.

Private Record Collection, Australian War Memorial 43 pages

These papers were donated to the Defence Department in 1997. Included are many of the documents described in PR88/178, *Kormoran*(2) above, as well as (1) a 3-page report of interrogation of Detmers dated 7 Jan 1942; (2) a 1-page report on Detmers' visit to his crew on 8 Jan 1942; (3) a 1-page record of interview with Dr Habben dated 16 Jan 1942; and (4) a nominal roll of the *Kormoran*'s crew.

**PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINTS OF DOCUMENT BELIEVED TO BE THE ENCODED NOTEBOOK
CONFISCATED FROM COMMANDER TA DETMERS, CAPTAIN OF THE HSK *KORMORAN*,
GIVING AN ACCOUNT OF THE ACTION BETWEEN THE *KORMORAN* AND
HMAS SYDNEY ON 19 NOVEMBER 1941 A12982**

Recorded by:

1941 Security Service, Victoria (CA 494)

Canberra 0.18 metres

**Photographic prints of document believed to be the encoded notebook
confiscated from Commander TA Detmers, Captain of the HSK *Kormoran*,
giving an account of the action between the *Kormoran* and HMAS Sydney on
19 November 1941, c1941 A12982, 1**

These documents are photographs from a notebook confiscated from Captain Detmers' on his recapture after escaping from custody as a prisoner of war in rural Victoria in January 1945. The photographs were copied from a set of photographic prints loaned to the Archives in 2004 by Maria Hehir, the daughter of John Leslie Hehir (see reference to PR88/178)

7 The Casualties

The human cost

In terms of lives lost, the sinking of HMAS *Sydney* remains to this day Australia's worst naval disaster. The enormity of the tragedy was felt by the entire nation, with few cities and towns unaffected by the loss of friends or relatives. On 1 December, the day of the Prime Minister's announcement, flags on all public buildings in Sydney were flown at half mast. The following day memorial services were held in churches and cathedrals.

The Australian Government was sensitive to the effect of the ship's loss on the country's morale. The *Sydney's* 645 personnel officially classified as 'missing presumed dead' comprised:

- 36 officers and 592 ratings (Royal Australian Navy)
- five officers and two ratings (Royal Navy)
- one officer and five airmen (Royal Australian Air Force)
- four canteen staff.⁸³

As already explained, the government sought to delay informing the next of kin for as long as possible because of the desire to keep any information of strategic value from the enemy. However, poorly framed censorship instructions naming the *Sydney* and forbidding any reference to 'alleged naval activity' combined with leakages from Canberra of the loss of a warship meant that by the time the War Cabinet met on 26 November public rumour had spread to such an extent that the War Cabinet had little choice but to decide that the next of kin should be informed immediately.

Some were still opposed to the idea, but the Prime Minister insisted that the next of kin must be informed because it would be a 'bad thing' if relatives should get the news by rumour, and that the 'honest thing' was to advise them.⁸⁴

Following the War Cabinet's decision, telegrams were sent to the next of kin late that afternoon, with a further telegram sent to postmasters at midday the next day asking them to confirm urgently that all telegrams had been delivered. The telegrams sent to the next of kin of naval personnel advised:

With deep regret I have to inform you that your [relationship and name] is missing as a result of enemy action. Minister for Navy and Naval Board desire to express to you their sincere sympathy.

The telegrams sent by the Air Board to the families of the members of the RAAF (see next page) differed slightly in their wording.

⁸³ Gill, op. cit., Volume 2, p712

⁸⁴ NAA: A9240, Set 2 Vol 4, Advisory War Council Notebooks, meeting of 26 November 1941.

Encl. 3A.

R.A.F. Form A 22 (Revised Nov., 1947)
(R.A.F. Form 96A)
(SUSRA (Rev.D))

MESSAGE FORM

Office Serial No.

Call IN
and
Preface OUT

No. of Groups.
GR

Office Date Stamp.

POSTAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT.

DELIVERY PERSONAL (Reverts see only.)

TO * Mr. G. A. Homard 14 Scott Street Newcastle NSW
FROM * Air Board PA.HBB 26/4 In reply to Number and Date.

(Write horizontally.)

Regret to inform you that your son Aircraftman K. Homard is reported missing as the result of enemy action. The Air Board expresses sincere sympathy.

This message must be sent AS WRITTEN

and may be sent by W/T.

Signature [Signature]

This message must be sent IN CYPHER

and may be sent by W/T.

Signature [Signature]

Original Instructions.* Degree of Priority*

Important

TIME OF

ORIGIN

T.O.R.

* Originator to insert "WOT" if message is not to go by W/T over any part of the route. (Below this line is for Signals use only.)

System	Type	Sender	Receiver	System	Type	Sender	Receiver	System	Type	Sender	Receiver

* The Signal Department is responsible that these details are transcribed to the appropriate portion of the message form and that all possibilities of compressing letters before signals etc. by omitting to remove their signatures from the address etc. is avoided. Failure delivery of the message form details are to be returned to P.M.

The War Cabinet decided on 26 November that the next of kin should be informed merely that the *Sydney's* men were 'missing due to enemy action' in order not to convey information of value to the enemy. This is reflected in the bland wording of this telegram, sent on the same day to the father of 27 year old Leading Aircraftman Keith Homard, RAAF. Correspondence on Homard's casualty file shows that nine months after the *Sydney's* loss his family were still hopeful that one day he would be found alive.

NAA: 703, 660/7/35338, LAC Keith Homard, RAAF, 35338 [Lost aboard HMAS Sydney, 19 November 1941] casualty – repatriation, 1941-43.

The crew of the *Kormoran* had not escaped unscathed. Of a crew of 393, of which 315 Germans and three Chinese were recovered, 78 lost their lives. Approximately 20 were killed in action on board and the remainder drowned through the capsizing of an overloaded raft.

The government was sensitive about releasing the number of survivors from the *Kormoran*. In a meeting of the War Cabinet on 1 December the Prime Minister noted that while there were '320 [sic] German survivors, there were none from the *Sydney*.' Presumably concerned at the effect of this on national morale, he instructed that this information should not be published, 'whatever the criticism'. The same day the Secretary of the Department of the Navy sent a message to his minister, advising him that the number of survivors from the *Kormoran* should not be published 'in view of the effect on next of kin, relatives and friends of personnel of HMAS *Sydney*.'⁸⁵

Three days earlier, at a meeting of the Advisory War Council, the Rt Hon. William Morris Hughes had expressed the view that there must be survivors. At that stage it was still thought possible that there were two raiders. The confusion was caused by the first German survivors stating that they were from the *Kormoran* while information from the British Government indicated that they were from the *Steiermark*. Not realising that they were the same vessel, it was thought that survivors from the *Sydney* may have been on the second raider.

By 4 December the Australian Government was satisfied that all hope of finding survivors from the *Sydney* had passed. The next of kin were sent a letter from the Secretary of the Department of the Navy referring to the earlier telegram, and informing them that:

The Naval Board direct me to inform you that an intensive search by sea and air has failed to find HMAS Sydney or any survivors from her gallant Ship's Company. The Naval Board, therefore, announce that all are considered to have lost their lives in action, and, with the Minister for the Navy, they tender to you again their heartfelt sympathy.'⁸⁶

The Royal Australian Air Force was more cautious. In a letter to the next of kin dated 6 December, the Secretary of the Department of Air confirmed the advice contained in the Air Board telegram of 26 November. Intensive searches by sea and air had failed to find any survivors among either the naval or air force personnel of HMAS *Sydney*. The letter continued:

If, after full consideration of all the circumstances, the Air Board is compelled to conclude that there is no hope of [relationship and name] being found alive, a presumption of death will be made.

In December 1941 and January 1942 requests were made by the naval and air force authorities to the International Red Cross asking that special inquiries be made concerning the possibility of personnel missing from the *Sydney* being held as prisoners of war. Official uncertainty about the fate of the *Sydney*'s crew was

⁸⁵ NAA: A5954, 518/36, HMAS *Sydney* – sinking, replacement fund.

⁸⁶ NAA: MP151/1, 443/201/946, *Sydney* re loss – copies of circular correspondence sent to next of kin and dependents by Navy Office

mirrored in the correspondence from the public and the next of kin, who months after the *Sydney's* loss still hoped that one day their sons, husbands and brothers would be found alive. As related in chapter 6, as late as October 1945 it was still felt necessary to make inquiries in Japan and elsewhere to make sure that rumours of the ship's personnel having been taken prisoner of war were untrue.

It was not until June 1942 that the Air Board officially notified next of kin that it presumed the members of the Air Force serving on the *Sydney* to have died. The submission to the Air Board from the Air Force Director of Personal Services indicated that the Naval Board had presumed the death of naval personnel on the basis of information obtained from the interrogation of the survivors of the *Kormoran*, and from the results of the sea and air searches. The submission went on to state:

Action to presume deaths of the Royal Australian Air Force members on board HMAS *Sydney* was not commenced previously as it was considered that different considerations would apply in determining the fate of Royal Australian Air Force members, some of whom might have been in an aircraft which was possibly in the air at the time when HMAS *Sydney* sank. The evidence negating this possibility was not at all conclusive (see Minute 11). In view of the lapse of time and the negative results obtained by enquiries from the International Red Cross Society...it is requested that these members be presumed to have died...on 19 November 1941.⁸⁷

The Air Board accepted the recommendation. The basis upon which the submission stated that some of the air force personnel were 'possibly in the air at the time when HMAS *Sydney* sank' and that 'the evidence negating this possibility was not at all conclusive' is unable to be determined. The file containing this 'evidence' (A705, 32/1/87, HMAS *Sydney* – members of RAAF missing from) is neither in the custody of the Archives nor in the Department of Defence, and is presumed to have been destroyed.

At the meeting of the War Cabinet in Melbourne on 4 December 1941, the Prime Minister asked why there were no survivors of the *Sydney*.⁸⁸

No explanation was given, but the official view was summed up by Mr Frank Eldridge in his report to the Director of Naval Intelligence on 28 February 1942:

Commander Detmers expressed the opinion that *Sydney* sank as the result of the punishment she had received, and that there could have been no survivors as the whole superstructure had been so smashed, boats on deck must have been destroyed, while any boats stowed below must have been burned by the fires which were raging.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ NAA: A703, 660/7/35338, LAC Keith Homard, RAAF, 35338 [Lost aboard HMAS *Sydney*, 19 November 1941] – casualty – repatriation, 1941–43.

⁸⁸ NAA: A9240, Set 2 Vol 4, War Cabinet notebooks, meeting of 4 December 1941.

⁸⁹ NAA: MP1185/8, 2026/19/6, Loss of HMAS *Sydney* – report by Mr F B Eldridge on interrogation of survivors of *Kormoran*.

The records

The human and very personal dimension of the loss is reflected in the official records of service of the men who died.

The service history records of each of these men are preserved by the Archives in Canberra. In some cases the records are still held by the RAN and RAAF personnel sections in the Department of Defence. Most of the records end in 1942 or 1943 with the finalisation of details of pay and personal effects. The most complete and comprehensive records are those of naval officers and RAAF personnel.

Naval personnel

For naval personnel (including Royal Navy personnel attached to the RAN), the most substantial records are officers' confidential reports, which were assessment reports prepared periodically by commanding officers. These reports are consolidated on a personal record file for each officer that usually extends over the officer's career. The confidential report prepared on Captain Burnett two days before he took command of the *Sydney* appears later in this chapter (see A3978, Burnett, J).

In addition, for each officer there are record of service cards that contain personal particulars about the officer and summary details of his service history and postings.

For non-commissioned naval officers and sailors, the most complete set of records are the record of service cards, which, as for those of officers, record each individual's personal particulars and service history.

There appear to be no surviving consolidated personal history files for naval personnel, although some files exist dealing with various aspects of service for particular individuals.

Air Force Personnel

The service history of the RAAF personnel is particularly well documented. Each serviceman, regardless of rank, has a personal history file, the content of which is described under A9300 and A9301 below. In addition, for five of the six servicemen, a casualty file survives that, among many other details, records the despatch to the next of kin of the royal message of condolence. The one airman whose casualty file has not been found is that of Leading Aircraftman Richard Dodds, 15452, whose records appear to have been destroyed.

Canteen staff

The reconstructed ship's ledger for the HMAS *Sydney* (see MP151/1, 474/208/455, described in chapter 2) shows that four civilian canteen staff were serving on the *Sydney* at the time of her loss. These were:

- Duncan McCalley – canteen assistant
- Samuel Psaila – canteen assistant
- Maurice Opas – canteen manager
- Salvatore Zammitt – canteen manager.

The service details of these men are recorded in their record of service cards (A6770) along with those of petty officers and men.

Other records

The other records described in this chapter consist of files containing versions of the official casualty lists, correspondence with the next of kin and expressions of sympathy to the Governor-General and the Prime Minister from within Australia and overseas.

This chapter departs from the convention followed throughout the rest of this guide of arranging records in series number order. For the sake of coherence and convenience, it groups record series according to the service to which the individual serviceman belonged.

Naval personnel

CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS – NAVAL OFFICERS (FORMS S206, PP101), 1912–A3978

Recorded by:

1939–1973 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)

Canberra 65 metres

This series comprises confidential reports on RAN officers prepared periodically by their commanding officers. Reports on officers who were seconded from the Royal Navy to serve with the RAN are included in the series.

The reports for each officer are consolidated on a personal record file, of which there is one for each officer. The reports give basic personal and service details and an assessment of the officer's qualities. The headings under which assessments are given include general conduct, initiative, judgement, reliability, command ability for seagoing ships, general opinion of officer, whether suitable to specialise and whether recommended for promotion. The files for some officers contain details of courses attended and performance assessments. A few files have a small black-and-white photograph of the officer taped to the cover in a square provided for that purpose.

Personal records – Burnett, Joseph, 1921-41 A3978, Burnett, J

RECORD OF SERVICE CARDS – NAVAL OFFICERS, 1905–70**A6769****Recorded by:****1939–1970 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Canberra 19.53 metres**

This series comprises cards recording each officer's personal particulars and service history from enlistment to discharge or death. Cards were maintained for all regular officers, including officers on loan or exchange from the Royal Navy and for officers of the Naval Reserve, the Naval Volunteer Reserve and the Naval Nursing Service. The cards ceased to be maintained in 1970 following computerisation of the records.

The information recorded on the cards includes date and place of birth; religion; next of kin; home port; details of marriage; pay number; decorations and degrees; specialist qualification; previous service; date commissioned; promotions and reversions to rank; dates of seniority; pay for higher duties; examinations; movements; terms of appointment; dates to and from each posting; date and circumstances of death; pensions granted to spouse and children; and repatriation statements. The cards for those officers lost on the *Sydney* carry the notation, 'Missing presumed lost HMAS *Sydney* 20/11/41.'

The information recorded on the cards includes: date and place of birth, religion, next of kin, home port, details of marriage, pay number, decorations and degrees, specialist qualification, previous service, date commissioned, promotions and reversions to rank, dates of seniority, pay for higher duties, examinations, movements, terms of appointment, dates to and from each posting, date and circumstances of death, pensions granted to spouse and children, and Repatriation statements. The cards for those officers lost on the *Sydney* carry the notation 'Missing presumed lost HMAS *Sydney* 20/11/41'.

RECORD OF SERVICE CARDS – PETTY OFFICERS AND MEN, 1911–70**A6770****Recorded by:****1939–1970 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Canberra 124.65 metres**

This series comprises cards recording the personal particulars and service history of petty officers and ratings from their enlistment to their death or discharge. Cards were maintained for all non-commissioned personnel, including those on loan or exchange from the Royal Navy, for reservists and for canteen staff. A new card was commenced on a sailor's appointment to commissioned rank and was then filed with the officer's record of service card (see series A6769 described above). The cards ceased to be maintained in 1970 following computerisation of the records.

The information recorded on the cards is essentially a summary of the sailor's personal and service history and includes date and place of birth; religion; occupation; next of kin; personal description on first entry; home port; personal number; details of engagements, medals, clasps and awards; service in other armed forces; good conduct record; character and efficiency assessments; details of meritorious service; postings; transfers; promotions; changes in classification; pay number; decorations and degrees; specialist qualification; previous service; date commissioned; promotions and reversions to rank; dates of seniority; pay for higher duties; examinations; movements; terms of appointment; dates to and from each posting; date and circumstances of death; pensions granted to spouse and children; and repatriation statements. The cards for those personnel lost on the *Sydney* carry the notation 'Missing presumed lost HMAS *Sydney* 20/11/41' and 'DD' (Discharged Dead).

This series includes employment cards for the four canteen staff members serving on the *Sydney*.

Three series – Navy personnel matters – correspondence, 1923–50

The following three series were recorded by the Navy Office, Department of the Navy, and are held in the Melbourne office of the Archives. These three series are the main Navy file series dealing with naval personnel matters. Access to each of the three series is controlled by name index cards (B1127) and a register (B1125).

CORRESPONDENCE RELATING TO NAVY PERSONNEL MATTERS, 1923–50 MT856/1

Recorded by:

Melbourne 49.86 metres

The file number block 429/202/1 to 429/202/700 in the index cards has been allocated the title 'Sydney Casualties' but few of these records still exist. The only Sydney personnel for which records have been found in this number block belong to series MT856/1, and relate to:

Lieutenant Commander Alexander Mackay Wilkinson MT856/1, 429/202/21

Acting Sub-Lieutenant Donald Wolsey McCabe MT856/1, 429/202/383

Ordinary Seaman Benjamin Jack Craske MT856/1, 429/202/439

Sick Berth Attendant John Robert Payne MT856/1, 429/202/579

Able Seaman Trevor James Armistice Johnstone MT856/1, 429/202/603

Lieutenant John Alan Cole MT856/1, 429/202/651

Able Seaman Harold Glasby MT856/1, 429/202/700

These files deal with matters relating to the payment of outstanding monies due to the estates of the deceased, pension entitlements and certificates of death.

The index cards also indicate the existence in the other two series (MT1214/1 and MT1334/1) of many files on *Sydney* personnel dealing with matters both before and after the loss, such as: disciplinary matters, medical treatment, details of postings and domestic affairs, requests from next of kin for information, wills and certificates of death, and estate and war gratuity matters. Note: because of the particular arrangement of these records tracing the files on any one individual can be difficult and time-consuming. It also appears that many records in these series may no longer exist.

3. 206a. CONFIDENTIAL. *For instructions see over and inside of cover.* *For use at the Admiralty.*

Rank.	Name in full (Surname in block letters).	Seniority.
Captain	Joseph BURNETT	31.12.38

Occasion for Report..... On supersession of 1st N.M.

Ship..... "Cerberus" for Navy Office Station

Period of Report { From..... 18.10.39
To..... 12. May 1941

Capacity in which employed..... Deputy Chief of Naval Staff

Section I.	(a) General conduct—Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory (b) Of temperate habits: Yes or No *†
Section II.	(c) Initiative 9 (d) Judgment 8 (e) Ability to Command, I.K.. (f) Zeal and Energy 9 (g) Reliability..... 8 (h) Administrative ability .. 8
Section III.	If in command of a sea-going ship :—(i) Ability in handling ship..... (j) Fit for more important sea command—Yes or No * (k) If reply to (j) is No—whether recommended for :— (1) a non-sea-going appointment; (2) No further employment.*
Section IV.	General opinion of Officer :— I have the very highest opinion of Captain Burnett at a Staff Officer and have no doubt that he will do equally well at sea. As Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff his work has been outstanding and he has a grasp as wide as I have known in any officer. He is full of initiative, most loyal and tactful and extremely hard working. One of the most promising and exceptional officers I have met.
Section V.	(f) Professional ability..... 9
Section VI.	(m) Captains only; Whether recommended for employment as Flag Officer: Yes or No * (n) Engineer and Medical branches only: Whether recommended for promotion—Yes or No.*

* Delete as requisite. † See Note (ii) overleaf.

Date..... 12 May 1941..... Signature and Rank of Reporting Officer..... *Admiral*

Remarks of Senior Officer (see Note (iv) overleaf) :—

Burnett, who was assessed in the report as 8 (above average) and 9 (exceptional) on most criteria, would never have seen the report, since it was the practice never to allow officers access to their own confidential reports. The letters 'I.K.' against 'Ability to Command' indicate that Colvin had insufficient knowledge of Burnett to make an assessment.

NAA: A3978, BURNETT, J

Royal Australian Air Force personnel

Of the six RAAF personnel who died with the Sydney, casualty records for five have been located. The airman whose casualty file has been identified but not located is Leading Aircraftman Richard Dodds, 15452. His file is presumed destroyed. However, the personal history files for all six personnel are held and are described under A9300 and A9301 below.

CORRESPONDENCE FILES, MULTIPLE NUMBER SERIES WITH OCCASIONAL ALPHABETICAL PREFIXES AND INFIXES (CANBERRA), 1940–84 A703

Recorded by:

1959–73 Department of Air (CA 35)

Canberra 457.58 metres

This was the Department of Air major correspondence file series after its move from Melbourne to Canberra in 1959 until the department's integration into the Department of Defence in 1974. The RAAF casualty files in this series relating to the personnel lost on the *Sydney* were for reasons unknown top-numbered into this series from A705 (described below). The one set of relevant casualty files remaining in A705 belong to Sgt R E Foster and are described under that series heading.

Sgt Sidney Marley, RAAF, 3967 [Lost aboard HMAS Sydney, 19 Nov 1941] – casualty – repatriation, 1941–49 A703, 660/7/3967

Sgt Marley's casualty file is typical of the files of the other four airmen described in this series and in A705 below. For this reason, detailed descriptions of the contents of the casualty files for the other RAAF personnel are not given.

Sgt Marley's file contains the following:

- a copy of the Naval Board's advice to the air force of 26 November that the six RAAF personnel on board the *Sydney* were missing
- a copy of the Air Board's telegram of the same day to Sgt Marley's widow
- a letter from the Department of Air to his widow dated 6 December confirming that her husband was missing and advising that a presumption of his death would only be made once the Air Board had concluded that there was no hope of her husband being found alive
- an inquiry by the Air Board to the International Red Cross, dated 12 January 1942, asking whether a number of missing RAAF personnel (including those lost with the *Sydney*) were being held as prisoners of war
- a letter dated 10 July 1942 to Sgt Marley's widow informing her that her husband's death was officially presumed to have occurred on 20 November 1941
- Sgt Marley's certificate of death and a certified copy of his will.
- Note: an inquiry from Sgt Marley's father to the Minister for the Navy in December 1941 is recorded in MP151/1, 429/201/374, described later in this chapter.

Cpl Arthur John Clarke, RAAF, 7143 [Lost aboard HMAS Sydney, 19 Nov 1941] – casualty – repatriation, 1941–42) A703, 660/7/7143

LAC Keith Homard, RAAF, 35338 [Lost aboard HMAS Sydney, 19 Nov 1941] – casualty – repatriation, 1941–43) A703, 660/7/35338

Flying Officer Raymond Barker Barrey, RAAF, 407000 [Lost aboard HMAS Sydney, 19 Nov 1941] – casualty – repatriation, 1941–63 A703, 660/7/407000

CORRESPONDENCE FILES, MULTIPLE NUMBER (MELBOURNE) SERIES (PRIMARY NUMBERS 1–323), 1922–60 A705**Recorded by:****1922–39 Air Services Branch (CA 778)****1939–60 Department of Air (CA 35)****Canberra (Melbourne) 750.81 (14.4) metres**

This was the RAAF's main correspondence file series from 1922 to 1960. It covers a wide range of subjects, including general administration, technical and specialist areas, equipment procurement and disposal, personnel matters, and leasing of land and buildings. The series was culled before its transfer to archival custody.

Sgt RE Foster, 9347 – casualty – repatriation, 1941–42 A705, 163/113/137**Cpl RE Foster, 9347 – committee of adjustment, 1941–42 A705, 163/113/215**

This item contains the air force casualty form for Cpl Foster completed on 1 December 1941; a copy of Cpl Foster's will; correspondence between the Department of Air and the deceased's widow; and a copy of the Proceedings of the Committee of Adjustment (finalising Cpl Foster's pay and other service affairs), dated 30 June 1942.

RAAF PERSONAL HISTORY FILES OF OFFICERS, ALPHABETICAL SERIES, 1921–50 A9300**Recorded by:****1921–39 Air Services Branch (CA 778)****1939–50 Department of Air (CA 35)****Canberra 356.32 metres**

This series was created in 1921 with the formation of the RAAF. The records consist of folders arranged alphabetically by the officer's surname.

Each file contains various RAAF forms and cards detailing aspects of the officer's personal life and career in the RAAF. Information relating to the officer's separation from the RAAF is also held on the files, as is correspondence between the air force and the officer or officer's descendants or other interested parties since the officer's separation.

This series was discontinued in 1949 when the RAAF introduced a change to the way service numbers were arranged and issued. Records of officers still serving were top-numbered into A12372.

RAAF PERSONAL HISTORY FILES OF NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS AND OTHER RANKS, NUMERICAL SERIES, 1921–50 A9301**Recorded by:****1939–50 Department of Air (CA 35)****Canberra 2462.85 metres**

The description of this series is the same as for A9300, except that this series contains the details of RAAF members who were not officers.

RAAF PERSONNEL FILES – ALL RANKS, C 1921–**A12372****Recorded by:****1949–73 Department of Air (CA 35)****Canberra 49.5 metres**

This series is the personnel series for post-World War II servicemen and women serving in the RAAF. All ranks are represented in this series.

This series provides information about an individual's service in the RAAF, including enlistment, postings, promotions and demotions and date of separation. It also includes correspondence between the individual or the individual's relatives and the RAAF after the serviceperson had left the service.

Other records relating to the casualties**CORRESPONDENCE FILES, MULTIPLE NUMBER SERIES WITH VARIABLE ALPHA PREFIX AND GENERAL PREFIX 'SC' (FOURTH SYSTEM), 1914–50****A1608****Recorded by:****1939–45 Prime Minister's Department (CA 12)****Canberra 50.94 metres****HMAS Sydney and HMAS Parramatta – expressions of sympathy, 1941–42
A1608, S51/1/6**

This item consists mainly of expressions of sympathy for the *Sydney's* loss from within Australia and overseas to the Governor-General and the Prime Minister. Among the telegrams received by the Prime Minister on the day of his announcement of the *Sydney's* loss was one from the Japanese Minister in Sydney, Mr Tatsuo Kawai, 'May I extend to you my sincere sympathy for the loss of the HMAS *Sydney*.' Prime Minister Curtin responded on the same day, 'My colleagues and I are deeply grateful to you for your kind message of sympathy in the loss of HMAS *Sydney*.'

NAVAL HISTORICAL COLLECTION, 1872–1974**AWM124****Recorded by:****1943–1973 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Australian War Memorial (AWM) 28 metres****HMAS Sydney – list of personnel at 11 November, 1941 [amended to 23
January 1942] [126 pages, 29 Nov 1941 – 23 Jan 1942] AWM124, 4/446**

This item contains two copies of a list of personnel lost on the *Sydney*, including their name, rank, service number, state and next of kin. The first list of 63 pages has two lists of amendments, to 29 November and 3 December, whilst the second list, also of 63 pages, is amended to 23 January 1942.

ROLL OF HONOUR CARDS, SUPPLEMENTARY SOURCES, 1885–1987**AWM237****Recorded by:**

1920–1948 Australian Imperial Force, Base Records Office (CA 2001)
1925–1987 Australian War Memorial (CA 616)

Australian War Memorial (AWM) 4.5 metres

Copy of list of those lost on HMAS Sydney 1939–1945 [25 pages, c.1941 – c.1942] AWM237, 21

This item consists of a photocopy of a list titled *HMAS Sydney Casualty List – Missing Presumed Dead – 19 November 1941*. The copy was supplied to the War Memorial by Navy Office in 1990 or 1991 from the records of the Naval Historical Section.

The item was previously identified as OW89/5, Box 15, *HMAS Sydney* – casualty list – missing presumed dead – 19 November 1941.

GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE FILES, 1923–1950**MP151/1****Recorded by:**

1939–1950 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)

Melbourne 107.28 metres

Inquiry from Chinaman who was a P/W [Prisoner of war] on the *Kormoran* [4 pages, 9–22 Dec 1941] MP151/1, 429/201/374

Deals with representations by Senator J J Arnold to Norman J O Makin, Minister for the Navy, on behalf of Mr J H Marley whose son, Sgt Sidney Marley, RAAF, was on the *Sydney* at the time of its loss. Mr Marley asked whether 'the Chinaman' who was a prisoner of war on the *Kormoran* made any statement about the position of the *Sydney* at the time of its loss. The response was that no new information had been obtained. (Sgt Marley's casualty file is described elsewhere in this chapter).

***Sydney* re loss. Copies of circular correspondence sent to next of kin and dependents by Navy Office [6 pages, 4–9 Dec 1941] MP151/1, 443/201/946**

This file contains master copies of correspondence sent to the dependants and next of kin of the *Sydney*'s crew concerning the payment of pensions, pay and deferred pay, and dependant allowances.

HISTORICAL RECORDS FILES, 1944–1975**B6121****Recorded by:**

1944–1973 Navy Office, Department of the Navy, Historical Section (CA 38)

Melbourne (NHS Canberra) 107.28 metres

A fuller description of this series is given in Chapter 2.

HMAS *Sydney* II – Casualties – 19/11/41 [88 pages] B6121, 141J

This item, held by the Naval Historical Section, consists of two undated typed lists. The first is a 63 page alphabetical listing of the officers and men lost on the *Sydney*. The list gives their name, rank and service number. It contains several errors which have been corrected in handwriting in ink and pencil.

The second list, titled *HMAS Sydney – Casualty List – Missing Presumed Dead – 19 November 1941*, consists of 25 pages and is also typed and undated, but appears to have been prepared more recently, perhaps by the Naval Historical Section in the 1970s. The list includes basic statistical information about the numbers of casualties.

8 The Prisoners of War

Recovery of the survivors

In a minute to the Chief of Naval Staff dated 22 December 1941, Commander Dechaineux reported that:

the first news of German survivors, and in fact that there may have been an action, was received timed 0816Z/24 from the Commander in Chief, China [Station] and received by the Naval Board late pm local time on the 24 November.⁹⁰

This was a reference to the 26 men picked up from a raft by the liner *Aquitania* early on 23 November, three-and-a-half days after the battle. Over the next four days the search for the *Sydney* recovered the remaining survivors, four groups at sea and two on the coast:

- 25 men were picked up from a raft by the British tanker *Trocas* on Monday, 24 November
- 46 men reached the coast at 17-Mile Well, north of Carnarvon on the same day
- 57 men landed on the coast at Red Bluff, also north of Carnarvon on Tuesday, 25 November
- 31 men were recovered from a boat by the *Koolinda* on Wednesday, 26 November
- 60 men, including the *Kormoran's* captain, were rescued on the same day by the *Centaur*
- 72 men were recovered from another boat by HMAS *Yandra* on Thursday, 27 November.

Of the *Kormoran's* complement of 393 officers and men, 315 were recovered along with three of the four Chinese taken captive when the *Kormoran* sank the *Eurylochus* 10 months earlier. Approximately 20 of the crew were killed on board during the battle, and another 58 drowned when their overloaded raft capsized.⁹¹

Interment

Except for the prisoners picked up by the *Aquitania*, which continued her voyage to Sydney, and those recovered by the *Trocas*, which proceeded directly to Fremantle, the prisoners were taken by sea and land to Carnarvon, where the preliminary interrogations took place. They were then transported to Fremantle where 19 men were taken to hospital and the remainder were distributed between Fremantle Detention Barracks, Swanbourne Barracks and the internment camp at Harvey, 87 miles south of Perth.

⁹⁰ NAA: B6121, 164L, *Kormoran*: (Raider No. 41) 'G' – German AMC.

⁹¹ Gill, op. cit., p456

Once the interrogations had been completed, preparations were made to transfer the prisoners to internment camps in Victoria. The officers departed on the liner *Duntroon* on 13 December, while the sailors were transported by train in two groups, the first departing on 27 December and the second in early January. Upon arrival in Melbourne, all the prisoners were taken to Murchison prisoner of war camp in northern Victoria where they joined those rescued by the *Aquitania*. The officers were later transferred to Dhurringile, a homestead property about 10 miles from Murchison camp that had been converted into a detention camp. In 1943 the men were transferred to a timber-felling camp at Graytown while others were transferred to Tatura.

Two prisoners too ill to travel remained behind in Fremantle, one of whom, Erich Meyer, died three months later of lung cancer. Meyer was the only crew member who died in Australia.⁹²

The prisoners remained interned in Australia under Army control until January 1947 when they sailed from Port Melbourne on the *Orontes*.

The records

As well as the individual records of interrogation of the Kormoran's survivors described in other chapters, the surviving records include official documents covering their period of detention as prisoners of war. These records are complemented by personal records seized and confiscated, many of which are still held in the official records. The records described in this chapter include:

- dossiers for each individual
- photographs
- copies and translations of intercepted mail
- seized documents, including personal diaries
- registers of injury and death
- details of escapes and courts of inquiry
- service and casualty forms.

These records are described in the remainder of this chapter.

PRISONERS OF WAR FILES, 1939–45

A7919

Recorded by:

1939–1947 Investigation Branch, Central Office Melbourne and Canberra (CA 747)

Canberra 31.23 metres

The series was created by the Commonwealth Investigation Service and consists of the camp records of prisoners of war interned in Australia during the World War II.

Each file in the series is the record of a particular prisoner of war. Each prisoner's dossier includes particulars such as their name, date of birth, place of birth, nationality, where captured and their unit and rank. Other personal particulars

⁹² Winter, op. cit., p199

include name of spouse and their trade or profession. A photograph of the prisoner is usually attached to the dossier, which also includes details of disciplinary offences (including attempts at escape) and punishments.

Many of the dossiers have copies of intercepted mail and documents seized from the prisoners and translated. In some cases the prisoners' personal diaries are included – eg that of Heinz Gustav Schott in his dossier 98667. Some records described elsewhere in this guide (eg B6121, 165K, *Kormoran* – translation of diaries, described in chapter 6) include translated extracts of diaries relating to the *Sydney–Kormoran* action. A number of dossiers of ex-*Kormoran* prisoners include formal application to the Australian authorities for permission to migrate to Australia after the war.

REGISTER OF DEATHS AND INJURIES OF PRISONERS OF WAR, 1942–47 **B3806**

Recorded by:

Directorate of Prisoners of War and Internees (CA 36)

Melbourne 0.05 metres

This series consists of three volumes of a register of deaths and injuries of prisoners of war who were held in Australia during World War II. Each book is indexed. The entries of details for each death or injury are typewritten onto pages pasted into the books, except for those recorded from folio eight in book three, which are handwritten. Each set of entries consists of the name of the prisoner, details of the court of inquiry or coronial inquiry including details of dates, circumstances and findings. Each entry is usually cross-referenced to a file in MP742/1 (described below). The file identified is often no longer extant.

Register of Deaths and Injuries to Prisoners of War, 1942–44 B3806, volume 1

This volume contains information about at least one ex-*Kormoran* POW. At p. 61 are details of a court of inquiry into a circular saw accident at Graytown on 1 July 1944 in which Willi Roenchen (POW 42287) lost all the fingers and thumb of his right hand.

Register of Deaths and Injuries to Prisoners of War, 1944–45 B3806, volume 2

Again this volume mentions at least one ex-*Kormoran* POW, Heinrich Schafer. The entry occurs on p. 18 of the volume, and simply states 'Schafer, Heinrich – Graytown report for week ended 28 October 1944'. There is no indication of the nature of his injury.

RECORD BOOKS OF ESCAPES OF PRISONERS OF WAR AND INTERNEES, 1940–47 **B3813**

Recorded by:

Directorate of Prisoners of War and Internees (CA 36)

Melbourne 0.09 metres

This series consists of books recording the escape of prisoners of war and internees in Australia during World War II. There are three books in the series covering the period 1940–46. The method of recording escapes varied between and sometimes within books.

Internees & Prisoners of War: Escapees, Sep 1940 – Nov 1944 B3813, 1

This register includes the details of each escape attempted by ex-*Kormoran* prisoners of war. Among the names recorded are those of Wendroth, Syre, Schulz, Daniel, Knauthe and Goewert. The degree of detail for each escape varies, but can include date of escape, date of recapture, camp, date of court enquiry, remarks by camp commandant, method of escape, prohibited articles, and suggested action and action taken by Army authorities. Each entry in the register refers to a file belonging to one of two series: MP508/1 (Army General Correspondence, 1939–42) and MP742/1 (Army General Correspondence, 1943–51). Some of the files referred to survive while a number have been destroyed.

Escapees – prisoners of war and internees, 1945 B3813, 2

As for B3813, 1. Among the names appearing is that of Detmers.

Escapees – POWs and internees 1946 B3813, 3

As for B3813, 1. Among the names appearing is that of Lugsch.

RESIDUE OF RECORDS RELATING TO PRISONERS OF WAR AND INTERNEES, WORLD WAR II, 1905–59 B4141**Recorded by:**

1939–55 Prisoners of War Information Bureau (also known as Prisoners of War and Internees Information Bureau) (CA 3055)

Melbourne 0.72 metres

This series consists of records on prisoners of war and internees both in Australia and abroad, including reports of death and the place of burial.

German nationals buried in Australia, [possibly] 1947 B4141, 31

This item contains a list of names against which is recorded POW or internee number; name; recorded next of kin; date and place of birth; religion; date and place of death; and date and place of burial. There is only one entry for an ex-*Kormoran* POW – Erich Gustav Heinrich Meyer, who is recorded as having died at 110 General Hospital Perth on 24 March 1942 and having been buried on 25 March 1942 at Karrakatta Cemetery, Western Australia, Grave 245, Lutheran Section.

Deceased prisoners of war and internees, 1942–43 B4141, 33 part 1

This item contains a single entry, again for Erich Meyer, which simply records his name, POW number, next of kin, age and religion.

**CORRESPONDENCE FILES, MULTIPLE NUMBER, SECURITY CLASSIFIED SERIES, 1941–50
MP385/7****Recorded by:**

**1941–1942 Command Headquarters, Southern Command [I], Australian
Military Forces (CA 1843)
1942–1946 Headquarters, Victorian Lines of Communication Area, Australian
Military Forces (CA 1844)**

Melbourne 0.9 metres

**Prisoner of war and internment camps – offer of aid to dependants of
HMAS Sydney MP385/7, 53/101/66**

This file contains the original and translation of correspondence from Camp Leader Koehn at Murchison prisoner of war camp, to the camp commandant. Koehn expressed the desire of internees rescued from the *Kormoran* to financially assist a family of a deceased crew member of the *Sydney*. The internees' concern was thought to have been generated by an article in *Smith's Weekly* (an undated cutting of the article is on the file) suggesting that families of the deceased crew were suffering hardship. The official response advised the internees that their offer was appreciated but that the needs of all the families were well provided for.

Dr Habben – diary, 1943 MP385/7, 53/101/178

This file deals with the confiscation by the authorities at Dhurringile of the diary of Dr Habben and its translation by Army authorities. The original diary is on the file. How it was found is not indicated. The Army concluded that 'although the diary contains matters of historical interest it is ... of no security value.'

**Complaint re condition of camp [camp leader Detmers, Dhurringile – letters to
Swiss Consul], 1942 MP385/7, 53/101/246**

This file contains a translation of two letters from Captain Detmers, the camp leader at Dhurringile, to the Swiss Consul complaining about conditions in the camp. The outcome of Detmers' complaints is not recorded.

Prisoner of war – officers' camp – 'Escapes', 1945 MP385/7, 53/102/74

On the night of 10 January 1945 Captain Detmers with 19 others escaped from Dhurringile camp through a 120-metre tunnel they had excavated from a music room. This file deals with the Army court of inquiry that was convened on 15, 16 and 17 January to investigate the escape, and with official action following the recovery of the escapees. The file contains three copies of the proceedings of the court of inquiry, including exhibits (eg witness statements, sentry instructions and standing orders). Detmers was among the last to be recaptured, being detained at Shepparton on 18 January. The escapees were given punishment of 28 days' detention.

The file records the confiscation from Detmers on his recapture of a 'notebook' containing entries in German cypher that were photographed by the Commonwealth Security Service and sent to the Navy for decoding. The cypher, the method of its decryption and a translation of its contents (purporting to be the deck and engine room logs of the *Kormoran*) appear in B5823 described in chapter 6.

Seven days after his recapture and while still in detention, Detmers sought and was granted an interview with the Swiss Consul during which he complained about his accommodation, the lack of light in his cell and the refusal of his request for a daily issue of fresh fruit. The file records the consul's representations to the Army and their response.

**ARMY SECRET CORRESPONDENCE FILES, MULTIPLE NUMBER SERIES (CLASS 401),
1936–45 MP729/6****Recorded by:****1939–45 Department of the Army (CA 36)****Melbourne 26.31 metres**

This series comprises holds Army Headquarters correspondence files, with a 'secret' classification. Items cover a wide variety of subjects.

Diary of Baron Stael von Halstein, 1943–45 MP729/6, 17/402/882

This item contains a typed copy of translated pages from a diary covering the period 26 October to 19 November 1941, which describe the action between the *Sydney* and the *Kormoran*. An unsigned, handwritten annotation on the translation notes that the diary entry is 'alleged to have been written by Capt Dietmer'.

The file also contains correspondence regarding a diary owned by Baron Stael von Halstein, then an internee in Australia. The diary was apparently taken from the baron's possession when he was captured from the German supply ship *Ramses* and landed in Australia. The Director of Naval Intelligence in Melbourne sent the diary to the Naval Liaison Officer in London who passed it to the DNI in London for information. The diary was then sent back to DNI in Melbourne for return to the baron because it was assessed as a personal record.

GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE, 1943–51**MP742/1****Recorded by:****Department of the Army (CA 36)****Melbourne 162.48 metres****Pay for German officer POW ex Kormoran detained by Commonwealth, 1942–43 MP742/1, 255/4/36**

This file contains:

- correspondence between the Director of Prisoners of War and the Army's Director of Personal Services about necessary amendments to Regulations to allow payment to German and Italian officer prisoners of war such as those from the *Kormoran*, who were captured by Commonwealth forces
- a telegram and correspondence concerning the mess charges to be applied to Italian officer POWs
- a signed copy of National Security (Prisoners of War) Regulations: Prisoners of War (Payment) Order (No. GIA1), dated 15 July 1943.

REGISTERS – 'SERVICE AND CASUALTY' FORMS (FORM A112) OF ENEMY PRISONERS OF WAR AND INTERNEES HELD IN CAMPS IN AUSTRALIA, 1939–57 MP1103/1**Recorded by:****1939–47 Prisoners of War Information Bureau (CA 3055)****Melbourne 10.08 metres****German Prisoners of War PWG 41983 to PWG 42094 and PWGA 42095 to PWGA 42414 (ex Kormoran), 1941–46 MP1103/1, 47**

This is a bound volume of POW service and casualty forms (Form AAF A112), numbers 41983 to 42414. Pencil notes on the inside cover indicate that form numbers from 42095 to 42382 and from 42388 to 42414 inclusive relate to POWs from the *Kormoran* (forms numbers 42383–87 are not used). In all, 315 of the forms relate to survivors of the *Kormoran* and were completed between about November 1941 and January 1947.

The top half of each form contains the details that include identification no.; [military] district; names and rank; date of capture and place; date and place of birth; trade or occupation; religion; nationality; marital condition; next of kin, their address and relationship; identification details; and distinctive marks.

The bottom half of each form has columns that record history entries such as 'Marched into Liverpool ex-*Aquitania*', with dates, place, authority, transfers, hospitalisation etc. The final entry given is 'REPTd [Repatriated] *Orontes* 21 January 1947'.

DOSSIERS – REPORTS ON INTERNEES AND PRISONERS OF WAR HELD IN AUSTRALIAN CAMPS, SINGLE NUMBER SERIES, ALPHA PREFIX, 1939–45 **MP1103/2**

Recorded by:

Prisoners of War Information Bureau (CA 3055)

Melbourne 21.6 metres

Records in this series contain more personal information about each POW than do those in MP1103/1, described above.

REGISTERS OF INTERNEES AND PRISONERS OF WAR, 1914–45

PP246/2

Recorded by:

1919–1945 Investigation Branch, WA (CA 908)

Perth 0.18 metres

This series consists of eight registers recording details of German, Austrian, Italian, Chinese and Japanese internees and prisoners of war during World War I and World War II.

Registers of prisoners of war and internees [1939–1945 War] German prisoners of war ex *Kormoran*, 1940–46 PP246/2, volume 8

Volume 8 includes the names of 289 of the prisoners from the *Kormoran* (POW number 42121–42382 and 42388–42414, inclusive). The registers merely record the name and number of each POW in a numerical arrangement. The names and numbers are then repeated in alphabetical sections.

**KARL ROPERS, SEAMAN, GERMAN AUXILIARY CRUISER KORMORAN – CONFISCATED
DIARY PR83/109**

Recorded by:

Karl Ropers, Seaman, German auxiliary cruiser *Kormoran*

Personal Record Collection (Australian War Memorial) 255 pages

**[Diary. Personal impressions of Karl Ropers, *Kormoran*], no dates
PR83/109**

Diary confiscated from Seaman Ropers following the capture of the survivors of the German Auxiliary Cruiser *Kormoran*. The diary was maintained aboard the vessel until it was sunk by HMAS *Sydney* in November 1941. Evidence of immersion in salt water.

GERMAN
AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES

A.A.F. A. 112
Revised, May, 1941

INDEXED 1142
PRISONER OF WAR - SERVICE AND CASUALTY FORM Identification No. **NGA.42132**
Promoted to (Kapitan junior) Captain 1-4-43 30/11/44 District WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Rank Commander Other Names **Theodor Anton Gunther** Surname **DETMEERS**

Date of Capture **27th November, 1941** **11 11 1**
Place of Capture **At Sea**
Date of Birth **22.8.1902** **02**
Place of Birth **Witten on Ruhr** **8**
Trade or Occupation **Naval Officer** **214**
Religion **Evangelist**

NATIONALITY **GERMAN**
Marital Condition **Single**
Next of Kin **Anton DETMEERS,**
Address of Next of Kin **Hamburg**
Address of Next of Kin **Brahms Allee 34.**
Relationship **Father**

Identification—Colour of Hair **Blue**
Distinctive Marks

REPORT	NAVY	REPORT	From whom received	Date	Place of Capture	Place of Release	Signature of Officer
		Marched in Fremantle ex "Kormoran"		27.11.41	Fremantle	A.111	
		Marched to "Prinzezen"		30.12.41	Prinzezen	R-113	
		Escaped from compound		11.1.45	Dhurringile		
		Recaptured		19.1.45			
		Escaped 22 days detention - escaping		23.1.45			
		To 115 H.M.H.		15.3.45			
		Marched to 115 H.M.H.		25.6.45			
		Escaped at Dhurringile		25.6.45			
		Marched to 115 H.M.H.		28.7.45			
		To 115 H.M.H.		8.10.45			
		Marched to 115 H.M.H.		24.10.45			
		Marched to 115 H.M.H.		15.11.45			
		Marched to 115 H.M.H.		15.11.45			

REPT. CRONTES
21 January 1947

The Prisoner of War Service and Casualty Form for Theodor Detmers, captain of the Kormoran. The form notes his escape from Dhurringile in January 1945 and recapture and punishment. Later the same year he was twice admitted to hospital after suffering a stroke.
NAA: MP1103/1, 47

9 The Relics

The physical evidence

Despite six days of searching by sea and air, little material evidence of the battle was found except for the German survivors, the boats and rafts from which they were rescued, and a Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Carley float and lifebelt. Because both the *Sydney* and the *Kormoran* had steamed or drifted for some hours after the battle, the precise locations at which they sank were unknown until discovery of the wrecks in 2008.

The debris that was found was sighted or located over two days – 27 and 28 November – and is documented in the records of the search and rescue operations. Not all material found was confirmed to be from the *Kormoran* or the *Sydney*. For example, on Thursday, 27 November an aircraft reported sighting three pieces of white timber, 15 or 16 feet in length, about one mile apart. On the same day HMAS *Wyrallah* picked up an inflated RAN-type lifebelt with 'OTRC 11/39' stencilled on the rubber fittings. It carried no name and its securing tape was knotted and had been snapped.

On Friday, 28 November the *Heros* recovered a RAN-type Carley float badly damaged by shell fire. The float was recovered approximately 160 miles north-west of Carnarvon and in 1942 was presented to the Australian War Memorial.

The *Heros* also recovered a green box resembling a dog kennel. This was later found to have come from the *Kormoran*, which had carried a dog and a monkey. Both animals reached the mainland with the survivors but were shot soon after by quarantine officers.

Also on 28 November HMAS *Wyrallah* picked up a partially burnt foreign kapok lifebelt, and two small metal Carley floats tied together. These appeared to be of foreign manufacture and one contained the body of a German. The clothing was taken from the body, which was then buried at sea.

On the afternoon of 28 November, a Catalina flying boat reported sighting a patch of oil. Although this was investigated by the *Wyrallah*, no oil was sighted. The crew considered that the sighting was possibly a cloud shadow.

When the search was abandoned on 29 November these were the only items that had been found. On 27 November coast watchers between Dongarra and Broome had been requested to arrange a search of the coastline. Nothing of interest was located until 8 December, when an oar was found. Further investigations were reportedly being made but nothing is recorded in official records as to the outcome.⁹³

⁹³ DNO WA report to Naval Board on search operations for HMAS *Sydney*, 11 December 1941. National Archives of Australia: MP1049/5, 2026/3/457, Track chart of air searches for HMAS *Sydney*.

Other items, not able to be definitely connected with the battle were found some time later. In February 1942 a Carley float containing a body was recovered off Christmas Island, and a lifebuoy bearing the name HMAS *Sydney* was found near Comboyuro Point in New South Wales in March 1943. From time to time other items have been found washed ashore on the coast of Western Australia but these have not been positively identified as having come from the *Sydney*, at least not at the time of her loss. Cases of apparent fraud and attempted hoax have also been investigated and well documented.⁹⁴

In 1993 the Carley float now displayed in the Australian War Memorial was subjected to forensic analysis in order to determine, inter alia, whether the condition of the float supported the theory that the crew of the *Kormoran* had machine-gunned the survivors of the *Sydney* in the water, thus explaining why there were no survivors of the *Sydney*. Following a technical and scientific inspection of the float, it was concluded that:

The extensive damage to the float appears to have been caused by particles of shrapnel from at least one high-explosive shell detonating on or near the main structure of the ship and ricocheting into the float. There is no evidence of damage by small arms fire.

The investigation team were satisfied that:

the holes in the float, the projectiles removed from the float and the angles of trajectory and divergence of those projectiles is consistent with explosive shells detonating relatively near the float while the float was in a horizontal, stored position.⁹⁵

The Carley float recovered at Christmas Island

Perhaps the relic most in dispute as being from the *Sydney* is a Carley float containing a body that was recovered off Christmas Island in February 1942. An examination of the float by eyewitnesses indicated that it had been manufactured in Australia, had been damaged by gun or shell fire, and contained in its kapok filling the remains of what was thought to be a bullet. No other vessel was identified from which the raft might have come, and the prevailing currents and the size of the marine growth on the raft were apparently consistent with it having been set afloat in the vicinity and at the time and place of the *Sydney*–*Kormoran* action.

The eyewitness accounts are contained in two shipping intelligence reports, copies of which appear later in this chapter. According to these accounts the corpse had no identification, but the island doctor was satisfied that the body was that of a white male. An autopsy was conducted and the body was interred on the island. No trace can be found of the autopsy report. It is assumed to have been destroyed during the Japanese occupation of the island shortly afterwards. The grave where the body was buried was identified in 2006.

⁹⁴ See Frame, op. cit., pp178–185 and Winter, op. cit., pp245–247

⁹⁵ Ashton, J Challenor, C and Courtney, R C H, *The Scientific Investigation of a Carley Float at the Australian War Memorial*. Australian War Memorial Technical Paper No. 1 (November 1993)

According to the eyewitness accounts the corpse was wearing a blue boiler suit which had been bleached white by exposure, and on the decking of the float was found a 'canvas shoe'. The information about a 'canvas shoe' is consistent in both reports, but a statement made to the *West Australian* in 1949 by another eyewitness, Mr J W Brown, who in 1942 was the Sergeant of the Christmas Island Platoon, refers to 'a pair of boots'.

The statement made to the *West Australian* by Mr Brown appears to have prompted the Naval Officer in Charge, Fremantle, to write to the Director of Naval Intelligence in May 1949 seeking further information. The Director of Naval Intelligence, then Captain George Oldham, wrote to the Navy's Director of Victualling and Director of Naval Stores, for advice, observing that the memorandum from Fremantle:

resuscitates a matter which was brought under notice during the War, and which is believed to have been investigated at the time, although no records can be found. Would D of V [Director of Victualling] please remark on paras 3(a) and (b) of WA Shipping Intelligence Report No. 137/1942 herewith and DNS [Director of Naval Stores] on para 3(c) thereof, in order to determine whether or not the Carley float and corpse which fetched up at Christmas Island were ex the Cruiser *Sydney* which was sunk by gunfire from the German raider *Cormoran* off the Western Australian Coast on 19 November 1941.

Captain Oldham added the annotation 'or *Perth*, lost in the NEI [Netherlands East Indies]'. His suggestion that the float may have been from the *Perth* apparently overlooked the fact that the *Perth* was lost almost one month after the recovery of the float at Christmas Island.

The Director of Victualling's response to the Director of Naval Intelligence was ambiguous. While the boiler suit worn by the body did not coincide with the type issued to RAN ratings, a rating may have worn such a boiler suit even though it was not official uniform. RAN officers purchased their own or had them made privately, but they were white or brown in colour. He went on to say that the markings on the shoe:

definitely correspond with supplies from our stocks. Provided they were leather not canvas shoes, I should think they had been issued to an officer or rating.

The advice of the Director of Naval Stores in relation to the Carley float is not present on the file, but would appear to have dismissed the possibility that the float was from the *Sydney*. In his reply of 2 August 1949, the Director of Naval Intelligence advised the Naval Officer in Charge, Fremantle that:

While these [shipping intelligence reports] show that the clothing found on the corpse could possibly have been that of an RAN rating, it seems reasonably certain from the particulars given of the covering of the Carley float that the float did not belong to an HMA Ship. My conclusion, therefore, is that the Carley float sighted on or about 6 February 1942 off Christmas Island was not ex HMAS *Sydney*.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ NAA: AA1980/700, NID 194/222 – *Carley float and corpse – recovered off Christmas Island*.

Was the Christmas Island Carley float from the *Sydney*?

The evidence of the eyewitnesses concerning the 'canvas shoe' or 'pair of boots' is inconsistent, although it is noted that the person providing the latter description did so more than seven years after the event. The Director of Naval Intelligence appears to have regarded the evidence as too inconclusive, since he made no mention of shoes or boots in his reply. However, it seems reasonable to assume that he was at least partly persuaded by the advice of the Director of Victualling that the shoes definitely corresponded with Navy stocks 'provided they were leather not canvas shoes'. This statement warrants some examination.

The logical conclusion to be drawn from the Director of Victualling's response is that canvas shoes were not a kit item in 1941, yet RAN kit lists of the period appear to suggest that canvas shoes may have been a kit item in 1941.

Quite by chance, kit lists for members of HMAS *Wallaroo* (sunk in an accident on 11 June 1943) were found on the file dealing with the reconstruction of the *Sydney*'s ledger, described in chapter 2.⁹⁷ This file contains a copy of the form 'Kit List – Men Dressed as Seamen' (Form AS98 – revised September 1937, reprinted March 1939) for each of the 80 men who lost their kit in the accident. Why the kit lists appear on this file is unknown, since there is no apparent connection between these and the other papers on the file. The lists were used to calculate the amount of reimbursement owed to the members of the ship's crew for their items of kit lost in the accident.

The kit lists separate items into 'Compulsory' and 'Optional' items. Item 15 on the compulsory list is '1 Pr. Shoes, White Canvas'. Versions of the form for men not dressed as seamen (Form AS98a, revised January 1941) also appear on the file still showing '1 Pr. Shoes, White Canvas' as compulsory kit. A statutory declaration provided by one of the crew (Leading Seaman Cook William Donald Newman) in support of his application for compensation attests to the fact that he was in possession of all articles of compulsory and optional kit except for certain items listed in the declaration (in which white canvas shoes were not mentioned).

Though the approximately 80 men of the *Wallaroo* each lodged claims for compensation for the loss of white canvas shoes their claim was disallowed in accordance with Commonwealth Navy Order 204/1943 – *Compensation for loss of, or damage to, uniform and clothing articles – Ratings*, promulgated on 27 April 1943. Referring to Commonwealth Navy Order 60/1943, promulgated on 9 February 1943, and which provided that 'during the period of the war the following items of compulsory kit are not to be issued to new entries...White Canvas Shoes', CNO 204/1943 provided that compensation was not payable for loss or damage to the items listed in CNO 60/1943.

A search of Commonwealth Navy Orders back to 1940 has failed to find any earlier orders withdrawing the issue of white canvas shoes from ratings' compulsory kit. However, one further relevant order was found:

⁹⁷ NAA: MP151/1, 474/208/455, HMAS *Sydney*. Reconstruction of ledger.

464. *Gratuitous Issue of Clothing to RN Ratings on loan to RAN* – RN ratings serving on loan in the RAN may be supplied gratuitously with the undermentioned articles on first joining one of HMA Ships...Shoes, white canvas, 1 pr.⁹⁸

In light of this, it seems possible that members of the *Sydney*'s crew may have been in possession of white canvas shoes as a kit item. If this were the case, it does not prove that the Carley float recovered at Christmas Island was from the *Sydney*. Equally, however, a conclusion that the float could not have been from the *Sydney* because of the report of the white canvas shoe found on the float's decking would appear to be tenuous.

Recovery of the body from Christmas Island

In October 2006 an RAN search team on Christmas Island located the grave in which the body found in the Carley float was buried. The remains were exhumed and tested in an effort to determine whether he had been a member of the crew of the HMAS *Sydney*. As noted by Professor Tom Frame in the new introduction to this revised edition of the guide:

The Australian Government has accepted that the man was a member of the ship's company of HMAS *Sydney* and, in accordance with government regulations, has proposed that his remains be reinterred in the Commonwealth War Cemetery nearest to the site of the *Sydney*–*Kormoran* action (Geraldton).

The man's identity is unknown at this point, but further DNA testing may reveal his name.

⁹⁸ *The Consolidated Orders and Regulations for the Government of the Naval Forces of the Commonwealth 1942*, Volume 1, Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, February 1942.

Now N.H.R.S.

NID 194/222

Q. 5/237.

SECRET :

W.O. SHIPPING INTELLIGENCE REPORT NO. 137/1942.Dec 2, 1942. M/V. "HERMION" from Christmas Island. (Captain E. Hannavig)

On board this vessel were J.C. Baker and wife, passengers from Christmas Island. From the former, the following, which is of interest, was gathered.

2 Mr. Baker, for the last six years, has been in charge of the Radio Station at Christmas Island. It is his desire that all information given be treated as unofficial, as he has given same entirely from memory, and suggests that, when opportunity offers, accuracy of detail should be checked.

3 His story is as follows :-

On or about 6/2/42 an object was seen drifting past the island, and, on investigation, this proved to be a Carley float. This float was grey in colour, the usual oval shape, and had rope beackets on the outside. Inside the float was a wooden decking held in place by a form of net roping.

On this decking was a corpse and a canvas shoe. On investigation ashore, the following was ascertained :-

(a) The corpse was clothed in a white boiler suit, the pockets were empty and there was nothing to establish identity. The Shore doctor established that the body was that of a white man. All the flesh was gone from the right arm, also the eyes and nose were missing. Otherwise, the corpse was decomposed in parts.

(b) The shoe was not on the foot of the corpse, but was found near the body. It was probably branded "CROWN BRAND PTY. 4", but Baker not quite certain regarding "CROWN" or "4".

(c) The Carley float had been damaged in places, apparently shrapnel or machine gun fire. One piece of metal, obviously not a bullet, was found embedded in the kapok filling. Another piece of metal, strongly resembling a machine gun bullet, was found in the kapok, the outer covering of the float being perforated by a small round hole.

The float was marked No. 2 on the outside covering, and, when the covering and kapok were stripped from the inner metal framework, the following brand was found in two places, "MADE IN N.S.W. ANNEALED ZINC INSIDE".

The pilot at Christmas Island stated to Baker that the barnacles on the float were 6 inches long, but it is suggested that he may have referred to ordinary marine growth.

When Baker left Christmas Island on 17/2/42, an inquest, which had been delayed owing to illness of an official, was in progress. A report is to be forwarded to Australia as soon as this inquest is concluded.

On or about 11/1/42, the "EIDSVOLD" was half loaded at the Island, and had to put out to sea owing to bad weather. On 16/1/42, at about 1430 local time, the "EIDSVOLD" reported that she had seen what was suspected of being a torpedo. At 1815 this vessel, which was quite close to the island, was torpedoed and the crew landed on the island.

The submarine then came to the surface and the fort ashore opened fire with its one and only 6" gun. The first four shots missed, but the fifth was a possible hit.

From that date the submarine was sighted on several occasions until the arrival of the "ISLANDER" at Christmas Island on 15/2/42, at dawn.

... 2

Now N.H.R.S. / N.I.D 194/222

G. 5/237.

SECRET:

SHIPPING INTELLIGENCE REPORT NO. 137/1942 :25/2/1942. S/S. "ISLANDER" from Christmas Island. (Captain G.H.A. Denne.)

The Master reported the following sightings :

- (a) 21/2/42. Lat. 20 25' S. Long 107 50' East, a cruiser of "GLOUCESTER" type escorting three merchant vessels.
- (b) 23/2/42. Lat. 27 57' S. Long. 112° East. Cruiser escorting one vessel, apparently aircraft carrier. The former is identified as M.S.4 with H.M.A.S. "PERTH", the latter as U.S.S. "PHOENIX" escorting "LANGLEY".

The "ISLANDER" brought a total of 48 evacuee passengers from Christmas Island. From Captain J.R. SMITH, Harbour Master from the Island, the following information, which throws further light on the report made by J. C. BAKER (Reference "HERMION" in this report), was gathered.

In Captain Smith's opinion, the Carley float in question was undoubtedly of Naval pattern. The wooden decking was branded with the word "PATENT" and one hole, apparently caused by a bullet was found in this decking.

The outer covering of the float was damaged in several places, a few pieces of metal being found embedded in the kapok filling. One of these pieces, in the opinion of the gun's crew on the island, was what remained of a bullet.

The inside framework, also the divisions between the buoyancy tanks, were branded as follows :-

"LYSAGHT DUA-ANNEAL ZINO. MADE IN AUSTRALIA INSIDE."

All the roping attached to the float had a red yarn running through the strands.

The barnacles found on the float were up to one inch in length.

The canvas shoe found on the float was branded either "McCOWAN" or "McEWAN" also "PTY" followed by a crown and/or a broad arrow.

The corpse was clothed in a boiler suit which had originally been blue, but was bleached white by exposure. There were four plain press buttons from neck to waist.

All other statements made tallied reasonably with those made by BAKER, and, without any suggestion of discrediting Baker's statements, which were given in good faith, it is suggested that those made by Captain Smith should prove the more reliable. The fact that a red yarn was found in the strands of the roping appears important, and would be one of the first things to attract the notice of a practical man such as Captain Smith.

With reference to the submarine suspected to have been sunk by the fort on 15/2/42, Captain Smith was most definite in stating that he has every reason to believe that the attack was 100% successful.

Two periscopes were seen close together, and these were so close to the fort as to be less than the minimum reading on the rangefinder. The Officer in charge estimated the range at 1,000 yards and opened fire. The shell exploded right on the spot, the submarine was seen to literally jump to the surface, no conning tower being visible, then disappear as suddenly.

The "ISLANDER" remained at Christmas Island for three days after the above incident, the "HERMION" for two, and as no attack was made on either vessel it appears reasonable to assume that Captain Smith's assumption may be correct.

Page 1 of a second report submitted two days later by the master of the SS Islander. The information about a 'canvas shoe' is consistent in both reports, but a statement made to the West Australian in 1949 by another eyewitness, Mr J W Brown, in 1942 the Sergeant of the Christmas Island Platoon, refers to 'a pair of boots'.

NAA: AA1980/700, NID 194/222

**NAVAL INTELLIGENCE DIVISION – FILES RELATING TO THE LOSS OF HMAS SYDNEY,
1941–49 AA1980/700****Recorded by:****Naval Board – also known as Naval Board of Administration (CA 88)****Canberra 0.18 metres****Carley float and corpse – recovered off Christmas Island, 1942–49
AA1980/700, NID 194/222**

This item includes two shipping intelligence reports. One, dated 23 February 1942, contains a witness account of the sighting and subsequent investigation of a Carley float containing a corpse that was seen drifting past Christmas Island on or about 6 February 1942. The second report, dated 25 February 1942, provides a more detailed description by a second witness. The file then jumps to 1949 with correspondence between the Naval Officer in Charge, Fremantle and the Director of Naval Intelligence, in which the DNI concludes that on the basis of the descriptions provided the Carley float containing the corpse did not belong to a Royal Australian Navy ship.

In 1979 this item was temporarily transferred by the Department of Defence to the Archives as AA1979/579, under which number it has been cited (eg see Barbara Winter's *HMAS Sydney: Fact, Fantasy and Fraud*). In 1980 it was permanently transferred as AA1980/700.

CORRESPONDENCE FILES, W (WAR) SINGLE NUMBER SERIES, 1939–52**A472****Recorded by:****1939–49 Attorney General's Department (CA 5)****Canberra 43.92 metres****Crown Solicitor's Opinion No. 51 of 1943 – lifeboats ex raider Kormoran –
claims for expenditure incurred, 1943 A472, W13955**

This item includes a request by the Department of the Navy to the Attorney-General's Department for advice about the liability of the Navy and the WA State Shipping Service for the charges incurred by them in the salvage, wharfage and storage of three lifeboats recovered from the *Kormoran*, and whether the Navy Office has authority to dispose of the lifeboats. The Crown Solicitor's advice was that the lifeboats were to be regarded as seized enemy vessels and could therefore be disposed of without a court order.

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL REGISTRY FILES, 1913–1979**AWM93****Recorded by:****1925–43 Australian War Memorial (CA 616)****1943–45 Official History, 1939–45 war (CA 7040)****Australian War Memorial (AWM) 78.8 metres****Life jacket belonging to seaman of the raider Kormoran donated by F/Lt C
Bourne, 1945–46 AWM93, 50/3/35/18**

This file deals with the donation to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra by Flight Lieutenant C Bourne, RAAF, of a life jacket that formerly belonged to Ernst, a German prisoner from the *Kormoran* who was taken to Carnarvon gaol. The life jacket was 'souvenired' by members of 14 Squadron RAAF (of which Bourne was a

member) who participated in the search for the *Sydney*. In thanking him for the donation, the AWM asked if he would be willing to amplify the details of the search for the *Sydney* and the recovery of the survivors, as he witnessed the events. Although he undertook to provide this information gathered from local operations room diaries, it appears that no further information was provided.

**CORRESPONDENCE FILES, SINGLE NUMBER SERIES WITH 'A' PREFIX, 1908–56
K1150**

Recorded by:

**1954 Deputy Director of Lighthouses and Navigation, Western Australia, and
Superintendent Mercantile Marine Office, Fremantle (CA 5268)**

Perth 3.78 metres

**Wrecks and salvage [including details of disposal of Kormoran lifeboats in
1946], 1945–52 K1150, A205**

On 26 February 1946, the Naval Stores Officer in Fremantle wrote to the Deputy Director of Lighthouses and Navigation in the Department of Supply and Shipping informing him that according to the opinion of the Deputy Crown Solicitor, Perth, the two steel lifeboats from the *Kormoran*, then moored in the Swan River adjacent the HMAS *Leeuwin* Boatshed, were the property of the Receiver of Wrecks (the Deputy Director of Lighthouses and Navigation), and that they were to be transferred to that authority.

This item deals with the advertising and sale by tender of the two lifeboats by the Receiver of Wrecks. It includes an inspection report on the boats and contains brief details of their dimensions and construction. Both boats were sold by tender to a Mr G J Baker of Nedlands, for the sum of £54/2/3. The Collector of Customs required the payment of 57¼ per cent customs and other duties on the boats.

**CORRESPONDENCE FILES, MULTIPLE NUMBER SERIES ('201' SERIES), 1911–50
MP150/1**

Recorded by:

**1939 Navy Office, Department of Defence (CA 2456)
1939–50 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)**

Melbourne 112 metres

**Relic ex HMAS Sydney – Carley float – transfer to Australian War Memorial,
1942–43 MP150/1, 635/201/1607**

This file deals with approval by the Naval Board to transfer to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra the Carley float recovered from the sea by HMAS *Heros* on 28 November 1941. Until its transfer to Canberra the float was held in store at Fremantle.

This item was incorrectly cited as MP150/1, 635/201/1507 by Frame in his bibliography in *HMAS Sydney: Loss and Controversy*.

10 Replacing the *Sydney* and Writing the Official History

In the course of compiling this guide a number of records were identified that did not fit logically into the preceding chapters. These records are included here. They cover a wide range of topics and in a number of instances they serve almost as a postscript to the story and aftermath of the *Sydney*'s loss.

The records described here include biographical information about some of the main personalities involved in the wake of the *Sydney*'s loss, the records of the official naval war historian, G Hermon Gill, records about the *Kormoran* and preliminary arrangements for the *Sydney*'s replacement.

CORRESPONDENCE FILES, MULTIPLE NUMBER SERIES, 1928–58

A816

Recorded by:

Department of Defence Co-ordination (CA 37)

Canberra 96.37 metres

HMAS *Sydney*, Replacement Fund 1941–42 A816, 40/301/290

This item deals entirely with arrangements to find a replacement for the *Sydney*. The file contains copies of cablegrams between Canberra and London and correspondence between the Prime Minister and the Lord Mayors of Sydney and Melbourne concerning arrangements for the administration of the HMAS *Sydney* Fund.

Award of US decorations to Commodore JA Collins, RAN and Captain E F V Dechaineux, RAN (dec'd), 1945–47 A816, 66/301/146

In July 1945 the United States Department of the Navy advised the Australian Government of its wish to award to Captain Emile Dechaineux the award of Legion of Merit, Degree of Officer:

for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services to the Government of the United States as Commanding Officer, HMAS *Australia* from March 9, 1944 until his death in action with the enemy. Directing his command with superb seamanship and great professional skill, Captain Dechaineux participated in vital and hazardous operations during this period of intensive hostilities against enemy Japanese forces, fighting his ship valiantly in support of our landing in the Philippines despite severe opposition until the *Australia* was subjected to a hostile suicide dive-bombing attack in which he sustained wounds which later proved fatal. His splendid leadership and unwavering devotion to duty reflect the highest credit upon Captain Dechaineux and the Royal Australian Navy. He gallantly gave his life in the service of his country.

A posthumous presentation of the award was made to the widow of Captain Dechaineux in Hobart in January 1966.

CORRESPONDENCE FILES, MULTIPLE NUMBER SERIES, ALPHA PREFIX AND GENERAL PREFIX 'SC' (FOURTH SYSTEM), 1914–50 A1608**Recorded by:****1939–45 Prime Minister's Department (CA 12)****Canberra 50.94 metres****HMAS Sydney Fund, part 1, 1941–43 A1608, Y55/1/2**

As early as 1 December, the lord mayors of Sydney and Melbourne contacted the Prime Minister suggesting a nationwide appeal for replacement of the Sydney. Most papers on this file concern donations to, and the administration of, the HMAS Sydney Replacement Fund. Other papers include:

- proposals to the Prime Minister by the Lord Mayors of Sydney and Melbourne for a nationwide appeal to fund the replacement of the Sydney, and the Prime Minister's reply
- Prime Minister's press release dated 2 December 1941 concerning the fund
- Prime Minister's cablegram dated 13 December 1941 to the Australian High Commissioner in London inquiring as to the wisdom of asking the British Government for an early replacement of the Sydney
- reply by the Australian High Commissioner dated 22 December 1941, advising that the First Lord of the Admiralty was most sympathetic to the idea of an immediate or early replacement for the Sydney, and suggesting a formal approach to the British Government; approach to Treasury and the Department of the Navy by the Prime Minister's Department asking whether appropriate funding and crew can be arranged in the event of a replacement vessel being provided, and replies by the Treasury and the Navy detailing the problems
- Prime Minister's cablegram to the British Government dated 10 January 1942 seeking a replacement vessel; reply from British Government dated 18 February 1942 advising inability to release a replacement vessel due to shortages, but offering to supply a vessel provided its deployment remained under Admiralty control and its crew was supplied by Australia
- advice by the Naval Board to the Prime Minister's Department dated 26 March 1942, advising of the difficulties of adequately manning a replacement ship, and suggesting that the replacement of HMAS Sydney should remain in abeyance
- formal advice to this effect dated 31 March 1942 to British Government
- Prime Minister's press statement of 14 April 1942 advising of the unavailability of a suitable replacement vessel but that the monies credited to the Replacement Fund would be held in trust for the purchase of a replacement
- claims for the refund of donations if a replacement vessel is not purchased, and the government's response
- Prime Minister's press statement of 29 July 1943 advising that the Replacement Fund monies would be temporarily invested.

It appears that 'Part 1' was included in the file title at the time the file was created. There is no evidence that a second part exists.

THE SHEDDEN COLLECTION – TWO NUMBER SERIES 1901–71**A5954****Recorded by:****1937–71 Sir Frederick Geoffrey Shedden, KCMG, OBE (CP 320)****1939–42 Department of Defence Coordination, Central Office (CA 37)****1942–71 Department of Defence, Central Office (CA 46)****Canberra 201 metres (smaller quantities in other Archives' offices)**

This series contains records collected by Sir Frederick Shedden during his career within the Department of Defence. It also contains material collated after his retirement in researching and writing a book on the history of Australian Defence Policy. The manuscript of this book remained unpublished at his death on 8 July 1971.

Drafts of this work are held in this series together with copies of departmental correspondence, files, reports and press cuttings. Copies of War Cabinet and Advisory War Council records are also held. This series is the major part of a larger accumulation of records the remainder of which, including the manuscript of the history, formed part of Sir Frederick Shedden's personal estate.

HMAS Sydney – sinking, replacement fund, 1941–49**A5954, 518/36**

This item is one of two files of papers accumulated by Frederick Shedden, who was Secretary of the Department of Defence Co-ordination and Secretary to the War Cabinet (the other file, A5954, 2100/21 is described in chapter 5). This file contains copies of many of the higher level briefing notes, cablegrams and Cabinet papers dealing with most aspects of the *Sydney's* loss, some of which appear on other files. Because it contains such a variety of papers, it is not easily classified under any of the earlier chapter headings.

Its contents include:

- a brief chronology of the events and searches for the *Sydney* conducted between 21 and 25 November, prepared for the War Cabinet
- requests by the press to be permitted to publish the names of the *Sydney's* crew and other information; briefing material dated 27 and 28 November for the Governor-General, the Prime Minister and the Minister for the Navy
- a brief history of the *Sydney* and biographical details of its senior officers
- a description of the action by the survivors of the *Kormoran*
- recovery by the HMAS *Wyrallah* of two Carley floats, one Royal Australian Navy lifebelt and one foreign lifebelt on 28 November
- the Prime Minister's press statements concerning the loss, a reconstruction of the action leading to the loss, and the intention to seek a replacement vessel (including details of the HMAS *Sydney* replacement fund)
- pressure from the press to release more information and the Lord Mayor of Sydney's request for permission to launch a public appeal for funds to replace the *Sydney*
- the Prime Minister's cablegram to the British Government, expressing concern at the 'premature' disclosure of information to the BBC and the British press
- a cablegram from the Prime Minister of New Zealand expressing embarrassment and concern at the public release in Australia of information that New Zealand authorities had been asked not to disclose
- launch of the Lord Mayor's replacement fund
- expressions of sympathy from various foreign governments
- the Prime Minister's cablegram dated 13 December 1941 to the Australian High Commissioner in London inquiring as to the wisdom of asking the British Government for an early replacement of the *Sydney*
- the Prime Minister's press statement of 14 April 1942 advising of the unavailability of a suitable replacement vessel but that the monies credited

to the replacement fund would be held in trust for the purchase of a replacement

- the Prime Minister's press statement of 29 July 1943 advising that the replacement fund monies would be temporarily invested
- the Acting Prime Minister's statement of 27 April 1944 advising that the £426 899 in the fund might not be spent on a new cruiser
- a press article in *The Argus* of 24 September 1944, claiming to provide new evidence of the action based on an eyewitness account published on 10 August in the *Voelkischer Beobachte*, 'the official Nazi organ', by a returned survivor of the *Kormoran*; an article in the Melbourne *Herald* of 19 November 1949 recounting the action.

OFFICIAL HISTORY, 1939–45 WAR, SERIES 2 (NAVY): RECORDS OF G HERMON GILL, C1914–72 AWM69

Recorded by:

Australian War Memorial (CA 616)

Australian War Memorial (AWM) 2.7 metres

This series consists of papers created by Gill during the writing of the two volumes of Series 2 (Navy) of the official history of Australia in the war of 1939–45. It includes correspondence, books, journals, manuscript and typescript notes, pamphlets, photographs, reports, research files and manuscripts and transcripts of chapters for the two volumes. Most printed material has been transferred to the Research Centre's Printed Records Collection.

Surface raider activity, part 1 (research by Mr Ware), undated AWM69, 23/63

This file consists of a typewritten research paper prepared by Mr Ware for the Official War History on German and Japanese raiders. It contains details of raider operations, tactics, aircraft and cooperation with U-boats (including instructions issued to the *Kormoran* for cooperation with U-boats). It gives the specifications of each of the German raiders, their voyage history and the ships they sank. This item, like many of the Official War History records, is in a Naval Intelligence Division file cover. The top page of the paper carries the note:

The following files have been perused in the course of research into surface raider activity during World War II. Note: These files have been made up from all raider material available. There are no further documents in existence in Navy Departments other than Naval Historical Research Section.

Of the files listed, those that appear to be relevant to the *Kormoran* are: *Aquitania* (185A), *Kormoran* Survivors (185), Loss of the *Sydney* (237), Raider G (*Kormoran*) No. 41 (208W) and Translation of *Kormoran*'s diaries (206G).

The list of files is then followed by the note: 'The above files have been made up by the Research Worker from all material available in Naval Records at Navy Office Melbourne. Except where otherwise stated all the data [contained in the research paper] is contained within these files.';

From the numbering it would appear that these files originally belonged to the Naval Historical Records series registered by the Archives as B6121 (previously MP1587/1). It appears that none of these files has come into the Archives'; custody nor are any held by the Naval Historical Section. One file from this series, number 237 is held, but is titled 'Convoy – United States 9, 1940–41'.

Surface Raider Activity, Part 2 (research by Mr Ware) [undated] AWM69, 23/64

This item consists of a typewritten research paper prepared by Mr Ware for the Official War History. It gives detailed notes on the specifications, activities and history of German raiders, with a small body of notes on Japanese raiders. The notes on Raider (G), No. 41 (the *Kormoran*), include:

- a chronology of the *Kormoran*'s voyages and activities
- significant dates in the ship's cruise
- notes on the sinking of the *Sydney*
- the *Kormoran*'s supply by Japanese ships [this merely states 'Dr Habben of the *Kormoran* stated this was a common practice']
- a translation from Detmers' diary of the Action Report and Engine Room Log at the time of the engagement with the *Sydney*.

A copy of the translated Action Report and Engine Room Log also appears on item AWM69, 23/20 ('Official History, 1939–45 War: Records of G Hermon Gill. Typescript. 'Operations, German and Japanese Armed Merchant Cruisers, 1939–45').

Manuscript and typescript notes for Naval War History, 1939–50 [mainly events of 1941–42] AWM69, 28/5

This file contains rough handwritten notes assembled by Gill in preparation for the writing of the official history, mainly covering events of naval interest during 1941 and 1942. Included in the file is a minute dated 7 September 1945 from Gill (then Naval Historical Records Officer) to R B M & Long, the Director of Naval Intelligence, submitting an 'analysis and comparison of reports of the final action of HMAS *Sydney* with the raider *Kormoran*.'

The attachment is a seven-page assessment of information obtained from the interrogated prisoners of war from the *Kormoran*, and a comparison of this with what appears to be information contained in the *Kormoran*'s own action report. In addition the information submitted includes two hand-drawn track charts of the ships' movements during and after the action. Among Gill's conclusions were that:

Sydney's A and B turrets were put out of action in the opening phase of the action...it is also apparent that, making a recovery from the initial staggering blows delivered by the *Kormoran* the *Sydney*'s X and Y turrets put up a good fight as long as was possible. X turret in particular appears to have...fought well, and to have been responsible for the ultimate destruction of the *Kormoran*.

The file also includes transcriptions of War Cabinet minute 1521 and Advisory War Council minute 566, both of 26 November 1941, and a copy of a *Sydney Morning Herald* article published on 29 July 1950, titled 'The Sydney was hit by six to seven hundred shells', relating the account by Karl Ropers, one of the survivors of the *Kormoran*.

Official History, 1939–1945 War, Series 2 (Navy): volume 1, chapter 12 [notes and manuscript, no date] AWM69, 227

This file contains what appears to be the first handwritten draft of chapter 12 of volume 1 of the official history. It carries many corrections and amendments. In it, Gill deals with the *Sydney–Kormoran* engagement (see pp. 71–93 of the manuscript). The file also contains background notes, not part of the manuscript, about the activities of the *Kormoran* and the *Sydney* prior to 19 November 1941.

Official History, 1939–1945 War, Series 2 (Navy): Volume 1, chapter 12 [Notes and manuscript, no date] [2cm] AWM69, 228

This is a typed master copy of the version of the draft of chapter 12 described in AWM69, 227. Gill obviously referred the draft for comment to Gavin Long, the

General Editor of the Official History, and to R B M Long, the by-then retired Director of Naval Intelligence.

Responding on 28 April 1953 Gavin Long told Gill that 'the story of the end of the *Sydney* (was) finely done'. R B M Long's reply of 23 November 1953 stated that chapter 12 (the chapter in which Gill deals with the loss of the *Sydney*) 'is the best one you have done so far'. The full text of Long's remarks on chapter 12 is given in the introduction to chapter 6 of this guide.

Official History, 1939–1945 War, Series 2 (Navy): Volume 1, chapter 12
[Typescript copy, no date] AWM69, 229

This appears to be a carbon copy of the typed draft of chapter 12 described in item AWM69, 228.

OFFICIAL HISTORY, 1939–45 WAR, BIOGRAPHICAL FILES, 1939–80

AWM76

Recorded by:

c1947–c1968 Official History, 1939–45 War (CA 7040)

Australian War Memorial (AWM) 3.6 metres

Official Historian 1939–1945 War, biographical files –Dechaineux, E F V [et al], 1947–68) AWM76, B137

This file contains a request from Gavin Long, the General Editor of the Official War History, to Dechaineux's next of kin to supply biographical information to assist with the compilation of the official history.

NAVAL HISTORICAL COLLECTION, 1872–1974

AWM124

Recorded by:

1943–74 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)

Australian War Memorial (AWM) 28 metres

This series comprises original records and other material created and acquired by the RAN and collected in the Naval Historical Records Section and its successors in Navy Office.

Naval historical papers, viz: – HMAS *Yarra*; The Coast Watcher; MTB [Motor Torpedo Boats]; *Vendetta* Comes Home; *Swan* and her Forebearers; Sea Lore; Anzac Day; End of an Enemy Convoy [WW2]; Tingira; How *Cormoran* Sank the *Sydney* [1.5 centimetres, 1944–1960] AWM124, 2/4

With the exception of the paper on the *Kormoran*, these papers are narrative histories prepared by the Archives Branch, Navy Office, in 1959 and 1960. Most of the articles were prepared for submission to the *Navy News*. The item on the *Kormoran* is a copy of the translated article from the German newspaper *Volkische Beobachter* of 13 August 1944.

NAVAL BIOGRAPHICAL FILES, ALPHABETICAL SERIES, 1892–1993**B6161****Recorded by:****1943–1959 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Melbourne 0.72 metres****Eldridge, FB [Frank Burgess], c1947 B6161, Eldridge, FB**

This file consists of a short career biography of Mr Frank Burgess Eldridge prepared at the time of his retirement in 1947 from the position of Master of the Royal Australian Naval College. It was Eldridge who completed the report on the loss of the *Sydney* in February 1942 (see chapter 6), although Eldridge's role in this is not mentioned in the biographical notes.

Dechaineux, Emile Frank Verlaine, by 1943 – by 1994 B6161, Dechaineux, EFV

This file consists only of undated biographical notes.

GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE FILES, 1923–50**MP151/1****Recorded by:****1939–50 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Melbourne 132.17 metres****HMAS Sydney – settlement of mess debts, 1942–44 MP151/1, 447/201/1057**

This file contains correspondence between the Treasury and the Department of the Navy concerning mess debts still owed by the *Sydney* to R Walker & Co., Fremantle, a Chandler's firm, and the settlement of credits still held by another firm on behalf of deceased crew members.

GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE, 1943–51**MP742/1****Recorded by:****Department of the Army (CA 36)****Melbourne 162.48 metres****German raider *Kormoran*, 1941–44 MP742/1, 175/1/103**

This file consists of correspondence and cables between the Australian Red Cross Society, the German Government through the Swiss Legation and Australian officials concerning the whereabouts of Australian survivors of merchant ships sunk by the *Kormoran*. There is also subsequent correspondence from the German Government, again through the Swiss Legation in London, concerning the whereabouts of survivors of the *Kormoran*. Information about the *Kormoran*'s survivors does not appear on the file.

CORRESPONDENCE FILES (GENERAL), 1923–50**MP1049/5****Recorded by:****1939–1950 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Melbourne 59.82 metres**

This series is described in chapter 3.

Sinking of SS *Mareeba*, 1941–45 MP1049/5, 2026/10/1855

This file is of interest because of the involvement of the *Kormoran* in the sinking of the SS *Mareeba*. The file is concerned with the *Mareeba*'s sinking and with the fate of its crew.

HISTORICAL RECORDS FILES, 1875–**B6121****Recorded by:****1944–73 Navy Office, Department of the Navy, Historical Section (CA 38)****Melbourne (NHS Canberra) 23.81 metres**

A fuller description of this series is given in Chapter 2.

HMAS Sydney II Replacement B6121, 141O

This file, held by the Naval Historical Section, consists mainly of newspaper reports and extracts from *Hansard* related to the June 1948 Parliamentary debate about the HMAS Sydney Replacement Fund.

SS *Mareeba*, sinking of (German AMC *Kormoran*) – casualties – POW experiences, 1941–47 B6121, 153H

This file, held by the Melbourne office of the National Archives, contains reports published in the *Newcastle Morning Herald* on 14 August 1943 and 21 August 1945 of two Australian merchant seamen's experiences as prisoner survivors on board the *Kormoran* from 26 June to October 1941 after the *Mareeba*'s sinking. The file also contains information supplied to the naval historian regarding the SS *Mareeba* engagement and the SS *Macumba*. There is also information supplied to the Repatriation Department on the fate of the crew of *Mareeba*.

***Kormoran*: (Raider No. 41) 'G' – German AMC [Armed Merchant Cruiser]. Translation of Log, Voyage, 1940–1943 B6121, 164N**

This item consists entirely of a translation of German naval publication no. 601, which was book 10 in a series titled 'Operations and Tactics: Evaluation of the Important Events in Naval War', published in December 1943 by the Supreme Command of the Navy (Department of War Science) in Berlin. It is written by Detmers and titled *The Voyage of the Auxiliary Cruiser 'Ship 41' ('Kormoran')*. Chapters are titled: 'Preface'; 'Details of officers and crew'; 'Details of ship's armaments'; 'Commissioning operation order'; 'Voyage to Norway'; 'The breakthrough of the straits of Denmark'; 'Operations in the Atlantic'; 'The battle of the cruisers in the Indian Ocean'; and 'Battle with the cruiser *Sidney* (sic) – the sinking of both ships'. Attached are six appendixes and two folded charts showing the routes taken by the *Kormoran* in the Atlantic and the Pacific.

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY SHIPS' HISTORY FILES, 1872–**B6255****Recorded by:****1939–1959 Navy Office, Department of the Navy (CA 38)****Canberra 0.09 metres**

A fuller description of this series is given in Chapter 3.

Kormoran 1940–41 B6255, Kormoran

This file is an unnumbered folder simply titled Kormoran. It contains the following typed original notes (none of which is dated), which by their appearance were probably compiled from various sources by the Naval Historian after the war:

- specifications of the Kormoran and details of its operations and cruises 1940–41 (19 pages, undated)
- a list of significant dates in the cruise of the Kormoran (three pages)
- notes on the sinking of the Sydney (two pages)
- a translation of Detmers' diary concerning the Sydney–Kormoran action (two pages) and of the Kormoran's engine room log (two pages)
- notes on the recovery of the Kormoran's survivors – a list of the original officer crew (one page); and a summary of the recovery of the survivors (two pages).

GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE, 1925–57**SP338/1****Recorded by:****1938–42 Captain in Charge (from 1939, Commodore in Charge), HM Australian Naval Establishments, Sydney (CA 4339)****1942–1945 Naval Officer in Charge, Sydney (CA 4340)****Sydney 4.5 metres****HMAS Sydney – replicas presented to ship's company, 1940–43 SP338/1, 691/19**

Late on the evening of 10 February 1941 HMAS *Sydney* returned to Sydney after its tour of duty in the Mediterranean. The next day an estimated crowd of 200 000 welcomed the officers and men of the ship when they marched through the city. This file deals with arrangements for the *Sydney's* arrival at Circular Quay, for a civic reception on 11 February at the Town Hall, and for the presentation to the ship by the people of Sydney of a plaque in commemoration of *Sydney's* sinking of the *Bartolomeo Colleoni* in the Mediterranean on 19 July 1940.

The file includes letters from relatives of the crew both before and after the *Sydney's* loss in November 1941, seeking presentation of replica plaques to those crew unable to collect them on the day of the presentation. Navy Office's advice was that unpresented plaques had been placed in the *Sydney's* safe and had therefore been lost with the ship.

Appendixes

Appendix 1 Chronology of events

1941

5 Feb	The <i>Sydney</i> arrived in Fremantle from the Mediterranean.
2 May	The <i>Kormoran</i> moved into the Indian Ocean via the Cape of Good Hope.
14 May	Captain J Burnett flew to Perth to take command of the <i>Sydney</i> .
26 Sep	<i>Kormoran</i> sank her last victim before her engagement with the <i>Sydney</i> (the freighter <i>Stamatios G Embiricos</i>).
Wed 5 Nov	<i>Sydney</i> took over escort of the troopship <i>Zealandia</i> from HMAS <i>Adelaide</i> in the Great Australian Bight.
Tue 11 Nov	<i>Sydney</i> departed Fremantle at 1.40 pm escorting the <i>Zealandia</i> to the Sunda Strait.
Mon 17 Nov	<i>Sydney</i> transferred escort of the <i>Zealandia</i> to HMS <i>Durban</i> on schedule and turned south, headed for Fremantle.
Wed 19 Nov	About 4 pm <i>Kormoran</i> sighted the <i>Sydney</i> and turned away. <i>Sydney</i> followed and requested <i>Kormoran</i> to identify herself – which she did as <i>Straat Malakka</i> . When asked for her secret call sign <i>Kormoran</i> dropped her camouflage, hoisted the German ensign and opened fire. Battle lasted from approximately 5.30–6.25 pm. Both ships crippled and on fire. <i>Sydney</i> steamed slowly south south east, still ablaze. <i>Kormoran</i> drifted for approximately 5 hours before being scuttled by her crew with explosive charges.
Thu 20 Nov	15 fishermen on Dirk Hartog Island reported sighting a destroyer 7 miles away steering south at high speed and on fire. This was

	later said by the authorities to be the tug <i>Uco</i> but this has been disputed.
Fri 21 Nov	District Naval Officer, WA signalled Navy Office, Melbourne – HMAS <i>Sydney</i> has not yet arrived.
Sun 23 Nov	The liner <i>Aquitania</i> recovered a raft with 26 German sailors about 100 nautical miles off Carnarvon. In evening, <i>Sydney</i> instructed by Naval Board to report her ETA.
Mon 24 Nov	The Chief of Naval Staff reported to the Minister for the Navy that radio contact with <i>Sydney</i> had been lost. Commander in Chief, China Station confirmed that <i>Sydney</i> had transferred escort of <i>Zealandia</i> to HMS <i>Durban</i> on 17 November, on schedule. All high power radio stations in Australia instructed to call <i>Sydney</i> continuously. Air and sea searches commence. MV <i>Trocas</i> picked up 25 Germans in a rubber raft about 120 nautical miles north-west of Carnarvon. 46 men reached the coast at 17-Mile Well north of Carnarvon.
Tue 25 Nov	57 men landed on the coast at Red Bluff north of Carnarvon. 60 men recovered by the <i>Centaur</i> from a boat under the command of the <i>Kormoran's</i> captain.
Wed 26 Nov	31 men recovered from a boat by the <i>Koolinda</i> . Lieutenant Commander Rycroft, Staff Officer (Intelligence) aided by an interpreter commence the interrogations in Carnarvon.
Thu 27 Nov	72 men recovered from a boat by HMAS <i>Yandra</i> . Aircraft reported sighting three pieces of white timber 15 or 16 feet in length about one mile apart. HMAS <i>Wyrallah</i> picked up an inflated RAN type lifebelt with OTRC 11/39 stencilled on the rubber fittings. The <i>Aquitania</i> notified the Wilson's Promontory signal station that on 23 November she had recovered a raft with 26 German sailors.

Fri 28 Nov	<p>A RAN Carley life float damaged by shell fire and containing an empty lifebelt recovered by <i>Heros</i>. A green box resembling a dog kennel also found drifting.</p> <p>HMAS <i>Wyrallah</i> picked up a partially burnt foreign kapok lifebelt and two small metal Carley floats tied together, one containing the body of a German.</p> <p>Oil sighted by Catalina flying boat but nothing found when investigated by HMAS <i>Wyrallah</i>.</p> <p>Commanders Dechaineux and Salm arrive in Perth to help coordinate the interrogations on behalf of naval intelligence.</p>
Sat 29 Nov	Final searches conducted.
Sun 30 Nov	<p>Admiral Crace sent to Fremantle to take charge of the interrogations.</p> <p>Prime Minister's announcement of the loss released for publication the next day.</p>
3 Dec	Prime Minister releases a reconstructed account of the battle.
9 Dec	Interrogations completed in Western Australia.
13 Dec	The first German prisoners leave for POW camps in Victoria.
1942	
16 Jan	Commander Dechaineux's report of investigation into the loss of the <i>Sydney</i> submitted to the Naval Board [no copy of this report can be located].
6 Feb	A Carley float containing a body recovered off Christmas Island.
28 Feb	Mr F B Eldridge submits his report to the Director of Naval Intelligence, reviewing all the evidence obtained in the interrogations.

June	Carley float recovered by the <i>Heros</i> presented to the Australian War Memorial.
1943	
19 Mar	A lifebuoy from HMAS <i>Sydney</i> found near Comboyuro Point in NSW.
1945	
Jan	Encoded diary seized from Captain Detmers upon his recapture after an attempted escape from Dhurringile POW camp.
Nov–Dec	Expedition to Red Bluff with Dr List in an attempt to find the camera he had hidden there four years earlier containing film of the <i>Sydney–Kormoran</i> battle.
1947	
21 Jan	The German POWs from the <i>Kormoran</i> departed Port Melbourne for repatriation to Germany.
1949	
Aug	Captain Oldham, Director of Naval Intelligence, concluded that after investigation the Christmas Island Carley float was not from the <i>Sydney</i> .
1957	
1957	Publication of <i>The Royal Australian Navy 1939–42. Volume 1. Official History of Australia in the War of 1939–45.</i>

1993

1993	Forensic examination of the RAN Carley float undertaken by the Australian War Memorial finds no evidence of damage by small arms fire, and attributes the extensive damage to the float to have been caused by particles of shrapnel from at least one high explosive shell.
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1999

Mar	<i>Report on the Loss of HMAS Sydney</i> by the Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade.
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2006

Oct	Location on Christmas Island of grave containing body of sailor found in Carley float in February 1942.
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2008

Mar	Discovery of the wrecks of both the <i>Kormoran</i> and HMAS <i>Sydney</i> off the Western Australian coast.
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2009

Aug	Report of the HMAS <i>Sydney II</i> Commission of Inquiry, 12 August 2009.
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Appendix 2 The Notebooks of the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council

The Records

The following transcriptions are made from the notes of the official notetaker present at meetings of the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council, and from the notes of the Secretary to these bodies.

They are a record of the discussions of all meetings of the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council at which the loss of the *Sydney* was discussed and are the basis of the formal minutes which were issued following each meeting. Examples of the notes themselves are given in Chapters 1 and 4.

The records of the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council are discussed further in Chapter 4.

The transcriptions

The original notes are written in pencil and are difficult to read. Some words have proven illegible. As one would expect of a hurried written record of discussion, the notes exhibit little or no punctuation, much abbreviation and mostly incomplete sentences. Many words, even those apparently at the beginning of a sentence, are not capitalised. Abbreviations, punctuation and capitalisation are duplicated in the transcriptions exactly as they appear in the notes.

The relationship between some statements is cryptic, and often the identity of the person making them is not clear. In order to allow readers of this guide to interpret the notes for themselves, they have been transcribed exactly as they appear on the page, with gaps between words and indentations included. Words which the notetaker wrote down and subsequently struck through are also included.

To help the reader, some information has been imposed. In all cases this information is given in square brackets. The information in square brackets indicates

- illegible words; or
- a suggested translation (which in all cases is followed by a question mark); or
- the expanded form of obscure abbreviations.

Each set of notes is accompanied by the date and place of the meeting, the name of the notetaker and the number of the formal minute which resulted from the meeting. The page numbers given are the page numbers of the relevant Cabinet notebooks.

MEETING OF THE WAR CABINET, CANBERRA, WEDNESDAY 26 NOV 1941**Background notes to War Cabinet Minute No. 1521 by Vincent Quealy
Set 2 Vol 4****A9240,**p. 624 Sydney

CNS reads

4 thingsA raft & lifeboat at sea, 2 life boats on
coast ..

What happened – out of commun[ication] for 3 days,
sunk by cruiser, if Syd sunk
only if took unwise approach &
raiders put two torpedoes into her
– every cruiser capt'n know certain
things – keep ahead – because may be
trailed by submarine – inconceivable
that this cd have happened –

Message from Trocas

(1) German [vessels?] sunk by gunfire 19 Nov
condition cruiser not known

(2) Survivors 110 70 miles North raider
engagement raider cruiser Perth class –
British ship in flames and believed sunk

(3) Phone conversation from Carnarvon –
engagement with 1 [st?] class cruiser
their ship blew up – when
last seen cruiser was on fire

(4) Wireless operator inform[ed?] – W/T on raider
'Comoran' raider – Guns 8in & a/a [anti-aircraft]
new ship Ind Oc 6 months –
Sank Greek ship – met

p. 625

cruiser Perth class escorting 5 ships
cruiser closed – raider opened fire
½ mile – Cormoran burning and sunk.
Cruiser vanished, burning – believed sunk.

Confirmed [craft or L/T?] – 1 [st?] class cruiser 7000 tons
cruiser thought vessel belonged to
convoy and approached – fired on by raider – crew
CNS Most unlikely Syd wd be escorting
ships – had no orders to do so –
was returning home on her own –
also raiders have not 8" guns in view necessity for 8" guns –
5.9 & 6" guns most likely –
officer of Burnett's perspicacity
think ship join up with
his convoy in broad daylight

– our interpreters arrived
there but not likely to be
different.
– Trocas men may give different
story
– 3rd lifeboat crew [possibility?]
at[?] 7 miles cruiser (Syd) cd have sunk her
she has 3 inch armour – but at ½ mile or mile point blank range not so good
not effective ag[ainst] raider with 6 inch guns.
p. 626

PM All conjecture Conclusion is Syd gone

CNS No survivors picked up – do not
know about 5 merchant vessels –
re survivors – 'could make report
to say Syd missing due to enemy action'
but may get infm shortly –
(If made a mistake & got near
– see torpedoes [coming?] and sunk
ships before [arrive?] – dynamo
may have failed & cdn't send
messages)

Press asked told in confidence re
what happened but not to
publish –

cd send message to next of kin
saying missing & further infm

Publn – not policy to publish

infm, give gratuitous infm

to enemy – and if they knew

Cormoran sunk wd be to their adv.

he is ag[ainst] making public statement

but if to be done sld be

done simultaneously UK &

also not say anything about raider

p. 627

merely to say Syd lost due enemy action –

PMin – inf next of kin, & keep

editorship on press and broadcasting

Agreed

**Background notes to War Cabinet Minute No. 1521 by Frederick Shedden
A5954, 730/2**

p. 571

HMAS Sydney (CNS present)

[Notes?] circ[ulated?] by CNS

Inform next of kin.

Censorship to be maintained
Announcement to be in a form that does not
convey informn [of value?] to the enemy.

MEETING OF THE ADVISORY WAR COUNCIL, CANBERRA, WEDNESDAY 26 NOV 1941

**Background notes to Advisory War Council Minute No. 566 by Vincent Quealy
A9240, Set 2 Vol 4**

p. 628

Sydney

CNS statement circulated & CNS comments
110 survivors at Carnarvon
Actn [Action] over 100 miles from land
PM Communicating with flags instead of wireless
Suggest was decoyed
took place at 5.30 pm –
Crew of Sydney 600 –
PMin Press inf[ormed] Syd missing confidential
WCab – inf[orm] next of kin –
that such and such person missing
(not quoting Sydney) &
censorship at present for 24 hrs until notified
ultimately release
Hughes To say they are missing
when know nothing about it – also value infm to enemy
rumours everywhere
hopes next of kin not notified
& censor
PMin bad thing that rel shd get
news by rumour – honest thing to
advise next of kin missing

p. 629

if we said in[?] 48 hrs Syd missing or sunk
H[ughes] if tell next of kin tell world –
and attack shipping
CNS Germans do not know where Syd
is operating –
Adm[iralty] practice to notify
only when we know enemy know
Adm[iralty] inf[orm] rel[atives] as soon as they
know no chance of rescue –
All this happened on 19/11/41
PM Syd seems to be sunk –
H attack on Nauru – 5 ships –
Adm[iralty] wdn't release for weeks
Mr Menzies agree with PMin –
PM[RM?] 600 missing for a week –

Shd tell [them?]

All agreed but Mr Hughes dissents

**Background notes to Advisory War Council Minute No. 566 by Frederick Shedden
A5954, 213/1**

p. 431

HMAS *Sydney* (CNS present)

CNS restatement of notes

N of K to be informed missing due to enemy
action – press & broadcasting censorship shd be
maintained.

Notification of loss of *Sydney* not to
convey information to enemy.

Appd. Mr Hughes dissenting

MEETING OF THE ADVISORY WAR COUNCIL, CANBERRA, WEDNESDAY 26 NOV 1941

**Background notes to Advisory War Council Minute No. 571 by Vincent Quealy
A9240, Set 2 Vol 4**

p. 639?

"*Sydney*"

interrogation of survivors – Trocus
confirms prev[ious] view –

PM[?] Raider 6 15cm

4 2cm guns

1 aircraft

mines

400 complement

[list?] ships sunk

Parramatta – sloop sunk outside Tobruk.

There are survivors –

Admiralty asked for infm as to this

PMin Syd didn't fire first shot – Aquitania

Hughes believes there must be some survivors

Aquitting

PMin ask Navy prepare [parties?]

have notified next of kin

no public statement until Navy

inf him that it is opportune to do so

McE his wife rumours

PMin same procedure to be followed as to "*Parramatta*"

"*Dunedin*" – not answering signals in Atlantic

p. 652

L26 [possibly a cablegram number] [Con?] [III?] Syd torpedoes missed

Raider torpedo hit 1 salvo

com[menced?] 1600 1830 – Syd last seen
steering south 5 knots – raider
had 25 killed

p. 653
Syd
No statement until Navy OK

**Background notes to Advisory War Council Minute No. 571 by Frederick Shedden
A5954, 213/2**

p. 433
Min for Navy [produced?] teleprinter [message]

MEETING OF WAR CABINET, CANBERRA, MONDAY 1 DEC 1941

**Background notes to Advisory War Council Minute No. 566 by Frederick Shedden
A9240, Set 2 Vol 4**

p. 654
"Sydney"
PMin impossible give any
more publicity
Navy – reassuring statement given as to
PM – DW says raider Steiermark may be
two beside Cormoran – keep infn
from enemy – consult [Navy?]
[other discussions ensue, then]

p. 664 "Sydney"
PM press anxiety for [stories?] re
Syd – 320 survivors formed part of complement from
raider – none from Syd – should not
be published – whatever the criticism
– also report was *Kormoran* but
DW990 of 30/11 says
"Steiermark" 9000 tons – no
survivors from Syd
PMin? is it conceivable there are 2 survivors raiders
Navy first survivors said off "Cormoran"
British infm says off Steiermark
PM asks Min for Navy to clear up this
all survivors of Syd may be on
other raider –
Navy [1 word illegible] has swept Indian Ocean
EA Catalinas cd have been used
for spotting before
PM 2UW & 3KZ broadcast PMin statement
of last night – in defiance of ban – [there?] are [word illegible]
(1) action ag[ainst] stations

(2) ban on bdcasting to 9 am tomorrow 48 hrs
Offence of grievous nature – NZ Govt lost raider because premature [broadcast?]

p. 665

Interviews [with?] from German prisoners
rept made from Perth paper
for publicn stories & photographs
This prohibited
Will tell press frankly off record
that summons[?] sticky[?] – & [two words illegible]
going to take
action ag[ainst] bcast
Replacement
Public meeting to inaugurate appeal
for funds to replace ship – can't buy a ship and money
N [avy?] Capitalise this for war loan
Supply[?] quota under Loan Fund
for this – goes into consolidated loan for purpose – cost £2.1
Treas. £3 ½ m say £4 [m]
Supply[?] Shd not promise ship
PM Agreed as soon as poss

**Background notes to War Cabinet Minute No. 1526 by Frederick Shedden
A5954, 731/1**

p. 574
HMAS Sydney
Question of 2nd raider
Broadcasts of PM's statement by
3KZ & 2UW.
Interviews with German prisoners – desire
to publish.
300 odd German prisoners – no [Austn?].
Replacement – 'There'll always be a Sydney'

MEETING OF WAR CABINET, MELBOURNE, THURSDAY 4 DEC 1941

**Background notes to War Cabinet Minute No. 1528 by Vincent Quealy
Set 2 Vol 4**

A9240,

p. 676 Sydney
Dir of Opns sent to Perth to investigate
German prisoners – and interpreter – &
now have as much infm as poss –
reads acct [account] – *Kormoran* sited Syd
& turned away – Syd chased & flashing
German ship no answer – as Syd got
closer ask for secret call signs.
Syd suspicious or thought genuine merchant
ship – put on starboard side pos[?] of tactical disadv

position – German said he was Dutch ship [2 words illegible] – aerop[lane] ticking over ready to fly off –

German fire simultaneous – 1 mile
apart – 2 torpedoes – 1 hit Syd in [coms?]
hit bridge & knocked [out] controls. killed Capn –
round stern – German had 15 salvos into Syd
& Syd got 12 hits into German –
Syd on fire badly – aero[plane] on fire –
[presume the?] [cumulative?] effects
torpedo & gt [great] many hits. Gone away
in burning glow and sunk.

p. 677

PMin any expn why no survivors
CNS Carley & 2 life belts – action [one word illegible] at 4pm
5 pm to 5.25 pm –
Captn thought Dutch ship & hesitated
to take action –
this is pre[liminary?] view – naval intelligence
Publicity – difficult – Admiralty
from Lon[don] w/out [without] ref[erence] to us
ran right across what we had
[done?] – & sent message
to [Admiralty?] as to ban on [one word illegible]
& BBC bdcst – incr[easing?] pressure
– adm[iralty?] clear ag[ainst] everything that normally done –
[ask for?] as much publicity –
no admission as to bad tactical position – no more publicity
Supply BC 6[th?] time [offended/offensive?] &
Govt shd protest – keep doing it
PM Navy [to?] put up a proposed cable
no 2nd ship trailing *Kormoran*
accepted by Navy – W/T in [1 word illegible]

**Background notes to War Cabinet Minute No. 1528 by Frederick Shedden
A5954, 731/1**

p. 576 HMAS *Sydney* – loss of [C. gram?] to UK Govt re premature disclosure.

MEETING OF ADVISORY WAR COUNCIL, CANBERRA, 18 MAR 1942

**Background notes to Advisory War Council Minute No. 842 by Vincent Quealy
A9240 Set 1 Vol 2**

p. 177 'Sydney' loss of
PM Court of enquiry
CNS full inquiry – 200 Germans
& have full details
conclusions – Syd take up position
15[00] yds starboard quarter – Germ opened

fire & 2 torpedoes one hit –
surmise how got into position –
Captn [hurry?] to get back & took risk –
failed in this respect – Gunnery[?] Off[icer?]
not ready 2 salvoes – 'Syd' shd
have been able to fire first
German ship alone – Captn
has orders how to [treat?]

**Background notes to Advisory War Council Minute No. 842 by Frederick Shedden
A5954, 213/2**

p. 541

Sydney – Court of Inquiry held
Conclusions – *Sydney*
took a position about

p. 542

1500 on starboard beam
German fired salvo & torpedoes, one of which hit
Capt – 24 hrs late in rendezvous –
ship had given wrong name – not on
daily list. Took a risk Capt &
[Nav[igating?]?] officer – Gunnery Officer not
ready – salvoes *Sydney* shd have
been able to fire first & get in
two salvoes. – Capt did not
follow his orders.

Appendix 3 The major personalities

Baume, A C, Lieutenant, RANVR

Officer in charge of the naval guard which boarded the MV *Trocas*

Beasley, The Hon. J A

Minister for Supply and Shipping and member of the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council

Bonney, Edmund G

Chief Publicity Censor in the Department of Information

Bird, H St G

Collector of Customs, Fremantle, 1933–1943

Burnett, Joseph

Captain of HMAS *Sydney*, May–November 1941

Chifley, The Hon. J B

Treasurer, and member of the War Cabinet

Cole, The Hon. T R H President of the HMAS *Sydney II* Commission of Inquiry 2008–09

Colvin, Vice Admiral Sir Ragnar (RN) Chief of Naval Staff, November 1937 – March 1941

Crace, Rear Admiral JG (RN)

Rear Admiral Commanding the Australian Squadron (RACAS)

Curtin, The Rt Hon. John

Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Co-ordination, and member of the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council

Davoren, T A F, Flight Lieutenant, RAAF

Staff Officer Intelligence (RAAF), Western Area

Dechaineux, E F V, Commander, RAN

An officer of the Directorate of Naval Intelligence seconded to assist with the interrogation of the *Kormoran*'s survivors, and later, to undertake an investigation and prepare a report to the Naval Board on the loss of the *Sydney*

Dedman, The Hon. J J

Minister for War Organisation of Industry and member of the War Cabinet (from 11 December 1941)

Detmers, T A, Commander

Commanding officer of the HSK *Kormoran* and camp leader at the Dhurringile prisoner of war camp

Drakeford, The Hon. A S

Minister for Air and Minister for Civil Aviation and member of the War Cabinet

Durnford, J W, Commodore (RN)

Second Naval Member on the Naval Board and acting Chief of Naval Staff, March 1941 – July 1941

Eldridge, F B

Senior master on the teaching staff at the Royal Australian Naval College who produced a report for the Naval Intelligence Division on 28 January 1942 based on his examination of all the material obtained from the interrogations

Evatt, The Rt Hon. H V

Attorney-General, Minister for External Affairs and member of the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council

Ewers, G

Sub-Collector of Customs, Carnarvon, and local Naval Reporting Officer

Fadden, The Rt Hon. A W

Leader of the Opposition and member of the Advisory War Council

Farncomb, H B, Captain (RAN)

The Commanding Officer of HMAS Canberra and the officer chosen to interrogate the prisoners of war from the *Aquitania* in *Sydney*

Farquhar-Smith, C, Captain, RAN

District Naval Officer, Western Australia

Forde, The Hon. F M

Minister for the Army and member of the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council

Getting, F, Captain, RAN

Took over from Burnett as Assistant Chief of Naval Staff when Burnett took command of the *Sydney*

Gibbons, W

Captain of HT *Aquitania*

Gill, G H

Publicity Censorship Liaison Officer in the Naval Intelligence Division of the Department of the Navy, and after the war appointed to write the naval volumes of the official war history

Hughes, The Rt Hon. W M

Non-government member of the Advisory War Council

Keller, G Leading Seaman

Belonged to the propaganda section of the German Navy and claimed he took a film of the *Sydney–Kormoran* battle

Kohn/Koehn, P, Chief Petty Officer

A telegraphist on board the *Kormoran* and camp leader at Murchison prisoner of war camp

List, F, Sub-Lieutenant

Doctor of Economics and propaganda officer who claims to have taken photographs of the battle with a camera which he hid in a cave at Red Bluff

Lobstein, J L

A teacher of modern languages at Scotch College in Perth, who was sent to Carnarvon with Lieutenant Commander Rycroft to conduct the first interrogations

Macandie, G L

Secretary of the Naval Board

Mclachlan, A D, Lieutenant Commander

Commanding Officer of HMAS *Harman*, the Naval Communications Station at Canberra

Makin, The Hon. N J O

Minister for the Navy and member of the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council

Mason, R W, Chief Petty Officer

Captain's Secretary to Lieutenant Commander AD Mclachlan, Commanding Officer of HMAS *Harman*

McEwen, The Hon. J

Non-government member of the Advisory War Council

Mearns, David

Marine scientist and deep sea search and recovery expert, lead the search team and located the wrecks of the *Kormoran* and *Sydney II*.

Menzies, The Rt Hon. R G

Non-government member of the Advisory War Council

Muirhead-Gould, G C, Commodore

Commodore in Charge, HMA Naval Establishments, *Sydney*

Oldham, George C, Captain, RAN

Director of Naval Intelligence (1949)

Quealy, V

An Assistant Secretary in the Department of Defence Co-ordination and official notetaker at meetings of the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council

Ramage, V A T, Commander, RAN

The senior naval intelligence officer in Fremantle

Royle, Admiral Sir G C (RN)
Chief of Naval Staff, July 1941 – June 1945

Rycroft, J L, Lieutenant Commander, RANVR
Staff Officer (Intelligence), Fremantle. Conducted the first interrogations of the German prisoners of war at Carnarvon

Salm, G B, Commander Royal Netherlands Navy
The Royal Netherlands Navy Liaison Officer who was sent to Perth with Commander Dechaineux on 28 November to assist with the interrogations

Shedden, F G (later Sir)
Secretary of the Department of Defence Co-ordination and Secretary to the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council

Shu Ah Fah
One of the two Chinese survivors of the *Kormoran*

Skeries, F, Lieutenant
The *Kormoran*'s gunnery officer

Spender, The Hon. PC
Non-government member of the Advisory War Council

Taplin, J A, Lieutenant
Commanding Officer, HMAS *Yandra*

Appendix 4 Contemporary acronyms and abbreviations

ACH

Area Combined Headquarters

ACNB

Australian Commonwealth Naval Board

AWM

Australian War Memorial in Canberra

CAS

Chief of the Air Staff

CGS

Chief of the General Staff

CNS

Chief of the Naval Staff

COIC

Combined Operational Intelligence Centre

CWR

Central War Room

CZM

The Commander in Chief of the Netherlands East Indies Naval Forces

DNI

Director of Naval Intelligence

DNO

District Naval Officer

FOCAS

Flag Officer Commanding the Australian Squadron

FRUMEL

Fleet Radio Unit, Melbourne

G

Golf time – GMT plus 7 hours (the time kept by the *Kormoran*)

GMT

Greenwich Mean Time (also known as Zulu or Z time) – 8 hours behind local Fremantle time

H

Hotel (Fremantle) time – GMT plus 8 hours

HMA

His Majesty's Australian

HMAS

His Majesty's Australian Ship

HMT

His Majesty's Transport

HSK

Handelstorkreuzer (auxiliary cruiser)

HT

Hired Transport

K

Kilo (Eastern Australian Standard) time – GMT plus 10 hours

NOIC

Naval Officer in Charge

POW

Prisoner of war

RAAF

Royal Australian Air Force

RACAS

Rear Admiral Commanding the Australian Squadron

RAN

Royal Australian Navy

RN

Royal Navy

SFTS

Service Flying Training School

SMS

Seiner Majestat Schiff

SWACH

South West Area Combined Headquarters

VDC

Volunteer Defence Corps

W/T

Wireless Telegraphy

Z

Zulu or Z time (also known as Greenwich Mean Time) – 8 hours behind local Fremantle time

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Appendix 6 The evolution of Australian Government access policy

Australian Government records related to the sinking of the *Sydney* first became available for public access in 1972. Until then the only information that had been released was that announced in two prime ministerial statements two weeks after the sinking, and in the official history of the Royal Australian Navy in World War II, published in 1957.⁹⁹

In 1966 the government had altered what was then the 50-year rule to accelerate the release of the records of World War I, but the public was still only permitted access to records created up to the end of 1922.

In December 1970 government policy again changed when Prime Minister Gorton announced that from 1 January 1971, a 30-year rule would replace the 50-year rule, except for the records of the Cabinet. In addition, to assist the study of the World War II period, the government decided that it would allow the accelerated release of records created between 1 January 1941 and 31 December 1945 where access to these was required for the preparation of important works of scholarship.¹⁰⁰ Despite these changes, the operation of the 30-year rule meant that records related to the sinking of the *Sydney* (ie records created in 1941 and 1942) were still unavailable to the general public until 1972 and 1973.

In January 1972 Prime Minister McMahon announced a revision of the 1970 policy. Because of the high level of research interest in World War II, his government had decided to accelerate the public release of records of the entire war period, and also to make most Cabinet records subject to the 30-year rule. Thus from 1972 records up to the end of 1945 were available for public access.

However, this did not mean that all records were publicly available from the time of the announcement. Records still had to be checked for sensitivities, and under the new policy access was still discretionary; departments could unilaterally withhold:

exceptionally sensitive papers the disclosure of which would be contrary to the public interest, whether on security or other grounds...documents containing information supplied in confidence the release of which might constitute a breach of good faith...and information about individuals the disclosure of which would cause distress or embarrassment to living persons.¹⁰¹

If access was refused the person seeking access had no form of redress. This access regime remained in place for a further 12 years. It was not until the proclamation of the *Archives Act 1983* that the discretion of government agencies to unilaterally refuse access was removed.

⁹⁹ G Hermon Gill, *The Royal Australian Navy 1939-42: Volume 1: Official History of Australia in the War of 1939-45*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1957.

¹⁰⁰ Prime Minister's press release No. 124 of 30 December 1970.

¹⁰¹ 'Access to Wartime Government Papers: Statement by the Prime Minister Mr William McMahon', 26 January 1972.

Under the Archives Act the public now has a statutory right of access to Australian Government records over 30 years old.¹⁰² Records may only be withheld on grounds set out in the Act. Reasons for the refusal of access must be given and researchers have the right to apply for reconsideration of the decision. If exemptions are upheld, researchers have the right to have any refusal of access reviewed by an independent decision-maker, usually the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

The administration of the Archives Act and the provision of public access to archival records is now the responsibility of the National Archives of Australia, which has the necessary statutory powers to ensure that access is granted equitably to all, and that agencies do not withhold records from public access unless this can be justified under the Act.

A significant feature of the Archives Act is that for records over 30 years old, it overrides the secrecy provisions in almost all other legislation. In addition, contrary to commonly held belief, there is not, and never has been in Australia, an official secrets Act. The relevant legislation in Australia is the *Crimes Act 1914*, which provides criminal penalties for the unauthorised disclosure of official information. Access provided under the Archives Act is authorised access and is not affected by the Crimes Act.¹⁰³

With respect to Australian Government records on the *Sydney*, any person may obtain access to any relevant records over 30 years old. No information described in this guide relating to the loss of the *Sydney* continues to be withheld from public access.

¹⁰² In November 2009 a bill was introduced to Parliament, the Freedom of Information Amendment (Reform) Bill, proposing the reduction of the closed period from 30 years to 20 years.

¹⁰³ In the context of the Royal Australian Navy, the primacy of the Crimes Act was confirmed by a British Order-in-Council dated 30 November 1915, which stated that 'the operation of the *Official Secrets Act 1911* is suspended in the Commonwealth of Australia, and the provisions of Part VII of the Commonwealth Crimes Act...applies instead' (Order 35, Official Secrets Act, in *The Consolidated Orders and Regulations for the Government of the Naval Forces of the Commonwealth 1942, Volume 1*, Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, February 1942).

Appendix 7 Records identified for the 2009 Commission of Inquiry

The Commission of Inquiry into the loss of HMAS *Sydney*, held in 2009, had very broad terms of reference. The National Archives of Australia identified and examined many different types of records in the course of the Inquiry.

Ships drawings – MP551/1

One of the most important matters considered by the Inquiry was the actual sinking of the ship, and the details of its shape and construction. The National Archives holds a very large collection of ships drawings in series MP551/1.

Of the more than 900 technical drawings of HMAS *Sydney* and her sister ships, very few had been requested by the public. A search was made of the consignment lists for this series, and a large number of files were identified. Many of these were of parts of the ship, or pieces of equipment, and a list was provided to the Inquiry. Of these, the following records were requested and the National Archives provided them to the Inquiry as copies.

Plans in series MP551/1

Series MP551/1 is a series of ships drawings and specifications, dating mostly from the late 19th century to the 1950s. This series is held in the Canberra office of the National Archives.

This is not a complete list of files relating to HMAS *Sydney* held in series MP551/1, but those that were identified on RecordSearch and digitised for public viewing. Files numbered with 'AF' are 'As fitted', meaning that they include modifications that were added to the ships when they were built.

MP551/1

HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Profile - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/1 [2]
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Sections - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/2
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Superstructure and bridges- Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/3
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Forecastle deck - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/4
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Upper deck - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/5

HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Lower deck - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/6
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Platform deck - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/7
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Hold - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/8
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Pumping, flooding and draining arrangements - Forecastle superstructure decks and bridges - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/9
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Pumping, flooding and draining arrangements - Upper and lower decks - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/10
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Pumping, flooding and draining arrangements - Platform and old - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/11
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Pumping, flooding and draining arrangements - Profile and sections - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/12
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Spraying and flooding arrangements in magazines etc forward - Scale 1/4" = 1 foot	136AF/14
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Spraying and flooding arrangements in magazines etc aft - Scale 1/4" = 1 foot	136AF/15
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Fresh and salt water services - Forecastle, superstructure decks and bridges - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/16
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Fresh and salt water services - Upper and lower decks - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/17
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Fresh and salt water services - Platform and hold - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/18
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Fresh and salt water services - Profile and sections - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/19

HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Fresh and salt water services - Description	136AF/20
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Ventilation arrangements - Forecastle superstructure decks and bridges - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/21
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Ventilation arrangement - Platform and hold - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/23
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Ventilation arrangement - Profile and sections - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/24
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Arrangement of pipes to aviation spirit tanks	136AF/30X
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Stowage of 6" magazine - 35-53 hold - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/32
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Stowage of 6" magazine X and Y - Hold 165-183 - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/36
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Stowage of 'A' shell room - Hold 29-35 - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/37
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Stowage of 'B' shell room - Hold 53-58 - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/38
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - W T and O T compartments - Scale 1/16" = 1 foot	136AF/41
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Tabular Statement of capacities oil fuel tanks and water tanks	136AF/43
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Plan of hold for Navigating Officers - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/45
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Holes in bottom - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/46

HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Expansion of outer bottom plating - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/47
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Expansion of inner bottom plating - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/48
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Docking plan	136AF/49
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Docking plan	136AF/49A
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Sketch of rig - Scale 1/16" = 1 foot	136AF/52 [1]
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Armour and protective plating - Scale 1/16" = 1 foot	136AF/54
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Course of ammunition - Scale 1/16" = 1 foot	136AF/55
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Arrangement of main W/T office - Scale 1½" = 1 foot (Type 48Y)	136AF/56
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Arrangement of second W/T office - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot (Type 49)	136AF/57
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Arrangement of auxiliary W/T office - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot (Type 45 and 43a)	136AF/58
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Wireless telegraphy rig - Scale 1/16" = 1 foot	136AF/59
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Voice pipes other than fire control - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/60
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Voice pipes other than fire control - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/61
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Plan of deck openings and loose work for removal of machinery etc - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/98

HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Fire control instruments on bridges - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/99
HMAS SYDNEY- Cruiser - As fitted - Aft control position - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/101
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted – Engineer's pumps, pipes etc - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/103
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Paravane arrangements - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/110
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Hoisting in and transporting arrangements for torpedoes - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/111
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Depth charge arrangements - Scale 1/4" = 1 foot	136AF/115
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Typical examples of damage and control - Average action condition blue after damage red - Scales Profile 1/32" = 1 foot - Sections 14/16" = 1 foot	136AF/118
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Modifications to as fitted plans - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/124
Amphion, Apollo and Phaeton - Platform deck plating forward	136R/8
'HMS Apollo, Amphion' and 'HMAS Sydney' - Engine room vent trunks - Aft engine room	136R/13
'HMS Apollo, Amphion' and 'HMAS Sydney' - Engine room vent trunks - Forward engine room	136R/14
HMAS 'Sydney' Arrangement of 2nd Wireless Transmitter Office and Lead of Aerial Trunk	136R/16
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Ventilation arrangement - Upper and lower deck - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/22

HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Ventilation arrangements - Description	136AF/25
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Oil fuel filling and air escapes - Forecastle deck, superstructure and bridges - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/26
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Oil fuel filling and air escapes - Upper and lower deck - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/27
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Oil fuel filling and air escapes - Platform and hold - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/28
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Oil fuel filling and air escapes - Profile and sections - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/29
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Description of oil fuel filling	136AF/30
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Stowage of small arms magazine including 2 Pdr and 3 Pdr ammunition - 25-29 hold - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/31
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Stowage of 4' H A and 0.5" magazines - 58-70 and 70-73 hold - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/33
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - War Head Room - 154-157 hold - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/34
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Bomb room - 157-160 hold - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/35
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Stowage of 'X' shell room - Hold 160-165 - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/39
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Stowage of 'Y' shell room - Hold 183-189 - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/40
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Tabular Statement of watertight and ventilation arrangements	136AF/42

HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Tests of watertight and oiltight compartments	136AF/44
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Calibrations of oil fuel tanks - A1 to A8, B1 to B7, Y1 to Y4, X1 to X8	136AF/44X
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Plan of rudder - Scale 1" = 1 foot	136AF/50
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Rudder method of withdrawing - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/51
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Arrangement for striking main topmast - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/53
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Arrangement of Officers' Galleys on 4" gun deck Fr 145 to 2'0" Aft 155 - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/62
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted – Seamen's Galley - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/63
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Arrangement of Bakery - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/87
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - H A Calculating Position - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/100
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Transmitting Station - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/102
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Pneumatic tube installation - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/104
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Instructions for working Sturtevant Pneumatic Transmission of Messages System	136AF/107
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Embarking of ammunition - Scale 1/16" = 1 foot	136AF/112

HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Depth charge hydraulic release gear, lead of pipes and details of fittings - Arrangements - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot - Details full size	136AF/116
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Additional 4" H.A.R.U. Lockers proposed positions on 4" Gun Deck - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/128
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Damage control diagrams - Stations 7-21 - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/130 (1)
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Damage control diagrams - Stations 35-53 - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/130 (2)
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Damage control diagrams - Stations 64-76 - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/130 (3)
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Damage control diagrams - Stations 100-116 - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/130 (4)
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Damage control diagrams - Stations 116-135 Starboard - Scale 3/16" = 1 foot	136AF/130 (5)
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Damage control diagrams - Stations 151-165 Starboard - Scale 3/16" = 1 foot	136AF/130 (6)
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Damage control diagrams - Stations 165-183 - Scale 3/16" = 1 foot	136AF/130 (7)
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Damage control diagram - Stations 200 2/3-212 - Scale 1/4" = 1 foot	136AF/130 (8)
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Damage control diagrams - Stations 212 - Stern - Scale 1/4" = 1 foot	136AF/130 (9)
HMS APOLLO, AMPHION and PHAETON - Position of 4" ammunition hoists - Heights between decks etc	136R/2

HMS Amphion, Apollo and HMAS Sydney - Watertight trunks to after engine room	136R/10
HMAS SYDNEY II - Cruiser - As fitted - 6" Twin MK XX1 Mountings - Circulating water connections to turrets - Scale 1/4" = 1 foot	136/784
HMAS SYDNEY II - Cruiser - As fitted - Soda fountain bar - Scale 1/2" to 1 foot	136/785
HMAS AMPHION, APOLLO and SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Officers shower on superstructure deck forward - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136/788
HMAS AMPHION, APOLLO and SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Dumping platforms under 6' shell embarking hatches - Scale 1" = 1 foot	136/790
HMAS AMPHION, APOLLO and SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Position and supports to 4" HA ready use lockers - Scales 1/4" and 1" = 1 foot	136/790
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Profile - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/1 (1)
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Sketch of rig - Scale 1/16" = 1 foot	136AF/52 (2)
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - No 1487 – Seamen's Galley 2 Sections off this oil fired firehearth Pattern No 23A with 1 fire and 2 ovens	136AF/64
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted – Seamen's Galley arrangement of furnace in oil fired firehearth Pattern No 23A - Cornhill Gravity System	136AF/65
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Wardroom Officers Galley - Oil fired firehearth Pattern No 25F	136AF/66
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Admirals and Captains Galley - Oil fired firehearth Pattern No 25G with 1 fire and 2 ovens	136AF/67
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Warrant Officers Galley - Oil fired firehearth Pattern No 25H	136AF/68

HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Steam heated hotcloset	136AF/69
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted – Seamen's Galley 4 off - Steam jacketed boiling copper - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/70
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted – Grant's Patent rapid discharge valve combined steam and grease trap for wet steam ovens	136AF/71
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Air-tight swing outlet damper for No 2 'KB' type 'NU' fan - Scale full size	136AF/76
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Air-tight swing outlet damper for No 1 'KB' type 'NU' fan - Scale full size	136AF/77
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted – Seamen's Galley 2 off - Cornhill oil burner for gravity system, admiralty type 1, 1/2" size	136AF/78
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - 3/4" Cornhill oil burner for gravity oil fuel burner (Admiralty type) - Full size	136AF/79
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted – Seamen's Galley - 75 gall welded MS oil fuel supply tank	136AF/80
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted – Officers' Galleys - 75 gall welded MS oil fuel supply tank - Scale 1½" = 1 foot	136AF/81
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted – Seamen's Galley 2 off - 1/2" steam jet for cooks tubs - Scale full size	136AF/82
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted – Seamen's Galley 2 off - Boiling water tank Scale 3" = 1 foot	136AF/83
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - C1 Steam heated oil fuel heater and filter - Admiralty type	136AF/84
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Arrangement of safety gear for wet steam oven	136AF/85

HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted – Seamen's Galley - Steam cooker Pattern No 23A - General arrangement - Scale 1½" = 1 foot	136AF/86
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - General arrangement - Rotex Ship Kneader - Scale 1/2 full size	136AF/88
HMAS SYDNEY, AJAX, AMPHION, APOLLO - Cruiser - As fitted - Admiralty Contract No - General arrangement of 4'6" x 4'0" Baking Oven - Scale 3" = 1 foot	136AF/92
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Official test on electrically heated oven	136AF/96
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Specification of Baker Perkins two- deck electrically heated ship oven, with baking chambers each measuring 4'6" x 4'0"	136AF/97
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Refrigerating machinery compartment - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/108
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Hoisting and transporting arrangements of Dynamo Armature - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/109
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Testing of Seaplane Crane - Defect List D32/15 Item No 16 - Date of test 11 January 1937	136AF/119
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Testing of Seaplane Crane - Defect list 32/96 Item No 2 - Date of test 7 November 1937	136AF/119A
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Stowage of demolition stores - Scale 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/120
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Proposed modification to ventilation of seamen's, CPO's and PO's washplaces - Scales 1/8" = 1 foot - Details 1/2" = 1 foot	136AF/121
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted – Proposed Cinema Hut (Upper Deck) - Scale 1" = 1 foot	136AF/122

HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted – Proposed Locker for stowage of films - Scale 1" = 1 foot	136AF/123
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted – Proposed ventilation to floor plates in 'B' Boiler Room - List A 32/2 Item 11 - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/125
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted – Proposed ventilation to floor plates in 'B' Boiler Room - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/125A
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Ventilation of Torpedo Gunner's Store - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/126
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - Ventilation to Gunner's Store - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/127
HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted – Proposed branch pipe from main service to sprinkle Petrol Control Room - Scale 1/8" = 1 foot	136AF/129
HMS APOLLO, AMPHION and HMAS SYDNEY - Cruiser - As fitted - 4" Ammunition hoist seatings for Devenport M.C.D.L 32779	136R/1
HMS APOLLO, AMPHION and HMAS SYDNEY - Arrangement of lockers and leads of gearing to magazines etc, flooding and spray valves - Devenport M.C.D.L 32839	136R/4
HMAS Sydney - Supports to jib of seaplane crane and stowing position	136R/9
'Amphion', 'Apollo' and 'Sydney' - Embarking and striking down torpedo heads - Details of striking down davit	136R/11
HMAS 'Sydney' - Proposed modifications to the inlets for all exhaust fans in engine rooms	136R/15
HMAS Sydney - Extension to 4 HA Gun Deck and supports to 4 HA twin mounting	136R/19
HMAS Sydney - 4" HA Magazine 58-73 hold - Bottle rack stowage for 4" ammunition for Mark XVI gun - Details of sliding doors	136R/20

The naval environment leading up to the sinking

The Inquiry was keen to identify the procedures and practices of the Royal Australian Navy before World War II and up to the sinking of HMAS Sydney. In order to do this, extensive searches were made of RAN correspondence files and control records. The Navy used a system of registration for all inward and outward correspondence to and from the Naval Board. This correspondence was entered into a registration book, listing the sender, the addressee, time and date, and the nature of the correspondence. These books, or ledgers, are a very useful way of identifying particular correspondence. Not all the files listed in the registers have survived to be transferred to the National Archives.

REGISTRATION BOOKS (L 14S) FOR SECRET CORRESPONDENCE FILES, MULTIPLE NUMBER SERIES B1122

Recorded by:

1 Aug 1922–13 Nov 1939 Navy Office [III], Department of Defence [II] (CA 2456)
13 Nov 1939–31 Dec 1950 Navy Office [IV], Department of the Navy [II] (CA 38)
30 Nov 1973 Department of Defence [III], Central Office - Navy Office (CA 46)

Melbourne 3.96 metres

Accumulation dates: 1 Aug 1922–31 Dec 1950
Contents dates: 1 Aug 1922–31 Dec 1973
System of arrangement and control: multiple number system
Predominant form: bound volumes

Navy correspondence files

The Registers in series B1122 were used to identify surviving records in the Series listed below, by using the file numbers listed in the registers.

SERIES MP150/1 FILES THAT WERE IDENTIFIED TO BE OF POSSIBLE INTEREST TO THE COMMISSION:

Organisation of naval staff, Navy Office	404/202/954
Naval Board Minute 1 August 1940 [Finance and Civil Member]	404/202/958
Naval Board Minutes 29 August 1940	404/202/960
Summary of organisation of Naval Forces and administration of RAN	404/201/23
Liaison between inspecting officer and ships gunnery officers	404/201/308
Recognition signalling procedure	404/201/521

Naval Board Minutes [appointments]	404/202/1005
Prisoner of War questionnaire	437/201/563
Ignition of BL cartridges	437/201/945
Review of Service Conditions 1939 - cotton knickers with elastic waistband	437/202/39
Review of Service Conditions 1939 - overalls - supply ratings	437/202/88
Naval defence of Australia [letter from Mr G M Taylor suggesting fitting of a device to convoy ship to confuse submarines]	449/201/761
Naval defence of Australia [letter from Mr C E Johnson suggesting that nets be used to trap submarines]	449/201/771
The automatic issue of death certificate	446/201/659
HMAS SYDNEY [Australian War Memorials Committee - Form for Verification of Name and Other Particulars]	446/201/706
Certificates of presumption of death of Members of the Forces	446/201/710
The use of a secret code by merchant ships	449/201/304
The installation of the pedal driven radio sets in ships of the merchant service	449/201/312
The movement of shipping	449/201/708
Comments upon the defence of ships against enemy raiders [letter from B Funnell]	449/201/733
Suggestions for detecting raiders [letter from Mr F J Muspratt]	449/201/742
The movements of raiders [letter from Mr C Lockwood]	449/201/758

The loss of HMAS SYDNEY [letter from Mr A McG Alexander]	449/201/897
Letter from 'traveller' regarding HMAS SYDNEY	449/201/898
German raider and HMAS SYDNEY in action [letter from Mr W Wright]	449/201/901
Loss of HMAS SYDNEY [letter from Mr E P Wells]	449/201/902
Loss of HMAS SYDNEY [letter from Mr Hugh Fyfe]	449/201/904
Loss of HMAS SYDNEY [letter from Mr Eric N Hewitt]	449/201/905
Theory suggested regarding loss of HMAS SYDNEY [letter from Mr R K MacGregor]	449/201/914
Australian Squadron Communication Orders	546/201/154
Australian Squadron - temporary memoranda and amendments	546/201/155
China Station - temporary memoranda	546/201/222
Station orders	546/201/229
Correction to AFOs [Admiralty Fleet Orders] "S" 2/41 table 5 line 2	546/202/319
Correction to AFO [Admiralty Fleet Order] number 116/41	546/202/320
Amendments to AFO [Admiralty Fleet Order] "S" number 2/41 - W/T organisations	546/202/332
Amendment to CAFO [Confidential Admiralty Fleet Order] number 538/1937	546/202/338
Cancellation of AFO [Admiralty Fleet Order] number 4974/41	546/202/351
HMAS SYDNEY requests Navy Order numbers 150-155	546/203/207

Report on RAN POWs in Japanese Hands	567/201/126
Consolidated orders and regulations - amendments	546/201/236
Amendment to China general memoranda	546/201/257
Admiralty Fleet Orders and Commonwealth Navy Orders	546/201/262

SERIES MP151/1 FILES THAT WERE IDENTIFIED TO BE OF POSSIBLE INTEREST TO THE COMMISSION

Loss of HMAS SYDNEY [Request for information re loss of HMAS SYDNEY - representation by Senator J J Arnold to Norman J O Makin, Minister for the Navy, concerning a statement made by a 'Chinaman' who was a prisoner of war on the "Kormoran"]	429/201/374
Callous rumours scotched	429/201/247
BL 6-inch charges packed in containers	421/202/624
Raider victims	429/201/251
BL and QF of 4-inch CP shell	408/204/1428
Amendments of M of F shell BL or QF APC etc, 5.2-inch and above (taking fuses OD type) consequent upon the adoption of .000 to .005-inch fuse intrusion	408/204/1635
Shell BL 6-inch – CFC AQ Mark VIII	408/204/1750
Shell BL of QF HE special 4-inch to 5.25-inch and shell BL or QF HE 4-inch, 6-inch method of filling - amendment to design	408/204/1849
Ammunition Circular Letter number 139	408/206/1647
Cartridges BL 6-inch Mark XXIII - gun packing	408/207/1340

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Fleet order and Intelligence files

Admiralty Fleet Orders [General Orders of a non-Confidential nature issued by the British Admiralty relating to subjects under the headings of Administrative, Personnel, Equipment, Stores, Stationary and Shore Establishments]

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Appendix 8 Other guides to the collection

The National Archives of Australia creates and maintains guides to records in its collection to help researchers identify and locate records relevant to their research. These guides are available on the [National Archives' website](#).

Appendix 9 Contact details

For contact details of the National Archives of Australia, see the National Archives of Australia [contact us page](#).