

# HSK Kormoran Related Documents in the Military Archive Freiburg, Germany

## A Brief Look at the German Perspective of the Sinking of HMAS Sydney

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## Introduction

This paper is the result of a first step research into authentic German documents stored at the Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv, and related to the German WW II raider Kormoran, which sank the Australian cruiser HMAS Sydney on 19<sup>th</sup> / 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1941. Due to time restrictions, it is rather likely to be incomplete, but it may give English speaking experts with

insights into this matter - who on the other hand lack knowledge of the German language - a chance to take a glance at the German view and documentation of HMAS Sydney related issues, in most cases originating from the German Naval Command as opposed to interrogations of survivors of HSK Kormoran by Australian authorities. The tables in Appendix B give an overview of such documents, and English translations of selected documents are attached in Appendix C. Where appropriate, original German terms are included in square brackets, own comments are included in {}. German quotation marks start in lower and end in upper case. Photocopies of the German original documents including the translated ones under Appendix B are not to be reproduced and are therefore kept in the authors files. They can of course be viewed on request.

The author was born and raised in Germany and holds a B.Sc. degree in Cartography as well as a Postgraduate Diploma in Surveying and Mapping. His current position is a Research Fellowship at the School of Spatial Sciences at Curtin University of Technology, Perth, which includes researching and applying underwater mapping techniques for the Department of Maritime Archaeology at the Maritime Museum in Fremantle. The Centre of Excellence and the author agreed on the requirement to search German archives which could be realised during a five week stay in Germany in June - July 1998.

### **The Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv or Federal Archive / Military Archive**

The Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv is the German government authority storing most of the official and original German documents that survived the second world war. By law, the Bundesarchiv has to „analyse“ its material, and therefore scientific books and papers about this subject have also been published. Its main branch is located in Freiburg in the southwestern state Baden-Württemberg and contains the main Navy files. A branch in Koblenz stores additional material. It is a reference archive, under normal circumstances no documents can be taken outside library buildings, and for conservation reasons it is usually not allowed to take photographs. Photocopies and reproductions can only be prepared by staff after ordering. In accordance to a government regulation, the Bundesarchiv - Benutzerverordnung or Federal Archive User Regulation, everybody has access to the archives, given that an application detailing the topic of the research to be undertaken is handed in and accepted beforehand.

### **Documents Related to HSK Kormoran and HMAS Sydney Battle**

In the Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv, documents are grouped together by certain criteria into folders etc., and are then given an ID. Related index books called „Findbuch“ list the according contents and sometimes also detail bibliographies or give relevant overviews or introductions, including

historically responsible authorities and their change in staff and organisation. For a general overview over all contents of the Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv, a main printed, and comprehensive index book called „Das Bundesarchiv und seine Bestände“ (see bibliography) is also available.

After World War II, all remaining German military documents were shipped to Britain where efforts were made to store them in a systematic archive, using the M box or PG numbers - M representing Marine or Navy - in case of the raiders for example. In the sixties and seventies, these documents were handed back in several installments to the Federal Republic of Germany in boxes, and the responsible authority, the Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv has been archiving them again under different and refined headings ever since. According to Mr. Döringhoff of the Bundesarchiv, this is still an ongoing process and discovery of files relevant to HSK Kormoran / HMAS Sydney is possible to date. The most recent completion of the specific Index Book [Findbuch] RM 100, about the German WW II Auxiliary Cruisers [Hilfskreuzer] as late as April 1998 somewhat emphasises that suggestion. Apparently, some 900 boxes, or in other words 1000 m of documents, so far still labeled with the English signature numbers are practically inaccessible because of illogical packaging and lacking index books. A study has come up with the calculation, that with the current personnel and the present poor technical equipment standards of the computer systems in particular, the Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv will need approximately ten more years to complete the systematic filing of this material. Chances for new discoveries may also well be increased by the fact, that in contrast to 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich Air Force Files and archives for example, relatively large portions of Navy material seem to have escaped destruction during the last period of the war, due to their transport to and storage in southern Germany at the time.

On November 4, 1997, the Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv received a request from the Bundesministerium des Inneren, Referat K II 2 / Federal Ministry of the Interior, which acted on behalf of an authority in Canberra, to compile information about the HSK Kormoran / HMAS Sydney. This compilation comprises copies of the documents RMD4 601 Heft 10, RM7 120, RM8 1150 and RM7 1576 as described in the list below. To date, Referat K II 2 has not contacted the Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv again and therefore the material is still kept there.

### Relevant Archives

Before starting to name general archives [Bestände] with contents that are actually or potentially connected to HSK Kormoran in this chapter, and listing specific selected material in the table under appendix A, it might be worth giving a brief introduction to the so called Kriegstagebücher (KTB) or War Diaries, since this term tends to come up quite often. KTBs are - often daily - records of events, and were compiled by many German departments, divisions and also warships involved in the war, and they covered topics of

respective relevance and importance. In case of the KTB of commanding authorities such as the Naval Command [OKM, later Seekriegsleitung], they cover only the main topics and can therefore serve as an excellent chronicle today. The KTBs of the Naval Command are divided into four parts as translated below :

Part A [Teil A] : Daily record of events, daily decisions and assessments

Part B [Teil B] : Weekly situation assessments and considerations of general military nature, especially :

I : Summary of the cruiser war in distant waters

Part C [Teil C] : Particular considerations in regard to specific topics / problems of the naval war (operative orders, analysis of operations), especially :

I : Cruiser war in distant waters

Part D [Teil D] : Reports, especially

- 1 : daily situations,
- 1a : distant war operation,
- 1f : East Asia,
- 5a : losses of enemy ships,
- 5b : losses of own ships

The following archives of the Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv were so far considered relevant in regard to HSK Kormoran :

RM 100 Titled Auxiliary Cruisers of the Navy 1939 - 1945 [Hilfskreuzer der Kriegsmarine 1939 - 1945], it covers selected material about all WW II raiders

RM 7 Amongst others, Band 2 covers the section Distant Waters [Außerheimische Gewässer], which includes the Indian Ocean and the Pacific

RM 8 covers material of the War Science Department of the Navy [Kriegswissenschaftliche Abteilung der Marine]. Within that, the Navy Regulations [M. Dv. or Marine Dienstvorschrift] detail the Evaluation of Important Events of the Naval War 1942 - 1944 [Auswertung wichtiger Ereignisse des Seekrieges 1942 - 1944].

RMD 4 & 5 includes a very large collection of often classified instruction manuals, compiled reports etc. as printed matters with



various thematic contents. The according index book [Findbuch] lists the documents in no order as far as syntax is concerned. As indicated under appendix B of this paper, the series RMD 4 / 601 is of particular interest, since it consists of several booklets about some raiders including HSK Kormoran.

According to the archivist Mr. Döringhoff of the Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv, the historian responsible for the systematic filing of the bulk of Navy material over the years, Dr. Maihöfer, had no direct Navy or nautical background and grouped some of the material in a way, which could be considered unorthodox by strict Navy measures. It might therefore be worth checking less obviously related index books as well.

### **Abbreviations and Translations**

HSK	:	Handels-Störkreuzer or Hilfskreuzer = Trade Disrupting Cruiser or Auxiliary Cruiser (See H. Boberach et al., p. 299)
Hilfskreuzer	:	Auxiliary Cruiser
Kaperschiff	:	Raider
Korsar	:	Corsair
KTB	:	Kriegstagebuch = War Diary
SKL	:	Seekriegsleitung = Naval War Command
1. SKL	:	Operationsabteilung der SKL = Campaign Division of the Naval War Command (see Das Bundesarchiv u. s. B., p. 272)

### **Some Conclusions from the Reviewed Documents**

The account told in RM 8 / 1150 is more like a narrative story as opposed to a strictly objective report and its source is what could be considered a popular magazine. The according description of the sinking of HMAS Sydney is therefore rather dramatic, but overall, most technical details are told correctly. Therefore it may be worth pointing out, that the first paragraph clearly says that HSK Kormoran was showing the „Norwegian Flag“, which would mean that it was not disguised as the Dutch „Straat Malakka“, as commonly thought. This would also support Michael Montgomery's theory as suggested in his book „Who sank the Sydney ?“. Also remarkable is the fact that this story was translated from a French magazine and received on 24/1/1942, too early to have survivors as the source. An explanation would be that it based on the decoded radio messages of the English Admiralty and was deliberately published by the Naval Command.

The booklet RMD4 / 601, Heft 10 mentions on page 30, that Dr. Habben, HSK Kormoran's doctor wrote a detailed report about the battle with HMAS

Sydney after he had returned from the P.O.W. camp in Victoria in 1943. Unfortunately that report has so far not been found amongst the documents in the Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv. As indicated by the descriptions in the booklet, which are mainly based on that report, it seems to support the account as given on p. 453 ff. of the reference book „Royal Australian Navy“ by G. Hermon Gill for example. That would probably be not very surprising because during his imprisonment in the Murchison detention camp in Victoria, Dr. Habben was in contact with all of the surviving crew including Commander Detmers - the prime source for all scientific HMAS Sydney texts - long enough to tell the agreed upon mainstream story. However, since it is not out of question to suggest that some differences between information given to enemy interviewers, and a report filed for the own German Navy Command during war time might exist, it may be worth to try once more to get hold of that document. The exact location where the battle was supposedly fought also corresponds to the information in "Royal Australian Navy" by G. Hermon Gill, given that the quotation of Dr. Habben's report of page 31 in the booklet RMD 4 / 601, Heft 10 is used as the reference. However, the set of coordinates printed on page 30 slightly differs from what was laid out the next page and in the action map on page 455 of "Royal Australian Navy". Instead of  $26^{\circ} 34' \text{ S}$ ,  $111^{\circ} \text{ E}$ , the German war-time publishers of 1943 put that location at  $25^{\circ} 34' \text{ S}$ ,  $111^{\circ} \text{ E}$  {my highlighting} on page 30, or "approximately 130 nm south-west of Shark Bay", whereas G. H. Gill puts HSK Kormoran's first sighting of HMAS Sydney down at about  $26^{\circ} 30' \text{ S}$ , or "150 nm south-west of Carnarvon", and the actual combat some 20 nm further west-south-west. All in all, this would result in a discrepancy of about  $1^{\circ}$  or 60 nm in northing, and about 20' or 20 nm in easting, which might be of interest in regard to potential attempts to locate the wrecks of the two ships. On the other hand it would be quite sensible to assume that the northing of  $25^{\circ}$  on page 30 was simply a typing error. Again, the original of Dr. Habben's report would have the final word on that.

Two interesting details about document RM 100 / 176, the report of an anonymous officer prepared for the Naval Command about the rescue operation of HSK Kormoran's crew, are the date it was received, and the introducing remark saying "sender writes :". The document does not say who was the sender. It was received on 18/11/1942, but the only known surviving officer of HSK Kormoran being able to report directly to the German Naval Command about the incident would have been Dr. Habben. The problem is, that he returned home from the prisoner-of-war camp later, in 1943, and all other officers are thought to have stayed at that very camp as well. As suggested by Theodor Detmers in his book on page 231, there seemed to be communication opportunities for Murchison war camp inmates. Document RM 7 / 1576, p.73 suggests, that the German Naval Command was given information that some survivors, namely "Kaptlt. Otzel", of HSK Kormoran had made it to Japan. In case of officer "Oetzel" however - which is how his name was spelled correctly - this was false alarm, because he had gone from board and aboard the supply vessel Kulmerland just before the battle between the cruisers took place (see T. Detmers et al., p. 196). Rescue

conditions surely did not allow survivors to save much more than their lives, but combining the fact that the engine log book of HSK Kormoran was salvaged with the communication indications implies that an extended search for material in German archives could be fruitful.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

First of all, investing more time in searching the archives of the Bundesarchiv, for example in regard to records of radio communication, or in order to follow loose leads might well be worth while. Other, so far unsearched material includes the huge collection of official and often restricted printed matters under RMD 4, which can sometimes be a good substitution for the big losses of original files, as can be seen from document RMD 4 / 601, Heft 10. Amongst others, RMD 5 includes the restricted weekly "Kriegsnachrichten für Seefahrer" or war news for seafarers, which might also mention the Sydney incident.

Additionally, visiting other institutions, such as the Koblenz branch of the Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv, which lists photographs of Theodor Detmers amongst its inventory, or the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich with its material from mainly private sources, the branch of the German Library in Leipzig with its supposedly complete collection of - partially classified - printed material, or the Bildarchiv Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin and Süddeutscher Rundfunk in Munich (see Enzyklopädie d. N., p. 330 ff.) for photographs might result in discovery of material of interest. As is generally known, privately organised veteran groups, or the Navy Officers Association [Marine-Offiziersvereinigung] in Bonn (phone no. : GER - (0) 228 - 251029) or maybe the German Navy Union [Deutscher Marinebund] or the Navy, Naval History and Maritime Publications Study Group [Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Marine- und Schifffahrtsgeschichte und maritime Publizistik] in Düsseldorf might still be of help as far as personal contact with survivors of KSK Kormoran is concerned.

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<http://dbix01.dbi-berlin.de:6100/DBI/login.html>

Searches of the databases of selected German libraries including „Die Deutsche Bibliothek“ (DBB) are available under :

<http://www.ubka.uni-karlsruhe.de/kvk.html>

## Appendix A

### Sighted Relevant Documents

Bundesarchiv ID	Pages	British ID	Original ID	Contents	Description
RM 100 / 137	Entire Log Book	M 1266 PG 70945 a-d		KTB 9.Okt. 1940 - 14.3.1941	War Diary = Log Book of HSK Kormoran covering the time between 9/10/1940 - 14/3/1941.
RM 100 / 138	Entire Document	M 1266 PG 70946		Operationsbefehl 24.10.1940	Instructions for operation of HSK Kormoran from 24/10/1940, with amendments detailing corrections due to changes of circumstances over time.
RM 100 / 139	Entire Folder	M 1266 PG 70947		Anlagen zum KTB 1940 - 1942	Attachments to the War Diary [KTB]. Amongst others, 139 contains the hand drawn routes of HSK Kormoran as later printed in RMD 4 / 601 Heft 10.
RM 100 / 140	Entire Folder	M 1266 PG 70948		Anlagen zum KTB 1940 - 1942	Attachments to the War Diary [KTB]. Amongst others, 140 contains detailed Gunnery reports [Artillerieberichte], Ammunition Lists [Schießlisten], and Battle Plans [Gefechtsskizzen] as caused by the destruction of the Australian steamer Mareeba for example.
RM 100 / 176	Entire Log Book	M 1266 PG 70945 e-h		KTB 14.3.1941 - 24.10.1941	War Diary = Log Book of HSK Kormoran covering the time between 15/3/1941 - 24/10/1941. Like RM 100 / 137, this copy was brought back to Germany by the supply vessel Kulmerland and therefore ends just short of the battle

Bundesarchiv ID	Pages	British ID	Original ID	Contents	Description
RM 7 / 120	S 159 - 161	III M 1011 / 3 PG 32154 Case GE 204 erhalten am / returned on 11/10/1963	KR 21107	1. SKL KTB Teil C, Heft I : Kreuzerrieg in außerheimischen Gewässern. Band 3 (Feb. 1941 - Jan. 1942)	with HMAS Sydney, the reason why it was not destroyed. Pages are divided into three columns : Date and Time [Datum und Uhrzeit], Place and Weather [Ort und Wetter], Events [Vorkommnisse].  This story is identical to the document in RM 8 / 1150, but here, no date is given.
RM 7 / 121	miscellaneous  22 ff.	III M 1011 / 4 PG 32155 Case 205		1. SKL KTB Teil C I, Kreuzerrieg in außerheimischen Gewässern, Band 4, Jan. 1942 - Dez. 1942	Cooperation with Italian and Japanese naval forces, mainly allocations of precisely defined operational areas for German raiders by the Japanese command, and numerous other raider related documents of 1942.  Instructions [Operationsbefehl] for raider Schiff 28 (=Michel) including the order for cooperation with German submarines, and numerous code names of areas and their real location.
RM 7 / 122	422 - 423	III M 1011 / 5 PG 32156, 21924 a+b, 70978 Case 206		1. SKL KTB Teil C I, Kreuzerrieg in außerheimischen Gewässern, Band 5, 2.1.1943 - 2.7.1945	Includes a compilation of so called important information [wichtiger Angaben] related to raider operation, a table listing details such as tonnage etc., which was compiled for the British Navy straight after the war.
				1. SKL I op. v. 23.8.1943 : Japanische U-Boote im	Japanese submarines in the Indian Ocean in 1943



Bundesarchiv ID	Pages	British ID	Original ID	Contents	Description
RM 7 / 122 K-1	large format map	III M 1011 / 5 PG 70978 Case 206		indischen Ozean Zusammenstellung : Versenkungen (Mai 1940 - Sep. 1943) durch deutsche Hilfskreuzer	Tables list all auxiliary cruisers and give details about the respective enemy ships, such as tonnage name etc., and are attached to a world map, which shows the location of each ship sunk or captured by German raiders. Unfortunately no precise coordinates are given.
RM 7 / 1576	Handwritten p. no. in blue : 73	18 - 1 PG 34352 Case GE 2231		1. SKL (Lagezimmer) Verschiedenes, 6. Mai 1941 - 3. Sep. 1942	Letter demanding detailed information in regard to a report, which suggested that the current location of some HSK Kormoran survivors would be Japan.
RM 7 / 30	211 reverse, 237, 268	III M 1000 / 27 PG 32047 Case 127	KR 55 / Chef	1. SKL Teil A KTB (Bd. 27), 1.11.1941 - 30.11.1941, täglicher Verlauf der Ereignisse	Daily record of the events in the main War Diaries [KTB] of the Naval War Command. These records have been republished as a series of books (see KTB der Seekriegsleitung 1939 - 1945, 1991). Knowledge of German Naval Command about the HSK Kormoran - HMAS Sydney battle unfolds over days.
RM 7 / 683	list	TS / 587 / 44 / 36		1. SKL KTB Teil D 5a, Feindliche Seekriegsverluste (hier : Kriegs- und Handelsschiffe der Alliierten), 4.9.1939 - 18.10.1943	Handwritten and Typed lists of all losses of enemy ships. HMAS Sydney is listed on 3.12.1941. Unfortunately, just regions of loss, but no coordinates are given.
RM 7 / 684	list	PG 32594 Case 520	KR 46998a	1. SKL KTB I b (Kr) : Feindliche und eigene Kriegsschiffverluste 1939 - 1941 (incl. Handelsschiffe)	Typed lists of own and enemy losses. Last entry „since 12/12/1941“ does not include HMAS Sydney
RM 7 / 800	miscellaneous	M / 1335 / 32336	KR 131436	1. SKL KTB Teil D9 [A II c], 10 Tage Meldungen der Wehr- machtteile (Personelle Ver	Lengthy lists of German losses of war material.

Bundesarchiv ID	Pages	British ID	Original ID	Contents	Description
RM 7 / 85	248 - 250	III M 1001 / 2 PG 32090 - 32093 Case 170	KR 14940G, 23961a, 34478a, und KA 3488	luste, Verluste an Schiffen, Verluste an Waffen, Gerät, Anlagen, Verbrauch an Munition, Torpedos und Sperrwaffen, Kriegsgefangenenzahlen (Bd. 2), 3.1.1941 - 23.12. 1941, hier Teil 2 (1.7.1941 - 20.12.1941)	Weekly War Diary. Detailed report concerning news about the battle with HMAS Sydney in week 25/11/1941 - 2/12/1041.
RM 8 / 1150	Handwritten p. no. in blue : 159 - 161  Printed p. no. in black : 276 ff.			1. SKL KTB, Teil B I, Überblick über die außerheimische Kriegsführung (Bd. 2), 31.12.1940 - 31.3.1944	Typed translation of a printed story about the battle between HSK Kormoran and HMAS Sydney, as published in a French magazine.  Report from Dr. Habben, Kormoran's doctor, who returned back to Germany in 1943. It details the conditions in the Australian POW camp, where the crew of the Kormoran was held.
RM 8 / 1423	108 ff.	M / 1439 / -		„Sprachregelungen“ und Unterlagen [161 - 236] (Band 8) (Teil 2, Unterlage 175 - 222), Jan. - Mai 1942; hierin : MI Ph Anweisung 3 / III / 42 : Behandlung der Lage Australiens (Berlin, 23.3.1942)  Der Indische Ozean	Instructions of the Chief Command of the Navy [Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine = OKM] in regard to the general situation of Australia from 23/3/1942.
	115 ff.				Radio speech concerning the situation

Bundesarchiv ID	Pages	British ID	Original ID	Contents	Description
	118 ff.			Die Rolle des Indischen O.	in the Indian Ocean from 25/3/1942
RMD 4 / 601, Heft 10	Entire Booklet + 2 maps			Operation und Taktik. Auswertungen wichtiger Ereignisse des Seekrieges. Die Fahrt des Hilfskreuzers „Schiff 41“ („Kormoran“), Korvettenkapitän (ab 1.4.1941 Freg. Kpt.) Detmers. Geheime Kommandosache, Berlin, Dez. 1943, OKM, Kriegswiss. Abteilung, M. Dv. Nr 601	Radio speech concerning the historical and present situation of the Indian Ocean from 1/4/1942  This is the main source about the Naval Command knowledge and view of the operation of HSK Kormoran. It contains an „objective representation of the operational and tactical decisions“ using current information. The booklet also contains a description of the raider and its crew including plans, a summary of the Instructions [Operationsbefehl] as given under RM 100 / 138, and a list of destroyed or captured enemy ships.

### Unchecked, Potentially Relevant Documents

Bundesarchiv ID	Pages	British ID	Original ID	Contents	Description
RM 7 / 117	?	III M 7010 / 1 PG 32136, 32137a, 32137b Case 201	KR 14940 1, 23961 1, 34478 1	1. SKL KTB Teil B X, Lageübersicht Ostasien. Seekrieg im Stillen und Indischen Ozean, Dez. 1941 - Jul. 1944	Fortnightly War Diary of the Campaign Division of the Naval War Command.
RM 7 / 253	?	PG 32220 - 32221 Case 272	KR 162 / Chef	1. SKL KTB Teil C XV, Zusammenarbeit mit Japan (Bd. 1), Jan. 1941 - Dez. 1941	Includes Japanese submarine action in the Indian Ocean and use of the Japanese Submarine Force in 1941, which might give some indication about the likeliness of Japanese submarine

Bundesarchiv ID	Pages	British ID	Original ID	Contents	Description
RM 7 / 271	?	PG 32237 Case 290	KR 17986	1. SKL KTB Teil D1, Lageberichte Kriegsmarine an OKW (Bd. 6), 21.7.1941 - 31.12.1941	support for HSK Kormoran. Contains reports of the Navy for the Command of the Army, especially reports concerning East Asia.
RM 7 / 277	?	PG 32249 - 32250 Case 296		1. SKL KTB Teil D1a, Lageberichte außerheimische Gewässer, 1.7.1941 - 9.11.1943	In accordance to the description of the 4 different parts of the Naval Command KTBs or War Diaries above, part D1a contains reports about the war in distant waters.
RM 7 / 309	?	PG 32246 - 32247 Case 295		1. SKL KTB D1f, Lageberichte Ostasien (Bd.1), 7.12.1941 - 9.12.1944	Contains reports about East Asia.
RMD 5 / 2118	?	?		Zeitschrift für Seefahrer 72. Jahrgang, 1941; 73. Jahrgang 1942	Marine serial from 1941 and 1942
RMD 5 / 2182	?	?		Kriegsnachrichten für Seefahrer. Jahrgang 1941 (Nr. 1 - 53), Jahrgang 1942 (Nr. 1 - 52)	Printed weekly serial called War News for Seafarers from 1941 and 1942.



## Appendix B

### Translations

The following pages are translations of selected documents of the Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv, as listed in Appendix A. It was attempted to maintain the original composition of sentences even if they may sound strange in English too. Obvious mistakes, such as misspelling, were also not altered.

**RM 8 / 1150, p. 159 - 161**

{stamped : received 24/1/42}

Copy.

Translation from French.

Magazine „Seven Days“, 65, Cours de la Liberte, Lyon.

„S t o p !“

-- and Detmers answered with a torpedo --

The international signal „stop“ is hoisted on the signal mast of the cruiser, the trade ship, a passenger steamer of approximately 9 000 t, sailing under Norwegian flag is no further away than 800 m, when the commander of the „Sydney“ all of a sudden discovers, that the peaceful ship he wanted to confiscate is the famous German corsair „Cormoran“ {misspelling, Cormoran was a WW I raider}, formerly „Steiermark“.

The „Cormoran“; She has been sailing the oceans since late 1940 in command of Frigate Captain Detmers. He has sunk the steamers „Agnita“ and „Craftsman“ in the southern Atlantic, the steamers „Villebit“ and „Mareeba“ between Ceylon and Sumatra, overall about 10 ships. All warships sent on his pursuit have missed him. Frigate Captain Detmers knows the raider war through and through, just as well as his ship, a fast passenger ship of the Hamburg - America Line, it was built mainly for that purpose in 1938. It carries six cannons of 6 Pouce each, torpedo tubes and 2 airplanes.

### For the First Time :

Detmers investigates the enemy from his lightly armoured bridge. This is a cruiser of the Australian Navy of 6 830 t, with high superstructures and outlines like a type of destroyer. She returns home to her Australian base after having fought hard and very well in the Mediterranean Sea. The log books confirm that she has covered 80 000 miles, has shot 4 000 shells, has gone through 60 attacks and has taken part in 20 missions. Some wounds have remained, which kept her from using her 32.5 knots.

That does not matter, the competition between a passenger ship, armed for war and a real cruiser is not really well balanced, nowhere near. The warship is built for receiving shell hits, shells, which would most likely send the merchantman to the bottom.

Nevertheless, Detmers does not hesitate because he was close to his enemy and he was ordered to show his nationality, he has no choice but to fight by using the surprise effect, if he can. That very second, a torpedo is launched from the „Cormoran“ towards the „Sydney“ and the shells of the cruiser hit the armed passenger ship.

Dramatic second ! The first salvo of the „Sydney“ seriously damages the German ship. But on the side of the Australian cruiser a jet of water rises, rips the bridge away, while a terrible explosion is heard. The Sydney tips over slowly, then faster and suddenly capsizes, taking her crew into their grave.

On board of the „Cormoran“ hoorays are cheered. The impossible has happened. For the first time in modern naval history an armed merchantman has sunk a warship.

### A Seafaring Secret

Now the crew of the „Cormoran“ struggles in order to save the own ship. They can not fight it. The shells of the Australian have destroyed the ship's side, the entire ocean rushes into the holds, the pumps can not fight that.

Captain Detmers has „abandon ship“ called out. Calmly his 500 men take seats in the lifeboats. The Australian coast of Carnarvon is only 250 miles away. The crew of the corsair knows the suffering of imprisonment. This means nothing less than being victorious.

„The destruction of the „Sydney“,“ says the Australian minister of the Navy, Mr. Norman-Makin the next day, „is a big seafaring secret“. Twenty years earlier, a different „Sydney“ had surprised and sank the famous German corsair of Frigate Captain Müller, the „Emden“ near the Cocos Islands. Luck has not stayed with the ship's name.

Chief Navy Command Baltic Sea  
- Home Headquarters Foreign Affairs -

Kiel, 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1943  
Roonstr. 8

To the

Relatives  
of the captured  
crew members of HSK „Kormoran“

The Navy Doctor Liebelt Habben, formerly 2<sup>nd</sup> doctor on the auxiliary cruiser „Kormoran“ is returned as exchange prisoner of war and has filed the following report about the camp life, which is applicable to your relative too.

Report about the crew camp Murchison A Campo and the 13<sup>th</sup> prisoner of war group in the state of Victoria, Australia, by Navy Doctor Habben, 2<sup>nd</sup> Doctor on the auxiliary cruiser „Kormoran“ and of the crew camp from 1<sup>st</sup> of Dec. 1941 - 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 1943.

This report is not suitable for publication and is addressed to the relatives of internees only.

After 315 crew members of the „Kormoran“ had been saved after the battle with the Australian cruiser „Sydney“ in late November 1941, they had first been accommodated in a detention camp in Western - Australia until the end of the year. The ones wounded during or ill from the naval battle could be cured very soon after; all of them were just minor cases. Then the crew was moved eastward overland, to the state of Victoria, to the camp Murchison, which exists to date, and which is combined on an area together with a camp for the Afrikakorps and two Italian camps.

The surrounding landscape is hardly pleasant for the German used to lush green. It is a slightly hilly, steppe-like landscape, covered with single or grouped eucalyptus trees. The tree steppe turns green only during the 3 winter months, it looks dry the rest of the year. There is a small lake approximately 2 km away from the camp, which sometimes is the destination for day trips. Summer is hot and dry, but our men handle it well, the only hardships are caused by the occasional sand storms, which are however no health hazard. Winter time between June and August rarely causes temperatures close to 0° and brings white frost just every odd morning. Heating of the living and dining barracks is cared for, even though heating material is sometimes measured too short. Given the generally dry and sunny climate (300 sunny and 65 slightly overcast days) it is possible to stay a lot outside in the fresh air. Therefore there are no colds or infections and the general medical state of the inmates is excellent.

Food supply is sufficient, nutritious and rich in vitamins. There is plenty of meat, even though 50 % of it is mutton. Fresh vegetables are supplied by a local plantation (of a size of 300 Morgen {1 Morgen is 2 500 - 3 400 sm}). Plenty of tomatoes are handed out between December and June. Depending on the season, the canteen supplies fruit the whole year through, oranges, bananas, grapes, stone fruit, pineapple, apples, and pears. Cooking is supervised by a great ship's cook, who constantly tries to have well prepared and varied meals on offer. Additionally, there is a local camp bakery supplying good rye bread to the canteen, which is very popular because the bulk loads of white bread are not as easy on the stomach (for us). For week-ends and birthdays orders for cakes can be handed in at the bakery.

Apart from tobacco products, which are rationed but sufficient for light smokers, the canteen also supplies sweets, chocolate, cookies, sometimes German Mettwurst too, occasionally eggs and coffee, milk daily and all general items such as writing material etc. Canteen surplus increases the camp savings.

Thanks to the regular deliveries of the military administration, clothing is sufficiently cared for. On Sundays and public holidays uniform is worn, civil internees wear civil clothing. Despite of the clothing vouchers which had to be introduced in Australia too (biggest exporter of wool of the world !) lots of underwear and other factory items are offered for sale every now and then.

Our men are accommodated in tin barracks which were built by our own labor commandos earlier on. 8 - 14 men live in each room, most of them are fitted out quite comfortably. Everybody's beds, cupboards and other furniture are self-made or made by comrades. Everybody has enough woolen blankets to stand the relatively cool nights, so no-one feels cold. Meals are served in four big stone barracks, which by now are also used as common or reading rooms, and are heated in winter. (porcelain china)

Occupation. Each inmate is under obligation to work, unless he is disabled in some way, all members of the army have also been ordered by the Supreme Army Command to extend their intellectual and occupational education under all circumstances. The Australian commander of the camp demands that an acceptable percentage of the internees works in labor groups outside of the camp (planting vegetables, road works, barrack construction, wood works, carpenter's workshop, laundry etc.). The labor groups are supervised by our own sergeants and guarded by one Australian guard each. Working day is 7 - 8 hours, no hard physical labor. 2 hours lunch break, leisure time starting 6 p.m. Treatment by the Australian guards is correct in every way. Australians have always paid more respect to the German than to the Italian prisoner.

A large portion of the men takes part in some course for additional general or occupational training, may it be engineering, navigation or agriculture or preparation for the university entrance exam, there is also a great variety of



language courses. For fair treatment, these course participants are also asked to work in or outside of the camp in regular intervals.

Sport is very popular the whole year through. Football and handball is played daily on spacious pitches, athletics and gymnastics are also often done. A tennis court is also occupied all the time. A music group of 25 men under headed by choir leader Liebig (HM) is responsible for concerts on official festivities and memorial days, for theatre performances and during coffee breaks. A marching band has also been founded a while ago. A big barrack with excellent stage and cinematic equipment including a German sound supported film projector is available for theatre or cinema presentations. American films of political nature are shown 2 - 3 times a week. Own theatre performances are staged every 4 - 6 weeks. Good humorous plays by beginners are always welcome. Additionally, the spacious camp's library is well stocked with good light reading. There is a public reading one night a week. A summary of political and military events based on German - as far as they are known - and foreign (Australian) news is presented twice a week in the theatre barrack. Accordingly, the composure and mood of our men is calm and confident, founded on the imperturbable belief in a German victory.

Hygiene conditions and medical care.

Washing bathing and toilet facilities are impeccable and cater in every respect for our European needs. Apart from cold water there is also enough warm water in summer and winter for washing and cleaning purposes. No vermin is found in the camp. The German doctor of the camp monitors the health conditions in the camp with regular health inspections and weight checks. There is a daily inspection hour, which can be used for treatment by everybody feeling sick. In special cases, specific medical attention is applied for through the Australian doctor of the camp, which to my knowledge has always been carried out very satisfactory. Dental care is carried out quite well by an Australian dentist.

Serious illnesses have not occurred during the 1,5 years I have been the camp's doctor. As mentioned above, infectious illnesses hardly occur. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 1943 Ob. St. doctor Lienhof has taken over medical care.

since our men are totally removed from civil life, they have always been very keen on being assigned to carry out agricultural work on farms, because working under conditions as described above is monotonous in the long run. The Australian agricultural sector is permanently hit by laborer shortage, butter has already been rationed and meat has also been rationed just now. Therefore this wish of our men might be fulfilled soon.

The crew's camp Murchison camp A covers an area of approximately 400 x 300 m, surrounded by barbed wire. The inmate number in May 1943 was roughly 700 men.

- That means
- 1.) One division of approximately 300 men of the Navy („Kormoran" and „Ramses")
  - 2.) One division of approximately 200 members of the Merchant Navy from various ships.
  - 3.) One division of approximately 200 men of the Air Force and Army

German commander of the camp was St. Ob. Fk. Mstr. Köhn.  
Home Headquarters Foreign Affairs hopes that this report is of interest for you.

Heil Hitler !  
p.p. !

{signed Böhm}

Frigate Captain (V)

RMD 4 / 601, Heft 10, cover page, p. 6 - 7, 30 - 33, 45 + map

Operation and Tactics

Analysis of Important Events During Naval War

Booklet 10

The Journey of the Auxiliary Cruiser „Ship 41“ („Kormoran“)  
Korv. Kpt. (Freg. Kpt. since 1/4/1941) Detmers

Secret Matter for Commanders Only, Berlin, December 1943, Chief Naval  
Command, Scientific War Division, Navy Regulation No. 601

{Side view drawing of „Schiff 41“}

**Details About the Crew of the Auxiliary Cruiser „Schiff 41“**

Commander : Korv. Kpt. (Freg. Kpt. since 1/4/41) Detmers

...

...

Navy Staff Doctor Dr. Habben <sup>1)</sup>

...

Prize Officers :

...

acting sub-lt. (S) Berns <sup>2)</sup>

acting sub-lt. (S) Jansen, R. <sup>2)</sup>

acting sub-lt. (S) Kube, Bernh. <sup>2)</sup>

...

acting sub-lt. (S) von Bloh <sup>3)</sup>

...

Navy meteorologist : Reg.- Rat Dr. Wagner  
Additionally approximately 375 sergeants and crew

- 
- 1) Returned home from a prisoner-of-war camp through exchange in 1943  
2) These 3 prize officers came on board of the auxiliary cruiser while the journey was already under way  
3) Returned home as Commander of the prize „Canadolite“

{Top view drawing of „Schiff 41“}

### **Details About the Ship and its Armament of „Ship 41“ <sup>1)</sup>**

Size : 9 400 GRT.

Length : 157 m. Width : 20.2 m. Draught : 8.8 m

Speed : 18 nm (At beginning of journey)

Engine : Diesel - electric with 2 shafts

Oil reserves : 5 200 t

Range : 70 000 nm (at 10 kn) <sup>2)</sup>

#### **Armament :**

Gunnery : 6 - 15 cm SK L / 45 - C / 13  
2 - 3.7 cm anti-aircraft guns (in twin mounts) <sup>3)</sup>  
2 - adjusted 3.7 cm anti tank guns  
5 - 2 cm anti-aircraft machine guns C / 30

Torpedo : 1 set of 7 twin tubes on each side  
1 single 4 tube on each side

Mines : Bottom mines (TMB) and anchor mines (EMC)

Airplanes : 2 „Arado“

Extras : 1 Speed-boat

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<sup>1)</sup> Formerly M. S. „Steiermark“ of the Hamburg-America Line, built in 1938 at Krupp, Germaniawerft A.G.

<sup>2)</sup> Theoretical range at Beaufort 4, 7.3 m draught and :  
10 kn : 84 500 nm  
13 kn : 74 000 nm  
17 kn : 50 000 nm



- <sup>3)</sup> All other auxiliary cruisers were equipped with a 3.7 cm twin anti-aircraft gun, but the shipyard's conversion plans of „Ship 41“ do not make a note of this type of gun.

...

26/10 On the 26<sup>th</sup> of October, the auxiliary cruiser gives notice of the release of „Kulmerland“. This was the last radio message from „Schiff 41“ received at home.

### **Battle With the Cruiser „Sydney“ - Sinking of Both Ships.**

The last remaining copy of the war diary of the ship brought home by „Kulmerland“ ends with the entry on 24/10/1941 :

„Thanks to the fast supply completion I hope to be back in the area of operation by next new moon.“

According to that, it has to be assumed, that the auxiliary cruiser returned to the area north of 20° S after having released the „Kulmerland“. In reality however, the commander decided - as can be derived from the detailed battle report of the ship's doctor Dr. Habben, who has just returned from captivity through exchange - to lay mines near Perth. Just before realisation of this task, a message was received which said that a convoy, escorted by the heavy cruiser „Cornwall“, was supposed to leave Perth. This message caused the Commander to give up laying mines near Perth and to move the area of operation north to the Shark Bay area.

In this part of the ocean, at 25° 34' S and 111° E, which means roughly 130 nautical miles south-west of Shark Bay, the battle between the auxiliary cruiser and the Australian cruiser „Sydney“ was fought on the 19/11, during which both ships sank.

First news about a naval battle in the Australian waters were received at the Naval Command on 24/11. That day, the radio station Sydney transmitted the request of an unknown land command to an unknown steamer to report „details about the battle and the name of the ship from which survivors had been taken aboard“. It took a few more days before the context became known due to a report of the Admiralty from 26/11, which was decoded on 30/11. It read :

„Cruiser „Sydney“ overdue in Fremantle for 6 days. She was on the way back from escorting a convoy. It is thought that she has sunk an enemy raider, but the news about the fate of „Sydney“ is uncertain. A British tanker took German seaman aboard from a life raft, others were found in life boats, of which 2 were reported to have landed in Western Australia. It seems that the „Sydney“ was burning when she was last seen by the Germans.“

At this stage, 30/11, there was only one remaining auxiliary cruiser - „Ship 41“ - at sea, which was operating in the waters concerned, so the ship sunk by the „Sydney“ could only be that auxiliary cruiser.

The aforementioned report about the battle from Dr. Habben reads as follows :

„At approximately 4 p.m. on 19/11/1941 and at 26° 34' S, 111° E, course 25°, medium speed, „Kormoran“ sighted a smoke column ahead, under which a light cruiser turned up very soon after, on course straight towards „Kormoran“. The auxiliary cruiser turned towards port, course 260°, and steered away from the cruiser at full speed, at 18 nm. This course lead into the sun, swell and wind. The cruiser started to follow and continually gained ground at a speed of approximately 25 nm. A lengthy signal conversation developed during which the auxiliary cruiser had hoisted the Dutch flag. All questions signaled by lamp were answered by flag signals, as is the common procedure in merchant shipping. The Commander of the auxiliary cruiser deliberately slowed down the exchange of signals, every now and then a signal was hoisted in an incomplete manner, or „not understood“ was signaled, in order to gain time and to get the cruiser to approach to a very short distance. The Commander had thought through a theoretical situation like this in earlier considerations, and realised them accordingly.

Roughly at 5.30 p.m. both ships were cruising parallel to each other, course 260°, speed 14 nm, at a distance of 900 m. „Sydney“ was positioned on starboard of „Kormoran“. The Commander of the enemy ship obviously considered the auxiliary cruiser to be completely harmless. The ship's plane, originally veered round on a catapult, was veered back again and the engine was killed. Also the guns seemed to be put only on medium alert.

Now only the delivery of the secret code by the auxiliary cruiser was missing in the signal conversation. That answer was given by the order to remove the disguise, which was done in a record time of 6 seconds. Simultaneously to the order to remove the disguise, the war flag and the Commander's pennant were hoisted and the Dutch flag was lowered. The war flag had not quite been fully hoisted when the first round was fired from the first gun. That first round was short, but the second salvo from 3 barrels hit the bridge and the artillery quarter of the enemy. Roughly at the same time the „Kormoran“ fired the second salvo, „Sydney“ fired her first salvo which went far beyond the auxiliary cruiser. The third salvo of the „Kormoran“ hit the second turret of the enemy, lifted its top and as a result prevented the first turret from turning. Therefore the enemy had only the two rear turrets left for use. The ship's plane, just veered round and started again was also destroyed by a direct hit. After the according run time had passed, the bow of the „Sydney“ received a torpedo hit just before the first turret, fired by the set of starboard surface tubes of „Kormoran“. The torpedo tore a large hole into the side. The bow sank in drastically, and it seemed for a moment

that the cruiser would go under. Therefore the speed of the enemy was heavily reduced. The 3.7 cm anti-tank guns below the bridge and the 2 cm anti-aircraft guns supported the attack of the main battery in a superb manner. They prevented the torpedo tubes and the light guns of the enemy from becoming manned, which was tried again and again, and they obviously also caused numerous losses of personnel in the coordinating posts of the cruiser.

The enemy replied only with single shots from the third and fourth turret. A central gunnery command was obviously not in action. These turrets succeeded in hitting „Kormoran“ three times, which unfortunately had grave consequences :

The first hit went through the funnel, detonated in lee and sprayed the radio room with its splinters, killing 2 soldiers.

The second hit destroyed the boiler compartment and an adjacent oil tank of the auxiliary cruiser. This destruction caused the normal, as well as the foam fire fighting equipment to go out of order.

The third hit destroyed the transformers of the main engine.

A fourth shell, a dud, blew over some of the crew from the third gun, later on some of them died of their wounds.

The consequences of the hits were very grave. A heavy fire with thick smoke and numerous electrical discharges was set off in the engine room. Due to the loss of the transformers, the load of the main engines was removed and the engines were racing; the chief engineer, the electrical engineer and 14 sergeants and crew of the engine room personnel tried their very best to fight the fire and to restore the engine. They had to pay for this effort with their life, they did not leave the engine room.

In the meantime, the „Sydney“ had slightly fallen behind because of her reduced speed, and then she tried to ram the disabled „Kormoran“ at her stern. Well aimed salvos, especially from the fifth gun prevented that. „Sydney“ passed through behind the stern of „Kormoran“ and slowly - at roughly 5 - 6 nm - steamed away due south. While moving away, the set of starboard torpedo tubes of the „Sydney“ fired 4 torpedoes, all of them missing their target. The next torpedo went about 150 m past the stern of „Kormoran“.

The enemy, whose turrets stayed turned to her port, was heavily bombarded by the artillery of the auxiliary cruiser while moving away. Salvo after salvo hit the ship, especially along the water line, piercing it considerably. The battery of the auxiliary cruiser shot at a rate of about 4 -5 seconds and in the end, approximately 500 shells had been fired. The artillery of the auxiliary cruiser has definitely rendered

outstanding services to the destruction of the enemy.

At dusk at roughly 6 p.m., the enemy leaves the range of the guns of the auxiliary cruiser on the rear port side of „Kormoran“ at a distance of 10 400 m, burning heavily, emitting repeated explosions and then slowly disappearing over the horizon. At about 11 p.m. a final glow was seen. This could be considered the point in time the cruiser sank.

Meanwhile, the fire on board of the „Kormoran“ had spread out and due to the destroyed fire fighting equipment there was no chance of fighting it. The Commander ordered the crew with the exception of the gunners to abandon ship. Since some of the boats were situated within the burning zone, some rubber dinghies and floats had to be used as rescue equipment apart from the lifeboats. 2 steel lifeboats stored under hatch I were also set to sea. This was especially complicated because no mechanical aid at all was available for lifting the heavy boats. The gunners who stayed aboard succeeded in moving the boats out of the hatch towards the railing with ropes and makeshift tools, where they were thrown overboard. Due to their big capacity, their stability in swell, and their good motor, these boats have been particularly successful during the rescue mission.

About 20 men were lost in combat. Unfortunately further 60 men of the crew drowned while abandoning ship, because a large, fully occupied rubber dinghy burst and its crew fell into the water at darkness and rough seas.

While the crew abandoned ship, the fire got dangerously close to the stored mines. A guard had to take position in order to find out for how much longer soldiers could stay aboard without taking the risk of the ship exploding because of the mines. Ship's mate Rotzin and lance corporal Schleppergrell are especially worthy of mentioning in regard to this surveillance mission. It was discovered that remaining aboard was no longer acceptable.

Therefore the Commander had the flag and pennant lowered, and then hoisted on the Commander's lifeboat at 00.10 a.m. on November the 20<sup>th</sup>. At 00.15 a.m. the Commander abandoned the ship, which sank stern first at 00.35 a.m. Beforehand, an explosion had occurred in an ammunition hold that could not be flooded due to the destroyed pipe, and subsequently, the stern section blew up after detonation of the load of mines.

The successful sinking by the „Kormoran“ was aided by several major mistakes of the enemy :

The enemy had failed to stop the ship to be investigated. She came far too close and the light guns were not manned at all. These circumstances made the daring mission of „Kormoran“'s Commander easier to attack the superior cruiser all of a sudden.



The weather became rougher during the night so that the boats got separated and sailed towards the Australian coast in different groups. A coastal steamer which took a lifeboat aboard gave notice of the battle for the first time. That message initiated a thorough search by the Australian Navy and Air Force. The pleasing result of this search was, that all lifeboats and rafts of the „Kormoran“ were found. No survivor, and not even a tiny bit of wreckage of the „Sydney“ has ever been found <sup>1)</sup>. The surprising success of the „Kormoran“ was not believed in Australia. According to Australian specialists, „Kormoran“ cooperated with a submarine, which gave the cruiser the final blow. The crew has been treated fair in Australian captivity and has kept its good cruiser spirit alive.

One of the officers writes about the battle and the following journey to the Australian continent as follows :

“a)

Our journey came to it's climax and to it's end after the sinking of the Australian cruiser „Sydney“ on 19/11/1941 (public holiday). We had to abandon our burning ship. After we had succeeded in rescuing the survivors - including the wounded - in difficult conditions, almost all of us reached the shore or were taken aboard ships. Fortunately, we had little losses in combat itself.

My cutter, badly overcrowded like the others, landed approximately 80 km north of Carnarvon (Western Australia) after 6 days of dangerous sailing full of privation. The boat was 8.5 m long, 2.8 m wide and had a crew of 57. That meant standing and sitting in turns, lying down was of course out of question.

b)

Journey of the lifeboat in permanent life-threatening danger resulting in worst psychological and physical hardships :

Overcrowded boat with the sides rising only slightly above water level, packed like herrings (No chance to move for 6 days, no lying down, and practically no sleep). Sometimes continuous baling out, always wet, burned skin during the day, grinding teeth because of the cold at night, daily rations shrunk to a minimum (a few pieces of hard bread, some bacon, one cup of liquid), ablution that difficult, that most of us refrained from it. Stormy night and morning, unfavorable winds dragging us offshore after that; danger to drift too far North into the desert zone where the pilot Hans Bertram was almost killed (seemed to be true while closing in towards the shore !). Exceptional nautical problems too : working with a makeshift rudder (home made) and home made rigging of sails. Many hallucinating crew members. Injuries : just burnt skin and badly swollen feet due to the hardships, so at first, many were unable to



walk. But only rarely long term injuries. Danger of hallucinating people jumping overboard. Landing point roughly 100 km north of Carnarvon."

After presentation of the last copy of the war diary of „Ship 41" that found its way home, the Naval Command concluded in regard of the journey of the auxiliary cruiser as follows <sup>21</sup> :

„The war diary concerned gives a complete overview over the entire operation, only the last 3 weeks are missing. It will not be possible to gather detailed information about that before the Commander and crew have returned from the prisoner-of-war camp.

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<sup>11</sup> The ship had a crew of 603 and 42 officers

<sup>21</sup> 1. SKL 17456 /42 Gkdos from 30/5/42.

## List of the Ships Captured by „Ship 41“.

No.	Captured on	Nationality and Name	Size in GRT	Cargo	From / via to	Whereabouts
1	6/11/1941	Greek steamer „Antonis“	3 729	4 800 t of coal	Cardiff / Rosario	6/11/1941 sunk
2	18/1/1941	English tanker „British Union“	6 987	Ballast	Gibraltar / Trinidad / Aruba	18/1/1941 sunk
3	29/1/1941	English cold-storage vessel „Afric Star“	11 900	5 708 t meat, 634 t butter	Buenos Aires / England	29/1/1941 sunk
4	29/1/1941	English steamer „Eurylochus“	5 723	Airplanes	England / Takoradi (Gold Coast)	29/1/1941 sunk
5	22/3/1941	English Motor-tanker „Agnita“	3 561	Ballast	Freetown / Carapito - Venezuela	22/3/1941 sunk
6	25/3/1941	English tanker „Canadolite“	11 309	Ballast	Freetown / Venezuela	Prize   sent to Gironde on 25/3, arrived there 13/4/1941
7	9/4/1941	English steamer „Craftsman“	8 022	Anti-submarine nets for Kapstadt	Rosyth / Kapstadt	9/4/1941 sunk
8	12/4/1941	Greek steamer „Nicolao D. L.“	5 486	Timber	Vancouver / Durban	12/4/1941 sunk
9	26/6/1941	Yugoslavian steamer „Velebit“	4 153	Ballast	Bombay / Moulmein	26/6/1941 sunk
10	26/6/1941	Australian steamer „Mareeba“	3 472	5 000 t of raw sugar	Batavia / Colombo	26/6/1941 sunk
11	23/9/1941	Greek steamer „Stamatios G. Embiricos“	3 941	Ballast	Mombasa / Colombo	24/9/1941 sunk
12	sunk on 19/11/1941	Australian cruiser „Sydney“	6 830 t	8 - 15.2 cm, 8 - 10.2 cm, anti-aircr. guns, 6 t.t. 1 airplane commissioned 1935	in West Australian waters	19/11/1941 sunk

11 merchant vessels of.....68,283 GRT, with 1 prize of 11,309 GRT, which returned home  
1 cruiser of.....6,830 t

Draft Version.

Naval War Command

Berlin, the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 1942

{stamped : Secret ! For Commander only !}

Comment of the Naval War Command in Regard to the War Diary „Ship 41“.

The war diary concerned covers the time between commissioning and 24/10/1941. On 19/11/1941 the auxiliary cruiser was lost during a battle with the Australian cruiser „Sydney“.

The war diary concerned gives a complete overview over the entire operation, only the last three weeks are missing. Learning about the details in that regard will not become an option before the Commander and crew have returned from the prisoner-of-war camp. The operation of „Ship 41“ is an excellently conducted mission, with an end that deserves to be highlighted due to the sinking of an Australian cruiser and the virtually unique nature of that act. The Commander's judgment in regard to all operative and tactical issues demonstrates a very well developed sense of intuition towards the conditions of auxiliary cruiser warfare, and he has lead his ship to good successes.

As a result, 11 ships of altogether 68,274 GRT and the Australian cruiser „Sydney“ of 6,830 t were sunk.

Even though the loss of the ship is regrettable as such, the mission forms a very successful entity, of which the sudden end was entirely compensated for by the sinking of the cruiser.

Due to wise nautical leadership, by far the majority of the crew could be saved and is held as prisoners-of-war in Australia at the moment, whereas the Australian cruiser sank with all of her crew.

The Commander has been awarded the Knight's Cross together with the Iron Cross by the Führer and the Chief Commander for the excellent command of his auxiliary cruiser as well as the sinking of the cruiser „Sydney“.

1/Skl.

la

lb

lk

{various signatures}

**BM 100 / 176, p. 173 + reverse**

Supplement to the War Diary of „Ship 41“

Report of an Officer of the Auxiliary Cruiser „Cormoran“ {Misspelling,  
„Cormoran“ was a WW I auxiliary cruiser} about the Rescue of the Crew and  
Conditions in the Camp.

Sender writes :

{This report is practically identical to the quotation in RMD 4 / 601, Heft 10,  
and has been translated there.}

{stamped : received 18/11/42}

{stamped : to Kr 1.Skl. p.p. I ac}

Navy Military Department I

Berlin, the 16<sup>th</sup> of January 1942

{stamped : Secret matter for Command only}

To the Campaign Division of the Naval War Command [1. Abt. / 1. Skl.]

Re. : Crew of auxiliary cruiser „Cormoran“.

Procedure : OKM to AMA / M Military I bw B. Nr 1024 /42 from 13/1/42

It has been derived from a report of the Division for Home Affairs Overseas, that Special Leader (Captain Lieutenant) O t z e l is apparently staying in Japan. That is what the Division for Home Affairs Overseas says it has told the Campaign Division of the Naval War Command. So far, the Navy Military Department, responsible in-house authority for personnel issues concerning crew matters has not received any report concerning the statement that members of the crew are staying in Japan.

Since directives about notifications of relatives in regard to actual losses are given from here, the Navy Military Department needs to be told about such changes in personnel of the crews of auxiliary cruisers, so that relatives are not alarmed by wrong notifications, and the trust in official information is not damaged.

The Navy Military Department therefore kindly asks, that all personnel matters reported to the Naval Command are also submitted to the Navy Military Department. Furthermore it is kindly requested to get the attaché of the Navy in Tokyo to report the crew members of auxiliary cruisers or their prizes staying in Japan.

p.p.

{signature not readable}

{Hand written reply, \* standing for unreadable words :}

Navy Military Department I bw orally \* from remote base, that Otzel is not in Japan. Otzel is at/on blockade \* with some \* {comrades ?}. information {or arrival ?} [=Ankunft or Auskunft ?] in 1 to 1.5 weeks. \* report about this/these \* will not be filed.



23/11/1941 {Under „War in Distant Waters, Own Situation“ :}

Informing Ship 41 about enemy ship movements in the Indian Ocean by Ft. 1037. Information about enemy position by Fs. 0056, 0705 and 1224.

24/11/1941 {Under „War in Distant Waters, Own Situation“ :}

Informing Ship 41 by FT 0110 about request of unknown land command from 24/11 to steamer by radio saying „B I W D“ - report by W T details engagement and name ship from which survivors were rescued“, Naval Command adding „Context not known“. This message allows to assume that some action has happened in the operational area of Ship 41. Details are not known yet.

Exceptional message to Ship 41 about enemy ship movements in the Indian Ocean by Ft. 0451. General information about enemy position by FT 2037.

30/11/1941 {Under „War in Distant Waters, Own Situation“ :}

According to decoded English report of the Admiralty from 26/11 the cruiser „Sydney“ has been overdue in Fremantle for 6 days. Sinking by enemy raider is assumed. Details are not given. German sailors in lifeboats have been sighted and partially taken aboard.

This can only be Ship 41, apparently having sunk the cruiser „Sydney“ and then sinking in one way or another as well. Details are not known yet.

## Appendix C

### Names and ID Codes of German WW II Raiders

Name	HSK Code	Schiff Code	Raider Code	M.Dv. Heft *
Atlantis	2	16	C	5
Coronel		14	K	
Hansa		5		
Komet	7	45	B	14
Kormoran	8	41	G	10
Michel	9	28	H	
Orion	1	36	A	15
Pinguin	5	33		6
Stier	6	23	J	
Thor	4	10	E	7
Widder	3	21	D	8

Source : Index Book [Findbuch] RM 100 : Hilfskreuzer der Kriegsmarine 1939 - 1945; Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv.  
 Index Book [Findbuch] RMD 4 (M.Dv. Publications);  
 Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv.

\* M. Dv. stands for Marine Dienstvorschrift or Navy Regulation. During late WW II, a series called M. Dv. No. 601 consisting of several booklets about specific auxiliary cruisers was published. This column lists the Heft Nr. or issue related to the listed raiders. All available issues are filed in the Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv under RMD 4, and therefore the full archive ID for the issue about Pinguin for example would be RMD 4 / 601, Heft 6.

## **Appendix D**

### **Address and Staff of Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv Freiburg :**

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Herr Döringhoff (RHS), Archivist  
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Knows about HSK Kormoran / HMAS Sydney : 0761 - 47817 866

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Knows about HSK Kormoran / HMAS Sydney : 0761 - 47817 860

Frau Notzke, Archivist / Librarian, (Reading Room) : 0761 - 47817 911

Frau Himmelsbach, Copy Centre : 0761 - 47817 908