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## William Ian Weir

1

### *HMAS SYDNEY – AN AFTERMATH*

*By W I Weir*

1. This rewrite is a more complete and updated account than those submitted to the 'End Secrecy on Sydney Group', 'The HMAS Sydney Foundation Trust' and to the 'Battye Library'. Since then I have supplied a copy of my recollections of the expedition to Red Bluff to recover a camera said to have been buried there by Lieut Fritz (Dr) List of the German Raider Kormoran, to Mr M McCarthy of the Maritime Museum in Fremantle and to The Shire Clerk of the Shire of Carnarvon. Red Bluff is some eighty (80) miles north of Carnarvon in Western Australia.
2. This record is born out of conversations with Mr M McCarthy and a Mr E McDonald of 32 Watsonia Road, Goosberry Hill and correspondence with a Mr B Clark who at that time lived in Carnarvon. All these gentlemen urged me to record my personal involvement in this facet of the historical aftermath resulting from the loss of HMAS Sydney, generally referred to as 'THE RETURN TO RED BLUFF'.
3. My first connection with the saga of the Sydney occurred in November 1941, whilst serving in the RAAF at No 9 Elementary Flying Training School (9EFTS) which was situated at Cunderdin in Western Australia.
4. Cunderdin is situated approximately one hundred and sixty (160) kilometres east of Perth (the State Capital) on the Great Eastern Highway to the Eastern States and other local towns. The Goldfields water supply main conduit passes through the townsite. One of several pumping stations for this supply was situated in Cunderdin. The East/West Transcontinental Railway skirts the town on its northern boundary, as does the Mortlock River, a tributary of the Avon/Swan system. Further north again was the site for the aerodrome used by the RAAF as part of the Empire Air Training Scheme.
5. There was a lot of hurried activity, men, rations, arms and vehicles were assembled and disappeared into the wide blue yonder. No official explanation was made but it was later learned that the reason for all this activity was directly related to the loss of Sydney. I do not remember the names of any of the personnel involved but RAAF records of the transport drivers serving at Cunderdin at that time, or their descendants, may turn up something useful. Either 'Stan' or 'Norman' Brearley was the Commanding Officer of the Unit at that time. The first question is, what connection, if any, exist with the report by Sgt Anderson (*Appendix A*) and my comments on that report (*Appendix B*) suggesting that the activities at 9EFTS Cunderdin may have been related to the military guard which arrived in Carnarvon on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1941. I realise that this may be a very remote possibility and may prove impossible to verify.

however the possibility does exist and must not be ignored. The mystery regarding that expedition therefore remains as does the suggested possibility.

6. My next, and direct involvement occurred whilst I was serving at No. 71 Operational Base Unit (71OBU) which was situated at the Aerodrome at Carnarvon. The drome served military and civil aircraft, mainly a RAAF Courier/Transport Service and Mc Robertson Millar Airlines, who used Twin Engined Lockheed Electra Aircraft; with occasional American, Dutch and English military aircraft dropping in for supplies and service. A notice in "VETAFFAIRS" led me to a John M Scrimgeour in Queensland. His letter of 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1999 states that thirty-four (34) squadron operated a courier/transport service to and through Carnarvon at that time.
7. Carnarvon is a port town at the mouth of the Gascoyne River, some nine hundred (900) kilometres north of Perth. In those days (1940's) the town was fairly isolated, being reached by air via McRobertson Millar Airlines, or aboard one of the State Shipping Service vessels, one of which was the Koolinda or Overland by following the telephone line along a rough track. The North West Highway is a relatively recent amenity.
8. The Aerodrome occupied by the RAAF is situated on the eastern edge of the town and was subject to periodic flooding by the Gascoyne River, therefore in 1943/1944 a levee bank was constructed by Bell Bros along its north and west boundary. The base was first occupied by the RAAF in May 1942 and was vacated in February 1946. I arrived in October 1943 and did not leave until February 1946 apart from a few days compassionate leave in early 1944 or thereabouts.
9. The airmen were, in the main, quartered in two houses, one in Robinson Street at least one lot west of James Street. I understand that this house was later moved into and facing James Street approximately opposite the other house which is in James Street several lots east of Robinson Street. Mr B Clark apparently owned this building until recently. There were approximately fifty (50) men on the base at any one time.
10. As an aside, and for the official record, it is interesting to recall:
  - (a) Japanese aircraft were often seen over the Drome. On one occasion I was 'buzzed' by one of their aircraft. They obviously knew that we had no defence facilities. Hence their low level intrusions.
  - (b) The Dutch military intelligence maintained a radio listening post in the Port Hotel. There were at least three (3) servicemen involved in the operation.

- (c) The Australian Army maintained a Corporal and a Private at Carnarvon. Their sole duty was to arrange for and supply rations to the RAAF Base.
  - (d) Two squadrons of 'Spitfire' and some one hundred (100) support aircraft passed through Carnarvon on their way to defend Perth against a feared invasion. One 'Spitfire' had to crash (belly) land. I cannot remember its fate. I understand these aircraft were previously stationed in Darwin in the Northern Territory.
11. Whilst at Carnarvon an article appeared in 'The Mirror' Newspaper, a scandal sheet of those times regarding a German Prisoner of War receiving preferential air transport to this State. This article included a photograph of Lieut (Dr) Fritz List. This article was located by Mr Bryan Clark of Carnarvon many years later. A similar report appeared in 'The Sunday Times' Newspaper on the 9<sup>th</sup> December 1945. This report was located by Mr Frank Dunn of 'The Sunday Times' in the record held by the Battye Library. I have added a typed copy of this report as Appendix (H). The question arises as to what reporting of the various events relating to Sydney were published in 'The Northern Times' Newspaper. I understand that copies of this Carnarvon Newspaper can be viewed at the Battye Library and the Carnarvon Shire Library and this I intend to do. From memory a Mr Jim Richard was the Editor of that publication at that time.
  12. The initial shock was the arrival of Lieut M F Yarra and Doctor Fritz List in Carnarvon. Again no explanation was made. They lived with us for about a week, during which time Lieut Yarra obviously contacted Mr Arthur (Coocher) Snook to act as guide to Red Bluff.
  13. Several days later an Australian Army Engineer Lieut presumably his name was 'Willis' but we were not told, arrived in Carnarvon. He was accompanied by an Army Corporal with an unserviceable mine detector. See Appendices (C) and (D).
  14. These two, together with Dr List, Lieut Yarra, our Commanding Officer, Mr Snook and up to five RAAF Servicemen, including myself, set out from 710BU for Red Bluff in a RAAF vehicle. In spite of my most determined efforts I cannot recall the names of the RAAF personnel who made the trip. From records that have come to hand it is certain that leading Aircraftsman A A (Bill) Firms and Corporal Les Le Poidevin were both members of the party. Letters from Bill dated 15<sup>th</sup> March 1996 and Les dated 16<sup>th</sup> August 1998 confirm my story. Other possibilities are Lac's H W Barrat, K C Cadd, A E Ford, G H Graham, L J Hourigan, W R Martin, W G Morcon, D E Schollefield, Corporal A B Clugston or G F Meyer. See paragraph nine (9) of Appendix (C).
  15. Short of Quobba Station Homestead we halted and a heated discussion obviously took place between Lt Yarra, Mr Snook and our Commanding Officer. Mr Snook and our C.O. apparently advising Lt Yarra to say 'Good Day' to Mr Baston, the

Owner/Manager of Quobba Station. Lt Yarra did not heed this advice, another obvious official blunder so we all proceeded on to Red Bluff as quickly as possible.

16. We abandoned the vehicle at an 'Outcamp' some distance from the beach, clambered down the steep sandy and rocky cliff to the beach then walked along the beach to the cave. This took the best part of an hour. The cave has two openings, one facing the sea, the other facing northwards along the beach. I intend to return to the area in the near future and carry out some time and distance studies and take a number of photographs.
17. When Dr List entered the cave, through the seaward entrance, he paused momentarily, looked up at a spot high on the back wall, then down to the floor of the cave and indicated where we should dig. I and the other RAAF personnel dug a hole in the sandy floor some two foot deep and some six to eight feet wide at the top. No camera, the alleged object of the whole operation was found, so Lt Yarra called a halt for lunch.
18. After lunch the mine detector was produced. An area of the beach adjacent to the seaward entrance, but outside the cave was to be swept but as the machine would not function, it was discarded after a few minutes. This concluded our efforts to find the camera, so we packed up and returned to Carnarvon after about two hours at the actual site. This included time out for lunch, so it must be said that it was not a very thorough or sustained search. Why on earth was the search by mine detector only focussed on the beach outside the cave, surely it would have required the inside of the cave to be given first priority.
19. Was Barbara Winter obviously relying largely on the official account when she wrote in her book:
  - (a) Someone's idea of '*Strict Secrecy*' was to send him (Dr List) in uniform on a commercial flight, as though German Naval uniform were so common that one more would cause no comment. See page 222 of her book.
  - (b) On page 223 is the phrase "*There was equipment to gather*". My comment on that is to ask what equipment other than an unserviceable mine detector and some shovels.
  - (c) On the same page she was obviously told that group Captain Hanna accompanied the party (to Carnarvon) to facilitate arrangements on the spot. I have no memory of such an important visitation.
  - (d) On page 224 she refers to the speculation on the action of the sea sweeping clean the floor of the cave and the subsequent replacing of the missing sand. Possible of course.

- (e) On the same page it appears she was told that a platoon from the Engineering Corps under the command of Lt J Willis shoveled tons of sand out of the cave and patrolled the beach with mine detectors. This operation went on for a week. I believe a platoon can comprise some twenty (20) persons and was told these men were provided with transport and rations from 710BU. As the Equipment Officer for the base I would have been aware of such a drain on our limited resources, therefore I can say quite categorically that this is pure fiction. Why?
20. In retrospect I would say that Lt Yarra, who was obviously ill with stomach trouble at the time, was eager to get back to Melbourne, make his report and disappear from centre stage. Dr List on the other hand was obviously and justifiably unhappy with the effort put into the search. Dr List is subsequently reported to have had very little to do with researchers and intelligence people. Perhaps the performance of Lt Yarra was partly to blame. It would be interesting to know the exact orders Lt Yarra received for the conduct of the search. If those orders were ever reduced to writing and if "Yarra" was the real name of the Lieutenant.
21. There is grave doubt about the real name of Lt Yarra. It appears his family emigrated from Germany and adopted "Yarra" as their family name. He entered the military using "Yarra" as his name. His knowledge of the German language must have assisted his entry into the Intelligence Section. He did not show much intelligence in refusing to say "Good Day" to Mr Baston of Quobba Station. His action is officially excused on the grounds that his 'orders' were to maintain "Strict Secrecy" about the whole operation.
22. Incidentally Lt Yarra told us, almost as an aside, that we were bound by the provisions of the "Official Secrets" Act not to disclosed any of the days events. This statement was made while we were all on the beach just prior to departure. I have honoured this request for some fifty years, however as we were not required to formally undertake such an obligation I do not believe one exists. Due to the lapse of time and changed circumstances on one hand and secondly as this is a factual history of what actually happened, it can hardly be said to prejudice national security any more than the official record, if one actually exists.
23. There is some doubt as to when the operation occurred. Evidence from a number of sources definitely point to early December 1945 as the actual time. As proof of this the reports of Captain Horwood and Lt Yarra, the newspaper articles appearing in "The Sunday Times" on 9 December 1945 all point directly to December in spite of the assertions by Lt T Frame of the Royal Australian Navy to the effect that Dr List made his alleged revelation in February 1945.

24. Assuming Lt Frame was correct, it does appear an inordinately long time, and highly unlikely, that the military would fail to act for some ten (10) months and then wrap up the actual search in a very few hours.
25. Having talked to Dr List on a number of occasions it would, in my opinion, be unlikely and out of character for him to have made such revelations regarding the camera before the cessation of hostilities on 8 May 1945 (V E Day) and most probably not before the 15 August 1945 (V J Day). Further I believe he would not have been permitted by his superiors to make such a revelation before May, 1945 at the earliest. These probabilities further strengthen the case for December, 1945 being the time this expedition was carried out, thus casting grave doubts about another of Lt Frame's many assertions.
26. Several years later I was contacted by Mr Jonothan Robotham, an ex army intelligence officer. He spent a lot of time at Red Bluff, wrote a book on the subject but did not, or could not, get it published. Copies of the manuscript exist in Battye Library, and I understand in the Carnarvon Shire Library. The manuscript is titled "*Eagle in the Crows Nest*". This meeting raises an important question "*How did Mr Robotham obtain my name as a participant in the 'Return to Red Bluff'?*".
27. Paragraph Twenty-six (26) also poses the question of why a book written by John Robotham and another by Bryan Clark have not been published. From what I have been able to read of the draft of the book by John Robotham there is very little, if anything, to preclude its publication and therefore its contribution to posterity. I cannot comment on the book by Bryan Clark as I have not seen the draft.
28. My next involvement was as a result of an article by Bryan Clark of Carnarvon which appeared in "The West Australian" Newspaper in August/September 1991. I wrote to Bryan pointing out that it was basically RAAF personnel involved in the "*Return to Red Bluff*". This has initiated some correspondence back and forth over the years.
29. An item in the West Australian Newspaper on 14 September 1992 led me to the "*End Secrecy On Sydney*" Group which included Mrs Moylan, Mr Doohan and Mr McArthur. Arising from this contact I prepared a written report for the group. That report was basically the same as the facts recorded so far herein. Strangely this report was *LOST* so I provided a further copy. I understand that my account was not well received in certain circles as it refuted the official line, and was described as a issue of lies, a common tactic. This naturally upset me, I dislike being called a liar, so I set out to prove my story, for my own peace of mind as well as to set the record straight for posterity. I have continued periodic correspondence with John McArthur over the years.

30. Firstly I read the book by Barbara Winter regarding the Sydney (twice) and as a result I wrote to her querying several assertions, her reply of 11<sup>th</sup> February 1993 refers. In essence her book and those by Michael Montgomery, Lt T Frame, what I have been able to read of the book by Capt Detmers or of the manuscript by John Robotham were of no help to me in my particular field of investigation.
31. Secondly I prepared a list of personnel whom I remember as being at 710BU Carnarvon about the time of *"The Return to Red Bluff"*, and tried by use of telephone books, electoral rolls, etc to locate them and so verify my story. Many of the airmen had died or could not be located. Eventually I found Mr A A (Bill) Firms of Dardanup in Western Australia. His letter of the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1996 refers and verifies my recollections.
32. My next venture was to write to *"The HMAS Sydney Foundation Trust"* through Mr Paul Filing M.H.R. on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1996 enclosing a copy of the reports made to the "ESOS" Group. This report was also allegedly *LOST*, so a further copy was supplied to a Mr Punchard. Receipt of that copy has been acknowledged.
33. On 7<sup>th</sup> March 1997 I wrote to the Australian Archives in Dixon A.C.T. asking for a copy of the report by Lt Yarra and a statement by Dr List regarding *"The Return to Red Bluff"*. The report by Lt Yarra and my memories of that day vary in many ways. See Appendices (C) and (D). I provided Mr Punchard with a copy of that report and my written comments thereon. The report did however confirm my contention regarding RAAF involvement in the operation.
34. In view of the articles appearing in The West Australian Newspaper on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> June 1995 it would not be unreasonable to assume that perhaps Lt Yarra was more interested in locating the gold/coin from KORMORAN than the camera he was allegedly endeavouring to locate.
35. From inquiries I have made it does appear certain that raiders such as KORMORAN did carry adequate gold/coin in order to pay for necessary goods and services at friendly or neutral ports. Whether this gold/coin was brought ashore or not is another mystery. If it was not then location of the wreck of the KORMORAN would appear to be one of high priority.
36. If on the other hand the gold/coin was loaded into one of the five (5) known lifeboat from KORMORAN, then there are a number of possibilities.
  - (a) Had the gold/coin been loaded into one or more of the lifeboats taken into tow by passing ships, then obviously the gold/coin would have been jettisoned at some appropriate time to prevent it falling into enemy (our) hands; or
  - (b) Of the two lifeboats which are said to have come ashore, one at Red Bluff and the other at some distance south, the gold/coin could have been hidden

at either site. This means that there are many hectares of beach and land to be searched. Was this what Jonothan Robotham was really about?

- (c) Would not some of the German survivors, who were aware of the hiding place for this gold/coin, have made some serious effort to recover this treasure. Apparently this did not occur, therefore it is logical to assume that this gold/coin was not hidden on the Western Australian coast and may still be in the wreck of KORMORAN.
  - (d) Is there a possibility of a sixth lifeboat being launched from KORMORAN and if so what became of it? It is now known that some eighty (80) German Sailors remain unaccounted for. Given that a number of these would have been killed in the battle where are these lost seamen?
  - (e) Historically it is important to know the fate of all these lifeboats, rafts etc, how they were recovered, by whom and where are these boats today.
37. Presumably Sydney was also provided with a similar supply of funds, in which case the location of the wreck would have a second purpose, namely financial gain.
38. As an ex-serviceman I am very aware of the importance the RAAF placed on the communication of information of all kinds to higher authority. I am also aware that Sgt Mel Kitson from the orderly room prepared a daily record of the activities at the base, Mr N T Durham in his letter of 23 June 1998 confirms this practice. I cannot believe that the navy did not have similar practices in place, as well as the responsibility to report emergency situations. Naval headquarters must therefore have a number of "Signals" initiated by SYDNEY prior to and during the encounter with KORMORAN. To deny this must inevitably lead to the assumption of a "Cover Up" which should and must be put to rest.
39. Regarding the various facts, theories, conjectures, all too scarce official records, and denials put forward from time to time concerning the loss of SYDNEY, it would from my reading of the books by Messrs Frame, Montgomery, Robtham, Winter and Detmers, personal knowledge and other information that I have been able to acquire, that:-
- (a) Tom Frame, as a naval historian, tried very hard to defend the navy, to discredit or disregard any facts or disparage any theories advanced on the basis of lack of proof, yet expected his assertions, no matter how incorrect, to be accepted as indisputable. He did not convince.
  - (b) Michael Montgomery tried to defend Capt Burnett but in view of Barbara Winter's summation of Capt Burnett's actual seagoing experience, Montgomery also failed to convince. Michael also condemned the responses of the German POW's under interrogation. He completely



ignores the fact that these people had a duty to refrain, evade or even lie when replying to questions.

- (c) Barbara Winter was certainly the most balanced in her writing. She compared the firepower of the two boats pointed out the problems of gun and torpedo control suffered by SYDNEY, a fact which should have been of considerable concern to the Navy and the Government of the day, the problems with the bearings on the drive shaft of KORMORAN, the lack of sea going and command experience of Capt Burnett. None of these facts have been refuted. The only criticism of her writings would be that she appeared to follow the official line too closely.
  - (d) From what I have been able to read of Capt Detmers book, that gentleman was not impressed by the tactics used or forced upon Capt Burnett throughout the engagement.
40. My research has raised more questions than answers, grave doubts about the veracity of the contents of such official document as I have been able to acquire, nasty suspicions where no answers have been provided and glaring examples of acceptance of situations which should not have existed or have been allowed to exist. Examples of the absence of answers leading to doubts, suspicious, unsatisfactory and unacceptable situation are referred to throughout this account, we must ask:
- (a) Why did the Navy Heirachy and the Government of the day who were well aware of the deficiencies in the control of the armament on SYDNEY, do nothing to correct these deficiencies, thus endangering the vessel and its company/
  - (b) Why, in view of the known inexperience of Capt Burnett in command and seagoing experience, appoint him to such an important position.
  - (c) Capt Burnett is continually being cited as being a strict follower of orders. Is it not therefore logical to assume he was following order in making a broadside approach to KORMORAN and to such close range, and therefore became the "Fall Guy".
  - (d) National security is continually being used as an excuse for not providing answers to untasteful questions. The given reason being to hide the fact that the Japanese secret codes had been broken. This was a valid reason in the 1940's but some sixty (60) years later can no longer be justified. Obviously national security is still being used as an excuse to protect some unknown fact/s, event/s or person/s.

- (e) Why do we persist in refusing to accept that SYDNEY and KORMORAN were capable of similar firepower, therefore the eventual result came down to tactics, experience, discipline and luck.
- (f) Where are the 'Signals' generated by SYDNEY; there obviously were some. I understand SYDNEY had trouble with its wireless equipment. What else was wrong with Sydney. It appear she was catastrophe going somewhere to happen.

41. My research is running into a lot of 'dead ends' due to the lack of accurate official records, the lack of knowledge as to how and where to locate such reports. A number of necessary reports appear to be classified as restricted, unavailable and even destroyed in the interest of national security. Other causes are the death of, inability to locate personnel who were present at the time, or their descendants, or the failing memories of such personnel when found, after fifty plus years for example a request for specific information resulted in a letter from Air Force Headquarters dated 15<sup>th</sup> July 1997 which said, and I quote:

*"As that Department does not maintain nominal rolls of individuals that serve at different units or bases I regret that I am unable to provide you with a list of personnel that served at Carnarvon in 1945."*

This poses the questions:

- (a) How did Jonothan Robotham obtain my name as a participants in the return to Red Bluff. See paragraph twenty-six (26) hereof.
- (b) How did Mr N T Durham locate and forward me a complete list of airmen who were stationed at 710BU in Carnarvon during its entire operation. See Norm's letter of 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1998.

Apparently I am asking the wrong people the wrong question.

42. Concerning the German lifeboats that came ashore north of Carnarvon, Sgt Anderson reported (see Appendix A) that the local customs officer and Constable Sullivan were to recover these boats and relevant equipment. No official record appears to exist of any report by either of these individuals to their respective superiors, on such operation. The Customs Department letter dated 26<sup>th</sup> February 1999 and the Police Department letter of that date refer. The Western Australian Archives were contacted on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1999 and were unable to supply any information on this matter. This is quite unbelievable, especially in the circumstances. Barbara Winter provides some information on the five (5) known German lifeboats in her book, at page 243. I understand that a lifeboat said to have come from KORMORAN is currently displayed on the Carnarvon jetty but have been unable to confirm this at this stage.

43. Due to the lack of qualified manpower in those days, the local circumstances and the remoteness of Carnarvon I assumed that Mr Tom Annear would have acted as the local customs officer. In fact I have recently learned that this role was filled by a Mr Gordon Ewers. Tom Annear was obviously a man of many talents. He was involved in every facet of the loading and unloading of the State Shipping Service vessels which entered the port of Carnarvon and in various aspects of the activities and responsibilities of the Harbour And Lights Department which included the maintenance and repair of the jetty, navigation lights, railway rolling stock and track and the goods sheds.
44. A letter from Mr G H Ewers dated 30<sup>th</sup> June 1999 confirms that he was the local customs officer in Carnarvon in 1941 and also acted as the representative for the Department of the Navy. As such he received some signal traffic from the Department. Regarding the SYDNEY/KOREMORAN battle, I wonder what those signals said, I guess we will not be told. Apparently he was superseded in Authority by a Commander Rycroft so he was not privy to a lot of information or the relevant activity including the recovery of the lifeboats. He did say he kept his superiors aware of events so obviously the Navy has some information on the whole picture but continues to say nothing. Why? More recently I have learned that Constable Sullivan had died and it was not known if there were any descendants.
45. This information clearly indicates that the Navy was solely responsible for the recovery of the beached German lifeboats. Commander Rycroft was named as being in charge of this operation. He presumably obtained the services of some local labour including that of Constable Sullivan. Commander Rycroft should certainly have made a detailed written report on the operation and I am still to obtain a copy for inclusion in this account and for posterity, but I will not hold my breath. From this it is obvious the Navy is lax in not demanding a report by Commander Rycroft or is not prepared to make it available, if in fact such a report exists.
46. I have written to the Royal Australian Navy requesting information regarding the recovery of the German lifeboats from KORMORAN and to the Australian Army Engineers regarding the expedition to Red Bluff by Lt Willis and Corporal "No name" to recover the camera said to have been buried there by Dr List, the war correspondent on board KORMORAN.
47. Regarding Flight Lieutenant Cook who is referred to in Appendix A, it appears this officer was a pilot detached from Pearce to Carnarvon. He could have been from either fourteen (14) or twenty-five (25) squadron. One squadron flew single engined WIRRAWAY Aircraft, the other flew twin engined LOCKHEED HUDSON Aircraft. The reason for his detachment was merely as part of the effort to locate SYDNEY and had no other significance. Pearce is the permanent RAAF base which is situated at Bullsbrook some fifty (50) kilometres north of Perth.

48. Regarding Appendix F which is the report made by Capt Horwood I wonder if the recommendation made in paragraph twenty-five (25) of that report was ever acted upon. If so was this the "missing" Appendix A referred to by Lt Yarra in his report. See paragraph one (1) of Appendix C hereof.
49. An obvious question which arises from the report by Sgt Anderson of the Carnarvon Police is why he (Sgt Anderson) first received the message regarding survivors from Mr Sharp of Dalgety and Company. This is not a criticism of Mr Sharp, or his informant, or the various actions taken by Mr Sharp as a result of that message, rather he is to be congratulated for what preparations he set in train for the reception of the survivors. Mr Sharp was apparently also the recipient of messages from Flight Lieutenant Cook regarding the survivors who were thought to be from SYDNEY.
50. The report by Lt Yarra (Appendix C) led me to the conclusion he was anti-German in spite of his own heritage, or because of it, and was unfortunately in a position to 'bend the truth' or at best to be quite inaccurate in order to denigrate Dr List and the German P.O.W's in general. I cannot retract from the stand I take in my various comments on Lt Yarra's report.
51. Appendix E is said to be an interpretation, by Lt Yarra, of the observations made by Dr List of the altered conditions at the cave site after four (4) years. Are these a biased version of what Dr List said to Lt Yarra and if so why?
52. Generally the report by Capt J F Harwood (Appendix F) appears to be a reasonably accurate account but does not support the assertions of Lt Yarra (Appendix C). Paragraph twenty-four (24) and twenty-five (25) of Capt Horwood's report raises two unanswered and probably unanswerable questions. The letter from the Australian Archives dated 17<sup>th</sup> November 1997 signed by Darren Watson, covering Capt Horwood's report is staggering in that it is assumed that the majority of the associated records have been DESTROYED.
53. Fact Sheet 111 (<http://www.naa.gov.au/research/factsheet/fs111.html>) states that "of the KORMORAN's crew of 397, 317 were rescued". Paragraph 36(d) of my account refers to the question and was the question of these missing seamen investigated in any great depth with the POW's and if not, why not. The same fact sheet also states "How could the SYDNEY with such superior fire power have been sunk by KORMORAN. Paragraphs thirty-nine (39) and Forty (40) of my account and the book by Barbara Winter both cast grave doubt on this assertion. Surely a ship with officially acknowledged problems with gun control, torpedo firing mechanism

it is past time that the Navy admitted these facts and permanently withdraw the assertion of SYDNEY's superior fire power.

54. The publication (<http://www.gov.au/housecommittee/facts/sydney/execsum.htm>) makes interesting reading but contributes very little to this account. It is broken up into a number of chapters, as follows:

- (i) This chapter laments the fact that the inquiry took place some fifty-eight (58) years after the event. It questions the reasons for such a long delay and poses the thought that this was a deliberate act, or even that the enquiry was forced upon officialdom by public pressure and may not otherwise have occurred.
- (ii) Credit Tom Frame with the proposal that Capt Detmers acted outside the rules of warfare. Is there any such rules? To me the proposal appears to be the typically Australian tactic of accusing your opponent of practising those unfair tactics which you yourself use in order to cover your own inadequacies.
- (iii) Recommended that the operations of the Archive Act 1983 be reviewed so that researchers such as I may be enabled to access approved records, however the Committee did not see that it should undertake such a search. It also made the point that there was no evidence of Japanese participation in the loss of SYDNEY and that certain documents would not be available for public scrutiny. Why? This statement also indicates that the Committee did do some research of such documents as were made available to it.
- (iv) This chapter skirts round the deficiencies on the SYDNEY but does not deny their existence. It further implies that the 'close approach' was part of Capt Burnett's order and that in fact he was virtually 'set up'.
- (v) The question of "signals" initiated by SYDNEY is also skirted around in spite of the testimony of Robert Mason. The suggestion of Japanese interventions is ruled out on the basis of lack of evidence and the probability that the suggestion was floated to excuse the erroneous belief that SYDNEY was the more powerfully armed ship (see sub-paragraphs two (2) and four (4) of this paragraph.
- (vi) This chapter deals with the delay in commencing a search for SYDNEY. This poses two questions:
  - (a) What day of the week was 19<sup>th</sup> November 1941?
  - (b) Who first sighted the German survivors and reported such information, presumably to Mr Baston of Quobba Station, to Mr.

Sharp of Dalgety and Company and finally to Sgt Anderson of the Carnarvon Police.

I have made six checks on the day of the week of 19<sup>th</sup> November 1941. Five of these have shown this was a Wednesday. On the other question I understand that it was an Aboriginal stockman who raised the initial alarm. Seemingly the search of SYDNEY had commenced some time before Sgt Anderson became involved on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1941. This chapter also goes some way towards establishing that the German version of the conflict is as accurate and truthful as such a traumatic event can be and that claim of murder of the SYDNEY survivors by German or Japanese could not be substantiated.

- (vii) This chapter deals mainly with the Carley Float and Body that came ashore on Christmas Island and related matters and possibilities.
  - (viii) This chapter deals with various aspects related to the possible/probable location of wreck sites of SYDNEY and KORMORAN.
  - (ix) This chapter deals generally with the provision of a memorial for SYDNEY and the source of funds for that project.
55. The paper, as set out in paragraph fifty-four (54) was therefore of very little use to me in my particular sphere of research. My record of my memories of "The Return to Red Bluff" appears to be the only factual record in existence of that portion of Australian wartime history.
  56. In December 1999 I had the opportunity to return to Carnarvon for a few days. I tried to contact the Shire Clerk but he has otherwise occupied so I talked to one of the Library staff for some time. Apparently the records of "The Northern Times" Newspaper are not held there. I did not ask about the book by John Robotham. I then talked to a lady in the Tourist Office who put me in touch with Cecily Miller (nee McKail). I also called on Mr Jim Richards, one time editor of "The Northern Times" Newspaper. He told me that all the papers records had been destroyed in a cyclone so he could not be of any real help to me. I also talked to one of the Hughes Family but cannot recall her married name. We banded names of people of yesteryear back and forth for some time. I also contacted an estate agent with business premises in Robinson Street who allowed me access to his many records on the Sydney/Kormoran saga. But I just did not have enough time to do a thorough search of that material.
  57. My daughter and I went to visit the cave at Red Bluff. Eventually we got to the caretaker's house at Red Bluff and over a cup of tea and biscuits I told him my story and the purpose of my visit. He told me that there was no windmill, water troughs, yards or out camp in the immediate vicinity and as far as he knew there never had been. He pointed out the cave said to have been used by the German

sailors, so we set off to investigate. The cave was similar to what my memory said it should be except that a large portion of the roof over the seaward entrance was missing, as were the pot holes (man sized grottos according to Lt Yarra) in the Southern Wall. Even these variations could be accepted but I cannot believe any cyclonic storm could alter the adjacent terrain to such an extent as to remove some two/three miles of unscaleable sandy, rock based and scrub covered cliffs to the north of the cave and further I have no memory of Red Bluff some distance southwards. However we took some photographs of the cave for the record.

58. On our way home we stopped at the caretaker's home and I told him that I did not think that the cave was the one I was taken to in 1945 and the reasons why, as set out in the previous paragraph.
59. I had hoped to visit an area locally known as "the Caves" some distance south of Red Bluff but we missed the turnoff and it was too late to turn back. Further south again we went in towards the coast to see part of the area known locally as the "17 mile" which is where one of the German life boats and a number of sailors are said to have come ashore.
60. Further south again we visited the Cairn erected to the memory of SYDNEY and KORMORAN and their crews. We paid our respects and took some photographs. We passed Quobba Homestead, had a quick look at the 'Blow Holes' and home to Carnarvon.
61. Next day we went out to the coastal end of the jetty and had a look at the lifeboat, said to be one of those from KORMORAN. I cannot confirm or deny its origin, though in general design and appearance, apart from its much smaller size, is similar to that of the German lifeboat I saw in Perth, where it was being used as a fund raiser for the war effort.
62. On reflection I am now becoming more and more convinced that the cave I was taken to in 1945 was not the cave at Red Bluff which we visited in 1999. The 1945 Cave must therefore exist on some other part of that wild coast, for example "The Caves" area. These words of Dr List keep coming back to me. There were many caves in the Cliffs where we landed. I wish I were a lot younger and stronger and had unlimited time and resources in order to carry out a thorough search of the coastline north of Quobba Homestead in order to locate my missing cave.
63. There still remains the unanswered requests to the navy and the army engineers for copies of reports on The Recovery of the German lifeboats by CDR Rycroft on one hand and the activities of Lt J Willis on the other these documents if made available will be treated as appendices with appropriate comments if necessary.

64. The photographs taken in December 1999 and any explanatory notes thereon will receive similar treatment. I do thank my daughter for her help and co-operation in my visit to Carnarvon and the various parts of the coast to the north of Carnarvon.
65. I had to go to the city recently so took a few minutes to visit the Battye Library. I asked to see their copies of "The Northern Times" Newspaper. The staff member indicated they had film of every issue so I asked for issues published in November/December 1941 and in December 1945. I did not have much time but the issue dated 6 December 1941 gives a fairly full account of the action and the rescue of the German survivors. The section under the sub-heading 'wounded in action' is very interesting as the word picture it portrays is nothing like my memory of the area adjacent to the cave I was taken to in 1945 and to alleged statements attributed to some of the German sailors. Which is correct? Will we ever know or is it, be allowed to know, or probably the real questions is who does know the whole truth.

38711  
SGT W I WEIR  
12 January 2000