

# DEEP LIGHT

Illuminating the wrecks  
of *Sydney* and *Kormoran*



WESTERN AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM  
**LEARNING RESOURCE**

Year 10 | HASS



Images courtesy of Curtin University and the Western Australian Museum. © Western Australian Museum



# DEEP LIGHT

Illuminating the wrecks of *Sydney* and *Kormoran*

## Overview of Exhibition

The World War Two encounter between HMAS *Sydney* (II) and the disguised German raider HSK *Kormoran* off the Western Australian coast stands as Australia's worst naval disaster. All 645 men on *Sydney* were lost; while 81 men from *Kormoran* were killed and 318 survived.

For more than 66 years, the location of the two ships remained a mystery. Then, in 2008, the Finding Sydney Foundation and shipwreck expert David Mearns found the wrecks off Shark Bay, Western Australia.

In 2015, the Western Australian and Curtin University, with vital assistance from DOF Subsea, the Commonwealth Government and other supporters, returned to the wreck sites. Using remotely controlled equipment, the team captured stunning underwater images that revealed the fate of the ships on the seabed, over two kilometres beneath the waves.

In this poignant exhibition, remarkable images and footage allow us to witness a tragic moment in World War Two history, preserved in a remote world of solemn loss, wondrous creatures and surprising colour.

Students will hear reflections from expedition team members and researchers, and have the unique opportunity to view the 3D film, *From Great Depths*, a permanent experience at the Museum of Geraldton.

## About this Learning Resource

*Deep Light: Illuminating the Wrecks of Sydney and Kormoran* may be of particular interest to Year 10 History students with *Depth Study 1: Investigating World War Two (1939-1945)*.

Year 10 History Curriculum	
Content Description	Elaborations
The impact of World War Two, with a particular emphasis on the Australian home front, including the changing roles of women and use of wartime government controls (conscription, manpower controls, rationing and censorship) (ACDSEH109)	Investigating the impact of World War Two at a local and national level (for example, significant events such as the bombing of Darwin; the Japanese submarine attack on Sydney and the sinking of ships off the Australian coast; the 'Battle of Brisbane'; the Cowra breakout and the Brisbane Line)

The exhibition themes and content, as well as some of the activity suggestions contained in this learning resource, lend themselves to other learning areas and year levels.

This Learning Resource was designed to be given to the students in the PDF format so that they can view the images.

# Pre and post visit

## Before your visit

Before your visit to the *Deep Light Illuminating the Wrecks of Sydney and Kormoran* exhibition, explore the online exhibition at <http://museum.wa.gov.au/explore/sydney>

This will give you a background on the HMAS *Sydney* (II) and HSK *Kormoran* story, and the search that followed, including:

- A history of the ships and the crews onboard
- A timeline of the encounter between *Sydney* and *Kormoran*
- An overview of the censorship and conspiracy theories surrounding the battle
- Reflections and background on the search for the ships

Your teacher may ask you to complete Classroom Activity Sets 1 and 2 before a visit to the exhibition. These activities use primary sources from the period to help establish the story of what happened to *Sydney* and *Kormoran* before the ships were located in 2008 and further evidence from the 2015 expedition became available.

Print out a copy of the *Deep Light – In gallery reflections* pages to take with you into the exhibition.

## During your visit

Things to do in the exhibition:

- Watch the 3D film – *From Great Depths* (15 minutes)
- View images taken during the 2015 expedition – take a photo or note one that resonates with you.
- Watch the interviews of experts on the expedition in particular the interview “*Battle Evidence*”
- Read the quotes by descendants of *Sydney*’s crew
- After exploring the exhibition sit down somewhere on the floor and reflect on the questions on the “*In Gallery Reflection*”.

## After your visit

Back in class discuss the questions from the “*In Gallery Reflection*”.

Classroom Activity Set 3 uses images from the 2015 expedition as source material.

Classroom Activity Set 4 looks at how we commemorate the crew of *Sydney*.



## Deep Light - In gallery reflections

Welcome to *Deep Light*. This exhibition is an opportunity to reflect on the events in 1941 that led to the sinking of both HMAS *Sydney* (II) and HSK *Kormoran*. This is achieved through the astonishing imagery captured by an expedition team that returned to the two sites in 2015. The exhibition is accompanied by reflections from descendants of *Sydney*'s crew, reminding us of the human loss and lasting impact of Australia's worst naval disaster.



Boots in the HMAS *Sydney* debris field.  
Images courtesy of WA Museum and Curtin University  
© WA Museum

*“ The sight of the leather boots strewn around the ground was a reminder that this isn't just a ship, but hundreds of men who lie there. ”*

Bridget Colless, Daughter of Captain Joseph Burnett

*“ It was cathartic for me to see these amazing images. To reach out and almost touch history. ”*

Garry Baverstock , Nephew of Able Seaman Ernest George Baverstock



## Deep Light - In gallery reflections

After exploring the exhibition sit down somewhere on the floor and reflect on the following questions.

How has this exhibition experience impacted your understanding of the battle between *Sydney* and *Kormoran*?

Why was it important to find the answers to what happened to the *Sydney* and *Kormoran*?  
Who are these answers for?

You will have read quotes on the walls from descendants of the crew of *Sydney*. Why have the quotes been included? After reading them has it changed how you view the events of 1941?

Look at the image you selected in the exhibition. Why did you choose it? How does it make you feel? What evidence does it provide?



# Classroom Activities 1: Whose History? A question of perspective.

HMAS *Sydney* (II) and HSK *Kormoran* came together on the evening of 19 November 1941. The *Kormoran* was disguised as a Dutch merchant ship, which caused *Sydney* to unwittingly draw close enough to it for the Germans to fire. After a short and violent battle both ships were gone.

Over 300 German sailors survived and told their stories to the world. The information which follows is based on the reports from *Kormoran*'s Captain Theodore Detmers and other crew members after the battle. We can only guess what was happening on the bridge of *Sydney* as they approached *Kormoran*. Due to loss of everyone on board, we will never know the stories from *Sydney*.



For more information about the battle between *Sydney* and *Kormoran*, see <http://museum.wa.gov.au/explore/sydney/history-hmas-sydney-ii/battle-hsk-kormoran>.

After you read the three information sheets over page, try the activities below.

1. Write a narrative account from the first contact to the beginning of the battle between *Sydney* and *Kormoran*. Choose a viewpoint from one of the ships or weave the two stories together.
2. Imagine that you are an Australian Naval interrogator and the prisoner Captain Detmers has just been brought before you. Conduct your own investigation into the beginning of the engagement between the two ships. Use Captain Detmers' account as your background. Present your work as a role play, a short film or a piece for radio.
3. Read the timeline carefully and draw a diagram showing the tracks of the ships and the events leading up to the battle from the first sighting to the first gunfire.
4. What if the events took place today? Imagine you are a war correspondent and present the story as it unfolds in a series of tweets.
5. Draw a cartoon relating to the *Sydney* and *Kormoran* events which might be suitable for a newspaper.



# Information Sheet A

## Timeline of the Battle

Based on the report by the Captain of HSK *Kormoran*, Theodore Detmers

**Location:** Indian Ocean off Shark Bay, Western Australia:  
19 November 1941

- 16:55** *Kormoran* travelling north-east towards the Australian coast. Lookout sights a vessel on the port bow. Detmers decides to turn away to the west and increase to full speed.
- 17:05** *Sydney* travelling south-east alters course to the south-west to give chase. Begins flashing the letters NNJ in Morse code asking *Kormoran* to identify itself.
- 17:35** *Kormoran* hoists the signal flags to signify they are the Dutch cargo ship *Straat Malakka*.
- 17:45** Exchange of signals continues. *Sydney* asking more questions such as port of destination and what cargo is being carried; *Kormoran* deliberately slow to respond knowing their only chance in a fight is surprise at a close range.  
They want *Sydney* to come even closer. *Kormoran* hides their main rangefinder (an instrument for estimating the distance of an object, especially for use with a camera or gun) so *Sydney* won't see the sophisticated navigational instrument - not seen on a cargo ship.
- 18:00** Detmers orders Q signal (emergency call) be transmitted saying he is under attack.
- 18:15** *Sydney* draws to a position on the starboard beam.
- 18:25** *Sydney* moves to a position on the starboard beam just over 1000 metres away. *Sydney* makes the signal 'hoist your secret call sign'.
- 18:30** Unable to reply, *Kormoran* removes Dutch flag, hoists their battle flag and opens fire.



# M | Information Sheet B

## HMAS Sydney (II)

### Captain Joseph Burnett

Was 41 years old and had been in the Navy since he was 13. He joined *Sydney*, his first command, in May 1941. He was a very experienced officer having served in World War One and the Spanish Civil War. He was a gunnery specialist.

When *Sydney* first sighted *Kormoran* Captain Burnett of *Sydney* knew:

- there were reports of a raider (a warship which is light, maneuverable, and fast-moving) in the area and he had recently discovered a floating object, which could have been a raider's practice target.
- his superiors on shore were keen to capture enemy ships for the secret information they had on board.
- one of his colleagues had been criticised for attacking a mystery ship from long range and wasting valuable ammunition.
- he was surrounded by experienced officers who had fought in the Mediterranean campaign on board *Sydney*.
- he had information on board such as the VIA (vessels in the area report) and ship identification books that could help him identify the mystery ship.

As *Sydney* approached *Kormoran* Captain Burnett may have been...

- asking his officers to study ship recognition books and the VIA to see if the mystery vessel was who they said they were.
- trying to determine if the vessel was a raider supply ship, a cargo ship or a German raider.
- considering if he should launch his aircraft to fly over the vessel and report back.
- confident he had a speed advantage and gunnery advantage over the mystery vessel.
- keen not to break radio silence in case a raider was close by and would pick up his signal.
- considering capturing the mystery vessel if he thought it was a raider supply ship, and then go after the raider which may be close by.



Captain Burnett - Took command of HMAS *Sydney* (II) on 14 May 1941. Image courtesy of the Australian War Memorial (128096)



# Information Sheet C

## *HSK Kormoran*

### Captain Theodor Detmers

Was 39 years old, the youngest of the German raider captains. *Kormoran* had been at sea nearly a year and had sunk or captured 11 ships. His crew was well trained and battle hardened. His orders were simple: to sink or capture enemy cargo ships and to avoid a fight with an enemy warship.

As *Sydney* approached *Kormoran* Captain Detmers:

- was hoping his disguise would work and the cruiser (a large, fast, moderately armoured and gunned warship) would leave them alone. He didn't want to fight an enemy warship.
- knew the cruiser was faster, stronger and had guns that could operate at a greater range.
- knew he had sufficient firepower to sink and capture merchant ships but not a warship unless he could surprise them at close range.
- knew *Kormoran* couldn't out run the cruiser.
- knew the flag hoist for the Dutch merchant man *Straat Malakka* and would pretend to be that ship.
- knew the cruiser was keen to find out who they were and would continue to ask questions by signalling.
- knew he should only answer with signal flags in the style of a merchantman but could pretend to be inexperienced and fumble his flag hoists to buy time.
- could see the cruiser had an aircraft that could be launched to fly over, examine his ship closely and possibly see through his disguise.
- knew he would not be able to fight effectively with his large guns until the cruiser came within 8000 metres of his ship.
- knew all his smaller weapons and torpedoes would be in range if the cruiser came within 3000 metres.
- knew his aft facing underwater torpedo tubes could be used if the cruiser took up a position close behind but he would have to slow right down to use them.
- believed that if it came to a fight he had a good chance if he could get the first shots in at close range.
- knew he would have to lower the Dutch flag and hoist his battle flag before firing at the cruiser.
- knew he didn't want his ship captured.



Captain Theodor Detmers, commander of the German Auxiliary Cruiser *Kormoran*.

Image courtesy of the Australian War Memorial (053869)



## Classroom Activities Set 2

### Censorship During Wartime

Strict censorship was imposed in Australia at the start of World War Two. The Menzies Government formed the Department of Information (DOI) to control publicity. It was believed censorship was necessary to prevent valuable information falling into enemy hands and to maintain high morale at home.

An example of the wartime censorship was the Government report on the bombing of Darwin in February 1942. The 'official' death toll was given as 17 when in reality the number was closer to 250.

When the Naval Board and the Government found out about the battle between HMAS *Sydney* (II) and HSK *Kormoran* they tried to suppress the news for as long as possible. They hoped that by not announcing the *Kormoran's* loss they might have been able to locate and destroy its supply ship.

By 24 November 1941, five days after the battle, rumours started to bubble to the surface. Many of the nation's newspaper editors were contacted personally by DOI officials and told that any mention of *Sydney* in the press was prohibited. However this censorship instruction only succeeded in fuelling the rumours to the point where the Government had little choice but to inform the next of kin. This was done on 26 November. The text of the telegrams sent to the next of kin reflected the Government's concern to release as little information as possible.

By now the rumours were quite out of hand and the most extravagant stories were circulating throughout Australia. By 28 November the Prime Minister John Curtin was receiving urgent telegrams from newspaper editors urging the release of more information.

On the evening of 30 November the Prime Minister finally released a statement to the press and the next day the news of the loss of *Sydney* was splashed across every newspaper in the land.

- For more information about the conspiracy theories and controversy surrounding *Sydney* see <http://museum.wa.gov.au/explore/sydney/history-hmas-sydney-ii/conspiracies-surrounding-hmas-sydney-ii>.



# Classroom Activity Set 2

## Censorship During Wartime

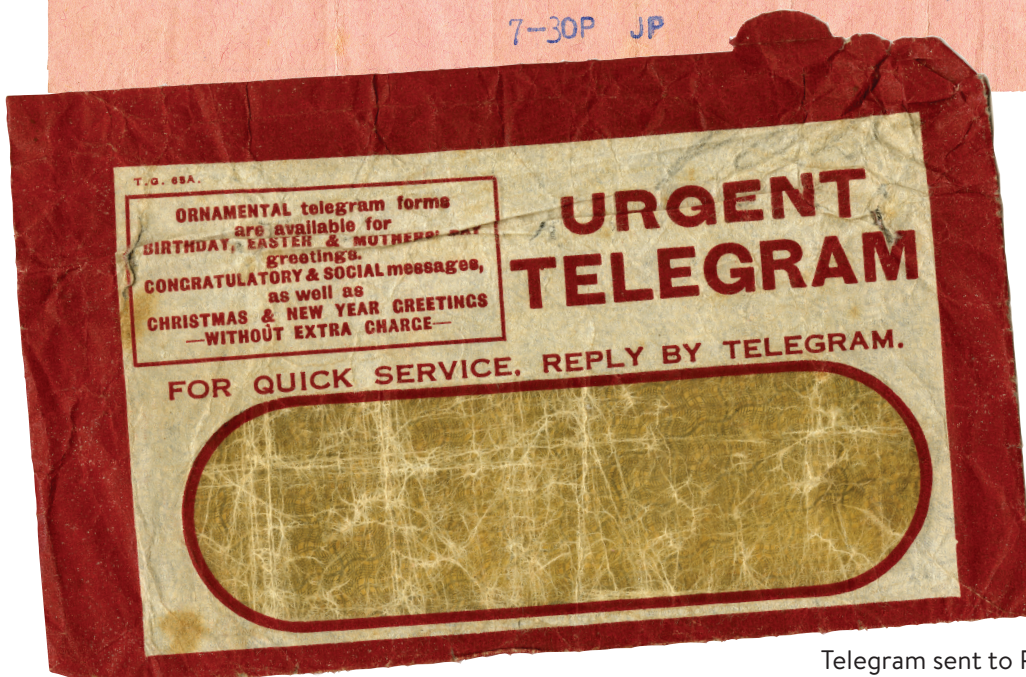
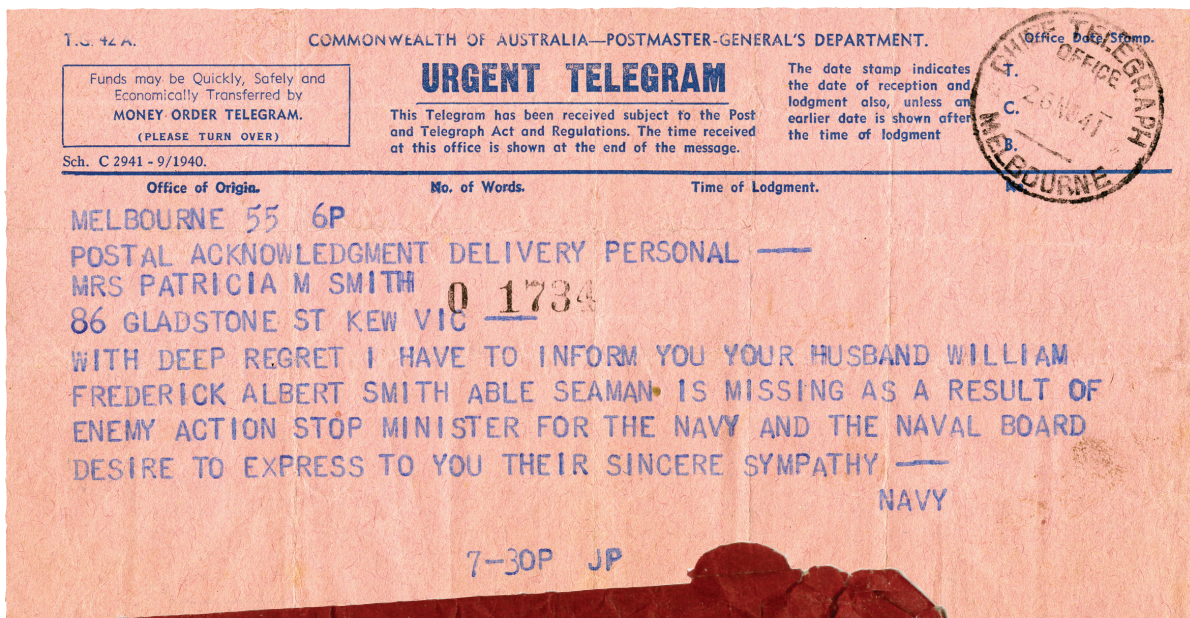
### Activity A | To censor or not to censor?

Choose one or more of the following activities:

1. Considering the huge growth of the Internet and social networks like *Twitter* and *Facebook*, is Government censorship still possible?

Write an essay that supports your opinion OR hold a class debate that explores this topic.

2. Research World War Two posters and update them to reflect current global issues.
3. In times of emergency the Government has the right to make any laws necessary to protect us. Do you agree with this statement? Explain.



Telegram sent to Patrica Smith, wife of Able Seaman William Frederick Albert Smith. Courtesy of WA Museum (donated by Maree Jenssen)



# Classroom Activity Set 2

## Censorship During Wartime

### Activity B | Document Study: Keeping Secrets

Examine the two official documents on the following pages about the disappearance of HMAS *Sydney* (II), and answer the questions below.

#### Source and context

- When were the documents written?
- Who wrote them?
- Reliability: Do you think these sources are authentic? Why?

#### Elements

- How would you describe the language used in these documents?
- What are the main points contained in the two documents?

#### Purpose

- Who were the document addressed to?
- Were they meant to be seen by the public?
- Why were the documents written?

#### Message

- What did the authors want the recipients of the messages to think, feel or understand?

#### Usefulness

- To what extent do the two documents help you understand the reasons for conspiracy theories surrounding the loss of *Sydney*?



# Classroom Activity Set 2

## Censorship During Wartime

### Activity B | Source Document A: Statement by the Prime Minister, 1941

NOT TO BE BROADCAST BY ANY AUSTRALIAN RADIO STATION.  
NOT TO BE CABLED OUTSIDE AUSTRALIA.

FOR PRESS : Statement by the Prime Minister.

H.M.A.S. SYDNEY

Information has been received from the Australian Naval Board that H.M.A.S. 'Sydney' has been in action with a heavily-armed enemy merchant raider which she sank by gunfire. The information was received from survivors from the enemy vessel, who were picked up some time after the action. No subsequent communication has been received from H.M.A.S. 'Sydney' and the Government regrets to say that it must be presumed that she has been lost.

Extensive search by air and surface units to locate survivors continues.

The next-of-kin, to whom the Government and the Naval Board extend deepest sympathy, were informed last Wednesday.

Although this action took place some few days ago, the announcement of it was not made earlier for three reasons.

For strategical reasons, including the safety of other ships, it was not desirable to publish information earlier than now.

There was the remote, yet not impossible, eventuality of the 'Sydney' still being afloat and of the hope that a version could be obtained from one of her personnel.

Time was taken in the very desirable direction of informing the next-of-kin.

The Government and the Naval Board had, however, kept the Press informed of developments as information was received and are sensible of the co-operation of the Press in withholding publication.

While regretting the loss of a fine ship and her gallant complement, the people of Australia will be proud that she and they upheld the traditions of the Royal Australian Navy and completed a glorious career in successful action against the enemy.

No.78

---oo--- Canberra, November 30, 1941

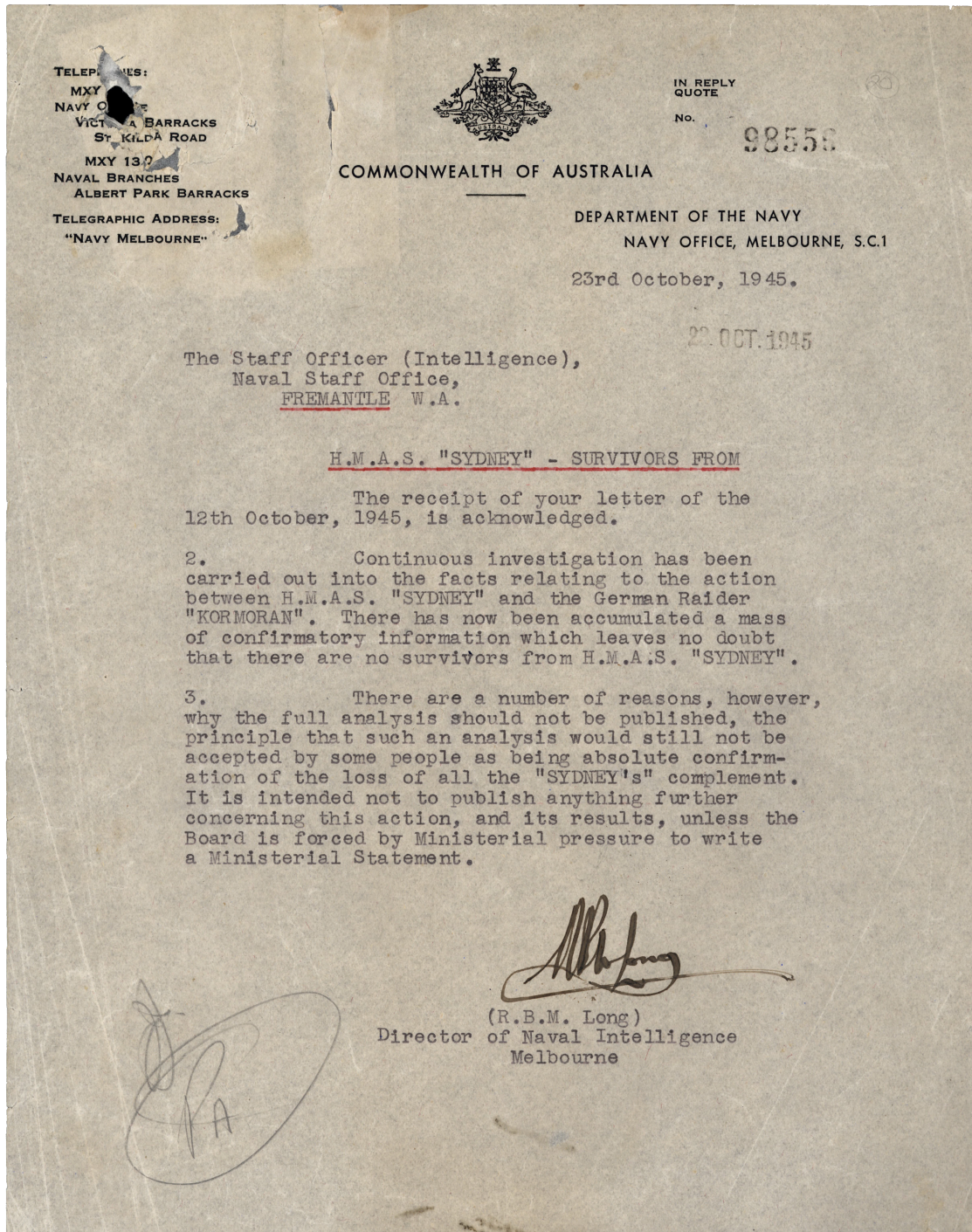
The Prime Minister's statement, approved by the Admiralty, which was officially released to newspapers late on 30 November 1941 for publication the next day. (Note: the faint text at the top states "Not to be broadcast by any Australian radio station. Not to be cabled outside Australia".) Courtesy National Archives of Australia (A5954, 2400/21 p.7)



# Classroom Activity Set 2

## Censorship During Wartime

### Activity B | Source Document B: Letter from Director of Naval Intelligence, 1945



Letter from Director of Naval Intelligence confirming there were no survivors from HMAS Sydney and rejecting a proposal to publish an account of the battle.

Courtesy National Archives of Australia (K997, 1/15/2)



## Classroom Activity Set 3

### Examining the Images

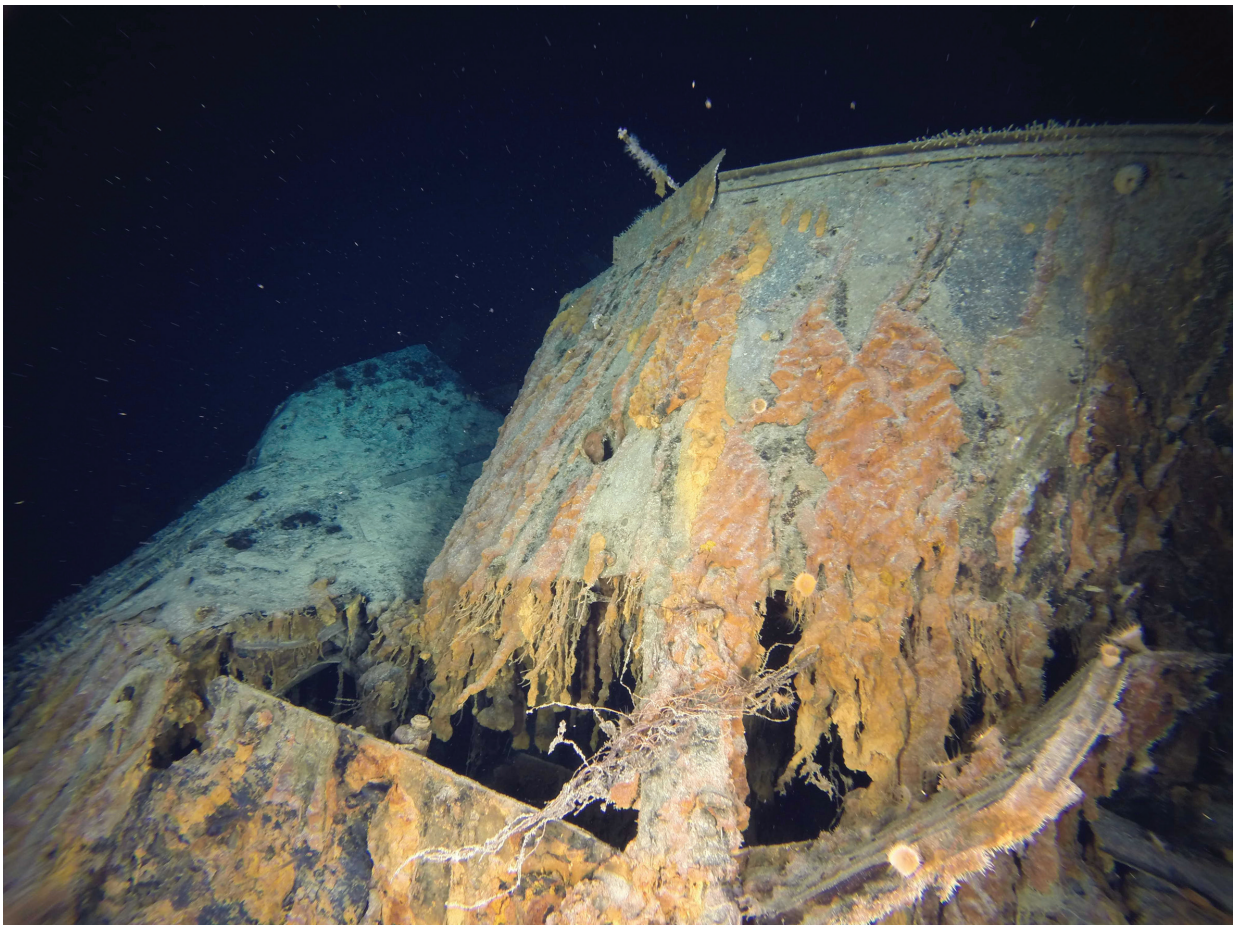
The Western Australian Museum and Curtin University led the 2015 expedition that comprehensively captured high-resolution 2D and 3D images of HMAS *Sydney* (II) and HSK *Kormoran*. Curtin designed and developed a specialist deep-water lighting and camera system, and a surface control room on board DOF Subsea's vessel *Skandi Protector*. More than 500,000 images and 300 hours video were collected from the two wreck sites.

Processing of this massive dataset is a large and still ongoing task using high-tech systems at the Pawsey Supercomputing Centre and the Curtin HIVE (Hub for Immersive Visualisation and eResearch). The data will allow the WA Museum to archeologically document the wreck sites and reveal more about the last moments of the battle. A range of outputs have been produced for cultural heritage projects including the 3D film *From Great Depths*. Environmental data was also collected in an effort to develop strategies for the long term preservation of the wreck sites. The latter initiative has also shed light on the deep-water marine ecosystems that exist on each wreck.



An online image gallery can be found here:

<http://museum.wa.gov.au/explore/sydney/photo-galleries-videos/hmas-sydney-ii-expedition>



Previously unseen 15cm shell hole through the bridge of HMAS *Sydney* (II).

Courtesy of WA Museum and Curtin University  
© WA Museum





# Classroom Activity Set 3

## Examining the Images

### Activity A | Document Study: New Evidence

The image on the previous page shows a 15cm shell-hole through the bridge of HMAS *Sydney* (II) at the compass platform. When the wrecks were found in 2008 the shell-hole was not obvious, presenting as a shadow in the photographs taken at the time.

This image supports the theory that within the first 30 seconds of the battle *Sydney*'s bridge was destroyed, her command structure lost, and her ability to effectively fight back severely disabled.

When questioned under interrogation HSK *Kormoran* Captain Theodor Detmer's account of the battle was "the first salvo to hit *Sydney* was a direct hit to the bridge".

Examine the image and answer the source analysis questions below.

#### Context

- When was this photo taken?
- How long after the loss of *Sydney* was this photo taken?

#### Elements

- Describe what you can see in the photo?
- How has it changed from what you know a ship's bridge to look like?
- What aspects of naval warfare would you need to know to help you better interpret this image?

#### Purpose

- Why do you think this image was taken?
- Who might have been the intended audience?

#### Message

- What did the photographer want you to think, feel or understand by looking at this picture?

#### Usefulness

- To what extent is this photo useful to a historian trying to understand the significance of the battle between *Sydney* and *Kormoran*? (In your answer, think about how the photo is useful, and also how it is not useful.)
- How does this physical evidence support the account of Captain Theodor Detmers?
- Why would people have doubted the accounts of the battle from interviews of the rescued German sailors?



## Classroom Activity Set 3

### Examining the Images

#### Activity B | Compare and Contrast

Investigators and historians compare and contrast images to assist in interpreting the damage sustained by HMAS *Sydney* (II) during the battle with HSK *Kormoran*.

Answer the following questions:

1. Imagine you were part of the team investigating what happened to HMAS *Sydney* (II). You have been asked to describe the damage to the bakery. As part of your background research you found the two contemporary photographs taken by members of the *Sydney* crew. Based on what you can see in the images describe the damage that has occurred to the bakery? What further knowledge do you need to better answer this question?
2. Put yourself in the position of one of the crew in the contemporary photographs from outside the bakery. Write a letter home of at least three paragraphs explaining your current time at sea. Describe what you see, what you smell, what you hear, and what surrounds you. Explain how your experiences have affected you and what you hope to accomplish.



A 2015 expedition image of damage to the bakery on HMAS *Sydney* (II)  
Courtesy of WA Museum and Curtin University  
© WA Museum



## Classroom Activity Set 3

### Examining the Images

#### Activity B | Compare and Contrast



This image reveals the distinctive features of the proving cupboard including the adjacent ladder and unique screen door.

Courtesy of State Library Victoria ( H98.105/2566)



A scene from happier times in the vicinity of Sydney's bakery during 'stand easy'.

Courtesy of State Library Victoria ( H98.105/2573)



## Classroom Activity Set 3

### Examining the Images

#### Activity C | What might have happened?

The disguised German raider HSK *Kormoran* was said to be carrying some 360 mines. According to accounts the plan was for *Kormoran* to lay them across vital Australian shipping lanes off Shark Bay on the night of 19 November 1941. Using that shipping lane was the *MV Koolinda*, an Australian general cargo and passenger ship that made regular voyages between Fremantle and Darwin. Seven days after the battle the *Koolinda* recovered 31 German sailors from a *Kormoran* life-boat.

The images on the next page come from the wreck of *Kormoran*. The glacis plate on one of the raider's deck guns is still emblazoned with a hand-painted skull and crossbones. Accompanying this decoration is the hand-painted German phrase 'Linda bringt das Glück dem Feind Verderben!' (Linda brings luck. To the enemy ruin!). Even more graffiti (wartime graffiti) was discovered within the remnants of *Kormoran*'s gunrooms. The raider's victims and their respective tonnages were hand-painted on two separate gunroom bulkheads and are listed in the order in which they were attacked. The graffiti adds a new human dimension to the interpretation of shipboard life aboard *Kormoran*, and the way the crew perceived their role as wartime commerce raiders.

Answer the following questions:

1. What might have happened if *Sydney* had not come across *Kormoran* that day?
2. In the battle *Kormoran* sustained damage and its crew made the decision to scuttle (deliberately sink) the ship. Why did the Germans choose to do this?
3. What is the likelihood that *Koolinda* might have ended up on the bulkhead list?
4. Based on these two images can you describe the possible attitude the *Kormoran* crew adopted in their final battle against *Sydney*?
5. If *Kormoran* had successfully managed to block or even disrupt shipping lines along the west coast of Australia, how might this have impacted the war on the home front?



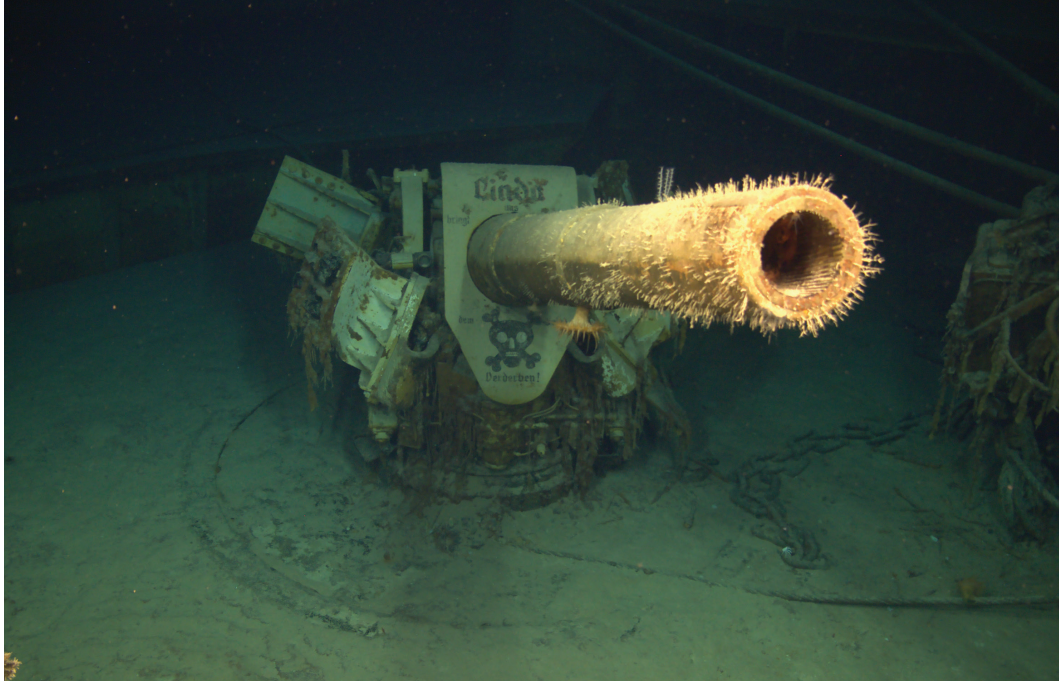
An unarmored mine lies within the shattered remnants of *Kormoran*'s hull.  
Courtesy of WA Museum and Curtin University  
© WA Museum



# Classroom Activity Set 3

## Examining the Images

### Activity C | What might have happened?



One of *Kormoran's* deck guns, featuring hand-painted graffiti on its glauc plate.  
Courtesy of WA Museum and Curtin University © WA Museum



Graffiti preserved on one of *Kormoran's* gunroom bulkheads, showing the names of its victims.  
Courtesy of WA Museum and Curtin University © WA Museum



## Classroom Activity Set 4 Commemoration

To commemorate means to remember and honour people and their actions. It is the way individuals and societies tell others about what is important to them.

We often think of memorials and services on anniversary dates, but there are other ways we commemorate. For example, each year the West Coast Eagles and Sydney Swans play for the HMAS *Sydney* (II) trophy.

The *Deep Light* exhibition is one way that the WA Museum is commemorating the crew of *Sydney*.

These activities explore the ways that *Sydney* has been commemorated.



Left:

The West Coast Eagles and Australian Navy holding the HMAS *Sydney* (II) commemorative trophy.

Courtesy West Coast Eagles

Below:

Church memorial service for the crew of HMAS *Sydney* (II), 18 November 1945

Courtesy of State Library of Western Australia (047116PD)





# Classroom Activity Set 4

## Commemoration

### Activity A | Memorial Service

On Sunday 18 November 1945 a morning service was held in St John's Church, Fremantle, in memory of the crew who perished on HMAS *Sydney* (II). It was pictorially reported in the newspapers from the time.

Examine the following photograph and answer the questions below.

#### Context

- When was this photo taken?
- What global events took place in the same year?
- How long after the loss of *Sydney* was this photo taken?

#### Elements

- Who are the people in the photo and where are they?
- What are they doing?
- What do you think they are thinking/feeling?

#### Purpose

- Why do you think this photo was taken?
- Who might have been the intended audience?

#### Message

- What did the photographer want you to think, feel or understand by looking at this picture?

#### Usefulness

- To what extent is this photo useful to a historian trying to understand the significance of the battle between *Sydney* and *Kormoran*? (In your answer, think about how the photo is useful, and also how it is not useful.)



# Classroom Activity Set 4

## Commemoration

### Activity B | Historical Tourism

Over the last few decades, historic battle sites have become increasingly important sites of pilgrimage for descendants, and others interested in Australia's military history. The Gallipoli peninsular in Turkey, is the most famous site of pilgrimage from World War One, with thousands of Australians visiting each year. One of the most well-known sites for commemorating Australian forces who fought during World War Two is the Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea.

The underwater wrecks of HMAS *Sydney* (II) and HSK *Kormoran* were declared *Historic Shipwrecks* after they were located in 2008, and are protected by Commonwealth legislation, that includes an exclusion zone, making it illegal to come within 800 metres of the site without a permit.

Communities along the Western Australian coast such as Carnarvon, Denham and Geraldton all have links to parts of the story. Descendants regularly visit these communities to be close to the wreck sites and pay their respects to their loved ones.

A memorial to commemorate the lives lost on *Sydney* was built in Geraldton, and dedicated on 18 November 2001. The Eternal Flame was lit the following day, 19 November 2001, 60 years to the day of the fateful battle. The Memorial has been declared a memorial of national significance, a rare declaration for memorials outside of Canberra. For more information about the Memorial visit:



<https://www.hmassydney memorialgeraldton.com.au/>



Pool of Remembrance at the HMAS *Sydney* (II) Memorial with the Dome of Souls and The Stele in the background.

Courtesy Karl Monaghan Photography.





# Classroom Activity Set 4

## Commemoration

### Activity B | Historical Tourism

Answer the following questions:

1. Why is it important that the *Sydney* and *Kormoran* wreck sites are protected from unauthorised visits?
2. Can a nearby memorial be an adequate substitute for the actual location of the event?
3. Do you think historical tourism is a positive or negative thing for history and historical sites?
4. Should other historical sites associated with World War Two, such as the Kokoda Track, be protected from historical tourism?
5. What memorials have you visited and did you get the emotional response you were expecting from it?
6. Visit Tripadvisor and read the reviews for the HMAS *Sydney* (II) Memorial. Locate a review of someone who has intentionally visited the memorial versus someone who has stumbled across it.
  - a. How are their experiences similar and how do they differ?
  - b. Write a Tripadvisor review of a memorial site you have visited.



A memorial to HSK *Kormoran* in Tatura, Victoria where the crew were imprisoned during the war in Camp 13. It is inscribed *Unseren gefallenen kameraden* ('To our fallen comrades').  
Courtesy Lenore Frost.



# Classroom Activity Set 4 Commemoration

## Activity C | The Unknown Sailor

On 6 February 1942, a Carley float containing the body of an unknown sailor from HMAS Sydney (II) was found drifting off Flying Fish Cove, Christmas Island. He was buried on the island and the location was lost over time. In 2006 the grave was located and the body exhumed and examined but, so far, not identified.

The unknown sailor was re-interred with full military honours at a service on 19 November 2008 at the Geraldton War Cemetery, Western Australia. The service was attended by dignitaries and descendants of the crew from Sydney.

Officiating chaplain Garry Lock said the service was held to “honour him and all his shipmates who died that day”.

Naval historian Lieutenant John Perryman told the gathering: “The unknown sailor who washed up on Christmas Island in a float in January 1942 has become a symbol for those who lost family members on the Sydney. It is Sydney’s entire crew that the unknown sailor has come to represent.”

The Federal Opposition leader at the time, Malcolm Turnbull reflected on the unknown sailor and what he represented: “The man to whom we pay our respects today died in our name. Not only for the Australia he know but for the Australia still to come. And that is why we honour him and all who lie at rest today having served our nation. They were all of them our mates and they died in our name and that is why the ‘unknown sailor’ and all sailors will be forever in our hearts.”

Quotes on this page taken from:



- <https://www.smh.com.au/national/emotional-tributes-mark-sydney-sinking-20081119-6ajq.html>
- <https://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2008/s2422123.htm>



Front page of the 19 August 2019 edition of *The West Australian*.  
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# Classroom Activity Set 4

## Commemoration

### Activity C | The Unknown Sailor

Answer the following questions:

1. What is the significance of the unknown sailor? Who does he represent? Do the quotes above represent your view?
2. Why were many people killed in action 'unknown'?
3. Why might the people of a nation choose to have a tomb of an Unknown Soldier such as the one at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra?
4. As seen from the front page of 19 August 2019 edition of *The West Australian* the identity of the unknown sailor may soon be known.
  - a. Who do you think is pushing for the identification to be made?
  - b. How will the identification impact the descendants of the other sailors?
  - c. How might the significance of this grave as a commemorative site change?



Grave of the HMAS Sydney (II) Unknown Sailor.  
Courtesy Royal Australian Navy  
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