

CHAPTER 9

COMMEMORATION

We know that Sydney went down just off our coast. The memorial to her gallant crew is the sea itself, and the memories of her whole career.¹

My personal belief is that a memorial for the Sydney is in people's hearts and minds, and I think that that memorial is very strong at the moment and will continue to be.²

9.1 The final matter contained in the inquiry's Terms of Reference involves what 'measure[s] ... should be taken to protect and honour the final resting places, if and when located, of HMAS *Sydney* and KSN (sic) *Kormoran*'. The issue of protection of the wreck sites has been discussed in the previous chapter; this chapter considers what would be the most appropriate way, after the passage of so many years, to honour both ships, and in particular the 645 Australians who died in the engagement.

9.2 The Committee thought it appropriate to examine what commemorative activities had already been undertaken, before assessing whether these were adequate. The Committee then considered what might be appropriate in the future, including some consideration of the various options available, depending on whether or not the wrecks are located.

9.3 Although the Committee was asked to consider commemorative activities that might involve the *Kormoran*, it felt that specific action to commemorate that ship was more appropriately the responsibility of the German Government. However, it is obvious that mention of the *Kormoran* and her crew will be inevitable in some of the commemorative activities envisaged, and where it is appropriate the Committee has commented on these.

Commemoration to Date

Physical Memorials

9.4 The Department of Defence was most explicit in its view that:

Additional commemoration of *Sydney* and her crew is not warranted. The ship is commemorated through the current HMAS *Sydney*. The crew of *Sydney* are remembered, along with the (sic) all of Australia's fallen, at the Australian War Memorial. At least two additional memorials to *Sydney* and her crew, one located at Bradleys Head, Sydney and the other at Carnarvon, Western Australia, exist.³

1 McDonald, E, Submission, p. 3172.

2 Burnett, R, Transcript, p. 537.

3 Department of Defence, Submission, p. 1860.

9.5 The Department of Veterans' Affairs, while less blunt in its assessment, noted that those who died on *Sydney* have been officially commemorated:

... on behalf of the nation, by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission on the Naval Memorial to the Missing at Plymouth in the United Kingdom. Their names are also listed on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial.⁴

9.6 While it is correct that there is a memorial at Bradleys Head in Sydney, it is a memorial to all four ships that have borne the name *Sydney*, not just HMAS *Sydney* II.⁵ In addition, for a number who made submissions to the inquiry, the commemoration in Plymouth was not seen as sufficient recognition:

... only Canada and New Zealand has seen fit to have their navy dead, whose only grave is the sea, commemorated in their homeland.

I consider this a dereliction of duty on the part of successive Australian governments. These sailors from HMAS *Sydney* and sailors from other RAN ships, whose only grave is the sea, MUST be brought home.⁶

9.7 The Committee is aware that there is a memorial to the Navy in Anzac Parade, Canberra. Officially opened in 1986, it is dedicated to 'all those men and women who have served or are serving as permanent or reserve members of the Royal Australian Navy', not as suggested by Defence to 'all naval personnel who have been lost at sea during the wars'.⁷

9.8 Smaller memorials exist at a number of locations around the country:

The names of all victims of the *Sydney* are listed on our local memorial and a special memorial cairn has been erected at the 17 mile well on Quobba Station. A memorial to the deceased of the *Kormoran* has also been built within the Gascoyne Historical Society precinct.⁸

9.9 *Sydney* is commemorated in smaller, but no less important ways, for example with a memorial plaque in the Naval Memorial Garden in Adelaide.⁹ Services have been held at various times around Australia to honour the *Sydney*, and a number of naval historical presentations have been established.¹⁰

9.10 The continued interest in *Sydney* is reflected in plans for a memorial to be constructed in Geraldton, by the Rotary Club of Geraldton, with the support of the Geraldton City Council, the RSL Geraldton Sub-Branch and the Batavia Maritime Heritage

4 Department of Veterans' Affairs, Submission, p. 346.

5 Department of Defence, Submission, p. 3199.

6 Aylott, Submission, p. 1322. Emphasis in original.

7 Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 21.

8 Gascoyne Historical Society, Submission, p. 1144.

9 Craill, Submission, p. 3732.

10 See for example Davey, Submission, p. 3917.

Association.¹¹ The Rotary Club explained why a memorial to *Sydney* was most appropriate in that location:

The planned site for the memorial ... is ... Mount Scott Park ... overlooking the shores of the blue-green Indian Ocean [and with] views which are of vital significance to any meaningful memorial to HMAS *Sydney*. The first is a commanding view of one of HMAS *Sydney*'s last port (sic) of call in Australia – the port of Geraldton. The second is a commanding view of the Indian Ocean and the path of her last voyage in which she disappeared so tragically, so mysteriously.¹²

9.11 The Rotary Club has advised that it has received 'phenomenal' community support for the project. It is conducting a search for input into the design of the memorial and will be conducting a fund raising exercise through all Australian RSL Clubs. It is considering, in addition to the Mount Scott Park memorial, 'a Sentosa Island (Singapore) type display at the nearby Marina housed in the Maritime Museum'.¹³ The final form of the development is not yet decided.

9.12 The Western Australian Maritime Museum has also advised that a new Maritime Museum and enhanced maritime precinct is to be developed at Fremantle. The new Maritime Museum will contain 'a substantial naval and wartime element, part of which will include the activities of the RAN and other navies ... on this coast. ... With respect to the loss of HMAS *Sydney*, and its crew in waters off this coast, there is a desire and indeed a need for the new Maritime Museum to treat the demise of the vessel in the context of its entire career, of the RAN and of the "war on our doorstep" in general'. The WAMM went on to stress that these aims 'do not preclude the strong support of the Museum for the initiatives presented by others to the Committee with respect to a specific-purpose "real" or "virtual" memorial specific to HMAS *Sydney* and its crew or for the establishment of archival databases and the like with a similar aim in mind'.¹⁴ The potential certainly exists, and would be supported by the Committee, for an integration of the efforts of the Trust and the WAMM towards appropriately commemorating the *Sydney*.

9.13 Various views were expressed to the Committee (by those who felt existing memorials were not sufficient), as to how and where *Sydney* should be commemorated. Suggestions of possible memorial sites ranged from Quobba, Carnarvon, Geraldton, Christmas Island, Fremantle and Canberra. Each location has particular strengths and disadvantages. The idea of a tripartite memorial was raised with the Committee: a three point memorial, covering Fremantle (the last point HMAS *Sydney*'s crew were on Australian soil); Christmas Island, marking the body believed to be from *Sydney*; and Quobba where two lifeboats of *Kormoran* survivors landed.¹⁵ While this idea has significant merit, the Committee believes that as there is already a small memorial on Quobba, and with some expected permanent marking of the Christmas Island grave (see Chapter 7), it is not necessary to proceed along these lines.

11 Rotary Club of Geraldton, Submission, p. 4495

12 *ibid.*, p. 4497.

13 *ibid.*, p. 4499.

14 Western Australian Maritime Museum, Submission, pp. 4059-4060.

15 Poprzeczny, Transcript, p. 313.

9.14 The Committee notes that many of the smaller memorials are a result of public interest in the fate of *Sydney* and a desire to mark the passing of those on the ship in some form or other. After considering whether a further memorial should be erected to *Sydney*, the Committee concluded it would be appropriate for a major memorial to be erected in Fremantle, the port from which *Sydney* sailed. The Committee believes that the memorial should be jointly funded by the Commonwealth and Western Australian Governments, and that it be dedicated on 19 November 2001.

9.15 The Committee recommends that:

- 16. the Commonwealth and Western Australian Governments jointly fund the construction of a memorial to HMAS *Sydney*, to be erected in Fremantle, with the memorial to be dedicated on 19 November 2001.**

9.16 While the Committee acknowledges the role that such memorials play, in giving a focus to commemorative activities, there are also other ways in which the memory of those who died on *Sydney* will live on. The Committee has some sympathy with the views expressed thus:

It is very nice to put a monolith up, but I do not know what good it does. It you had something like a program or a scholarship to train people. ... I think that is better than putting up a stone monolith that the pigeons rest on every now and then.¹⁶

9.17 The Committee supports this desire to commemorate *Sydney*, not only through a physical memorial but also through a 'living' form of memorial. The Committee supports the establishment by the RAN of a research grant scheme in the name of HMAS *Sydney*, through which the memory of those lost on the ship will be remembered. It would be appropriate for recipients of the scheme to be either civilian or military, but the scheme should support research into aspects of Australian naval history, and operate along the lines of the Army History Grants Scheme. The scheme should be administered by an appropriate body such as the Australian War Memorial, with broad criteria to encompass both university and community based research. The Committee believes that a sum of \$50,000 should be made available per annum for this purpose, with bids being made from individuals and groups for funding within this overall amount.

9.18 The Committee recommends that:

- 17. the Royal Australian Navy create a research grant scheme in the name of HMAS *Sydney II* and her crew, to the value of \$50,000 per annum, to support research into aspects of Australian naval history.**

Other Activities

9.19 The HMAS *Sydney* Foundation Trust, in its first submission to the inquiry, indicated that its long-term aim was 'to achieve a wider and enduring remembrance of those who gave their lives. The Trust considers this a matter of honour, and aims to achieve a

16 Collins, J J, Transcript, p. 353.

"spiritual homecoming" for those whose whereabouts for so long remained a mystery'.¹⁷ The Trust is considering two forms of commemoration:

- a 'virtual memorial', involving computer-based displays; and
- development of a film based on on-water and in-water photography from the search. Funding for this project will be sought through independent channels. The Trust has also indicated that footage from the search will be one of the sources of this activity.¹⁸

Each of these is discussed briefly in this section.

Virtual memorial

9.20 The Trust has argued that, as the physical remains of *Sydney* and *Kormoran* will remain where they are after they have been located, one way to create a suitable memorial is through the creation of a 'virtual memorial' site on the Internet. It will provide educational, historical and cultural information, including design specifications and plans of both vessels, information about the equipment on each, the living and working conditions on each vessel, details of the crews, reconstruction of the engagement, information about the search for the wrecks and so forth. The Trust notes that 'The database will include digitised copies of papers and reports from the archives, and it will therefore depend on cooperation from the Australian Archives, the Australian War Memorial, the Western Australian Maritime Museum and other bodies in Australia and overseas ... The final product will be accessible on the World Wide Web in both English and German'.¹⁹

9.21 Funds will be needed to develop the software for the virtual memorial, to fund maintenance and system development over an initial three year period, and to allow acquisition of equipment and rental accommodation suitable for the public access sites in Fremantle and Sydney.²⁰ While the Committee questions the need for rental of public access sites (given that a virtual memorial would be accessible from any computer linked to the internet), the Committee believes it appropriate that the funds raised by the Trust through a public appeal (see paras 8.83-8.96) be directed not only to the search, but also to the memorial aspects of the Trust's work.

A documentary

9.22 The Committee has no in-principle objection to the making of a film about the search for HMAS *Sydney* and HSK *Kormoran* and their discovery, provided that the film is made in a suitably respectful manner. Any profits from the film should be used by the Trust in its commemorative activities.

A Memorial Service

9.23 Commemorative services were held immediately after the loss of *Sydney*, although not all relatives were able to attend.

17 HMAS *Sydney* Foundation Trust, Submission, p. 819.

18 *ibid.*, p. 829.

19 *ibid.*, p. 838.

20 *ibid.*, p. 832.

9.24 The year 1991 was a significant year for those interested in the fate of *Sydney*, as it saw the 50th anniversary of the battle, with a number of memorial ceremonies and dedications being held. It would be fitting if, by the year 2001, the 60th anniversary of the loss of *Sydney*, that some form of larger commemorative activity be undertaken, most probably in concert with the search for the wrecks, but also in connection with the commemoration of a new memorial in Fremantle (see para 9.15).

9.25 Should the site of the wreck of HMAS *Sydney* be established, the Committee believes it would be appropriate for the Department of Defence to co-ordinate a service at that location. Mrs Glenys McDonald has argued that such a service be held, even if the exact site of *Sydney*'s final resting place is not known, at an area of 'most likely occurrence':

I would like to see all next of kin, even all relatives, if possible, plus the researchers who have devoted many years to this subject, and the surviving members of the *Kormoran*, to sail to this position on several of the Navy's largest ships. The delegation should include Federal and State politicians, the Governor etc.

The ceremony should be scheduled between 6.30 pm and 7.30 pm as the sun sets. Each family should have the opportunity to throw a wreath overboard. As too should the Germans.

The ceremony should be widely telecast throughout Australia.

Then and only then do I believe we can 'let go' and say goodbye to our 645 valiant men and boys. Then and only then will people accept that the Government and the Navy valued their lives. Then and only then will Australians appreciate that our servicemen are valued in either victory or defeat.

For the sake of our future, we must make this gesture to the past.²¹

9.26 The memorial in Fremantle should also be a focus of commemoration in 2001, with commemorative activities also being undertaken in Sydney for those on the east coast unable to travel to Western Australia.

21 McDonald, G, Submission, pp. 182-183.

9.27 The Committee recommends that:

- 18. the Department of Defence co-ordinate services of commemoration for HMAS *Sydney* II in the year 2001, at the site of the wreck if determined, but also at the new memorial in Fremantle, and in Sydney.**

Future Research

9.28 The Committee is well aware that the level of interest in *Sydney* and her fate is so extensive, that regardless of the outcome of this inquiry, individuals and groups will continue to research the topic and expound on their various theories. This is to be welcomed, if it is undertaken with an openness to the information available and a willingness to listen and to take into consideration opposing views.

9.29 During this inquiry, the Committee was concerned that research into *Sydney* may be being hampered by animosity between the various 'groups' with an interest in the matter. For example, there have been claims that the Trust has been less than forthcoming in sharing of information:

[Other researchers] have been alienated. I think, really, if the foundation trust did a bit more public relations with some of the people who have had their heads in this for a long time, then we might be heading in a proper direction. I think the foundation trust people are very anxious and excited at the prospect. It is just that I think they have gone about it the wrong way.²²

9.30 One of the main benefits of this particular inquiry has been the pooling of knowledge and opinion into one consolidated source, available to all who are interested. This process will obviously cease when the Committee has reported, but the Committee would like to see some means by which this information sharing might continue. The 1991 Forum on *Sydney*, organised by the Western Australian Maritime Museum was a successful and productive venture. Unfortunately the 1997 Forum was less so, but the concept of gathering researchers together is a valuable one.

9.31 The Western Australian Maritime Museum has indicated that, should the inquiry seek it, the WAMM is willing to assist in continuing to fill the vacuum currently being filled by the Committee.²³ The WAMM has played a most constructive role so far in encouraging scholars and other institutions pursuing *Sydney*-related research, and a number of papers have been published by the Museum on this subject. The Committee would encourage the WAMM to continue in this work.

9.32 It is important that information and theories be shared and examined. The Committee strongly believes there is a need for all involved in the *Sydney* debate to move beyond animosity and antagonism and find common ground. No one group 'owns' *Sydney*, or has a monopoly on truth. The Committee hopes that in future researchers will rise above the personal acrimony and suspicion that has marred so much of the debate thus far. The 'dialogue of the deaf' that characterises so much of this debate is counter-productive. An

22 Kennedy, Transcript, p. 461. See also Kennedy, Submission, p. 2304.

23 Western Australian Maritime Museum, Submission, p. 4059.

exchange of differing views is a positive process, and can only lead to a better understanding of the events of November 1941. HMAS *Sydney* deserves no less.

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Chairman