



HMAS SYDNEY II SEARCH PRESS ROOM

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THE FINDING SYDNEY FOUNDATION

Latest Search Reports

Closing Thoughts

David Mearns – Search Director, The Finding Sydney Foundation

Looking back on the 43 days since we began mobilising the SV Geosounder on February 27th I can safely say that the Finding Sydney Foundation team, including all their offshore subcontractors, exceeded the highest possible expectations anyone could have before the project started.

Of course the headline news was that HMAS Sydney II was finally located 66 years after her sinking and the tragic loss of the entire ship's company of 645 men. This stunning achievement, along with everything else accomplished during the expedition, as I have summarised below, must be viewed in the context that locating Sydney was never going to be a sure bet. In fact there was a considerable chance of failure and there were many doubters who increased the stakes and pressure with their opposition. For this reason I feel that full credit must be paid to the Commonwealth Government of Australia, the state Governments of WA and NSW, all the private donors large and small, the RAN, the Sydney relatives who fully supported the search and of course the Finding Sydney Foundation.

Project Accomplishments:

- HSK Kormoran was located in 64 hours of active searching.
- A total of 3 "high-resolution" side-scan sonar passes were made over the wreck of Kormoran which allowed us to confirm its identity on the basis of the sonar data alone.
- HMAS Sydney (II) was located in 67 hours of active searching.
- A total of 4 "high-resolution" side-scan sonar passes were made over the wreck of Sydney which allowed us to confirm its identity on the basis of the sonar data alone.
- Both wrecks and their associated debris fields were filmed in high-quality video totalling approximately 60 hours and an additional 1,435 still photographs were taken.
- Commemorations were held at sea directly over both wreck sites.
- The Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, separately announced the discovery of both wrecks to a waiting Australia (we missed a single announcement for both wrecks by just 1 hour).
- As a result of being located both wreck sites are now legally protected under the Historic Shipwreck Act of 1976 and hereafter will be managed by the Department of the Environment Water, Heritage and the Arts.
- A Commission of Inquiry led by Terrence Cole QC will be conducted to inquire into the circumstances of the loss of HMAS Sydney.
- The Finding Sydney Foundation's website received over 12 million hits during the course of the expedition.
- Over 60,000 unique visitors visited the Virtual Press Room to receive media information.
- A documentary of the search expedition will be broadcast on ABC on April 15th, less than 1 week after the project has been completed.
- Most importantly, over 900 families related to men lost with the sinking of Sydney have contacted the RAN's Relative Helpline and registered their details.

Although it involved an enormous amount of work and commitment over a period of 5 years I also realise that I was enormously privileged to lead such an important search on behalf of The Finding Sydney Foundation

and I wish to thank the Directors, past and present, for their support and trust.

Finally, I want to express my deep appreciation to Patrick Flynn, Commander Fiona McNaught of the RAN and John Perryman of the Sea Power Centre for their professionalism in handling such an unusual, and at times difficult project. John, in particular, has been with me every step of the way giving me good advice when needed and his role in the success of this project can not be overstated. Every single day with John was a fascinating lesson in the history of the RAN and good fun.

Glenys McDonald - Director, The Finding Sydney Foundation (Observer)

As we bring our blogs of the search for HMAS Sydney to a close, I have to pinch myself when I realise just how successful we have been. It is difficult to comprehend that David, John and I have been on the MV Geosounder for about seven weeks.

It seems a far cry from the day I arrived during the mobilisation phase and met the Williamson crew from Seattle. As the crane lifted all their sensitive equipment on board I noted confidence amongst the chaos, even in the 40 degree heat. I was in a panic that day because of the unfamiliar surroundings and fear of the unknown.

The first lesson I had to learn was patience, as the road to this success has not been easy. We seemed doomed before we began with mechanical, technical and weather down time. There were days on end when we were unable to function because of not one but two cyclones, days when some people were seasick (I was one of the lucky ones) and days when sensitive electronics like the sonar and ROV were not operating as we might wish. I learnt to have trust in the expertise of the professionals who knew how to do their job, and just let them get on with it.

There were disappointments too, when interesting targets turned out to be geological on closer analysis. But as long as I live I will never forget the feeling of seeing the sonar images of first Kormoran, and then HMAS Sydney for the first time.

The most frustrating period for me was the long delay in port between the first phase and the second ROV phase over the Easter period. But all that paled into insignificance when on 3 April we lowered the ROV to depth over HMAS Sydney. I was incredibly nervous as we waited for the first video footage of Sydney to appear on the screen. We were not disappointed and after working day and night for several days we have an incredible video record of both ships and debris fields.

This search is also about people: the five volunteer Directors of Finding Sydney Foundation who refused to give up; the folk who funded us; the team work on board despite incredibly long shifts and the friendships made; and most of all it is about the relatives of the lost mariners to whom we brought a mixture of joy and sorrow when we finally told them where they loved ones were.

John Perryman – Senior Naval Historian (Observer)

Yesterday afternoon, having completed our examination of the Kormoran and her associated debris field, we shaped course for the Sydney wreck site to conduct one final ROV pass in an attempt to find the few remaining large ship fittings thus far unaccounted for. These included the second set of quadruple torpedo tubes, the main mast, four ships boats, and two sets of large boat davits.

It was certainly worth the effort, as later in the evening we found all but the remaining boats and davits. We also found the middle section of the High Angle Control Station tower which had severed from its mounting at the rear of Sydney's bridge behind the Director Control Tower. This was an unexpected but most welcome surprise.

At 2342, satisfied that we had now examined and recorded as much of the debris field as possible, David Mearns declared the survey and search for the wreck of HMAS Sydney (II) complete. Amidst a sense of pride and achievement the team congratulated one another on a job well done.

As the ROV made its ascent to the surface, the light cast by its powerful underwater lights on Sydney's wreck began to fade. Once again the pride of the Royal Australian Navy's World War II fleet was left in peace, concealed and safe in the depths and darkness of her underwater sanctuary.

There is no doubt that this voyage of discovery and commemoration has been a resounding success for all concerned and I am very proud to have played a part in its planning and execution. As this will be my final contribution to this search diary I would like to extend my personal thanks to all those people, throughout Australia and overseas who never lost faith in the search team's ability to find the wrecks. The staunch, unwavering support of these individuals helped to make the search a reality and to all of them I extend a sincere vote of thanks.

To the many relatives of those lost in this great warship who have carried pain, anguish and grief for so many years, I sincerely hope that the knowledge of knowing where their loved ones now lie brings them some sense of solace.

Dr. Michael (Mac) McCarthy – Curator of Maritime Archaeology, WA Museum (Observer)

HMAS Sydney and HSK Kormoran became the most sought after of any shipwreck in our nation's history. This has led to the expenditure of hitherto unprecedented amounts of time, funds and resources in research, seminars, inquiries and now search.

Being sometimes quite complex and often difficult to understand at a glance, those interested in the reasons why the search took so long are referred to Museum Report Number 230 (see link below). In essence the failure to grasp the moral obligation we all share in trying to ensure that the circumstances whereby people are lost or injured in Service are properly explained was a fundamental cause. Associated and intertwined is the failure to properly attend to the needs of those bereaved or affected by death or injury of relatives in public service. In the HMAS Sydney case a 'fair go' was patently not forthcoming. Therein lies the source of the frustration and anger so often vented at the authorities. Thankfully as a nation we are now turning that corner.

That the search and survey just completed has been conducted with experts from overseas, in the presence of independent observers, with rapid and effective overnight reporting back to the nation (when weather and technical faults have not conspired to produce inactivity) is unprecedented. That provision for verifiable hard copy data with independently-generated records all linked in time and place has been made, is again unprecedented. It has to be, for the reasons outlined above.

The microcosm that was life on SV Geosounder for 43 days, the sailors, galley staff, stewards, engineers and officers (men and women from across Australia and from overseas) used every moment of their free time to crowd into the search and survey control room to watch the work. That is a reflection of the interest the search has generated. Millions from other ships, from farms, sheep stations, towns and cities watched from the wider world. While there was a natural curiosity, for many, if not most, a satisfactory explanation for Australia's greatest maritime and wartime mystery was being sought.

The two wrecks and their debris fields are now protected under the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act. That future access to their restricted zones will again be the subject of stringent entry and reporting requirements attests to their ongoing importance as heritage sites. That they remain the property of the services whose flag they once fought under, yet are protected by an act that makes those same properties part of the national estate, again places them in a very rare category indeed. These are national icons.

For many this successful search is finality. For some it is but a continuation. For others it is only the beginning, for an independent inquiry has been announced. In these last cases let us hope that the lessons learnt to date will lead to exhaustive archival search, objective research, debate and well-reasoned analyses and conclusion on all fronts and at all levels. Above all let us hope that the sacrifice of those who we now know so desperately died in service on HMAS Sydney is honoured. This crew died trying to make our nation a place where diversity of opinion could thrive, where respect to others would be shown and where all were to be given that fair go.

www.museum.wa.gov.au/collections/maritime/march/publications.asp.



Photo Above: (left to right) Glenys McDonald, David Mearns, John Perryman, and Mac McCarthy with the Explorers Club Flag awarded to David Mearns - a Fellow of the EC - to carry on this expedition.



Photo Above: The expedition team back in Geraldton following the successful ROV video investigation of the wrecks.

Patrick Flynn - Project Manager, The Finding Sydney Foundation

Supporting the Directors of the Finding Sydney Foundation (Ted Graham, Don Pridmore, Glenys McDonald, Bob Trotter and Keith Rowe); our offshore Search Director (David Mearns); our Contractors (DOF Subsea Australia P/L, Williamson & Associates of Seattle, and Electric Pictures P/L); and the Royal Australian Navy throughout the search was a small and dedicated group - Richard Sojka our IT/Internet Manager and LeeAnne Evans and Penny Buchan, our office management team, whom I thank for their efforts in helping to keep the rudder straight and the sails aloof.

Valuable legal support from Tim Cocks, Paul Hopwood, Mal Hartford and Minal Shah enabled our contractors to deliver their professional services and equipment in a compressed schedule. I also wish to acknowledge the facilities provided by the Mayor of the City of Geraldton-Greenough and the services of various contractors that aided the search vessel SV Geosounder whilst in Geraldton port.

I treasure the legacy of the search for HMAS *Sydney* and HSK *Kormoran* and sincerely trust that by locating and providing their resting imagery in the deep waters of the Indian Ocean, we have provided some comfort to the many relatives and friends of the sailors and airmen whose lives were lost on 19th November 1941.



Photo Above: Office Management for The Finding Sydney Foundation, LeeAnne Evans (left) and Penny Buchan (right)

Richard Sojka - Internet & IT Project Manager, The Finding Sydney Foundation

On behalf of the IT/Web Team at findingsydney.com it has been our pleasure to bring the Search for the HMAS Sydney II to the world via the internet. Having personally been involved with the project for some seven years, I fully understand what the find and subsequent imagery has brought to the relatives of the brave men who gave their lives for their country. Also the level of interest both in Australia and overseas, the search has attracted.

The Search website although existing for many years as an appeal was upgraded on the 27th of February 2008 to commence reporting on David Mearns search team progress to the public and the media, bringing the subsequent finds to the world. Since this date we have currently received more than 12 million hits to the sites, serving more than 350 gigabytes of bandwidth data over the course of 43 days, with zero downtime. We have had more than 60,000 unique visitors to the Virtual Press Room alone to download information, which provides some indication to the extent this story has interested media outlets everywhere.

We have received much thanks and praise for our efforts in publishing the information contained both in the public and press room websites and have been extremely pleased that we have managed to bring you news and blogs as quickly as possible, with the compelling images and footage from the ROV.

The high definition images published for media distribution at the Virtual Press Room are the exact unaltered versions we received from the Search team on board the SV Geosounder. These images were compressed to a smaller size for the public to view in photo galleries and blogs due to bandwidth constraints. Aside from a small degree of sharpening to compensate for the lowering to a smaller image size, the inclusion of watermarking of "findingsydney.com" on the bottom right hand corner of blog photographs, the web team has gone to great lengths to ensure the images you have seen are as true to the originals as possible. The streaming video footage from Electric Pictures was reduced to a smaller scale for streaming and delivered as per the original source.

As the Finding Sydney Foundation is a non-profit organisation, we do not use advertisers on our sites to subsidise our web costs. Subsequently a very small web team has done an extraordinary job of publishing and delivering a high profile story to the world, in a very short space of time, within budget. It has been with care and respect for the crews of both the HMAS Sydney II and the HSK Kormoran, and their many relatives of these men that we have made every effort to ensure the websites are maintained and evolved for future generations to remember.

There have been a number of IT tasks undertaken during the course of the project, the most significant being the collation and storage of 1,435 still ROV images and approximately 60 hours of underwater digital footage from the Search Project. This was successfully completed today, with the unaltered source files archived with the Finding Sydney Foundation for historical record and copies being provided to contractual parties.

I would personally like to thank the board of the Finding Sydney Foundation and the Project Manager Patrick Flynn for supporting our team with their strong belief in ensuring information is reported accurately and rapidly to the public. It has been a great pleasure to be involved in such a historical and worthy project.

Lest We Forget Sydney



Photo Above: Richard Sojka, Foundation Web and IT Manager (right) being congratulated for his work with Finding Sydney Foundation by the Premier of Western Australia the Hon Alan J Carpenter MLA (left)

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Comments

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