

HMAS SYDNEY

Motion

MR SWEETMAN (Ningaloo) [4.01 pm]: It is my pleasure today to be involved in this debate. I move -

That -

- (1) this House pause to remember the service and sacrifice of the officers and crew of HMAS *Sydney* lost in the battle with the German raider *Kormoran* on 19 November 1941 off the coast of Western Australia between Geraldton and Carnarvon;
- (2) that this House recognise and applaud the efforts of the communities of Carnarvon and Geraldton for diligently tending and honouring the memory of those who gave their lives in defence of this State and nation; and
- (3) that this House request the State Government and the Federal Government on the sixtieth anniversary of the sinking of the *Sydney* to support Mr Mike McCarthy and the WA Museum in their efforts to locate the final resting place of both HMAS *Sydney* and the raider *Kormoran*.

So much still remains to be said, even after 60 years. At approximately 5.30 pm on Monday, 19 November it will be exactly 60 years from when the HMAS *Sydney* first sighted the German raider *Kormoran* somewhere off the coast of Carnarvon. It is fitting that today, considering the controversy over the years, and, regrettably, some of the controversy that has developed in the past 12 to 18 months between Geraldton and Carnarvon, that we talk through some of these issues. I will attempt to ensure that from this day on - the sixtieth anniversary of the sinking of the *Sydney* - we will in some way overcome a lot of the mystery and controversy surrounding the sinking of the *Sydney* and ensure that this does not signal the start of further controversy about how our State and towns within our State remember and preserve the memory of the *Sydney*.

For those in the House who are not acutely aware of the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the *Sydney*, I will briefly go through the circumstances. HMAS *Sydney* was returning from the Sunda Strait where it had escorted a transport ship, the *Zealandia*, which was on its way to Singapore carrying cargo and troops - the 8th Division. The *Sydney* was on its return voyage from that trip and was only a little over a day out of Fremantle. It is believed that approximately 160 nautical miles south of North West Cape the *Sydney* first saw the *Kormoran*. It did not know it was the *Kormoran* at that time. It was approximately 15 miles from the German raider when it first saw it. At the time it saw the vessel, the *Sydney* altered course and headed in what was generally a westerly direction. The *Sydney* then made chase. The *Sydney* was capable of about 32 knots; the *Kormoran* was capable of about 18 knots, but because of some malfunction in its engines was capable of only 16 knots. It did not take long before the *Sydney* started to close in on the *Kormoran*. I understand from the records that at about 9 000 or 10 000 yards, the *Sydney* was signalling "identify yourself". Through the use of lights, signals and other communications, the information that came back from what turned out to be the *Kormoran* was that it was the Dutch ship the *Straat Malakka*, which was a merchant ship. The *Sydney* did not believe there was any enemy craft within those waters, so it did not have sufficient reason to be suspicious other than it knew there was a war on and there had been sightings in the Indian Ocean of some German ships previously in 1941, so it had reason to investigate further.

Obviously, as the *Sydney* was searching its books to identify the *Straat Malakka* and, as it got closer to what it was given to believe was a Dutch merchant ship - to all intents and purposes that is what it looked like - it continued to insist that the vessel identify itself. Through some bumbling and fumbling of flags and signals the *Kormoran* bought time as the *Sydney* was lured closer to the raider. When the *Sydney* was within about 1 200 metres, it was clear that Captain Burnett, the captain of the *Sydney*, was becoming increasingly anxious that he had not had the secret code back. There was a code in the books by which they would signal certain letters by lights, and it was up to vessels to respond to the secret code - to put the letter either side of the two letters that were beamed out by the signal. The vessel was unable to do that, so by this time it was action stations on the *Sydney*, as it was on the *Kormoran*. However, the *Kormoran* still looked like a merchant ship. Then at a distance of approximately 1 200 metres with the *Kormoran* heading in a generally westerly direction and the *Sydney* heading in the same direction, slightly astern of the *Kormoran*, the *Kormoran* identified itself as being a German raider, and the screens and hatches that covered the guns were peeled away, folded back and the *Kormoran* was able to fire one of the first salvos in the battle. Almost simultaneously the *Sydney* returned fire. Whether by luck or simple good drilling, the *Kormoran* was able to inflict heavy damage on the *Sydney* in the first couple of salvos. The *Kormoran* took out sections of the bridge, which no doubt would have crippled the main command centre on the ship; fire started almost immediately; the communications network was wiped out and there was interruption to the electrical systems on the *Sydney*. That may be why the *Kormoran* was able to

Mr Rod Sweetman; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Pandal; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Colin Barnett

get away five separate salvos firing starboard into the port side of the *Sydney* before the *Sydney* could get off its second salvo. I understand that it was during the second salvo that the *Sydney* fired that it severely damaged the *Kormoran*. One of the six-inch shells landed in the engine room of the *Kormoran* and immediately set off a fierce fire. That battle started at about 1830 hours or 6.30 pm in our time and lasted for only five minutes. Something like 10, 12 and some say 13 salvos were fired from the *Kormoran* into the *Sydney*. It is believed that over 550 six-inch shells were fired at the *Sydney*. It is estimated that somewhere between 40 and perhaps as many as 60 of those shells were direct hits on the *Sydney*, as well as one torpedo from the torpedo hatches on the *Kormoran* that struck the *Sydney* towards the bow section of midship. The *Sydney* was critically wounded in a five-minute battle that took place at very close quarters - only 1 200 metres apart, a distance that advantaged the German raider *Kormoran*. In fact, the *Kormoran* evened up the scales to some extent even though it was outgunned, outmanned, outweighed by the size and sophistication of armaments on the *Sydney*. The *Sydney* then dropped astern. It was bowed down at the front, had already started to list, and it was losing speed. It fell astern of the *Kormoran* and by this stage the *Kormoran* was also almost totally immobilised, only making two or three knots as it headed in a generally westerly, south westerly direction. Some of the survivors said that when the *Sydney* was turning to port - it turned nearly 90 degrees and was about to cross the stern of the *Kormoran* - they thought it was putting itself into a position to fire torpedoes. It has not been confirmed whether the *Sydney* was able to fire torpedoes at the *Kormoran*. However, it certainly passed to the stern of the *Kormoran* and was last seen going in a southerly direction, still heavily bowed down at the front and listing to a point at which both props on the *Sydney* could be seen in the heavy swell as it wallowed and limped its way off into the distance. It is assumed that later that night the *Sydney*, like the *Kormoran*, sank. An effective search did not begin until about four days later because naval intelligence did not believe that there was any threat in the Indian Ocean. It was waiting for the *Sydney* to renew wireless transmission with it to work out its exact position.

The first survivors of the *Kormoran* landed on the mainland six or seven days later in their life rafts. That created a lot of consternation in Carnarvon at that time because the word was that the first of the *Sydney* survivors had landed. There was great merriment in Carnarvon and preparations were being made for parties to welcome back the survivors of the *Sydney*. Of course, they were disappointed when they found out that the 103 people who had been picked up - 46 came ashore at 17-Mile Well and 57 at Red Bluff, approximately 60 or 70 kilometres north of Carnarvon - were from the *Kormoran*. They were held in Carnarvon for some time before being moved to Harvey where they were interned, or so I believe. I do not know where they went from there, but during that time they were heavily interrogated, and much of the information that was gleaned during that time was not released until recently. A lot of work has gone into trying to identify the final resting place of the *Sydney*. That is the controversy and the mystery of the *Sydney*, and to some extent much of it is unanswered even today.

I am proud of the efforts that the community of Carnarvon has made over a long period. The culmination of Carnarvon's effort to ensure that the memory of the *Sydney* did not fade was the 1981 erection of a cairn at High Rock on Quobba Station, which marked the fortieth anniversary of the sinking of the *Sydney*. The sinking of the *Sydney* is duly commemorated, and each year there is a pilgrimage back to that cairn on the day, or as close to the day as is possible, to remember those who lost their lives in the sinking of the *Sydney*. Every person who is doing an investigation of the sinking of the *Sydney* inevitably finds his or her way to Carnarvon to talk to the Carnarvon folk, the naval association and the Returned Services League. Over a long period, Carnarvon has developed a belief that it, to some degree, has responsibility for and ownership of the heritage and history that belongs to the *Sydney*.

One of the reasons I wanted to move this motion was so that I could stand in Parliament today with my colleagues, the members for Greenough and Geraldton, and say that I and the people of Carnarvon support the erection of this memorial in Geraldton, regardless of the hurt that the people of Carnarvon might feel. I got a call from a minister in the previous Government who said that Cabinet was looking at the idea of providing \$200 000 for the erection of this memorial. I said, "Just give us five minutes". I spoke to some of the key people in Carnarvon, such as those involved in the RSL and those who had been responsible for much of the work that had been done on the *Sydney* about these issues, and although they were unhappy that they would somehow lose their significant relationship with the *Sydney*, they accepted that it was a decent and appropriate thing to do, and if Geraldton had the wherewithal to do it, then good on it. Much of the controversy over recent times has been too public, and it has involved Carnarvon people criticising Geraldton, undeservedly, for robbing them of their heritage.

Mr McRae interjected.

Mr SWEETMAN: Going back nearly 18 months, I received a call from a minister who said that Cabinet was looking at a proposal to put in a third of the cost to provide a lasting memorial to the *Sydney* in Geraldton. I was

Mr Rod Sweetman; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Pandal; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Colin Barnett

asked how that would go down with the people in my electorate, and I said that I would find out. I agreed, reluctantly in one respect, that it was an appropriate thing to do, and I got the backing for it to go ahead. While I was trying to get \$4 500 through various funding submissions to build a disabled access route to the memorial cairn at High Rock, Geraldton was off sourcing \$600 000 to provide a lasting and significant memorial to the *Sydney*.

Geraldton is doing a grand thing, and I understand that by the time the monument is finished, the cost will have blown out to over \$900 000. However, it will be very significant. On behalf of the people of Carnarvon - as their elected representative I can be considered their attorney on occasions like this - I say that the memorial is a good thing. I believe that the Leader of the Opposition is going to Geraldton to look at the memorial at the weekend. I want to ensure that every community does its part, and that the member responsible for the Geraldton electorate and I, as the representative of the Carnarvon constituents, give an undertaking that there will not be any controversy over who remembers the *Sydney* and where it will be remembered. We must make that commitment. If we can find the final resting place of the *Sydney*, I am sure that there will be lasting healing, and we will be able to preserve the dignity of the sacrifice and service made by the captain, officers and crew of the *Sydney*. In fact, we should find the final resting place of both vessels. No-one wants to be macabre about this issue and try to retrieve anything that is on those vessels. Wherever they are, they are war graves. I am not in favour of marking them once we find them. We will have the coordinates to allow people to dive with cameras to film whatever needs to be filmed to help answer some of the unanswered questions about this battle and the sinking of the *Sydney*.

Mike McCarthy, the curator of the WA Maritime Museum, and Wes Olsen, author of one of the most definitive works on the *Sydney*, are almost certain that the *Kormoran* and the *Sydney* lie within a circle of about 25 kilometres. After collating and cross-referencing information, they believe that the *Kormoran* will be found easily. It will be a relatively inexpensive task. They believe that if they find the *Kormoran*, that will be a testimony to some of the evidence about the final resting place of both ships, evidence about which they have been suspicious for so long. However, because they believe it will be easier to find the *Kormoran*, they will be able to then use that as a reference point to locate the *Sydney*.

I encourage the Premier to support the WA Maritime Museum in its efforts to relocate these two vessels; to play a part in ensuring that both Geraldton and Carnarvon are united in the way they preserve the memory and pay homage to the sailors of the *Sydney*; and to encourage a drawing together of the two communities. Perhaps the Premier could visit Memorial Avenue in Carnarvon where plaques have been erected and trees planted for each of the 645 officers and crew who were lost on the *Sydney*. A lot of work has been done and the celebrations continue. I will return to Carnarvon on Saturday and continue to participate in the commemoration services that have been organised by the various groups in Carnarvon to pay homage and recognition to the service and the sacrifice that those people on the HMAS *Sydney* paid for us.

DR GALLOP (Victoria Park - Premier) [4.19 pm]: On 19 November 1941, somewhere off Steep Point between Geraldton and Carnarvon, the HMAS *Sydney* was engaged by the German armed cruiser the *Kormoran* and sunk. I note the description of those events by the member for Ningaloo from the best evidence that is available to him on that issue. All 645 crew members on the HMAS *Sydney* were lost. That battle remains the greatest single loss of life in Australian naval history, and therein lies the significance of this tragedy. To this day, that loss is felt not only by the friends and family of the crew, but also by the nation. In particular, the people of Western Australia feel that loss.

It is interesting to note that in 1999, the report by the federal parliamentary inquiry into the loss of the HMAS *Sydney* recommended that a memorial be constructed in Western Australia. The two potential sites for such a memorial were Geraldton or Carnarvon. Geraldton was a potential site because the HMAS *Sydney* visited there a number of times, the last time less than four weeks before she was lost. Carnarvon was a potential site because the survivors of the *Kormoran* found their way there after the battle, which was described very well by the member for Ningaloo. Both of those towns have been keen to provide a memorial. In Geraldton, the provision of a memorial has been facilitated by the Geraldton Rotary Club, which has had financial support from the Commonwealth and State Governments, the Lotteries Commission of Western Australia, the City of Geraldton, the Rotary Club of Geraldton and the friends and relatives of the crew. The rotary club has also had a huge amount of in-kind support from the community and businesses in and around Geraldton. That memorial will be officially opened on Sunday.

The memorial includes a domed roof of silver gulls that represent the souls of the 645 men who lost their lives. Also, a black granite wall of remembrance bears the names of those men, an eternal flame symbolically keeps their spirits alive, and a bronze figure of a waiting woman represents all the loved ones who were left behind and to whom the memorial is dedicated. That memorial is a credit to the community of Geraldton, which has joined

Mr Rod Sweetman; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Pendal; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Colin Barnett

together to fund and build it. I am very proud that the State Government also made a significant contribution towards the cost of that memorial, which will become one of the most significant memorials in Australia. I urge all members to visit it. It overlooks Geraldton and the sea, and is a truly magnificent commemoration of the 645 men who lost their lives. The sculptured woman is looking out to sea waiting for her loved ones to return; however, they did not return.

My family is from Geraldton. When my mother was a young woman, she met the crew of the HMAS *Sydney* at the local yacht club dances that were held for the visiting servicemen and women. My grandfather worked on the Geraldton wharf and only four weeks before the tragedy was called to duty to allow the HMAS *Sydney* to leave from Geraldton.

Carnarvon has also played an important role. The member for Ningaloo mentioned the memorial cairn that was built on the coast in 1981, 40 years after the tragedy. Importantly, in and around Carnarvon, people have taken a real interest in the issue. The local historians have gathered a lot of evidence. Next door to the one-mile jetty in Carnarvon is a wonderful museum that has pictures and photographs of the history of Carnarvon. The historians and the local community of Carnarvon have kept the issue alive in a way that brings them credit. As a living monument to the 645 servicemen, the community of Carnarvon built a memorial avenue. That monument is the result of the efforts of the Shire of Carnarvon, the Carnarvon Chamber of Commerce and the community in that area. I pay tribute to the work done by the community and those organisations. Unfortunately, I could not attend the opening of that memorial on 10 November. My ministerial colleague, Hon Tom Stephens, attended and, on behalf of the Western Australia community, congratulated Carnarvon for the construction of that avenue. Along the avenue will be planted 645 trees. It is hoped that every tree will be planted and adopted by a family member or friend of a deceased officer. Each plaque will state the name, age, rank and serial number of each naval officer. This is a tremendous memorial, and the community of Carnarvon is to be congratulated. There is a direct link between the events of 1941 and the towns of Geraldton and Carnarvon. Both of those communities are contributing to a memorial and both will play a role in keeping this story alive in memory of those servicemen who lost their lives.

On Friday, 16 November, the Royal Australian Navy will convene a seminar to discuss the possibilities of where to locate the HMAS *Sydney*. The seminar includes an oral history session, an archival session, a technical session and an oceanography session. The Western Australian Museum is assisting the navy to provide facilities at the Western Australian Maritime Museum to hold that seminar. Great interest has been expressed in this seminar and the capacity of the hall has been fully booked, such is the level of interest in this issue.

I congratulate the member for Ningaloo for raising this matter in Parliament. It is important that he has done so. I congratulate the people and the communities of Geraldton and Carnarvon for putting memorials in place. I urge all members of Parliament to take an interest in this matter and to visit Carnarvon and Geraldton to see the work that has been done. Let us hope that the further work of the technical experts, including the oceanographers and naval experts, will provide more evidence to take us closer to the solution to what has been a mystery that has haunted the Australian people for 60 years.

MR EDWARDS (Greenough) [4.27 pm]: I commend the member for Ningaloo for raising the matter of the HMAS *Sydney* and I commend his articulate description of the events of the battle of that day as written by Wes Olson. Some of my remarks will include issues raised by the member for Ningaloo and the Premier. I respect the remarks made by the Premier about the HMAS *Sydney*.

The sinking of HMAS *Sydney* in 1941 remains one of today's greatest sea battle mysteries. Remembering the deaths of those 645 men who served on her final voyage should focus our attention on trying to ascertain what happened in her final moments. Enough has been written about that story to know the probabilities of what happened; however, we do not really know about her final moments. As the Premier recognised, over the years, the communities of Geraldton and Carnarvon have claimed that the HMAS *Sydney* disappeared off their coastlines. That remains a battle of wits. However, one hopes that with the construction of these memorials, the situation will change. I am not lending any argument to either of those claims, but I congratulate both communities for not allowing the memory of the disaster of HMAS *Sydney* to die.

The member for Ningaloo and the Premier spoke about the efforts of the people of Carnarvon to raise a memorial to and a means of recognition of the men of HMAS *Sydney*, with both the cairn at Quobba, which I have seen, and the planting of the 645 memorial trees. I draw the attention of the House to the memorial being completed in Geraldton. It is arguably one of the most magnificent memorials in Western Australia. I claim some ownership of it, because in another life I was the president of the Shire of Greenough. I am aware that my parliamentary colleague the member for Geraldton intends to speak on this matter, and I do not want to take away from anything he has to say. However, as the shire president, I argued very forcibly for a contribution of \$50 000 towards the cost of constructing the memorial. We now have a very worthwhile memorial in Geraldton.

Mr Rod Sweetman; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Pendal; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Colin Barnett

The construction of the memorial was achieved through the hard work of the Rotary Club of Geraldton. Richard Larriera, a local physiotherapist, was the president of the club when the idea first emerged. He was looking for a project the Rotary Club could support. He heard a discussion or some conjecture about the HMAS *Sydney*, and he was walking from his office into his reception area when it suddenly hit him that it would be a great idea to build a memorial to those who died on the ship. That was the birth of the project. Many other characters in the Geraldton and Greenough area have been involved over the years, and Glenys McDonald is one such person. She has a passion for the history of the HMAS *Sydney*. In fact, if members have a day to spare, they should ask her what happened, how it happened and her thoughts about it. Many people from various groups were interested in the topic and drove the project.

More than \$700 000 has been raised. The coalition State Government of the day made two contributions - one of \$75 000 and another of \$40 000; the City of Geraldton contributed \$50 000; the Shire of Greenough contributed \$50 000; the Rotary Club contributed \$20 000; the federal Government, through a Department of Veterans' Affairs grant entitled "Their sacrifice - our heritage", contributed \$200 000; the Lotteries Commission recently contributed \$200 000; the public contributed \$25 000; and Western Power contributed \$15 000. In addition, Golden West Network Ltd donated \$10 000 worth of advertising time and Western Power donated the electrical network for the memorial.

As has already been mentioned, the site includes a memorial wall, a cupola - which has 645 seagulls - and the *Waiting Woman* statue. The member for Geraldton may be able to confirm that a 60-foot high silhouette of the bow of HMAS *Sydney* is to be erected. The cupola contains 645 seagulls because at the first memorial service held on Mt Scott, during the minute's silence after the bugle was sounded, a flock of silver-backed seagulls flew over from the north west. Those watching had an eerie feeling; it raised the hairs on the back of my neck. I do not think there were 645 birds - the number was probably nearer 100 - but to this day I have not seen another seagull in the area.

It is important that we remember the sacrifice that those 645 men made in the defence of their country. I am aware that a degree of resentment has built up between Carnarvon and Geraldton about the funding of each town's memorial. That is sad. I hope that my contribution and those of the members for Ningaloo and Geraldton about the respective memorials will focus attention on the most important factor; that is, that both are dedicated to the memory of the men who were killed in the action between HMAS *Sydney* and the German raider *Kormoran*. I agree with the member for Ningaloo that it is important we remember that point.

Much has been said about what really happened to HMAS *Sydney* and her final resting place. I recommend that members read Wes Olson's book *Bitter Victory*. His assessment of the battle is very detailed and is based on information gathered from German sailors. He and the curator of the Western Australian Maritime Museum, Michael McCarthy, are keen to find *Kormoran*. As the member for Ningaloo said, if they can find it - they seem to think they can - presumably it will provide some clues about HMAS *Sydney*'s resting place. I do not believe that we should bring her to the surface, but I would like to know where she is and what happened. That would perhaps end the great mystery that has surrounded the ship for so long. I support the motion moved by the member for Ningaloo on this the sixtieth anniversary of the sinking of HMAS *Sydney*.

MR HILL (Geraldton) [4.35 pm]: I support the motion. I cannot add much more to the topic, apart from details of my history lesson with Glenys McDonald over the past six months. She is constantly reminding me of the debate and what has happened in the past.

The men of the HMAS *Sydney* comprised one-third of the Royal Australian Navy personnel killed in action during the Second World War. Those men came from communities throughout the country. I support the members for Ningaloo and Greenough. We are one community from Carnarvon and Geraldton, and I look forward to continuing that relationship.

MR PENDAL (South Perth) [4.36 pm]: I support the motion and congratulate the member for Ningaloo. Glenys McDonald is a formidable woman. About seven or eight years ago she contacted me to talk about HMAS *Sydney*. That contact led to questions being asked in this House and followed this Parliament's agreeing to appoint two successive select committees - a Legislative Council committee was appointed in 1992 to inquire into the *Batavia* incident and a Legislative Assembly committee was appointed in 1994 to inquire into ancient shipwrecks off the coast of Western Australia. In turn, that prompted Glenys McDonald to contact me. As a devotee of the HMAS *Sydney* mystery and based in Geraldton, she provided members with data indicating that the first engagement between the two vessels may have occurred off the coast of Northampton on the night of 19 or 20 November 1941. That first engagement was visible off the coast between Northampton and Geraldton. There is a sting in the tail of my contribution. I will be brief, but this story has a good lesson for everyone.

Mr Rod Sweetman; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Pandal; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Colin Barnett

Glenys McDonald has amassed an enormous amount of information. She had documents indicating that the Western Australia Police Service had information that was capable of throwing considerable light on what happened. The vessel may have sunk off the coast of Carnarvon, but it appears from the evidence she has gathered that the first engagement happened off the coast of Northampton. On her behalf, in 1996 I asked questions of the then Minister for Police. I asked whether the daily occurrence books for the Northampton and Geraldton Police Stations covering that night were still held by the Police Service or in some archive. If they were not, I asked whether the minister could say why they were missing. On 20 August 1996, in response to the question of whether the daily occurrence books of the Police Department still existed, the minister replied -

No. Retention and disposal schedules were not in place at the time. The officer in charge of the police station would have disposed of the records with approval from the secretary of the Western Australian Police Department at the time.

This is relevant because, in this decade alone, this Parliament has legislated on two separate and major occasions for the protection of archival and documentary material. A Bill was introduced in 1992 to protect the royal commission into WA Inc, and to determine what would happen to its records. Another Bill was piloted through this place at this time last year by the then Minister for the Arts, and supported by everyone in the House. That legislation put in place for the first time very strict regimes for the control and preservation of public records. Herein lies the sting in the tail. It was the firm belief of many people involved in research into the loss of the *Sydney* that, had the daily occurrence books maintained by the Northampton and Geraldton Police Stations on the night of 19 November 1941 been retained, they may have thrown some light on the engagement that took place off the Northampton coast that night. They are convinced that the first engagement was off the coast there, and that the *Sydney* then took all of that time to sink. If anyone needed confirmation of the value of secure public records, this incident alone provides that. Many people tend to disregard the topic, and think it is mainly for fuddy-duddies and crackpots like me, who happen to be interested in historical records. The story of the *Sydney* might have been told earlier and in a more comprehensive way had those occurrence books been available.

The member for Geraldton placed in context the enormity of the tragedy of losing so many people in one action. To place it in parliamentary terms, the number of people lost in the *Sydney* that night is roughly the same as the number of members who comprise the House of Commons in London. The impact of seeing a huge Parliament like that wiped out can only be imagined. It rivals the population of some of the smaller and medium-level towns in Western Australia. I congratulate the member for Ningaloo. It is one of the most tragic moments in the history of Australia and Western Australia. Were it not for the fact that we were very cavalier in the way we treated our public records, in particular those held by the Police Service, we might be much closer today to the truth about the *Sydney*. The loss of those records was a sad occurrence, and it was an even sadder moment when 645 men were lost with the *Sydney* on the night we commemorate today.

MR McGOWAN (Rockingham - Parliamentary Secretary) [4.44 pm]: I congratulate the member for Ningaloo for putting forward this motion. He did so in a non-political fashion, and with the best of intentions. It is terrific that he has put forward a motion to commemorate and remember a period of Australian history that all should be aware of.

Last Sunday in my electorate, I attended a Remembrance Day ceremony, which was attended by many veterans of World War II. On that occasion I thought about Australia's military history, which has been a major factor in tempering the way we see ourselves as a nation, our current place in the world, and the way Australians treat one another. The concept of mateship is born out of the military experience of Australians throughout the world. Australia's military history has demonstrated a number of things about the character and strength of the nation. It may be a cliché, but it is widely acknowledged throughout the world that wherever Australians participate in military action on the world stage, they always perform above and beyond the call of duty. They are always seen as the bravest and the most reliable; as people who always do their bit. This image has been borne out ever since Australia has been participating in foreign conflicts. The country's first such experience was in 1865, and since then Australia has been involved in 14 conflicts.

Australia has always taken a world view of its experience overseas, and Australians have always seen themselves as playing a role. Account must be taken of the period in which that role was played, by which I mean the historical norms of the time in which the conflict took place. The events surrounding the *Sydney* resulted from Australia taking this world view of what it saw as the right thing to do to protect other countries from the scourge of fascism and Nazism. Australia's world view, and its bravery and participation, have always come at a very great cost. Approximately 100 000 young Australians have perished in wars, which has often meant a great cost to those left behind. Women in Australia have traditionally borne the brunt of the loss of many husbands,

Mr Rod Sweetman; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Pandal; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Colin Barnett

brothers, sons, and often daughters. The scale of that cost has meant that no community has been unaffected by events in either of the world wars, or other military experiences throughout the world.

I once visited the battlefields of the First World War, on the western front in France and Belgium. Those places create a sense of the enormity of the conflict. In some places, Australians perished, not in their hundreds, but in their tens of thousands. In the Somme valley in France is the field of the famous battle of Pozières, which was part of the battle of the Somme in July 1916. Approximately 5 000 Australians died in a couple of weeks during that momentous conflict around the village of Pozières. The area in question is only a couple of acres. In these areas is a monument, a place where Australians have participated, and the final resting place for many of them. The cemeteries in that part of the world are legendary. I am sure that members have seen photographs of them, but to be actually there to see cemeteries containing the graves of tens of thousands of young men from Britain, Australia and other commonwealth countries, as well as from Germany, is an opportunity to experience and remember what took place.

Of course, no such burial place exists for HMAS *Sydney*. There is no such site by which to commemorate and remember the young men who perished. The sinking of the HMAS *Sydney* was an unparalleled tragedy, as the member for Ningaloo so eloquently pointed out. It was a famous ship named after the World War I cruiser that defeated the HMAS *Emden*, another ship that belonged to Western Australia's history. Earlier in the Second World War she was involved in a famous action in Australian naval history when she defeated an Italian light cruiser in the Mediterranean Sea, known as the *Bartolomeo Colleoni*, if my memory serves me correctly. The HMAS *Sydney* has been commemorated since by two later warships, an aircraft carrier that transported troops and supplies to Vietnam and a frigate now in the Royal Australian Navy with the name HMAS *Sydney*.

The loss of the *Sydney* was an unparalleled tragedy in Australian naval terms. It occurred during a time of national fear and concern not previously experienced in our nation's history. When the HMAS *Sydney* went down on about 19 November 1941, it closely followed a two-month period during which Australia went from a country at war in Europe to a country at war at home. Only two or three weeks later, on 7 December, Australia entered into a war with Japan that threatened our very existence. They were very concerning times for everyone in our country. The Prime Minister at the time, John Curtin, another Western Australian, had been in office for a matter of weeks when he received the news that the *Sydney* was missing; yet the Government waited for between 11 and 14 days in the hope that she would show up somewhere along the coastline of Australia or in some of our Indian Ocean territories. Unfortunately, that was not to be.

When he made the horrific announcement to the nation that 645 of our sailors and officers had disappeared without a trace and apparently had been killed, no community throughout Australia was unaffected. Two weeks later we were involved in the Pacific war with Japan during which other calamities occurred such as the falling of Singapore, tens of thousands of Australian troops being killed, wounded or captured and the threat to our existence.

It is a very important period in our history and one that we must commemorate. That is occurring with the various memorials we heard about in Carnarvon and Geraldton. It is important that we acknowledge those memorials and provide an opportunity for the people who were most closely affected by those events such as family members - sons, grandsons and grand-daughters - and friends to visit and remember their grandfathers or great-grandfathers who perished in that very tragic event.

I will not enter into the arguments about how the *Sydney* was lost. However, I support efforts to locate her final resting place. I am aware that when naval ships transit that part of the world, they turn on one of their sonar instruments to see whether they can pick up a reading of any ship that may be lying on the seabed. To date I do not think they have been successful in finding her. I hope the *Sydney* is found simply to provide some comfort to the families and relatives of people who were lost on board and to answer the mystery of her location. I do not think that finding the *Sydney* will determine how she was lost. It is clear how she was lost. However, it would provide an opportunity to put to rest many of the questions in the minds of those people with an interest. The love of fathers and brothers does not dim over 60 years. They remain an ever-present reminder in a great many people's minds. I hope those people's minds are put to rest. If and when we find the HMAS *Sydney*, I hope it will provide a great opportunity to remember what those people did for all of us in such a trying period.

MR BARNETT (Cottesloe - Leader of the Opposition) [4.54 pm]: The member for Ningaloo has done a great service to this Parliament by raising this issue in this way and for giving such a detailed account of his understanding of the events surrounding the loss of HMAS *Sydney*. I congratulate the members for Greenough, Geraldton and Rockingham for their contributions to this debate.

I recall as a young boy in Perth hearing my parents speak a little about the war years. Generally they spoke about the Catalina flying boats on Crawley Bay and occasionally the Italian prisoners of war. My background

Mr Rod Sweetman; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Pandal; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr
Colin Barnett

provided no sense of how much of the war impacted on Western Australia. Gradually over recent years - "Australia Remembers" has been part of that - there has been a growing acknowledgment of the World War II bombing raids to the north of our State, the submarine presence and the HMAS *Sydney* itself. It was an immense tragedy and a significant event in Australia's military and wider history, which should be respected, remembered and always honoured. The communities of Carnarvon, Geraldton and other towns along the coastline have done this nation a great service by their attention to this piece of our history. The fact that it was commemorated in Geraldton last Sunday is important and I congratulate everyone who made that memorial possible. It was a great recognition of a very sad part of our history. This Parliament has done the right thing by formally recording that brief moment in our history.

MR SWEETMAN (Ningaloo) [4.56 pm]: I am grateful to the members who participated in the debate in this Chamber. If at any stage it appeared that I tried to give my view about the final resting place of the *Sydney*, that was not what I meant to do. Over a long period since prior to 1980 when a lot of this information became available, there was speculation that the HMAS *Sydney* could have sunk anywhere within the area from Fremantle to the tip of North West Cape and up to 600 nautical miles off the coast. That area has shrunk; until recently there has been a general belief that the *Sydney* sank up to 600 nautical miles off the coast. That belief has changed recently, primarily through the work of people like Mike McCarthy and Wes Olson. Since he wrote his book and even in his presentation in Carnarvon last Saturday evening, Wes Olson has said that he is now confident, based on his computations and the evidence he has collected, that he had the wrong information and he has recently changed his mind to believe that its location is further to the south west than he first thought. He has done an enormous amount of work as an investigator, he has applied a clinical investigative rationale to his assessment of the facts and he has pragmatically collated his views. I am happy to go along with him. His belief is that if it is near a community, it is closer to Kalbarri than Geraldton, Carnarvon or Shark Bay. That is very interesting. That correlates with the anecdotal evidence of the survivors of the *Kormoran*, who indicated that the last they saw of the *Sydney* was a glow on the horizon just prior to midnight as she maintained her course and headed in a southerly direction. People believe that the sighting of the *Kormoran* by the *Sydney*, 160 nautical miles south of Exmouth was wrong and that the sighting and ultimately the engagement occurred considerably further south. The ship continued in a southerly line, albeit very slowly.

It has been a pleasure to participate in this debate. I thank all my colleagues, and with my colleagues the members for Greenough and Geraldton and our communities ask that at the conclusion of this debate we observe a minute's silence in commemoration of the sacrifice the *Sydney* crew made for this State and country.

Question passed, members standing.