

Memorial to HMAS Sydney's souls lost at sea

Article from: [Herald Sun](#)

Gerard McManus

March 18, 2008 12:00am

THE 645 men lost aboard HMAS *Sydney* will be left to rest in peace after the Rudd Government declared a provisional ban on anyone touching the sunken vessel.

After the most important maritime discovery in Australian history, the Government declared the wreck sites of the *Sydney* and the *Kormoran*, the German vessel which sank it, war graves.

It banned anyone from disturbing, damaging or removing parts from the shipwrecks.

But limited research and filming can continue, possibly including attempts to find the ship's log and other items that could hold vital clues to its final tragic hours.

Images of the *Sydney* could appear within days, and an undersea vehicle is expected to film both wrecks late next week.

Announcing the discovery yesterday, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said the *Sydney* was a tomb and should never be raised.

"From my point of view and from the (Finding the *Sydney*) Foundation's point of view, they contain the remains of many people, and our view is firmly that they should be left alone," Mr Rudd said.

He said the discovery would help bring closure to families who lost loved ones in the naval tragedy.

"It's also a time for the nation to reflect on the bravery of all of those who gave their lives in defence of their country . . . in this particularly bloody and brutal naval engagement," Mr Rudd said.

The 66-year mystery of the HMAS *Sydney* ended on Sunday, when the Finding *Sydney* Foundation expedition located a "dark shape" on the seabed, 2468m under their search vessel, which was 150km off the coast of Shark Bay, Western Australia.

Using sonar instruments, US-born search director David Mearns found the anomaly on what he said was an otherwise featureless seabed.

The wreck was 12 nautical miles from the German raider, the *Kormoran*.

Later tests confirmed the ship was the RAN cruiser *Sydney*, lost with all hands after a sea battle on November 19, 1941.

Chief of Navy Vice-Admiral Russ Chalders said unlike the *Kormoran*, the *Sydney* was intact.

"We believe the hull is largely intact . . . and sitting upright on the floor of the ocean," Vice-Admiral Chalders said.

Mr Mearns, a private shipwreck hunter hired by the Finding *Sydney* Foundation, declared his discovery to be on a par with finding the *Titanic*.

"This has been a monumental day, and one which I hope brings some comfort to the relatives of those lost in her," he said.

Opposition Leader Brendan Nelson called for a national memorial service for those who died.

"I think it's important the Australian Government consider a national memorial service for families and those who've been directly affected over a long period by the loss of Sydney," Dr Nelson said.

Families have already asked to be allowed to visit the site and lay wreaths for their lost relatives.

HMAS *Sydney* Association president John Atkins said the Government should pay for victims' families to visit the site.

"There are a lot of them, spread Australia-wide, but it would be nice if it could somehow be arranged," Mr Atkins said.

He said the wreck should never be raised.

"There are the remains of more than 600 sailors in there," Mr Atkins said.

"It is purely and simply a war grave."

Stan Davey, who was just five when his father, PO John Davey, died on HMAS *Sydney*, said the ship's resting place was "a sacred site".

"It is a grave site and should be kept that way," Mr Davey said. "The past is the future for us."

Retired magistrate Ted McGowan, whose brother died in the battle, said he would like to lay a wreath at the site and for authorities to permit this.

"I think it appropriate people are given the opportunity to stand and reflect, and perhaps toss a wreath into the water," Mr McGowan said. "That's the most I could do in my brother's memory."

Mr Atkins said researchers could now use remote submersibles to try to discover what happened.

"We have only got witness reports from the German crews, which people take with a grain of salt," he said.

"And of course, there wasn't one member of the crew left to hear our side of the story."

The Finding Sydney Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation that raised millions of dollars.