



3 July 2017

Guy Barnett, Liberal MHA for Lyons

## Quest for Victoria Cross continues

The quest for a Victoria Cross to recognise the heroic act of bravery by Tasmanian sailor Edward (Teddy) Sheean continues with appropriate recognition being sought through the Royal Australian Navy.

Unfortunately our request for reconsideration through the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence was unsuccessful, despite acknowledgement of Sheean's bravery and sacrifice.

Together with Teddy Sheean's nephew Garry Ivory, we will be writing to the Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral T. W. Barrett seeking an upgrade to an award of the Victoria Cross or a referral to the Australian Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal.

We have done this on the basis that a review was recently held into Captain Raymond Allsopp (deceased) for his actions in July 1, 1945 at Balikpapan and that the Tribunal posthumously recommended that Captain Allsopp be awarded the Star of Gallantry for "acts of Heroism in action in circumstances of great peril."

We believe a precedent for reconsideration has been set under the Tribunal's "review" powers rather than its "enquiry" powers and Sheean's bravery should receive more appropriate recognition.

- The Minister recommend to the Governor General that Ordinary Seaman Teddy (Edward) Sheean, Service No. H1617, Royal Australian Navy (RAN), as an Oerlikon anti-aircraft gunner, be posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross (or such other award as appropriate) for acts of Heroism in action in circumstances of great peril as his ship, *HMAS Armidale*, was attacked by Japanese aircraft and hit by two aircraft-launched torpedoes.
- Although wounded, he remained at his post at the aft Oerlikon Gun, and was responsible for bringing down one enemy bomber and continued firing until he was killed at his gun as the ship sunk.

In summary Sheean's story is extraordinary:

Born in Lower Barrington, Sheean joined the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) as a Oerlikon anti-aircraft gunner in 1941, at just 17 years of age—little more than a boy.

Whilst on a risky resupply and evacuation mission to Japanese-occupied Timor on 1 December 1942, his ship, *HMAS Armidale*, was attacked by Japanese aircraft and hit by two aircraft-launched torpedoes. With the ship sinking fast, Sheean—who had been wounded during the attack—was standing by the side of the vessel ready to abandon ship when he saw his crewmates being strafed in the water from the enemy aircraft above.

Making his way back to his gun, Sheean sustained a second wound, before strapping himself to his gun and shooting at the attacking aircraft even as the ship was sinking beneath him.

He shot down one plane and damaged another with crewmates testifying they saw tracer bullets coming from the gun as Sheean was dragged under the water, firing until the end.

He died on 1 December 1942, aged just 18, leaving an example of courage that lives on today.

Of the 149 men on board, 47 died when the *Armidale* was attacked and just 49 were eventually rescued a week after the sinking—some surely owing their life to Sheean's courage.

During the time at which Sheen's actions occurred, it is our understanding that decisions on bravery awards granted to Australian naval personnel were made by the British Admiralty.

In a commendation made to the Admiralty on 11 December 1942, LTCDR DH Richards of *HMAS Armidale* stated that:

*'Ordinary Seaman Sheean, although wounded, remained at his post at the aft Oerlikon Gun, and was responsible for bringing down one enemy bomber. He continued firing until he was killed at his gun'.*

This commendation from an Australian naval officer was clearly designed to ensure the recommendation of an award for Teddy Sheean. To our knowledge, the British Admiralty did not act on this commendation.