

# Mutiny over snub to dead navy hero

## EXCLUSIVE

MATTHEW DENHOLM  
TASMANIA CORRESPONDENT

Australia's navy community is in mutiny over Scott Morrison's snub to World War II war hero Teddy Sheean, challenging the right of Defence Chief Angus Campbell to veto Sheean's Victoria Cross.

The Naval Association of Australia, representing naval personnel past and present, has written to the Prime Minister seeking an explanation for his decision to deny Sheean a retrospective VC.

Ordinary Seaman Sheean gave his life to save others during the 1942 sinking of HMAS Armidale, strapping himself to a gun to fire on Japanese fighters strafing his comrades in the water, even as he sank with the ship.

Last July, the Defence Honours and Awards Appeal Tribunal unanimously recommended a retrospective VC for the Tasmanian, but its report was buried by government. Defence Personnel Minister Darren Chester accepted the recommendation, but the government later rejected it.

Last week, amid a gathering revolt by Tasmanian Liberal backbenchers, advice to Mr Morrison from General Campbell, urging against granting the VC, was leaked to the media.

General Campbell expressed the view that backing a retrospective VC could lead to other appeals for backdated VCs and may not be acceptable to the Queen, who has the final say.

However, Naval Association of Australia national secretary Russell Pettis said General Campbell's view should not necessarily override the unanimous view of a four-member independent tribunal.

THE AUSTRALIAN,  
MONDAY, JUNE 1, 2020  
theaustralian.com.au

3

"He's the Chief of the Defence Force, but I didn't realise that we'd given that sort of power to anybody," Mr Pettis said. "That's his opinion. They should ask the Queen."

"We have tribunals of the sort that held the investigation into this issue to examine the facts and make recommendations.

"Ordinarily, you would expect the people who put the tribunal in place to do that; to accept their recommendations, not overrule them."

Government sources also said General Campbell had a history of trying to shut down the tribunal and that he believed decisions on awards should rest with him or the top brass.

General Campbell declined to comment. Mr Morrison was asked whether General Campbell's advice may have been coloured by a philosophical opposition to the tribunal. Mr Morrison's office did not respond to this point by deadline, instead referring to his previous statements that his decision was based on advice from defence chiefs past and present.

Mr Pettis said his association had written to the Prime Minister seeking a further explanation and was distributing a petition backing the VC for Sheean, who was just 18 when he sacrificed himself for his mates.

It was also seeking the support of the wider defence community, via the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations.