



NAVAL ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

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Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal
Canberra BC ACT 2610

For the attention of: The Chair, Mr Mark Sullivan AO

Dear Sir,

Tribunal review of recognition for Edward 'Teddy' Sheean

I make this submission on behalf of the Naval Association of Australia to seek appropriate recognition of Ordinary Seaman Edward (Teddy) Sheean's bravery, as witnessed when HMAS Armidale was sunk by the Imperial Japanese Navy on 1st March 1942.

Much has been written about acts of bravery by many members of the ADF over the past century. There are instances, such as the matter of Teddy Sheean where service and ex-service men and women are skeptical about a review process that has demonstrated an inability to acknowledge what, in our view is obvious. For instance, the magnitude of Teddy Sheean's actions surpasses the ordinary.

For over twenty years I have heard Able Seaman Victor (Ray) Leonard, now Dr Leonard refer to his experience on that fateful day in 1942, as he recounts the actions surrounding the sinking of HMAS Armidale. Dr Leonard refers to the horror of being in the sea, Japanese planes strafing the water trying to kill him and his shipmates. He describes the Oerlikon machine gun firing, a different sound to the Japanese aircraft guns. Whilst he was not an actual witness to the specific actions of Teddy Sheean, other survivors of the sinking of HMAS Armidale were. They had ten days of isolation, not knowing if they were going to survive to contemplate what had happened, Teddy Sheean was foremost in their minds.

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Dr Leonard was very lucky to survive, as were his Shipmates. Dr Leonard's statement detailing his experience is one of several, all witnesses present on that day provided unwavering comments about Teddy Sheean's actions. The review of 2011 records no less than five individuals who witnessed Teddy Sheean's actions. They described Teddy Sheean's movement to the Oerlikon machine gun and his effort to shoot down the Japanese aircraft. These witnesses had nothing to gain from their description of the events on that day, except to acknowledge their admiration of a Shipmate who had acted in such a creditable manner, who made the supreme sacrifice – he did much more than be killed doing his duty!

The fact that these witnesses survived the worst of experiences at sea, ship torpedoed, sunk with most of their Shipmates killed. They were in fact inspired by the bravery of one of their own. Dr Leonard stated that the survivors talked of Teddy Sheean in wonderment, admiration and with gratitude. In his view, the survivors were driven by the inspiration of Teddy Sheean's valour, something that carried them through what was a most harrowing experience.

The survivors of the sinking of HMAS Armidale were gravely disappointed that the decision makers at the time did not acknowledge the true depth of the action taken by Teddy Sheean. Maybe there was some semblance of guilt, as they survived because of Teddy Sheean's sacrifice. It cannot be denied that Teddy Sheean did what was inevitably a selfless act, a courageous act to protect his ship and most importantly to protect his shipmates.

Some say the naming of a submarine, HMAS Sheean and the fact that Teddy Sheean was Mentioned in Despatches (MID) is reasonable recognition. Each is respectful and highlights in some way the merit of his actions, recognition of his action by later generations - but this is not enough! This matter has been going on for 77 years. Reviews and decisions that painfully take us back to the original decision, where being Mentioned in Despatches was deemed to be adequate.

The Review of 2011, reads as if Teddy Sheean just happened to be aboard on that day. Virtually all of the report describes the operational scenario, the unsatisfactory assessment of threat and poor guidance from the Shore Command. It diminishes statements made by first hand witnesses by focusing on ship movements, capacity of the armament and other matters that are more about the report of proceedings than the heroism of one or more of the Ship's Company. The final 2011 review statement to justify the decision regarding Teddy Sheean paints a word picture about the events leading up to the sinking, touches on the movements of Teddy Sheean and then trails off to describe the inefficiency of the Northern Command.



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The Establishment apparently have issues with the notion of changing decisions made by their predecessors, however, irrespective of who is at the helm of the Naval Association of Australia, there is likely to be no rest from the Navy Veteran fraternity until the matter of Teddy Sheean is seen to be corrected and justified.

The matter of appropriately acknowledging the heroic actions of Teddy Sheean is an imperative by the Naval Association of Australia, along with many of the affiliated Ship Associations and should rightly be elevated to the highest order of bravery.

We wish the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal well as it takes all of the facts into account and hopefully focuses on the specific actions of one individual, Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean as:

- a. Warship HMAS Armidale was sinking on the 1st March 1942;
- b. Imperial Japanese aeroplanes strafed the Warship and the surrounding sea attempting to kill shipmates on the Warship's upper deck and those in the water;
- d. he took control of an Oerlikon machine gun, firing at the enemy to protect his Warship and his shipmates in the water; and
- c. he stayed at the gun to his own peril, making the supreme sacrifice when he could have abandoned ship.

May we be worthy of his sacrifice,

Terry Makings AM

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