



# The Bosun's Call



Special edition

Once Navy, Always Navy

2020

## Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean—Victoria Cross



ABOVE: Dale Marsh's painting of Teddy Sheean hangs in the Australian War Memorial. (Australian War Memorial)

Left: Tasmanian WWII Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean. (Australian War Memorial)

That the astonishing act of wartime bravery by Edward "Teddy" Sheean, an 18-year-old with less than two years at sea, was denied a Victoria Cross does not come as a surprise to military historian Tom Lewis.

This week, supporters of the campaign to have Sheean posthumously receive a VC were dealt a huge blow, with the Government seeing no reason to overturn an earlier decision to withhold the award, Australia's highest wartime honour.

Included in the reasoning was the determination that nothing had changed since it had been decided Sheean's actions in 1942 "did not reach the particularly high standard" required.

"Of the approximately 100 that have been given to military personnel in Australian history, the Royal Australian Navy has never been given one," Mr Lewis said.

Wounded, his ship sinking beneath him, Sheean is recorded as returning to his anti-aircraft gun to fire at enemy aircraft that were strafing his shipmates as they floundered in the water, despite the order having been given to abandon ship.

"Nobody expects anything more from you when you're told to abandon ship, than to abandon ship," Mr Lewis said.

"But to do more, to go over and above, to turn back and man your station again and fire at the enemy, to defend your shipmates who have been machined-gunned in the water by Japanese aircraft, what better example can you get of outstanding bravery?"

ABC News 13 May 2020



National Edition Newsletter of the  
**Naval Association of Australia**



A painting depicting the final stand of Teddy Sheean on the HMAS Armidale and (inset) Sheean.

Article from the Sunday Telegraph by Annika Smethurst 24 May 2020

# SHOT DOWN

**PM torpedoed bid to give highest award to a war hero who died saving his mates**

**ANNIKA SMETHURST**  
NATIONAL POLITICAL EDITOR

A WOUNDED Teddy Sheean tied himself to an anti-aircraft gun and lied firing it at the Japanese to save his mates, who described seeing the cannon still shooting at the planes as the waves closed over the sinking ship.

But Prime Minister Scott Morrison doesn't think that's "indisputable evidence" of bravery and personally intervened to overturn a recommendation to award a Victoria Cross to the teenage war hero.

The move has angered several Cabinet ministers, who disagree with the Government's decision to overrule a unanimous decision by an independent tribunal to award Australia's highest wartime honour to Sheean, who died, aged just 18, in 1942 defending HMAS Armidale off the coast of East Timor.

And this could end up as an election issue, with Labor promising to award a VC to the Tasmanian hero,

a move that could swing several marginal seats in his old home state.

The Sunday Telegraph understands at least six federal ministers have expressed frustration internally about the decision to overturn the Tribunal's findings, including Defence Personnel Minister Darren Chester.

Last year Mr Chester supported the findings of the Tribunal, which unanimously recommended Sheean receive the VC. As the relevant minister, Mr Chester then passed the report and his recommendation to the Prime Minister's Office, where it was blocked.

Mr Chester would not confirm whether he backed the PM's decision to overrule the tribunal.

"There is no debate about this: Teddy is an Australian war hero and his service to our nation was extraordinary," he said.

Privately, a growing number of backbenchers are also angry about the decision, including several Tasmanian MPs who are increasingly concerned about holding on to marginal seats.

And The Sunday Telegraph can exclusively reveal Labor will award the VC to Sheean if elected. "Teddy Sheean deserves the Victoria Cross," Labor Leader Anthony Albanese said.

Teddy Sheean's nephew Garry Ivory said he is also willing to try and "bring the government down" over the issue. "It's been knocked back by the Prime Minister and I am gutted," he said. "If they don't have a turn around they could feel it at the next election. Everyone around the world knows what Teddy did but the Prime Minister and Defence Minister don't agree."

Mr Morrison said decisions like the Sheean case "should be left to the decision makers of the time" while also backing a 2013 inquiry into Sheean, which denied him a VC, describing it as "more comprehensive". He said there were "extreme practical



difficulties" due to the amount of time that has passed. "Overturning a decision like this nearly 80 years later would need compelling reasons," Mr Morrison said. "Through the passage of time, it is no longer possible to be sure, without indisputable evidence exactly what happened in the action in which Sheean was involved."

**The Naval Association of Australia Inc ABN 56 653 989 978**  
221 Centenary Avenue MELTON VICTORIA 3337

**Patron In Chief:** HM The Queen of Australia.  
**National Patron** His Excellency General The Honourable David Hurley AC DSC Retd  
Governor General of Australia

## Teddy Sheean's act of 'outstanding bravery' inspires continuing fight for Victoria Cross

By James Dunlevie and April McLennan

Posted by ABC 16 May 2020, updated 17 May 2020

Sheean had already cheated death once, before the fateful attack in December of 1942.

Born in December of 1923, Teddy grew up in the small country town of Latrobe in the north of Tasmania, the fourteenth child of his parents James and Mary Jane.

At 18, he followed in the footsteps of five of his brothers who had joined the armed forces — enlisting in the Royal Australian Naval Reserve in April 1941.

The next year, Sheean was posted to Sydney where he was billeted at Garden Island in the requisitioned ferry Kuttabul, before joining his first ship as an Oerlikon anti-aircraft gun loader.

By then, Australia had no illusions it could escape the war — Darwin had been smashed in two surprise raids by Japanese fighters and bombers on the morning of February 19, the first of what would be 64 attacks on the northern stronghold.

In May 1942, Royal Australian Navy history records that Sheean was on home leave and not aboard when the Kuttabul was torpedoed by Japanese midget submarines that raided Sydney Harbour.

Twenty-one of his shipmates were killed.

Eleven days later, after his return to Sydney, Sheean was sent to his new posting aboard one of Australia's new minesweepers, the Bathurst class HMAS Armidale — its first mission to carry out "escort duties along the eastern Australian coast and in New Guinea waters", navy history notes.

In October, Armidale set off for Darwin, with Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean as crew member on one of three Oerlikon 20-millimetre anti-aircraft guns.

Each Oerlikon was served by a gun crew of three or four; the gun chief who found the targets, the gunner strapped to his weapon with a waist belt and held firmly in shoulder supports, who had the essential role of hitting enemy targets; the loader who fed the ammunition drums of 7-inch rounds to the cannon, with sometimes a second loader, Each gun crew member trained to serve in all three positions."

The Oerlikon was capable of 480 rounds-per-minute, fed by a drum magazine of 60 rounds, the weapon would keep firing as long as the firing lever was held back — or until something broke.

Teddy Sheean had been trained as a loader, but also knew how to aim and fire the Oerlikon.

It would be only two months before he would be doing so, in the act of bravery he is remembered for.

Navy history notes in November 1942, Armidale, HMA Castlemaine and Kuru, a "shallow draught, 76-foot wooden motor vessel" were taking part in a relief and resupply operation in Japanese-occupied area now known as Timor-Leste, a mission codenamed Operation Hamburger.

With Kuru sailing on ahead, Armidale and Castlemaine followed, leaving Darwin after midnight on November 29, the plan to make two separate night

runs into the coastal village of Betano on Timor's southern coastline, dropping off reinforcements and picking up civilians.

"One hundred and twenty miles from their destination, the two corvettes came under aerial attack from a single enemy aircraft. Although neither ship sustained any dam-

*(Continued on page 4)*



*HMAS Armidale at Port Moresby*

*(AWM)*

## Teddy Sheean's act of 'outstanding bravery' inspires continuing fight for Victoria Cross

*(Continued from page 3)*

age or casualties, concerns were raised that the mission may have been compromised," the Royal Australian Navy website states.

"The attack was duly reported and orders were received to 'press on'."

More attacks would follow, with Armidale and Castlemaine managing to avoid major damage, both ships eventually meeting up again with the Kuru, which by that time had picked up a group of Portuguese who were transferred to the Castlemaine.

"No sooner was the personnel transfer complete when enemy bombers again appeared," RAN records note. With Castlemaine ordered back to Darwin, Armidale and Kuru were ordered back to Betano to complete the reinforcement mission."

Armidale would become separated from Kuru, after both were attacked from the air, the smaller vessel ordered to bolt for Darwin.

Armidale was on its own.

At approximately 1:00 pm on December 1, five Japanese bombers were spotted by Armidale's lookouts, RAN records note.

"For the next half an hour Armidale's gunners beat off successive Japanese attacks and the ship escaped serious damage."

Darwin radioed Armidale, advising that warplanes would be there to help in 45 minutes.

Official naval history states it was just before 3:00pm when Armidale was attacked by nine Japanese bombers, three fighters and a float plane.

"The fighters split up and came in at low level, strafing decks with machine gun fire. With her gunners thus distracted, the torpedo bombers mounted their attacks from different directions as [Commanding Officer David] Richards manoeuvred desperately to avoid their torpedoes.



"In spite of the brave resistance, the ship was hit twice by torpedoes, immediately heeling over to port. At that point Richards gave the order to abandon ship. Rafts were cut loose and a motor boat freed from its falls before men took to the water. Their ordeal, however, was far from over.

"The Japanese airmen then pressed home further attacks, machine gunning the survivors."

ABC war correspondent Peter Hemery interviewed two of the survivors from HMAS Armidale, soon after they had returned from their ordeal.

Arthur Lansbury was Signalman on Armidale's bridge at the time of the torpedo attack.

"When the first one hit, it threw me to the deck, and when I got on my feet again, I raced to the voice pipe down to the radio room to try and send out a distress message, but couldn't raise them," Mr Lansbury said.

Later, it would be understood that the radio had been destroyed.

Jack Duckworth was at the stern of the ship when the torpedo hit and was knocked over by water rushing into the vessel.

"While we were getting to the motorboat, Jap fighters machine-gunned us ... several boys were hit with cannon fire," Mr Duckworth said.

"We eventually got the boat away, and jumped into the water.

"We'd just dropped astern when another torpedo hit her midships, smoke and oil went everywhere."

Another survivor, Leading Seaman Leigh Bool, would tell of how, after the order to abandon ship was given, "seven or eight of us were on the quarterdeck when we saw another bomber coming from the starboard quarter. It hit us with another torpedo and we were thrown in a heap among the depth charges and racks".

"We could feel the Armidale going beneath us, so we dived over the side and swam about 50 yards astern as fast as we could," Seaman Bool said.

"Then we stopped swimming and looked back at our old ship. She was sliding under, the stern high in the air, the propellers still turning.

"The hero of the battle was a young ordinary seaman, Edward Sheean, not long at sea, who refused to leave the ship.

*(Continued on page 5)*

*Oerlikon anti-aircraft gun, in use during World War II. (Australian War Memorial)*

## Teddy Sheean's act of 'outstanding bravery' inspires continuing fight for Victoria Cross

*(Continued from page 4)*

"Sheean had no chance of escape. Strapped to his anti-aircraft gun, he blazed away till the last. One of the Jap bombers, hit by his gun, staggered away trailing smoke, just skimming the surface until it crashed with a mighty splash about a quarter mile away."

Survivor William Lamshed said he recalled first sighting the enemy aircraft.

"When we first saw these different looking planes coming, we just knew we were in big trouble, and that our end might be near, so I quickly went to my hidey-hole, as I called it, and cringed in a corner, waiting to be blown to pieces."

He would be washed into the sea by a wall of water from an explosion.

"The Zeroes [Japanese fighter planes] were raking the ship with cannon and machine-gun fire from their noses and wings, then another torpedo struck on the starboard side and the ship split in two," he would recall.

"I was now in complete panic as my ship was sinking in front of my eyes, with all still on board trying to escape. Now the front of the ship was turning on its side and going down.

"The rear section was leaning on an angle, when the after Oerlikon gun started firing and I saw tracers actually hitting a dive-bombing Zero, which flew over my head and disappeared into the sea about a quarter of a mile away.

"A brilliant bit of shooting, I thought, considering the deck was at such a steep angle and that the gun was still firing as the ship sank under the water."

Jack Duckworth was another who said he saw Teddy Sheean do the unthinkable.

"As she went down, Ted Sheean kept one of his guns firing, and went down with the ship," Mr Duckworth said.

"He got a row of machine-gun bullets right across the chest, but went back to his gun, strapped himself in and kept on firing as she went below the water."

Armidale's Commanding Officer Richards would credit Sheean as "bringing down one enemy bomber", adding Sheean "continued firing until he was killed at his gun".

It would not be enough.



*Survivors of HMAS Armidale in a life raft, spotted from the air. (Australian War Memorial)*

## Terms of reference of Valour Tribunal 2011-2013

The Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal (the Tribunal) is directed to inquire into and report on the appropriate recognition for specific acts of gallantry or valour performed by the following naval and military personnel:

Gunner Albert Neil (Neale) Cleary - Army  
 MIDN Robert Ian Davies - Navy  
 LCK Francis Bassett Emms - Navy  
 LEUT David John Hamer - Navy  
 Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick - Army  
 LCDR Robert William Rankin - Navy  
 AB Dalmorton Joseph Owendale Rudd - Navy  
 ORD SMN Edward Sheean - Navy  
 LACM Noel Ervin Shipp - Navy  
 LCDR Francis Edward Smith - Navy  
 LCDR Henry Hugh Gordon Stoker - Royal Navy  
 LSMN Ronald Taylor - Navy  
 CAPT Hector Macdonald Laws Waller - Navy

The Tribunal is directed to make recommendations on the eligibility of the naval and military members, as listed, to be awarded the Victoria Cross, the Victoria Cross for Aus-

tralia or other forms of appropriate recognition for their gallantry or valour.

The Tribunal is to examine relevant documentary evidence and consider any other material relevant to these claims, including, but not limited to, any previous reviews conducted with regard to appropriate recognition for this service.

The Tribunal must consider the nature and context of the members' actions in relation to the criteria for Australian and Imperial awards in order to arrive at a fair and sustainable response to claims for appropriate recognition.

The Tribunal may interview such persons as it considers appropriate and consider material provided that is relevant to the Terms of Reference.

The Tribunal is to report to the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence on any recommendations that arise from

*(Continued on page 6)*

## 2011-2013 Valour Tribunal Review

In 2013, as part of an inquiry into unresolved recognition for past acts of naval and military gallantry and valour it was noted that arguments put forward in submissions against the award included "if it is decided that the VC was denied because the administrative arrangements prevailing at the time were inappropriate and that current conditions should apply, then it is incumbent on the awards system to reassess all past award (sic) through a modern prism".

Another argument made, according to the 2013 review, was "without wanting in any way to detract from the very real gallantry displayed by Ordinary Seaman Sheean ... the majority of claims made about Sheean's actions post the date of his death are inaccurate at best and in many cases preposterous".

Of the 149 personnel on board the Armidale, only 49 would survive the Japanese fighters attacking them in the water and the days at sea before rescue.

As part of the 2013 inquiry, the tribunal heard submissions from two people that upon their arrival in Darwin, the survivors from the Armidale were treated "outrageously" by authorities.

Ray Leonard, who was aboard the Armidale, told the inquiry the Naval Officer in Charge in Darwin, Commodore Cuthbert Pope and "other senior naval officers met them with formality, distance, coldness and even an implied threat".

"Dr Leonard recalled that Pope said that 'none of you must say a word about the sinking of Armidale to anyone'," the inquiry recorded.

"Dr Leonard said he was left with the impression that Pope thought the survivors had failed in losing their ship, and he felt that this was a factor in [Armidale's Commanding Officer] Richards not getting another command."

Ray Leonard said after being admitted to hospital for a few days, the surviving members of the ship's company were sent their separate ways, "some

overland in trucks, others returning to eastern Australia via sea with no opportunity to talk, because they were forbidden from doing so".

Edward Sheean remains the recipient of a Mentioned in Dispatches (MiD), an Imperial form of recognition of bravery citing his name in an official report.

### Result

In its report the 2011-2013 Valour Tribunal concluded that there was not sufficient evidence to find that there was a manifest injustice with regard to the outcome of the recommendation concerning Sheean. The Tribunal was also satisfied that there was no new evidence to support the reconsideration of Sheean for a VC for Australia.

17-143 The Tribunal concluded that Sheean's actions displayed conspicuous gallantry but did not reach the particularly high standard required for recommendation for a VC. If Sheean had lived he might have been recommended for a higher Imperial honour (such as a second or third level gallantry award) rather than the fourth level MID, but such intermediate honours were not available posthumously in 1942, and the equivalent level Australian gallantry honours should not be recommended now. The Tribunal therefore concluded that it could not recommend that Ordinary Seaman Sheean be awarded the VC for Australia.

### Tribunal recommendation

17-144 The Tribunal recommends that no action be taken to award Ordinary Seaman Sheean a Victoria Cross for Australia or other further form of recognition for his gallantry or valour.

17-145 The Tribunal also recommends that the RAN perpetuate the use of Sheean as the name of a major combatant vessel.

### *Part of the consideration by the 2019 Review on the process of the 2011-2013 Valour Tribunal*

## Terms of reference of Valour Tribunal 2011-2013

(Continued from page 5)

the inquiry.

In formulating its recommendations the Tribunal is required to maintain the integrity of the Australian honours system and identify any consequential impact any finding or recommendation may have on that system.

In addition, the Tribunal is also directed to receive submissions supporting the recognition of acts of gallantry or valour performed by other members of the Defence Force. Submissions are only to be received where supported by appropriate documentation. Submissions based on hearsay or anecdotal evidence need not be

considered.

The Tribunal is to report to the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence on the detail of the additional submissions received in order for the Government to determine whether a proposal for recognition should be referred to the Tribunal for review.

The Tribunal is to determine its own procedures, in accordance with the general principles of procedural fairness, when conducting its inquiry as set out in the Terms of Reference.

Submissions to the Tribunal close on Thursday, 30 June 2011.

## Barnett and the Department of Defence re: Sheean 2019

A Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal in Hobart last year re-examined the 2013 findings, with Defence Minister Linda Reynolds announcing last Wednesday the review "did not present any new evidence that might support reconsideration of the valour inquiries recommendation".

"It is a very difficult decision, but I believe in the circumstance, the right decision," Ms Reynolds said at the time.

### The recommendations from the 2019 Review are as follows:

#### Conclusion in relation to the Victoria Cross for Australia.

144. The Tribunal is satisfied that Ordinary Seaman Sheean, in the presence of the enemy, performed an act of the most conspicuous gallantry and that his actions are also properly considered to be a pre-eminent act of valour

145. For the reasons given above, the Tribunal finds that Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean meets the eligibility criteria for the Victoria Cross for Australia

#### TRIBUNAL DECISION

146. The Tribunal decided to **recommend** to the Minister for Defence Personnel that:

The decision by the Chief of Navy to refuse to recommend the award of the Victoria Cross for Australia to Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean in respect of his actions in HMAS *Armidale* during a Japanese aerial attack in the Timor Sea on 1 December 1942 be **set aside**.

The Minister **recommend** to the Sovereign that Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean be posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for Australia for the most conspicuous gallantry and a pre-eminent act of valour in the presence of the enemy in HMAS *Armidale* during a Japanese aerial attack in the Timor Sea on 1 December 1942.

## 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 asking 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.

"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.

THE AUSTRALIAN,  
MONDAY, JUNE 1, 2020

**Letters to the Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Personnel****THE NAVAL ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA  
NATIONAL COUNCIL**

Patron in Chief Her Majesty the Queen

Patron: His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC FTSE

**National President**

Graham Savage  
1/155 Kars Street-  
Frankston South Vic. 3199  
Tel. 0407 301 418  
Email: NationalPresident@NavalAssoc.orq.au

**National Secretary**

Russell Pettis FAIM  
221 Centenary Avenue  
Melton Vic. 3337

Email: NationaiSecretarv@NavalAssoc.orq.au  
ABN 55 653 989 978

25 May 2020

The Honourable Scott Morrison  
Prime Minister of Australia  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

**REJECTION OF THE HONOURS AND AWARDS TRIBUNAL — SEAMAN TEDDY SHEEAN FOR  
AWARD OF THE VICTORIA CROSS POSTHUMOUSLY**

For many years, the Naval family has worked to champion the cause of Ordinary Seaman Eddy Sheean in having him recognised for his extraordinary valour aboard HMAS ARMIDALE on 1 December 1942. His heroism led to the potential saving of the lives of countless shipmates who were adrift in the sea as their ship was sinking and were being strafed by Japanese aircraft.

After earlier attempts to have his valour recognised by the award of the Victoria Cross, an appeal was launched by the Tasmanian Government in 2019 under the auspices of the Honourable Guy Barnett MP, Minister for Veteran Affairs, Tasmania. We have discovered only in the last few days with the official release of the findings of that appeal that the Tribunal found in favour of the Appeal and recommended that Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean be posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

It is incomprehensible that after such a finding by the Body set up specifically to investigate such matters and tasked with providing recommendations to Government without fear or favour, that the Government has overruled their findings. The wider naval family across Australia, led by the Naval Association of Australia, wishes to formally request a redress of the decision and will now lead a campaign across the broad Ex-service community to marshal our means to have the recommendation accepted by the Government.

We see this decision as letting down those who serve or have served our country, in both war and peace, at a time when the country needs all the cohesiveness it can muster, to get through these very difficult times\_ I urge you to reconsider, before the groundswell of public opinion will demand the reversal of your decision. We look forward to hearing from you positively soon.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Savage  
National President  
Naval Association of Australia

ONCE NAVY ALWAYS NAVY



## DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

Patron-in-Chief: His Excellency General The Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd)  
NATIONAL OFFICE

PO Box 4166  
KINGSTON ACT 2020

1 June 2020

The Hon Mr Darren Chester MP  
Minister for Veterans Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel  
PO Box 6022  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

### **Honours and Awards Tribunal Recommendation - Award of the Victoria Cross to Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean**

Dear Minister,

You will be aware from recent extensive media reports that there is a growing disquiet surrounding your Government's action to overrule the findings of a properly constituted inquiry by the Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal into Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean's most conspicuous gallantry on 1 December 1942.

On 23 July 2019 the Tribunal recommended that Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean be posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

By his acknowledged pre-eminent act of gallantry, Ordinary Seaman Sheean saved the lives of many of his shipmates when his ship, HMAS Armidale, was sunk by Japanese aircraft. This was the unqualified finding of the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal.

Minister, the Tribunal not only recommended that a previous denial of the Victoria Cross to Ordinary Seaman Sheean be set aside, it recommended that indeed he be posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his conspicuous gallantry on the day in question. Indeed, Admiral Noonan, Chief of the Navy in his submission to the Tribunal cited Sheean's action as the, "most conspicuous and most gallant we'd seen in our Navy".

Ten months after the Tribunal handed down its final report Senator Reynolds, the Minister for Defence, in her address to the Senate on 13 May 2020 said the 'that there is no relevant new evidence for the original decision to be overturned'. Yet the Tribunal found that in going back to man the Oerlikon Gun, Ordinary Seaman Sheean's actions showed, "most conspicuous gallantry and was a pre-eminent act of valour in the presence of the enemy"

Minister, you will appreciate that there is much scepticism across the veteran community about your Government's decision. The Prime Minister is being quoted the he will not intervene in the matter.

The Chief of the Defence Force is being quoted that he will not be party to embarrassing Her Majesty the Queen by seeking to reverse the original decision made in 1943. That comment alone does no justice to the memory of Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean and his actions on that fateful day.

Minister, I suggest the Government owes the Naval Association of Australia and the broad veteran community a detailed explanation of why it has rejected the recommendations of the Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal for the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross.

Where does an Australian hero fit into the Australian story of the 21st century?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Kel Ryan  
National President  
Defence Force Welfare Association

CC Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds – Minister for Defence  
Ms Liz Cosson AM, CSC – Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs



## THE RAAC CORPORATION LIMITED (ACN 156 250 958)

### SUMMARY

1. In summary, the Sheean matter is one that must be resolved in favour of Edward Sheean and his family. The fact this battle has continued for such a length of time is due to the persistence of the Sheean family and members of the ex-service community and others to advocate for as long and hard as they have in order to right a terrible wrong.
2. The failure by the Naval Board of Inquiry into the sinking of HMAS *Adelaide* to examine the issue of medallic entitlements, given the savagery and intensity of the action is indefensible and incomprehensible.
3. The injustice of Edward Sheean's treatment by the Commonwealth on this matter is an extension of that initial failure. It is also indefensible.
4. It is a *malé fides* exercise by the Commonwealth which has taken an unhealthy adversarial approach to this matter.
5. Both Tribunals looked at the issue closely, with one Tribunal failing manifestly to have regard to critically important direct similar-fact evidence causing the Commonwealth as represented by the Prime Minister to fall into serious error.
6. The Barnett Tribunal decision was on any reading and on every level, the correct decision.
7. The test of reasonableness was met by the Barnett tribunal at every step of the way.
8. The Commonwealth failed that test manifestly and in so doing, failed to act as an honest broker.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion:

1. The decision to recommend the award of a posthumous VC to Edward Sheean is correct on every level.
2. The evidence put before the Barnett Tribunal clearly establishes a level of gallantry and self-sacrifice by a teenage sailor who was at the time, ineligible due to his age, to vote or drink alcohol in a hotel.
3. His conscious and deliberate decision to forgo an opportunity to take to the lifeboat and subsequently return to and operate the gun to save his mates lives, displays a level of incomparable maturity and an acceptance of impending death in one so young.
4. The evidence of the survivors clearly described the deliberate action OS Sheean took to save his shipmates' lives in the full knowledge he would die doing so.
5. The striking parallels between Sheean's action and that of two RN sailors Mantle and Sephton, make it unambiguously clear that Edward Sheean's uncommon gallantry in circumstances of great peril, should be recognised by a like award.
6. All the evidence supported by relevant persuasive authority clearly and unambiguously makes him eligible for this award.
7. The criteria for the posthumous award of the VC to Edward Sheean has been met by him every step of the way.
8. The decision by the Commonwealth to refuse to support the Tribunal's recommendation in respect of a posthumous VC to be awarded to Edward Sheean, based on a spurious claim of no new and compelling evidence, has not been made out.
9. The case for awarding a posthumous VC to Edward Sheean based on the overwhelming evidence has been made out.
10. It now falls to the Prime Minister and the relevant Minister to redress this terrible injustice.

### RECOMMENDATION

That you note the above and make representations to the Prime Minister to set aside his decision to refuse to support the Tribunal's recommendations and agree to the recommendations that:

1. The 2018 decision of Chief of Navy to refuse to recommend the award of a posthumous VC be set aside; and
2. The relevant Minister recommend to her Majesty the Queen that Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean be posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for Australia for the most conspicuous gallantry and a pre-eminent act of valour in the presence of the enemy in HMAS *Armidale* during a Japanese aerial attack in the Timor Sea on 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1942.

Submitted for your consideration and action.



Noel Mc Laughlin OAM MBA  
Chairman  
RAAC Corporation  
4<sup>th</sup> June, 2020

This is a part of a very comprehensive legal style letter of 13 pages. The part reproduced here is a good summary of its intended direction.

**TO THE HONOURABLE THE SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF  
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Petition Title: Redress of the Decision to Reject the Recommendation of the  
Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal to Award VC  
Posthumously to Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean.**

**Reasons:**

**This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House:**

*The Independent Tribunal appointed to investigate, review and advise the Government of matters before them related to the Award of Service Honours and Awards and related Appeals has been ignored by the Federal Government led by Prime Minister Scott Morrison in not granting the Victoria Cross posthumously to Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean.*

**Request:**

**We** therefore ask the House to: review and reverse the decision made by the Morrison Government in the matter of the granting of the posthumous Victoria Cross to Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean.

**PRINCIPAL PETITIONER**

**Full name:** Russell William Pettis

**Signature\*:**

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**Address:** 221Centenary Avenue MELTON VICTORIA. 3337

**Email:** [nationalsecretary@navalassoc.org.au](mailto:nationalsecretary@navalassoc.org.au)

**Telephone:** 0419 898 427

\*When signing this petition as principal petitioner, you are declaring you are either a resident or citizen of Australia Pettis



**With regard to the petition, the following emails are relevant.**

From: Russell Pettis [mailto:nationalsecretary@navalassoc.org.au]  
Sent: Sunday, 24 May 2020 9:52 AM

To: Eileen Calway <nationaltreasurer@navalassoc.org.au>; Tony Cornell <nationalredvp@navalassoc.org.au>; Corbin Dingle <corbsnaa@gmail.com>; Brian Ellis <flossie00@gmail.com>; Gordon Fuller <nationalbluevp@navalassoc.org.au>; Lorraine Grey <nationalwhitevp@navalassoc.org.au>; Keith Grimley <nswpresident@navalassoc.org.au>; Ian Holthouse <iholthouse@hotmail.com>; Pat McKay <nationalasstsecretary@navalassoc.org.au>; George Mock <nationalmembershipregistrar@navalassoc.org.au>; Russell Pettis <nationalsecretary@navalassoc.org.au>; Graham Savage <graham.savage3@bigpond.com>; Peter Tanner <vicpresident@navalassoc.org.au>; Ray sandford <naaqlpres@outlook.com>

Cc: Ian Holthouse <iholthouse@hotmail.com>; Helga Jongewaard <naasasecretary@bigpond.com>; Alan Masters <secretary.naa.act@gmail.com>; Michael Nash <nswsecretary@navalassoc.org.au>; Russell Pettis <nationalsecretary@navalassoc.org.au>; Graham Thomas <secretary.egnaa@gmail.com>; Helen Yench <helen.yench@bigpond.com>; David Manolas <stbdstayportgiveness@gmail.com>

Subject: Fighting to Correct a Terrible Decision

Good Morning All,

It is time for all members of the NAA to stand up and be counted. I think one of the harshest things ever done to a Navy person has just be enacted. As we know from the National Council AGM in Launceston in March 2019, those in attendance listened to a speech by the Tasmanian Minister for Veteran Affairs. His topic was the raising of an Appeal against the earlier decision not to award a VC to Teddy Sheehan. He told us that the Appeal would be heard by the Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal and he expected a result to be known later in 2019. No report was released in 2019 and only in recent days has it been released. The Tribunal Report recommended that Teddy Sheehan be awarded the VC and they even drafted a suggested citation for the Award. However it has now become apparent that the Government received the report but rejected the Tribunal findings and Teddy will not be awarded a posthumous VC.

It is time to marshal our forces and get this thing overturned. The biggest hurdle has always been to get the Tribunal to agree. They have now done so and amazingly it is the politicians who are now holding up the closure of this very sad saga. Please go on to the internet, download the report at the Defence Honours and Awards Hearings site.

Also start to contact your local Federal member to say how wrong this decision is for the whole Navy family. I will prepare a petition to circulate across the nation. However please start with your local Federal members and proceed from there.

Regards

Russell Pettis  
National Secretary

Good Evening All, {NAA Section Secretaries}

Today we have sent a letter to the Prime Minister objecting to the decision to reject the findings of the DHAAT hearings where they recommended the granting of the VC Posthumously to Teddy Sheehan. Also attached is a petition which you should send to all sub sections and ask them to print and get as many signatures from the general public as possible. I will let you know what to do with them when the time comes.

Yours Aye,

Russell Pettis  
National Secretary

**NAA Website re Teddy Sheehan**

Details of the Naval Association's correspondence and other relevant details from 2011 to today of the support regarding the campaign to have Teddy Sheehan awarded the Victoria Cross are available on the Naval Association's website at:  
<https://navalassoc.org.au/notices/vc-teddy-sheehan>

STOP PRESS ABC 10 June 2020

An "expert panel" is set to re-examine the case as to whether World War II hero Edward 'Teddy' Sheean should be posthumously awarded a Victoria Cross.

Key points:

- Last month, the latest attempt to have Teddy Sheean's commendation for bravery during WWII upgraded to a Victoria Cross received a major setback
- Soon after the decision to refuse him the award was announced, a row broke out between the tribunal tasked with examining the matter and the government
- Now, the Prime Minister says an "expert panel" will review the case, with it due to report back to him by the end of July this year

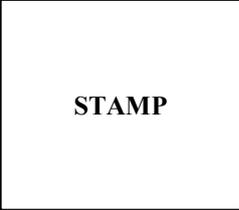
Today, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said he had "commissioned an expert panel" to provide advice as to whether the 2019 review by the tribunal "had any significant new evidence ... compelling enough to support a recommendation by the Government that Sheean's Mention in Despatches be replaced by a Victoria Cross".

Mr Morrison said the panel will be chaired by former minister for defence and former director of the Australia War Memorial Dr Brendan Nelson AO, with former solicitor-general David Bennett AC QC, former secretary of the department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Dr Peter Shergold AC, and senior curator and historian at the NSW Anzac Memorial, Brad Manera.

"The panel will report to me by 31 July 2020."

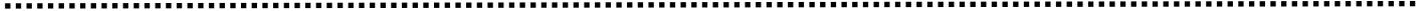


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The Bosun's Call Special Edition



Mr Morrison said overturning a decision relating to a Victoria Cross "nearly 80 years after Sheean's heroic actions in 1942 would need compelling reasons".

"That is why the Government's view and clear policy is that consideration of the awarding of a retrospective Victoria Cross would only occur in light of compelling new evidence or if there was evidence of significant maladministration."

Previous attempts at having Sheean awarded a VC — the military's highest wartime honour — have been unsuccessful, with a [2013 inquiry](#) finding Sheean's actions "did not reach the particularly high standard required for recommendation of a VC", and the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence refusing to consider him for the accolade in 2017.

In May this year, Defence Minister Linda Reynolds said a review in 2019 by the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal had found "no new evidence that might support reconsideration of the valour inquiries recommendation".

Soon after that announcement, tribunal chairman Mark Sullivan AO wrote to Ms Reynolds saying she had [misrepresented the findings of the tribunal](#), demanding she "correct the record".

The Tasmanian Minister for Veterans' Affairs Guy Barnett said he welcomed the news and said it remained his view "Teddy's extraordinary bravery deserves our country's highest honour".

Mr Barnett, a long-time advocate of Sheean's who made a submission to the 2019 review, said he "looked forward to reviewing the expert panel's terms of reference and again making the case for a Victoria Cross for Teddy".

Posted 10 June 2020

1st fold

2nd fold