

2021 Commodore Sam Bateman Book Prize Lecture

Dr Tom Lewis, OAM

This address was given on 10 March 2022 at the Australian Defence Force Academy.

Good afternoon all.

I begin this talk with a little picture in the corner of the screen of me awarding a prize at a high school. I have had rather a curious career: a mix of nearly 20 years in the Navy in military intelligence (it says in my notes 'pause here for laughter'; I'm not sure why); but also as a military historian, hence the book covers also on the screen; but also in high schools. My time as an educator included several stints in high schools – five years at the RAN College, and a short time here at the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) as well.

So I think I have some reasonable insights into the minds and motivations of young Australians. Teddy Sheean was around the age of some of the ADFA naval trainees in the room now. He was nearly 19 when he decided to put his mates first. He returned to his 20 mm Oerlikon gun, and fired at the aircraft strafing HMAS *Armidale* as she proceeded to abandon ship.

There is a lot of criticism these days of young people, as I'm sure you're aware. It's not, however, a new thing.

The Greek philosopher Socrates, around 2500 years ago, complained:

Children; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. They no longer rise when elders enter the room, they contradict their parents and tyrannize their teachers.

Only some 150 years ago, the campaign was in full swing against young people playing together. In its July 1859 issue, *Scientific American* magazine railed against a pastime of young people: 'a mere amusement of a very inferior character, which robs the mind of valuable time that might be devoted to nobler acquirements, while it affords no benefit whatever to the body'. They were actually referring to the game of chess.

Teddy Sheean was no saint. He was, as one of his shipmates said, 'the type that let hammocks down'. In those days sailors slept in hammocks on board ship. You set up your hammock with ties to the deckhead above, and used a knot to tie the rope to the hammock at both ends. A cunning prankster could rework the knot so it looked fine, but once you dived into your hammock – a sort of dive and half-pike being necessary – you would come crashing down to the deck below.

Teddy managed to get himself into 'scrapes', as they were called, several times in his training. Once he and several others rounded up some stray dogs and managed to get them aboard one of the training vessels in the Derwent River in Hobart. The dogs were much excited, and the gangway gate was shut from the outside, and Teddy and his mates scarpered.

On another occasion at HMAS *Cerberus* he took the shell from a dead crayfish on a walk near the parade ground where some defaulters were being paraded. The shouts from the gunnery staff can only be imagined.

An interesting mix of exuberance and reality pervaded the young men's world. Just before Christmas 1941 the naval trainees were made to put on a parade through Hobart. The liner *Queen Mary* was in town, readying for another dash across the Indian Ocean, and the streets were full of Tasmanians and 'mainlanders'.

Teddy and his shipmates had a Chinese cannon from the Boxer Rebellion to tow. Yes, it's the one that has been at the RAN College for many years – I'm sure many Navy people here have seen it, and some of you may have actually polished it. It had been captured some 40 years previously.^a Now it was all prepared, its bronze surface shining, and white drag ropes enabled the trainees to pull it on its wheels through the Hobart streets. Their Chief Petty Officer was of course many years older, and on a practice run beforehand his age didn't allow him to keep up at the end of the march, as his charges deliberately marched faster and faster and then, as they turned a corner, they deliberately broke into a trot, and then their cannon got away from them on the steep street and, out of control, charged into some bush.

'And there,' Jack recalled, 'were a lot of local girls entertaining the sailors from the *Queen Mary*. We all thought that was very funny.'¹

Teddy's sisters would later recall the last time they saw their young brother – at the end of home leave, wearing his great coat, naval cap and a white scarf around his neck, waving as the train pulled out from Latrobe railway station on its short trip to Burnie, where Teddy would take the ferry to the mainland to join the *Armidale*. As a family member later said: 'He was young, vibrant and full of confidence as the family waved goodbye.'²

The corvette followed the normal course of action for a new ship. The month of July 1942 was filled with preparing *Armidale* for sea. On the 11th she was commissioned, and the following day ammunitioned and christened.³ Both of the ceremonies were important ones for a ship's

^a This is extremely likely to be one of a pair of Chinese brass cannon captured in the Boxer Rebellion, where the naval forces of Australia played a part. One is now displayed outside the Trainees' Gunroom at the RAN College at HMAS *Creswell* in Jervis Bay, south of Sydney, where Navy officers are trained. (The author served there for five years as an instructor.) The other is thought to be located in northern Tasmania at a Naval Cadet site.

future life and 'luck', and some celebration was warranted. Morts Dock, off Balmain, Sydney, was the site for at least 14 of the 60 corvettes to be constructed in Australia during the war.

Armidale endured a series of tests to prove herself, and this beginning also allowed the officers and ratings to learn how their new warship was operated, handled, and responded. Her minesweeping gear was deployed and tested on 18–19 June. On the following day her magnetic signature was measured for correct operation at the degaussing range. On the 20th *Armidale's* ability to heel was tested, which would have been a good measure too of how well her loose fittings had been stored. By 26 June she was trying out her engines at full speed, and then she anchored overnight at Port Kembla.⁴ She was a brand new ship; she was passing all of the tests; her ship's company was working together, and their hearts were high.

The next day *Armidale's* usefulness as a weapon of war was put to trial for the first time. She kept overnight anti-submarine watch for the harbour, at anchor from 1800 every night until 0700 the next morning.⁵ For the ship's company this would have been a good introduction to both keeping 'defence watches' at sea, and manning the ship's weapon systems against possible enemies. Her guns were manned, with ammunition in the main gun, as well as the 20 mm Oerlikons, and her machine-guns. More ammunition was kept ready close by in the 'ready-use' lockers.

The ship was in a 'darkened state' with no white lights used, and only red lights inside where necessary. Curtains were hung in pairs where the doors were to be used. The scuttles – military portholes – were curtained inside. It was the duty of the Officer of the Watch to ensure this darkened state was complete, and this was done by being rowed around the ship as night fell to ensure the vessel was completely blacked out. Then the duty watch fell in, mustered on the quarterdeck at the ship's stern for special instructions, and then dispersed to their stations.

July saw more anti-submarine watches; an exercise for three days against aircraft attack; and, on the 7th, the escorting of the freighter *SC Sorenson* to the port of Newcastle. Now *Armidale* had graduated from the school of hard knocks; and her routine now saw her outside protected harbours, escorting convoys along the east coast of Australia and as far north as New Guinea for the first six months of her commission.

A new team of sailors, senior ratings, and officers had all worked to establish themselves as a welded fighting force which would mean they could rely on each other in adversity. This is what bonds people who have served in the same organisation: ship, battalion, squadron – they can depend on each other. Teddy Sheean was now a member of the ship's company. Rex Pullen was a fellow Oerlikon gun operator:

I was 25 and he was 18 just turning 19, that was a big difference in those days. We knew each other on the ship, he was a hell of a good bloke. He had character, I got shelled with him a few times, things were a little bit different in wartime to what they are in civvies, first pub we could get to that would do ... You get to the first pub and you stop, life was pretty uncertain in those days. The way life was. Sheehan was in that way, he was a good Australian. When you get involved in these little tight corners you just realise what bloody champions Australians are, they stand out like beacons, with all the guts and determination, extra, Teddy was like that.⁶

The Final Fight of 1 December 1942

Armidale was deployed on typical small ship operations in between what is now Indonesia and Timor, and Australia. The second-last day *Armidale* was to sail the seas was fine and clear, by night as well as day. It was an ideal opportunity for a Japanese reconnaissance aircraft to try its hand at night bombing. Lieutenant Lloyd Palmer recalled:

The voyage was without incident until about 0200 the next morning (November 30th) when a Jap recon plane was sighted. This plane dropped four bombs which fell very close to *Armidale*, and then made off.⁷

This was to set the tone as the day of 30 November dawned. *Armidale's* ship's company went to action stations again and again, the alarms ringing and every man racing to his station, cramming his helmet on and readying the guns, with the gunners opening fire as soon as they had swung their weapons onto the target, using their own judgement as to when to depress the triggers. Rex Pullen later recounted:

The Oerlikon gun you could sweep around on the deck and follow right round. It was defence against aircraft and I was a loader on one of those, I was on the starboard one, which was right under the bridge and we were quite conversant with what was happening in the ship as we could hear what the orders given on the bridge. Every ace cannon shell, that you put in these, a 20 ml thing that cannon show about as thick as your thumb, which was made to pierce aircraft, pretty powerful, you have to get the kites down low enough to be of any use. So we were only able to use them when the aircraft were low.⁸

Teddy Sheehan was on the aft Oerlikon – that is, closest to the stern. He too would have been busy. The gun crew alternated positions when they could, partly for experience, and partly to relieve the heavy physical exercise. The crew of four were the main gunner, in behind the gun in a harness fitted with waist-belt and shoulder supports; the second member, the gun chief, who designated the targets; the third crew sailor – the 'feeder' – who removed the empty 60-

round magazines as necessary, and fitted in new ones; and the fourth member, who was responsible for getting the range from a ship's telephone, connected to a headset, and adjusting the sights, although this was usually not possible in quick, short aircraft engagements. Trips nearby to the ready use lockers to retrieve new magazines were necessary depending on how busy the gun was.⁹

The barrel of the gun could also be changed in around 30 seconds, and this was necessary when extensive firing had been engaged in. Stoppages also had to be quickly dealt with. The gun was very reliable, but complicated, and it needed a trained crew to operate it quickly.

Added to the hard physical work of training it, firing, removing and replacing the magazines, was the added tension and fear of what failure could mean. The metal shield and the crews' metal helmets were not much protection, and the ship's company by now had seen enough action – enemy aircraft, both bombers and fighters – and heard a multiplicity of stories about what could happen to them. For most, in their hearts they would have been afraid, but action was welcome in a way in that they became too busy to dwell on grim thoughts.

In between engagements against aircraft the crews were not allowed to leave their positions, and indeed the main gunner stayed ready in the harness with the weapon loaded. This meant that the whole crew ate when they could, usually sandwiches, and drank warm water from canteens. During the engagements they were deafened by the explosions of the gun firing, the two other Oerlikons fitted to the bridge wings, and the machine-guns mounted further forward of themselves.^b

At nightfall the ship was brought onto a course for Betano, on the southern coast of Timor, with the weary crew at defence watches, four hours on and four hours off, but always ready for the entire ship's company to be back to action stations. Those off watch crammed down food and snatched sleep where they could, sometimes not even rigging their hammocks but sleeping with head on folded arms at the mess deck tables.

The corvette had been delayed by the bombing. She was due to meet HMAS *Kuru*, and to land her cargo of soldiers on the beach where they would meet up with soldiers already there. But neither *Kuru* nor the land force made the rendezvous, and so, somewhat after 0200 in the morning, without landing the soldiers, *Armidale* withdrew, and set course for Darwin.¹⁰

At eight in the morning *Kuru* was sighted and the two ships met up. She had on board civilian evacuees. HMAS *Castlemaine*, another corvette, also made the rendezvous, and the three ship commanders met on board her – the latter ship's Lieutenant Commander Philip J Sullivan RANR (S) was the senior – to confer, while their vessels lay almost becalmed on the sea.^{11,12}

^b There are very few accounts of life on the guns in the Royal Australian Navy, but an excellent narrative about time in the US Navy on anti-aircraft guns is given in *Pacific war diary 1942–1945*, by James J Fahey.

Built at Sydney, *Kuru* was initially employed by the Northern Territory Administration on customs and police patrol duties. With war looming she was requisitioned for RAN service and commissioned on 8 December 1941 as a tender to the elderly depot ship HMAS *Platypus*, which spent all of her time in Darwin Harbour. Before commissioning *Kuru* was also used on various occasions in connection with the Coastwatching organisation then being set up around the Northern Territory coast and nearby islands. Coastwatcher personnel were delivered, fetched, and supplied with equipment, especially radios.

The Coastwatchers, invaluable civilians given a uniform, usually an officer's commission, and a radio set, provided invaluable intelligence of enemy movements during the Pacific conflict, at considerable risk, for the uniform would not have saved them from execution as a military man if caught; rather they would have been shot as spies.

On 31 May 1942, under the command of Lieutenant Joe Joel RANVR, *Kuru* had inaugurated the naval supply run between Darwin and Betano in Timor, in what was loosely known as Operation HAMBURGER. The official title for this overall assistance was 'Hamburger Operations – Assistance to Allied Forces in Timor'.

Sparrow Force was one such organisation. This Australian Army formation had been engaged in guerrilla warfare against the Japanese, since the enemy had occupied Timor in February. Air supply had been attempted, but proven too hazardous in the face of Japanese air superiority. Over the next six months *Kuru* had made eight trips on what became known as 'The Timor Ferry Service'. To avoid detection, all loading and unloading in Timor was done during the hours of darkness.¹³

Kuru had been under the command of Lieutenant JA Grant, RANR (S) since November. On 29 November she had proceeded to Betano and embarked almost 80 men, women and children, mostly Portuguese evacuees.¹⁴ The situation was grim. Historian Ian Pfennigwerth sums it up well:

The operation was now severely compromised. The Japanese knew there were two RAN corvettes off the south coast of Timor, and [the Royal Navy Naval Officer-in-Charge Darwin in late 1942, Commodore Cuthbert] Pope recognised that. He arranged for air cover for the ships and attacks on the airfield at Dili, but determined that the operation should be rescheduled for 1 December, with the corvettes standing off the Timor coast during daylight hours. In the interim, a rendezvous was effected with *Kuru*, and her troops were transferred to *Castlemaine*.

Again coming under Japanese air attack that morning, the ships were ordered by Pope to disperse, *Kuru* back to Betano, *Castlemaine* to Darwin with the evacuees, and *Armidale* to chase rain squalls in which to hide until it was time to close Betano Bay again that night. Pope's orders contained the homily, 'Air attack is to be accepted as ordinary routine secondary warfare'.¹⁵

The three ships loitered quietly on the glassy seas while the refugees changed vessels. Transfer between the ships was likely made with one rafted up to another, tied alongside to allow the easy movement from one vessel to another – a welcome variation on such evolutions, which could often mean using small boats if the seas were rough, rather than damage two ships alongside each other.

Once the transfer of the refugees was made, *Kuru* and *Armidale* started off north, back to Betano. *Castlemaine* headed south for Darwin, crammed with the 80 civilians, having been ordered back to Darwin by the naval officer in charge over radio.^{16,17}

Before completing the mission *Kuru* and *Armidale* became separated and both were subjected to enemy air attack. According to Japanese records, a flight of three Betty twin-engine bombers led by Lieutenant Fujiwara was launched at 1228 and was on the way to attack *Armidale* when *Kuru* was spotted. Over seven hours according to her reports, but five according to the Japanese sources, *Kuru* was attacked by scores of aircraft.^c

The ship was targeted by four waves of 753 Ku Betty bombers. Two waves were led by Lieutenant Fujiwara and two by Lieutenant Yokomizo. Totalling 19 aircraft they released 228 bombs.¹⁸ (*Kuru* by comparison reported some 44 aircraft which between them dropped more than 200 bombs.)

In one attack the assault boat that was being towed behind *Kuru* received a direct hit and vanished.¹⁹ In another, one 60 kilogram bomb landed in the water close by, with the shock wave damaging some of the ship's internal machinery.²⁰ Shrapnel penetrated *Kuru's* hull, wounding one officer and two ratings and damaging her engines.²¹ Two of *Kuru's* personnel were later decorated for their actions in battle: Lieutenant JA Grant RANR with a mention in despatches, and Acting Engine Room Artificer J Crooks.²²

By nightfall her ammunition was almost exhausted, and *Kuru* was ordered back to Darwin as a result. She arrived safely a few days later on 3 December.²³

^c Japanese air movements are taken primarily from the Kodochosho – that is, the Japanese record of imperial forces in World War II, specifically flights over northern Australia. These are accessed through the records of the Japanese forces in World War II, now held in the Military History Department of the National Institute for Defence Studies, Tokyo.

Air Defence for Warships

Dealing with a swarm of hostile aircraft was a very new aspect of combat for *Armidale* and other warships around the world in 1942. Around a year before the corvette was sunk, military experts everywhere had to adjust their perspectives on how these new aerial weapons worked against sea power.

Two great powerful warships, the Royal Navy vessels *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* – a battleship and a battlecruiser – were sunk by a horde of Japanese aircraft in an engagement of just a few hours. But in 1939, at the commencement of the war, aircraft were not seen to be the definitive killer of ships: that was still the province of the big gun vessel, and so the battleship rather than the aircraft carrier was ‘the capital ship’.

Aircraft themselves contributed towards the misunderstanding. World War I had seen substantial developments in both fighters and bombers, but the fighters fought each other or attacked bombers, and the bombers generally attacked land targets with small weapons without the enormous effects which would be seen in World War II. The machines themselves were flimsy; often their airframes were built of wood and the sides covered in fabric. Their limited range meant warships at sea were also generally out of reach.

As with much technology though, aircraft improved steadily as a result of ‘group think’ – many manufacturers and designers working apart but quick to catch ideas developed by the industry as a whole. The development of torpedoes slung underneath aircraft, and more powerful bombs, together with more effective aiming, gave credence to the possibility of punching holes in the surfaces of ships. The Germans developed the dive bomber and practised with it in the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s.

The best defence against attacking aerial enemies was in fact defending aircraft themselves, carried along on aircraft carriers. (The concept of supplying air cover from land – even today occasionally resurrected – is ridiculous; they never arrive when the navy needs them, and the warships are restricted to operating within their range.)

In *Armidale*’s case the ship’s tormentors even combined to attack from several angles at once, and this meant the ship’s guns were simply insufficient in quantity; and they were ineffective in quality. The main foredeck gun, manually aimed rather than from a central director point, was not able to angle up enough to attack aircraft. Its rate of fire – perhaps 10 to 14 rounds a minute, depending on a crew’s expertise – was unable to deal with a dozen or so aircraft, although if ever one was hit the size of the shell was more than enough to guarantee a kill.

The best anti-aircraft (AA) measures were the quick-firing weapons such as the Oerlikon, with its large 20 mm round most effective if it caught an aircraft in its vitals or hit the pilot. The heavy machine-gun – the .50 calibre – also had a spread of shot, a big enough calibre, and sufficient muzzle velocity to do good damage to an aircraft. It was rather like using a shotgun against the flying machines, but it was a big shotgun; smaller calibres such as .303 didn’t do enough damage.

Warships after World War II moved steadily into the missile age, and aircraft moved with them, with semi-intelligent weapons delivered well out of range of the ships’ guns. The ships developed their own anti-aircraft weapons for both long-range and close-in defence, including automatic ship guns. But the old systems remain viable, especially when sophisticated technology fails. The .50 machine-gun, in use on *Armidale*, was in popular use in the Royal Navy flotilla attacking the Argentine-held Falkland Islands in 1982, for example.

Although automated weapons such as Phalanx and Goalkeeper, which deliver high-speed blasts of projectiles, are popular, the human-manned ‘fifty-cal’ is still a reliable anti-aircraft weapon.

'The .50 caliber machine gun has proven to be a dependable, effective weapon against Japanese aircraft. This weapon was generally credited with eliminating extremely low altitude attacks against our installations by Japanese aircraft.'

Lieutenant Colonel Robert Totten, Air Corps, South Pacific Area, 1942

.50 Caliber Browning M2 Machine Gun

Muzzle Velocity: 2900 feet/second (M2 ammo); 2800 feet/second (M1 ammo)

Breech: Automatic (must be cocked before first firing)

Maximum Rate of Fire: 600 rounds/minute (450 rounds/minute for HB guns)

Elevation Limits: +10° to 90° (depending on mount used)

Recoil Type: Spring

Fire Control: Individual Tracer

Maximum Effective Slant Range: 600 yards

Maximum Effective Horizontal Range: 1800 yards

Maximum Effective Vertical Range: 1700 yards

'The .50 caliber machine gun has proven a most excellent weapon against low-flying aircraft, and German attack aviation appears to dislike it intensely. These weapons interspersed along a column will force enemy aircraft to stay so high that casualties inflicted by [the aircraft] will be negligible.'

Major General Walton H Walker, IV Armored Corps, North Africa, June 1943

Armidale was not to be so fortunate.

The Betty bombers attacking *Kuru* had also spotted the corvette for a second time at 1300 and radioed her position, while some sporadic attacks on the ship were made, releasing only two or three 60 kilogram bombs on each run.²⁴ The aircraft were Mitsubishi G4M1 Betty bombers of 753 Kokutai, flying out of Penfoie aerodrome on Timor. They were armed with big quarter-tonne (250 kilogram) bombs, plus secondary weapons of 60 kilogram ordnance.²⁵

Armidale's records record her on the afternoon of 1 December being attacked by five aircraft. She asserted she fought off this assault, with two aircraft being forced to jettison their bombs, according to Richards, and with one possibly crashing. This is not, however, supported by the Japanese records, which argue they did not lose an aircraft.²⁶

Lieutenant Palmer said of the action:

This time, however, they altered their tactics. On the previous day, the bombing had all been from about four thousand feet, and our Captain had easily avoided every stick. But now they started to dive-bomb, which was rather a different story. However, we were still not hit, although the intensity of the attacks increased with every wave.²⁷

But at around 1430 that afternoon the corvette was subjected to a more vigorous attack which was to include torpedo bombers attacking simultaneously at opposing angles, a new

factor which was first scrutinised by Bradford.^{d,e} They were Betty twin-engine machines carrying one massive torpedo each.

At 1450 Richards registered the sighting of the incoming force of 13 aircraft and increased the ship's speed to her full 15 knots.²⁸ At 1505 the aircraft took up their attacking positions, and Richard commenced zigzagging the vessel to throw off the bombardier's aim.

This was confirmed by the analysis of the later board of inquiry. At 1515 *Armidale* was under full attack, according to the later inquiry: '9 bombers and 3 fighters took part'. The fighters strafed the ship with their guns, while the bombers made approaches to release their main ordnance.²⁹ Lieutenant Palmer later put the force as being 13 aircraft rather than 12, and he said they approached 'from five directions – nine bombers, three Zeros and a float plane, attacking simultaneously with aerial torpedoes, bombs and machine guns'.³⁰

The Japanese tactics had been analysed by the Allies. They were made up as follows:

Daylight torpedo bombing approaches are usually made in close formation at medium altitude.

Attacks may be made in a wedge or loose diamond formation, or in small groups which separate to attack individual objectives from different directions.

Glides are made at an angle of 40 to 45°, and torpedoes are dropped from an altitude of 200 to 300 feet at a range from 500 to 1,200 yards from the target.

Approaches are planned from the direction where the least concentration of anti-aircraft fire may be expected. Full advantage is taken of the position of the sun and cloud formations.³¹

The corvette's defence would have seen her manoeuvring not only to put off the bombers' aim but also to open her guns' arcs of fire to their best advantage. If the bombers were approaching from the bow or stern in line, for example, this would give them the best chance

^d Author Bradford's website at <http://users.picknowl.com.au/~wjb718/hmas_armidale.html> analyses the aerial attacks in much detail, including the use of torpedo bombers. Commodore Pope, commanding the naval vessels from Darwin, said in his post-action report: 'I naturally hoped that these small, maneuverable and (as against low level attacks below Oerlikon range) fairly well armed vessels would escape serious damage. Unfortunately this was not the case and *Armidale* was finally sunk by a heavy and well coordinated attack which included torpedo bombers, a new factor in these waters, without which the ships would probably have escaped serious damage. This is also the view of the CO *Armidale*, expressed to me verbally.'

^e There seems little doubt about the size and nature of the force attacking the ship. The inquiry arrived at this composition after exhaustive analysis, and it is repeated in modern accounts – see for example 'HMAS *Armidale* (I)', Royal Australian Navy [website], <<http://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-armidale-i>>, accessed February 2012.

of hitting the ship: lengthwise, rather than from one side to the other. It would also minimise the anti-aircraft fire coming up in attack, as the ship's superstructure would have masked most of the guns' ability to fire and the gunners' vision of their target.

While the aircraft crews knew of such practices to assist their strike rate and set their attack runs accordingly, so too did the ship's company below. Not only was *Armidale* violently changing her track to throw off the aircraft runs; she was also manoeuvring to open the gunners' arcs of fire to the maximum, giving them the ability to hit the aircraft with all possible fire. The guns each worked independently, filling the skies full of lead, firing by direct visual means, not as bigger ships did by director fire, with targeting information provided from a central location and all guns firing together. This was a small ship with limited firepower fighting for her life.

Japanese Flying Units

Two main terms are in use here. They have not been translated into an English term because the concept of how to organise aircraft in the Japanese mind in World War II was different.

The building block of each Japanese air formation was a *shotai*, or flight of three aircraft. Three of these combined into a *chutai* of nine aircraft, appearing as an even larger 'V'. These combined in formations of nine, 18 or even 27 aircraft, each appearing from below as larger and larger 'V's.^f

The aircraft attacking *Armidale* would probably have attacked as a *chutai* to provide a cohesive force – sometimes the Japanese split into *shotai* of three aircraft and attacked from different directions.

The attack only a year previously on the British warships HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse* was a case in point. These two mighty vessels – respectively a battleship and a slightly less capable battlecruiser – were sunk in a matter of hours off Malaya a year previously by Japanese aircraft, which simply overwhelmed their defences.

Prior to this there was still existing a body of thought, by some anyway in naval circles, that big warships were not able to be sunk by aircraft, due to the inadequacy of any weapons the planes carried and the capability of the ship-carried anti-aircraft weapons. It is a battle even pursued today, with missiles replacing guns, with the twin key elements of accuracy and range now countered by seduction techniques of decoy systems and joined by close-in weapons systems and long-range anti-missile techniques.

At 1430 a *chutai* of nine Bettys led by Lieutenant Ogino attacked *Armidale* in a low-level torpedo run using Type 91 Kai torpedoes. These massive weapons, painted red and green

^f According to a brief history of the Royal Flying Corps, the predecessor to the Royal Air Force: 'When the RFC deployed to France in 1914 it sent four Squadrons (No's 2, 3, 4 and 5) with 12 aircraft each, which together with aircraft in depots, gave a total strength of 63 aircraft supported by 900 men. By September 1915 and the Battle of Loos, the RFC strength had increased to 12 Squadrons and 161 aircraft. By the time of the first major air actions at the first Battle of the Somme, July 1916, there were 27 Squadrons with 421 aircraft plus a further 216 in depots.' It can be seen that the composite of 12 aircraft per squadron grew over time to nearly 16 aircraft each, likely though held as spares, although as needs arose they would have been flown if the aircrew was available. See *The Royal Flying Corps 1914–18* [website], <<http://www.airwar1.org.uk>>, accessed July 2014.

according to Stoker Ray Raymond, who saw one in its final seconds before impact, weighed around 800 kilograms each.³²

Aircraft flying in protective cover over *Armidale* would have lessened the attack or even prevented it. But although air power had changed World War I, was changing World War II, and has significant still-changing impact on the face of conflict today, it cannot be everywhere all the time.

Ship's company gunner Rex Pullen commented on this succinctly:

We were totally I s'pose 400 km from Australia we had no air support because by the time the kites could fly across from Darwin across to there, spend ten minutes with us cos it has got no petrol and has to get back and so we were restricted and didn't get any air support and while the Japanese were all air, we had nothing to defend ourselves with.³³

And Commanding Officer Richards recorded in his report of proceedings bitterly: 'No Fighter support was present at any of the bombing attacks'.³⁴

In addition to this the aircraft were armed with torpedoes, a significant new weapon that had not been used in the region. Each Betty bomber aircraft carried one on the aircraft's centreline.³⁵ They were an 800 kilogram model.

Further, this was the first time that torpedo bombers had been seen in this area, so their assault would have been completely unexpected. For example, no torpedoes had been dropped during the devastating attacks on Darwin on 19 February, or during subsequent attacks in the vicinity.

The Japanese accounts show what weapons were used: a combination of bombs, with an all-up weight of 10 tonnes, and torpedoes.³⁶ *Armidale* was doomed if the aircrews knew their job – and by this time the Japanese forces in the south-west Pacific area were all well blooded and expert in their skills. Further, while new aircrews might well be deterred by being fired on by ship artillery, the experienced aircrews and such a massive ordnance load meant the aircraft would keep coming until they scored hits and sank their target.

Torpedo bombing was a post-World War I concept which took torpedoes, used in submarines and warships, and mounted them underneath aircraft. It was an approach at first beset with difficulties. The torpedo was a considerable weight for the engines and airframes of the day to lift.

Second, the characteristics of the weapon made a low-level straight run against the target necessary – and this meant the incoming bombers were a good target for the AA ship defences, especially compared against high-level or dive bombers.

Third, the torpedo itself was a more complicated weapon than the high-level bomb. However, the torpedo weapon had one great advantage. It penetrated the water and travelled in to strike a ship in a way shells did not: under the waterline. The sea itself was a defence against incoming shells: water being an incompressible mass meant shells were stopped very quickly. The torpedo by comparison used its streamlining to part the water, and came in at high speed until it struck.

The torpedo also delivered a very large amount of explosive at a critical part of a ship's hull: the waterline. Many warships were armoured, but they were more defended against surface gunnery, which struck the hull sides above the water or the superstructure. The torpedo delivered high explosive of a considerable weight and at high speed, with the resultant kinetic energy discharged as well. Corvettes, like most light warships, carried no armour at all.

| Main body | Warhead | High explosive (kg) | Speed (knots) | Range (m) | Total length (m) | Diameter (m) | Total weight (kg) | Comments |
|------------|---------|---------------------|---------------|-----------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|--|
| Type 91 | Type 91 | 149.5 | 42 | 2000 | 5.270 | 0.45 | 784 | - |
| Revision 1 | Rev.1 | 149.5 | 42 | 2000 | 5.270 | 0.45 | 784 | Supported shedding wooden tail plates in 1936 |
| Rev.2 | Rev.2 | 204.0 | 42 | 2000 | 5.470 | 0.45 | 838 | Body reinforced in 1938, anti-rolling controller in 1941 |
| Rev.3 | Rev.3 | 235.0 | 42 | 2000 | 5.270 | 0.45 | 848 | - |
| Rev.3 | Rev.3 | 235.0 | 42 | 2000 | 5.270 | 0.45 | 848 | Reinforced warhead |
| Rev.5 | Rev.3 | 235.0 | 41 | 1500 | 5.270 | 0.45 | 848 | Precision forging and stainless cast steel in body |
| Rev.5 | Rev.7 | 420.0 | 41 | 1500 | 5.710 | 0.45 | 1080 | Warhead designed to break target's bilge keel |

Table 1: Type 91 aerial torpedo and Type 91 warhead, operational models

Torpedo bombers by December 1942 had achieved some success. The Royal Navy's Fairey Swordfish aircraft, launched from the carrier HMS *Illustrious* on 11 November 1940, had inflicted considerable damage and loss on an Italian fleet at Taranto in the Mediterranean.

The Royal Navy paid a small price of two aircraft lost and two damaged – a considerable victory, especially considering the extremely hot reception the Italian AA had put up.

In the later Battle of Cape Matapan, torpedo bombers, again carrier launched, had smashed the steering gear of the battleship *Vittorio Veneto*, which flooded her and allowed the Royal Navy to catch her and destroy not only the battleship but her escorting cruisers and destroyers. In the Atlantic, the German battleship *Bismarck* was so damaged by aircraft-borne torpedoes that she was reduced to helplessly steering in circles while desperately defending herself. Again, this allowed heavy warships to catch up, and they sent the pride of the German fleet to the depths.

In the Pacific, torpedo bombers had been used in the Pearl Harbor attack, with Kate carrier aircraft used to considerable effect along with high-level and dive bombers. The Japanese had also used torpedo-carrying Betty and Nell bombers against the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse*, sinking both off the Malayan peninsula. Not to be outdone the US Navy had struck with considerable success at the Battle of Midway, which smashed the Japanese carrier fleet. However, there the loss rate was enormous for torpedo aircraft, with the more devastating blow being struck by dive bombers.³⁷

The use of land-based torpedo bombers was a new variant in the waters to the north of Australia though, and the local warships were far less conversant with defending themselves against them. By comparison, they had dealt with high-level bombers, such as the Kate, with ease, and with dive bombers such as the Val, both of which had been used in Darwin Harbour in the first air raid. The Betty had been a feature of the dozens of raids the Northern Territory had endured up until then.

Armidale's last action would have seen the ship heeling to the extreme as Richards and the bridge team conned the ship at speed through the bomb bursts. The Oerlikon roar of steady 20 mm fire would have been counterbalanced by the scream of the machine-guns rattling away, the gunners and loaders all fighting for balance as the ship's steel deck tilted and pitched underneath them.

It was a beautiful afternoon of blue sky and calm seas, with Nature serene as the humans scattered across the face of the skies and ocean fought it out between the two sides of Empire versus Empire. It was perfect flying and sailing weather, and neither side would back off from the fight: the Japanese determined to sink the ship, and the Australians determined to resist to the end.

At 1505 the Japanese began to attack from three different directions, in three groups of three. Richards then manoeuvred *Armidale* with a short zigzag and also ordered full port

wheel at the time he judged that the attacking aircraft were at their dropping points, but to no avail. *Armidale* was hit by a torpedo on the port side just forward of the bridge.

A minute later the corvette was hit again on the port side, between the engine room and the boiler room. A third torpedo from the port side missed ahead. A fourth torpedo missed astern, and a fifth torpedo passed over the bridge. The conventional bombs were still coming as well, with one narrowly missing the ship on the starboard side.³⁸

It probably was the case that the ship was struck by two torpedoes and possibly one bomb.³⁹ The summary of information furnished by the Chief of the Naval Staff to the War Cabinet agenda on 12 January 1943 specified that *Armidale* was 'hit by a torpedo'. Notably there was use of the singular here, and no mention of bombing or strafing.⁴⁰

The possibility of two torpedoes is given as follows:

| Account from | Suggestion of ordnance used | Strike point | Timing |
|--|---|---|---|
| Lieutenant William Whitting ⁴¹ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two torpedoes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> After end of port mess deck Starboard side after end of mess deck | One minute apart |
| Lieutenant Commander David Richards ⁴² | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two torpedoes One near miss bomb | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Port side just forward of the bridge Port side between engine room and boiler room Bomb abreast the whaler [boat] on the starboard side | Gives interval of three minutes between first attack and sinking |
| Engine Room Artificer Richard Maddocks ⁴³ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least one torpedo Possibly two – second was described as 'the last explosion' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Port side amidships Boiler room starboard side | Does not specify but gives time interval between explosions of perhaps a few minutes |
| Lieutenant Lloyd Palmer, Gunnery Officer ⁴⁴ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'a torpedo almost immediately' 'Another torpedo' 'and a bomb' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hit forward and the ship 'took a heavy list to port' Second torpedo 'on the port side' Bomb 'on the starboard side' | 'in three to four minutes from the start of the attack, <i>Armidale</i> had sunk' |
| Rex Pullen, loader on the starboard Oerlikon gun ⁴⁵ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two torpedoes One near miss bomb | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two torpedoes in the port side | Does not specify but first struck when he was loading a gun; second when 'I wasn't far from the sinking ship when the second torpedo hit about port midships' |

Richards, as commander, must be judged as being the person on board most likely attuned to what was happening to his ship as a whole, simply because that was his job at the time, rather than having some other primary occupation such as gunnery or engines.

In summary it is certain that at least one torpedo but probably two struck *Armidale*, detonating in a mighty explosion which likely split the ship's steel sides wide open. An inspection of the shipwreck would confirm this, but as of the time of printing the sunken ship has not been found.

Shipwrecks from World War I and II are being discovered steadily as underwater technology and search techniques improve, but *Armidale's* wreck has not yet been found. There has not been a pressing imperative to find out what happened to the ship, as there was with the wreck of HMAS *Sydney*, which sank in her final fight with the raider *Kormoran* off Western Australia in late 1941.

In that case, the search was driven by a burning need for closure for the families of the 645 men the Australian cruiser took to the seabed with her, and a quest to understand why a modern warship had been defeated by an armed converted civilian freighter. *Sydney* moreover had been mightily successful in her career, especially under her previous commander Captain John Collins.⁴⁶

On 17 March 2008 the Australian Government announced that the wreckage of both HMAS *Sydney* and the German raider *Kormoran* had been found, approximately 112 nautical miles off Steep Point, Western Australia. *Kormoran* is lying at a depth of 2560 metres; *Sydney*, approximately 12 nautical miles away, is at 2470 metres.

The finding of the two shipwrecks led to analysis of the damage caused to both, which in turn drove the battle damage assessment and a more complete understanding of what had happened. The examination in fact confirmed the original *Kormoran* survivors' account, although no corroborating evidence was available from the Australian side as there were no *Sydney* men living (for long, at least[§]) after the combat action was broken off.

Sydney had approached the *Kormoran* off the raider's starboard stern quarter in classic cautionary but offensive fashion, but came far too close, thus negating her superior gun range and accuracy. *Kormoran* threw off her disguise and opened fire, and the two ships duelled until both were sinking. The German ship's company took to the lifeboats, and *Sydney* drifted off, fighting onboard fires, and probably not under control. The Australian cruiser likely sank suddenly, while her ship's company was fighting to save her, and this accounted for the deaths of all on board.

Armidale, by comparison, presents no need for her wreck to be found: there has been a general acceptance of the narrative given by the many survivors, and there is no great mystery surrounding the circumstances of her loss. She is said to be located at 10 degrees south, 126 degrees 30 minutes east.⁴⁷ A small group of searchers has been formed in Australia to begin the hunt to find the corvette.

[§] One man lived long enough to take to a Carley float, a life-preserving small boat. His decomposed body was recovered at Christmas Island, well north, in February 1942. Later analysis showed the body was that of a serviceman from HMAS *Sydney*. See *The loss of HMAS Sydney II*, 'Empirical evidence: Christmas Island's unknown sailor', Department of Defence [website], <<http://www.defence.gov.au/sydneyii/finalreport/Report/Chapter%2015.pdf>>, accessed June 2014.

The Immediate Actions after the Fatal Impact

Signalman of the Watch Arthur Lansbury was on the bridge. He said:

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

Lansbury found out later that a piece of shrapnel had gone straight through the radio set. This unfortunate damage meant that *Armidale's* situation would remain unknown – not that any aircraft could have reached her in time to help, but the rescue situation was going to be dangerously compromised.⁴⁸

Able Seaman Jack Duckworth was on the quarterdeck of the corvette, and recalled being:

... swept away by the water rushing through. I grabbed a depth charge thrower, and managed to get back on my feet. I got to work cutting everything that would float loose. While we were letting go the motor boat, Jap fighters machine gunned us ... several boys were hit with cannon fire. We eventually got the boat away, and jumped into the water. We'd just dropped astern when another torpedo hit her amidships ... smoke and oil went everywhere.⁴⁹

The explosions had been massive. Many of the Dutch soldiers were killed in the area of impact. There has always been confusion over who died, until now.⁵⁰ *Armidale* began sinking fast, and it was now that Teddy Sheean determined to stay on and fight. Ordinary Seaman RM Caro wrote later:

Teddy died, but none of us who survived, I am sure, will ever forget his gallant deed which won him a Mention in Despatches. He was a loader number on the after Oerlikon gun. When the order 'Abandon Ship' was given, he made for the side, only to be hit twice by the bullets of an attacking Zero. None of us will ever know what made him do it, but he went back to his gun, strapped himself in, and brought down a Jap plane, still firing as he disappeared beneath the waves.⁵¹

The Gunnery Officer, Lieutenant Palmer, gave a brief but clear account, and as the senior man on board in charge of the ship's weapons, his is one of the most significant.

Ord. Seaman Ted Sheean was responsible for one plane in the last attack. He was a loading number at the after Oerlikon, and when the order was given to abandon ship, he made for the side, but was wounded by a machine gun bullet. He returned to his gun, and started firing again, bringing down one plane, but was again

wounded and went down with the ship. Sheean received a 'Mention in Despatches'.⁵²

Armidale's Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Commander Richards, wrote later in his report of proceedings:

Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean, although wounded, remained at his post at the after Oerlikon, and was responsible for bringing down one enemy bomber. He continued firing until he was killed at his gun.⁵³

Long after the war, the political leader Senator Chris Schacht expressed those last moments well when he said in Parliament:

From the moment he took the decision to strap himself into the gun mount Sheean must have known he was not going to survive. His actions were pure, selfless heroism.⁵⁴

Schacht's comments were typical of people from all sides of politics who have discovered the Sheean story and determined that here was a naval hero.

Crew member Ray Raymond said:

... the after section righted itself from the tilt and the after oerlikon [sic] came into sight being manned by Ted Sheehan [sic] who was still firing the gun which resulted in him shooting down one Japanese plane and damaging possibly two others.⁵⁵

Historian Graham Wilson has argued that Sheean could only have shot for between 16 and 33 seconds.⁵⁶ He bases this assumption on the argument that the Oerlikon was fed by two 60-round magazines, and the rate of fire from the weapon was 450 rounds per minute at its maximum. Therefore at the maximum rate of fire the gun would have been out of its ammunition in 16 seconds, or at its slowest rate of fire in 33 seconds.

However, there is no reason to assume Sheean would have fired off all his ammunition, as Wilson implies – 'if he maintained a constant stream of fire'. Rather, he could – and would – have saved it for available targets. Wilson suggests too:

This begs the question, where did he get the extra ammunition from? There is not a single statement to the effect that Sheean was seen to reload his Oerlikon, nor that anyone stayed aboard to assist him as loader.⁵⁷

But then again, the ship section Sheean was firing from was not that readily seen by the survivors, and in any case, Sheean could have reloaded from nearby ammunition drums. Near him were 'ready-use lockers', basically big watertight boxes in which equipment, including ammunition was stored. Crewman Alf Thornton, associated for many years with the museum ship *Castlemaine* – an identical corvette – says that both *Castlemaine* and HMAS *Goulburn*, in which he served from 1943 to 1945, utilised ready-use lockers in those positions.⁵⁸

Suggestions that have been made that Sheean continued firing from beneath the water must be treated as exaggeration. Firstly, of course Sheean could have only held his breath for an extremely brief period, perhaps 10 to 20 seconds. Second, the mechanical possibility of Sheean firing the Oerlikon from under the water was analysed by the tribunal. It concluded:

The tribunal reviewed the operating manuals and drawings of the gun.

In its research, the Tribunal observed that the gun cycle is operated by gas blowback. As each round fires, gas pressure from the explosion blows the breech block backward from the chamber, ejecting the expended cartridge case during its travel. At full recoil, it is either stopped by the trigger hook or it continues its cycle by collecting a new round from the magazine and returning it to the chamber to fire; and so the cycle continues until the trigger is released. This cycle will not operate automatically if the breech block is submerged, due to the combined effect of water resistance slowing the breech block travel, and the significant reduction in the available pressure delivered by the gas.

There is no question that Sheean was firing as *Armidale* was sinking, but, as mentioned above, the mechanical nature of the Oerlikon would not sustain an ability to fire from under water. Observers, viewing the action from the surface of the water, could have been misled into believing that the Oerlikon was firing by the effect of the strafing from enemy aircraft, which continued after *Armidale* had sunk.⁵⁹

It might be rated as probable to likely that Sheean shot down an aircraft, given the number of people who say they saw aircraft go down. However, the Japanese records disagree: neither the 202 nor 753 Ku Kodochosho has any recorded as being lost. The Royal Air Force's 31 Squadron records have no claims detailed or confirmed.⁶⁰ Then again, there are mistakes, including aircraft not recorded as lost when they were, to be found in the Japanese records.^h

^h For example, the loss of the Dinah reconnaissance aircraft of Ku 202, which on the afternoon of 17 August 1943 sent over an aircraft from Koepang, though the unit Kodochosho has no entry for the day. The aircraft was intercepted some 16 kilometres north-west of Darwin at 1625 hours by Wing Commander CR Caldwell and Flight Sergeant PR Padula after the Dinah was spotted ahead of anti-aircraft fire over Charles Point at 26,000 feet. Caldwell hit the Dinah, which descended rapidly and hit the water, resulting in the deaths of both CPOs

But it is not what Teddy Sheehan failed to achieve in not shooting any down but what he tried to achieve. No one else tried.

One factor which may have misled watchers is that the engines in the Zeroes and Bettys put out smoke when they were powered on. It was a common error with the Zeroes particularly and many pilots thought they had shot one down when in fact they were at full throttle.⁶¹

The inquiry found:

Sheehan's action station was as a loader on the centreline aft Oerlikon AA gun. When the order to abandon ship was given, Sheehan is recorded as being on the deck with Able Seaman Edward (Ted) Pellet, who was using a tomahawk to release the motor boat. Sheehan was then seen by Pellet returning to the gun rather than abandoning ship with him.

Leading Signaller Arthur Lansbury, who was piping 'abandon ship' throughout the ship, saw Sheehan strap himself into the firing position of the Oerlikon gun (not his normal action station) and commence firing. Lansbury also says that Sheehan had been 'hit in the back' but continued firing the gun. One witness, Stoker Ray Raymond, who having abandoned ship and was in the water on the port side, said that Sheehan shot down one Japanese plane and possibly damaged two others.

Another witness, Wireman Bill Lamshed, says that he saw the aft Oerlikon shoot down a Zero fighter, and that he later learnt that it was Sheehan who had strapped himself into the Oerlikon and shot down the aircraft.⁶²

Bill Lamshed later wrote:

I was a man overboard and in a ringside position to witness the sinking. The ship broke into halves. The front section was going down – the rear section was leaning on an angle to port, when the after Oerlikon started firing, and I saw tracer bullets hitting a Zero which flew over my head and hit the water some distance away.⁶³

Of the other crewmen whose accounts can be found, Victor Leonard only heard the Oerlikon engage, and Rex Pullen did not see Teddy's action.⁶⁴

The 'abandon ship' order was given, and sailors began to lower the ship's boats and to jettison Carley floats and rafts. The ship was listing to 50 degrees, and everything that could be used to support the ship's company in the water was jettisoned.

Tomihiko Tanaka and Shinji Kawahara. The crash was verified by Caldwell and his wingman, who flew around the wreckage at 'zero feet' and also photographed it through a gun camera.

Sterling work in the abandon ship routine was done by many, but in particular by Lieutenant Whitting, who Richards later singled out for praise:

Lieutenant Whitting, 1st Lieutenant, did excellent work in getting the lifesaving gear away under very difficult circumstances, being wounded in two places and constantly under fire.⁶⁵

But now the Japanese aircraft began to circle and machine-gun those men in the sea. Three escorting Zeroes of 202 Ku led by Lieutenant Fujikazu Koizumi flew over the survivors and strafed them in the water.⁶⁶ The deaths of those killed, the inquiry found, was due to 'about two-thirds of the Netherlands East Indies troops' dying from the 'blast of the torpedo explosions' while 'most of the Ship's Company casualties were due to enemy machine gunning personnel whilst in the water'.⁶⁷

Of the 149 men on board, perhaps up to 50 were killed in the initial torpedo and strafing attack. At 1520 the ship was fully sunk in position 10°S, 126°30'E.⁶⁸ The survivors took to the ship's boats and rafts.

There was a big delay in search and rescue operations, mainly as it was assumed the sunken *Armidale* was maintaining radio silence as ordered. A search was commenced around midday two days after the sinking. It is a sad tale but a brave account too, and is only summarised here:

Timetable of Events:

- 29 November, Sunday 1200. *Castlemaine* and *Armidale* left Darwin.
- 30 November, Monday 0900. First air attacks.
- 1 December, Tuesday 0200. Arrived Betano, leaving immediately.
 - 0800. Sighted *Kuru* with evacuees.
 - 1100. Turned back for Betano (*Armidale* only).
 - 1519. *Armidale* sunk.
- 2 December, Wednesday 1200. Captain left with wounded in motor boat.
- 4 December, Friday. Raised whaler.
- 5 December, Saturday 1115. Whaler started out. Motor boat sighted by aircraft and later rescued by HMAS *Kalgoorlie*.
- 7 December, Monday. Raft sighted by *Catalina*.
- 8 December, Tuesday. Food dropped to raft. 1200 Whaler sighted by *Catalina*.
- 9 December, Wednesday 1735. Whaler picked up by HMAS *Kalgoorlie*.
- 10 December, Thursday 1100. Arrived Darwin.⁶⁹

In essence, Sheean was not imbued with some sort of patriotism that we don't have any more. He had that, we can assume, as most people then and now do in varying degrees. But he likely turned back to his gun primarily out of concern for his shipmates.

To fight for those alongside you is quite usual in warfare. I see no less concern now in young people than there was then. To fight for your mates is of paramount importance. That loyalty, as Lawrence LeShan points out in a collection of thoughts from combat veterans, is a most powerful driving force.⁷⁰ 'We were closer to each other that we were to our wives' was one significant comment. Historian Stephen Ambrose noted that virtually without exception those he interviewed said that their closest friends, 'the men from whom they have no secrets, the men with whom they would gladly share their last piece of bread', were their combat comrades.⁷¹ Australian soldier NX31016 was eloquent on the subject:

Your mate was your tender companion, the rough-house drunken bum you went on a spree with, the bloke you could depend on in life or approaching death, who would never let you down ...⁷²

Even though Teddy Sheean and his shipmates – and indeed all of the Australian armed forces – would realise they were up against massive malevolent forces, that would have been something accepted. US Paratrooper Don Malarkey wrote of his World War II experiences:

There is not a day that has passed since that I do not thank Adolf Hitler for allowing me to be associated with the most talented and inspiring group of men that I have ever known.⁷³

Furthermore the need to defend one's mates often sees acceptance of the horrible aspects of warfare. Soldier Daniel Webster could have been withdrawn from his unit through several methods: experience, parental influence at home, promotion, or his two combat wounds. Instead he returned to the battle. On one journey back to his unit by truck, surrounded by his comrades, he reflected he was returning to a 'bright home full of love'.⁷⁴ Despite the stresses and horrors of close-quarter combat, soldiers will often return to it rather than let their comrades down. Poet and infantry officer Siegfried Sassoon went back to the horrors of World War I trench warfare because he could not live with the thought of his comrades being there without him: 'he couldn't bear to think of poor Old Joe lying out at night in shell-holes and getting shelled'. His poem 'When I'm asleep, dreaming and lulled and warm' is about the ghosts of soldiers he had had known reproaching him in his dream for his absence.⁷⁵

World War II Marine EB Sledge, at first puzzled by why former members of his unit would want to return to the horrors and dangers of fighting, concluded that it was because no-one else would 'understand what we had experienced, what in our minds seemed to set us apart forever from anyone who hadn't been in combat'.⁷⁶ In Vietnam, wounded by a white

phosphorous grenade which had burnt sections out of one arm, Sergeant John Setelin had received first aid and was due to be helicoptered out of the Battle of Ia Drang. He changed his mind and took the sling off and went back into battle, explaining 'I couldn't in good faith get on a chopper and fly out of there and leave those guys behind'.⁷⁷

The closer to combat one is with one's comrades, the more one bonds. Wehrmacht soldier Guy Sajer transferred from transport to infantry, and while he noted that the decision almost cost him and a like-minded comrade their lives, he did not regret belonging to a combat unit. 'We discovered a sense of comradeship which I have never found again, inexplicable and steady, through thick and thin.'⁷⁸ US paratrooper Leo Boyle was wounded in combat in World War II and never returned to his unit; he commented: 'I never became fully resigned to the separation from the life as a "trooper" – separated from my buddies, and never jumping again'.⁷⁹ Marine Officer Philip Caputo thought that the US Marines in Vietnam fought as hard as they did rather than be a deserter who 'ran out on his friends'.⁸⁰

Shared fears, such as those on *Armidale* experienced, make for self-stabilisation. World War I soldier George Coppard thought that 'the daily comradeship of my pals, whether in or out of the line, gave me strength'.⁸¹ In World War II New Guinea, Corporal Lofty Cox told his mate that after seven straight days of fighting and being shelled the only thing that stopped him jumping out of his position and running was that he had 'a bloke like you alongside me', only to be told in reply that his mate felt exactly the same.⁸² So the last thing a soldier will do is inform authority about his battle-partner's behaviour, leading us to surmise that such behaviours as discussed in this work may very well be widespread and therefore unreported.

The worst thing one can do as an infantry soldier – or as anyone engaged in close-quarter combat – is to let down one's friends. World War II battle surgeon Brendan Phibbs took part in an assault by his infantry company in the Battle of the Bulge which was not supported very well by the two companies on either side, and noted the pained giving and taking of the comments that followed its bloody aftermath:

'Where were you guys, for chrissakes? We needed you on our right' ... exquisitely painful when a wounded man points a bloody hand at a friend from another company, [and] mutters, 'Where the f... was you, Tom?'⁸³

In conclusion, Teddy Sheean chose to give up his life for his friends rather than take an easier way out. Perhaps there raced through his mind his life later, should he survive, but he would be haunted by the ghosts of those he would feel he had let down. Instead he therefore turned back to his anti-aircraft gun. There is no higher sacrifice than that of giving up one's own life for others. He earned the Victoria Cross immediately in that respect. It is a sad aspect of our country's attitude towards retrospective honours that it took so many years for it to be given in actuality.

¹ Jack Bird, telephone interview with the author, August 2015.

² 'Edward (Teddy) Sheehan', *Lynne's Family* [website], <<http://lynnesfamilies.wordpress.com/sheehan/edward-teddy-sheehan/>>, accessed December 2014. Entire paragraph is taken from the site, with the exception of the explanatory text.

³ Royal Australian Navy, *HMAS Armidale*, Report of Proceedings, p. 3, <<http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/AWM78/38/1/>>, accessed June 2013.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Rex Pullen, interview with Peter Williams, Hobart, 2005, Dr Peter Williams Collection.

⁷ J Sullivan (ed.), 'The loss of HMAS Armidale', *Naval Historical Review*, September 1983, *Naval Historical Society of Australia* [website], <<http://www.navyhistory.org.au/the-loss-of-hmas-armidale>>, accessed June 2012. (The account is given on the society's website as having come from the original copy of 1983, and is headed as 'By John Sullivan', who was *Castlemaine's* CO. However, it is clearly the work of Lieutenant Lloyd Palmer, the Gunnery Officer, as he describes the action as being on the ship, in the first person, and Sullivan was on the other corvette. It is possible that in 1983 Sullivan was editing the work for the Naval Historical Society.)

⁸ Rex Pullen, interview, 2005.

⁹ 'Battleship photo archive: 20mm Oerlikon', 'Duties of members of the gun crew', *NavSource Online* [website], accessed June 2015.

¹⁰ Sullivan, 1983.

¹¹ 'HMAS *Castlemaine*', *Royal Australian Navy* [website], <<http://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-castlemaine>>, accessed June 2014.

¹² I Pfennigwerth, *Missing pieces: the intelligence jigsaw and RAN operations from 1939–71*, Papers in Australian Maritime Affairs No. 25, Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, <<https://www.navy.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/PIAMA25.pdf>>, accessed June 2015.

¹³ 'HMAS *Kuru*', *Royal Australian Navy* [website], <<http://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-kuru>>, accessed July 2014.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Pfennigwerth, 2008.

¹⁶ 'HMAS *Kuru*'.

¹⁷ Sullivan, 1983.

¹⁸ B Alford, 'The loss of *HMAS Armidale*', four-page manuscript in the possession of the author. Courtesy Bob Alford.

¹⁹ 'HMAS *Kuru*'.

²⁰ Alford, 'The loss of *HMAS Armidale*'.

²¹ 'HMAS *Kuru*'.

²² 'HMAS *Armidale*, Recommendations for awards to Lieutenant WG Whitting, RANR(S) & Ordinary Seaman E Sheehan (sic) H1617', The National Archives – UK: ADM 1/14364. (Cited in Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal, *The report of the inquiry into unresolved recognition for past acts of naval and military gallantry and valour*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2013.)

²³ 'HMAS *Kuru*'.

²⁴ Alford, 'The loss of *HMAS Armidale*'.

²⁵ *War diary 753 Ku – 1 December 1942*, translated by Asako Kobayashi. Courtesy Bob Alford. Translation reads: '250 kg x 14 bombs, plus 60 kg x 110 bombs. Total of 124 bombs.'

²⁶ Military History Department of the National Institute for Defence Studies, Tokyo, *Kodochocho*, translated by Indo Tepei, 2015, and Misako Piper, through Bob Piper and Bob Alford.

²⁷ Sullivan, 1983.

²⁸ 'Naval Operations – Report by Naval Board on loss of HMAS *Armidale* 4/12/42 – 12/1/43', National Archives of Australia, MP138/1, 603/280/945, p. 24.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁰ Sullivan, 1983.

³¹ *Handbook on Japanese Military Forces*, US Army War Department Technical Manual, 15 September 1944, p. 57, section 4, <<http://ftp.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/Japan/IJA/HB/HB-4.html#V>>, accessed June 2014.

³² Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal, Inquiry into unresolved recognition for past acts of naval and military gallantry and valour, 6 February 2013, submission from Mr Howard Halsted, <<https://defence->

honours-tribunal.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Submission-027-Mr-Howard-Halsted-President-Royal-Australian-Navy-Corvettes-Association-NSW-Inc.pdf>. In this document the weight of the weapon is given as 784 kilograms, but other sources all say 800 kilograms, so that change has been made in the text.

³³ Rex Pullen, interview, 2005.

³⁴ 'Naval Operations – Report by Naval Board on loss of HMAS *Armidale* 4/12/42 – 12/1/43', p. 5.

³⁵ It is also written 'torpedo for airplane x 8' at the bottom (but in the same section).

³⁶ T 10,100 is total size (i.e. 250 kg x 14 bombs + 60 kg x 110 bombs = 10,100 kg).

³⁷ See M Vego, *Major fleet-versus-fleet operations in the Pacific War, 1941–1945*, US Naval War College, Newport, 2014, p. 139. Vego makes the useful point that the torpedo-bomber attack, while resulting in the loss of 35 out of 41 aircraft, and what looks like no hits, did in fact draw down the Zero fighter combat air patrol over the Japanese carriers to a low height, which made them incapable of defending against the US dive-bomber attack moments later. Mitsuo Fuchida, leader of the air group which attacked Darwin, who then went on to fight at Midway, observed: 'Seven enemy planes finally succeeded in launching their torpedoes at [aircraft carrier] *Hiryu*, five from her starboard side and two from port. Our Zeroes tenaciously pursued the retiring attackers as far as they could. *Hiryu* turned sharply to starboard to evade the torpedoes, and we watched anxiously to see if any would find their mark. A deep sigh of relief went up when no explosion occurred ... not a single hit had been scored.' See M Fuchida & M Okumiya, *Midway – the Japanese story*, Cassell and Co., London, 1992, p. 210.

³⁸ Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal, *Report of the inquiry into unresolved recognition for past acts of naval and military gallantry and valour*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2013, 'Chapter Seventeen: Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean', <<https://defence-honours-tribunal.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/AF13049824.pdf>>.

³⁹ 'Naval Operations – Report by Naval Board on loss of HMAS *Armidale* 4/12/42 – 12/1/43', p. 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴¹ F Walker, *HMAS Armidale – the ship that had to die*, Kingfisher Press, NSW, 1980, pp. 147–149.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 149–150.

⁴⁴ Sullivan, 1983.

⁴⁵ 'Survival at sea: in the whaler after the sinking of HMAS *Armidale* in 1942. A personal account by Rex Pullen', *Gun Plot* [website], <<http://www.gunplot.net/main/content/hmas-armidale-survivors-story>>, accessed June 2013. Used with permission of Russ Graystone, webmaster/owner.

⁴⁶ See the same author's *The submarine six* for an analysis of his career. For an analysis of the *Kormoran* engagement, see the excellent work *The search for the Sydney* by David L Mearns, the principal shipwreck hunter; and Tom Lewis, 'An end to the mystery', *Australian Warship*, <<http://www.defence.gov.au/sydneyii/CORR/CORR.006.0020.pdf>>.

⁴⁷ Walker, 1980, p. 143.

⁴⁸ 'Radio talk presented by ABC war correspondent, Peter Hemery. "Interview Survivors HMAS *Armidale* (Lansbury & Duckworth)" [4p] [Box 5]', National Archives of Australia, SP300/3, 378.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Much of the analysis is taken from *Teddy Sheean VC*. A selection further on in the book details exactly how many people on board died, and their origins.

⁵¹ GH Gill, *Royal Australian Navy 1942–1945*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1968, p. 218.

⁵² Sullivan, 1983.

⁵³ Gill, 1968, p. 218.

⁵⁴ Commonwealth of Australia, Parliamentary Debates, Senate, Official Hansard No. 5, 2001, Wednesday, 4 April 2001, Thirty-Ninth Parliament, First Session – Eighth Period, Award of Victoria Cross for Australia Bill 2001, p. 23697, <<http://www.aph.gov.au/Hansard/senate/dailys/ds040401.pdf>>.

⁵⁵ Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal, 2013, submission from Mr Howard Halsted.

⁵⁶ Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal, 2013, submission from Mr Graham Wilson, p. 3, <<https://defence-honours-tribunal.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Submission-099-Annex-J-Mr-Graham-Wilson.pdf>>.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Peter Driver, Museum Ship *Castlemaine* staff, letter to the author, 2014. Mr Driver quotes Alf Thornton, who was a volunteer on the ship at the time. The author has inspected the Oerlikon position, and opines that Sheean could have easily enough supplied his gun alone.

⁵⁹ Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal, *Report of the inquiry into unresolved recognition for past acts of naval and military gallantry and valour*, 2013.

-
- ⁶⁰ 31 Squadron RAAF were equipped with Beaufighters and based at Coomalie in the Northern Territory from November 1942. They were often engaged for fighter cover out to ships, and on aggressive patrols against the Japanese. See Bob Alford, *Darwin's Air War*, second edition.
- ⁶¹ B Alford, email to the author, 14 January 2015.
- ⁶² Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal, *Report of the inquiry into unresolved recognition for past acts of naval and military gallantry and valour*, 2013, 'Chapter Seventeen: Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean'.
- ⁶³ Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal, 2013, submission from Mr Howard Halsted.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁵ 'Naval Operations – Report by Naval Board on loss of HMAS *Armidale* 4/12/42 – 12/1/43'. The report of proceedings (ROP) is pp. 24–26 of the overall document, with the survivor ROP being the final single page, written as a separate document.
- ⁶⁶ Alford, 'The loss of HMAS *Armidale*'.
- ⁶⁷ 'Naval Operations – Report by Naval Board on loss of HMAS *Armidale* 4/12/42 – 12/1/43', p. 5.
- ⁶⁸ 'HMAS *Armidale* (I)', *Royal Australian Navy* [website], <<http://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-armidale-i>>, accessed February 2012.
- ⁶⁹ Sullivan, 1983.
- ⁷⁰ LL LeShan, *The psychology of war: comprehending its mystique and its madness*, Noble Press, Chicago, 1992, pp. 84–85.
- ⁷¹ DK Webster, *Parachute infantry*, Louisiana State University Press, 1994, p. XV.
- ⁷² J Barrett, *We were there*, Allen and Unwin, NSW, 1995, p. 189.
- ⁷³ SE Ambrose, *Band of brothers*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1992, p. 20.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 228.
- ⁷⁵ R Graves, *Goodbye to all that*, Penguin, London, 1960, p. 225.
- ⁷⁶ EB Sledge, *With the old breed: at Peleliu and Okinawa*, Presidio Press, 1981, p. 267.
- ⁷⁷ HG Moore & JL Galloway, *We were soldiers once and young: Ia Drang: the battle that changed the war in Vietnam*, Random House, New York, 1992, p. 191.
- ⁷⁸ G Sajer, *The forgotten soldier*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1971, p. 113.
- ⁷⁹ Ambrose, 1992, p. 173.
- ⁸⁰ P Caputo, *A rumor of war*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1977, p. 247.
- ⁸¹ G Coppard, *With a machine gun to Cambrai: the tale of a young Tommy in Kitchener's army 1914–1918*, H.M.S.O, London, 1969, p. 107.
- ⁸² C Baker & G Knight, *Milne Bay 1942*, Baker-Knight Publications, NSW, 1991, p. 271.
- ⁸³ B Phibbs, *The other side of time: a combat surgeon in World War II*, Little, Brown, Boston, 1987, p. 128.