



Australian
Historical
Association

25/8/2020

Senator Jacqui Lambie
PO Box 256
Burnie
TAS 7320

Dear Senator Lambie,

On behalf of the Australian Historical Association, I am writing to provide additional evidence of the vital need for historical expertise in Australia – expertise that is greatly threatened by the Commonwealth government’s proposed changes to university funding. In an earlier letter (29/7/20), I described the changes as threatening the vitality of Australia’s national culture and debate. Since writing that letter, Ordinary Seaman ‘Teddy’ Sheean has been posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for Australia, thanks to dedicated campaigning from advocates and the discovery and examination of fresh historical evidence by professional historians.

The award was recommended by the 2020 Historic VC – Expert Panel, which investigated previously unexamined primary sources held in archives managed by the National Institute for Defence Studies in Tokyo (NIDS). Through connections held by Dr Steve Bullard, it was discovered that the records of the Japanese bomber and fighter squadrons involved in the attack on *HMAS Armidale* had survived the war. Translations of these documents allowed for confirmation of claims that were treated as conjecture by the Australian Official History in the 1950s.

Analysis of these documents by historians revealed new and compelling evidence that supported two crucial justifications for Ordinary Seaman Sheean’s award. Dr Brad Manera investigated Japanese reports of ammunition expenditure to reconstruct the events of December 1942. The high expenditure of 7.7mm ammunition (which is useless against the steel hull of a warship) demonstrated that multiple strafing runs were conducted by Japanese planes against survivors in the water and crewmen attempting to abandon ship. Dr Manera comments “it must have been the sight of the machine gunning of helpless sailors struggling in the sea that inspired Sheean’s calculated and heroic act of self-sacrifice”. Furthermore, these documents confirmed that two of the seven large,



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twin-engined 'Betty' bombers from the 753rd Japanese Naval Air Group were damaged during the attack on *Armidale* – damage that was, in all probability, inflicted by Sheean.

This evidence was critical to convincing the Historic VC – Expert Panel to recommend to the Prime Minister that Ordinary Seaman Sheean be awarded the Victoria Cross. It was provided by professional, trained historians, using primary source documents and analytical skills developed at university. The proposed changes to university funding, increasing humanities degrees by 113%, will threaten the development and retention of this kind of expertise in Australia and put it out of reach for many young Australian students particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The increases will diminish the vitality of our national culture and debate, and reduce the chances that grave injustices of the past, such as the disregarding of Sheean's bravery, will be corrected.

This provides further evidence for why I urge you to reject the proposed changes when the legislation comes before the Senate. I would be happy to discuss this further with you.

Yours Sincerely

Professor Melanie Oppenheimer FASSA

AHA President