

The Legacy

SMNCSO(A) Paul Baverstock (11/2002)

I never had the pleasure of meeting my Great Uncle Ernie. Grandpa always spun yarns about growing up in the '30's with his brothers.

The integrity of your senior citizenship hinges on the ability to tell a good warrie.

Let's say any scar on his little frame was caused by shrapnel wounds, yet evidence suggests years of motor neurone complications left its mark. As a youngen, I couldn't take Grandpa seriously, until I eventually asked him what happened to his brother.

The mood changed.

Able Seaman Ernest George Baverstock, one of 645 brave Australian souls to perish in our country's most tragic day in our proud naval history. A serene location in the Indian Ocean would play as a backdrop to what can only be described as yet another unsolved mystery of the sea.

HMAS SYDNEY sank off the Western Australian coast, 19 November 1941, yet this seems to be the only concrete evidence in a case riddled with conflicting statements.

Grandpa can tell you exactly what happened on that day. How he knows that information can only be described as old man's wisdom, but who am I to argue? If only there was one survivor to decipher the events that unfolded. If only I could ask Uncle Ernie myself. Speculation of deemed truths can be the only fuel for this analysis.

"We all know the bloody Germans sunk the Sydney", Grandpa resounded, but the chain of events before and after the actual battle leaves a unique aftertaste in my mouth. The German Raider *HSK Kormoran*, disguised herself as a Dutch Merchant vessel '*Straat Malaaka*'. Upon sighting the SYDNEY, and failing several verification signal attempts, KORMORAN closed up her battle ensign, and exposed her somewhat formidable armament. A close range slug fest followed, rendering both ships mortally wounded after a reported 70 minutes of fighting.

Grandpa insisted “This was a bloody typical Nazi style, coward mode of conducting their warfare”, but the aftertaste I previously referred to produced an outcome that should not have been feasible.

HMAS SYDNEY sank 6 hours after the initial conflict, not one Aussie sailor survived, no bodies or wreckage – apart from a Carley float – were recovered.

Vanished!

In true testimony to Grandpa’s evidence/opinion (the margin between these two words faded quickly over the years), I will name the following parties loosely, obviously trying to refrain from offence;

Based on rugged speculation, the SYDNEY had an encounter with a Japanese submarine, following her brief conflict with the KORMORAN. “Why were those Jap bastards (sic) in our waters anyway?”, Grandpa continued, “They were going to mine the whole bloody coast!”. AS Grandpa’s carotid artery cranked into overdrive, he let me know how much his brother, the SYDNEY, and the Navy meant to him with a few choice words. A few words I am beginning to grow very accustomed to.

We must fight and win at sea. Our independence must not be underestimated. Australia owns its beautiful freedom due to its notable trait of never giving up, much like our boys on the SYDNEY.

A valid point I must introduce concerns the volume of information directly fed to the public. Owing to wartime secrecy, very little could be confidently added to what was known about the tragic loss of the SYDNEY, speculation so a word running rampant through the bowels of this saga. I can comfortably believe the theory provided by my Grandpa, as not single versions of events is watertight, until SHE is found.

It’s been 61 years since our distinguished Light Cruiser submerged. The quality technology unfolding today must surely be capable of locating the carcass of the SYDNEY, and releasing the souls of her 645 gallant sailors, of which one very soul, means the world to me. The recovery of her would paint a million pictures, and possibly close all doors of question.

At a personal level, it is of the utmost importance to find the whereabouts of the soul where my Great Uncle Ernie lies, my Grandpa sadly passed away a couple of years ago, and I still talk about him if he were still alive. My family has always kept name links through generations; for instance, the Legacy passed on from my Great Uncle – Able Seaman Ernest Baverstock – would be awarded to my father. Dad realizes the honour of bearing such a distinguished name.

Sydney Baverstock, although never a serving member of the RAN, still remains an integral part of our family's proud naval background.

I'm proud to be a Baverstock

I'm proud to be a sailor in the Royal Australian Navy.

Warship's loss recalled



A BELMONT naval recruit has been awarded the Literacy Skills award at the end of his course at the training base, HMAS Cerberus in Victoria.

Recruit Combat Systems Operator Paul Baverstock received the award for an essay on the loss of HMAS Sydney during World War II.

He wrote it while completing his RAN recruit course.

The 11-week course lays the foundations for a naval career.

It includes a variety of high-level physical training, parades, drills, weapons training and a week at sea learning seamanship and survival skills.

Recruit Baverstock will now be transferred to a permanent position.

Paul Baverstock receives the Literacy Skills award from Commodore Gately, director general of navy strategic policy and futures.