

**4 Warrego Street,
Albion Park, 2527.**

21st February, 2009.

**Mr. Garry Baverstock,
HMAS Sydney Virtual Memorial,
P>O> Box 614,
Yandina, Qld. 4561.**

**Re: Virtual Memorial for the Crew of HMAS Sydney II
19th November, 1941.**

Dear Garry,

Enclosed is a brief history of my father, William Ernest McLean, his wife Dorothy and family. My memories of dad are rather poor, as I was only nine when he was lost.

My daughter Janne Bradley, did quite a lot of research to obtain her grandfather's service record in the First World War, together with an account of his naval career. She presented this to me on my birthday some years ago.

There is very little known of dad's early life, as he became disassociated with his step father Charlie McLean.

I hope this story of my father, is what you are looking for.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ernie McLean". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Ernest Warren McLean.

WILLIAM ERNEST McLEAN
14th MARCH, 1899 - 19TH NOVEMBER, 1941

**14th JUNE, 1916 THE AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE,
 2nd BATTALION,
 REINFORCEMENT 5, PRIVATE NUMBER 2760**

**15th FEBRUARY, 1922 - ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY
 STOKER II**

19TH NOVEMBER, 1941 STOKER PETTY OFFICER

My father, William Ernest McLean, always known as Ernie, was born in South Melbourne on 14th March, 1899. He was the youngest of three sons of Elizabeth and Charles Fox. When my grandfather passed away, my grandmother married Charles McLean, and the three boys adopted the McLean name.

World War I broke out in 1914 and the two older brothers, Harry and Alfred joined the army. Putting his age up by 12 months, Ernie joined the Australian Imperial Force on 14th June, 1916.

He served in Europe and was in the trenches in Belgium when he was gassed twice and injured in the right knee when hit by shrapnel. He was Discharged on 28th December, 1919.

In 1922, Ernie joined the Royal Australian Navy, signing on for 12 years. He served on several different ships, based at Cerebus in Victoria and Penquin in Sydney Harbour, including HMAS Mallow, HMAS Marguerite, HMAS Moresby, HMAS Swordsman, HMAS Australia, HMAS Voyager and HMAS Sydney. While working on the oil inlet pipes on HMAS Australia, he slipped and fell into Sydney Harbour causing him to develop pneumonia, and spent 6 weeks in the naval hospital at Randwick. When he recovered, he spent time on HMAS Penguin stationed in Sydney Harbour. On 26th April, 1938 he joined HMAS Voyager as Acting Stoker Petty Officer until 1st July, 1938. He then transferred to HMAS Sydney on 2nd July, 1938, as Acting Petty Officer. After passing his exams he became Stoker Petty Officer on 29th April, 1939.

He met my mother, Dorothy May Dunn when she was waitressing at Selfridges Cafeteria in Sydney. They were married on 15th December, 1928 and they had two children, Dorothy May and Ernest Warren. During peace time he travelled all over the world on various ships. My sister and I received many beautiful post cards from him. I still have and treasure them to this day. In 1934 he signed on for a further 5 years and was due to be discharged prior to World War II. He then signed on for a further 5 years. He was on the Sydney during the campaign in the Mediterranean. On returning to Australia, he received together with the entire crew, the commemorative medallion in recognition of the sinking

of the Italian cruiser Bartolomeo Colleone. As a result of this battle, Sydney's funnel was holed, leaving many pieces of shrapnel on the deck. Dad was given a piece of this shrapnel, which I had in my possession for many years before donating it to the Australian War Museum in Canberra.

The crew of Sydney had a six weeks break before returning to active duty and their final battle in the Indian Ocean. The ship went down on 19th November, 1941 but the families were not informed until some days later that the Sydney was posted as missing. As a nine year old boy, I was not fully aware of the devastating effect the loss of the Sydney and death of my father would have on my family for years to come. During the depression, mum had a difficult time keeping not only her family together, but also helped three of her brothers and dad's brothers as my father was the only bread winner. During their married life my parents spent a lot of time apart, however, mum always believed dad would return home safe. When the Sydney was lost, the situation was difficult for her and she had a breakdown. She decided to take my sister Dorothy and me back to her roots where she was born at Failford, a small town near Taree. We returned to the city two years later, so mum could find work to support us. She continued to work for many years as a cook, finally becoming a chef until she retired. She passed away in 1978 aged 71 years.

When the wreck of the Sydney was discovered on 16th March, 2008, it was unbelievable after so many years. However it was soon proved to be correct. The "Finding Sydney Foundation" has done sterling work in making this a reality. The culmination of the solving of this mystery for me became a memorable experience. My family and I attended the Memorial Service at St. Andrews Cathedral on 24th April, 2008, and I was able to go to Geraldton, W.A. for the 67th Anniversary Commemorative Memorial Service for Sydney II with some of my family. My daughter Janne and I went to sea on HMAS Manoora, while my wife Barbara, daughter Dianne and grandson Gavin attended the HMAS Sydney II Commemorative Sunset Service at the Geraldton HMAS Sydney II Memorial.

The naval department went out of their way to make this a special time. We thank the "Finding Sydney Foundation" members for their dedicated work as well as the naval personnel who were involved in taking care of us.



Ernest Warren McLean.