

Submission 201

Mr Tom Legoe DSM



Australian Government
Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal

Internal use only
INQUIRY NO: 2011/020
DHAAT/IN/ SUB/2011/201
DHAAT/OUT/
DATE: 14 DEC 2012

LODGEMENT OF SUBMISSION

This form must be lodged with a submission to an Inquiry

Applicant Title: Mr Ms Mrs Miss Other please specify
Rank: Able Seaman
Surname: LEGOE First Name: TOM

Service Number/s 7252 Date of Birth: 20.08.1925

Service Navy Army RAAF Other please specify

Postal Address
18 TYNE STREET
GILBERTON SA 5081

Telephone Business: Home: Mobile:

Email Address tomlegoe@adam.com.au


Name of Inquiry Unresolved recognition for past acts of naval + military gallantry + valour

Note: Are you providing this submission on behalf of an organisation? YES: NO:

If YES, what is the name of the organisation?

What position do you hold in the organisation?

Desired Outcome

 Please attach your submission and supporting documentation

CONSENT AND DECLARATION

1a I **consent** to the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal making my submission publicly available.
OR

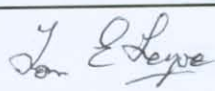
1b I **do not consent** to the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal making my submission publicly available for the following reasons:

- 2 I also **consent** to the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal:
- a) using this submission to conduct its own research;
 - b) giving this submission to a person or organisation considered by the Tribunal to be appropriate;
 - c) giving this submission to a person or organisation the subject of adverse comment in the submission;
 - d) using the content of my submission in its report to Government.

The Tribunal will decide which person or organisation is appropriate, and this may include:

- a) a person or organisation that has the capacity to assist with the inquiry; and
- b) a person or organisation that has an interest in the inquiry.

3 I also **declare** that the information I have given on this form is correct.

Signature: 	Date: 11-12-12
--	----------------

Return this form with your submission and any supporting documents to:

Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal
CP2-3-061
Locked Bag 7765
CANBERRA BC ACT 2600

Contact Details

e-mail DHA.Tribunal@defence.gov.au
website www.defence-honours-tribunal.gov.au
telephone (02) 6266 3486

RECEIVED
BY DHAT

14 FEB 2012

DHAT/IN/6011/201
Matter No 20

On New Year's Eve 1944, and again back at sea, Tom wrote home:

Dear Mum & Dad...

We were in harbour for a couple of nights and had a couple of good pictures. On Friday night we had 'The Hound of the Baskervilles', which although I had seen it before was well worth seeing again. Last night we had 'The Moon and Sixpence' about an artist - George Sutherland, which wasn't bad...

On the job I have now [above the bridge] I have to sleep there at night & as it has no protection from the weather I can see myself going without sleep for a while now & then, unless of course I get used to sleeping in a pool of water...

It is New Year's Eve tonight, so I hope things turn out better for us in 1945 than it did this year. Time seems to just fly past up here, it hardly seems any time since we left. In fact it doesn't seem long ago when we were all at the Naracoorte New Year Races 12 months ago. Will they be having one of those again tomorrow? I suppose so...

Well as usual at sea there is very little else to write about except the blokes you live with & they are a pretty happy crowd, which makes us a happy ship & that's half the game.

We ought to be home sometime before 1946 so looking forward to the day (& remember I am still an optimist.)

Love to you all,
Tom

On New Year's Day 1945 *HMAS Australia* arrived back at Leyte Gulf on the east coast of the Philippines to re-join the US Fleet. The plan was to sail west through Suringao Strait into the Sulu Sea, then up the west coast of the Philippines to Lingayen Gulf on Luzon Island, 100 miles (160km) north of Manila, where another amphibious landing would to be staged. This huge armada comprised four battle groups that would leave Leyte Gulf at one-day intervals. *Australia* was in the Fire and Bombardment Support Group, the second and by no means the largest, which comprised 6 battleships, 12 carriers, 8 cruisers, 46 destroyers and other small craft, totalling 164 ships in all. Tom was thoroughly impressed by the sheer immensity of the American war machine, respected the efficiency of its servicemen, and appreciated the level of co-operation that existed between them and the Australians.

HMAS Australia's battle group left Leyte on 3 January and, with air cover from Morotai and Leyte as well as the US carriers, the voyage was uneventful until 5 January, when they came within 120 miles of the Kamikaze base at Clark Field, Manila. By this time the Allies were well aware of the new Japanese Kamikaze tactics, which were their last-ditch strategy to prevent the Allied invasion of Japan, and not just desperate isolated incidents. Furthermore, the accuracy of the Kamikaze attacks had improved. Pilots had initially tended to hit only the stern of the fast-moving ships, or miss them altogether, due to their limited opportunity of practising suicide attacks, but their accuracy had improved.

In the late afternoon Tom sighted an approaching squadron of six Kamikazes, or Zombies as they were now known on the *Australia*. One of them, carrying a large bomb, managed to penetrate both the air cover and the intense barrage, to dive vertically and hit the port side upper deck at 5.35pm. The fires were quickly subdued, but 25 gunners were killed and 30 wounded, which severely affected the ship's fighting efficiency. The new captain, Jaime 'Black Jack' Armstrong, stood

unperturbed on the bridge throughout the attack, as he manoeuvred his ship in violent evasive action at high speed, although it was later suggested that, as a gunnery specialist, the horrendous noise of the barrage was probably music to his ears, and perhaps his eyesight was not particularly keen. However, his undoubted bravery was of great reassurance to the morale of those around him.

At dawn the next morning, 6 January, minesweepers entered Lingayen Gulf and had it cleared by mid-day. At 3.00pm *HMAS Australia* entered the gulf to take up its bombardment position, and the suicide attacks continued. Tom's action station in the Air Defence Position was located in the Fire Control Director Tower above the bridge, from which the aiming of all the cruiser's heavy armament was co-ordinated. His job was to identify any approaching enemy aircraft, amidst the intense dog-fights that were occurring above, and to help direct the ship's anti-aircraft fire. At 5.34pm a Kamikaze bomber dived towards the ship's starboard quarter, flattened out and hit the upper deck, killing 14 and wounding 26. Ironically, the bomb was a 16-inch British naval shell captured in Singapore, with an impact fuse attached.

By this time the ship's defensive firepower was severely compromised due to damaged guns on both the port and the starboard sides and heavy casualties amongst the gunners. Furthermore, unlike *HMAS Shropshire*, none of its guns was radar-controlled. As the senior gunnery officer, Lt Cdr Richard Peek, later stated, "The *Australia* had to depend for the direction of all its anti-aircraft guns on the courage of David Hamer and Tom Legoe, his communications number, in the air defence position. They were brave beyond the call of duty."

HMAS Australia withdrew to sea the next day to lick its wounds, but returned into the Gulf on 8 January to resume the bombardment. At 7.20am a Kamikaze attacked from the port quarter, pursued by four US Wildcat fighters and was shot down, splashing only 20 yards from the ship. Disintegrating and skidding along the port side, it did little damage, although its engine made a hole three feet square in Captain Armstrong's day cabin, and the gun crews were drenched with aviation fuel, which fortunately did not ignite.

Nine minutes later a second Kamikaze attacked from the same direction and was shot down just short of the ship, but hit the waterline below the bridge. Its engine, propeller and the pilot's head landed on the deck and its bomb blasted a hole 14 feet by 8 feet (4.3m x 2.5m), riddling both the Stokers' and Petty Officers' Mess Decks with shrapnel. Although full of wounded at the time from the previous attacks, fortunately there were no further casualties. A provision room and a fuel-oil tank were also blown open to the sea, flooding the bilges and causing the ship to list five degrees to port. Although the bulkheads held, the damage reduced the ship's speed to 15 knots, limiting its ability to take effective evasive action. However, it was still able to continue its bombardment duties throughout the day, with a US destroyer in close attendance to provide extra anti-aircraft firepower.

At dawn the next day, 9 January, with the arrival of the entire Allied fleet in the Gulf and the destruction of the Japanese defensive positions, the landings by the US Sixth Army commenced, still under a covering naval bombardment. The Kamikaze attacks also continued, but in dwindling numbers due to a depletion of aircraft and attrition of pilots. However, Tom sighted two

approaching at 1.11pm. One dived past him and hit the battleship *USS Mississippi*, while the other made a curving dive from dead ahead aiming directly for *Australia's* bridge. As Captain Armstrong reported:

He missed his aiming point [passing over the bridge] and, diving under the fore-yard, his wingtip touched a mast strut which swung him into the foremost funnel and over the side. There was no material damage other than the top of the funnel, which was cut clean away and meant shutting-down the two boilers in 'A' Boiler Room. Radar and W/T were quickly repaired. There were no casualties.

Tom provides a much closer perspective, having been within a few feet of being decapitated, and becoming a casualty himself:

When the last Kamikaze hit us the Air Defence Officer [Lt Hamer] and I were sitting in a protected area (so we thought) but the wing of the plane scraped over us just above our heads and bent the forward funnel. I was badly shaken. (I don't think he was.) That was the worst moment of my life in the navy. It was the sixth Kamikaze to hit us.

With the beach landings a success, and with 56 wounded aboard, the severely battered *HMAS Australia*, or the *Aussie* as she was affectionately known by her crew, was ordered to take up position close to the battleship *USS West Virginia*, which was bristling with guns, and then to join the 'cripple convoy' back to Leyte. Leaving the Gulf, she was cheered by every US ship that she passed. Admiral Jesse Oldendorf signalled Captain Armstrong and said: "Your gallant conduct and that of your ship have been an inspiration to all of us. Sorry to lose you at this time." Admiral Berkey, who had recovered from the Christmas flour bombs, signalled: "Sorry the hell birds concentrated on you. My deep regrets for losses in the ship's company." And Admiral Sowell on *USS West Virginia* added: "You and your fine ship can certainly take it. All hands are deserving of recommendation. We are proud to be associated with you."

However, it was a sad voyage back to Leyte. Thirty-nine of the ship's company were buried at sea. As Tom remembers, "It was difficult to get over the loss of your mates." During the Philippines campaign, *HMAS Australia* suffered 69 killed in action and 120 wounded. And by this time, 199 Kamikaze attacks had sunk 22 Allied ships in the Pacific and damaged 86. They were a terrifying weapon, and as the war drew nearer to Japan their devastating toll grew. In this desperate, last-ditch tactic, young Japanese pilots were being ordered to fly every available aircraft on suicide missions to their deaths. The policy continued until 15 August 1945 when the Japanese were shocked into surrendering by the enormity of the atomic bombs, thus obviating the need for an invasion of Japan and consequently saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of Allied servicemen, and probably millions of Japanese civilians as well.

In the meantime, *HMAS Australia* would not fire another shot in anger. She arrived at Leyte on 12 January for temporary repairs, and left for Sydney soon afterwards. Tom, having been promoted to the rank of Able Seaman on 19 January 1945, left the ship in April and returned to Flinders for an officers' training course. However, not intending to continue with a career in the navy, and with the end of the war in sight, he opted instead for anti-aircraft and leading seamen's courses to fill in time.