ANZAC DAY 2020

Requiem for an Able Seaman -

6092 Able Seaman Henry Louis Emanuel Sellick

John Perryman

Henry Sellick joined the Royal Australian Navy during the First World War on 10 April 1917, aged 15. He was one of many young boys who began life in the navy in the training ship HMAS *Tingira;* a familiar sight to Sydney-siders, secure at her moorings in Rose Bay.

Discipline was strict in *Tingira* and the days long, but in that environment young Henry became part of the Naval family learning, among other things, seamanship, boat-work and musketry, it was an environment that saw him mature from boyhood to manhood.

On completion of his training, young Henry joined the second class cruiser HMAS *Encounter* in which he was rated an ordinary seaman second class. For a teenager, serving in a warship bristling with guns and promising adventure was an exciting environment in which to live, work and learn. But for Henry this was just the beginning of his seafaring life.

Other postings were to follow and between 1919 and 1927 Henry was promoted able seaman, gaining further experience in the battle cruiser HMAS *Australia,* the destroyer HMAS *Anzac* and the survey ship HMAS *Moresby*. At the end of that period Henry, seeking respite, transferred to the Royal Australian Fleet Reserve.

In 1939 Henry, then aged 37, was quick to answer the call for war service, re-entering the RAN just a month after the commencement of hostilities. Because of his mature age he was affectionately nick-named 'Pop' by his juniors who looked to him as a 'staid' hand and mentor.

Pop soon returned to sea joining the Royal Navy armed merchant cruiser HMS *Arawa,* a former passenger ship requisitioned by the Admiralty and converted for active service. Her crew comprised many members of the Royal Australian Naval Reserve and in her Pop was soon on patrol between Hong Kong and Vladivostok, and on the China Station, searching for German ships attempting to leave Japanese harbours. *Arawa* later deployed to the East Indies before proceeding to the Atlantic, where she undertook convoy escort work as well as carrying supplies to and from England.

Much of the convoy work took place between Sierra Leone and Greenock in Scotland under the constant threat of U-boat attack and at times in the face of appalling weather. In July 1941 *Arawa* was converted to a troopship at which time the well-seasoned Pop returned to Australia.

Pop Sellick's next posting was to the Tribal class destroyer HMAS *Arunta* which he joined as a member of the commissioning crew on 30 March 1942. *Arunta,* was modern and well-armed and her crew quickly became an enthusiastic, tight-knit and capable ship's company. By that time Japan had entered the war, conquering much of South-East Asia and the Pacific and it was in those theatres that 'Pop' Sellick's adventures continued.

The Tribal class destroyer HMAS Arunta *at speed during World War II.*

Over the next three years *Pop* and his shipmates were in the thick of action in waters stretching from New Guinea to the Philippines. During that time *Arunta* detected and sank the Japanese Submarine *RO-33* off Port Moresby (29 August 1942) and operated in support of numerous amphibious landings in the hotly contested New Guinea area. The enemy was tough and the climate harsh. Escort duties and shore bombardments were commonplace continuing throughout 1944 as the US 'island hopping' campaign moved north towards Leyte Gulf in the Philippines.

On 13 October 1944 *Arunta* sailed from Hollandia as part of a vast armada assembled for the landings at Leyte Gulf in the Philippines. She joined HMA Ships *Australia, Shropshire* and *Warramunga* as part of US Task Group 77.3, a

Close Covering Group under Rear Admiral Berkey USN. After participating in the pre-landing bombardments *Arunta* joined *Shropshire*, taking part in one of the most decisive surface engagements of World War II - the Battle of Surigao Strait.

Fought in darkness, the Japanese were placed at a hopeless tactical disadvantage which ended in their complete rout with the loss of two battleships and three destroyers. The Allied force, under Rear Admiral Oldendorf, USN, comprising six battleships, eight cruisers and 20 destroyers lost no ships and suffered only superficial damage. Pop and his shipmate's luck had held.

Arunta remained with the task groups patrolling the Leyte area until 16 November when she sailed for Manus Island and well-earned respite. In all she spent 28 days in the Leyte area under frequent air attack and facing the new threat of suicide attacks from Japanese kamikaze aircraft. This deadly new tactic had seen numerous ships damaged, claiming many lives, including the RAN flagship HMAS *Australia*.

As 1944 rolled into 1945 there was a feeling amongst *Arunta*'s battle hardened crew that the end of the war was nearing. Pop Sellick was by then 43 years of age and no doubt looking forward to returning home to Australia after many years at sea.

Then, late in the afternoon of Friday 5 January 1945 while *Arunta* was en route to Luzon the ship's look-outs reported two enemy aircraft flying in low over the water. *Arunta*'s guns crews opened fire at close range and were soon scoring hits on the planes as they made their approach. At that point, one of the planes, a Zero carrying a 250 pound bomb, veered sharply crashing into the sea on the port side of *Arunta*. There was a loud explosion, inflicting significant damage that sent shrapnel flying in all directions and causing two casualties. One of them was 'Pop' who was supplying ammunition to the ship's Pom-Pom anti-aircraft battery credited with bringing down the aircraft. The badly injured Pop was removed to the captain's day cabin to receive medical attention but he soon succumbed to his injuries.

Later that night, following makeshift repairs, *Arunta*'s crew assembled in disbelief to farewell their slain shipmate who was buried at sea with naval honours.
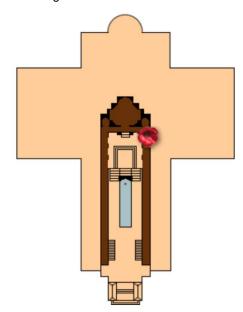
In recognition of his 'gallantry, skill and devotion to duty' Able Seaman Henry 'Pop' Sellick was posthumously awarded a Mention in Dispatches.

The RAN has no picture in its archives of Pop Sellick, but he is commemorated in the heart of our Nation on panel 1 in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia.

It's seems a fitting time of year to reflect and remember the service of Able Seaman Sellick who represents the many naval ratings who served during the second great conflict of last century.

Lest We Forget.

Henry Louis Emanuel Sellick's name will be projected onto the exterior of the Hall of Memory at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra on:

Sat 23 May 2020 at 5:11am

Thu 30 July 2020 at 8:57pm