

**ARTHUR BANCROFT — HMAS PERTH**

*Statement by Minister for Veterans*

**MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot — Minister for Veterans)** [2.05 pm]: On 28 July 2013, Western Australia lost one of its favourite sons, Arthur Bancroft. Arthur Bancroft was born on 24 November 1921 and grew up amongst the character of 1920s Fremantle in a large family. Although raised during the Great Depression, in his own words he “had a happy childhood.” On 18 November 1940, at 19 years of age, Arthur joined the Royal Australian Navy—service number F3239—and became Ordinary Seaman Second Class A. In March 1942 he was serving on board HMAS *Perth* when she was torpedoed and sunk by the Imperial Japanese Navy in Sunda Strait.

In his highly acclaimed book *Arthur’s War*, which was published in 2010, Able Seaman Bancroft wrote of the *Perth* —

Everything—all of it sinking beneath the waves. I am appalled, and stupidly hear myself crying out, ‘There goes my home.’

Of the 681 sailors, 353 went down with the *Perth*. All but four of the 328 survivors were captured as prisoners of war. Of those captured, 106 died in captivity and the surviving 218, including Arthur Bancroft, were returned home to Australia after the war. Upon the *Perth’s* sinking, Bancroft spent a week in the water before he, along with the remaining survivors of the *Perth*, were taken as prisoners to work on the notorious Burma–Thai railway. During his incarceration Bancroft risked his life to keep a diary. This record of his experience, made of scrap journals and rice paper, was kept buried beneath his bunk. In the diary he captured the horrific stories and thoughts of his mates, their memories and their poems.

He was also a very handy sportsman, and in the 1940s played 12 games with the Subiaco Football Club in the Western Australian Football League. Arthur Bancroft’s life was a remarkable story, having survived two ship’s sinkings. His passing is a great loss to this state and our sympathy goes to all his family and friends. He is now reunited with his HMAS *Perth* shipmates. When later speaking of his war experience, Arthur Bancroft remarked —

Sometimes I wonder how exactly I managed to survive while other men around me died. Some of them were better men than me ... but many of the blokes we lost were the flower of our generation. Maybe they were unlucky because, for sure, luck had a lot to do with whether you lived or died back then. And I reckon I was lucky.

Like many of Bancroft’s generation, these brave men endured hardship so that we might know opportunity, and some paid the ultimate price so we might know freedom. We wish Arthur fair winds and a following sea.