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Rabaul & Montevideo Maru Society

MvM Newsletter 13

May 2010

Huge turn out of Friends for memorial resolution

WELL OVER 100 Friends have already signed up for special events at Parliament House in Canberra to honour those who died in the fall of Rabaul and in the sinking of the Montevideo Maru.

The Australian Parliament is set to debate an historic motion on Monday 21 June.

Veterans, relatives and friends are invited to Canberra to witness the debate and attend a function hosted by Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel Minister Alan Griffin and Environment Minister and Patron of our Society, Peter Garrett.

The resolution will cover:

- the gratitude of the Australian nation to the military personnel and civilians in Rabaul and the New Guinea Islands for their services in the defence of Australia during World War II
- regret and sorrow for the sacrifices that were made in the defence of Rabaul and the New Guinea Islands after the invasion of 23 January 1942 and in the subsequent sinking of the Montevideo Maru on 1 July 1942
- condolences to the relatives of the people who died in this conflict
- thanks to the relatives for their forbearance and efforts in ensuring that the nation remembers the sacrifices made

The speakers will be Catherine King (ALP Vic), Louise Markus (Lib NSW), Bruce Scott (Nat Qld), John Murphy (ALP NSW), Steven Ciobo (Lib Qld) and Bob Katter (Ind Qld).

The Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society was established to ensure national recognition of Australia's greatest maritime disaster, a tragedy of war that cost well over 1,000 lives and affected many thousands more. Contact the Society at PO Box 1743 Neutral Bay, NSW 2089

A similar motion is expected to be moved in the Senate by Senator Anne McEwen (ALP SA).

Eligible people who wish to attend these events need to register with Andrea Williams at andrea.williams@bigpond.com.

Spouses of people involved are welcome to attend, so long as they register to do so. There is no charge.

These events represent significant actions by the Australian Parliament: events that the few remaining men of Lark Force and the relatives of those who died, many now in their eighties and nineties, have been awaiting a long time and will treasure.

They will travel to Canberra to witness it and be part of it. They will sit in the gallery and know the sacrifice is honoured by their nation.

People should arrange to be in Canberra by lunchtime on Monday 21 June. The Society will charter buses to take people to and from Parliament House if transport is required.

Documentary producer, Phil Donnison, is donating his time and will record proceedings to produce a DVD as a permanent record of the day. A future issue of the *MvM Newsletter* will provide details of how this can be obtained.

At this stage final details of the events in Parliament are not available but Friends will be emailed when the responsible Minister, Alan Griffin, has established precise arrangements with Parliament House authorities.

Meanwhile, people from every State of the Commonwealth have indicated their intention to be present on this very special day.

New name changes MvM Trust into a Society

BY KEITH JACKSON

BIZARRELY, IT became a frustrating bureaucratic grind to find a suitable name for our organisation.

When the original committee decided it would need to incorporate in order to effectively achieve its goals, first step was to register an acceptable name.

The title, 'Montevideo Maru Memorial Trust', favoured by the committee, seemed to accurately sum up what we were on about.

But, after many weeks of deliberation, the authorities decided that 'Montevideo Maru' in that context had already been grabbed (by the film company, Montevideo Maru Pty Ltd) and that we could not use the word 'Trust'.

So we had to get on our roller skates to come up with something new and different to enable us to press on with incorporation.

Without incorporation, we won't be able to raise funds from the corporate sector nor proceed to deal formally with other entities like the Australian War Memorial.

So within a few hours, we decided to name our organisation the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society - a name that proved to be different and eccentric enough to satisfy even the most finicky authorities.

Hope you don't mind!

The last letter home from Gunner Trigg

Ted Trigg sent us this letter written in the Rabaul POW camp by Gunner Keith Trigg NX43269. The family heard no more until they received the 1945 telegram advising of his death on the Montevideo Maru.

10 March 1942

Dear Mother,

Just a note which the Japanese has been kind enough to allow us to write. I am enjoying the very best health and being treated well.

I hope you are all in the best health and not worrying over me as I guess you have been doing a little. How is Allan [?] enjoying his new work. Tell dad not to worry too much about the farm. Hope Ted is still at Tuggerah and tell him to sit tight.

Had the Japanese [not?] waited a few more days this would have been a nice birthday present.

We are allowed out in work parties each day if we wish to work.

Remember me to Aunt Ivy and Else [?], also to Aunty Gert and everyone out at The Entrance. How is Dorothy & Aileen. OK I hope. I suppose Barry is quite a lad now. Give my love to [?] and [?].

I will have to close now with tons of love to everyone. Loving son, Keith.

Trekking the Lark track

BY RON HAYES

My uncle, Private Jack Groat perished on the Montevideo Maru. I was fortunate to be part of a five-day trek starting on Anzac Day last year along the Lark Force wilderness track in East New Britain. A party of six, including journalist Ilya Gridneff, joined Kori Chan's South Sea Horizons group; an emotional experience I will never forget.

Kori and his team were of great assistance in the jungle conditions, and helped to make our journey something to enjoy, as well as respecting the families and their hospitality in the villages of New Britain.

Later, on 1 July 2009, Marg Curtis and her mother Ailsa Nisbet (my auntie) and I attended the unveiling of the Montevideo Maru memorial plaque at the Hellships memorial at Subic Bay in the Philippines. The ceremony was conducted by the Australian ambassador, Rod Smith, with great dignity and respect. We were fortunate to meet many friends including Andrea and Ally and families from Rabaul.

I look forward to meeting friends again in Canberra on Monday 21 June. Keep up the great work, Keith. The story of the 2/22nd Battalion must be told and recorded in the history of our great nation, Australia.

Dear nephew: You must try not to fret

Sapper Francis (Frank) Gordon Williams died on the Montevideo Maru. His younger brother, Alex, lived in Melbourne and, after hearing of Frank's death, received the following letter from Uncle Art in Hobart.

Alex's son Bob says: "It provides us with a snapshot of what information was released to relatives at the time and how families came to grips with the loss, and tried to console each other."

Sunday 14 Oct [1945]

Dear Alec,

Just a few lines to let you know that I was up to see mother & father to-day. They received your letters & gave them to me to read. They are bearing up very well, although, of course, feel the sad news very much.

There may still be a chance yet Alec, that Frank may be alive. The loss of the ship and all on board is only presumed.

Time will tell, but if the worst is to be you must not fret. There are a lot of trials in this world and Frank may have been saved a lot. And another way to look at it is that if he had been in a prison camp for years and ill-treated it would have been much worse and caused a lot more worry.

Mother and father went to the Rabaul Garrison Parents Association's meeting the other night and saw Lieut Chandler who was in Rabaul with Frank. He said he shook hands with Frank when he went on the ship & he and all the boys were in the best of health.

He also said that the ship was a very good one and definitely not a hell-ship as some papers stated. He said the men had plenty of room. From the time Rabaul was taken until the [men] embarked on the ship, he said that all the men had a good time and mostly employed loading or un-loading boats.

Mother told me to tell you she would have written to-day but could not decide whether she can get away to come over.

They are very busy and you know work is a great reliever when you are in trouble. It takes your mind off things.

Mother is writing to you in a few days.

Aunty Amy sends her love and says to tell you not to worry too much. It is hard we know not to, but look on the best side. Frank led a very good life & was a fine lad. We will always remember him.

Amy would have written Alec, but she has had a bad illness. She was in hospital for about five weeks but home again now. She is just a trifle better.

Well, Alec, look after yourself mate & try not to worry son. It is not the ones that have gone, but those that are left that suffer and if Frank had his way he would not want you to worry. You know that.

Kindly remember us to Ruby. We both hope the children are quite well & yourself & Ruby also.

Cheerio for the time being Alec.

Uncle Art

On the Rev John May's new shoes

I found this recent email from Mary May especially evocative and touching and wanted to share it with you.

Dear Keith,

Thank you for your email. I think my daughter, Dr Marian May, is organising details so that I can get to Canberra for the June ceremony.

John was hoping to be there, and even let me buy him some new shoes [!!] for whatever event there might be and, about an hour after he had been persuaded, he announced that he was going for a walk.

He wanted to be strong enough to make it, and we agreed he should go "even if it killed him".

However, the knowledge that the committee was on the ball and that things were happening at last, helped him to feel that he could move on.

Thank you once more for what you all have done is what he surely would want me to say.

Sincerely,

Mary May

FEEDBACK

ERIC & LOIS NEWMAN

We represent the Bendigo 2/22 Lark Force and Montevideo Maru Remembrance Group, formed in Bendigo 10 months ago by four families who wanted answers to many questions regarding our loved ones who went to Rabaul and never came home.

This little gathering has now reached over 40 families and we would like to attend this historic event in Canberra. There will be four adults attending if possible. We have to travel up on Sunday as one of our group will have to have dialysis on Monday morning in the Canberra hospital, which has been booked.

We are in contact with four men who returned: Fred Kollmorgen, Norm Furness, Bill Harry and Jack Moyle. What wonderful men they all are. We have spent several hours in their company and have collected many interesting stories from them.

TED TRIGG

A big thank you for all the information you have sent us concerning the Montevideo Maru. We enjoyed the DVD very much. It makes me feel so good when so many people are helping so much. We will make an effort to be in Canberra on 21 June. Would love to catch up with you.

Keith, is there any way to get a Death Certificate for my brother, as it would be much appreciated by the family.

I have taken up this matter with the relevant Minister, Alan Griffin - KJ

TODD VAIL

Both my grandfather and great grandfather were lost on the Montevideo Maru. My Grandfather, Ian Maclean, was the local dentist in Rabaul and also a sergeant in the NGVR. He was in charge of a Vickers machine gun detachment at the time of the invasion. While we understand he escaped into the jungle following the attack, he returned to Rabaul some days later to be with his father, a civilian plantation owner, who he knew could not survive captivity without him.

I am a passionate supporter of Lark Force and for the last 29 years have marched with the Sydney survivors on Anzac Day. Sadly, this year there were no Lark Force veterans marching, but my brother, cousin and I marched with the banner, as we have done so for many years.

My mother, Susan, was born in Rabaul. Together with her mother and two brothers they were evacuated just before the invasion in 1942. She always attends on Anzac Day to talk with the survivors of Lark Force, many who remember her father following a visit to his dental practice in Rabaul.

MICK MORELL

Many thanks for the MvM Newsletter. The refusal by the Menzies' government not to exchange records seems quite incredible to me. Since it took 15 months to reply, it was obviously well considered.

MARK KLOPPER

My great uncle, Jim Henderson VX19568 of the 2/22nd, was on board the Montevideo Maru. I am currently serving in the Navy as a Warrant Officer and have been since 1980.

GILLIAN NIKAKIS

I was amazed and delighted to read the newsletter and see that there will be a debate on Rabaul and the Montevideo Maru in Parliament. I will certainly be there. Please keep us informed. Congratulations. Things are certainly moving.

PAUL NING

What a coincidence. I was trawling through the internet to try to find living members of the 2/22 Battalion who defended and were evacuated from Rabaul in 1942, and I came across your name and articles. My interest in the Battalion is that one of my father's schooners, the MV *Iboki*, was used in 1942 in the evacuation of Australian troops from East New Britain. I would love to track down some 2/22 members and eventually get to met them. Would you have some contacts?



Memorial plaque in Kavieng to the local civilians who died in World War II

INVITATION

Friends of Montevideo Maru are invited to join us in Canberra on Monday 21 June to witness the passage of a special resolution through the Australian Parliament and to attend a function afterwards hosted by Ministers Alan Griffin and Peter Garrett.

It may be difficult to accept registrations beyond mid-May, so you now need to contact Andrea Williams at andrea.williams@bigpond.com or on (02) 9449 4129 to ensure your registration can be accepted.

MAY NOTES

FRIENDS

The number of Friends of Montevideo Maru increased from 200 in February to 240 in March and 280 at the end of April. The Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society has many projects, including fundraising for a memorial at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. You can encourage people to join as Friends and receive this monthly newsletter by emailing the Society at benelong@bigpond.net.au or writing to PO Box 1743, Neutral Bay NSW 2089.

MEMORIAL FUND

The Fund now stands at \$9,240. Donors during the month were Bob Williams, Mick Morell, A Pattison, Gillian Nikakis, J Robb, Rev George Garnsey, Senator Anne McEwen, Nola McCann and Ron Hayes.

Our fund-raising for a memorial in Canberra is a continuing endeavour. Please give what you can afford and encourage friends, relatives and other people (especially companies that may see this as a good project) to do the same.

PAYMENTS. Cheques to 'Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee' at PO Box 1743, Neutral Bay NSW 2089. Or make a direct deposit to the Society's bank account: BSB **082-401** A/c No **16-083-2367** and include your name in the description.

POSTAL ADDRESSES

The Society will be incorporated in the near future and we will need to advise the authorities of the names and postal addresses of our Friends. So, if you see your name on the following list, we need your postal address:

Adams, Lucy; Adams, Rob; Anderson, Nola; Ashley-Brown, Henry; Bagot, Stafford; Baldwin, Valda; Beadle, FR; Bond, Claudia; Brier-Mills, Chris; Brown, Kerrie; Campbell-Williams, David; Cole, Belinda; Cook, Kathleen; Crawford, Bruce; Crawford, Jackie; Curtin, John; Doughty, Ralph; Drane, Noel; Edwards, Dr Bob; Evans, Tim; Ferguson, Jack; Franks, Eric; Gherke, Mark

Gibb, Malcolm; Hanna, Robyn; Henning Stavenes, Age; Henning Stavenes, Nils; Horsey, Don; Ishizuka, Ms Yohko; Ivey, Greg; Johnston, Mark; Keenan, Bernie; Klopper, Mark; Kollmorgen, Jim; Komiya, Mayumi; Limbert, Joy; Long, Fay; Maclean, Rod; Maish, Jo; McDonald, David; McEniery, Nicola; McMillan, Karen; Miwa, Yuji; Ottesen, Kirsten; Payne, Keith; Pearce, Tim

Peel, Julie; Pitman, Bernadette; Rajamae, Cheryl; Ridges, Jim; Rosina-Smith, Lynette; Sasamoto, Taeko; Saunders, Steve; Schmidt, Cynthia; Scott, Bob; Selvik, Nils; Smith, Tony; Sutherland, Colin; Tamura, Yoshiko; Taylan, Justin; Walter, Knut; Williams, Frank;

Please email your postal address to kjackson@jacksonwells.com.au

MONTEVIDEO MARU DVD

The DVD of *The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru* is still available and, under an arrangement with the producers, \$18 from the sale of each two-hour production is donated to the Memorial Fund.

ORDER YOUR COPY: The extended DVD is on sale for \$40 including packaging and posting. Cheques for \$40 to 'Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee' at PO Box 1743, Neutral Bay NSW 2089. Or make a direct deposit to the Committee's bank account: BSB **082-401** Account No **16-083-2367**.