



Salvos join forces with our Committee

THE MONTEVIDEO Maru Memorial Committee has been boosted by the appointment of two Salvation Army members, John Cleary and Lindsay Cox, by Australian Territorial Commander, Commissioner James Knaggs.

“The sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* was a tragedy for the Salvation Army, with the loss of so many Salvation Army Bandsmen who were part of the 2/22nd Battalion,” Commissioner Knaggs said. “Please know that we are supportive of the efforts of the Committee, and would be willing to provide whatever support is appropriate and possible.”

The Committee was established earlier this year to represent the interests of families of soldiers and civilians captured in Rabaul and the New Guinea Islands after the Japanese invasion in January 1942. Some 1,053 men are believed to have perished on the *Montevideo Maru* when it was torpedoed off the Philippines on 1 July 1942.

The purpose of the Committee is to gain national recognition and greater understanding of the tragedy and its antecedents in the interests of relatives and the historical record.

John Cleary is one of Australia's leading commentators on religious affairs. He is a member of the ABC's specialist religion unit, best known for his years as presenter of *The Religion Report* and *Meridian*. He is a member of the Salvation Army and former bandmaster of the Brunswick band, with its close connection to the 2/22nd Battalion and the *Montevideo Maru*. In 1994 his book on the Salvation Army, *Salvo*, was Australian Religious Book of the Year.

Lindsay Cox is the Melbourne-based Territorial Archivist for the Salvation Army. As a Bandsman and an ex-CMF soldier, he has long been interested in the tragic story of the 24 Salvation Army bandsmen who enlisted in the 2/22nd Battalion, featured in the comprehensive files and photographic collection at the Salvation Army Heritage Centre.

Lindsay is author of *Brave and True*, a detailed account of the Band of the 2/22nd Battalion. He has also written several other books on Australian Military history and early Salvation Army history.

OUR PURPOSE

The Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee represents the interests of families of soldiers and civilians captured in Rabaul and the New Guinea Islands after the Japanese invasion in January 1942, many of whom are believed to have perished on Montevideo Maru when the ship was torpedoed off the Philippines on 1 July 1942.

The purpose of the Committee is to gain national recognition and greater understanding of the tragedy and its antecedents in the interests of relatives and the historical record.

BECOME A FRIEND OF MONTEVIDEO MARU

Contact the Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee

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THE MONTEVIDEO MARU DOCUMENTARY

At www.montevideomarafilm.com find out more about John Schindler's documentary on the *Montevideo Maru* tragedy, due to be released in cinemas in November this year.

A MEMORIAL service for the 1,053 men who died on the Montevideo Maru will be held at Subic Bay, 150 km south of the site of the sinking, on 1 July. Australian Ambassador to the Philippines, Rod Smith, will unveil a plaque at the Hell Ships Memorial.

THE COMMITTEE has begun planning a major submission to the Federal Government to gain national recognition of the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* as a major national event and to secure the Government's commitment to further historical research.

OBJECTIVES

1. To secure national recognition of the *Montevideo Maru* tragedy.
2. To facilitate comfort and closure in the minds of the victims' relatives.
3. To locate the nominal roll brought back from Japan that was deposited with Central Army Records.
4. To stimulate action to provide greater knowledge of the events that led to *Montevideo Maru* tragedy including the official handling of the Rabaul evacuation in January 1942.
5. To encourage action to ensure the story of the tragedy is a significant part of Australia's social history and to enhance knowledge in the community of the role of and sacrifices made by Australians in PNG.

PETER STONE

Peter Stone has donated a copy of his magnificent and seminal book *Hostages to Freedom: The Fall of Rabaul* to Kim Beazley, with a letter from the Committee thanking Prof Beazley for accepting the position of Patron of the Committee.



The Rabaul Memorial

Quest for closure on worst sea disaster

By KATRINA ADAMSKI, North Shore Times

ANDREA WILLIAMS remembers growing up on an idyllic island in Papua New Guinea.

Little did she know that her family would be tangled up in the mystery of what happened to the men who were killed in Australia's worst maritime disaster.

The *Montevideo Maru*, a Japanese prisoner-of-war ship, was torpedoed on July 1, 1942, off the coast of the Philippines with the loss of 845 Australian troops and 208 civilians - 1053 men.

Mrs Williams, now living at St Ives, said the prisoners had been put to hard labour in the township of Rabaul in PNG before being sent to sea. Her grandfather, Philip Coote, and her grandmother's brother, Hugh Scott, were civilians who were listed as being on the ship when it was targeted by the Americans as "fair game".

"It sank within a few minutes and there has never been a proper memorial dedicated to the men who died," Mrs Williams, 53, said.

"The relatives of these men would like some recognition because they simply disappeared from our lives. Neither the ship nor the prisoners were ever recovered despite it remaining Australia's greatest single maritime disaster.

"Many questions remain unanswered, but all we want is for the Federal Government to fund a memorial in their honour."

Her solace is being a member of the *Montevideo Maru* Memorial Committee, which represents the interests of the families of soldiers and civilians captured in Rabaul. Their greatest achievement is organising for a plaque to be erected next month in Subic Bay, 150km from where the ship sank off the Philippines.

Another member, Albert Speer, of Naremburn, who knew Mrs Williams's grandmother, has devoted many years to looking for answers about who was on board. Mr Speer, 87, is keen that a katakana nominal roll (the only proof of who was on board), which he saw in New Guinea in the early 1960s, is located.

The Australian government ran a brief, closed inquiry into the fall of Rabaul in May, 1942, but it ended before the *Montevideo Maru* sailed. At the end of World War II the government said there had already been an inquiry into Rabaul and nothing would be gained by having another.

"I served during the war as a field ambulance officer in New Guinea and after the war I was posted to Rabaul as a medical assistant," Mr Speer said.

"I became interested in the ship's history and wanted to find out the truth. I've been searching for many years because the mystery remains about missing documents and who was on board. I won't ever give up. It's a never-ending search."

FRIENDS OF MONTEVIDEO MARU

If you have relatives or friends who you think would like to support action to achieve greater national recognition of the events surrounding the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*, and would like to receive this newsletter, ask them to email Keith Jackson at kjackson@jacksonwells.com.au to register their interest and become a Friend of *Montevideo Maru*.

THE COMMITTEE

Prof Kim Beazley AC
Patron

Keith Jackson AM
Chairman

Phil Ainsworth

John Cleary

Lindsay Cox

Chris Diercke

Rod Miller

Albert Speer MBE

Hooky (Philip) Street

Liz Thurston

Clive Troy

Max Uechtritz

Andrea Williams

Web references

Rod Miller
www.montevideomaru.info

John Schindler
www.montevideomaru.com

Montevideo Maru
Foundation
www.montevideomaru.org

Salvation Army Archives &
Museum
<http://www.salvationarmy.org.au/museum/>

Lost Lives
www.jje.info/lostlives/places/montevideomaru.html

Rabaul Nurses
www.rabaulnurses.com.au/Montevideo%20Maru.html

Australian POWs - Soldiers
of Lark Force & Civilians
www.australian-pow-ww2.com/montevideo_maru_11.html

Australian War Memorial
www.awm.gov.au/atwar/re-membering1942/montevideo/transcript.asp

Ballarat Memorial
www.ballaratgenealogy.org.au/ex_pow_memorial.htm

One aeroplane flight; two John Curtins

By KEITH JACKSON

FLYING BACK to Sydney from the Sunshine Coast last week, I happened to find myself in a seat adjacent to John Curtin.

He's the grandson of the Labor Prime Minister of the same name who came to power in October 1941 as head of a government which, in the words of historian Prof Hank Nelson, "faced great and immediate danger".

John Curtin *petit-fils*, a pleasant and cheerful man with his grandfather's eyes, was explaining that he felt Australians in general lacked of a well-balanced sense of our own history.

His remarks struck a chord, and I asked if he had heard of the *Montevideo Maru*. He had not and, when I explained and he looked slightly crestfallen, I hastened that this was no fault of his. It was another momentous Australian event that for too long had not been made part of our story.

An early decision made by the Curtin Government had been to evacuate women and children from Rabaul and the islands, but to leave behind the male (and Chinese and mixed race) civilians and a small garrison of Australian troops, known as Lark Force.

Lark Force was the bastion against the Japanese advance. The bulk of these troops comprised the 2/22nd Battalion of the Australian Army. Amongst their number was the Brunswick Salvation Army band from Melbourne.

In January 1942, Rabaul was overwhelmed by a far superior Japanese force. Disaster ensued. Of the many men taken prisoner, 1,053 - troops, civilians and the bulk of the Brunswick Band - died when the *Montevideo Maru* was torpedoed off the Philippines.

And there is another profound link with John Curtin, as ABC Radio's John Cleary, religious commentator, Salvo and former Brunswick bandmaster, has explained.

"The socially progressive and creative Salvation Army attracted a promising young man to its Brunswick Citadel in the 1900s," he told the ABC-TV program *Compass* in April 2008. "He was John Curtin and he would go on to be wartime Prime Minister of Australia.

"The young Curtin became an enthusiastic lantern bearer, assisting the Citadel's brass band on its night marches through the streets of Brunswick."

John Cleary subsequently told a journalist from the *West Australian* newspaper: "So, in 1941, when [Curtin] had to make the decision to abandon the garrison on Rabaul, and he finds out later that they've all gone down [on the *Montevideo Maru*] courtesy of the Americans, he must have known their families. He would have felt that deeply personally."

Curtin's Prime Ministerial predecessor, Arthur Fadden once wrote: "I do not care who knows it but in my opinion there was no greater figure in Australian public life in my lifetime than Curtin."

And now his grandson, also John Curtin, my companion on a flight to Sydney, has become the most recent Friend of *Montevideo Maru*.



NEW FRIENDS

John Bell

My previous generation comprised four brothers. One is on the list for the *Montevideo Maru*. One was killed as a Coastwatcher. One received the OBE and survived the war. So did the other, attached to the US Navy, receiving a Legion of Merit. My grandfather was killed in the Kavieng Massacre. I have a keen interest in that period and that area. One historical novel published so far, I am now on my third manuscript and waiting for a publisher for number 2.

Fay Long (nee Wallis)

My father Ronald Edward Wallis of the Australian Army Ordinance Corps (QX 64944) is listed and presumed lost at sea on the *Montevideo Maru*. I would appreciate receiving any further newsletters on progress made.

Claudia Bond

Although I did not lose any friend or relative in this tragedy, I have followed the story with interest. My Grandfather, Claude Chadderton, was a plantation owner on New Ireland at the time of the war and was captured by the Japanese. At the end of the war the Japanese told the Australian authorities that all POWs were put on board the *Montevideo Maru*. A couple of years later this proved to be untrue and in fact all the men had been massacred in Kavieng. I am outraged that this information was not passed on to the relatives and to this day there could be descendants who still believe their relatives died when the *Montevideo Maru* went down. I support any effort that brings attention to this tragedy and may help clear up other mysteries.

Tragedy of the bandsmen of Brunswick

By LINDSAY COX



BANDMASTER Arthur Gullidge perished when the *Montevideo Mary* was sunk. He was 33.

At the time of his enlistment in the AIF in July 1940, Arthur Gullidge was Bandmaster of the Salvation Army's Brunswick Citadel Band.

He was also Australia's most prolific composer of brass band music since the end of World War 1.

In 1933 Arthur had won the brass band section of the ABC's national composition award. In 1934 he won first prize in two sections of the

Salvation Army's international competition. And in 1935 he won the military band section awards.

His marches in particular are instantly recognisable. He developed a unique and distinctive style of street march.

As Australia followed Britain into war in 1939, Bandmaster Gullidge and his fellow bandsmen wrestled with the problem of reconciling their Christian ethics and the killing inherent in war.

The outcome was that these Salvationist bandsmen enlisted together and formed the Band of the 2/22nd Battalion, thus appeasing the conflict between serving God or Country.

By May 1941, 23 Salvation Army bandsmen (plus two non-Salvationists) were garrisoned with their unit at Rabaul. Twenty-two of these men, including Arthur Gullidge, were to die in Rabaul or on the *Montevideo Maru*.

In reflecting upon the life and the loss of Arthur Gullidge, Commissioner Leslie Rusher of the Salvation Army said:

"The life and creative work of Arthur Gullidge gave a distinctive Gullidge sound to the world of brass banding.

"Cut off at its source by the tragedy at sea, the compelling sound has, for over half a century, continued to re-echo around the world, attracting people and drawing them toward the Kingdom of God."



Photos: Bandmaster Arthur Gullidge (Brunswick Citadel Band); Bandmaster (Sergeant) Arthur Gullidge 2/22nd Bn Band with wife Mavis and daughter Judith

MEDIA COVERAGE

GAVIN FANG of the ABC's Australia Network will be at Subic Bay with a camera crew for the 1 July memorial service. JOHN SCHINDLER will also film sound and vision for his documentary, *The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru*. Keith Jackson and Clive Troy met with MARK DAY of *The Australian*, who is organising news coverage of the event. The *Newcastle Herald* will publish a feature before 1 July. Hooky Street and Andrea Williams met with JOHN HUXLEY, Associate Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

LETTER

From Rev Neville
Threlfall

I organised the memorial service in Rabaul in June 1972, which Kim Beazley Snr attended, as told on page 10 of Newsletter 1, and I prepared a memorial envelope with pictorial postmark applied at the Rabaul Post Office on 23 June 1972. I still have some spare copies of the cover if any Friends would like one - 3 x 55c stamps will cover cost and postage.

Incidentally, on page two of the Newsletter, Prof Kim Beazley's uncle is referred to as Rev Sydney Beazley. Sydney Beazley was a builder and technical instructor, not a minister, so was not called Rev. I knew his widow, Mrs Beryl Beazley, in Western Australia.

I first heard of the loss of the prisoners on the *Montevideo Maru* in 1946, when the Methodist Church in Australia held memorial services for its missionaries after hearing of their loss. My interest in the whole story increased when I first went to Rabaul in 1961 and references to it were often heard.

I worked for the Methodist Church and then the United Church in New Britain and New Ireland 1961-80, and wrote the history *One Hundred Years in the Islands: The Methodist/United Church in the New Guinea Islands Region 1875-1975* to mark the centenary. Since then I have collaborated with Wally Johnson in writing *Volcano Town: The Rabaul Volcanic Eruptions, 1937 and 1941-43*, and have also written a comprehensive history of Rabaul and East New Britain which is still unpublished.

Passage denied: Saga of MS *Herstein*

By KEITH JACKSON

Based on research by CHRIS DIERCKE, who is investigating the Norwegian and Japanese antecedents of the *Montevideo Maru* disaster



MS HERSTEIN was a Norwegian cargo ship of 5100 tons, owned by Sigurd Herlefson & Co and, since May 1941, chartered to the Commonwealth of Australia.

In January 1942, while berthed and loading copra, *Herstein* was severely damaged in a Japanese air raid on Rabaul. She caught alight and there were some fatalities.

Herstein was cut from her moorings and eventually beached near Matupit Harbour.

The master of the *Herstein*, Captain Gotfred Gundersen, managed to evade capture by the Japanese and escaped from New Britain on the *Laurabada*.

But, upon the fall of Rabaul, 31 of the ship's crew were taken prisoner by the Japanese. They were interned and later transferred to the ill-fated *Montevideo Maru*.

Before the demise of the *Herstein*, Australian Administration officials in Rabaul had suggested to the Federal Government in Canberra that the ship forego loading copra.

Instead, it was proposed, *Herstein* should take on board non-essential civilian personnel and ship them to safety before the imminent Japanese invasion.

The request was denied and the original role of the *Herstein*, to take on copra, remained unchanged.

On 20 January, the Japanese bombing raid scored several hits on the ship and the highly combustible cargo burned for two days. The Japanese invaded three days later.

Canberra's reluctance to enable the *Herstein* to be deployed to evacuation not only resulted in the destruction of the ship, it was a virtual death sentence for most of its crew and perhaps for many hundreds of civilians.

This was one of those decisions taken in the heat of war that leave a multitude of questions unanswered.

Questions that the *Montevideo Maru* Memorial Committee would like to see the Commonwealth Government address.

LETTERS

From Chris Diercke

I have had contact with the two sons of the last Captain of the *Montevideo Maru* (Captain Kasahara). He survived the torpedoing but was later killed by anti-Japanese guerrillas on the Philippines coast.

Both sons are doctors in Tokyo. The older son published a book about the *Montevideo Maru* in 2002. The book contains maps, photos and illustrations relevant to the ship.

I am also in contact with Synove Weel Gjesdal in Norway. His uncle Olaf Hansen was the electrician aboard the *Herstein*. Olaf subsequently perished on the *Montevideo Maru*. Olaf's sister Edith is still alive at 87 and she apparently got on very well with her brother Olaf.

Descendants from the *Herstein* are still being sought in Norway.

From Lindsay Cox
Territorial Archivist
The Salvation Army
69 Bourke Street
Melbourne
03 9639 3618

As you no doubt are aware, the band of the 2/22nd Battalion was comprised of enlisted Salvation Army bandsmen. Sixteen of them perished on the *Montevideo Maru*, and six died at Rabaul. One bandsman escaped back to Australia and is a Salvationist at the Ringwood Salvation Army Corps.

Our Australian Southern Territory Archives & Museum holds a series of files relating to the men and the event as well as a number of photographs, ephemera and a few artefacts. We also have a permanent exhibition in our Museum which is open 9am to 4pm Monday to Friday.

The story of Harry Francis Schiffmann

By PHIL AINSWORTH

JOHAN AND Wilhelmina Schiffmann were German migrants from Westphalia. After arriving on the Darling Downs in 1853, they lived on Canning Downs Station, a property with which the family had a 20 year association.

Canning Downs was named by Allan Cunningham in 1827 when he discovered the Darling Downs. It was settled by the Leslie brothers in 1841. By 1847 Canning Downs was the largest run, about 700 square kilometres, in the northern districts of NSW with 80 residents, 20,000 sheep and 2,000 cattle. Nearby Warwick, the largest town on the Darling Downs had a population of 257 in 1851.

Johan and Wilhelmina had five children; a son who died soon after birth in Germany, Johann junior who was born at sea in 1852 on route to Australia while Caroline, Joseph and Frederick were born on Canning Downs in 1854, 1856 and 1861 respectively. The family moved to Tenterfield in 1874.

Frederick, the youngest son, married in 1885 and in 1900 he selected land at Demon Creek and became a farmer and grazier. They had 10 children.

The youngest child, Harry Francis Schiffmann, was born on 3 December 1903. Harry never married and lived and worked on the family farm with his elder brother Joseph. Harry was reputed to be a fine horseman and a good bushman. Their mother died in 1936.

Harry enlisted in the AIF at Tamworth early in the war. His service number was NX40995. After his initial training he was transferred to the 2/1 Independent Company, a unit which was trained for commando activities.

The 2/1 was sent to Rabaul, New Britain as part of Lark Force from March 1941. Harry was situated at Kavieng in New Ireland at the time of the Japanese occupation on 22 January 1942.

Nothing was heard of his fate until October 1945 when an official notification was received from the Army that Harry had died on 1 July 1942, the day the Japanese prison ship *Montevideo Maru* was sunk.

When the news was passed on to Harry's 84-year old father, Frederick, he collapsed and died in hospital two days later.

Note: Harry's background was sourced from Joan Ainsworth's unpublished family history while his army details were from the Australian archives website

From Liz Thurston

My husband Michael is very interested in contacting the family of David Selby whose book *Hell and High Fever* is a classic story of the escape from Rabaul by members of Lark Force.

He and his party escaped to the south coast and set up their headquarters on Drina, which belonged to my father in law, Jack, and it was from there they managed to escape on the *Laurabada*.

It is my wish to do a reprint of this classic with the help of the Selby family, a revised edition intro and photos.

Jack added many notes to the original publication, for which Selby was grateful but the book had already been published.

It is an historic place and my father in law obtained the land for Drina through Phebe Parkinson in 1928; they were very close friends.

LETTERS

From Margaret & Scott Henderson

I think we are very fortunate to have Kim Beasley as the Patron.

He has a personal interest in the *Montevideo Maru* and also has the political knowledge to assist in making the nation aware of the *Montevideo Maru* and the huge loss of life.

Thank you also Keith for taking on this challenge.

From John Schindler

Thank you for forwarding the letter from Margaret and Scott Henderson. It is reassuring for us to know there are folk who are keen for us to succeed.

I am disappointed the documentary won't be ready for a premiere on 1 July to mark the service at Subic Bay.

One good aspect of that is that the finished film will actually include this service so that people who can't get there can view it later in the context of the film itself.

Margaret and Scott suggested the Australian Government may help, however they are not aware that this path did not yield results.

I appreciate your offer to try to change this however it's a heck of a job to try to change a Minister's mind once he has made a decision. Thanks again Keith for all your help.

You can visit the excellent website of 'The Tragedy of the *Montevideo Maru*' at www.montevideomaru.com

John is still seeking finance for the documentary and the website explains how you can get 100% tax deductibility on any gift made through the Documentary Australia Foundation

BOOKS

Brave and True: From Blue to Khaki - the Band of the 2/22nd Battalion



BRAVE AND TRUE is the story of the Band of the 2/22nd Battalion, their posting to Rabaul, and their ultimate tragic fate.

Twenty three Salvation Army Bandsmen arrived at Rabaul with Lark Force; but only one came home to Australia.

In this book their real story is told, stripping the myth from the legend.

This book is about happy, healthy, talented Christian young men who answered the call of duty to their country. It is a celebration of their lives, cut so tragically short; and the brass band march *Brave and True* by George Marshall, The Salvation Army bandmaster of the Band of the 2/22nd.

In 1942 the biggest single loss of life suffered by Australia happened in one single tragic wartime act.

The number of lives lost was two and half times the total number of Australians killed during the Vietnam War.

Amongst those who perished were 22 Salvation Army Bandsmen enlisted into the AIF under renowned Salvation Army Brunswick Bandmaster Arthur Gullidge to form the battalion band of the 2/22nd Battalion.

Just one bandsman survived the invasion of Rabaul and his saga reflects the indomitable spirit of the whole Band and is told in Fred Kollmorgen's own words, as for four months he toiled on foot through 1,000 km of steamy, fetid, enemy patrolled jungle.

The hard facts based on official wartime records are enriched by the personal descriptions of service life recorded by Arthur Gullidge, Frank Meddings, Stan Parker, Harold Pannell, Wilfred Trigg and others, extracted from their private letters sent home from Rabaul to their loved ones.

The author is Lindsay Cox, the Territorial Archivist for The Salvation Army. He is a Bandsman in the Brunswick Band and a keen historian with published works on pre-Federation Australian military and social history.

BRAVE AND TRUE: FROM BLUE TO KHAKI

Format: Book

Author: Cox, Lindsay C (Lindsay Charles), 1943-

Description: [Melbourne]: The Salvation Army, Australia Southern Territory, Archives & Museum, 2003. ix, 136 p. : ill., maps, ports.; 22 cm. ISBN 0909206589. Includes index & bibliography

Subjects Salvation Army. - Band - Australia - History. | Australia. - Army. - Battalion, 2/22nd. - Band - History. | World War, 1939-1945 - Campaigns - Papua New Guinea - Rabaul. | Prisoners of war - Papua New Guinea - Rabaul - Personal narratives, Australian. | Military bands - Papua New Guinea - Rabaul. | [Rabaul \(Papua New Guinea\) - History - Bombardment, 1942.](#)

Available From Salvation Army Archives and Museum, 69 Bourke Street, Melbourne Vic 3000

Some thoughts on Australian hostages of fortune

By PHIL AINSWORTH

CHRONOLOGY

26.04.39 Robert Menzies PM
29.08.41 Arthur Fadden PM
07.10.41 John Curtin PM [dies in office 5 July 1945]
07.12.41 Japanese attack Pearl Harbour
08.12.41 Japanese invade Hong Kong & Malaya
10.12.41 *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* sunk
25.12.41 Japanese occupy Hong Kong
22.01.42 Japanese occupy Kavieng
23.01.42 Japanese occupy Rabaul
30.01.42 Japanese occupy Ambon
Feb 1942 2/6 Division AIF recalled from Middle East
Feb 1942 Japanese occupy Singapore
23.02.42 Japanese occupy Timor
08.03.42 Japanese occupy Lae & Salamaua
04.05.42 Japanese occupy Tulagi & Guadalcanal
04-08.05.42 Battle of the Coral Sea
04-07.06.42 Battle of Midway
22.06.42 *Montevideo Maru* departs Rabaul
01.07.42 *Montevideo Maru* sunk
27.07.42 Japanese occupy Buna, Gona & Sanananda
07.08.42 US Forces occupy Guadalcanal
25.08.42 Japanese land at Milne Bay
07.09.42 Japanese defeated at Milne Bay
22.01.43 Japanese defeated at Buna, Gona & Sanananda
09.02.43 Japanese defeated at Guadalcanal
10.02.43 Last Australian soldiers evacuate Timor

WHEN JAPAN entered World War 2, Australia had been at war with Germany for two years with most of its fighting overseas, mainly in the Middle East.

Australia, a nation of 7 million, was just emerging from depression when war with Japan was declared. John Curtin, the third Prime Minister within three months, had been leader just two months when Pearl Harbour was bombed.

The prelude to the Japanese invasion of Rabaul should be considered in the context of the rapid Japanese southern thrust in the Pacific and the pivotal Midway Battle, fought six months after the attack on Pearl Harbour. The US victory at Midway destroyed Japan's naval superiority: four aircraft carriers sunk, a loss Japan would never redeem.

The accompanying chart outlines the turmoil of the time and highlights the difficulties facing the Government.

There were three Australian 'hostages of fortune' groups, all part of 23rd Brigade 2/8 Division AIF: 2/22 Battalion with attached units and NGVR in Rabaul and 2/1 Independent Company in Kavieng (Lark Force); 2/40 Battalion and 2/2 Independent Company in Timor (Sparrow Force), and 2/21 Battalion in Ambon (Gull Force).

It is pertinent to consider the Government's capacity to act for the hostages of fortune (including civilians) because of the overwhelming circumstances and the need to return the 2nd AIF home from the Middle East to defend Australia.

This unwillingness to act was perhaps exacerbated by the Government's inexperience, the paucity of communications and the scarcity of resources generally.

The Kavieng Massacre - A War Crime Revealed by Raden Dunbar, provides an insight into the difficulties Australia faced investigating Japanese atrocities after the war. It required the work of an extraordinary man, Albert Klestadt, to unveil the shroud of secrecy and unwrap the Japanese cover story concerning the massacre of 30 civilian men including 23 Australians on the Kavieng waterfront.

Additional difficulties included pressure from the US and UK for Australia to quickly wrap up war crime investigations in the late 1940s so "the peace could be won".

Perhaps Prime Minister Ben Chifley was correct when he said in Parliament on 28 June 1946 that he "saw no purpose in raking over the ashes of the past and that, while many wartime mistakes were made, these were made by men acting in good faith and in these circumstances no good would come from allocating blame and besmirching the name of such men, many of whom rendered honourable service and gave their lives for Australia".

The cruiser HMAS *Sydney* was found early 2008 using relatively new technology with Australian Government and private funding. Funding for finding the hospital ship MV *Centaur* off south-east Queensland is in place and its discovery is a matter of time. Both ships were Australian and were directly supporting the war effort.

It is fitting and timely for the Australian Government to fund and organise the finding of the Japanese prison ship *Montevideo Maru*, torpedoed by an allied submarine on 1 July 1942 off the west coast of the Philippines at position 18 degrees 37 minutes north latitude and 119 degrees 29 minutes east longitude.

The victims of the *Montevideo Maru* prison ship are deserving of receiving national recognition in a similar manner as those in HMAS *Sydney* and MV *Centaur*.