



Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee

# MvM Newsletter 8

## December 2009

### Peter Garrett is new *Montevideo Maru* patron



**PETER GARRETT is the new patron of the Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee.**

In February, he will take over the role from Prof Kim Beazley, recently appointed as Australia's ambassador to the United States.

The Committee was established a year ago to ensure greater national recognition for events surrounding the fall of Rabaul in 1942 and Australia's greatest maritime disaster, the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* with the loss of 1,053 troops and civilians.

Peter Garrett's grandfather, Tom Vernon Garrett, was a prisoner on the *Montevideo Maru*. Tom, a planter, was born in London UK and served in World War I with the 6th Light Horse Regiment. He lived at Varzin Plantation on New Britain and was 54 when he died.

"My grandfather's death was mentioned in passing at family events, but it wasn't until my mid-twenties, when I saw an article concerning the incident, that my understanding was filled in," Mr Garrett said.

"It's time to fill a huge gap in our history," Mr Garrett said. "By giving recognition to one of the most significant and tragic events of World War II, we can honor those who lost their lives and provide a much needed commemoration of this extraordinary event."

"The sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* was one of the most significant events of World War II but is still relatively little known. It is an important part of Australia's history and, given my family connection, I was pleased to become Patron of the committee."

Peter Garrett AM MP was elected Labor Member for the electorate of Kingsford Smith at the 2004 federal election and was appointed Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts following the election of the Rudd Labor Government in November 2007.

He is a passionate advocate and campaigner on a range of Australian and global issues, particularly related to the arts and the environment.

He came to public prominence as a member and lead singer of the Australian band, Midnight Oil. In this role, he wrote the lyrics of a popular song, *In The Valley*, which drew its power from the *Montevideo Maru* sinking and other tragic events that had affected his family.

*My grandfather went down with the Montevideo  
The rising sun sent him floating to his rest*



## Song lyrics evoke the spirit of family & tragedy

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**PETER GARRETT'S life has not been without great tragedy. As well as losing his grandfather on the *Montevideo Maru*, his father, a company executive, died of work stress and later his mother died in a house fire.**

Peter's song, *In the Valley*, draws its power from these dreadful events. He has written of it: "It's just a simple story of someone talking about what's happening to their family and the passing of generations - and how that stays with you."

### IN THE VALLEY

My grandfather went down with the *Montevideo*  
The rising sun sent him floating to his rest  
And his wife fled south to Sydney seeking out safe harbour  
A north shore matron she became with some paying guests

My father went down with the curse of big cities  
Traffic tolls and deadlines took him to his peace  
Now Bob Dyer glued us to our seats  
And lawns were always Victa neat

Whilst Menzies fawned at royal feet do you remember  
In the valley I walk I took some comfort there  
In the valley I walk cold comfort I can hear you talk  
In the valley I walk - who will take me there

When my mother went down it was a stiff arm from Hades  
Life surprises and tears you like the southerly  
She always welcomed the spring always welcomed the stranger  
I don't see too many around like this

Oh no, that's what I'm looking for, year, what we're looking for  
In the valley I walk who will take me there  
In the valley I walk cold comfort I can hear you talk  
In the valley I walk I took some comfort there

In the valley I walk oh rough justice I hear you talk  
In the valley I walk to meet my water shed  
I hope virtue brings its own reward  
And I hope the pen is mightier than any sword

I hope the kids will take it slow  
I hope my country claims its own  
In the valley I walk I cried yes I cried I was down then I crawled  
Mercy's arms all around me when I was down there  
In the valley I walk do you read me they can hear me in the valley

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**JOHN HUXLEY**

## **Government agrees MvM needs greater recognition**

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**RELATIVES OF MORE than 1000 Australian troops and civilians who lost their lives in the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* in 1942 have had a breakthrough in their campaign for greater understanding of the tragedy.**

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, told the *Sydney Morning Herald*: "I think we all agree now that the detail and the significance of the event have not received appropriate recognition in the past."

He said the Government would investigate the possibility of declaring the site of the sinking, off the Philippines, an official war grave, and assist family and friends in raising funds for a memorial in Canberra.

"It will require public fund-raising on a massive scale, which the Government will support."

Mr Jackson said the meeting had been productive and had achieved breakthroughs in several other areas.

The War Memorial will include a permanent *Montevideo Maru* display in its revamped World War II galleries.

The Government will renew the search for Japanese papers bearing the names of those who died on the ship.

"It will also be represented on and support the formation of a working party to ensure the story of the invasion of Rabaul and the sinking of the ship becomes a more recognised part of Australian history."

The *Montevideo Maru*, which was being used by the Japanese to move civilians and prisoners of war, was sunk by mistake by the submarine *USS Sturgeon*.

It remains the worst maritime disaster in Australia's history.

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John Huxley wrote this article under the title **Greater recognition for *Montevideo Maru*** for the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 20 November 2009

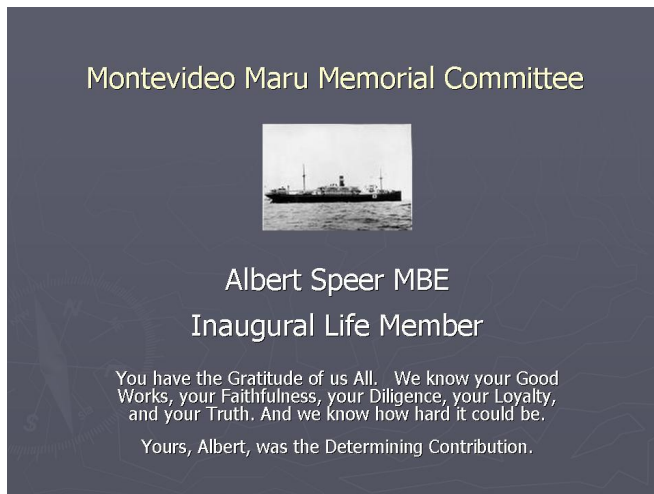
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**The *Montevideo Maru* Memorial Committee thanks Friends for joining with us in this great endeavour to ensure our nation remembers the fall of Rabaul and the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*, two related elements of our history that Australians must never forget.**

**We wish readers the compliments of this Christmas Season, a pleasant New Year and a 2010 that brings to you those things you wish.**

## Albert Speer MBE awarded MvM life membership

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### **THE MONTEVIDEO MARU Memorial Committee rarely meets face-to-face.**

With members scattered throughout the world – Norway, Dubai, Japan, as well as Australia - it conducts just about all its business online.

It's been a big first year for the group, with the *Montevideo Maru* soaring into public consciousness, the Federal government engaged after decades of official neglect, and

the formation of a thriving organisation (now over 160 members and still growing strongly).

On Wednesday - at the committee's second physical meeting in Sydney – Albert Speer MBE was awarded inaugural life membership of the committee. As committee member Rod Miller said, "He really is a man of New Guinea."

Albert was born in Roslyn NSW in 1922 and needed his mother's permission to join the army in 1942 aged 17 to serve in World War II. He became a medic in PNG and served at a number of locations including Milne Bay and Wau.

After the war, he stayed on with the post war administration as a medical assistant. His role with the Department of Public Health took him to Kerema, Popondetta, Lae, Tari, Koroba, Rabaul and Goroka as well as Moresby.

Most famously, he was involved with medical support after the Mount Lamington volcano erupted, for which he was awarded the MBE. When he retired in 1979, Albert had served in PNG for 37 years.

He became interested in the *Montevideo Maru* during his posting in Rabaul and started intensive research into the tragedy around 1997.

His commitment to finding the nominal roll of the men who died on the ship was often frustrating and for many years seemed fruitless. But Albert was undaunted and, in his pursuit of the truth, kept the flame burning for the relatives of the missing men.

Now, as the search for the nominal roll warms up, and as the new committee engages itself in a range of matters related to the national recognition of the tragedy, the awards acknowledges the great contribution that Albert made through his unyielding effort.



## The Memorial Fund needs your support

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**THE MONTEVIDEO MARU Memorial Committee is working on many tasks, including fundraising for a memorial at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.**

Why? Because when we consulted with Friends in preparing a submission to the Federal Government, this is what many of you wanted: a place to mourn, a place to show respect – and a place to leave flowers.

A *Montevideo Maru* memorial in the national capital is a wonderful goal worth working hard to achieve. Here's how you can help.

### **YOU CAN RECRUIT PEOPLE AS FRIENDS**

We have over 160 Friends of Montevideo Maru. The more people who join as Friends, the more chance we have of constructing the memorial. You can get people to sign up by asking them to email Keith Jackson at [benelong@bigpond.net.au](mailto:benelong@bigpond.net.au) (or write to him c/- Jackson Wells Pty Ltd, PO Box 1743, Neutral Bay NSW 2089) – and ask to be a Friend.

### **YOU CAN DONATE TO THE MEMORIAL FUND**

Please give what you can afford and encourage friends, relatives and other people you know (especially those in the corporate world who may see this as a good project) to do the same.

**PAYMENTS.** Cheques to the 'Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee' and sent to PO Box 1743, Neutral Bay NSW 2089. Or can make a direct deposit to the Committee's bank account: BSB **082-401** A/c No **16-083-2367**. If you make a direct deposit, let Keith Jackson know by sending an email to [benelong@bigpond.net.au](mailto:benelong@bigpond.net.au).

**MEMORIAL FUND STANDS AT \$1,725 (LAST MONTH \$560):** AR Pattison \$40, HB Wakelin \$35, BM & JL May \$100, Grace Lovell \$200, Keith Jackson \$200, Max Henderson \$100, Peter & Betty Muller \$265, Douglas Stewart \$65, Gillian Nikakis \$15, Phyllis & Douglas Smith \$115, Sue Pascoe \$115, Patrick Bourke \$15, Rev DW Hosking \$15, Tim & Jan Gambrell \$15, Tony Booth \$40, Doreen Beadle \$200, Margaret Jenkins \$15, Nola McCann \$15, Marg Curtis \$80, Esther Gascoigne \$50, Bill Linggood \$15, Patrick Lindsay \$15 [total includes contribution from DVD sales]

### **YOU CAN PURCHASE THE DVD**

We are taking orders for the DVD, *The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru*, due in February. Cost: \$35 (the retail price, which including postage and packing). Producer John Schindler has generously offered to let the Committee have copies of the DVD at a big discount - so \$15 from the price of each DVD will go to the Memorial Fund.

The DVD will be the full uncut version (the one screened on Foxtel was very much shortened). It will include additional material not in the documentary.

**ORDER YOUR DVD** from [benelong@bigpond.net.au](mailto:benelong@bigpond.net.au) or write to Keith Jackson at Jackson Wells, PO Box 1743, Neutral Bay NSW 2089. Payments can be made in the same way as donations [above].

## **MvM committee restructures for the task ahead**

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**THE MEETING WITH Government** [reported on by John Huxley on page 3] **threw the committee into a more intense phase of planning and commitment.**

The Committee was boosted during the month with the appointment of former ABC journalist Donald Hook as a member. Don spent many years in PNG and Asia as a senior reporter and is now a resident of Canberra.

There are now four major areas of activity and each committee member has been asked to nominate to work on one or more of the areas. If readers are interested in joining, and working hard for, any of the sub-committees listed here, contact Keith Jackson at [kjackson@jacksonwells.com.au](mailto:kjackson@jacksonwells.com.au)

### **MEMORIAL SUB-COMMITTEE**

Task: Memorial fundraising and construction

Activities: Fund-raising; memorial design and construction, AWM liaison

Co-convenors: Clive Troy and Phil Ainsworth

Members: Keith Jackson

### **WAR GRAVE SUB-COMMITTEE**

Task: Declare sinking site as official war grave

Activities: Liaison with Office Australian of Australian War Graves

Convenor: Elizabeth Thurston

Members: Lindsay Cox; Keith Jackson

### **RECOGNITION SUB-COMMITTEE**

Task: Consolidate Rabaul and Montevideo Maru stories as continuing part of Australian history

Activities: Form and manage a History Working Party including government representation to ensure this important part of history is permanently entrenched in the Australian story

Convenor: Andrea Williams

Members: Lindsay Cox; Max Uechtritz; Hooky Street; Rod Miller; Keith Jackson

### **NOMINAL ROLL SUB-COMMITTEE**

Task: Search for and locate the nominal roll

Activities: Liaison with relevant authorities (e.g., Office of Minister for Defence Personnel, Defence Department, RSL), establish a joint working party

Convenor: Chris Diercke

Members: Keith Jackson; Harumi Sakaguchi; Hank Nelson

## Inspector Huggins cracks the mystery of the plaque

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*The Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee's recent submission to the Federal Government mentioned a small memorial plaque at the Brisbane GPO commemorating three Rabaul-based wireless technicians of the Postmaster-General's Department who died on Montevideo Maru. **COLIN HUGGINS** sallied forth in search of it.*

### **WELL THE PLAQUE - to find it.**

John Holland, Brisbane PNGVR historian, did give me a pretty good clue about where to look, but initially I couldn't find it, so around and around that building I went - almost into the restricted zone!

I ventured into the private mail boxes - all the time thinking, someone is going to pat me on the shoulder and ask what on earth I'm doing. Seems to prove that security isn't all it is beefed up to be. If anyone looks like a possible terrorist, I fit the bill.

However I had my story ready for them if patted on the shoulder - the 44 page *Montevideo Maru* submission to the Government.

Just as I was about to give up, I found it.

P.M.G's  
DEPARTMENT  
CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES  
TAKEN PRISONERS OF WAR  
WHILST ON DUTY  
DIED IN ENEMY HANDS  
WORLD WAR II – 1939-1945  
DUUS W.L  
PLUNKETT T.M.  
TURNBULL H.F

The plaque is located on the right hand side of the building as you walk through to St Stephen's Cathedral - at the back of the front pillar.

I saw the very old paper seller at the front. He knew of the plaque, but had no idea what it represented. So I did my best to inform him. I spoke to a few other people, too.

So, hopefully, when they read something in the newspapers of the *Montevideo Maru* disaster, they will know what it is all about.

*Photo: Insp Huggins contemplates his next step with a glass of inspiration*



## FEEDBACK

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### ROD MILLER

I read with interest the letter from Carole Worthy in the last newsletter.

For the last 15 years I have been researching the 18 Australian women taken from Rabaul to Japan in 1942. There were government and army nurses, missionaries and a civilian plantation owner in the group.

The Japanese wanted to take all the Australian women, including nuns, to Japan together with captured Australian officers on the *Naruto Maru*. This seemed to take on some urgency after the news of the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* was received in Rabaul.

The women were lined up outside Vunapope mission and inspected by a Japanese prince in Rabaul at the time of the sailing of the *Montevideo Maru*. Due to the intervention of Bishop Scharmach, the Australian nuns were kept at the mission.

The Rabaul women were taken to Japan to be part of an exchange of internees originally scheduled for August. Information about these women is available on my web site [www.montevideomaru.info](http://www.montevideomaru.info) Full details are available in my book *Lost Women of Rabaul* which is soon to be the basis for a dramatisation about these women by the ABC.

### JOHN SCHINDLER

Unfortunately, production of the extended DVD version of *The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru* has been delayed. The reason is that we are required by law to have the new version classified by the Attorney General's Department which takes five weeks. After classification, we must include the information on the DVD sleeve. Printing will take another two weeks.

We had hoped to make the DVD available before Christmas 2009 but this will not be possible now. Sorry. It's frustrating for us too. We estimate the DVD will be ready early in February 2010. I can assure readers, it will be worth waiting for.

### TONY BOOTH

I am pleased to read of the progress being made by your committee in the investigation concerning the *Montevideo Maru*. Being too young to serve in World War II, I followed the fortunes of a cousin and a neighbour during the NG campaign – they both survived.

### TIM GAMBRILL

Because my mother-in-law, Helen Wayne (wife of Ron, a civilian on that *Maru*) kept a vast amount of historical stuff about Rabaul, I got caught up in the excitement of learning as much as I could. I was 12½ years of age when the *Maru* sank and, as a youth, I was already collecting a vast amount of historical research.

In identical circumstances, I too would have used torpedoes on a Japanese troopship. I feel as sorry for the sub skipper as for those trapped in the holds of the *Maru*.

In wartime, in my home town of Gisborne on the east coast of New Zealand's North Island, Boy Scouts were employed on Saturdays with the job of making (very neatly)



camouflage netting. In the event of an air raid or beach invasion, we Scouts were to become cyclist messengers for the civil and military authorities.

Having lived through that time in New Zealand, the attitude was 'war is war; such is life'. My mother-in-law held no grudge – except against the Japanese.

### **NOLA MCCANN**

I'm so glad to hear of the great progress within the Friends of the *Montevideo Maru*. Congratulations.

### **SUE PASCOE**

Thank you so much for your generosity in time, effort and finance. Thank you also for your graphic description of your visit to Parliament House which drew the rest of us into your unique experience.

### **COLIN HUGGINS**

An excellent report, as usual you have outshone yourself. My father was a major in PNG at the end of WW2. He never spoke of the war. The only thing I ever got out of him was after I was posted to my first school at Dregerhafen, outside Finschhafen. Dad got real excited about that. He went to a conference there and his plane did a belly flop landing on the Finschhafen strip. The plane was a write-off but no-one was injured.

### **PATRICK BOURKE**

It appears that you and Kim Beazley had a productive meeting with the Minister for Veterans' Affairs. I agree generally with the direction the committee is heading in, but I do have doubts about the memorial. The amount of government funding is unknown. What amount of money should the committee aim for? How many people would visit the memorial in Canberra? Could this money be spent in a better way?

The key point should be to make the invasion of Rabaul and the sinking of the ship a more recognised part of Australian history, especially through the school curriculum. The national history school curriculum is now being finalised.

### **GILLIAN NIKAKIS**

The documentary was very powerful. Congratulations to John Schindler. Some scenes I found very difficult to watch as my father was on the ship. The American's reaction was very healing and important.

### **JOHN BELL**

I'm not much of a writer but *The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru* moved me to tears. Right from the start it was a gripping show, and one could not help but be moved by the whole production.

It was very interesting to hear that Japanese sailor talk about the fate of the prisoners, as only recently I had read an article written by someone who was in Rabaul and who stated that he never actually saw the men get loaded onto the ship, reckons they could have been taken into the jungle and shot, but the sailor gave a heart wrenching description of what happened that morning.

## **HUGH FIGGIS**

The activities of your committee including the newsletter are much appreciated by my family. My father Peter, who died recently, read the newsletters with great interest and was very pleased that the sinking of the MvM was at long last getting due recognition.

Dad fielded questions all his postwar life about the sinking from relatives seeking hope or closure. (He also received inquiries from relatives of the Tol Plantation massacre.) I was only sorry that Dad was not able to see the MvM movie on Foxtel. Keep up the great work! Cheers.

## **FRANK (FRANCIS GORDON) WILLIAMS**

I was named after my uncle, Sapper Francis Gordon Williams, TX 4411, who served in the RAE Fort Engrs Rabaul with Lark Force 2/22 Battalion and is presumed lost at sea on 1 July 1942 on board the *Montevideo Maru*. I plan on visiting Rabaul on Anzac Day 2010 to trek the Lark Force escape route and pay homage to my uncle.

## **MAX HENDERSON**

I'm reminded of the last major 2/22 ceremony at Bitapaka. Bill Harry was handing out poppies on pins and gave me one as he passed. A couple of steps on he reversed course and asked "are you a returned soldier?" "No," I replied, "but my father and his five brothers were". Wasn't good enough for Bill. He took the poppy back and continued on his rounds.

## **PETER MULLER**

We think you are doing a terrific job and congratulate you on what has been achieved to date. As we are in Canberra it occurs to me that there may be times when you could use someone who is on the spot and if the task is not beyond my abilities please feel free to call on me.

## **GLENDA SHEARWOOD**

Another member of my family has made me aware of the newsletter. My uncle, John Robertson, was one of the bandsmen that went down with the sub.

## **BILL LINGGOOD**

My father was one of the missionaries captured at Rabaul and listed as being on the *Montevideo Maru*. I was born at Raluana mission station but had been left in Melbourne in early 1941 to go to school. My mother and sister were evacuated at the end of 1941.

I went back to work for the Methodist Mission as a plantation manager in 1963 and was on Ulu in the Duke of Yorks. Before I went back I had heard that the local people did not believe the missionaries were on the boat.

I spent six years working for the mission during which I visited Rabaul and Raluana a number of times and made a lot of enquiries about what had happened to my father. Every time I was told the missionaries were not on the boat and that they were killed just before the war ended. So I do not believe my father was on the *Montevideo Maru*.

A friend of mine, Rev Malcolm McArthur, whose father was also supposed to be on the boat also made a lot of enquiries while he worked in New Guinea and he is of the same view that the missionaries were not on the boat.