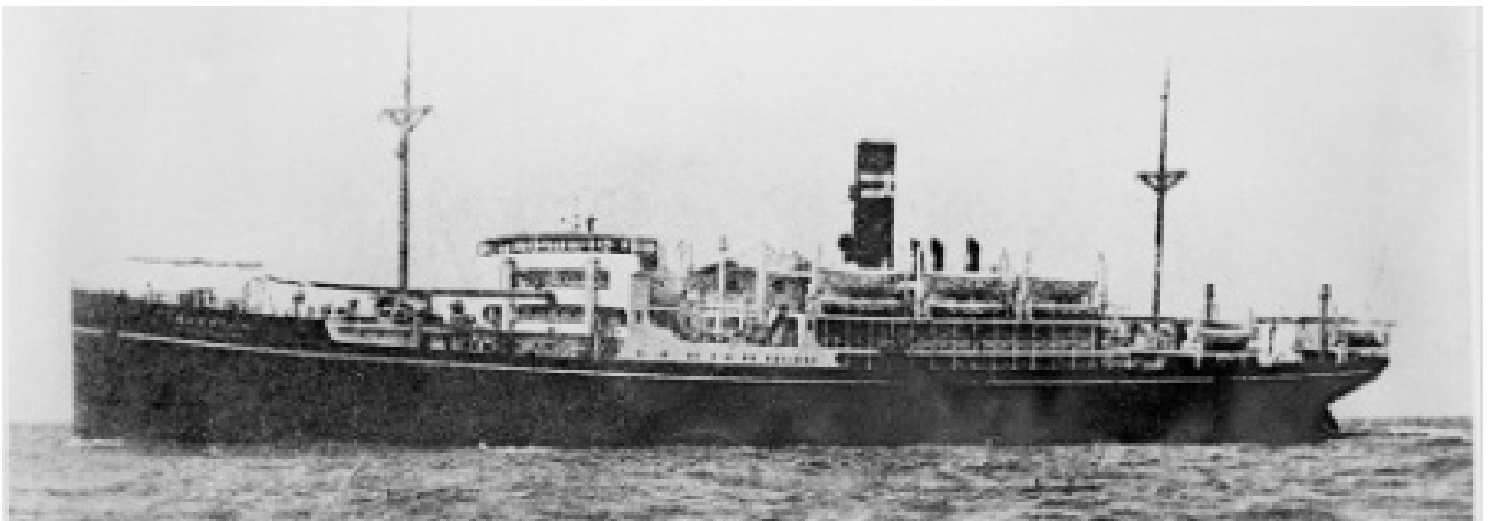


The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru. Time for Recognition.



A Submission to the
Commonwealth Government

MONTEVIDEO MARU MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

NOVEMBER 2009

Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee

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 of 23 January 1942. Many of these people are believed to have died when the prisoner-of-war ship *Montevideo Maru* 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 the context in which it occurred.

Objectives

1. To secure national recognition of the *Montevideo Maru* tragedy.
2. To facilitate comfort and closure in the minds of relatives.
3. To urge government action to locate the nominal roll of prisoners aboard the *Montevideo Maru* and to identify the burial places of people whose graves are unknown.
4. To achieve greater public knowledge of the fall of Rabaul and the New Guinea islands.
5. To enhance awareness of Australia's role in Papua New Guinea.

Committee

Patron

Professor Kim Beazley AC

Chairman

Keith Jackson AM

Historical Adviser

Emeritus Professor
Hank Nelson

Members

Phil Ainsworth

Gerald Borthwick

John Cleary

Lindsay Cox

Chris Diercke

Rod Miller

Nils T Selvik

Albert Speer MBE

Aage Henning Stavenes

Hooky (Philip) Street

Elizabeth Thurston

Clive Troy

Max Uechtritz

Andrea Williams

War brings many tragedies and today we remember one of the greatest tragedies of the Second World War...



The families and associations with connections to the *Montevideo Maru* have never lost sight of the tragedy that occurred 67 years ago.

That some questions concerning the ship may never be answered must also add to their sense of loss.

It is something that we as a nation should never forget.

- Alan Griffin MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs
25 June 2009



The *Montevideo Maru* sinking is Australia's most devastating loss at sea, but is a quiet part of public consciousness of World War II history.

The military personnel lost in particular were a product of the first desperate efforts of the Australian Government to defend our immediate approaches.

The Japanese occupation of Rabaul produced many heroic Australian efforts at resistance and escape and an enormous Australian tragedy, both from massacres on land and the huge loss of life at sea.

Getting this story more firmly into our national consciousness is a noble effort.

- Professor Kim Beazley
Ambassador Designate to the United States
2 May 2009

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Foreword

This Submission is more than the story of Australia's greatest maritime catastrophe.

It is a weave of history and advocacy, and a plea for national recognition of great sacrifice.

It is a story of Australian settlers in New Guinea who had their lives disrupted by war; of young soldiers – mostly from Victoria – who found themselves defending a tropical township with a capacious harbour; of a Salvation Army band rallying to the national flag; and of a new Federal government, confronted by a number of crises of war, making the hardest decision any government can be called upon to make: the decision to leave its citizens in harm's way.

Despite the passage of time – nearly 68 years - since the disaster of the fall of Rabaul, the consequences of this great Australian tragedy remain powerfully imprinted on many people.

There has been a continuation of grief and frustration, sustained to this day, for relatives of people killed under Japanese occupation – civilians and soldiers – both because they lack the knowledge of exactly how and where many of their loved ones died and because of the failure of previous Australian Governments to appropriately recognise this tragedy and thereby respond effectively to a profound need for closure.

Rabaul fell on 23 January 1942, inducing, less than six months later, one of the most dreadful single events in the history of our nation. The sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* on 1 July was a calamity that cost 1053 lives.¹ It was and it remains Australia's worst maritime disaster.

In the House of Representatives in Canberra on 25 June 2009, in a rare Parliamentary acknowledgement of this event, Veterans' Affairs Minister Alan Griffin MP called for the nation to pause on 1 July, the 67th anniversary of the sinking, to remember the lives lost. "War brings many tragedies," he told the House, "and today we remember one of the greatest tragedies of the Second World War."

A nation only hazily aware of the *Montevideo Maru* did not in fact heed the invitation to pause – except at private ceremonies in Brisbane and at Subic Bay in the Philippines. In Brisbane, the NGVR and PNGVR Ex-members Association² held its annual memorial service at the Brisbane Cenotaph. And, at a commemoration organised under the auspices of the Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee at Subic Bay, Australian Ambassador, Rod Smith unveiled a privately funded memorial.

¹ A confirmed list of Australians who died on the *Montevideo Maru* is not available. The Australian War Memorial records that between 1050 and 1053 prisoners were on board including "about 200" civilians, although recent research indicates the total number could have been more than 1080

² New Guinea Volunteer Rifles and Papua New Guinea Volunteer Rifles

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“This tragedy is not forgotten. The families are not forgotten. These men are not forgotten. We honour them all,” said Ambassador Smith. But Australia has come perilously close to forgetting. Indeed, were it not for the relatives keeping the iridescent flame of remembrance alive, this terrible Australian tragedy would have been largely forgotten – and probably lost from public view.

The recent words by Minister and Ambassador are important.³ But there remains a deep-seated feeling among the relatives of those who died, reinforced by perceptions of tepid official concern down the years, that the sacrifices of the people of Rabaul and the New Guinea islands need more meaningful commemoration by our government on behalf of the Australian people.

More than anything, the relatives seek some form of permanent national recognition for those who died, whether they perished in the armed forces or as civilians caught in the maelstrom of war.

The granting of appropriate recognition will make good an outstanding moral obligation of the Australian nation for the sacrifices made in Rabaul or as the result of Japanese occupation of Rabaul.

In late 1941, the Federal government realised the dangers of stranding an under-strength and under-supported garrison in Rabaul, but conscientiously believed this measure was justified in the defence of the Australian mainland. So the government chose to position and retain Lark Force and civil administrators in Rabaul, and they did not encourage other civilians to leave this Australian territory until it was too late.

It was a decision made by a newly-elected government confronting the most challenging wartime circumstances in Rabaul and elsewhere in the Pacific, Asia, Africa and Europe.

It can be fairly argued, however – and historian Emeritus Professor Hank Nelson, an assiduous student of this period, supports this contention – that the decision of War Cabinet and the terrible consequences it engendered, obligates the Australian nation to these men and women and, for so long as the matter remains unrecognised, to their relatives.

Many of the people of Rabaul and the New Guinea islands were compelled to make the supreme sacrifice, emanating from a need to defend Australia. It was a sacrifice that made a great contribution to the safety and security of our nation.

The time has come for recognition.

- Keith Jackson AM
Chairman
Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee

³ It should also be noted that Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Louise Markus MP, also spoke in Parliament on 26 June saying, inter alia, “It is important to thank and acknowledge those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for this nation, a sacrifice that has contributed to the peace we enjoy today.”

1. Introduction

The Submission begins by looking at Australia's emergence as the colonial power in New Guinea after World War I. Many Australians who went to "the islands", and there was a preponderance of ex-servicemen, saw themselves not as temporary residents but as permanent settlers.

During the 1930s, Japanese strategic interest in New Guinea grew, as did its surveillance of the region; even as the Australian Government remained faithful to its League of Nations Mandate that required it not to militarise the Territory.

At the outbreak of World War II, however, the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles was formed and, in February 1941 with Germany now active in the South Pacific and Japan a looming threat, Australia despatched an AIF garrison of some 1400 troops, designated as Lark Force, to Rabaul.

The official view was that these troops could do no more than briefly delay any Japanese advance. They were a sundry group based on the 2/22nd Battalion raised in Victoria as part of the 23rd Brigade, 8th Division, 2nd Australian Imperial Force.

Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941, whereby Japan entered the war, the Japanese ordered an invasion fleet to take Rabaul.

Australian women and children were evacuated, a process completed by 29 December. The first bombs fell on the town on 4 January. The bombing continued for three weeks until the Gazelle Peninsula was invaded.

The Australian War Cabinet determined that Lark Force and civilian administrators would remain to defend Rabaul. It was a decision that ultimately led to the deaths of perhaps 1500 people. A further decision, on 19 January 1942, to evacuate unnecessary civilian personnel came too late to be put into effect.

Soon after midnight on Friday 23 January, the 5300 strong Japanese South Seas Force invaded Rabaul. Before midday, the Australian military commander, Lieutenant Colonel Scanlan, ordered "every man for himself" as Lark Force was overwhelmed. And so Rabaul fell.

About 450 people escaped by making the difficult trek through New Britain, but the majority troops and civilians surrendered. Some were quickly executed, including a massacre of 160 men at Tol and Waitavalo plantations. Most of the rest were interned at camps in Rabaul.

On 22 June 1942, an estimated 845 prisoners of war from Lark Force and 208 interned civilian men⁴ were marched from their camps to board the Japanese vessel MV *Montevideo Maru* moored in Rabaul harbour.

⁴ As noted previously, the number of troops and civilians on the *Montevideo Maru* has never been confidently established. The official estimates of 845 troops and 208 civilians date back to Major HS Williams' original report from Tokyo on behalf of the Recovered Personnel Division of the Australian Army (6 October 1945), although the report also confusingly mentions 848 troops. These figures were subsequently cited in various official statements in Parliament. While the numbers differ somewhat in other accounts, the Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee accepts the official estimates

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The ship had been assigned to take the prisoners to Hainan Island in south-east China but, early on the morning of 1 July 1942, it was torpedoed 110 kilometres north-west of Cape Bojeador in the Philippines. The vessel sank within minutes with the loss of all prisoners. It remains Australia's worst disaster at sea.

After the war, a Japanese roll thought to contain the names of the prisoners on *Montevideo Maru* was brought to Australia, but it was lost.

The doubts about who died at sea, who died on land and how they died linger to this day. Many relatives feel no sense of certainty and no sense of closure. They believe there has been no appropriate national recognition. Most feel that successive Australian governments have taken their sacrifice for granted and that they have been let down.

This Submission suggests that this situation needs to be remedied: since it discredits the sacrifices that were made in the defence of Australia and ignores the residual pain of relatives.

The Submission proposes a straightforward approach as to how the continuing anguish of the relatives can be satisfactorily and permanently resolved.

The recommendations of this Submission

This Submission makes three recommendations to the Australian Government, which are presented and discussed in more detail in Section 12 of the Submission (page 30).

RECOMMENDATION 1

A place for people to remember and honour the sacrifice

That the Australian Government on behalf of the Australian people construct a memorial, inscribed with the names of the dead, in the national capital to commemorate the considerable sacrifice of troops and civilians who died in the defence of the Australian Mandated Territory of New Guinea.

RECOMMENDATION 2

An officially designated and commemorated war grave

That the Australian Government initiate action to have the site of the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* declared an official war grave and arrange for a vessel carrying relatives and friends to visit the site for a memorial and wreath-laying service.

RECOMMENDATION 3

A sacrifice that is recognised and a story that is told

That the Australian Government appoint an officially sanctioned group, which will include Friends of Montevideo Maru, to develop strategies to ensure that the fall of Rabaul and surrounding islands and the sinking of the Montevideo Maru remain an enduring part of the nation's history.

2. Australia & Rabaul

Rabaul (it means ‘mangrove swamp’ in the local Kuanua language) is located in a volcanically active area at the north-eastern tip of the island of New Britain in what is now the independent state of Papua New Guinea. Rabaul’s magnificent deep water harbour is a flooded three kilometres wide caldera.

From 1870 traders operated in the New Guinea islands and, in 1875, Australian Methodist missionaries established their first stations in the area. By 1878 a German firm had established a commercial outpost on Matupit island near the present-day town. The settlement became a coaling station and eventually a major trading centre

Rabaul developed into a fine town with elegant colonial buildings, wide tree-lined avenues, tramways, and many facilities to make life comfortable for the settlers. To the south was an important wireless station at Bitapaka.

In 1884 the German government raised flags and formally laid claim to the New Guinea islands and the northeast mainland. The *Neu Guinea Compagnie* was given a charter to administer the region, which was later expanded to include what is now Bougainville. In 1899 the Imperial German Government took control, moving its administrative headquarters to Rabaul in 1910.

In September 1914, upon the outbreak of World War I, an Australian expeditionary force of 1500 men captured Rabaul and German New Guinea became an occupied territory. This force was the first to leave Australia under the command of Australian officers and on board its own ships.

Part of the force landed at Herbertshohe (now Kokopo) to capture the Bitapaka wireless station. In the ensuing battle, Able Seaman WGV Williams RAN became the first Australian casualty of World War I. Australian troops hoisted the British flag in Rabaul on 13 September 1914.

At the 1919 post-war Paris Peace Conference, Australian Prime Minister William Morris Hughes argued for the annexation of the former German New Guinea and, at the end of the following year, under Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, Australia was granted a Mandate over the colony. It became the Territory of New Guinea with its administrative centre in Rabaul.

The Mandate obliged Australia to take charge of the “spiritual interests of the natives and their development to a higher level of culture” and prohibited “the military training of the natives, otherwise than for the purposes of internal police and the local defence of the territory...” It also proscribed the establishment of military or naval bases or fortifications.

In May 1921, military administration of the Mandated Territory gave way to civil administration, with an expectation it would operate without external subsidy. German plantations and assets were expropriated and war reparations paid to Australia.

Under Australian Administration, Rabaul continued to prosper as a vibrant regional headquarters and the largest town in New Guinea. It boasted every

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conceivable civil and social amenity during a period Christine Winter has termed “a brotherhood of whiteness”.

There was an active soldier resettlement program, mainly exploiting existing plantation holdings. Australian ex-servicemen from World War I became a dominant presence on plantations and amongst Administration officials, to the extent that Rabaul was sometimes referred to as “a suburb of Anzac.”

The Australian settlers saw themselves as permanent not temporary residents, and were intent on forging a life in New Guinea. Rabaul became their town.

By the late 1930s the population of Rabaul numbered almost 5000 – 800 Europeans, 1000 Asians and 3000 indigenous workers who were employed in police, in government and as labourers and servants.

On 1 July 1937, Territories Minister and former Prime Minister, William Morris Hughes, reacting to suggestions that Hitler might be appeased by the return of former German colonies, told an audience in Rabaul that New Guinea was Australia’s and “all hell is not going to take it away.”

3. Japan & Rabaul

Japan’s interest in New Guinea grew during the 1930s as *Nanshin-Ron* (southward advancement theory) gained momentum amongst Japanese intellectuals.

The Imperial Japanese Navy was aware of its relative inferior strength and, in the event of war, planned to gradually weaken the US Pacific Fleet before engaging in a decisive battle in waters near Japan. The preferred arena for this contest was between the Marianas and Marshall islands.

Truk Atoll in the Carolines became the main advance base for the Japanese Fleet. The principal threat was seen as coming from Australian-administered Rabaul.

Japan was active in the Pacific for many years before the attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941, ignoring its commitment under the 1922 Washington Agreement not to fortify hundreds of mandated islands. The Japanese Imperial Command also used visits by merchant vessels to other South Pacific territories, including New Guinea, as a source of intelligence.

In 1939, for example, the 2000-ton passenger-cargo vessel *Takaichiko Maru* was running four trips a year from the Marshall Islands to Rabaul and other island ports. It carried little cargo and the Japanese on board showed a propensity for photography. It was just one of many vessels engaged in covert surveillance.

By August 1941, the Imperial Japanese Navy considered the occupation of Rabaul essential for the prosecution of a successful war against the US, and it petitioned the Army to support this goal.

The Army, while recognising the desirability of occupying Rabaul, initially refused: considering a troop deployment beyond the limits of its capability. A compromise was reached and there was agreement that, upon the outbreak of war, a South

Seas Force comprising a strengthened infantry regiment of about 5300 would occupy the town.

As tensions grew between Japan and the Allies, the Japanese decided to initiate military action against the USA, UK and Holland in early December 1941. After Pearl Harbour, the prime targets would include the Bismarck islands (Rabaul and Kavieng) and south-east Asian cities as far west as Malaya. These would be attacked at the same time, or very soon after, the surprise attack on Hawaii.

The Australian Government meanwhile was scrupulous in observing the demands of its Mandate. Until 1939, while there were plans for the defence of New Guinea, none had been implemented. The preparations eventually made were minimal and designed to delay rather than thwart an invading force.

4. The defence of Rabaul

Immediately after the outbreak of war in Europe, the Australian Army authorised the formation of an unpaid militia unit, the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles (NGVR), which was raised from white residents on 8 September 1939. Consideration was given to allowing New Guineans to join but the Administration decided, given Australia's responsibility to protect the indigenous people, that they would not be permitted to fight.

On the eve of the outbreak of the Pacific War, the NGVR's overall strength was twelve officers and 284 other ranks - most of whom were deployed in Rabaul, Salamaua, Bulolo and Wau with headquarters in Lae.

In February 1941, as the threat from Japan was seen with greater clarity, the Australian War Cabinet authorised the despatch to Rabaul of an AIF battalion and the installation of coastal defences.

The defence of New Britain, a front of more than 1600 km of coastline, was to be the responsibility of 1399 Australian troops known as Lark Force, which arrived in March and April 1941 and that was, from October 1941, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel JJ Scanlan.

The garrison consisted predominantly of the 2/22nd Battalion,⁵ commanded by Lt Col HH Carr, but there were also other units.

The composite Lark Force included the men of the NGVR and 100 personnel of the 17th Antitank Gun Troop. There was a detachment of 2/10 Field Ambulance, which established a camp hospital. There was a meagre artillery: two 6-inch naval guns and two 3-inch anti-aircraft guns. Sundry small headquarters units made up the complement of the force.

RAAF 24 Squadron under Wing Commander John Lerew arrived in early December 1941. It was ill equipped with ten lightly-armed Wirraway fighter

⁵ Annex I outlines the story of the composite Salvation Army Band, which was the band of the 2/22nd Battalion

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trainers based at Lakunai airstrip near Rabaul and four Lockheed Hudson light bombers at Vunakanau.

The Royal Australian Navy contingent consisted of a small number of base staff commanded by Lieutenant HA Mackenzie of Naval Intelligence.

A commando unit, the 2/1st Independent Company, comprising around 250 officers and other ranks, was detached to garrison the nearby island of New Ireland. About 150 men were based in Kavieng to protect the airfield while others were deployed as observers to central New Ireland, Bougainville and Manus Island as well as to Tulagi in the British Solomon Islands and Vila in the New Hebrides.

When the Japanese invaded, 74 members of NGVR – manning medium machine guns and a mortar - were in Rabaul under the command of the 2/22nd Battalion. There was also an auxiliary ambulance detachment of Chinese youths.

Lark Force was not equipped to repel an invasion. It had no sea support, poor air cover and little artillery. The infantry units were lightly armed and possessed few mortars or machine guns.

The view of the Australian chiefs of staff was that, at best, this force could do no more than briefly delay a Japanese advance. The Army Department admitted, in a minute of 2 August 1941, that to secure Rabaul against attack would require a scale of defence beyond the resources at its disposal. Lark Force would be tasked to impede the Japanese advance and the Administration would be tasked to maintain civil order.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbour on 7 December, the chiefs of staff advised War Cabinet that the Japanese would probably try to occupy Rabaul, Port Moresby, New Caledonia and Darwin. Australia also had small and susceptible forces in Ambon, Timor and Java and a major but equally vulnerable force in Malaya and Singapore.

Rabaul could not be seen in isolation; as the Japanese advanced south, a total of around 25,000 Australian troops was at risk.

The new Curtin government had inherited decisions made by the Menzies and Fadden governments. Australian political and military leaders wanted the Dutch, British and Americans to fight in defence of their colonies in the region and, in such circumstances, the government felt it could scarcely withdraw from Australia's own territories.

The government also appreciated the significance of Rabaul in the defence of the southwest Pacific and was completing negotiations for American naval forces to use the port.

Rabaul was the forward observation point for Australia; and the government decided it should be held for as long as possible. While the garrison could provide only token resistance, its presence would compel the Japanese to assemble a significant land, air and sea force. That would take time and would deny the force other immediate options while it secured Rabaul.

The chiefs of staff warned they could not provide adequate air or naval support for the evacuation of troops or civilians. Australia also had little capacity to reinforce or resupply the vulnerable troops. The few units that were deployed north early in 1942 went from Australia to Singapore or were diverted, upon their return from the Middle East, to Java.

As late as 12 December, War Cabinet considered three courses of action in relation to Rabaul: reinforce the garrison; retain it as it was; or withdraw and abandon the area. The chiefs of staff knew the force could offer nothing more than token resistance: an official cable referring to “its present small garrison being regarded as hostages to fortune”.

Faced with this dilemma, the chiefs of staff recommended - and War Cabinet accepted - that Lark Force must remain in Rabaul. It was a decision made in the national interest and it ultimately led to the deaths of perhaps 1500 people.

5. The evacuation

On 12 December 1941, five days after Japan entered the war, War Cabinet decided to compulsorily evacuate Australian women and children from the territories of Papua and New Guinea. Evacuation orders were broadcast over Rabaul radio on 16, 18 and 20 December.

Males over 16 were to remain in Rabaul with their fathers, but in a few cases younger boys stayed. Ivor Gascoigne was 15 and had recently started work. He pleaded to remain with his father, Cyril, a motor fitter. Acting Administrator, HH Page, said it should be his mother’s decision. Ivor and his father died aboard *Montevideo Maru*. Ivor’s mother lived with the pain of that decision for the rest of her life. His sister still does.

The evacuation order did not apply to indigenous, mixed race or Chinese people. The failure to evacuate Chinese women and children in Rabaul and Kavieng caused understandable bitterness in a Chinese community which feared the Japanese.

The six government nurses were offered evacuation but volunteered to stay. The Australian Army Nursing Service nurses were not given the opportunity to evacuate as it was deemed their duty to stay with the men.

Mission women were also given the option to stay and a number, including many women of several nationalities at the Catholic Sacred Heart Mission and four Methodist nurses, did so. The nurses and Kathleen Bignall, who owned a plantation, were later interned and sent to Japan. All survived and were repatriated after the war.

When it received the evacuation order, the Administration notified outlying islands and transported people to Rabaul. The women were given only a day or two’s notice and limited to a baggage allowance of 30 pounds (11 kg) with an extra 15 pounds for each child.

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One evacuee on New Ireland recalled how, as the women prepared to depart, the men plaintively sang the *Maori Farewell*. “We should have been singing it to them,” she says.

The liners *Neptuna* and *Macdhui* arrived in Rabaul on the evening of 21 December and the women and children boarded next day as heavy rain fell.

The monsoon was in full force, making sea travel difficult and dangerous. The log of the small coastal vessel *Ambon* tells how gales, heavy seas and poor visibility meant regular changes of course to take shelter.

Ambon's 21 passengers from Pondo on the north coast of New Britain finally arrived in Rabaul on Christmas Day 1941, three days after the evacuation. Seventy-five women and children from New Ireland and the north coast of New Britain also arrived too late.

By 28 December the situation in Rabaul was grim. Two civil aircraft were sent to evacuate the remaining women and children. They arrived early in the morning and loaded and took off within five minutes.

The civilians who remained were mainly Administration officers, planters, businessmen, traders and missionaries. Most were settlers - ‘Territorians’ as they called themselves - and their livelihood was in New Britain. Many were former World War I soldiers too old to enlist.

Meanwhile, as *Neptuna* and *Macdhui* steamed south, the women and children separated from their men felt deeply uncertain about their future. The evacuation was officially complete by 29 December when 592 women and children from Papua and 1210 from New Guinea arrived in Australia.

Back in Rabaul, hundreds of civilians were left to their fate.

On 15 January, Acting Administrator Harold Page cabled Canberra asking War Cabinet to consider evacuating civilians from Rabaul and the New Guinea islands to either mainland New Guinea or Australia.

The chiefs of staff considered the cablegram and advised the War Cabinet on 19 January, as they had previously, that an attack on Rabaul was likely to be of such strength that the Australian force would be overwhelmed.

They also advised that civil administration should continue for as long as possible - to provide administrative services and law and order so avoiding the diversion of military personnel to such tasks - but that any “unnecessary civilians” should be evacuated.

The advice was accepted and Page was asked to compile a list and instructed that the people named should be evacuated “as and when transport is available”. But the decision had come too late.

The 6000 ton Norwegian freighter *Herstein* had arrived in Rabaul on 14 January and was unloading cargo until the 18th when it began to take on copra. But on the morning of 20 January, while still loading, *Herstein* was bombed by Japanese aircraft and burned to the waterline. It was the same day War Cabinet’s reply to

Page was drafted advising him to consider evacuating civilians. There was now no available transport.

In her book, *A Very Long War*, Margaret Reeson quotes an Australian officer who escaped from Rabaul saying “the abandonment of the European males and the Chinese population was scandalous.” But events had moved too quickly and the Australian Government and the Rabaul Administration had simply run out of time.

Only four of the hundreds of European civilians who remained in Rabaul were alive at the end of the war. In addition more than 150 civilians were liberated from a camp at Ramale in the Kokopo area, nearly all members of the Sacred Heart Mission, including many nuns.

6. The Japanese invasion

On 6 November, a month before the attack on Pearl Harbour, the operational order of the Japanese South Seas Force was that, after securing Guam, it would assemble in Truk and with the cooperation of the Navy occupy Rabaul.

By mid-December Japanese scout and reconnaissance aircraft were frequently spotted over Rabaul. In early January the Japanese had reasonably accurate knowledge of Australian troop deployments and equipment in Rabaul and detailed invasion orders were issued.

The first bombs fell on 4 January 1942 at 10.35 am, killing twelve and wounding thirty. Most of the people who died were from the Trobriand Islands, eating their first meal following being rescued after six weeks lost at sea. The bombing continued for the next three weeks until Rabaul was invaded.

On 8 January, *Malaita* left Rabaul with Japanese internees and a few remaining European women. The last plane from Sydney arrived on 16 January.

The commander of Lark Force, Lieutenant Colonel Scanlan, had based the defence of Rabaul on the assumption of the availability of a brigade group that never eventuated. He had made no plans for retreat or withdrawal. Indeed, on Christmas Day 1941, he issued the grim order that “there shall be no faint hearts, no thought of surrender, every man shall die in his pit.”

The raid by Japanese carrier-based aircraft on 20 January heralded the end. In an engagement with 80 bombers and 40 fighters lasting less than ten minutes, three of 24 Squadron's eight remaining Wirraways were shot down, one crashed on take-off and two were damaged in crash-landings.

Wing Commander Lerew famously signalled RAAF HQ in Melbourne *Nos Morituri Te Salutamus* (‘we who are about to die salute you’), the phrase uttered by gladiators in ancient Rome before entering combat.

“For sheer, cold-blooded heroism I have never seen anything to compare with the pilots of those Wirraways”, Sergeant FS Smith AIF, said later. “They knew they were doomed but they had all the guts in the world.”

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At the end of the attack, *Herstein*, on which Acting Administrator Page had hoped civilians might be embarked, had been torn from its moorings and lay burning in the harbour. Thirty of the crew, mostly Norwegian, were later captured by the Japanese. Most were lost on *Montevideo Maru*.

The next day - 21 January - reports were received in Rabaul that a large convoy was approaching from the north-west. It was a Japanese naval taskforce of eight cruisers, twelve destroyers, nine submarines and two aircraft carriers with 171 aircraft.

On 21 January, there were also air strikes on Bulolo, Salamaua and Lae, the administrative centre since September when Administrator Sir Walter McNicoll moved there because of volcanic activity in Rabaul.

McNicoll, a very sick man, realised a Japanese occupation was approaching and handed responsibility for civil administration to the NGVR before he left for Port Moresby and Australia.

Civil administration of the Mandated Territory effectively ended as the Japanese occupied Rabaul on 23 January and formally ceased in Papua on 14 February 1942. The separate Papuan and New Guinea administrative units were combined in April into the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU).

By the evening of 21 January all Rabaul civilians had either taken shelter in a nearby precinct called Refuge Gully to await the Japanese or had left town by vehicle for distant plantations.

The next day, 22 January, Rabaul was bombed by fighters and dive bombers. No RAAF aircraft were available, the indigenous population was terrified and the troops apprehensive. Rabaul had all but fallen.

The invasion fleet carrying Major-General Tomitaro Horii's 5300 strong South Seas Force, a brigade group based on the 55th Division that had also taken Guam, arrived off their anchoring points at 11.40 pm.

Soon after midnight on Friday 23 January, Major Bill Owen's A Company heard the hum of an approaching aeroplane and watched as a parachute flare illuminated the harbour. Owen's 90 AIF and 50 NGVR had taken a defensive position along the harbour shoreline north of Vulcan volcano to await the attack.

A fleet of transports launched landing barges, each holding 50-100 men, at six points around the harbour. At 1 am landing craft could be seen heading towards Matupit island.

"The fighting was effectively over within a few hours," says Australian historian, Emeritus Professor Hank Nelson. "Probably less than 100 Japanese and Australians died in battle.

"The Australians were too few to oppose most landings, they were quickly divided, communications between companies and headquarters were lost early. "Those Australians who fought stubbornly were bypassed and naval and air-power directed against them."

By 8 am the main body of the force was mopping-up and Rabaul township was occupied. Soon after 9, Lark Force headquarters received reports that the Japanese were coming “in their thousands” and could not be held.

At about 11, Colonel Scanlan gave the order “every man for himself”. No further defence was feasible. Australian forces withdrew and broke into small parties. Men tried to escape to the north and south coasts of New Britain, struggling through unknown country without maps, medicines and stores. In all, only 450 soldiers and civilians managed to escape.

At 11.30 the Japanese naval force moved up the harbour in line. By noon, the Gazelle Peninsula was in the hands of the invading force. Naval combat troops captured Vunakanau airfield at 1.10 pm. The invasion of Rabaul was complete.

7. The aftermath

In their analysis of the fall of Rabaul, the Japanese surmised that the poor resistance was due to a lack of Australian military intelligence leading to a mistaken calculation that a landing would not occur in that location.

But the chiefs of staff were aware the Japanese would land at Rabaul and did not feel they could offer more than a token garrison. The Australian force was defeated in this first important battle of New Guinea, fighting against odds of three to one and with no support from naval or air forces.

As no provision had been made for the escape of Lark Force, the small groups of men making their way across New Britain faced great difficulties. Only the RAAF had made evacuation plans; its personnel being removed by flying boat.

Australian soldiers remained at large in New Britain for some time. But Lark Force had placed no supply dumps in the interior, let alone planned for guerrilla warfare. Without supplies, the health and military effectiveness of the escapers rapidly declined.

Leaflets dropped by Japanese planes stated: “You can find neither food nor way of escape in this island and you will only die of hunger unless you surrender.” The majority of Australian soldiers were captured or surrendered during the following weeks.

Upon capture, most of the men were interned in camp outside Rabaul. Others met with great brutality. On 4 February, about 160 men were shot or bayoneted at Tol and Waitavalo plantations on the south coast of the Gazelle Peninsula. Six miraculously survived and the massacre was reported in the Australian press in April. The officer responsible, Colonel Masao Kusunose, later committed suicide.

For the Japanese invaders, the conquest of Rabaul had been an uncomplicated operation. To Mitsuo Fuchida, who led the Japanese Air Force assault, the affair was a waste of the talents of Nagumo Force: “If ever a sledgehammer had been used to crack an egg, this was the time,” he observed.

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With the capture of Rabaul, the Japanese commanded a base which became the key staging and supply centre for their plan to dominate the Coral Sea. The Japanese South East Fleet established its headquarters there and, by June 1942, 21,570 troops were stationed in the area, the biggest Japanese base in New Guinea. In 1945 when Japan surrendered there were still nearly 100,000 Japanese troops and auxiliaries in the area.

Back in Australia, there was considerable disquiet about the fall of Rabaul, Timor and Ambon. A court of inquiry into the Japanese landings in these places was conducted in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Ballarat and, in relation to Rabaul, heard from 68 military and civilian witnesses “for the purpose of inquiring into and reporting upon the facts and circumstances associated with the landing of the Japanese forces and events subsequent thereto in New Britain...”

There were nine specific matters to be investigated and general authority to investigate “any other matters” thought desirable. The court also drew upon four previous courts of inquiry relating to Rabaul in which over 30 witnesses had given evidence.

The three-volume report of 29 July 1942 led to Army Minister Frank Forde noting a number of items of evidence which in his view warranted further investigation. He proposed a wider enquiry by an independent investigator on seven points including:

- “whether the forces were properly equipped for their roles and, if proper equipment was not available, whether the forces should have been despatched”
- “the conduct of Commanders”
- “the evacuation of the civil population from Rabaul”
- “whether, in view of the progress of the Japanese advance, adherence to the plans originally laid down was proper”
- “whether proper measures were taken to endeavour to rescue the garrisons, particular that at Rabaul”

Prime Minister Curtin pointed out to Forde on 3 July 1943 that if there was to be a further inquiry it would need to wait until the return of the prisoners of war, including senior military and civil officers who were thought to be held by the Japanese.

By June 1946, when the question of an inquiry was debated in Parliament, Curtin had died and Ben Chifley spoke for the government. The debate on 26-27 June covered Rabaul, Ambon and Timor and other disasters that had occurred early in the war.

In his speech Chifley did not refer specifically to Rabaul, but to “Dunkirk, Malaya, the Middle East and elsewhere”. He said he did not favour inquiries unless it could be shown that men were “corrupt or treasonous rather than fallible and mistaken”. Opposition leader Robert Menzies followed Chifley and said that on “post-mortems” he was ready to “personally agree”.

While some commentators hold the Curtin Government responsible for the disaster of Rabaul with the failure to hold a post-war inquiry cited as evidence,

historian Prof Hank Nelson says the post-war Labor Government had nothing to fear from an inquiry.

The Menzies and Fadden Governments had made the decision to deploy the troops to Rabaul (and to other places where over 20,000 men became prisoners) and Curtin inherited those decisions upon his election in October 1941 at a time of military crisis for Australia.

Prof Nelson says the arguments of the chiefs of staff for maintaining the force in Rabaul were rational and that the government acted in conformity with this advice. War Cabinet minutes record Curtin asking the chiefs for assurances that everything possible was being done for the men in Rabaul.

But for many of the relatives the fact that there was no post-war enquiry remains a source of concern, suspicion and even bitterness.

Did Australia fail the civilians of Rabaul and the members of Lark Force? “There can be no doubt that Rabaul was unprepared and hopelessly defended against Japanese invasion,” Timothy Hall wrote. And, in a view endorsed by many relatives, added: “It was inexcusable that provision was not made by Australia for the evacuation of the civilians.”

8. *Montevideo Maru's* last voyage

The Japanese merchant ship *Montevideo Maru*⁶, built in 1926 to carry emigrants from Japan to South America, was used as a troopship in World War II. On 28 May 1942 it departed Surabaya under the command of Captain Kazuichi Kasahara carrying personnel for Rabaul, where it arrived on 9 June.

There were frequent air raids during the period *Montevideo Maru* was in port but the ship sustained no damage. On 22 June, an estimated 845 prisoners of war from Lark Force and 208 interned civilian men were marched from their camps to board the vessel under the supervision of Japanese guards.⁷

Escorting the men on the voyage in addition to the ship's crew was a naval guard of an ensign, a medical orderly, and 63 ratings. After embarkation, the ship set sail for Hainan island at the south-east corner of China.

The US submarine *Sturgeon*, under the command of Lieutenant Commander William ‘Bull’ Wright was on patrol west of Luzon on the night of 30 June. Like all Japanese and Allied ships carrying prisoners of war, *Montevideo Maru* bore no special markings.

⁶ An extract from Lloyd's Register of British and Foreign Shipping lists *Montevideo Maru* in these terms. Construction: 1926, Mitsubishi Zosen Kaisha Ltd, Nagasaki. Owners: Osaka Syosen KK. Port of registry: Osaka. Rigging: steel twin screws motor ship. Tonnage: 7267 tons gross. Dimensions: 430 feet long, 56 foot beam. Code letters: JIAB. Official No: 31553

⁷ Personnel from the following units are listed as being on board the ship: 2/22nd Infantry Battalion; 1st Independent Company; New Guinea Volunteer Rifles; RAA Heavy Battery; 34th Fortress Engineers; Fortress Signals; 17 Anti-Tank; AA Battery; 2/10th Australian Field Ambulance; 18 & 19 Special Dental Unit; Australian Canteen Service; Australian Army Ordnance Corps; Headquarters New Guinea Area; Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit; Engineers Service Branch; 8 Division Supply Column; RAAF; RAN

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Lt Cdr Wright's log entries for *Sturgeon* state:

30 June 1942: Patrolling northwest of Bojeador as before. Dove at dawn, surfaced at dusk. At 2216 sighted a darkened ship to southwest. At first, due to bearing on which sighted, believed him to be on northerly course, but after a few minutes observation it was evident he was on a westerly course, and going at high speed. He quite evidently had stood out of Babuyan Channel, headed for Hainan.

Put on all engines and worked up to full power, proceeding to westward in an attempt to get ahead of him. For an hour and a half we couldn't make a nickel. This fellow was really going, making at least 17 knots, and probably a bit more, as he appeared to be zig-zagging. At this time it looked a bit hopeless, but determined to hang on in the hope he would slow or change course toward us. His range at this time was estimated at around 18,000 yards. Sure enough, about midnight he slowed to about 12 knots. After that it was easy.

1 July 1942: Proceeding to intercept target as before. Altered course to gain position ahead of him, and dove at 0146. When he got in periscope range, it could be seen that he was larger than first believed, also that his course was a little to the left of west, leaving us some 5,000 yards off the track. Was able to close some 1,000 yards of this, and then turned to fire stern tubes as (i) Only three tubes available forward, and at this range and with large target four torpedo spread desirable; (ii) After tubes had 70D/heads, while heads forward were small ones.

At 0225 fired four torpedo spread, range 4,000 yards, from after tubes. At 0229 heard and observed explosion about 75-100 ft. abaft stack. At 0240 observed ship sink stern first. 0250 surfaced, proceeded to eastward, completing battery charge. Ship believed to be *Rio de Janeiro Maru*, or very similar type, although it is possible it was a larger ship, he was a big one. A few lights were observed on deck just after the explosion, but there was apparently no power available, and his bow was well up in the air in six minutes. Dove at dawn. No further contacts.

On 1 July 1942, about 110 kilometres north-west of Cape Bojeador on Luzon, at north 18 degrees and 40 minutes, east 119 degrees 31 minutes, *Montevideo Maru* listed and sank so quickly – in just 11 minutes according to Lt Cdr Wright's log - there was not even time to radio a distress message. Wright, of course, was unaware the ship carried allied prisoners. It is believed all prisoners perished along with some of the crew and guards.

A subsequent Japanese report to the owners of *Montevideo Maru* said three lifeboats were launched, one of which was severely damaged. Many of the crew and guards got away in the other two and, the following day at 7 pm, made landfall near a lighthouse at Cape Bojeador. In seeking safety, only a small number survived conflict with Filipino guerrillas.

The last resting place of *Montevideo Maru* is on the ocean floor of the South China Sea, probably at a depth of about 4200 metres. Rabaul had contributed over 1000 of the 8000 Australians who died as prisoners of war of the Japanese.

9. The nominal (Katakana) roll

The Australians taken prisoner in January 1942 were held first by the Japanese Army which, after occupying Rabaul, controlled the area until May 1942. Officers recorded prisoners' names as they were rounded up.

Gordon Thomas, editor of the *Rabaul Times* and one of four Australian captives who survived the Japanese occupation of Rabaul, kept a diary of his ordeal. It tells how, in late May 1942 when the Army handed control of Rabaul and the prisoners to the Japanese Navy, it took an entire day for Army officers to conduct a roll-call of "over 200 civilians ... and something like 800 military personnel".

When the Army recorded the names the previous January, prisoners were made to write them after which the names were transcribed into Japanese (Katakana) characters. When the roll was called in May, the prisoners had difficulty recognising the pronunciation of the names.

This Katakana roll, passed from the Japanese Army to the Navy, is almost certainly the basis of the roll carried to Japan and found there at the end of the war. It listed prisoners in camp in Rabaul at the end of May 1942.

By mid-September 1945, the Australian government knew much about what had happened to the prisoners of war and civilian internees in Rabaul. Thomas and the other surviving civilians made statements and Japanese officers in Rabaul admitted that prisoners had sailed on *Montevideo Maru* which had been sunk. This backed up intelligence Australia had received during the war but had been unable to verify.

On 26 September, Army Minister Frank Forde stated that 700-1000 Australians had sailed from Rabaul for Hainan, that they had failed to reach their destination and that the government held "grave fears" for them. But the government still had no confirming documents to justify a definitive public statement.

Forde had been compelled to make the statement because rumours were circulating about the missing men and the Rabaul officers who had survived imprisonment in Japan were about to arrive in Australia and were known to suspect the men had died at sea.

Major Harold Williams, who had worked in Japan pre-war and spoke fluent Japanese, was despatched by the government to investigate the *Montevideo Maru*. He arrived on 27 September to work with the Directorate of Prisoners of War and Internees during which time he interviewed officials of the Japanese Prisoner of War Information Bureau.

Williams had a good idea of what he was looking for. His report states:

Scraps of information collected at DPW & I LHQ over the period of several years prior to Japan's surrender, pointed to the probability that about 1000PW, officials and civilians had been embarked at Rabaul in June 42 for a destination unknown. Close interrogations of recovered Aust PW passing through Manila had confirmed this probability.

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Within 24 hours Williams had the confirmation he was seeking: a letter from the Japanese Navy reporting the sinking of *Montevideo Maru* and the 48-page roll in Katakana characters representing phonetic spellings of the prisoners' names. He radioed his first report on 29 September.

Williams' transliteration of the roll and his report, as well as evidence collected from the Rabaul survivors, form the basis of the archival material on which is based the official history of what occurred.

Two points support the claim that the roll found in Tokyo in late 1945 was an authentic list of the men on *Montevideo Maru*.

First, the roll apparently did not contain the names of Australian Army officers not on *Montevideo Maru* but who were transported to Japan later on *Naruto Maru* and who survived the war. Nor did it contain the names of the four prisoners (including Thomas) who did not leave Rabaul in 1942 but remained as technical assistants to the Japanese.

Secondly, in 1945 after the war had ended and they were freed, Thomas and his co-prisoners compiled a list of the names of the men at the roll call. The list contains 169 names and forms part of the archives of the Australian War Memorial. After the war, the 60 captured officers were also able to supply names of soldiers they had watched march from the camp. These names tallied closely with those on the nominal roll found in Tokyo.

Williams' report states he delivered the Katakana roll brought from Japan to O2E [2nd Echelon] HQ, AMF in Melbourne. It was checked against the prisoners' personal documents and this information formed the basis of the subsequent notification of next of kin.

External Territories Minister Ward made a public announcement on 5 October stating the fears expressed by Forde about *Montevideo Maru* were justified and the sinking was confirmed:

It has now been ascertained the Japanese Navy Department officially informed the Tokio Prisoner of War Information Bureau on 6 June, 1943, that the SS *Montevideo Maru* sailed from Rabaul on approximately 22 June, 1942, carrying 845 prisoners of war and 208 civilians, and that this ship was during its voyage torpedoed near Luzon with a total loss of the prisoners of war and internees embarked at Rabaul. It has also been ascertained that amongst the prisoners of war embarked were members of the 1st Independent Company which had been operating in New Ireland.

Ward also said the roll was being translated and next of kin being informed as names were identified and checked. The casualty lists became public in newspapers between 17 October and 22 November 1942.

"The series of public statements made by the government in September and October 1945 were in accord with what was known with reasonable certainty and issued as soon as possible," says Prof Nelson.

In a bizarre mishap, the Katakana roll subsequently disappeared, which has engendered much speculation and complicated and blurred what should have

been a straightforward process of informing grieving families and allowing them to adjust to their loss.

Professor Nelson has written:

I have no idea what happened to the Katakana roll. There may be documentary evidence that it was placed in Central Army Records, but I have not seen it. It might turn up.

Sometimes these things are referred to another department - say Attorney-General's, because some matter of law arises, or Foreign Affairs - and are subsequently located by accident. But the more people are alerted to the fact that it is important and missing then the chances of it turning up increase.

10. Lack of closure for relatives

Despite the length of time since the Rabaul tragedy, its consequences continue to be powerfully imprinted on the people directly affected and their descendants.

The sacrifice of fathers, grandfathers, brothers and friends killed under Japanese occupation – and the lack of knowledge about how and where many of them met their deaths – ensures lingering uncertainty and grief.

As the women and children bid farewell to their men just before Christmas 1941, they were apprehensive but had no thought they would never see them again. For these people, every Christmas remains a painful reminder of what they lost.

Upon reaching Australia the lives of the evacuees fragmented. Friends drifted apart and families scattered, their plight subsumed within the great disruptions of a nation at war. Margaret Reeson writes in *A Very Long War*:

If the fall of Rabaul and the disappearance of the Australian men in the islands had taken place at a time when the nation was not preoccupied with a great many other military setbacks, that too may have held a larger place in the national consciousness.

As it was, both the evacuation of the women and the disappearance of the men coincided with a time when the Australian people feared invasion by the Japanese, and week after week the daily news was filled with other real and impending disasters.

The evacuation was particularly difficult for women who had been involved in plantations and other commercial enterprises. With their wealth left behind, many struggled financially. Often there was no employer to help. When Rabaul fell, the larger Pacific trading companies took the view, as the captured men were no longer working for them, that they need not continue paying their salaries.

While Army families received soldiers' wages throughout the war,⁸ many civilian wives had no reliable income. Separated from men, homes, livelihood and

⁸ Although it seems families of NGVR members received no pension payments during the war. There is a reported case where a family received no payment until the serviceman, listed as missing, was confirmed dead in 1946 when four years' retroactive-pension was received at once

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community, many struggled. There was an overwhelming feeling of loss, isolation and disempowerment.

The women took what employment they could. Sometimes this meant leaving children with grandparents to find work elsewhere. After the loss of husbands, such separation triggered anxiety and depression. The women felt humiliated by their status as “those poor evacuees”. The children still talk of feeling “different”.

A few letters from the men got through in the weeks immediately following the evacuation of Rabaul. They mentioned air raids and the loneliness of life without families. Then they stopped arriving.

Meanwhile the women and children lived in hope of imminent reunion, even government action to rescue their men.

On 6 February 1942, Army Minister Forde wrote to Prime Minister Curtin:

It is quite apparent, however, that not only the relatives of the Rabaul Garrison, but also the people of Australia are anticipating that some drastic action, which for security reason is not being divulged, is being taken by the Government and that every possible avenue of relief is being utilised.

Should the facts of the position become known to the public, I feel sure it would come as a very great shock, and they would wish to know what endeavours have been made to relieve the situation. I appreciate that there might be very severe limitation on our ability to do this...

In fact, although many of the men who succeeded in fleeing Rabaul were retrieved, nothing could be done for those who remained.

In April 1942, as part of a reciprocal agreement with the Allies, on a bombing raid over Port Moresby the Japanese dropped brief letters from the Rabaul prisoners. These established that many people had been moved into prison camps. Nearly half the missing people either had written letters or were mentioned in them. Much later, some relatives received letters, cards and a few radio messages from officers who had been shifted from Rabaul to Japan.

But beyond this, for most families, what followed was nearly four years of official silence interspersed with disturbing rumours.

The women listened to prisoner-of-war radio broadcasts and mailed 15-word letters through the Red Cross. There were no replies, but the families never gave up hope they would be reunited with their men.

The first detailed newspaper reports of what had happened to Rabaul were released by the censor and began appearing in April 1942. Based mainly on interviews with escapers, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published articles like ‘Gallant beach fighting and terrible retreat’ and survivors’ detailed accounts of the Tol massacre.

Here was an agonising puzzle for the families of the missing: there had been news of a horrific massacre and an unexpected release of letters but, after April 1942, nothing.

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Within weeks of the war ending in September 1945, the terrible fate of Rabaul and the *Montevideo Maru* became clear. Hundreds of people had died in Rabaul and the islands and more than 1000 men had perished in the sinking of the ship.

The overriding need of grief-stricken families was to learn what had happened to *their* men. They had many questions but few satisfactory answers. The government, supported by the opposition, chose not to hold a post-war inquiry into the fall of Rabaul, setting aside the 1942 suggestion by Army Minister Forde that there might be one.

The government's position led to various theories being promulgated about what had happened to the people of Rabaul.

Mrs Frances Ryan, who by now knew she was a widow, wrote to Prime Minister Chifley:

No inquiry into the tragedy of Rabaul has been allowed. You yourself have expressed the opinion that no good can come of it, but as a widow of one of the men I hope the inquiry will be made.

Over 300 civilians were needlessly sacrificed and we women were kept in ignorance far too long. To us has [sic] been the years of anxiety, loneliness and sadness.

But the war was over and Australia was moving on. Many families chose not to discuss what had happened to their men; it was a story too painful to reflect upon. Margaret Reeson writes:

For the families of the men in the islands, therefore, there was little national energy left for what might, in other circumstances, have seen an outpouring of public sympathy and support.

For families of the missing there was no dramatic news, no funerals, no reunions, no visible mourning, no grave, no certainty and no end to the suspense of waiting. The families of the island men received none of the usual overflowing of concern, compassion and practical help on which Australians pride themselves...

And, of the men on *Montevideo Maru*:

There were no witnesses and no remains. How could anyone be sure who went on what ship? Was the government trying to provide a softer version of their end compared to the possibility of torture, executions or painful and lonely death of disease on a jungle track while trying to escape?

Andrea Williams⁹ writes:

At first the families had no choice but to accept the news, but then questions arose causing a pain and uncertainty which persists. There were so many rumours.

Who was on the ship? Did the ship leave Rabaul loaded with the men, and then return a few days later without them? Why would an important document, the

⁹ Grand-daughter of Philip Coote; company manager and great-niece of Hugh Moore Scott, plantation manager, both lost on *Montevideo Maru*

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only reference as to who was on board *Montevideo Maru*, disappear from Central Army Records?

How to explain the inconsistencies between the names on various lists as to who was on the *Montevideo Maru*? Why was there not more acknowledgement of the fate of the New Guinea islands men in Australian history?

Such questions, and others like them, remain. Even now, not all are capable of being answered. But there is one outstanding matter that can be addressed and awaits official attention. It concerns the moral obligation of the Australian nation for the sacrifices made in Rabaul.

In late 1941, the Australian chiefs of staff and the Australian government, realising the dangers involved but also believing the measure was justified in the defence of Australia, chose to retain Lark Force and civil administrators in Rabaul, and did not encourage other civilians to leave until it was too late.

It can be fairly said – and historian Prof Hank Nelson supports such an assertion – that this decision, made by a new government in the most difficult circumstances, challenges the Australian nation with a significant moral obligation to the men and women who died and to their relatives.

These people were compelled to make a sacrifice emanating from a need to defend Australia. It was a sacrifice that made a great contribution to the safety and security of the nation. It is a sacrifice that has never been appropriately acknowledge or recognised.

That is what this Submission and its recommendations are designed to resolve.

11. Existing aspects of recognition

A sense of loss exacerbated by indifference

For many years, in fact for many decades, relatives have sought greater national and official recognition of the sacrifices made by the men and women of Rabaul and the New Guinea islands and of their own grief and unrequited loss.

It is a common complaint that, when representations are made to Parliament, the responses are dismissive and even misleading; seemingly designed to persuade people that sufficient has been done without much having been done at all.

What is perceived as official indifference has led to continuing grief, frustration, bitterness and a sense of rejection and alienation. This should not be the legacy of Rabaul.

After making the journey to Subic Bay in July 2009, Ailsa Nisbet¹⁰ wrote an impassioned letter to the Veterans' Affairs Minister seeking recognition for the men of the 2/22nd Battalion who survived Rabaul and are still alive. Miss Nisbet's letter expresses an elemental powerlessness:

¹⁰ Sister of Pte Donald Nisbet, 2/22nd Battalion, lost on *Montevideo Maru*

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I lost a precious brother on that boat and know just what, after 67 years, this means to us... There have been many promises of being 'looked into' by so many politicians and 'high up' personnel and so far no result...

The men who are left (14) are nearing the end of their lives – wonderful men who work tirelessly for remaining relatives and have fought for the Defence Medal, are too ill and frail to fight any longer, so I am begging you to do something about it.

Don't put it on a shelf and say you will look into it - do it before it's too late. We all have our freedom and our wonderful country because of what these gallant young men sacrificed for us.

I am 82 years of age and would like to see this recognition for them before I die too. This letter is written from a bitter heart.

In the light of a lack of appropriate official action, good Australian citizens feel betrayed by what they perceive as their nation's lack of sympathy and understanding of a huge and sometimes almost unbearable sacrifice.

Official national recognition of the people of Rabaul

With the exception of the Bitapaka War Cemetery near Rabaul, established by Australian Grave Services in 1945, official action to recognise and remember the people who lost their lives in the New Guinea islands and on *Montevideo Maru* has been minimal, and, in respect of the civilians who died, non-existent.

The roll of honour at the Australian War Memorial records the names of all Australia's war dead. It takes the form of bronze panels in a commemorative area and a database accessible on the memorial's website. To be eligible, an individual must have died while serving with or directly as a result of service with a military unit raised by the Commonwealth. Servicemen who died on *Montevideo Maru* are included, but not civilians.

The War Memorial has documents on its website that mark the sinking of *Montevideo Maru*: Major HS Williams' report of 1 October 1945 for the Recovered Personnel Division and the list of what are termed "passengers" who are believed to have left New Britain on *Montevideo Maru* compiled by the prisoners who survived in Rabaul.

The War Memorial has also developed a *Montevideo Maru Document Study*, which it says is:

...based on a 1945 report detailing the lengthy and frustrating search for information on the missing passengers of *Montevideo Maru*... The study is designed to assist high school students to use a primary source document to gain factual information, insights and understanding into this tragic event.

The invasion of Rabaul and what happened to civilians is covered in the Australian official war histories, particularly two chapters in Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust* (1957), and the chapter by Sweeting on civilians in Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942-1945* (1970).

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The official histories tell much about the men who escaped from the New Guinea islands but little of those who died. The *Montevideo Maru* tragedy rates a cumulative 12 lines and footnote across Australia's war histories. This, then, is the diminutive official record of a great Australian tragedy.

Filling the gap - private memorials

Apart from Bitapaka War Cemetery, the most significant memorials have been put in place as the result of private effort and subscription.

Let's start with the North Star Soldiers Memorial Bore and Water Supply, established in 1954, which supplies the NSW town of North Star and includes the name of WT Cracknell,¹¹ a *Montevideo Maru* victim, among the seven personnel honoured.

In 1955, a tablet honouring Methodist martyrs of the Pacific war was erected on the wall of a missionary training institute in Haberfield in Sydney, relocated to Parramatta in 1988. The plaque is in memory of ten Methodist missionaries who died aboard *Montevideo Maru*¹² and two others.

Woorayl District Memorial Hospital in South Australia, built as a World War II memorial, honours local men who died in the conflict, including Jack Howard¹³ who was on *Montevideo Maru*.

There is a small memorial plaque at the Brisbane General Post Office commemorating three wireless technicians¹⁴ of the Postmaster-General's Department who died on *Montevideo Maru*.

At Waverley Cemetery in Sydney, relatives dignified Henry Fulton's death¹⁵ on the ship by dedicating a plaque to his memory.

On 16 September 1993, the Rabaul 1942-45 Memorial was unveiled on the shores of Rabaul Harbour, close to where the men boarded *Montevideo Maru*. It commemorates more than 1200 service personnel who lost their lives in New Britain and New Ireland and who have no known grave. The bronze plaque was paid for by private donations and a \$1000 contribution from the Australian government.

On 6 November 1993, the NGVR & PNGVR Ex-members' Association erected a memorial plaque in the Hall of Memories at Brisbane Cenotaph in honour of 34 NGVR men lost on *Montevideo Maru*. A memorial service is held each year on 1 July. In recent years this service has widened its scope to include all victims on the ship.

¹¹ NX32378 Cpl Walter Thomas Cracknell, 29, 1st Independent Company

¹² These include the Rev William Lawrence King Linggood, 40, of Raluana, New Britain; the Rev William Daniel Oakes, 36, of Pinikidu, New Ireland; and the Rev John William Poole of Kalas, New Britain, 28

¹³ VX46854 Pte John Leslie Howard; Aged 32; 2/22nd Infantry Battalion

¹⁴ Wilfred Leonard Duus, born Brisbane Qld of Rabaul, New Britain, 25; Hedley Fred Turnbull, born Laidley Qld of Rabaul, New Britain, 24; and Thomas Reginald Walsh, born Paddington NSW of Rabaul, New Britain, 41

¹⁵ Henry Bernard Fulton, Clerk, born Waverley NSW of Rabaul, New Britain, 33

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On 4 July 2002, a bronze plaque, remembering 97 named civilians who died in New Ireland and on *Montevideo Maru* was unveiled at the Kavieng War Memorial. Ms Erice Ashby organised and paid for the plaque, which cost \$2000, after the then Veterans' Affairs Minister said her Department could not help civilians and did not want the responsibility of looking after the plaque. "We're bitterly disappointed," Ms Ashby said.

On Saturday 7 February 2004 a commemoration service was held in the Ballarat Botanic Gardens to unveil a memorial for civilians and soldiers who lost their lives on *Montevideo Maru*.

An Australian Capital Territory Memorial was dedicated on 10 August 2006 to honour men and women associated with the ACT who served in conflicts and peacekeeping missions. A website associated with the memorial includes the men on *Montevideo Maru* who had a relationship with the ACT prior to active service.

On 1 July 2009, on the 67th anniversary of the sinking, a *Montevideo Maru* plaque, measuring 1.8 m by 35 cm and engraved in black Italian granite, was unveiled and dedicated at the Hellships Memorial at Subic Bay, Philippines. The plaque is prominent within the Memorial and tells the story of the ship. It was paid for entirely by private subscription.

Undoubtedly there are other small memorials scattered in communities throughout Australia to remember individual victims such as the family plaques at the former Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital and a memorial window for Norman Rothery Gair¹⁶ in Canberra Grammar School chapel.

Recent government recognition of the tragedy

In the House of Representatives on 26 June 2009, in a rare Parliamentary acknowledgement of the tragedy, Veterans' Affairs Minister Alan Griffin MP called for the nation to pause and remember the 1053 Australian lives lost. "War brings many tragedies and today we remember one of the greatest tragedies of the Second World War," he said.

Shadow Minister Louise Markus MP, speaking after the Minister, thanked and acknowledged the men who "made the ultimate sacrifice for this nation, a sacrifice that has contributed to the peace we enjoy today".

Australia's Ambassador to the Philippines, Rod Smith, reinforced these reflections when, concluding a speech at the Subic Bay memorial service on 1 July 2009, he said: "This tragedy is not forgotten. The families are not forgotten. These men are not forgotten. We honour them all."

The Department of Veterans' Affairs recently committed \$7200 to the Angeles City RSL Sub Branch in the Philippines for the installation of an interpretive panel at the Hellships Memorial and a display at a nearby museum to tell the story of *Montevideo Maru*.

¹⁶ VX28693 L/Cpl Norman Rothery Gair, Aged 25; 2/22nd Infantry Battalion

These recent speeches and actions were important to the relatives of the people of Rabaul, as were the events and media publicity surrounding the inauguration of the privately-funded memorial at Subic Bay.

But there remains a strong view, drawn from the absence of official interest and sensitivity down the years, that the sacrifices made need to be more effectively, more prominently and more permanently commemorated by the Australian government on behalf of the Australian people.

12. Recommendations

These young men gave their lives to fight for their country and protect their families. Grandchildren still feel the sadness of their parents' and grandparents' loss. I question why anyone would want to go to war if they know that sacrificing their life for their country will not matter to anyone but their family - Gillian Nikakis¹⁷

More than anything, the relatives and friends of those who died in and around Rabaul, in the New Guinea Islands and on the *Montevideo Maru*, whether they perished in the armed forces or as civilians caught in the maelstrom of war, seek some form of tangible official recognition.

This Submission does not ask the Federal government to finance an undersea search for *Montevideo Maru*.¹⁸ But it does seek the adoption by government of three recommendations.

Recommendation 1: A place for people to remember and honour the sacrifice

That the Australian Government on behalf of the Australian people construct a memorial, inscribed with the names of the dead, in the national capital to commemorate the considerable sacrifice of troops and civilians who died in the defence of the Australian Mandated Territory of New Guinea.

[We want] somewhere we can go, place flowers and remember our loved ones - Phyllis Smith¹⁹

I believe it is important that the men should be remembered by name - Betty Muller²⁰

There is a common view among relatives that the Australian government should erect a memorial in an appropriate place, the Australian War Memorial in Canberra being the most frequently mentioned.

¹⁷ Daughter of Cpl George William Spensley, New Guinea Volunteer Rifles, lost on *Montevideo Maru*

¹⁸ In 2004 the then Coalition Government declined to act on a petition from 950 Australians urging a search for the ship

¹⁹ Daughter of L/Cpl Eric George MacAdam, New Guinea Volunteer Rifles, lost on *Montevideo Maru*

²⁰ Daughter of Cyril John Gascoigne; motor fitter, and sister of Ivan Norman Gascoigne, clerk, aged 15, both lost on *Montevideo Maru*

The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru. Time for Recognition

Relatives feel that past Australian governments have used the existence of privately sponsored memorials to dissuade them from seeking greater national recognition and as an excuse for not taking more meaningful official action.

It is felt the memorial should be inscribed with the names of all those who died – military personnel and civilians alike.

Recommendation 2: An officially designated and commemorated war grave

That the Australian Government initiate action to have the site of the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* declared an official war grave and arrange for a vessel carrying relatives and friends to visit the site for a memorial and wreath-laying service.

After 67 years, the only thing that is important is that the ship is located and declared a war grave - Jude Sullivan²¹

The Australian Government has an obligation to all the living relatives of the deceased to find and locate the final resting place of the *Montevideo Maru* then declare the site as a national war grave - Beverley Saunders²²

While the wreck of *Montevideo Maru* lies at great depth and has not been found, the coordinates logged by the skipper of *Sturgeon* as 18 degrees 40 minutes north and 119 degrees 31 minutes east provide a precise enough location to enable the declaration of an official war grave.²³

There are precedents. For example, in March 2009, after a long campaign, the UK Ministry of Defence agreed to designate the site of the sinking of the troopship *Mendi* in the English Channel as an official war grave. In February 1917, 615 members of the 5th Battalion, South African Native Labor Corps perished when *Mendi* was rammed by *Darro*. It took 92 years to gain recognition, a decision expected to be formalised by the British Parliament in late 2009.²⁴

The Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee urges the government to set upon this task immediately and also plan for a memorial service aboard a Royal Australian Navy vessel in the vicinity of where *Montevideo Maru* went down.

²¹ Niece of Sgt Richard Stanford Roberts, 1st Independent Company, lost on *Montevideo Maru*

²² Daughter of Bandsman Corporal John Stanley Robertson, 2/22nd Infantry Battalion, lost on *Montevideo Maru*

²³ At these points of latitude and longitude a minute is equivalent to about 1.8 km

²⁴ In 2006, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission launched 'Let us die like brothers', an educational CD-ROM telling the story of *Mendi*, the men on board and their legacy. The resource was distributed to every secondary school in the UK and, in 2007, across South Africa to encourage young South Africans to remember the disaster

Recommendation 3: A sacrifice that is recognised and a story that is told

That the Australian Government appoint an officially sanctioned group, which will include Friends of Montevideo Maru, to develop strategies to ensure that the fall of Rabaul and surrounding islands and the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* remain an enduring part of the nation's history.

I believe it is important for the whole story to be told, as it is such an important part of Australian history. If we send men to fight an unwinnable battle with obsolete weapons and then abandon them and hardly mention them in our history books, what sort of message does this give Australians - Gillian Nikakis²⁵

Friends of Montevideo Maru believe strategies need to be developed to ensure that the story of an Australian territory overwhelmed and devastated by war and with consequent great loss of life should not be allowed to fade from the pages of our nation's history.

To this end, it is proposed that a task force be established for a finite period, perhaps twelve months, to develop strategies to ensure that the fall of Rabaul and Australia's greatest maritime disaster remain an enduring part of our history. The Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee is willing to provide some members of this group.

As part of a broad consultation conducted by the Committee in the preparation of this Submission, many suggestions were offered about how the story of the Men of Rabaul and *Montevideo Maru* could be embodied in Australian social history. These suggestions will be submitted to the task force for consideration.²⁶

There is still much work to be done.

²⁵ Daughter of Cpl George William Spensley, New Guinea Volunteer Rifles, lost on *Montevideo Maru*

²⁶ Suggestions include a special display at the Australian War Memorial; the story told in schoolbooks at elementary school level; the official war histories, written in 1957 and 1970 before the expiration of the '30 year rule', be updated in respect of the fall of Rabaul; archival documents relating to the history of the invasion of Rabaul be better organised and made more accessible and freely available to researchers; award Lark Force members the Defence Medal for overseas duty

Annex I. The Salvation Army Band

The band of the 2/22nd Battalion was comprised almost entirely of members of The Salvation Army led by one of Australia's brightest young composers of the inter-war period, W Arthur Gullidge. Military bandsmen in time of war also functioned as stretcher-bearers.

Salvation Army members served in all branches of the Armed forces during World War II. Many joined as combatants while others occupied support roles to reconcile their Christian beliefs with the realities of war.

The Brunswick Citadel Band, under bandmaster Gullidge, was one of The Salvation Army's best. At the outbreak of war, the military urged Gullidge to enlist and he did so with nine other members of the Brunswick Band.

Gullidge then arranged with his friend Major HR Shugg, the Southern Command bandmaster, to ensure they were all posted to the same unit, the 2/22nd Battalion. The band formed at Victoria Street Drill Hall in Melbourne on 15 July 1940 comprising 23 Salvationists and two non-Salvationists.

Whilst the core of the 2/22nd Battalion Band were members of the Brunswick band, eight other Melbourne Salvation Army Corps - Moreland, Mordialloc, Preston, Fairfield, Thornbury, Northcote, Springvale and Camberwell - were represented as well as bandsmen from Geelong, Launceston and Petersham in Sydney. Six of the bandsmen were also members of The Salvation Army's elite Melbourne Staff Band.

The 2/22nd Battalion band was considered one of the best in the AIF and Gullidge arranged a book of *Music For Ceremonial Occasions*, which remained the standard for the Australian Military until the mid-1970's.

As the Battalion paraded through Melbourne before its embarkation for Rabaul, it marched to a Gullidge arrangement of the theme from *The Wizard of Oz*.

In Rabaul, the band took an active part in the life of the community, assisting the local constabulary band and the Methodist Church choir.

When the Japanese invaded, all but one band member were captured or killed, Fred Kollmorgen escaping overland to eventual safety. The captured bandsmen, including Gullidge, were aboard *Montevideo Maru* when it was torpedoed.

In 1956 the Australian military inaugurated the Gullidge Medal for the best military musical apprentice and the Defence Force Academy of Music continues to present an annual Gullidge Award.

The marches of Arthur Gullidge are still played around the world. Gullidge and the band of the 2/22nd Battalion occupy a distinct niche in Australia's musical and military history.

Annex II. The relatives' stories

This Submission is not only about honouring the sacrifice made by those people in Rabaul and the New Guinea islands who died in the defence of Australia. It is also about paying tribute to their relatives, who also gave so much.

Annette Baggie

I read with interest the recent article in the *North Shore Times* about the *Montevideo Maru*. My late mother's first husband was one of the Australian servicemen on the ship after being captured in New Guinea: Gunner Keith Morden Smith [NX52916 AIF 17 A/Tk Bty Royal Australian Artillery]. I know my mother never received a death certificate at the time.

NX52916 Gnr Keith Morden SMITH; 17th Anti-Tank Battery; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 25

Chris Brier-Mills

My uncle, Pte Kevin George Russell VX30014 (known to his family as Keith), was a member of the 2/22 infantry and was lost when the ship was sunk by the *Sturgeon*. The story handed down was that Keith died near the end of the war when a hospital ship was sunk by the Japs. It was quite a shock to learn the truth of his death.

VX30014 Pte Kevin George RUSSELL; 2/22nd Infantry Battalion; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 27

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 two.

Donald Joseph BELL; Planter; Born Herberston, Queensland; Resided Teripax Plantation, Tabar Island; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 30. (Son of John William BELL)

John William BELL; Planter; Born Herberston, Queensland; Resided Penipol Plantation, New Ireland; Executed Kavieng, New Ireland 18 Feb 1944; Aged 64. (Father of Donald Joseph BELL)

Alan & John Bell

I read the article in the *North Shore Times*. Our grandfather James Leonard Ormond suffered the same fate as Andrea Williams' grandfather and great-uncle.

James Leonard ORMOND; Plantation Manager; Born Devonport, England, UK; Resided Djaul Island, New Ireland; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 64. (Served World War I; Regt No 472; 21st Infantry Battalion)

Claudia Bond

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.

Claude Garfield CHADDERTON; Planter; Resided Lamerika and Kapsu Plantations, New Ireland; Executed Kavieng, New Ireland 18 Feb 1944; Aged 53. (Served World War I; Regt No 90828; Depot Company)

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Gerald Borthwick

My grandfather the Hon GG Hogan MLC was the Crown Law Officer in Rabaul from 1922. He fought in World War I as a Lieutenant in Artillery, was promoted to Major, mentioned in dispatches and recommended for the award of the Military Cross. My grandmother also served overseas in World War I as a staff nurse at 1 Australian General Hospital. She lived to her 100th year, yet never a day passed without mourning for her husband. Just one of the many widows left to wonder how this was allowed to happen.

Gerald George HOGAN, MC; Crown Law Officer; Born Melbourne, Victoria; Resided Rabaul, New Britain; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 56. (Served World War I; Major 1 Division Artillery)

Kerry Brown

My great uncle Albert Carr was on board the ship when it was hit.

VX29724 L/Sgt Albert CARR; 1st Independent Company; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 39

Brian Chauncy

One of the prisoners of war on the *Montevideo Maru* was John Harold McKenzie Edwards, also known as Jack Edwards. Jack was the wharf manager for Burns Philp at Rabaul and was taken prisoner by the Japanese. Mrs Edwards passed away in the '70s in her 103rd year.

I know Mr and Mrs Edwards had no children and it would be very unfortunate if the memory of this highly decorated and brave soldier from the World War I was not properly commemorated.

I commend you on your good work with the fight for a memorial and wish you continuing success in your quest for proper recognition of these unfortunate and brave people.

John Harold EDWARDS DCM MC MM; Supervisor; Born Terang, Victoria; Resided Rabaul, New Britain; Previously Enlisted NGVR - NG4053; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 52. (Served World War 1; Regt No 845; Lieut 21st Infantry Battalion)

Edward Cooper

My uncle Arthur Cecil Cooper NX191469 enlisted on 2 May 1941 in Bega NSW. He served with AA & MIL LCFT Depot as a Gunner. He was my youngest uncle of a large family. Three brothers also served and returned.

I was born on 2/5/1942, on his birthday. Between the time of his capture and subsequent loss on the *Montevideo Maru*, I was given the second name of Arthur as the family had not heard any news at the time.

NX191469 (N109814) Gnr Arthur Cecil COOPER; Rabaul Anti-Aircraft Battery Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 19

Bruce Crawford OAM

My mother's cousin Frank Veale Saunders was a plantation owner on New Ireland. He served in World War I, attained the rank of Captain and was awarded the OBE (Military). Frank's sister Ruth married Lt Colonel John Charles Mullaly OBE of Natava Plantation, also an NGVR man. My experience with Ministers for Veterans Affairs going back to the days of Bronwyn Bishop is that they all need some prodding along.

Frank Veale SAUNDERS OBE; Planter; Born Stanmore, NSW; Resided Kavieng, New Ireland; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 50

Marg Curtis

My uncle John George Groat VX23647, who was in the 2/22 was taken prisoner and said to be on board the *Montevideo Maru*.

VX26347 Pte John George GROAT; 2/22nd Infantry Battalion; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 28

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Knut W Edvardsen

My uncle Hans Teien, born in Sandefjord, Norway on 3 November 1915, was one of the crew members on MS *Herstein* and later perished in the catastrophic attack on *Montevideo Maru*. Hans was one of four brothers and one sister (my mother). One of my other uncles, Lars Teien, a brother of Hans, perished in 1944 as a crew member on MS *Braganza*.

Hans TEIEN; Motorman; Born Bukkestad, Sandjfiord, Norway; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 26; Next of Kin - Thorbjarn TEIEN, Father

Michael Fittler

My great uncle Harry Francis Schiffmann NX40995 was a member of the 1st Independent Company (L Force) commando unit and was stationed at Kavieng in July 1941. When the Japanese invaded the island those who could escaped on board the *Induna Star* but were captured and taken to Rabaul as POWs. As you know these prisoners were then put on *Montevideo Maru* which was subsequently sunk.

Harry was raised Tenterfield, a small town in Northern NSW where a large number of his extended family still reside. My mother is alive and very interested in developments regarding the *Montevideo Maru*.

NX40995 Pte Harry Francis SCHIFFMANN; 1st Independent Company; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 38

Eric Franks

My brother, AB Franks NX47288, was in the 1st Australian Independent Company and was taken prisoner at Rabaul. We don't know if he was on the *Montevideo Maru*. It was presumed he was. We had one letter from him after he was taken prisoner.

It would be a big relief for relatives of the 1st Australian Independent Company POWs to have a list of those who perished on the *Montevideo Maru*. My brother would have been 92 next month. My older brother who is a returned soldier and myself are the only remaining family still alive.

NX47288 Pte Allen Bernard FRANKS; 1st Independent Company; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 23

Jan Gambrill

My father was on that ship with other civilians. His name Ronald Norman Wayne and he was a lay Methodist missionary who explored parts of New Britain with Rev Brawn and others in the 1920's and early 1930's. Later he joined the Administration and was the official court interpreter. When Japan took over Rabaul, I was at boarding school in Gordon but my mother and young brother were evacuated.

Ronald Norman WAYNE; Public Servant; Born Sydney NSW; Resided Rabaul New Britain; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 38

Håkan Gustafsson

My name is Håkan Gustafsson from Sweden and my uncle Göte Gustafsson was on board the copra loading Norwegian vessel *Herstein* and the *Montevideo Maru*.

Robyn Hanna

My family had a friend on the *Montevideo Maru*, Bruce Lorraine Dargin. We are so happy that at last someone is doing something about this mystery. Thank you so much for the work you are doing to try to come to the truth

NX59242 L/Bdr Bruce Lorraine DARGIN; 17th Anti-Tank Battery; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 27

Graeme Hockey

My wife's grandfather Philip Coote and his brother in law Hugh Scott were on the ship.

Philip COOTE; Company Manager; Born London, UK; Resided Rabaul, New Britain; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 54

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Hugh Moore SCOTT; Plantation Manager; Born Suva, Fiji; Resided Asalingi Plantation, New Britain; Lost Montevideo Maru

Don Hook

My father Corporal (later Sergeant) Wally Hook, a member of the First Independent Company, was based at Kavieng. He was in Rabaul for medical treatment at the time of the Japanese invasion. He and another commando, also in Rabaul for medical treatment, decided to go it alone. They walked for weeks before being picked up at Drina and taken to Port Moresby on the *Laurabada*.

Judy Ireland

My mother's eldest brother Gunner Keith Morden (Jim) Smith went down with the *Montevideo Maru* and although he died two years before I was born I have always had an interest in the ship and its occupants. My uncle was part of Lark Force, initially in 17th Anti-Tank then part of the 2/22. My poor grandfather many years later heard the news of what happened and had a heart attack - but luckily he lived until 1960.

NX52916 Gnr Keith Morden SMITH; 17th Anti-Tank Battery; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 25

Barbara Knowles

I have no family connection with the ship but have always had a keen interest in this tragic event. My father, who is now 86, served in Lae in World War II and as a young man had a connection with Arthur Gullidge. Both were involved in Salvation Army banding in Melbourne prior to the War. My sister and her husband are currently serving as missionary officers of The Salvation Army in Port Moresby.

Ever since I can remember, the story of the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* has been spoken about in our family with much sadness and reverence. My father and I share your frustration at the lack of recognition for the POWs who perished. And we applaud any efforts made to locate the missing nominal roll.

I am keen to see promotion of awareness of the tragedy of the *Montevideo Maru*. I believe that the families involved deserve recognition for their loved ones. Australians should know more about the largest maritime loss of our fellow countrymen.

VX37499 Sgt William Arthur GULLIDGE; 2/22nd Infantry Battalion; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 33

James Lloyd

My uncle, John Morell, was one of those on the *Montevideo Maru*. I would be interested in becoming a Friend of Montevideo Maru.

NGX466 (NG4052) Pte John Francis MORELL; 1st Independent Company; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 23

Fay Long

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 news on progress made.

QX64944 (Q197046) Pte Ronald Edward WALLIS; Rabaul Ordnance; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 28

Roderick Maclean

My father Sgt CI Maclean NGVR and grandfather CHR Maclean, a civilian, were lost on this vessel. I would very much like to become a Friend of Montevideo Maru.

NGX475 (NG4013) Charles Ian MACLEAN; New Guinea Volunteer Rifles; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 36

Charles Hector Roderick MacLEAN; Manager; Born Sydney, NSW; Resided Rabaul, New Britain; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 61

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John Mansley

My uncle Private Frederick William Mansley [NX60075 AASC 8 Div Sup Col] was on the *Montevideo Maru*.

NX60075 Pte Frederick William MANSLEY; 8 Division Supply Company, AASC; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 24

Rev John May

As Anglican chaplain to Lark Force at Rabaul, I was captured on 23 January 1942 and said goodbye to the men as they were marched out of camp to embark on the *Montevideo Maru*. I had to go with the party on the *Naruto Maru*.

Nola McCann

My father was Gunner Helge Rumar George Bjorklof (NX55339) believed to have been lost on the *Montevideo Maru* during World War II. My mother told me he "stayed back to look after the wounded" but I took this to mean he had not retreated with the other soldiers when he had the chance.

However, I am delighted to know about the work being done to have the tragedy acknowledged. I am keen to be a Friend of Montevideo Maru and to help in any way I can.

VX55339 Gnr Helge Runar George BJORKLOF; 17th Anti-Tank Battery; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 36

Alison Meldrum

Our family records say that Mum's cousin, Edwin Malcolm Abbott (known as Malcolm or Mac) was one of the civilians on the *Montevideo Maru*. He was a Seventh Day Adventist Missionary working in Rabaul. Mac hasn't any direct descendants. He was married but hadn't any children. He was also an only child so there aren't any nieces or nephews either. He was about 32 at the time of his death; born in 1910 but I don't have the exact date.

Pastor Edwin Malcolm ABBOTT; Mission Superintendent; Born Waverley, NSW; Resided Toboi, Rabaul; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 33

Greg Miles

My great uncle Bruce George Patterson [NX 36777 1st Independent Coy] was on the ship. It is extremely encouraging to see the interest generated in the story and possible search for the wreck.

NX36777 Pte Bruce George PATTERSON; 1st Independent Company; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 22

Paul Mishura

Thanks for the newsletter, which I have forwarded to our resident World War II historian, teacher Mark Johnston. He is the author of a number of books about World War II and was recently discussing the *Montevideo Maru* with his boys. Last night I discovered Thomas Evan Evans died on the *Montevideo Maru*, making him the third Scotch College boy known to have died on it (the others being Carson and Oaten). None of their three deaths were known by Scotch until recently.

Thomas Evan EVANS; Technical Assistant; Born Nelson, New Zealand; Resided Rabaul, New Britain; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 38

Lewis William CARSON; Planter; Born Yanerathan, Victoria; Resided Fead Island; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 48

Frederick Edmund OATEN; Plantation Manager; Born Seymour, Victoria; Resided Komuli Plantation, Manus Island; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 30

Gillian Nikakis

My father was manager of Colyer Watson, and a friend of Andrea William's grandfather, Philip Coote, who was manager of Burns Philp. I've had a book published on the Japanese

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invasion and was interested in examining whether civilians were on the *Montevideo Maru*. Absorbing, fascinating, but the jury is still out.

NGX490 (NG4031) Cpl George William SPENSLEY; New Guinea Volunteer Rifles; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 38

Ailsa Nisbet

I have just recently returned from a Montevideo Maru dedication in Subic Bay in the Philippines. It was a very emotional and long waited for recognition of the worst disaster in Australian history that so few people know. I lost a precious brother on that boat and know just what, after 67 years, this means to us... These beautiful young boys from the 2/22nd Battalion were sent to Rabaul – all volunteers to save our precious country, young gallant men who wanted to be in the Middle East to finish off the war, as they said.

The men who are left (14) are nearing the end of their lives – wonderful men who work tirelessly for remaining relatives and have fought for the Defence Medal, are too ill and frail to fight any longer, so I am begging you to do something about it. I am 82 years of age and would like to see this recognition for them before I die too. This letter is written from a bitter heart.

VX21363 Pte Donald NISBET; 2/22nd Independent Company; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 24

Kirsten Ottesen

My father, Reidar Thorbjørn Myhre, was a prisoner from MS *Herstein* on *Montevideo Maru* and unfortunately one of the 31 Norwegians on board. Reidar was born in Oslo in 1904 and was married to Borghild and they had one child, me.

Reidar MYHRE; 2nd Engineer; Born Oslo, Norway; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 38; Next of Kin - Borghild MYHRE, Wife

Suzanne Pascoe

It is very gratifying that there is a group trying to give this terrible disaster its rightful place in history. My father Frank Wearne Pascoe VX28754 born 29/8/1916 was in Lark Force and listed as being on the ship. He had passed his Corporal's exams by the time of his capture but hadn't had any men assigned to him.

Mum received a POW letter which was one of those retrieved from the sea after a Japanese bombing raid. He bluffed Mum that he was treated well by the Japanese! She heard the story from two different sources that he had stayed behind to look after soldiers too ill to move, presumably before capture. I know he was just an ordinary soldier but special to me even though I never met him!

VX28754 L/Cpl Frank Wearne PASCOE; 2/22nd Infantry Battalion; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 25

Keith Payne

My late mother told me I was named after her brother, Keith Gratton, who was presumed lost on the ship, so I have always been interested in his fate, and that of all the others on board. It is good that this important part of our war history is finally being given some publicity as it appears to have been ignored for many years by authorities and the media.

SX11445 (SP4534) Sgt Keith William GRATTON; L Heavy Battery, Rabaul; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 23

Cheryl Rajamae

I am the niece of Francis Meddings who was on the *Montevideo Maru* when it was torpedoed by the Americans. He and his best mate Wilfred Trigg were both bandsman from the Geelong Salvation Army. I am the only relative who is interested in Uncle Frank and would like to know more about the ship that was their watery grave on. The disaster left my grandmother very distressed.

VX27254 Pte Francis Roy MEDDINGS; 2/22nd Infantry Battalion; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 22

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VX40058 Cpl Wilfred Ernest TRIGG; 2/22nd Infantry Battalion; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 28

Beverley Saunders

I was interested to read the newsletter especially about the plaque at Subic Bay honouring the men on the *Montevideo Maru*. I am the daughter of John Robertson VX37497 of the 2/22nd Battalion Band who died on the *Montevideo Maru*. I commend all your efforts to raise awareness of this tragedy and any efforts to locate the remains of the ship.

VX37497 Cpl John Stanley ROBERTSON; 2/22nd Infantry Battalion; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 25

Phyllis Smith

We were Rabaul residents prior to the Japanese invasion. My mother, two siblings and I were evacuated but my father, Eric George MacAdam, remained as a member of the NGRV. He was lost in the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*. My mother Dora MacAdam, siblings Terry and Diana and I were evacuated in December 1941. Dad later apparently boarded *Montevideo Maru*. At the end of the war my mother received a letter enclosing Dad's signet ring and some keys, from Dora Rosa (Roea?) who was left behind at the time of the evacuation and saw Dad just before he was captured.

NGX503 (NG4045) L/Cpl Eric George MacADAM; New Guinea Volunteer Rifles; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 43

Kate Snow-Reyes

I would be greatly interested in hearing any news about the search for the nominal roll and the ship as my great uncle, Fred Mansley, was a member of Lark Force and it is believed he perished aboard the *Montevideo Maru*. I know what heartache the uncertainty surrounding his supposed death caused my grandmother and her family, so for all their sakes I would like the mystery solved.

NX60075 Pte Frederick William MANSLEY; 8 Division Supply Company, AASC; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 24

Jude Sullivan

My name is Judith Sullivan and I would like to register my mum Nancy Wade as a Friend. Her brother was on the *Montevideo Maru*. She would really like to keep up with what is happening and if any new information comes to light. Richard Stanford Roberts was his name and he was part of the 1st Independent Company that was with Lark Force and one of four brothers who went to war.

SX2804 Sgt Richard Stanford ROBERTS; 1st Independent Company; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 27

Mike Sullivan

I hope the efforts of the committee are successful without too much more delay. When in Canberra last year I visited the War Memorial and eventually found my brother George's name on 'the wall'. It took a while and there is no doubt that a singular memorial for the Rabaul people would be great. My late parents would be delighted at the efforts your committee is making

TX4386 (T44274) Gnr Walter Derwent George SULLIVAN; L Heavy Battery, Rabaul; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 21

Mary Symons

I think my father Dr H Champion Hosking was on the *Montevideo Maru*. My mother, sister and I were evacuated from Rabaul on the *Macdhui* in December 1941. I would love to hear more about the *Montevideo Maru*. I wonder also if Mr Rudd will find the money to establish exactly where it is.

Herbert Champion HOSKING; Medical Practitioner; Born Murtoa, Victoria; Resided Rabaul, New Britain; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 47 (Served World War I; Lieutenant 10 Infantry Battalion)

The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru. Time for Recognition

Mike Tobin

My mother's sister lost her husband on the ship (they were married in June 1941) and naturally I never got to meet him. Colin Jackson QX12940 was a medic with the 1st Independent Company at Kavieng and was amongst those captured on the *Induna Star* attempting to escape after Kavieng was attacked.

QX12940 Cpl Colin JACKSON; 1st Independent Company; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 24

Bob Williams

My uncle Sapper Francis Gordon Williams [TX4111 Fortress Engineers] was lost on the *Montevideo Maru*. He was from Lenah Valley in Hobart and aged 22. It's great what you're doing and my family would very much like to be kept informed. Surely the time has come to find the *Montevideo Maru*.

TX4411 (TP10774) Spr Francis Gordon WILLIAMS; Rabaul Fortress Engineers; Lost Montevideo Maru; Aged 22

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The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru. Time for Recognition



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257 Elizabeth Street
Melbourne
3 November 1945

Dear Sister Jackson,

Although it is such sad circumstances, I am happy to hear from you, I can assure you that you are a very real person in my mind because I have often talked of you with Colin. As you know Colin and I were very good friends, and I had the greatest admiration for him.

I know how deeply Colin loved you, and that was only a reflection of your love for him, so I can imagine your sorrow, and I only wish I could do something to lighten the burden for you.

The simple facts of my last knowledge of him are these - Colin, Bill Taylor and Frank Pollock were with me at Head Quarters detail in Kavieng. We were heavily bombed on 21 January 1942, and although none of us were hit, we had a busy time with the wounded. The Japanese landed at about 3.00 a.m. on 23 January. They were about 4,000 strong against our 100 odd, and after destroying the aerodrome and petrol, we withdrew into the jungle. Colin was with the party that stayed on the aerodrome and was amongst the last to leave Kaveing.

After about ten days in the jungle it was obvious that we were hopelessly surrounded, and Major Wilson decided to attempt to try and run the Japanese blockade, and at least reach the Trobriand Islands where there was radio with which we could communicate with Port Moresby. We did well along the coast of New Ireland, but on the morning of 1 February we were sighted by a Japanese sea plane and bombed. We were less than 100 miles from the Trobriand Islands. Late that day a destroyer came alongside and took us to Rabaul.

Colin was an example of bravery and calmness at all times, and his manner of caring for the sick did a lot towards maintaining the morale of the men at this difficult time. His outstanding effort was when we had been struck by a near-miss bomb. The ship was holed and threatening to sink, there were four fatally wounded, and about thirty injured. Although the sea plane was manoeuvring into position to make a second attack, Colin calmly carried on with the work I had allotted him, namely to look for men who were hurt, and see that they had morphine and any other first-aid that they needed. I will always remember him walking calmly across the deck with a syringe in his hand looking for anyone who was wounded.

After we were taken to Rabaul - Colin, Bill and some of the orderlies with the 2/12th Battalion looked after the sick in camp. Colin was by far the best nurse we had. I often wondered if it was due to your tuition? He had charge of the most seriously wounded. The conditions were very difficult, but Colin successfully collected from the Japanese, often by very dubious means, enough blankets, soap and towels to see that the most seriously sick were clean and comfortable as possible.

With Bill, and other boys, Colin would take turns at accompanying the working parties to the wharves as first-aid attendants. Of course the "acquisition" of food and other comforts was very brisk there, and Colin did more than his share of the work.

Except for a few scratches that we all had, Colin had no wounds or illness at any time.

On the morning of June 22nd we woke up to find machine guns all around the camp. All the Officers were put in one hut and the rest told to pack up and move. They took the civilian doctors but would not take us, because they said they were ordered to keep all Officers. Colin and Bill were cheerful in spirits when they said good-bye, and they marched off down to the ship. That is the last I saw or heard of my boys. While I realize it was outside my control, I feel it very badly, that I came back, and the men I was responsible for, did not.

I am sorry I can say nothing that will help the lost spark of hope that I know you had, but I personally feel that this ship, which we're now told is the Monte Video Maru is gone and all those good fellows with it.

I can assure you that as a soldier your husband was a man of whom you can justifiably be proud. The fortune of war was such, that he fought and died in a small, quickly forgotten action, but those of us who knew Colin will remember him as a brave, good fellow of a most lovable type. I hope this short account of our happenings will fill in a few gaps, but I wish that I could meet you and tell you of all the little details that you want to know.

Would you please give my respects, and condolences to Colin's parents - I do not know their address at present, but I would like to write to them sometime.

I hope you have much happiness and good health in the future to make up for the sadness of the past, although you have memories richer than most of a wonderful character and that is small compensation.

My very best wishes for you.

Yours sincerely,
Vincent Bristow

Letter to Joyce Jackson about her brother Colin written by Dr Vincent Bristow, 3/11/1945

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