

## **SECOND WORLD WAR (1941-45): CAUSES, EVENTS, OUTCOMES AND NATURE OF AUSTRALIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN RABAU**

**Rabaul was then the capital of the Australian administered Territory of New Guinea.**

### **AN INSIGHT INTO THE FIRST ENGAGEMENT OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR ON AN AUSTRALIAN TERRITORY**

**CONTENT** (Including links to the Australian History Curriculum)

**Examine Australia's relationship with New Guinea and its implications during the Second World War** (ACDSEH024): *Literacy; Creative Thinking*

- Locate Rabaul on a map
- Identify how, when and why Rabaul became an Australian territory

**Investigate how the threat of a Japanese invasion contributed to Australia's changed allegiance** (ACDSEH110): *Literacy; Critical and Creative Thinking*

- Why did Australia support Britain so strongly in the First World War?
- Who became Australia's main ally in December 1941? Explain the reasons for this change, identifying key events and people.
- Explain why Rabaul was a key strategic military base.
- Examine the different groups involved in the defence of Rabaul, New Britain, and Kavieng, New Ireland, and the consequences of the Japanese invasion.

**Examine Australia's responsibility to the people of Rabaul and the New Guinea islands** (ACDSEH107): *Ethical Understanding*

At the Australian War Cabinet meeting on 12 December 1941 the Australian Government Ministers were presented with 3 options for the Rabaul garrison:

- 1) Do nothing
  - 2) Reinforce the garrison
  - 3) Withdraw and abandon the area
- What option did the Government decide on?
  - What were the reasons for this decision?
  - Consider the consequences
  - Reflect on whether it was an ethical choice.

**The experiences of Australians during the Second World War** (ACDSEH): *Critical and Creative Thinking; Personal and Social Capability*

Examine the different reactions and recollections of POWs and civilian internees.

Particular emphasis could be on those Australians isolated on the New Guinea islands following invasion and occupation by an enemy force, the POWs and internees kept in Rabaul and Kavieng (either for a few months or for the whole of the war years), and those POWs who were sent to Japan.

- Appreciate diverse perspectives
- Identify and clarify information and ideas

## **BACKGROUND NOTES**

### **Part 1: How and Why Australia acquired New Guinea Territories**

### **Part 2: The Fall of Rabaul and the Consequences, including the experiences of POWs and Civilian Internees**

The number of lessons will depend on the time that teachers have for teaching this wartime history. For example, they could give a lesson on:

- how and why Australia got involved in having territories in New Guinea (1880s – 1921)
- why Rabaul was the first battle for Australians on Australian soil in both WWI and WWII, preceding Darwin by three weeks.
- the fall of Rabaul during WW2 (1942 -1945) and what happened to the Australian civilians (men, women and children), servicemen and servicewomen, and also the local New Guinea and Chinese population.
- why Rabaul is connected with Australia's worst maritime disaster

**This WWI and WW2 history supplement about Rabaul and the New Guinea islands will give fresh perspectives to history students and is worth studying for several reasons.**

**The first part**, about how and why Australia acquired New Guinean territories will give students of history an insight into Australia's close relationship with New Guinea which goes back to the early 1880s and led to Papua New Guinea's independence from Australia in 1975.

Also, it explains why there's over 300 names of Australians from New Guinea amongst the names of WW2 civilian war dead in the Books of Remembrance which are in Westminster Abbey, London.

**Part two** looks at the Fall of Rabaul and its consequences on an Australian population. The Japanese invasion of Rabaul and the New Guinea islands during January 1942 marked the beginning of WW2 in Papua and New Guinea, and the first time an Australian territory had been invaded.

Following the Japanese occupation of Rabaul on 23 January 1942, on the next day, Australia's Acting Prime Minister and Minister for the Army, made an emergency broadcast - *'the Battle for Australia has commenced' and 'Anniversary Day 1942 is a solemn day for Australia. For the first time in her history, an attack has been launched against her territory; for the first time her soil has been violated and the militia has probably seen battle'.*

<https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/earshot/the-war-we-forgot/9083624>

Whilst the battles on the New Guinea islands were brief, many Australians were killed and the very strategic port town of Rabaul, with its valuable deep-water harbour, fell to the Japanese armed forces. Rabaul would become a military fortress for the Japanese headquarters during the Pacific War with over 100,000 Japanese soldiers and support groups stationed there, and a base for the taking of Port Moresby, then in the Australian territory of Papua. Rabaul was, ultimately, one of the most heavily bombed towns in WWII.

Additionally, a very large number of Australians, around 1,300 to 1,400 people, which included civilians as well as military personnel, would become prisoners of war. Most would not survive the war. How they died will give students an insight into how prisoners of war died during WW2 and how some survived the war. Included was an 11 year old boy who was shot for 'spying'.

On 18 April 2023 the significance of this wartime history was highlighted by the discovery of the wreck of the Japanese prisoner of war transport ship, the *MS Montevideo Maru*. This discovery was led by the Silentworld Foundation. [See article here](#). With thanks to:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-04-24/new-images-from-the-montevideo-maru-shipweck-car-truck-seabed/102261198>



Photo of Simpson Harbour, Rabaul, with thanks to John Lau

## Part 1: How and Why Australia acquired New Guinea Territories

### **Pre-First World War**

Australians, especially the Queenslanders, were concerned about the growing German influence in eastern New Guinea during the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The fear was that Germany would take possession of eastern New Guinea. So, in 1883 the resident Queensland magistrate on Thursday Island was sent to Port Moresby by the Queensland Government to raise the British flag and claim all eastern New Guinea for Britain, and force Britain to take possession of eastern New Guinea. The British Government was not pleased with this action and didn't annex this part of New Guinea. However, in November 1884 Britain and Germany agreed to share the territory of eastern New Guinea. On 1<sup>st</sup> September 1906 British New Guinea was handed over to Australia and renamed Papua. This followed Australian Federation in 1901 and the Papua Act in 1905. Hence, at the beginning of the First World War the island of New Guinea was divided up by three foreign countries: the western half was held by the Dutch; Germany had the north-eastern section; and Australia was in possession of south-eastern area. Rabaul was the capital of German New Guinea.

### **First World War**

Very soon after Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914 (10am 5 August, Eastern Australian Time), Australia and New Zealand were asked by Britain to capture the German colonies in the South Pacific. As John Connor notes in his chapter on the capture of German New Guinea in the book, *Before the Anzac Dawn* (a military history of Australia to 1915), edited by Craig Stockings and John Connor, Germany as part of its colonial empire between 1884 and 1889 had colonies in west, east and southern Africa, the northern China enclave of Kiautchau – centred on the city of Tsingtao (now Qingdao), home port to the German Navy's East Asiatic Squadron – three island groups in the North Pacific, and German New Guinea, Nauru and Samoa in the South Pacific.

Australia quickly agreed to this invitation. A volunteer force of 1,524 men was very quickly formed. This new military force, which was called the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (ANMEF), consisting of soldiers and sailors, was very quickly trained and equipped, and left Sydney on 19 August. They stopped at Palm Island, Queensland, to do some training before heading to Port Moresby, arriving there on 4 September 1914. About 500 military soldiers from north Queensland, known as the Kennedy Regiment, were already at Port Moresby and wanted to join the ANMEF. This was allowed. However, the crew of the ship taking the Kennedy Regiment to German New Guinea were civilians and had not volunteered to go German New Guinea, so they refused to sail the ship and the Kennedy Regiment left the convey and was returned to Townsville.

The covey that travelled from Port Moresby to German New Guinea on 7 September was quite impressive with the ship, the *Berrima*, carrying the ANMEF servicemen, and the Australia naval force consisting of the battleship, HMAS *Australia*, two cruisers, three

destroyers and two Australian submarines, *AE1* and *AE2*. Four days later the covey arrived in German New Guinea and began military operations. Their first land mission was to capture the very powerful wireless station at Bitapaka, near Rabaul. (The Bitapaka War Cemetery is now in this area).

The ANMEF met the German forces in a battle and whilst they were successful in capturing the wireless station, six ANMEF servicemen were killed and four were wounded. They were the first Australian military casualties of the First World War. On 13 September, the British Flag was raised at Rabaul and by the end of the year German New Guinea was secured and placed under Australian military rule for the next seven years. On 14 September 1914, Australia's first submarine, the *AE1* was lost near Rabaul. This submarine was found on 20 December 2017 under water near the Duke of York Islands, near Rabaul.

See WWI diary by GPO HH Kemsley 'How and When New Guinea was Won – and the Loss of *AE1*' at <https://pngaa.org/how-and-when-new-guinea-was-won-and-the-loss-of-ae1-by-gpo-hh-kemsley/>

As John Connor mentions in the book, *Before the Anzac Dawn*, the New Guinea expedition was a minor skirmish when seen in the context of the First World War, but it still is significant. The ANMEF successfully removed a real threat to Australia and its economy by capturing the German radio station at the Bitapaka and the excellent harbour at Rabaul, preventing their use by the warships of the German East Asiatic Squadron and the expedition contributed to the British strategy to capture all German colonies.

The following Australian War Memorial information sheets give information on these Australian operations:

Operations against German Pacific Territories

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E84777>

## **AE1**

*AE1* was the first submarine to serve in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). She sank, with all hands, on 14 September 1914 and was found near the Duke of York Islands, East New Britain, in December 2017.

On 23 April 2014 on ABC Radio National during the Historyonics segment of the RN Drive program David Howell from the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne was interviewed in regards to the Bitapaka battle. In this ten-minute interview David talks about the battle and its importance. Refer: <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/radionational-drive/historyonics3a-the-battle-for-bita-paka/5407518>

Also see the following articles:

<https://pngaa.org/article/the-loss-of-submarine-ae1-in-1914/>

<https://pngaa.org/article/ae1-found-at-last-source-www-news-navy-gov-au/>

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U50785>

<https://www.sea.museum/en/maritime-archaeology/finding-hmas-ae1>

This information can be used as a review of WW1 history that has been taught previously.



### **The Paris Peace Conference**

After the First World War ended, the question arose regarding the control of the former German New Guinea colony. At the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919 the USA President, Woodrow Wilson, wanted the proposed League of Nations, the international organization, to have total responsibility for this former German colony. The Australian Prime Minister, William Hughes, rejected this proposal, as he wanted Australia to annex the former German colony of New Guinea.

*“Australia had suffered 90,000 casualties in this war and lost 60,000 killed .....The islands were as necessary to Australia as water to a city.....If there were at the very door of Australia a potential or actual enemy, Australia could not feel safe.”* William Hughes. (AA A981/1, WAR P16)

The British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, intervened and brokered a compromise. Australia would have control over this former German colony as a United Nations’ Mandated Territory which meant there would be restrictions. On 9 May 1921, Australia formally was granted a mandate to administer what was German New Guinea on behalf of the League of Nations. One of the restrictions, which Australia adhered to, prevented Australia from establishing military or naval bases or any fortifications in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea. This would have very serious consequences for Australia in the Second World War, particularly when Britain was heavily focused on Europe.



Rabaul became the administrative capital of the Mandated Territory of New Guinea and Port Moresby was the administrative capital for the Australian Territory of Papua. Now Australia had to defend an area, which was twice the size of Victoria.

Australian WW1 ex-soldiers were encouraged to migrate to the Mandated Territory of New Guinea where they were given preference for Government positions and assistance to purchase plantations. A number of these ex-servicemen died there during WW2. Refer to the WW1 Connections website link on the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Memorial at the bottom of the website page at <https://www.montevideo-maru.org> where there is a list of 58 Australian WW1 ex-servicemen who died on the *Montevideo Maru*.

Rabaul became a very cosmopolitan town of around 5,000 people – 800 Europeans, 1000 Asians (with a large Chinese population), and around 3,000 Indigenous people. The Australian settlers saw themselves as permanent residents. Rabaul was sometimes referred to as ‘suburb of Anzac’ because of the large number of Australian WW1 ex-servicemen living there. There were also many missionaries (Germans as well as Australians and others) in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea.

Teachers can use questions/do a quiz to test their student’s knowledge of how and why Australia obtained New Guinea territories during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Also, why the Australian Prime Minister, William Hughes, wanted full control of the former German New Guinea colony. Understand the difference between an annexed territory and a mandated territory and what the League of Nations was. Germany and Japan left the League of Nations in 1933.

This information links WW1 history to WW2 history.

## Photo Gallery

Photos courtesy of Australian War Memorial



<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1006368>

Photo of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion ANMEF on the ferry to Cockatoo Island, Sydney, on 18 August 1914, prior to embarkment on the *HMAT Berrima*



- <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1028766>

Photo of the Bitapaka Wireless Station



- <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C74087>

Studio photo of Able Seaman Williams ANMEF, first recorded Australian casualty of WW1

- <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C386715>

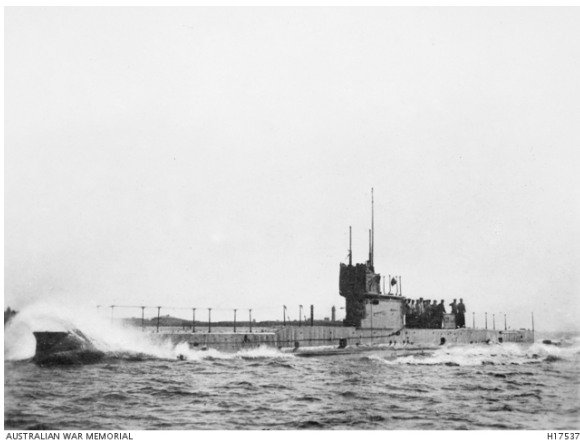


Photo of AE1 submarine at sea.



## Part 2: The Fall of Rabaul and the Consequences, including the Experiences of POWs and Civilian Internees.

From April 1941, as the threat of war with Japan increased, Australia started to send military forces to Rabaul and the New Guinea islands. The principal military force of around 1,400 servicemen was called Lark Force, and was based at Rabaul, on the New Guinean Island of New Britain.

Lark Force consisted of the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion, 2/10<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance, Australian Army Nursing Service, RAA Heavy Battery, 34<sup>th</sup> Fortress Engineers, Fortress Signals, 17<sup>th</sup> Anti-Tank AA Battery, 18 & 19 Special Dental Unit, Australian Canteen Service, Australian Army Ordnance Corps, Headquarters New Guinea Area, Engineers Service Branch, 8 Division Supply Column, RAAF, RAN and New Guinea Volunteer Rifles.

Lark Force were a part of the 'Bird Forces' and 'The Malay Barrier' strategy. Similar size Australian military forces were sent to Ambon (Gull Force) and Timor (Sparrow Force). These military forces were undermanned and poorly armed. They lacked naval and air support and would not be able to withstand any large Japanese attacks. Australia also had little if any capacity to reinforce or resupply these vulnerable troops.

There were also small Independent Companies, commando units, like the Number 1 Independent Company, which were based at Kavieng on the New Guinean Island of New Ireland, in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea, (close to New Britain and Rabaul where Lark Force was based). Number 1 Independent Company has also been called the 1<sup>st</sup> Independent Company.

Besides this website, the Australian War Memorial website has information about these military forces E.g.

- 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U56065>
- Number 1 Independent Company: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U56146>
- New Guinea Volunteer Rifles: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2757919> and <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2632001> and <https://pngvr.weebly.com/>

There is a publication about the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles at <https://pngaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/KEEPERS-OF-THE-GATE-Phil-Ainsworth.pdf>

The New Guinea Volunteer Rifles had the distinction of being the only Australian army military unit raised, mobilized, fought and disbanded 'overseas' from Australia – in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea between 1939 and 1943. Men whose homes and livelihoods were in New Guinea hastened to join.

Students can examine these military units, using websites such as the Australian War Memorial website, and write their findings.

### **The Fall of Rabaul**

Students can locate Rabaul on a map and answer the following question:

- Why Rabaul, a deep-sea harbour, would be of strategic importance during war time, especially in the Pacific War.

In late 1941, the Australian 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 retain Lark Force and the civil administrators in Rabaul, and they did not encourage other civilians to leave this Australian territory until it was too late. (Source: *The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru. Time for Recognition – A Submission to the Commonwealth Government*. November 2009.) <https://montevideo-maru.org/about/activities/publications/time-for-recognition/>

On 12 December 1941 the Australian Prime Minister's Department sent a Most Secret and Important Cable to Washington referring to the Lark Force garrison at Rabaul as being 'hostages to fortune'. The cable read:

*"Formerly, it is not intended to develop Rabaul beyond the requirements of an advance air operational air base. It was felt that strategically Rabaul was too exposed for your slender forces. Doubt has been expressed of the possibility of American forces operating in the area. Under these circumstances, and as reinforcements and subsequent supply would be hazardous without United States co-operation, it is considered better to maintain Rabaul only as an advanced air operational base, its present small garrison being regarded as hostages to fortune. Occupation by Japan would of course prevent its use for offensive operations by United States, bring Japan nearer to Australia and give the Japanese a base for air operations against Moresby. If however United States forces carry out original intention of operating in Suva, Noumea, Samoa, Moresby and Darwin, the whole position might well be changed and clearing up operations against the Mandated Islands might be undertaken at a later date."* (Source: book, *Hostages to Freedom*, Peter Stone).

On 12 December 1941 the Australian War Cabinet were presented with three options regarding the Rabaul garrison. They were:

- 1) Retain the present Rabaul garrison
- 2) Reinforce the Rabaul garrison
- 3) Withdraw the Rabaul garrison and abandoned the area

The War Cabinet chose the first option.

Also, at this time the Australian Government decided to evacuate the Australian women and children from Rabaul, Port Moresby and Darwin.

Males aged 16 and over were to remain in Rabaul with their fathers but, in a few cases, younger boys stayed. 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 civilians who remained were mainly Administration officers, businessmen, planters, traders and missionaries. Most were settlers - 'Territorians' as they called themselves - and their livelihood was in New Britain.

### **Every Man for Himself**

What did this mean?

Lark Force had not trained for the tropics and had no plans for retreat except for the final order "every man for himself". Lark Force was not reinforced. This decision by the Australian War Cabinet, sent by cable to Washington on 12 December 1941, would eventually lead to the deaths of 1,400, perhaps 1,500 Australians – around 1,125 POWs and 275 civilian internees. About 80% of the Australian soldiers and civilians in Rabaul became casualties of this war. Their deaths comprised about 15% of all Australian Prisoners of War who died during captivity.

Rabaul was bombed on 4 January 1942 and on several occasions before the Japanese invasion. The one ship that could have removed many people, the MV Herstein, was bombed in a raid on 20 January 1942 and sunk with a full load of copra. The Japanese invaded on 23 January 1942 and Rabaul quickly fell to the Japanese armed forces.

Students can examine this information and consider the war cabinet's decision regarding the Rabaul garrison.

- Was the war cabinet's decision on 12 December 1941 the correct decision?
- How was the decision possibly related to the war in Europe?
- Many of the servicemen who managed to escape, and the families of those who died, felt that they'd been abandoned and sacrificed by the Australian Government. Do you agree? Give reasons for your opinion.

The information on the Commonwealth Department of Veterans' Affairs Anzac Portal website can be used to examine the Fall of Rabaul and its consequences.

As the website links can change when the website is updated it would be best to use the search tab at <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au> using words such as Rabaul, Tol, and Montevideo Maru to find information. Rabaul can lead to:

- Fall of Rabaul
- A miserable scene – the fate of the Australians at Rabaul, including the death of an Australian 11-year-old boy.
- Left to their fate – the abandoned Australians at Rabaul

- Hungry and .....cold - the fate of the Australian Army nurses.

The small Australian Army garrison at Rabaul was soon overrun by the very large Japanese armed forces on 23 January 1942. Most of the Australians were killed or captured. Rabaul became the Japanese headquarters in the Pacific from 1942-1945.

### **Escape**

Around 400 Australian soldiers from Lark Forces and some civilians were eventually able to escape from the island of New Britain. Those who escaped were in very poor physical condition when they were rescued. Many had spent months in the jungle. They had walked hundreds of kilometres and crossed crocodile infested raging rivers. They suffered lack of food, tropical diseases, and war injuries. All escapees endured the ever-watchful Japanese air-arm and navy.

Some of the soldiers were able to recover their health and resume their duties. One of these men was William Owen who was a Major in the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. William Owen was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and assumed command of the 39<sup>th</sup> Battalion on 7 July 1942. Owen was mortally wounded on 29 July 1942 on the Kokoda plateau.

### **Coastwatchers**

Many civilians and others who remained in the New Guinea islands became coast watchers. These men gathered intelligence about Japanese shipping and military movements. Whilst their code name was 'Ferdinand', just like the bull in the children's book who was not expected to fight but to sit under a tree and smell the roses, their role was extremely dangerous. There were 100 Coastwatchers in the field and about 1,000 New Guineans. Of these, 37 Europeans and 50 New Guineans were killed. (US Naval Institute Proceedings, Coastwatching In World War II by Cdr. E A Feldt, RAN (Ret.), September 1961, Vol. 87/9/703)

### **Tol Massacre**

At least 150 Lark Force soldiers and civilians were executed when they gave themselves up at the Tol and Waitavalo Plantations on 4 February 1942. Other soldiers and civilians were killed by the Japanese or died in the jungle from disease and hunger.

One question for consideration is why this happened and why no bases were established with food, medicine, maps, radios, ammunition or clothing.

### **Prisoners-of-War and Internees**

The remainder of the Lark Force and the surviving Number 1 Independent Company soldiers from the New Guinea island of New Ireland, as well as many Australian civilians from the New Guinea islands, became prisoners of war. Most of these Australians would die as POWs or civilian internees when the Japanese prisoner of war transport ship, the

*Montevideo Maru*, left Rabaul five months later and was sunk by an American submarine on 1 July 1942.

### **Australia's worst maritime disaster – the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru***

Japanese POW records given to the Australian Government in 2012 show that 1,054 prisoners died on the *Montevideo Maru*. Most of these prisoners were Australians. Several of the Australians who died on the *Montevideo Maru* were very young. For example, Ivan Gasoigne, who died with his father, Cyril, was 15. James Tynan, a merchant seaman, was 16. The sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* is Australia's worst maritime tragedy.

The wreck of the *Montevideo Maru* was discovered on 18 April 2023 in the South China Sea, off the northwest coast of The Philippines. See <https://montevideo-maru.org/found-the-ship-that-sank-with-979-australian-troops-and-civilians-in-world-war-ii/>

A list of the prisoners who died on the *Montevideo Maru* is on the National Archives of Australia's *Montevideo Maru* website at <http://montevideomaru.naa.gov.au>

### **Online educational video: *Some Came Home* (free to schools)**

The experiences of the POWs and civilian internees can be further investigated by the viewing of the 15-minute educational video, *Some Came Home*, which is on the Rabaul and *Montevideo Maru* Memorial website at <https://montevideo-maru.org/wp-content/uploads/SomeCameHomePromo.mp4>

After viewing this video, students could answer the following questions:

- Why did John May feel he should not point out he was a POW?
- Why do you think someone like John May would help POWs survive?
- What insight did Norm Furness give of the character of the Australian servicemen at Rabaul and why recalling these memories would be so painful?
- Norm Furness mentions that a soldier who was escaping with him from the island of New Britain became sick and couldn't continue. Another soldier volunteered to stay with this soldier. They were never seen again. What do you think happened to them?
- What did you learn from the war experiences of Rudy Buckley, the Indigenous New Guinean?
- How were the Australian POW nurses treated?
- Why did the nurses never give up hope?
- What did the Japanese tell Sister Bernice and the internees at Rabaul to make them think that Japan was winning the war?
- How did Sr Berenice know the war was over?
- The order was given 'everyman for himself'. What does this mean?
- Why wasn't there a withdrawal plan?
- What is the difference between 'prisoners of war (POWs)' and 'civilian internees'?

## Photo Gallery

Photos courtesy of the Australian War Memorial



Photo of the remains of the Australian soldiers massacred at Tol Plantation on 4 February 1942.

- <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1261383>

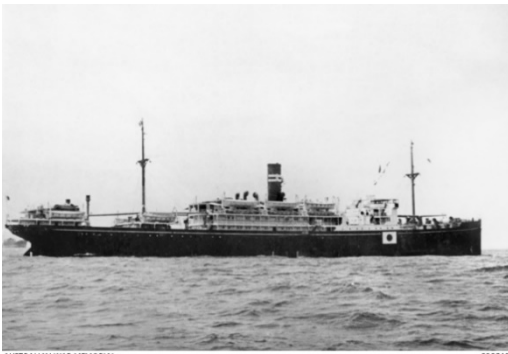


Photo of the *MS Montevideo Maru*.

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C249925>



Group photo of the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Regimental Band. Only one of the band members survived. Most of the servicemen died on the *MS Montevideo Maru*.

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1021219>





Photo of Australian Army nurses, Mavis Cullen and Lorna Whyte taken at Manila in The Philippines on 4 September 1945. They were on their way home after being released from a prisoner of war camp in Japan. They were a part of a group of 19 women, most of whom were captured in Rabaul. The 19 women were later placed in prison camps in Japan during WW2. This group of women included seven civilian nurses from the Namanula Government Hospital; four civilian Methodist Mission nurses; six Australian Army nurses; an Australian civilian, Mrs Kathleen Bignell; and Mrs Etta, an US citizen who was captured on the island of Attu.

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C259069>



Private Thomas Henry Herket (1894 -1942) By mid-1916 Herket was attached to the 53rd battalion serving in the battle of Fromelles. After becoming wounded he was taken to a German POW camp. In WW2 he again became a prisoner-of-war under the Japanese in Rabaul. He died on the Montevideo Maru.

- <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2107595>  
 - [Please see article here for more information about Private Thomas Henry Herket](#)

## References

- *Before the Anzac Dawn*. John Connor and Craig Stockings, editors. New South Publishing. University of New South Wales Press Ltd. 2013.
- *The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru. Time for Recognition. A Submission to the Commonwealth Government*. Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee. November 2009. <https://montevideo-maru.org/about/activities/publications/time-for-recognition/>
- *Hostages to Freedom*. Peter Stone. Ocean Enterprises. Yarram. Victoria. 1995.
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission website.
- Australian War Memorial website.
- Commonwealth Department of Veterans' Affairs' *Anzac Portal* website.
- National Archives of Australia's *Montevideo Maru* website.

## Further Reading

### Teachers

- *When The War Came: New Guinea Islands 1942*. Compiled and edited by Gayle Thwaites. Papua New Guinea Association of Australia. Roseville. NSW. 2017. With over 150 contributors and over 400 photos, this 500-page large print publication gives readers a unique insight into the fall of Rabaul and its aftermath.
- *Our National Myopia – a History Forgotten* by Max Uechtritz  
<https://montevideo-maru.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Myopia.pdf>
- *Line of Fire*. Ian Townsend. Fourth Estate (Harpers Collins). Sydney. NSW. 2017. This is the true story of a forgotten war, a lost family and a 11-year-old Australian boy who was shot for being a spy.
- *Lost Women of Rabaul*. Rod Miller. Big Sky Publishing Pty Ltd. Newport. NSW. 2022. The inspirational true story behind the ABC television drama, “Sisters of War”.
- The Anzac Portal's link to its Virtual Remembrance Trail and the Japanese invasion of Rabaul and a selection of associated photos.  
<https://www.pngremembrancetrail.gov.au/trail/when-war-came-papua-and-new-guinea/event/japanese-invasion-rabaul>

### Junior High School Students

- *Finding Darcy*. Sue Lawson. Black Dogs Books. Fitzroy. Victoria. 2008. This story is about a young Australian girl, Darcy Abbott, and her family, and the shadows that the past can cast on families and societies. The story is inspired by Sue Lawson's grandfather, William McLennan VX23813, 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion AIF, who is listed as dying on the *Montevideo Maru* on 1 July 1942.  
In 2024 *Finding Darcy* was included in the book list for the NSW Premier's Reading Challenge, and in 2025 for the South Australian Premier's Reading Challenge:  
<https://premiersreadingchallenge.sa.edu.au/books/finding-darcy-2/>  
The book was shortlisted for the 2009 Children's Peace Literature Awards.  
A large mural at Stanhope in Victoria pays tribute to all those who perished in Australia's largest maritime disaster, including three men from Stanhope. One of these was William McLennan.

*Finding Darcy* notes, classroom worksheets and writing ideas can be found [here](#).

### Further Student Investigations

As a group or individually, students can further investigate this wartime history using the Australian War Memorial website, the Anzac Portal website, the National Library of

Australia's TROVE website, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's website and the information on the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Memorial's website.

Students could investigate:

The men who died on the islands and on the Montevideo Maru and the effects on their families.

The men who managed to escape and the suffering they endured.

The experiences of the POWs and civilian internees.

How the women and children coped when they were evacuated to the Australian mainland.

The experiences of the Indigenous population and the large Chinese population on the islands.

How this wartime history has been commemorated.

Why this wartime history is not widely known to Australians. Does this matter?

**Further information available:**

1. [Poems and songs](#)
2. Supplementary Questions (coming soon)
3. Links to Websites, the Arts, Sport, DVDs and Books (coming soon)