



The Committee's purpose is to gain greater national recognition and understanding of the tragedies of the fall of Rabaul and the New Guinea Islands in January 1942 and the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* on 1 July 1942 with the loss of 1053 lives.

### 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 the other men of Rabaul whose graves are unknown
4. To achieve greater public knowledge of the fall of Rabaul.
5. To enhance awareness of Australia's role in Papua New Guinea.

**Keith Jackson**

### The submission nears completion

For the last few months I've been working with other Committee members to develop a paper asking the Federal Government to more decisively recognise the sacrifices associated with the Japanese invasion of Rabaul and the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*.

In broad terms, the submission tells the story of this tragic piece of Australian history and it asks our government to agree to three proposals:

- (1) Construct a memorial, inscribed with the names of the dead, in Canberra to commemorate the sacrifice of those who died defending Rabaul and the islands.
- (2) 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.
- (3) Appoint an official group including Friends of *Montevideo Maru* to develop strategies to ensure that the fall of Rabaul and the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* remain an enduring part of the nation's history.

Prof Hank Nelson, our historical adviser, has provided a thorough review of the submission and contributed a great deal to ensuring that the story it tells is as accurate a version of history as it is possible to record.

The document goes to the Committee's patron, Prof Kim Beazley, this week and, some time in November, I hope to join him in Canberra where we will try to persuade the Federal Government to give serious attention to implementing its recommendations.

This month, *MvM Newsletter* begins publishing material from the 42-page submission so you can build up your knowledge of the case we're making for greater recognition and what that means in practical terms.

The first extract, the Foreword, is on page 4.

And we'll let you know how you can help to achieve our objectives in this next phase of activity.

## New friends

### Nola McCann

My father was Gunner Helge Rumar George Bjorklof (NX55339) believed to have been lost on the *Montevideo Maru* during World War II.

I have looked at the photos of the POWs loading rice in Japan and the enlistment photos of my father on the Internet. I have a number of photos taken in Sydney after he enlisted and they look remarkably like the photo of the POW#1 with the rice bags. It makes me wonder whether he ever was on the *Montevideo Maru*.

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.

Could he have left Rabaul on the second boat? My mother had found comfort in the thought that my father would probably not have suffered when the *Montevideo Maru* sank with all Australian lives lost and I'm rather glad she didn't live to experience the horror of an unknown death for him.

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

## Invest in a landmark documentary

Producer John Schindler reports that production of his documentary *The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru* is progressing well and the series will be completed in late October ready for screening on Foxtel.



This project has been the beneficiary of a great deal of John's personal as well as professional commitment.

He mortgaged his home to achieve a budget to make a film that would be worthy of its epic subject matter.

"I had to invest \$96,000 of my own money in the series; it just had to be done," says John. "The story deserved to be told well and, to achieve this, our team needed to have a reasonable budget."

John is now seeking two investors prepared to commit \$48,000 each against future sales of the documentary.

"Even if we found just one it would take a big weight off my shoulders," he says.

Investors will share proceeds from the series, except for the Foxtel fee which has been invested back into the project.

Other revenue sources to be negotiated include:

- Australian and worldwide DVD sales
- sales of the series to the USA, UK, Norway, Japan and elsewhere
- a free to air sale in Australia two years after the series first goes to air on Foxtel
- a book

"Investors will also be contributing to the making of a landmark television series that will make many Australians aware of the *Montevideo Maru* tragedy and the events in Rabaul that led up to it," says John.

"I will keep them personally informed of developments, they will be honoured guests at the Sydney and/or Brisbane premier, they will be invited on location for the filming of re-enactments and, of course, their names will feature in the credits.

If you are interested, or know someone who might be, get in touch with John Schindler at (07) 3267 0515, [john@schindler.com.au](mailto:john@schindler.com.au) or at PO Box 303, Northgate, Queensland 4013.

If potential investors want to know more about legal and accounting aspects they are welcome to speak with the film's lawyer Hendrik De Korte on (07) 3340 5193 and the film's accountant Robert Edwards on (07) 3391 6300.

## New friends

### Barbara Knowles

I have no family connection 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 had a connection as a young man 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, especially following the location of the HMAS Sydney, that the families involved deserve recognition for their loved ones.

Australians should know more about the largest maritime loss of our fellow countrymen.

## Kim Beazley is our man in Washington

It's been one of those vintage years for Prof Kim Beazley, one of Australia's favourite politicians, Ambassador to the United States in waiting and Patron of the Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee.



The story is probably well known to you by now.

Prof Beazley's uncle Syd Beazley worked for the Methodist mission in the Gazelle Peninsula at the time of the Japanese invasion.

He was interned by the Japanese, consigned to Hainan on the *Montevideo Maru* and died aged 33 along with 1,052 other prisoners when the ship was torpedoed in the South China Sea.

It was with this family relationship in mind that Prof Beazley agreed to become patron of our Committee earlier this year.

He is presently chancellor of the Australian National University in Canberra, having retired from Federal politics in 2007.

He was opposition leader twice during the Howard government years, the first when Labor lost power in 1996 and the second in 2005 when he took over from Mark Latham.

Mr Beazley was replaced by Mr Rudd as opposition leader in December 2006 and left politics at the 2007 election. He is widely considered an expert on the US.

His appointment is one of the few jobs Mr Rudd has given to former Labor colleagues since becoming Prime Minister.

When he became Patron, Prof Beazley remarked that "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," Prof Beazley said.

At the time of going to print, *MvM Newsletter* did not know whether Prof Beazley will continue as patron of the Committee in his new role.

## New friends

### Eric Franks

My daughter at Wagga sent me a cutting from the paper about the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*.

My brother - AB Franks NX47288 - was in the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 FRANKS, Allen Bernard; Aged 23; 1st Independent Company; Lost Montevideo Maru

### 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 2/22<sup>nd</sup> 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 ROBERTSON, John Stanley; Aged 25; 2/22nd Infantry Battalion; Lost Montevideo Maru

## From our submission: the Foreword

Despite the passage of time - nearly 68 years - since the tragedy of the fall of Rabaul in 1942, the consequences of this great Australian tragedy remain powerfully imprinted on many people.

There has been a continuation of grief and frustration for relatives of those who were killed under Japanese occupation - civilians and soldiers - both because of the lack of knowledge about how and where many of the victims died and because of the failure of past Australian Governments to appropriately recognise the tragedy and thereby effectively respond to the relatives' need for closure.

One of the most dreadful events that occurred after the fall of Rabaul on 23 January 1942 was the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* the following 1 July. It was a disaster that cost 1053 lives, Australia's worst maritime disaster.

In the House of Representatives on 26 June 2009, in a rare Parliamentary acknowledgement of this event, Veterans' Affairs Minister Alan Griffin MP called for the nation to pause and remember the Australian 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 pause - except at private ceremonies in Brisbane and at Subic Bay in the Philippines to mark the 67<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sinking on 1 July.

In Brisbane, the NGVR and PNGVR Ex-members Association held its annual memorial service at the Brisbane Cenotaph.

And, at a ceremony at Subic Bay, Australian Ambassador, Rod Smith unveiled a privately funded memorial at a privately organised commemoration.

"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, if it were not for the relatives, this Australian tragedy would have been largely forgotten.

The recent words by Minister and Ambassador were important. But there remains a deep-seated view among the relatives of those who died, reinforced by the absence of official interest down the years, that the sacrifices of the Men of Rabaul need to be more effectively commemorated by the Australian Government on behalf of the Australian people.

More than anything, the relatives seek some form of permanent official recognition for their men, whether they perished in the armed forces or as civilians caught up in the maelstrom of war.

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## New friends

### Jan Gambrill

I wish to to become a friend of *Montevideo Maru*. 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.

We grew up at Lawson in the Blue Mountains and later I married a New Zealander and lived there for 30 years.

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

### 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.

HOSKING, Herbert Champion; Medical Practitioner; Born Murtoa, Victoria; Resided Rabaul, New Britain; Lost *Montevideo Maru*; Aged 47 (Served World War 1; Lieutenant 10 Infantry Battalion)

## Beverley Saunders

### How our men should be recognised

Thankyou very much for the in depth report in the Newsletter 4. This story is certainly news to us as it is the first time it has unfolded. Best wishes in obtaining the results you and the committee members are seeking.

The Australian Government as the responsible authority, has a duty of care to honour the men and women who so bravely defended our shores against attack.

A battle fought with little manpower, few supplies and without proper air support: a hopeless task against overwhelming odds of Japanese who overran Rabaul.

Australian Government records show the defence force was left for dead. If not for these brave heroes, we would now be speaking Japanese and living under Japanese authority.

This present government has an obligation to all the living relatives to find and locate the final resting place of the *Montevideo Maru* then declare the site as a war grave.

This task is not unreasonable and not beyond the capability of today's Navy.

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## Suzanne Pascoe

### How our men should be recognised

Thank you so much for your newsletters. I find the contact and information so reassuring and encouraging. As a result, I was able ask Rev John May if he remembered my father, Frank Pascoe, who had written about him to Mum.

Just knowing that he did remember him, even without anything specific, was a great comfort as I was born a few months after my father left for Rabaul.

I would like to see a comprehensive and permanent display at the Canberra War Memorial of all relevant information about the *Montevideo Maru* including the reason why the government kept the families in such tragic suspense.

Also an outdoor memorial should be erected where an annual Service of Remembrance would be held each year on 1 July, with wide media coverage giving the incident and the background events leading up to it the important recognition it deserves.

I believe it would be a waste of money and resources to try to locate the resting place of the *Montevideo Maru*. The souls of the men now reside elsewhere, and the best we can do to honour them is to educate the living about the valour of the past and the tragedy and futility of war.

Thanks again for your wonderful work.

## New friends

### Michael Fittler

My great uncle Harry Francis Schiffmann NX40995 was a member of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 SCHIFFMANN, Harry Francis; Aged 38; 1st Independent Company; Lost Montevideo Maru

### Friends

If you know someone who may want to be a Friend of Montevideo Maru and who would like to receive this newsletter, ask them to register at  
kjackson@jacksonwells.com.au

At the end of August, there were 137 Friends of Montevideo Maru.

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The postal address of the Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee is c/- Jackson Wells Pty Ltd, PO Box 1743, Neutral Bay NSW 2089.

## Malcolm 'Chips' McKellar

### How our men should be recognised

In support of the Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee, I wish to add to George Oakes' remarks in the newsletter in which he states that the *Montevideo Maru* list includes people not on the ship when it was torpedoed.

To this I also add that there was a conspiracy theory that the Japanese used the *Montevideo Maru* as a cover-up to disguise a massacre of Australian civilians at Rabaul, so as to divert an investigation at Rabaul where evidence to the contrary could be found.

My uncle Colin Mackellar (Masta Koll) of Pigibut Plantation, Simberi Island, Tabar Group is listed on the memorial plaque unveiled on 4 July 2002 as having drowned on the *Montevideo Maru*.

When I was in PNG, I asked Chris Makin, then stationed in Kavieng, to inquire if Masta Koll's cook boy was alive and if so, if he saw Masta Koll being loaded on to the *Montevideo Maru*.

Chris found the aged cook boy who said he was present when Masta Koll was taken prisoner in Rabaul, and that he was also present in a crowd of onlookers when Masta Koll with other Australians was lined up along the side of a street in Rabaul and shot by the Japanese. According to the cook boy, the Japanese conscripted the onlookers to bury the bodies. The cook boy said he helped bury Masta Koll, and that he could show Chris where Masta Koll is buried, except that at the time this story was told, both Chris and the cook boy were in Kavieng and not Rabaul, so the matter was not pursued any further.

Now there is an active Committee investigating the *Montevideo Maru* tragedy, I am suggesting it should have another objective, and this is:

To ask the Federal Government in concurrence with the PNG Government to investigate if:

- (a) some persons listed as having perished aboard the *Montevideo Maru* were not on board at the time, and
- (b) there is a mass grave in Rabaul of Australians massacred by the Japanese, and
- (c) the bodies of those in the grave can be recovered and identified by DNA or other means, and
- (d) the bodies can be exhumed, and reburied with honour.

As any investigation might rely on eye witness accounts of aged New Guineans who can remember this tragedy, it is urgent that any such investigation be commenced quickly, before these memories are lost.

We all appreciate the work you and the Committee have done so far with the memorial to Montevideo Maru tragedy.

## Prize winners

As the sole judge in our 'best way to recognise the MVM' contest, I've decided that the three prize winners.

Suzanne Pascoe and Phyllis Smith have won copies of the CD *The Music of W Arthur Gullidge* played by the Melbourne Salvation Army Staff Band and donated by John Cleary.

Elaine Campbell believes her father Fred Hay once owned *Krait*, but under another name, *Gnair*, and has won a DVD of John Schindler's award winning documentary *The Story of the Krait*.



The *Montevidео Maru* was originally built as a migrant ship to carry Japanese emigrants to South America before World War II.

This is a rare photograph of a Japanese migrant family aboard the ship in those days before it was pressed into duties as a prison ship.

## Gillian Nikakis

### How our men should be recognised

I have thought long and hard about what I would like to happen concerning the tragic loss of life in Rabaul, New Britain in 1942. The events were catastrophic for those living there at that time. Families torn apart, loved ones missing, and so many unanswered questions.

It is pointless blaming anyone now. The Australians were ill prepared for the Japanese onslaught and New Britain was sacrificed. These difficult decisions have to be made in war. War is all about people dying and the making of widows and fatherless children. In that respect we, who lost loved ones in Rabaul are no exception.

Would finding the MVM or finding bodies in New Britain achieve anything? It would certainly be healing to know where my father actually died. I could then visit or visualize his resting place.

But I believe it is important for the whole story to be told, as it is such an important part of Australian history. The sinking of the *Montevidео Maru* is just a part of the story.

If we send men to fight an unwinnable battle with obsolete weapons and abandon them and not even mention them in our history books, what sort of message does this give Australians. These young men gave their lives to fight for their country and protect their families. Who cares or even recognizes their existence, let alone their sacrifice?

We glorify the sacrifice of the Australian troops at Gallipoli. We walk the Kokoda Trail in honour of the men who died protecting Port Moresby. There have been films and documentaries made of these events and I believe this is a powerful way of bringing the stories to public awareness.

The Committee is doing a tremendous job in bringing to people's attention the loss of 1,000 men on the MVM. Although the men lost on the MVM are remembered at the Memorial in Ballarat and a plaque has been laid at Subic Bay and politicians have been lobbied, I feel a little cynical at the promises of politicians. They are initially full of words of support but nothing moves. Words are cheap.

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. Wives and family of those lost in New Britain were left as widows without recognition or real acknowledgement of the sacrifice.

Grandchildren still feel the sadness of their parents' and grandparents' loss.

Knowing soldiers are valued and honoured from previous battles must help tremendously with troop morale, knowing that at least their own sacrifice will be honoured if they die. There may not be forty virgins waiting but at least their sacrifice will not have been in vain.

## Websites

Rod Miller

[www.montevideomaru.info](http://www.montevideomaru.info)

Hell Ships Memorial

[www.hellshipsmemorial](http://www.hellshipsmemorial)

John Schindler

[www.montevideomarufilm.com](http://www.montevideomarufilm.com)

Montevideo Maru Foundation

[www.montevideomaru.org](http://www.montevideomaru.org)

Salvation Army Museum

<http://www.salvationarmy.org.au/museum/>

Lost Lives

[www.ije.info/lostlives/places/montevideomaru.html](http://www.ije.info/lostlives/places/montevideomaru.html)

Rabaul Nurses

[www.rabaulnurses.com.au/Montevideo%20Maru.html](http://www.rabaulnurses.com.au/Montevideo%20Maru.html)

POWs - Lark Force & Civilians

[www.australian-pow-ww2.com/montevideo\\_maru\\_11.html](http://www.australian-pow-ww2.com/montevideo_maru_11.html)

Australian War Memorial

[www.awm.gov.au/atwar/remembling1942/montevideo/transcript.asp](http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/remembling1942/montevideo/transcript.asp)

Ballarat Memorial

[www.ballaratgenealogy.org.au/ex\\_pow\\_memorial.htm](http://www.ballaratgenealogy.org.au/ex_pow_memorial.htm)

Pacific Wrecks

<http://www.pacificwrecks.com/ships/maru/montevideo.html>

PNG Attitude

<http://asopa.typepad.com/>

Hellships Memorial

[www.hellshipsmemorial.org](http://www.hellshipsmemorial.org)

## Committee

Prof Kim Beazley AC, Patron

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Phil Ainsworth

Gerald Borthwick

John Cleary

Lindsay Cox

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Rod Miller

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Albert Speer MBE

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Hooky (Philip) Street

Liz Thurston

Clive Troy

Max Uechtritz

Andrea Williams

Historical Adviser -  
Prof Hank Nelson

## Bert Speer



## On matters of outstanding importance

Senator the Hon John Faulkner  
Minister for Defence  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

Dear Minister,

As a former member of the Defence Forces of Australia I saw active service at Milne Bay, Wau, Aitape-Wewak and the surrender of the 18<sup>th</sup> Army in New Guinea. Since the end of the hostilities I have been engaged in trying to find out what happened to our captured forces at Rabaul and became interested in the movements of the *Montevideo Maru* and other ships possibly involved in the transportation of prisoners from Rabaul, particularly civilians, and I endeavoured to trace the whereabouts of a roll described as the Katakana Roll brought to Australia from Japan and deposited with the Australian Army in Victoria Barracks in Melbourne.

The Katakana Roll was a handwritten document of manifold size paper comprising some 47 pages in Japanese writing. I saw the roll retrieved by Brigadier later Sir Donald Cleland, Administrator of Papua New Guinea, who went to Melbourne and with a Mr Harry collected the roll and brought it to Rabaul for display to Returned Servicemen as a matter of interest. Sir Donald had required the roll for verification of matters pertaining to the establishment of registration of deaths in the Territory of PNG. Sir Donald requested us to keep the matter from media release and now it is very difficult to find anybody living who recalls this meeting and I cannot recover any records pertaining to the roll itself nor any record of the translation.

The second part of my letter deals with an article published in the journal *Una Voce* No 2 of June 2009 on pages 40-41 entitled 'Mystery on the Manko' by Captain Robert Scott. I am concerned that insufficient investigations were carried out on the bodies located on that ship by Capt Scott. I have raised the matter with the War Graves Commission in Canberra who directed me to refer the matter to you and it now seems that Australia must request PNG to allow further investigation and possible retrieval of skeletal remains as it seems that racial identification of the headless corpses and possibly DNA testing may have to be carried out but something must be done quickly.

I commend the foregoing to you for your consideration, action & advice please.

Yours faithfully,

Albert Speer, MBE