

The Newsletter - May 09



Our Rationale

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

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

Subic Bay memorial will be unveiled

A plaque to commemorate the sinking of the Montevideo Maru will be unveiled at a ceremony at Subic Bay in the Philippines on Wednesday 1 July.

Businessmen Clive Troy and Phil Ainsworth have made the development of a memorial a passion.

Relatives of the victims and other people are invited to the Subic Bay ceremony. The memorial is at the Hellships Memorial, dedicated to prisoners of war who suffered on Japanese POW vessels, including the Montevideo Maru.

“Rather than referring to closure for descendants of the tragedy,” Clive says, “I’d use the words comfort and resolution. The plaque will be unveiled by Australian Ambassador to the Philippines, Rod Smith, but the ceremony will be low key.”

Subic Bay is a leisure and cultural enclave just two hours from Manila airport, and Clive will coordinate on-ground activities for visitors. Current airfares from Australia to the Philippines are as low as \$600-700.

If you’d like to join the group for this historic event, contact Clive on (02) 9868 2123 or email him at clive.troy@bigpond.com

Objectives

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



The Ballarat Memorial

Kim Beazley Montevideo Maru patron



Former Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister, Kim Beazley AC, has accepted the role of Patron of the Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee.

The Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee was established to gain official recognition of the sinking, to determine precisely who was on board at the time and to encourage further research into events in Rabaul that led to the tragedy.

Prof Beazley's uncle, the Rev Sydney Beazley, who resided in Rabaul at the time of the Japanese invasion, was just 33 when he was believed lost on the Montevideo Maru.

“The Montevideo Maru sinking is Australia's most devastating loss at sea,” Prof Beazley said, “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

Prof Beazley's ministerial career began in 1983 in the first Hawke Government. In December 1984, he became Australia's youngest ever Defence Minister.

He also served as Special Minister of State, Minister for Transport and Communications, Finance Minister and Minister for Employment, Education and Training. He was twice Opposition Leader.

He is now professorial fellow in Political Science and International Relations at the University of Western Australia.

BECOME A FRIEND OF MONTEVIDEO MARU

Contact the Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee

PO Box 1743, Neutral Bay NSW 2089

kjackson@jacksonwells.com.au

Organising Members

Prof Kim Beazley AC
Patron

Keith Jackson AM
Chairman

Phil Ainsworth

Chris Diercke

Rod Miller

Albert Speer MBE

Hooky (Philip) Street

Liz Thurston

Clive Troy

Max Uechtritz

Andrea Williams

Web References

Rod Miller

www.montevideomaru.info

John Schindler Documentary

www.montevideomarufilm.com

Montevideo Maru Foundation

www.montevideomaru.org

Lost Lives

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

Rabaul Nurses

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

Australian POWs – Soldiers of Lark Force & Civilians

www.australian-pow-ww2.com/montevideo_maru_11.html

Australian War Memorial

www.awm.gov.au/atwar/remempering1942/montevideo/transcript.asp

Ballarat Memorial

www.ballaratgenealogy.org.au/ex_pow_memorial.htm

Wikipedia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montevideo_Maru

World War 2 mystery still unsolved

By Ilya Gridneff of AAP

Rabaul, April 24 – Families who lost loved ones in Australia's worst maritime tragedy want the shipwreck to be found and made a war grave by the federal government.

Relatives of men onboard the torpedoed World War II Japanese prison ship have set up the Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee to mark the tragedy they say has been overlooked by officials.

The Montevideo Maru carried 845 troops from Australia's Lark Force and 208 civilian men, taken prisoner of war after Japan invaded Rabaul in Papua New Guinea's East New Britain province in January 1942.

The unmarked Japanese ship left occupied Rabaul on June 22, 1942 but nine days later on July 1 an American submarine torpedoed it off the Philippines coast.

Andrea Williams, whose grandfather and great uncle were on board, wants a government response similar to the recently found HMAS Sydney, another World War II sea tragedy that claimed 645 lives.

"There is a fair amount of literature on the Montevideo sinking but there are some nagging specifics, like why there was no inquiry into the fate of these men?"

"It is still a secret as to why these men were left to their fate," she said. Australian archives had several passenger lists but they were inconsistent and there was no passenger manifest, she said.

"What has happened to the nominal roll of the men apparently on board?" Williams wrote to Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd urging him to launch a search. "The site then should be declared a war grave. The story should be enshrined as part of our wartime history," she said.

Keith Jackson, a committee member, said victims' relatives, historians, academics and "others in the group share the belief that this is unfinished business. Sadly this neglect at an official level has gone on for too long," he said.

On July 1 the group will unveil its own plaque at the Hellships Memorial in Subic Bay, Philippines.

Australian National University Pacific historian Professor Hank Nelson said the sinking was the "greatest disaster at sea ever suffered by Australians".

"By the end of the war we're hearing about the Burma railway, we're hearing about Sandakan, Timor and Ambon and we've got nearly 8,000 prisoners of war dead, so within that context the loss of Montevideo Maru got lost," he said.

New Friends

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 lost when the ship was sunk by 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.

David Campbell-Williams

As a Rabaul resident in the 60s and 70's, and having lost a great uncle in the 600 gunners atrocity on Ballalae in the Shortlands, I am interested in the committee's efforts.

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.

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

In explanation of our objectives

1. National recognition

It is imperative to the relatives of the men who died in Rabaul and on the Montevideo Maru that the full story of this Australian tragedy be known: the fall of Rabaul, the failure to evacuate civilians, the identity of the men on the ship, the long official silence for many years, the missing nominal roll and other documentation.

The Committee wants the Australian Government to recognise the sinking of the Montevideo Maru as a national tragedy and to acknowledge this event on behalf of the Australian people.

Furthermore, in order to honour the memories of the civilians and servicemen who died, the Committee seeks that the Government renew and reinvigorate the research effort to shed light on unanswered questions about this matter.

2. Comfort and closure

The Committee believes there is a national obligation to the victims' relatives to formally acknowledge the tragedy and their grief, and thereby help assuage the pain that many people continue to feel.

A declaration of the site of the ship's sinking as an international war grave will facilitate closure for the victims' relatives and honour the memories of the men who died.

3. Nominal (Katakana) roll

An outstanding issue relating to the Montevideo Maru concerns the identification of the men who were and who were not aboard when the ship went down.

The Committee expects the answers to this and many other important questions are in government records. We believe these records should be tracked down since they could provide a platform for the development of a clearer understanding of where the nominal roll might be located.

4. Related events - Rabaul 1942

The events leading to the Montevideo Maru tragedy, including the official handling of the civilians stranded in Rabaul when the Japanese invaded, need to be clarified and better understood.

5. Montevideo Maru as social history

Few Australians have knowledge of this enormous tragedy and the impact it had on so many people, especially the families. The Committee wants to encourage Commonwealth Government action to ensure it becomes a significant part of Australia's World War 2 history and that it is duly acknowledged in educational curricula.

Montevideo Maru documentary needs public support

JOHN SCHINDLER, executive producer of the documentary film, 'The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru', due to be released in November, talks with KEITH JACKSON...



Keith: Let's start from the beginning, how did you get involved in the media?

John: After finishing school at Canterbury Boys High, I went overseas and worked in Berlin and then for the NSW Government in London, advising migrants about the way of life and employment in NSW

When I arrived home I was a sales rep for a while then started a media career - 2VM Moree, 2WL Wollongong and WIN TV Wollongong. During this period I also wrote and produced an award winning documentary called *University - A New Way of Life*.

After a spell with Panorama Productions - makers of Variety Italian Style – I was offered the job of Executive Producer with Jumbuck Productions, owned by Channel

7 in Brisbane where I wrote and produced corporate videos and television commercials.

And then you moved into documentary production?

I formed my own company, Schindler Communications, where I continued with corporate video and television commercial production. Along the way I became part owner of Fortitude Productions, a documentary production company. We've made some outstanding docudramas and documentaries including *The Story of the Krait*, *Rainforest - The Amazing World Within*, *By the Seats of their Pants*, *Miracle of the Mountains* and, most recently, *The Moth Loves Doodie*, the inspirational life story of Ched Towns, who tragically lost his life in the Himalayas immediately following the completion of the film.

How did you get engaged with the Montevideo Maru story?

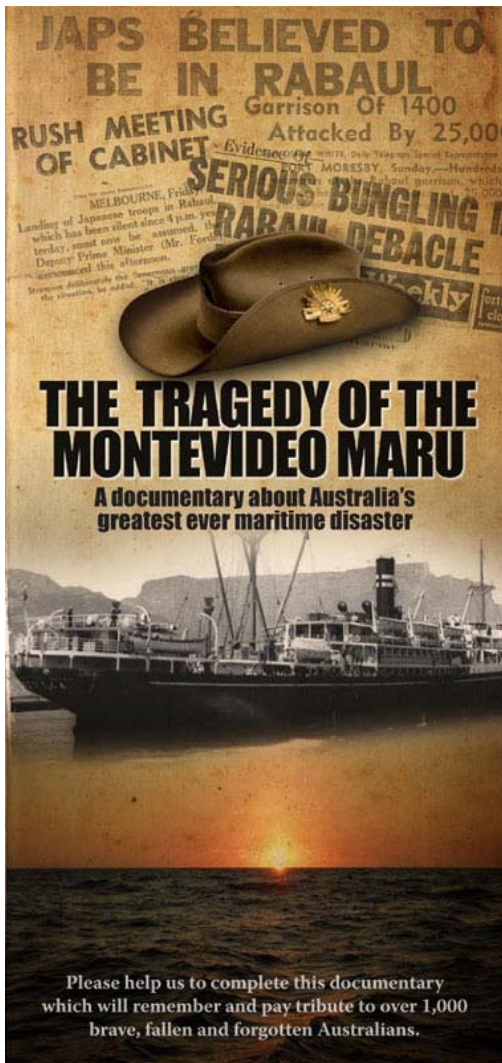
It started two years ago when Mum died and my brother and sister and I were deciding what should be done with items very precious to her. I was intrigued by a small photo of a handsome lad Mum had on her piano. He was a friend of the family and his name was John Wilson Day.

My Mum and her sister Molly had promised John and the three Turner brothers that they'd wave goodbye to their troopship, *Zealandia*, from the middle of Sydney Harbour Bridge as it sailed in 1941. But they were late, and when they got there the ship had passed Pinchgut and was almost out of sight. John and most of his company didn't come back from the war. Mum said it was a mystery what happened to them. All she knew was they died on a ship called the *Montevideo Maru*.

When Mum died, my brother Tim, a Sydney doctor, suggested I should try to find out more about the photo and this mystery ship and the circumstances surrounding the men's death. That's how I got into it.

So this compelled you to make a film?

In my films, I'm drawn to factual stories about human bravery and self sacrifice for the good of other human beings. In the case of the *Montevideo Maru* the ultimate sacrifice was made by over 1,000 brave young Australian men. I think this story should be told for their sake, for the sake of their relatives, many of whom are still alive, and for the sake of the Australian people who enjoy a democratic society because of them.



How are you structuring the film?

It includes interviews with veterans covering a spectrum of people drawn into these tragic events. The interviews are interspersed with colour and black and white archival film, still photos from the period, and dramatic re enactments. Music is being developed by two of Australia's top film music composers. Since starting production in April 2007, we've spent over two years filming in San Francisco, Boston, Japan, Dundee Scotland, England and all over Australia.

Will the film reveal new material?

Most certainly.

How have you been financing it?

Mainly money from my own pocket, plus resources from film industry colleagues who've donated time, expertise and equipment. We've now reached a point where we need financial assistance to complete the project. While we're in the final stages of licensing the film to an Australian Network, this income and a possible investment by Screen Australia still falls far short of the money needed. So we're looking for public support.

Can our readers help?

They certainly can - by making a donation as soon as possible.

When will the film be ready for release?

We hope by 11 November this year. We were originally hoping to have it completed by 1 July, the anniversary of the sinking, and it's frustrating that we can't because the veterans we've interviewed are keen to see it.

How do you feel personally about Rabaul and this episode of Australian history?

Overwhelmingly, I'm very saddened that so many young men lost their lives. I feel so sorry for the relatives and friends of those who died. They have not been able to find closure.

My Mum and Auntie Molly never did find out what happened to John Wilson Day and the Turner brothers. This film is too late for them. They died and many others passed on without knowing.

I want this film to be seen so these folk and their children and their children's children will know the sacrifice these men made so we can enjoy our life in this wonderful country. Lest we forget.

How you can help

Go to the website www.montevideomarufilm.com to find out more about the documentary and to donate to the official fund that will ensure the film's completion.

Alternatively, you can email John Schindler direct at john@schindler.com.au

Organising Member Profiles

Phil Ainsworth was in PNG for 21 years. He is president of the NGVR & PNGVR Ex-members Association. Many members of the NGVR died in the defence of Rabaul, while escaping or as prisoners of war. A distant relative of Phil's wife was a member of the 2/1 Independent Company stationed in the Kavieng area of New Ireland at the time of the Japanese invasion. The family was notified after the war that he had died on the *Montevideo Maru*.

Kim Beazley, a former Australian Deputy Prime Minister, is professorial fellow in Political Science and International Relations at the University of Western Australia. In December 1984, Prof Beazley became Australia's youngest ever Defence Minister. He also served as Special Minister of State, Minister for Transport and Communications, Finance Minister and Minister for Employment, Education and Training. He was twice Opposition Leader. Prof Beazley's uncle, the Rev Sydney Beazley, who resided in Rabaul at the time of the Japanese invasion, was 33 when he was believed lost on the *Montevideo Maru*.

Why the tragedy must not fade away

By Keith Jackson

The Montevideo Maru Memorial Committee is a small group that meets around a table from time to time and by email much more frequently.

Its handful of members report, check progress, plan and make commitments for their self-imposed task of gaining national recognition for that most appalling of tragedies, the sinking of the prison ship *Montevideo Maru* on 1 July 1942 – Australia's worst maritime disaster.

The committee consists of relatives of some of the 1,053 men who died together with others of us who became captivated by the story. Having learned as many of the facts as can be gleaned from the official records (although it is known there are some records that have never seen the light of day), we share the relatives' belief that this is unfinished business.

It's probably worth restating the reasons why this matter is of importance to the people affected and to all Australians.

Firstly, there are the victims' relatives and their thirst for knowledge and need for closure. Because there remain so many questions about the tragedy, it is impossible for these people to assure themselves that the full story has been told. In the dishonouring of the rights of the relatives to official recognition of this tragedy, there is an implicit dishonouring of the memories of the 1,053 men who died.

Second, there is much that is unknown about political decisions made in Canberra in January 1942 that left just 1,400 Lark Force troops to defend Rabaul against a strong Japanese invading force supported by overwhelming air and naval power.

Third, there was the discreditable official silence, for the entire duration of the war, surrounding the fate of the 1,053 (it is thought) troops and civilians loaded on to the *Montevideo Maru*. And then there was the unsolved puzzle of who exactly was on board the vessel. There was a roll kept by the Japanese that apparently fell into Australian hands after the war. It went missing.

Fourth, there has been the unfathomable official reluctance to give due recognition to the *Montevideo Maru* tragedy, which is at least as significant as the sinking of the light cruiser *Sydney* (645 deaths) and the hospital ship *Centaur* (268 deaths).

Fifth, there are stories that Australians should know about our history. This is surely one of them.

These are the reasons why this matter must be pursued.

Organising Member Profiles

Chris Diercke, a retired school principal and history teacher who lives in Newcastle, was born and bred at Vunapope near Rabaul, a direct descendant of Queen Emma. He regularly returns to PNG and has been instrumental in the development of the Lark Force Wilderness Track. He is representative for the International Porter Protection Group.

Keith Jackson went to PNG as an 18-year old teacher and moved into journalism. He spent 13 years in PNG and worked in SE Asia for some years before returning to Australia in 1979. He was General Manager of Corporate Relations in the ABC and founded the public relations firm, Jackson Wells in 1991. He publishes the *PNG Attitude* website and newsletter.

Rod Miller is one of the best-informed researchers into the history of the effects of World War 2 on the Rabaul community and the Montevideo Maru tragedy. He is author of *Lost Women of Rabaul* - the story of the 18 Rabaul women taken to Japan. He has extensively researched the exchange of internees that took place between Australia and Japan in 1942.

Dear Mr Rudd: re Montevideo Maru

By Liz Thurston

With the finding of the HMAS Sydney there is now a passionate determination among those of us who have family listed as missing on the Montevideo Maru to experience a similar sense of closure.

We have been extremely heartened by your positive response to requests to locate the vessel, and we are enormously appreciative of the dedicated effort of a few people to bring this great wartime tragedy to the attention of the Australian public.

Mr Albert Speer, MBE, has been particularly outstanding in his efforts to find more answers than questions to the fate of those 208 civilians captured by the Japanese in Rabaul and, allegedly, taken aboard the Montevideo Maru. He has worked tirelessly, and at his own expense, on behalf of the families and all Australians to try and reconcile the inconsistencies and discrepancies surrounding this tragedy.

The prominent historian, Professor Hank Nelson has contributed years of scholarship to the topic and others have sought to publish their research. But, surely, it is now time for the government to step in and help shoulder the burden, carried to date by only the families and a committed few.

My uncle, Henry Fulton, crippled by polio as a child, was working in Rabaul for Burns Philp when captured by the Japanese. His name is on the nominal roll as missing on the Montevideo Maru.

He had gone to New Guinea to join his brother – my father – in 1937 and to begin a new life in the beautiful town of Rabaul. The tragic irony is that because of his physical disability, Henry was unable to enlist with his three brothers, Ted, Jack and Frank. Yet he was the only brother never to return.

They were part of a generation of men and women who made enormous sacrifices, suffered without complaint and harboured no sense of entitlement.

We have marked Henry's too-short life by a plaque that sits on his parents' grave at Waverley Cemetery and overlooks his beloved Bronte beach. We have his last letters, a telegram from the Australian government (dated 30 Oct 1945) to my aunt, and a few black and white photos of a slight and wistful young man....

I believe it is the responsibility of the Australian government – and not just a few dedicated individuals - to pursue every avenue of enquiry about the fate of those 208 civilians and 848 troops.

Organising Member Profiles

Albert Speer served in New Guinea from 1942-45 with 2/2 Australian Field Ambulance then joined the public service as a medical assistant. For many years he has worked tirelessly and at his own expense to reconcile inconsistencies and discrepancies surrounding the tragedy.

Hooky Street was born in Rabaul, the son of Solicitor-General James Lee Street, who had served in the AIF in World War 1. James was in the AIF when the Japanese invaded Rabaul and was killed in the Tol Plantation massacre in 1942. After an early career as a veterinary surgeon Hooky joined TAFE, ending up as Head of Rural Studies.

Liz Thurston is a book editor and writer. She grew up on Makurapau Plantation, Kokopo, owned by her family. She worked with Angus and Robertson Sydney and The Bodley Head London. Liz returned to PNG from 1981-85 after marrying Michael Thurston. Liz's uncle, Henry Fulton was working for Burns Philp in Rabaul when captured by the Japanese. His name is on the nominal roll of those missing on the Montevideo Maru.

Tragedy poem very much in mind



Award winning bush poet Jim Brown is still contemplating writing a poem on the Montevideo Maru tragedy. "I haven't forgotten it," he told us.

In 1990, as a TV reporter, Jim went to Gallipoli to cover the 75th anniversary of the Anzac landing. Fifteen years later, on the wall of an antique shop, he saw a photograph of a World War 1 light horseman. "For some reason I still can't explain, I had to have it," he said, "and I started writing a poem based on the question of who he was"

This became the much-loved Anzac on the Wall, written as performance poetry and winning first place at the 2005 Victorian Bush Poetry Championships.

"I am humbled by the fact that so many people have been moved by the poem, especially around Anzac Day," Jim says. "The suffering of those waiting at home has not been written about enough."

It was with this thought in mind – the grief and pain of those left behind - that, a year ago, Keith Jackson asked Jim if he might consider writing a poem about the Montevideo Maru. Jim was given plenty of material, including a list of names of the 1,053 men believed to have drowned.

"I haven't got around to the Montevideo Maru yet," says Jim, "but I have not forgotten it. I was sidetracked by a poem called Fromelles I wrote after meeting Lambis Englezos, the man who found the missing Anzacs."

So, with a bit of luck, and in the near future, one of Australia's premier bush poets will turn his attention to writing some compelling verse about a matter very dear to our hearts.

Organising Member Profiles

Clive Troy is a director of Infratex (Australia) Pty Ltd and a long-standing executive member of the Australia Philippines Business Council. He served in PNG from 1955-64 and 1967-74 as a Treasury official. He is the driving force behind the memorial to the Montevideo Maru at Subic Bay.

Max Uechtritz is director of programs with Al Jazeera in Doha. He was born in Rabaul and is a grandnephew of Queen Emma. From 2000-04, Max was executive director of news and current affairs with the ABC. He joined Al Jazeera English from NineMSN, where he was editor-in-chief.

Andrea Williams was raised on the family owned Langu Plantation in the Witu Islands, and later in Rabaul. Several years were spent in Sydney working in travel before returning to Rabaul and managing RTC World Travel for five years. After stints in Lae and Port Moresby Andrea left PNG in 1988. She is the long standing publisher and editor of *Una Voce*, the quarterly journal of the PNG Association. Andrea's grandfather, Philip Coote, a company manager, is believed to have died on the Montevideo Maru.

I came here to find a man ...

On 22 June 1972, the 30th anniversary of the sailing of the Montevideo Maru, a service was held in Rabaul. One of the speakers was **KIM BEAZLEY Sr**, like his son, a Federal Member of Parliament. Fortunately **George Oakes** kept a transcript.



When the allegation came out that there had been no prisoners on the Montevideo Maru, that they had been murdered and buried in a mass grave and that their wristlet watches had been found, it was a very authoritative statement by a very distinguished citizen.

And my widowed sister-in-law was extremely upset. So I wrote to Paul Hasluck, then the Minister for Territories, and he caused certain research to be made.

There is no doubt that the American submarine *Sturgeon*, commanded by Captain Wright, torpedoed and sank the Montevideo Maru off Luzon in the Philippines. The question still remains, were the people on board?

I came up here about 12 years ago to see if I could find any New Guinea man whom my brother had trained and had actually seen them go on the ship.

The then Education Officer, knowing my brother was a technical instructor who had instructed New Guinea men to build houses in the European style, realised there was a group of older New Guinea men building in a particular area who must have been trained by my brother.

So he drove me out into the country, into a clearing. I was introduced to the foreman. When he heard my name his face lit up. He had known my brother and had been compelled to carry luggage to the waterfront at the spot where the memorial is and had actually seen them going on to the ship.

So that resolved the problem as far as I was concerned, whoever had been killed and buried in a mass grave, there was no doubt that hundreds had been taken on board the Montevideo Maru, including my brother.

These were men of the Administration and the missions who were absolutely clear they were assisting the people of New Guinea to build a nation.

So the work of those men still goes on. They didn't know that they were training men who would become Ministers of government but their vision was not betrayed. As I saw that day in the clearing, the instructions, the training they had given, was still being carried on.

In my brother's case he never saw a child born posthumously after his wife was evacuated to Australia. There were many other personal tragedies like that and many Australian families remember today and will be interested in the service you are holding here this afternoon.