

Now a search wanted for POW ship



After the recent discovery of HMAS Sydney and the German raider HSK Kormoran in the Indian Ocean 67 years after their World War II battle, there has been a flurry of interest in locating the *Montevideo Maru*, in which 1053 Australian POWs and civilians lost their lives.

According to the Australian War Memorial's records, on 1 July 1942 the *Montevideo Maru* was sunk off the northern coast of Luzon by an American submarine.

1,053 Australians were lost in the greatest single maritime tragedy in Australia's history.

Paul Jones, of Curtin, ACT, wrote to *The Canberra Times* on June 9, "With HMAS Sydney located and the last resting place of so many Australians known at last, we can now properly turn our much-needed focus to locating the *Montevideo Maru* and the 1053 men lost with her.

"Australia's greatest maritime disaster, the *Montevideo Maru*, transporting 1053 soldiers and civilian prisoners of war from the occupied New Guinea islands of New Britain and New Ireland, was torpedoed by an American submarine off the Philippines on July 1, 1942.

"There was some interest when the *Montevideo Maru* Memorial was commissioned at Ballarat on February 7, 2004, as part of the prisoner-of-war wall commemoration.

"Also, from time to time over recent years, the media has shown interest, including *Compass* on April 20 this year, in the fate of the Brunswick Salvation Army Band.

"The band served as medical attendants for 2/22 Battalion, which was lost with the exception of a single survivor, now living in Victoria.

"As the 66th anniversary of the sinking looms, it is heartening to learn that Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is considering an appeal to provide funds to search for the location of the *Montevideo Maru* with the prospect of the site's being declared a war grave."



This prompted Patrick Ryan, of Turner, ACT, to respond, "As a former merchant seaman, I follow matters nautical with interest.

"Since HMAS Sydney was found there seems to be [something] of a clamour to search for other vessels sunk during World War II, such as the *Centaur* and now the *Montevideo Maru*

"Putting aside the physical difficulties involved — the *Montevideo Maru* was sunk [near] the Mariana Trench, the deepest part in the world at over 9000m — one has to ask what benefit would come from locating this wreck.

"The ocean floor is the graveyard of thousands of seafarers and others and they should be left in peace.

"HMAS Sydney was different, as there was some mystery as to how she was sunk and why there were no survivors; not the case with the *Montevideo Maru*."

The Hon Terence Cole AO RFD QC is heading the Commission of Inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the loss of HMAS Sydney in an engagement with the German raider HSK Kormoran, when the warship went down with all hands on 19 November, 1941.

Interest invited

Les Drew, of Greenway, ACT, is the local contact for a group pressing the Government for support to find the *Montevideo Maru* and for its appropriate recognition of the sacrifice of those who died.

He suggests that anyone with an interest, particularly relatives, should register their interest by contacting Cynthia Schmidt by email at rabau1941@gmail.com.

The Australian War Memorial has more information about the loss of the ship, including a transcript and audio of a Roll of Honour talk, presented by Ian Hodges in July 2002; the report by Major H.S. Williams, dated October 1, 1945, for the Recovered Personnel Division on the Japanese steamer *Montevideo Maru*; and a list of passengers believed to have been on the ship.

Fromelles mass grave yields its savage secrets

Work at the limited excavation of a World War I burial site at Pheasant Wood, Fromelles, France, ended on June 13 after archaeologists confirmed the presence of the human remains at the site, as well as providing an assessment of the number of individuals and the condition of the remains.

The Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division team has confirmed that the remains of several hundred men lie at the site as well as artifacts that signify their Australian and British nationality.

Preliminary reports indicate that the remains are of a skeletal nature and seem to be in good condition.

A ceremony was held in Fromelles on June 13 to acknowledge the significance of the ground and provide the local community with an opportunity to pay their respects to those who have lain buried in their field for more than 90 years.

Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, the Hon Warren Snow-



Workers sift painstakingly through the World War I burial site at Pheasant Wood, Fromelles, France, where several hundred of the fallen lie.

don MP, said, "It is important that we recognise the professionalism of the survey team and the support they have received from the British Government, the French authorities, the Common-

wealth War Graves Commission and the local community; and of course we must remember that it is likely that none of this would have happened without the foresight and dedication

of Mr Lambis Englezos, the amateur historian and head of the Friends of the 15th Brigade whose research led to Army's decision to investigate."

The ceremony included prayers for peace by Reverend John Porter, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and Father Roger Duprez, a local priest. Official wreaths were laid by the Australian Ambassador to France, His Excellency Mr David Ritchie; the Mayor of Fromelles, M. Hubert Huchette; the senior Australian Army representative on the Fromelles Evaluation Group, Major General Mike O'Brien; the UK Ministry of Defence's Defence Services Secretary, Major General Matthew Sykes; the Director, France, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Mr David Symons; and the head of Australian Army History Unit, Mr Roger Lee.

Members of the public, including Fromelles residents and Australian nationals, were also invited to lay wreaths.

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