

A camaraderie and understanding of the highest order ...

On the bleak Canberra morning of August 19 a large contingent of the Royal Australian Corps of Signals units who served in Vietnam 1965–72, many accompanied by their families, attended the Australian War Memorial, for the plaque dedication ceremony.

The welcome was given by Ms Nola Anderson, Assistant Director of the AWM, supported by prayers by Chaplain Jim Cosgrove — Army Headquarters.

The inspiring commemorative address was given by Lt Col Peter Murray (Retd), Officer Commanding 547 signals Vietnam 1968 who made special reference to those who died in service in Vietnam.

The unveiling of the plaque was carried out by Major Bill Wattam (Retd), President of the RACSA (ACT Branch) and Dane Walmsley of Pinjarra Senior High School, WA.

Chaplain Jim Cosgrove then dedicated the plaque.

Major Phil Perman, OAM (Retd),



The band of RMC Duntroon accompanied the Australian Rugby Choir at the dedication of the plaque to recognise the sacrifice and service of ex-members of the sub-units of the Royal Australian Corps of Signals, Vietnam, 1965–1972.

Officer Commanding 110 signals Squadron Vietnam 1968–1969, recited the *Ode*. The thanks and farewell address was given by Brigadier Neil Horn (Retd) of 104 Signals Squadron, Vietnam 1969–1970.

The impressive ceremony was supported by the band of the Royal Military College, Duntroon, which ac-

companied the Australian Rugby Choir. The large choir also has several ex-service members, including Major Bill Wattam — a number of whom served in Vietnam. The inspiring ceremony closed with the *Corps Prayer*, led by Chaplain Cosgrove.

The following acknowledgement by the late General Blamey in 1944 encaps-

ulates the esteem all other Australian units have for the Corps of Signals.

He said, “The linking of the various headquarters and units by one group of men and women has created amongst themselves a camaraderie and understanding of the highest order and has earned them the respect and trust of all other Arms”

Hell ship memorial wreath-laying



After *Stand To's* publication in July of letters about searching for the *Montevideo Maru* (below right), the Angeles City and Subic Bay Sub-Branches have sent more details and photograph (above) of a wreath-laying earlier this year at the memorial to the 1053 Australians lost when the Japanese ship carrying the PoWs was sunk by a US submarine in 1942. The Australian Ambassador in Manila will be the keynote speaker at a ceremony on November 11 to be held at the Hellship Memorial in Subic Bay, Philippines. The memorial is dedicated to all of the Allied forces captured and held prisoners of war who lost their lives on Japanese POW ships.

There has been no further announcement regarding a search for the ship lost in or off the Mariana Trench since Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said the Government would consider an appeal to provide funds to find the ship after receiving a letter from Sydney historian and *Montevideo Maru* campaigner Albert Speer.

David Mearns, who found *HMAS Sydney* and *Kormoran*, told ninemsn the 3.7km sea depth at the sinking site would not prohibit a search.

“Such a depth is not a barrier to search like the one we conducted for *Sydney*, it just ensures that the expedition will be costly and run into the millions of dollars,” he said.

“The sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* was the greatest disaster at sea ever suffered by Australians,” said

prominent historian Hank Nelson, who has spent decades researching the loss of 845 prisoners of war and 208 civilians.

Only one eyewitness account has ever emerged and then only after 60 years when the sole surviving Japanese sailor revealed details of the “death cries” of trapped Australians going down with the ship while others sang *Auld Lang Syne*.

Among the civilians was Reverend Syd Beazley, of the Methodist Mission, brother of Kim Beazley Snr, the father of the former Opposition Leader. The grandfather of Environment Minister Peter Garrett was also lost.

The Australians had been taken aboard the *Montevideo Maru* on June 22, 1942 at Rabaul, where they'd been

BELOW: Major Bill Wattam (Retd), President of the RACSA (ACT Branch) and Dane Walmsley, of Pinjarra Senior High School, WA, unveil the plaque.



interned after the Japanese invasion and occupation of the former capital of Australian-mandated New Guinea. It was bound for Hainan.

However, it was intercepted and sunk by the *USS Sturgeon* about 60 miles west of Cape Luzon, in the Philippines, in the early hours of July 1.

The submarine commander, Lieutenant William “Bull” Wright, had no way of knowing the ship was carrying allied troops and civilians.

There is confusion over the nominal roll, which was apparently lost after being brought back from Japan by

post-war investigators.

Anyone with information on sunken vessels of historical significance was urged to contact the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. Mr Speer wrote to the Prime Minister calling for action for “the sake of historical truth, certainty and peace of mind of the families” of the victims.

In 2003 the previous government rejected a petition of 959 people to search for the *Montevideo Maru* and regular appeals by Mr Speer and others.

