

RABAUL and MONTEVIDEO MARU GROUP
PAPUA NEW GUINEA ASSOCIATION of AUSTRALIA Inc.

SOME CAME HOME: AN INSIGHT INTO THE FIRST ENGAGEMENT OF WWII
ON AUSTRALIAN TERRITORY

PREAMBLE

Since 2014 the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Education Group, as part of the PNGAA, has been in contact with high school history teachers throughout Australia in regards to the teaching of the WWII history of Rabaul and the New Guinea islands. Feedback from teachers has been appreciated. Teachers have been impressed by the outstanding teaching resources that have been gathered in the teaching document. It is understood that teachers have limited time in which to teach the WWII history in the school history syllabus but this has been designed to fit easily into one or two of your history lessons. Any queries can be addressed to admin@memorial.org.au.

When you look through the teaching document you will see that this Australian history shows us the complexity of war.

It was the first time an Australian territory was invaded.

There are many linkages:

- WWI: The capture of German New Guinea and the battle for the German radio station at Bitapaka – the first battle for the Australian military during WWI.
- The Paris Peace Conference where the future of the German colony in New Guinea was decided.
- A place where Australians, including many WWI veterans (soldier settlers), could find employment after WWI.
- WWII: When the Australian Mandated Territory of New Guinea was invaded and occupied by the Japanese resulting in the deaths of at least 1,400 Australians (many civilians as well as servicemen) – the fall of Rabaul; the massacres and executions, including an 11 year old Australian boy; and over 1,000 Australians who died on the hellship, the *MS Montevideo Maru*. Some came home, but only a small percentage (20%) of the Australian population (estimated to be around 2,000) which was at Rabaul and in the New Guinea islands when Japanese invaded in January 1942 survived the war. Many of the soldiers who were able to escape from the New Guinea island of New Britain in 1942 continued to fight in the New Guinea Campaign. Captain William Owen was killed at Kokoda on 29th July 1942. Hugh “Nipper” Webster who survived the Tol Plantation Massacre on 3/4 February 1942 returned to fight on New Britain later on in the war.

Use the resources in this teaching document to enrich your teaching of WWII history.

Patrick Bourke February 2018

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