

**A VERY LONG WAR:  
THE EXPERIENCES OF THE FAMILIES  
OF THE MISSING MEN OF THE NEW GUINEA ISLANDS, 1941-1995**

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This thesis is my own work containing, to the best of my knowledge and belief, no material published or written by another person except as referred to in the text.

M. I. Reeson

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## **Abbreviations**

AA - Australian Archives

AA, A - Australian Archives, A.C.T.

AA, MP - Australian Archives, Victoria

ANU - Australian National University

AWM - Australian War Memorial

ML - Mitchell Library, Sydney

MOM - Methodist Overseas Missions

NGVR - New Guinea Volunteer Rifles

PIM - Pacific Islands Monthly

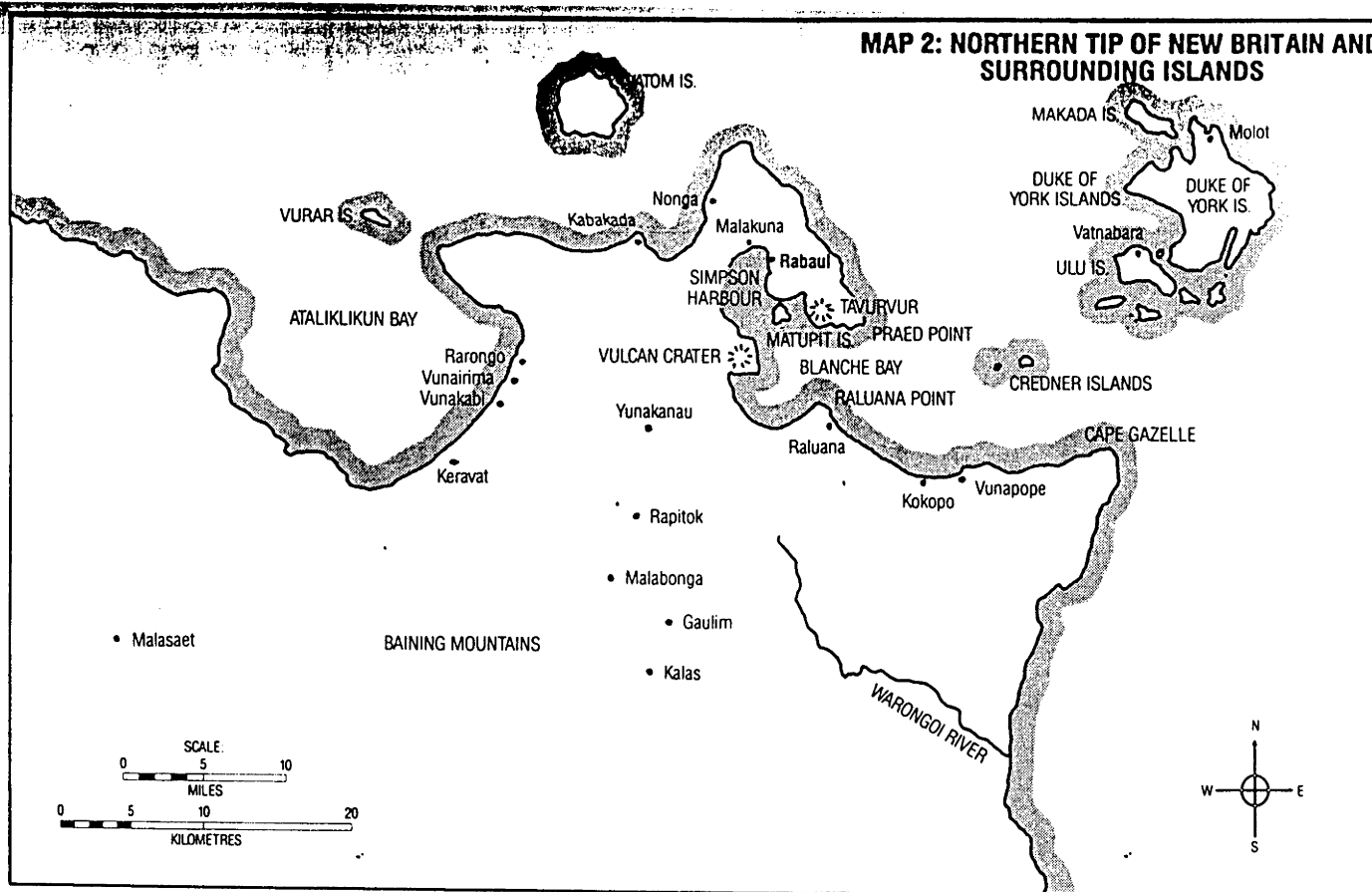
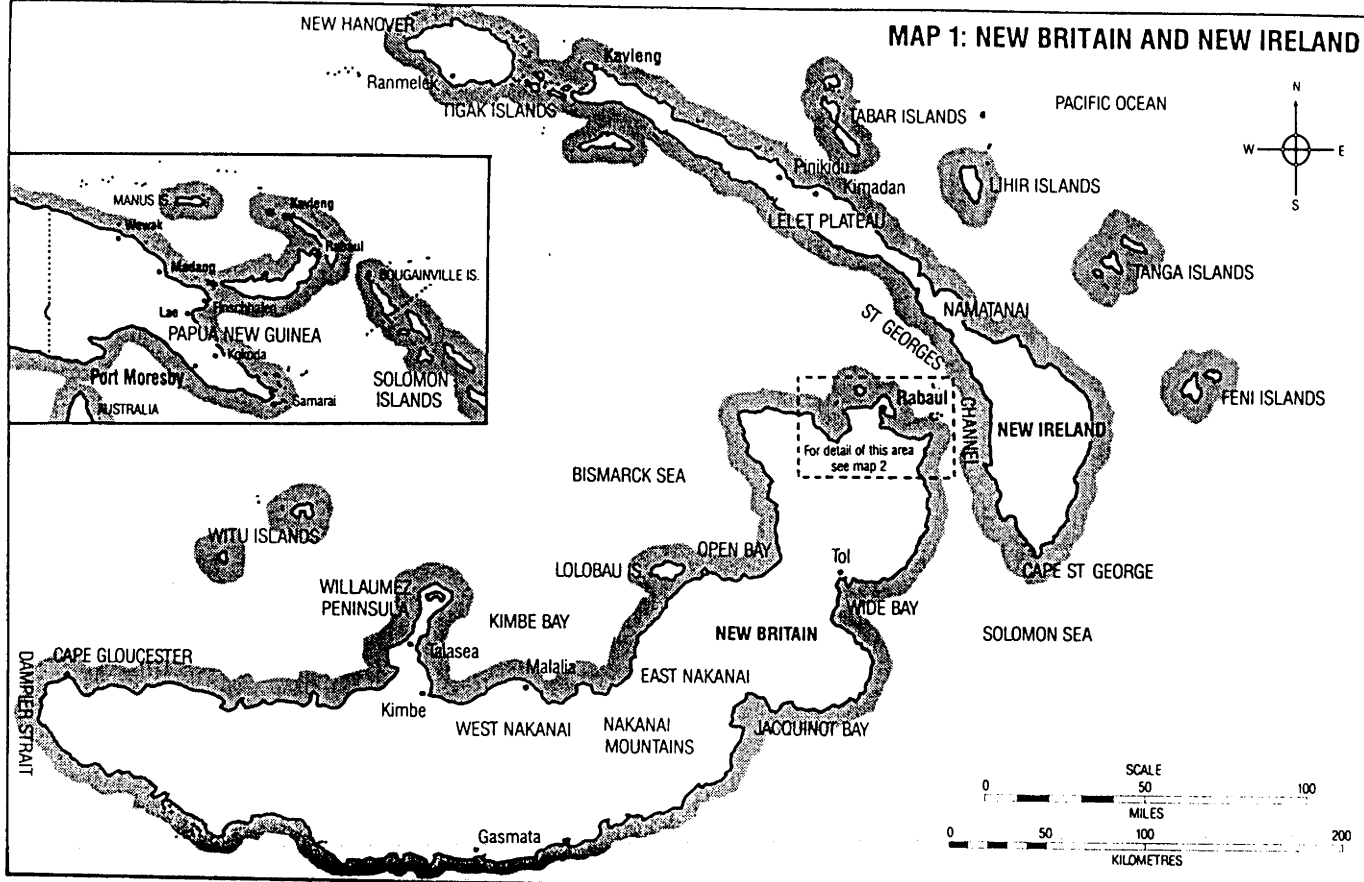
PMB - Pacific Manuscripts Bureau

SMH - Sydney Morning Herald

2/22nd Bn - 2/22nd Battalion

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## PREFACE

In September 1993, a very large boulder was hauled into position on the harbour foreshore in Rabaul, on the island of New Britain, Papua New Guinea. It carried a bronze plaque and was intended to be a permanent memorial to the many Australians who had disappeared in the islands during the war years 1942 -1945. A year after the memorial rock was put in place, it had disappeared under a layer of ash following volcanic eruptions at Rabaul. The hidden memorial rock is a metaphor for the fate of the people it was meant to memorialise. Their loss was unknown to their families for so long and the tragedy has been obscured from public view ever since. From the beginning, there has been a disturbing element of mystery, misunderstanding, misinformation and confusion over the events of those years. Although the memories remain, full of meaning for families and friends, the story and the effects of that loss continue to be buried in the privacy of their lives, unseen by the wider community.

The community of Australians who lived in the islands of the Mandated Territory of New Guinea in 1941 was only one of many communities broken by war. The experience of separation and bereavement was shared by thousands of other Australian families. Although many elements of this experience are not unique to the Australians in New Guinea, a case study of this group is part of understanding the wider picture of war. The aim of this thesis is to explore the experiences of a particular community located in a specific period and place, in order to illuminate the private and hidden history of individuals whose lives were thrown into chaos by the public actions of nations. It will describe what happened to them, the impact on their lives over the

fifty years which followed, and the ways in which they have perceived and measured this experience.

The fall of Rabaul, New Britain, and the tragic loss of life which followed, provide the background for the thesis but the focus is on the relatives and friends at home in Australia rather than the events in the islands. The civilian families had lived in the islands of New Guinea - New Britain, New Ireland, New Hanover, Duke of York Islands and nearby small island clusters - before the war, but the families of the soldiers of Lark Force had never seen the islands, and their only link was the presence of their men there during 1941-1942. The relatives, in particular the wives and children of the missing men, were forced to cope with separation, then long years of having no news of their fate and finally learning, little by little, the painful truth that their men would not be coming home. The circumstances surrounding their tragic loss were to produce complications in the way the women would be treated by the Australian authorities, differing according to whether their man was a soldier or a civilian. For the civilian families, there were added problems which developed according to whether their man had been working for the civil administration, as a missionary or in private enterprise. They all had to cope, often alone, with their own personal grief, with the difficulties of caring for their children and with a bureaucracy which sometimes seemed uncaring. The effects of the loss and grief have continued for many of these relatives to the present day. It is that hidden story which is the subject of this thesis.

My interest in this topic began in 1988 at a public event to recognise the re-siting of a memorial plaque for a group of ten Methodist missionaries from New Guinea islands who disappeared in 1942. On that occasion, widows of the missing men, surviving colleagues, New Guinean church leaders, ex-servicemen and representatives of the one-time island community were present and spoke with feeling of their loss. From this initial contact, research was begun on the lives of the mission

staff from 1941-1947 through the eyes of six of the mission women, including two nurses who had been captured by the Japanese and interned in Japan from 1942-1945. This was published as *Whereabouts Unknown*, Sydney, 1993 (Albatross Books). As a result of reflecting on what I had learned, it became clear that the wartime experiences of the missionary women had been repeated in a much wider community of Australian women, and that the real meaning of the war years for those women could only be understood in the light of the fifty years which followed.

A discussion of the literature which has come out of this sequence of events is found in context in Chapter 5. As well as war histories which examine the military and political aspects of the conflict in the islands, much of the literature is biographical, written by survivors who describe epic journeys of escape, mission histories reflecting on the survival or martyrdom of their people, or commentaries on the experience of being prisoners of war or internees. It appears that the experience of bereaved family members waiting in Australia has not been the subject of prior research.

The sources for this discussion include archival documents, both public and private, contemporary journals and newspapers and most importantly oral history gathered from those who lived this experience. Many people have shared their stories. Some were contacted in the course of writing *Whereabouts Unknown* and continued their involvement in the research for the thesis. Others read the book and made contact. A Questionnaire was developed and distributed to 168 people, with 121 responses. The use of the questionnaire provided a contact point with people to whom I was a stranger, as well as gathering data about their experience from a wide range of people. In addition to the formal responses which came back, many people added illuminating personal notes, offered private archives and wrote letters. From this contact, there developed a network of people who were prepared to be interviewed.

Interviews with 55 people were conducted over several years in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Canberra. Several significant networks of people became accessible: the longterm friendship network of the former Methodist missionaries, the links between former Lark Force families through the 2/22nd Battalion Lark Force Association, names and addresses of those (many of them civilians who had businesses in New Guinea islands) who attended two major services of remembrance at North Parramatta in 1988 and 1992, and the Retired Officers Association of Papua New Guinea. Each group has been generous in friendship and in offering memories and reflections on their experience. One very valued aspect of the work has been the way so many people have continued their interest after sending back a questionnaire or completing an interview; many write or phone with additional material, contributing to what has become a group exercise.

For the purposes of this work, it is often useful to be able to link names with family of origin. In the case of women who were children during the war, their maiden name is used in references to the years of their childhood. However, when quoting them as adult women, now known by their married name, both names are used. For example, 'Jennifer Render Evans' indicates that her father's name was Render. To identify women who were widowed and remarried after the war, their first married name is given in brackets eg. Jean (Poole) Mannering.

People who responded to the questionnaire or were willing to be interviewed were offered confidentiality, if they preferred. In those cases, their comments are identified by a number on their questionnaire, which simply indicated the order in which their reply arrived, or the city in which they were interviewed. The frankness and honesty of their responses have been greatly valued.

This work is offered on their behalf, to give a voice to those who feared that the events of Rabaul 1942-1945 and the aftermath in the lives of their families would be forgotten.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE SCATTERING OF A COMMUNITY

#### Unease in the islands

In 1941, a community of Australians lived and worked in the islands of the Mandated Territory of New Guinea.<sup>1</sup> For many of them the islands were home, and the mix of people - New Guineans, Chinese, Malay, people from Europe and others - made up their world.<sup>2</sup> The war in Europe seemed remote to many of them,<sup>3</sup> though a number of younger men from the islands had enlisted and departed to distant war zones, then, during 1941, talk of the possibility of Japan entering the war intensified. When the Australian military leadership sent troops to the islands (Lark Force began arriving in Rabaul, New Britain, in April 1941 and the 1st Independent Company reached Kavieng, New Ireland, in July 1941) and from May 1941 the evacuation of Australian women and children was encouraged, war moved closer to their communities.

The presence in the towns of the newly arrived soldiers was a reminder that their world might not be as stable as it seemed. Despite this, the men of Lark Force were generally made welcome in the community. Families who had lived in the islands for years accepted the normal hazards of island life - uncertain economic conditions, the heat, the risk of malaria, earth tremors and active volcanoes on the edge of town - and accepted these newcomers with greater or less enthusiasm. Many households invited

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<sup>1</sup> In this account the use of 'the islands' or 'the islands of New Guinea' is shorthand for New Britain, New Ireland, New Hanover, Duke of York Islands, Tabar Islands, Lihir Islands, Vitu Islands. The mainland of New Guinea, the Admiralty Islands, Bougainville and the Papuan islands of Milne Bay are not included.

<sup>2</sup> Official Year Book of Commonwealth of Australia, No.34 -1941, gave the population of the Mandated Territory of New Guinea as at June 1940: white - 4,399 (3,345 British); Chinese - 2,061; Japanese - 38; 'native population' (in New Britain and New Ireland alone) - 143,605. Only about half the white population would have lived in the island areas which form the background for this study.

<sup>3</sup> For residents of Rabaul and Kavieng there was a brief excitement in January 1941. Survivors from ships sunk by German raiders were landed on Emirau Island and passed through those towns on their way home.

the soldiers to their homes and plantations, and the visitors joined in local sporting and social events when they were free to do so. On plantations and missions on New Ireland and the smaller island clusters, families lived in comparative isolation, rarely encountering the soldiers. For the men of Lark Force, the islands of New Guinea seemed at first a disappointing and unexciting place to be posted, far from the realities of war, and they sent letters and photographs home describing new friendships in the tropical community where they 'won golden opinions from the Territory people'.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout 1941 there was a growing unease. Nancy Edwards, wife of Assistant District Officer Murray Edwards in Kavieng, was not happy when soldiers built a gun emplacement near her house and 'thought it was dangerous to have them there'.<sup>5</sup> A secret correspondence passed between the Administrator of the Territory of New Guinea and the Military Board of the Defence Department discussing plans for a possible evacuation of 'non-essential civil personnel in Rabaul in an emergency'.<sup>6</sup> The War Cabinet recommended that Australian women and children should be encouraged to leave New Guinea and Papua, but the advice should be given 'unobtrusively in order to avoid panic'.<sup>7</sup> By July 1941 over 100 women had already left New Britain, or were preparing to leave. Although the choice of whether to leave or stay was left to the individual, it was not a simple decision. Cost of travel was an issue, temporary separation of families was not undertaken lightly and for some women there was no readily available accommodation in Australia. In any case, with only a limited understanding of the likelihood of Japan entering the war, civilians tended not to take the situation seriously. Commercial companies and mission leaders tried to learn what

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<sup>4</sup> Lady McNicoll, wife of Administrator McNicoll. *Sydney Morning Herald* 23 January 1942

<sup>5</sup> Nancy (Edwards) Mathews, interview, Adelaide, January 1994

<sup>6</sup> Ramsay McNicoll to Prime Minister, 12 June 1941. AA, A 518: BJ 16/2/1 Part 1 Evacuation of Women and Children from New Guinea. Administrator McNicoll sent details of the white women and children in the whole Territory including the mainland, numbering 1,425, but from that number excluded 289 women who were staff of missions who, he presumed, would wish to stay on. A footnote added 736 Chinese women and 2 Japanese women. Only some of the 1,425 listed lived in the islands of New Britain, New Ireland, New Hanover or the Duke of Yorks; probably more than half lived on the mainland in the towns of Lae, Madang, Wewak, Bulolo as well as missions, plantations and mining communities.

<sup>7</sup> Evacuation of Women - External Territories March 1941. AA, A518: BJ 16/2/1 Pt2

they could but with mixed results. Rev. Dr. John Burton, General Secretary of Methodist Overseas Missions, wrote to his staff in the islands of the 'conflict of opinion regarding the seriousness of the situation' and reassured them that there was no evidence of any specific danger in New Guinea and any general danger was not so serious as appeared in the minds of some.<sup>8</sup>

Individual women and their husbands decided whether they should leave or stay. One missionary wife, Jean Shelton, recalled that she obeyed the general government advice to leave because 'You do what you're told', while another, Daisy McArthur, chose to stay on with her husband in Rabaul until they could travel home for leave together, as planned. Nancy Edwards in Kavieng was pregnant and did not want to travel, but felt obliged to go because of pressure on her husband from both military and civil leaders. Kathleen Bignell, plantation owner and business woman, chose not to leave because of work responsibilities and financial problems. Whatever their decision, the women felt that they were open to criticism; they were seen as either being uncooperative or they were running away. In any case, mixed messages were being given, with some women being permitted to return from leave while all others were encouraged to leave. Decision-making as late as 17 November 1941 was still ambivalent.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the uncertain position of civilians, decisions were being made at that time which would affect the 1,400 men of Lark Force and their families at home. Because of changing policies of the US military strategists to activity in the Pacific,

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<sup>8</sup> Methodist Overseas Missions Board Minutes 1939-1943, p.397. ML MOM 339

<sup>9</sup> AA, A518: BJ 16/2/1 Pt 2. On 17 November, the War Cabinet's secret minutes affirmed that although compulsory evacuation was not necessary on the ground of either military need or shortage of supplies, and they preferred to avoid 'disturbance of domestic arrangements', they would continue to make secret preparations for a possible evacuation of civilian women. An example of the continued changing of the official mind was the case of the new bride of patrol officer George Greathead; Mrs Greathead booked a berth on a ship to join her husband in August, September and October but was refused a permit to travel each time, although the wives of other men were allowed to return - her permit was granted on 25 November 1941. Cilla Higgins' Permit to travel home to Rabaul was signed on 8 December 1941, though she was warned that she returned at her own risk. Neither woman travelled.



Australian leaders had decided 'to maintain Rabaul only as an advanced air operational base, its present small garrison being regarded as hostages to fortune'.<sup>10</sup>

### **Time to act**

The entry of Japan into the war on 7 December 1941 galvanised the government into action. The Commonwealth Government, through the War Cabinet, made the decision on 12 December that Australian women and children in Papua and New Guinea were to be compulsorily evacuated. Decisions, long delayed, were suddenly carried out under pressure, with great urgency, and people were caught up in a tide of actions and reactions with little control over individual lives, no knowledge of how long they might be away from their homes in the islands and in some cases no idea where they could go in Australia. The logistics of transporting hundreds of people from remote outposts in the islands to cities across Australia, by ship, aircraft and train, were complex. From New Britain, New Ireland and the smaller island clusters around them, some 500 women (not including missionary women) needed to be moved on an unidentified date known only as 'Z Day'.<sup>11</sup>

It became clear very quickly that 'compulsory evacuation' of Australian women and children had many ambiguities. 'Missionaries and nurses' were exempted, but policy was unclear regarding male adolescents, missionary wives, mixed race women, enemy alien women or women running their own plantations. Asian and New Guinean women were certainly not included in plans for evacuation nor were Australian men who were too old for military service.<sup>12</sup> Decisions on several of these issues were

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<sup>10</sup> Australian Prime Minister's Department to Washington DC USA, marked 'Most Secret and Important', Cablegram 12 December 1941. AA, A816/1: 14/301/255

<sup>11</sup> War Cabinet Minutes 11 December 1941; cables sent on 12, 14 December 1941. AA, A518: BJ 16/2/1 Part 2

<sup>12</sup> Rabaul Administrator to PM Department 15 December 1941; PM Department to Territories 16 December; Evacuation plans completed 13 December and announced 14 December "Most secret and immediate". Secret cables to Page, Rabaul 16 December, to Murray, Port Moresby 17 December; AA, A518 BJ16/2/1; cable from Rabaul 16 December AA, MP1587/1/0 97E; AA, A518/1 DR16/2/1A

produced in haste, and then modified. All of these clouded questions contributed to the general sense of instability as families prepared for separation.

For each segment of the community a different set of factors applied. For the families linked with the civil administration in Rabaul and Kavieng there were the fewest problems; most of the government departments were already in process of transferring personnel and facilities from the volcano-haunted town of Rabaul to the intended new capital of Lae. Household goods were already being packed and jobs and salaries would remain secure, even if their family life was interrupted while their women spent some time in Australia. The missionary families knew that they would have the support of their mission board and local churches if they went back to Australia, but had a strong sense of duty to the work they were doing and hesitated to leave their New Guinean people. Different missionary societies in different districts made their own decisions but for each group there were common issues of 'call' by God, responsibility and faithfulness, and how to interpret these in the light of a potential invasion by an enemy power.<sup>13</sup> In the case of the Methodists, with the exception of four nurses, all their women (staff and wives) were sent home with the evacuation, and the men agreed that they ought to stay on in hope of being able to continue their work. Missionary Dan Oakes wrote home, 'I feel that it is more than ever my duty to stay here'.<sup>14</sup> His colleague Tom Simpson wrote to his wife Nellie that Assistant District Officer Murray Edwards had suggested that the missionaries should 'stand by on our jobs' in order to act as go-betweens between the local population and an invading force. Simpson was dubious about the chances of missionaries being permitted such

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<sup>13</sup> The contemporary experience for mission groups in Papua and New Guinea is described in a number of places. Some examples: Wetherell, David, (ed.) *The New Guinea Diaries of Philip Strong 1936-1945*, Melbourne, 1981, p.222-223 (Anglicans in Papua); Leo Scharmach M.S.C., *This Crowd Beats Us All*, Sydney 1960, (Roman Catholics in New Britain); A.P.H.Freund, *Missionary Turns Spy: story of his service with the New Guinea Coastwatchers in the war against Japan, 1942-43*, Adelaide. 1989, p.32 (Lutherans on New Guinea mainland); H.N.Nelson, 'Loyalties at Sword-Point: the Lutheran Missionaries in Wartime New Guinea, 1939-45', *Journal of Politics and History*, August 1978

<sup>14</sup> Rev. Dan Oakes, letter to Rev. G.E.Johnson, 8 December 1941, privately held. Written from Pinikidu, New Ireland.

freedom should an invasion take place, but wrote, 'It is no use worrying and we can't run from the job in anticipation'.<sup>15</sup>

The group for whom the evacuation of their women raised most difficulties was those people involved in commercial enterprises, be they staff in a large company; plantation managers or owners, mill workers, trades people and those with their own small businesses. Few of them had a major employer to provide help, and many were already facing financial problems and struggled to retain their businesses. A number had lived in the islands for years and had lost touch with their Australian connections, leaving them without an obvious place to send their families. Those who had found employment in the islands directly from their original homes in the United Kingdom or the Netherlands, for example, had never ever lived in Australia and had no personal links there. Nonetheless, whether or not they wished to leave, almost all the women found themselves preparing for a long, stressful and potentially dangerous journey to an uncertain future. One other key group, the relatives of the military people in the islands, would also be profoundly affected by the events which were unfolding. However, at least they did not have to face the problems of evacuation. They were still in their own homes, with their own support systems and a normal life; the absence of their men during military service was common to much of the wider community.

Not everyone wished to be evacuated. For several women who were in business alone, the problems of abandoning their plantation or mill persuaded them to remain while all the other women were travelling to Rabaul for transfer to Australia. A few of these were able to escape later with groups of civilian men,<sup>16</sup> but two suffered for their decision. Kathleen Bignell, business woman, avoided leaving and unsuccessfully

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<sup>15</sup> Tom Simpson, letters to wife Nellie from New Hanover and Kavieng, New Ireland, 26-27 December 1941, privately held.

<sup>16</sup> MP 1587/1/0 97E, report from Mrs N.M.Boles 'coastwatcher of Waterfall Bay, New Britain' to Naval Intelligence, Brisbane, 16 February 1942; Mrs Gladys Baker of Witu Islands, J.K.McCarthy, *Patrol into Yesterday: My New Guinea Years*, Melbourne 1963 p.189

attempted to escape after the invasion; she was captured and interned in Japan.<sup>17</sup> Jean Harvey, de facto wife of planter Ted Harvey, stayed on the plantation. Ted was heard to state that she was 'an integral part of my machinery'<sup>18</sup> but private conflicts and some anomalies regarding her marital status may have influenced him to keep her at home.<sup>19</sup> Jean Harvey was executed with her husband and son during 1942.

As well as the women who did not want to leave, there were also at least two teenage boys who objected to being counted among the children. The Gascoigne family had lived in Rabaul since 1924 and owned a business. Fifteen year old Ivor had recently started work and pleaded to be allowed to stay with the men. The acting Administrator, H.H.Page, said that it should be Mrs Gascoigne's decision. Older sister Betty recalled

It was a terrible decision for Mum to have to make. Ivor used to come home from work every day and say to Mum, 'Well, have you decided?' I don't think any of us thought what did happen would happen - it was a strange sort of situation. She said he was working, he didn't want to come and she thought he'd be company for Dad. Poor Mum...<sup>20</sup>

There were also those who would have left if they had been given the opportunity. Among these were many Chinese families, mostly store owners, a number of whom had sent their children to Australia for their education. As a community they had good reason to be very fearful of the Japanese because of the continuing conflict in China and because many of the New Guinea Chinese were publicly committed to the Kuomintang. Chinese people from other parts of New Guinea were able to reach Sydney, but the Rabaul Chinese did not.<sup>21</sup> Women in mixed race households were

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<sup>17</sup> Margaret Clarence, *Yield Not to the Wind*, Sydney 1982 p.102

<sup>18</sup> Ron Wayne, letter to wife Helen Wayne, 24 December 1941, privately held

<sup>19</sup> Hank Nelson, address at launch of *Whereabouts Unknown*, Margaret Reeson, 30 November 1993.

<sup>20</sup> Betty Muller, nee Gascoigne, interview, Canberra, 19 August 1994. The other youth was Topal Jnr, with his father on New Ireland

<sup>21</sup> Ping Hui, interview, Sydney, 27 July 1992; Mary Jenkins, *The Missionary Review*, 5 May 1942 p.10

also expected to stay in the islands and survive as best they could, though a few mixed race wives and servants of Australians travelled with the evacuation.<sup>22</sup> Administrator Page attempted to gain permission for many older white civilian men to be evacuated but without success.<sup>23</sup>

### **The dispersal**

Thus, willingly or unwillingly, the Australian community across the islands of New Guinea was on the move. In the neighbouring islands of Papua the same thing was happening, and at some points the two separate streams of evacuees merged briefly. Few had more than two or three days to prepare for a major disruption of their lives as they packed, farewelled their menfolk, home, staff and possessions and travelled to the gathering points of Rabaul, Port Moresby and Samarai. The elements provided a backdrop of violent storms and destructive winds of the north-west season. 'Flying weather has been vile', noted one official on 21 December,<sup>24</sup> and the stories of hazardous journeys to the centres allude to dangerous weather conditions for travel in small boats, on unsealed roads or by air. For those in Rabaul, there was an unsettling pattern of regular earth tremors as Tavurvur volcano puffed dust and steam over the town. Among the residents of Rabaul there was confusion and tension. Ellice Fisher and her friend Dell Crombie, wives respectively of the government vulcanologist and a Rabaul solicitor, planned to end their own lives in the event that the Japanese landed before they escaped. They decided that Dell would shoot Ellice and then herself. However, their failure at pistol practice when they were unable to hit a tin on a post suggested that they might need another plan. Norman Fisher remembered

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<sup>22</sup> Emma Lehmann travelled with Gladys Baker, see McCarthy, *Patrol*, p.194; AA, A518: BJ16/2/1 Part 3 p.222 Miss H. Leivrang and Miss C.Pflug, mixed race-women, travelled with their employers Mrs Coote and Mrs Woolcott

<sup>23</sup> Of the 175 white male civilians who were listed as having died with the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*, (excluding the Scandinavian sailors from the *Herstein*) 44 were aged over 50 years, 35 aged 45-49 years, 25 aged 40-44 years.

<sup>24</sup> Leonard Murray to Prime Minister's Department, 21 December 1941

Ellice came home to me and she said, 'She's not going to kill me - she's going to MAIM me!' So I said, 'Righto, we'll go down to the lab'. We made up a series of suicide capsules.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the passage of time, the days of the evacuation are still vividly recalled today by the women involved. The events were printed on their memories as among the most powerful images of their lives. Many mentioned the anxieties of trying to select what they should carry within their baggage weight limit of 30 pounds, with an extra 15 pounds for a child. Nellie Simpson, on remote New Hanover, heard the evacuation order on the wireless and joined about twelve women from Kavieng for a 'terrible trip' of over 24 hours on a copra sailing ship through storms and heavy seas. When they reached Rabaul at last, however, they discovered that 'nobody was worried about us in Rabaul because they were all worrying about themselves trying to pack and get out'.<sup>26</sup> Jean Poole was with husband John at a lonely mission station on the edge of the Baining mountains, without telephone contact. They were surprised when

we were woken up at midnight by a loud bang on the front wall and my husband went out. It was a policeboy with a document from the government telling all women to be in Rabaul two days hence to go by boat back to Australia.<sup>27</sup>

Jean Poole made her way into Rabaul partly by foot, because of broken bridges and washed out roads, and then by utility truck. Her friend Kathleen Brown had expected to travel home to a mission station on west New Britain that week, after a difficult childbirth in Rabaul, but missed the sailing; in retrospect she was grateful because the other plantation and mission women from the north-west coast of New Britain sailed through hurricane storms and arrived in Rabaul after the evacuation ships had gone.<sup>28</sup> Plantation, business and mission women along the length of New Ireland gathered under instructions to evacuate.

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<sup>25</sup> Norman Fisher, interview, Sydney, 19 October 1994

<sup>26</sup> Nellie Simpson, interview, Adelaide, 26 November 1991

<sup>27</sup> Jean (Poole) Mannering, interview, Sydney, September 1991

<sup>28</sup> Kathleen Brown, interview, 26 November 1991

They all went across and waited all day in blinding rain and windstorm well-knowing nothing could get through to take them - but orders were orders. There were 26 altogether, I believe and some are still waiting in Namatanai but others have gone home to await orders.<sup>29</sup>

Among those who went home to wait were Myra Ashby and her children from Maramakas plantation, and Gwen Ives with her small daughter from a west coast plantation.

For those in the Territories with responsibility for the evacuees, the problems were overwhelming. Hundreds of people, suddenly uprooted and torn from spouses, work and friends, were leaving remote plantations, businesses, missions and tropical towns and had to be transferred to locations across the Australian continent. Distance and isolation, poor communications and the weather, together with practical issues of appropriate shipping and the availability of aircraft all combined to frustrate their plans. The original 'Z Day' of 18 December had to be deferred because many women had not yet arrived in Rabaul. On 22 December 1941, the women and children who had arrived boarded two passenger ships, the *Macdhui* and the *Neptuna*, in the harbour. Despite the potential danger of the occasion, the embarkation took place without incident. Some saw evidence of a miracle during that day. Fred Kollmorgen, a Salvation Army bandsman now with the 2/22 Bn, the only one to survive, was working on one of the hills overlooking the harbour.

We knew that they were loading the women and children but we did not see them all day, because of a dense fog [over the harbour]... We were so thankful that they could load like that in the daytime, without any fear of the Japanese bombing them.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Tom Simpson, letters, 25 December 1941. Simpson letters privately held by Margaret Henderson

<sup>30</sup> Fred Kollmorgen, interview, Melbourne, 18 August 1995

One of the few men who was on the wharf in Rabaul to farewell the women, and who survived the war years, Rodger Brown, recalled the scene after the husbands were ordered off the ships: all were wondering whether they would meet again and fearing an attack on the ships more than an occupation of the islands.<sup>31</sup> Nellie Simpson remembered

We were all crying, leaving everybody. It was a sad affair... all the men ran up, rushed up the big pier and we went past it, and that was the last...[we ever saw of them].

That evening, 22 December 1941, some shouted 'We'll be back in six months!' to the men on the wharf as the ship pulled away. Jean Poole commented, 'I imagined we would be in Australia for a while then return to our homes and husbands. The men thought that because they were civilians they might be allowed to continue with their work. We had no idea of what really might happen'.<sup>32</sup>

### **A strange kind of Christmas**

Within days, it was Christmas. For those who were at sea and those who were left behind, it was a very strange season, remembered and recorded in detail. The *Macdhui* and the *Neptuna* sailed south with their complement of women, children and a handful of sick men, last-minute arrivals sleeping on the floors of lounge and music rooms. Despite the disruption to their lives, an effort was made to maintain the traditional rituals of Christmas. The women of the New Guinea Club in Rabaul had prepared for the annual Christmas tree and party for the children of the white community and had taken on board over 200 Christmas stockings, sweets, gifts and decorations. This together with the roast turkey and plum pudding for Christmas dinner preserved the outward signs of normality. Even so, it was a strange and unnatural time

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<sup>31</sup> Rodger Brown, interview, 26 November 1991

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Mel Trevitt, Sydney, October 1991; Nellie Simpson, November 1991, Netta Allsop, letter, 2 May 1992; Jean Poole, letter, 29 March 1992



as Muriel Macgowan, a schoolgirl on the *Macdhui*, recalled in 1994, 'I get very agitated when Christmas draws near. Christmas depresses me, even now'.<sup>33</sup>

Christmas was also a time of disappointment for the families and friends of the soldiers of Lark Force. They had been told that many of their men would be home for Christmas, but with the outbreak of hostilities in the Pacific all leave was cancelled. 'We'll be stopping here indefinitely,' camp cook Jack Render wrote home, as he described restrictions on camp life where things were 'more dull than ever'.<sup>34</sup> Girls, like Flora Pivaresky, who had been writing to their soldier boyfriends, parents of soldiers (in several cases, two or three brothers were together in Rabaul), and wives and children faced Christmas without their men. In Melbourne, Sadie Pascoe cherished the Christmas gifts her husband Frank sent, and his special letter to his new-born daughter, but she would have much preferred his presence.

For those left behind in the islands, Christmas 1941 was like no other. In so many ways, their community was not itself. Court interpreter Ron Wayne wrote after the ships sailed, 'Rabaul is absolutely flat today... Nobody could work except by driving themselves to it'.<sup>35</sup> For many of the white male residents of Rabaul there was less than the usual giving and receiving of hospitality and it was said to be a 'dull, quiet day'.<sup>36</sup> Other long-term residents of Rabaul offered hospitality to the soldiers who were spending Christmas far from home; Cyril and young Ivor Gascoigne decided that as Mrs Gascoigne had already prepared the Christmas cake and puddings for their family they would go ahead with their original plan to invite some soldiers up for Christmas dinner. Only one man of that company survived the war to later recall the hospitality.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ron Wayne letters 24 December 1941; interviews with Nellie Simpson, Kath Brown, Netta Allsop; Muriel Macgowan Lerner, Qn No.51

<sup>34</sup> Jennifer Evans, *Choco Jack: a Frankston Man*, personal record, 1994 pp.15-19

<sup>35</sup> Ron Wayne letters, 23 December 1941

<sup>36</sup> *Rabaul Times*, 2 January 1942

<sup>37</sup> Betty Gascoigne Muller, interview, 19 August 1994

A party of eleven Methodist mission staff, including several nurses, spent the day together at Raluana mission station out of town and had a 'great day' together.<sup>38</sup> Christmas or not, the acting Administrator in Rabaul, H.H. Page, was in his office sending more cables; he had sixty more women and children to evacuate.<sup>39</sup> On New Ireland, Myra Ashby cooked Christmas dinner for Stan and their three children on Maramakas plantation and in the afternoon they went back to wait for the ship once more. Forever after, that family had bitter-sweet feelings about Christmas Day; it was the last time they were all together as a family.<sup>40</sup> Gwen Ives, also on New Ireland, was touched by the farewell given to her by the German priest in her area. Fr Neuhaus presented her with a tiny bouquet of wildflowers and a prayer that next Christmas Day they might meet in peace. The New Ireland women and children were among the final party to fly out of Rabaul on 28 December 1941, their departure hurried as news came through that enemy planes were approaching.<sup>41</sup>

The evacuation ships travelled south in safety, despite rumours and fears of enemy attack. Kath Brown remembered 'the rumours that were on board on what was going on in China, and how they were raping all the women'. When they came through the reef to enter Townsville, there was anxiety about the possibility of mines on the reef, and they were continually warned to avoid speaking to anyone of where they had come from - 'We were continually told, The enemy listens!' At Townsville, many women and children were offloaded to continue their journey south by train, while others sailed on to Brisbane and Sydney. Those left behind found themselves waiting at Townsville railway station with their single suitcase per family. It was a long, slow, exhausting journey down the east coast of Australia because, as one woman recalls it, trains were 'pretty primitive in those days'. The train journey took several days, some

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<sup>38</sup> Ron Wayne letters, 23, 24, 26 December 1941

<sup>39</sup> Series of cables between Rabaul and Prime Minister's Department, Canberra, 23-26 December 1941. AA, A518/1 BJ16/2/1, Part 3

<sup>40</sup> Erice Pizer and Joan Turner (daughters of Stan and Myra Ashby), interview, Melbourne, 12 July 1994

<sup>41</sup> Gwen Ives, interview, NSW, 22 February 1995

women arriving in Melbourne on 31 December and others travelling on to Adelaide or Perth. Some women chose to share a bunk rather than wait for a later train. Frequently the trains were shunted from the main line to allow more urgent traffic through, with long delays. It was very hot. Smoke, dust and smuts continually blew into the carriages from the steam engine. Women queued to use the public wash basin at the end of the train corridor. For those travelling with young children it was a nightmare. They were very grateful to various groups of Red Cross women, Country Women's Association, Catholic Daughters of Australia and VADs along the train route who gave up their Christmas holidays to help, providing meals, drinks, emergency clothing where luggage had been lost, child care so that mothers could rest and baths for the children.<sup>42</sup>

The cost of the dispersal was great and the Commonwealth Government found itself faced with an immense bill for travel, meals and accommodation, as well as temporary financial support for the exiles.<sup>43</sup> Far greater was the cost in human terms of the destabilisation of families and communities. Between 20 December and 31 December 1941, 1,792 Australian women had been evacuated from the Territories of Papua and New Guinea, many from the islands of New Britain and New Ireland.<sup>44</sup> (In the same period, women were being evacuated from other Australian Territories, such as Nauru and Darwin.) The community which had lived in the uneasy intimacy of tropical towns, networks of plantations and mission stations had been scattered. They had been drawn together from around the globe, over the years, for commerce, adventure, employment, religious calling or escape. They did not always approve of each other, or like each other, or even move in the same social strata, but they knew

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<sup>42</sup> Elsie Wilson, Kath Brown, Betty Gascoigne, Gwen Ives, interviews; AA, A518/1 BJ16/2/1 Part 3; *Pacific Islands Monthly*, March 1942 p.28

<sup>43</sup> AA, A518/1 CL16/2/1, A518/1 CL16/2/1B eg. claim from Steamships Trading Co 'To supplying 800 meals to evacuees at the Cosmopolitan Hotel at Samarai...'

<sup>44</sup> AA, A518/1 BJ16/2/1 Part 3; the *Katoomba* had carried 345 women and 213 children who gathered in Port Moresby, the *Macdhui* was overloaded with 109 women and 116 children, the *Neptuna* took 132 women without children from Rabaul and picked up another 38 people at Samarai, civil aircraft transported 762 and the RAAF flying boat uplifted 87 in trips out of Samarai.

one other. They travelled on the same ships, they all ordered goods from the same island suppliers, they were members of the same local clubs, sporting teams and churches, and they were all linked by the invisible ties of local news-sharing. Now, in the calamity which preceded an even greater calamity, their world began to disintegrate.

### **Change and loss**

The exiled women and children now found themselves adrift in a strange and occasionally inhospitable environment. Though, for some, Australia was home, for many more their true home had been left behind, along with husband and father, house, personal possessions, and community. Most of what they valued was now either missing or lost forever. One woman wrote at the time,

Naturally our hurried departure and the fact that our husbands, our homes and all that we possess must be left behind - other than the 30 pounds of luggage allowed us - caused most of us to feel more or less over-wrought.<sup>45</sup>

One of the Ashby children, in the confusion of hastily being thrust on board the DC3 taking the last group of women from Rabaul, had lost one of her sandals. Fifty years later, she met a man who had been there that day. She found herself wanting to ask him, 'Do you know what happened to my sandal? I lost it that day'. It had become a small symbol of the life she had lost.

The Australia to which they returned was not the comfortable haven of which they had dreamed. Major city buildings were surrounded by sandbags, slit trenches were being dug in public parks and backyards, barbed wire was being laid along favourite surf beaches, streets were blacked out at night and city children were being sent to the country. In addition to invasion fears, severe drought conditions existed along the eastern seaboard and water was restricted, Sydney had a heat wave and

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<sup>45</sup> Mrs Ellen Austin to Prime Minister 12 January 1942. AA, A518/1 BJ16/2/1 Part 3

bush fires, while Melbourne and Adelaide suffered from dust storms throughout January.<sup>46</sup> Preoccupied with fears of invasion, and other significant events in a world at war, the distress experienced by the evacuated families did not make much impression on the Australian public.<sup>47</sup>

The women had only been in Australia for a few weeks when Australian metropolitan newspapers carried a small piece headed 'Rabaul Silent Since 4pm Yesterday'.<sup>48</sup> It was 23 January 1942 and the silence that had fallen over Rabaul was to continue almost unbroken for nearly four years. Radio contact may have been lost, but it became clear that the invading Japanese fleet had arrived and was attacking Rabaul and Kavieng. After brief, fierce battles, the Australian civilians and soldiers were either dead, fleeing, hiding or in captivity. By 27 January nervous families read that 'The fate of the garrison stationed in the town [Rabaul] is not yet known'<sup>49</sup> though reports (generally vague and without firm information) appeared at intervals that fighting was continuing in the hills. Almost immediately, the civilian families who had lived in New Britain began to ask what steps were being taken to rescue their men. Island trading companies, mission headquarters and External Territories were all besieged with requests. The Managing Director of Burns Philp and Co. informed the Navy that 'many anxious enquiries are being made by relatives of our staff members and our clients through New Guinea'. The Department of the Navy's reply was that 'at the present moment it is impracticable to contemplate an expedition to evacuate civilians from New Britain'.<sup>50</sup> Then slowly, a trickle of civilian men who had escaped

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<sup>46</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 December 1941, 1 Jan, 6 Jan, 8 Jan, 10 Jan 1942

<sup>47</sup> ML MOM 339 p.473 . Minutes of Board of Methodist Overseas Missions, 3 February 1942. The General Secretary of the Methodist Overseas Missions, writing from Sydney in January 1942 to mission staff in Rabaul, pointed out that it was difficult to promise special help to the returning mission families as bombs might be falling, soon, over Sydney.

<sup>48</sup> *SMH* 23 January 1942

<sup>49</sup> *SMH* 27 January 1942

<sup>50</sup> Managing Director of Burns Philp and Coy Ltd to Prime Minister's Department, 28 January 1942. Navy to Burns Philp. AA, MP1049/5/0: 1855/12/21. The reasons given for being unable to help were that there was no communication with New Britain, there were inadequate naval or air resources, and as no one knew where any escapers might be located it would be a logistic impossibility. Their original draft for the letter had stated that 'Naval Forces cannot be spared from other vital duties to cover such an expedition'.

from the islands ahead of the invasion began to arrive in Australia; several of them immediately offered to be part of a rescue mission, but their plans were discouraged, and for want of available air or sea craft nothing came of the schemes.<sup>51</sup> Those who were missing and were to survive, both civilians and the members of Lark Force, would have to be rescued through their own initiative or through the efforts of other civilian residents of the islands. There would be no concerted help from their own government. Family members waiting for news or action were given no encouragement.

During the months which followed January 1942, many critical events took place which were to have immense implications for nations and individuals. Malaya and then Singapore fell, the Japanese began their advance in Papua New Guinea, the Dutch East Indies were overrun. In the wide reaches of the Pacific the American and Japanese navies fought a deadly game of ambush and slowly the tide of war turned. For the families waiting in Australia, all war news was given close attention, but the most vital news for which they longed was information about their missing men. Soldiers' families received telegrams which informed them that sons, brothers and husbands were missing, believed prisoners of war. Women collected newspaper cuttings with any reports of possible locations of prison camps, but knew that such reports were based on guesswork. But there was almost no other news. On the far side of the silence, some soldiers and civilians were travelling on foot across New Britain, attempting to escape to freedom; some were to die of disease or exhaustion and others were to be massacred. Civilians, soldiers and missionaries lived in internment at the Malaguna Camp in Rabaul, or at the Catholic mission at Vunapope near Kokopo. Some civilians and soldiers hid in the bush near their plantations for months and, in some cases, years. A few missionaries, generally Germans, were allowed to stay on remote mission stations for a while, then they, too, were sent to internment camps or retreated into the bush.

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<sup>51</sup> AA, MP 1587/1/0: 97E K.G.Munro (W.R.Carpenters), J.L.Chipper (timber exporter); A518/1: CK16/2/1 F.J.Mackenzie (Commonwealth Bank Manager, Rabaul), N.R.Wilde (pilot)

The silence was broken, just once, during those months, in a remarkable incident. Japanese officers in charge of the prisoners of war and internees held in Rabaul offered them an opportunity to write a single letter to their families and these letters were dropped in mailbags over Port Moresby in April 1942.<sup>52</sup> About 400 families of soldiers and civilians received a letter, and continued to hope that one day another brief letter would come.

Unknown to those in Australia, on 22 June 1942, just over a thousand men, civilians and other ranks of Lark Force, marched from the prison camp in Rabaul, leaving some sixty officers behind. Chinese and New Guinean labourers saw them boarding a ship in the harbour. Meanwhile, the officers together with seventeen Australian nurses and Kathleen Bignell boarded another ship, the *Naruto Maru*, and were sent to prison camps in Japan. Small groups of other Australians remained in hiding or in captivity in the Rabaul area, and the Catholic mission at Vunapope became a centre where some mixed race people and missionaries from Axis nations were gathered under guard. None of these groups knew anything of the whereabouts or wellbeing of any of the others over the months and years that were to follow. Apart from a few letters which passed between the officers in Japan and their families, none of the captives had news from their families for the whole period, nor did their families know whether they lived or had died.

In this strange period of waiting for news, women and children were forced to accommodate great changes in their lives. They could not guess how long they would have to wait but it was plain that it would be more than a few weeks and so action needed to be taken on housing, employment, location and other practical and business matters. Families of both soldiers and civilians had a common anxiety - they had no news of their men. Yet the families of the soldiers of Lark Force were better placed

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<sup>52</sup> List of families who received a letter dropped over Port Moresby: AA, A7030:4; H.R.Knickerbocker, despatches to newspapers concerning 'leter bomb': AWM54: 773/4/65 Examples of these letters are held by the families of Gascoigne, McArthur, Pascoe, Hosking, Gambrill and others.

than the civilians. They still lived in their own homes and neighbourhoods, with familiar networks of friends and their personal possessions around them. If they chose to look for a job, it was a personal choice rather than dire necessity, as they were receiving the usual military pay. A great many other Australian women were in exactly the same situation, with men missing or prisoners of war. Doris Render in Frankston, Victoria, was very worried about her husband Jack, but she and her little girls were still at home in their own cottage with Jack's vegetable garden, fernery and prize dahlias around them. Doris Michelson's 'Tiny' was a prisoner in Rabaul, but at least her girls could stay at their usual school. Sadie Pascoe and her new baby Sue continued to live with her parents in Melbourne, as her husband had been posted to Rabaul after only a few brief weeks of independent married life.

It was very different for the civilian women and children who had been evacuated. In almost all respects they were refugees. A Sydney paper ran a story on the plight of the evacuee wives who were 'calling daily at the New Guinea Trade Agency' in Sydney. The paper said that, apart from anxiety for the menfolk whom they left when they were evacuated to Australia, many of the women need money and employment.<sup>53</sup> Within weeks, almost everything which they valued had been stripped from them. Wives became, effectively, single women. Women who had let their husbands take the lead found themselves described on an official form as 'head of the family travelling', with the related responsibilities. Women who had been supported financially by their husband had to find immediate employment. Women who had been in comfortable financial circumstances became poor. Those who had been mistress of a household with several servants found themselves in a single room in a boarding house, or in the humiliating position of becoming a poor relation, relegated to a sleep-out on the verandah and expected to participate in housework such as they had not done for years. Women without relatives in Australia were without support. Women who had for many years run their own plantations, or shared the business with their

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<sup>53</sup> *Sun* (Sydney) 2 February 1942



husbands, were suddenly redundant and without the satisfaction of good work. From being a person of privilege and prestige as a member of the dominant white community in a colonial setting, they became very ordinary members of a community where white skin carried no special honour. Whereas they had understood the internal workings, the relationships and the 'language' of their island community, they were suddenly without a place in the networks of the suburb or country town where they found themselves, and their new neighbours saw them as foreigners whose past, interests and way of speaking did not belong in the local setting. For some, who originally had travelled direct from England or Europe to the islands and had never previously lived in Australia, a place in Brisbane or Sydney was strange indeed. Even on the level of the personal possessions, most of them had been reduced to the contents of a suitcase, and though some had included treasures like photograph albums or personal jewellery among their things, most had left behind wedding gifts, heirlooms, furniture, books, handmade items from their 'glory box' and other things which defined their life and personality. When these changes and losses were combined with anxiety over a missing spouse, it was not surprising that many of these women found 1942 a very hard year.

Children who came from isolated island plantations and missions were especially confused and distressed by their sudden loss of status. They had assumed that it was normal for playmates to let them lead and have their own way. One child of the time recalls her mother's anxious injunction 'Speak English!' as she tried to help her daughter fit into a society which did not understand Pidgin English, her loneliness on the edge of other people's games and the sadness of no longer having the affection of her New Guinean nanny.

The question of accommodation and an income was an urgent matter for the exiled civilians. In most cases, they found a temporary place to stay, though often it was not ideal. Whole families lived in single rooms, or with relatives, women took

governessing jobs on country properties in order to have work where they could have their child with them, or lived in inner-city flats, bed-sitters and boarding houses. Income varied depending on the group to which the woman belonged. The missionary wives received modest portions of their husbands' stipends, but most needed to augment that in some way. The Administration officers' wives were initially receiving an allowance from their husbands' income, but by March the issue had become 'very confused'<sup>54</sup> as the administration of New Guinea islands by the Australians had ceased and it was questioned whether the men should continue to be paid; eventually, when it became clear that the men were captives or missing, these families were supported financially by the government. (Many administration officers had transferred to the army shortly before the invasion, but this change was not known by the wives.)

The most disadvantaged group was the women who had been depending on a private business or plantation for an income. Many of these had been going through a difficult time before the invasion, with a fall in copra prices and business problems. Now, with their business or plantation in occupied territory, the women were left without income. Gladys Baker, a widow running her own plantation on the isolated Witu Island, arrived in Cairns on the *Lakatoi* with no funds at all. Another group to be disadvantaged were those women who had obeyed the original order to leave the islands, before it was compulsory; fares and support were offered to the later group, but the earlier group had paid their own way.<sup>55</sup> Frances Ryan had travelled to Sydney in November 1941 but though she experienced all the problems faced by the other women she did not receive the assistance offered those recognised as evacuees.<sup>56</sup>

Finding work became more urgent. Single women, of whom there had been many in Rabaul, and married women without children found this relatively easy. A

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<sup>54</sup> S.Lonergan 19 March 1942. AA, MP1587/1/0: 97E

<sup>55</sup> External Territories to Burns Philp, 21 May 1942 . AA, A518 CL16/2/1A

<sup>56</sup> Julia Ryan Richardson, interview, 15 July 1994

number had been teachers, secretaries and nurses and were able to find jobs, particularly because of the number of men leaving the workforce to enlist.<sup>57</sup> But it was many years since some of the women had worked outside the home and they suffered the usual self-doubt about their competence. It was 23 years since Edith Gascoigne had last been employed, but her husband's business was gone and so at age 47 she went to work in a shirt factory.

In a climate of change, anxiety and loss, many of the women turned to each other for support. Branches of a society for women who had lived in the islands were established in the capital cities: the 'New Guinea Women's Association' in Melbourne and the 'New Guinea Women's Club' in Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide. Similar women's organisations catered for soldiers' families, sometimes with a specific group linking families whose men were together in the same unit. Major Mollard's wife organised a group for the women linked with Lark Force. One recalled, 'It was a very good place for women to come. If there wasn't any news then at least we were all in the same boat. We got to know each other and understand each other'.<sup>58</sup>

For many of the displaced women, these meetings played a vital part in keeping them sane and supported. They provided social interaction, purpose, entertainment, and a place where they knew they would be understood. The journal *Pacific Islands Monthly*, which was read by people from the white communities across the Pacific islands, commented on the value of a forum where women could talk about island interests and issues - 'unfortunately, it is a language that the Sydney-sider does not understand'. By October 1942, the Sydney group had devised a scheme whereby more fortunate members would assist those in difficulties. Mocking the Japanese propaganda claims about establishing an East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere in newly

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<sup>57</sup> Details of families being evacuated 1942 : A518 Part 1 DR16/2/1A,

<sup>58</sup> Sadie Pascoe, interview, Melbourne, 15 July 1994

captive Asia, the women called it the 'Co-Prosperity Co-operative Plan'.<sup>59</sup> Other groups raised funds for the Comforts Fund and to help their children.

So, despite the extreme stresses of evacuation, change, loss and anxiety, the families of the missing settled themselves to wait in hope for them to come home.

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<sup>59</sup> *Pacific Islands Monthly*, September 1942, p.9 describes a gathering of the Sydney Club on 29 August 1942 with soloists and a violinist, fundraising through the sale of 'posies and handmade sweets'. The Melbourne Association met monthly in Scotts Hotel, with an 'Australian Tea' social function and fundraiser in the home of Mrs Joan Best. Ted Best was an officer with 2/22nd Bn and in October 1942 his whereabouts was unknown. October 1942 p.5 'The average Territory's resident, after a year or so, loses touch with Australia. They live under a totally separate set of social conditions... In these days...it is a lamentable fact that evacuees have been made to feel that they are indeed foreigners in a foreign land'.

## CHAPTER TWO

### COPING ALONE: 1942-1945

If so large a group of women and children had been abruptly and dramatically evacuated to Australia at any other time, perhaps it would have attracted more public attention than it did. If the fall of Rabaul and the disappearance of the Australian men in the islands had taken place at a time when the nation was not preoccupied with a great many other military setbacks, that too may have held a larger place in the national consciousness. As it was, both the evacuation of the women and the disappearance of the men coincided with a time when the Australian people feared invasion by the Japanese and week after week the daily news was filled with other real and impending disasters. The troops and civilians in the islands of New Guinea were only a small proportion of the Australians who were missing or in captivity early in 1942. During the war years, 23,000 Australians became prisoners or internees of the Japanese, nearly all of them captured early in 1942. A further 8,000 were prisoners of the Germans and Italians: 30,000 men were recorded as Missing in Action, among them men shot down over Europe while serving with the RAF Bomber Command. As many women said later, 'We were all in the same boat'. For the families of the men in the islands, therefore, there was little national concern left over for what might, in other circumstances, have seen an outpouring of public sympathy and support.

If the incidents of the islands had affected a community of similar size on mainland Australia, it may well have had a greater impact on national awareness than it did. However the communities of the Territories of the Commonwealth of Australia lay somewhere beyond the immediate concern of the general population, or even the Government. As Paul Hasluck pointed out, 'For twenty years the territories had been

remote from Australian political events and seldom under public discussion'. Territory affairs were handled, usually without urgency, by a small and 'obscure' branch of the Prime Minister's Department.<sup>1</sup> There was a bitter irony about this which touched families of militiamen who had been despatched to Rabaul and were directly involved in the bombings, invasion and battle. When enquiring about their eligibility for a Female Relative's Badge, worn with pride by women whose men were serving overseas, wives and mothers of Rabaul's militiamen were informed that they were not eligible because members must have 'embarked for service with the AIF beyond the limits of the Commonwealth of Australia. [Those] serving in Darwin, Rabaul and the Mandated Territory are not considered to be serving abroad'.<sup>2</sup> Rabaul was not overseas, as far as officialdom was concerned, but neither was it truly part of Australia. The missing men seemed to belong nowhere.

If the news of the islands catastrophe had been known immediately, or known more clearly, there may have been a greater public response to the needs of the families of the missing. As it was, knowledge of these events emerged in thin trickles, some information held back by censorship, as was proper, but much of the information oozed into view very slowly because no one really knew what had happened. There were very few identified bodies. Even when six survivors returned to Australia with the news that a large party of Australian men had perished violently during their escape attempt in February 1942, some reports were published,<sup>3</sup> but others were suppressed,

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942-1945, Official History of Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, Canberra 1970, p.134

<sup>2</sup> Nottage Correspondence. AWM PR83/189 Item 5. During 1942 there was a correspondence between individual women, groups like the Rabaul Fortress Relatives' Association and the RSL and Army authorities demanding the right to be recognised as women with men abroad in military service. Militia wives did not receive recognition as such. A year after Captain Stewart Nottage had been in action in Rabaul and was captured, Mollie Nottage finally received her Female Relative's Badge on 20 January 1943 after the decision was made that the withholding of the badge would be 'unjust to members of the forces stationed in North Australian areas and the Territories which had been the scene of actual military operations or been subjected to repeated air attacks'.

<sup>3</sup> Press cutting from collection of Ken Macgowan; no date or identification of newspaper, but the internal evidence gives 'Townsville, April 6' as a by-line, and it is clearly in 1942; 'Barbarous Japanese Actions:

and in any case the news emerged over months and then years. By the time the enormity of what had taken place became clear, it was past history. For families of the missing there was no dramatic news, no funerals nor reunions, no visible mourning, no grave, no certainty and no end to the suspense of waiting.

The families of the island men received none of the usual overflowing of concern, compassion and practical help about which Australians pride themselves in times of bushfires, floods, severe drought, mine disasters or earthquake. Though some officials, particularly J.R.Halligan of External Territories, worked hard on their behalf, for the families affected there was no sign of the 'altruistic community' of private citizens who would attempt to help, even before they were asked.<sup>4</sup> They realised that they would have to help themselves. Individually and collectively, the women set about finding support, emotionally and financially. They had to take their own initiatives in seeking information about missing people and in demanding assistance.

### **Searching for news**

Overriding all other needs, the chief concern of both the military and civilian families was to learn what had happened to their men. It began with natural anxiety as days passed into weeks without reliable news. The first stories came with civilians who had fled before the Japanese arrived, so their reports were often inaccurate guesswork.<sup>5</sup>

Wives of the men of Lark Force had expected to have been kept up to date with their

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Australians Bayoneted to Death: After Surrender in New Britain'. Metropolitan daily papers carried this story.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia E.Erickson and Thomas E. Drabek 'Families in Disaster: Patterns of Recovery', *Mass Emergencies* Vol.1, No.3 1976 p.206 in p.203-216

<sup>5</sup> newsclipping, (origin unknown, but in wartime scrapbook of Mrs Helen Wayne), 1 February 1942, dateline 'Townsville'. Among names of those who supposedly had 'reached Australia' in two schooners from New Guinea are Cyril Gascoigne, who wrote to his wife from prison camp in Rabaul in late February 1942 and died with the *Montevideo Maru*, W.R.Huntley, believed to have been executed on New Britain in early August 1942, whose diary of a fugitive life in the bush on New Britain between February and April 1942 was recovered post-war, and L. Vial, who reached Port Moresby, served as a coastwatcher with RAN and died in an air crash in April 1943.

husbands' whereabouts, but this seems not to have happened. Eileen Crocker, soldier's wife, heard on the radio that Rabaul had fallen.

Then there was nothing, dead silence. All I got was a telegram saying he was missing ... I never did hear anything.

Eileen Crocker was fortunate in that her husband was among those to escape early and he arrived in Port Moresby on 27 February 1942. The first news she had was a letter written from hospital by her husband Willis, but she 'got nothing from the Army at all'.<sup>6</sup>

An Adelaide woman, Mollie Nottage, whose husband Captain Stewart Nottage was an officer with the Rabaul Fortress Company, Special Coastal Defence Force, like many other wives made repeated attempts to learn what she could through the Army Military Board and the District Records Office. In February she was told that 'no information has as yet been received concerning him'. In March she was sent a printed form letter stating that 'In the absence of further advice, it can be accepted that [your husband] is safe and well'. In April she was told 'no definite information is at present available' and the added unsettling request that she send District Records 'any information whatsoever you may receive from any source'.<sup>7</sup> It was becoming clear that the Australian military authorities had no more idea than she had of the whereabouts and wellbeing of the Rabaul men.

If the Army was not able to give information to waiting families about the men of Lark Force, neither could anyone answer the questions of civilian families. The Attorney-General's Department, on 9 February 1942 lamented, 'There exists no machinery for the dissemination of vital information respecting the welfare of husbands

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<sup>6</sup> Eileen Crocker, interview, Canberra, 11 November 1994

<sup>7</sup> Nottage Correspondence, AWM PR 83/189 (Item 5) 2 of 10



and/or other relatives remaining in the Mandated Territory'.<sup>8</sup> Not only was there no machinery. There was no information either.

As survivors, both military and civilian, about four hundred of them, gradually made their way back to Australia over the next six months, it was not only the military who wanted to interview them but also the families of the missing. However, even if there had been no question of military security, the escapees had almost nothing to tell about people they had left behind. They had left Rabaul in haste within hours of the invasion and their stories were of epic journeys and amazing escapes during long and dangerous treks across country, with little news of the men who remained in captivity. Sadie Pascoe was one among many who watched the newspapers for news of returning survivors.

I absolutely haunted Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital ... several of them said, 'Look, I saw [Frank Pascoe] the other day on his way down. You'll see him in a few days time'. So he must have tried.<sup>9</sup>

Military intelligence collected information from each survivor as he arrived. For security reasons, and because the identities of the victims could not be confirmed, much of this material was marked 'Secret' and withheld from families.<sup>10</sup> However, some survivors told their stories to the press and by April 1942 accounts of the tragedy of Tol and Waitavolo plantations, where an unknown number of men (probably about 150) were brutally executed on 4 February 1942, appeared with details which would have chilled any waiting relative. The authorities were very disturbed by this reporting as some of the information appeared in the papers before it reached Army

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<sup>8</sup> Minute Paper from Attorney-General's Department for C.I.B.Melbourne, 9 February 1942 'Survey of Evacuees from Mandated Territory of New Guinea, now resident in State of Victoria'. AA, A518/1 DR 16/2/1A Pt 1

<sup>9</sup> Sadie Pascoe, interview, Melbourne, 15 July 1994

<sup>10</sup> J.C.H.Gill, Assistant Naval Intelligence Officer, R.A.N.R., Rabaul, Report of Proceedings from 22 January 1942 to 28 March 1942 from interviews with survivors; Naval Staff Office, Townsville, 30 March 1942. AA, MP 508/1: 85/701/170

Headquarters. By 16 April 1942, J.R.Halligan of External Territories left a handwritten note for his staff with the offending press cuttings:

Look around for any other cuttings of this nature. There have been several. Make a file of this ... I am holding a report in the safe as a secret document.<sup>11</sup>

Joan Best remembered that 'the press used to write the most ghastly stories about atrocities'. Other stories in the press were falsely hopeful, such as the item which said that 'several hundreds of Europeans from Rabaul are with the remnants of our armed forces, somewhere in the New Britain jungle west of Rabaul', and that they could all 'maintain themselves' indefinitely until they had a chance to escape.<sup>12</sup> However though some families saw these occasionally hopeful but mostly frightening news items, many did not; perhaps families and friends conspired to keep it from them. The Lyons family in Melbourne was a case in point. Young Vincent Lyons had enlisted while still under age; Vin had described to his family how he told the doctor he was 'eighteen. The doctor said, "You're a bloody liar but keep going!" and he pushed him on in the queue'. When the news came through that Vin was Missing in Action, Mrs Lyons 'lamented the day she gave permission for Vin to go'. That week, she had one son missing from Rabaul, another missing from Broome and a third, Frank, leaving for a seminary where he was training for the priesthood. Frank Lyons has never forgotten farewelling his mother at that time: 'I can still see my mother standing on a footpath when I got on a bus... She was devastated'. The Lyons family did not see the newspaper reports of Tol and were given no further news of Vin apart from 'Missing believed killed' in 1945. Vin Lyons was later identified as being among those who died at Tol.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Press cuttings from Sydney *Sun* 9 April 1942, *Sun Pictorial*, Melbourne 14 April 1942, with notes by J.R.Halligan, 16 April 1942. A518/1 DB16/2/1 Pt 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Pacific Islands Monthly* March 1942

<sup>13</sup> Frank Lyons, interview, Canberra, 12 October 1994

Apart from the chance that an escaped soldier might have news, for most families the only source of direct information about their men after their capture was the letters which had been air-dropped over Port Moresby. Before they were passed on to the families, they were carefully scrutinised by government authorities to gather information and every reference to Australians. The 300 soldiers' and 100 civilians' letters alluded to their writers being prisoners of the Japanese Imperial Army and in some cases mentioned friends who were also with them in the camp in Rabaul. (It is thought that at least one further mailbag fell in the sea. Another bag was retrieved from the bush in October 1942 and that mail was sent on months after the first group of letters. Captain Stewart Nottage, writing from Japan in 1943, listed the letters written in Rabaul on 'February 16 and June 1' which he said the Japanese had assured them had been dropped over Port Moresby. The second collection was never received,<sup>14</sup> however a 'rotted mailbag' was found out of Port Moresby in about 1949, with the contents decomposed.<sup>15</sup>) Anxious relatives made urgent requests for lists of names of civilians who received letters but the names were not released. 'Officialdom,' complained the *Pacific Islands Monthly*, 'although it has a list, refuses to permit publication - Heaven alone knows why'.<sup>16</sup>

Any means of hearing news became of prime importance to the anxious families. Radio, newsreels, newspapers and the postal service all took on powerful roles in daily life. One woman described the stress of waiting for the post.

In those days the postman came twice a day and you just waited from one postman's whistle to the next and it just went on, and on, and on.

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<sup>14</sup> Betty Gascoigne, interview, 19 August 1994; Gascoigne family papers; Stewart Nottage to Mollie Nottage, 16 June 1943. AWM PR83/189 (4)

<sup>15</sup> Gwen Ives, interview, 22 February 1995. Gwen Ives had returned to the islands in 1948.

<sup>16</sup> *Pacific Islands Monthly*, June 1942 p.4

Sometimes newsreels were screened of the allied bombing of the Japanese positions in the islands. Gwen Ives remembered going into town to the Capitol Theatre to see the continuous newsreels. 'There'd be nothing, just a bit of land and something being bombed, but you'd sit there and watch it three or four times over'.<sup>17</sup>

The radio also became important. Sue Pascoe recalled how, as a small child, she had hated the 'tension every time the radio went on... I didn't know what was wrong, I didn't know what they were listening for'.<sup>18</sup> As the war went on, The Australian Broadcasting Commission Short Wave Division established the Listening Post as a section of the Commonwealth Department of Information, Melbourne. Staff monitored and analysed propaganda material from Japanese-controlled radio stations which broadcast names and messages from Australian prisoners-of-war or British or Australian civilians in Japanese hands on a regular 'Prisoners-of-war Information Hour'. Although, before the war, very few Australians owned short-wave radios or listened to overseas broadcasts, the possibility of news from a captured family member 'came to be regarded by anxious relatives as a vital link, often the only link, with their men'.<sup>19</sup> Late in September 1942, Mollie Nottage received a form letter from Army records which said that her husband was claimed to be a prisoner of the Japanese though it warned 'it might not be authentic'.<sup>20</sup> This message came through the Radio Tokyo broadcasts of brief letters from allied prisoners and indicated that at least some Australian men from Rabaul were alive in Japan. Family and friends began to send telegrams, letters and other messages to Mrs Nottage, full of excitement that Stewart Nottage was alive. Mollie immediately sent a letter to her husband in Japan,

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<sup>17</sup> Gwen Ives, interview

<sup>18</sup> Sue Pascoe; interview 15 July 1994, Melbourne.

<sup>19</sup> L.D.Meo, *Japan's Radio War on Australia 1941-1945*, Melbourne, 1968. pp.231-238; p.243; p.166 Appendix 3 : A special report issued by the Australian Broadcasting Commission Short Wave Department, July 1942.

<sup>20</sup> Nottage Correspondence, AWM PR83/189 Item 5

enclosing a small photograph of herself and their young daughter, which Stewart Nottage finally received on Christmas Eve 1943.<sup>21</sup>

In previous conflicts, families had been given information of prisoners through the Australian Red Cross Society. However, in this case the Red Cross reported that although they had 'worked ceaselessly' to obtain information about missing people held by the Japanese 'these efforts have not met with the success that was hoped'. The Red Cross dealt with a great volume of letters sent from Australian families through the Japanese Red Cross but there was little or no sign that any mail was getting through, except for the few letters received from the 64 officers with Captain Nottage in Zentsuji POW camp, Japan.<sup>22</sup> During the war years, Mavis Barton, wife of Arthur Barton who was with the 2/22nd Bn, worked at the Red Cross in Melbourne

in the Bureau for Wounded, Missing and Prisoners of War - searching daily Casualty lists supplied to the Red Cross by Department of the Army - in the hope that a name would appear of a member of the 2/22nd Battalion - or give some indication where the men had been taken. Cables were constantly sent ... to Geneva - all to no avail. Letters were written regularly - but were never returned. Those years will remain in my memory forever.<sup>23</sup>

The knowledge that the officers from Rabaul were alive was a source of encouragement, and their brief letters were shared within the network of waiting families, but even those letters came so very slowly and said so little. They included no news of the current whereabouts of the other ranks, the Australian nurses or the civilian men, though a letter from Major Lannen, 2/22nd, dated 18 August 1942, did the rounds of the Adelaide women's network in 1943 with the information that 'The troops and civilians were evacuated a fortnight before the officers'.<sup>24</sup> But evacuated to where?

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<sup>21</sup> Nottage Correspondence, AWM PR83/189 Item 5

<sup>22</sup> Australian Red Cross Society circular No. 344, February 1943. AWM PR83/189 Item 5

<sup>23</sup> Mavis Barton, letter, 26 September 1994

<sup>24</sup> Lorna Hosking, letter/diary to Dr Herbert Hosking, 8 March 1943. Personal papers.

Stories of the horrors of Japanese POW camps in Asia slowly began to come through during 1944 when some former prisoners survived the sinkings of prison ships transporting them to Japan. When Australian survivors finally arrived home in October 1944, they brought with them the first eye-witness accounts of the conditions under which Australian prisoners-of-war were living in Asia. On 17 November 1944 a public statement was made in the House of Representatives by the Acting Prime Minister, Frank Forde. For any family with a relative who was a prisoner under the Japanese, it was a time of great distress. Not only did they hear the news that many men had already died in the camps or been drowned at sea, but they also heard something of the horror of the camps, though it was qualified by the suggestion that in POW camps in Japan 'it is believed conditions may be relatively better'. It was noted that the survivors had 'performed a great service': they brought eye-witness accounts of conditions, their own lists of men who had been shipped with them and lists of men known to have died in the camps.<sup>25</sup> The waiting families of the Rabaul men could not help but assume that their men and women were suffering under similar conditions. One who had been a child at the time recalled how her mother, Emily Ashby, visited a friend whose husband was in an Asian POW camp:

she was there when her friend first saw a *Women's Weekly* photo of emaciated men - the woman hadn't seen such photos before. She absolutely fell apart, and I remember Mum pushing us children out of the house.<sup>26</sup>

So the families waited in vain for news. Even those who escaped from the islands had no news of the missing. As the years went on, even though unsuccessful

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<sup>25</sup> Don Wall, *Heroes at Sea: Identifies 1800 Australian POW and Intermees Lost at Sea in WWII*, Sydney 1991 pp.111-112; Hank Nelson, *POW Prisoners of War: Australians Under Nippon*, Sydney 1985 pp.149-150. *Tamahoko Maru* and *SS Waerwijck* were sunk in June 1944 and the *Rokyu Maru* was sunk in September 1944.

<sup>26</sup> Joan Turner, Erice Pizer and Jenny Evans, interview, Melbourne, 12 July 1994

rescue attempts were made, still nothing was discovered. It was not reticence or unwillingness to speak. They simply did not know the answers.

### **Rebuilding community**

In a questionnaire that was answered by 92 members of families of the missing men for this thesis,<sup>27</sup> they were asked what personal support they received during the long period of waiting for news. Of the 82 responses to the question, many indicated that there was little help from the wider community. Many indicated that they found support in more than one place, with 50 citing their families, 33 their personal friends, 27 their home church, and 27 the New Guinea Club and POW Relatives networks. For eight respondents, the New Guinea Club was their sole source of support. Only five indicated that they found support from work colleagues. The Clubs were important because although other groups, such as church communities, did their best to offer comfort and help, they often were unable to understand what the continuing mystery meant for the women. One woman recalled,

In a way, [church friends] didn't understand... I used to go to prayer meetings but I never heard them pray for me, but I think they must have. I think they... didn't know how to say to me, 'Have you had any news?' Another lady whose husband came home said much later, 'I didn't know how to help you'. It is quite understandable'.<sup>28</sup>

So the women learned to be self-reliant, valuing the help of their families and close friends where that was available, but building mutual support with others in a similar position. The New Guinea Women's Associations and groupings of military wives<sup>29</sup> became vital for the well-being of the women. In some cases, women attended

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<sup>27</sup> A total of 121 people responded to the Questionnaire. Of these, 31 were former members of AIF or NGVR; 18 were the widows or siblings of the soldiers, 12 were the children of the soldiers. Of the civilian group, 31 were the children of the civilians in the islands, 23 were their widows and siblings and the remaining people were contemporaries and friends.

<sup>28</sup> Sadie Pascoe, interview 15 July 1994

<sup>29</sup> Some of the military groups included 2/22nd Battalion Women's Auxiliary, Rabaul Fortress Relatives Association, Melbourne (also known as Rabaul Fortress Welfare Club), Australian Prisoners of War Relatives Association and the POW Auxiliary of AIF.

both military groups and the civilian Clubs. The one common theme among them was that their men had been together in the islands, were presumably still together somewhere, and the women understood each other's longing for information and consolation.

As well as the more formal networks of women in the same cities, informal networks developed as women made contact with anyone who may have been in her son or husband's unit. Photo albums were searched for clues about the names of men who appeared to have been their men's friends in Rabaul, and correspondence flowed between strangers in different states. Joan Best said, 'We wives kept in touch'. Lillian Botham corresponded with Mollie Nottage, though they had never met, because their husbands had been colleagues; Bill Botham had escaped.

I still feel it terribly for all those who are still anxious for their loved ones, one cannot rejoice too much ... I doubt if Bill will be able to tell you much ... I can imagine just how you are feeling. I received a lot of comfort with the knowledge that the anxiety was not all mine, so many were feeling the same.<sup>30</sup>

News passed between women in Adelaide and Melbourne whose men were in the same group in Zentsuji camp, Japan. Mrs W. Page thanked Mollie Nottage for news of the men in Zentsuji which had been read out at their meeting. 'I felt you were an old friend'.

I wish we had a meeting of all of us with our dear ones in Zentsuji. They must all know each other very well by now.<sup>31</sup>

Not all the letters between strangers were encouraging. One which was brutally honest said, 'I must ask you not to build up your hopes regarding their fate... I am afraid there is no hope'.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Lillian Botham, Box Hill, Victoria, letter to Mollie Nottage, Adelaide, no date but probably early April 1942, Nottage Correspondence, AWM PR 83/189 Item 5

<sup>31</sup> Mrs W. Page, Prahran to Mollie Nottage, Adelaide, 6 October 1943. AWM PR83/189 (Item 5) 2 of 10. Mrs Page's son Bill had been in the 1st Independent Company at Kavieng.



Families of soldiers who were missing often approached former Rabaul residents who had known their husband or son. They did not expect them to have current news, but sought any anecdote of their time in Rabaul. Betty Gascoigne told mothers and wives

They were all such nice fellows ... After church they'd come home for tea or coffee and something to eat, and then they'd wander back to the camp. Different families would take it in turns to have them.

It was always hard to distinguish truth from fiction and sometimes women heard stories which they did not repeat. In 1943 Betty Gascoigne visited an acquaintance whose husband they had known well in Rabaul. The husband had gone back to New Guinea with the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit.

Out of the blue she said, 'You know they found a dead Jap and he had a diary on him, and he said he'd made some friends among the men they'd captured and they'd all been lost on a ship'. And my heart went down to my boots. I thought, 'If I tell Mum this, she'll lose all hope' ... I didn't tell a soul. I think part of it was, you know, rumours in the tropics.

Over the next fifty years, Betty told no one but her husband that she had heard this story, fearing that it had been a cruel rumour without basis.<sup>33</sup> The story of the diary was, in fact, true and was recorded in the report on Japanese atrocities by Sir William Webb as an example of a humane Japanese, to balance his report of horrors.<sup>34</sup>

Lillian Botham, writing to Mollie Nottage in 1942, spoke of false rumours.

I was told so many things, even by civilians, who had 'seen' my husband. Also, I was told "By Authority" that they were dropping letters and parcels. This cheered me no end as I had been writing with a hope one might get through. All this was not correct.

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<sup>32</sup> Mrs Inkster to Mrs McCaffrey, 14 July 1942. AWM PR83/189 Item 5

<sup>33</sup> Betty Gascoigne Muller, interview

<sup>34</sup> Report on Japanese Atrocities and Breaches of Rules of Warfare, by Mr Justice William Webb, 15 March 1944: AWM51:182

Bill Botham also wrote to Mollie, with apologies for having so little to tell her but added, 'it will at least clear up some of the erroneous reports you appear to have all received'.<sup>35</sup> Irene Davies joined the Adelaide New Guinea Women's Club, and her daughter Dianne recalled

There was a rumour that a few men like my father [radiographer Roger Davies], Dr Hosking and some others had escaped ... they thought that they were on an island. My mother, with a young baby, didn't give up hope and she'd heard that they were on a particular island and they were safe.<sup>36</sup>

Rumours and conjecture passed from group to group and from state to state through regular correspondence. A woman in Victoria passed on a 'scrap of news' from a Brisbane member to an acquaintance in Adelaide; a Brisbane doctor had received word from his son who was 'a prisoner on an island near Tokio and the boys who were taken prisoner at Rabaul were at the same camp as he was'. Mollie Nottage received a letter from an acquaintance who passed on comments from a journalist who assured her that Zentsuji was 'noted for its beauty'.<sup>37</sup> On his escape from New Ireland, former District Officer G. Macdonald wrote from Sydney about men left behind to a family in Queensland who copied the letter and sent it on to Nellie Simpson in Adelaide.<sup>38</sup> Former Methodist Mission women, now scattered in every state of Australia, kept in

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<sup>35</sup> William Botham to Mollie Nottage, 27 April 1942. Nottage Correspondence AWM PR 83/189 Item 5.

<sup>36</sup> Dianne Edwards, interview, Adelaide, January 1994

<sup>37</sup> Joyce Cooper, 22 Swan Street, North Hobart to Mollie Nottage 23 March 1942 and 9 October 1942; Marion Jones, Kew, Victoria to Mollie Nottage, Adelaide 23 September 1942; Philip Pring to Mollie Nottage, 25 February 1943. AWM PR83/189 (Item 5) 2 of 10.

<sup>38</sup> Family papers of Nellie (Simpson) Thirkettle. G. Macdonald to Mrs Bestmann, Caboolture, Q., 3 July 1942, copied and sent on to Nellie Simpson in Adelaide, 8 July 1942. The letter stated that a group of New Ireland men 'had left Kavieng in schooners the day we were bombed (21 Jan). They were all caught about a week later hiding on an island. They were all brought back to Kavieng and remained there for about 6 weeks. They were all transferred or taken away with the exception of Bill Attwood. (I have it from pretty good authority that they were sent to Laizon)... Others were taken prisoners later and were in Kavieng with Bill'. The writer escaped from New Ireland on 29 April and listed the others as: F.V. Saunders, R. McPherson, W. Attwood, C. MacKellar (schoonermaster), J.C. Goad (Medical Assistant), Doyle (planter Manager), W. Wilkins (Planter), W.D. Oakes (missionary), T.N. Simpson (missionary), J. Ourrone (?) (Plantation manager), C. Pines (Medical Assistant), D.L. Roberts, (School Teacher), M.S. Edwards (Assistant District Officer), W.C. Box (Planter), S.R. Miller, C. Charlson (Planters?). There is evidence from the surviving officers that at least some of these men arrived in Rabaul and were sent away with the others on the *Montevideo Maru*. However, it is thought that several others on this list may not have reached Rabaul, but died elsewhere. The earliest list for the *Montevideo Maru* includes some but not all of these names, plus other New Ireland names.

touch by mail, as did single young women who had been friends in Rabaul. From 1944, stories began to come from Allies on West New Britain, most from Australian coastwatchers, but there was nothing certain.

At various times rumour had it that the Rabaul men were in Manchuria, or seen on a street in the Philippines, or loading cargo in Japan, or on Watom Island<sup>39</sup> off New Britain, but there was nothing of substance. Mrs Tyrell, an officer's mother, wrote of the monthly meetings of the Rabaul Fortress Relatives Association, 'it is quite pitiful to see so many who have never heard one word from their loved ones. I do hope and pray they will hear soon'.<sup>40</sup>

Joan Best was one of the few to hear a report which was both hopeful and true. Early in 1944 she met a Marine who had been with the US troops who landed on West New Britain at Cape Gloucester and had re-occupied Gasmata on the south-west coast.

This Marine that I got to know found a whole lot of letters or lists of men who'd been taken, and Teddy was one of the names. Afterwards the Red Cross got in touch, but it was Jim Peel who found the names in this mission in New Guinea ... That was the first news I had. I've kept Jim Peel's letters telling me this thing. It was incredible ... I rang the head of the Red Cross, and said that I'd had this news. He said that they hadn't heard.

In time Joan received a letter from Ted Best. He had indeed been captured at Gasmata, taken back to Rabaul and sent with the other officers on the ship *Naruto Maru* to prison camp in Japan. From time to time brief letters came through for Joan

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<sup>39</sup> Lorna Hosking, letter/diary, 20 September 1942, quoting news from Mrs H.H.Page, through 'Diddy'. A father kept a cutting from 'a Sydney newspaper in 1943', convinced that the young soldier with his back to the camera, playing a violin at a church service in a Japanese prison camp at Keijo, Korea, was his missing son, a member of 2/22nd Bn, and still believed in October 1945 that 'it may yet provide a clue to the whereabouts of my son and other members of the 2/22nd Battalion who are believed to have been lost'. Melbourne *Herald*, 16 October 1945

<sup>40</sup> Mrs Tyrell to Mollie Nottage, 7 October 1943. AWM PR83/189 Item 5.

and for her mother-in-law but at least they knew that he had been alive at the time of writing.<sup>41</sup> The families of the other ranks and the civilians heard nothing at all.

### **Keeping busy**

The wisdom of the day suggested that the best solution to loneliness and anxiety was work. One woman said, 'If you looked after yourself and contributed, that was the best medicine'. Some had to find paid employment because they needed the funds, but others joined the workforce for the sake of keeping occupied and having something useful to do. Joyce Cooper, whose husband Lt S.H.Cooper was in Japan, chose to join the AWAS, throwing herself into the intensive training and exams:

Stanley will have a fit when he knows I'm an Army Sergeant, he fondly thinks AWAS is some little game among a few women, because it had only just been formed when Rabaul fell.<sup>42</sup>

Doris Michelson had already taken a factory job, even though she knew her husband did not approve of working wives (except in emergencies, like a strike) and was rather upset to find that her first day at work, 23 January 1942, coincided with the fall of Rabaul. She recalled seeing the paper on the way home from work and thinking 'My God, the first day I start work this happens!' But Doris continued to support herself and her two school age daughters, first at the factory and then with her own dressmaking business for many years.<sup>43</sup> Lorna Hosking and Irene Davies both took positions as governesses on remote country properties. After a year, however, Lorna Hosking chose to return to Adelaide and the support of friends. Irene Davies was an art teacher with a baby born in March 1942.

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<sup>41</sup> Joan Best, interview, Canberra, 22 September 1994

<sup>42</sup> Joyce Cooper to Mollie Nottage, 9 October 1942. Nottage Correspondence, AWM PR 83/189 (Item 5) 2 of 10.

<sup>43</sup> Doris (Michelson) Ross, interview, 16 August 1995, Melbourne

She did governessing-housekeeping because she was able to keep me and look after me on site. ... then after three years she went relief teaching but we struggled financially... we boarded in one room.<sup>44</sup>

Gwen Ives had her small child with her as she worked as caretaker for a large country house. Several of the women evacuated from the islands found that the only way they could find accommodation (as many boarding houses or blocks of flats refused to take children) or be free to work was to place their children in a children's home or boarding school. This brought them much heartache.<sup>45</sup> Others lived with relatives who shared the child care responsibilities.

For some women without serious financial need, volunteer work of various kinds filled an important need for purpose. During the years of waiting, they needed a worthwhile occupation. Joan Best

went and worked for the Comforts Fund and for the Red Cross and we sewed. I remember going to Government House - they turned the ballroom into a [sewing workroom]. We worked very hard for the Red Cross. We sent parcels ... I was very well backed up by my mother and my mother-in-law [in caring for a young baby].<sup>46</sup>

There were many women who would have been happier if they could have had the challenges and satisfactions of managing their own household and caring for their small children. This was possible for soldiers' wives who were already in their own home, but many others were recent brides who went home to parents while waiting for their husband. For women evacuees, few had more than a room or a temporary place with relatives, and initiatives in homemaking were denied them. An older woman wrote to a younger,

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<sup>44</sup> Dianne Davies Edwards, interview, 21 January 1994, Adelaide

<sup>45</sup> Frances Ryan (Mrs Walter Ryan) to Prime Minister Chifley, 8 December 1946. AA, A1066/1 IC45/55/3/19

<sup>46</sup> Joan Best, interview, 22 September 1994, Canberra

I hope you will soon be able to get into your own house - I think everybody is better in their own place and I'm sure time will pass quicker, you will have so much more to interest you.<sup>47</sup>

It seems that during the war years it was common for civilian women to encounter more difficulties with accommodation, finance, employment and support than the wives of soldiers. Of 33 people who responded to questions about these issues, only two were from the families of soldiers.<sup>48</sup> The one major problem which they had in common was lack of information about their men.

### **Preparing for the return of their men**

Some women hesitated for a long time before they felt that they could take any major life decision. For months, they assumed that their man might be home soon, and even when that hope faded, they still lived in a constant state of preparation. For some women who had lived in the islands, life in an Australian city was seen as a temporary measure, to be borne until they returned to the tropics. Muriel Rooke, plantation owner in New Britain for 21 years, wrote in 1942, 'All of us share one hope - that some day we can go back home'.<sup>49</sup> Jean Poole, missionary wife and teacher said, 'I always thought I would go back'.

Although they had heard nothing for months, then years, the families of the missing acted on the assumption that they were alive and would come home. The presence of the father and husband was invoked in various ways. Helen Wayne knitted a series of jumpers for husband Ron through the years of separation, garments he

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<sup>47</sup> Mrs Tyrell, East Malvern, to Mrs Mollie Nottage 12 July 1944. AWM PR83/189

<sup>48</sup> Of 33 respondents, twelve had difficulties with accommodation, eight with finding employment, eighteen with access to finance and fourteen with lack of emotional support.

<sup>49</sup> Muriel Rooke, "'Government Message, Missus"... said her houseboy', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 7 February 1942

would never wear. Lorna Hosking kept a personal diary addressed to her absent husband Bert, a very personal and passionate account of her life as she waited. Sadie Pascoe kept a detailed diary of the development of their child. Mothers kept careful photograph albums recording the development of the children. This seemed to be of particular importance for women whose babies had never been seen by their father. 'She [kept the album] with the specific idea that my father was coming back and she wanted him to enjoy my growing up', said Clare Beaumont's daughter Janice. Dianne Edwards said her mother Irene Davies

clung on to hope because she took regular photographs of me until I was three, to show my father. And then there was a gap for some years - that tells a story.

There is a poignancy about the series of tiny black and white photos neatly labelled of small children from infancy to age three or four which were never seen by the man for whom they were intended. At least ten babies (and probably many more) were born to the missing fathers after their final contact, and mothers waited in hope to tell their husband that he had a son or daughter. Several women collected news cuttings in a scrapbook 'to show him when he comes home'. The Ashby children were encouraged to keep good school reports and other schoolwork to show Dad. Women prayed faithfully for their missing husband and kept writing letters even when it became almost impossible to know how to write. In the Pascoe home a blue and white Chinese ginger jar was a symbol of hope; for years it waited on a kitchen shelf to be opened as a celebration 'when Frank comes home'. Helen Pearson bought a holiday house as a peaceful place where her Howard could recuperate on his return.<sup>50</sup>

For some women, there was the more subtle and sensitive question about relationships. Because they assumed that their husband was alive, any thought of an

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<sup>50</sup> Interviews with Janet Wayne Gambrill, Mary Hosking Symons, Sadie Pascoe, Janice Beaumont Steinfurth, Dianne Davies Edwards, Mary Mansley, Jean Poole Mannering, Margaret Simpson Henderson, Erice Ashby Pizer, Joan Ashby Turner, Keith Pearson.

alternative relationship would have been complicated by feelings of unfaithfulness and guilt. There must have been some, among such a large group of young women, for whom this was a serious issue. Any woman who found comfort with another man would have done so with mixed feelings; they did not know whether the man to whom they thought they ought to be faithful was dead or alive. At least one girl, in love with a Rabaul soldier but not formally engaged, spent the years of waiting imagining his return and designing her dream wedding gown. As her collection of designs grew, her girlfriends at work tried to persuade her to go out with other men but she was not interested.

Young children lived with the expectation that one day the mysterious man whose photograph had such significance to their mother would return to them. Sue Pascoe said, 'I used to sit inside the wire front door and watch for a man in uniform to come home'. For the younger ones, their father was an invisible but very real part of the household, understood either as a threat ('whatever would your father think of such behaviour!') or as a benign being who would make the world safe again and make mother happy. Relatives and neighbours added to the sense of expectation which involved the return of father. As well as happy anticipation it also involved obligation. They were urged by others, 'Be good! Your mother's had so much to put up with, so you must be good'. Patterns of childhood behaviour were moulded by the absence and expected return of father. Boys were expected to be 'the man of the house' at a young age. This could be a positive experience, as they learned practical skills, but for some there were unreasonable demands to provide emotional support to their mothers. Daughters learned to do everything, rather than divide roles by gender. Older daughters sometimes were told that they were responsible for 'being daddy' or in other cases 'Your mother has to be the man so you have to be the mother'. Some sons recall 'living in a very female world', so that in later years it has been more natural to



relate with ease to women than to groups of men. One man has kept his father's last letter to him, written for the young boy he was in 1942, with news of the plantation, instructions on courtesies a boy should offer women and the request 'I hope you are looking after Mummy and the girls and not letting them spend too much money'. This feeling of obligation to both mother and the absent father was developed through the years of waiting and has left many of the younger generation with a continuing sense of duty and responsibility for the welfare of others.<sup>51</sup>

### **Knowing and not knowing**

The years of waiting lasted from early in 1942, when the last letters were received, until September or October 1945 when the families were told, at last, that their men were dead. During those long years, most families were given at best a few scattered fragments and in most cases no information at all about their man's whereabouts or fate. Yet through the war years some information had always been known. The separate pieces of the jigsaw were held in different countries, in Japan, America, Australia and New Guinea, by people who had no contact with each other, and in some cases did not understand the implications of the piece of knowledge they held. For example, the Commission conducted by Sir William Webb in 1943 into war atrocities knew considerable detail about the deaths at Tol and Waitavolo plantations but could not confirm the identities of the dead. But although almost all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle existed somewhere in the world, no one had access to all the pieces and so the picture remained incomplete.

Despite the lack of hard information about the fate of their men, however, some of the waiting women in later years told their families that in some unexplained way they had known that their man had gone. Myra Ashby told her daughter, years later,

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<sup>51</sup> Interviews with Ian Higgins, John Spensley, Jenny Evans, Mary Symons, Erice Pizer, Janet Gambrill

that she thought she knew the day our father died. She was sitting with guests in front of the fire, staring into the fire. Suddenly, she said, she was not aware of anyone else in the room. 'I could just hear him screaming out my name. Inside me I was saying, What is it, Stan? Then it went quiet and I knew that he was gone'. She was not the sort of person who believed in psychic phenomena.<sup>52</sup>

Mel Trevitt was teaching in a Tasmanian boarding school in the winter of 1942. She woke from sleep in the middle of the quiet night to a nightmare of detonations in her mind, followed by a deep silence. Years later, she said that she knew then that her teacher husband Jack would not be coming home.<sup>53</sup> Sadie Pascoe attended a concert in the Town Hall with her former music teacher, during the years of waiting. As students, she and Frank had often attended such concerts.

While the music was playing, I felt he was free. He was so near and yet all around me. He was free - but I couldn't tell whether he was free from this life, or free from prison.<sup>54</sup>

Lorna Hosking woke from a dream one night in September 1942 with the presentiment that something was seriously wrong with husband Herbert. A week later she wrote in her diary

I am feeling desperate about you lately ever since I woke that night feeling something was very wrong and have woken often since ... Why has this hell overtaken us?<sup>55</sup>

So, thin slices of the truth were available to people scattered in different parts of the world. No one had enough to see the whole picture. All that the families had were rumours, suspicions and premonitions.

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<sup>52</sup> Joan Turner, Erice Pizer and Jenny Evans, interview, 12 July 1994, Melbourne

<sup>53</sup> Melville (Trevitt) Walker, interview, October 1991, Sydney

<sup>54</sup> Sadie Pascoe, interview, 15 July 1994, Melbourne

<sup>55</sup> Lorna Hosking, letter/diary, 20 September, 28 September 1942. Private papers

## CHAPTER THREE

### HOPING AGAINST HOPE: August - November 1945

On 15 August 1945, the day Australia celebrated Victory in the Pacific, the families of missing people welcomed it with a difficult mixture of euphoria and fear. For them, the overriding question was: would their loved ones now be found and come home safely? No one knew the answers. The Rabaul garrison and the missing civilians of the islands of New Guinea comprised only a small proportion of the total number of Australians who were missing and whose families were still waiting. Sixteen year old Muriel Macgowan, who had been born in Rabaul, recalled the day.

I just could not go out with the revelling mob. I hated their rejoicing and stayed at home crying for all those men whom we knew not where they were.<sup>1</sup>

In the garment factory where Flora Pivaresky worked, the women toasted victory. Flora added another toast in honour of her boyfriend Bob Cornelious - 15 August was Bob's 25th birthday and she had not seen him since early 1941.

Earlier in August 1945, when the signs seemed hopeful that the war would soon be over, those waiting at home felt that they had reason to be confident. The Melbourne branch of the New Guinea Women's Association held a special social gathering for fundraising; they 'were still working for their prisoners of war and hoped to be able to give them all a token of their esteem when they returned'.<sup>2</sup> The Board of the Methodist Overseas Mission, at its meeting on 10 August, rose spontaneously to sing 'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow' when their General Secretary presented a telegram just received from the International Red Cross; their four missing

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<sup>1</sup> Muriel Macgowan Lerner, Qn.51

<sup>2</sup> *Pacific Islands Monthly*, September 1945 p.24

nurses had been found safe in Japan. They arranged for a Thanksgiving Service in Sydney to welcome home the women and expected to plan a similar service when the missionary men were also released.<sup>3</sup> The families of the government and military nurses and Mrs Kathleen Bignell, who had all been in captivity in Japan with the mission nurses, were notified that their women were safe and in the care of the Allies, and they could expect them home in a few weeks.

### **Hopes raised**

Despite the lack of news through the war, many families assumed that now peace had been declared, their men, wherever they were, would appear and return home. At the news of peace, the three sons of missing missionaries Herbert Shelton and Dan Oakes ran around the grounds of their boarding school in country NSW in a jubilation of clashing dustbin lids. In Melbourne, schoolgirl Erice Ashby wrote to 'My darling Daddy' Stan Ashby of the good school reports saved to show him, her long hair 'as you like it', and happy plans for 'when you come home'. Her seven year old sister Joan wrote 'I hope you are well. At last I am able to write to you... When will you come back' and filled half the page with row upon row of 'loves and kisses'.<sup>4</sup> In Sydney, a thanksgiving party was held in Paddington Town Hall to celebrate the coming of peace and among the crowds who attended were 'a great many wives of the men who had become civilian internees in Rabaul'.<sup>5</sup>

Nellie Simpson was one of a number of soldiers' and civilians' wives who had young children to introduce to their fathers. She wrote with renewed hope to

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<sup>3</sup> ML, MOM 340 Minutes of MOM Board 1943-1947, 10 August 1945

<sup>4</sup> George Oakes, interview, Sydney 4 February 1992; Erice Ashby to Stanley Ashby, Glen Iris, 2 September 1945

<sup>5</sup> PIM October 1960, p.34

husband Tom; Tom Simpson did not even know that she had been pregnant when she left New Hanover.

At last peace, and how we are all anxiously awaiting news of our loved ones of whom no word during those dark terrible years. We have been told today we can write to you with some degree of certainty of our letters being delivered ... All those years we have talked, hoped, prayed and continuously thought about "our daddy"... Margaret is now 4 1/2 years and such a grown up little girlie. And your son John Nevison has just turned 3. You never knew you had a son, Tom. Such a bonny little chap ... He is going to be like daddy ... You will have such a welcome home.<sup>6</sup>

Other families knew that they would have to break bad news to the returning men, of deaths and other hurtful things.<sup>7</sup>

The first news came from New Britain. On 3 September the *Melbourne Herald* optimistically reported that the allies were likely to find POWs and internees at Rabaul. The 'first task at Rabaul... will be to handle a number of white captives held by the Japanese there. The actual number is not known [admitted the *Herald*] but they possibly include missionaries and airmen'.<sup>8</sup> On 8 September both the *Brisbane Telegraph* and the *Melbourne Sun* carried reports by war correspondent Warren of the rescue of a sole Australian, John Joseph Murphy,<sup>9</sup> and the expectation that the missing internees would be located at the Catholic mission. Another correspondent, Thornton, prepared a dispatch the same day, stating

Rabaul has been a place of mystery... unlike other Jap-held areas almost nothing was known of the fate of the Prisoners of War... None of the survivors know what

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<sup>6</sup> Nellie Simpson to Rev. Tom Simpson, 21 August 1945. The letter was addressed to 'Kavieng, New Guinea, Liberated British Civilian Intermee'

<sup>7</sup> Parents of three of the eighteen Australian nurses in Japan, and the mother of one of the Australian nuns in Rabaul died while their daughters were in captivity. No doubt a number of the parents or siblings of missing men also died during their absence. The small daughter of Murray and Nancy Edwards died in June 1945.

<sup>8</sup> *Melbourne Herald* 3 September 1945

<sup>9</sup> Murphy was captured by the Japanese on 12 June 1943 when he was with a party attempting to enter New Britain near occupied Rabaul to gather intelligence. He spent his time in captivity with US, New Zealand and British captives. AWM127:14 144/1/264 See also Hank Nelson, *POW Prisoners of War: Australians Under Nippon*, Sydney 1985

happened to the Australians but they do know that [in] November [sic] 1942 hundreds [of] white prisoners were shipped away to [an] unknown destination'.<sup>10</sup>

The dispatch was not immediately made public.

The scattered community of Australians who waited for news of the missing men and women of the New Guinea islands continued to hope and prepare. The Red Cross was inundated with family members eagerly seeking the latest news of returning men and women. Plans were made to receive home their people. For the missing soldiers, the military organised personnel to seek out and process released prisoners, with groups such as Prisoner of War Contact & Enquiry Unit and Prisoner of War Recovery Group. For the civilians, the Department of External Territories set up a new Prisoners' Welfare Section in Sydney, taking over a whole floor of 40 King Street, Sydney with staff and equipment to deal with the New Guinea civilian returnees in liaison with the Pacific Territories Association, the New Guinea Women's Club, the Australian Red Cross and the War Damage Commission.<sup>11</sup>

By the middle of September 1945, detailed information about the fate of the prisoners of the Japanese across south-east Asia began to come through. Lists of names were carried to Melbourne and soon lists of survivors and those who had died began to appear in daily papers. As thousands of names of men who had been in Changi, Japan, Siam and Indonesia were published, it was always with a note that the lists were still incomplete and more names would be available soon.<sup>12</sup> Other families were receiving telegrams which announced: 'Safe Allied hands home soon'. The party of nurses, who had been held in Japan since July 1942, arrived at Mascot, Sydney, to

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<sup>10</sup> AWM 54 1010/4/172 Eric Thornton, war correspondent, writing from Jacquinot Bay, New Britain 8 September 1945. First press release from Rabaul.

<sup>11</sup> PIM August 1945

<sup>12</sup> *SMH* 12 September 1945 p.1, p3; *SMH* 13 September 1945 pp 6,7,8

be welcomed by jubilant families.<sup>13</sup> The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on 14 September the arrival of the nurses, the expected arrival of the first batch of men from Japan and the surrender of Japanese troops in Rabaul. On 27 September, some of the Rabaul officers who had been held in Japan arrived in Sydney on HMS *Ruler*, (others had travelled by air via Darwin) and there was great rejoicing as Mollie Nottage, Joan Best and the other officers' wives and families prepared to welcome their men.

### **Hoping against hope**

Little by little, other Australian families realised that many of their men were not coming home after all. The press began to publish warnings that large groups of men might be gone forever. When at last the whole story was known, it became clear that of the almost 22,000 Australian prisoners of war under Nippon nearly 8,000, 34 per cent, had died in captivity, as well as the civilian dead.<sup>14</sup> In addition, many of those who did return came back broken in body, mind and spirit, never to be the same again. But the families of the people of the islands of New Guinea still waited for news in hope and dread. Mavis Barton had believed that she was fortunate because her husband was a POW, not among the lists of Killed in Action she studied at the Red Cross; through the years she had gone on 'hoping against hope that my husband would return to me'.<sup>15</sup> But now she felt her hopes fading.

On 6 September 1945, the Japanese formally signed surrender documents on the aircraft carrier *Glory* in Jacquinot Bay off New Britain. Immediately Australian military personnel entered the ruins of what had been Rabaul. 'Rabaul is a wreck,'

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<sup>13</sup> *SMH* 14 September 1945; photograph of nurses on arrival; Dorothy Drain, 'Hunger, privation did not subdue their spirit', *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 29 September 1945

<sup>14</sup> Gavan McCormack & Hank Nelson, *The Burma-Thailand Railway: memory and history*, Sydney 1993 p.164

<sup>15</sup> Mavis Barton, letter, 26 September 1994

wrote a correspondent serving with the 11th Division. 'What used to be the town area is overgrown with jungle 20-30 feet high. Not one building is standing'.<sup>16</sup> The Australians found that there were thousands of prisoners of war waiting hopefully for release, but they were not the people they had been expecting. Instead of Lark Force soldiers and the Rabaul civilians, they found some 8,000 Asians who had been brought to Rabaul (Chinese, Indonesians, Malaysians and Indians), the Rabaul Chinese civilians, the last eighteen survivors of 600 British soldiers brought to Rabaul in November 1942, seven American airmen who had been shot down, one New Zealander, one Dutchman and a number of mixed race families. John Murphy was still the only Australian found. Apart from the internees and prisoners of war, there were also over 100,000 Japanese soldiers in the area who had to be cared for by the relieving Allied forces. (War correspondent Eric Thornton wrote that travelling around the 50 camps scattered across the Gazelle Peninsula was 'like making a tour of exhibits of an international exposition'.<sup>17</sup>) As the days passed, other small groups of Australians were located. The Catholic mission community from Vunapope, made up of some 360 people of seventeen different nationalities, had survived Allied bombs and Japanese guards in a hidden valley. They had sheltered among them some Australians - nine nuns,<sup>18</sup> four civilian men,<sup>19</sup> and the Anglican priest Father James Benson, who had reportedly been killed with the other Anglican missionaries at Buna in 1942.<sup>20</sup> The men of Lark Force and the civilians who had lived and worked in Rabaul, over a thousand men, were nowhere to be found.

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<sup>16</sup> Warren, war correspondent, copy on the occupation of Rabaul, September 1945 AWM54: 773/4/12

<sup>17</sup> Eric Thornton, Rabaul, 18 September 1945 AWM 54 1010/4/172

<sup>18</sup> Sisters Flavia O'Sullivan, Borgia Kelly, Adela McGrath, Philomena Bryant, Editha Macrae, Michael Macrae, Immaculata Mazcngarb, Felicitas McFadden, Berenice Twohill, Marcella Myndes; these Australian women were aged between 28 and 76. AWM 127:14 144/1/264 Appendix 'B'

<sup>19</sup> Gordon Thomas, former Editor of *Rabaul Times*, James Ellis, motor engineer, George McKechnie, marine engineer, Alfred Creswick, engineer with pre-war Public Works Department

<sup>20</sup> AWM 54 1010/4/172 Thornton despatches 8 September, 9 September, 15 September, 17 September, 18 September, 20 September 1945



The Welfare Section set up so hopefully in King St, Sydney, found itself idle. The *Pacific Islands Monthly* reported

Unhappily, there was little for the Section to do ... There had not been one word received up to noon on 14 September that any of the New Guinea civilian prisoners have been found ... perhaps not yet alarming. There is still great confusion in all the Japanese territories ... We must expect that a proportion of these people will not be found... The New Guinea internees cannot have escaped altogether.

For those who read *Pacific Islands Monthly*, the next statement came as the first public acknowledgment of an awful possibility.

There is one explanation of circumstances for which relations of missing people must be prepared. It definitely is a possibility that the great majority of the civilians were placed aboard a ship in Rabaul about June 1942 and that ship was lost with its entire company ... Friends and relations should not lose hope, but they should also be prepared for a great tragedy.<sup>21</sup>

Following the end of hostilities, the question arose as to how much detail should be released in the press about wartime atrocities now the men were returning from prison camps. The public was informed, for instance, that Dr Evatt had left for London on 3 September with a copy of the Webb Report which detailed atrocities perpetrated against Australians and others in New Guinea, with the intention of using the Report as a bargaining tool to gain Australia a part in the post-war judgement on the Japanese. During the war years, the Department of Information had controlled material 'which would be helpful to the enemy or a handicap to our own forces' as well as anything which 'by causing distrust or confusion among our own people' could weaken public morale. The community agreed with the good sense of the former, but there were continued debates over the wisdom of the latter. A new code of Censorship Principles had been announced on 19 May 1944 allowing that 'Censorship shall not be

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<sup>21</sup>*PIM* September 1945 p.49ff

imposed merely for the maintenance of morale or the prevention of despondency or alarm'.<sup>22</sup> The *Melbourne Herald* was one of the first to reveal details of Japanese atrocities. Soon after the cessation of hostilities in August 1945 it carried a report entitled 'New Japanese Atrocity Horrors in Webb Report. Brutality Almost Indescribable. Fiendish Torture'. Though the brutalities were 'indescribable', the *Herald* journalists managed to report beheadings, mutilation of women, bayoneting, torture, 'outrage' (rape of women), drownings, amputation of limbs, machine gunning, massacre, sadism, burning, the use of POWs as live targets and murder. The public were 'protected' however because the *Herald* gave no indication of location, period or the names of victims.<sup>23</sup> A few weeks later, the same paper published a more detailed description of atrocities in the New Guinea islands, with locations mentioned and names withheld.<sup>24</sup> For relatives this was a nightmare, as they were still waiting for news and imagined any or all of the atrocities being enacted against the man they loved. The debate over publication of this material ranged from those expressing hatred to the Japanese ('inhuman monsters', 'vein of subhuman savagery runs deep') and demanding further details<sup>25</sup> to those who suggested that such terrible material should have been 'suppressed or toned down', because of the 'mental anguish suffered' by those who still did not have news of relatives, or those who were becoming ill 'due to the daily suspense'.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942-1945 Vol 2, (Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series Four, Civil)*, Canberra, 1970. p.401, 405, 413

<sup>23</sup> *Melbourne Herald* 21 August 1945

<sup>24</sup> *Melbourne Herald*, 10 September 1945

<sup>25</sup> *Melbourne Herald* 8 September 1945

<sup>26</sup> *Melbourne Herald*, 10 September 1945, letter from 'Humanity' of Surrey Hills.

## Hope lost

The missing pieces of the puzzle finally began to fall into place during the last weeks of September 1945. Information from three separate sources came to light, all of which suggested that a large party of Australians had been taken away from Rabaul in late June 1942 and that the ship they had been travelling on had been lost at sea. War correspondents in Rabaul were told by the few allied survivors there that the men had left Rabaul by sea; this was relayed to their newspapers. The surviving officers from Lark Force who had just arrived back in Australia from Japan also believed that the men had been lost at sea, and spoke of it both publicly and privately.<sup>27</sup> In Japan, Investigating Officer Major H.S. Williams arrived in Tokyo to search for evidence of what had happened to those still missing in action, including the men of Rabaul, and swiftly discovered crucial documents outlining their fate. It was inevitable that the news would quickly spread through the community.

Within a week, the families of the missing began to pick up clues. A tiny paragraph on page 4 of one paper said that 'Japan is being searched for a broken-nosed Japanese interpreter, who is believed to know the movements of many members of the 2/22nd Battalion ... It is known they were sent out of Rabaul not long after its fall early in 1942'.<sup>28</sup> The question was raised in the House of Representatives on 26 September and Minister for the Army Frank Forde admitted that the government held grave fears for the Rabaul people. That evening, metropolitan evening daily newspapers around Australia reported Forde's statement. The Melbourne *Herald*, under a headline reading 'Rabaul Men Lost at Sea Is Fear', reported that a Japanese prison ship

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<sup>27</sup> As early as 17 April 1944, Stewart Nottage had written to Mollie Nottage that the 'lads' plus civilians 'left Rabaul on 22 June 1942, that's the last we have heard of them' AWM PR83/189. The Webb Report recorded on p.424 that a Japanese prisoner had said, prior to March 1944, that he had heard in July 1942 that 'all military prisoners, except officers, were torpedoed in a ship en route to Hainan Island.' AWM51: 182

<sup>28</sup> SMH 19 September 1945 'Rabaul Garrison Search in Japan' p.4

carrying between 700 and 1,000 Australian prisoners of war...may have been lost at sea, early in 1942. This may be the solution to the mystery of what happened to the majority of the garrison which was overwhelmed by the Japanese at Rabaul.<sup>29</sup>

The following day, the morning dailies carried the story, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reporting that 'it was feared [the ship] had failed to reach its destination'.<sup>30</sup>

Even though it was still only 'feared' that the men were lost, and no details of the name of the ship or the nature of the disaster were released, the publication of the supposition came as a profound shock to the relatives. Essie Linggood saw the newspaper item over the shoulder of a fellow-traveller on a Melbourne tram on her way home from the city. Mavis Barton bought an evening paper after work. Betty Gascoigne thought it was 'just a terrible thing to let it get into the papers'. She was changing trains at Spencer Street station, Melbourne with friends on their way home from work.

One of the girls' mothers worked at the ammunition factory and she used to be waiting for us. And she was reading the paper and it had a headline something like 'Rabaul Men Lost' ... Marie must have seen it first, and she rushed over to her mother and shut the paper. I used to buy a paper on the way home, and I actually read it on the train. It was another month before the telegram came.

Sadie Pascoe heard it first on the radio. 'I remember Mum just saying, "Well, that's rotten!" I just didn't believe it'.<sup>31</sup>

Even as the families tried to deny the possibility of such a loss, Major H.S. Williams was in Japan uncovering evidence which would confirm the truth of the story. The records of Japan's Prisoners of War Information Bureau had been

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<sup>29</sup> Melbourne *Herald*, 26 September 1945, 'Rabaul Men Lost at Sea is Fear', p.1

<sup>30</sup> *SMH* 27 September 1945 'Search for Men of Rabaul Garrison' p.3

<sup>31</sup> Interviews with Betty Gascoigne Muller, Bill Linggood, Sadie Pascoe; Mavis Barton, Heidelberg, Victoria, letter, 26 November 1994

transferred to a school in a small village outside Tokyo because of the danger of air raids. There Williams was assured by the second in charge that 'no Australian personnel had been transferred out of Rabaul, and certainly that Bureau had no information of any having been lost at sea'. Unconvinced, Williams

continued to press the matter with the result that a letter dated 6 Jan 1943 was unearthed together with a nominal roll of 1053 PW and civilian personnel who were lost. They also located enquiries received from the Jap Foreign Office following representations from the Swiss Legation as protecting power for British interests. Apparently all the aforementioned documents received scant attention.<sup>32</sup>

In a remarkable feat of investigation and swift action, Major Williams, on 27 September 1945, his first day of work in Tokyo, had the nominal rolls of the missing Rabaul men in his hands, as well as the letter of 6 January 1943 confirming the loss of the *Montevideo Maru*, rescued from the paper chaos of the Bureau. On his second day, he interviewed key people from the Japanese Army, the Japanese Navy Department, the Chief of the Prisoner of War Section in the Foreign Office and the General Manager of the shipping company, Osaka Shosen Kaisha, who had owned the *Montevideo Maru*, as well as arranging to see the Swiss Legation, the International Red Cross and the Japanese Red Cross. The departmental offices of both Navy and Foreign Office had been completely destroyed in severe bombing of Tokyo in May 1945, which made it unlikely that they could produce any further documents.<sup>33</sup> This made the recovery of the Rabaul rolls and letters about the loss of the ship even more significant, indeed almost a miracle. Williams sent his first signal with a summary of his findings on 28 September and this was received with even greater gratitude by the Army in Australia because they had just been told by newly released prisoners from Rabaul that 'after receipt of advice of the sinking of the transport all records of the ship

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<sup>32</sup> MP742/1 336/1/1955 [4 of 15] Major H.S.Williams to Col. J. McCahon

<sup>33</sup> In addition, there was widespread destruction of records in Japan, burned in the period 16-19 August 1945. AWM 779/1/1:417/1/7 Appendix F H.S.Williams said, 'Japanese people were psychologically in a state of utter confusion, if not panic-stricken.'

and her prisoners were destroyed'.<sup>34</sup> How the rolls of names reached Japan from Rabaul is not clear, but they may have been sent with the officers on the *Naruto Maru*. The officers and other survivors recalled the occasion in May 1942 when all allied prisoners in camp in Rabaul had been mustered in order to complete and check the Nominal Rolls for Lark Force and civilians. Williams in Japan compared the Nominal Roll, written in Japanese Katakana phonetic script with the Echelon rolls for the Lark Force men, provided by the Australian Army, and found that he was able, with the Prisoner of War Information Bureau translator, to match 250 names of soldiers with the rolls in Katakana on the first day of translating.

Major Williams had performed a profound service for the waiting families. Many of them would find some sort of understanding and finality in the thought that 'his name was on the list'. Williams sent back his letters describing the way his investigations had been proceeding in very professional and understated terms, although he must have experienced great emotion as he made his discoveries. He permitted himself a small explosion of exclamation marks in a letter to a colleague in Manila.

When expressing to General Tamura today the concern which is felt at their failure to report this disaster to Australia he replied 'We made mistake. Please forgive'. !!<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, in Melbourne on the same day as the news reached the daily papers, the newly repatriated POWs Captain Nottage and Captain Toser informed the Army that they had heard from several sources that the men had sailed, possibly to Hainan. Then, in about March 1944, they had been told by the Japanese camp adjutant, Captain Hosotani, that 'the ship in question had been sunk on voyage'.<sup>36</sup> The

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<sup>34</sup> MP 742/1; 336/1/1955 [4 of 15] Department of Army Minute Paper; Rabaul Garrison Ref: AFPAC Adv Signal 52449 of 28 September 1945, signed by Col. Ross 02E, 30 Sept 1945

<sup>35</sup> MP742/1 336/1/1955 Correspondence Files, Williams to Col. J.McCahon LHQ 30 September 1945

<sup>36</sup> MP 742/1 ;336/1/1955 [4 of 15] Department of Defence. Army Headquarters. Correspondence Files 1943-1951 Interviews with Captains S.G.Nottage and H.A.J.Toser, and Major J.C. Mollard

Australian Authorities were now in a difficult position. They were convinced that a ship carrying Australians had been lost, but they did not know who was on board. On 30 September, it was decided that no further press statement should be made until after all names had been received and checked. Without a definite list of names there were too many unknowns; they did not yet know the names of those who had died at Tol, or had been executed or had died during an escape. It was feared that any further press release would 'have the effect of placing all next of kin in a condition of "nerves"'. But it was already too late. A few days later, on 2 October, Major J.C.Mollard, another former Zentsuji prisoner, arrived to be interviewed in Melbourne. Not only did he display a roll of members of his unit known to have been taken from Rabaul, which had been compiled from memory by the surviving officers, but the previous day Major Mollard

had attended a meeting of the 2/22 Bn Auxiliary of which his wife was President and during the course of the meeting he had read out to the members present the names of 297 personnel believed to have been drowned on the sinking of the transport.<sup>37</sup>

It is hard to imagine the pain of the meeting of women of the 2/22nd Bn Auxiliary in Collins Street, Melbourne. They had waited so long for news. Perhaps it was Mrs Mollard, who had met with this community of anxious women each week for years, who insisted that her husband read the list even though he had not yet presented it through army channels. She could well have felt that the women had waited long enough. Sadie Pascoe was there.

He read out this list to us and I'll never forget that meeting. He read out all the names of the men who were definitely on the boat. Frank's name was one.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> MP742/1 336/1/1955 [4 of 15] Department of Defence (III) Army Headquarters Correspondence Files. Colonel Wallace Ross 02E , 2 October 1945

<sup>38</sup>Sadie Pascoe, interview, Melbourne, 15 July 1994

Doris Michelson was also at the meeting. Mollard had warned them that some names might be nicknames, as it depended on the officers' memories, and her Bill was named as T.Michelson - T. for 'Tiny'.

We had to sit there and hear him read it all out. He never said that the ship had been sunk or anything, but the way he broke down we knew we would get the news, but he couldn't give it to us officially ... He got to the end and he was in tears and he had to sit down ... We walked out on to the street ... and it was in all the papers that the ship had been torpedoed.<sup>39</sup>

Even then, shocking though it was to hear the list of 297 names, they did not realise that this was only the beginning. Hundreds more names were still to come.

The authorities were now caught between two imperfect courses of action. They could either make their own official announcement of the loss of the ship, even though they could not give specific names of victims, with some control over the accuracy of the statement, or on the other hand they could wait until they had all the information. It was decided that a Ministerial announcement should be made and the next of kin, at least of the 297 names brought by the officers, should be notified.<sup>40</sup>

The Minister for External Territories, Mr E.J.Ward, read a statement to the House of Representatives on 5 October 1945. He spoke of the 1,053 missing Australians, including 316 Rabaul civilians, and stated that

most urgent prisoner of war enquiries were being made to ascertain [their] whereabouts ... [which] confirmed the Government's fears that the majority of the Australian Prisoners of War and internees captured in Rabaul and still missing, lost their lives at sea ... Next of kin can be assured that names will be progressively

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<sup>39</sup> Doris (Michelson) Ross, interview, Melbourne, 16 August 1995

<sup>40</sup> MP742/1 336/1/1955 [4 of 15] Department of Defence (III) Army Headquarters Correspondence Files. Colonel Wallace Ross O2E , 2 October 1945; MP742/1 336/1/1955 [4 of 15] Col. Wallace Ross, Department of Army, Minute Paper 027774 30 September 1945; Minute Paper 027961, 2 October 1945



released as they become available in Australia ... So far no authentic information has been obtained as to the names of the civilian internees on the vessel.<sup>41</sup>

The waiting families had to be content with that. Even now many of them refused to give up hope. They still had weeks to wait before the telegrams began to arrive.

It would be some time before all the information would be gathered, but the missing pieces of the puzzle which had confused them for so long were falling into place, even though some pieces would never be revealed. As far as could be understood, the weight of evidence pointed to a great tragedy for the people of the islands. The Australian officers with Lark Force witnessed the departure of the civilians and other ranks from the POW camp at Rabaul on 22 June 1942<sup>42</sup> and Chinese and New Guinean wharf labourers saw the men boarding a ship in the harbour.<sup>43</sup>

Australian intelligence learned that the prisoners had been sent away by ship from New Guineans who arrived on mainland New Guinea during battles in mid-1942.<sup>44</sup>

The submariners on the US submarine *Sturgeon* knew that they had torpedoed and sunk a large Japanese ship on 1 July 1942 at a location off Luzon. The officers of the *Sturgeon* recorded in their log the pursuit north through the waters of the Philippines, describing how they came within range soon after midnight on 1 July 1942. Four torpedoes were fired, two of them striking the target amidships, holing it and causing fire to break out. The watching submariners observed the ship sink within eleven minutes.<sup>45</sup> Ship owners in Japan were informed of the loss of their vessel *Montevideo Maru*, a ship which matched the description, location and time of sinking of that sunk

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<sup>41</sup> Statement by the Minister for External Territories in the House of Representatives on Friday, 5 October 1945.

<sup>42</sup> John May, *Missionary Review*, 1945

<sup>43</sup> Ping Hui, interview, Sydney, 27 July 1992; letter from Rev. Mo Pui Sam, *Missionary Review* October 1945

<sup>44</sup> Interviews with Rabaul villagers who were working as carriers for Japanese, escaped and joined Australians, 13 August 1942. AWM54: 779/3/76

<sup>45</sup> War Patrol Report USS *Sturgeon*, Fourth Patrol, 14 June-22 July 1942; AWM 54:779/1/26

by the *Sturgeon*. As well as the prisoners in the holds, most of the crew and guards also perished with the ship, only seventeen Japanese seamen and three guards managing to escape. The loss of the *Montevideo Maru* and the prisoners was reported to the Japanese Navy and to the shipowners.<sup>46</sup> Allied prisoners in Rabaul were told by Japanese officers that the ship carrying the men from Rabaul had been lost in July 1942.<sup>47</sup> In Japan, the loss of the ship with prisoners from Rabaul was mentioned in newspapers<sup>48</sup> and the Australian officers in prison in Japan learned of it. The Japanese authorities had information about the loss of this prison ship, but had mislaid the list of names of those who were supposed to have been on board.<sup>49</sup>

The Welfare Section in King St, Sydney, set up with such hope for returning civilians, sent a circular to all the families on 11 October. It included a copy of the Statement made by the Minister for External Territories and a letter expressing their 'utmost sympathy in your present anxiety' with the assurance that as soon as definite news of the fate of individuals was available they would be informed. The telegrams began to arrive by the end of October, the Army dealing with its personnel and External Territories with the lost civilians. Families for whom this small scrap of paper dealt a mortal blow tended to think that the wording was 'cold' or impersonal. It read:

It is with deep regret that I have to inform you that the transmission of the nominal roll of the Japanese vessel *Montevideo Maru* which was lost with all personnel after leaving Rabaul in June 1942 shows that [ name] was aboard the vessel and I desire to convey to you the profound sympathy of the Commonwealth Government.  
Minister for External Territories.

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<sup>46</sup> Japanese documents concerning loss of *Montevideo Maru*; AWM 54:779/1/26

<sup>47</sup> Leo Scharmach, *This Crowd Beats Us All*, Sydney, 1960, p.31; Gordon Thomas, diary, PMB 36

<sup>48</sup> AA, A7030: 4

<sup>49</sup> Investigations of loss of *Montevideo Maru* by Major H.S. Williams, 1945; AWM 54:779/1/1; AWM 54:779/1/5

Yet what else could have been done? The Minister for External Territories and his staff were under considerable pressure from relatives to pass on the news as quickly as possible, even though they may have preferred, like the Army, to wait until they were sure of all the information. Certainly the continuing search through records and transcripts of interviews was to go on for years, with some names always eluding any clear answers. Nonetheless, the telegrams were sent. Sadie Pascoe recalled

When the telegram came in the morning, the little [telegraph delivery] boy said 'I'm sorry' and he went away again. And I just brought the telegram in and said, 'It's not true. It can't be true'. I didn't ring my mother-in-law up until the afternoon. I couldn't believe it.<sup>50</sup>

The Gascoigne family had three of their own to think about - father Cyril, son Ivor and Mrs Gascoigne's brother Harry Adams. When at last the telegram arrived, Betty Gascoigne was in the canteen at work and had a phone call from her neighbour who had received the telegram on their behalf. She was very distressed and her workmates sent her home. 'And then I had to tell Mum - it was ... awful'.<sup>51</sup> Mavis Barton saw the telegraph boy leaving her parents' house as she arrived home from work and knew what it meant.<sup>52</sup> The Vinnell family had sent three sons to Rabaul with the 2/22nd Bn; Alan had escaped but now they learned that Bert had died of malaria in the jungles of New Britain and Arthur had been lost with the ship.<sup>53</sup> The Buck family had lost both Dick and Ces, serving with 2/10th Ambulance and killed at Tol. The Russell family also lost two sons, Jack killed at Praed Point and Cpl R.W.Russell with the ship.<sup>54</sup> In more than one case, telegrams went to the wrong address or with a confused message. Jack Render's wife received a telegram but the name was another Render; the correct

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<sup>50</sup> Sadie Pascoe, interview, 15 July 1994

<sup>51</sup> Betty Gascoigne Muller, interview, Canberra, 19 August 1994

<sup>52</sup> Mavis Barton, letter, 1994

<sup>53</sup> Mrs Madge Vinnell, Moe, Victoria, letter 20 October 1994

<sup>54</sup> Keith and Mrs Ditterich. Interview, Melbourne 18 August 1945. Mrs Ditterich remembers her brothers, the Russells, and the family grief.

telegram arrived later and the brief flicker of hope that Jack might still be alive quickly died.<sup>55</sup>

In the Lyons household, when the final telegram came, Frank Lyons was still in the seminary at Werribee. His father rang asking him to come home and he was able to join his grieving family the same day.

It was the longest night of my life. There was nothing you could say to console my mother. There was nobody coming in - when a death occurs, people come and help, don't they? But on an occasion like this, which was so long after my brother had died, nobody came. I was wishing somebody would come to the house and provide a diversion. We were there the whole night, just myself, my mum and dad and two young sisters - it was a pretty grim night. It went on for days ... She just felt she could never laugh again, though she was a very bright woman, and for twelve months or more she wouldn't do anything [of her usual social activities].<sup>56</sup>

Gwen Dix also received a telegram to say that her New Guinea Volunteer Rifles husband Lionel was 'Reported became missing on fourth February 1942 and is presumed to be dead at Tol New Britain'.<sup>57</sup> There was no information offered about what 'dead at Tol' might mean, and women like Gwen Dix were left to piece the story together from newspaper articles, if they could. The officers who had survived in Japan undertook the grim task of visiting the families of the men who were lost. A lieutenant visited the Mansley family in Sydney on behalf of their son and brother Fred, a private in the 2/22nd, and they were grateful to him, as they treasured any scrap of information.<sup>58</sup>

Mothers, newly bereaved, had to face telling their children. Daisy McArthur had suffered a nervous breakdown during the waiting time and was still away, so her

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<sup>55</sup> Jennifer Evans, 'Choco Jack', memoir of father Jack Render, 1994

<sup>56</sup> Frank Lyons, interview, Canberra, October 1994

<sup>57</sup> Telegram among personal archives, held by daughter Margot Bottrill

<sup>58</sup> Mary Mansley, interview, Sydney, April 1995

older son was told of his father's death by the headmaster of his school. The Oakes and Shelton sons learned at school that their initial excited victory percussion had been a mistake. When Suzanne Pascoe was a four year old, her mother told her that her father was not coming home.

I had to tell her. Every time we saw an aeroplane we'd say "Daddy will come." Then one day we were walking along the street and she was talking about Daddy coming home and I thought that I had to say it ... she seemed to take it all right but she didn't understand.<sup>59</sup>

People who had lived in Rabaul for years also lost an entire community of relationships. Families like the Gascoignes, the Ryans, the Spensleys, the McCoskers and the Macgowans mourned the soldiers they had befriended and the townsmen they had known. Their whole expatriate community had been torn apart. Muriel Macgowan's father Bill had escaped but, as one who had known the Rabaul community from birth, she wrote that she had lost 'Hundreds': school friends' fathers, family friends and all her social and community contacts from a happy childhood were gone. Betty Gascoigne had worked for Burns Philp for seven years so also knew, at least by name and reputation, all those who lived on plantations and outposts in the other islands of the area.

They were men you'd worked with, or you'd known since you were this high and in a place like that, where you are not all intimate friends but you know everyone, people you've known for donkey's years, to have them all [die]...<sup>60</sup>

Of the groups of civilian women who had been meeting for mutual support in the New Guinea Women's Clubs, at least 176 had been bereaved. The widows were touched when those whose men had survived sent them each a large florist's box of flowers in sympathy.

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<sup>59</sup> Sadie Pascoe, interview, 15 July 1994

<sup>60</sup> Betty Gascoigne Muller, interview, Canberra, 19 August 1994

All the widows, civilian and military, had suffered a profound loss. But the deaths of their spouses had a further dimension for the expatriate civilian women. They now knew that they had also lost forever their former home, place, community and way of life.

### **Vain hope**

The telegrams were a terrible end to the years of waiting. Yet for some families the waiting had not ended. In the case of men whose names were not listed with those who died at Tol, during the brief battle nor on the *Montevideo Maru*, the Australian authorities had no information so decided to send no telegram. Gwen Ives, whose husband Vivian Ives had been a New Ireland planter, received no telegram.

I didn't get any information whatsoever. I wrote to Canberra to the Department of External Territories ... It was only because I was going overseas to get married that I got the Presumption of Death, but that was just before I left in 1947 - I couldn't go until I had it.<sup>61</sup>

Clare Beaumont was another who received no telegram. Jack Beaumont's name did not appear on the list for the *Montevideo Maru*, and in fact he had been part of a group of civilians who had been seen at intervals on the Gazelle Peninsula until May 1944. As with a number of others, there was no definite information on Jack's fate but his name appeared, in pencil, 'J.B. missing', in the records of the department sending Clare her payment as a New Guinea evacuee in April 1946. Her final payment arrived in September 1946; the department noted that the allowance had been terminated and that Mrs Beaumont was now a 'widow - NG civilian War Pensioner'. Clare Beaumont was not convinced that she was a widow. With no direct evidence of death, no grave and no witnesses, she would continue to wait for Jack to come home.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Gwen Ives, interview, NSW, 22 February 1995

<sup>62</sup> Janice Steinfurth, private family history document recording the lives of her parents John Patrick Beaumont and Clara Annie Manning; interview with Janice Steinfurth, Canberra, 23 December 1994

Even some of those who had received an official telegram continued to hope that somehow their man had survived. However slim the chance, they clung to the thought that there might have been a mistake. Sadie Pascoe had heard her husband's name read out by Major Mollard and received a telegram but 'there was always the chance that perhaps somebody had managed ... and I knew that if Frank had a whisker of a chance, he'd escape, because he had everything to escape for'.<sup>63</sup>

For relatives who refused to believe their man was dead, there were examples to which they could point. Though there had been serious loss of life among them, many Catholic missionaries at Vunapope-Ramale had emerged alive at the end of war.<sup>64</sup> Men thought to be dead, like Anglican missionary Father James Benson<sup>65</sup>, were alive after all. Occasional tales of survivors who emerged from the jungle after years in hiding were circulated, and people spoke of rare cases when survivors of shipwrecks had been discovered on remote islands. Without a body and a grave, relatives found it easier to hope.

Even so, as the weeks went by, more and more grim stories were being told of people who would never come home. The remains of the men who had died at Tol and Waitavalo had lain undisturbed in the plantations and jungle where they had fallen in February 1942 until they were found by the advancing allies early in 1945. The remains were gathered for identification and final interment in the War Cemetery at

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<sup>63</sup> Sadie Pascoe. interview, Melbourne, 15 July 1994

<sup>64</sup> Bishop Leo Scharmach, *This Crowd Beats Us All*, Sydney 1960 . pp.210-211 The mission staff who survived at Ramale, New Britain, included religious of the Mission of the Sacred Heart, Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Oblates of the Sacred Heart, Daughters of Mary Immaculate. They were an international company, with members who were Australian, American, British, German, Austrian, Polish, Czechoslovak, Dutch, Luxembourg, French, Italian, Canadian, mixed race and four distinct New Guinean tribal groupings. As well as their own Mission people, they cared for missionaries of other orders and denominations who came to them for shelter.

<sup>65</sup> James Benson, *Prisoners Base and Home Again: the Story of a Missionary POW*, London 1957

Bitu Paka after the war. Not all could be identified. Among the few to be identified from dental records was Vin Lyons. His brother Frank Lyons said

As far as I recall, we were never told by the Army or anybody else that he was involved with the Tol massacre. All we got was a telegram after the war that he had been Killed in Action ... If you go to the cemetery now there's a whole row of 'Known unto God' on the tombstones, but my brother is there with his name ... They found his wristlet watch. I said to this guy [who identified Vin], 'Where was the watch, was it hanging on his wrist?' And he said, 'No, it was in his sock' ... the watch was still there. They sent the watch back to us.<sup>66</sup>

A woman who was told that her husband had died 'at Tol New Britain' made a journey with her young child from Adelaide to Sydney in order to seek 'more information from men who were in New Guinea and just returned'. Later she let her relatives believe that he had gone down with the ship. Perhaps as she learned more detail of the events at Tol she felt it was better for her relatives not to know the truth.<sup>67</sup>

The grief and shock of those who mourned the loss of the Australians was shared by New Guineans who had known them. The New Guineans had also suffered greatly during the years of war. Soon after the end of the war, letters began to pass from New Guineans to the families of Australians they had known. One wrote of being 'overcome with joy' on receiving the first post-war edition of the Methodist newspaper in vernacular

but when we started to read it we came to the great disaster in it. Our hearts were filled with sadness and sorrow and our joy departed, because we expected to meet again our missionaries - but no - we were waiting to meet with them again and take them by the hand and laugh with them but no! The dear souls. The young men, the missionaries and the [Methodist Mission] Chairman, where are they now? ... We send our love to their wives and children.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Frank Lyons, interview, Canberra, 12 October 1994

<sup>67</sup> Letter, Adelaide, 1994

<sup>68</sup> Letter from Ulia To Kekel, Duke of York Islands, to Miss Margaret Harris, long-time missionary in New Britain, translated from Kuanua by Miss Harris. No date but probably 1945 or 1946.



A very painful experience for many women was the return of the letters they had written. Where had the letters been in the years between, they asked? Janet Gambrill recalled the occasion when her mother Helen Wayne received her own letters back.

All these letters we'd written to him, they sent them all back. That was terrible - poor Mum. A few months after the war she went to the mail and they'd all come back with Return to Sender on them. All those years she'd written ...

Helen Wayne was also left with the garments she had knitted for her husband.<sup>69</sup> It must have been heartbreaking for women to re-read their hopeful and loving words, their attempts to maintain a connection through years of loneliness, and realise that they had been writing to a dead man. Jean Poole had written every week, even though it had become harder and harder. One of Frances Ryan's letters which came back read:

Three years without news. Faith and spirit still strong. Children well. Praying for your safety. Keep smiling, darling.<sup>70</sup>

Nellie Simpson's letter telling Tom about his young son came back but Tom did not.<sup>71</sup> The Ashby children's letters came back and have been kept with other tragic artefacts, including the packet stamped in purple "No Record of Repatriation of Addressee" and the typed note reading 'The Post Office sincerely regrets the circumstances which have precluded the delivery of the enclosed correspondence'.<sup>72</sup> Mrs Spensley was to receive a last, almost indecipherable letter from her husband, delivered long after the war was over and kept with his medals; Spensley, who had been a copra dealer with Colyer Watson pre-war, had anticipated the invasion and had provisioned several caves in the bush behind the plantations and retreated there with

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<sup>69</sup> Janet Gambrill, interview, Sydney, October 1994

<sup>70</sup> Letter among family papers held by Julie Ryan Richardson.

<sup>71</sup> Nellie Simpson to Rev Thomas Nevison Simpson, 21 August 1945; letter held in family correspondence by Margaret Simpson Henderson

<sup>72</sup> Letters among family correspondence held by Erice Ashby Pizer and Joan Ashby Turner.

two friends. They were only captured shortly before the *Montevideo Maru* sailed. John Spensley said

He wrote a letter which he left with an old Chinese couple and it was left in the roof of the house where the Japs wouldn't find it. It eventually came back. My uncle... was able to decipher it - the ink had run.<sup>73</sup>

'There remains a faint hope that a few of these people may yet be found alive,' wrote the *Pacific Islands Monthly* in the issue for October 1945. There was still the possibility that some may have survived in the jungle, or struggled to shore somewhere in the Philippine Islands. But the article concluded, 'Even these hopes are fading fast. It is six weeks since the Japanese surrendered and if there had been any number of these men alive, they would have made their presence known by now'.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> John Spensley, interview, Melbourne, 17 August 1995

<sup>74</sup> *PIM* 16 October 1945, p.49

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **TRYING TO UNLOCK THE PUZZLE: 'We must wait until the end of the world before we know the truth of this thing'.**

Faced with the unanswerable questions on the official 'Form of Information of Death', many relatives of the missing men ruled a line or left a blank beside 'date and place of burial', or the names of the undertaker or a witness to burial. Beside 'Cause of Death' some left a blank, or wrote a cautious 'notified officially ...'<sup>1</sup> They were not confident that they knew the truth.

The lack of any solid information was not due to a lack of effort on the part of the Australian authorities. Years of work went into what became a truth-seeking industry. War crimes were investigated, suspects tried and the guilty punished. The remains of unidentified war dead were sought with great diligence and war cemeteries established. Witnesses were questioned, some of them being sought out over several years and pursued to remote villages in the islands and the cities of Japan. The details of a range of lists of civilians and military were examined and compared. Nonetheless, many unanswered questions remained.

There were, in fact, many sources of information but in almost every case there was a sound reason for questioning the reliability of that information. Japanese witnesses were distrusted, while Australian escaped soldiers had little to tell of the missing men once they had left the battle zone. The Australian officers and nurses had been separated from the other men, and even when they were in Rabaul they only

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<sup>1</sup> File of 'Form of Information of Death' completed by next-of-kin of those listed as being on *Montevideo Maru* AA, A518/1: GR16/2/1

knew some of the large community imprisoned there. (A returned officer from Zentsuji noted: 'When we returned my impression was that everybody knew more than us'.)<sup>2</sup> New Guinean witnesses were not always taken seriously because of racist assumptions about their reliability. The missionaries at Vunapope had been isolated for years and in any case many of them were suspect because they were German nationals or from other Axis countries. Even Australian nuns did not always tell the whole truth, because they wanted to protect family members from the worst of the things they had seen. The few surviving Australian civilians in Rabaul had some information, but most of their information was hearsay. Chinese, enemy alien and mixed race civilian residents of New Britain and New Ireland were sometimes not trusted because of pre-war white attitudes and because they were known to hold some personal bitterness toward the white community. In addition, some were under investigation as possible collaborators. Surviving coastwatchers had limited information because they had lived in isolation. Even the evidence gathered in the extensive Webb Report on atrocities had always been classified as 'most secret', in part to spare the relatives further pain.

## **WAR CRIMES INVESTIGATIONS**

### **The Japanese account**

When the allied war crimes investigations began in Rabaul in October 1945, some Japanese witnesses were remarkably frank about what had happened to certain groups of victims while in other cases they were vague or presented elaborate, concocted accounts of the fates of the missing. The Australian interrogators could not be sure whether they were hearing the truth or a convincing fiction. It was discovered

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<sup>2</sup> Qn 106 22 November 1994

later, during the War Crimes Trials in Tokyo, that urgent orders had been sent to at least one Japanese prison camp in Asia at the end of the war to destroy incriminating documents, to 'annihilate' all remaining prisoners and 'not to leave any traces'.<sup>3</sup> Harry Spanner, a mixed race young man, told Gwen Ives after the war that he and others had been ordered to clear the entrance to caves near Rabaul with machetes because the prisoners, mostly missionaries, were to be put in the caves and machine-gunned to death. Rudi Diercke, a survivor on New Ireland, heard that the execution order for himself, and the local Chinese and Indians, had been signed but not carried out.<sup>4</sup>

Although information about Japanese war crimes came to light unevenly, it gradually became clearer that Australians and other allied prisoners in the islands had met their deaths in other ways beside the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*. Small groups had been executed: the Harvey family in May 1942,<sup>5</sup> Huntley, Pratt, Tom Goss and about 5 companions in August 1942,<sup>6</sup> several groups of allied airmen who had been shot down through 1942 and 1943,<sup>7</sup> and others who had been in hiding before capture. There had been executions of about thirteen civilians and airmen on Nago Island, off New Ireland.<sup>8</sup> A large party of Catholic and Lutheran missionaries from Manus and Kairiru Islands, including women and young children, had been taken one

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<sup>3</sup> Aiko Utsumi, 'Prisoners of war in the Pacific War: Japan's Policy', p.77 in Gavan McCormack and Hank Nelson, *The Burma-Thailand Railway: memory and history*, Sydney 1993; p.77; p.22 footnote 40

<sup>4</sup> Gwen Ives, interview, Leura 1995

<sup>5</sup> Statement by Mitzusaki Shojiro in Tokyo, 4 August 1949, on execution of Harvey family. AA, MP 472/1: 336/1/1955 [Part 15 of 15]; Harvey family, Lassul plantation, AA, A518: 16/3/316

<sup>6</sup> Records of interview of recovered internees, 1945-1946: AA,A518/1: FP16/2/1; AA, A7030: 4; AA, A 7030/1:5

<sup>7</sup> Summaries of executions in Rabaul, as given by Japanese witnesses : AA, MP 336/1/1955 [8 of 15]; descriptions of executions of prisoners of war, Rabaul, 1943; interrogation of Japanese commander 9 December 1949: AA, MP 336/1/1955 [Box 802] (9 of 15)

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Flanagan, Melbourne 'Nago Island - Fate of Allied Airmen and Civilians' 4 June 1947. AA, MP 375/12/0: WC43. The victims who were identified were listed as Benham, Kyle, Page, Talmadge, Herterich and Fathers Murphy and Martin.

by one, bound, shot and their bodies dumped overboard from the destroyer *Akikaze* in March 1943.<sup>9</sup> As well as executions which were finally admitted, there may have also been a number of others about which no information ever came to light. Even the two accounts of the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*, as given by survivors, left unanswered questions about the possibility of allied survivors.<sup>10</sup> (As well as the losses of Australians, a great many men of other nations met their death in the islands during the war years, including British, Indian, Chinese, Indonesian, New Guinean, American and Japanese.)

Australian investigators were occasionally frustrated in attempts to discover the truth by outwardly plausible accounts devised by Japanese officers who had briefed potential witnesses on the agreed story.<sup>11</sup> In one case of proven deception, it was given in evidence that the civilians from New Ireland and New Britain had embarked on the ships *Kowa Maru* and *Kokai Maru* and that these ships had been sunk, by allied attack, with the loss of all life in February 1944 northwest of New Hanover.<sup>12</sup> It was true that these ships had been sunk, but in August 1947 new

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<sup>9</sup> Statements from interviews concerning deaths on *Akikaze*: Kai Yajiro, interview by Major H.S.Williams, in Japan, 18 November 1946: AA, A518 : DS 16/2/1; A7030/1: 2; Interviews of Ichinose, Ishigami and Oimoto in April 1947: A518/1: FP16/2/1

<sup>10</sup> AWM 54 779/1/1 Appendix 'I' and Appendix 'L'. One report suggested that two lifeboats were righted and boarded but although 'every effort was made to recover survivors, the number of missing was large'. Another report said that 'as the vessel sank instantly there was no time to launch any lifeboats or to radio a distress message. However the Captain and "more than 10" of the crew boarded a cutter that had floated off the sinking ship...' and reached the island of Luzon by the evening of the next day. Under attack from guerilla fighters, ill and starving, the last survivors only reached safety to report the loss after nearly two weeks had elapsed. Though the Navy Department reported an immediate search, 'no trace of ship or men could be found'.

<sup>11</sup> Interviews in Tokyo in January 1950: AA, MP 336/1/1955: [Box 802] (9 of 15). One record of interview stated, 'those of the Japanese Navy in Rabaul who could have told the truth about executions feigned ignorance... he had kept to the false statements prepared, just after the war'. In another interview, an officer admitted that 'all staff officers concerned in S.E.Fleet HQ' had agreed to the fabrication of certain evidence. MP 742/2/0: 336/1/1601 A Japanese engine hand who gave the first clues about the Kavieng 32 stated that he and other witnesses were 'repeatedly briefed and ordered to say internees were sent to Rabaul', 27 June 1947.

<sup>12</sup> 'Rabaul Report on Civilians and POW August 1945 - February 1946', given by Japanese. Includes statement that civilians embarked on *Kokai Maru* and *Kowa Maru*, which were sunk on 21 February 1944. The New Britain civilians said to have been on these ships were H.J.Badger, J.Beaumont, A.Cameron, A.A.Chancey, A.S.Evensen, W.H.Fitzgibbon, W.Korn, K.A.Sherwood, H.Wheatley and Cloukey (the last two from the Solomon Islands) and the New Ireland men named were Attwood, Bell, C.Chadderton,

evidence came to light which caused the case to be re-opened. Finally it was learned that on 17 March 1944 the New Ireland civilians, 23 of them Australians, had been strangled on the wharf at Kavieng and their bodies carried out into the channel on barges, weighted with cement blocks and sunk.<sup>13</sup> Clear evidence as to the fate of the New Britain men has never been uncovered, but it was believed that some time after their last sighting in May 1944 they had been executed.<sup>14</sup>

### **Evidence from the Allies**

Documentary and oral evidence of the war years were gathered from allied sources. Diaries and papers belonging to missing Australians were handed in by New Guineans and Chinese who had kept them hidden throughout the war; these shed light on the period when men hid in the bush beyond Rabaul.<sup>15</sup> Members of the Catholic Mission at Vunapope/Ramale were interviewed. Priests on outstations and those at Vunapope were sometimes the last to see the missing, or knew the locations of scattered graves.<sup>16</sup> The Australian nuns had seen things which disturbed them deeply but had agreed among themselves to draw a veil over certain things because they feared that

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Consterdine, Furlong, Garnet, Gordon, Griffin, Hemming, Ives, Levy, Miller, Mosely, Naughton, C.Ostrom, M.Ostrom, Pinnock, Topal and teenage son, Whitehead, Williams, Woodhouse, Woolcott and German priests Hemig, Kohlstatte, Krutzenbrichler, Kutscher, Lakaff, Neuhaus, Schleuter, Utsch, Zumkley. AWM 127 [Item 14]: 144/1/264: J.R.Halligan, External Territories to Administrator of Papua and New Guinea, 1 October 1946: AWM 54: 1010/9/78; Interrogations by Australian War Crimes Section in Tokyo which was uncovering information that missing 'Kavieng 32' had been massacred in Kavieng, not lost on *Kowa Maru*. November 1946 - July 1947. AA, MP742/1/0: 336/1/1601

<sup>13</sup> Minute Paper of Japanese War Criminals: Rear Admiral Tamura Ryukichi and others 18 February 1948: AA, MP 742/1/0: 336/1/1951.

<sup>14</sup> AA, MP336/1/1955 [8 of 15] gives no names of execution victims, only '8 or 9 civilians, April or May 1944', '9 or 10 civilians, About April 1944'; Australian interrogators attempted to make hypothesis as to who may have died then and suggested that they may have included Cameron, Evensen, Fitsgibbons, Badger and Jack Beaumont.

<sup>15</sup> Diary of W.R.Huntley, Jan-April 1942, while in hiding near Tobera Plantation with Alan Carr, V.A.Pratt, F.O.Smith, A.A.Smith, Tom Goss, T.V.Wallace, Spencer Job, Symes and himself. He also referred to Chauncy, Greenwood and Sweetapple, other civilians hiding elsewhere. AA, A518/1: FP16/2/1. Diary of V.A. Pratt: a typescript copy of this diary is in circulation and a copy was sent to me in 1994.

<sup>16</sup> External Territories to Army, 15 April 1946, Army to External Territories 24 December 1945; statement by Dr Schuy 19 November 1945: AWM 127: 13; Statement of Rev Murche and Bro Overkamping 5 February 1946: AA, A518/1: FP16/2/1

details might reach bereaved families. (One of these women, Sister Berenice Twohill, did not speak of the torture of an Australian officer which she had witnessed until she told Monsignor Frank Lyons in 1992. At that time Twohill and Lyons were visiting Rabaul with a party honouring the 50th anniversary of the loss of the *Montevideo Maru*. Sister Berenice said, 'If something terrible was done to my father, I wouldn't want to know all the details. That he was executed by the Japanese would be sufficient for me'.<sup>17</sup>) The four civilian male survivors in Rabaul, Thomas, Ellis, McKechnie and Cresswick, were interviewed at length. They had kept lists of men they had seen which proved useful and Thomas, former editor of the *Rabaul Times*, had kept a diary.<sup>18</sup>

Much evidence, including detailed reports from the six survivors of the killings at Tol and Waitavolo plantations, existed in the 'Report on Japanese Atrocities and Breaches of Rules of Warfare' completed by Justice William Webb in March 1944. Even so, this material was still only a partial account as many witnesses were still not available. However, this material was not released publicly, partly for security reasons, partly because the report was written before the allies had returned to Tol to identify the dead and partly not to cause distress to the parents and other relatives. Although the horrifying details of what happened at Tol and Waitavolo have been published in newspapers, articles and books, the archival records which are available to the public have been expunged, with the names of victims carefully cut from the record.<sup>19</sup> This has been done with the best of intentions under the Archives Act 1983,<sup>20</sup> however, for

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<sup>17</sup> Monsignor Frank Lyons, interview, Canberra, 12 October 1994; Sr Berenice Twohill, Kensington, NSW 8 February 1994. Though the nuns did not speak of it, a New Guinean seminarian who had witnessed the same events reported them to the Australian War Crimes Inquiry. See Statement of Patrick Natera, Vunapope: AWM 127: 13

<sup>18</sup> Various lists and letters with names of missing people who were presumed dead, 1945: A1066/1: IC 45/55/3/19. Manuscripts by Gordon Thomas, Rabaul 1942-45 held by Pacific Manuscripts Bureau: PMB 600; PMB 36

<sup>19</sup> Report on Japanese Atrocities and Breaches of Rules of Warfare, by Mr Justice Webb, 15 March 1944: AWM 51[182]

<sup>20</sup> Archives Act 1983, 33 (1) (g) Exempt records: 33 (1) For the purposes of this Act, a Commonwealth record is an exempt record if it contains information or matter...the disclosure of which under this Act



some family members this withholding of the names has caused further pain because they have continued to imagine every possible cruel end of their son or spouse.

New Guinean people who knew missionaries, planters and other white residents well were able to provide helpful information to investigators as they had greater mobility during the war years than most others. They had, however, seen only some of the white men and then often only briefly. Methodist missionary Rodger Brown had escaped from west New Britain in 1942 and returned to Rabaul as a chaplain with 118th General Hospital in October 1945. Having just received the news of the loss of his missionary colleagues with the *Montevideo Maru*, he met with New Guinean church leaders and people and read the letter, in translation, to the group. To his surprise,

all the people laughed and said 'That isn't true!' And they began to tell me people who had seen them subsequent to that 1 July and much later on.

Brown took what they said seriously, but said nothing to any of the widows at that stage. He reasoned that the truth would come out and it was not his place to spread distressing rumours of possible brutality and execution. When, after some years, alternative stories of the fate of the men were circulated in Australia, he regretted that he had not spoken immediately of what he had learned in 1945. Over fifty years later, he is still disturbed by the uncertainties and considers that probably some of his friends and colleagues were executed and others went down with the ship, but he does not know which was which.<sup>21</sup> New Guineans from different areas had a range of memories of sightings. In Rabaul in 1972, a New Guinean wrote a statement for the vernacular church paper *A Nilai Dovot*. He listed all the Australian Methodists who lost their lives during the war and described one group who, in February 1942, were

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would involve the unreasonable disclosure of information relating to the personal affairs of any person (including a deceased person)'.

<sup>21</sup> Rodger Brown, interview, Adelaide, November 1991

captured, beaten and refused the right to continue their work. They were taken to the Catholic mission at Vunapope.

When the fighting became worse they were taken to Bitagalip and they made them work in various places ... Some people gave them food in secret. [We were told about the deaths at sea but] One thing only, we knew they were at Bitagalip until 1945 and an officer of the Japanese told me that the missionaries were at Bitagalip until the end of the war. Some people had seen them and greeted them when they were on the road ... And yet they are said to have perished on the ship *Montevideo Maru*. Thus we do not know or have faith in the truth of these stories. We must wait until the end of the world before we know the truth of this thing.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, Chinese minister Rev. Mo Pui Sam, who had spent the war years interned with the Chinese community in the Rabaul area, wrote a letter to the Methodist Mission Board as soon as he was released (and before official news of the loss of the *Montevideo Maru* reached Rabaul) describing how he had seen his Australian colleagues embarking on a ship in the harbour, naming several.<sup>23</sup>

It was not surprising that many family members found it hard to believe that their man was dead. Rumours of sightings of various people continued. In November 1945 urgent cables passed between Tokyo, Melbourne and Wellington, suggesting that New Zealand missionary Rev. Don Alley may be 'safe and well' in Japan, although his name was on the list of those lost with the *Montevideo Maru*. This raised hopes that others might still be alive and Australians in Japan were asked to

ascertain whether any other believed aboard vessel did not embark or if aboard and saved any relevant particulars regarding those rescued.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The passage quoted is a translation made on 11 July 1992 by Rev. Rodger Brown of a galleyproof from the vernacular journal *A Nilai Dovot* brought from Rabaul by a visitor to the printing press manager there in June-July 1972. The writer is not identified but is thought to be Rev. Mikael To Bilak.

<sup>23</sup> Rev Mo Pui Sam, letter to General Secretary of Methodist Overseas Missions, September 1945. This letter was published in *The Missionary Review* in October 1945

<sup>24</sup> Army HQ Correspondence files 1943-1951: AA, MP 742/1 File No. 336/1955 [4 of 15]

Sadly, the sighting of Don Alley proved false, and Mrs Alley's hopes were crushed. In another case, some Australian officers in Zentsuji were sure they recognised men from Rabaul in a newspaper photograph of prisoners in Japan and wrote to the wife of one with the news. This also proved to be a mistake and the confused widow was 'naturally, very upset over everything'.<sup>25</sup>

### **War graves: the search**

The search for the missing had been conducted concurrently with the search for the remains of the dead. By late 1946 investigators were sure that they would not find any more of the missing alive and that 'it is unlikely we will ever know what happened to them', but the search for the dead went on. The Australian War Graves Unit in New Britain followed up any clues uncovered during the War Crimes trials. Local Tolai people led the Australians to the sites of executions they had witnessed, but the searchers worked under extreme difficulties with the remains sometimes scattered across expanses of mountainous jungle or disposed of at sea. The quest to identify specific men was made almost impossible because of the lack of records, or a confusion of records (such as dental records which failed to tally). There had also been attempts to obscure signs of executions. In 1949, a former Japanese commander at Rabaul confessed that at the end of hostilities he had realised that 'we had no remains of dead prisoners of war to hand over to the Australians'. He ordered that the bodies should be dug up from original execution sites, cremated and left at the Fleet depository for collection.<sup>26</sup> The Australians were presented with several individual boxes of remains plus one large box with the remains of 28 people and a list of 31

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<sup>25</sup> Series of letters between F.M.Forde, Sir Archdale Parkhill, Attorney-General, Miss P.Allen (sister-in-law of Gunner Robert James Ryan) between October 1945 and January 1946, regarding the identification made by Lt R.J.Parkhill from an English edition of *Osaka Mainichi*. November 1942. AA, MP727/1/0: GP 25/334

<sup>26</sup> Interview 9 December 1949: AA, MP 336/1/1955 [Box 804] 9 of 15

names. Cremated ashes of prisoners of war who had died or been killed in the camps were 'lost or mixed with those of Japanese servicemen during the confusion of the handover after the Japanese capitulation'. One very systematic search in 1949 covered about twelve acres at the foot of Matupi crater, the area known to have been used as cemetery and execution ground. Thick kunai grass was burned, each section was probed with thin iron rods in hundreds of places and any soft areas were dug down to seven feet in depth. The search revealed the remains of another 30 people, mostly US and RAAF aircrew. A bomb crater seventeen feet in diameter was found at the site of what was thought to have been 'the mass grave of civilians', based on the evidence of some non-service shoes and 'personal items'; it was impossible to make identifications as the bomb had scattered and destroyed all but some partial remains. By September 1949, the evidence suggested that 60-70 Allied prisoners of war and civilians had been executed in the Matupi area between early 1942 and late 1944.<sup>27</sup> Japanese, British, American, Indian and other nationalities also returned to New Britain in the post-war years to seek out the remains of their dead.

The search for human remains had been long and very thorough. The bodies which had been discovered had been laid to rest in the new War Cemetery at Bita Paka, a place which was to become a sacred place of pilgrimage for relatives. When Lt-Col Houghton made his final report in September 1950, 180 bodies had still not been discovered, but Houghton explained that they were scattered somewhere in jungle across the length of the island of New Britain beyond the Wide Bay area, fallen from disease or violence while attempting escape. Although the story of a 'mass grave' in an unknown location would become part of the continuing mythology of the missing

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<sup>27</sup> Summary of file; 'Research Missing Personnel - New Britain' 19 June - 21 July 1950: AA, MP 742 Box 801 [3 of 15] 336/1/1955

from Rabaul, those investigating between 1945 and 1950 found no evidence to support this notion. Houghton wrote

It is desired to record for official purposes that during the entire searches at Matupi, no information was disclosed that could in any way be associated with the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*. This statement is made to allay any possible anxiety of the next-of-kin of members who were reported to have lost their lives as a result of the sinking of that ship.<sup>28</sup>

### Comparing Lists

As well as those employed in searching through people's memories, and those searching the soil for human remains, others sought answers through written records. Military and civilian lists of names of the missing were compiled and the slow process began of attempting to match names to information. There were still many unknowns, and the lack of certainty about the fate of so many was causing problems for their widows and other relatives.

There were many lists and fragments of lists to cloud the issue. The officers had made their list of the 297 soldiers known to them. Thomas and the other surviving civilians from Rabaul had compiled a list from memory of known civilians sighted in the prison camp in May 1942.<sup>29</sup> The Department of External Territories had a list of missing civilians and *Pacific Islands Monthly* published lists of missing civilians at intervals.<sup>30</sup> Sir William Webb's report had its own list of victims, and officers such as David Selby kept lists of soldiers seen during the escape period and those known to have died as they travelled.<sup>31</sup> Records of names of men and women left on New

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<sup>28</sup> Report of Lt-Col Houghton on recoveries made of service personnel at Kokopo and Matupi 19 June-21 July 1950; letter 13 September 1950: AA, MP 742 Box 801 [3 of 15] 336/1/1955

<sup>29</sup> Lists of names of missing civilians prepared by Thomas, McKechnie, Ellis, Creswick: AWM 1010/9/78; also A518/1: FP16/2/1. In the latter, the nominal roll was divided into categories of Administration, Commerce, Missions, Planters, 'From Kavieng' and '36 crew of the "Hoerstein" names unknown'.

<sup>30</sup> PIM 16 October 1945, p.9-10

<sup>31</sup> David Selby, *Hell and High Fever*, Sydney, 1956 p.139

Ireland came to Australia with escapees, and at the end of hostilities the few survivors, mostly mixed race people, Chinese and isolated missionaries added what they could.<sup>32</sup> Even so, by October 1946, there were still 27 men on New Britain and 44 people on New Ireland, all civilians, who were not on the *Montevideo Maru* list and who could not be adequately accounted for in other ways.<sup>33</sup>

The list discovered in Japan by Major H.S. Williams was of very great value. Nominal rolls of both troops and civilians, who had been in the camp in Rabaul in May 1942 and presumed to have been on board the *Montevideo Maru* when it was sunk, had survived the desperate burning of documents in Tokyo on 15 August 1945.<sup>34</sup> From the original version in Katakana script a phonetic translation was produced and matched with the names of the missing.<sup>35</sup> There were still inconsistencies and unanswered questions. In the years which followed, many versions of lists of the missing from the islands were produced, some based on the list from Japan<sup>36</sup> and others used as working tools for establishing the fate of the wider community of the

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with New Ireland evacuees early in 1942. AWM 54 616/8/11. Names on list who were said to still be on New Ireland were: J.W. Bell, Williams, Gordon, L. Furlong, E. Mosely, S. Ashby, L. Woolcott, Forbes Cobb, Ivan Tate, Merwin, Levy, L. Davies, C. and M. Ostrom, Lightbody, Griffin, Hemming, Norton, Ives, Diercke, Topal and son, C. Page, J. Talmadge, Kyle, Benham. War correspondent Warren on occupation of Rabaul, 28 September 1945: AWM 773/4/12

<sup>33</sup> J.R. Halligan, External Territories to the Administrator of Papua and New Guinea, Port Moresby, 1 October 1946: AWM 54 1010/9/78. J.R. Halligan was very anxious to clarify the issue and prepared a document which outlined as much information as they had, but almost every record was marked 'not free from doubt' or 'no confirmatory evidence'

<sup>34</sup> Burning of records in Japan, 16-19 August 1945: AWM 779/1/1:417/1/7 Appendix F

<sup>35</sup> Transliteration of civilian list found in Japan in September 1945: AA, A1066/1: IC45/55/3/19 This version appears to be earliest available transliteration of the list of civilians, though it is headed 'Copy'. It appears to have been done without benefit of help from any person with local knowledge of place names or people and lists civilians by name, age in 1942, occupation, nationality and place where they were arrested. Despite the odd spellings, many identities are recognisable.

<sup>36</sup> Some examples: AA, MP742/1/0: 255/15/1643; AA, A 7030/13; A7030/4; AA, A7030/1:5; AA, MP727 Department of Army GP 25/293 (Lark Force); AA, MP727/1: GP25/334; AA, MP727/1: GP25/293; AWM 127: 3; AA, A1066/1: IC45/55/3/14/2/1; AWM1010/1/30; AWM54: 1010/4/172AA; AA, A518/1: FP16/2/1

missing.<sup>37</sup> Ian Downs, who worked with Halligan at External Territories for a period in 1945, wrote

The feeling grew that anyone in our service who could not be accounted for must have been lost on the *Montevideo Maru*.<sup>38</sup>

This led, in time, to a general belief that the *Montevideo Maru* 'list' could not be trusted because names may have been added later in order to tie off loose ends, or to provide financial help to families who appeared to qualify for nothing.

## PRIVATE SEARCHES

Many relatives of the missing and dead began to believe that the truth was being withheld from them. They had been offered so little information - in most cases a telegram and in a few cases nothing at all - and even in the early weeks after the news was published, there were those who wrote letters to the press demanding more evidence that what they had been told was the truth. Some feared that something even worse may have happened, and felt that they would prefer to hear the naked truth rather than suffer from the nightmare of their own imaginations. Others refused to give up hope, and dreamed of husband or son one day emerging from the jungle, or being rescued from an isolated island.<sup>39</sup> In the case of others, they decided to initiate their own private searches for the truth.

Where 2/22nd Bn officers were available, family members contacted them for details of their last contacts with the missing men. Chaplain John May, on his return

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<sup>37</sup> 'Civilian war dead. TPNG': AA, A518/1: DS16/2/1 Part 4 p.975-978; AA, A7030/1: 9; AA, A7030:4; AA, A7030: 8; AA, A7030/1: 11; AA, A7030/1:12

<sup>38</sup> Ian Downs to Bill Gammage, 30 August 1990

<sup>39</sup> This was not an unreasonable idea, as Japanese troops were still appearing alive from hiding in south-east Asia and the Pacific between 1956 and 1959. *PIM* January 1960 'The War's Over - but has it ended?'

to Tasmania, called a meeting in Hobart Town Hall to speak to bereaved families, and this was much appreciated.<sup>40</sup> Gwen Ives in Melbourne learned that one New Ireland planter, Rudi Diercke, had survived; she wrote to him for any information and valued his detailed reply.<sup>41</sup> Among the Australian soldiers who were sent to Rabaul in September 1945 to help establish a holding camp for the 100,000 Japanese prisoners was Ronald Cornelious whose brother Bob had been lost with the 2/22nd men.

I enquired amongst several civilians about the fate of the 2/22 Battalion but they only knew that some had escaped by sea or fled into the hills. My family never received official information from the Army or Government on his fate, only 'Missing in action, believed killed'.<sup>42</sup>

Iris Schmidt was told that her husband Adolph Schmidt, headmaster of a Rabaul school, had been lost with the *Montevideo Maru*. She was not persuaded and returned to Rabaul in 1947 searching for evidence. In Rabaul she met some New Guineans known to her before the war who told her that her husband had been executed by firing squad, with three New Guineans, in Rabaul in April 1944. They told her where to find the grave. Mrs Schmidt was deeply disturbed by this experience.<sup>43</sup> Another widow, Helen Pearson had gone as a bride to Rabaul in 1937 and had always believed that her missionary husband Howard would survive imprisonment. When she was told that he had died with the *Montevideo Maru* she did not believe it and returned to Rabaul in 1947, ostensibly as a teacher but with the main goal of finding his grave. Her search led to a nervous breakdown.<sup>44</sup> One widow, who married a former neighbour in New Guinea several years after the war, commented that she realises

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<sup>40</sup> Letter from Eileen Cox, formerly Mrs Wilf Pearce, Newtown, Tasmania, 25 January 1994

<sup>41</sup> Gwen Ives, interview, 22 February 1995.

<sup>42</sup> Ronald Cornelious, Qn 20.

<sup>43</sup> Interviews with John of Manus by Lt Dodderidge, 4 July 1947, 22 July 1948, 29 July 1948: AA, MP 742 Box 801 336/1/1955 [1 of 15]. Lt Doddridge considered the evidence for an execution unreliable because the witness seemed ill at ease, though 'he stuck to his story'. The story of Iris Schmidt is told by H.E. Clarke, 'The *Montevideo Maru*', *Una Voce News Letter*, No.4 December 1994

<sup>44</sup> Rodger and Kathleen Brown, interview, Adelaide, November 1991



now that not only was she very lonely but 'in my subconscious I wanted to get back to New Guinea - it was part of the looking and seeking'.<sup>45</sup> When she was a teenager in the 1950s, the daughter of missing civilian Jack Beaumont saw her mother Clare searching the newspapers for any suggestion that her husband's remains had been discovered. Janice Steinfurth recalled, 'They were digging up bones in New Britain and mother scoured through the papers every night'. Clare Beaumont had remarried by this time, but hid her search from her second husband.<sup>46</sup>

Frank Lyons was disappointed that 'the Army never once told us how [Vin Lyons] died or what were the circumstances'. They had to make their own discoveries. All they knew was that Vin had died at Tol plantation in February 1942. In 1960 Frank Lyons travelled to Rabaul as a naval chaplain on board the aircraft carrier HMAS *Melbourne*. By a coincidence, he met a party of 2/22nd Bn survivors there and went with them to the war cemetery where he met Billy Cook, one of the few survivors of Tol.

We went back to the Kokopo RSL and I remember it was a very hot day. So I got a jug of cold beer and wheeled him [in his wheelchair after an industrial accident post-war] over to a corner and I said, 'Listen, Billy, I want the story. Don't spare me any detail'. Billy was bayoneted eleven times. He took his shirt off and showed me his torso and I counted the scars ... but he'd survived all that ... But that was the only detail that I got of the thing, though I'd heard stories before ... Later I got to know Bill Harry and he filled me in on a lot of things ... Perhaps they just didn't want to distress relatives. I don't know.<sup>47</sup>

While on leave in Australia, shortly before returning to New Guinea on 16 June 1950, Gwen Ives saw an editorial in a Melbourne paper describing the fate of the

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<sup>45</sup> Qn No. 112

<sup>46</sup> Janice Steinfurth, interview, Canberra, 23 December 1994

<sup>47</sup> Frank Lyons, interview, Canberra, October 1994

New Ireland civilians on the wharf at Kavieng, including her first husband, and the way the story had been confused with the loss of the *Kowa Maru*.

It was the first I heard of it. None of us knew. We were never officially notified. All I've got is a 'Presumption of Death' for 18 February 1944 - Missing Presumed Dead. No apologies, no nothing. Because I didn't keep the newspaper, I was doubted. (My husband destroyed it - I don't think he wanted me to dwell on it.)

For Gwen Ives there was the continuing frustration of being disbelieved by those who had not seen this newspaper statement. Though the details were in fact published in the official history in 1970,<sup>48</sup> Gwen Ives did not see this and it was not until her daughter inspected the relevant archival papers in 1989 that she felt vindicated.<sup>49</sup>

### **Continuing to sift rumour from truth**

In the absence of identified bodies and graves, it was difficult for many relatives to discern truth from fiction. In such a climate, rumours took on a life of their own. Despite the considerable documentation which existed concerning the *Montevideo Maru* and the other losses, many relatives were not aware of the details of this information but they heard distressing rumours. Tales of bodies of civilians washed ashore were circulated<sup>50</sup> and Bill Macgowan was told soon after the war, by a Chinese man, that he witnessed the men being herded aboard the *Montevideo Maru*. It left port and returned a few hours later much higher in the water. He believed the men were not on board when it left the same night for Japan.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> J.R.Sweeting, in Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942-1945, Australia in the War of 1939-1945 Series 4, Vol.2 'Civilians in Wartime Papua-New Guinea'* p.684-685, Canberra 1970

<sup>49</sup> Gwen Ives, interview.

<sup>50</sup> Army HQ Correspondence files 1943-1951: AA, MP742/1, File No. 336/1/1955 [4 of 15] Nottage and Toser reported that body of C.McKellar, civilian, had been washed ashore after embarkation in June 1942, had heard the story from J.McDonald, former District Officer at Manus, who heard it from natives in 1943. Gwen Ives also heard that L.C.Saunders had been found on a New Hanover beach with a gunshot wound in 1942. Other enquirers heard from New Guineans that they saw only Japanese bodies washed on to beaches.

<sup>51</sup> Muriel Macgowan Lerner, Qn 51

Former coastwatcher W.J.Read wrote in 1975 of his own doubts about the *Montevideo Maru*: 'My own opinion is that none of them were lost that way - they were done away with here'. However, he offered no evidence to support his opinion.<sup>52</sup>

In 1960, Bishop Leo Scharmach published an account of the years of internment experienced by the Catholic missionaries at Vunapope and Ramale. *This Crowd Beats us All* appeared in both serial and book form. The Bishop wrote of his serious doubts about the story of the loss of the *Montevideo Maru* as told to him in 1942 by Japanese officers. He stated his own theory.

It is highly probable that a *Montevideo Maru* never existed. The prisoners were taken by truck to Matupit and other places. Most likely they were equipped with spades and were ordered to dig a trench, after which machine guns gunned them down ... Just to put investigators on the wrong track, they assiduously spread the story of the *Montevideo Maru*.<sup>53</sup>

Although the Bishop's claims were based on his own theory of events and without evidence to support them, his opinion circulated quickly around Rabaul and in Catholic circles in Australia. Not every family involved heard about it but those who did were very distressed. As Bishop Scharmach was a respected cleric and had been in the area throughout the war years, faithful Catholics felt that his version could well be the truth. Before the book was published, Scharmach asked island resident Frank Holland to read the manuscript. Mabel Holland:

He wanted Frank's opinion of it. No doubt there was a ship *Montevideo Maru* but if it had come to Rabaul and all those people boarded, word would have spread far and wide, someone would have seen, heard and spoken about it.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> W.J.Read, Kavieng, New Ireland, to 'Peter', 19 June-1975. Copy of letter held by Joan Turner.

<sup>53</sup> Leo Scharmach, *This Crowd Beats Us All*, Sydney 1960 pp30-31

<sup>54</sup> Letter from Mabel Holland, Oxley, Queensland, 19 September 1994. Holland had been awarded an MBE for his role in the rescue of many Australian soldiers who were attempting to escape from the north coast of New Britain in 1942.

This way of seeing the events of 1942 is an example of the difficulties people have had with knowing how to judge what is true. Although the documents existed which described in detail the existence of the *Montevideo Maru*,<sup>55</sup> witnesses had seen large numbers of Australians embarking on it and both American and Japanese accounts of the loss of the ship existed, the theory of the Bishop still carried weight with many of his hearers. Nonetheless, it was true that it was difficult to establish precisely which individuals had boarded the ship in Rabaul. Those who lived in the islands through the fifties and sixties recalled that 'Rabaul was full of these stories' of other possible fates for the missing. Those in the New Guinea Women's Club network also heard them. Children of missing people continued to hear statements from New Guineans and from former islands residents that individuals were not on the ship, and met their fate in other ways.<sup>56</sup> One of the many women who was distressed by the suggestion that '*Montevideo Maru* never existed' was Beryl Beazley, widow of mission builder/teacher Syd Beazley. Her brother-in-law, parliamentarian Kim Beazley Snr MHR, was visiting New Guinea in 1961 on behalf of the Labour Party and arranged to go to Rabaul to make his own enquiries. There he contacted a New Guinean building foreman named Devis who had been trained by his brother and knew him well. Devis told him of the ship in the harbour and how

he had been one of those forced to carry luggage by the Japanese down to rowing boats that took all the Methodist missionaries who he knew, led by Laurie McArthur, out to the boat and he saw them go on it.<sup>57</sup>

In the years since 1945, family members have continued to try to establish the truth of what happened. They have written to the Australian War Memorial for

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<sup>55</sup> In 1992, a former missionary doctor, Dr James Ferguson, described his voyage with the *Montevideo Maru* from China in 1939, when it was still a well-appointed passenger ship plying between Asian ports.

<sup>56</sup> Interviews with Bill and Carolyn Linggood, Betty Gascoigne Muller, Gwen Ives, Malcolm and Glen McArthur, Robert Edwards, Dianne Edwards, Margaret Henderson, Diana Martell, Erice Pizer, Joan Turner

<sup>57</sup> Kim Beazley Snr, interview, 21 November 1995, Canberra

information, explored archives and collected cuttings and books which refer to the events of 1942 in the islands. Articles in *Pacific Islands Monthly* by survivor Gordon Thomas, and books by various soldier survivors<sup>58</sup> were of special interest. At the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the loss of the *Montevideo Maru*, held in Rabaul in 1972, several speakers made a point of quoting from documents gathered in the course of their own research into the fate of the men, suggesting that the question of whether or not the story of the ship was a hoax was still a very live issue.<sup>59</sup>

In some cases, relatives heard disturbing rumours of alternative fates many years later. Nellie Simpson had two such experiences. On the first occasion, when her children were still small, she had a chance encounter with Sister Dorothy Maye in Adelaide. Sister Maye had worked in Kavieng before the war and was not removed from Kavieng to Rabaul until March 1942, so had seen other Kavieng civilians during that period. Nellie visited Sister Maye hoping for news of her husband Tom. For a while they talked about

everything *but* Kavieng and at last I said, 'What can you tell me about Tom?' She stopped and then she jumped up and screamed and ran out of the room and I never saw her again.

Years later, in 1975, Nellie met some distant family connections. One of the group told Nellie that there was 'something I should tell you' and went on to tell a story told him by one Captain Saunders, known to Nellie as the Kavieng boat owner before the war. He explained that

Tom was trying to save one of the young soldiers who was going to be - beheaded, or I don't know what - and he lunged against him, and the young fellow got the

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<sup>58</sup> Some books which are valued are: David Selby, *Hell and High Fever*, Sydney 1956; Douglas Aplin, *Rabaul 1942*, Melbourne 1980; Dawes, John, *Every man For Himself*, Sydney 1960, Eric Feldt, *The Coastwatchers*, Melbourne, 1946, 1991

<sup>59</sup> Record of speeches at Commemoration Service for the prisoners on the *Montevideo Maru* held at Rabaul, PNG on 22 June 1972; District Commissioner E.V. Smith, RSL and 2/22nd Bn representative H.W. Smith, Kim Beazley Snr.

sword through the legs or the body or something and they said, "Clean him up too" and Tom was supposed to be beheaded... [The informant] only lived a couple of weeks after that.<sup>60</sup>

Even in the very recent past, statements have been made in the press and in conversation which have unsettled relatives. In 1992 a letter to the Editor in the *Adelaide Advertiser* suggested that 'Remains in a mass grave discovered during pool excavations in Rabaul in the mid-1960s may be those of prisoners said to have been lost with that ship'.<sup>61</sup> The two sisters of Driver Frederick Mansley of 2/22 Bn, whose name appeared on the *Montevideo Maru* list in 1945, each heard disturbing stories. In 1990 one sister was told by a chance acquaintance that there had been survivors rescued from the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*, but told only her husband 'as I did not want to put my family through the torment we had already experienced when Fred was posted missing'. Her sister had always believed that her brother had been on the ship, until she heard a talk in March 1995, given by a woman who had lived in Rabaul after the war. For the first time, Miss Mansley heard that anyone questioned the existence of the *Montevideo Maru*, and found the 'reports very disturbing especially after all these years'.<sup>62</sup> Again, the address must have been based on hearsay rather than fact, as the weight of evidence does not support a theory which denies the existence and loss of the *Montevideo Maru*.

And then there are those who even after all these years have never heard of the *Montevideo Maru*. A military historian, researching the 1st Independent Company at Kavieng, noted that 'occasionally we hear of relatives of the *Montevideo*

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Nellie Thirkettle, Adelaide, 26 November 1992. Simpson's name does not appear on the list of names of civilian men known to Gordon Thomas seen in the prison camp in Rabaul in May 1942; either Thomas did not know him (though he had lived in or visited Rabaul between 1937 and 1942), or did not see him, or he was not there. His close friend and colleague Dan Oakes was recognised by Thomas and by Chaplain John May in the camp, but Simpson was not.

<sup>61</sup> C.B.T.Campbell, Frewville, S.A., letter to the *Adelaide Advertiser*, 30 January 1992

<sup>62</sup> Doreen Beadle, W.A., letter, 4 December 1994; Mary Mansley, Sydney, letter, March 1995. It is almost certain that the supposed 'survivors' were in fact those who survived one of the other sinkings of prison ships during the war years, and the informant confused the name of the ship.

*Maru* casualties saying, "Only recently have we found out that Uncle Jack or Tom met his fate on the *Montevideo Maru*", through some odd or unusual contact he or she has made'.<sup>63</sup>

One woman only knew that the man she had loved was 'Missing, believed killed'. For nearly fifty years she worried over the thought that he had been among those soldiers who had surrendered at Tol, whom she had heard had been 'tortured and beheaded'. In 1992, now widowed twice, she had a vivid dream.

I dreamt I saw a ship sink, it was going down like that - I can still see it - all this white froth and I saw a chap shoot up out of the water in a ragged uniform and I woke up screaming out his name.

When she had calmed down, she got up and wrote to Veterans Affairs in Canberra, asking for information. They sent her a detailed reply about the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* and a list with her man's name marked. This was, she said, the first time she or the rest of his family had been told that he was on the lost ship.<sup>64</sup>

The quest for some kind of resolution to the uncertainties is still alive for many families as well as for survivors of 2/22nd Bn. Despite the range of material which has been published over the years, and the many who have done their best to uncover the truth, there seems to be a continuing unease among some people who appear to distrust the veracity of what has been published, or feel that somehow some vital clue may have been missed. In 1994, a survivor of the 2/22nd Bn contacted historian Hank Nelson about the possibility of interviewing any Japanese crew who survived the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*. The reply, setting out the main evidence for the loss of many Australians with the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*, and pointing out that no one has ever found one survivor, was published in the Retired Officers'

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<sup>63</sup> Bill Goodall, Victoria, letter, 21 November 1994

<sup>64</sup> Interview, Melbourne, 15 August 1995

Association of PNG News Letter in March 1995 with a note which added that it seemed that all possible steps had already been taken to establish the truth.<sup>65</sup>

Would it have been different if at least a handful of survivors had come back to be the witnesses to the loss of the ship, or to the executions, to give clear and immediate answers to family members? It is possible that people may have felt more confident that they understood the truth if they could have spoken to eyewitnesses. And yet, the results of months of questioning of survivors (mostly missionaries) in the islands immediately after the war did not produce unambiguous evidence.<sup>66</sup> Each one only knew a little, and even that little did not always match the evidence of others. All the problems inherent in gathering oral evidence were present. The family members, in many cases, did not have easy access to written evidence of any kind, and regretted the lack of eyewitnesses. As one woman put it:

You waited all that time and you knew some men wouldn't get back - that had to be - but you kept thinking someone will get back. But for no one to get back, it was just unbelievable.<sup>67</sup>

There is still sufficient uncertainty about what happened to the people of the islands of New Guinea during the war that many people still feel a need to ask the same questions twenty, thirty and even fifty years later.

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<sup>65</sup> *Una Voce News Letter*, Retired Officers' Association of Papua New Guinea, March 1995 'Montevideo Maru - A Summing Up' p.16

<sup>66</sup> Statements of allied survivors in Rabaul concerning missing civilians, 1945: AA, A518/1 FP16/2/1; AA, A7030:4

<sup>67</sup> Gwen Ives, interview, 1995



### UNRESOLVED PROBLEMS: 'I am very, very angry'.

Not only has there been great grief caused by the wartime events in the islands, but the events have also given rise to anger, bitterness, confusion and cynicism. Relatives of those who disappeared from the islands feel that their men were betrayed and abandoned by their own people as well as being injured by their nation's enemy. They claim that as a result of the years of unanswered questions they have been disadvantaged in many practical ways. To add to their sense of injury, many are hurt by the way events which have such significance for them seem to be relatively unknown.

#### Abandoned by their own

From the beginning of the war in the Pacific there was outrage at what was seen as unpreparedness and ill-advised decision making by the Australian authorities, both civil and military. Even before Rabaul fell, the *Pacific Islands Monthly* declared 'God help officialdom if any of us can ever get at it'.<sup>1</sup> Three and a half years later, when at last the news came through that their men were dead, a woman wrote, 'I would like to get my hands on those responsible for sending them there. The whole of the Rabaul affair is a disgrace and it stinks'.<sup>2</sup> Those looking for someone to blame found their target in the faceless men of government departments and military leadership, and the more public figures, politicians and church leaders, who were all seen to have failed them.

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<sup>1</sup> *PIM* January 1942. Article dated 'Rabaul, 9 January 1942'

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Evans, *Choco Jack*, 1994. p.22

A common complaint was that the Australian government did not permit evacuation of the civilian men from New Britain and New Ireland. 'They wouldn't let the men come with us. No plantation manager could get out unless he was so ill he needed surgery', said one woman. Though some civilian men chose to stay on their plantations, mission stations and government posts, those who wished to leave were given few opportunities. In early January 1942, as bombing raids over Rabaul increased, acting Administrator H.H. Page made repeated requests to the War Cabinet in Melbourne for advice on the evacuation of civilian men from his region. A potential escape vessel, the *Herstein*, was in the harbour but a reply was delayed until it was too late. Most civilians were cut off.

There was, and continues to be, considerable bitterness at what is seen as inexcusable slowness to act. Lorna Hosking, writing to her husband, as she thought, in March 1943: 'I feel so furious and exasperated with whoever was responsible for failing to evacuate Rabaul in time for you all to get right away'.<sup>3</sup> An officer who escaped from Rabaul wrote in 1994, 'The abandonment of the European males and the Chinese population was scandalous'.<sup>4</sup> Survivor Gordon Thomas defended Administrator H.H. Page, who was being blamed by some; he wrote during and after the war of the way the authorities back in Australia 'refused to give permission and stated "to carry on as usual"'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Lorna Hosking, diary kept for husband Dr Herbert Hosking, 8 March 1943

<sup>4</sup> J.C.H. Gill, AM, MBE, Naval Intelligence Officer Qn No. 94

<sup>5</sup> Gordon Thomas, handwritten notes headed 'Impressions of Rabaul Prior to Japanese Landing'. PMB 600; Gordon Thomas, interview on arrival in Cairns on *Marella*. n.d. but possibly October 1945; press cutting from collection of Ken Macgowan. Another civilian and colleague of Harold Page, volcanologist Dr Norman Fisher, also recalled a conversation in January 1942 in which Page showed him the cable he was sending to request evacuation.

A legend has grown over the years that all the civilians could have escaped with the Norwegian ship *Herstein*, which was loading copra in the harbour at Rabaul, but that a telegram from the Australian government put the commercial value of the copra ahead of the value of the human lives. Relatives retold the story as they understood it. One said,

They were furious at the Government because the Government had the option to get the men out or get the copra out, and they got the copra out. Mother was very angry about all that.<sup>6</sup>

Another recalled that a copra boat came in and the Administrator 'asked Canberra if they could send civilian men, instead of copra. Canberra said no'. Another pre-war resident quoted a friend: 'the famous [Earle] Page telegram came back - "Put all the women and children on the ships, the men are expendable"'.<sup>7</sup> (As Earle Page was in the Opposition at the time, he would have had no part in such an order, in any case.)

There is no evidence supporting this story; it is a myth. No telegram or cable with a message resembling this appears in the sequence of documents in the Archives. It is unlikely that there ever was such a cable. It seems more likely that the tragic error of the War Cabinet, as advised by the Chiefs of Staff, was a lack of urgency, and a mistaken view that life could and should continue as normal for as long as possible. With this view in mind, the continued loading of copra under the direction of the Copra Marketing Board can be seen as simply everyday work rather than a deliberate decision to put economic profit ahead of human life. There were also other smaller ships available in the last days before the invasion, and some civilians did escape on them, on their own initiative and without hindrance.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Janet Gambrill, interview

<sup>7</sup> Jean Mannering, interview; Gwen Ives, interview

<sup>8</sup> Australian men, including bank staff and others, travelled to safety on *Matafele*, *Muliama* and *Malaita*. A518/1 CP16/2/1 Pt 1 and Pt 2

Wherever fault lay, the result was the same. The men had not been evacuated and their lives had been lost. Some relatives and survivors blamed H.H.Page for being too obedient to the authorities in Australia and not taking independent action. J.R.Halligan of External Territories in Canberra, who had responsibility for the island civilians, 'blamed himself for their situation. He believed he should have convinced the war cabinet to take proper measures for their repatriation'.<sup>9</sup> Ian Downs suggests that his patrol officer friends who were coastwatching had died because they were 'betrayed by the reluctance of Australian governments to spend money on defence'.<sup>10</sup> In interviews and correspondence with bereaved civilian families, it is evident that their attitudes towards the 'government', 'Canberra' or 'officialdom' have been very negative since that time. Many commented that they had 'never trusted governments since'. One spoke of 'real hatred for the government of the day'. Another wrote that failure to evacuate civilians 'is hard to accept even now', and yet another, 'The bitterness will never pass, nor my deep hatred and mistrust of the Japanese and my mistrust of the Australian Government past and present'.<sup>11</sup> The cost to the civilian families was very great. At a personal level, most of the pre-war families in the islands lost husband or father, and many of their close friends. In terms of the leadership offered by the Australians to the Territory of New Guinea, six heads of Departments<sup>12</sup> were lost as well as eight out of fifteen members of the Legislative Council. In the courts, education, health, public works and every other administrative system, years of experience, skills, energy and commitment to the task were lost.

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<sup>9</sup> Ian Downs, *The Last Mountain*, St Lucia, 1986

<sup>10</sup> Ian Downs, *Last Mountain*, p.191

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer Evans, Qn No.71, Marion Taylor, Ken Macgowan

<sup>12</sup> H.H.Page, Acting Administrator, H.O.Townsend, Treasurer, G.H.Murray, Director of Agriculture, Dr H.C.Hosking, Acting Director of Public Health, C.R.Field, Director of Public Works, G.G.Hogan, Crown Law Officer

For some, the focus for anger has been the leadership of mission societies who mistakenly assumed that non-combatant missionaries would not be mistreated and would be able to do some good by staying with the village people. With hindsight it is easier to see that this could not be so. There was a very large loss of life among mission staff<sup>13</sup> and mission leaders who encouraged their people to stay at their posts were later accused of contributing to their deaths.<sup>14</sup>

Those linked with the military in the islands have serious accusations concerning what they see as a failure of leadership at several levels. Soldiers who took part in what one Territorian called 'the New Britain farce' were very bitter about the way New Britain was seen as expendable. It was this attitude, they believe, that led to the garrison being ill-equipped, inadequately prepared, lacking reinforcement and having no plans for withdrawal. Many of the former soldiers who responded to the Questionnaire on the subject of Rabaul 1942 wrote of the unnecessary waste of life and the many things they consider should have been done differently. A civilian observer wrote at the time of the retreat 'our handful of poorly equipped troops had not the slightest chance... the most ghastly affair that one could ever imagine. Our troops scattered in all directions'. He made a scathing attack on the military leadership.<sup>15</sup> A woman who had been a resident in Rabaul in 1941 remembered meeting soldiers at the time who were

very fed up with being there and not doing anything, they thought. Yet when it came to the action they were so unprepared. You must blame the leaders for that.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Theo Aerts, *The Martyrs of Papua New Guinea: 333 Missionary Lives Lost During World War II*, Port Moresby 1994

<sup>14</sup> *The New Guinea Diaries of Philip Strong 1936-1945*, Ed. David Wetherell, Australia 1981 p.136. Also see H.N.Nelson, 'Loyalties at Sword-point', *Journal of Politics and History*, August 1978

<sup>15</sup> Victor A.Pratt 'War Fugitives in New Britain Jungle' 1 May 1942. Transcript of manuscript held by D.O.Smith. Pratt was among the party of civilians who are believed to have been executed early in August 1942.

<sup>16</sup> Betty Gascoigne Muller, interview

For many families of soldiers, there is a continuing disenchantment with military and civil authority. Jenny Evans 'has no anti-Japanese feelings. The criminals are in Australia, not only overseas. It's the ordinary man against the hierarchy'. Writing of her father Jack Render, Frankston stonemason and army cook in Rabaul:

He believed in the competence of those running the show. Sorry, Jack, I disagree ... The Jacks are still being set up by others to do their dirty work for them.<sup>17</sup>

Yet another frequent complaint is that when Rabaul was invaded, there was no serious government attempt to rescue fleeing troops and civilians. The first few to escape from Rabaul passed on the news that hundreds of civilians and troops were in flight across New Britain, but there was no attempt by the Australian government to rescue them. A plan for withdrawal, with a designated pickup point, had been made and carried out by the RAAF for their own men, but nothing was done for the army or civilians. This frustrated and angered relatives and friends who saw this failure as either bungling inadequacy or a devaluing of human lives. Among others, the Burns Philp Company immediately contacted the Prime Minister's Department requesting that the 'responsible authority' should give urgent consideration to 'ways and means of providing for their evacuation'. It was nearly two weeks before someone in the Navy began drafting a reply to say that it was 'impracticable to contemplate an expedition to evacuate civilians from New Britain'.<sup>18</sup> It was not for want of offers of men to attempt to go back in search of the missing. Former Rabaul residents offered various schemes for a rescue, some more practical than others, but all needed either planes or ships to be put into action.<sup>19</sup> But at that time, February to April 1942, the Australian government

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<sup>17</sup>Jennifer Evans, *Choco Jack*, manuscript , 1994

<sup>18</sup> Burns Philp and Co Ltd to Prime Minister's Department, 28 January 1942; Department of Navy to Burns Philp and Co, 10 February 1942: AA, MP 1049/5/0: 1855/12/21 The original drafts suggested that 'Naval Forces cannot be spared from other vital duties' and 'regret that for the moment they are unable to see how to rescue the personnel'.

<sup>19</sup> AA, A518/1: CK16/2/1; AA, MP1587/1/0: 97E Some men who offered to return were F.J.Mackenzie, N.R.Wilde, K.G.Munro, J.L.Chipper - a bank manager, a staff member of one of the major trading companies, a timber exporter and a pilot. All had many close friends and colleagues among those trapped on New Britain and had themselves been fortunate enough to escape.

had a great many other urgent things to worry about, and severe limits on available aircraft or shipping which could be put to use in this way. The dangers and difficulties of logistics seemed to be insurmountable. Even Lt Commander Eric Feldt, RAN, whose work with Naval Intelligence would become legendary, feared that a rescue attempt would probably be doomed and wrote

I will be willing to try ... [but] the difficulty will be to get in touch with refugees who will be scattered along a hundred miles of coast and will be in hiding ... it is problematical if any men would be contacted, and certain that not more than a dozen would be rescued.<sup>20</sup>

So for several hundred men struggling along the north and south coasts of New Britain, many of them ill, injured, hungry and without jungle survival skills, the expectation of 'being picked up by our warships or seaplanes'<sup>21</sup> was never realised. The rescue of refugees from New Britain was left to the initiative, courage and determination of the men of pre-war New Guinea administration, commerce and missions, and the efforts of officers and men of 2/22nd who achieved prodigious feats in survival to be in a place from which they could be rescued. (As late as September 1942, a story was circulating that a former resident 'was collecting craft of every description and hoped to see home town soon'.<sup>22</sup>) The little Dunkirk of the islands was the triumph of independent initiative.<sup>23</sup> Relatives and friends felt, yet again, that their men had been valued so little that they had been abandoned by those who were responsible for their predicament.

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<sup>20</sup> Lt Commander E. Feldt, Supervising Intelligence Officer, Townsville to Director of Naval Intelligence, Melbourne, 3 April 1942: AA, MP 1587/1/0: 97E

<sup>21</sup> V.Pratt, journal, May 1942

<sup>22</sup> Lorna Hosking, letter, 20 September 1942

<sup>23</sup> For descriptions of the rescue of men from the islands, see: Douglas Aplin, *Rabaul 1942*, Melbourne 1980; David Selby, *Hell and High Fever*, Sydney 1956; Keith McCarthy, *Patrol into Yesterday* p.191ff ; Rodger Brown, Hank Nelson, 'The Troops, the Town and the Battle, Rabaul 1942' *The Journal of Pacific History*, 27:2, 1992; Rodger Brown, for South Australian Historical Society of Uniting Church, 1986

Finally, there has been discontent because there was no Inquiry into the problems experienced in the islands during the war. Demands for a formal Inquiry began in May 1942 with articles in *Smiths Weekly*,<sup>24</sup> followed by similar challenges in *Pacific Islands Monthly*, and continued at intervals until 1947. There were courts of Inquiry into other contemporary issues, including a Court of Inquiry in 1942, with Brigadier A.R.Allen as President, to enquire into the 'facts and circumstances' of the Japanese landing at Rabaul and subsequent events, but not to investigate what were seen as the inadequacies of military planning and 'the most damnable official bungling, resulting in hundreds of civilians losing their lives'.<sup>25</sup> When the loss of the *Montevideo Maru* was announced in Parliament in October 1945, Mr Anthony (Country Party) called for an official inquiry into the needless waste of Australian lives, not only at Rabaul but also Timor and Ambon.<sup>26</sup> A formal request for an Inquiry was brought to the House of Representatives by another Country Party member, the Hon.J.P.Abbott on 15 March 1946 and repeated on 28 March 1946. With other questions relating to Papua and New Guinea he asked the Minister for External Territories to 'ascertain why 300 whites were not evacuated from Rabaul'.

Prime Minister Chifley asked for advice from the Army, Defence and External Territories and a document was prepared which outlined the decisions and communications which had left the Australian civilians and troops so vulnerable in 1942. It included the urgent cables from H.H.Page and the delayed and guarded response of the War Cabinet asking for numbers of 'unnecessary' civilians, the note that 'few, if any, of [the 300 white civilians] would come within the category of "unnecessary civilian personnel", and that the 'general evacuation of male civilians

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<sup>24</sup> *Smith's Weekly*, 16 May 1942, p.1

<sup>25</sup> *PIM*, May 1942, p.12; *PIM* 16 October 1946 p.3-4

<sup>26</sup> *Melbourne Herald*, 4 October 1945



should not be permitted' as all ablebodied men should be called up immediately.<sup>27</sup> This message did not reach Rabaul because the invasion had already taken place. The appeals by commercial and government officers for rescue transport were mentioned, and the plight of the Chinese population whose needs were ignored, but there was no mention of any official decisions to act on these needs. This litany of inefficiencies and inaction was summarised for Chifley.<sup>28</sup> E.J.Ward replied to J.P.Abbott's four questions on 2 May 1946. To question 4 concerning an Inquiry he replied: 'The whole of the facts associated with the occupation of the Rabaul area are known to the Government which considers that a further enquiry is therefore unnecessary'.<sup>29</sup>

Not everyone was satisfied. Senator Sampson raised the matter again, with the Acting Minister for Defence, in August 1946<sup>30</sup> and Sir Earle Page repeated the request for an Inquiry in the House of Representatives on 19 March 1947. However, when External Territories, Defence and the Army considered his question, they decided to reply on similar lines to the answer Abbott had received a year earlier. Not only were parliamentarians dissatisfied with the situation. Widows who were struggling to rebuild their lives felt that no one was prepared to face the truth. Frances Ryan, one of the widows, wrote to the Prime Minister expressing her anger.

No inquiry into the tragedy of Rabaul has been allowed. You yourself have expressed the opinion that no good can come of it, but as a widow of one of the men I hope the inquiry will be made. Over 300 civilians were needlessly sacrificed and we women were kept in ignorance far too long. To us has been the years of anxiety, loneliness and sadness.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Statement received from the Department of External Territories, 4 April 1946, 'Situation at Rabaul: January 1942' : AA: A816/1: 14/303/95

<sup>28</sup> Note for Prime Minister on Evacuation of White Population from Rabaul, 4 April 1946 : AA, A816/1 : 14/303/95

<sup>29</sup> A816/1: 14/303/95. The first suggested reply read: 'The Government considers that no good purpose would be served by holding an enquiry into this matter'.

<sup>30</sup> Question in Senate, Notice Paper 79, Senator Sampson to Acting Minister for Defence, 6 August 1946: AA, A816/1: 14/303/95

<sup>31</sup> Frances Ryan to Prime Minister Chifley, 1946: A518 DR16/2/1A Pt 1

This lack of a formal public inquiry has allowed some people to presume that there has been a coverup. Among others, Ken Macgowan suspects that 'the *Montevideo Maru* has become a convenient scapegoat for the Japanese, Australian and American governments' to try to hide atrocities and 'a huge blunder by the Australian Government for not evacuating all civilians'.<sup>32</sup>

If the government had granted an Inquiry into the events of Rabaul 1942, they would have been obliged to offer the same courtesy to the relatives of Australian victims of Timor, Ambon, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Singapore, Malaya and other places where men had also been left in untenable positions, facing years of imprisonment, deprivation, slavery, torture, disease and death.<sup>33</sup> There would be no end to inquiries. So it seemed reasonable to refuse to undertake an expensive and ultimately pointless exercise; it was all too late and could make no difference. Yet for the families who had lost someone it seemed one more injustice, that no one would take responsibility for tragic errors which had cost dearly. Mrs Lyons, mother of young soldier Vin, was deeply embittered towards 'officialdom', so much so that she rejected the medals awarded posthumously to her son by the government which had let him die.

One dreadful day my brother's medals arrived ... I never saw them. She threw them out. My father described it to me. She took the lid off the dust bin and threw them in.

When brother Frank came home, he tried to rescue the medals but it was too late, the garbage truck had already been. He recalled, 'That was her reaction - it was her dissatisfaction with the whole thing'.<sup>34</sup>

Though there was no formal Inquiry, neither can there said to have been a 'cover-up', if that means that fault was never acknowledged and that the public was never informed of what had happened. In 1957, the official history of those events was

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<sup>32</sup> Ken Macgowan, letter November 1994

<sup>33</sup> Hank Nelson, *POW Prisoners of War: Australians Under Nippon*, 1985, Sydney.

<sup>34</sup> Frank Lyons, interview, October 1994

published, with the whole sorry story set out for public scrutiny.<sup>35</sup> A further volume of the official history series, published in 1970, gave more detail of the experience of the civilians and made the strong statement that 'to the Australian Government [belongs] the blame for ignorance, ineptitude, and neglect of responsibility'.

The most charitable view, namely that Canberra was out of touch with what was happening in New Guinea, is itself a criticism only less damning than the alternative view that Canberra did know but did not care enough.<sup>36</sup>

Many of the bereaved families expressed bitterness and hatred towards the Japanese enemy. There was anger because the international Prisoners of War conventions, which ought to have protected the men who had surrendered, were not kept.<sup>37</sup> The story developed that the prisoners on board the *Montevideo Maru* had been 'battened down in the holds' which made escape impossible, though the earliest accounts referred merely to the 'supposition' that this was so.<sup>38</sup> One of the greatest sources of anger was the fact that, until Major H.S. Williams discovered the information in the 'incredible muddle and inefficiency' of the Japanese POW Information Bureau in late September 1945, the Japanese had not informed Australia of the loss.<sup>39</sup> It was felt that it had been unforgivable for the families to have to wait over three years to hear the truth. In the questionnaire strong feelings against the Japanese were expressed by many, and in a number of cases the children of the men who were lost seem to have even greater antipathy than their mothers. Many mentioned a lifelong refusal to buy

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<sup>35</sup> Lionel Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust*, Series 1 (Army) Vol.4. Appendix 4 'Ordeal on New Britain' pp.653-674

<sup>36</sup> Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942-1945*, Canberra, 1970, pp.135,137; with A.J.Sweeting, Appendix 2 'Civilian Wartime Experience in the Territories of Papua and New Guinea' pp. 179-186

<sup>37</sup> AWM 51 [182] p.11, p.15

<sup>38</sup> Nottage Papers : AWM (PR 83/189). The newspaper cutting is unidentified and undated but probably late 1945; *The Argus*, 23 November 1945. The Australians may have been battened down, but of crew and guards, who would have been free, only 20 reached land out of 153 men. The ship sank around midnight when most would have been asleep, the torpedoes struck the area of the holds, fire broke out and the ship's bow was high in the air in 6 minutes, sinking completely in 11 minutes. Another torpedo, which did not strike the ship, exploded under water.

<sup>39</sup> AWM 54 779/1/1 Appendix 'I', Appendix 'J', Appendix 'K'

any Japanese products. Others commented with anger on the way in which, in recent years, Japanese people have been 'buying Australia'. Two women described how they found themselves, with great reluctance, accepting a young Japanese into their homes - a son's school friend, and an exchange student - and each one felt she had betrayed her parents.

Despite this bitterness against the Japanese, there is an even greater bitterness against military and civil authorities in Australia for initial bad decisions, for failure to attempt a rescue, for what is perceived as a refusal to accept responsibility and for serious failures in appropriate communication. Of 74 people who responded to a question about this in the survey, almost all indicated anger against Australian leadership compared to 30 against the Japanese.<sup>40</sup> As one family member put it, 'I am very, very angry. The Australian Government ... has treated this family with contempt'.<sup>41</sup>

### **Missing documents**

In early January 1942, Rabaul was on the edge of chaos. Bombs were falling, the women had been evacuated, the volcano was becoming more active and various government departments were in the throes of packing for a planned transfer to Lae, the new centre for administration of the Territory of New Guinea. This included packing all legal documents and archives. Court interpreter Ron Wayne wrote to his wife, 'You can't go insolvent because Jack B's files are packed, and similarly, Fritz says births,

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<sup>40</sup> Question 70: Where have you or your family directed your anger [concerning loss of life in the islands]? Of 74 respondents to this question, several marked more than one answer; a. against the Japanese - 30, b. against the Australian government - 51, c. against mismanagement by Australian military leadership - 36, d. against Australian authorities in Rabaul - 3

<sup>41</sup> Robert Edwards, Qn 26

marriages and deaths are off'.<sup>42</sup> When those officials put their precious files into packing cases for transfer to Lae, they had no idea that all those documents would be among the casualties of war. Official records relating to property, financial records, wills, certificates of birth, death and marriage never reached Lae. Within a week the Japanese had arrived, the Australians had gone and the legal documents defining identity, citizenship, property and status were never seen again. In the haste and confusion of the evacuation of the women and the flight of the men from Rabaul, most people did not take their own legal documents with them so both public and private records were lost. In the post-war period, the loss of these papers together with the unanswered questions about the deaths of the men were to prove a serious source of anxiety for many relatives.

Firstly, the widows had to wait for a Presumption of Death certificate. During 1946-1947, a series of letters passed between widows, solicitors, former employers, government departments and insurance companies. Until they had a document which confirmed the death of the husbands, it was impossible to complete legal work concerning pensions, insurance and estates. Social Security and insurance companies were not always convinced by papers which stated that someone was 'for official purposes presumed dead'.<sup>43</sup>

For those attempting to resolve the legal problems for the relatives, there were many difficulties. The list of names of men said to have been on the *Montevideo Maru* had its own inconsistencies, causing hesitation in completing legal work. People had also died as a result of massacres and executions, their deaths documented in the

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<sup>42</sup> Ron Wayne, court interpreter, Rabaul; letters to wife Helen , 15 January 1942. Privately held.

<sup>43</sup> Civilians reported lost on *Montevideo Maru*. AA, A 1066/1: IC45/55/3/19 Among many examples cited are three missionary women; Daisy McArthur was trying to get access to insurance money in October 1946, Essie Linggood was having difficulties in applications for probate, Beryl Beazley was having her case questioned by both Social Security and an insurance company.

Inquiry of Sir William Webb. This was 'a most secret document' and in the case of the deaths of the Anglican women mission staff on the New Guinea mainland it was decided in consultation between Attorney-General's, Army, Defence and External Territories that it could not be used to prove death for purposes of probate.<sup>44</sup> Even more intractable was the problem of the 71 civilian men still missing without trace in New Britain and New Ireland. Any clues offered by survivors were vague and out of date.<sup>45</sup> During this time of waiting, widows continued to write asking for death certificates. J.R.Halligan sent urgent requests to staff making investigations in the islands to try to obtain further testimony, to help resolve the problem and wrote with apologies to the widows

Owing to the lack of evidence regarding the fate of these people, particularly in respect of the probable date of death, of which many conflicting reports have been received, it has not been possible to issue Certificates of Death under Regulation 5A.<sup>46</sup>

Even when, in 1948, the fate of the civilians and missionary priests in Kavieng was discovered, the numbers did not add up and the names of only three men could be confirmed by witnesses.<sup>47</sup> Though there could have been legal implications for relatives in the fact that the accepted date of death for the Kavieng group was changed from 18 February to 17 March 1944<sup>48</sup>, relatives were not informed of this new information or of the nature of the deaths. Gwen Ives, widow of Vivian Ives who is presumed to have been among those who died on the wharf at Kavieng, remarried in

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<sup>44</sup> Army, Melbourne to Attorney-Generals, Canberra, 17 April 1944, External Territories to Army, 16 June 1944, October 1944, External Territories to Defence, 9 October 1944, Attorney-General to External Territories 8 November 1944. AA, A518/1 DB16/2/1 Part 1. This correspondence related to the affairs and 'proof of death' for Anglican mission staff Lilla Lashmar, Marjory Brenchly and Lt Louis Austen. The secrecy surrounding their cases would have applied also to the expunged names of the men who died at Tol.

<sup>45</sup> Series of statements concerning casualties, given by survivors. AA, A518/1: FP16/2/1

<sup>46</sup> Letters from Mrs Mosley and Mrs Pinnock, January 1947; J.Backhouse to J.R.Halligan 28 January 1947, Halligan to widows, 7 February 1947 : AA, A518/1: DS16/2/1 Part 4

<sup>47</sup> Attwood, Naughton, Topal Jnr

<sup>48</sup> A7030: 4. 6 October 1948

1947, having made a direct approach for a Presumption of Death certificate in order to do so.

Nobody ever contacted any of us afterwards ... I've actually stood on the spot where the executions took place and didn't know it! All we got was a Presumption of Death for 18 February 1944 and 'Missing Presumed Dead' - no apologies, no nothing!<sup>49</sup>

Jack Beaumont was with a group of civilians who had vanished on New Britain, last seen near Rabaul in May 1944. Despite searching, no remains or evidence of his death was ever found, yet two conflicting versions of his possible end were given to investigators late in 1945.<sup>50</sup> His wife Clare Beaumont was informed of neither version and 'didn't get any telegram'. In 1948, Clare Beaumont finally approached 'one of the Government departments and said, "I've heard absolutely nothing, there must be some news somewhere on my husband"'. A probate document which stated that Jack was 'for official purposes presumed dead' was issued at last in August 1948. His daughter commented

At school as a small child ... other kids would say, 'Where's your Dad?' and I'd say, 'He was killed in the war,' and they'd say, 'How do you know he was killed?' Well, good question. I don't. You get quite a bit of teasing and tormenting as a child. I can remember crying quite a bit.<sup>51</sup>

Continued efforts were made to clarify the status of missing civilians from 1948 into the 1950s, for the issue of death certificates.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Gwen Ives, interview

<sup>50</sup> Statements from survivors in Rabaul in October- November 1945. A518/1 FP16/2/1. In one version, the interrogating officer Major W.Kendrick was convinced by Japanese and native informants that Albert Evensen 'together with 10 other Europeans was put on board the *Nagaurau* on 21 February 1944 ... bound for Japan ... sunk by Americans off New Ireland ... no survivors'. Survivor Jim Ellis reported that an Indian brought the names of eleven Australians (Evensen, Beaumont, Fitzgibbons, A.Cameron, Badger, Chauncey, Korn, Bachman, Ostram, Wheatley and one other) who were 'camped within 500 yards of us ... they were then OK' in Rabaul in May 1944.

<sup>51</sup> Janice Steinfurth, interview, 20 December 1994, Canberra

<sup>52</sup> A7030/1: 2 'Territory of Papua- New Guinea, List of European Civilians Who Died During the Japanese Invasion or are Missing Thought Dead'. Begun 1 October 1948. Final date listed, 1951. Father Ted Harris and Father Alphons Mayrhofer were still listed as 'Missing'.

David Marsh was President of the Retired Officers Association of Papua New Guinea in 1986. He received a letter from a man who was about to retire and wanted his aged mother to be able to sell her house and join him in his new retirement home. However the old family home was in the names of both parents and he explained that because

his father had been on the *Montevideo Maru* and because there were no Death Certificates issued, his mother had not been able to remarry... and she couldn't sell [the house] because there was no proof of death.

David Marsh and the Retired Officers Association took up the case and through the Ombudsman the problem was finally rectified.<sup>53</sup>

The question of remarriage was very difficult for women who were still uncertain about their status as widows. Even though the death of their husband was 'presumed', some found it hard to contemplate a second marriage if there was any possibility that their first husband still lived. More than one woman was very anxious about marrying again, and at least one described nightmares about her status after remarriage. A daughter born in 1942 described her mother's fears.

When I was a teenager, she'd say to me, 'What would happen if your father knocks on the front door? What would I do? Where would I stand?' ... She wouldn't marry until I was nine.<sup>54</sup>

As well as having problems with death certificates, wills and other legal documents were also missing. These included a metal patrol box of Methodist church records and documents concerning land ownership, hidden and never recovered. Though a few of the men in the islands had made legal arrangements for their wives, (for example, Rev Herbert Shelton, a former accountant, sent instructions before the invasion for all legal and financial affairs 'in case we are cut off from each other', and

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<sup>53</sup> David Marsh, interview, February 1995, Sydney

<sup>54</sup> Qn No.104



Dr Herbert Hosking used his single letter as a prisoner to set out his legal affairs) most had not had the opportunity. Frances Ryan was one of many women who was left with no will. In her case, the family funds were divided into three portions between herself and her two children. Her daughter Julie could not touch her portion until she turned 21 in 1961 and regretted that her mother did not have access to those assets when she most needed it. The complexity of the situation was such that many women were not able to complete their financial and legal affairs relating to their war loss until well into the 1950s.

Though many important legal documents were lost forever, a few turned up unexpectedly, or were learned to have once existed. W.R.Huntley's will and diary was recovered after the war, handed in by a trusted New Guinean who had known Huntley. The will and diary were sent on to Hannah Huntley in NSW.<sup>55</sup> Richard Hermann, who was one of the few New Ireland men to escape, signed an affidavit after the war stating that he and some other New Ireland and Kavieng men had witnessed each other's wills before they separated in January 1942.<sup>56</sup> In the post-war years, Gwen Ives encountered a Chinese woman from Kavieng who was visiting Rabaul. Mrs Singsing did not know of her connection with Kavieng and told a story, in Gwen's hearing, of contact with the European prisoners of the Japanese, before their deaths. The Chinese woman said that the white prisoners had arranged to keep one of the lavatory cans used in the prison camp clean so that, when village men carried the used cans to the sea for daily cleaning, this can could be used for smuggling information or food.

All those men made a will and wrote a final letter. Singsings had them in their house and somebody betrayed that. The Japanese turned up... [her husband] grabbed them, and she was washing clothes up the back with [a fire under] the copper and

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<sup>55</sup> AWM 127:13 - letter from Army to External Territories, 24 December 1945; A518/1: FP16/2/1 p.94A,B,D,E Diary of Bill Huntley 20 Jan - 18 August 1942, List of names and addresses of next of kin of those in hiding with Huntley.

<sup>56</sup> A518/1: FP16/2/1 The wills were missing but had existed for F.Saunders, McKellar, Attwood, Naughton, Miller and Goad.

they threw all those letters and wills into the fire so they wouldn't be caught. They would have been killed if they had been caught.<sup>57</sup>

The situation was more complicated for the pre-war residents of the islands than it was for the men of Lark Force. In the case of the soldiers, papers regarding property, wills, birth and marriage certificates were often held by the wives or parents at home. Men left their wives with wills, even if the will was very simple. As one woman said, 'He didn't have much to leave'.<sup>58</sup>

The loss of personal documents such as birth and marriage certificates was to cause difficulties for civilian families in later life. In February 1943, *Pacific Island Monthly* published a cautionary tale of a woman evacuee who persisted through seven state and federal government departments in pursuit of a birth certificate for her daughter born ten years earlier in New Guinea, in order to be eligible for Child Endowment. Because the original documents had been destroyed in Rabaul, she was forced to spend several months preparing detailed documentation to obtain legal registration of birth as she feared that the child would be 'left with no evidence of birthplace, date of birth or particulars of nationality'.<sup>59</sup> Her words were prophetic. During the 1980s, a change in legislation meant that additional documentation was required for those applying for an Australian passport. Several island-born adults found themselves in difficulties for want of documentation, including Mary Hosking Symons, Loloma Linggood Puls and Ian Higgins. Loloma Puls was told that she was 'an alien'. Ian Higgins tried to renew his existing passport; having a strong sense of an Australian identity, with forebears who had come to Australia in 1838, he was astonished to be

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<sup>57</sup> Gwen Ives, interview

<sup>58</sup> Doris (Michelson) Ross, interview

<sup>59</sup> *PIM* February 1943

told that he was not an Australian citizen. All the identifying documents had been lost in Rabaul and both parents were dead.

I spent hours if not days being shifted from the Department of Immigration to Foreign Affairs to prove that I had an Australian identity ... That was a nightmare. You wouldn't think it would come back to haunt you so long after.<sup>60</sup>

Yet another area of difficulty for families was whether or not they qualified for pensions or other assistance. The families of the servicemen were in a better situation for financial support than the civilian families because the military already had systems in place to assist relatives of those missing in action. As one private's widow said

All those three and a half years, we women were being paid living soldiers' wages, because they didn't know what had happened to the men.<sup>61</sup>

The situation was not so clear for those whose men had joined the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles. There were no records in Australia to show whether civilians had been acting as part of the NGVR at the time of their capture, or whether, when the men reported to the Japanese, they identified themselves as civilians or NGVR. This left their families in financial and legal limbo, although they had expected to be receiving allotments and later pensions. Colwyn Parry, son of Dr Arthur Parry of Rabaul, for instance was certain that his father was in the NGVR 'yet Canberra was "unable" to substantiate this'.<sup>62</sup>

The situation was even less clear for those who had remained civilians. The authorities had no experience of dealing with Australian civilians who had died

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<sup>60</sup> Loloma Puls, interview, 17 August 1995, Melbourne; Ian Higgins, interview, 18 August 1995, Melbourne

<sup>61</sup> Interview, 15 July 1994, Melbourne

<sup>62</sup> Colwyn Parry, Qn.108; A.P.H.Freund, *Missionary Turns Spy: Freund's story of his service with the New Guinea Coast Watchers in the war against Japan 1942-1943*, Adelaide, 1989 p.68. Freund tells the story of the experience of Lutheran missionary wives who had heard, in letters from their husbands in the Lae area in 1942, that they were now with NGVR, but the Army had no records to that effect.

during internment. Relatives of missing Administration staff worried about whether they would be more secure, and receive appropriate entitlements, if they were regarded as Army personnel with the NGVR, or how they would fare with no entitlement at all, relying on the Government to handle their needs in a humane way. After an early period when salaries and entitlements for Administration staff in the occupied islands were 'very confused', regular support was paid to the families.<sup>63</sup> Methodist missionary families continued to receive a proportion of the missing husband's stipend and allowances during the war years, until March 1946.<sup>64</sup>

The most disadvantaged of the evacuee families were undoubtedly those from private enterprise (especially those from small firms or self-employed) who had no organisation to take care of their needs. They depended on government help, through Evacuees allowances, child endowment and later on widow's pensions, as well as their own efforts to earn an income for themselves. The early months of separation were the most difficult for them. During that period the Commonwealth was still developing policies and infrastructure to deal with various kinds of welfare payments, as well as dealing concurrently with Australian civilian evacuees from Nauru, Northern Territory and Asian areas, so had neither staff nor experience to handle the demands on them.<sup>65</sup> The confusion did not always work to the disadvantage of the families. In a few cases, women abused the system by drawing on more than one source for financial assistance, or in more than one name to claim aid.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Letter from S.Lonergan 19 March 1942: AA, MP1587/1/0: 97E

<sup>64</sup> ML, MOM340 Methodist Overseas Missions Board Minutes, 18 October 1945

<sup>65</sup> AA, A518/1: 15/501/209

<sup>66</sup> AA, A518/1 BJ16/2/1 Pt 5 For example, a number of women drew both Australian Child Endowment as well as the Child Allowance provided for staff working in the Territories. Some households were asked to repay funding where there was seen to have been an overlap of allowances.

One major cause for anxiety was the arrangement that sustenance allowances were to be considered as loans to be repaid. The New Guinea Women's Club in Sydney wrote to the Prime Minister about the 'present financial plight' of their members and argued that payments should be allotments rather than loans, or else,

when our men return to us, if such be our good fortune, they will be faced with this accumulated debt to the Commonwealth Government.<sup>67</sup>

Changes were made to the system later in 1943, which relieved some of the pressure on the women.<sup>68</sup> Although, after the war was over, there were still many women whose status and entitlements remained confused, in 1946 the government set up a civilian war pension for the widows of civilians lost during the Japanese occupation of New Guinea similar to the military war pension.<sup>69</sup> J.R.Halligan 'took a personal interest in their families in Australia' with the result that he

managed to get ex gratia payments from reluctant wartime governments to sustain them. The dependants of civilians killed, mutilated or interned by the Japanese, or those reported missing, were not legally entitled to pensions, sustenance or any other form of compensation. Without Halligan's efforts some would surely have suffered even greater hardship than they did.<sup>70</sup>

For civilian women such as Clare Beaumont and Gwen Ives, who were still waiting for Presumption of Death certificates for their husbands, it was decided that 'some allowance be paid to these women under the Repatriation Benefits Act'.<sup>71</sup> In 1953, a Civilian Internees Trust Fund was established for those civilians who had lost their breadwinner while he was an internee.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> New Guinea Women's Club, Sydney, letter to Prime Minister, 9 March 1943: AA, A518 DR16/2/1A Pt 1

<sup>68</sup> A518/1 BJ16/2/1 Pt 5

<sup>69</sup> Halligan to dependents 16 April 1946, Jean Poole to Halligan, 18 February 1946, Repatriation Commission, NSW to Repatriation Commission, Melbourne 14 May 1946: AA, A518/1 16/3/381; Halligan to Treasury 22 January 1946: AA, A518 DR16/2/1A Pt1

<sup>70</sup> Ian Downs, *The Last Mountain* p.155

<sup>71</sup> The women listed were Mesdames Beaumont, Bell, Clark, Einsiedel, Florence, Ostrom, Pinnock, M.M.Smith, O.M.Smith, Garrett, Ives, Thompson, Whitehead, Furlong, Gordon and Woodhouse : AA, A518/1: DR16/2/1A Pt 1.

<sup>72</sup> Circular letter to Mrs Hearnshaw, widow of Rev. Dan Oakes, from Civilian Internees Trust Fund, Melbourne, 24 June 1953

In addition to pensions and allowances, the civilians were able to claim for war damage to property and possessions. For many of the people from towns, missions and plantations, homes, contents and businesses were all gone. The Pacific Territories Association had campaigned for compensation and now helped members prepare their applications to the War Damage Commission.<sup>73</sup> The compensation process was complex and slow but eventually most people received at least some payment, although some widows felt that their inexperience in business affairs had led to their disadvantage. For some of the widows, the problems of trying to make a proper assessment of such things as a major medical library, a small business or a builder's tools and equipment was another serious anxiety.

They expected you to know what you paid for things [years earlier] and when you bought them. With Dad's business, tools and things, Mum didn't have a clue.<sup>74</sup>

Assistance was offered to the families both by government departments and groups such as the War Widows Guild, Legacy, the Red Cross, the New Guinea Women's Clubs and various churches and businesses. Again, self-employed civilians were in the most difficult situation, in many cases assuming that they did not qualify for help. One such widow finally received a civilian war widow's pension but 'she hadn't known that she was entitled to a War Service loan, she'd thought her husband had to be a soldier, and she'd gone ahead in ignorance', struggling to finance housing.<sup>75</sup> Several civilian widows reported that although they were turned away by Legacy ('Oh no, I'm sorry, your husband was a civilian'), the Repatriation Department helped them with medical, educational and some other expenses, and they were grateful. Unfortunately, some women believed the rumour that if they received help from the

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<sup>73</sup> *PIM* 16 October 1945 p.56, p.61

<sup>74</sup> Betty Muller, interview, Canberra 19 August 1994

<sup>75</sup> Dianne Edwards, interview, Adelaide, January 1994

Repatriation Department, officials could enter their homes searching for evidence that the women had been unfaithful, or bad mothers.

They could take your child. I don't know whether it was true or not, but I believed it at the time and Mum and I were terrified.<sup>76</sup>

During 1949, the Sydney branch of the New Guinea Women's Club lobbied on behalf of their members 'to try to get some extra benefits for our New Guinea widows, but without much success,' they reported, and listed interviews with External Territories, the Repatriation Department and Mr Anthony MHR, but despite sympathetic hearings, they were told that 'nothing could be done at present'.<sup>77</sup> The War Widows Guild cared for some civilian women as well as the service widows, and offered great encouragement and support. Many of the families, both military and civilian, were greatly assisted by the support given through church and other organisations which offered scholarships and bursaries for the education of their children. (This led to a kind of compensation whereby many of the children of that group have received greater educational opportunities than was common for the average Australian in secondary or tertiary education during the 1950s.<sup>78</sup>) Some unexpected acts of kindness to the women and children were offered, including free tickets to Wirths Circus in Melbourne, and a Sydney businessman F.J.Salisbury made his Palm Beach holiday house available to the widows for short holidays.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Interview, Melbourne, 17 July 1994

<sup>77</sup> *PIM*, August 1949. President at the time was Mrs M.L.Foxcroft.

<sup>78</sup> The results may have been biased because people with higher educational attainments may be more inclined to complete a questionnaire for a thesis. However, given that the names of those who received questionnaires were obtained almost at random, and there was no question in the survey which related to education, it is interesting to note (from interviews or asides in letters) that an unusually high proportion of the children of the islands communities have received tertiary education.

<sup>79</sup> *PIM* 16 October 1945, p.11

## A forgotten tragedy

Apart from the anger, cynicism, bitterness and anxiety associated with the loss of their relatives in the islands, family members and former soldiers feel that what happened there is almost unknown to the wider community.<sup>80</sup> One woman said that she was 'almost jealous of people who lost their father at Gallipoli or Kokoda' because they did not have to explain the most elementary aspects of the story to anyone who asked about their father. A survivor of 2/22nd Bn spoke with feeling. He pointed out that the loss of over a thousand men on the *Montevideo Maru* alone, apart from those who died in other ways in the islands, involved twice as many Australian lives as those who died in Vietnam. And yet Vietnam has a powerful place in the Australian folk memory, while the tragedy of the men of the New Guinea islands is so little known. A typical comment was: 'totally unknown and not believed by all who were not involved with Rabaul'.<sup>81</sup> There is disappointment, frustration and even anger that a situation which has had such a profound impact on their own families, and the families of about two thousand other Australians,<sup>82</sup> should be unrecognised, forgotten or ignored by most of their compatriots. They feel that they have not been included in Australian history and wonder why this should be so.

When the questionnaire associated with this study was distributed to 168 people, the surprisingly large number of 121 people responded. A comment made by many of them was that they were motivated by a desire for the events of 1942 in the

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<sup>80</sup> In response to a question asking whether they thought the fall of Rabaul and the loss of the *Montevideo Maru* was 'wellknown', 'less wellknown' or 'almost unknown' to the general public, compared to other contemporary war events, of the 92 who responded 80 considered it was almost unknown and only 2 thought it was wellknown.

<sup>81</sup> Interviews with Julie Richardson, Ben Dawson, Ken Macgowan, Sr Berenice Twohill, Frank Lyons

<sup>82</sup> 1,500 military people were involved as well as around 500 civilians in the group of islands; some were lost on the *Montevideo Maru*, some died during escape, some were executed or died of disease and some escaped.



islands to be 'made known' in the wider community. In a speech in 1992, Frank Lyons said,

The history of those months deserves to be far better known. Most Australians know about Gallipoli, the Kokoda Trail, the Coral Sea, Tobruk, and so they should. But not so the first enemy invasion of these parts.<sup>83</sup>

Hank Nelson, in a seminar on the post-war return to Rabaul of the Australians, stated

The sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* is the greatest single disaster suffered by Australians in World War 2. But it is rarely referred to on Anzac Day or other days of national remembering ... When the *Montevideo Maru* is recalled it is usually to query that a particular person was on board, or to doubt that the boat existed, or if it did, that any Australians sailed on it.<sup>84</sup>

The perception that the losses from the islands were unknown or ignored was strengthened during 1995, when during the *Australia Remembers* commemoration of the end of World War 2, so many aspects of human endeavour during the war were recalled, retold and given honour in the communal memory. It was very rare to hear any reference at all to Rabaul, Kavieng or the *Montevideo Maru* in any of the mass of material offered through the media under the banner of *Australia Remembers*. Even the Pilgrimage to many wartime sites, including Rabaul, in August 1995, was given far more media coverage at Kokoda and the other better known areas, again overlooking the loss from New Britain and New Ireland. In at least two ABC TV presentations, it was stated that the tragic loss of HMAS *Sydney* was 'the greatest single loss' of the war. In 'A Great Survivor', for example, it was claimed that

HMAS *Sydney* was sunk by the German raider *Kormoran* and all 645 crew died, the greatest single loss of life on any day in Australian history.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Frank Lyons, address at Bitu Paka War Cemetery on 18 June 1992, for service of remembrance with group who had returned for the fiftieth anniversary of the loss of the *Montevideo Maru*.

<sup>84</sup> Hank Nelson, 'The Return to Rabaul', seminar, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, 1994, p.33

<sup>85</sup> 'A Great Survivor', 'Australia Remembers 1939-1945', ABC Television. Broadcast on a number of occasions, including 2 July 1995; 'Faces of War', ABC TV, 8 May 1995

Family members who lost someone among the 1,035 Australians who died when the *Montevideo Maru* sank feel, when they hear this, that their sense that no one has heard of this event has been confirmed yet again. A 'history' of Australia, in which their loss has no place, was being reinforced in the minds of the general public.

The perception that this story is relatively unknown was borne out during the period of my own research into these events between 1992-1995. The name '*Montevideo Maru*' and the tale of the loss of the community from the islands was unfamiliar to many in a range of community settings, including tertiary educated people. However, it is not true to suppose that 'nobody knows' about this subject. There is immediate recognition among several large sections of the community. Those over seventy years of age generally remember the situation well, and have not forgotten the impact it had on the community at the time. People who have lived in or studied Papua New Guinea are familiar with the material, whether they are academics or those with a general interest. Another large group includes those who have a direct personal link with the events of 1942.

There is another reason why it is an exaggeration to suggest that 'nobody knows'. Many do know, but they don't know the other people who know. There is a great degree of isolation from other people with an interest in this subject. In the years since the war, widows have lost contact with groups like the RSL or War Widows Guild as they have remarried, or taken up their lives again in new directions. They blended into the community and by the time their children became adults, they no longer had any links with any others who knew their story. This isolation has made them feel that no one else cares about the events which mean so much to them. Those who have researched the story sometimes know no one else who has done so. Meetings

between some of these people in the past few years have been significant and helpful, as they have finally discovered others who understand.

Why is the story of the wartime tragedy of the islands not better known? Some suggest a deliberate effort by people in high places to draw a veil over certain actions, or lack of action, during the war years. Others have suggested that perhaps there was something discreditable about the flight or capture of the Australians from the islands, and that therefore it has been better to let the matter fade quietly away. Those involved dispute this. It seems more likely that the real reasons have been otherwise. The story would appear to have almost all the elements needed for the creation of an Australian legend. But several key ingredients are missing. Firstly, the initial capture and subsequent deaths of the men in the islands happened at a time when the Australian public was anxious and preoccupied about the fates of a great many other Australians in south-east Asia, Europe and the Middle East. Secondly, there were no surviving witnesses to give firsthand accounts of the loss of the ship or the executions. The result has been that those events have disappeared behind the other dramatic events for which there were eyewitnesses. Thirdly, the most celebrated and eagerly acknowledged war events are those where our men conquered a foe, through great trials, or those which are interpreted as a triumph of the spirit. These events, together with other contemporary events which were undeniably defeats, have therefore tended to be overlooked. Also, the events of the islands were not covered by war correspondents, artists or cameramen until the war was over, so with neither stories nor illustrations available it has not been the subject of repeated documentaries in the way Kokoda or even Changi and the Burma railway have been. In addition, and despite the official Australian war histories, a number of other writings about the war years have focussed on Rabaul as a Japanese stronghold, and US military strategies

in relation to it, rather than referring to the lost community which once lived there.<sup>86</sup>

Another factor has been the way in which Australians have understood their relationship to the islands to the north. Before the war, Australians understood that the 'Territory of New Guinea' was an Australian Territory, a frontier but under Australian control and responsibility. After the war, and in the years leading to and following Independence in Papua New Guinea, this has changed. Hank Nelson, for instance, has stated that

when the men on the *Montevideo Maru* are remembered, they are described as having left from Rabaul, a distant port in an independent nation. Their history has been part of the redefinition of Australia, and their history now lies outside Australia. That has made what happened to them more significant, and more difficult to make integral to Australian history. They were then, and are now, in part victims of an expanding and contracting notion of Australia.<sup>87</sup>

Although a surprising amount has been written about the fate of the men of the islands over the years, in many cases the people most interested have not seen it. Networks through which word-of-mouth reports of such literature might pass have broken down. Some of the material has been embedded in unexpected places, or in the newspapers of cities distant from the potential reader.<sup>88</sup> For example, a single significant sentence stating that his father Murray Edwards had been 'executed in Kavieng' had been published in 1954 and another sentence in 1986<sup>89</sup>, but neither book was seen by Robert Edwards until 1990; Edwards and his family had been told that

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<sup>86</sup> For example: Shaw, H.I. & Kane, D.T., *Isolation of Rabaul: History of US Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, Vol. II, 1963; McAuley, Lex, *Into the Dragon's Jaws: The Fifth Air Force Over Rabaul, 1943*, Arizona, 1986

<sup>87</sup> Hank Nelson, 'The Return to Rabaul', seminar, ANU, 1994 p.34-35

<sup>88</sup> Among a number of examples of series of newspaper articles are those by the *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist Alan Gill, often in the Religion column, 'Obscure tragedy recalled on Anzac Day', 22 April 1987, 'Honouring Pacific war martyrs', 30 April 1987, *Sun-Herald* 26 June 1988, Alan Gill, 'Forgotten' Martyrs: the Bishop believes they were massacred', *Good Weekend* June 1992. *Una Voce News Letter*, which serves the network of retired officers who worked in Papua New Guinea, has also published a series of pieces on the *Montevideo Maru* and related themes. *Brisbane Courier-Mail* 23 October 1994.

<sup>89</sup> Colin Simpson, *Adam in Plumes*, Sydney 1954. Ian Downs had informed Simpson of this material. Ian Downs, *The Last Mountain*, Brisbane, 1986 p.190

Murray was on the *Montevideo Maru*. Another reason why information is not passed on has been for fear of distressing someone. When a family member read a graphic description of the deaths at Tol in Patsy Adam Smith's *Prisoners of War*<sup>90</sup> he hesitated to show it to the brother of a victim. Such intended kindnesses have meant that families have tended to assume that no more information is available, and only the most determined have kept searching.

Details of the key events of the New Guinea islands between 1941 and 1945 have been described in a number of places over a long period. Official histories appeared in 1957 and 1970 with substantial material on the fall of Rabaul, the escapes, the massacres and the loss of the *Montevideo Maru*.<sup>91</sup> Bishop Scharmach's book, *This Crowd Beats Us All*, appeared in 1960. In 1961, A.J.Sweeting, who was working on research for the official war histories, published an article '*Montevideo Maru - Myth or Merchantman*' which disputed Scharmach's claims that there had been no *Montevideo Maru*.<sup>92</sup> A range of books and articles on escapes, coastwatching and personal experiences in the islands during the war were published over the years, including the 2/22nd Battalion Lark Force Association book, *Rabaul 1942*, published in 1980 and reprinted in 1994, and pieces in *Pacific Islands Monthly*.<sup>93</sup> Hank Nelson,

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<sup>90</sup> Patsy Adam Smith, *Prisoners of War*, Melbourne 1992, pp.293-313. In a similar way, people may choose not to pass on the excerpts from the War Trial of Kavieng, concerning the deaths of 32 civilians and priests in March 1944 (AA MP742/1, Melbourne) published in *The Martyrs of Papua New Guinea*, Theo Aerts, Ed., Port Moresby, PNG 1994 pp.230-236

<sup>91</sup> Lionel Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust, Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, Series 1, Vol IV. Canberra 1957. Chapter 18, pp.392-417, Appendix 4 'Ordeal on New Britain' p.653-674; Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942-1945*, Series 4 (Civil), Vol.II, Canberra 1970; A.J.Sweeting, 'Civilians in War-time Papua-New Guinea' pp.678-686

<sup>92</sup> Leo Scharmach, *This Crowd Beats Us All*, Sydney, 1960; A.J.Sweeting, '*Montevideo Maru - Myth or Merchantman?*', Australian Territories, Vol.1, No.2, February 1961 p.36ff

<sup>93</sup> Some examples are Gordon Thomas, manuscript, Pacific Manuscripts Bureau 600; *Red Grew the Harvest: Missionary experiences during the Pacific War of 1941-1945 as related by Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart*, Sydney 1947; David Selby, *Hell and High Fever*, Sydney 1956; Eric Feldt, *The Coastwatchers*, Melbourne 1946; Neville Threlfall, *One Hundred Years in the Islands, Rabaul*, 1975; Douglas Aplin, *Rabaul 1942*, Melbourne 1980, 1994; Mary Murray, *Escape: A Thousand Miles to Freedom*, 1965. In the case of Mary Murray's *Escape*, a number of former New Ireland families were deeply offended by the way the men who did not survive were described as having 'not made any attempt to escape ... preferred to sit down in their comfortable homes and await the enemy'. The widows believed that Murray's husband had abandoned them and rejected her writing.

historian at Australian National University, has written and spoken extensively about the events of the war years in the islands with particular reference to the men of Lark Force; though he is frequently consulted by the men of Lark Force Association, many civilian families have not discovered his books or the articles in academic journals.<sup>94</sup> Private research has been carried out by a number of people with a strong motivation to uncover anything they can concerning the mystery of the missing people of the islands.<sup>95</sup> Of the published material, the focus of much of it has been the experience of those who escaped. Those looking for information about the *Montevideo Maru* find that, even when a writer mentions it, there is little new to add.<sup>96</sup>

Despite the industry and commitment of so many to have these events of 1942 made known, it seems that few of the private researchers have encountered each other, each assuming that they are the only ones with an interest in the subject. It also appears that families tend to be more likely to have read Scharmach or Mary Murray than historians Wigmore, Sweeting, Hasluck or Nelson. So the impression remains that very little has been written to recognise the losses from the islands.

Memorial services have had a role in keeping memories alive, yet a large number of those who lost a relative have lost touch with the islands network and expressed their disappointment at having few formal opportunities to remember. Yet

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<sup>94</sup> Hank Nelson, *POW Prisoners of War: Australians Under Nippon*, Sydney 1985; 'The Troops, the Town and the Battle: Rabaul 1942', *The Journal of Pacific History*, 27:2, 1992; 'To the Limits of Nation and Nationality: The Journeys of the 23rd Brigade 2nd AIF', seminar, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, July 1991; 'The Return to Rabaul 1945', Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, seminar 1994

<sup>95</sup> Among a larger group who have spent a number of years gathering information are Stan Whitty, H.E. Clarke, Anne McCosker, Bill-Goodall, Ken Macgowan, J.C.H. Gill, L.M. Cummings, Arthur Brawn, Neville Threlfall, Robert Mitchell and Alan Gill.

<sup>96</sup> An illustration of this is Don Wall, *Heroes at Sea*, Sydney 1991, which lists 1800 Australian POWs and internees lost at sea in World War 2 yet only gives 5 pages out of 142 pages of text to the loss of the *Montevideo Maru*, although over a thousand of the total lost were on board. pp.134-139. In all other cases, Wall had been able to gather material from survivors.

even before it was known which men had lived or died, memorial occasions were begun; for example, on 22 January 1944 people from the former island community met to lay wreaths at the Cenotaph in Sydney.<sup>97</sup> In those first years, especially immediately after the war when the losses were still very fresh, there was no question of the story being forgotten. Although it was always dominated by other events, memorial services and other public times of remembering were common and regular. In some cases they were initiated and led by churches and in others by RSL and the 2/22nd Bn Association or the New Guinea Women's Clubs.<sup>98</sup> The *Pacific Islands Monthly* reported on regular memorial services in the immediate postwar years.<sup>99</sup> The people of the state of Victoria suffered severely with the loss of the *Montevideo Maru*, losing over 500 servicemen as well as civilians in that single event. For nearly fifty years, since 1 July 1946, a group has gathered at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne to honour those lost with the *Montevideo Maru*; this group has kept in touch, meeting annually at Trawool where the 2/22nd first assembled. In Sydney a group met in the early years at the Cenotaph.<sup>100</sup> Arthur Brawn, a Methodist minister who had been a friend and colleague of the Methodist men who had died, conducted private commemoration services in NSW for many years, in 'churches, school halls, a retirement village and RSL clubs. Sometimes the only other person present was the caretaker'.<sup>101</sup> In Adelaide a regular service of remembrance was led, initially by Methodist clergy, at the Cross of Sacrifice.<sup>102</sup> Memorial occasions have been held in

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<sup>97</sup> *SMH* 22 January 1944

<sup>98</sup> *Missionary Review*, November 1945 reported 'many services in honour of the New Guinea missionaries have been held in the several states'; Aerts, *Martyrs of Papua New Guinea*, pp.191-193, quoting from *The War Cry*, states that the Melbourne Town Hall was crowded for a 'Night of Honoured and Affectionate Remembrance' in February 1946, in honour of the Salvation Army war dead, including the bandsmen of the 2/22nd.

<sup>99</sup> *PIM*, January 1946, p.5; February 1947, p.70; January 1949, p.9; June 1950, p.17, July 1952, p.126 Memorial services were held on 23 January and 1 July, as well as Anzac Day and Remembrance Day, with a special event on the tenth anniversary of the loss of the *Montevideo Maru*.

<sup>100</sup> *Missionary Review*, March 1946, p.9

<sup>101</sup> Alan Gill, Good Weekend, *Sydney Morning Herald*, late June 1992

<sup>102</sup> Rodger Brown, interview, Adelaide 1991

several states and in Papua New Guinea to remember the tenth, twentyfifth, thirtieth and fiftieth anniversaries of the fall of Rabaul and the loss of the *Montevideo Maru*.<sup>103</sup> On at least four occasions over the years, the 2/22nd survivors have taken a party back to Rabaul, and have held memorial occasions at Bita Paka War Cemetery and at the waterfront memorial. On 7 August 1995 during the *Australia Remembers* Pilgrimage to war sites in Papua New Guinea, a memorial service was held at Bita Paka. In addition, a number of ex-servicemen and family members have returned independently. Bill Harry is one who has returned on many occasions. Alex Fraser returned to Rabaul every year from 1958 to 1975, then again each year between 1982 and 1992; he said of going back that it was 'very emotional'.<sup>104</sup>

Over the years since the first well-attended memorial occasions, fewer people have been involved. The parents of the lost men have died, the widows have remarried or lost touch with the 2/22nd Bn Association, the Lark Force men are dying and the children have no contact with others with a similar background. People who might have been eager to attend have not heard about the memorial events. In recent years, as the children of the men who were lost are now in mid-life, many are discovering in themselves a need to commemorate their fathers, and to share this experience with others with the same background. The networks are reconnecting. One woman went to the Shrine alone one year, to remember her first love, and was surprised to meet a group of others also there to remember the men of Lark Force; since then she has joined them regularly although, knowing that her husband would object, she

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<sup>103</sup> Some of many examples: a 25th anniversary event in Sydney (see Arthur Brawn, 'Are they forgotten men?' *The Missionary Review*, May-June 1967, p.8); a thirtieth anniversary of the departure of the men was remembered in Rabaul on 22 June 1972, organised by the United Church of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands; a celebration of '50th anniversary of the PNG Martyrs' on 18 April 1993, in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, for many churches across the country, described in Aerts, *Martyrs of Papua New Guinea*, p.245

<sup>104</sup> Alexander Fraser, Qn No. 30



lied about it every time I went to the Shrine. I'd make out I was going out with my neighbour.<sup>105</sup>

Several women from civilian families described the significance for them of attending a Memorial Mass in Melbourne in 1992.<sup>106</sup> They had not been aware of other memorial occasions and said that the Mass was 'the very first opportunity to recognise [their loss publicly] ... a lot of emotion'.<sup>107</sup> In 1992 people travelled from Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne and Brisbane to a Fiftieth Anniversary Service of Remembrance in Sydney, organised by Uniting Church (the successor of the Methodist Church), again seeing this as a rare opportunity to formally honour their dead. Yet it was not so rare an opportunity as they imagined.

### **Hidden symbols of memory**

In many places in Australia and in Papua New Guinea memorials both private and public have been established in memory of the Australians who were lost from the islands. Families established memorials in a variety of forms; inscriptions on family gravestones, church windows or furniture, memorial donations and bequests,<sup>108</sup> names added to Honour Rolls in schools and churches. Organisations, business firms and churches have provided their own appropriate memorials to lost members.<sup>109</sup> A memorial was unveiled in Brisbane, at the Shrine of Memories, Anzac Square on 1 July 1995, commemorating the men of the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles who were

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<sup>105</sup> Interview, 15 August 1995, Melbourne.

<sup>106</sup> Memorial Mass at St Peters Parish, East Bentleigh, Victoria in July 1992, to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*; involved 2/22nd Bn and War Widows Guild.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Joan Turner, Erice Pizer and Jenny Evans, 12 July 1994, Melbourne.

<sup>108</sup> Undated and unidentified news cutting, but after 1974, reported that Sister Dorothy Beale, who worked in health education both before and after the war in New Britain and New Ireland, donated most of a large bequest to establish ten residential units for students with the Medical School of UPNG, in memory of lost Methodist missionaries.

<sup>109</sup> AA, MP1587/1/0: 182P 'The Post Office, Brisbane, has erected a plaque to the memory of those of the PMG Department who were captured in Rabaul and lost their lives when this ship was sunk'.

presumed lost on the *Montevideo Maru*.<sup>110</sup> However, in addition to the natural gradual fading of intense feelings about the events memorialised, and the passing of those who shared those times, it is true that several memorials have seemed doomed to obscurity, neglect or damage at some point.

Attempts to establish a permanent memorial in Rabaul have gone on for almost 50 years. The original monument to the people lost with the *Montevideo Maru* was placed in Rabaul in January 1946, a modest plaque on a low cement plinth 'at the foot of Wharf Street', later moved to the harbour foreshore.<sup>111</sup> However, by 1960, the plaque had disappeared from the plinth and over the next few years the site was neglected.<sup>112</sup> A larger and superior memorial was re-established on the harbour foreshore, but by 1992 it had been defaced by graffiti and the Lark Force Association decided that the memorial was inadequate. A fine new 'indestructible' memorial, with impressive bronze plaque on a vast rock, was unveiled on 16 September 1993,<sup>113</sup> but by September 1994, the memorial stone, along with everything else in the area, was buried under volcanic pumice dust from the volcanic eruptions in the area. By the time Bill Harry and others returned to Rabaul with the 'Australia Remembers' pilgrimage in July 1995, the ceremony at the new memorial was conducted with the rock 'standing half a metre below us in a square hole dug out of the ash'.<sup>114</sup> In the case of a memorial plaque in Sydney in memory of the Methodist missionaries, it disappeared into storage

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<sup>110</sup> As reported in *Una Voce Newsletter*, No.3, September 1995 p.15

<sup>111</sup> Neville Threlfall, ms on history of Rabaul, p.454. Writing of a visit to Rabaul in 1994, Roma Bates referred to telling her family the story of the *Montevideo Maru* while visiting Vulcan 'and the cairn which Charles [Bates] had had erected at the spot, or near it from which the ship left'. *Una Voce News Letter*, No.3 1995 p.28

<sup>112</sup> *PIM*, October 1960 p.33. In 1963, I visited the site which was becoming overgrown, and heard the story of the ship told by a resident, though the memorial itself was in poor condition.

<sup>113</sup> *Una Voce Newsletter* No.4, 1994, December. This memorial was erected by the 2/22 Battalion, 'Lark Force' Association and relatives of those who died, with support from the Office of Australian War Graves, East New Britain Provincial Government, Rabaul RSL and Rabaul Town Council.

<sup>114</sup> Geoff Pryor, 'A Voyage to Remember', *Canberra Times*, 15 July 1995 p.C1

in the archives in the early 1980s when the property where it had been displayed since 1956 was sold. It was reinstated in 1988 at the Uniting Church Centre for Ministry through the activity of several senior people who were determined that their former colleagues should not be forgotten. Even at the Australian War Memorial, there is little to signal to the visiting public the part played by the people of Rabaul and Kavieng. A large painting depicting the brief defence of Rabaul on 23 January 1942<sup>115</sup> hangs in the Pacific gallery but there is almost no other reference.

In the matter of suitable memorials, as in so many other ways, those most disadvantaged have been the island civilians who were in private business. The Imperial War Graves Commission provided for the beautiful war cemetery at Bita Paka, south-west of Rabaul, with permanent memorials for the dead servicemen, whether or not their remains had been found.<sup>116</sup> The names of the servicemen also appear on the wall of the 1939-1945 Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. Church denominations provided memorials for their mission staff and government departments and major business firms did the same for their people. But the people who had worked independently had only their families and personal friends to keep their names alive. One plantation manager's widow was very hurt when she visited Bita Paka to find that her husband and his neighbours, all civilians who were executed, had not been memorialised there: 'We had nothing ... It's as if those [New Ireland] civilians never existed'.<sup>117</sup> Even more invisible than the civilians who had lived in the island communities before the war, and were known by their neighbours, were a small group of civilian men who had only just arrived in Rabaul on various work contracts just before the invasion; few even knew that they had gone there and they were known and

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<sup>115</sup> Painting at Australian War Memorial, Pacific Gallery, 'A Company 2/22nd Battalion in action at Vulcan on the morning of 23rd January 1942 against initial Japanese landings at Rabaul', artist G.Mainwaring, 1970.

<sup>116</sup> PIM, August 1949 'New Guinea War Cemeteries'

<sup>117</sup> Gwen Ives, interview, 1995.

remembered by no one except their families. Neither the Australian War Memorial nor the Imperial War Graves Commission saw the death of civilians as coming under their charter, as they limited the scope of commemoration to those who had died 'on or as a result of active service'.<sup>118</sup> Civilian family members have been disappointed that, in a gallery on Prisoners of War at the War Memorial, a large map display titled 'Areas of Captivity', which purports to show where Australians were held prisoner, has not identified New Ireland, where civilian men were held captive before execution without trial; again they have the sense that their men do not count. During the past ten years, some of these civilian families have forged links with the Australian Civilian Japanese War Reparation Action Group. Centred in Queensland, this group is working with other groups of Dutch, British and other nationalities whose civilians suffered under the Japanese. Their hope is that court action through the Human Rights Commission of United Nations Organisation will eventually provide 'recognition and acknowledgment in terms of reparation or in any other way on the part of the Japanese nation'.<sup>119</sup> However, despite years of effort, as recently as February 1995 a newsletter from the civilian group to families suggested that 'very slow progress is being made' and mentioned frustration and discouragement about the difficulties encountered.<sup>120</sup> Nevertheless, one daughter received a formal letter of apology from Japan late in 1995.

There remains for many of the relatives a continuing urge to press for further recognition of the circumstances which took their husband, brother or father. They know that this is only one of many stories of loss and grief which has emerged from the terrible waste of war. But though many of them are isolated from each other

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<sup>118</sup> *The Canberra Times*, 6 February 1996, p.3, quoting Micheal McKernan, *Here is the Spirit - A History of the Australian War Memorial 1917-1990*, 1991

<sup>119</sup> Gavan McCormack and Hank Nelson, *The Burma Thailand Railway*, 1993, Sydney pp.140-143.

<sup>120</sup> Australian Civilian Japanese War Reparation Action Group, Newsletter No. 9 February 1995

and little known in the wider scheme of things, they want their story to stand beside other stories as a recognisable part of the history of Australians at war. As one soldier's daughter said

The fall of Rabaul still needs to become one of the fully recognised events of the war, for the sake of the mute men and women who had to endure this particular way of being put to death.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Jenny Evans, Qn. No.72

**WOUNDED PEOPLE: 'a very bruising loss'**

The community which had once existed in the islands no longer existed. Those who had been linked through the 2/22nd Battalion had, in many cases, lost touch with each other. Yet the shadow of that community remained. Women and children who had never met or even heard of each other, living in different states over a period of fifty years, described aspects of their lives which seemed to be part of a single story, rather than many independent accounts of human lives. The nature of the loss of their men from the islands during the war years - the sudden separation from spouse and place, the long wait for news, the uncertainty about what was truth, the practical problems which grew from changes forced upon them - had touched them all in body, intellect and emotions. The ripples from that period of violence during the war were still spreading outwards through time. In attempting to describe the longterm impact of the losses of the war years on human lives from that islands community, the methods of discovery must extend the boundaries of history and draw upon other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, philosophy and theology. The scholar is the historian puzzling over what happened and why it happened, as well as what the participants in those events understood to have happened.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the light of current research into the effects on physical, mental and emotional health of chronic prolonged moderate stress or severe traumatic stress, further study of this community by sociologist or psychologist could prove fruitful. For a comment on this field, see 'The potential killer that lurks in your mind', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 January 1996, p.1.

## Emotional damage

Several relatives of the missing men from the islands described themselves as 'damaged'. In the peaceful and unexceptional suburbs of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide, people who had never encountered a Japanese soldier, who were never imprisoned, who never suffered a direct enemy attack on their suburb or town, who were never starved or under siege, experienced problems which one day would be described as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Health professionals have examined the experience of people who have been through extreme conditions of stress, such as torture or as prisoners of war. One former prisoner of war described the difficulty of understanding this condition, and the fear and anger which continued to

act in subtle and unseen ways to influence and mould the way I live... Today, these many years later, we live with the physical and mental consequences of that suppression of strong emotions. Fatigue, restlessness, depression, irritability, crying, insomnia, nightmares and shaky hands are some of the symptoms that point to the anger within each of us today.<sup>2</sup>

Although to the public eye it may have seemed that the Australian women and their children in country towns and city suburbs were managing their lives very well during and after their loss, many strong emotions were continuing to act in 'subtle and unseen ways to influence' their lives. Two doctors who, as small children, were evacuated from the islands each commented on this. Psychiatrist Dr. John Spensley said that from 'the psychiatric and emotional point of view it profoundly affected us', citing impact on marriage relationships, parenting style and impaired ability to be close and to feel, while Dr. Robert Edwards M.B., B.S., F.F.A.R.A.C.S. noted that 'We all suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.' Tales of psychological and physical

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<sup>2</sup> Nippon Very Sorry, p.78-85, 88-89, from publication 'POW MEDSEARCH' 1983

health problems were a common theme in the way people described their lives since the war.

Although it is only a small sample, on face value it would seem that the civilian families from the islands may have experienced even more health problems than the military families. Of 54 women and children from civilian families, 25 (46 per cent) reported periodic illhealth, a major health problem or that they 'coped with difficulty under stress' during the war. Of the 35 relatives of servicemen in the same period, 23 (66 per cent) said that they 'generally coped well' and only twelve (34 per cent) reported health difficulties. Twenty respondents (37 per cent) noted that their health problems continued for many years.<sup>3</sup> The relatives of soldiers may have found that they managed better than civilians because they were within the existing framework of the military with expectations and precedents, as well as being in their own familiar homes, whereas civilian families found their entire world in chaos.

The stress of waiting for news was already having an impact on emotional health in 1942 and this intensified as the years passed. Mollie Nottage wrote at the time that 'all these five months of waiting have been appalling and are having a dreadful effect on [my] nerves.' By September 1942 Mollie Nottage and the wives of 64 other officers knew that their men were alive in Japan but hundreds of other families had no news at all. Inevitably, the tension overcame some of them. An officer's mother wrote in July 1944, 'I am not well ... have had weeks in bed and

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<sup>3</sup> Of the total of 86 relatives who responded to the questionnaire concerning health after the war, 23 (27 per cent) reported difficulties with sleep patterns, 8 (9 per cent) reported physical breakdown, 23 (27 per cent) reported psychological breakdown, 17 (20 per cent) reported behavioural problems, 7 (8 per cent) reported recurring nightmares, with a theme of unresolved grief underlying most of the reports. Though 37 (43 per cent) respondees said that their chief problems with health were immediately after the war, with another 10 (12 per cent) reporting 'occasional' troubles, 20 (23 per cent) indicated that the problems continued for many years.



months indoors with a bad nervous breakdown'.<sup>4</sup> Another woman, during the war years, was sometimes found 'curled up in a windowseat, very upset' and there was a period when her children were 'bundled off' without explanation to stay with friends.<sup>5</sup> Lorna Hosking 'lived on phenobarb for years and years.' In the first year of her separation from her husband, Lorna kept a journal, intending to share it with her husband on his return. Some selections from this journal reveal her anguish, suggesting the pain which was common to so many others. She wrote

How long is this nightmare going to last? ... I get so scared at times... I am so terrified they may take you away ... it is hell hoping, day after day, to hear of real action ... I just think and think in vicious circles, and get nowhere ... [I come up against a blank wall of despair ... I am feeling desperate about you lately ... tonight I am in the deepest depths of depression.<sup>6</sup>

Twenty three people (27 per cent), from a group of 86 respondents, reported that a member of their family had suffered from psychological breakdown, and the detail of their stories suggests such pain that one wonders how many other families who lost someone from the islands in 1942-45 would have similar stories to tell. For one of the missionary wives, the loss of her loved husband 'was a very bruising loss.' Torn from her marriage, home and role in the islands, she and her young sons were set adrift in a series of temporary rural homes, isolated and fearful for her husband. She suffered a breakdown, needing special care over two years.<sup>7</sup> Helen Pearson returned to New Britain early in 1947 and began to search for execution sites, questioning villagers about the fate of her husband. She did not discover what she

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<sup>4</sup> AWM PR83/189 (Item 5) 2 of 10. Bill Botham to Mollie Nottage; Mrs Tyrell, East Malvern, Victoria to Mollie Nottage, 12 July 1944. One son, Lt R.T.Tyrell, had been captured with Stewart Nottage on 2 February 1942 and they were together in Zentsuji Camp. Another son, Murray Tyrell, had been Secretary to Senator McBride and was by this time Secretary to Mr Chifley

<sup>5</sup> Interview, NSW September 1992

<sup>6</sup> Lorna Hosking, diary 27 February, 29 May, 6 June, 27 July, 4 August, 28 September, 24 December 1942

<sup>7</sup> Interviews with sons, 26 November 1991, 18 August 1995

sought but the strain of the search became overwhelming and she was flown back to Australia under restraint five months later. In Australia, she was admitted to hospital until she was 'allowed her freedom again' in the care of family. Sadly, her life never recovered her pre-war health and vitality, and she experienced many griefs and dislocations until her death in 1992. A family member said: 'The war didn't end in 1945 for her, or for her son. She had a hell of a life for fifty years. A tragedy'.<sup>8</sup> Stella Hogan, widow of Gerald Hogan, Crown Law Officer in New Guinea from 1922, suffered disturbed sleep patterns, physical and psychological breakdown caused by the trauma and nightmares associated with the death of her spouse for the rest of her life.<sup>9</sup> A former Rabaul woman, who never really recovered from her loss of husband and place, experienced a pattern of deterioration and breakdown until 'as the years passed she became more and more extreme in her manic depression'.<sup>10</sup>

### **Insecurity**

A common theme among the children of men missing from the islands has been a feeling of insecurity, even where mother and other relatives have done their best to provide a stable home. Of 37 'children' who responded to a question about whether they felt insecurity, linked with their loss, fifteen (41 per cent) agreed that they did. One described how, in childhood, because of the changes and difficulties of her mother's life she had 'no sense of personal security' and has never forgotten how, in a bad moment, her mother threatened to put her in an orphanage if she didn't behave; she still suffers from 'chronic depression and anxiety, also panic attacks, which therapy hasn't cleared up'. Another suggested that 'nervous troubles' over many years were triggered by her childhood fear that 'my mother would die, as had my father';

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<sup>8</sup> Mitchell Library, MOM340 p.347, p.562; Mitchell Library, MOM 501 Letter from Methodist General Secretary to C.Mannering in Rabaul, June 1947; interview with Keith Pearson, Adelaide, 27 November 1991

<sup>9</sup> Geraldine Hoy, Questionnaire No.42

<sup>10</sup> Interview, Melbourne, 18 August 1995

her mother did die when she was in her thirties and the daughter suffered a nervous breakdown. A minister of religion attributed his earliest childhood thoughts about religious questions to the loss of his father when he became 'aware of the transience of life and the reality that people who matter can just die'.<sup>11</sup>

Some of the widows were forced to place their children for a time with relatives, boarding hostels or in children's homes. The children found that this added to their sense of insecurity. One such child wept, many years later, as she recalled longing to return, and her youthful attempts to please her mother 'because I thought that then she might let me come home'. Another spoke with some bitterness of her mother 'getting me out of hock for the weekend', even though with the passing years she now has a better understanding of the reasons why her mother placed her in the care of an institution for a time. A man spoke of the instability of living with a series of relatives, and attending a series of schools. One pondered how different her experience might have been if her father had come home; during secondary schooling she lived at a Legacy Hostel with others whose parents had died, deserted them or were in psychiatric care.

Of the children who passed through in the four years I was there only two of us kept our heads above water long enough to go on to university and subsequently get degrees.<sup>12</sup>

Another said, 'Our family was shattered, absolutely. I can remember how it affected me - I spent my school life hiding, down behind the shelter shed'. One man, reflecting on his boyhood, wrote of feeling 'abandoned and deserted' and as a result 'for many years was very reticent and had difficulty mixing in public'. Another man admitted having

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<sup>11</sup> Qn No. 6; Qn No. 77; Higgins, letter

<sup>12</sup> Interviews, 12 July 1994, 15 July 1994, 28 November 1991, Qn No.6

found it hard to express affection to his own family as an adult, suggesting that he has been afraid to let himself be close to others, physically or emotionally, for fear of losing them.<sup>13</sup>

### **Memories: private, shared and revised**

People deal with the memories of trauma and pain in very different ways. Some long to forget, some remember but keep their memories to themselves, while others find release in speaking openly and often. Whether by deliberate choice or the natural blurring of passing years, some have been able to put their worst memories from their minds. As Canon John May commented, on the experience of Rabaul, 'a lot of things through our kindly memory have been forgotten'.<sup>14</sup> For many women, there was a deliberate choice to put the past behind them, particularly for those who remarried. One noted that 'I've pulled a blind down on that part of my life', while another, after years of preferring not to speak of her loss, received a visit from the daughter of her first husband's close friend and colleague and told her guest 'in a lovely way, "You made me go back fifty years and maybe unlocked a closed door'."<sup>15</sup>

Those who have been grateful to have the sharpest edges of disturbing memories blunted with the years have found it very difficult to have that edge honed once more when they have read recent material about the loss of the men or attended memorial services. Several who read *Whereabouts Unknown*, the story of some of the missionary families as they waited for news of their men, said that they could only read 'a bit at a time' because it 'stirred up so many memories'. One woman reported having

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<sup>13</sup> Interview, 12 July 1994; Qn No. 77; Qn 83

<sup>14</sup> John May, interview, Canberra 1994

<sup>15</sup> Margaret Henderson, letter, 1995

nightmares while she was completing the questionnaire for this study and another wrote of it that 'I felt you were bringing to life all the agony and heartache again'.<sup>16</sup>

The loss of memory was sometimes involuntary. Eileen Cox, widow of missionary accountant Wilf Pearce, frequently suffered during the wars years 'a type of amnesia due to the nervous stress of having no news of the missionary men, nor the other missionary wives and teachers'.<sup>17</sup> A woman who was nine years old at the time of the evacuation has lost most memories of her life before then, but commented

It affects you, though. Even now when I talk about it I get very cold and shaky.<sup>18</sup>

At least one elderly widow suffering from dementia still carried confused memories of this most painful period of her life even after most other memories would no longer come to her. Before her death in July 1995, Jean (Shelton) Stuart could barely recognise her daughter who saw her daily but had a recurring question for her, asked over and over. 'Where is your father? What happened to him?' Nurses who cared for her reported that Mrs Stuart, from the confused memories of over ninety years of living, kept telling them a story of a prisoner of war, and a lost ship.<sup>19</sup>

Reflecting on the approach to counselling and pastoral care of the immediate post-war period, many commented that their mothers rarely took opportunities to speak of their memories and the feelings linked with them. Some chose not to speak, anxious that they might become emotional and embarrass themselves. Some felt that they had no one who was really appropriate as a confidante. One woman

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<sup>16</sup> Doreen Beadle, letter, 29 January 1996

<sup>17</sup> Eileen Cox, letter, 25 January 1994

<sup>18</sup> Interview, 12 July 1994, Melbourne

<sup>19</sup> Winifred Playford, interview, Canberra May 1995

came from a big family ... The rest of the family used to say, 'Are you all right?' And she'd say, 'Oh, yes, I'm fine' - and she was amazed that that was the extent of their enquiries ... [So she struggled on in isolation] to the detriment of her health.<sup>20</sup>

For some, the time was not right to speak of their memories; that time would come after many years. As the years passed, others assumed mistakenly that the old memories no longer had power to hurt. A compassionate stranger may have played a useful role for those who found it easier to 'confess' to a priest, pastor, counsellor or even an interviewer (as I discovered when people spoke in depth with me of their personal lives, even though we had only just met). Speaking for surviving soldiers, a former officer said, 'My generation did not receive counselling. We had to work out our own salvation'.<sup>21</sup> This was also true for the widowed women.

The relationship of mother and children sometimes but not always included a sharing of the story of father and his fate. Of 61 people who responded to the survey question about whether they had been able to discuss this with their mother, 37 (61 per cent) said that they had. One woman thinks that she avoided psychological damage because of her close, open and supportive relationship with her mother. However, seventeen (28 per cent) of those who answered 'yes' said that it had been only recently or rarely that they had been able to discuss it, and ten (16 per cent) said they had not been able to speak with their mother about their loss.<sup>22</sup> When a woman felt unable to speak freely with her children about their father, even though she intended to protect them from distress, this excluded them from signs of their mother's grief and

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<sup>20</sup> Interview, Adelaide, 1994

<sup>21</sup> J.C.H.Gill, Qn No.94

<sup>22</sup> Qn 64: Have you/your mother felt able to talk about those years? a. Yes 37 (61 per cent), b. No 10 (16 per cent), c. only recently 6 (10 per cent), d. very rarely 11 (18 per cent) e. with others, but not with mother 6 (10 per cent)

also from information and a sense of connection with the missing father. One said, 'Nothing was ever discussed. Silence.' Many felt a personal loss. In a Melbourne home

[Mother] couldn't talk about it. She would never talk to us. I remember, just once, screaming at her, 'Why won't you ever TALK to us?' And she just went on shelling the peas. My brother grabbed me, and pulled me out. She just couldn't talk, poor love.<sup>23</sup>

The phrase 'My mother didn't talk about it' was repeated in many interviews and letters. A soldier's daughter was never close to her stepfather, who her mother married in 1946, and said. 'My Mum has only spoken [to me about my father] since my step-father passed away in 1993.' This silence has saddened their children. Muriel Macgowan Lerner said, 'I deeply regret that my Mother and I *never* discussed those years when I was old enough to understand'. Several, like Margaret Coe Goode, said that 'my father is a person I knew only by photographs.' Photograph albums have been a way of connecting with the missing father, but some mentioned the difficulty of distinguishing a real memory and an image evoked by a picture.<sup>24</sup>

Memories and mental images have returned to both older and younger generations in the form of dreams. Several people reported recurring nightmares. Iris Schmidt, who had returned to Rabaul 'in a terribly distressed state of grief' to try to learn about the fate of her husband had bad dreams about him and died, years later, haunted by stories of atrocities and sinking ships.<sup>25</sup> Until a few years ago, Gwen Ives had a recurring nightmare. In it she returns to the plantation and to the office desk in the house she shared with Vivian.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview, Melbourne, 12 July 1994

<sup>24</sup> Qn No. 46; Qn No.98; Janice Steinfurth; Winifred Playford; Margaret Coe Goode; Qn No. 6; Joan Turner; Glen McArthur; Janet and Tim Gambrell; Muriel Macgowan Lerner

<sup>25</sup> H.E. (Lyn) Clark, '*Montevideo Maru*', article published in *Una Voce News Letter*, Retired Officers' Association of Papua New Guinea, No.4, 1994 December

There's a book open and I recognise his handwriting, but he's not there and I go looking for him. I go past the plantation and there's just bush. And there's this enormous clump of bamboo, very dark, and I'm never able to get past this clump of bamboo. It's always exactly the same.

More recently, now elderly, she has been dreaming that her first husband meets her, with a promise to return for her.<sup>26</sup> A woman who remarried after the war was regularly disturbed by dreams about her first love.

Many a time I've dreamed that he was in the room and I'd wake up crying. My husband used to say, 'What's the matter with you? Why don't you go and see a doctor? You're always having dreams' ... I've always felt he was still here, with me.<sup>27</sup>

The generation of 'children' also reported dreams, which were probably the result of their imaginations working with family atmosphere and lore about the missing men. One had a recurring nightmare in which she found herself on the ship and met her father 'and I'd wake up in this fearful unresolved state'.

In a number of cases, people who were interviewed for this study, or who wrote letters to return with the questionnaire, spoke of their appreciation of being given the opportunity to tell their story. A number indicated that it was the first time they had spoken of the impact of those significant years. For others, there has always been an unsatisfied curiosity about their loss. It has helped some to read the book *Whereabouts Unknown*, and a number reported shedding tears over it. One wrote that it 'fills in so many missing pieces of my brother's last days that I am content that I now have the full picture'.<sup>28</sup> Another said

Reading your book has been part of a healing process for me. [It] has allowed me to talk to my husband about what my early life was like, and one son joined us in looking through the photo album, so the family story will not be lost.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Gwen Ives, interview, February 1995

<sup>27</sup> Interview, 15 August 1995

<sup>28</sup> Doreen Beadle, letter, 29 January 1996



Gwen Ives said, 'A lot of people say, "Why talk about it? Why remember it? Why think about it?" But I think getting it all off my chest ... It's been a cleansing.'

### **Denial of reality**

Many of the widows found it hard to believe that their husband was dead. Their children had been nurtured on the dream and promise of a father who would one day come home. One family commented that the greatest single effect on their household was their mother's denial that her husband was really dead. They 'lived in hope and fantasy for many years, but [this] added to my mother's depression. She could not get on with her life'.<sup>30</sup>

Even when the mothers finally accepted that all hope was lost, some of the children still clung, secretly, to the thought that there had been a mistake and the father of family fable would some day enter their lives again. An internal disbelief still affected the way they related to their world. Joan Turner, until she was sixteen, 'still thought he had amnesia and one day would come home'. Another woman wrote that as a child she had known of her father's 'missing, believed dead' status and hoped that he was still alive.

After reading a story book in which the father who was believed dead returned, I started to fantasise about the possibility until my mother caught up with the idea and told me his coat had been found in a grave.<sup>31</sup>

Consciously or subconsciously, family members worried that their man did not *choose* to come home. A young daughter blamed herself; though she constantly waited for his return, she felt that she 'was bad and that's why he didn't return'. A

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<sup>29</sup> Qn No.6

<sup>30</sup> Gillian Nikakis, interview 17 August 1995

<sup>31</sup> Qn No.6

widow had occasional dreams that her husband was now living with his aunts and had rejected her. It was not until a helpful encounter with Bill Harry of 2/22nd Battalion Association in the late 1980s that she was finally convinced. Until then she and her daughter 'had the haunting feeling that he could be alive somewhere'. Clare Beaumont, whose husband had disappeared without trace in 1944

always anticipated that knock on the door. I don't think she ever gave up because often she'd make a small reference or something - 'that could be Jack' - even up until quite near when she died [in 1988] ... She always used to say, 'I wish I had a finality to it'. But there never was a finality.<sup>32</sup>

### **Physical health**

It is the perception of a number of the bereaved families that physical illnesses which have been experienced by family members through the years may well have links with the trauma of the war years. In most cases they mention this with caution, not sure how far to take this notion, but they make their own connections between a relative's early death from breast cancer or a mother's alcoholism and the acute stress and pain of the years of waiting for news.

An example of a family whose physical health was affected was the Pascoes. Not long after Sadie Pascoe found that her husband was not coming home, her health began to deteriorate. From childhood, her daughter Sue suffered a series of similar symptoms to her mother, though the problems were not diagnosed, missing a lot of school until she was finally forced to drop out of art school at the age of nineteen. During the next four years, Sue was bedridden: 'she was just lying there helpless with no strength and pain in every movement and nobody could explain what it was'. When Sue's health permitted, the two women established a working partnership as artists and illustrators, working when they were well enough from a studio at home. It was not

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<sup>32</sup> Janice Steinfurth, interview 22 December 1994

until 1987 that both Sadie and Sue Pascoe were finally diagnosed as being almost lifetime sufferers from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.<sup>33</sup>

### **Location and dislocation**

Women and their families who bore enforced wanderings in search of safe and suitable accommodation longed to be able to settle. Women with generous relatives were very grateful, but it did not answer their deeper need for a place of their own.

Lorna Hosking, staying with relatives, wrote in 1943:

I'm really fortunate to have two places to call 'home'. (There ought to be some other word for temporary abodes - there is only one 'home'.)<sup>34</sup>

The deep need for a genuine home, a place of safety and stability, was a need which affected not only the practical and physical but also the spheres of mind and spirit. People discovered that they had been bereaved of place as well as people. Daisy McArthur and her two boys found strong support through 'our wonderful extended family that was always there and kept us sane and protected ... That was the only thing that saved us.' Over many years, regular family gatherings on a rural property provided vital security to the itinerant household.<sup>35</sup> It was not until well after the war that some of these families could describe the relief when at last their mother was able to buy or rent a place of their own, providing longed-for stability, security and independence. 'The first little brick Housing Trust place was wonderful', said one.

### **Finding a purpose**

For many women, practical work was a comfort. They were grateful for something which made demands on their physical energies and gave them a purpose for each

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<sup>33</sup> Sadie and Sue Pascoe, interview, 15 July 1994

<sup>34</sup> Lorna Hosking, diary 27 February 1942 - 26 June 1943

<sup>35</sup> Glen McArthur, interview, Melbourne, 18 August 1995

day, whether in the home, as a volunteer or in the paid workforce. Mrs L.T.Coe, formerly of Rabaul, for example, 'assumed a leadership role in the family and buried a lot of her grief in "doing" activities', becoming active in the War Widows Guild.<sup>36</sup> Lorna Hosking was another among the many who found that the War Widows Guild gave her 'the support and purpose for living she desperately needed'.<sup>37</sup>

Others had to find paid work from necessity, even though it was sometimes an exhausting burden. Marion Taylor, who had lived in the Rabaul community before the war and knew many of the widows, wrote in 1995

The courage of the New Guinea women should be known ... A few women - not many - were overwhelmed by the long strain ... The majority of the women are unsung heroines, I feel - just becoming the financial providers for their families, by entering or re-entering the work force and holding a family unit together.<sup>38</sup>

In an era when many married women had not expected to go back to work unless they chose, the war widows returned to their pre-war professions or found any jobs they could. A number of the women had been teachers. Jean Poole was among the first group of Australian women permitted to return to Rabaul in late 1946, where she helped to rebuild an education system and teacher training; this work gave her great satisfaction.<sup>39</sup> Others taught with distinction in Australian schools<sup>40</sup>, some undertook training (Marion Oakes as a nurse, Frances Ryan in her late forties studied to gain promotion in her secretarial work), Mel Trevitt became Personnel officer for a large

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<sup>36</sup> Margaret Coe Goode, South Australia, Qn No.33

<sup>37</sup> Mary Hosking Symons, letter 25 February 1995

<sup>38</sup> Marion Taylor, South Australia, letter January 1995

<sup>39</sup> Jean (Poole) Mannering, interviews, Sydney 1991, 1992

<sup>40</sup> Some of the many widows who worked as teachers included Helen Wayne, Essie Linggood, Mel Trevitt, Daisy McArthur, Helen Pearson, Irene Davies and Marjorie Vial.

Melbourne firm, Edith Gascoigne continued at the Pelaco shirt factory, Sadie Pascoe worked as an artist and Doris Michelson set up her dressmaking business.

As well as employment in the workforce, many women found purpose in a range of voluntary work, becoming the backbone of church or community groups, giving substantial time to work with youth, the poor, the lonely and the disadvantaged. An example, among many, was Daisy McArthur, who in later years 'looked after all the lost souls of the district ... and had a real sense of mission that had to be fulfilled'.<sup>41</sup>

### **Discovering identity**

When the women learned that their spouse was dead, they found that they had to rediscover their sense of identity. When required to describe their occupation in an official form in 1946, several of the women defined themselves in terms of their bereavement and wrote 'widow'. They were no longer a wife, with partner, place and position in the islands. Though they had lived alone for years, they had thought of themselves as wives waiting for their husbands. Now this was no longer true and they needed to learn to recognise themselves in their new identity as single, independent people.

For those women who were mothers, a key element of their identity was their relationship with their children. Their purpose was to protect, nurture and provide for them until they were independent adults. A common thread in interviews with the children of the missing men has been the great respect and gratitude they have for the sacrifices and commitment of their mothers, even in cases where the relationship of mother and child has not been easy, recognising as adults the personal and financial

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<sup>41</sup> Glen McArthur, interview

price their mothers paid. Sons and daughters said of the mothers such things as 'I admire her greatly', 'she was very strong, very capable', 'mother's sense of humour, which was able to change things ... an interesting lady and her house was always fun', 'Mum was such an extraordinary person', '! think my mother's feeling was, I can't give you much, but I can make sure you get a good education'.<sup>42</sup> As the children became adults, however, some mothers lost that sense of purpose. At least two of the Rabaul widows suicided when their children were young adults and engaged to be married. Their children suggest that, in addition to the despair their mothers were feeling, each had persisted in living until she felt that her task of raising her children was complete, 'then life finished when the parenting role finished'.<sup>43</sup>

Place, in the sense of belonging to a particular community, provided another aspect of personal identity. Those who had lived in the islands often spoke of themselves as being 'from New Guinea', even though they had not been there for years. This notion was strengthened through continuing links with New Guinea Women's Association and Clubs. The journal *Pacific Islands Monthly* contributed to this by providing continuing news of the islands, and of former islands people. A son commented that 'they saw themselves as expatriates ... they didn't belong in Brisbane'.<sup>44</sup> Some of the women continued to feel that their real place was somewhere else, and expressed this by trying to recreate something of the atmosphere of the islands in the way they decorated their houses, or planted tropical gardens, or hung a painting of Rabaul as a sign of 'home'. Those who had been children in the islands sometimes surprised themselves by the way they still identified with some aspects of

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<sup>42</sup> Interviews with Marjorie Michelson Eastwood, Betty Gascoigne Muller, John Spensley, Glen McArthur, Ian Higgins

<sup>43</sup> Interviews in Melbourne and Adelaide

<sup>44</sup> Interview, Melbourne, August 1995

Papua New Guinea. For example, a woman who recalled the loving environment of her childhood in New Ireland described how she embraced a stranger, a young professional woman from that district, when they met briefly in Melbourne in the 1980s.<sup>45</sup> The place which was home for happy wife or contented child has become part of their identity, even if far in the past.

The children of the missing men expressed their need to discover, learn about and feel they belonged to their father.<sup>46</sup> A soldier's daughter who never saw her father said

Sometimes I think that people think that I am the result of a virgin birth! They don't seem to think that Mum ever had a husband or I ever had a father.

For most, this search has become more urgent as they reach their fifties and sixties and their mothers and their parents' contemporaries are coming to the end of their lives. There is regret that opportunities to talk with those who knew their father have been lost. One of many such comments was 'I realise at last just what I missed in not really knowing my own father'.<sup>47</sup> They hope to find out what kind of man their father was. They are curious about personality, interests, character, medical history, giftedness. As many of them are parents of adult children and have grandchildren they are interested in their father's contribution to the family gene pool. Their interest is not simply to find out who this man was, but to understand better who they themselves are.

The experience of the people who lost their fathers from the islands of New Guinea is not unique. It has many parallels with other groups of people who have been

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<sup>45</sup> Erice Pizer, interview, 12 July 1994

<sup>46</sup> In response to a question: 'Have you gone to lengths to recapture memories and links with lost father?' of 37 children of civilians and soldiers, 20 (54 per cent) agreed that they had.

<sup>47</sup> Interviews with Mary Symons, Loloma Puls, Winifred Playford

separated from parents at an early age who also attempt to connect again with that significant missing person. Their own identity is so intimately connected with that of their parent. Some examples of those who have followed such a quest have been migrant children from the United Kingdom who were separated from their families, British people fathered by American GIs during World War 2, Aboriginal children separated from their natural parents, and adopted children.<sup>48</sup> For some this has meant years of searching through appropriate networks, exploring archives and writing letters. Some have made a serious search for information about their father's death. Others reconstruct their father's life through research and writing, while yet others revisit sites which were significant for their father. For some the search has taken them deep into their own psyche or resulted in explorations of the paranormal. Because, as one said, they are 'still hungry for any little crumb of information,' some family members have also sought the help of hypnotists and attended seances.

The need to be part of a continuity of family, to have identifiable roots in people, place and time, becomes important. Lindy Gilham, the daughter of pre-war patrol officer Leigh Vial, was presented by the RAAF with a painting of her father on the 50th anniversary of his death as a coastwatcher in 1943. Her mother Marjorie had been evacuated from Rabaul before Lindy's birth.

[The presentation of the painting] brought to the surface feelings of urgency in me to learn what I could about my father from my mother whilst her ability to recall was good. Reading *Whereabouts Unknown* fuelled this urgency and prompted my visit to Papua New Guinea, and Rabaul and Lae in particular ... My life has changed (in feelings of "roots" and belonging to a "time in history") since 30 April 1993 when the RAAF gave us a picture.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Philip Bean and Joy Melville, *Lost Children of the Empire: the Untold Story of Britain's Child Migrants* 1989, London; Shirley McGlade with Mary McCormack *Daddy, Where Are You?* London 1992; Coral Edwards and Peter Read, eds, *The Lost Children: thirteen Australians taken from their Aboriginal families tell of the struggle to find their natural parents*, Sydney, 1989

<sup>49</sup> Lindy Vial Gilham, Qn No.111



Fifty years after the loss of their father, many regret that their own adult children, who may carry many of the characteristics of their grandfather and would have relished a relationship with him, never knew him.<sup>50</sup> Grandchildren, including those with links with the islands, were among those who placed crosses at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne for the gathered memories of Victory in the Pacific on 15 August 1995. The missing older generation of men still mattered to the younger generation.

Yet another aspect of personal identity for those who lost a father in the islands seems to be that many of them describe themselves as 'feeling different' and in some ways inferior to those around them.<sup>51</sup> One woman who left Rabaul as a twelve year old described the contrast between the stability and happiness of her childhood and the stress, anxiety and financial insecurity of life in an unfamiliar Australia which 'caused a great feeling of inferiority and being different from other people which has never really left me'. The daughters of several soldiers used the term 'embarrassed' to describe how they felt in their youth, concerning their fatherless situation.<sup>52</sup> Even so simple a thing as Father's Day became difficult for them, and lack of money was an issue. Another woman said

I also felt very inferior to other children and I felt I had to be better than them at everything to prove I wasn't worse than they were. My teens and my early twenties were the worst time ... I was always terribly conscious of the fact that I was different from other people. I was probably thirty or so before I came to terms with the fact that I was an individual regardless of what the family background was.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Examples of people who spoke of this are Geraldine Hoy, Qn No.42, and Mary Symons, letter, 25 January 1995

<sup>51</sup> Q 63. Respondents included 23 children of civilians, 14 children of soldiers. a. felt different from others with fathers 20 (54 per cent), b. related health problems 5 (14 per cent), e. hesitated to build close relationships 5 (14 per cent), f. felt insecurity, linked with loss 15 (41 per cent). Eight (22 per cent) respondents marked all negative experiences.

<sup>52</sup> Qn No.57

The children were not the only ones who struggled with feelings of inferiority. A number of the war widows expressed similar feelings, with one speaking with great appreciation of the work of Mrs Jessie Vasey and the War Widows Guild where 'I learned to respect myself more'.

### **Grief and loss**

The one deep emotion which lies below every description of life for the families of the men missing from the islands is grief. For some it is mingled with regret or remorse but for all there is a deep well of sorrow in their spirit. One striking feature of speaking with these families has been the number of people who were moved to tears, during an interview with a stranger, over a sorrow that was fifty years old. In responding to the questionnaire, 15 indicated that, though it had taken a long time, their grief was finally completed, but 37 others indicated that it was not fully healed, even now.<sup>54</sup>

Remembering, people said 'I still get emotional about it' and 'My eyes fill with tears and I really have to control myself every time I think about it'. A son reflected on the tough and short life of his father and his continuing grief for his widowed mother, left to support her children, 'who was so grieved with the loss of my father that we rarely talked of him in her presence'.<sup>55</sup>

One woman lost both her first husband and her beloved brother with the ship. Recalling the war years, she wrote 'life was very hard. I was so afraid and lonely and very unhappy.' She remarried, happily, in 1954, 'so I suppose others would say I

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<sup>53</sup> Qn No.46

<sup>54</sup> Question No. 73 Has there been a sense of completion, and that the war is over at last? a. many years ago? b. not for a long time but it is over now - 15, c. the grief is still not completed - 37.

<sup>55</sup> Qn No.2

was over it at that time but I have never forgotten [my first husband] and my second husband knew this and accepted it.<sup>56</sup>

Many people commented on the general expectation that they should have 'got over it' long ago. Yet news items of disasters, and films about family loss still bring tears for many. Films depicting family reunions, where the father is welcomed home, still have the power to hurt. Sadie Pascoe said

It still hurts me inside, which is silly after all these years. I think, I'm an old woman now, it shouldn't matter.

The mother of young soldier Vin Lyons

never got over it, never. Her reactions were quite extreme sometimes. She lamented the day she had agreed to sign the form [giving an under-age son permission to enlist] for the rest of her life ... There was nothing you could do to console her.<sup>57</sup>

Val Pont, one of the few whose father's grave is identified at Bita Paka War cemetery, thinks that her 'grief may be complete some day if I get to Rabaul and see his grave'.<sup>58</sup>

Whether or not people consider that their grief over a loss which occurred fifty years ago has been 'resolved', there remains the sadness over what might have been. Women have mourned for many years over marriages which were shortened in such a painful way, or marriages which they had dreamed about but which were never fulfilled. Whether or not real life could have sustained the idealised marriages they imagined, the loss was still very real as lives took a different course. Flora Pivaresky waited for four years for her boyfriend Bob Cornelious to come home, dreaming of the day they would be together as husband and wife. Bob, a soldier with Lark Force, did not return.

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<sup>56</sup> Letter, Sydney, 2 May 1992

<sup>57</sup> Frank Lyons, interview, October 1994

<sup>58</sup> Val Pont, Qn No.98

The best part of my life is missing. All these years I carry a scar around inside me and will until the day I die - as I loved him so very much and have never stopped.<sup>59</sup>

By 1953, when a review was made of the next-of-kin of those lost, many of the widows had remarried. For some women, this was a good new beginning, and they found many years of contentment with their new partner. However for others it was not a success, and perhaps regret, grief and the 'unfinished business' of their first marriage may have contributed to later marriage difficulties.<sup>60</sup>

Not only women who lost a husband, but those who lost beloved boyfriends and fiances found that later marriages were affected by their earlier bereavement. A woman who had chosen to wait for her boyfriend, only to learn that he had died years earlier with the *Montevideo Maru*, married after the war. Although she had spent years designing her dreamed-of bridal gown, she chose to be married in street clothes 'because to me it was like a second marriage ... I knew I would never feel the same about anybody else.' The years passed, and her husband recognised that she had not forgotten her first love. Sometimes, when she was silent, he would accuse her: 'Who are you thinking about?' After eight years of marriage, she came home one day to the smell of burning papers, and discovered that her husband had destroyed all the old letters she had kept from her first boyfriend, as well as her photograph of a smiling boy in uniform. The husband's jealousy of a dead man, and the wife's unforgiveness of his destructive act, did not help their marriage. Several years later her husband died, and in time she remarried. Even then, her new husband said

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<sup>59</sup> Flora Barker, interview, Melbourne, 15 August 1995

<sup>60</sup> It is possible that the results of the questionnaire and interviews may be biased towards those who are still grieving, or whose subsequent marriages were disappointments; such people may have been more likely to respond to a request for information than those whose post-war lives have been contented. However, as most names were gathered individually, by word of mouth, according to those who still maintained contact with others, and so many of those were prepared to participate, the results may in fact give a reasonable picture of the truth.

'You haven't stopped thinking of your husband, have you?' But it wasn't my husband I was thinking of.<sup>61</sup>

Not all the widows remarried, of course, and some who remained alone found their loneliness and despair continued to crush their spirits. A woman recalled her mother's distress.

As a child, I thought that I must be a dreadful child to make my mother so unhappy ... a couple of times she was just beside herself, and I couldn't understand, I was only little and I didn't know what was troubling her.

The daughter had a very unhappy childhood characterised by rare expressions of maternal love, a strongly disciplinarian attitude to parenting and episodes when her mother 'couldn't contain herself and a spanking would turn into a quite violent occasion.' There was a time when the mother was ill, alone and craving the comfort of human touch. The daughter was not feeling very loving towards her but the mother pleaded

'Please hold me, just put your arms around me' - but I didn't want to hold her because she'd been awful to me. I lay on top of the bed, and it was very difficult for me, but I held her ... it was tragic, she just needed human warmth and affection ... It's only now that I understand ... I 'talk' to her sometimes.<sup>62</sup>

Women also mourned for the children which they did not bear. Many of the wives of Lark Force men, as well as the women from the islands, were young women and the separation from their men came at a time when they would under other circumstances have been having babies. The loss of future potential pregnancies was part of the cost of the loss of their husband. At least twelve women were pregnant when they were evacuated from Rabaul late in 1941, and a number of soldiers' wives also had new babies. Most of these children remained the only child of their widowed mother. There were other young women, some recently married, who would remain

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<sup>61</sup> Qn. No. 105

<sup>62</sup> Interview, Adelaide, 1994

childless for the rest of their lives, a heavy personal price to pay. One woman, who married 'the first decent man who asked' after years of waiting for a man who did not come home, gave birth to her first baby. A nurse found her with the newborn with

tears running down my face and she said, 'What are you sniffing about?'... And I said, 'This poor kid's got the wrong father!' I laugh about it when I think about it now.<sup>63</sup>

The children mourned the family life they might otherwise have known, a life with their own father and brothers and sisters, and a mother who was a contented and fulfilled woman. Two groups of children were affected by the loss of the men; over a hundred children of the island communities and an unknown number of children of the men of Lark Force.<sup>64</sup> Forty six of those children, 32 of them from island families, and now men and women in their fifties and sixties, have responded to the questionnaire as part of this study. The experience of childhood changes and disruptions has had an effect on these people in the way they have experienced family as adults. For some, there has been a strong desire to recover in adulthood what was lost as children. One man told his fiancée that 'at last he would have someone he could call Dad' and through their years of marriage he has 'tried very hard to be the father he didn't have'. Another man suggested that a significant result of his childhood experience had been the way in which it had affected his approach to rearing his own children. Several women suggested that this group of people have been 'putting so much effort into our own marriages to compensate for what was missing in childhood.'<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Interview, Melbourne, August 1995

<sup>64</sup> When the *Macdhui* sailed from Rabaul on 22 December 1941, it carried 40 infants of three years and younger, 43 children between 4 and 14 years and 7 in the later teen years. In addition, at least twelve of the women on board were pregnant at the time, Mrs Ethel Dix, Mrs Eileen Pearce, Mrs Beryl Beazley, Mrs Irene Davies, Mrs Nellie Simpson, Mrs Clare Beaumont among them. Other children travelled back to Australia by plane, had travelled earlier in 1941 or were living in Australia while attending High School.

<sup>65</sup> Carolyn Linggood, John Spensley, Loloma Puls, Julie Richardson

The grief, despair and damage to the human spirit was, in some households, passed from one generation to the next. A young woman who had been conceived in Rabaul shortly before the evacuation prepared for her marriage in the early 1960s. One day at work, a work colleague offered his sympathy because he had just learned from a former Rabaul resident that her father, thought to have been on the *Montevideo Maru*, had in fact been beheaded on New Britain. Though her colleague assumed that she had always known this, it was the first time anyone had suggested this to her. She did not pass on this information to her mother, who was very depressed at the time, but the mother suicided soon after. She spoke to no one about what she knew, either of her father's execution or her mother's suicide, apart from her fiance, not even to the minister who conducted her mother's funeral, for fear he would not feel able to offer a 'Christian' funeral.

[Mother] didn't know [of the story of the beheading of her husband] but the burden on me - I remember crying a lot. My first husband was not at all sympathetic. I remember feeling these strange emotions which were obviously grief, feeling so sad, and there wasn't a soul I could tell ... It took me quite a while to stop crying.<sup>66</sup>

For a number of men and women who lost their father, it has been only in recent years that they have begun to deal with their grief. Ian Higgins had not realised that he had been carrying grief for his parents all his life. In 1993, he participated in a writing workshop where I spoke about my manuscript in progress titled *Whereabouts Unknown*. He recognised this as relating to his own parents' experience. After exchanging a few sentences with me, a stranger to him, he prepared to leave the conference, and astonished himself by beginning to weep.

I was very upset at the time I saw you and I went to see a counsellor ... At one point he got me to write a letter to my father and that was pretty distressing. I remember feeling very upset about this. I thought, I'd better write this, having put it off, so I

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<sup>66</sup> Interview, Adelaide, 1994

hastily wrote this letter and I took it in. And he said, 'Now you can read it to me' - and I just cried and cried. The family said I was easier to live with after that ... I think that was a healing thing that happened.<sup>67</sup>

Another man reported that his first opportunity to grieve properly for his missionary father was when he attended a Memorial service at North Parramatta, NSW, in 1988. His mother had rarely spoken to him of her own grief and from childhood, when he had been sent away to boarding school, he had been unable to express his own feelings of sorrow. The Memorial service had been helpful in releasing his grief and he wrote in 1994, 'Even as I write I have tears in my eyes'.<sup>68</sup> Gillian Spensley Nikakis described a visit to Rabaul in 1985 with her mother as a 'cathartic healing experience', which was only completed in a second visit with the group who travelled to Rabaul in 1992. She wrote that she

spent quite some time in therapy dealing with my grief and the effects on my life. I did not cry as a child ... Thank God for 'emotional release' work. When I cried, I cried for months like a 5 year old.<sup>69</sup>

It is not possible to say how many women considered ending their lives, during their worst moments. However there are hints that this may not have been uncommon. One family reported:

This day we were out on the pier at Sorrento and [mother] nearly pushed us all off and jumped in herself. She said later that the only thing that stopped her was - What if he does come back?

Another woman told how she learned, years later, that her mother's friends at work used to become very anxious if she was late returning from lunch. They knew how desperately unhappy and despairing she was and feared that she might have attempted to take her own life. The son of one of the missing men committed suicide as an 18 year old university student. His sister said:

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<sup>67</sup> Ian Higgins, interview, 18 July 1995

<sup>68</sup> Qn No.77

<sup>69</sup> Gillian Nikakis, interview 17 August 1995, Qn No.20



In a note he said he couldn't live up to the person his father was ... [He] thought he could never be as brave or good or great as his father. He had a picture of him as a superman, a superior man.<sup>70</sup>

Some did take their own lives in later years. Of one woman, her daughter said that she lived this quiet, private life, but inwardly she couldn't grieve properly. It poisoned her ... It finally overcame her. I really do think that the tragedy of the war was the cause of her death. She never found her life again.<sup>71</sup>

Of another, her son wrote

My impression is that my mother never 'got over' the grief. After my father died, she had lost her husband, her home, her possessions, her career and the wonderful (for her group) existence of servants etc in a de facto British colonial world. She had also lost most of her friends.<sup>72</sup>

This kind of experience may have been the meaning behind the cross, in Melbourne's Field of Remembrance in August 1995, which was inscribed 'To all mothers who did not make it'.

The experience of grief and loss has continued to shadow lives to a greater or lesser degree. Even those, and there are many of them, whose present life is fulfilling, satisfying and successful have spoken of subtle ways in which the long-ago mystery and loss has touched them in body, mind and spirit. It has become part of their identity and their way of understanding their world. Margaret Henderson was in living in Malaysia when she read *Whereabouts Unknown* which described the experience of her parents, Tom and Nellie Simpson. When she finished the book, she happened to encounter two Japanese families in the lift in their apartment block. They bowed and greeted Margaret.

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<sup>70</sup> Interviews in Melbourne, July 1994 and Sydney, October 1994

<sup>71</sup> Interview, Adelaide, 1994

<sup>72</sup> Qn No.43

I thought, where does reality start and finish, and what a very strange world this is. Here am I, 53 years old and over 52 years away from New Guinea, being bowed at by Japanese, when a member of my own family and his friends were forced to bow to them, at another time and another place.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Margaret Henderson, letter, 29 July 1994

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### MEANINGS AND MYSTERY

#### Trying to make sense of disaster

'What did he achieve?' asked a son of one of the Rabaul men who did not come home. It was a question of some bitterness. Bitterness for his own loss and for his widowed mother, now aged, anxious and grieving. 'What did he achieve?! Saved this country from destruction but lost his life and left us alone'.<sup>1</sup>

The search for some sort of explanation for the loss of husbands and sons, brothers, fathers and friends, has been a constant among those who grieve. Some find solace in the belief that their sacrifice was important to the overall war effort. Others find no such comfort. Sister Berenice Twohill, a nun who saw the might of the Japanese navy in Rabaul harbour from the convent windows at Vunapope and was taken into captivity by their troops, believes that there was a valuable purpose in the sacrifice.

When [the Japanese] first arrived in Rabaul, [some of the troops] thought they were in Australia. I'll maintain to my dying day that Rabaul saved Australia.<sup>2</sup>

Another Rabaul prisoner of the Japanese, Gordon Thomas, wrote in 1945 of his belief that both troops and civilians 'played a highly important part in war strategy, that Australia might be safe ... that gallant band who met the foe on Australia's first line of defence'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Qn No. 97

<sup>2</sup> Sister Berenice Twohill, interview, Sydney, February 1995

<sup>3</sup> Gordon Thomas, *Pacific Islands Monthly*, November 1945 p.19

When the Cross of Sacrifice was unveiled at the Bita Paka War Cemetery in New Britain where the men are remembered, in a ceremony in 1953, Sir William Slim, then Governor-General, spoke of the 'madness in the human race which twice in a lifetime has brought such desolation and sorrow to the world'.

Sometimes ... we are tempted to wonder whether these men died in vain. Never believe that they did. Could they speak to us with the knowledge they now have, they would tell us to be comforted, that their lives were not wasted. They would say ... 'We with our shortened lives bought for you a life in which you can walk as free men and women and lead your children, if you will, in clean and gentle paths.'<sup>4</sup>

Not everyone finds any truth or comfort in this view. Some believe that it was wrong to deploy a force of the size and with the inadequate equipment of Lark Force to the islands at all, and that the tactics used by that force were wrong. If this was true, then the events of 1942 in the islands can be seen as a tragic and pointless waste of life. Frank Lyons, speaking of the impossible situation of the troops, said

There was no way they could be a delaying factor, and their presence could do little to help the local population. Tragic loss of life resulted, to no good purpose.<sup>5</sup>

Julie Richardson, reflecting on the fact that Japanese culture is now being embraced in Australia, asks

What's the point? So much was lost to stop the Japanese coming into Australia but now my children sleep on futons and eat sushi ... I think - what a waste! It makes all this loss of life so pointless.<sup>6</sup>

Another wrote, 'The Government is selling Australia to the Japanese and that is hurtful. If they'd waited a bit they'd have got Australia without killing our men'.<sup>7</sup> Yet another

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<sup>4</sup> His Excellency the Governor-General, Field Marshall Sir William Slim, address at unveiling of Cross of Sacrifice, Bita Paka War Cemetery, New Britain, 23 November 1953

<sup>5</sup> Frank Lyons, interview, Canberra, October 1994

<sup>6</sup> Julie Richardson, interview, Melbourne, 15 July 1994

<sup>7</sup> Qn No. 53

responded that 'the whole sad story was a big mistake ... A very sad, useless loss of life and unnecessary suffering to the soldiers and their families'.<sup>8</sup>

As the years have passed, some people have been able to speak of things they have learned from the experience. Mick Smith is an example of a soldier who compared his later service in the battles from Lae to Shaggy Ridge as 'physically a picnic' compared to the privations of the flight from New Britain; 'I learnt a lot from both experiences'.<sup>9</sup> Others found no solution to their questions and could only accept that this was how things were. John Spensley said, 'I've decided it's *karma*. I couldn't make sense of it'. A widow said, 'I think I was rebellious for quite some time ... I'd think, Why, God? Why? Because he was a good man'.<sup>10</sup>

There is for some a feeling of obligation to make sense of the lives of their parents by living their own lives to the full. As Dianne Edwards said,

We must be strong for our children and ourselves, to make our parents' lives worthwhile, because they lost their lives so prematurely.<sup>11</sup>

### **Heroes and martyrs**

Part of the quest to make sense of the events of 1942 has been to invest those who were lost with the status of heroes and martyrs. No doubt there were many individual instances of heroism which were never recorded or reported because there were no surviving witnesses. So families have been deprived of most records of personal courage in the face of violent death, or of sacrificial acts towards mates. Among the

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<sup>8</sup> Qn No.85

<sup>9</sup> 'Mick' D.O.Smith, letter, 17 October 1994

<sup>10</sup> Sadie Pascoe, interview, Melbourne, 15 July 1994

<sup>11</sup> Dianne Davies Edwards, Adelaide, January 1994

papers of soldier survivor Fred Kollmorgen is a poem titled 'Rabaul' which includes the lines

The bravest in the world  
Could not stem the thousands hurled  
Against them; stubbornly they fought to hold  
Their post: 'twas ten to one -  
...They died, yet live forever.  
O God, may we endeavour  
To be as strong...<sup>12</sup>

At a ceremony at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne in 1993, Frank Lyons stated that the 'opposition given was heroic, the successful escapes an epic episode, and the Tol Massacre barbaric'.<sup>13</sup> To deny the idea that the whole event was a meaningless catastrophe - men dying because they had been caught, or betrayed, or because of a random mistake - family members and survivors have taken any clues they could gather, as well as their knowledge of the character of the lost men, to create a class of heroes and martyrs.

One way of understanding this has been to recall the character of the man, and consider reasons why he would have chosen not to attempt escape (if a civilian felt he had a duty and responsibility to remain) or to attempt escape (if as soldier or civilian he might survive to fight or work another day). For example, Ron Wayne's daughter explained, 'Mum always said, "Dad wouldn't have left his natives."' In the Oakes family, a final letter from the Rev Dan Oakes is cherished in which he writes that he feels it is 'more than ever my duty to stay here'.<sup>14</sup> Colywn Parry wrote of his father Dr Arthur Parry

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<sup>12</sup> 'Rabaul', no author or date, probably war years; among papers of Fred Kollmorgen

<sup>13</sup> Frank Lyons, transcript of address, Shrine of Remembrance 17 January 1993

<sup>14</sup> Rev.Dan Oakes to Rev.G.E.Johnson, 8 December 1942, privately held. Written from Pinikidu, New Ireland

He had buried our valuables and moved his hospital to a safer place. Captain Duncan told me he refused to leave as he could not abandon his patients.<sup>15</sup>

The officers who had survived in prison in Japan were a source of information concerning the final months of those who died. Walter Ryan was said to have been on his way along the coast, but returned to captivity to support an injured colleague; in 1994 Julie Ryan Richardson found the name of her father and his work mate listed together in the nominal roll made by the Japanese in the camp; and saw this as confirmation that her father had suffered because of compassion for a friend. Mrs Eileen Cox, widow of Methodist lay missionary Wilf Pearce, heard Chaplain John May speak at a public meeting in Hobart late in 1945. He explained that although the New Guinean Christians had offered to help their Australian missionary friends escape through the mountains

our men said that they could not go and leave the natives without any Christian support. We felt this was true. Rosemary [daughter of Wilf Pearce] has grown up to respect her father's memory.<sup>16</sup>

Several parties of escaping soldiers passed through Kalas, a Methodist mission station on the edge of the Baining mountains in the days immediately after the fall of Rabaul. Among them was Bill Harry, who knew the Methodist staff well. At Kalas he found a party of missionaries 'all neatly attired in white and awaiting the arrival of the Japanese'. One of them was John Poole with whom Harry had explored the Central Baining area in previous months. Bill Harry invited Poole to travel with the soldiers but he 'refused to leave the rest of the party' as they were all concerned for the safety of the Methodist women missionaries who they feared were already under Japanese control at the Catholic mission where they had been sent for 'safety'.

The missionaries considered in the circumstances that they should accept a similar fate and maybe prevail upon the Japanese forces to treat the mission sisters with respect.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Colwyn Parry, Queensland, Qn No.108

<sup>16</sup> Eileen (Pearce) Cox, letter, Tasmania, 25 January 1994

In a similar way, on the south coast of New Britain, Father Ted Harris chose not to join the other Australians escaping on the *Laurabada*, although the troops tried to persuade him. Their respect for the young Australian priest was great. His reason for staying, as recorded by David Selby:

I've only been here about three years teaching these people what Christianity means. If I ran out on them when they're in danger, do you think I could ever come back and preach Christianity again? <sup>18</sup>

Sacrifice, as a theme, is an important aspect of the understanding of veneration of the war dead, along with notions of courage, duty, faithfulness, freedom and the value of human life. There is meaning for many relatives in the thought that their men who died did so, consciously or unconsciously, on behalf of others, so that they might live. Frequently sung on Anzac Day are the words 'All you had hoped for, all you had, you gave/ To save mankind - yourselves you scorned to save'. <sup>19</sup> In his speech in Rabaul in 1953, Sir William Slim said

They left, in us, memories of fortitude, of self-sacrifice and of courage that are the source at which we replenish the very spirit of our race. <sup>20</sup>

In the years since 1953, particularly in the multiplication of rituals and memories of the dead evoked during recent years which culminated in 'Australia Remembers' 1995, his words have become increasingly true. There is a strong sense in which Australians are 'replenishing the very spirit of our race' from the source of memories (and sometimes myths) of the sacrifice, courage and honour of those who died in war.

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<sup>17</sup> C.O.(Bill)Harry, Ms 'New Britain 1941-42: the Japanese invasion and thereafter as recorded by VX24.800'

<sup>18</sup> David Selby, *Hell and High Fever*, p.191

<sup>19</sup> Hymn, 'O valiant hearts, who to your glory came'.

<sup>20</sup> Sir William Slim, speech at Bitu Paka War Cemetery, New Britain 1953



As well as thinking of their dead as men with a nobility of character and as heroes to be honoured, some Christian churches remembered their lost workers as martyrs. Missionaries and members who died from the Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Salvation Army and Seventh Day Adventist Churches are all viewed with honour by their church members. Some Christian denominations, such as the Anglican and the Catholic Churches, have a much stronger tradition of martyrdom than others and were able to incorporate their war dead into an existing framework of understanding. Yet even those churches which do not have their own recognised 'martyrs', or who consider a martyr to be one who has died because of his or her faith rather than a believer who has been caught up in war, have used the notion of martyrdom occasionally when referring to the missionaries who died. Appeals for new missionaries to go to the islands included allusions to the concept that 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church'.<sup>21</sup> Churches are named for the 'Martyrs', both in Papua New Guinea and in Australia. The Salvation Army remembers with respect the bandsmen of the 2/22nd Battalion under Arthur Gullage, all of them Salvationists from Victoria and gifted brass musicians. On the 25th anniversary of the loss of the *Montevideo Maru*, as on other occasions, a Methodist gathering in Sydney remembered the 'missionary martyrs' and all the other men of the community lost.

The loss our Church and Australia suffered in that one sinking can never be calculated ... We must never forget them. Their story must ever be told.

Succeeding generations must hear of it ...<sup>22</sup>

In Rabaul on the 30th anniversary of the loss, New Guinean minister the Rev. Mikael To Bilak spoke of the way New Guinean people understood the loss of the Australian mission staff.

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<sup>21</sup> *Missionary Review*, November 1945, p.10

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Brawn, speech at Lyceum 'Pleasant Sunday Afternoon', Sydney, 18 June 1967

The men of our church did not suffer these things to no purpose, and they did not die idly; they died for us, the people of New Guinea, to help us become good men and women in our living.<sup>23</sup>

It has never been clear which people should be included among the recognised 'martyrs'. In 1995 a book celebrating the lives of many of the mission staff lost during World War 2 across Papua New Guinea described the difficulties of establishing those who should be counted, finally naming 333 people.<sup>24</sup> The Methodists did not include former missionary laymen who had gone down with the ship, nor a Chinese mission carpenter, who was executed.<sup>25</sup>

In public ceremonies and within families the lost men have also been honoured for the contribution they had made to New Guinea through their lifetime. Some who had been part of the islands community for many years had considerable achievements to their credit, in commerce, science, public administration, education, medicine, law and all aspects of community life. It may be that some were portrayed in more glowing terms after death than had been their lot in life. As with any tropical or other community, there would have been a normal mixture of scoundrels and saints, the lovable and the loathed. If comparing descriptions of the Rabaul community, for example, written in the *Rabaul Times* in 1942 immediately before the invasion with pieces written in 1945 after it had been learned that the men had died, there is a significant difference in tone. When Gordon Thomas wrote, in November 1945, his

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<sup>23</sup> Rev. Mikael To Bilak, transcript of speech, Thirtieth Anniversary, Rabaul, July 1972

<sup>24</sup> Theo Aerts, *Martyrs of Papua New Guinea: 333 Missionary Lives Lost During World War II*, Port Moresby, 1994

<sup>25</sup> *Missionary Review*, December 1945. Methodist laymen Ron Wayne and Bill Huntly were not included among the printed eulogies under the headline 'Our Missionary Martyrs' nor were their names on the brass memorial plaque with the others. After years of service as mission plantation managers and in other roles, the fall in copra prices forced them to seek secular employment in Rabaul, though they maintained close links with the mission; Wayne in particular continued as lay preacher, friend and constant member of the mission group. Mr Leong Tim, Chinese missionary carpenter who is believed to have been executed, was not included among the 'martyrs' either.

recollection of his final meeting with old friends in May 1942, even the least admirable of men was described with affection and tolerance. The dead had become heroes.

This I know, from my observations of their demeanour in the camp, that when the time came they faced the issue bravely and maintained the fine traditions of their adopted country - New Guinea. Their passing is yet another deed to be engraved upon New Guinea's well-filled honour roll.<sup>26</sup>

There were many men whose loss to New Guinea was considerable, and their contribution was remembered with great respect. An example among many is that of missionary builder and trade teacher Sydney Beazley. In 1960 his brother Kim Beazley (Snr) MHR visited Rabaul on a personal quest to try to discover anything he could about Syd, whose name was on the *Montevideo Maru* list. During his visit, he was moved when he met a New Guinean foreman on a building site who had been trained in his trade by Syd before the war. On a return visit in 1972, Beazley also met several senior government ministers who had been educated by the Methodist missionaries and he remarked on this in a speech at a Memorial Service.

So the work that these men did still goes on. They didn't know that they were training men who would become ministers of the Government of this country but their vision was not betrayed. They did participate in training the future leadership of this nation.<sup>27</sup>

The Australian troops and civilians of the islands are remembered with great pride by their families and friends. Whether or not they were exceptional men in life, in death they are honoured as heroes. Ailsa Nisbet, sister of one of the troops wrote

These boys were brave, brave men and I'm sure their efforts were not in vain, and very much assisted in keeping the enemy out of Australia, which would have been disastrous. Our freedom and wonderful country are precious.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Gordon Thomas, *Pacific Islands Monthly*, November 1945

<sup>27</sup> Kim Beazley Snr, transcript of speech at Thirtieth Anniversary Commemoration, Rabaul, 1972

<sup>28</sup> Ailsa Nisbet, Qn No.64

Former soldier Mick Smith said, 'I regarded the 2/22nd Bn as a unit to be proud of'. Sir William Slim said, 'We are their memorials ... in pride and faith, let us who follow them be resolute in duty as they were'.

### **Meanings and questions of faith**

When faced with the many unanswerable questions associated with such an experience, some conclude that religious belief is a bitter hoax. Others frame questions which are among the large questions of being human, whether or not they are couched in religious language. In view of what has happened to them and their families, they ask about the value of individual human life and how they can understand 'absurd death'. They ask whether there is a God who answers their prayers, or a God who is deaf to their pleading, a capricious God, a helpless God, or no God at all. They reflect on the possibility of life after death, of hope for the future, and whether they will ever again, in any way, meet the one who was lost. In an unstable and painful world, they look for security, solace, meaning and somewhere, a love that can be trusted not to abandon them. For some, there has been a long private struggle to deal with the debilitating effects of guilt (real or imagined), anger, unforgiveness, hatred, bitterness or endless regrets which are linked with the war years. Issues of their own mortality and the uncertainty of life have been highlighted by their family experience of untimely loss.

As with any cross-section of the community, there is a wide range of response to these questions, from conservative Christian to atheist. However, of those who responded to a question on religious experience in the questionnaire, only a few indicated that the experience of the war years had changed their world view; people who had been Christians remained so and those who were agnostic likewise.

In spite of the sadness of their experience, a number of family members remarked that their faith in God had been vital to their own personal survival. For years they prayed for the safety of their men but even when they learned that their men were dead many of them did not accuse God of failure to answer. They tended to attribute the evils of the war years to human agents, and the strength to survive it to God. Gwen Ives spoke for many when she said she had 'enormous faith in God ... I've had a rough time but God has looked after me ... If other people come along and muck it up for us, it's nothing to do with God, is it?' This did not mean that families with a simple faith were untroubled and unquestioning. For some, it was their first real experience of a conflict of spirit and mind, when the old verities no longer answered all the questions. Sadie Pascoe recalled her confusion and anguish: 'I used to think that Christians were supposed to never doubt, never fear, never worry but ...'

For many men who escaped to safety there is the question of whether their survival was a random event, good luck or whether it was an act of grace by God. A number of people expressed their thoughts on this in religious language. Bruce Mitchell, whose brother Henry Mitchell escaped from Rabaul, noted that the experience strengthened his brother's faith in God and that 'in the critical days in New Britain, although fired upon by the enemy, he escaped harm under the protection of God'; at the same time he acknowledged that 'it was not the lot of every Christian to survive the perils of war'.<sup>29</sup> A young man who was with those who escaped from the north coast on the *Lakatoi* recalled that dangerous journey. When they were the most exposed to attack, 'a storm, which was an Act of God, enabled us to escape'.<sup>30</sup> The community of missionaries interned at Ramale discovered after the war that there had been at least three plans to eliminate them. Bishop Scharmach wrote later, when 360

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<sup>29</sup> Bruce Mitchell, Qn No.100

<sup>30</sup> Qn No.117

missionaries had survived, 'Our survival was entirely and exclusively Divine Providence watching over our destinies' and suggested that the powerless missionaries were 'in contact with and drew upon supernatural powers infinitely greater than those available to the invaders'.<sup>31</sup> (The missionaries sought protection from the allies as well; an elderly nun was known to pray, 'Lord, preserve us from our friends' as allied bombers flew over Vunapope.) David Selby wrote of the experience of men who escaped from the south coast.

One thing which we never treated flippantly was a conviction among everyone that we had been preserved by Divine Guidance. There was scarcely a man in the party who had not been saved several times from death by what seemed nothing short of a miracle. Often, when I found myself sinking into the depths of depression, I would remind myself of the remarkable escapes I had had ... A cynical voice would whisper that those who had already died or were now dying had probably thought the same at some time, but it was a voice to which I refused to listen.<sup>32</sup>

People became actively interested in God and divine protection while in desperate circumstances, but lost interest when the tension was eased. Rodger Brown, Methodist missionary who travelled out of West New Britain with the men on the *Lakatoi*, recalled how men expected him to 'pray them out of the situation' and asked him many questions about the nature of God and of prayer - 'God is on your side - is he on mine?' However, on arriving safely in Cairns, a few said, 'See, we didn't need you!'<sup>33</sup>

Those who attributed their survival to divine protection were aware that this begged hard questions about those who did not survive. The community of Australian Methodists who waited through the war for news of their missionary nurses and their ministers and laymen prayed with equal zeal for the women and the men. One week

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<sup>31</sup> Leo Scharmach, *This Crowd Beats Us All*, Sydney 1960 pp.261, 271

<sup>32</sup> David Selby, *Hell and High Fever*, pp142-143

<sup>33</sup> Rodger Brown, interview, Adelaide, November 1991

after they welcomed home the nurses, alive and well, they learned that the missionary men had perished. Faced with one of most profound and difficult questions of human experience, the issue of undeserved suffering and why some survive 'by a miracle' but others do not, most of the families still turned to God for consolation, rather than turning away in disillusionment.

The notion of an after-life, and the possibility of being together again, means a lot to some. Several spoke of their confidence that their loved one was alive with God and they would meet again. Others sensed the presence of spirits and the supernatural. A woman walking down a suburban street in the 1990s startled her friend by stopping abruptly; she had felt her wartime boyfriend beside her, and his hand on her shoulder. Mick Smith returned to New Britain in 1972 and stayed with a government officer at Lassul Bay. While he was in the area he revisited places where many troops were captured. He said, 'I knew most of them. I could sense their ghosts in this area in 1972'.<sup>34</sup> Ken Macgowan was another who revisited the area and in reflecting on the unanswered questions about what happened to the missing said that

the Memorial in Rabaul serves the purpose of bringing all those souls back to Rabaul where we can pay tribute to them and remember them. Perhaps they can Rest in Peace.<sup>35</sup>

For children who grew up in a household without a father, questions about the nature of God became important. One woman said

From the time I was a very small child, God was a reality to me. He never replaced having a father with me physically, but because I was denied that, I was given an extra spiritual insight, I think.<sup>36</sup>

Another commented that she

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<sup>34</sup> D.O. 'Mick' Smith, Qn No. 80

<sup>35</sup> Ken Macgowan, Qn No.96

<sup>36</sup> Qn No. 69

didn't think being without a father made the slightest bit of difference to my relationship with God until the 'God is our Mother, sometimes' movement got under way, and I really came out fighting ... here was this movement trying to destroy my Father.<sup>37</sup>

Ian Higgins described how, as a child, the loss of his father created in him 'an active interest in 'issues of mortality, God, the after-life, which resulted in my becoming a minister'.

This was much against the wishes of the family and the whole Enlightenment ethos they held which regarded religion as at best a superstition and at worst bordering on the interests of the mentally ill, which they termed religious mania.<sup>38</sup>

In the same years as this young man from an agnostic household was exploring Christianity, a young woman from a conservative Christian household was exploring other religions. During a period of extreme stress and physical illness, she decided to read and reflect more widely on religion because she did not want to 'just believe this if it's not true'. In the end she concluded that her Christian faith was a very real thing.<sup>39</sup>

The question of forgiveness and unforgiveness recurred in the comments of a number of people who responded to the questionnaire. For some it was not an issue, as they felt that it was only natural that they could not forgive their former enemies. Others are troubled when they discover in themselves feelings of unforgiveness which they thought they had dealt with long ago. One wrote, 'I know we should not have any resentment and we should forgive as we expect God to forgive us. One thinks they have, but I found the Questionnaire stirred up many deep emotions'. Another wrote of having two sets of young Japanese tenants, and how they

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<sup>37</sup> Qn No.6

<sup>38</sup> Ian Higgins, letter 1994

<sup>39</sup> Interview, Melbourne, July 1994



had avoided speaking of the war. She wrote, 'Let us forgive - but not forget the lessons of the past'.<sup>40</sup>

The question of whether to seek revenge or reconciliation was a practical issue for Kim Beazley Snr, who had lost his brother. As a Member of the House of Representatives he had put forward views in the Peace Settlement Committee which he later decided were 'misleading. I no longer believed that the Western powers had been blameless in their pre-war policies towards Japan'. In 1953 he had visited Caux in Switzerland where he was greatly influenced by the philosophy of the Moral Re-Armament movement. During this period he met an international group of people working for peace and reconciliation, including Japanese leaders, and returned to Australia determined to be part of the small group of parliamentarians and others working for change in official attitudes and actions towards Japan. Among other actions, he spoke in Parliament on the eve of the trade visit of the Japanese Prime Minister Kishi, in 1957, in an attempt to counter Australian hostility to the visit. He said of pre-war trade policies

If you deny a country the right to live, you make an act of war on it as plainly as if you declare war, because you produce within that country political trends whereby it will try to solve its problems by force.<sup>41</sup>

The war and its aftermath influenced some to withdraw from a pre-war commitment to a Christian denomination or a particular congregation. Though for some this was linked with a loss of faith, it was also sometimes a complex mix of other factors. The church community could be a safe and welcoming place, or, to a bereaved woman, it could seem excluding and lacking in understanding. A vulnerable woman

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<sup>40</sup> Letter, Sydney, November 1994; Qn No.6

<sup>41</sup> Kim Beazley Snr, speech in Parliament, quoted in biographical manuscript in preparation with John Bond, 1995, p.39. Interview with Kim Beazley Snr, Canberra, December 1995. For further material on Australians working for reconciliation through Moral Re-Armament, see Basil Entwistle, *Japan's Decisive Decade: How a determined minority changed the nation's course in the 1950s*, London 1985 pp.141-143, 171

could also be afraid of becoming emotional in public if the elements of a service of worship triggered significant memories. So she might choose to stay away. In Rabaul before the war, the Gascoigne family had been regular members of the Anglican church but in later years, after the loss of son, husband and brother, Edith Gascoigne

couldn't stand going to church. She'd get too upset. Dad was a very good tenor and used to sing in the church choir in England. Mum just couldn't stand hearing hymns sung ... It wasn't that Mum wasn't religious. We'd go into the cathedral occasionally.<sup>42</sup>

For others, there was anger or disappointment with their home church.

Some women felt that their minister had failed to care for them in a way that was helpful through the years of waiting for news. One missionary widow moved away from the institutional church for years, only returning in later life and another found her own spiritual nourishment through a different, Pentecostal branch of the wider church. On the other hand, many found that the love and support of their home congregation, as well as the opportunity to pray within a known framework of faith, was vital to their survival. As some moved away from churches, others returned. Commenting on a Rabaul woman who found her way in later years to the rich ritual of the High Anglican liturgy, her daughter said:

Mother had a spirituality too. She went back to the church... She got a lot of spiritual help there.<sup>43</sup>

Some returned servicemen, and the widows and children of the lost men, though not normally describing themselves as religious, have from time to time felt the need for a service of remembrance. On these occasions, it seems that they have been happy to invite a priest, minister or pastor to conduct such a service. They have been looking for a way to connect with the transcendent, but particular religious denomination has been immaterial. For example, Monsignor Frank Lyons has been

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<sup>42</sup> Betty Gascoigne Muller, interview, Canberra 1994

<sup>43</sup> Gillian Spensley Nikakis, interview, Melbourne 17 August 1995

invited to conduct the funerals of several of the few old soldiers who survived the Tol massacre where his own brother died; they trust him to speak to God on their behalf because he would understand them, not because they necessarily have a link with the Catholic Church.

### **Ritual and symbol**

Those who lost a family member or friend in the islands express their regret that their man was denied appropriate funeral rites. The signs of mourning, the gathering of friends and a farewell with meaning were not possible. As well as hundreds whose remains were consigned to the ocean after the sinking of their ship, some men had been forced to dig their own graves before execution, while others had lain unburied for years where they had fallen. Even men who died of disease during their attempt to escape were sometimes buried in haste by the track without ceremony. David Selby and Major Palmer, after the burial of a malaria victim on the south coast of New Britain during their escape attempt, agreed that it was a sad thing to bury a man without any religious rites. Major Palmer borrowed a prayerbook from a nearby mission and Selby

condensed a short service [from the Burial Service] for our own use. Thereafter I acted as officiating clergyman at all burials and read the service at the graveside, the men joining in with the Lord's Prayer.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps this absence of appropriate ritual to make visible the closure of a life and a relationship has been yet another reason why families often still feel that there is something incomplete about their grief. For want of the usual private and community occasions to express grief and say farewell, the more public and general occasions have become important to the families linked with the islands. Locations such as war cemeteries, the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne, the Cenotaph in Sydney and the Australian War Memorial in Canberra are seen as 'sacred places'. The

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<sup>44</sup> David Selby, *Hell and High Fever* pp140-141

deep quietness of the Silence following the Last Post at rituals of Anzac and Remembrance Days is frequently a time of tears, genuine emotion and reflection on mortality, human frailty, suffering and regret - a recurring funeral for the dead. Even in a generally secular society a most solemn moment is seen to be enhanced by a reference to the transcendent, and hymns are often sung or played with references to the unchanging love of God, hope, solace, and security in an unsafe world.

One family decided that their lack of a funeral in 1942 was contributing to the way in which their grief was still unresolved forty years later. In about 1982, at the suggestion of their therapist, the Spensley family enacted a funeral ceremony for husband and father. Funeral directors and a hearse with a coffin bearing the nameplate of George William Spensley arrived at the psychiatrist's rooms, where a celebrant conducted a funeral in a setting of flowers and candles, and in the 'primal room, a big padded room' the relatives

went down into the grieving and having to say to each other what we really needed to say ... It was a very intense affair. It was very important.<sup>45</sup>

Both the Christian symbol of the cross and the Jewish Star of David were used for the memorial 'Field of Remembrance' at Melbourne's Shrine in August 1995. (The Star of David was marked on a plain timber upright.) Hundreds of people had placed the symbols in memory of relatives and friends, including servicemen from Lark Force and civilians lost from the islands of New Guinea. Several family members commented on the importance for them of the opportunity of having, even so fleetingly, a public and visible place to mourn for a man who had no known grave. The handwritten inscriptions were very moving, in many cases linking the name of a grandfather with several generations of his descendants, a sign of inclusion and continuity in his family.

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<sup>45</sup> John Spensley, interview, Melbourne 17 August 1995

As a postscript to the theme of rites for the dead, some of the most paradoxical and unexpected passages in the records of interview at the War Crimes Trials concern rites offered by Japanese people for men they had just executed. In Rabaul, one officer who had given the command to his men to carry out an execution an hour earlier, returned to the grave site to lay on it a bouquet of wildflowers he had just gathered.<sup>46</sup> Following the terrible scenes of execution of missionary men, women and children on the *Akikaze*, the Japanese crew gathered on deck for Buddhist prayers and rites for the souls of the dead.<sup>47</sup>

### **Pilgrimages: personal and communal**

Pilgrimages to significant sites in the islands have been made through the years, not only by former servicemen but also by family members of the men who were lost. For the younger generation, it is a significant part of re-connecting with their father, acknowledging his life and honouring him in death. Some returned in young adulthood during the 1960s and 1970s to work in Papua New Guinea, taking opportunity to visit the site where parents once lived, or where father was last seen. Others have made brief visits to Rabaul while in Papua New Guinea on other business. Some have retraced their father's steps when they have themselves reached mid-life, in a number of cases travelling with their ageing mother.<sup>48</sup> Many suggest that this is something they 'need to do'. Not everyone, however, has the same urgency about returning. Of two brothers, one said that his return visit had not been a 'passionate search... I didn't have as immediate a sense of having to respond to that gap as [my brother] did'.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Japanese statements made in 1949 concerning executions in Rabaul area between 1942-1944: AA, MP 742/1: 336/1955

<sup>47</sup> *Akikaze* executions - March 1943: statement of Ishigami, Shinichi, and Oimoto, Yoshiji A518/1:FP16/2/1

<sup>48</sup> Of 37 'children' who responded to the questionnaire, 21 have visited the islands, and 12 hope to do so one day. (A number of stories were told of people whose intentions to return had been thwarted in a variety of ways, and their regret about this. These included two couples whose 1994 cruise booking to Rabaul was cancelled because of the volcanic eruption.)

<sup>49</sup> Glen McArthur, interview, Melbourne, 18 August 1995

For families who had lived in the islands before the war, a return visit has brought mixed feelings of nostalgia, disappointment and sadness. Rabaul, or the plantation of their childhood, has through the years taken on a mystique with a 'fantasy about it', as one said. A man who returned wrote that he was

Filled with nostalgia for the loss of a parent and shortened stay in a child's paradise. Wished I had returned sooner and stayed longer.<sup>50</sup>

Several mentioned their disappointment that Rabaul was not as they remembered, or as their mother described it. Lorna Hosking took her daughter Mary Symons to revisit Rabaul for the first time when Lorna was 80 and Mary was 50. Mary found the experience 'very satisfying' but noted that 'it gets larger and larger in your mind, and when you get there you realise how small it was'.<sup>51</sup>

The families of the men of Lark Force only knew Rabaul as a place of war and potential war. Bruce Pilkington's father Thomas Pilkington was killed at Praed Point, Rabaul, in the bombing on the day before the Japanese landing, 22 January 1942. The family did not know of his death until after the war. Bruce 'maintained a strong interest in Rabaul and a fascination with Praed Point, and often thought, one day I'll get there'. He visited Rabaul in October 1990, spending a week in exploration. During this time, he

met by chance a Chinese store owner, Simon Hui, who was a young boy at the time Rabaul fell and he had a keen interest in the 2/22nd's involvement there. I spent a couple of days with him. [I visited both Praed Point and the Bitu Paka War Cemetery on two occasions] and at both these places I experienced a lot of emotion.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Qn No.2

<sup>51</sup> Mary Symons, interview, 16 August 1995

<sup>52</sup> Bruce Pilkington, Qn No. 68

When making these pilgrimages to the islands, some have been saddened by the lack of an identifiable grave site. Jennifer Evans spoke of being distressed by the idea of 'a collective, anonymous death... where you just wipe the slate'. Janet Gambrill visited Rangoon a few years ago and went to the War Cemetery there. As she walked among the graves of soldiers who died at about the same time as her father, she found herself weeping.

What got me was that they all had resting places... At least their relatives can go and see a grave...It hadn't worried me till then.<sup>53</sup>

The Imperial War Graves Commission established the war cemetery at Bita Paka in New Britain as a way of solving this problem. First begun late in 1945, the cemetery has been developed into a beautiful garden setting, with the classic Cross of Sacrifice, rows of headstones and an avenue of stone pylons bearing bronze panels on which are recorded the names of 'those to whom the fortunes of war denied the known and honoured burial given to their comrades in death'. This is a feature which may be peculiar to this war cemetery. There are many more names of men without graves, and graves without names, marked simply 'Known Unto God', than there are identified graves. Few of the remains of men who died at Tol could be identified. The remains of most of those who were executed elsewhere or who were lost at sea cannot be found. Nonetheless, the names of the lost soldiers (but not the civilians) are there, engraved in bronze, and many people find it comforting to see them. One who visited Bita Paka in 1992 was Ailsa Nisbet, to remember her brother Pte Jack Groat. She found it

a wonderful experience and a feeling of nearness to my brother. The war cemetery was such a beautiful, restful place. The people were wonderful to us ... I was very pleased I had gone.<sup>54</sup>

As well as the private pilgrimages there have been a number of trips arranged by the 2/22nd Lark Force Association. A pilgrimage of special significance for

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<sup>53</sup> Jennifer Evans, interview 12 July 1994, Janet Gambrill, interview 19 October 1994

<sup>54</sup> Ailsa Nisbet Qn No. 64

a cross section of people with links with Rabaul 1942 travelled to the islands in 1992 to remember the fiftieth anniversary of the fall of Rabaul.<sup>55</sup> Among the travellers were former Lark Force men, two ex-army nurses who had been interned in Japan, Sister Berenice who had survived at Vunapope Mission and a number of children and siblings of men who were lost. For the 'children', this was a profound experience, combining as it did visits to the sites with the memories and presence of the older men and women. Gillian Nikakis was especially moved by frail old soldier Willis Crocker who

could hardly walk ... He renewed my faith in everything, that man. To see someone who, fifty years later, would go and honour his comrades - that meant so much.<sup>56</sup>

For Canon John May 'going back to Rabaul smoothed off some of the ragged edges of my war'. The visit in 1992 was the first time he had returned to the place where he had been a young military chaplain. At a memorial service held at the harbourside he read from the prayerbook he had carried in 1942 the passage from the Psalms which he had read to the men as they were being moved out of camp, never to be seen again.

They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord ... they cry unto the Lord in their trouble and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm ... Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.<sup>57</sup>

John May was very touched to have the opportunity to read 'They shall grow not old, as we who are left grow old ... We will remember them' at Bitu Paka. A visit to the resurrected Catholic Mission at Vunapope, and the overgrown wartime tunnels of

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<sup>55</sup> Video film of this pilgrimage, including detail of memorial occasions at the memorial stone by the harbour, Bitu Paka, interviews with ex-service people and the welcoming brass band (which included two elderly New Guinean bandsmen who remembered the musicians of the wartime band) was made by Ken Macgowan of Vanuatu.

<sup>56</sup> Gillian Spensley Nikakis, interview, 17 August 1995

<sup>57</sup> Psalm 107 verses 23-31



refuge, was very significant for Sister Berenice. A special moment for Frank Lyons was the farewell to the pilgrims by the schoolgirls at Vunapope Mission.

They sang a little hymn, "May the peace of the Lord go with you." It was beautiful. To see all these old diggers with the tears running down ...<sup>58</sup>

Since the volcanic eruptions of 1994, it has been more difficult for people to return to Rabaul. Muriel Lerner, who lives in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea intends 'to return and visit all the little street corners and places where my heart lies and say a final farewell'.<sup>59</sup> Despite the difficulties, on 7 July 1995, some men from the 2/22nd travelling with the 'Australia Remembers' Pilgrimage around the major war sites of Papua New Guinea returned to honour their dead at Bita Paka War Cemetery, New Britain. The words of the prophet Isaiah were read, a call for the day when 'they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks ... neither shall they learn war any more'.<sup>60</sup>

### **Treasures in wooden boxes**

When women spoke of the loss of their home at the time of evacuation they meant far more than the loss of accommodation. Most significantly, it meant the severing of the life that was lived in that home, with the interaction of husband and wife, parents and children, relatives, neighbours and guests. It also meant the loss of objects with meaning to the women, the things that defined them and expressed their relationship with others. Many women arrived in Australia with a single suitcase and lost everything else. Some of the Rabaul women were fortunate in that their household goods had already been packed and despatched en route to the intended new government headquarters in Lae and at least some of their boxes reached Australia; in this way

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<sup>58</sup> Frank Lyons, interview, 12 October 1994

<sup>59</sup> Muriel Macgowan Lerner, letter, 25 September 1994

<sup>60</sup> Isaiah chapter 2, verses 1-5. From folio of prayers, scripture selections and hymns suggested by chaplains for the sequence of 'Australia Remembers' memorial services at war cemeteries around Papua New Guinea and South-east Asia during June and July 1995.

Helen Wayne received her sewing machine and some heirlooms and Lorna Hosking had her crystal glassware among other things packed in wooden chests made by Herbert. Betty Gascoigne had just celebrated her 21st birthday in Rabaul, and was able to take her gifts with her. Women chose to take in their suitcase the family photo album, prized certificates or papers, collections and sketches and a few personal things. Their husbands, in a number of cases, packed boxes of wedding gifts, linen and treasured items from their 'glory box' and sent these things by the few ships which visited the island ports early in January 1942. Some of the items reached their owners after considerable adventures, reappearing from hiding places after the war. Two missionary wives, Essie Linggood and Kath Brown, both received back wedding gifts which they had thought were lost forever; village Christians and church leaders had hidden their boxes of household goods through the war years, often at risk to themselves, and produced them in 1946.<sup>61</sup>

Nonetheless, many of the women were forced to leave behind most of the objects which framed their world. Things made with their own skill, gifts from parents and other family members, heirlooms passed through the generations of their family, significant family papers, a new bride's violin, things bought to mark the birth of a child or other rites of passage, photographs; these were objects which, even if they had the financial resources, were irreplaceable. Later, a number of women, when describing their personal losses during the war in the Pacific, tended to speak more easily of the loss of their meaningful personal objects than of the unspeakable loss of their husband and many friends. Today in households across Australia there are many small collections of precious papers, photographs, medals and other memorabilia, often kept

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<sup>61</sup> Interviews with the families of Ashby, Davies, Shelton, Brown, Higgins, Oakes, Poole, Wayne, Simpson, Gascoigne, Linggood. In some cases, the retrieval of such objects had a hint of the absurd; Mrs Pratt's husband Vic had almost certainly been executed in August 1942, but she was sent, post-war, not only a recovered dispatch box with Vic's 1942 diary but also items found lying in the bush near their plantation which included a silver cakestand, an inkwell and two silver toast racks. See AWM127:13

in camphorwood chests and small handmade timber boxes. These are the visible memories of the lost men, treasured and preserved. The younger generation values these things as did their mothers.

The artefacts, photographs and letters serve several purposes. They are used as part of family rituals of remembering. In the Lyons home, the watch discovered on the bones of son Vincent was always brought out with tears on 4 February, the anniversary of his death, by the grieving mother. They maintain a continuity with the lost father or husband as families move through the years. Table linen rescued from the islands has been spread on the bridal tables of the next two generations. Portraits, landscapes and photograph albums are displayed with pride. They form a basis for storytelling to younger family members and are a valuable archive.<sup>62</sup>

Many families have kept collections of papers relating to the man they have lost. In almost every case this includes the telegram which announced the fate of their man. It includes his last letters, as well as programmes and Orders of Service for Memorials, newspaper cuttings and medals. A number of the widows also kept their own letters which they had written in hope to their husbands, but received back. These were their last attempts to communicate with the man they loved. Those brief letters, often with limited words, also formed a personal map of the years which had passed, and would have been kept as diary material. These very personal documents are cherished by their children as a window into the experience of the mother.

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<sup>62</sup> One of the many examples of well-labelled albums of people linked with troops of the 2/22nd in Rabaul is that held by Doreen Beadle; among photographs identified are shots of Mr and Mrs Wal Hill and daughters, Joe Brennan, Neil Callaghan, Lt Allen, Cpl Don Cowley, Jim Walker, Bob Clark, Allan Cusack, Eric Newton, Tom Baker, Sgt Fred Nickle. Another collection belongs to the Pascoe family and includes photographs of soldiers, various plantations including Lassul, Anzac Hall with the Salvation Army band instruments set up, tent with stretcher under mosquito net, and Frank Pascoe out sailing with friends from the plantations. Matupi erupting was a favourite motif for everyone's album.

## Being a survivor

Gwen Ives, who returned to Rabaul after the war and heard the stories first-hand, said

The biggest crime the survivors in Rabaul committed was surviving. I heard that one committed suicide - couldn't stand the pressure. All the accusations ...

Muriel Macgowan Lerner was very aware of the loss of the civilian population because 'my best friends had lost their fathers'. Her own father had survived and so she

wondered and was hurt when stories appeared that those who survived had run away. It was to be many years later that I knew this was not the case.

Soldiers were angry to see themselves described as men who 'gave up after little fighting' and compared unfavourably with the 'superior' courage and resistance of the Japanese.<sup>63</sup> Missionaries felt grief at being accused of abandoning their charge. Other civilians were subjected to innuendo and always felt that they had to explain themselves or be seen forever as cowards who fled. If the men who perished were heroes and martyrs, they asked themselves, what did that make those who escaped? The burden of such questions weighed heavily on many men, who carried an unreasonable guilt into the years that followed.

A few of the men of Lark Force had the misfortune to be cast in the role of deserters, before the full implications of the calamity of Rabaul was clear to the Australian military. Signaller Stan Whitty, with a party of other Fortress Signals men, was part of the confusion of the departure from Rabaul as the Japanese invaded. They survived because they had useful knowledge of the area, and what had seemed to be a stroke of luck when they 'stumbled across the RAAF pickup' on the south coast, and were taken off New Britain with the RAAF men. However, when they finally reached Port Moresby, the Fortress Signals men were

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<sup>63</sup> John Robertson, *Australia at War, 1939-1945*, Sydney 1985 p.216

met by armed guards, herded into the back of a three-tonner, go to some barracks area, refused a medical, court-martialled, called 'cowards, traitors, deserters' - to be retained in New Guinea but separated into different units - 'rotten apples' job.<sup>64</sup>

This experience, which was not the fate of later escapers, was to be very painful for the men so labelled, and not forgotten over the years. In 1974 Stan Whitty made enquiries of the Australian War Memorial concerning the 1942 accusations against himself, and this began many years of intense interest in the events of that period with the implications for soldiers and families.

Even for men who were never accused of desertion, there has remained a slight difficulty with some aspects of the celebration of the mythically heroic soldier by the wider community. In their case, the battle was so very brief and their chief opportunities for heroism were during what was undeniably a shambles of a retreat. The Rabaul officers who spent the war imprisoned in Japan were to learn that their prison at Zentsuji had been, compared to the experience of so many other Australians under Japanese rule, surprisingly benign. Because their real experience had not been like the public perception of what might have happened, some hesitated to discuss it a great deal. The experiences of mixed race men who remained in the islands were also misunderstood and viewed with suspicion by returning Australians. Although Australia had granted these men neither citizenship nor other privileges, and they owed Australia no loyalty, it was said of them that 'if you survived, you had to be a traitor'; after the stresses of their war, this was an added insult.

Several survivors described encounters with the families of the men who had not come home. For reasons ranging from physical inability to attempt the difficult trek across the island (a number of the men were older and lacked fitness and stamina) to unwillingness to leave their plantations or missions, men had been left

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<sup>64</sup> Stan Whitty, letter, 20 October 1994

behind. With or without justification, their wives felt that somehow the survivors should have brought their men home. Norman Fisher recalled his arrival in Brisbane where

a couple of women attacked me. 'Why didn't you bring my husband out?' An impossible question...<sup>65</sup>

Men who had lost close friends felt an indebtedness and obligation to their mates. Journalist Osmar White, who narrowly escaped with his life in 1943, wrote

Why those four men [with me] should have died and I live and walk, I do not know. But I know this. The living have the cause of the dead in trust.<sup>66</sup>

Ian Downs, who was to rise to senior positions in the Administration of Papua New Guinea after the war,

lost seven close friends [including Murray Edwards and Leigh Vial] and a score of good companions ... When my own career began to prosper with rapid promotion this was due to the opportunities that came my way because so many of my friends had lost their lives.<sup>67</sup>

The survivors of war in the islands have responded to their experience in many ways. Some civilians wanted to return to New Britain to attempt to rescue their friends.<sup>68</sup> A range of rescue schemes were proposed during the war. Those who attempted rescues, or recovery of remains, faced grave dangers and in some cases men died, were captured or barely escaped as a result of their efforts. Others have felt a responsibility to continue to remember and provide memorials for their mates. Bill Harry is an example of those who have taken up the care of the survivors and the families of the dead as a responsibility to fulfil on behalf of those who perished.

Other survivors who pursued the search for the truth about the lost men turned it into something verging on a crusade, seeking information over many years.

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<sup>65</sup> Norman Fisher, interview, 19 October 1994

<sup>66</sup> Osmar White, *Green Armour*, Melbourne, 1972 p.287

<sup>67</sup> Ian Downs, *The Last Mountain*, Brisbane, 1986, p.129

<sup>68</sup> A518/1 CK 16/2/1 F.J.MacKenzie, Commonwealth Bank Manager stated that 'even to contact the civilians would make one feel he had done some good ... I was never so serious about a scheme as I am about this'.

Gordon Thomas, civilian survivor, was frequently asked for information by bereaved families and did his best to help, writing to one enquirer, 'It is the least I can do in return for having been saved from the same fate as those who were lost'.<sup>69</sup> For the missionaries, survival has brought a strong sense of obligation. Mission staff were criticised for staying when to stay was putting others in danger, and criticised for leaving; in both cases church leaders had to attempt to offer justification for their directives to their people, and the actions of their staff.<sup>70</sup> Those who escaped felt obliged to continue to explain their actions, aware of spoken or unspoken criticism.<sup>71</sup> Others felt under obligation to work harder, longer and with unquestioning obedience. Of one it was said that he was 'still haunted by those events of 1942' despite intense effort in the years since and that 'he felt whatever the Mission Board asked him to do, he had to do it'.

Many survivors have found, through the years, that although they have never forgotten what happened they tend to keep it to themselves, speaking to mates who would understand or to carefully chosen others. Yet another sad result of the years of war has been that the families of those who survived have felt an awkwardness with the families of those who lost someone, and relationships which were cordial while they lived in the islands gradually drifted apart. Isabel Platten, whose missionary husband Gil was one of only two Methodist ministers to survive,

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<sup>69</sup> Gordon Thomas, letter to Jean Brawn, 24 February 1965

<sup>70</sup> David Marsh, interview, Sydney 21 February 1995. Marsh, a patrol officer in 1942, recalled the experience in Papua where, in the Anglican Mission, 'Bishop Strong, on the public radio schedule, in reply to a query from May Hayman and Mavis Parkinson at Gona, said 'Let your conscience dictate'. They stayed and were killed - I found their graves in the advance. The thing was that they could not perform their duties: they were a burden on the national people; they endangered the lives of the people but they thought they were doing their duty'. See David Wetherell, ed. *The New Guinea Diaries of Philip Strong, 1981*

<sup>71</sup> Gil Platten, 'For Peace and Loveliness Repining' *Missionary Review*, 5 April 1942; Rodger Brown, 'A Statement to the Board: Why did I leave?' *Missionary Review*, 5 May 1942, John W. Burton, General Secretary of Methodist Overseas Missions, in defence of missionaries who left Papuan islands, and the 'unfounded and unthinkable cruel criticism' leveled against them. *The Missionary Review*, 5 March 1943

described in later years 'how she felt guilty in some ways (she knew unnecessarily)' that her husband was alive. This awkwardness was compounded for those women who had been able to salvage more of their possessions than their friends and so 'it was difficult to talk to other less fortunate women'.<sup>72</sup>

### **Telling the story**

In 1995, a number of families took the opportunity to revisit the experience of their family during the war. The events and rituals of the 'Australia Remembers' period provided an appropriate time and setting for speaking with family and others about things which had remained unspoken for fifty years. For one woman, it was important to have her parish minister listen to her story privately during the week before 15 August 1995. A number of people who were interviewed for this study commented that it had been a rare chance to reflect on their family experience, and though they would not choose to do it often, it had been a useful and meaningful conversation. As one woman put it,

This is the first time we've really discussed it in depth. It's like the ripples of a stone thrown into a lake - sad ripples. But the ripples get further apart and they fade.<sup>73</sup>

Among the family members, a number have taken a serious interest in researching and writing the story of their father's life and death. In some cases, this has been a significant project for many years, while for others it is a recent activity. It has been found to be a powerful way of reconnecting with the father lost in their early childhood. Sources of family information are becoming available as the mothers are reaching the end of their lives and private papers are becoming accessible. For some of the children, these old letters, diaries and other material have proved something of a

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<sup>72</sup> Chilla Bulbeck, Qn No. 10. Chilla Bulbeck interviewed Australian women who had been former residents of Papua New Guinea, including her grandmother Isabel Platten, for her book *Australian Women in Papua New Guinea: Colonial Passages 1920-1960*, Cambridge 1992

<sup>73</sup> Interview, Adelaide, January 1995



revelation, showing an intimate side of their parents' lives as well as bringing to life the communities of pre-war Rabaul, or wartime women waiting for news.

The telling of the story has taken many forms. Several people mentioned book manuscripts in planning or progress while others have prepared shorter essays for private distribution among family members. Bruce Pilkington, a graphic artist, has a photographic record of his visit to Rabaul. Songwriter Peter Garrett has written and recorded a lament which begins

My grandfather went down with the Montevideo  
The rising sun sent him floating to his rest  
And his wife fled south to Sydney seeking out safe harbour...<sup>74</sup>

A grandson of Dr Herbert Hosking is planning to write a biography of his grandfather, and a granddaughter of Fred Kollmorgen wrote an illustrated essay on her grandfather's epic escape as part of her Year 12 studies. Several people, including Lynne Crocker Bowman, Janet Gambrell, Margaret Henderson and Ken Macgowan, described typing out handwritten diary and letter material from their father's old documents.

One of the earliest to begin the process of research and storytelling was Anne McCosker, daughter of a pre-war plantation family. The stories of the loss of the men of the Rabaul community 'echoed throughout my childhood and ever since' and as a young child she heard her father's account, told with pain and passion, of his escape from Rabaul and the family plantation at 'Matala', to return to New Britain after the war. During the 1970s she collected written and oral evidence on the loss of the Australians from the islands of her birth and completed *Masked Eden* by 1979, expressing the strong conviction that the men had *not* been on the *Montevideo Maru*.

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<sup>74</sup> Peter Garrett, Hirst, Moginie, song title 'In the Valley', *Midnight Oil, Earth and sun and moon*, Columbia, CD 1993. Peter Garrett's relatives were Tom and Nora Garrett, plantation owners of Rabaul area.

The quest to have her research and writing on this theme recognised has been pursued with energy, both in Australia and the United Kingdom, for at least fifteen years. As she believes that there is something of a 'sick fairy tale' about the perpetuation of the story of the ship, she was very disturbed by the wording of a plaque unveiled in 1995 in Anzac Square, Brisbane which stated that the men of the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles were among those whose final resting place was the hull of the *Montevideo Maru*.<sup>75</sup>

Ken Macgowan began his research into the story of his father's escape, and the wider story of the loss of the men of Rabaul, in the mid-1970s, collecting newspaper cuttings, photographs and diary material. In 1994 he explained that he hoped

to make Australians more aware of the facts. It is the least I can do in memory of those who remain beneath the soil of PNG ... It seems to have become a life-long project.<sup>76</sup>

Another man with a similar research project is John Holland, son of Frank Holland who assisted many to escape from New Britain. As a three year old, John told his mother Mabel that, in a dream, 'I saw my Daddy, my Daddy is on a big ship and my Daddy is coming home'. Frank Holland returned safely soon after with the men on the *Lakatoi*.<sup>77</sup> Despite reaching what seemed a dead-end in her search for information about her father in 1964, Janice Beaumont Steinfurth did not forget her quest. Thirty years later, in 1994, she appealed for information through a newspaper advertisement and this led to several helpful contacts; Janice has written a chapter on her father in a private family history.<sup>78</sup> The two sons of Henry Mitchell, a soldier who escaped, had

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<sup>75</sup> Anne McCosker, letter 14 March 1995, letter 25 September, with enclosed copy of letter to Robert Manne, *Quadrant*, August 1995

<sup>76</sup> Ken Macgowan, letter 24 October 1994

<sup>77</sup> Mabel Holland, letter, 19 September 1994

<sup>78</sup> Janice Steinfurth, private family history document, 'The Beaumonts and the Cousins', 1994

heard almost nothing of their father's war years, though they knew he had won a Military Medal. Ian Mitchell, who worked with his father for 12 years, said

he told me nothing ... I would try to sidle up to the subject of Rabaul but he would always sidetrack with a funny story. I always thought nothing much had happened.

In 1989, after the death of his father, the older son Robert Mitchell walked into the Public Records Office one day, thinking he might find 'half a page on the fall of Rabaul'. This led to a wide search of archives with a focus on his father's wartime experience; the research was completed in 1995 for the benefit of younger family members.<sup>79</sup> Jenny Evans, daughter of soldier Jack Render, has prepared a detailed manuscript on his pre-war life in Frankston and war experience, illustrating it from public and private archives, contemporary press reports and letters.<sup>80</sup> Margaret Henderson first read some old letters and papers of her father Tom Simpson on Christmas Day 1993, after the death of her mother Nellie. These writings, as well as letters from her mother, provided new insights into the father she had never known. Margaret began her own research through the Australian War Memorial, Canberra in August 1994 and during 1995 prepared his biography for her family, completing it on VP Day, 15 August 1995; she found the work 'a busy and emotional time'.<sup>81</sup>

Whether it has found expression in religious understanding, in the creative arts, in work or in the offering of memorial symbols, those who lost someone in the islands during the war have discovered ways to demonstrate what their loss has meant to them.

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<sup>79</sup> Robert and Ian Mitchell, phone conversations during 1994-1995

<sup>80</sup> Jennifer Evans, 'Choco Jack: a Frankston Man', privately published 1995

<sup>81</sup> Margaret Henderson, 'A Life Sketch of Thomas Nevison Simpson', August 1995

## CONCLUSION

The loss of life of Australians in the islands of New Guinea during the years of war, in what ever ways that took place, affected relatives for the rest of their lives. The impact of those losses, and the perception of the relatives as to what had really happened and what it meant for them, has continued for fifty years. The loss of the men, and the ways in which that loss occurred, have affected not only parents, siblings and spouses of the dead but also their children.

For the groups of Australians associated with the islands of New Guinea during the war years - administration staff, missionaries, people in private enterprise and the families of the men of Lark Force - some experiences were common to all. They all experienced the long strain of waiting for news of the missing men for three and a half years. They all remember the unanswered letters, the searches for clues, the rumours. All of them knew the pain and loneliness of those years, their hopes, fear and despair which culminated in the shock and grief of learning, at last, that their men had probably been dead for years. They were all to feel the anxiety and continuing heartache which related to the mystery, rumours and myths which grew around the deaths of the missing men. Anxiety over whether or not to remarry, and sadness over the children they would not bear to their first husband, were common to many of them.

Irrespective of whether the lost relative was a government officer, missionary, plantation manager or soldier, some aspects of that loss have continued to affect practical issues, health and relationships for over fifty years. It has also continued to shape understanding of the meaning of things. Their view of the world in which they live has been modified in the light of this experience. The world, they have learned, can be an unsafe, insecure place where one can never be quite confident that things will

turn out for the best. It is a world where those significant to their families have been lost, and so they can never be sure that others who are important to them will not also leave without warning. It is a place where they don't trust those in authority; they expect to be let down. They are not convinced that they will be told the truth about things which matter.

The children of the lost men have all grown to adulthood and middle age in a post-war world in which their natural father was not a part of ordinary family life but a sometimes idealised and legendary figure. Many of them share a desire to rediscover this man, and to recognise and honour his life in some way. Mothers and children have reported physical and emotional health problems through the years which they relate to the trauma of their loss. On the other hand, many of the children who participated in the study are now successful people in their fields, independent, educated, creative, hardworking and with a highly developed sense of responsibility. They attribute some of these abilities to the strong contribution of their mothers during their childhood, and the efforts of others in their communities to attempt to compensate for their loss.

Yet despite the many things they have in common, there are significant ways in which the experience of the civilians differs from that of the military families. The losses of the civilians were multiplied, with the result that the effects on their post-war lives were also more extreme. Of those who participated in this study, a greater number of relatives of civilians took part than of soldiers, which may suggest that they felt a greater need to be represented.

The civilian families lost not only husband, son, brother and father. They also lost forever their homes, their community in the islands, their livelihood and many of their personal possessions. They lost their role, at least temporarily, their normal work and in many cases, their sense of personal identity. The drama of the evacuation threw many civilian households into chaos, leaving them as impoverished refugees, reliant

on the generosity of families, friends and institutions. They had not been prepared for the death in war of civilian husbands, who had been last seen as men carrying on normal work in offices, shops, plantations and missions; soldiers' wives knew that this was always a possibility. In the confusion of evacuation and invasion, legal documents were lost, leaving civilian households with years of inconvenience and disadvantage. For the families of soldiers, systems were already in place to identify their men, to keep in touch with their next-of-kin, to pay their wages and offer support through women's groups associated with the men's units. For the families of civilians, External Territories was organised for normal processes during peace but had to redesign appropriate ways to deal with an unexpected diaspora now spread across Australia. Even to build accurate lists of civilians, evacuated or missing, was a challenge. The infrastructure to deal with salaries, pensions and other financial support had to be developed. New support groups had to be created to provide for the well-being of civilian families, and for those who had moved to country districts, such groups were not accessible.

When the news came that the men were lost, the families of soldiers were informed of specific names before the families of civilians, because the military already had echelon rolls to use as a basis for checking lists. Civilian lists had to be compiled, sometimes with difficulty, from many sources. The Lark Force Association, due in large part to the many years of commitment to the task by men like Bill Harry, has maintained a very high level of contact with the families of the survivors of their battalion, higher than most other such groups. This has offered the families of the soldiers who escaped, and as many families as they can contact of those who were lost, continuing support, information and a sense of community. Civilians who had been employed by government, church or a large commercial company were often offered some continuing support, and had some longterm friendships among former fellow staff members. These networks also provided families with information and included them in memorial events.

However, some civilian families, particularly those whose men were on rural properties or in small businesses, were outside other formal groupings such as employees of government, church or company, and as a result were even more disadvantaged. They had no organisation to take a personal interest in their needs, they did not meet the criteria for continuing payment of part-wages, they had to fend for themselves and in a number of cases they did not become involved in support groups set up for women from the islands. They lost not only a job, but also their investment in a business, and post-war compensation payments did not always match the value of what had been lost. Their men included, in a number of cases, those who lived in more remote rural areas, and were not captured immediately. As a result, they did not appear on the *Montevideo Maru* list and the circumstances of their death are still obscure. Their widows were those who declared that they 'heard nothing at all', even years later. As independent individuals, these households did not appear on lists of such groups as Lark Force Association or Retired Officers Association of Papua New Guinea, so were not always aware of reunions, memorial occasions, publications or pilgrimages, becoming the most isolated of all the islands families.

In the years since the war, the families of soldiers have been part of Anzac Day and Remembrance Day occasions, have shared in providing a memorial in Rabaul and conducted their own reunions and anniversaries. The names of their men are recorded at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra and at Bita Paka War Cemetery, New Britain. The civilians, however, have no identified part in Anzac Day marches, nor are their names listed at those places of memorial. Civilians from some large organisations have been memorialised by the people of those communities, such as church denominations. Civilians whose man was plantation manager, timber worker, auctioneer or plumber are named nowhere, except in the hearts of their families and

friends. It is not surprising that the responses from civilian families included so many accounts of extreme and longterm stress and trauma, resulting in breakdowns of health.

Although the grief and pain have been felt by all, the responses to the survey, as well as interviews, suggest that the civilian families have been even more profoundly damaged and disadvantaged than the families of the men of Lark Force. Even so, there is a great understanding and mutual concern among both communities whenever they have an opportunity to meet.

When thirty six relatives and friends of the missing Australian soldiers and civilians of the islands gathered in Brighton, Melbourne on 18 August 1995, they were representatives of a community which had existed for a brief period of some fifteen months in 1941-42. Civilians and soldiers had lived, worked, played sport, attended social functions, fought and finally died together. Their relatives, even those who had once been close friends, had in most cases been scattered across Australia and for over fifty years most had been invisible to each other. Now some of those relatives met, many of them strangers to each other, widows, siblings and children of civilians and soldiers as well as three of the surviving soldiers. Old photos were passed around, faded news cuttings shared, memories revived. Even though there had been so little contact through the years for most of them, people met that evening who had travelled south on the Macdhui together at Christmastime 1941. Two women met whose men had died side by side at Praed Point, another two had both been present at the meeting of women in 1945 when Major Mollison read out the list which included their husbands' names and yet others recognised family names which had been part of their own family legends of the past. They had all lost someone, and had all shared those long years of waiting for news. As they talked, the lost men were present in memory, recognised and honoured. Their own long years of living since then were also



recognised. Before they parted, a candle encircled by white camelias laid on silk was lit. Archival lists of names of those who had died were spread around it, the names known and unknown. One by one, people spoke the name of their man who had died. A prayer was said. The need to know that their men are not forgotten, and that the circumstances of their passing are recognised among their fellow-Australians, will not be lost. But in that setting, among others who understood, there was a sense of community among those who will continue to recognise and remember.

## APPENDIX

### NOTES ON USE OF QUESTIONNAIRE

A questionnaire was distributed to as many people who had links with Rabaul 1942 as could be contacted. Names and addresses were gathered through the networks of the 2/22nd Bn Lark Force Association, the Retired Officers Association of Papua New Guinea, Methodist/Uniting Church in Australia, and individual contacts.

Of 168 questionnaires which were sent out, 121 were returned. This is an unusually high response rate and is an indication of the interest in this subject still felt by family members. Responses came from 31 former servicemen and army nurses, seven widows of men of 2/22nd Bn, fourteen children of servicemen lost with the *Montevideo Maru*, eleven siblings of servicemen, 32 children of island civilians, 4 widows of civilians, 21 other relatives (most of them siblings) and contemporaries of the lost men. (As 56 of the lost civilian men were single, and only 73 of the others had children, according to archival evidence [see AA, A518/ GR16/2/1] the response from 32 of their children tells its own story.) The questionnaire was designed so that people with a different experience could select an appropriate path through the questions. The former soldiers, for example, could not comment on the experience of widows or children. Therefore, almost no question has been answered by all respondents.

Although there have been limits to the usefulness of the questionnaire as a source of statistical data, its great value has been in the contacts it has made possible, and the responses it has provoked. Comments on open-ended questions, marginal notes, letters, interviews and phone calls have come from it. The wealth of material has been so great that only representative quotations could be used, but every response has added its own weight to the evidence.

**QUESTIONNAIRE  
RABAUL 1942: IMPACT ON SURVIVING FAMILIES**

As part of the research for a Master of Arts thesis, this questionnaire asks:

**What has been the impact on the surviving families of so many unanswered questions surrounding the loss in World War 2 of Australian troops and civilians in the New Guinea islands?**

You are invited to respond from your perspective as a family member or a friend of those who disappeared.

No single person will answer all the following questions; just follow the trail for the questions relevant to you.

Please return the completed questionnaire to:

Margaret Reeson  
5 Whitham Place  
Pearce. ACT 2607  
Phone: (06)286 4139 by 29 October 1994.

Please circle the number of each item closest to your own response, or fill in spaces provided. You may circle more than one answer.

Example: In 1941 I was:

- a. a schoolchild in Australia
- b. an adult civilian living in New Guinea
- c. a serviceman stationed in Rabaul
- d. other

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YOUR NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

NAME of relative/friend in New Guinea in 1941-42 .....

**Q1. Please indicate your link with the events in the New Guinea islands in 1941-42.**

- a. I was a civilian resident in the islands in 1941-42 [GO TO Q2]
- b. I was a child, living in islands with parents in 1941 [GO TO Q2]
- c. I served with military forces in islands in 1941-42 [GO TO Q11]
- d. My husband was a serviceman in the islands [GO TO Q13]
- e. My father was with the forces in 1941-42 [GO TO Q13]
- f. I did not live in islands, but had friends/relatives there [GO To Q13]
- g. Other (Specify) ..... [GO To Q13]

**IF YOU WERE A CIVILIAN RESIDENT IN THE ISLANDS:**

- Q2. Year of Birth: .....
- Q3. Place of Origin in Australia .....
- Q4. Religion (in 1942) .....
- Q5. Occupation in New Guinea .....
- Q6. When did you first go to New Guinea? .....
- Q7. Where were you living in 1941?.....
- Q8. In 1942, were you a. married b. single c. divorced
- Q9. If married,  
Name of spouse: .....  
Year of birth of spouse: .....  
Year of marriage: .....  
Occupation of spouse: .....  
Number and ages of children in Jan 1942.....
- Q10. If married, did spouse survive the war? a. Yes b. No [GO TO Q18]

**IF YOU WERE WITH MILITARY FORCES IN THE ISLANDS**

- Q11. Which unit did you serve with? .....
- Q12. Where were you based?      a. Rabaul                      b. Kavieng                      c. other [GO To Q18]

**IF YOU HAD A RELATIVE/FRIEND IN THE ISLANDS IN 1941-42:**

- Q13. Name of relative/friend: .....
- Q14. Your relationship:              a.spouse              b.child              c.sibling              d.friend
- Q15. Relative's year of birth: .....
- Q16. His/her occupation in the islands: .....
- Q17. Did he/she survive the war in New Guinea?              a.Yes              b.No [GO To Q18]

**NEW GUINEA ISLANDS 1941-1942: EVACUATION AND ESCAPE**

- Q18. When the Japanese invaded Rabaul -  
a. I had already been evacuated/left voluntarily [GO TO Q19]  
b. I escaped and returned to Australia [GO TO Q26]  
c. I was captured and in captivity till end of war [GO TO Q31]  
d. I was in Australia, living at .....[GO TO Q36]

**[For those who were evacuated]**

Q19. When did you leave New Guinea islands? .....

Q20. How did you travel back to Australia?

- a. with the Macdhui
- b. with the Neptuna
- c. with the Katoomba
- d. by plane
- e. by coastal shipping

Q21. Where, in Australia, did you go? .....

Q22. In the first months of separation, did you have difficulties with any of the following?

- a. accommodation
- b. employment
- c. access to finance
- d. lack of practical and emotional support
- e. lack of information about the men in Rabaul

Q23. Did your family receive any letters from New Guinea early in 1942? a. Yes b.No c.Don't know

Q24. Some letters from Rabaul prisoners were dropped over Port Moresby in April 1942. Did your family receive one of these? a. YES b.NO c. Don't know

Q25. Did any men (military and civilian) who escaped from the islands make contact with your family with news? a. YES b.NO [GO TO Q36]

**[For those who survived the invasion during 1942]**

Q26. During January 1942, were you in

- a. Rabaul
- b. Kavieng
- c. elsewhere .....

Q27. Did you leave Rabaul/Kavieng

- a. before 22 January 1942
- b. on 22 January when Japanese fleet was nearing
- c. on 23 January, after invasion
- d. on 5 July with the Naruto Maru for Japan

Q28. When did you have your last contact with the men who did not survive? .....

Q29. How did you make your way back to Australia?

- a. by south coast on New Britain and Laurabada
- b. by north coast on New Britain and Lakatoi
- c. by coastal shipping (specify).....
- d. post-war, from Japan
- e. other .....

Q30. If you escaped, when did you finally reach home? .....

[GO TO Q36]

**[For those who were captured]**

Q.31. When were you captured? .....

Q32. Where were you at time of capture? .....

Q33. Where were you imprisoned? .....

Q34. When were you released? .....

Q35. Did you receive letters during imprisonment? If yes, how many and from whom?

.....  
.....[GO TO Q36]

**WAITING FOR NEWS: 1942-45**

Q36. During the time of waiting for news, did your family hear any of the following?

- a. rumours of sightings of prisoners
- b. rumours of relocation of prisoners
- c. stories of atrocities to Rabaul men
- d. information through listening to Radio Tokyo
- e. news from Australian officers in prison camp in Zentsugi, Japan
- f. no news at all

Q37. Did you/your family attempt to get news of the missing men by any of the following methods?

- a. writing letters to the Army
- b. continuing to write letters to him, via Red Cross
- c. joining a branch of New Guinea Women's Association
- d. maintaining links with other ex-N.G. people
- e. appealing to Member of Parliament for help

Q38. During the war years, did you/your family find the lack of information

- a. deeply disturbing
- b. understandable in the circumstances
- c. an experience common to many Australians then
- d. made them angry with Australian government
- e. made them more bitter towards the enemy

Q39. Did any difficulties arise because of uncertainty about missing man's official status? For example:

- a. men in militia did not have same entitlements as those serving "overseas", even though POW
- b. possibility that some civilians had enlisted in Rabaul
- c. who were members of New Guinea Volunteer Rifles?
- d. other? .....

Q40. What were the most helpful sources of personal support during the time of waiting for news?

- a. family members
- b. work colleagues
- c. New Guinea Women's Club, and N.G. network
- d. church community
- e. personal friends
- f. other.....

Q41. What effect did the years of waiting have on health of the family, particularly the spouse or parent?

- a. generally good health
- b. periodic illhealth
- c. suffered major health problem. What year?.....
- d. generally coped well under stress
- e. coped with difficulty under stress

**WAR'S END**

Q42. How did family first hear information about missing person?

- a. message from POW camp in Japan or Rabaul [IF YES, GO to Q43]
- b. newspaper or radio with general news of loss [Go to Q45]
- c. statement in parliament [Go to Q45]
- d. official telegram [[GO To Q45]]
- e. other .....[Go to Q45]

**[For those who survived captivity]**

Q43. On your return from POW camp, did you

- a. have information about the missing to pass on to authorities?
- b. make contact with bereaved families of men you had known?
- c. have bereaved families approach you for information?
- d. try to discover what had happened to the missing men? (If so, for how long did you search for information? .....

Q44. Can you comment on what the loss of the men of Rabaul/Kavieng has meant for those who have survived? .....

[Go to Q66, unless you would like to answer any of the other following questions from your knowledge of families who lost someone.]

**[For those whose men did not come back]**

Q45. To the best of your knowledge, what was the cause of death?

- a. illness
- b. Tol massacre
- c. sinking of prison ship Montevideo Maru
- d. privation during escape attempt
- e. execution Where? .....
- f. other .....
- g. unknown or unsure

Q46. Date of death (if known) .....

Q47. Do you agree with the official information about the circumstances of death?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Uncertain

Q48. Did you/your family have any hope, after 1945, that the missing man might have survived somewhere and could return?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Uncertain

Q49. Was your family ever given alternative information about the fate of the missing man?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Uncertain

**[IF NO, GO to Q54]**

**IF YES:**

Q50. How long after the official news did the alternative stories emerge?

- a. around the same time - 1945
- b. before 1950
- c. much later Year?.....

Q51. What other information was your family given?

Q52. By whom? How did they get their information?

Q53. Do you tend to believe the alternative story?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Undecided

Q54. In what ways did the widow begin again?

- a. return to NG
- b. relocation in Australia
- c. re-marriage
- d. continuing or changing employment
- e. remaining in same situation

Q55. Because of the mystery surrounding the end of so many men, did their families have any problems establishing their credentials? For example:

- a. receiving widow's pension
- b. collecting insurance money
- c. legal matters about estate and legacies
- d. being recognised as a war widow
- e. freedom to remarry
- f. other .....

Q56. Did your family benefit from any of the help available in the postwar period to bereaved families such as

- a. housing through War Widows' organisation
- b. scholarships through New Guinea Women's Club
- c. Legacy assistance
- d. R.S.L. War Veterans Homes
- e. War Service Homes
- f. other.....

**POST-WAR UNCERTAINTIES**

Q57. After the war, did the widow

- a. continue to search for clues about husband's fate, even years later?
- b. prefer to close the chapter and move on?

Q58. Did your family ever approach a parliamentarian in an attempt to have an enquiry opened into the loss of those islands and people in 1942-45?

- a. YES
- b. NO
- c. Don't know

Q59. If YES, in what year and which parliamentarian? .....

Q60. When Bishop Leo Scharmach published "This Crowd Beats Us All" in 1960, and suggested that there had never been a ship Montevideo Maru but a major massacre, was this suggestion

- a. very disturbing for the family?
- b. dismissed by the family as unlikely?
- c. book not known to family?

Q61. Some families who have experienced the trauma of a long mystery such as the loss of the men of Rabaul have reported health and emotional problems in later years. Has your family experienced any of the following?

- a. longterm disturbed sleep patterns
- b. physical breakdown influenced by trauma
- c. psychological breakdown influenced by trauma
- d. behavioural difficulties associated with trauma
- e. nightmares associated with death of spouse/father
- f. other .....

Q62. If such problems were experienced, were they

- a. immediately post-war
- b. only occasional and not very serious
- c. continuing for many years
- d. other .....

Q63. What has been the effect on the children of the men who were lost? Has it made any significant difference to the course their own life has taken in the years since? For example, have you

- a. felt different from others who had fathers
- b. experienced health problems which could be related
- c. gone to lengths to recapture memories and links with lost father
- d. felt under special obligation to achieve or behave well for sake of lost father or bereaved mother
- e. hesitated to build close relationships for fear of losing that person
- f. felt insecurity, which you link with loss
- g. other.....

Any comments:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Q64. Have you/your mother felt able to talk about those years, either in the past or recently?

- a. Yes
- b. No, it is too emotional a subject
- c. only recently
- d. very rarely
- e. can talk with others, but not with mother

Q65. If you were to describe your own experience, has it

- a. destroyed a pre-war faith in God
- b. strengthened existing faith
- c. shaken and changed ideas of God
- d. made no difference to understanding of God



**PILGRIMAGES AND MEMORIALS**

Q66. Have you or your family been part of arranging for a formal memorial for those who were lost?  
 a. YES b. NO

Q67. IF YES: What form did that take?.....  
 .....

Q68. Have you, or any other family members, travelled to New Guinea since 1945 in order to revisit wartime sites?  
 a. Yes, I went  
 b. Another family member went. Who? .....  
 c. No, but hope to go one day  
 d. No, could not face that

Q69. If YES to Q68 a or b, please comment on experience .....  
 .....

Q70. For many, the loss of life involved in the Rabaul has caused grief because at least some could have been avoided. Where have you or your family directed your anger about it?  
 a. against the Japanese enemy  
 b. against the Australian government  
 c. against mismanagement by military leadership  
 d. against local authorities in Rabaul

Q71. Do you think that the fall of Rabaul and the loss of the Montevideo Maru is  
 a. wellknown in the wider Australian community  
 b. less wellknown than other equivalent war events  
 c. almost unknown to the general public

Q72. IF you consider it a little-known event, do you think that is because  
 a. it is only one of many war tragedies  
 b. so few came back to report  
 c. there was no media coverage till post-war  
 d. there has been a government cover-up  
 e. people don't want to keep going over it

Q73. For many families, it has been "a very long war". In your case, has there been a sense of completion, and that the war is over at last  
 a. many years ago  
 b. not for a long time, but it is over now  
 c. the grief is still not really completed

Any other comments; .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

[Use separate sheet if you like.]

**A few final general questions:**

1. With this information which you have supplied, would you prefer, when it is written up:
  - a. to remain anonymous?
  - b. for your name to be linked with your own story?
  - c. to indicate particular points at which you would prefer not to be identified?
  
2. Would you be willing to:
  - a. be interviewed, so that you could tell your story more fully?
  - b. send me a tape or a letter with your response to what this tragedy has meant for your family?
  - c. send me photocopies of any documents which your family holds which you think would add to this story e.g. a letter received from a family member from behind enemy lines?
  - d. tell me other places to look e.g. newspaper items, books, archival material.
  
3. When this work is complete, would you wish to see it?  
If YES -
  - a. to borrow and return
  - b. to buy (copying + postage)

4. Do you have other names and addresses of people I should contact?

Name .....

Address.....

.....

Thank you so much for taking the trouble to reply. It is my hope that the telling of this story can be part of the continuing healing for families who experienced this great loss. It is clear that those who were lost were greatly loved and deeply mourned.

Margaret Reeson.

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