

THE TRAGEDY OF THE
**MONTEVIDEO
MARU**

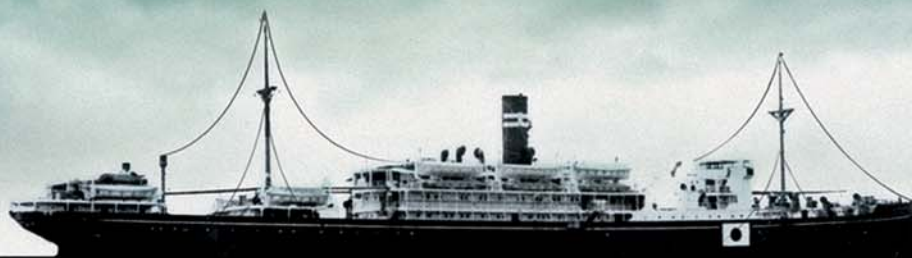
PRESS KIT

PREPARED 05/11/2009

PRODUCED BY
JOHN SCHINDLER & BOB BLASDALL

DIRECTED BY
DAVID NAPIER

NARRATED BY
JOHN JARRATT



Australian Government

SCREEN
AUSTRALIA



HISTORY



**Pacific Film and
Television Commission**

QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA

The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru

World Premiere November 11, 2009 – The History Channel

A Montevideo Maru Pty Ltd production. Produced with the assistance of Screen Australia, Pacific Film & Television Commission and Foxtel.

www.MontevideoMaru.com.au

Key Credits

Director	David Napier
Producers	John Schindler Bob Blasdall
Executive Producers	Richard Stewart Foxtel
Writer	Anthony Griffis
Editor	Bob Blasdall
Line Producer	Jeremy Harrison
Director of Photography	Tony O’Loughlan
Narrator	John Jarratt
Historical Advisor	Professor (Emeritus) Hank Nelson

Tag Line

Australia's Greatest Maritime Disaster – The Untold Story.

Short Synopsis

Before Kokoda, before the bombing of Darwin, Australia came under attack from the full might of the Japanese Empire – Rabaul, 1942. In the ensuing carnage of aerial bombardments and an armada not seen in Australian waters before, a small garrison of Australian soldiers, forgotten by many, made a courageous stand against an insurmountable force. Some men would escape, some would be shipped to Japan, but most – 1053 in total – would perish in Australia's greatest maritime disaster, The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru.

Long Synopsis

Sydney Harbour, 1941

Two attractive young ladies dressed in light coloured flowing summer clothing and large summer hats are running towards the Milson's Point approach to Sydney Harbour Bridge walkway with streamers in hand. They are holding their hats and laughing as typical Aussie girls do whilst struggling to hold on to a large handwritten sign with the words "*BYE John Day and the Turner Brothers*".

They are obviously late. As they run we cut to archival footage and stills of troops ships pulling away from wharves lined with Aussie soldiers. These men have no idea where they are being sent. The most popular guess at their destination is Europe to fight the Germans.

The two women finally make it to the middle of the bridge but they are too late. The Zealandia has past Pinchgut and the troops lining the rails are just dots in the distance. These hundreds of men are not aware they are seeing their beloved Sydney for the last time. Their next voyage will be as prisoners on a ship called the MONTEVIDEO MARU. There will not be one Australian survivor.

The MONTEVIDEO MARU a Japanese prison ship carrying over 1,000 young Australian prisoners was torpedoed on the 1st July 1942 by the American submarine USS Sturgeon. The Montevideo Maru had sailed from the port of Rabaul, New Britain headed for China.

The men were POW's and had been locked in the hold of the Montevideo Maru and drowned when this unknown Japanese prison ship was torpedoed. In terms of loss of life this tragic event is Australia's greatest ever maritime disaster.

Not one Australian survived. The *Montevideo Maru* has remained very much a mystery ship to this day. Most Australians do not know what happened on this tragic ship. Indeed many people have

never even heard of it. Why were so many young Australians on this ship in the first place? Heavily outnumbered and with few resources they had bravely made their stand against overwhelming odds in New Britain and New Ireland.

John Jarratt will read a letter from a Rabaul Officer who escaped and later became Australia's Chief Justice Selby. He writes that he has seen an official Australian War Cabinet memo advising that the men and women in Rabaul "must be regarded as "hostages to fortune, they must not be reinforced, withdrawn or re- equipped." Chief Justice Selby continued the letter with a personal comment "Lovely, none of us are supposed to be alive today."

The events leading up to the sinking of the Montevideo Maru are like the pieces in a giant jigsaw puzzle. This film will endeavour to put all these pieces together. What happened to these men between the time the troop ship Zealandia sailed out of Sydney Heads to the time they died on the Montevideo Maru? Guessing they were being sent to Europe, they instead found themselves in the tropical paradise of New Britain.

But things were about to change. Paradise was soon to become hell.

Telling the Story with No Survivors

The only Japanese crew member to survive and live to this day tells us in his interview that some prisoners did in fact get out of the ship's hold and he formed an opinion of immense respect and admiration for Australians when they started singing "Auld Lang Syne" in dedication to their drowned mates. We have an 11th hour interview with a SURGEON crew member who had the opportunity to view the last moments of the MONTEVIDEO MARU through the periscope.

Some of the Rabaul contingent surrendered and one group of 160 were murdered after surrendering at a place called the Tol Plantation. There is a dramatic re enactment of this event. Other Australians managed to evade capture and make it back to Australia and some men and women (Australian nurses) survived because they were captured and sent to Japan on a prison ship and just refused to die.

Other prison ships sailed from Singapore headed for Japan. Many of these ships were sunk by the Americans and, in order to illuminate the experience of the men on the Montevideo Maru, we have included a number of escape stories from men who were aboard these other ill-fated ships including a Sydney Doctor, Rowley Richards, who was a prisoner on the infamous Burma Railway. He survived this and also survived when his prison ship was torpedoed.

Another superb interview was filmed with an Australian ex Burma Railway soldier who survived a nightmare of hellish hot conditions in the China Sea. He was unclothed and without food or water for 3 days on a makeshift raft. The vessel he was aboard was torpedoed by an American submarine and he was about to be saved by another American submarine. He explains in graphic detail his feelings as their numbers became less and less.

We have recorded the story of a 93 year old Scottish Burma Railway survivor, Alistair Urquhart, a Gordon Highlander and one of the only men to escape from the locked hold of a Japanese ship torpedoed by an American submarine. How did this amazing man survive when most of his friends did not?

We have also recently located a submariner who was aboard the USS STURGEON when it torpedoed the MONTEVIDEO MARU. He tells us what he saw when he looked through the periscope.

We located Australian and British survivors of other sinking's and travelled to quite a number of countries around the World to have them relate their stories. Most had been locked in the hold of their various ships. How did they survive? How do they feel about the Americans who sank their prison ships and in so doing killed their good friends? How do the US Navy submariners feel about inadvertently killing thousands of Australian, English and American POW's and then rescuing hundreds from the jaws of death?

The submarine which was involved in the rescue of Australian POWs still exists in the USA and we conducted a number of superb interviews with the last remaining veterans inside their submarine. All these interviews vividly portray the feelings of individuals caught up in cataclysmic wartime events.

A crew member on one of the submarines who was a professional photographer in peacetime was ordered by the Captain to take the 16mm movie camera from the sub's locked safe and record in colour this historic moment - the rescue of the Australians.

Survival

Amazing survival stories will abound in this film. They will range from the escape by men sick with malaria and starving, who struggled through the dense tropical rainforest jungles of New Britain to the escape by the few from locked cargo holds on prison ships.

We have interviewed a Catalina Pilot who was shot down and captured moments after spotting the Japanese invasion fleet steaming towards Rabaul.

We also have many other significant re-enactments including: POWs suffering hardships in the hell ships holds; torpedoed survivors clinging to floating debris; desperate men struggling to stay aboard makeshift rafts and hapless soldiers fleeing Rabaul as they battle dense tropical jungle and try to evade pursuing Japanese troops.

The prison ships were in many cases "hell ships" but our research indicates that pre-war most were quite the opposite. We have archival film of these ships in their role as luxury liners with passengers from the USA and the UK on board travelling the World in luxurious comfort with at times famous passengers.

The audience will be taken inside the magnificent luxury cabin used a number of times by Charlie Chaplin. These surroundings will provide a stark contrast to the conditions for the men on most of these ships and the viewer will be taken into the dank, dimly lit hold of the one surviving ship of this class, for significantly Japan was to lose all but one of these ships.

Did the men who died defending Rabaul and the men who paid the supreme sacrifice on the Montevideo Maru die for nothing? This film will explain why these “hostages to fortune” did not die in vain. It is time that tribute is paid to these brave, fallen and forgotten Australians. Lest we forget!

Personnel Details

Producer – John Schindler

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John Schindler has worked in the film and television industry for over 35 years. Starting his first TV role as on camera newsreader for WIN TV Wollongong after a successful career in radio, John went on to write and produce thousands of television commercials for direct clients and Sydney advertising agencies. In the 1980's John was offered a position in Brisbane as Executive Producer with Channel 7 owned "Jumbuck Productions" with a staff of 55. Since this time John has gone on to independently produce a number of award winning documentaries for Australian and International release.

Previous Credits

1988 Executive Producer / Producer

Unsung Heroes – Tigers and Snakes

44 minutes

Director: Dick Marks

Editor: Bob Blasdall

Penguin Award Winner, screened on the 7 Network in Australia

1992 Executive Producer / Producer

Miracle of the Mountains

44 minutes

Director: Dick Marks

Editor: Bob Blasdall

Screened on the 10 Network in Australia

1990 Executive Producer / Producer

Rainforest – The Amazing World Within

44 minutes

Director: Glen Threlfo

Sold to 35 countries, screened on the 9 Network in Australia

2000 Executive Producer / Producer

The Moth Loves Doodie

52 minutes

Director: Dick Marks

Editor: Megan Turner

Screened on the 9 Network in Australia

Winner of numerous international awards

1991 Executive Producer / Producer

By the Seats of their Pants

44 minutes

Director: Peter Wiltshire

Editor: Bob Blasdall

Screened on the 10 Network in Australia

Producer – Bob Blasdall

Bob started in the television industry in 1968 as cameraman and later as editor for both the 7 Network and the 9 Network in Australia. In 1971 he joined Queensland's major film production company Martin Williams Films where he worked as editor on innumerable television and cinema commercials and documentaries.

In 1976 Bob started his own freelance editing company, the first post production only facility ever established in Queensland. In association with Producer/partner Penny Wall this company now trades as THEpostWORKS. In 1996 Bob was inducted into the Queensland Advertising Industries *Hall Of Fame* and was honoured by the Queensland Branch of the Australian Cinematographers Society when bestowed with the *Frank Hurley Award* for services to the Australian Film Industry.

In 1998 Bob was further honoured by the film industry when he received the inaugural *Kinetone Award* for services to the Film Industry at the Warner Roadshow Pacific Film & Television New Filmmakers Awards.

THEpostWORKS also sponsor student awards for best editing at the Warner Roadshow Pacific Film & Television New Filmmakers Awards and student awards at The ACS Qld Branch State Awards.

Bob has to the present time edited, directed and edited, or produced and edited in excess of 250 dramas and documentaries.

Previous Credits (Sample)

The Crocodile Hunter – Collision Course

Motion Picture for MGM – Editor

All footage involving Steve Irwin - shared credit with Saresh Ayan

Bindi the Jungle Girl;

28 part series for ABC and international distribution.
(*Emmy award winner 2008*) Editor

The Crocodile Hunter Series;

All episodes of The Crocodile Hunter from 1993 – 2007 including memorial service clips;
plus **3 x 1hr. *Croc Hunter Specials*** for the US NBC Network;

Worst Animal Nightmares

6 part docu-drama international release Editor

Croc Files

52 Episodes; Supervising Editor and Editor (*Emmy nomination 2000*);

Escape with E.T. – 2002 -2009

Lifestyle Series for Australian Network and international distribution – 116 eps to date:
Producer; Editor & Supervising editor.

Croc Diaries;

3 x Series 26 eps. each – Editor & Supervising Editor:

Tigers and Snakes;

Penguin Award winning dramatised documentary on HMAS Krait's successful World War 2 raid on Singapore – Associate Producer/Editor:

The Crocodile Hunter – Ghosts of War

EP.1 Ep2. USA Pacific Island campaign during World War 2 utilising USA Archives material.

Miracle of the Mountains;

dramatised documentary on the Stinson aircraft crash on the Lamington Plateau in Queensland in 1937 – Associate Producer/Editor:

Director – David Napier

David's career spans 30 years in front of and behind the camera.

For television he has Directed episodes of international Sci Fi series 'K9', Network TEN's NEIGHBOURS, SBS's 'mockumentary' series sTRUTH, kids shows for the Nine, TEN, and Seven Networks as well as a myriad of both factual and entertainment based corporate videos and TVCs. Lately, he has also Directed and supervised over 1700 VFX shots for the 'K9' series, is developing a slate of low-budget features in association with Producers David Hannay and Tony Ginnane, and is Co-Producing a major documentary – SCRAMJET - for the international market.

His award-winning short films have been in many Festivals such as Tropfest, St Kilda, Hollywood, Bergamo (Italy) and Los Angeles and have been shown on cable networks internationally.

In various capacities ranging from Producer to Director to puppeteer to technical advisor he has worked for all national TV Networks and on several feature films. He is also an accomplished editor.

Previous Credits (Sample)

SCRAMJET – 2009 – Documentary

Co-Producer

ABC / National Geographic. In production.

K9 – 2008/9 – Science Fiction TV Series

Director & Co-Director 4 episodes. VFX Director 26 episodes.

Macbeth – 2005/6 – Feature Film

Special Technical Advisor

sTruth – 2002 - Documentary Series (Docudrama)

Director

SBS TV.

The Art of Farewell – 2001 – Short Film

Director / Producer / Editor

Award winning short. Tropfest Finalist.

Bogey Men – 1999 – Short Film

Director / Producer / Editor

Award winning short.

Interview with Producer John Schindler

What drew you to the story of the Montevideo Maru?

My Mum had 4 friends who were lost on the MONTEVIDEO MARU – John Wilson Day and the 3 Turner brothers from Sydney.

Why is it important to tell this story?

It is Australia's greatest ever maritime tragedy with the loss of over 1,000 Australian lives and yet most Australians have never heard of it.

Can you tell me about some of the people you have interviewed in the making of this documentary?

In order to learn of what these poor men would have experienced we needed to seek out and interview survivors of other "hell ships".

They were still to be found in various parts of Australia. Scottish and English POW's were located in the UK and Scotland. American submarine crew were interviewed in the USA. The sole Japanese sailor still alive today was interviewed in Japan. People from all walks of life were located and interviewed ranging from Nuns to pilots to air crew, civilians and Padres, soldiers and their Officers. I feel honored to have interviewed all these wonderful people from a generation that will soon be gone.

Can you tell me how and where you filmed the re-enactment of events?

Wellington Point for the shipwreck scenes in the Indian Ocean and private property in the Tambourine Mountain area for the New Guinea jungle scenes. The Queensland Maritime Museum loaned us their clinker boat for our Japanese lifeboat and the interior of the Australian Navy Frigate DIAMENTINA at Southbank was utilised to portray the interior of a number of sinking Japanese ships.

What do you hope people will take away from a viewing of this documentary?

When we started this over 2 years ago people would say when told the name MONTEVIDEO MARU "I have never heard of it" and this is still the case with most people when you mention the name. Our dream was that when you mention the MONTEVIDEO MARU people will immediately know of it and be aware that this was our greatest ever war time tragedy. It is also our plan to put faces to the numbers as an indication to viewers that these boys just like the boy next door. If I was asked my personal feeling about this project I would say that one should think of the saying that goes something like "all it takes for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing" These boys were good men who did something. They were keen to fight.

They were no less brave than the men who stormed the beaches at Gallipoli or fought on the Kokoda trail. They found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, they made the supreme sacrifice and they did it for us. Lest we forget.

Who worked on this project with you?

In addition to the Producers named many dedicated and proud Australian film makers and volunteers too numerous to mention here all assisted on a speculative basis. Particularly those volunteers who helped out when we were trying to get on our feet. That was when we really needed help and we are grateful for their selfless efforts because it helped us a lot. You'll find their names in the credits but one name should be mention specifically here and that is Ian Bates from PROCAM who would fall into the category "without whose help none of this would probably have happened." Co Producer Bob Blasdall should also be singled out for a special mention as he also went "above and beyond the call of duty." Once when things were looking quite difficult on this project Bob and I pondered the thought "how easy we have it compared to the experiences of the poor blokes who are the subject of our film?" After that it became a lot easier for us.

Line Producer Jeremy Harrison worked on this with a passion and Richard Stewart helped untie many Administrative and legal knots. We are also most appreciative of the support from Screen Australia and the Pacific Film and Television Commission.

Interview with Producer & Editor Bob Blasdall

Why do you feel the documentary is important?

I feel that the men who gave their lives defending their country so that we can live a life free of tyranny deserve to be hailed as heroes. I am also aware that the almost forgotten soldiers involved in the events surrounding the fall of Rabaul and Singapore are at an age where they will not be able to relate their first hand experiences for much longer. I am mindful of the fact that these men are the only living links to two of Australia's greatest military naval tragedies: the sinking of the Montevideo Maru and the "Rakuyu Maru." United States submarines accounted for both the Montevideo Maru and the Rakuyu Maru, vessels which transported, along with war material, large numbers of allied prisoners of war. The "Montevideo Maru" was transporting civilian internees as well as military personnel. I firmly believe it is important that all those forever lost men and youths be afforded well deserved memorable recognition from all Australians. Maybe in some small way the documentary: "The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru" will help achieve this recognition.

Why did you become involved and how did you work on the production?

When I was approached to become part of the documentary team I had never heard of the 2 POW transport ships "Rakuyu Maru" and "Montevideo Maru." I also knew little about the fall of Rabaul and of the men of the Eighth Division who were committed to battle in Malaya, New Britain and New Ireland. I quickly understood that it was most important for these events to become common knowledge. So I agreed to commit to the production. It has been a long hard slog searching through hundreds of hours of interviews and stock footage to try and come up with the final material to weld the story into shape. It has been at times maddeningly frustrating but at all times it has been a labour of love. In fact any hardship I underwent was trivial when compared to the suffering endured by the brave men and women who are the living, breathing heart of the documentary.

What do you hope the documentary will achieve?

I hope that "The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru," will remain a deserving tribute to all those who underwent the death, destruction, suffering and trauma of battle; the indignity of surrender and brutal treatment from their captors. I also trust that the documentary will be a lasting tribute to those many POWs who suffered further horror when they became victims of allied torpedo attacks. Attacks which occurred while, against their will, they were being transported to Japan's territories where they were to become forced labour in factories, docks and mines.

Was it difficult for you to record forever the statements from the people interviewed?

All the marvelous men and women from around the world who were interviewed gave willingly of their time and they talked freely – many for the first time - about their painful experiences. A large number of those interviewed bared their souls when they re-lived the hell and horror of their suffering. Their anguish is visibly etched in their faces as they speak. I found it an incredible humbling experience to witness this distress and I still shed tears when I watch some of the interviews.

What are your personal thoughts regarding the final program?

I sincerely hope that we, as a documentary team, have been respectful and that in the final product we have preserved the principles, dignity and integrity of all who trusted us to record their experiences.

For all interviewed who went through the horror that was World War 2 are indeed heroes!
Heroes also are all their long lost mates.

Truly: "Lest we forget."

Interview with Director David Napier

How did you personally feel about being involved in this project ?

Gallipoli, Kokoda, the HMAS Sydney - all have rightly secured their place in the Australian consciousness, yet the story of the souls lost on the Montevideo Maru is relatively unknown. Indeed there has been scant focus on the fall of Rabaul and its aftermath; hence I'm very proud to be associated with a project that addresses this. As this documentary is the first mass media retelling of the fate of the men on board this Japanese ship, I felt a tremendous responsibility to do them the historical justice and recognition they deserve. The re-enactments of their lives and hardships had to have solid basis in fact, yet be visually and emotionally compelling. Truth be told, there is no way we could fully re-enact or portray the true horrors these brave men and women went through - we can only hope to give a sense of what it was like and do it well without fuss and over-dramatization. First and foremost in my mind, and a fact I continually impressed upon the young actors, was this was all real, it actually happened. This was brought home to them in an incredibly visceral way when on the first day of shooting the recreation of the TOL plantation massacre I displayed to them a Japanese bayonet found at the site - the actual instrument of the deaths of many diggers. When holding this still razor-sharp dagger in one's hand one begins to grasp the true horror of this type of weapon and those that met their fate upon it. The keywords to getting this stuff right is 'research' and 'care', Producer John Schindler and Producer/Editor Bob Blasdall sourced some stunning imagery and recounts of the time and this was of tremendous assistance in producing the finished product.

What were the challenges?

With tight production schedules and limited resources, attention to detail is the primary challenge in shooting re-enactments such as this. You have to get the minutia right or the audience is quickly jarred out of the emotional impact of the events. Casting, costume, makeup, props, and locations have to be accurate. Sourcing genuine military hardware of the day is a challenge, devising a way of showing the men in flooding holds, being executed in rainforest - all within time and budget - is a challenge. We also utilized simple but effective visual VFX techniques to turn our 10 extras into 40 and give the scenes some scale. A huge challenge for the makeup department was coming up with a suitable stand-in for the fuel oil that covered the men while in the water - the answer? Molasses. And then there's the extra inconvenience of having 10 men covered in this goo for 8 hours in freezing water in the middle of the night and keep them acting! A feat our guys managed with nary a complaint. Though the largest difficulty was creating the hold of the Montevideo Maru and flooding it with 10 tonnes of water while maintaining safety for cast and crew. It wasn't easy, but certainly worth it as the results speak for themselves.

Locations – difficult?

Much larger 'Hollywood' productions either go to the place of the events or build large scale replicas. We could do none of this, making do with whatever was available in the local area. The rainforest was not difficult as the hinterland of the Gold Coast provides excellent scenery, placing men in the dark waters of the South China Sea was a different matter. Fortunately for us the local council at Victoria Point were incredibly co-operative and we were able to achieve very realistic results shooting in the waters of Moreton Bay. Ironically, our 'realistic' serious WW2 drama was

occurring just around the corner from the uber-fantasy 'Chronicles of Narnia'. Another consideration was we had many scant-clothed men running around a rainforest crawling with tick and leeches, so for them it wasn't very hard to act with some degree of discomfort.

You delivered such breathtaking and realistic high quality re enactment scenes. How did you achieve this?

It was always our intention to deliver 'cinematic' looking footage to compliment the diverse quality of the archival material. We used 3 HD cameras, each with unique abilities - slow mo, low light capacity and macro focus - the last being incredibly important as it was imperative we catch the despair and drama in the men's faces. DOP Tony O'Loughlan did a fantastic job in very difficult conditions to deliver great footage. And again, it comes back to detail and research. Make-up artist Vicki Sands did a fantastic job at making the men look REAL, as did the art, costume, and props departments. It was certainly a team effort to pull this all together very quickly and I'm very proud of the results.