THE SINKING OF THE *MONTEVIDEO MARU*

On July 1 1942, the *Montevideo Maru* carrying 1053 Prisoners of War, captured by Japanese forces was sunk by an Allied submarine, USS *Sturgeon*.

The prisoners were captured in January 1942 by Japanese forces in Rabaul, New Britain, now known as Papua New Guinea. They were being transferred to Hainan Island, off Southern China, to be used as forced labour.
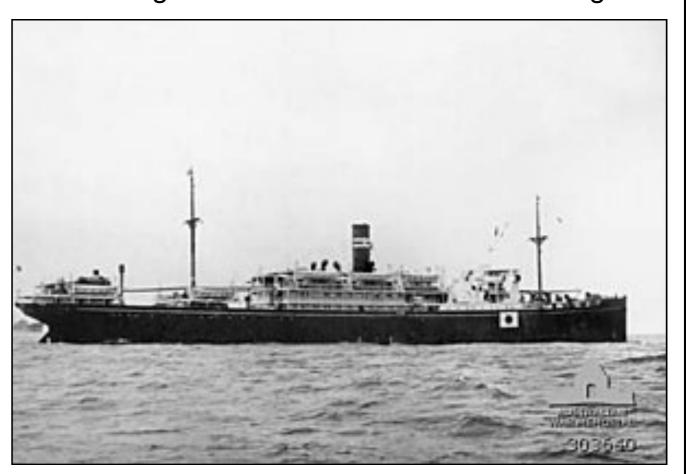
The *Montevideo Maru* was torpedoed off Luzon in the Philippines in the South China Sea, by the USS *Sturgeon,* unaware that it was carrying allied prisoners as the *Montevideo Maru* was unmarked and unescorted. All prisoners on board were lost.

The deaths on the *Montevideo Maru* were not fully revealed in Australia until after the end of the war when evidence was found in Japan.

During the war the International Red Cross made several enquiries concerning those who had been captured on New Britain and received no answer. The Japanese Foreign Office sought information and the Swiss Legation made at least seven unsuccessful attempts to obtain information. No response was forthcoming.

Fragments of information had come from wartime sources and captured Japanese personnel. After hostilities ended, Japanese and surviving civilians in Rabaul pieced together additional information. An Australian officer searching through records in Tokyo found a list of names that had been translated from English into Japanese script and back, creating considerable difficulties. The translated roll finally reached Canberra in late October 1945. Three and a half years after the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru,* the fate of the POWs on board was revealed to their families and friends.

From the National Archives of Australia