



PAPUA NEW GUINEA ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA Inc

And the RABAUL and MONTEVIDEO MARU Group

The Papua New Guinea Association of Australia Inc and the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Group have great pleasure in congratulating Norman Harold Furness OAM (VX23557), 94 years, for his significant recognition in the Australia Day Honours 2016.



The citation reads: "For service to veterans and their families'.

Norm has been a member of the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia since October 2010. As President of the 2/22nd/Lark Force Association (since 1999) he was involved in the formative stages, in early 2009, of the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society which has now been integrated into the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia.

He is particularly well known for his lifelong active work in support of the widows and families of the 2/22nd Battalion/Lark Force Association and also for his commitment to the few survivors of the battalion, despite their widely scattered homes.

As Norm managed to survive the horrific onslaught of the Japanese in the early part of WWII, and managed to escape New Britain in those first months of 1942, Norm's 70+ year commitment to the families of those who did not survive has been extraordinary. In order that history can learn from the past, and so that his mates did not die in vain, Norm has also worked to ensure that what happened to the 2/22nd Battalion, a unit which has not been re-raised, and Lark Force will not be forgotten.

Each year in January, on a date close to the fall of Rabaul in 1942, there is a memorial service at Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance. For many years Norm has organised this. For a long time too an annual casual gathering at the original campsite in Traawool, Victoria, has been held for the members/families of Lark Force. Again an opportunity for families to gather, to share memories and be comforted in their joint experience. Norm has organised this. Both these events continue to be held and grow in size.

In 2012 Norm Furness was awarded the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance Medal – see:

<http://www.shrine.org.au/Shrine/Files/89/89ab72ad-bb71-4ccd-945a-e644dd21a844.pdf>



He was interviewed for the Burwood Bulletin's March 2013 issue where he spoke about his escape from Rabaul in 1942. The interview is [here](#).

Norm has been interviewed regularly, including for the DVD series: *The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru*.

When the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society formed in early 2009, the goal was to seek public acknowledgement for what happened in 1942 in the New Guinea islands and to ensure that there was a national memorial, where the men who had been lost could be remembered. The Society joined several stakeholders ie 2/22nd Battalion and attached units, 1 Independent Company, the NGVR/PNGVR Ex Members Association and the civilian families, to act as a combined group.

On 1 July 2009 Norm Furness's contribution ensured that a plaque was dedicated at the Hellships Memorial in Subic Bay, Philippines. His dedication to and generous support of the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society, including raising donations for the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Memorial, was tireless. The Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Memorial was dedicated at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra on 1 July 2012, the 70th anniversary of the sinking of the Montevideo Maru, and Norm Furness spoke on behalf of all troops involved.

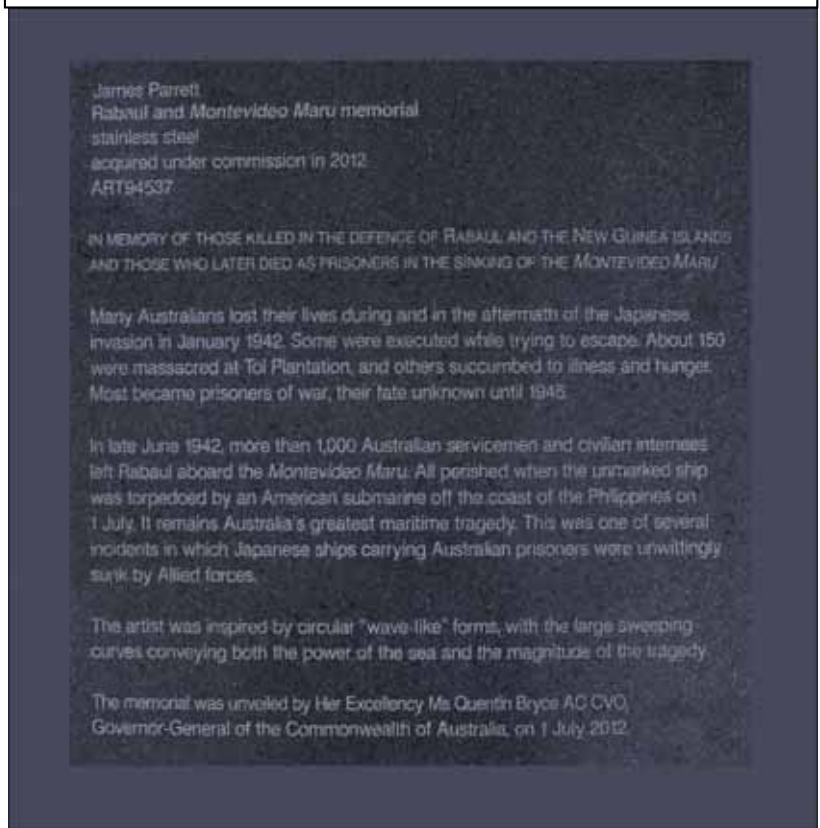
Norm Furness has been instrumental in the erection of several memorials in Australia, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. In addition to the national memorial in Canberra and the plaque at Subic Bay, Philippines, Norm has been involved with:

- a memorial at the original campsite at Traawool in Victoria where there is an annual gathering
- the Montevideo Maru Memorial dedicated at Ballarat in February 2004
- the Rabaul 1942-1945 Memorial, dedicated 16 September 1993 on Rabaul foreshore
- the Tol Plantation Memorial, dedicated May 1987 on the site where over 160 Australians were massacred by the Japanese
- plaque at Bendigo Soldiers Memorial Museum dedicated 11 November 2011
- Haus Niugini, Frankston, Victoria (part of RSL Park), dedicated 1991



Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Memorial, Australian War Memorial, Canberra ACT Australia

Photo of Memorial: Ross Johnson; Photo of Plaque Norm Plant





Haus Niugini, RSL Care, Frankston, Victoria

In the 1960s and 1970s he was involved in raising funds to build three units at RSL Care, Frankston, for widows of the 2/22nd Battalion. Following that *Haus Niugini* was also funded. *Haus Niugini* is a community centre which was achieved through the fundraising efforts of Norm Furness and others and dedicated in January 1991. The units have now been replaced with more contemporary buildings and the connection with 2/22nd Battalion has sadly been lost – however *Haus Niugini*, which was built to provide

residents with somewhere to meet, remains. It is well maintained and regularly used for a variety of purposes by

Veterans and members of their community. On a visit to *Haus Niugini* a few years ago, Norm Furness realised that there was no longer knowledge about the 2/22nd Battalion/Lark Force and so he found a number of books containing the history and donated them to the Library.

Norm's efforts as Welfare Officer for the East Malvern RSL Sub-Branch earned him both a Life Membership of the Sub-Branch and an RSL Life Membership conferred by the National ruling body.

Excerpts from the East Malvern RSL's official history from 1933-1993 show that Norm's contribution achieved outstanding results:

'In 1982 Norm Furness accepted the position of permanent Appeals Officer, thus ensuring continuity of organisation. The move has proved entirely successful and the funds raised for welfare have reached new levels. Later, Norm also became Welfare Officer. His efforts have earned him, not only a Life Membership of the Sub-Branch, but also an RSL Life Membership conferred by the National ruling body. With this tradition in welfare so firmly set, we can be sure that future years will see our endeavours continue.'

'Money was raised by dances, card nights and various special efforts. These funds were supplemented by the Anzac Day and Poppy Day annual appeals. The support given by members has been outstanding, as evidenced by the amount raised in 1992 – over \$50,000.'

Over the years, the Welfare Committees have been formed by dedicated members who gave of their time voluntarily and have had at heart their concern for fellow members. As well as hospital and home visitation, they have supported the special needs of ex-servicemen's children, providing camps for the needy and when necessary, sheltered workshops and other worth activities.'

In recent years we have given both financial and practical assistance to the Salvation Army, Nursing Home 'Weeroona'. We have provided a Christmas Party for the residents, complete with gifts and entertainment.'

At home we provide our widows and widowers with a Christmas dinner and entertainment. We also have a Winter Luncheon for members and wives. In 1992, 170 attended. Further, we have provided financial support to the needy and have arranged for home maintenance for deserving cases.'

http://www.eastmalvernsl.com.au/pdf/emrsl-history_1933-1993.pdf

Norm has said: *'The 2/22nd association has been my life as I was born in 1922, lived in house 22 in Fairfield, went into the 22nd Battalion, my Army Number VX23557 adds up to 22 and recently checking my records and in the 'F' column I am last on the list and the only one living.'*

Norm Furness is clearly an outstanding Australian. Being one of the fortunate few to escape New Britain at the start of WWII he has devoted his life to the 2/22nd Battalion community and to helping others. In selflessly and proactively caring about others over a long period of time, he demonstrates a wonderful spirit of humility, kindness and strength that all Australians might aspire to. He has been a loyal friend to his mates who did not survive Rabaul, 1942, by doing all he could to assist the widows and families, and to ensure the memories of their men live on. At 93 he continues to be actively involved.



Above Left: Lark Force and Montevideo Maru Memorials in Rabaul, Papua New Guinea on occasion of 70th anniversary 2012

Above right: Norm Furness shows us his paybook after escaping from Rabaul in 1942

Photos: Andrea Williams

Below: 2016 Australian of the Year, Lieutenant General David Morrison AO with Norm Furness OAM at the 70th anniversary luncheon commemorating the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Memorial in 2012. More on General Morrison and his keynote speech at this event is [here](#).



www.memorial.org.au

www.pngaa.net

At the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru 70th anniversary commemorative luncheon in 2012, Norm highlights the benefits of the Lark Force wine from Traawool Valley Vineyard to General Morrison. The site of the vineyard is on a WWII training camp.

The 2/22 Infantry Battalion was formed on the site of the current vineyard in July 1940, where they undertook their initial training before being sent to Rabaul. The Traawool Vineyard regularly supports the 2/22nd Battalion.