

BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO DVD: SOME CAME HOME

Padre John May, MBE

John May TX6004 was the 2/22nd Battalion Chaplain. POW at Rabaul and in Japan, 1942-45. As noted in this DVD, Padre May played a very important supporting role in the Rabaul and Japan mainland POW camps. He, along with the Australian Army officers, the 17 Australian nurses at Rabaul, and Mrs Kathleen Bignell, a plantation owner on New Britain, were transported as prisoners from Rabaul to Japan in July 1942 where they spent the rest of the war. John May was awarded his MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) in 1947 for his actions as a prisoner of war (POW) in maintaining the morale of troops & POWs in the Second World War.

Fred Kollmorgen

Private F W Kollmorgen VX29061. Fred, who was a Salvation Army church member, was in the 2/22nd Battalion Army Band. All the members of this army band except for one man were in the Salvation Army. Salvation Army members did not believe in taking part in armed combat. So when their Battalion was in action they would put on Red Cross armbands and act as stretcher-bearers and medical orderlies or assist in other non-combatant roles. Fred was the only member of the 2/22nd Battalion Army Band to escape from Rabaul. All the others in the army band died in the fighting, perished on the *MS Montevideo Maru*, were killed during the Tol Plantation Massacre or died in the jungle trying to escape from the Japanese. Fred's strong religious beliefs are shown in this DVD.

Paul Metzler

Flt/Lt Paul Metzler, ex 24th Squadron, Service Number 03105, RAAF. The Australian and USA air forces bombed Rabaul very heavily during the Second World War. Rabaul was the most heavily bombed settlement by the Allies in the war in the Pacific. The fate of captured airmen as noted in this DVD was not very good. Paul Metzler retired from the RAAF with the rank of Wing Commander in 1959.

Lex Frazer, OAM

Capt. A Frazer QX6470, 1st Independent Company, New Ireland. POW, Rabaul and Japan, 1942-45. As an Australian Army officer, Lex was transported to Japan in July 1942. He will always remember the loss of his fellow 133 commandos from the 1st Independent Company who died on the *Montevideo Maru*. On Monday 21 June 2010 in the Australian Parliament House the names of these 133 commandos were tabled as part of the regret and condolences motions for the loss of the Australians who died in the defence of Rabaul & New Guinea Islands and on the *Montevideo Maru* when it was sunk by an American submarine on 1 July 1942. At the same time the Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, announced in parliament that a number of Australian commandos were killed in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan.

Norman Furness, OAM

L/Cpl N H Furness VX23557, 2/22nd Battalion. Norm was able to escape from New Britain and the Japanese on the *Lakatoi*, after many months in the New Guinea jungle.

Norm was the President of the 2/22nd Battalion Association (Lark Force) from 1999 until his death on 31 August 2020, aged 98 years. For his work for his battalion, Norm in 2016 received an OAM. www.memorial.org.au/Assets/NormFurness.pdf. In the DVD Norm mentions that his mate Harry Jobe (VX44847) was not well and could not go on, so Bill Apsey (VX46493) decided to stay with him. Both these men have been listed as dying on the *Montevideo Maru* on 1 July 1942, as POWs. Refer www.montevideomaru.naa.gov.au .

Lorna Johnston (née Whyte)

Lt L M Whyte NFX 180288, **MID**, Australian Army Nursing Service. Lorna was a POW at Rabaul and in Japan. Lorna was captured at Rabaul in 1942 with her five army nursing colleagues, seven civilian nurses and four Methodist Mission nurses. The women were held for six months at the Sacred Heart Mission near Rabaul before being transported to Japan where they faced very tough conditions as prisoners of war for another three years. In 1948 the six Australian Army nurses from Rabaul received Red Cross and military awards, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article137223656> .

Sister Berenice Twohill

Sister Berenice was a Catholic teaching sister at the Sacred Heart Mission near Rabaul when the Japanese military forces invaded on 23 January 1942. Under the leadership of the head of the Sacred Heart Mission, Bishop Scharmach, this Catholic Mission was allowed to continue on New Britain for the length of the war. Bishop Scharmach was a German and had served for Germany in the First World War. The Sacred Heart Catholic Mission was originally founded in New Britain in 1881 by a French Order, the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, and when the Germans annexed the area in 1884 the French lost jurisdiction over their Missions to Germany.

Sister Berenice's and Lorna Whyte's wartime experiences have been portrayed in the ABC TV historical drama *Sisters of War*.

Joe Nason

Joe Nason, an American airman, was shot down over Bougainville on 28 October 1943. He was captured after spending five days in the jungle. Joe was transferred to Rabaul, arriving there on 8 December 1943. He spent the remainder of the war as a prisoner at Rabaul. Many of the Allied airmen who were captured by the Japanese were executed or died from illness as POWs.

One of the men with Joe during most of his time at Rabaul was Captain John Murphy, an Australian Coastwatcher. After the war ended John Murphy was accused of giving secrets to the Japanese in 1943 and faced court martial. Joe Nason firmly believed that Murphy was not guilty of these charges. On 17 February 1946 Captain John Murphy received a full acquittal.

Joe Nason became an attorney at law after the war.

Rudy Buckley

Rudy Buckley who was an indigenous resident in Rabaul talks about his experiences as a child during the Japanese occupation. As a young child living in Rabaul with his parents Rudy

was one of several children given camp jobs by his Japanese captors, one of which was cooking rice for the soldiers. They worked for nine to ten hours daily for a small sack of rice. In March 1943 his father, a mechanic, died from injuries that he suffered when he was bashed 16 times by a Japanese supervisor over a work dispute in a Japanese navy workshop.

Around the time of the sailing of the *Montevideo Maru*, Rudy was working in the Rabaul wharf area. He saw many servicemen and civilians being herded onto barges which would take them to the *Montevideo Maru*. One of the soldiers smiled at Rudy and threw him a khaki army issue handkerchief. He kept it in a tin along with other Australian soldiers' badges and other items. He buried this tin as he would have been severely punished if this tin was found by the Japanese. More information is at <https://pngaa.org/rudy-buckley-and-the-montevideo-maru-maxwell-r-hayes/> .

Sources :

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- *Little Hell, The Story of the 2/22nd Battalion and Lark Force*. Compiled by Carl Johnson. Blackburn, Vic: History House, 2004.
- *Not Now Tomorrow*. Alice M Bowman. Daisy Press. Bangalow, NSW 1996.
- *World War II Nominal Roll* (Dept of Veterans' Affairs, Canberra).
- *National Archives of Australia's Montevideo Maru website*
- *National Library of Australia's TROVE website*.
- *Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society website*.
- *Papua New Guinea Association of Australia website*.

Patrick Bourke