



Media Release

The Hon Alan Griffin MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs

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REMEMBERING MONTEVIDEO MARU – OUR WORST MARITIME DISASTER

On the 67th anniversary of Australia's worst maritime disaster, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, has called for the nation to pause and remember the 1053 Australian lives lost in the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*.

"War brings many tragedies and today we remember one of the greatest tragedies of the Second World War," Mr Griffin said.

Speaking on indulgence in Parliament last week, Mr Griffin said the story of the sinking was an unfortunate and lesser known episode of the Second World War.

"On 1 July 1942, a United States submarine, USS *Sturgeon*, torpedoed and sank what it believed to be a Japanese merchant vessel. It was in fact the *Montevideo Maru*, carrying Australian prisoners of war (POWs) and civilians who were locked in the hold with no means of escape once the ship was struck," he said.

"On board were 1053 Australian prisoners of war and civilians who had been captured and held by the Japanese at Rabaul on the island of New Britain, in what is now known as Papua New Guinea.

"The *Montevideo Maru* took 11 minutes to sink. No Australians survived. It was not until after the war that Australian authorities discovered the tragic fate of those captured at Rabaul.

"The families and associations with connections to the *Montevideo Maru* have never lost sight of the tragedy that occurred 67 years ago. That some questions concerning the ship may never be answered must also add to their sense of loss. It is something that we as a nation should never forget," Mr Griffin said.

Mr Griffin said a local ceremony would be held in Subic Bay to remember those lost in the tragedy.

"Today the Australian Ambassador to the Philippines, Mr Rod Smith, will unveil a plaque commemorating those on board the *Montevideo Maru* on behalf of the Papua New Guinea Volunteer Rifles Association at the Hellships Memorial, established in memory of all the ships that carried POWs," he said.

Mr Griffin also confirmed he has approved a \$7200 grant to enhance the central plinth at Subic Bay.

"Later in the year, under a grant made by the Australian Government to the RSL Angeles Sub-branch in the Philippines, commemoration of the *Montevideo Maru* at the Hellships memorial will be further enhanced and an interpretation will be placed in a nearby museum."

The funds have been granted through the *Overseas Privately-Constructed Memorial Restoration Program*, which recognises the contribution that organisations around the world make to honouring Australia's wartime heritage. For more information visit www.dva.gov.au/commems_oawg or contact the Department of Veterans' Affairs on 133 254 (international callers +61 2 6289 6184).

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