



FOUND!

THE SHIP THAT SANK WITH 979 AUSTRALIAN TROOPS AND CIVILIANS IN WORLD WAR II

(Sydney, April 22, 2023) The wreck of the *Montevideo Maru*, on which approximately 979 Australian troops and civilians perished in the worst maritime disaster in Australia's history, has been located at a depth of more than 4,000 metres off the coast of the Philippines – 80 years after it was sunk by an American submarine during World War II.

The location of the Japanese transport ship has been an enduring mystery since it was torpedoed on July 1, 1942 by the *USS Sturgeon*. Unbeknown to the submarine, the *Montevideo Maru* was carrying prisoners of war and civilians who had been captured in the fall of Rabaul a few months earlier.

Approximately 1060 prisoners, both military and civilian, were lost. The ship sank with at least 850 Australian service members and 210 civilians from 14 countries, who ranged from a boy aged 15 to men in their sixties.

Almost twice as many Australians died in this one incident than were killed in the entire Vietnam War. Significantly more were lost than in the sinking of the HMAS Sydney (645) in 1941 and the hospital ship Centaur (268) in 1943.

The wreck was discovered on an extraordinary mission put together by Sydney's Silentworld Foundation, which is dedicated to maritime archaeology and history, and Dutch company Fugro, deep-sea survey specialists, with support from the Department of Defence.

The search commenced on April 6 in the South China Sea, 110km north-west of Luzon. After just 12 days (April 18), a positive sighting was recorded using state-of-the-art technology, including an Autonomous Underwater Vehicle (AUV) with in-built sonar.



It took a number of days to verify the wreck using expert analysis from the project team, comprising maritime archaeologists, conservators, operations and research specialists, and ex-naval officers.

It has taken nearly five years of planning by Silentworld and 20 years of dedication from the Montevideo Maru Society to assemble the expedition team, led by Australian businessman, maritime history philanthropist and explorer John Mullen, the director of Silentworld.

“The discovery of the *Montevideo Maru* closes a terrible chapter in Australian military and maritime history,” Mr Mullen said.

“Families waited years for news of their missing loved ones, before learning of the tragic outcome of the sinking. Some never fully came to accept that their loved ones were among the victims. Today, by finding the vessel, we hope to bring closure to the many families devastated by this terrible disaster.

“I would like to express my gratitude to all of the dedicated Silentworld team involved in this expedition, to the outstanding Fugro crew and technical team on board the Fugro Equator, and to the Australian Department of Defence for their unwavering support.

“I am proud to be the citizen of a country that never forgets or stops looking for those lost in the course of duty, no matter how many years may pass.”

No family suffered more from the tragedy than the Turners of NSW. Their three inseparable young sons, Sidney, Dudley and Daryl, enlisted together in Australia’s first commando group, the 1st Independent Company – and perished together in the submarine attack.

Australian Andrea Williams was on board when the wreck was discovered. Both her grandfather and great uncle died in the tragedy. She is a founding member of the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society, formed in 2009 to represent the interests of descendants.



“Today is an extraordinarily momentous day for all Australians connected with this tragic disaster,” said Ms Williams.

“Having had a grandfather and great-uncle as civilian internees on *Montevideo Maru* always meant the story was important to me, as it is to so many generations of families whose men perished. I could never understand why it was not a more powerful part of our Australian WWII history. Being part of the Silentworld team that has found the wreck, has been both hugely emotional, and also fulfilling.”

The wreckage of the *Montevideo Maru*, sitting at a deeper depth than the *Titanic*, will not be disturbed. No artefacts or human remains will be removed. The site will be recorded for research purposes out of respect for all the families of those onboard who were lost.

Chief of the Australian Army Lieutenant General Simon Stuart said finding the wreck has ended 81 years of uncertainty for the loved ones of the lost.

“The Australian soldiers, sailors and aviators who had fought to defend Rabaul had enlisted from across the country to serve, met a terrible fate at sea on the *Montevideo Maru*,” Lieutenant General Stuart said.

“Today we remember their service, and the loss of all those aboard, including the 20 Japanese guards and crew, the Norwegian sailors and the hundreds of civilians from many nations.

“I want to thank the Silentworld team and the dedicated researchers, including the Unrecovered War Casualties team at Army, who have never given up hope of finding the final resting place of the *Montevideo Maru*.

“A loss like this reaches down through the decades and reminds us all of the human cost of conflict. Lest We Forget,” he added.

Details of any commemorative events will be provided at the appropriate time.

Descendants of the *Montevideo Maru* may register their details to be kept informed at <https://www.army.gov.au/our-work/unrecovered-war-casualties/register-us>



Media Assets [HERE](#) (including b-roll, images from the discovery and archives)

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Silentworld Foundation

John and Jacqui Mullen are the founders and directors of the Silentworld Foundation. John is also Chairman of Telstra, and Brambles Ltd, and Chairman of the Australian National Maritime Museum. The not-for-profit Silentworld Foundation based in Sydney supports and promotes Australasian maritime archaeology, history, culture and heritage. It also operates a private museum dedicated to understanding our nation's early maritime history and supports annual expeditions and other ventures seeking a greater understanding of our past. The discovery of the *Montevideo Maru* is another high-profile success story. Amongst others, in 2017 Silentworld participated in the finding of HMAS AE1, Australia's first submarine. In 2009, the Foundation solved a 180-year mystery by locating the wreck site of *HMCS Mermaid*, lost on a coral reef off the Queensland coast in 1829. Website: <https://silentworldfoundation.org.au>