



Australian War Memorial

DOCUMENT STUDY – *Montevideo Maru*

Your name: _____

Title of document: _____

Part 1 – establishing the facts

Read the report on the sinking of the Montevideo Maru and then complete the questions relating to each section.

Preface	
How many captured people were shipped from Rabaul in June 1942?	
What was their destination?	
What is the purpose of this report?	
Description of Casualty	
What was the name of the ship?	
Who was the owner?	
Who chartered the ship?	
When did the ship depart from Rabaul?	
What was their destination?	
Who was on board?	
What happened to the ship?	
Where there any survivors?	
What was their fate?	
Notification of Casualty	
When were the owners of the ship informed of its fate?	



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When did the Japanese Navy forward the details onto the PW Information Bureau?	
What happened to the information at the Bureau?	
When did the writer discover information about casualties?	
Enquiries made by IRC on behalf of Australia	
What does IRC stand for?	
What phrase upset the Japanese authorities?	
How did the Japanese authorities respond?	
Enquiries made by Japanese Foreign Office	
Why were the details of enquiries made by the Foreign Office not available to Major Williams?	
Enquiries made by Swiss legation on behalf of Australian Authorities	
What was the only definite reply received from the Japanese?	
The Information Bureau's responsibility	
When does Lt Gen Tamura, admit they knew of the full details?	
What reason does he give?	
Letters addressed to the 1053 persons who were lost	
How long were the relatives of the missing prisoners ignorant about their fate?	
What happened to the letters of the prisoners?	



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Part 2 – what else can we find?

You have now established a sequence of events from this document. Now use your research and analytical skills to explore these issues. Some questions may require further research.

1. Describe Major Williams' attitude towards the Japanese authorities, using references to support your description.

2. Why was a Swiss legation making enquiries on behalf of the Australian authorities?

3. Why do you think Japanese authorities withheld information about the sinking of *Montevideo Maru*?

4. Using references from the document, list two places where Australian prisoners of war were stationed during Second World War. Research and list four other places where Australians were imprisoned.



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4. Complete this timeline, the first and last dates have been filled in for you.

• Japanese invasion of New Britain	February 1942
• Passengers of <i>Montevideo Maru</i> last seen in Rabaul	_____
• Sinking of <i>Montevideo Maru</i>	_____
• Loss of <i>Montevideo Maru</i> reported to its owners	_____
• PW Information Bureau receive information on <i>Montevideo Maru</i>	_____
• End of Second World War in the Pacific	_____
• Major Williams makes his report to the Recovered Personnel Division	_____
• Australian families of the passengers receive telegrams confirming their fate	October 1945

Optional extra activity:

Create a parallel timeline for other major events in the Second World War. Create a third timeline detailing cultural and social changes (eg fashion, music, film) from 1939 – 45.

5. Assess the types of information that you can obtain from this document study

	Yes	No	Partially
The number of people who died on <i>Montevideo Maru</i>			
Conditions on the ship			
Australia’s relationship with Japan during the Second World War			
Background of Major Williams			
Size, colour and appearance of <i>Montevideo Maru</i>			
Attempts that were made by Australian Government on the fate of the <i>Montevideo Maru</i>			
Name of the American submarine that torpedoed the <i>Montevideo Maru</i>			
Role of IRC during the Second World War			
Feelings of families waiting for news of prisoners			

On 6 January 1943 the Navy Dept. forwarded details of the sinking to the PW Information Bureau, together with a complete nominal roll of 848 PW and 208 civilians who were on board and presumed lost.

It is to be particularly noted that the later information was not communicated by the Information Bureau, and remained hidden in the files of the Bureau until discovered by the writer on 28 September 1945.

4. Enquiries made by IRC on behalf of Australia. Many written enquiries were made by the IRC Delegate in Tokyo to the Prisoners of War Information Bureau, culminating in a communication dated 20 April 1945, referring to a telegraphic advice from the Committee in Geneva that "information from Japanese Official sources of present welfare of enemy civilians and/or PW detained at Rabaul, New Britain is singularly lacking," and seeking information.

The Information Bureau took exception to the use of the phrase "singularly lacking" as conveying criticism, dissatisfaction, mistrust or suspicion and threatened a discontinuance of their information service including facilities for visits by IRC delegates to PW camps. Despite the Delegate's assurance that the phrase had been used by way of presenting a comparison, the Bureau demanded that the IRC Committee in Geneva should clarify their views in a manner satisfactory to Japan.

Despite the fact that the Bureau had withheld the information which it had received as far back as January, 1943, it has persistently informed all enquirers that all known information had been transmitted.

5. Enquiries made by Japanese Foreign Office. Owing to the destruction of the Foreign Office's records, full details of the enquiries made by the Foreign Office at the request of the Swiss Legation acting as Protecting Power for British interests are not available. However the Information Bureau has admitted that an official enquiry was received on 31 May 1944 from the Foreign Office concerning 199 named civilians taken by the Japanese in Rabaul. The Bureau did not transmit any reply to the Foreign Office, nor apparently did the Foreign Office press for a reply.

6. Enquiries made by Swiss Legation on behalf of Australian Authorities. More than 7 formal interventions were made by the Swiss Legation in an effort to secure information from the Foreign Office. In addition the Legation made numerous verbal enquiries and calls both on the Information Bureau and the Foreign Office. The Information Bureau gave no information and the Foreign Office generally ignored the enquiries. The only definite reply that was given to the Legation was to the effect that "it seems that none of the persons referred to are in the hands of Japan and it is believed that all may have taken refuge in the hills."

It will be noted that while the true facts were withheld, a story, which must have been known to have been false, was given out instead.

7. The Information Bureau's responsibility. Lt Gen TAMURA, Director of the Information Bureau, admits that the full details were in the possession of the Bureau since January 1943. He expresses regret that the information was not transmitted to Australia, but claims it was due to an oversight.

8. Letters addressed to the 1053 persons who were lost. The relatives of the PW and civilians who were lost have over a period of nearly 3-1/2 years,

been despatching mail in the belief that their men folk were alive. Evidence is available from recovered PW who were working in the PW mail sorting centre at Omori Camp that a great deal of such mail reached Japan. In reply to my enquiries the Bureau has stated that all such mail has been forwarded from Japan to Rabaul. I have declined to accept that explanation and have made a demand for full details of the manner in which such mail was handled and disposed of and also its present whereabouts.

9. Investigations on other aspects of this case are continuing.


(Major) H. S. Williams

6 October 1945.