



# Stolen Years:

Australian prisoners of war



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Cover image

Recently liberated prisoners of war display artificial limbs made in the camp by a fellow captive, Changi, Singapore, 1945. AWM 019327

Details for back cover image appear on page 121.

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Commemorations Branch

Department of Veterans' Affairs

GPO Box 9998

Canberra ACT 2601

Phone: 02 6289 1111

email: [commemorations@dva.gov.au](mailto:commemorations@dva.gov.au)

Department of Veterans' Affairs contribution: research and writing by Dr Richard Reid and Dr John Moremon, photo editing by Courtney Page-Allen, text editing by Kerry Blackburn, proof-reading by Diana Page, layout and design by Rosanna Horn.

Australian War Memorial contribution: research and writing by Dr Peter Stanley and Nola Anderson, additional research by Kate Potter and Jennifer Mattiuzzo, text editing by Dr Robert Nichols.

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Sergeant Joe Elliott (left) greets his brother, Sergeant Frank Elliott, on the gangway of the Royal Navy aircraft carrier, HMS *Striker*, October 1945. Frank had just arrived home to Sydney with other Allied ex-prisoners after years of captivity under the Japanese. AWM 122060

*You evidently hear the last second of the shell that hits you, or is close to you, because what you do is you crouch down under the wall nearest the enemy. Of course, no trouble at all, the whole wall just rolls over you. I was thrown away like a rag doll, and the bloody swale just rolled over on top of me. I was buried up to the shoulders. I had no chance of ever freeing myself. It was the Germans who dug me out. They carried me out on a stretcher.*

Jim Wheeler, captured at Bullecourt, 1917

## INTRODUCTION

This book seeks to interpret the Australian experience of captivity in wartime. It has been produced in association with the exhibition *Stolen Years: Australian prisoners of war*, and draws substantially on research undertaken in preparation for the exhibition. Though it refers to and elaborates on the documents, photographs, artefacts and works of art selected for the exhibition, it does not attempt to replicate the exhibition as a book, nor to act as a catalogue. Instead, it offers an opportunity to reflect on several important questions: what was captivity like and how did Australians react to it? How did they record the experience and what do we know about it? What do we know about captivity and how can we learn more?

Each of the four contributors deals with these related questions. Nola Anderson's essay discusses the powerful stories that she translated into and expressed through the exhibition. Richard Reid tells the story of Australians in captivity across three conflicts and in the hands of six enemies. Peter Stanley surveys what has been written and produced which tells their story, and suggests ways in which those seeking deeper knowledge can find answers to their questions. John Moremon examines the lives and experiences of a selection of prisoners covering the major conflicts and the branches of service.

The interest, respect and affection that Australians generally feel toward former prisoners of war is a relatively recent phenomenon. Australians had previously tended not to consider captivity as a part of their country's military history. Surrender traditionally carried vague connotations of personal disgrace: of officers giving up swords and units their colours. Until the wars of the twentieth century, like those killed and wounded in battle, prisoners were rarely mentioned in formal histories. Those captured were handled by improvised and often inefficient organisations. Returning prisoners received no medals and little special consideration. Indeed, for much of military history, one of the most precarious states to be in was that of captivity. In ancient and medieval wars, wealthy prisoners might be ransomed: many others would be impressed as labourers or condemned to slavery, or at worst killed to remove an inconvenience.

By the nineteenth century, the growing size and complexity of national armies and navies and the magnitude of their operations made the organisation of captivity a part of the management of war. In the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, entire armies were



captured and held, in Britain, America, Spain and elsewhere in Europe, and methods were devised to order their treatment. The haphazard practices of antiquity began to change. Conventions evolved to guide how officers could be paroled, how wounded and sick prisoners could be exchanged, and how men could be held, albeit often in conditions even more appalling than those endured by soldiers of the time. As late as the American Civil War, however – a war fought by forces of similar culture – large numbers of those captured sickened and died in hideous camps. The notorious Andersonville stockade in Georgia foreshadowed the worst of camps on the Eastern Front or in Japanese-occupied Asia in the Second World War. Disgust at the effects of inefficiency, improvisation and brutality, and a belief that human affairs could be regulated and moderated, impelled reformers to seek to introduce a change.

By the late nineteenth century, European nations began to codify their views of the treatment of war's victims: civilians, prisoners, and the wounded. The formation of the Red Cross lent a humanitarian impulse that contributed to the development of international conventions, agreed at The Hague in 1907. As a result, by the outbreak of the First World War most combatant nations had subscribed to shared understandings of what could and could not be done to and with prisoners of war. These conventions were often bent or broken. For example, several hundred Australians captured in France in 1917 were kept in wretched conditions performing war work within artillery range of the front, in direct contravention of the Hague Convention. The wonder is not that the convention was breached, but that it held up as well as it did, or at all. Though during the First World War more prisoners were taken than in any previous conflict, it is also probable that a smaller proportion died than ever before.

Australia's exposure to captivity in war began during the Boer War, in South Africa in 1900. A few Australians were taken by Boer commandos in the campaign preceding the

British capture of the Boer capitals of Bloemfontein and Pretoria. They were very few – probably fewer than a dozen – and they were held very briefly, for a matter of weeks. Within hours of the landing on Gallipoli in 1915, Australians were taken prisoner: not only soldiers but also sailors, members of the crew of the submarine *AE2*. They became the first of over two hundred Australians to be taken by Ottoman Turkey, on and around Gallipoli and in campaigns in Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Sinai-Palestine. A further 4000 Australians were captured by the Germans in the fighting on the Western Front in France and Belgium between 1916 and 1918, but they became invisible in the Australian story of the war. Again, the suspicion attached to surrender imposed an awkwardness. All prisoners were required to write a statement on their liberation, in effect justifying their capture. Overshadowed by the magnitude of death

Horace De Laine, photographed in 1900 whilst serving with the Adelaide Mounted Rifles, went to South Africa in 1901 with the 5<sup>th</sup> Imperial Bushmen Corps and was captured by the Boers in January 1902. AWM P00187.004



and suffering among their comrades, it was perhaps understandable that former prisoners from the First World War fostered no formal or organisational identity.

The experience of the First World War stimulated a further round of international negotiation, revision and strengthening of what became known as the Geneva Convention of 1929. It was to govern the treatment of prisoners of war in the Second World War, for those nations that had ratified it. Capture, again of entire armies – in North Africa, the Middle East, Singapore, Russia and France – became a commonplace part of the war. British Commonwealth troops talked, seemingly with resignation, of going ‘into the bag’. The contrast with the far harsher regime encountered by those captured in Asia has served to soften our perception of that ordeal, but it too entailed hunger, inadequate medical care, harsh discipline and brutality. The fates of the forces captured varied widely. Some prisoners were paroled or repatriated in the fashion of centuries before. Some – including Australians taken in Europe – would be treated generally in accordance with the Geneva Convention. Others – Russians captured by the Germans, Germans taken by the Russians, and almost everyone captured by the Japanese – would be treated in ways that defied belief.

The ordeal of those Australians captured by the Japanese – an ordeal of hunger, heavy labour on starvation rations and brutal discipline often ending in death – has become the understandable focus of Australia’s awareness of its prisoners of war. It justifiably occupies the bulk of the exhibition, *Stolen Years*, as well as the majority of books and films on the subject. But that focus would not come until long after 1945, and a full acceptance of both the ordeal and the qualities it demanded would not mature for decades. At the time, even the families of prisoners were left not knowing what their loved ones were confronting. Wartime propaganda sought to put an optimistic gloss on the meagre reports reaching the Allies. When, in 1945, the full extent of their suffering became apparent, many wanted not to know. Indeed, official counsel was ‘least said soonest mended’ and families were advised not to ask. The connotations of disgrace clung to the early battles of 1942 and few wanted to aggravate the tender parts of a wartime memory that rapidly grew faint, even for the parts in which Allied forces were victorious.

Allied prisoners of the Japanese rest on their sleeping platforms in an attap hut at the Tamarkan camp, near Kanchanaburi, on the Burma-Thailand railway. Each man had approximately 75 cms width of bed space on which to lie.

AWM P01502.003



Finally, Australians of all three services became prisoners of war in Korea. Their number was few, but their suffering was great. In addition to the familiar hardships of hunger, cold and brutality, prisoners in Korea suffered the impost of ideological assault through what the prisoners called 'brainwashing'. The ways in which they, and all of those captured before them, resisted and prevailed against the privation, indignities and assaults they endured has been widely admired.

At war's end, these men, like the many before them who had suffered periods of captivity in enemy hands, would find themselves in the hands of the Department of Veterans' Affairs, originally known as the Repatriation Department, which from 1918 onwards has been responsible for the care of all Australian veterans. As well as providing a range of services including health care, housing and pensions for returned servicemen and women and their families, the Department endeavours to tell their stories to the wider community through commemorative events and publications, public grants and educa-

tional programs. It has also provided funding for projects at the Australian War Memorial, including exhibitions and publications such as *Stolen Years: Australian prisoners of war*.

Since its inception, the Australian War Memorial has been intimately associated with the rediscovery of prisoners of war and with successive efforts to tell their stories. The Memorial's earliest records of prisoners were collected shortly after 1918. For the Second World War, its collection includes the writings of prisoners, the official records maintained during captivity, records of those who died, and the statements of those who survived, as well as a vast array of private journals, diaries and memoirs, both unpublished and published. It also

includes works of art by official and unofficial artists, photographs taken by prisoners, and a surprisingly large collection of the personal artefacts the Memorial calls 'relics'. The magnitude of this material is impressive in both its richness and pathos and in the fact of its survival at all. Indeed, prisoners, most of whom possessed the barest necessities, seem to have brought home and then donated more material proportionally than those who were fortunate to avoid capture.

Over the past 20 years, the Memorial has directly sought prisoner of war relics and records. It opened its *Barbed Wire and Bamboo* gallery in the late 1970s, and has developed several temporary and permanent galleries since, in which the material energetically acquired was displayed. But more importantly, perhaps, is the fact that former prisoners of war and their families continue to regard the Memorial as a fitting place to commemorate those who died in captivity, and to acknowledge those who returned and their families. And that is what this book, and the exhibition it elaborates, seeks to achieve.



A column of United Nations Command soldiers taken prisoner of war by the Chinese, walk under armed guard along a road cut into a hillside in Korea, April 1951.  
AWM P02758.006

**IN CAPTIVITY:  
AUSTRALIAN PRISONERS OF WAR  
IN THE 20TH CENTURY**

*Captivity ... that precious state of  
companionship.*

Brigadier Phillip Greville, 1RAR, captured Korea, 1952

*A fowl, Palembang model, flew over the fence from the Jap guard-house alongside our kitchen. There was a mad rush by a few Australian and English sisters. Margot Turner was first to get it. In two minutes the unfortunate bird was in our block and we were discussing if we should kill it or put it back over the fence. After all, it did belong to the guards... Margot was holding it by the legs and keeping its beak shut to stop its noise, when suddenly the fowl closed its eyes and went limp in her hands. Margot's face was a study; she was sure she had killed it, so let it go. The wily old bird flew under the bed-space platform and it took us ages to get it out. There was no delay then; it was killed, de-feathered and into the pot in a few minutes.*

Lieutenant Betty Jeffrey, 2/10<sup>th</sup> Australian General Hospital (AGH),  
captured on Banka Island, 1942

## IN CAPTIVITY: AUSTRALIAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN THE 20TH CENTURY

It gave me a great understanding of men. And a great appreciation of the ordinary things of life: bread and butter, a bit of jam on your toast in the mornings, a glass of beer when you're thirsty. And the value of human relations. You know, when it comes to the end, the only thing that really matters are the people whom you love and who love you.

[Dr Kevin Fagan, who served in 1943 as a doctor on the Burma–Thailand railway, as a prisoner of war of the Japanese]

Since the inception of the Commonwealth of Australia and its armed services, Australians have fallen into the hands of the enemy in an astonishing variety of places. The first Australian servicemen to become prisoners of war were captured in South Africa during the Boer War of 1899–1902. During the First World War, men of the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF) became prisoners of the Germans on the Western Front, while a few became the enforced guests of the Ottoman Empire on Gallipoli and in the Middle East.

In the Second World War large numbers of Australian servicemen and women were made prisoners of war. Many were captured in the campaigns of 1941 and 1942 in North Africa, Greece and Crete, fighting against the Germans and Italians. Flying on operations, mainly from Britain, significant numbers of Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) aircrew were forced to bail out over enemy territory and spend the rest of the war in prison camps in Germany.

However, it is the story of the thousands of Australian prisoners of the Japanese that has made the deepest and most lasting impression on the average Australian. The suffering and death of Australians between 1942 and 1945, in dozens of prison camps and enforced labour locations in Asia, is often seen as the archetypal experience of Australian prisoners of war in this century.

Fortunately, in the conflicts in which Australia has been involved since 1945, few servicemen have fallen into enemy hands. None was taken prisoner during Australia's involvement in the Malayan Emergency (1950–60), Indonesian Confrontation (1963–66), Vietnam War (1962–72) or Gulf War (1990–91). However, during the Korean War (1950–53) a small number of Australian prisoners of war experienced treatment at the hands of the Chinese and North Koreans which was, at times, equal to the conditions endured by their compatriots in Japanese camps in the Second World War.

Since 1900, approximately 35,000 Australians have faced the challenges of captivity in war. As prisoners they faced isolation, hunger, sickness, brutality and death. Through it all these men and women showed courage, ingenuity, fortitude and a deep compassion for each other's suffering. Theirs is a story now firmly accepted as an inspiring part of the legacy of Australians at war.



Ex-POWs returning from Japan are inoculated by Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) nurses in Manila. AWM 030261/19

## THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Soltau was a real League of Nations. I think every nation which was at war with Germany was represented there – Russians, French, Belgian, Italian, Serbians, Rumanians, and just about every regiment in the British Army ... They [the Russians] were dying at the rate of five or six a day. During my stay there, they used to carry the bodies out in a box, tip it into a hole, and then go back for the next one.

[Don Fraser, 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF, describing the prison camp to which he was taken in Germany after he was captured at the first battle of Bullecourt, 11 April 1917]

POWs at work 700 metres below ground in a coal pit in Germany, 1916.  
AWM C02903



### Western Front

In operations on the Western Front in France and Belgium between April 1916 and November 1918, 3850 men of the First AIF were captured by the Germans. Of these, about nine per cent died in captivity. The conditions under which they were held varied considerably. By late 1917, conditions for civilians in Germany were deteriorating rapidly as the Allied sea blockade began to bite. At this time of shortage, Australian

and British prisoners of war were comparatively lucky. Right up to the end of hostilities they continued to have access to Red Cross food parcels and they were comparatively better nourished than the German population around them.

In general, the treatment of Australian prisoners of the Germans in the First World War was not severe. However, aspects of their captivity, and that of other Allied prisoners, caused some concern. In an attempt to show that Allied claims of close cooperation between their multinational forces were a sham, the Germans placed men of different nationalities in the same camps, with no allowance made for differences between cultural groups. At times, prisoners of war were used for the purpose of war production. Don Fraser, 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF, was put to work at the Kieselgour Works, near Melbeck, to mine and dry a light clay substance that he subsequently learnt was used as a binding element in the manufacture of nitroglycerine. At other times, Australians were held in camps in dangerous proximity to the front line, where they were vulnerable to shelling. The Germans alleged that this was in retaliation for similar treatment of German prisoners by the British.

## Turkey

During the First World War, 217 Australians fell into Turkish hands. Half of them were light horsemen captured during British Imperial operations in Sinai and Palestine between 1916 and 1918. A third were taken on Gallipoli, and the rest came from the Australian Flying Corps and the crew of the submarine *AE2* which had made the passage of the Dardanelles in 1915 before it was disabled and its crew captured.

By comparison with their compatriots in German captivity, those Australians who were imprisoned in Turkey did not fare so well. They suffered forced marches, long railway journeys in crowded trucks, poor food, disease and inadequate medical supplies. Other ranks were set to building a railway in the Taurus Mountains. Hard manual labour can be fatal for malnourished men and 25 per cent of those Australians who worked on the railway died. Officers were not made to work and only one Australian officer died as a prisoner of war in Turkey.

Four Australian prisoners of war and their dog relax outside their tent, Langeloths, Turkey, c1918. AWM H19403





## THE SECOND WORLD WAR

I shall never forget my experience as a POW, even if I live to be a hundred. One of the greatest experiences was mateship. You had a good mate, you helped one another, shared everything together, and this comradeship still exists today though a lot of your mates have since passed on. You will never forget your mates – one of the things that helped pull one through.

[Reflections of Jim McAuley, 2/15<sup>th</sup> Battalion, who was a prisoner of the Italians and the Germans from April 1941 to May 1945]

### Europe

According to Australia's official war history, the first soldier of the Second Australian Imperial Force to be taken prisoner in the Second World War was Sergeant Kenneth Walsh, 6<sup>th</sup> Divisional Cavalry Regiment. On 26 December 1940, Walsh was captured by the Italians near Giarabub, Libya. In 1941 and 1942, during the Middle East and Mediterranean campaigns, 7115 Australians fell into enemy hands. The greatest number of these – 5174 – became prisoners of the German invaders of Greece and Crete in April and May 1941. The Germans and Italians took 1941 Australians prisoner in North Africa – 507 in the retreat towards Tobruk, Libya, in early 1941, 467 during the Siege of Tobruk (April to December 1941) and the remainder mainly in operations in Egypt and Libya in 1942.

Few Australian units in North Africa suffered as greatly as the 2/28<sup>th</sup> Battalion. On 26–27 July 1942, the battalion took part in an attack on Afrika Korps positions at El Alamein. On the appropriately named Ruin Ridge the men of the 2/28<sup>th</sup>, fighting stubbornly, were surrounded and overrun by German tanks. A last message from the battalion commander read simply, 'We have got to give in'. Sixty-five men of the 2/28<sup>th</sup> had been killed in battle and the remaining 489 were formed up by the Germans and marched off to prisoner of war camps.

Wounded POWs sit in the courtyard of a converted orphanage, Kokkinia, Greece, 1941. AWM P1333/07/06



However, it was during the disastrous fighting in Greece and Crete in April and May 1941 that the largest number of Australians fell into enemy hands in any one operation in the Mediterranean. Virtually every unit of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division lost men in Greece and Crete. On Crete, 1420 men from three battalions – the 2/1<sup>st</sup>, the 2/11<sup>th</sup> and the 2/7<sup>th</sup> – became prisoners of war. From these three infantry battalions alone came virtually 20 per cent of all Second AIF soldiers taken prisoner by the Germans and Italians.

Another group of Australians who faced the constant danger of death or capture were aircrew of the RAAF. It has been estimated that of every 12 RAAF

men lost over enemy territory eight were killed, one evaded capture and three became prisoners of war. Altogether 1476 Australian airmen became prisoners of war in Europe, most being taken prisoner after they had bailed out of a stricken aircraft of Bomber Command over occupied Europe or Germany. A few belonged to other RAF and RAAF units and some were captured during the Middle East and Mediterranean campaigns.

As the war progressed, Allied airmen who bailed out over Germany after an 'area bombing' operation on an enemy target faced a particular hazard – death at the hands of local civilians before they could be taken into custody by military authorities. In the Ruhr area of Germany especially, it is known that Allied airmen, Australians among them, were at times beaten, stoned and even killed by infuriated mobs whipped up by enemy propaganda aimed at the so-called 'terror-fliers'.

Before their arrival in more permanent camps in Germany and Italy, prisoners from the Middle East, Greece and Crete faced periods in primitive holding camps and long journeys by rail or sea in overcrowded conditions. Among the worst transit camps, both run by the Germans, were Feldpost 12545, near Tripoli, and the Salonika camp in northern Greece. By the end of July 1941, the Salonika camp held over 12,000 Allied prisoners in antiquated and dilapidated military barracks. Many men were forced to sleep outside with no blankets. Rations were inadequate, beatings and kickings were commonplace, and dysentery and malaria were rife.



Australian POWs at work at Stalag XIII C, Hammelburg, Germany. AWM P02507.002

From Salonika, men faced a long journey to Germany in often appalling conditions. Charles Robinson, 2/2<sup>nd</sup> Field Ambulance, remembers the train ride from Salonika to Stalag XIII C at Hammelburg:

*Our bedraggled mob was marched to the station and given a small round loaf of bread and a tin of pork per man, for what we were told would be a five-day journey. We were crammed into cattle trucks, thirty-five to forty-five men per truck, and the doors were barred and*

*sealed with barbed wire, as were the small ventilator slots. The doors were not opened for the first day and as many men were still suffering from diarrhoea they just had to use any receptacle available . . . we were so cramped that it was impossible to lie down without draping part of our bodies over someone else . . . The heat and stench inside the trucks was incredible.*

Some did not survive the journey to the prison camp. In August 1942, the Italians evacuated over 2000 Allied prisoners of war, including 201 Australians, from Benghazi, Libya, in the cramped holds of the freighter *Nino Bixio*. On its second day out, bound for Italy, the freighter was torpedoed. All told, 37 Australians died as a result of this action, among them Lance Corporal James Paterson, 2/28<sup>th</sup> Battalion, of Perth, Western Australia, who drifted for nine days at sea on a raft.

Campo 57, Italy, where by October 1942 over 1200 Australians and 1000 New Zealanders were interned as prisoners of war.  
AWM P02793.006



Eventually most of those taken prisoner in North Africa found themselves in camps in Italy, among which the most notorious was Campo 57 at Gruppignano, near the Yugoslavian border. A sign over his office door revealed the attitude of the camp commandant, Colonel Vittorio Calcaterra:

*'The English are cursed, but more cursed are those Italians who treat them well'.*

Harsh and arbitrary sentences of detention were common at Campo 57 for infringing petty regulations and, on one occasion, an Australian, Corporal Edward Symons, 2/32<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, from Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, was summarily shot dead after an

argument with a guard. Not all Italian camps, however, were like Campo 57. Of the commandant of Campo Prato, near Bolzano in northern Italy, one man wrote:

*'He was a good old bloke in many ways and the boys had nothing to say against him. He used to let us go for walks two or three miles from the camp and we always got our Red Cross parcels and fags.'*

In September 1943 the Italians signed an armistice with the Allies. However, owing to a previous British instruction that all prisoners of war stay in their camps to await liberation, the Germans and their Italian sympathisers were able to evacuate over 25,000 Allied prisoners to Germany and Austria. On one train trip north to Germany, 102 men escaped, among whom were 13 Australians. Two of them were a father and son combination from Toowoomba, Queensland – the Sharps. They jumped from the train at Le Viss, near Trento, and spent seven days walking over the Alps to freedom in Switzerland.

By the end of 1941, virtually all Australians taken prisoner in Greece and Crete were being held in 24 camps in Germany, Austria and Poland. Officers were placed in Oflags (*Offizierlager* – an officers' camp) and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and other ranks in Stalags (*Mannschaft-Stammlager* – a camp for men other than officers). Conditions in the camps varied but were in general survivable. Stalag VIIA, Moosburg, near Munich in Bavaria, was typical and 1000 Australians arrived there from Salonika on 20 August 1941. The sleeping quarters at Moosburg consisted of large dormitories with 200 beds in tiers of three. Palliasses stuffed with wood-wool and two blankets formed the bedding. Food provided by the Germans ran to a cup of ersatz coffee for breakfast; cabbage, potato soup and a thick slice of bread or sometimes sauerkraut and two potatoes in their skins, for lunch; and for tea, carrot or potato soup and cabbage. Rations were supplemented by Red Cross parcels and, when on work detail outside the camp, men were able to acquire cash from German civilians for Red Cross items such as cigarettes and tea. In this way an escape fund was built up and a number of prisoners managed to get away from outside work camps and reach nearby Switzerland.

In general, camp life was boring and routine. To relieve the monotony the men kept themselves occupied in a number of ways. At Oflag VIB at Warburg, officers of the 51<sup>st</sup> Highland Division taught Highland and Scottish dancing to any who wished to learn. At Stalag 383, Hohenfels, near Regensburg, which by the end of 1942 contained 500 Australian NCOs, theatre productions were a lavish and regular

Performance of Oscar Wilde's  
*The Importance of Being Ernest*,  
Stalag 383, Hohenfels,  
Germany, 1943.  
AWM P02070.004



feature. A camp orchestra provided the music, and 'usherettes', 'dressed in neat little skirts and pill-box hats', collected thousands of cigarettes which paid for the production. The audience was transported far beyond the barbed wire as they watched



Work party from Stalag XVIII A,  
Wolfsberg, Austria, c1944.  
AWM SUK13740

performances of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, *HMS Pinafore* and *The Gondoliers* or plays such as *Dinner at Eight*, *Night Must Fall* and *I Killed The Count*.

At the extreme of the Australian experience of German captivity was the time spent by some 100 Australian servicemen in concentration camps. As the Allied armies advanced towards Paris in 1944, the Germans removed to Germany the inmates of Fresnes prison, most of whom were being held by the German secret police – the Gestapo. Among the 1650 men, women and children from Fresnes were 168 Allied airmen who had initially evaded capture. When apprehended in civilian clothing they were not regarded as prisoners of war but

instead flung into Fresnes. Among this group were nine men from the RAAF. After their arrival in Germany they were taken to a camp whose name has become a byword for brutality and horror – Buchenwald. At Buchenwald the prisoners of war were treated with the same savagery as all the other inmates and set to tasks which indicated the fate that awaited them. Pilot Officer Bob Mills from Salisbury, South Australia, was forced to collect the dead for delivery to the crematorium:

*'I actually witnessed those terribly emaciated corpses being fed into the ovens. It's a sight I can never, ever forget.'*

Just days before they were due to be executed in a most barbaric manner, the airmen were removed from Buchenwald and sent to a regular prisoner of war camp. Fortunately for them, word had reached the highest levels of the Luftwaffe (German Air Force) that they were being held in a concentration camp and successful representations were made for their removal.

During their time in German camps there were only two ways to freedom for the Australian prisoners – escape or repatriation through prisoner exchange. In all, 1329 men of the AIF who were maimed, medically unfit or of protected status were exchanged for a similar number of enemy prisoners and protected personnel. Those of protected status were mostly medical personnel or soldiers specially trained as auxiliary nurses and stretcher bearers, who, if taken prisoner, were entitled to repatriation under the Geneva Convention.

However, it is the many escape attempts which have dominated Australian understanding of Australian prisoners of war in Europe. Altogether 582 Australians are estimated to have made an escape from a German or Italian prison camp between 1941 and 1945. Typical of an individual escape story is that of Corporal John Parker. Corporal Parker (later Lieutenant Parker DCM, 2/1<sup>st</sup> Field Company, 1 Base Store Company) from Coffs Harbour, New South Wales, a prisoner in Moosburg, hid himself on a platform beside the wheels of the locomotive of a train bound for Switzerland. At Munich, an engineer worked on the wheels within a couple of metres of Parker's hiding place but he remained undetected and reached St Margrethen over the Swiss border after a 12 hour journey, sometimes at high speeds, in his cramped position. There are many examples of escapes like Parker's, escapes which led men into a huge variety of experiences – fighting with partisans in Yugoslavia and Greece, with the Maquis in France, or, simply, after passing through well organised escape routes helped by local civilians, crossing the English Channel to rejoin the war.

Of all the escape stories, undoubtedly one of the best known, and most tragic, is that of the breakout from Stalag Luft III, Sagan, a camp for airmen. Between March 1941 and March 1944 over 100 escape tunnels were dug by the prisoners of war in Sagan, who were described by their German captors as 'these active and mobile men who do not want to do anything except escape!' In 1943 a grand escape plan envisaged the breakout of over 200 prisoners through a set of three tunnels known as Tom, Dick and Harry. Tom was discovered and Dick was thereafter used as a storage tunnel. On the night of 24–25 March 1944, 80 men successfully crawled to freedom through Harry. Four were quickly recaptured and 76 headed off in a number of different directions attempting to reach a neutral country.

Hitler was enraged by this mass escape. He demanded that more than 50 per cent of all those recaptured should be shot despite their protected prisoner of war status. This so-called 'Sagan order' was duly carried out and 50 men were taken in small numbers from local prisons and shot along deserted highways. Their ashes were returned to Sagan with the advice that they had all been killed 'while attempting to escape'. Four Australian airmen were among those executed in this manner – Squadron Leader John Williams, Sydney; Squadron Leader James Catanach, Melbourne; Flight Lieutenant Reginald Kierath, Killara, New South Wales; and Warrant Officer Albert Hake, Haberfield, New South Wales. One of them, unable to walk on his frostbitten feet, was

Private Lawrence Saywell (second from left) with a New Zealander and two Russians, with whom he escaped from a prison camp in Bohemia in 1943. They were sheltered by villagers and in return helped partisans with sabotage operations. Saywell was shot by a German patrol on VE day, 8 May 1945. He was the last Australian killed in Europe. AWM P02551.006



carried out to his death by his executioners. At Sagan a special memorial was created to the memory of the dead escapers. On it, beneath an RAF eagle, was the inscription: *'In memory of the officers who gave their lives'*.

In early 1945 many of the Australians faced their final ordeal in captivity. As the German army was driven back all along its Eastern and Western fronts Allied forces began to get close to the prisoner of war camps. There now began a series of forced marches from the camps back into the heart of Germany. For example, as the Russians approached Stalag VIIC at Sagan on Germany's eastern border, the prisoners set out in late winter on a 480 kilometre march to Duderstadt. On 17 February a similar march began in a heavy snowstorm from Stalag VIIIA at Gorlitz. One prisoner recalls their condition after two days of this:

*'Dawn finds us a sorry lot. Many are crippled by blisters and are unable to march any further, while others suffer from cramps, torn tendons and muscles.'*

By March 1945, hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war were on the march all over Germany and Austria as the Allies closed in. With the collapse of Germany, the Australians found themselves liberated in a thousand different ways and few will forget that moment. For Flight Lieutenant Joe Herman, RAAF, it came on 22 April 1945 when, after enduring a terrible 80 kilometre forced march from Stalag Luft III at Sagan to Luckenwalde, he was freed by the Russians:

*An American Lieutenant came into the camp on May 6 in a Jeep ... he told me he had about a dozen trucks about four kilometres down the road in the forest. We were back across the Elbe that night and I was back with my English bride on her birthday, 13 May 1945.*

Men from Stalag 383 halt beside a stream at Etehausen during a forced march south.  
AWM 129006



Of those Australian servicemen taken prisoner by the Germans and Italians, 265 died in captivity. Of the remainder, 1329 were returned in prisoner exchanges during hostilities, and the rest were evacuated to England, mainly by plane, soon after liberation. Once there, Second AIF men were cared for by an AIF Reception Group at Eastbourne on the Sussex coast. RAAF personnel were looked after by a special POW Section at Brighton. After proper rest, recuperation and leave, the ex-prisoners, except for a few who took their discharge in the United Kingdom, headed home. By 15 August 1945, only a few medical cases from the RAAF remained in England. On 30 August, a final small draft of AIF ex-prisoners of war left, so completing the repatriation of those who, in their own minds, had spent too much of their war service as 'guests of the enemy'.

At the end of the war I interviewed every Australian and English soldier in my camp; I was the only medical officer in the camp. And I thought it was my duty to record their disabilities. And you'd say to them, what diseases have you had as a prisoner of war. Oh, nothing much Doc, nothing much at all. Did you have malaria? Oh yes, I had malaria. Did you have dysentery? Oh yes, I had dysentery. Did you have beriberi? Yes, I had beriberi. Did you have pellagra? Yes, I had pellagra; but nothing very much. All these are lethal diseases. But that was the norm, you see, everyone had them. Therefore they accepted them as normal.

[Dr Ian Duncan, who served with the Australian Army Medical Corps and became a prisoner of the Japanese in the Second World War.]

## Asia

On 8 December 1941 the Japanese invaded the British colony of Malaya and for the next seven weeks fought their way down the Malayan peninsula. At places such as Gemas, Bakri and Muar, units of the Second AIF's 8<sup>th</sup> Division earned Japanese respect by a determined resistance to their advance. During the Malayan campaign, the 8<sup>th</sup> Division, which constituted just 14 per cent of the British Empire's ground forces in Malaya, sustained 73 per cent of that force's battle deaths.

By 31 January 1942, the Japanese had pushed the British back into the supposedly impregnable island fortress of Singapore. At 10.30am on the evening of 8 February, Japanese units crossed the Straits of Malacca and, within a week, brought the British commander, Lieutenant General Arthur Percival, to surrender negotiations at the Ford factory at Bukit Timah. The British capitulation at Singapore on 15 February 1942 was a catastrophe. Many thousands of British Empire servicemen fell into enemy hands, of whom 14,792 were Australians, almost all men of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division.

A member of the 2/21<sup>st</sup> Battalion, AIF, captured at Ambon in 1942, lies in the improvised hospital at Bakli Bay camp, Hainan, suffering from dysentery and starvation, August 1945. AWM 030358/05





These were not the only Australians to become prisoners of the Japanese in early 1942. On 23 January 1942, Major General Horii's South Seas Force from Guam invaded Rabaul in the Australian Trust Territory of New Guinea; within a day, and despite stout resistance, it had overwhelmed Rabaul's garrison, the ill-fated Lark Force comprising mainly men of the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Division. Approximately 800 Australian servicemen and women became prisoners of war. A similar fate befell Gull Force on the island of Ambon where, again after a brave attempt to resist, 1075 Australians, mainly soldiers from the 2/21<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Division, surrendered on 3 February 1942.

On Timor island, Sparrow Force, men of the 2/40<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Division, and the 2/2<sup>nd</sup> Independent Company fought for four days against a greatly superior Japanese invasion force. Surrender on 23 February sent another 1137 Australians into Japanese captivity. Until late December 1942/early January 1943, the 2/2<sup>nd</sup> Independent Company, reinforced by the 2/4<sup>th</sup> Independent Company, continued successful guerilla warfare against the Japanese occupiers of Timor.

Crew of HMAS *Perth*, some of whom survived to become POWs, in the Mediterranean, March 1941. AWM 006846



On 19 February 1942, units of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division, Second AIF, freshly returned from the Middle East, were landed in Java to assist the Dutch in the defence of the Netherlands East Indies. They did not have long to wait for the Japanese. On the night of 28 February–1 March, Allied naval units encountered an enemy invasion force, headed for western Java. In the ensuing battle of the Sunda Straits, the Australian light cruiser HMAS *Perth* was sunk with the loss of over half its crew. The remaining 320 men were taken prisoner. On 12 March, Java fell and a further 2736 Australians became prisoners of war. Altogether, between the fall of Rabaul in late January and the collapse of Java in mid-March 1942, the Japanese had taken over 22,000 Australian prisoners of war in addition to many thousands more British, Indian and Dutch servicemen and women.

Within days, sometimes hours, of becoming prisoners, many Australians faced death at the hands of their captors. At Parit Sulong in

Malaya on 22 January 1942, 110 Australians were massacred after the battle of Muar. On New Britain, 160 men of Lark Force were killed by Japanese guards at Tol Plantation on

4 February, and a similar fate befell over 200 Australians at Laha Airfield on Ambon sometime after 2 February. Undoubtedly, many others met a similar fate in the field before the large number of prisoners were concentrated into more permanent camps.

Of all the massacres of prisoners in those early days of 1942, none is better remembered in Australia than the fate of some of the survivors of the SS *Vyner Brooke*. The *Vyner Brooke* left Singapore on 12 February, three days before the surrender, carrying among others 60 members of the Australian Army Nursing Service. Off Banka Island, about 400 kilometres south of Singapore, the *Vyner Brooke* was bombed and sunk. Two of the nurses were killed and another nine, who drifted away on a raft, were never seen again. One group of 22 of the remaining nurses, along with other survivors, landed on the island and on 16 February gave themselves up to the Japanese. They were made to wade into the water. Sister Vivian Bullwinkel recalled what happened next:

*We were sitting down, and we were ordered up, and then told to march into the sea. Which we did. As we got to about waist level they started machine gunning from behind. I was hit at the side of the back. The bullet came through, but I wasn't aware of it at the time. I thought that once you were shot you'd had it. What with the force of the bullet and the waves I was knocked over into the water. And in so doing I swallowed a lot of water. I became violently ill and . . . I realised I was very much alive . . . and I just lay there. When I did venture to sit up there was nothing. All my colleagues had been swept away, and there were no Japs on the beach.*

Three nurses of the 2/4<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station, photographed soon after their arrival in Malaya in late 1941. Of the three, only Sister Mavis Hannah (centre) survived the war, as a prisoner of war in Sumatra. Matron Irene Drummond (right) was killed in the massacre of nurses on Banka Island on 15 February 1942 and Sister Dora Gardam (left) died on 4 April 1945 as a prisoner of war. AWM 120519



Sister Bullwinkel was the only survivor of the Banka Island massacre and her blood-stained uniform is on display in the Second World War Gallery at the Australian War Memorial. Along with 31 other Australian nurses she endured imprisonment at

Palembang on Sumatra and at Muntok on Banka Island until August 1945. During their last months of captivity, eight nurses died from disease, malnutrition and overwork.

For three and a half years from January 1942 to August 1945 thousands of Australians suffered a regime which involved brutality, privation and, all too often, death at the hands of the Japanese. In Japan and Borneo, in the jungles of eastern Thailand, and in



Ex-POW amputees on their way home from Thailand arrive at Singapore.  
AWM 119706

dozens of other places across east and south-east Asia, Australians, and many thousands of Allied prisoners of war and forced labourers, were put to work for the enemy in conditions where ill-treatment, bad food and disease were commonplace.

Over 130,000 European civilians were interned by the Japanese when their armies swept over Asia. Approximately 500 of these civilians were Australians. These businesspeople, planters, administrators and missionaries, in many instances along with their families, were overrun by the swift Japanese advance. Between 1942 and war's end they were held in camps all over Asia where, like the military prisoners, they often endured harsh conditions. Captive children suffered particularly from deficiency diseases and were often traumatised by witnessing acts of

brutality. Women were humiliated, sometimes sexually, and some were compelled to become prostitutes for the Japanese military.

No short account can do justice to the suffering and fortitude shown by Australian prisoners of the Japanese. However, two incidents – the building of the Burma–Thailand railway in 1943 and the Sandakan death marches in 1945 – carry the essence of the story of what, at its worst, it was like to be a prisoner of the Imperial Japanese Army in the Second World War.

### The Burma–Thailand railway, 1942–43

By mid-1942 the Japanese had a large army in Burma. To keep it supplied involved a long and exposed sea voyage up the Malayan and Burmese coasts from Singapore to Rangoon. To shorten this supply line, it was decided to build a railway through wild jungle country across the Burma–Thailand border to link the Burmese town of Thanbyuzayat with the Thailand railway system at Bampong – a distance of 421 kilometres. The Japanese decided to build the railway from both the Thailand and Burmese ends simultaneously, and for this purpose in September 1942 they began assembling a labour force which would be made up eventually of approximately 62,000 Allied prisoners of war, including 9500 Australians, and 270,000 conscripted Asian labourers. By 17 October 1943 the railway was operational but along the line lay the graves of thousands of prisoners of war and Asian labourers who had been worked to death in its construction. Of the prisoners of war, over 10,000 died, of whom 2650 were Australians – nearly 30 per cent of all Australian captives who had been sent to Burma and Thailand. Countless thousands of Asian labourers also perished.

This appalling death toll can be simply explained – the Japanese expected men to undertake hard physical labour in tropical conditions with inadequate equipment. The prisoners of war were in a constantly undernourished condition, and with non-existent medical supplies. Many men, weakened by starvation, succumbed to an array of diseases – cholera, beriberi, malaria and pellagra. An unfortunate number were simply beaten to death for their insubordination or inability to work any more. In the mid-1980s some of the survivors of the railway told their stories to Hank Nelson for his book, *Prisoners of War: Australians Under Nippon* (Sydney, 1985). More than anything else, the direct testimony of those who were there reveals the full horror, tragedy and pathos of this dark episode in Australian history:

*In one of the worst speedos [a 'hurry-up' work period] we started at 5 o'clock in the morning and got home at 11 at night, and we got home at one o'clock the next morning, and one o'clock the morning after that.*

[Stan Arneil]

*Then you just go on and on for 150 days without a let-up ... it was just a matter of getting out to the job and getting back, and getting out and getting back; that was all. You went, and then you flopped on your bunk at night.*

[Ray Parkin]

*It was like a scene out of Dante's inferno. The Japs decided we would work twenty-four hours a day, two shifts, one was the day shift and one was the night ... If you stood on the top of the cutting you would see the burning fires at intervals of about twenty feet; you'd see the shadows of the Japanese with their Foreign Legion caps moving around with their sticks belting men. There was shouting and bel-lowing. And this went on all night.*

[Hugh Clarke on the scene at Hellfire Pass cutting]

*So when we got there, if the beriberi was excessive, you might have to lie some of them on their backs with their feet against the side of the embankment to keep the fluid flowing down through their legs into their bodies so that their legs wouldn't burst. They couldn't work at all. We'd feed them at lunch time. They were looked after, hats placed over their faces to keep the rain out, and they were talked to and joked to. They understood the position. We would carry them back at night. Usually one would die during the day.*

[Stan Arneil on looking after the sick who were forced to make up work details]

A north-bound train passing over a trestle bridge on the Burma-Thailand railway. A similar bridge near Hellfire Pass was called the 'Pack of Cards Bridge'. During construction, the bridge fell down three times, 31 men were killed in falls and 29 men were beaten to death.  
AWM 122309



Initially the dead were given proper burials beside the railway with a bugler playing the *Last Post*. Later, with the risk of disease and constant demands for work, the dead were cremated quickly. Their ashes were preserved in bamboo tubes, and after the war the remains of 1362 Australians were buried at Kanchanaburi in Thailand and 1348 at Thanbyuzayat in Burma.



Advanced tropical ulcer on the leg of a POW at Tarsau camp, Thailand, 1943.

AWM P00761.010

Among the prisoners, one group saved untold lives and worked tirelessly for them – the doctors. They improvised medical treatments from any suitable material, and drew on their knowledge of the pharmacological properties of local jungle plants. Lieutenant Colonel Albert Coates (later Sir Albert Coates) considered that he did some of the best work of his medical career at Kilo 55 Camp in Burma. He had few medicines and his medical equipment was little better than had been available to the surgeons of the First Fleet to sail to Australia in 1787. At Kilo 55, the Dutch chemist, Captain C van Boxtel, managed to produce pain-killing spinal injections from cocaine tablets. Alf Mitchell recalls Coates, assisted by van Boxtel, operating at Kilo 55:

*At the end of the hut you could see the Colonel operating. With the help of the Dutchman van Boxtel they had made a drug and they used it to stick in the back of your spine. The orderlies held your head and bent your back right over and stuck it in, which would paralyse you from the chest down. You could go there and watch ... Colonel would cut right around the flesh and he'd grip the arteries and that to stop the blood from flying out ... he was taking six legs a day off there.*

On many occasions the doctors saved lives by refusing to allow sick men to be worked. This, not surprisingly, caused at times intense conflict between the prisoners' medical protectors and the Japanese guards intent on bringing work details up to the required strength. One doctor who suffered a severe beating at the hands of the guards was Major Bruce Hunt who, at Tarsu in Thailand, tried to prevent 37 sick men from being taken. In front of those he was trying to protect, Hunt was beaten virtually insensible and had a metacarpal bone fractured by three guards wielding bamboo canes.

The prisoners themselves reserved many of their most heartfelt tributes for the doctors. Russell Braddon, in his book *Naked Island*, described the work of Major Kevin Fagan:

*... he also carried men who fell; he carried the kit of men in danger of falling ... And when at the end of our night's trip we collapsed and slept he was there to clean blisters, set broken bones and render first-aid.*

From among the doctors one man has passed into legend – Sir Edward ‘Weary’ Dunlop – whose statue stands today in the grounds of the Australian War Memorial. Perhaps of all the images of the building of the Burma–Thailand railway none is more illustrative of the tragedy of the situation, and the courage and compassion of doctors like ‘Weary’ Dunlop, than a scene described by survivor Ray Parkin. At Hintok camp the sick would be inspected by the Japanese to see if they could be sent to work. Dunlop told really sick men to sit on a log – the ‘wailing log’ – and under no circumstances to respond to a guard’s bellowed instruction to stand up. Parkin describes Dunlop’s reaction:

Weary would go and pick up a man in his arms like a baby, bring him over to Nippon, and say, ‘This man, Nippon?’ And then he would carry him back. Even the most hardened Japanese found it difficult to accept a man proffered in Dunlop’s arms as fit to labour on the railway.



Funeral of a POW who died during the construction of the railway, Burma, c1943.  
AWM Poo 406.031

## The Sandakan death marches, 1945

In January 1945, in the Sandakan prisoner of war camp in British North Borneo, there were approximately 2770 prisoners, Australian and British. In late January, fearing imminent Allied invasion, the Japanese force-marched 470 of the prisoners 260 kilometres inland across rough jungle and mountain terrain to a small village called Ranau. Few men were fit as they embarked on this march; virtually all were suffering from malaria, beriberi and malnutrition. An estimated 60 per cent had no boots.

By March, those remaining at Sandakan were in a pitiful condition. The withholding of food and medical supplies produced what the Australian official historian called ‘walking skeletons’ – men weighing between 40 and 45 kilograms. On 29 May, the Japanese began destroying the camp. Many of the prisoners of wars were severe hospital cases, yet despite this, the Japanese ordered another 536 of the emaciated men to set out on the track to Ranau, a situation which was presented to them as a ‘very short journey’. As all the barracks at the camp had now been destroyed, for those sick prisoners of war left behind there was no accommodation and they lay out in the open.

As the second march moved through the jungle, men were beaten with rifle butts. Only 100 grams of rice, little more than a handful, was allowed per man per day and even this meagre ration was eventually reduced. The track itself was extremely rough and men urged themselves forward through, at times, knee-deep mud. As the country became steeper, the prisoners had to crawl up the hills and allow themselves to slide down the other side. It soon became clear that those who dropped out and fell behind were being

shot by the guards. Don Wall, in his account of the marches, *Sandakan – the Last March*, writes:

It was not uncommon to see a PW sitting on a log or a stone on the side of the road and as his fellow PWs passed he would give them messages to pass on to another friend in the leading column of the march. Many of these men went to their deaths shouting curses and insults at the Japs and telling them to 'let me have it'. Nelson Short remembers 'Smiler' Watts saying, 'Nelson, if you make it, tell Mum this is where I fell out'.

On 26 June 1945, approximately 180 of those who set out on this second march reached Ranau alive. Two men had escaped from the march and, with the help of local people, were rescued by Allied forces. At Ranau, the marchers found just six survivors of those who had set out on the first march in January. The rest were dead. At Ranau the survivors lived in unbelievably harsh conditions. The rice ration was reduced to 70 grams a day and working parties of sick and dying men were forced to build huts and carry food supplies. More men died and the survivors were barely strong enough to lift the dead into shallow graves. Throughout all this, the Japanese used the prisoners of

war to fetch and carry for them. An estimated 18 men died carrying the required 130 bucket loads of water per day up a hill so steep that men were unable to stand on it. Protests or opposition led to severe beatings. One man from the first march who died from this savage treatment was Gunner Albert Cleary. Don Wall describes Cleary's fate after he had been recaptured trying to escape:

*'They then tied Cleary up and after taking his clothes from him, put a chain around his neck and chained him to a stake. The guards would continually kick him and spit on him . . . he was putrid and starving.'*

By early August there were no prisoners left alive at Ranau. Two small parties had escaped into the jungle and were befriended by local people. From these parties four men, all Australian, survived.

After the departure of the second group for Ranau, about 290 prisoners were left at the Sandakan camp. On 9 June, 75 of these were sent on a third march to Ranau and none was seen alive again. By this stage, 23 men were still standing and capable of assisting their sick and dying comrades. On 13 June, these 23 prisoners of war were taken out to the local airfield and shot. The rest were left in the open air to die of neglect, disease and starvation. By 21 June all had died. Thus, on 15 August 1945, the day the Japanese

Three of the six survivors of the Sandakan-Ranau death marches: Private Nelson Short, Warrant Officer William Sticpewich and Private Keith Botterill, North Borneo, 1945.  
*AWM OC3552*



surrendered, there were no British or Australian prisoners left alive at Sandakan to hear the news. For them, their only liberation from suffering had been death. Of those prisoners of war who had been alive in Sandakan in January 1945, only six, all Australians, survived the death marches and their treatment at Ranau. *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History* concludes simply:

*'The Sandakan death march was one of the worst Japanese atrocities against western POWs during the Pacific War.'*

At the liberation in August 1945, approximately 13,870 Australian prisoners of the Japanese were in an astonishing number of camps and locations spread across Asia and the Pacific. At the isolated work camp on the Mergui Road in Burma, ten fit men out of 300 Australian, British and Dutch prisoners of war witnessed a broken Japanese army in retreat and on 19 August heard the war was over. At Hainan Island, the Japanese surrender of 15 August happened just in time to save the lives of the Australians there who were literally starving to death.



Evidence of the 2500 POWs held in the Sandakan area, of whom only six survived, is examined at war's end.  
AWM 120438

In August 1945 there were hundreds of Australian prisoners of war in Japan, where they had been brought over the previous three years to labour on wharves, in factories and in coal mines. Some witnessed the explosion which ushered in the atomic age and heralded their liberation:

*'Our camp was twenty-three miles from Nagasaki, and we thought they hit a gasworks because of the colours radiating from the thing. Like if you seen a dry storm at night going out to sea . . . And there was a hell of a wind after it'.*

[David Runge, an Australian imprisoned near Nagasaki, Japan, on 9 August 1945]

When an Australian Recovery Team reached Rabaul, New Guinea, in August 1945 there was no sign of Lark Force. On the broken slabs of the Lark Force camp, Malaguna Road



Barracks, they discovered a few soldiers' names etched into the cement. That was all. Gradually the story emerged – 160 had died at the Tol Plantation massacre and 849 of the rest had drowned when, on the night of 1 July 1942, an American torpedo hit the *Montevideo Maru* which was taking them to Japan. Of those members of Lark Force who had been made prisoners in January 1942, only some of the officers and the nurses, who had gone on a different ship to Japan, returned home in 1945.

Emaciated survivors of Gull Force, evacuated from Ambon Island on HMAS *Junee*, are loaded into an ambulance, Morotai, September 1945.  
AWM 115765



Some initiated their own release. On Ambon Island by August 1945, of the 528 men of Gull Force left there in October 1942 when a large party had been taken away to Hainan, only 123 were still alive. The Japanese on Ambon were unsure of their country's surrender and nothing happened for two weeks. Eventually a prisoner demanded to be taken to the radio room where he made contact with Allied Headquarters on Morotai and managed to convince a sceptical radio operator that there really were Australian prisoners of war on Ambon, mainly stretcher cases. On 10 September 1945, the sad remnant of Gull Force assembled on the wharf to witness their liberation:

*We were very excited. Were looking out the heads and couldn't see anything, and then suddenly we saw this tiny little ship coming in, and then another one, and another one. The first that came in was the [HMAS] Glenelg, then the Cootamundra, Junee and Latrobe. And each of us was allocated to a corvette.*

[Jack Panaotie, Gull Force survivor]

Between 15 August, war's end, and the arrival of the Royal Australian Navy, five prisoners had died. Two more died in hospital on Morotai. And so Gull Force, or what was left of it, returned from three years and seven months of captivity.

In all, some 13,872 Australian prisoners of war were recovered from Japanese captivity at the end of the war. Of those taken prisoner, approximately 7780 had died – 35 per cent. As the Australian official history states, this represented 'nearly three times the number killed in battle in, for example, the 9th Australian Division during its four campaigns'.

There is no simple conclusion that can sum up the experience of the Australian captives in Asia during the Second World War, nor estimate the importance of their experiences in the development of Australian national consciousness. As historian Hank Nelson, who has met and talked with many of them, asserts, 'the prisoners do not measure themselves against national history'. Perhaps then, what we are left with is not one or two glib conclusions but the richness in our community of the personal reflections and very human understandings of thousands of Australian men and women. What their country asked from them in war was not only the normal military virtue of courage in battle – and many of them proved they possessed that as well – but an unusual capacity to endure humiliation and privation and to support each other. Those qualities are certainly considered part of what it might mean to be an Australian.



Sisters Carrie Ashton, 2/13<sup>th</sup> AGH, and Mavis Hannah, 2/4<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station (CCS), arrive to a homecoming celebration in Adelaide, September 1945, after three and a half years of imprisonment by the Japanese in Sumatra. AWM P00431.001

## THE KOREAN WAR

It was terrible, no matter how sick or injured you were, if you fell out of line, they'd just shoot you and leave you. I saw them do it to my friends.

[Private Robert Parker, 3RAR, prisoner of war, Korea.]

The Korean War began on 25 June 1950 with the invasion of South Korea by the People's Army of North Korea. The fighting ended in an armistice signed at Panmunjon on 27 July 1953. Australian units served in Korea within a British Commonwealth Brigade (eventually a Commonwealth Division) which formed part of a United Nations force. During three years of war, 339 Australians were killed in action and 29 became prisoners of the North Koreans and their Chinese allies. Of this 29, one man died.



Harsh and often brutal treatment was characteristic of the Australian prisoner of war experience in Korea. Typical was the handling of four soldiers captured in early 1951 – Corporal Don Buck and Privates Keith Gwyther, Robert Parker and Tom Hollis, all of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment. Held at Camp 5 in the far north of North Korea near the Chinese border, they were subjected to periods of frequent so-called 'corrective discipline', mostly in the 'Sweat Box', a small cell four metres square. Other punishments included reduced rations, denial of washing or drinking water, infrequent toilet visits and beatings with rifle butts and pistol barrels. In June 1952, Corporal Buck led a breakout from his prisoner of war camp. Following his recapture, Buck was subjected to frequent beatings over a two week period for refusing to confess who had organised the escape.

During their time in captivity, despite constant

Warrant Officer Ronald Guthrie (with beard) with American, British and Turkish POWs during the winter of 1952-53, North Korea. AWMPo305/06/01

pressure, Buck, Gwyther, Parker and Hollis refused to give any 'confession' or divulge any information which might have gained them better treatment. After their release, their courage was recognised and all four were mentioned in despatches. The report of the Officer Commanding the British Repatriated Prisoners of War Interrogation Unit noted:

*'As long as men such as these are to be found, the British Commonwealth has nothing to fear from any foe.'*

Thirty-one members of 77 Squadron RAAF were posted as missing in Korea. Of these, only seven, one of whom was a member of the RAF, survived to undergo imprisonment by their enemies. On 19 January 1951, Flight Lieutenant Gordon Harvey, RAAF, became the first Australian to be taken prisoner in Korea when his Mustang was shot down near Pyongyang. Harvey was in captivity for two and a half years during which time he escaped once. As punishment for this, he spent 44 days in a hole in the ground two metres deep and a metre square. Warrant Officer Ronald Guthrie, RAAF, captured on 29 August 1951, was at one point bound with wire and left on a street corner in the rain where passers-by spat at him and prodded him with sticks. Later he was beaten up, marched to the top of a hill, told to dig his own grave, and threatened with death for his refusal to answer questions. In November 1951, along with other Australian and Allied prisoners, Guthrie took part in the notorious 300 kilometre winter march from Kandong to the Yalu River.

During their captivity in Korea, many efforts were made to indoctrinate Allied soldiers and to obtain from them so-called 'confessions' on matters such as the alleged use of germ warfare by the United Nations Command. One Australian officer subject to intensive interrogation to get him to admit the use of germ warfare was Captain Phillip Greville. When not undergoing interrogation, Greville was forced to sit at attention, cross-legged at the door of his cell. After three and a half months of interrogation, 90 days of which was spent in solitary confinement, Greville was released into the comparative luxury of an ordinary prisoner of war camp.



Private John Mackay, 3RAR, has his wounds treated at an American tent hospital after his release by the Chinese in Korea, April 1953.  
AWM 157551



Ex-prisoners of the Japanese recover at 2/12<sup>th</sup> AGH after more than three years of captivity, September 1945. AWM 116366

**AUSTRALIAN PRISONERS OF WAR:  
SELECTED BIOGRAPHIES**

Out of my life I lost four years; and  
very valuable years when you're  
twenty five to twenty nine. They were  
certainly lost years except for the  
friendships I made there and the  
experience it gave me.

Sister Sylvia Muir, 2/13<sup>th</sup> AGH, captured in Sumatra, 1942

In this space [twenty men in 3m x 3m]  
we had to eat and sleep for a week.  
The only liberty we had was one hour  
per day for those well enough to take  
it. By the end of the week things were  
almost insufferable, all were goaded  
to desperation. I have often been in  
cramped spaces in submarines where  
you could cut the air with a knife but  
never did I experience the nausea I  
suffered in that putrid hole and it must  
have been worse for the sick and weak.

A B Wheat, *AE2*, prisoner of the Turks, Taurus Mountains, 1915

## SORRY THAT WE HAD TO GIVE IN

### Able Seaman Albert Knaggs

#### HMAS *AE2*

Albert Knaggs was born in Bristol, England, in 1882. He joined the Royal Navy in 1897, and in 1912 became a police constable and naval reservist. Missing life at sea, Knaggs enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy in 1913. He trained as a submariner before sailing for Australia in HMAS *AE2*. His wife and two sons were to follow but the war intervened and they stayed in England.

Knaggs became a prisoner of war on 30 April 1915 when the *AE2* was sunk in the Sea of Marmora, Turkey. He wrote in his diary of 'being sorry that we had to give in' but figured the submariners were lucky to be alive. They were 'nearly eaten alive with bugs and lice' in second-hand clothing issued before reaching Constantinople. The food was 'not fit for pigs' and, after interrogation, their hair was 'shorn close and shaved like criminal prisoners'.

Taken to Afion-Kara-Hissar, Knaggs and his fellow prisoners (except the officers) were held in a hut, finding it 'impossible to sleep at nights with the cold and the wind, nearly all hands marching up and down all night'. They moved to another camp and spent two months confined in small quarters, with sanitary arrangements 'in a bad state'. They were then employed on roadworks and breaking stone, 'kept going by armed sentries, a few of our people being struck with the rifle'.

Knaggs worked in several camps. Conditions were bad, but the prisoners held out hope, with rumours of an imminent end to the war causing great excitement. By mid-1916, Knaggs was at Belemedik, the base camp for railway construction. He was lucky to get light work as a cook and to receive parcels of clothing from his wife and philanthropic organisations. But typhus and malaria broke out, and Knaggs was admitted to hospital at Bozanti. He died on 22 October 1916 of malaria and acute dysentery. After the war, his remains were re-interred at Baghdad (North Gate) War Cemetery, Iraq.



Able Seaman Albert Knaggs (middle row, second from left), in a group portrait of the officers and crew of the submarine HMAS *AE2*, Gosport, England, February 1914. AWM P01075.045



## TOO ROUGH AND TOUGH

Merchant Seaman Charles Lacey

Motor Tanker *Teddy*

Charles Lacey was 16 in 1939 when he went to sea. In 1940, he and three other Australians signed onto the Norwegian tanker M/T *Teddy*. On the night of 8–9 November 1940, a German raider, *Atlantis*, intercepted the *Teddy* in the Bay of Bengal. Soon Germans were ‘running all over the place and the next thing I know I got a gun sittin’ in me back, told to get my gear’.

Prisoners were transferred to the *Atlantis* and later to a captured tanker that rendezvoused with several raiders and laid mines off Australia before heading for Europe. Over 600 Allied merchant seamen and sailors were contained in its holds. An attempt to seize the ship was thwarted by guards opening fire. In February 1941, the prisoners disembarked in France and went into a staging camp. Some escaped, but Lacey was too ill.

Merchant seamen were transported to *Stalag 10B*, located within the Sandbostel concentration camp, near Bremen. They occupied old, drafty, bug-ridden huts, and worked cutting wood and peat or emptying latrines. Rations were watery turnip soup or sauerkraut, with small potatoes, and ersatz bread made of flour and sawdust. Disease was rampant. Australian prisoners, ‘too rough and tough’, generally coped quite well. Wearing a Dutch jacket, Belgian pants, French cap and Yugoslav overcoat, Lacey went barefoot for weeks after a guard stole his boots, until a prisoner with his sized shoes died of disease. Sabotage was one way of fighting back; Lacey came of age with 28 days’ solitary confinement for damaging shovels.

In late 1941, after Red Cross protests, merchant seamen began moving to the *Marine Internierten Lager*, or Milag-Marlag Nord Internment Camp, at Westertimke. Conditions were better, but as the war dragged on rations got worse. Red Cross parcels, shared among friends of different nationalities, were a saving grace. At long last, in April 1945, British forces liberated the overcrowded camp. In Britain awaiting passage home, Lacey married, returning to Australia in 1946.



Merchant Seaman Charles Lacey in England after his release from Milag-Marlag Nord Internment Camp, Germany, 1945.

AWM P02339.005

## WHITE COOLIES

### Sister Betty Jeffrey 2/10<sup>th</sup> Australian General Hospital, AIF

Betty Jeffrey began nursing training at 29, after working as a secretary, and graduated in 1940. She joined the Australian Army Nursing Service and went to Malaya with the 2/10<sup>th</sup> Australian General Hospital. She was in the second and last batch of 65 nurses evacuated from Singapore, surviving the sinking of the *Vyner Brooke* and two days in the water before reaching Banka Island. Jeffrey's capture on 17 January 1942 was frightening, as Japanese troops 'jumped off the truck and ran towards us, fixing their bayonets to their rifles as they came!'

Taken to Muntok and then the Sumatran mainland, Jeffrey narrowly survived her long captivity. Worked hard, starved, moved about, occupying camps in highly malarious areas, lacking medical supplies, growing weaker and sicker, camp life for Jeffrey and others became 'just an existence'. When liberated from 'that hell-hole' in mid-September 1945, she weighed just 30 kilograms and was suffering severe tuberculosis. On finally reaching Melbourne, Jeffrey spent one night at home before being admitted to the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital. After her eventual release two years later, she and Vivian Bullwinkel raised money to establish the Nurses Memorial Centre in Melbourne in memory of their lost colleagues and friends; Jeffrey was its first administrator.

As a prisoner, Jeffrey had taken the great risk of keeping a diary, and this later formed the basis of her autobiographical account of captivity, *White Coolies*. Published in 1954, well written and riveting, it was an instant local and international success. With at least 19 editions, it is one of the most widely read accounts of captivity by a prisoner of war of any nationality or conflict. In 1996, Jeffrey was an advisor for the film *Paradise Road*, based in part on *White Coolies*. Over the years, she also travelled widely, speaking on behalf of, and to, ex-prisoners of war; she was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in 1987 for this work. Jeffrey died in September 2000, aged 92.



Lieutenant Betty Jeffrey recovers from malnutrition in a hospital in Malaya, after her release from a prisoner of war camp in Sumatra, 1945. AWM 305369

## ONLY HOPE AND OPTIMISM

Corporal Athol Pledger

2/12<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance AIF

Athol Pledger enlisted in August 1940, aged 22, and landed on Ambon with Gull Force in December 1941. He was captured on 1 February 1942, two days after the Japanese invaded. Fifty-two men crammed into a small building were thrown 'a couple of tins of powdered milk and some lollies and a tin of green paint and [later] a bowl of rice and a couple of tins of meat'.

The prisoners moved to Tantui after the main force surrendered. Pledger risked severe punishment (possibly execution) by keeping a diary detailing the awful conditions and mistreatment of prisoners. In late October 1942, he was moved to Hainan Island, off China. His work in the camp hospital became more taxing as prisoners grew weaker and medical supplies ran out. In September 1943, he wrote: 'it has been very disheartening for us as we have not had a single success with any of our bed patients; and it is very hard to sit there and see them gasping for breath, for about 24 hours before they pass away'.

By mid-1945, the remaining Australian and Dutch prisoners were literally starving to death. They scrounged for anything edible – rats, grass, snails, cockroaches – dreaming of 'oysters, beans, kidneys and sweets'. Frail men were bashed to keep working. Pledger continued caring for the sick and dying, but on 16 August 1945 he noted his concern 'with the way the war is going . . . I never thought I would have been here this long . . . it is only hope and optimism which keeps us going'. In fact, Japan had surrendered, but the prisoners were not told for another ten days.

Corporal Pledger was mentioned in despatches for his service in captivity. After discharge, he began rebuilding his life and married. In 1947 he donned his uniform again to give evidence, using his diary, at war crimes trials in Hong Kong. He later donated the diary and other papers of captivity to the Australian War Memorial.



Corporal Athol (Tom) Pledger during training at Tamworth Camp, NSW, 1940. AWM P 02654.002

## A VERY BRAVE AND COURAGEOUS GENTLEMAN

Captain Lionel Matthews

8<sup>th</sup> Division Signals, AIF

In the *London Gazette* of 28 November 1947 there appeared the following notice in relation to the award of a George Cross, a medal given 'only for acts of the greatest heroism or the most conspicuous courage in circumstances of extreme danger':

*In recognition of gallant distinguished services whilst a prisoner of war in Japanese hands (prior to September 1945).*

The award was to Captain Lionel Colin Matthews, 8<sup>th</sup> Division Signals, AIF. Matthews, however, did not receive the medal in person, for he had been executed by the Japanese at Kuching in Borneo on 2 March 1944.

Matthews fell into Japanese hands at the surrender of Singapore on 15 February 1942, and in July 1942 he went with 'B' Force to the Sandakan Camp in Borneo. At Sandakan, he became involved in 'underground' activities amongst which was the secret preparation for a local uprising in the event of an Allied invasion of Borneo. In July 1943, under torture, four members of Matthews' organisation revealed details of the plot and Japanese searches uncovered a radio and further details of what had been planned. Matthews, refusing to escape, was arrested and subjected to systematic brutality until March 1944. Then, along with two members of the British North Borneo Armed Constabulary and six other local people, he was executed.

For his courage, Matthews was awarded a posthumous George Cross, the only Australian prisoner of war during the Second World War to receive this medal. A longer medal citation in the *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, reads, in part:

Captain Matthews, although subjected to brutal torture, beatings and starvation, steadfastly refused to make admissions to implicate or endanger the lives of associates. His conduct at all times was that of a very brave and courageous gentleman and he worthily upheld the highest traditions of an Australian officer.



Captain Lionel Matthews GC MC AWM  
059358

## FAILURE AGAIN!

### Flight Lieutenant Albert Henry Comber

#### RAAF

A phrase which recurs in Flight Lieutenant Arthur Comber's handwritten account of his wartime experience as a prisoner of war is "failure again!". Four times between October 1942 and March 1944, he tried to dig or claw his way to freedom while a prisoner under the Italians or Germans.

Comber, who was shot down over the Gulf of Taranto in August 1942, first tried to abscond from Campo 78 at Sulmona, Italy. For over two months, with others, he had dug away under the camp until heavy rain caused a cave-in of their tunnel beyond the wire. Later, at a camp near Bologna, after the Italian armistice, Comber, and twelve other Australian officers, broke out but "were surrounded, were machine-gunned and forced back into captivity. Failure again!" From Italy, Comber was transported by rail to Germany. On the journey he and another Australian ripped up the floorboards of their cattle truck with a penknife. After wriggling out, they sat on the buffers for three to four hours before they were able to jump away safely. They were captured within two hours by a German patrol.

Comber ended up in Stalag-Luft III camp at Sagan, Poland, where he helped dig the tunnel used in the famous "Great Escape" of March 1944. Yet again, Comber was unable to carry through his escape plan:

Eighty officers got out and away before German guards found out what was happening – the remaining 120 of us standing by to go out that night sneaked back to our bunks. Failure again!

Comber was lucky. Fifty of the escapees were shot as an example to the others not to attempt another break out.

In addition to his escape activities, Comber practised his skill as an artist in the camps and over the years built up a collection of paintings. When Sagan was evacuated in January 1945, he took his paintings with him. On a forced march in freezing conditions, he had to abandon these priceless records. Liberated and back in London, Comber was appointed an official war artist and he produced a series of new paintings to replace those lost in Germany.



Flight Lieutenant Albert (Henry) Comber at work on his painting 'Italian Spring', probably photographed while a prisoner of war at Sulmona in Italy, April 1943. AWM P01357.001

## THE WAY HE WAS MADE

Private Horace William Madden

3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment

Private William Madden was captured by the Chinese on 24 April 1951 during the battle of Kapyong, Korea. Seven months later he died in captivity. During those months Madden stubbornly refused to work with his captors as they tried to make him collaborate with them. Indeed, so determined was his resistance that his name spread among his fellow Commonwealth and Allied prisoners. Such defiance brought Madden many beatings and other forms of ill-treatment, but through all this he remained cheerful and resolute. As a further form of torture, Madden was deprived of food and what meagre rations he did obtain he was always willing to share with others, especially those who were sick.

In early November 1951, prisoners from different camps, Madden among them, were gathered together for a 300-kilometre forced march in cold weather to another camp. Most men were ill-clad and were given only very scanty rations to last them for the journey. Madden, by this time, was too ill to march, so he was put into a cart with other sick men. Captain Anthony Farrer-Hockley, a British officer, was also in this cart and he recalled that Madden was “so thin he looked like a skeleton covered with little skin”. A few days after the end of the march, Madden died. For his courage and defiance in captivity, Private William Madden was awarded the George Cross. Of him another Australian prisoner, Private Keith Gwyther, testified:

*‘Slim’ was a real hero – and didn’t even know it. He became a sort of legend. He didn’t try to be like that – it was the way he was made.*



Private Horace (Slim) Madden GC, in Japan, 1947. AWMP02580.001



Lieutenant George McLean DCM (centre) with two British Army officers at a prisoner of war camp at Schwarmstedt, Germany. AWM H13759

**IMAGES:**  
**1914-1918**

Some of the pals we left behind were  
the bravest and best that ever a nation  
bred ... they live forever in our  
memory.

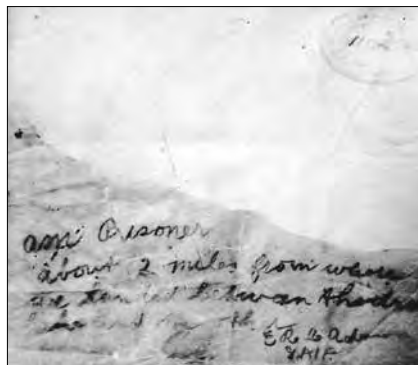
Private Frank Hallihan, 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion, captured France, 1916



The vermin in the house was beyond what I can describe and the majority of us got typhus. At one time 90 per cent were in hospital, I amongst them, being unconscious for fifteen days. They told me I had a temperature reaching  $103.2^{\circ}$  [ $39.4$  Celsius].

An Englishman in this ward looked after me with medicine and food and I would certainly not have lived had he not done so because the Turks stole the food and medicine as well as the few poor rags of clothing I possessed and sold them. When I was discharged from hospital I was almost without clothes. By the end of May 1917 I was declared fit for work but malaria again attacked me, and then I had rheumatic fever.

Leslie Duncan Richardson, captured at the Suez Canal, 1916



On 1 November 1915, a bottle washed up on a beach in Egypt with a message written by Adams, stating that he had been taken prisoner close to where his battalion had landed. No further record of his fate was ever traced.  
AWM H02397

Private Edgar Adams, 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF, who went missing during the Gallipoli landings on 25 April 1915.  
AWM H14064



Grave of Petty Officer Charles Varcoe (left), a crew member of submarine HMAS *AE2* captured by the Turks on 30 April 1915, Belmedick, Turkey, c1916. Varcoe died while working as a prisoner of war on the Baghdad to Berlin Railway. After the war his remains were reinterred in the Baghdad (North Gate) War Cemetery, Iraq. AWM P01645.003



Australian and British prisoners captured during the Battle of Fromelles on 19-20 July 1916 are escorted through the city streets under armed guard. Many of these men were forced to work close to the German trenches, sometimes under artillery fire, in contravention of the Hague Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war. An Australian soldier found this photograph in a German trench later in the war. AWM A02239



Wounded Australian prisoners of war, captured during the Battle of Fromelles, wait at the German collecting station on the morning of 20 July 1916. AWM A01551



Private Joseph Marrinon, 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion AIF, lies wounded in hospital after his capture by the Germans in July 1916, Douai, France. AWM P01114.002



Lieutenant Claude Vautin of No 1 Squadron AFC (left) with German aviator Oberleutnant Gerhardt Felmy, after being forced down over Palestine in July 1917. This photo was dropped to Vautin's airfield as proof that he was captured but unharmed.

AWM P02097.002



Two Australians and one Belgian relax in their barracks in an officers' prisoner of war camp, Karlsruhe, Germany, September 1917. AWM P01981.010



Interior of the dining hall at the officers' prisoner of war camp, Karlsruhe, Germany, 1917. AWM P01981.002





Prisoners of war unload parcels from a horse-drawn cart at the Schneidemühl camp, Posen, Germany, December 1917. AWM P01981.009



German orderlies, assisted by Allied prisoners of war, inspect Red Cross food parcels, Camp Z3036, Hanover, Germany, c1917. AWM H13925



Women at work during the First World War in the Index Card Department of the Prisoners of War Information Bureau, London, England. AWM H07970



Red Cross volunteers pack 'comforts' parcels in London for Australian prisoners of war in Germany, 1918. AWM H00507

The grave of Private William Malthouse, 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Navy and Military Expeditionary Force, who was taken prisoner of war when the SS *Matunga* was captured by the German Navy raider *Wolf*. Malthouse died at Gustrow, Germany, on 7 December 1918. AWM H15477



**PRISONERS OF WAR:  
THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL'S  
COLLECTION**

It was a tragedy: the dying and the  
hating equally ... but there emerged a  
sense of values which made the  
simple rich and profound.

Petty Officer Ray Parkin, HMAS *Perth*, captured in Java, 1942



Cooks prepare dinner at a transit camp for liberated POWs. Bangkok, Thailand, September 1945. AWM 117358

## PRISONERS OF WAR: THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL COLLECTION

Stan Arneil, a young man in his early twenties, kept a diary of his experiences as a prisoner of war on the Burma–Thailand railway. At the time, he thought of it as a lifeline to the future. In this he was no different to many of his fellow prisoners of war: recording the traumatic events of those years was one way of believing it would all eventually end. Looking back 40 years later, Arneil came to see his diary as a link with the past, and dedicated his published journal to the memory of his fellow prisoners of war.

Diaries, photographs, sketches, scraps of poems, official records, trinkets and mementos, salvaged from years of captivity in the camps, provide a rich source of personal memories and public evidence for the prisoner of war experience. The Australian War Memorial's collection holds many such items, each with its own personal story. The collection is the more remarkable given the difficult circumstances in which much of it was produced or collected. In prisoner of war camps, keeping records could be highly dangerous and was often punished. Materials were scarce. Australian servicemen and women persisted in spite of this, at times with obsessive determination. In the material poverty of the camps, such records were personal treasures.

Items manufactured by  
prisoners of war at Changi  
Prisoner of War Camp,  
Singapore.  
AWM PAIU2002/117.12





There are literally thousands of items relating to prisoners of war in the Memorial's collection: photographs, private records, official records, special document collections such as cards and maps, oral history, art, handmade posters and relics of all shapes and sizes for every conflict in which Australians were prisoners of war. Recording the experience, in whatever way possible, helped the prisoner of war to cope with the loneliness, hardship and injustice of captivity. In later years, however, these records would become much more. Photographs taken in secret would provide evidence in war crimes trials, as would medical records and witness statements based on diaries. Diaries and mementos would also provide some continuity in the transition to freedom, and, for families at home, some light on an experience they could hardly begin to imagine.

Finally, when writing their diaries, taking photographs in secret, or making a quick sketch, prisoners of war sometimes thought about the likelihood that their records might one day reach a wider audience. As part of the Australian War Memorial's collection, this is exactly what they do.

One of the most remarkable media to tell the prisoner of war story is that of photography. The circumstances in which these images were taken, and the subjects they depict, reflect the marked differences in each of the major conflicts in which Australians were prisoners.

Miss Elizabeth Chomley's photograph album is one of the most significant photographic records of First World War prisoners of war. Miss Chomley, an Australian living in London, was in charge of the Prisoner of War section of the Australian Red Cross Society. She maintained contact with the Australians captured in Germany, and despatched parcels of food, clothing and other small necessities critical to the prisoners' survival. Miss Chomley, however, was much more than an administrative officer. Her album contains hundreds of photographs and cards sent to her by the soldiers, their cards and letters invariably addressed to 'my dear Miss Chomley', as was the custom of the day. She became a point of human contact for men who were lonely, cold and hungry. Her album and letters piece together many stories that would otherwise never be told.

*'My dear Miss Chomley ...'* wrote Private Herbert McMahan from Friedrichsfeld prisoner of war camp in Germany on 29 November 1916. Private McMahan carefully described his height and his boot size. *'It is getting cold here'*, he notes in neat copperplate, and asks her for warm clothing. McMahan was born in Melbourne and enlisted in the farming district of Coolup, Western Australia. The bitter European winters made conditions particularly trying. Lack of warm clothing increased the risk of illness for men who were already in poor condition through an inadequate diet.

Over one year later, Private McMahan and his mate Private Freeman, still prisoners of war, sent Miss Chomley a photographic portrait of themselves – apparently taken with

the approval of the camp administration. Under Freeman's image was inscribed, 'going', and under McMahan's, 'strong'. Eight months later, however, the bitter conditions and poor food took their toll and McMahan succumbed to influenza and died.

In camps for officers, such as Gustrow and Karlsruhe, theatrical performances were particularly popular. There are a number of images of these productions. It seems the German camp administrators approved and even encouraged such events to be recorded, and the courtesies extended to photographs of living and dining quarters.



Similar opportunities existed for prisoners of the Germans in the Second World War. There are many images of life in these camps, showing the relatively well organised routine of camps such as Hohenfels, Wolfsberg and Weinsberg. The prisoners were determined to make the best of any opportunity. With supplies arriving from the Red Cross and in general fewer restrictions on prisoners' activities, theatre and sports days, complete with betting facilities (the currency was cigarettes), were held and photographed for posterity.

Conditions for prisoners of the Japanese were on the whole much worse. Opportunities for taking photographs were severely restricted, and it had to be done in secret. Given the extreme conditions, it is surprising that any images have survived at all. That they do is a testament to the determination and ingenuity of prisoners of war.

The number of 'secret' cameras that were in use is certainly surprising. This could in part be attributed to the fact that by this time many young men had developed an interest in home photography, using small, portable cameras and improvising home

Entertainers and committee of the 'Bing Boys' theatrical troupe in costume, Gustrow prisoner of war camp, Germany, September 1918. AWM P01981.038

developing processes. This, linked with the enthusiasm to produce souvenir shots of their first travel overseas, may explain the number of cameras and, hence, secret photographs taken during captivity.

In many cases the identity of the photographers is now lost. Produced in secret, passed from hand to hand for safe keeping, sometimes developed months or years later, ownership became a communal notion. None the less, the photographs bear witness to the conditions in camps whose names would come to signify the hardships and suffering of the prisoners of war: Changi, the Burma–Thailand railway including Kanchanaburi, Tamarkan, Tamuang and Tarsau, and camps in Japan such as Naoetsu and Fukuoka.

Similarities in the Japanese prisoner of war photographs might provide some insight into what the photographers were trying to do. A large number feature fellow prisoners, in candid poses, often looking straight at the camera. Except for some of the photographs taken in the early days of Changi, there is little emotion, little treatment of what might be considered redeeming features of camp life, few pictures of recreational activities, or of camaraderie. The mood is stoic. There is the feeling that these images were intended as evidence. They expressed the hope that justice would eventually prevail, and these would report the crime.

The identity of some photographers is known. Corporal James Bunning, for example, took a series of photographs of the horrific conditions at Konyu, a camp on the Burma–Thailand railway at which many men died of dysentery and cholera.

The best known of the prisoner of war photographers is George Aspinall, whose story is told in Tim Bowden's book *Changi photographer*, first published in 1984. Aspinall took photographs throughout his captivity, beginning in Changi and on to the Burma–Thailand railway with the work party known as 'F Force'. This work party endured some of the harshest conditions on the railway, in remote camps at which it was impossible to get regular supplies of the albeit inadequate rations. Aspinall was eventually forced to discard his camera at Kanchanaburi in late 1943 to avoid its discovery by the Japanese secret police.

Back in Changi, some of his negatives and prints were sealed in a shell case along with other official camp documents, dropped into a borehole for safe keeping and retrieved after the war. A selection of these photographs was offered as evidence at later war crimes trials, and some were published as part of a series for the commercial market in Australia by the Far East Picture Company, under the rather ironic title *Malayan Snapshots*.

More recently, the Memorial has acquired copies of a number of photographs taken by Major Kennedy Burnside of the Australian Army Medical Corps 2nd Mobile Bacteriological Laboratory in Singapore. Burnside's images offer a unique record of



early days in Changi in 1942, including the pathology 'laboratory' established using equipment salvaged from the unit's trucks, views inside the sleeping quarters, rice grinding and wood collecting details and a number of portraits of Burnside's fellow internees. The quality of these images is surprisingly good, given that the film was buried at Changi, as Aspinall's had been, for a number of years and retrieved after liberation.

While Aspinall's later photographs were intended as criminal evidence and hence a means for future reckoning, those taken by the Japanese themselves had an entirely different purpose. There are, in the Memorial's collection, a number of images taken by a Japanese photographer, most probably a member of a propaganda film crew. These were passed to ex-prisoner of war Bunny Seary, by a member of a Japanese re-union party, when both met by coincidence in Thailand in the 1970s.

The Seary images attempt to present the 'achievement' of the Burma–Thailand railway, an element conspicuously lacking in any of the Australian images of the camps. They include the labour gangs transported in cattle trucks, sleeper gangs, construction of the Songkurai bridge (a little over 450 kilometres north of Nong Pladuk), the opening of the railway at Konkoita on 25 October 1943 and the first train to use it. When seen against the brutality and inhumane conditions endured by the prisoners of war whose labour made it possible, any question of 'achievement' is meaningless.

While the crew who produced the Seary images had been filming, an Australian prisoner of war, Harold Sutton, had secretly recorded the film crew's activities in his diary.

One of the images passed to Bunny Seary in Thailand: prisoners of war lay sections of track on the Burma–Thailand railway, 1943. AWM P00406.017

They had filmed prisoners lining up to a fake 'bar' and working 'happily'. Sutton notes in his diary that he had on that day 'made the movies', and that he had been in the guard of honour at a 'mock funeral'. 'Wouldn't it be funny,' he wrote, 'if the pictures ever get to Australia.'

Sutton wrote his diary in the margins of the popular children's book, *The Tailor of Gloucester*, apparently scrounged while on a working party in Changi before leaving for the railway. His descriptions of death and hunger are framed by Beatrix Potter's beautifully illustrated story of a mouse. The diary is one of hundreds kept by Australian prisoners of war and held in the collection. Along with official camp records, letters home, handmade books and secret medical records, they provide a detailed account of attempts to deal with the relentless boredom, loneliness, hunger and disease.

Diaries and letters, more than any other item from the camps, satisfied the need to capture small moments and preserve thoughts of home. For some, they also satisfied an obsessive desire to record events. There was some ambivalence in keeping diaries. Corporal George Kerr, captured at Gallipoli and a prisoner of the Turks, noted in his diary that the monotony of his days made for uninspiring diary entries, but were at least a way of 'recalling the various little things to our mind afterwards'.



Diary written by Harold Sutton, an Australian prisoner of war on the Burma-Thailand railway, inside a copy of Beatrix Potter's *The Tailor of Gloucester*.  
AWM PAIU2002/120.11

Writing was also a way of preserving dignity and resistance in the face of injustice. Scraps of old army forms, the backs of scrounged documents, toilet paper, the margins of books, cigarette papers and homemade inks were all pressed into service.

Even the shortest letter could carry a story of great courage and stoicism. During the Second World War, Private James McCracken, a farm worker from Ararat, escaped from a prisoner of war camp in Vercelli, Italy. He was recaptured with a group of partisans. We know very little about McCracken, but the Memorial holds his last letter to his family, written the night before his execution in April 1944. *'Just a line to tell you'*, he wrote with stoic directness, *'that I will not see you again as I am going to be shot.'* The night before his execution, Private McCracken summoned grace, courage and concern for family at home that was not untypical of many in dire circumstances.

For prisoners of the Japanese during the Second World War, diary materials were short but ingenuity plentiful. Anything to hand was used. Corporal 'Mick' Kildey, of the 2/10<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance, made an autograph book from cigarette packets, measuring only 7 by 13 centimetres. Kildey was captured at Singapore and later transported to work at the shipyards in Kobe and Kyushu with 'C' Force at the end of 1942. Kildey also kept a record of deaths of prisoners of war and the types of ships being built. The most interesting aspect of Kildey's book is that it is not only a record, it is a work of art. The front covers, joined with thick red thread, are embellished with silver foil. It is one of the most fragile diaries in the Memorial's collection.

Autograph book created by Corporal 'Mick' Kildey from salvaged cigarette packets, while a prisoner of war at Changi, Singapore.  
AWMPAIU2002/122.05



Private Carr also used cigarette cards, this time a Japanese brand. His pages are carefully ordered into small bundles. He recorded details of the daily prisoner of war routine on Hainan Island, just off the south coast of China. Included are records of rations and work schedules, and descriptions of brief moments of respite, some spent in secret gambling. Cigarettes were the going currency. By January 1944, luck seems to have deserted him and he made a resolution to 'gamble no more'. Private Carr died as a prisoner on Hainan Island in March 1945, only months before liberation.

Diarists suffered from the tyranny of space, and developed a number of ingenious ways of conserving paper. Over the succeeding years in captivity, Stan Arneil devised a system of rubbing out two words on a day's entry to make room for an entry on the same day for the next year. Gordon Cade Burnett's solution was to keep the writing as small as possible. Burnett was a civilian interned in Stanley Camp, Hong Kong. Prior to the war, he had been the proprietor of the *China Mail*. Burnett's diary is a masterpiece in miniature script. The document, illegible without a magnifying glass, is a testament to one man's passion to get the story down.

Finding paper was only one challenge facing the diarist under the Japanese regime. Another was to keep the document intact and safe. Penalties for keeping diaries or other documents were often extreme, and at the least they were confiscated. As a consequence, documents were hidden in extraordinary places: artificial legs, water bottles with false bottoms, hut roofing, tops of stools, under tables, inside pieces of bamboo or in a boot. The energy expended in devising clever hiding places was second only to that used to hide secret radios.

The urge to record the injustices of conditions on the railway was also felt keenly by the doctors who worked with the men in the camps. Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop's diaries from his time on the Burma–Thailand railway are now well known for their detailed and candid descriptions. Doctors were trained to keep meticulous records, and many felt it their duty to do so despite the obvious risks of discovery.

Dr Rowley Richards, who also served as a prisoner of war on the Burma–Thailand railway, was conscious of his responsibility to keep medical records. His motivation to do so arose partly from his professional training as a doctor, and partly to keep his mind active. He continued to record medical details, work details, numbers of sick, rations and personal notes throughout his time on the railway and in Japan. Guards discovered and destroyed Richards' first diary. His second was entrusted to Major John Shaw, who carried it in the false bottom of a billy can and returned it to him shortly after the war. As it was by no means certain which records might survive, Dr Richards also hid a six page summary of his diaries under the grave cross of Corporal Sydney Gorlick, who had died on Paulau Damarlaut, a small island off the south west coast of Singapore in August 1944. This summary was recovered after the war, after having been buried for two and a half years.

Officers were also conscious of their duty to record the mistreatment under the Japanese regime. Colonel Charles Kappe displayed tenacious zeal in secretly recording statistics of disease and deaths on the railway. In his official diary, the barest detail became evidence of the appalling conditions suffered by the men. Columns of words in ink conveyed the date and the pitiful circumstances in which they died.

The harsh conditions experienced by prisoners in the Korean War offered few opportunities for illicit record keeping. Prisoners were closely guarded in confined quarters,

physically abused and, in the early years, subjected to intense brainwashing. However, even from these circumstances, some documents exist to provide an insight into the prisoners' experiences. Captain (later Brigadier) Phillip Greville kept a notebook while a prisoner in Camp 2 at Chang-ni on the border with China. By late 1952 notebooks such as these were issued by the Chinese to all prisoners in the camp as part of the self-education program. Prior to this, the prisoners had been subjected to intense indoctrination programs of daily lectures on communist philosophy. The Australians had steadfastly refused to respond to the brainwashing. Eventually the Chinese had allowed the prisoners to conduct their own classes on subjects of their choice. These included mathematics, English comprehension, logic and ethics, music appreciation and speed reading. Greville's notebook contains notes from lectures he gave and attended, and lists the very limited range of communist inspired reading material allowed in the camps.

While diaries were a form of documentation available to anyone who could find paper and pencil, those who could draw or paint held another powerful tool for making their story known.

The Memorial's collection of art created by prisoners of war in the Second World War is extensive. For those with professional talent who could scrounge drawing materials, art was an extraordinarily powerful tool for observing and coping with captivity. Following release, the work would become a unique record of the prisoner of war ordeal.

Once again, there is a marked difference between the work of artists in Germany and Japan.

Artists working in German prisoner of war camps usually experienced less oppressive conditions, and greater access to materials and free time. For some, such as Howard Taylor, their work during the years of captivity began long artistic careers continued after release. At age 20, Howard Taylor graduated from the RAAF Flying Training School at Point Cook and served twelve months with the RAF before being shot down over France in the early years of the war. He was interned at Stalag Luft III in the Polish town of Sagan. Small works from this period, using watercolours, coloured pencils, inks and crayons are snapshots of life in the camp. Taylor continued painting after the war, studying at the Birmingham College of Art before returning to Perth in 1949.

Henry Comber was also a prisoner at Stalag Luft III. Before joining the RAAF in 1940, Comber had studied at the National Art School in Sydney. He was commissioned as a Flying Officer in 1941, flew reconnaissance operations over England and joined 39 Squadron RAF based in Malta. He was shot down over the Gulf of Taranto in August 1942. Like many of his fellow prisoners, he was transferred through a series of camps from Corfu to Italy, including Sulmona, before being taken north, crowded in a cattle truck, into Germany. He arrived at Stalag Luft III towards September 1943.



At the camp, Comber taught art classes and designed stage sets for the camp theatre troupe. With the advance of the Russian army, Allied prisoners, including those at Sagan, were forced to march west, carrying what little food and clothing they could in the freezing weather. In the worsening conditions, Comber was forced to ditch his bundle of paintings beside the road. After liberation, RAAF Headquarters in London asked him to make a visual record of his experiences. These are the works now held in the Memorial.

*A view of huts and fences at Stalagluft III after rain and with sun breaking through clouds.*  
Howard Taylor,  
date unknown  
Medium unknown,  
12.3 x 15.5cm  
Australian War Memorial.  
ART2857



Comber had developed a lively interest in escape, having made a number of unsuccessful attempts of his own on the journey north from Italy. His last camp, Stalag Luft III, would later become famous for 'The Great Escape'. Throughout 1944 the internees laboriously dug a series of tunnels, named Tom, Dick and Harry. After a year of digging, 76 prisoners escaped. Tragically, all except three were recaptured. The Gestapo murdered 50 of those recaptured. Comber's works capture this now epic story in a series of pen and ink drawings.

There was a much darker side to works of art from this theatre of war, exemplified in Bernard Slawik's drawings of Janowska concentration camp. These have only recently come to light and were acquired by the Memorial in 1994. Slawik was interned as a civilian in the Janowska concentration camp in Lvov, Poland, where he secretly produced the drawings. In late 1943, Slawik managed to escape, bringing some of the

drawings with him. He settled in Australia in 1948, but kept the drawings hidden for the remainder of his life.

Slawik uses heavy dark pencil lines, dark shadows and ghostly figures to depict the horrors of Janowska camp and the Lvov Ghetto. His work is a glimpse into the horrific experiences of the Jewish population during the Second World War. These pencil drawings are apparently the only surviving visual art record of this camp.



***The death march***  
Bernard Slawik, c1943  
Charcoal on paper,  
18.0 x 25.0cm  
Australian War Memorial.  
ART90357

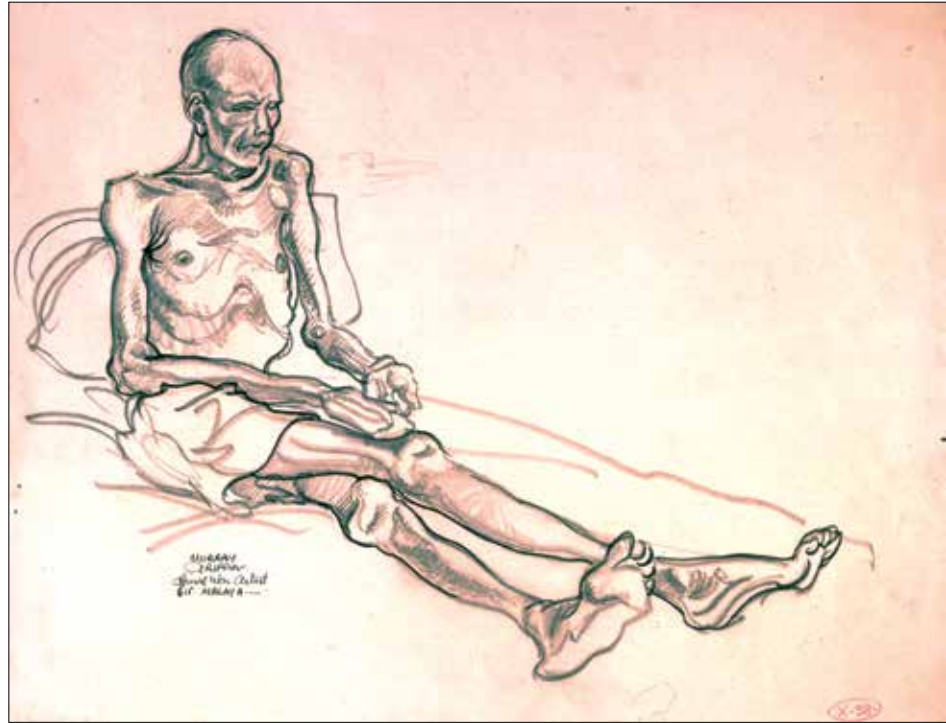
While conditions for artists working as prisoners of war under the Japanese regime in the Second World War were on the whole more difficult than those in Germany, there is no less abundance of art from this theatre to record the experience. The extensive collections of work by Murray Griffin and Jack Chalker are outstanding in their power to vividly portray the physical and mental reality of life as a prisoner at Changi and on the Burma–Thailand railway.

Murray Griffin was an official war artist with the Australian troops in Malaya. He became a prisoner of war with thousands of other troops of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division when Singapore fell in February 1942, and spent three and a half years in Changi. Griffin's works are unique as they chart his progression as an artist over this period, and provide some insight into the effects of prolonged captivity in a relentlessly dehumanising situation.

As an official war artist, Griffin had taken with him a large supply of paints and other materials, which were retrieved from a kit store for him a few months after the surrender.

Conditions in Changi were not ideal and rations became steadily worse, but they did at least give Griffin the opportunity to produce a substantial and sustained body of work.

*P.O.W. just returned  
from Burma*  
Murray Griffin, 1943  
Pencil 28.3 x 36.4cm  
Australian War Memorial.  
ART26524



Griffin's works vary greatly in focus and technique as the years progress, possibly due to the materials he had at hand, and perhaps as a response to the increasing harshness and suffering, and especially as the full horror of the Burma–Thailand railway became clear. In the early months, Griffin painted the scenes around him as the men restored what order they could to a dishevelled world. He drew daily chores of washing, the ingenious machines and equipment the men built to produce food and other camp items, the work parties sent to scrounge for wood and supplies. Later Griffin drew the skeletal figures of the work parties returning to Changi from the railway and the more dispiriting scenes of camp life after many years of captivity.

Unlike some other prisoner of war artists, Griffin did not seem to paint so much for mental escape as for mental reflection, and those reflections found less and less to celebrate as the years wore on. The cumulative effect is an oppressive but candid record of daily events over which he as a fellow prisoner had no control and in which he could find little relief or pleasure.

The Memorial also holds an extensive collection of works by Jack Chalker, an artist serving with the British Army as a gunner in the Royal Artillery and who later worked with two surgeons, Captain Markowitz and (then) Colonel 'Weary' Dunlop on the

Burma–Thailand railway. Chalker had had some preliminary training as an artist prior to joining up. Like Griffin, he became a prisoner of war in February 1942 when Singapore fell. He took with him into captivity his paints and scraps of paper, and carried them with him when he joined a work party on the railway. Chalker spent time at some of the most notorious camps, including Konyu River, and passed through others such as Hintok, in which many died of brutality, overwork and disease.

Keeping drawings in such camps was a hazardous business, and Chalker, like others, suffered beatings when an early set of drawings was detected. All of the drawings, except two, were destroyed by the guards, and those two remain his most treasured. One of them is *Two working men*. The drawing itself is well known by ex-prisoners of war, and has become a symbol for the lasting bonds of comradeship in the camps.

Chalker's drawings from his years of captivity remained largely unknown until a number were included in Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop's published diary in 1986. Chalker had worked with Dunlop at the hospital in Chungkai camp in 1943, when the doctor had asked him to record details of the medical work carried out in the hospital. Dunlop hid many of the drawings for Chalker throughout the remaining years of captivity. Works by Chalker have been donated to the Memorial by the families of Albert Coates and 'Weary' Dunlop. In 2002, a further collection of more than 70 drawings and documents from Chalker's own collection was donated by Tattersall's Holdings Pty Ltd.

Just as space was at a premium for diarists, so artists found the need to draw was rarely matched by a quantity of paper on which to do so. The works of Pat Gunther are tiny, with many measuring only a few centimetres, and drawn in pencil. But they do provide an exquisite and intimate record of life as prisoner of war in the women's camp in Palembang. Gunther was one of the 65 nurses of the Australian Army Nursing Service evacuated from Singapore on the *Vyner Brooke*. The ship was attacked and sunk by Japanese bombers. Along with 32 other nurses, Gunther survived and spent the remainder of the war in captivity, principally in Muntok and Palembang.

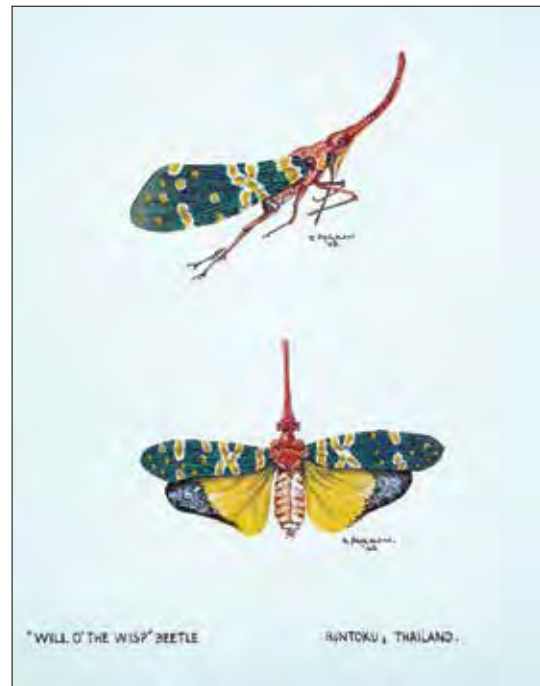
Gunther, who took up drawing while in the camp, turned her artistic skill to practical ends by selling some of her drawings to fellow internees. Women in the camps who had no cash or goods for trade often embarked on such 'cottage industries' to earn money for food. This was essential for the nurses, who had arrived with nothing. To those with some extra cash, Gunther's drawings would have been an expensive luxury to bring pleasure in an otherwise harsh and tedious existence.

It was also apparent that Gunther found some personal respite through her drawing. The tiny drawings of her tennis dress and sewing kit may have been one way of keeping a small part of civilised life for her own memories. Each small image is a denial of the stark reality that was the nurses' daily lot. It is extraordinary that such delicate works could be the legacy of such brutal conditions.

Many artists approached captivity in south-east Asia with ambivalence. On the one hand, they perceived beauty in the richly coloured tropical landscape and exotic insects and felt satisfaction in expressing the achievements of the human spirit. On the other hand, the relentless progress of days, deteriorating conditions, physical duress and the stench of sickness all wore down the toughest spirit. Art, then, went beyond expression and became a record to either pursue justice or commemorate those who suffered.

Artist Ray Parkin found beauty in even the disastrous circumstances of the railway. Petty Officer Parkin was on the HMAS *Perth* when it was sunk in the Battle of Sunda Strait in March 1942. A small group of ten survivors, including Parkin, reached shore in a lifeboat, dubbed *ANZAC*, which they rigged with a sail. They were eventually captured and interned in Java. Parkin was sent to work on the railway and then transported to Japan. He kept a diary and sketched throughout the ordeal. Parkin did not see his art as a means to record history. Drawing for him, and writing, was a much more subjective act. It was, he said later, a part of his 'biography'. He drew what he saw around him – strange plants, exotic insects, the camps, the men – with an eye for exquisite beauty and detail.

*A folio of drypoints from drawings made in captivity 1942 – 1945 (embossed faux leather volume containing prints and one watercolour of figures, landscapes and vessels; 35 pages)*  
 Ray Parkin, 1943 – 1956  
 Medium various,  
 dimensions various  
 Australian War Memorial.  
 ART90933.032



Parkin realised it would have been impossible to hide his work when he was to be transferred to Japan, and Dunlop, as he had done for Chalker, hid them for the remainder of the war. Parkin remained grateful to Dunlop for his courage in securing the drawings, and for the leadership he provided for the men on the railway. He later expressed this gratitude by compiling an album of dry point etchings based on the original drawings.

The album, along with a number of etchings, was donated to the Memorial as part of the Dunlop estate. The collection is quite an extraordinary testament to the human spirit's ability to rise above devastation.

The sail of the *ANZAC* was salvaged by the survivors, and came to symbolise the care and regard which held the entire ship's crew together. Each member of the *ANZAC* crew signed the flag, which was kept for the remainder of their captivity and brought back to Australia after liberation. To the ten names were added the names of 310 of the ship's company who had become prisoners of war. Over 100 of these men had died in captivity.



Sail autographed and decorated by HMAS *Perth* survivors who became prisoners of war in 1942. AWM PAIU2002/121.07

The sail is one example of the power of objects as symbols of what men have endured and in what esteem they count their companions. In whatever conflict, for those suffering the privations of captivity, small relics and keepsakes have assumed meaning far beyond their material worth. Personal items are treasured for their link to another life, bare surfaces are filled with signatures, small objects scrounged and kept. In a world in which all manner of mental or emotional relief was barred, the ordinary object could assume a significance beyond all reckoning.



Small compass used during escape from Holzminden POW camp by Captain Stanley Purves, RAAF, 1918.

AWM PAIU2002.123.03



Pair of identity discs salvaged by Private Tom Hollis from his time as a prisoner of war in Korea.

AWM PAIU2002/119.01

Often the tiniest objects tell magnificent stories. The Memorial's collection holds many small objects which tell such stories. Examples include Captain Tom White's boots, in which he hid his diary from the Turkish guards in the First World War; Captain Stanley Purves's handmade compass used to make his escape from Holzminden camp in 1918; spikes salvaged from the Burma–Thailand railway; and the buttons retained by Private Tom Hollis from his Australian uniform as a prisoner of war in Korea.

When captivity stretched into years, as it did for many of those prisoners of the Japanese, any possessions they had were more often than not traded for food. With constant undernourishment, cravings for food became almost unbearable and the need to barter with anything to hand was great. It was remarkable, then, that prisoners of war would refuse to part with some objects, so important were they in their personal scheme of things. Sister Jenny Greer, an Australian Army nurse interned in Palembang, carried with her a fountain pen (no ink), her official Army paybook (no pay) and eye-brow tweezers. Sister Gunther kept a silver spoon she had been able to scrounge – spoons were at least a civilised way of eating totally uncivilised food – and, perhaps for the same reason, Sister Jessie Simons kept a ceramic bowl.

Tragically for many, their last possessions remain the only tribute to lives wasted. Charles Kappe's diary on the Burma–Thailand railway lists, in neat coloured ink, the few last possessions of those who died: a watch, a wallet, a notebook.

At times it was almost impossible for substantial amounts of material to survive. The circumstances of the prisoners of war in Korea, given the extremes of the cold winters and the severely restricted prison conditions, made it very difficult to accumulate personal effects. In these instances, the stories told by the veterans themselves, sometimes years after their return, are the most substantial record available. The Memorial holds a number of oral history interviews of Korean prisoners of war, produced as part of its Korean oral history program. It also holds the sound recordings of Tim Bowden's interviews of Japanese prisoners of war, produced for the 1985 ABC documentary *POW: Australians under Nippon*.

The most remarkable thing about all the Memorial's collection is the story that each item tells. Some of those stories have survived in great detail, and through them men and women of great courage and integrity have become well known. There are also stories for which we will never know the source. There are photographers, diarists, artists, correspondents and collectors whose names we will never know. It is to all the prisoners of war, known and unknown, who have taken the care, and the risk, to record and collect their memories, that we owe a great debt.

**IMAGES:**  
**EUROPE 1939-1945**

A live prisoner is a hindrance to the  
enemy; a dead one saves him trouble.

From the first moment of capture  
there is in the back of every prisoner's  
mind a firm determination to come  
through  
with a whole skin.



Me and some others were planning to escape but the actual escape was not planned, it happened on impulse. Some of us were standing at the gate one night, just looking. The guard was walking up and down and a German came in, leaving the gate open. It was dark, so I said, 'I'm going out the gate. Is anybody coming with me?' And two chaps said, 'Yeah'. So that made three of us. And I said, 'Righto. Once we're out, don't look around, just keep walking. If we get shot in the back, bad luck.'

'Blue' Heron, Stalag VIII B, Lamsdorf, Germany, captured in Crete, 1941



Doctors perform an operation at a prisoner of war hospital near Piraeus, Greece, May 1941. Medical staff were from the 2/5<sup>th</sup> Australian General Hospital, ordered to remain in Greece to treat Allied prisoners of war after the evacuation. AWM P01333.003



Allied prisoners of war at Campo 65 crouch around an improvised stove, cooking some of the contents of a Red Cross food parcel they had received, Altamura, Italy, June 1942. AWM P00866.001



Australian soldier wounded in both arms and captured by the Germans. His injuries were treated by a German medical officer before the dressing station was overrun and taken by British troops, North Africa, November 1942. AWM 042076



Prisoners assemble on a parade ground while others play volley ball beside the vegetable gardens at Stalag 383, a special non-work camp for non-commissioned officers, Hohenfels, Germany, 1943. AWM P02070.002



British, New Zealand and Australian prisoners of war who competed at the 'Empire Games', Stalag 383, Hohenfels, Germany, 1943. AWM P00110.023



German soldiers at a dump of Red Cross tins, Stalag 383,  
Hohenfels, Germany, 1943. AWMP00134.003



'Some of the camp cooks at Stalag 383 prisoner of war camp ... the girls on the wall couldn't wait, all finished up marrying Yanks.' Les Pinson, 2/4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Hohenfels, Germany, 1945. AWM P00110.010





'Anzac Avenue' at Stalag 383, Hohenfels, Germany, bordered by the huts of Australian and New Zealand prisoners of war. AWM 072850



Flight Sergeant John Ansell, a wireless operator with 460 Squadron RAAF, was shot down over France in February 1944. Rescued by members of the French Resistance, he was hidden in a number of farmhouses with other servicemen, while the French Underground planned his escape to Spain. The party was betrayed, however, and captured by the Germans one mile from the border. Ansell was treated as a spy and subjected to severe interrogation by the Gestapo at the Fresnes Prison in Paris. He then spent 18 months in Stalag III and Stalag VII, where he formed two jazz bands, using instruments supplied by the Red Cross. AWM Po3075.001



Prisoners of war relaxing in one of the huts, Stalag Luft III, Sagan, Poland, c1944. AWM P00631.009



A former prisoner of war, who was captured in the Middle East and escaped into Switzerland from Italy, is welcomed home, 1944. AWM Po2018.334



Funeral of Lance Sergeant Maxwell Pascoe-Pearce, 2/1<sup>st</sup> Field Ambulance, who died at Stalag 383, Hohenfels, Germany, March 1945. His body was reinterred at Durnbach War Cemetery after the war. AWM P02764.007



Warrant Officer Carlton Younger, RAAF, who bailed out of a Wellington bomber over Paris in May 1942 and was a prisoner of war for nearly three years, marries his 'pen friend', Miss Margaret Gilby, at St Mary's church, East Walton, England, 14 July 1945. AWM UK3102



RAAF and RAF ex-prisoners of war from Germany in Australian Red Cross Society buses on the Station Pier, Melbourne, October 1945. AWM 117442

**REMEMBERING CAPTIVITY:  
THE PRISONER EXPERIENCE  
AS LITERATURE**

The memories of starvation, the almost impossible tasks of work, the sickness and the misery – these I will never forget.

Private Brian Flanagan, 2/19<sup>th</sup> Battalion, captured in Malaya, 1942



Letters from home! Who can imagine what it meant to us? For fifteen weary months we had been forced by starvation and hardship to submit to humiliation and indignities, allowed barely sufficient food to keep body and soul together, and forced to gather weeds and herbs for sustenance; gaunt, unwashed, unshaven and devoured by vermin; knowing practically nothing of what was going on beyond our barbed-wire enclosures; seemingly dead to the world, and, for all we knew, mourned as dead; would we ever see our loved ones again? ... And at last to see the old familiar handwriting; to be brought into touch with the outer world. At sight of those letters I broke down completely.

Tommy Taylor, Heilsburglager, captured at Bullecourt, 1917

## REMEMBERING CAPTIVITY: THE PRISONER EXPERIENCE AS LITERATURE

When we knew that the war was over we thought that we would close those prison gates and forget all about the bad times, but I'm afraid those prison gates will never close...while we live.

[Frank Osborne, Gull Force, captured on Ambon, 1942]

The memory of being a prisoner in wartime does not go away. Memories return unbidden, prompted perhaps by a word, the smell of powdered milk or dark chocolate, the taste of rice, or the sight of a person of Asian appearance. Some ex-prisoners block out those memories, except in their dreams. But a few have harnessed their memories and turned them into memoirs, constituting some of our most powerful accounts of what captivity was like. These memoirs, together with writings made at the time and other works by those who were not prisoners themselves, constitute the literature of captivity. This essay will survey those published writings to explore the question of what we have remembered about that subject and how we can learn more.

It is important to understand the number of books published and also their uneven distribution across the subject. Exact counts of the numbers of books published are difficult due to the vagaries of library classification, but the Australian War Memorial's catalogue of printed works includes just over 500 books of all kinds dealing with Australian prisoners of war. Books by prisoners of the Japanese account for about three-fifths of them. Prisoners of the Germans in the Second World War constitute about a third. Prisoners of the Italians in the Second World War make up less than 10 per cent, while prisoners of the Germans or the Ottoman Turks in the First World War, civilian internees of the world wars and prisoners in Korea make up a tiny percentage. The emphasis on prisoners of the Japanese more or less reflects the proportions of men and women captured, the extreme nature of their captivity and certainly the number who died in captivity. By comparison, virtually all other groups of prisoners of war are less amply covered than might be expected.

Australian POWs enjoying the tone of hand-made instruments, Karlsruhe POW camp, Germany, 1917. AWM P01981.011



## The First World War

The strongest contrast is with the experience of the 217 Australians captured by the Ottoman Turks in the Middle East in the First World War. Sixty-two of these men, or nearly one in four, died, many of ill treatment and outright brutality comparable to the experience of prisoners of the Japanese. Despite the drama and the pathos of their story very few published accounts have appeared. EH Jones's popular *The Road to En-dor*, an account of a British officer's escape in which Turkish credulity to the occult figured in the plot, was published in 1921. Thereafter, however, little appeared besides TW White's *Guests of the Unspeakable*. Also the account of a successful escape by an officer, it was first published in 1928, and was re-published in 1990. Neil Smith's listing *Australian Prisoners of the Turks, 1915–1918* (Gardenvale, 1992) at least recorded the names and fates of these men.

Popular attention briefly focussed on them in Greg Kerr's *The Lost Anzacs*, (Melbourne, 1997) based on the remarkable survival of the diary kept by his great uncle. Fred and Elizabeth Benchley's *Stoker's Submarine* (Sydney, 2001) told the story of the submarine *AE2* and the captivity of its crew in detail for the first time. The myth propagated in celebrations of Australia and Turkey's special relationship dating from Gallipoli, which includes the belief that 'Johnny Turk' was actually a 'decent chap', has generally clouded investigation of those who suffered as prisoners at the hands of an inefficient, negligent and often outright brutal regime.

Australian and British prisoners of war, including a crew member of the *AE2*, outside their hut at Belemedik, Turkey, 1918.  
AWM H19414



Prisoners of the Germans in the First World War, though twenty times more numerous than those taken prisoner by the Turks, were even more thoroughly neglected. Except for some official British reports into the conditions under which prisoners were held, they were ignored officially. No volume of the Australian official history dealt with them at all. While their experiences played some part in early accounts such as *The Tunnellers of Holzminden*, published in 1920, very little else was published. Except for articles and wireless talks published or broadcast by individuals in the 1930s, almost nothing appeared for 70 years. The late David Chalk interviewed several men captured at Bullecourt and published their stories in his article "Talks with old Gefangeners" in the *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* (14, 1989) which constituted virtually the first published account since the 1930s. Patsy Adam-Smith included several stories by "Gefangeners" in her book *Prisoners of War: from Gallipoli to Korea* (Ringwood, 1992), but their lead was not followed until, in preparation for the exhibition *Stolen Years*, the Memorial commissioned Ms Rosalind Crone to undertake a research paper as part of the Memorial's 2002 Summer Vacation Scholarship Scheme. Using archival records (notably AWM 30, the testimonies of thousands of repatriated prisoners) Ms Crone was able to show that the experiences of prisoners of the Germans depended crucially upon when and where they were captured. She revealed, virtually for the first time, how many hundreds of prisoners were compelled to labour behind German lines in France in 1917. Otherwise very little is known of prisoners of the Germans in the First World War: more research is required.



German guards expose a tunnel through which British and Australian officers escaped from the Holzminden camp in July 1918. Seventy-five men planned to escape in this, the largest mass escape of the First World War, but the tunnel collapsed after only 29 men got out. AWM H11791

## The Second World War

Perhaps 20 million military personnel were captured in the course of the Second World War. The circumstances of their capture and their captivity varied widely. In Europe, the five million Soviet soldiers captured by the Germans suffered severely, as did nearly as many Germans captured by the Soviet Union (and later Japanese taken in Manchuria). Not only did up to 90 per cent die in captivity, but the survivors waited more than a decade to be repatriated. In Asia, European prisoners of the Japanese were similarly denied the protection of the Geneva Convention and paid the penalty in suffering and death. Kent Fedorowich and Bob Moore's collection of essays *Prisoners of War and Their Captors in World War II* (Washington, 1996) provides a good overview of this range of experience. Against this spectrum, Australians captured in Europe fared as well as most: those captured in Asia fared as badly as any.

The first general account of Australian prisoners of war in Europe was written by AE Field in a lengthy appendix to Barton Maughan's official history *Tobruk and El Alamein* (Canberra, 1966). A chapter on the medical aspects of captivity under the Germans and Italians was included in Allan Walker's medical history *Middle East and Far East*

(Canberra, 1953), while John Herington's *Air Power over Europe* (Canberra, 1963) included a chapter on 'Evaders and prisoners'. Though determinedly concerned to establish a factual narrative, the official histories remain highly readable and are an essential basis for further research.

## Prisoners of the Italians

The first Australians captured in the Second World War – in December 1940 – were taken by the Italians in North Africa. Many of the thousand Australians – mainly soldiers – captured in North Africa were either taken in battle fighting against the Italians or were passed to Italian guards and transported to camps in Italy. Memoirs of prisoners in Italy tend to form part of a longer narrative incorporating the German camps to which many prisoners were shipped following Italy's capitulation in 1943. Compared to New Zealand accounts (notably Jim Henderson's biting and best-selling *Gunner Inglorious*) Australian accounts of Italian captivity tend to have been self-published. Self-published memoirs such as Bill Waller's *Go There You Die* (1989) and Malcolm Webster's *An Italian Experience* (1995) are representative of this aspect of European captivity.

In the confusion following the Italian surrender in September 1943, a few hundred prisoners managed to make for Allied lines or to reach anti-fascist partisan groups. Their story has been documented by Roger Absolom's article 'Another crack at Jerry' in the *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* (14, 1989). Absolom's subsequent book, *A Strange Alliance: Aspects of Escape and Survival in Italy 1943-45* (Florence, 1991) details the story and places the Australian episodes in an Allied and Italian context. Prisoners of the Italians, however, remain overshadowed: the popular image of a prisoner in Europe is a man probably in air force blue battledress in a barbed wire enclosure in Germany.

Very few Australians had been captured by the Vichy French in the Lebanon–Syrian campaign of 1941. They were soon released and repatriated. One, Lieutenant Walter Summons of the 2/2<sup>nd</sup> Pioneer Battalion, described his journey through German-occupied Europe to be repatriated. After returning to his unit, Summons was captured again, by the Japanese in Java. His memoir, *Twice Their Prisoner* (illustrated by Ray Parkin and Jack Chalker) was published in Oxford in 1946.

Australians, who had been prisoners of war of the Vichy French, have their wounds treated in a French hospital, June 1941. AWM 008995



## Prisoners of the Germans

Most of those held captive in the European theatre, however, became prisoners of the Germans. Some 5000 soldiers arrived in 1941, dirty, thirsty, hungry and smelly, climbing down from railway trucks at the end of long journeys across eastern Europe from Salonika in Greece. A further thousand followed in 1943 after a journey over the Alps from Italy. Some 1400 Australian airmen also drifted down into enemy-held territory, many from bombers flying against targets in Germany and occupied Europe. Because virtually all airmen were held in Germany and because most soldiers passed from Italy to Germany in 1943, over 20 months before their liberation, most prisoners were also held by the Germans, and they identify as prisoners of the Germans. They became a small part of perhaps 200,000 British Commonwealth prisoners held by the Germans from Allied defeats in north-west Europe, North Africa, Greece, the Aegean, the air war and at sea.

The literature of captivity under the Germans is correspondingly large, though Australian contributions to it are relatively few. Memoirs published soon after the war set the tone of much of the literature of captivity under (and escape from) the Germans. Indeed, virtually all of the most popular memoirs and films deal with escape from captivity as the central dynamic of the narrative: for example *The Wooden Horse* (London, 1949) by Eric Williams and *The Great Escape* (London, 1951) by the Australian Paul Brickhill. A journalist-turned-airman-turned-Kriegie-turned-author, Brickhill went on to write two other classics of the air war and captivity, *Reach for the Sky* (a biography of the legless ace Douglas Bader) and the story of the dams raid, *The Dam Busters*. These works tended to present captivity in Germany from the perspective of officers and airmen and escapers (what might be regarded as the 'Colditz effect'). Colditz, Oflag IVC, the supposedly 'escape-proof' officers' camp (actually a castle) in Silesia, has been the subject of dozens of books since Patrick Reid's *The Colditz Story* (London, 1953). Its centrality to the depiction and recollection of the prisoner of war experience was confirmed for a generation by the production of several series of the BBC television drama series *Colditz* in 1972–74. The Australian aspect of Colditz was told in *The Diggers of Colditz* (Sydney, 1985), co-written by Colin Burgess and Jack Champ.

The popularity of such memoirs helped to inspire and confirm a representation of captivity portrayed in a string of films, mostly British, in the 1950s and 1960s. An early example was *The*

Allied prisoners of war conduct a funeral procession after the death of a French officer at Colditz, Germany, c1943.  
AWM P01608.004



*Captive Heart* (1946). Film versions of *The Wooden Horse* (1950), and *The Colditz Story* (1954) defined the genre. Reflecting the decline in the British film industry and the ascendancy of Hollywood, the most celebrated films about European camps were American. They included *The Great Escape* (1963), based on Brickhill's book and *Von Ryan's Express* (1965). *The Great Escape*, depicting a mass escape based on the breakout from Stalag Luft III, Sagan, starred Steve McQueen (though no Americans were actually involved) and James Garner as the token Australian with the faux Cockney accent. *Von Ryan's Express* starred Frank Sinatra as an American colonel who hijacks a train carrying British and American prisoners of war from Italy into Germany and gets them to Switzerland. It is important to recall that (as with much of Australia's military history, such as popular perceptions of the Vietnam War) the Australian memory is subsumed within an overseas tradition.

As a consequence, despite the popularity of prisoner of war memoirs and films, little interest has been shown in Australian prisoners of the Germans and Italians and they are still relatively neglected. While authors such as Colin Burgess have published books such as *Barbed Wire and Bamboo* (Sydney, 1992) and *Destination Buchenwald* (Kenthurst, 1995) relatively few memoirs of captivity in Europe have appeared and many have been published privately (a sign of the lack of interest from mainstream publishers). The best include Leslie Le Souef's *To War without a Gun* (Perth, 1980), Barney Roberts' prize-winning *A Kind of Cattle* (published by the Australian War Memorial in 1984) and Elaine Thompson's transcriptions of her interviews with Charles Willoughby in *I was There* (Brewarrina, 1994). Further research needs to be undertaken to document their war.

A particularly valuable aspect of the Australian literature are the unit histories (mainly the product of unit associations) which devote space to the experience of those members left behind. Histories of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division units which were virtually destroyed in Crete and re-formed particularly devote space to men who in other circumstances tend to be overlooked. Notable examples include Gordon Hoff's *The Rise, Fall and Regeneration*

Australians overwhelmed by the German attack at Rethymnon, Crete, photographed after their surrender, May 1941.  
AWM 101185

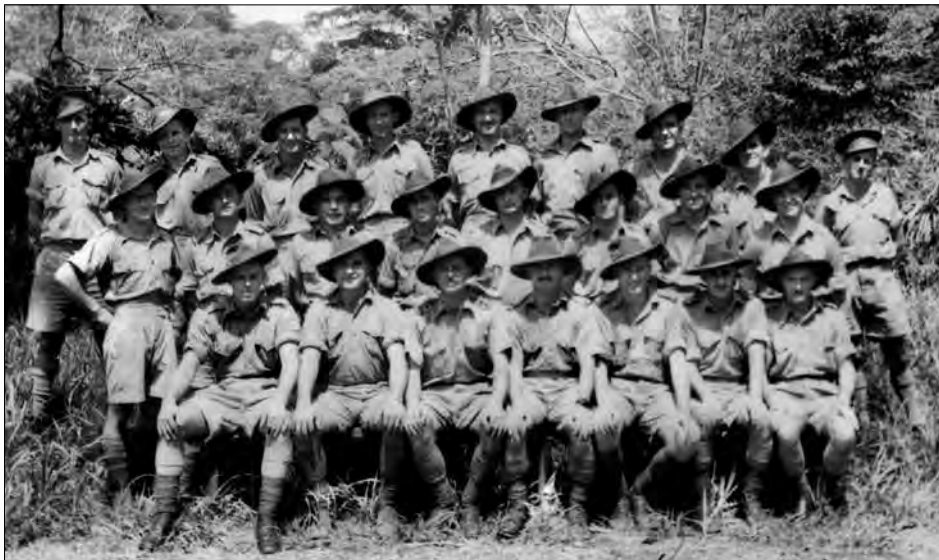


of the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Australian Field Ambulance (Adelaide, 1995) and William Bolger's history of the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, *The Fiery Phoenix* (Melbourne, 1983). Members of the 2/28<sup>th</sup> Battalion, which had been virtually entirely captured at Ruin Ridge at El Alamein in July 1942, likewise documented their captivity in Phil Loffman's 2/28<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion (Perth, 1999).

A curiosity is Donald Watt's memoir *Stoker*. Ostensibly the harrowing story of an Australian sent to the work and extermination complex of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the book has been criticised for inconsistencies and errors which Holocaust scholars regard as sufficient to consider the book as fraudulent. Sadly, doubts over the veracity of *Stoker* obscure the fact that a few Australians did become caught up in the machinery of death. The story is documented in James McClelland's memoir of the concentration camp at Terezin, *The Answer – Justice* (Toronto, NSW, 1998), in Alex Barnett's *Hitler's Digger Slaves* (Loftus, 2001) and in a chapter, 'Witnesses to hell', in Colin Burgess and Hugh Clarke's *Barbed Wire and Bamboo* (St Leonards, 1992).

## Prisoners of the Japanese

Some 14,000 Australian service personnel and perhaps several hundred civilians survived captivity under the Japanese: half as many again died in camps from Burma through the Netherlands East Indies to Japan itself. Again, they were among perhaps 100,000 Allied service personnel and as many civilians (mainly Dutch) interned in camps all over east and south-east Asia. A useful work giving a context is Gavan Dawes' *Prisoners of the Japanese: POWs of World War II in the Pacific* (New York, 1994). The comparison between Australian and other Allied prisoners, especially in terms of their responses to captivity and rates of survival, permeates the literature, with more assertive nationalist certainty than firm evidence.



Twenty-four members of the 2/10<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance detachment, Rabaul, July 1941. Of this group, only six escaped capture by the Japanese. Of the 18 who were taken prisoner of war, 13 were executed, four drowned after the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*, and only one survived to be a prisoner of war in Japan.  
AWM Poo348.001



From the first, they were known to have been treated badly, and the first substantial reports of mistreatment to arrive (in 1944, from men recovered after American submarines torpedoed transports) confirmed widespread fears. Even so, conscious of the feelings of the thousands of families of the 22,000 men and about forty women who had been captured, the government released partial and positive details before the war's end. With the liberation and repatriation of the prisoners, war correspondents began to file reports which began to disclose what had occurred. These filled and fuelled a great desire to know, even if it was to be the worst. This desire explains the sales of the few memoirs published in the immediate post-war decade, books such as Rohan Rivett's *Behind Bamboo* (Sydney, 1946), Russell Braddon's *The Naked Island* (London, 1952) and Betty Jeffrey's *White Coolies* (Sydney, 1954). The demand for these books was intense: long queues formed for Rivett's book, and it was reprinted several times until 1954, soon becoming a 'classic'.

AJ Sweeting's chapters on 'Prisoners of the Japanese', in Lionel Wigmore's volume of the official history, *The Japanese Thrust*, (Canberra, 1957) provided the first formal history. Though substantial, Sweeting's section is arguably shorter than might have been expected. (However, it could be regarded as occupying the middle ground: New Zealand produced a full volume on its prisoners in Italy and Germany, but Britain and India did not include prisoners in their official histories at all.) It provides the starting point for the subject and all subsequent writers are indebted to Sweeting for his patient dissection of inadequate records and his clear, if at times frustratingly brief, exposition of a complex story. His chapters present an horrific story with a disciplined outrage all the more effective for its restraint. Complementary chapters in Allan Walker's *Middle East and Far East* (Canberra, 1953) deal in detail with medical aspects which were proportionally more important for these prisoners particularly.

As with prisoners in Europe, unit histories provided a strong vehicle for recording the ordeal of captivity. The earliest units seem to have been the 2/30<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the 8<sup>th</sup> Division Signals, which both published histories in Sydney in 1949. AW Penfold and others drafted parts of *Gallegghan's Greyhounds* while in captivity, and JW Jacobs and RJ Bridgland completed *Through: The story of Signals 8 Australian Division and Signals AIF Malaya* shortly after the war. Most units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division and others captured in 1942 have published histories, the most recent being Max Venables' history of the 8<sup>th</sup> Ammunition Sub-Park, *From Wayville to Changi and Beyond* (Adelaide, 2002).

Except for the official histories, a handful of 'classic' prisoner of war books and unit histories with severely limited circulation, until about 1980 little else was published. Among the few exceptions was the memoir trilogy published by Ray Parkin, formerly of HMAS *Perth*. Parkin, who survived the battle of the Sunda Strait, captivity in Java, Japan and the construction of the Burma–Thailand railway, had left the navy to become a tallyman on the Melbourne waterfront. He drew on his wartime diaries (and his collection

of illustrations, created in appalling conditions on the railway) to write the remarkable memoir series, *Out of the Smoke, Into the Smother* and *The Sword and the Blossom*, published from 1960. Other former prisoners published memoirs or other accounts, notably Hugh Clarke, whose *The Tub*, an account of his voyage to Japan, (Brisbane, 1965) became the first of several memoirs and books, including *Last Stop Nagasaki!* (Sydney, 1984), *Twilight Liberation* (Sydney, 1985) and *A Life for Every Sleeper* (Sydney, 1986). Stan Arneil's powerful transcription of his wartime diary, *One Man's War* (Sydney, 1980) represents one of the points at which the tide began to turn in favour of publishing about captivity.



In September 1945, recently liberated Australian and British prisoners await repatriation at the 'Bicycle Camp', a former Dutch military barracks in Java, later used as a prisoner of war camp by the Japanese. AWM 123661

Before about 1980, prisoners of war generally had occupied no special place in Australian recollection of war. It may even have been that many individuals felt embarrassed at having been associated with defeats, particularly the 8<sup>th</sup> Division, which had been lost in a series of defeats in 1942. In the early 1980s that air of awkwardness dissipated, and it did so because of a unique partnership between an historian, a journalist and a group of former prisoners of war. The broadcast in 1985 of the ABC radio series *POW: Australians under Nippon* (based on extensive interviews by Hank Nelson and Tim Bowden) arguably transformed popular awareness of prisoners of war from indifference to sympathy. A 'boom' in memoirs followed. Nelson, who became the Australian authority on Australian prisoners of the Japanese, published *POW: Australians under Nippon* in 1985. His review article in the *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* (14, 1989) on 'Recent POW books' demonstrated the growing numbers of books by and

about prisoners of war. Several must stand as examples of an unprecedented development. Philippa Poole's transcriptions of her father's letters from Changi and Thailand and her mother's from Sydney provided a powerful evocation of the cost captivity imposed on a family in *Of Love and War* (Sydney, 1982). Rowley Richards (with Marcia McEwen) *The Survival Factor* (Kenthurst, 1989) provided the reflections (based on documents kept at the time) of a prisoner of war medical officer. The result is one of the most important Australian observations of how men survived the ordeal. Many others were published privately, a reflection of the growing confidence among prisoners of war that readers would be receptive to what they had to say. It is significant that Patsy Adam Smith's *Prisoners of War: from Gallipoli to Korea*, (Ringwood, 1992), a popular book and the only general account of captivity across several wars, was begun in this period.

A part of the credit for the growing interest in captivity was what can be thought of as the 'Weary Dunlop effect'. Dunlop's stature among former prisoners in Java and Thailand (though not elsewhere) had always been high. He had been introduced to a wider readership through Ray Parkin's tribute in *Out of the Smother*. By the 1980s Dunlop became the representative prisoner of war, a symbol of the courage and compassion upon which their survival depended. Interest was stimulated by the publication of his extraordinary *War Diaries of Weary Dunlop* (Melbourne, 1986) and Sue Ebury's posthumous *Weary: the Life of Sir Edward Dunlop* (Ringwood, 1994). The creation of statues of Dunlop in Benalla, his birthplace, as well as in Melbourne and in the grounds of the Australian War Memorial (and the minting of a 50 cent commemorative coin depicting him) confirmed his popular reputation as the representative prisoner of war doctor.

Mirroring the reluctance to explore the experience of prisoners of war in Asia was a lag in the depiction of their situation in Hollywood. Films about prisoners of war in Asia took longer to appear than those dealing with the European war, a reflection of the relative interest in what is called in Britain 'the Far East' and the greater logistic difficulties involved. An American-made film, *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) starring Alec Guinness as the British colonel who forgets whom he's supposed to be

Liberated Australian soldiers carry rice from the mess at Changi prisoner of war camp, Singapore, September 1945. AWM 019192



fighting, began the pattern. Hollywood returned to the theme, adapting James Clavell's novel based on his experiences in Changi, *King Rat*, in 1965. Excluding some shockers (*The Camp on Blood Island* and *The Secret of Blood Island*, 1958 and 1964) the last major British film made about the experience was *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*, a British-Japanese co-production in which Laurens van der Post meets Major Tom, made in 1982.

Despite the strong Australian interest in prisoners of the Japanese, relatively few films have appeared, other than *Blood Oath* (1991, re-released in 2002) and the television drama series *Changi* (2001). *Blood Oath*, loosely based on events on Ambon, is a dark tale of retribution. *Changi*, written by the satirist John Doyle, melded a sensitive portrayal of the effects of captivity on survivors and their families with a gross caricature of Changi as a horror camp run by the Japanese. Though hailed by some as a triumph of Australian drama, it hurt many former prisoners and their families who saw their ordeal presented as vaudeville.

The past 20 years have seen an outpouring of memoirs. Though we are unlikely to see many more (given the age and infirmity of former prisoners of war) we are surprisingly well-off compared to the body of work that existed 20 years ago. In relation to, say, Outram Road prison, we have accounts by Bill Young *Return to a Dark Age*, (1991), John Wyett *Staff Wallah at the Fall of Singapore*, and Penrod Dean, *Singapore Samurai* (1998). We have accounts of several prisoner 'forces', such as Don Wall's *Heroes of F Force* (Sydney, 1993) or Alex Dandie's *The Story of J Force* (Sydney, 1994). We have accounts of several nurses' experiences, such as Norman Manners's *Bullwinkel* (Carlisle, 1999) and Pat Darling's *Portrait of a Nurse* (Sydney, 2000). Still, relatively little attention has been devoted to the experiences of prisoners in some areas – Java, Korea, Kuching, Taiwan and, oddly perhaps, Changi and even Japan itself. Much more attention has been paid to other episodes – Sandakan, the Burma–Thailand railway, Ambon and the women's camps around Palembang; though for good reasons. Each bears a brief reference and collectively they demonstrate the vigor of Australian works on the subject.

The prolonged agony of the 'Sandakan death march', in which about 2,400 Australian and British prisoners of war died or were killed in the course of a nightmare forced journey across British North Borneo in 1945, has become one of the most studied aspects of captivity under the Japanese. It was the subject of a pioneering 'actuality' broadcast when an ABC reporter took a wire-recording set along the route of the march in 1946: the program was broadcast and produced as a booklet. The death march was treated briefly in the official history (1963). Peter Firkins' *From Hell to Eternity* (1979) told the story to a new generation. In the 1990s interest in Sandakan quickened due to the coming together of the families of Sandakan prisoners and the related publication of successive editions of Don Wall's Sandakan books, beginning with *Sandakan under*

*Nippon: The Last March* (Sydney, 1988). In the late 1990s two further books were released, Kevin Smith's *Borneo: Australia's Proud but Tragic Heritage* (Armidale, 1999) and notably Lynette Silver's *Sandakan: A Conspiracy of Silence*, (Burra Creek, NSW, 1997). Despite Silver's sensational title, the book is actually a detailed (perhaps too detailed) account of the Sandakan prisoners, unreliable only in its final chapter which advances an unsubstantiated claim that a rescue attempt was unjustifiably cancelled and the knowledge concealed. Yuki Tanaka's *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War II* (1996) explored the treatment of prisoners of war in Borneo from Japanese sources with an impressive candour. The focus of a pilgrimage during the 'Australia Remembers' year of 1995, Sandakan became the location of a memorial constructed by the Office of Australian War Graves in 1999.

The Burma–Thailand railway is central to the experience of prisoners of the Japanese. Rather more Australians died on the railway than at Sandakan, though over a greater temporal and geographical span. Because most Australian prisoners of the Japanese laboured on it, it has assumed a central place in the representation and memory of captivity. Hank Nelson and Gavan McCormack convened a seminar at the Australian National University in 1991, *The Burma–Thailand Railway: Memory and History*, (Sydney, 1993). The resultant collection of papers presented fresh insights into the experience of the railway, from Allied, Japanese and Korean perspectives. Sibylla Jane Flower's research on Commonwealth prisoners in Asia has been prefigured in her contribution on the Burma–Thailand railway in Moore and Fedorowich's *Prisoners of War and Their*

Members of the 3 POW Contact and Enquiry Unit examine articles of clothing and other personal items left behind at the Sandakan POW camp in Borneo by Australian and British prisoners of war, thousands of whom died in the camp and on forced marches. AWM 121783



*Captors*. Her work reflects the significance of the railway as a crucial arena for understanding captivity and demonstrates the need for exceptional command of both the sources and their context in order to make sense of the evidence. As a result, the railway retains its power as the defining prisoner of war experience. It is no coincidence that a major memorial and museum constructed by the Office of Australian War Graves was opened at Hellfire Pass in Thailand in 1998.



Australian and British prisoners of war lay sections of track on the Burma-Thailand railway, c1943. AWM P00406.034

The larger and better-known episodes of Sandakan and Burma–Thailand railway long overshadowed the ordeal of the Gull Force. Captured on Ambon in February 1942 many of the men of the 2/21<sup>st</sup> Battalion were later transported to Hainan, where they were subjected to a regime of brutality second only to Sandakan and the worst camps on the railway. Ambon and Hainan were the subject of Joan Beaumont’s *Gull Force*, (Sydney, 1988). Beaumont’s book, also based on extensive contact with survivors, was framed around survival and leadership in captivity. It posed and explored hard questions about men’s responses to the demands of captivity which challenged received traditional shibboleths about mateship and authority. Ambon has attracted other books, such as Courtney Harrison’s *Ambon, Island of Mist* (Geelong, 1988) and self-published accounts such as Ailsa Rolley’s *Survival on Ambon* (Beaudesert, 1994) and Ron Leech’s memoir, *Pacific War Odyssey* (Sydney, 1995).

The women’s camps around Palembang have been the subject of intense interest, in both Britain and Australia. The Australian nurses held there have been the subject of arguably greater scrutiny than any other group of prisoners of comparable size. The returned nurses were the subject of intense interest from the first and Betty Jeffrey’s

memoir *White Coolies* was among the best-selling of the early books. They were held in camps along with civilian women and children and their experience cannot be separated from those of the larger group. Even so, accounts of internees' experiences have not emerged until recently. Despite early memoirs such as Mary Cornelius' *Changi* and Agnes Keith's account of internment in Sandakan and Kuching, *Three Came Home* (also filmed), relatively little appeared before the 1980s. Lavinia Warner and John Sandiland's *Women Beyond the Wire* (London, 1982) became the first substantial secondary account, albeit focussing on British internees. Shirley Fenton-Huie's *The Forgotten Ones* (Sydney, 1992) drew upon the recollections of former Dutch colonial families now living in Australia to describe the ordeal of Dutch internees. Jan Ruff O'Herne's *Fifty Years of Silence*, (Sydney, 1997) is a moving account by a courageous former 'comfort woman'. It acted as a powerful catalyst in mobilising protest against the Japanese failure to accept responsibility for the Japanese army's policy of using women in occupied territories (overwhelmingly Asians) as forced prostitutes. Almost as moving is Neil Begley's memoir *An Australian's Childhood in China under the Japanese* (Kenthurst, 1995) which is a reminder of internment's effects on Australian children caught up in the war. Of particular interest to Australians, for whom the Changi quilts have become a symbol of women's internment, is Sheila Allen's *Diary of a Girl in Changi*.

While internees have until recently been largely overlooked in the general and scholarly literature, they have been disproportionately prominent in films about captivity in Asia. In 1950 *Three Came Home* appeared, based on Agnes Keith's account of internment at Sandakan and Kuching. The first film version of Neville Shute's novel *A Town Like Alice* was released in 1956, and again as an Australian television mini-series in 1981. It was notable for treating the Japanese as more than mere stereotypes. In the meantime,

three series of the BBC historical drama *Tenko*, based on *Women Behind the Wire*, gave a detailed and truthful portrayal of women's reactions to internment, captivity and liberation. *Empire of the Sun*, based on JG Ballard's boyhood memories of internment in China was made in 1987. Another mainstream American film, *Paradise Road*, included several Australian nurses as characters, based loosely on the Palembang nurses and internees. Hank Nelson has severely criticised this film's rendering of history in 'A map to Paradise Road' in the *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* (April 1996).

Australian Army Nursing Service Sisters captured at Rabaul in 1942 and later interned at Yokohama, arrive home at Sydney, September 1945. AWM 115953



Despite the welcome resurgence in studies of prisoners of war, much remains to be investigated. Michael McKernan's *This War Never Ends* (Brisbane, 2001) has begun the exploration of the impact of captivity on them and their families: more needs to follow. Fortunately, it is known that studies are under way on the ordeal of those confined in Outram Road Gaol (through the work of Tim Bowden), and prisoner of war medical officers (though the work of Rosalind Harder).

## Korean War

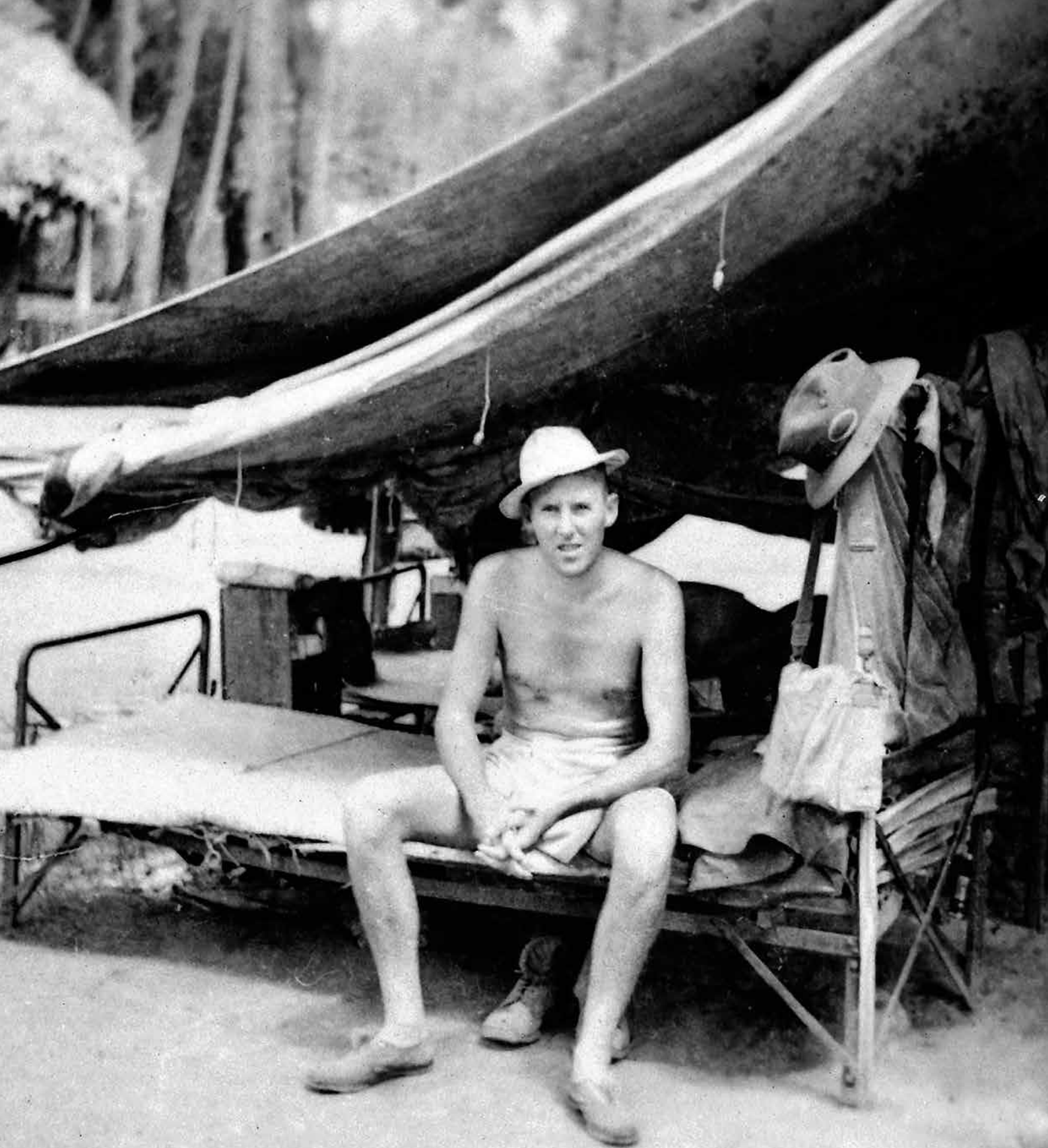
The relatively few Australians captured in the Korean War have been comprehensively documented. Brigadier Phillip Greville wrote an appendix, 'The Australian Prisoners of War', to Robert O'Neill's official history, *Australia in the Korean War 1950-53, Combat Operations* (Canberra, 1985). It offers both a general account of captivity in Korea and tells the stories of many individuals. Greville, a former prisoner, has written an appendix that is a comprehensive record. It is supplemented by references to individual experiences in other memoirs (such as Anthony Farrar-Hockley's *The Edge of the Sword* (London, 1954), which describes 'Slim' Madden GC) and Maurie Pears and Fred Kirkland's *Korea Remembered* (Georges Heights, 1998).

The welcome resurgence of interest in prisoners of war over the past 20 years has given us many books of power and richness, especially about the ordeal of those interned by the Japanese: books that attempt to do justice to experiences unparalleled in Australian history. Much more needs to be done to record the stories of prisoners in other theatres and other wars, but we must hope that we will never again see former prisoners regarded as uninteresting or marginal to Australian military history. There is clearly more to be said about Australians in captivity in war: let us hope that we will be ready to listen.

In August 1953, at Panmunjom in North Korea, an Australian prisoner of war is deloused by American medics on his release after two and a half years of captivity. AWM JK1008







A member of Sparrow Force sits on his bunk at a prisoner of war camp at Oesapa Besar, Timor, 1942. AWM Po2699.008

**IMAGES:**  
**ASIA 1939-1945**

All I want now is home and mother,  
a bottle of icy-cold lemonade,  
and some bread and jam.  
It is almost too much to believe  
that this may all happen any day.

Lieutenant Betty Jeffrey, 2/10<sup>th</sup> AGH, captured on Banka Island, 1942

There were about 300 of us left out of about 600. From that group, none of whom were well, all of whom had malaria, were malnourished, and some of them were shivering on parade, dressed in a laplap or a pair of shorts, rarely any boots, I had to choose 100 men to march another 100 miles into the unknown, certainly to worse and not to better. I never saw any of those men again. ... It was the most terrible thing I've had to do. If I hadn't done it, then the Japanese would have taken the first 100 they found, and they would all have died. Some of these men had a chance of surviving. None of them should have been asked to do any more. Later on that day the Japanese medical officer came by ... I said to him, 'Unless you change your treatment of these prisoners they will all die.' He said, 'That would be a very good thing; it would save the Japanese army much rice.'

Major Kevin Fagan, who served as a doctor on the Burma-Thailand railway, as a prisoner of the Japanese. 1943



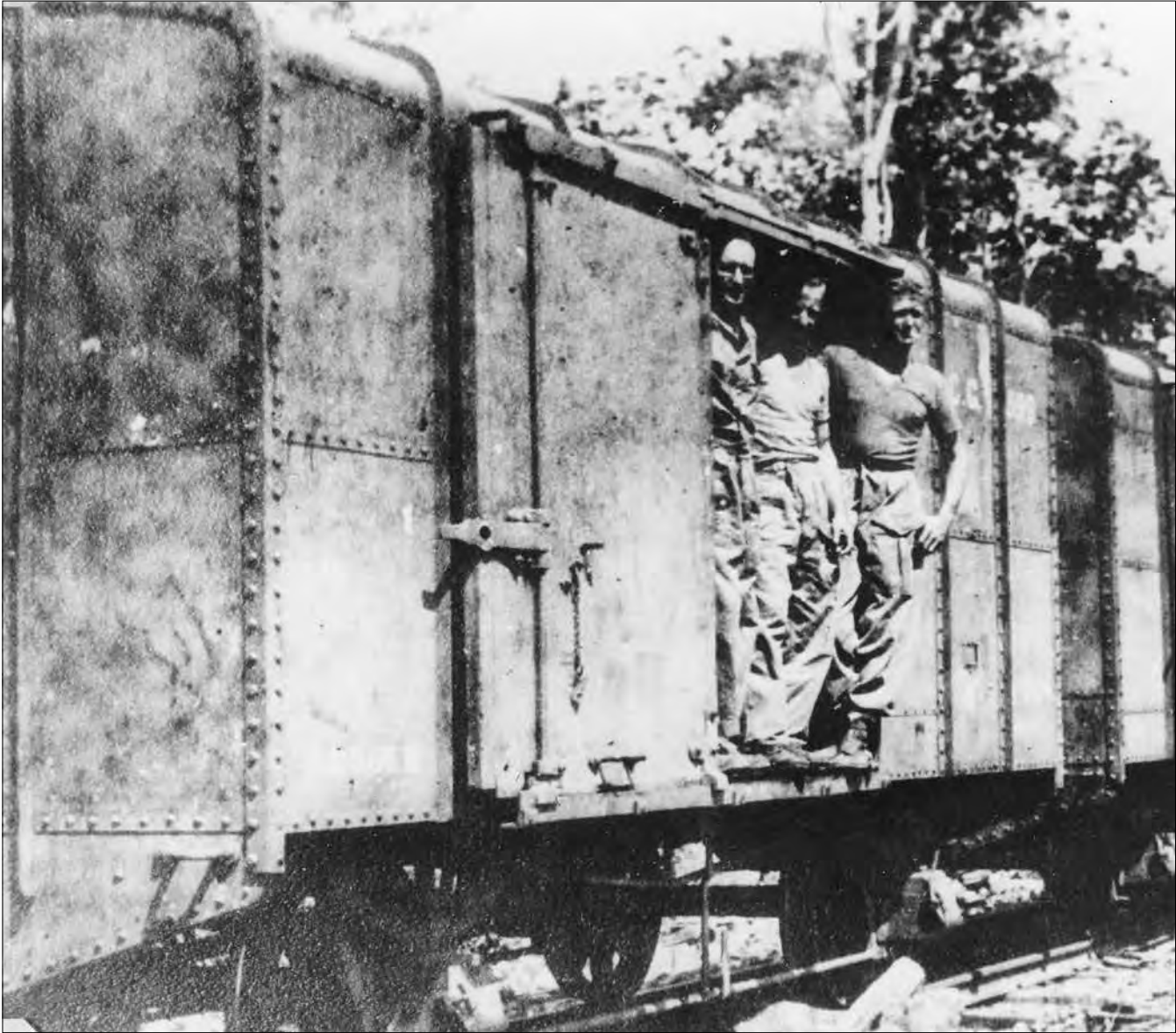
The 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, led by its band, prepares to move off during the Anzac Day service at Rabaul, New Guinea, 1941. The battalion's band was unique, as its 24 members were all Salvation Army bandsmen who enlisted as a complete band and were assigned to the battalion together with their bandmaster. Sent to garrison Rabaul as the infantry unit in Lark Force, the battalion suffered 571 men killed or died as prisoners of war, many being executed in the Tol Plantation massacre or being drowned when the *Montevideo Maru* was sunk in the South China Sea by the USS *Sturgeon*, in July 1942. Of the 24 bandsmen, only one survived the New Britain campaign. AWM P02328.004



Some of the thousands of Allied prisoners of war captured after the surrender of the British forces in Malaya, on 15 February 1942. This photograph was reproduced in a Japanese propaganda magazine entitled 'Home', which came into the possession of an Australian POW in Singapore. AWM 134903



Fifteen thousand Australian and British prisoners of war, including hundreds of men with dysentery, crowd into the barrack square at Selarang Barracks, Changi, Singapore, 4 September 1942. This photo was secretly taken by an Australian prisoner and concealed in the false bottom of a water bottle until the war's end.  
AWM 106530



'Salt wagon' railway carriages on the Burma-Thailand railway. These wagons were used to transport prisoners of war from Singapore to Thailand, a journey of several days and nights. Forty men were packed into these badly ventilated wagons. AWM 157866



Prisoners of war load attap, a palm-like material used for roofing, Burma-Thailand railway, c1942.  
AWM P00406.015





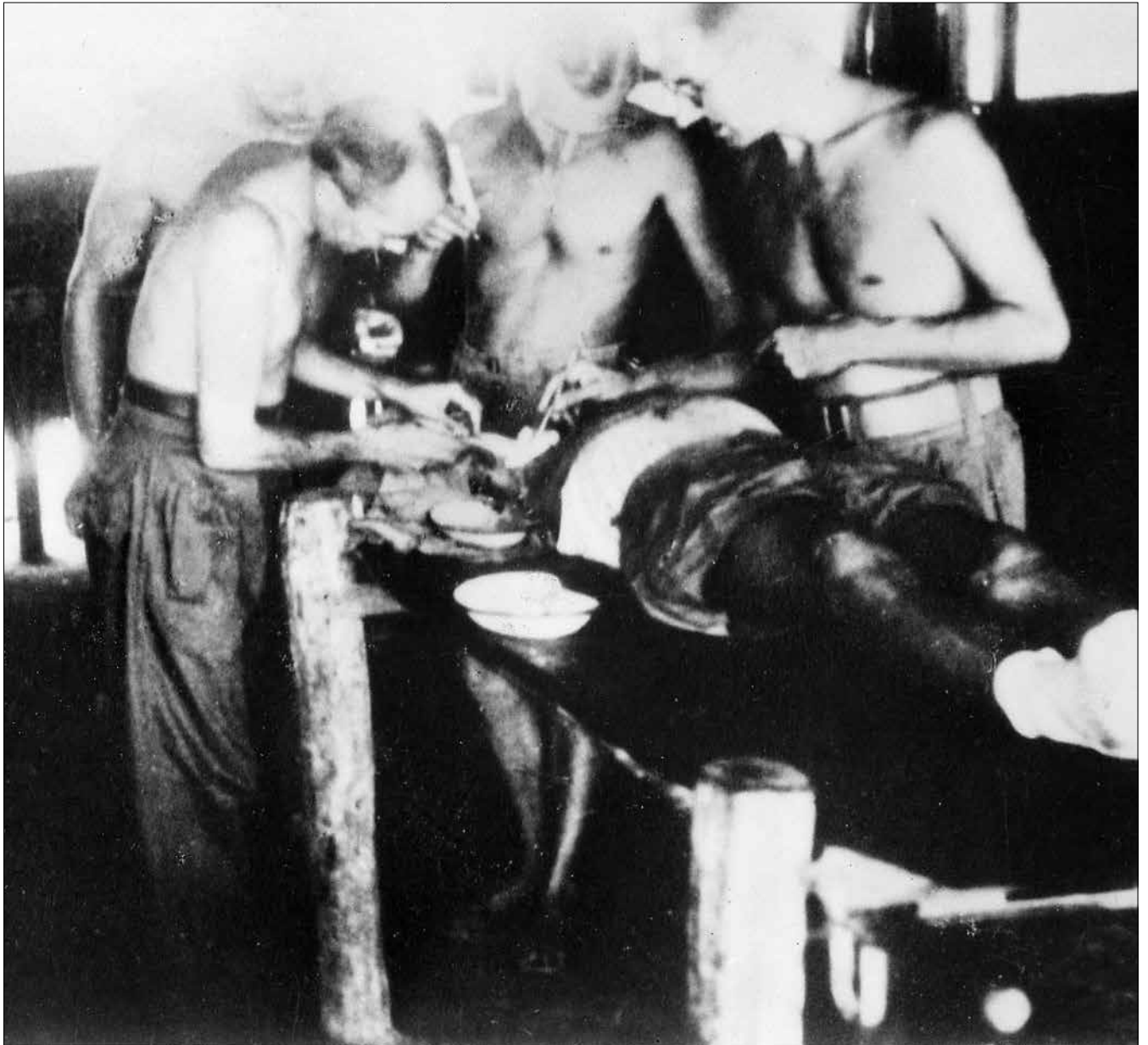
A urinal, typical of those constructed by prisoners of war at camps along the Burma-Thailand railway, photographed in 1945. AWM 157869



British and Australian prisoners of war captured by the Japanese at the fall of Singapore and transported to Korea in the prison ship *Fukkai Maru*, march through the streets of Fusan, Korea, October 1942. Many men collapsed during the march from sheer fatigue after the gruelling six week sea journey in the crowded ship. AWM 041102



British and Australian prisoners of war collect straw to place under their sleeping mats at Keijo, Korea, December 1942. AWM 041115



Major Arthur Moon performs an operation in the primitive conditions of the hospital hut at Tamaung, near Kanchanaburi, Burma-Thailand Railway, Thailand, 1943. AWM P00761.013



Prisoners of war on the Burma-Thailand railway enter a fake bar as the camera rolls, during the creation of a Japanese propaganda film showing the good treatment supposedly given to prisoners, c1943. AWM P00406.024



Four prisoners of war show the effects of starvation and beri-beri, at Tarsoe, on the Burma-Thailand railway, c1943. Tarsoe was used by the Japanese as a staging camp for POWs moving north to work on the railway, and as a base hospital. AWM P00761.011



Prisoners of war on the Burma-Thailand railway load petrol and stores, c1943. AWMP00406.016



Chaplain Charles Patmore, 2/21<sup>st</sup> Battalion, AIF, conducts a church service at the Japanese prisoner of war camp at Ambon. Chaplain Patmore was later killed on the island, in a bombing raid on the aerodrome. After recapture of the island by the Australians, a roll of film, of which this is one frame, was found in the camp. AWM 136290





Prisoners of war being rescued by an American submarine in the China Sea, 15 September 1944. In September 1944, hundreds of British and Australian prisoners of war were on their way to Japan in Japanese merchant ships. Allied submarines sank at least ten of these ships, and then rescued some 160 prisoners from the sea, where they had spent days clinging to rafts.

AWM P02018.326



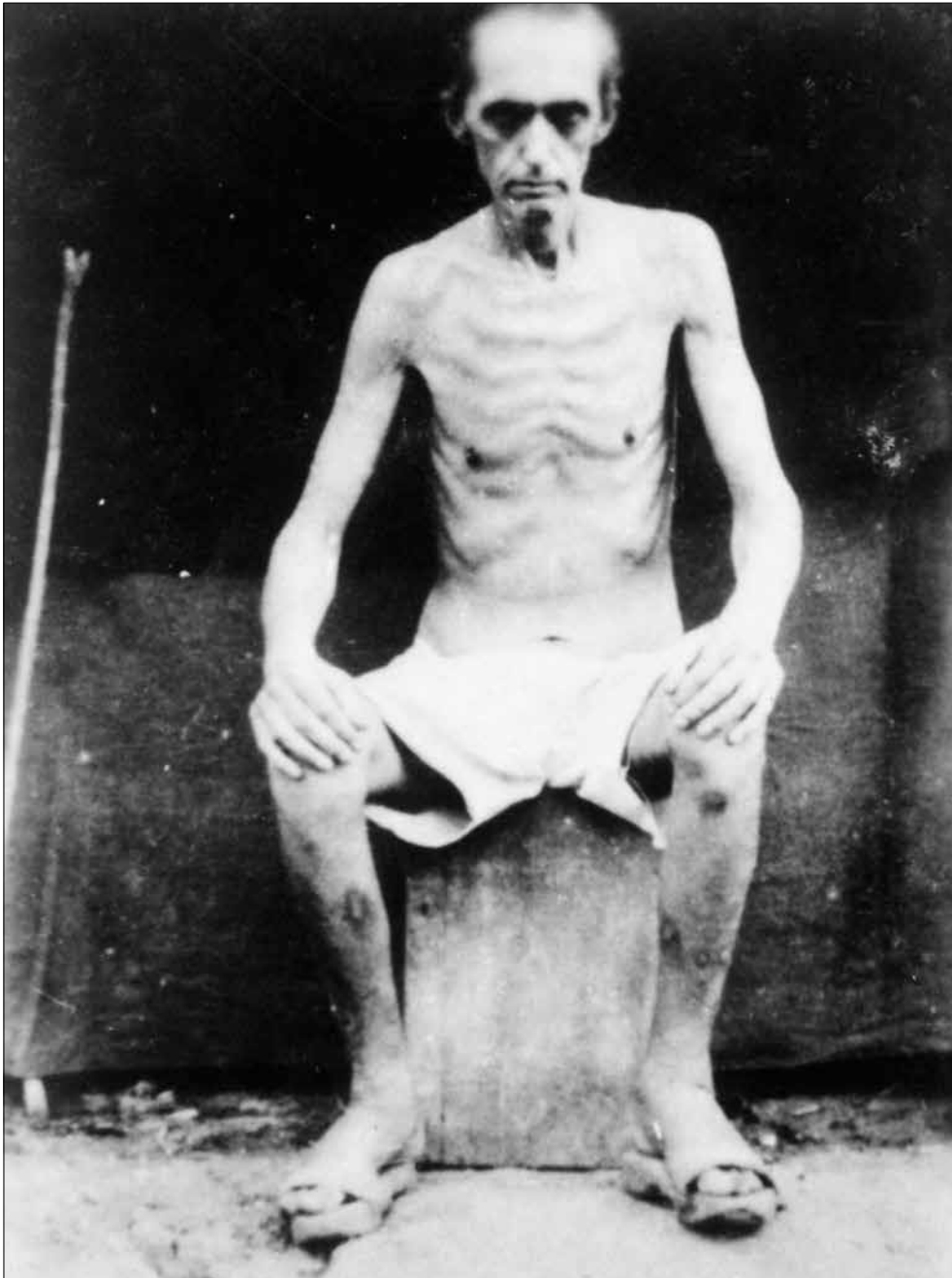
Pig raising at Taiwan prisoner of war camp No 3, Formosa, June 1944. This scene was mocked-up for the visit of a delegate of the International Red Cross who was inspecting conditions at the camp, and the pigs were removed after he left. AWM 041209



Mrs Mary Foster makes inquiries at the Prisoners of War Relatives Association Rooms, Elizabeth House, Melbourne, about filling in a radio message form for broadcasting overseas to her son Stoker Horace Foster, HMAS *Perth*, August 1944. The *Perth* was sunk by the Japanese on 1 March 1942 during the Battle of the Sunda Strait. Of the ship's crew of 674 RAN personnel, 357 were lost in action or died soon thereafter. The remainder became prisoners of war, and of these, 106 died through ill-treatment in captivity. Because of Japanese failure to provide proper lists to the International Red Cross of prisoners of war, many families in Australia with relatives on the *Perth* were unaware of the fate of individual sailors and continued to hope for their survival throughout the war. Stoker Horace Foster went down with the *Perth* on 1 March 1942. AWM 141592



General Sir Thomas Blamey, Commander in Chief, Allied Land Forces, South-West Pacific Area, speaks with ex-prisoners of war who were rescued after the sinking of a Japanese transport by United States Navy submarines, October 1944. AWM 088946



An Australian prisoner of war bears the signs of malnutrition and hard labour. On his legs are the scars of tropical ulcers, which could quickly reduce a man's legs to bone and sinew if left untreated, and for which the only treatment available in captivity was to have the wound gouged out without anaesthetic, using whatever sharpened instrument was to hand. AWM P01433.021



After the announcement of the Japanese surrender, Japanese staff of Lintang Barracks prisoner of war camp at Kuching, Sarawak, Borneo, are ordered from their quarters, searched and placed in the former British officers' compound, under guard of the 2/4<sup>th</sup> Pioneer Battalion. AWM 120753



A recently liberated prisoner of war demonstrates a punishment technique used by Japanese guards of the Afuna prisoner of war camp in Japan, in which prisoners received regular beatings with a wooden club. A group of Australian War Correspondents were the first to discover the camp, and found the men living in shocking conditions. AWM 019107



Flying Officer Eric Thake, RAAF War Historical Section, sketches Lieutenant General Yamada, Commander of the Japanese 48<sup>th</sup> Division, at Koepang, Timor, October 1945. Yamada was charged with having committed murder on Flores Island, in the Netherlands East Indies, but was acquitted. AWM 120153

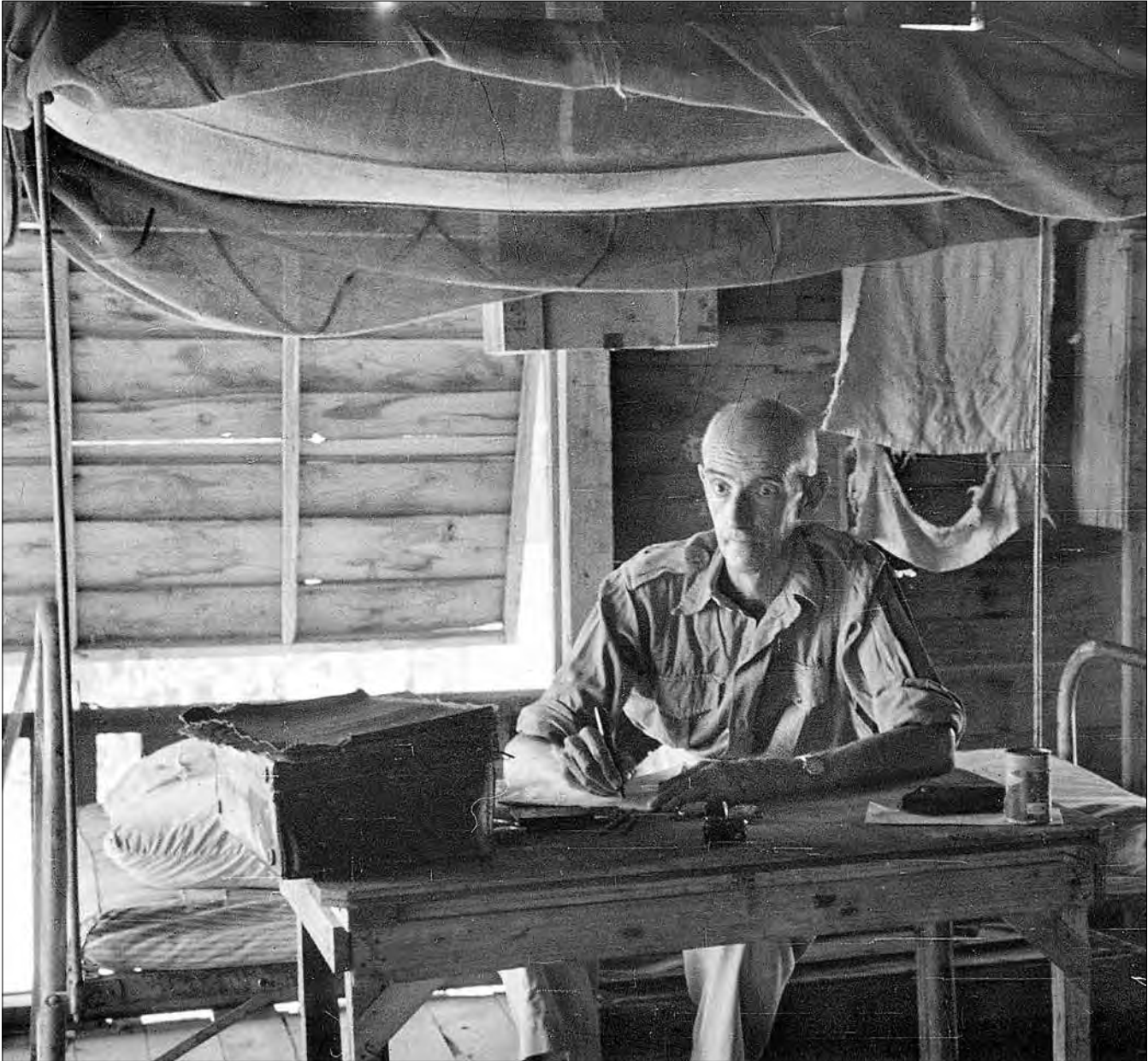




A member of the Sandakan Kempei Tai (Japanese Military Police) confesses to shooting two Australian prisoners of war and five Chinese civilians, during interrogation at Sandakan, North Borneo, October 1945. AWM 121782



A Japanese working party excavates a mass grave at Tawiri, Ambon, in December 1945, as a member of the Australian War Graves Maintenance Unit examines the remains of Australian and Dutch prisoners of war executed by the Japanese in February 1942.  
AWM 030388.06



Lieutenant Colonel William Scott DSO, 2/21<sup>st</sup> Battalion AIF, senior Australian officer at the Bakli prisoner of war camp, at work in his quarters, Bakli Bay, Hainan, August 1945.

AWM 030359.06



Australian and Dutch ex-POWs in the camp kitchen at Bakli Bay, Hainan, August 1945. AWM 030356.02



Captain A Smith working in the officers' vegetable garden  
in the Changi Gaol, September 1945.

AWM 117002



Two recently released prisoners of war examine the wireless set constructed by Lieutenant R Wright, Australian Army Ordnance Corps, at Changi, Singapore. The radio was successfully hidden from the Japanese inside a home-made broom. AWM 117006



Men of the 2/29<sup>th</sup> Battalion, AIF, pose after their release outside their hut in the Changi prisoner of war camp, Singapore, September 1945. AWM 117112



Recently liberated Australian soldiers demonstrate the conditions at Changi Gaol, in which four men occupied a cell designed for two, September 1945. AWM 116463





Recently liberated Australian prisoners of war with their home-made cooking utensils, in front of the cookhouse at Changi Gaol, Singapore, September 1945. AWM 116541



A recently released Australian prisoner of war checks his weight gain on a set of scales in the Changi Gaol courtyard, September 1945. AWM 116466



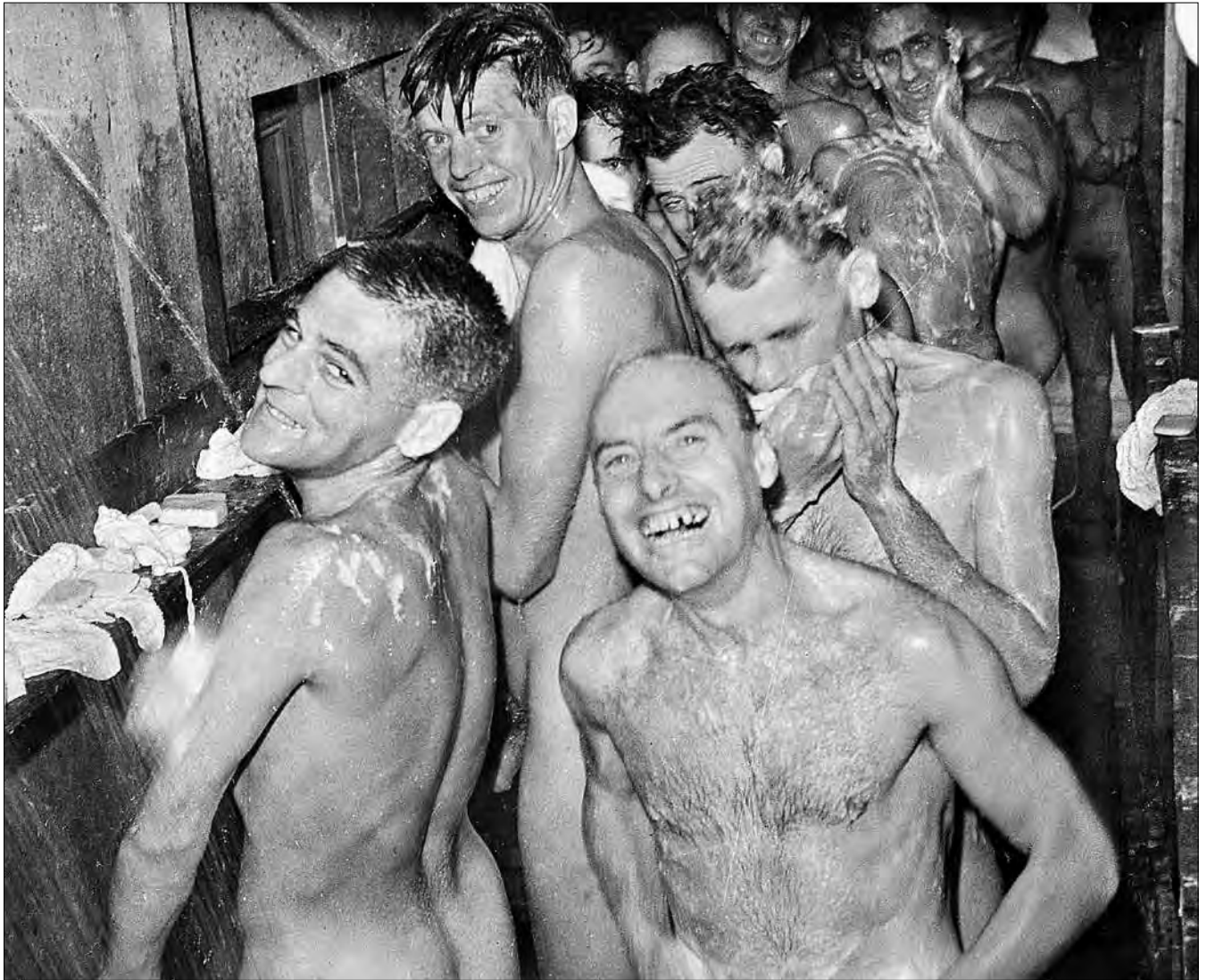
An Australian ex-prisoner of war with his accordion at Bicycle Camp, Batavia, Java, September 1945. Captured on Timor in 1942, he managed to retain his instrument through three and a half years of imprisonment.  
AWM 124354



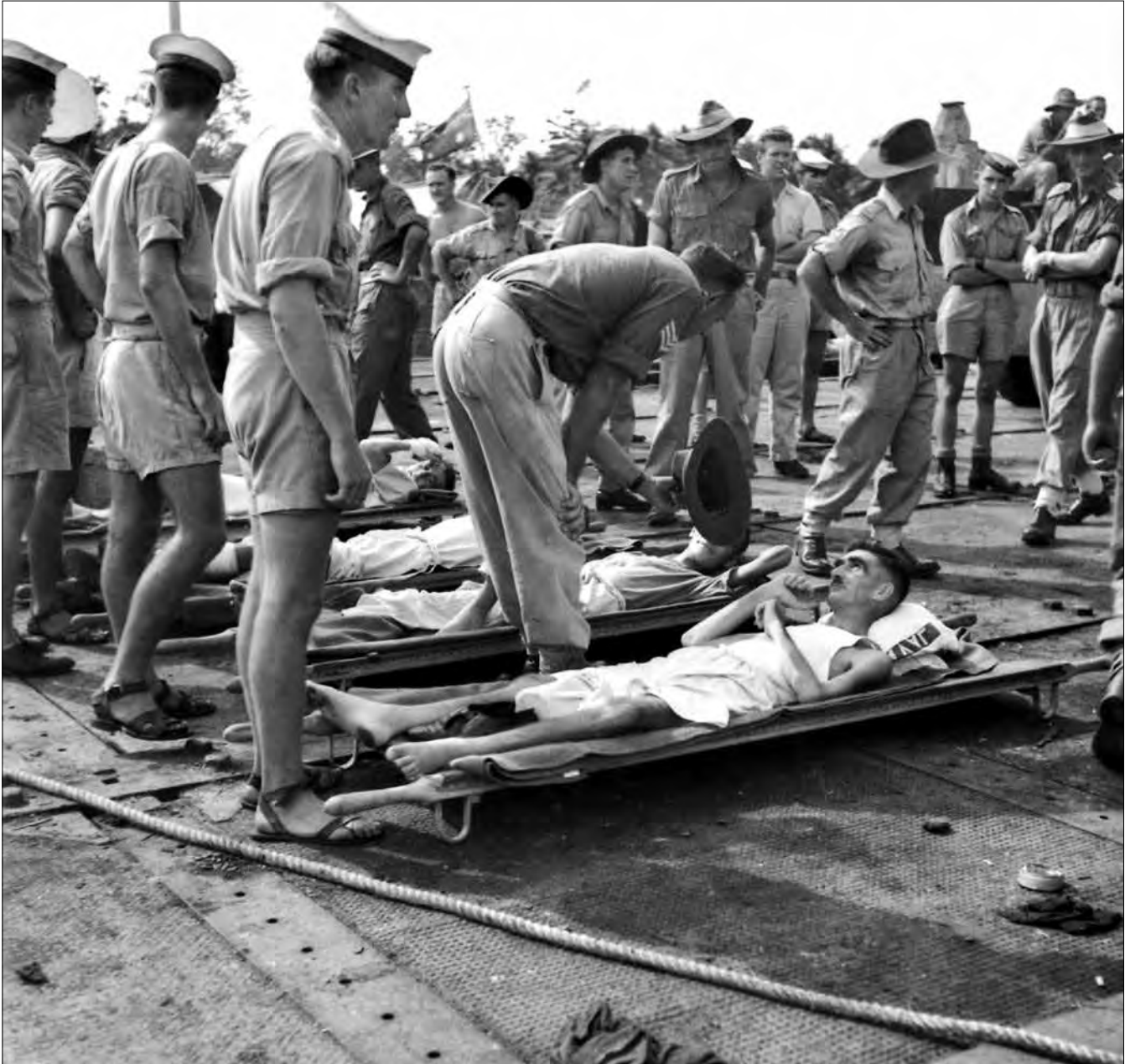
AANS Sisters, recently evacuated from a prisoner of war camp in Sumatra, attend a concert given by Gracie Fields at the former residence of a Japanese General, Singapore, October 1945. AWM 118809



Recently liberated prisoners of war arriving at the railway station in Yokohama, Japan, in 1945, proudly display their handmade Australian flag. AWM 019202

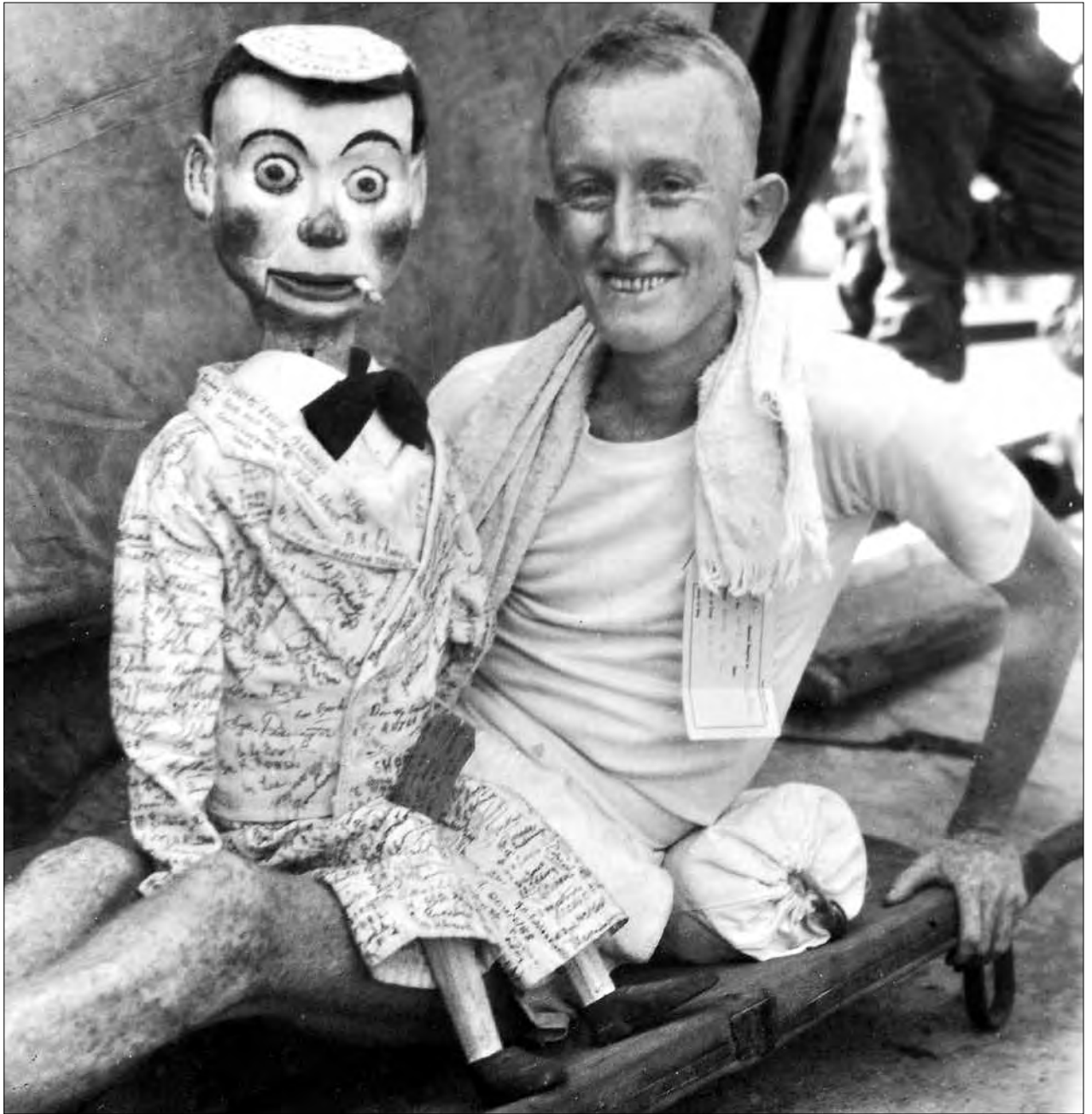


Australian ex-prisoners of war having their first shower in years as they go through 'processing' at Yokohama, Japan, 1945. Most of these men of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division were made prisoners after the surrender of Singapore in February 1942. AWM 019284



Survivors of Gull Force and the 2/21<sup>st</sup> Battalion, AIF, liberated from Japanese prisoner of war camps and evacuated from Ambon, are brought to Morotai by RAN corvettes for hospitalisation at the Australian Prisoner of War Reception Group camp, September 1945.

AWM 115775



Gunner Thomas Hussey, 2/10<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, AIF, waits on a stretcher to board the Australian Hospital Ship *Manunda* with his ventriloquist dummy 'Joey', after release from Changi prison camp, September 1945. AWM 116036





Australian and Allied prisoners of war liberated from Palembang, Sumatra, relate their experiences to a British war correspondent in Singapore. AWM P00444.193



Ex-POW members of the War Graves Commission survey party display a camera, film and documents recovered on 27 September 1945 at the 105 kilometre camp on the Burma-Thailand railway, from the grave of Private Norman Fraser, 2/4<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Battalion, to whom the camera and film belonged. The negatives covered the period from his internment at Changi (February 1942) to the 105 kilometre camp (May 1943), including shots of the *Toyohashi Maru*, Victoria Point, Tavoy, Thanbyuzayat and intervening camps along the railway. AWM P00761.042



Sergeant William Dalley, 2/20<sup>th</sup> Battalion, AIF, ex-prisoner of war, arrives home on the Australian Hospital Ship *Manunda* with other members of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division and the AANS, and is taken to the 113<sup>th</sup> AGH for convalescence, Sydney, October 1945. AWM 122162



Members of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division, AIF, liberated from Changi prison camp, arrive at Rose Bay Catalina Flying Boat Base in Sydney and are ferried ashore by RAAF launch, September 1945. AWM 116746



Leading Aircraftsman Keith Parker, RAAF, ex-prisoner of war of the Japanese, greets his mother and sister at Mascot Aerodrome, Sydney, September 1945. AWM 115908



Chaplain G Beatty, 2/14<sup>th</sup> AGH, conducts a funeral service in the Changi War Cemetery for an 8<sup>th</sup> Division ex-prisoner of war, September 1945. AWM 117663

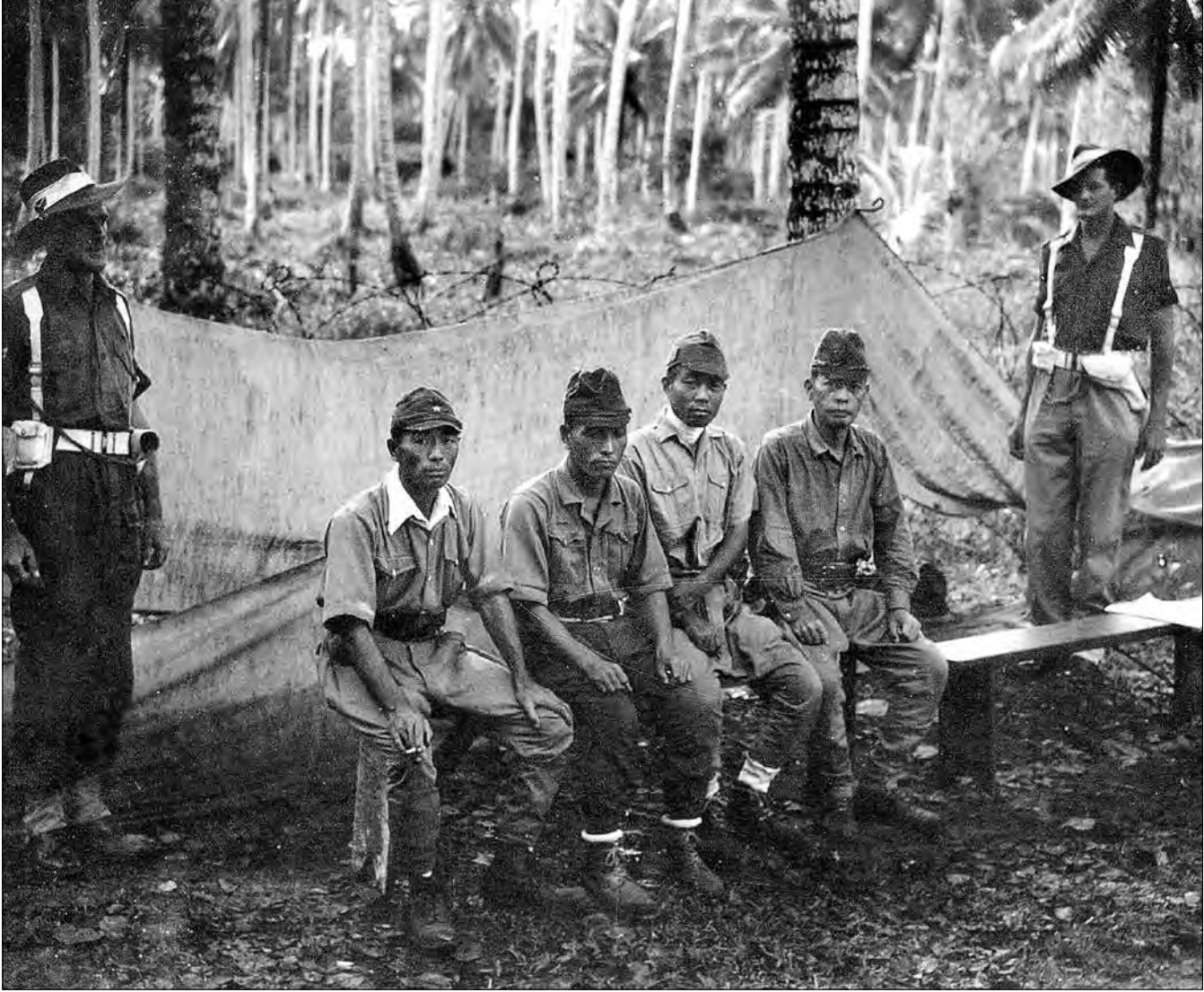


Japanese soldiers on trial at a war crimes court in Darwin, March 1946, take notes while charges are read. AWM NWA1043



Cemetery containing the graves of hundreds of Australian and British prisoners of war whose bodies were recovered from burial sites in and around the Sandakan prisoner of war camp, Borneo. These graves were eventually relocated to Labuan War Cemetery, Borneo. AWM Robertson Collection 122/1





Military police guard four Japanese officers of the Borneo Prisoners of War and Internees Guard Unit, outside the Australian 9<sup>th</sup> Division Headquarters where they were to appear at a war crimes trial, Labuan Island, December 1945. AWM 123170



Overcome by emotion upon receiving a telegram announcing the safety of her son, a prisoner of war since the fall of Singapore three and a half years earlier, a mother embraces the female postal worker who delivered the news to her door.

La Trobe picture collection, State Library of Victoria, image # ano05006

After discharge from the Army the hardest thing was to settle down to civilian life. You felt you were unwanted. You had done nothing during the war and you just wanted to keep moving all the time. This was the attitude of the ex-POW; after his release from captivity, after so many lost years, there was so much that one had to do to make up. ... we didn't want to be paraded through the streets to cheering crowds. ... [we] wanted just to get out of the Army, come home unnoticed, meet our loved ones, and try to settle down. For us, the war was over the day we were taken prisoner.

Jim McCauley, captured in Libya in April 1941 and released by General Patton's Fourteenth Army in May 1945 after four years of imprisonment in Italy, Germany and Poland



Prisoners of war at Tarsoe, on the Burma-Thailand railway, c1943.

*You saw these men every day when you were getting treated for ulcers. The dead were lying there, naked skeletons. They were all ready to be buried. Day after day they were just dying like flies in the camp, malaria, malnutrition. And you thought to yourself, well, how could I possibly get out of a place like this? Then when it came to the death march, you thought, how can I get out of this? And even after escaping, you'd say to yourself, well, right, we've escaped, now what are our chances, where are we going? Nowhere. We're in the middle of Borneo, we're in the jungle. How could we ever survive? Sydney was a long way from there.*

Nelson Short, one of only six survivors of the Sandakan death marches, 1945