



**In the Bag:**  
**Prisoners of War: 1915-1945**  
One Day Conference Saturday 12 November 2016  
Pompey Elliott Memorial Hall, 403 Camberwell Road, Melbourne  
Keynote Speaker - Dr Michael McKernan  
Historian and author  
Register at [www.mhhv.org.au](http://www.mhhv.org.au)



MILITARY HISTORY AND  
HERITAGE VICTORIA INC.

# **“IN THE BAG”:**

## **PRISONERS OF WAR 1915 - 1945**



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HERITAGE VICTORIA INC.**

**THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE HELD AT  
THE POMPEY ELLIOT MEMORIAL HALL,  
CAMBERWELL RSL BY MILITARY HISTORY AND  
HERITAGE, VICTORIA.**

**12 NOVEMBER 2016**

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## “In the Bag” the overall experience of Australian Prisoners of War 1914-1945

Major Craig Smith



How many Australians were PWs?

### World War One

- Around 4,000
- 3,850 by Germans (310 died)
- Mortality rate around 8%
- 217 by Ottoman Empire (62 died)
- Mortality rate 29%

### World War Two

- In excess of 30,000
- Around 8,000 by Germans/Italians
- Mortality rate 3%
- Over 22,000 by Japanese
- Mortality rate 36%



Private Leslie “Brick” Edmunds. Captured Crete 22 May 1941

"We had been fighting the Germans in Crete for a bit and I had not gone to the toilet for a while. During a lull at night I was about to drop my strides when the sergeant whispered, 'Bullshit Edmunds, I am not going to have you shit in the position. Do it out there.' [He pointed] to a small gully near our platoon position. I dutifully crawled past the gunner and found a very discreet hidey hole. Being a bit modest, I moved just out of sight of the Bren gun. After making a scrape, I took my pants off to do my business. As I sat crouched there, with a .303 next to me, I heard the distinctive click of a Mauser being cocked and [saw] a Kraut pointing his rifle at me with a bloody big grin on his ugly face. 'Halten Soldaten! Hände Hoch.' He paused and then said a phrase in English that I would hear in my head over and over again: 'For you, the war is over.' ..... quickest shit in my entire life!"

Leslie "Brick" Edmunds, Captured Crete, 1941

1. Capture
2. Processing
3. Daily Life
4. Comfort
5. Escape
6. Punishment
7. War Crimes
8. Freedom
9. Coming Home



## Capture

1. Ordered to surrender.
2. Captured in combat.
3. Incapacitated.
4. Voluntarily surrender.
5. Captured by chance.

"We were going to fight our last stand. We shook hands with one another then all of a sudden they sent for the NCOs. our NCO came back and said 'I just got orders from Egypt to surrender. The orders were we must capitulate.' Then he said, 'What's the bloody word mean, capitulate?' We didn't even know what 'capitulate' meant. It was an insult to the blokes we had seen die. To be sold out like that! Not given any choice, like a mob of sheep.....I've never forgiven the Army for that."

Private Lansell West, Victoria. Captured at Crete May 1941.

“You evidently hear the last second of the shell that hits you, or is close to you, because what you do is 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 Bullecourt, 1917



“This is where you really felt vulnerable and not too happy looking down the barrel of this gun. At this moment you waited with a sick feeling. You are not able to say goodbye to your family.” Rick Hunter, Captured Crete, 1941



## Processing

1. Disarmed
2. Segregated
3. Data collection
4. Interrogated
5. Medically Categorised
6. Allocated



“After the Jap guards had counted us, we were given our POW numbers – mine was 5168. Each number was printed on a piece of white cloth and had to be worn over the heart so the Jap guards had the best possible target....

The Japanese were trying to get information relating to military installations in Australia but none of the officers broke. **They’d been strapped to chairs and bashed with pieces of wood and metal, burned with cigarette lighters, and so on.** Colonel Williams of the 2/ 2 Pioneers, and possibly others, had then been subjected to the often fatal water treatment, whereby water was poured into a man’s body via his nostrils. None of these tactics had worked.” Jack Thorpe, Captured 1942

"They brought out a party of soldiers and lined them up in front of us. They loaded their rifles and asked us to give them the information they required. **We still refused crying out to them to shoot away.** I believe they would have carried out their purpose had it not been for a German officer, who spoke a few words rapidly in Turkish and gave them the order to 'imshi' (go away)." George Handsley, Captured Romani, 1916

The Italian spotted my collar badge and he said: 'Which regiment is this?' And, of course, we had been drilled to give only your name, rank and number. So I said, 'LeFevre, WX5933, Lance Corporal.' He said, 'I didn't ask you that.' So he got out of the chair and grabbed this Beretta ....He said, 'If you don't tell me I'll shoot you.' And I thought: ....why doesn't somebody come? "Anyway, somebody did come in. It was a German officer.... He came in and said in English, 'What is going on here?' .....The German picked up (my) belt and looked at it. He went outside through the back door. **He was gone for about a minute and he came back and put the belt on the table and said, '10th Light Horse, Western Australian Cavalry Regiment, now disbanded.'** I thought, **My God, he knows more than I do,** because I didn't know the 10th Light Horse had been disbanded. And to add insult to injury, he said: 'It's now probably the 10th Armoured Unit and it is based in north-west Australia,' which is something that we didn't know. So then he said, 'Let the boy go.' So I plucked up courage and I asked: 'Can I have my belt back, Sir?' The Italian officer answers, 'No you can't.' So I said, 'I can't run around with my pants hanging down.' So the German went out and came back with a piece of twine, which I tied around my pants. I wore it for the next six weeks to stop my pants from falling down."

Doug LeFevre, Captured El Alamein, 1942

## Daily Life

1. Geneva and Hague Conventions
2. Work Duties
3. Routines
4. Food
5. Sanitation
6. Shelter

Art. 11. The food ration of prisoners of war shall be equivalent in quantity and quality to that of the depot troops.

Prisoners shall also be afforded the means of preparing for themselves such additional articles of food as they may possess.

Sufficient drinking water shall be supplied to them. The use of tobacco shall be authorized. Prisoners may be employed in the kitchens.

All collective disciplinary measures affecting food are prohibited.

1929 Geneva Convention.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

POW001 010



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

PO3138.009

"In the Bag": Prisoners of War 1915 - 1945

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Officer camp, Karlsruhe, Germany, 1917

Bakli Bay Hainan 1945

Stalag VIIA at Moosberg 1942



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

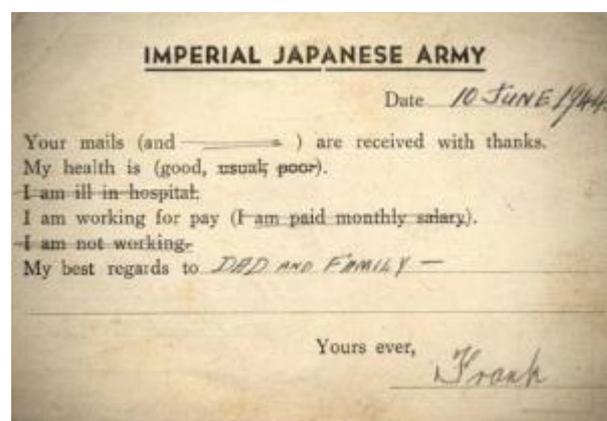




Allied prisoners of war laying track on the Burma–Thailand Railway, at Ronsi, Burma.  
The interior of a bunker room at Fort 15, Stalag XX

## Comforts

1. Correspondence
2. Red Cross Parcels
3. Sport
4. Drama and concerts
5. Libraries
6. Larrikins



"We actually had a Australian Rules football competition: we competed for a cup....which was won by the Western Australians by the way....."

Keith Hooper, captured Crete 1941

"We use to hear the BBC news every night. They had a little wireless there. How the hell they got it there, I don't know!"

Ernest Brough, captured at El Alamein 1942



Roman Holiday Parade Stalag 18a using recycled Red Cross Parcels

"They have a system here that on your birthday you receive an extra of some sort..Tommy Betts, an old cobbler, gave me a tomato he grew"

Tom Pledger, Captured Ambon 1942

"Without the Red Cross supplies of food, and not forgetting the medical stocks, we would have had the hope of a snowball in hell of surviving the war without serious illnesses." Ron Lister,Captured Crete, 1941

"The Japanese told us they knew all about the Melbourne Cup...(we were told) we must clear an area of the camp to hold a mock Melbourne Cup. We must cut long pieces of bamboo use as horses between our legs...Their little joke, well we'd get our laughs out of the situation as well... We were to recreate Flemington in the Burmese Jungle..some blokes built a "bar"...the cheapest (drink) was a "Yellow Nip" at one cent, while a glass of Maiden's Water was 100 pounds. The drinks were coloured with burnt rice. (Horses names included) "Scanties- out of place and Rice Bubbles...What we hadn't expected was one of the Jap engineers to tell us the name of the winner the next day....Colonus" Jack Thorpe captured Java 1942

## Escape

1. "Duty" to escape
2. Punishment if caught
3. Escape committees
4. Surviving through the wire
5. Making it home



"We were supposed to get an American Red Cross parcel each. Well we got one between seven men and the Japs kept the other six." Cyril Gilbert, captured Singapore 1942



Improvised Melbourne Cup : Lieutenant W E Peck, Lintang Prisoner of War Barracks, Kuching, Borneo

Art. 51. Attempted escape, even if it is not a first offence, shall not be considered as an aggravation of the offence in the event of the prisoner of war being brought before the courts for crimes or offences against persons or property committed in the course of such attempt.

After an attempted or successful escape, the comrades of the escaped person who aided the escape shall incur only disciplinary punishment.

1929 Geneva Convention

"Changi is on the south-east coast of Singapore Island and there was nowhere to escape to, other than the waters which were shark-infested and patrolled by the Japanese air force. It was impossible to blend in with the Asians, unlike in Europe where they could disguise themselves easily. The few prisoners that did try to escape were mostly caught and beheaded or tortured, or both."

Willoby "Bill" Wharton, Captured Singapore 1942



Corporal R.E. Breavington and Private V.L. Gale  
Executed after attempted escape 2 Sep 1942

"Often an escape required a bit of bluff to get through the main gate, and to do this a German uniform and equipment had to be made. Rifles, hand carved, took some months of work, with details being checked against the genuine article by studying the guards....Badges of rank could also be carved or embroidered. Some of the chaps did fine needlework.

Ron Lister, captured Crete 1941



Prisoner of war handmade escape compass  
: Lieutenant A L Walker, 2/1 Australian  
Machine Gun Battalion

"No one escaped from our group, but (they did) from one of the camps where the British were. Five or six of them escaped, but they all got captured. The natives handed them over and they were all executed. **So there was no place to go. You were a white man in a black man's country,** and if you were in the jungle and you scratched your leg by going through bamboo and that, you'd have an ulcer, and before long half your leg would be gone. So there was nowhere to go."

Cyril Gilbert, Captured Singapore, 1942

"The Japanese regard the recent escaping of prisoners very seriously, and told us last night that for every man who escapes now a man in camp will be shot."

Jim Ling, Captured Singapore, 1942

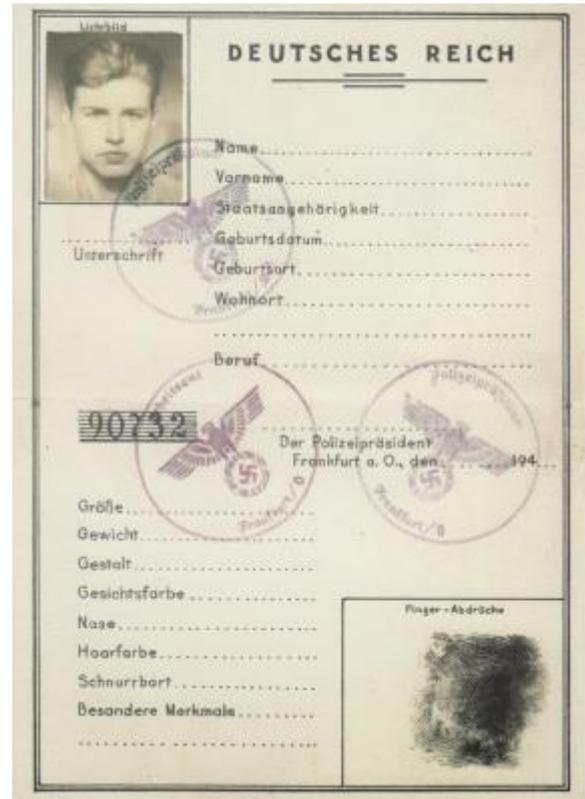
"POWs have got an immense amount of time. I could analyse you- if you were guarding me-down to every step you took, whether you stopped and lit a cigarette, whether you patted your dog or whether you looked at the sky. I knew exactly how long it took you to walk 100 yards, and in that 100 yards, I've seen 15, 20 fellows go out through the wire"

Doug Nix, captured Crete 1941



“There were many attempts to escape, usually involving a small number of would-be escapees. But the most brilliant and the most successful from this camp was on one night in August 1942, when a bold attack on the perimeter fences was made using teams of prisoners and systems of ladders to scale the perimeter. Being a later inmate, it was not until close to the end of the war, in fact, the end of 1944 while in Oflag VIIB, that I and four others became involved in planning and rehearsing a similar ‘over-the wire’ attempt which did not come to fruition, probably fortunately. The cancellation was due to unsuitable weather conditions on the day. Also, news had come through of the massacre, on direct orders from Hitler, of 50 recaptured escapees from Stalag Luft 3 in Northern Germany. This would have also influenced the escape committee’s decision to cancel the attempt anyway.”

John Crooks, Captured Greece, 1941



## Punishment

1. Geneva and Hague Conventions
2. Legal and illegal punishments
3. WW2. German, Italian, Japanese differences.



Art. 54. Imprisonment is the most severe disciplinary punishment which may be inflicted on a prisoner of war.

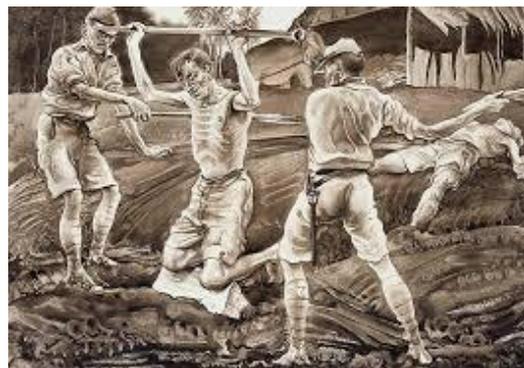
The duration of any single punishment shall not exceed thirty days.

This maximum of thirty days shall, moreover, not be exceeded in the event of there being several acts for which the prisoner is answerable to discipline at the time when his case is disposed of, whether such acts are connected or not.

1929 Geneva Convention

“Japanese military discipline was sadistic, because they administered instant or Japanese punishment. This was carried out on their own troops, but when it was administered to prisoners it was particularly vicious and brutal”.

Tom Uren, Captured Timor, 1942



“It was at Kami Songkurai Camp that we came across the eisho for the first time. This little Japanese play toy was one of their favourite forms of bastardry, torture and torment. **It was a small box-like structure made of bamboo slats about four feet wide by four feet high and five feet long. Its purpose was the incarceration of prisoners who were considered to have sinned against Nippon.** They only had to ‘think’ you were going to do some wrong, either real or imagined, to punish you, even up to and including death. As you can gather there was neither room in the eisho to lie down, sit up or in any way ease your terribly aching muscles and anatomy. The usual treatment was anything from a day up to a month cooped up in this prison. You were not allowed out except for your regular daily, or hourly, bashings.”

Richard Armstrong, Captured Singapore, 1942

“This camp was described by the prisoners who had been there some time as the worst in Turkey, a hell on earth. Floggings were given daily on the slightest pretext and very often we received thrashings for offences of which we were ourselves totally ignorant. **On one occasion a whole gang of 100 prisoners was flogged.** The reason was that on the occasion of a Turk religious festival they were, according to their religion, forbidden to eat bread, so no ration was issued to the prisoners. As a consequence they refused to work without food. The commandant of the camp ordered the whole gang to be flogged.”

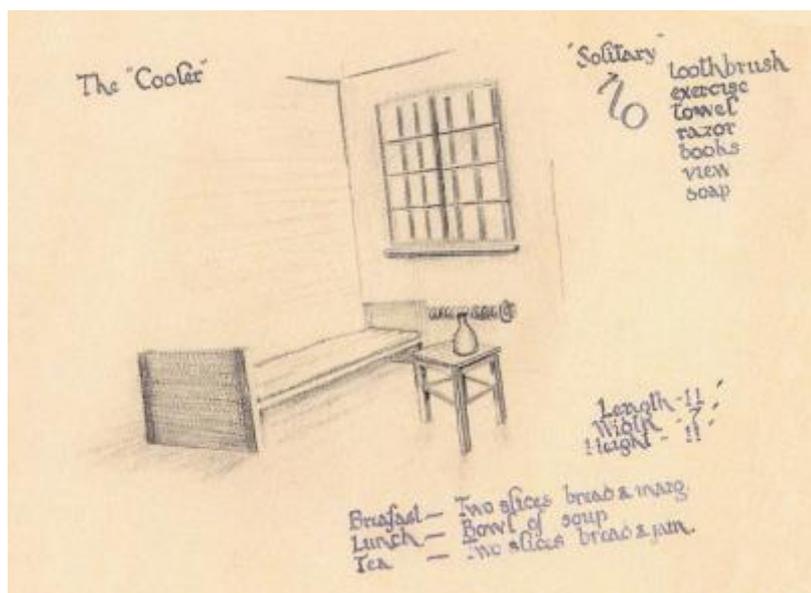
George Handsley, Romani, 1916

“If you did any damage (whilst escaping) to a German establishment, that’s why you got 21 days bread and water- not for the escape, but because you damaged the wire and stuff like that trying to get out”

Doug Nix, Captured Greece, 1941

“There would have been at least 30 Jewish boys in our camp. I’ve always thought it really interesting that the Jews were never persecuted if they were in a British uniform.”

Keith Hooper, captured Crete 1941



## War Crimes

1. WW1 versus WW2
2. Executions
3. Physical torture
4. Mental torture
5. Nuremburg versus Tokyo War Crime Trials
- 6.



Art. 46. Prisoners of war shall not be subjected by the military authorities or the tribunals of the detaining Power to penalties other than those which are prescribed for similar acts by members of the national forces.

Officers, non-commissioned officers or private soldiers, prisoners of war, undergoing disciplinary punishment shall not be subjected to treatment less favourable than that prescribed, as regards the same punishment, for similar ranks in the armed forces of the detaining Power.

All forms of corporal punishment, confinement in premises not lighted by daylight and, in general, all forms of cruelty whatsoever are prohibited.

Collective penalties for individual acts are also prohibited.

1929 Geneva Convention

"I was good friends with Mickie, a lovely bloke, a larrikin. He mixed with anybody. He was put in charge of a working party, but he got very sick and was sent to hospital. Apparently, some of the blokes from his group went into the bush and hid and didn't go out on the job. The Japs did a count and found out, so they got Mickie out of the hospital and, because he was in charge of those men, gave him a brutal bashing. I didn't see it. I remember one of the blokes in our tent was on the line up, so I asked him what had happened and he said, 'I don't want to talk about it.' They carried Mickie into hospital, but he was terribly battered. After Mickie died the next day, I was coming back from work and I remember talking to a bloke from the 11th Platoon, Mickie's platoon. 'They killed our cobber' (he said). That's the saddest memory I have got. **To be bashed to death. I mean, it's one thing if you get a few slaps across the face, it's another thing to be bashed to death.**"

Arch Flanagan, Singapore, 1942

"We were ordered by the admiral to kill them on the following day, for he had received a report informing him that the POWs at Soeakodo were restive. In compliance with this order, I took about 30 other ranks to Soeakodo. I cannot recall now from which platoons these men were selected. We dug holes in a coconut plantation about 200 metres from Soeakodo in the direction of the airfield and killed the POWs with swords and bayonets. It began at 10am and took about two hours. I divided my men into three groups, the first for moving them out of the house in which they were confined, the second for preventing disorder on their way to the plantation, the third for beheading or bayoneting them. **The POWs were sent to the spot one by one and made to kneel, with their eyes bandaged. Our men of the third group came out in turn, one at a time, to behead the POW with a sword or to bayonet him through the chest.**"

Company Commander Nakagawa, Laha Massacre, 1942, Testimony at his War Crimes Trial in 1945/46. He received 20 years imprisonment.

“The harsh discipline at PG57 by the Italians kept us on our toes. A soldier nicknamed ‘Old Socks’ was shot because he stood up too fast to salute a guard. He was one of the older men sitting down when a guard came along and gave him a prod with a bayonet as he said: ‘Attenzione’ (stand to attention). He stood up quickly and was shot. The guard’s excuse was that he thought he was being attacked. There was another incident. During the cold winters our huts were only lit either when the Red Cross would come to inspect the camp or when you could steal some wood. Jack Richardson returned with a couple of sticks of wood from the cookhouse. He was bailed up by one of the guards, with their dog (they only used dogs at night), who demanded to know what he was doing. ‘Just stealing a piece of wood,’ he replied, thinking at worst he would get a week’s solitary confinement. Without warning the guard shot Jack in the chest. They then allowed the men in a nearby hut to come out on the porch. The guards said, ‘That’s what’s going to happen if we find anyone out at night. We will shoot you dead.’ In the morning, when they came for Jack’s body, he was still alive.”

John McWilliams, Captured El Alamein, 1942

“Testimonials have been provided by officers and men from many units of the Commonwealth and allied forces which showed that the heroism he displayed was outstanding. Despite repeated beatings and many other forms of ill-treatment inflicted because of his defiance to his captors, Private Madden remained cheerful and optimistic. Although deprived of food because of his behaviour, resulting in malnutrition, he was known to share his meagre supplies purchased from Koreans with other prisoners who were sick.

This did not deter him and for six months, although becoming progressively weaker, he remained undaunted in his resistance. He would in no way co-operate with the enemy. This gallant soldier’s outstanding heroism was an inspiration to all his fellow prisoners.”

PTE Slim Madden’s George Cross Citation.



## Freedom

1. Lead up to release
2. Actions of the guards
3. “sitting tight”
4. First contact with liberators



Allied Prisoners of War & Civilian Internees, these are your orders and/ or instructions in case there is a capitulation of the Japanese forces:

1. You are to remain in your camp area until you receive further instructions from this headquarters.
2. Law & order will be maintained in the camp area.
3. In case of a Japanese surrender there will be allied occupational forces sent into your camp to care for your needs and eventual evacuation to your homes. You must help by remaining in the area in which we now know you are located.
4. Camp leaders are charged with these responsibilities. The end is near. Do not be disheartened. We are thinking of you. Plans are under way to assist you at the earliest possible moment.

Signed: Lieutenant General A.C. Wedemeyer, USA. August 1945

"Wednesday 15th August, 1945 was a day which will live forever in the memory of every prisoner of war in Siam. For us at Kanburi it was a day crammed with excitement and incident. In the morning while we were getting ready to pack, a rumour that the war had ended spread round the camp like wildfire. A few days before a friendly Korean had told us that Japan had asked for an armistice, but we had treated the information with reserve. We had been caught so often with false rumours that nothing short of an official announcement would convince us. So, when Lieutenant Meynell Davies came into our hut, did a war dance, and announced that the war was over, most of us just went on packing. I must confess to a tight feeling in the chest, due to suppressed excitement. I just could not bear to be disappointed.....my efforts were not very successful, for all the time a little gremlin kept whispering to me: 'It must be true. It is true. Why don't you believe it? Don't you understand? You're free, free, free!'"

Jim Jacobs, Captured at Singapore, 1942

We would see some poor bloke, as skinny as a rake, get a great big block of chocolate and eat it quickly, then be violently sick. When we left Changi to get on the boat to come home I remember the sight of the Gurkhas, who came down with the 14th Army, wandering around with rifles over their shoulders standing guard over the Japs weeding the gardens and sweeping the streets – it was a bloody lovely sight."



Walter "Wally" Holding, Captured Singapore, 1942

"On November 5th, four days before the general revolution took place, the navy mutinied and our little lager (camp) came under the red flag. From that time we did no work and were allowed out without sentries. We promenaded all over the countryside and into Kiel and generally enjoyed ourselves. After 10 months inside the barbed wire, never out of sight of sentries with rifles, it was unbridled joy to get out at last. We inundated Kiel and were treated as friends by the populace, chatted to the girls in vile German and invaded the postcard shops and pub, which all had music. As one person said to me, 'That is one thing we have plenty of in Germany, if nothing else.' There was much misery to be seen in Kiel, poor little pinched kiddies, who followed us about in the hope of getting a biscuit. All round the district the youngsters looked upon us as sort of fairy godfathers who sometimes had food to give away."

Justin Dawson, Captured 1917

"The Yanks came in. And they were saying to us all the time on this radio: 'Stay put, stay put.' A lot of fellas didn't, they buzzed off. Some went down to Italy and some went all over the place, but I was mainly interested in getting home. So we stopped at this place and we weren't there that long when the Yanks came in with trucks and we were taken to Salzburg. We flew out from there and went across to Rheims in France. And we got there and the Yanks treated us like royalty and we were taken food and Yankee uniforms. The Germans were there and all cleaning your boots and things like that for you."

John Hawkes, Captured El Alamein, 1942

## Coming Home

1. Mustering
2. REAL FOOD
3. Hurry up and wait
4. Homecoming
5. Aftermath



“We were taken down to the docks....I stood at the bottom of the gangway and thought to myself I’ll never make it up there. Just then there was this kiwi nurse.....she put my arm around her shoulder and lugged me up. She said to me, with tears streaming down her face, “come on soldier, you’re going home”. And that was my therapy, she took me up and I came home”

Jim Connor, Captured Singapore, 1942

“The Yanks were marvellous and took us to a huge building in Paris where we saw doctors, dentists, had showers, got new uniforms and plenty of food (but no girls). At Le-Havre we caught flights with the RAF boys to High Wycombe and then on to Gowrie House in London. **There, while on leave, I had a set of teeth made and met the Duchess of Kent when I was sitting in the dentist chair with my mouth wide open.** On 8th May, 1945 the war was declared over in Europe and we all went crazy in the streets of Brighton. The Poms really knew how to throw a party.”

Les Manning.

“**It was wonderful to get under the first hot shower since our captivity three and a half years earlier. There was plenty of soap and we scrubbed ourselves as if to wash away the grime of a lifetime.** Our bodies were tanned down to the waist after long exposure to the sun and it took several years before normal Australian living left me with natural white skin all over.”

Gordon Nelson, Captured Singapore, 1942

“After war’s end in mid-August, many people who worked on Changi airfield had time on their hands and waited impatiently to go home. Some were not very happy with the way the really brutal Japanese were to go free after the harsh treatment that was given to prisoners of war. **Several Englishmen, with Australians, sought and found out where some ‘Nips’ were camped, so they visited their barracks and dealt with them, showing no mercy.**”

Max Venables, Captured Singapore, 1942

“I finally got from her the problem of the rice pudding. I then told her not to be silly but to get the pudding out of the oven and we would eat it. Which we did. And very nice it was too. I then explained to Sis that there was a vast difference between baked rice pudding at home and the muck we so often ate during our years of captivity. **Over the years I have often wondered how many of my mates had rice for their first meal after getting home.** I would venture to say, some perhaps, but not too many.”

Richard Armstrong, Captured Singapore, 1942

"We got to the Alhambra Bars and I fronted the bar and ordered four beers. The barmaid told me that she couldn't serve me with 'that Aboriginal'. 'You must serve him,' I told her. 'He's wearing the King's uniform, he's been overseas fighting for this country for the last four and a half years, plus he's been a prisoner of war of the Japanese for three and a half years!' "She said, 'No, I can't serve you if you have him in your company. If you don't go I will call the police.' 'Good idea. Call the police!' I told her. And I walked over to the foot of the stairs to wait for them to come down. When they arrived I asked them if they were here for the purpose of ejecting an Aboriginal. They said they were, so I told them all about 'Snow White' and that we had been POWs together and that this was going to be our first drink in Australia for four and a half years. "They asked where he was and I was taking them over when one of the police said, 'Is that him talking to those two men with their legs off?' I said it was, and they walked over to the three of them and shook their hands. Then they went to the bar, put down a pound and told the barmaid, 'Serve them all, and the drinks are on us!'"

Jack Thorpe

"The inability to express their feelings to their wives was perhaps the most damaging part of the post-war years. Inside them still existed the code of survival, to not let anyone know the unforgettable fears and stress built up during their years of captivity. Fortunately, the majority of the wives realised that their husband's outlook on the outside world was unpredictable. Their personalities had changed to such an extent that their attitude towards the family, employment and life itself could change within minutes. **Despite all this, these women stuck to the task of rearing a family and trying to understand what years of captivity can do to not only the body but the mind of a loved one. Our wives – the unsung heroines.**"

Walter "Wally" Holding, Captured Singapore, 1942

"The interesting thing that has always stuck in my mind is when the fellows came out of Japanese hands, including my kid brother, who was lucky enough to come home, and all the fellows from Korea later, they were all shoved into hospital. When we came home from Germany we never got any of that. **I remember the bloke in Melbourne saying, 'How do you feel?' 'What are you going to say?' 'Oh, not bad?'** Then later on you get these various problems that come on. I'm a disabled veteran and now I'm starting to get depression and insomnia." Keith Hooper, Captured Crete, 1941

"There was no counselling or emotional therapy then for people who had been through what we had. The Army patched up our bodies and sent us on our way, to cope with post-POW life as best we could. And many of us couldn't. I wasn't the only one who had returned home to discover that a grateful nation had not kept our jobs available for us, despite promises. I was not the only one who came back to find that **I felt something of an outsider in my own country, which had changed and moved on while we were away.**"

Jack Thorpe, Captured Java, 1942

"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 Libya, 1941

"We saw quite a lot of doctors there and they tried to give us this crap psychology to see whether we were troppo or not. Everyone started feeling better in themselves and getting to know their family again, which was hard. You know, awkward. Going into the city of Launceston and getting used to things again, it was all heavy going. Still we got through that all right with the help of our family and loved ones. **Everyone helped, all the ex-servicemen around Launceston, didn't matter what service they were in at that time they helped one another.** If someone wanted a car touched up, well I would do that. If someone wanted a bit of carpentry, well Monty would do that and vice versa. We all worked in that way." John Prosser, Captured Timor, 1942

"I decided that I would not harbour bitterness for the rest of my life because, if I did, I would be the only one who would be affected. **No one in Japan was going to lose any sleep over my carrying that bitterness.**" Neil MacPherson, Captured Java, 1942

"War is painful not only for the soldiers fighting on the front line but for the ones who are left behind. Consider the worry they must go through and the anxiety they must suffer. You take our wives when they heard we were prisoners of war. What they must have gone through. It's unbelievable. **They suffered just as much in their own way as we suffered in our way wondering are we ever going to meet again.**" Owen Campbell, Captured Singapore, 1942

"When we look back over those troubled times **is it any wonder that we thank the good Lord for his provision of steadfast mates,** and above all for the doctors and medical staff who overcame incredible difficulties to return so many men to their loved ones at home." Bill Haskell, Captured Java, 1942

"My experience as a POW has made me appreciate food more and has probably made me more resourceful. **For the first few years after my release, I felt animosity towards the Japanese** and the hairs on the back of my neck would rise if I heard Japanese spoken. As the years have passed these feelings have subsided and I have come to realise that the Nippon troops were simply obeying orders, as we were. However they were needlessly cruel and often sadistic." Willoby "Bill" Wharton, Captured Singapore, 1942

"To me it was totally different to come back. I went away a very insecure young man, I had a speech impediment, I was against everybody, I was against authority. **I went away, as the saying goes, a snotty-nosed kid and I came back a man.**" Doug LeFevre, Captured El Alamein, 1942

# The End

