



CENTURY OF SERVICE



Endurance

Stories of Australians in wartime captivity



Endurance: Stories of Australians in wartime captivity

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Front cover images: AWM ART90410.003 (detail); Norman Stuckey, AWM 117022; RELAWM16503; AWM REL/12679.002; AWM 044480

Page 1 images:

Napier Waller, Hall of Memory: East window (1950, stained glass. AWM ART90410.003 [detail]); AWM P01015.005

Back cover images:

AWM ART26951; RELAWM20480.008; Ernest McQuillan, AWM 115908

Timeline images:

AWM C01052; RELAWM05406.003; AWM2016.612.2.1; AWM 3DRL/2691; AWM REL/12431; AWM 044480; AWM REL33251; AWM REL/17907.003

Background images:

AWM REL/12679.002; AWM P01015.005 (page 1); AWM REL25741 (page 23); AWM PRO3440 (page 41); Department of Air, AWM NWA0978 (pages 48–49)

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ISBN: 978-0-6488823-3-6

P04343

Published by the Department of Veterans' Affairs in association with the Australian War Memorial

Designed by Fivefold Creative

July 2021



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs



**AUSTRALIAN
WAR MEMORIAL**

Comradeship

Ancestry

Patriotism

Chivalry

Loyalty

Resource

Candour

Curiosity

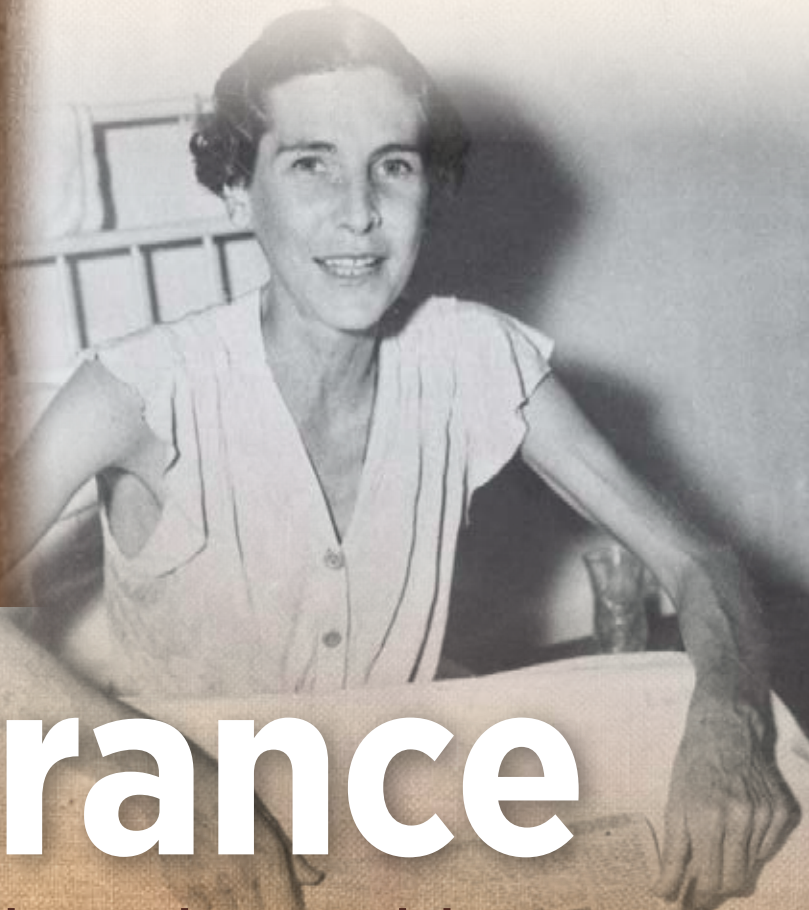


AWM ART90410003 (detail)

In the Hall of Memory at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra there are 15 stained-glass windows. Each shows a figure dressed in military uniform, and under each figure is a word which describes a quality displayed by Australians during wartime.

One window features a wounded soldier holding a broken sword point, standing beneath a pyramid and a column carved in rock. He represents the physical and mental resilience of Australians held captive during wartime.

This window bears the word *Endurance*.



Endurance

Stories of Australians in wartime captivity

Written by Karin Huckstepp and Joanna Taplin





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Note to the reader:

Most of these stories take place during wartime. You may feel sad after reading them. Tell a teacher or trusted adult if you require support. Teachers may wish to be sensitive to those students who have personal experience with conflict, family members who are veterans, or parents serving overseas in war zones.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this publication contains images of people who have died.





1944

1945

1946

1950

Introduction

During the 20th century some 35,000 Australian servicemen and servicewomen became prisoners of war. More than 4,000 Australians were captured by Ottoman and German troops during the First World War, and 30 were captured by enemy forces during the Korean War. In the Second World War, more than 30,000 Australians became prisoners of the Italians, Germans, Vichy French and the Japanese. The number who died in captivity was extremely high, particularly in the Asia-Pacific theatres: more than 8,000 of the 22,300 Australian prisoners of war died as a result of their captivity. Changi prison in Singapore, the railway cutting known as “Hellfire Pass” along the infamous Burma–Thailand Railway, and the Sandakan death marches in north Borneo: all have become an integral part of how we remember Australia’s prisoners of war and the Australian experience of the Second World War. About 1,500 Australian civilians were also interned by the Japanese during the conflict. Fortunately, no Australians have suffered as prisoners of war during commitments to later conflicts in South Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Australians who became prisoners of war were serving as soldiers, airmen, sailors and nurses. Some had been wounded in battle, or been surrounded by enemy soldiers. In such circumstances, commanders often **surrendered** to save the lives of their soldiers. Others survived aircraft crashes and shipwrecks, only to be captured by the enemy. While their circumstances varied, these men and women often felt periods of fear, anxiety, uncertainty and shame. All too often Australian prisoners of war experienced hardship, hunger, **intimidation** and bullying, including physical violence. Sometimes Australian prisoners survived only because of the brave assistance of the local people.

Heartache was also felt on the home front, as families and communities could spend years not knowing the fate of their loved ones: not knowing if they were alive, if they were safe, or even where they were. Occasionally the families of prisoners of war received **telegrams** or brief letters. While the absence of a loved one had an undeniable impact on their families in wartime, the return of former prisoners of war, and their struggles to regain their own lives, at times affected the family and their descendants even more strongly. Returned prisoners of war often sought the company of other ex-prisoners, making connections to create new families of people with shared experiences. Regardless of the conflict in which they served, Australian prisoners of war and their families have all had to endure.

They inspire us all.

Dr Karl James
Australian War Memorial

Newly released prisoners at Changi, Singapore, after the surrender of Japan.

AWM 043596





1915

1917

1942

1943

Captured on Gallipoli: Bugler Frederick Ashton

Fred held the bugle tight in his hands and memories of his war service filled his mind. He turned to his grandson, placed his lips on the mouthpiece, and began to play.

Frederick Ashton, known as Fred, was born in Sydney in 1893 and later moved to Geraldton in Western Australia. Fred had been working as a bank clerk when he heard that war had been declared in 1914. He and a friend, Gordon Gunn, dashed to the enlistment office. Fred recalled that “we couldn’t get there quick enough. We were all afraid that the war would be over before we got to it.”¹ At the age of 21 in August 1914, Fred enlisted with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and was posted to the 11th Battalion.

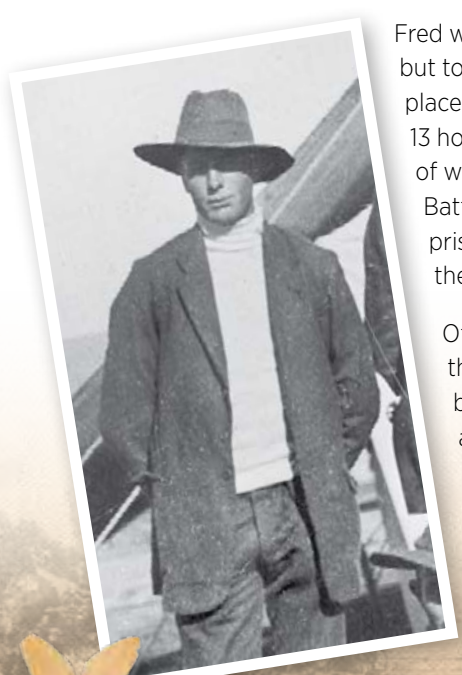
The new recruits received some training at Blackboy Hill camp near Perth before embarking in early November 1914 on ships to take them to the war. After arriving in Egypt, Fred and his mates had more training, which included learning how to fire a rifle.

The following year, the 11th Battalion was one of the first units ashore at what became known as “Anzac Cove” on the shores of Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. The sun had not yet risen as they rowed their boats ashore, and Fred later recalled, “It was a peculiar feeling, believe me, to be fired at.”² Once they finally made it to the beaches, he and the others clambered up the hills, making their way through the thick scrub. Soon after, he came upon a wounded New Zealand soldier. Fred tried to bandage the wound in the soldier’s hand, but bullets were flying around them, so Fred explained that he would try to get medical help and moved on.

Fred then encountered an Australian soldier who was wounded in his hip. Fred tried to help him too, but the soldier did not want to be moved, so Fred kept going, hoping to get back to the beach to find some medical assistance. But that was not to be.

Fred was confronted by a group of Turkish soldiers. He was on his own and had no choice but to surrender. They took Fred’s equipment, marched him to their headquarters and placed him under guard in a tent. Fred had been on the Gallipoli Peninsula for only 13 hours (from around 4.00 am to when he was captured at 5.00 pm) and was fearful of what was going to happen to him. Soon three other Australians from the 16th Battalion were captured and joined him. The four men were taken by boat to a prison in Constantinople (now known as Istanbul). Fred remained a prisoner of the **Ottoman Empire** for the next three and a half years.

Other Australians joined him in a variety of camps over those years. In some camps they were given adequate food, but in others the situation was terrible. Fred recalled being held in a warehouse in the Turkish town of Izmit, where they were neglected and diseases spread quickly. Fifteen men died there. The prisoners’ daily ration of a few pieces of bread with water was not sufficient nourishment to keep them well and strong enough for manual work. Six days a week the prisoners were forced to carry stones and make roads. Later, the prisoners spent their entire days loading and unloading railway trucks and barges.



AWM C01052
(detail)



1944

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Fred and the other prisoners heard that the **Armistice** with Turkey had been signed in November 1918. As he later put it, they marched out past the guards in their camp, and made their way back to Constantinople. He boarded HMAT *Katoomba* and sailed from Turkey to Italy.

Fred had been given the choice of travelling directly to Australia or staying in England for a while before continuing his journey home. He discovered that his father had enlisted in the AIF after Fred had been taken prisoner, and now he was in London. So Fred chose to go to England to be reunited with his dad. Four months later in April 1919, the pair boarded SS *Wyreema* to return to Australia. Fred went back to his job at the bank in Geraldton, and later married Alice Truman. Over the years, they had three children.

In 1976, Fred gave an account of his wartime experiences through an **oral history** interview with the State Library of Western Australia. At the end of the interview Fred said that he considered himself very lucky because so many of his friends had not made it back to Australia. Fred continued playing music, and later taught the trumpet, drums, clarinet and saxophone. He reflected on his service through music, teaching his grandson bugle calls that he had used during the First World War. Fred died in 1982, aged 89.



AWM REL/01481

When Fred enlisted he was given the rank of Bugler and would have played a bugle similar to this. Buglers played calls like **reveille** to let the soldiers know when they were needed.

Like other bandsmen, buglers were often called on to act as **stretcher-bearers**.



Fred would have worn a colour patch like this on his uniform. It represents the 11th Australian Infantry Battalion.

RELAWM13307.074

Fred (far left, back row) with fellow prisoners of war. Private Reg Lushington (centre, back row), Fred and a New Zealand prisoner tried unsuccessfully to escape from a camp in the Turkish village of Belemelik on 4 August 1917. They hoped to make it to the coast and be picked up by an Allied warship, but after 15 days they were recaptured.

AWM C01052





Finding a way home: Private Herbert Horner

Herbert's boyhood ability to navigate his way through the Australian bush later helped him and his fellow soldiers as they fought for their lives, on the other side of the world in Europe.

Herbert Horner was born in Riverton, South Australia, in 1874. He had been working as a farmer when he enlisted in the army, aged 41, in February 1916. Herbert travelled to England with the other new soldiers and was posted to the 3rd Australian Machine Gun Company. In April 1917, after serving through the coldest winter France had experienced in 30 years, he found himself with his unit in the French village of Lagnicourt, which had been reduced to ruins. Herbert had become known for his ability to find his way by observing the night sky and stars. Although compasses were often used for navigation, to work properly they needed to be kept away from metal, including objects like helmets and weapons, which was impossible during the war. Herbert's knowledge of **celestial navigation** was soon in demand.

One evening, after a patrol of the area guided by his navigational skills, Herbert's unit returned to rest in the deserted building where they were camped. At 4.30 am, Herbert was awoken by gunfire. He realised that German soldiers had taken over the village, and although Herbert tried to escape, he and five others were taken prisoner on 15 April 1917.

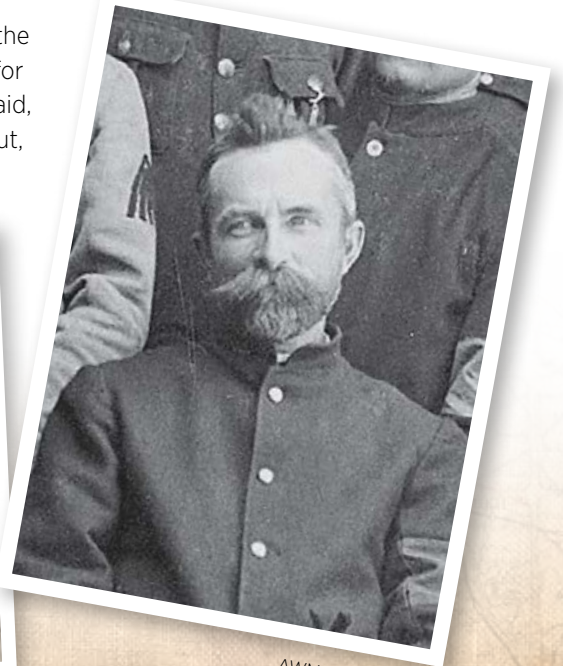
Herbert and the other prisoners were marched through villages in northern France and boarded a train to the town of Oudenaarde in Belgium, where they were forced to work as labourers building a railway for the German forces. The prisoners were given little food by their **captors** and sometimes were so hungry they had to eat grass. But Herbert later recalled the locals offering them things such as food, clothing and soap. The people of Oudenaarde and other towns put their own lives at risk by giving supplies to the prisoners.

Herbert and the others were then sent on to Germany by train, and spent the next year in prisoner of war camps and working on farms and in factories for the German army. Describing the winter conditions in Güstrow camp, he said, "There was a foot of snow on the ground ... although we had a fire in the hut, there was thick ice on the inside of the windows day and night."



Oudenaarde, Belgium.
Herbert is kneeling, second from left.

AWM H13917



AWM H13918 (detail)



1944

1945

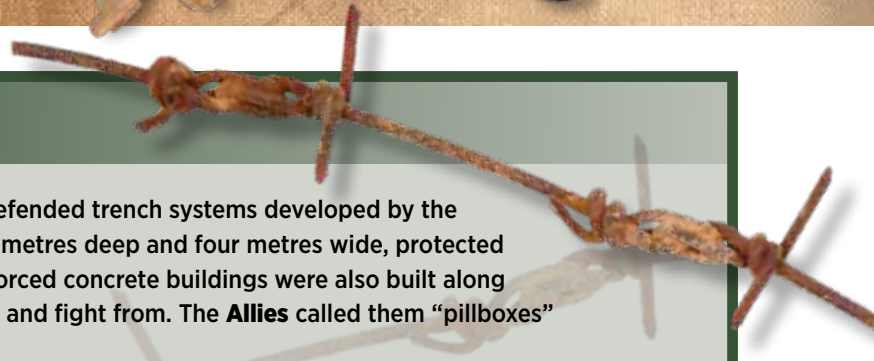
1946

1950

Did you know?

The Hindenburg Line was a series of well-defended trench systems developed by the German army. The trenches were often five metres deep and four metres wide, protected by barbed wire **entanglements**. Small reinforced concrete buildings were also built along the Line for the German troops to shelter in and fight from. The **Allies** called them “pillboxes” because of their box shape.

Many significant battles took place as the Allies tried to break through the Hindenburg Line. One such area was around the town of Lagnicourt, with attacks in late March of 1917. The Germans **counter-attacked** a few weeks later in the early hours of 15 April.



These shoe soles were made from a thin piece of leather, covered with strips of wood. The wood was attached by nails with large heads called hobnails. Herbert held onto these shoe soles and took them home with him to Australia.

Why might the prisoners have needed to make these for their shoes?

RELAWM04446

Herbert's cap, and the identity disc that was wired onto the front of the cap.

RELAWM05406.003
RELAWM03900



Herbert had been led to believe that the Allies were losing the war and his chances of ever being released were slim. He decided his only hope was to escape. At a farm where he was working, he managed to **evade** the guards, known as sentries. Over the next few days he walked through villages, but kept on the move only at night to try to avoid being caught. Herbert soon realised that at some stage a local would identify him as an escapee and tell the German soldiers, so he handed himself in. Herbert was returned to the farms to work.

As the months went by, he could sense that Germany was struggling. The villages were poverty-stricken and the local people told him that the Allies were now winning the war. He could see that the end of the war was close. Following the Armistice on 11 November 1918, the prisoners were released and sent back to the United Kingdom, where Herbert had a month to rest and recover before returning to Australia. But the kindness shown to him by the local people in France and Belgium was always in his thoughts. He went to **Australia House** in London, where he sat and wrote letters to those who had helped him. Three weeks later Herbert received letters from several of them. He was glad to hear they were well, and continued writing to them after the war. On 19 April 1919 he boarded a ship from England, and arrived in Australia just over two months later.

Relieved to be home, Herbert described arriving at the port in Fremantle, Western Australia, “Our own Australian sky, with clearly defined white clouds, was above us.”² He was officially discharged from the AIF in July 1919 at the age of 44.



Cup used by Herbert when he was a prisoner of war.

RELAWM10295.002



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1917

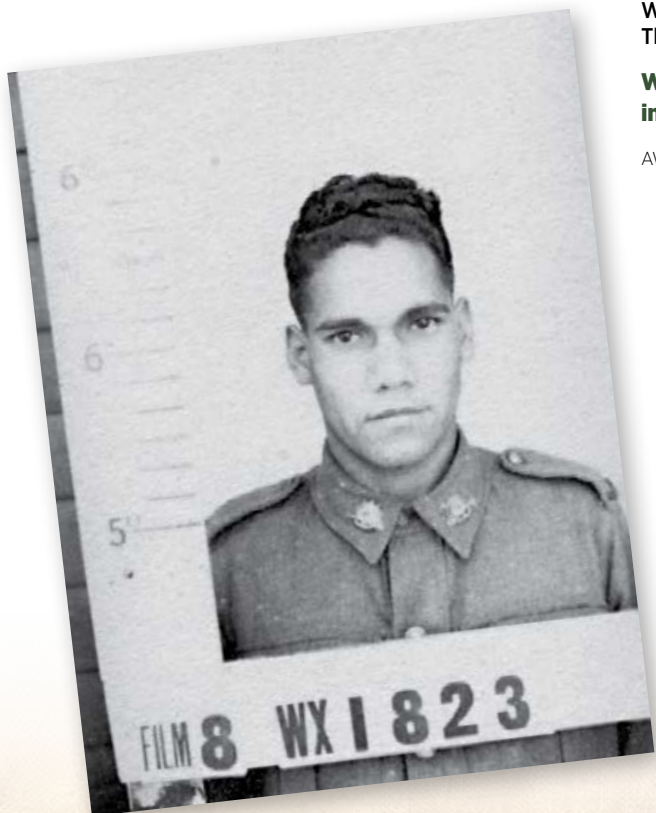
1942

1943

A long time away from home: Private David Harris

A member of the Wardandi Nation, David was born in 1919 in Toodyay, Western Australia. Before the Second World War he worked as a farmhand. In 1940, at the age of 20, he enlisted with the AIF.

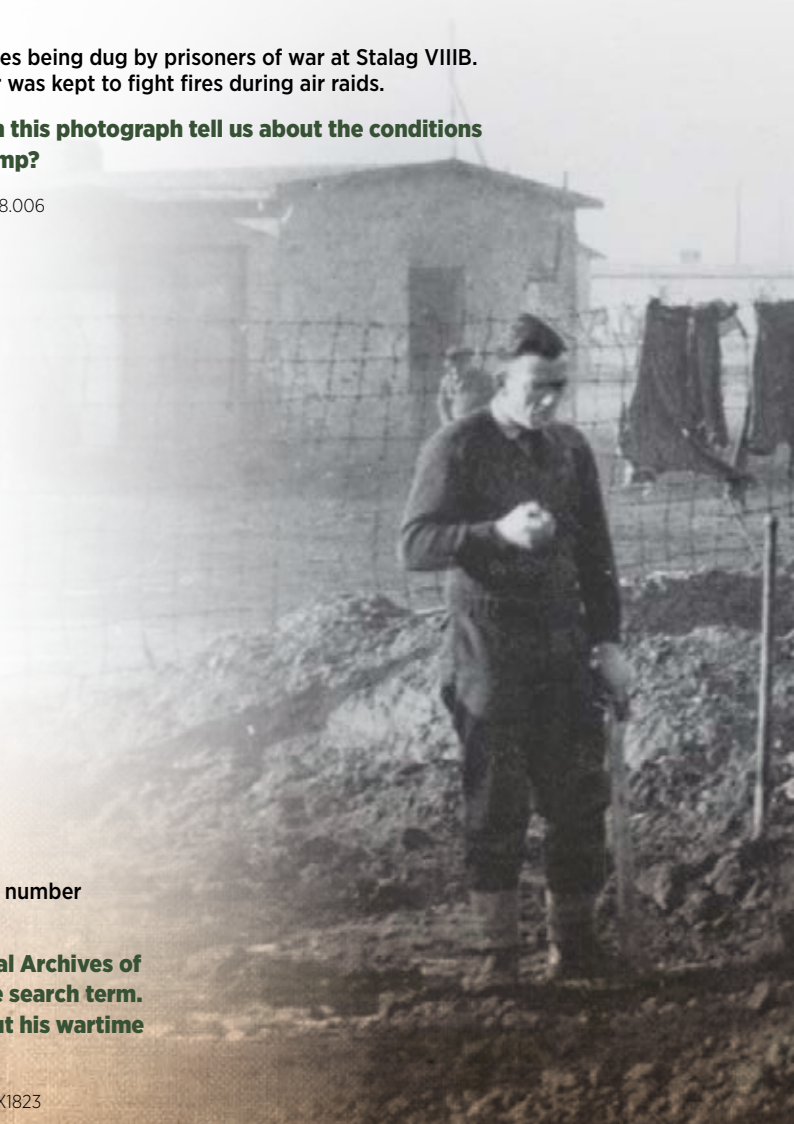
Joining the 2/11th Battalion, David Harris was selected as a member of the unit's recreational boxing team. His battalion embarked on 20 April 1940 to serve in the Middle East. From there the battalion was sent to assist Allied forces in the defence of Greece. As the Allies struggled against the German forces, David's unit was **evacuated** to Crete. After ten days of fighting against German paratroopers, they had to surrender on 1 June 1941. Suffering from bullet and shrapnel wounds in his leg and chest, David was in a **casualty clearing station** when he was captured and taken prisoner by German troops. This was the fate of most members of the 2/11th Battalion following the surrender.



Water holes being dug by prisoners of war at Stalag VIII B. The water was kept to fight fires during air raids.

What can this photograph tell us about the conditions in the camp?

AWM P10548.006



Enlistment photograph of David, including his service number WX1823, c. 1940.

Access David's service record through the National Archives of Australia website, using his service number as the search term. What information can, or cannot, be learned about his wartime experience from his service record?

Image courtesy of the National Archives of Australia, NAA:B883, WX1823





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David was among those held at Stalag VIII B, later known as Stalag 344 near Lamsdorf. He spent the following years in captivity, working 10 to 12 hours a day in coal mines, farms, sawmills and stone quarries. He was paid approximately 30 **Reichsmarks** each month for his work. He received Red Cross parcels and mail irregularly, and described the conditions in the camp as “rotten” and the **rations** as “very bad”¹. In March 1945, suffering from pneumonia, David spent time in hospital at Göttingen, Germany.

David (standing in the second row, second from left), with other Australian prisoners of war at Stalag VIII B.

AWM 045263



This bracelet was made by Flight Lieutenant James Holliday at Stalag VIII B, using Australian threepenny coins.

Why do you think he decided to make the bracelet?

AWM REL48153



1915

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1943

David was one of more than 8,500 Australians taken prisoner by German forces during the Second World War. In 1945 after about four years in captivity, David was among many liberated prisoners brought to Gowrie House in England, where he was to begin the **repatriation** process.

David spent the following months recuperating before returning home to Australia. He had served a total of 1,936 days overseas.

Though he may have been considered an equal while serving his country, David returned home to an unequal Australia, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were not given the same rights as others. Disheartened, he decided to move to New Zealand, where he lived for the rest of his life.

This portrait was created by Stella Bowen of an Australian at Gowrie house, though she did not record his name in the painting's title.

After much research, 69 years later in 2014 the subject was identified as David Harris.

Stella Bowen, *Private, Gowrie House* (1945, oil on hardboard, 52 x 47 cm, AWM ART26277)



***For our Country* is a sculpture that recognises the military service of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It was designed by artist Daniel Boyd, a Kudjala/Gangalu/Kuku Yalanji/Waka Waka/Gubbi Gubbi/Wangerriburra/Bandjalung man from North Queensland. The sculpture has a quiet area for contemplation behind mirrored glass that has thousands of transparent lenses allowing you to see out. This is to represent our incomplete understanding of time, history and memory. Behind *For our Country* is the Bomber Command memorial, commemorating the service and sacrifice of members of Bomber Command during the Second World War.**

Daniel Boyd, *For our Country* (2018–19, pigmented black rammed earth, bronze, glass, steel, concrete, timber, 3.03 x 11.17 m, AWM2018.1108.1)

Neil Dawson, *Bomber Command memorial* (2005, stainless steel, glass and black granite, 16.5 x 4.5 x 3.0 m, AWM ART92683)



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Missing in action Flying Officer Thomas Lynch

In the Second World War around 10,000 Australians served with the Royal Air Force's (RAF) Bomber Command in England. Among them was Thomas Lynch, an air gunner who had enlisted in Brisbane to serve with the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).

Flying over enemy territory, they were responsible for bombing targets across Europe. This was a dangerous job, causing many casualties; one in three Bomber Command airmen lost their lives.

While he was in No. 460 Squadron, Thomas was drawn by Stella Bowen, an Australian official war artist stationed in England to produce portraits of RAAF members. The portrait of Thomas was one of many sketches Stella made of the men on 27 April 1944.

In the early hours of the following morning Thomas and his crew were shot down during a bombing operation over Germany. After the men were reported missing, Stella returned to her studio in London. Using photographs and her sketches, Stella completed a painting of the men, titled *Bomber crew*.

No one knew at the time that Thomas was the only survivor of the crash. His leg was so severely injured that it had to be amputated.

He woke up in a German hospital and spent the following months as a prisoner of war in Germany. Thomas endured intense pain from his wounds, and met other prisoners of war who were also suffering. He received treatment from German medical staff and other prisoners, and recorded these experiences in a notebook.

In early 1945, Thomas was released and began his journey to England.



Thomas,
c. April 1944.

AWM 081315



Stella Bowen, *Bomber crew* (1944, oil on canvas, 86.9 x 63.9 x 2 cm, AWM ART26265)

What might this artwork mean to the families of the men who went missing?

Victory in Europe Day

On 8 May 1945 Germany signed an unconditional surrender to the Allied forces. The day was declared Victory in Europe day, or VE day, as it brought an end to the war against Germany and its European allies.

VE day signified liberation and the beginning of homecoming for those who had been prisoners of war in Europe. Following Germany's surrender, hundreds of Australian prisoners of war in Germany were brought to England by the RAF.

It was a time of both joy and sorrow for Australians. Some joined in the celebration that the war in Europe, the Middle East and the Atlantic Ocean had come to an end. But it was also a time of grief and anxiety, as many families mourned the loss of their loved ones, and the war in the Pacific continued.

This Australian Lancaster aircraft was used to transport liberated prisoners of war from Germany.

Why do you think the RAAF decided to decorate the aircraft with messages?

How might the prisoners of war have felt when they saw the aircraft?

Laurence Le Guay, AWM UK2856





1915

1917

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1943

A survivor against all odds: Private Maric Gilbert

On 10 June 1940, Max enlisted with the AIF. Little did he know that on the same day three other men – Eric Stagg, Jack Morrow and Allan Martin – also enlisted. The four would become close friends during their time as prisoners of war. Eric and Max agreed whatever food they could scrounge or thieve would be shared between them.

Maric Gilbert, known as Max, was the first-born child in his family, followed by two sisters and a brother. He attended school until the age of 15, but as this was during the **Great Depression**, Max left to begin working at a wholesale jewellery firm.

On 3 September 1939, Prime Minister Robert Menzies announced that Australia would join Britain in the war against Germany. Soon after, a school friend shared the news with Max. The following June, Max enlisted in the AIF, and went on to serve with the 2/21st Battalion. The battalion was sent to Darwin for training, then to Ambon, an island north of Australia, to form Gull Force, which was to assist Dutch colonial forces in their defence against the Japanese.

Max (standing, far right) with other members of Gull Force and Ambonese people.

This photograph was taken on Max’s Kodak Baby Brownie camera before he was taken prisoner of war. As a camera would have been forbidden, he destroyed it. But he managed to keep the film hidden in his haversack throughout his captivity, and had it developed once he returned home to Australia.

Why might it have been important to Max to keep the film?

Maric Gilbert, P07476.001



Max, c. 1946.

Image courtesy of the Gilbert family



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In 1942 many Australians held at Tan Tui camp believed they were to be moved to a new camp. They were taken to Laha, where other members of Gull Force were held after their surrender to the Japanese.

The men were executed by their captors and buried in mass graves. Approximately 300 Australians were killed. These events were not discovered until after the war.

This water bottle and “Australia” shoulder title were among objects found at Laha. The shoulder title was worn on an Australian’s uniform.

What might these objects mean to the families of those who were killed?

RELAWM20480.004, RELAWM20480.008

In February 1942, days after the Japanese invasion of Ambon, members of Gull Force had to surrender. Max was among those taken prisoner at Tan Tui camp, the site of their former **barracks**. He later described how the rations were reasonable during the first year of captivity, as the men were able to go out and retrieve food that had been stockpiled by the Dutch people throughout the island. Conditions increasingly deteriorated as the prisoners experienced brutal treatment and starvation.

Many of the Australians held captive experienced **dysentery**. As Max fought the sickness, he looked forward to Eric’s return from the work parties each day. He later described how the moral support of others helped him survive, “I think one of the things that helped me to get through was having a **staunch** mate.”¹

In 1945, just before the war’s end, Eric died in captivity. Max named one of his children Philip Eric in memory of his best mate.

Max survived three and a half years as a prisoner of war in Ambon. He was the only one of the four friends to return. Fewer than 30 per cent of prisoners of war in Ambon survived.

After the war, Max married Joan Butcher. He described how she had been a support in his recovery:

*She was a tremendous strength in that I wouldn’t have recovered as quickly as I did if it hadn’t been for her wonderful understanding, her patience with me because I wouldn’t have been all that easy to live with in many respects especially if I was waking up screaming during the night which she would have found terribly distressing. But she supported me all the way through.*²

Max and Joan were married for 42 years before she died. In April 2021, Max celebrated his 100th birthday.



AWM REL31317

Prisoners were often forced to perform hard labour for the Japanese officers. This included digging tunnels and air raid shelters, as well as unloading heavy supplies from ships. Max wore these sunglasses to protect his eyes from the harsh glare while he was working.

They were made for him by a fellow prisoner of war at Tan Tui camp in Ambon, from an existing pair of lenses, split brass tubing and pieces of a toothbrush handle. Despite wearing the glasses, Max experienced eye damage from the sun.



Max, 2021.

Image courtesy of the Gilbert family



1915

1917

1942

1943

Friends for life:

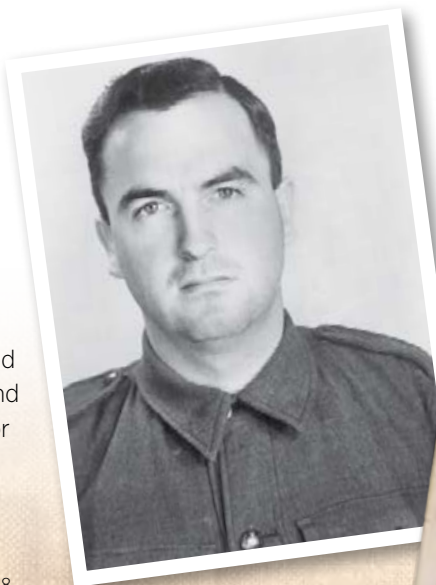
Gunner Wallace Blatch and Bombardier James Richard Braithwaite

Meeting for the first time in the humid tropics of Malaya, Wal and Dick did not realise the deep friendship which would develop between them during the war, and the devotion they would both share for a woman called Joyce.

James Richard Braithwaite, known as Dick, was born in Brisbane in 1917. Sport was a big part of his younger years, and he represented Queensland in cricket and Australian Rules football. After he finished school, Dick became an apprentice process engraver, producing images to be printed in newspapers and magazines. He excelled in his trade, and in 1939 moved to work in Newcastle, New South Wales (NSW). Free time was spent with new friends and swims at the beach, and there were opportunities for his beloved sports.

Later that year, with the outbreak of war, many were enlisting to serve. However, Dick was unsure about joining up. He had seen the impact of war on his grandfather Joe, a First World War veteran who suffered from poor health after the war. Nonetheless, Dick enlisted in the army on 24 June 1940, joining the 2/15th Field Regiment and training in Sydney. The unit arrived in Singapore in September 1941, before moving on to Malaya (now known as Malaysia), where a recent recruit, Wallace Blatch, was assigned to Dick's gun crew. Wal, as he was known, did not make a great first impression on Dick, who was not confident of the new recruit's abilities. This doubt did not last long and they soon became firm friends. Later, as prisoners, they would be best mates.

Wal was from Yeoval in western NSW. His family were sheep farmers but he was keen to become a banker and went to work in Sydney. There he met Joy Lusted through their church when they were both 15. They enjoyed each other's company, and Saturday nights were spent together at the local movie theatre seeing the latest films, which Joy especially delighted in. The pair married in October 1940, when they were 21, and moved to the NSW town of Barellan for Wal's work with the bank.



Wal, 1941.

AWM P02467.068



Dick, c. 1940.

AWM2016.612.2.1



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By 1941, Wal felt he needed to play his part and join the army; he too enlisted, and was sent to Singapore. Joy had spent her childhood in the Sydney suburb of Strathfield, and she returned there when Wal went away to war.

On 8 December 1941 the Japanese invaded Malaya. British, Indian and later Australian soldiers were overwhelmed by the Japanese advance, and by early February 1942, Wal and Dick's unit retreated to Singapore. There they became prisoners of war following the surrender of British and Commonwealth forces to the Japanese Army on 15 February 1942. Wal and Dick were sent to the prison camp at Changi.

Made from scraps of cotton fabric, this flag bears the colour patch for the 2/15th Field Regiment, of which Wal and Dick were both members.

AWM REL29495

AWM REL41672

Did you know?

In the 1930s Britain realised that it needed to keep its navy in the Asia-Pacific region, so it built a large naval dockyard in Singapore.

Countries including India, Hong Kong, Malaya and Burma (now Myanmar) were part of the British Empire, and Britain was keen to have a base in the region to monitor any possible threats to their security. Being relatively close and strategically located, Singapore was key to the defence of Australia.

The large naval base seemed to offer strong protection and the island was described as a **fortress**. But the strength and ability of the Japanese forces, combined with the lack of Allied ships and modern aircraft, led to the surrender of Singapore.

India

Burma

Hong Kong

Malaya

Singapore

Australia



1915

1917

1942

1943

This silk pincushion was sent home to Australia from Singapore by Corporal James Clark. James later died of disease and **malnutrition** on the Sandakan death march.

During their travels, service personnel often collected **souvenirs** which they posted home as precious gifts for their relatives. Parcels and letters provided families with welcome updates on the welfare of their loved ones.

But for those held in prisoner of war camps, the opportunities to post mail were extremely limited, which caused anguish for those at home.

What might souvenirs like these represent to the family members of those who died in wartime?



AWM REL39521.002

Five months after arriving at Changi, Dick and Wal were transported by ship with almost 1,500 other Australians to British North Borneo (now known as Sabah, a state of Malaysia), to build an **aerodrome** for the Japanese forces at Sandakan. The following year, another 776 British and 500 Australian prisoners of war joined them.

At first the prisoners were given adequate food and were even paid small amounts for their work. However, the food rations soon began to run out and the workloads increased, and many prisoners were subjected to severe physical and mental punishments. To boost the small amount of rice they received, the desperate Australians foraged for snails, grubs and insects, which sometimes made them very ill.

Gunner John Holland died in the Sandakan camp on 2 May 1945. He was 29 years old.

John is mentioned in Dick's recollections of those he was imprisoned with in Borneo. He wrote: "Johnny was a great morale booster, when the going was tough and the fellows in the hut were depressed, I would ask John to tell a story, he seemed to have an endless fund of experiences to relate and the hilarity caused everyone to forget their own problems."¹

Why might John's stories have been important to his friends?

AWM P02467.522



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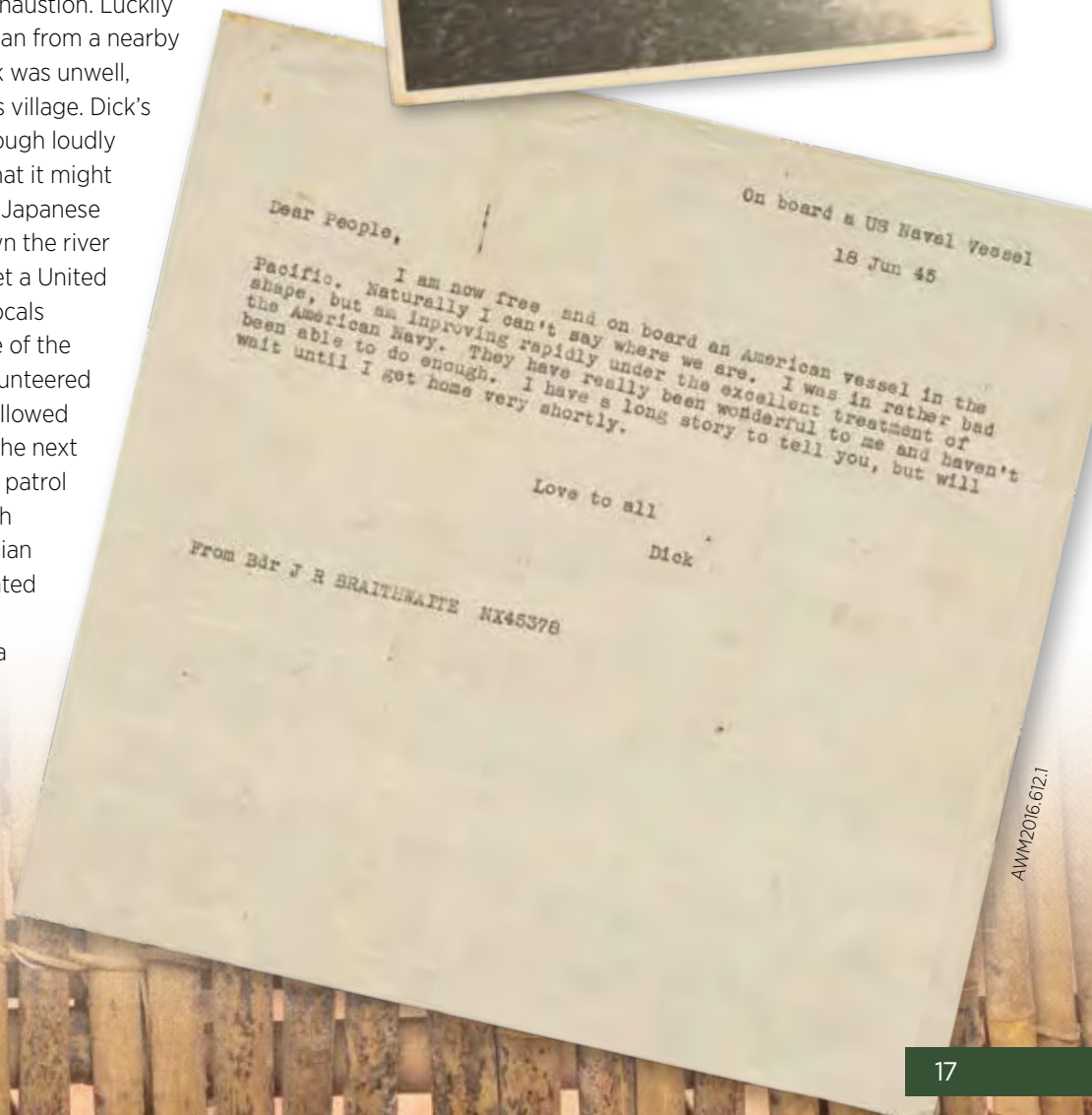
1950

Once the aerodrome had been completed, the Japanese soldiers began marching prisoners from Sandakan to Ranau to avoid Allied air attacks. The prisoners were already in poor health, and most had to walk more than 260 kilometres without shoes. The track and the terrain were rugged; hundreds died on the journey from disease and malnutrition.

Early in 1945, 2,428 Australian and British prisoners of war were listed as being held in Sandakan. Only six, who had managed to escape, remained alive to return home to Australia after the war had ended. Dick was one of them.

AWM2016.612.2.35

On the march from Sandakan to Ranau, Dick grew weaker and weaker. Although Wal and Dick had discussed escaping together, Dick felt he was so unwell that he might **jeopardise** Wal's safety. So Dick seized the chance to leave the group by himself, aware that he might die alone in the jungle. He evaded Japanese soldiers for the next few days and then made his way to a river, which he hoped would take him to the coast. He tried to make a raft, but was almost overwhelmed by exhaustion. Luckily he came upon an elderly man from a nearby **kampong**. Seeing that Dick was unwell, the man led him back to his village. Dick's **malaria** was making him cough loudly and the villagers worried that it might attract the attention of the Japanese troops. They took Dick down the river to the coast, hoping to meet a United States Navy ship that the locals knew to be in the area. One of the villagers, Loreto Padua, volunteered to accompany him. They followed the river to the ocean and the next day were met by American patrol torpedo boats, one of which took him to join the Australian forces. The Australians wanted to know all he could tell them about his comrades, a process called **debriefing**, and then he was returned to Australia by hospital ship.



AWM2016.612.1



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Dick did not know that Wal had died on the march, on 1 June 1945. A telegram arrived at Joy's parents' home in late September, bringing the terrible news. Joy later said, "The bottom of my world fell out."² Overwhelmed by grief, she wondered how she could go on without her beloved Wal. However, with her faith and the support of those around her, Joy found the strength to carry on. She also announced that since she no longer had 'joy' in her life, she now wished to be known as "Joyce". Making this change allowed her to accept a new chapter in her life.

Soon after returning to Australia, Dick set about contacting families of his mates who had died in the war. He later sent them letters, trying to include any special memories he could recall in the hope of easing some of their pain. In a letter to the mother of Private Eric Bloom, Dick wrote, "I knew Eric extremely well. I lived in the same hut with him for quite a while ... He had a good job in the camp doing leather repairs and did not have to work outside the camp and so missed out on the harsh treatment. Eric was a fine fellow and you have every reason to be proud of him."³ As well as writing to families, Dick visited many relatives; visiting his best friend Wal's widow was a priority.

Dick wrote to Joyce a few months after returning to Australia, explaining his connection to Wal. They arranged to meet in Sydney, and Joyce invited him to dinner at her parents' home. Although Joyce knew nothing of the soldier who appeared on her doorstep, Dick felt he already knew her from Wal's descriptions. He recalled that they often talked about their lives back in Australia, and Wal had spoken of the love he had for Joyce.

Following their dinner, Dick and Joyce went to see a movie in Kings Cross. Still weak from the malaria he had contracted in Borneo, Dick collapsed. Joyce managed to help him back to her parents' house, where she cared for him for two weeks. Dick then asked Joyce to marry him, which they did on 3 August 1946. In 1947, the couple welcomed a son to their family, Richard Wallace Braithwaite, whose middle name was chosen to honour Wal. Later a daughter, Christene, and another son, John, joined the home.



Joyce and Dick on their wedding day, 1946.



Joyce, Dick and Richard, c. 1949.

Images courtesy of the Braithwaite family



1944



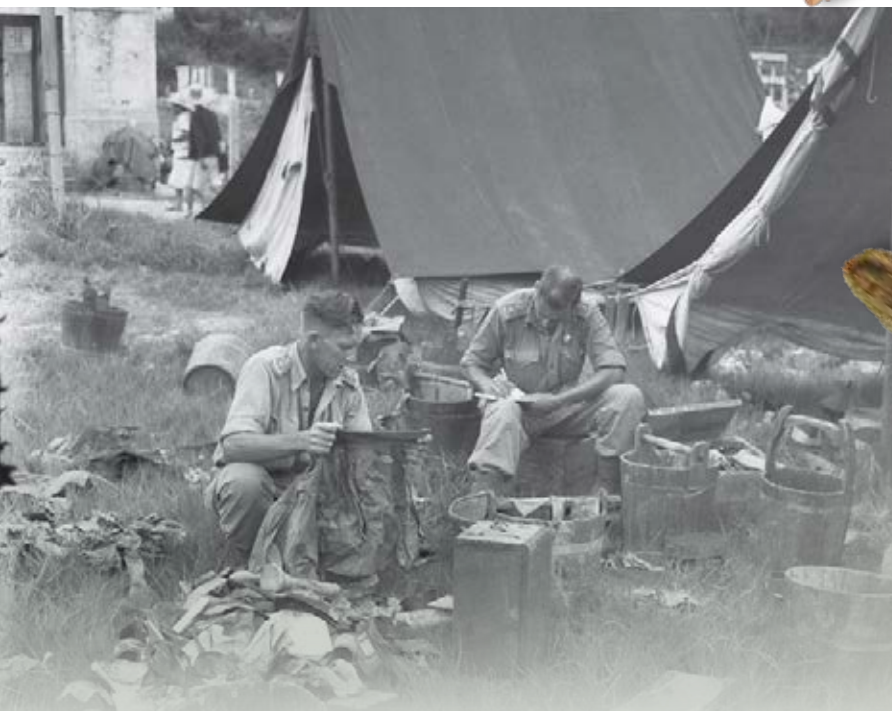
1945



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AWM REL02029.004



RELAWM28351.002



RELAWM28351.001

Soon after the war, investigators were sent to the site of the Sandakan camp to gather evidence. Many of the objects they found carried the names or service numbers of Australian and British servicemen who had perished there. Among the things they found were possessions such as a shaving brush and equipment used for mealtimes. A “dixie tin” or food bowl had been made from a metal water bottle.

Frank Burke, AWM 121783

What do objects like these help us to understand about the conditions in the camp?

Dick was grateful for the help he had been given after his escape, especially by Loreto Padua. All his life he sought to acknowledge the risks the local people had taken to help him. Dick made contact with Loreto and hoped to meet him when he returned to Sandakan in 1981. Unfortunately Loreto had passed away a few months earlier. Dick died in 1986, aged 69.

The Braithwaite family continue to recognise the experiences of the Sandakan prisoners of war, with visits to Borneo and writing detailed publications to record what had happened to Dick and his fellow soldiers. Joyce visited the site of the Sandakan camp in Borneo to attend the opening of a commemorative park created to recognise the losses. She later reflected, “After tragedy and unspeakable horror there, the Sandakan Memorial Park with its impressive interpretive pavilion, now has an atmosphere of pervading peace and incredible beauty.”⁴ Joyce died in 2014 aged 95.



Several memorials have been constructed around the world to remember those who suffered and died at Sandakan and on the marches to Ranau. This artwork in the Sculpture Garden at the Australian War Memorial was installed in 2005. The shape of the sculpture was inspired by the airfield which the prisoners were sent to build. It centres on a sundial and is symbolic of the passage of time, and how lives were cut short.

Anne Ferguson, *Sandakan Memorial* (2005, granite, sandstone, glass, 74.5 x 660 x 427.5 cm, AWM ART92680)



1915

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“Intelligent persistence brings desired results”: Flight Lieutenant Donald Dowie



AWM REL29287

Taking off from the airstrip at Kota Bharu, Don and his three crew members were focused on the task at hand: to defend Malaya from seaborne invasion by Japanese forces.

Donald Alexander Dowie, known as Don, was born in Adelaide, South Australia, in 1917. As a boy he enjoyed gymnastics, and his coach William Duggan often used the saying “intelligent persistence brings desired results”.¹ These words remained with Don throughout his life. During challenging times, he drew support from their message about the value of perseverance and endurance. Although he took up an apprenticeship as a tool maker and fitter with General Motors Holden, flying held a fascination for Don. In 1938 he joined the RAAF and trained as an aircraft mechanic. When the Second World War began a year later, Don successfully applied to become a pilot. After his training he joined No. 1 Squadron, which was sent to Kota Bharu, Malaya (now known as Malaysia) in 1941.

On 8 December 1941 two aircraft from the squadron did not return to base in Kota Bharu. One of those missing aeroplanes was Don’s. A telegram was sent to his wife on 13 December 1941, advising that Don’s aircraft had failed to return, but she should not give up hope as he might have survived a crash.



Don in Singapore, 1940.

Image courtesy of the Dowie family



Don was flying a Lockheed Hudson like this one in Malaya.

AWM P02266.005



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Don recalled that the Lockheed Hudson he and his crew were flying had started to struggle after dropping a bomb load over a Japanese ship. The aircraft crashed into the sea, throwing Flight Lieutenant John Ramshaw and Don through the Perspex window, into the water. Don was floating in a life jacket and saw that John was still alive. They shouted out to each other, and John said he was badly burnt and had a broken arm and leg. Don kept calling out to John but after a while with no response, realised that John had died. The other crew members, Flight Sergeants Garet White and Jeffrey Coldrey, did not survive the crash either.

Alone in the water, Don saw an abandoned row boat called a *prau* nearby. Although he had broken bones in his back during the crash, Don managed to swim over and climb into the boat. For two days he floated in the water before being picked up by a Japanese patrol boat and taken prisoner. After **interrogation** at Singora prison in Thailand, Don was transferred to Saigon in Indochina (now known as Vietnam). He was then sent on to Changi in Singapore, and arrived blindfolded on the back of a truck, from which he was thrown by his captors. Don was quickly welcomed by a group of British prisoners, but his family would wait more than a year to find out that he was still alive.



Murray Griffin, *Changi trailer party carrying logs* (1942, gouache with watercolour over pencil on paper, 25 x 36.8 cm, AWM ART26488)

Murray painted this artwork of prisoners of war moving a trailer. What feelings do these earthy, muted colours convey?

Changi Gaol

This was one of several camps in the Changi area in the north-eastern part of Singapore island. The Changi area had been the site of the British Army's main base in Singapore before the war.

Although the conditions were cramped, the hardships experienced were less than those in other Japanese prisoner of war camps, such as those on the Burma–Thailand Railway. At first, the prisoners in Changi were kept in the British military barracks. There they were largely responsible for their own care, and **supplemented** their rations of rice with produce they grew in vegetable gardens. Concert parties and adequate medical care were also available. But this changed in 1944, towards the end of the war, when almost 5,000 prisoners were moved from the Changi camp and crammed into Changi **Gaol**, which had been a civilian prison designed to hold 600 men. Extra huts were built on the Changi Gaol site to accommodate thousands more. As the number of prisoners grew, so did the demand for food and supplies, and many men suffered from malnutrition.

Australian prisoners of war
in the Changi Gaol, 1945.

AWM 043131



1915

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Don became part of “H Force” in May 1943, one of the last working parties to be sent to work on the Burma–Thailand Railway. Consisting of more than 3,000 men, including British, Australian, Dutch and American prisoners of war, the group was sent to the southern end of the railway. The men were provided with little food and were forced to carry too much equipment, which caused them to suffer from severe exhaustion.

When the railway was completed in October 1943, Don and those who had survived from “H Force” were returned to Singapore and Changi.

The Burma–Thailand Railway

Approximately 60,000 prisoners of war, mostly British, Australian and Dutch soldiers, and 200,000 Asian labourers, were used by the Japanese forces to build a 420 kilometre-long railway. The railway was built to provide the Japanese with a supply route linking Thailand to Burma. The terrain was rugged and steep, making the building of bridges and cuttings into the mountains, using only hand tools, difficult.

It took 12 months to build the railway and it came at a huge cost to human life. Of the 13,000 Australians who worked on the railway, at least 2,815 died.

AWM 122309



AWM REL/12431

This rattan basket was used by Private Leslie Gaffney when he was working on the Burma–Thailand Railway. The basket was carried by two men and could hold up to 50 kilograms of the blue metal rocks that were used to form the bed of the railway track.

AWM REL46833

When the war was finally over, Don was repatriated to Australia but needed time to **recuperate**. He then decided to study medicine, and graduated as a doctor in 1954. A few years later Don joined the Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition at Mawson Station in Antarctica as the Medical Officer. Not only was he responsible for the medical care of people stationed there, he also stepped in to help the husky sled dogs with veterinary care when needed.

Later he worked for various hospitals in Adelaide, specialising in the design, construction and fitting of **prosthetics**. Don often cared for former prisoners of war, who like him had worked on the Burma–Thailand Railway or had been in Changi. He listened to their harrowing stories of how limbs had been removed to save their lives, and how often no **anaesthetic** had been used to dull the excruciating pain. These stories inspired Don to strive to develop innovative and improved artificial limbs for those who needed them.

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Although he cared for former prisoners of war in his work as a doctor, speaking about his own experiences remained difficult for him. When he was notified in the 1970s that the engines from his crashed aircraft had been found by a fisherman, Don's family believe it was a turning point which allowed him to open up about his wartime experiences. Both engines were later donated to the Australian War Memorial and Don visited the Memorial in 2003 to see them on display.

When he retired from the medical profession, Don enjoyed the challenges of restoring stone cottages in Adelaide and on Kangaroo Island. He passed away in May 2016 and is survived by his wife Cynthia, and his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

In 1995 Don visited the crash site in the ocean at Kota Bharu, Malaysia.

Image courtesy of the Dowie family

Who might Don have been honouring with these floral tributes?



Bringing them home

Flying Sister Joan Loutit

At the age of 21, in early 1943, Joan Loutit finished her nursing training. Keen to contribute to the war effort, she applied to join the Royal Australian Air Force Nursing Service. Joan's first posting was to a military hospital in Sydney where she cared for returned Australian navy, army and air force personnel. Joan was then posted to the newly formed Medical Air Evacuation Transport Unit (MAETU) which gave inflight medical care to patients evacuated from war zones in New Guinea and the surrounding islands. The nursing sisters soon became known as the Flying Angels.

In 1945, after the surrender of the Japanese, surviving prisoners of war needed urgent evacuation to Australia. Some travelled home by ship, but air travel was faster, so every available aircraft was pulled in to assist in getting them home as quickly as possible. The MAETU provided inflight medical care on the return journey, for the ex-prisoners of war who were in extremely poor health. Joan recalled, "We flew every day for 28 days ... on my first trip I had 48 patients ... we usually only carried 27. Some POWs were only 4 stone (25 kilograms)."² But she found comfort in the tremendous welcome they received from the patients' relatives and friends when they touched down on Australian airstrips.



Joan (far right) with RAAF nursing colleagues, Sydney, 1946.

AWM P00477.008



1915

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“We’ll always support each other”: Captain Wilma Oram Young

Wilma stepped onto the 2/1st Australian Hospital Ship (AHS) *Manunda*. She was finally beginning her voyage home after more than three and a half years in captivity. It was an emotional time as she looked to her future, though her thoughts were with the friends who were not going home.

Wilma Oram was born in 1916, one of five children in her family. Her adolescence was spent growing up on a farm in Victoria during the Great Depression. At the age of 18, Wilma began training to be a nurse at Warrnambool Base Hospital. On her first day she met another young nurse, Mona Wilton, and the pair quickly became friends.

In May 1940, Wilma was completing a **midwifery** course. After working a night shift, she woke in the afternoon to news that Germany had invaded France. Sensing that her nursing skills were needed, she decided to enlist. She was unsure which service to join, so she filled out applications for both the air force and the army. Mona had enlisted in the army, and persuaded Wilma to put only her army application in the post. In July 1941 her application was accepted, and the following month she was eligible for an overseas posting with the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS).

Wilma was thrilled to find that she and Mona were both members of the 13th Australian General Hospital. The pair boarded the AHS *Wanganella*. Though there was secrecy surrounding their destination, they quickly found out they were bound for Singapore. They stood together on the upper deck as the ship passed by Mona’s home, waving goodbye. Wilma later reflected that she did not think it would be dangerous, as she thought the war was most active in the Middle East. Her main concern was looking after those who needed help.



Wilma, 1945.
AWM P00431.002
(detail)



AWM REL30997



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Despite Wilma's initial thoughts, the war came to Singapore in early 1942. Fierce fighting on the island made it dangerous for the nurses to stay, so they were evacuated. On 12 February 1942 Wilma was among 65 nurses who boarded the overcrowded SS *Vyner Brooke*. It was one of the last ships to leave Singapore. During the voyage, *Vyner Brooke* was attacked by Japanese aircraft. As it sank, Mona was struck by a lifeboat and died in the water. She was 28 years old.

Amid the chaos, Wilma was also hit by several life rafts that fell from the sinking ship. With a wound to her head, she still managed to climb onto one of the life rafts. *Vyner Brooke* sank in just 30 minutes.

Wilma was joined by Dorothy Gibson on the life raft. They spent 16 hours at sea, paddling towards land in the distance. Throughout the night they encountered Japanese ships passing by. Wilma recalled how she and Dorothy yelled for help, but they were ignored.



Mona, c. 1941. AWM P00431.004

Fall of Singapore

On 8 February 1942, a battle for Singapore began when Japanese forces invaded from neighbouring Malaya (now known as Malaysia). The fighting resulted in heavy loss of life, with more than 880 Australians killed in a single week.

As the Allied forces began to lose control of the **reservoirs**, the commander of the British Empire forces in Malaya, Lieutenant General Arthur Percival, decided to surrender to the Japanese forces. He ordered troops to cease resistance on the evening of 15 February.

Following the **fall of Singapore**, more than 15,000 Australians became prisoners of war, as well as a further 7,000 in neighbouring islands. This was a time of worry for families back home, as they did not know where their loved ones were, or if they were still alive.



Miyamoto Saburo, *The meeting of General Yamashita and General Percival 1942*, postcard, courtesy of Garth O'Connell



1915

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Wilma and Dorothy managed to get ashore at Banka Island. Exhausted, filthy and covered in oil, the women were taken prisoner of war by Japanese guards. Wilma was reunited with other nurses who had survived the sinking, and one of them cut her matted hair away from her head wound.

Wilma realised that more than half the nurses who had been on board the *Vyner Brooke* were not accounted for. She would later discover that in addition to those who had died during the sinking, 21 nurses had been executed by the Japanese on Radji beach, Banka Island.

During the night Wilma was woken by a Japanese guard tugging at her shoulder. Fearing that she would be taken away and killed, she clung to Sylvia Muir, a fellow nurse, and eventually was left there. The following morning the women discovered that the men were missing – they had been separated from the women. With her short hair, and wearing a boiler suit, the only clothing she could find, Wilma had almost been mistaken for one of the men.

During their time in the camp in Sumatra, the women did jobs such as carrying water, chopping wood and emptying toilet pits. Wilma also took on the job of cooking rice for the internees. Rations were scarce, so the women carefully measured each serving. Though they tried their best to maintain good hygiene, the dirty rice and rotten vegetables often made them sick, and many of the internees suffered from dysentery.

Wilma later explained how the disciplined training she had received during her nursing career helped her to endure her time in the prisoner of war camps. Describing how she withstood such difficult experiences, Wilma recalled, "I think your mental attitude to life helps tremendously."¹

Though the nurses endured cruel treatment and conditions were appalling, they were devoted to caring for one another. Wilma described her relationships with the women:

*The bond between us is very real and very important and if anything happens, word goes round amongst all of us straight away and we're always there to give support, we'll always support each other. It doesn't matter what happens, we'll always support each other.*²

During their time in captivity, the women formed a choir, performed concerts for each other and played charades. They also made playing cards out of old pieces of cardboard to play cribbage.

Wilma made this wooden cribbage board for scorekeeping.

Why might it have been important for the women to be involved in these sorts of activities?



This ceramic bowl was collected and used by Sister Jessie Simmons, a fellow nurse held captive in Sumatra.

AWM REL/11871



AWM REL30999



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Socks made by Wilma while in Sumatra, using knitting needles made from fencing wire.

AWM REL/12522

Did you know?

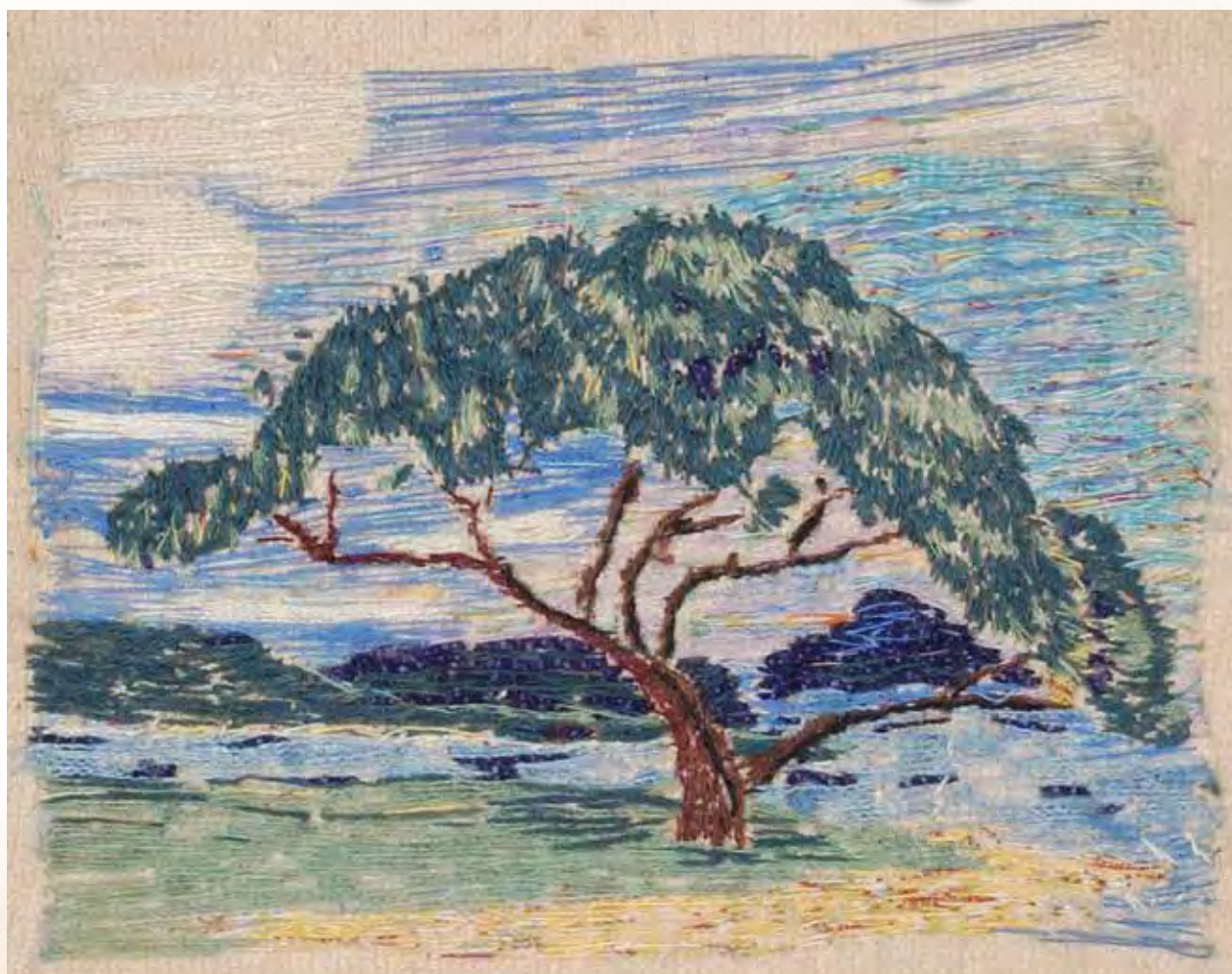
During the Second World War, escape compasses were hidden in ordinary items such as uniforms and given to Australians. Sister Sylvia Muir, a nurse interned in Sumatra, collected these compass buttons during her time in captivity.

One button has a small indentation where the other is balanced on top. Small painted dots on the top button indicate north.

What other items could have been used to conceal escape equipment?



AWM REL35611



This embroidery of a eucalypt gum tree was made by Sister Pat Gunther, an Australian nurse who had survived the sinking of *Vyner Brooke*. It was made using threads pulled from clothing at the prisoner of war camp.

Pat Gunther, *Tree* (1944, wool and cotton embroidery on fabric, 7.8 x 9.8 cm AWM ART90951)

Why might Pat have chosen to create a gum tree?



1915

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1943

After three and a half years in captivity, the war was over and the women were released. Wilma described that time:

So many of our friends had died in the camps that it really was a very sad time. We didn't throw our hats in the air or do anything like that. We just accepted that the war was now over.³

Of the 32 nurses who were taken prisoner, eight had died in captivity.

On 5 October 1945, Wilma was among the AANS nurses who boarded *Manunda*, bound for home in Australia. Wilma later described how on their homecoming the streets were lined with people awaiting their arrival.



John Allcot, *Hospital Ship Manunda* (1944, watercolour on paper, 31.8 x 43.1 cm, AWM ART28076)

Finally back in Australia, Wilma recalled that few people asked about her experiences, and there was a lack of understanding about what the women had endured.

It was important to Wilma to meet the families of the nurses who had died during the war. She visited Mona's parents and travelled back to Warrnambool to meet the nurses she and Mona had trained with. Later, Wilma unveiled a memorial stained glass window in Mona's honour at Warrnambool Base Hospital.

In 1946 Wilma met Alan Young, who had been interned in Germany during the Second World War. With their shared experiences as prisoners of war, they quickly developed a bond and an understanding of one another. The following year they married. Soon after, Wilma was pregnant with their first child. The couple had two daughters and twin sons.

Passionate about helping those who had suffered as a result of the war, Wilma joined the Returned and Services League of Australia (RSL). She remained devoted to helping veterans throughout her life.



1944



1945



1946



1950



Wilma (back row, centre) with fellow AANS nurses on board the 2/1st AHS *Manunda* on its arrival home. They hold bouquets of flowers, gifts from their families.

How might the women have felt when they were reunited with their families?

AWM P01701.003

Fifty years after the sinking of *Vyner Brooke*, Wilma travelled back to Singapore and Banka Island. It was an emotional time as she recalled her experiences and remembered her friends who had died. She laid flowers in their memory.

Wilma remained close to the women with whom she had shared time in captivity. In a speech she delivered at the Australian Nurses Memorial Centre, Wilma said:

When the chips are down, what do we hang onto? We value life itself, the ability to live with very little in the material sense ... True friendship is when you will give your little to help a friend in need. War is an abomination and there are no winners. The result of war is there for all to see - broken minds and bodies, broken families and a lifetime of grief. I urge you all to cherish and nourish your friendships."⁴

Wilma died in 2001, aged 84. She was known for her quiet determination, and as someone who could always be relied upon. Wilma's family remember her legacy through their continued involvement with the Nurses Memorial Centre, the RSL and the Ex-Prisoners of War and Relatives Association of Victoria.



This pair of silver-plated salt and pepper shakers was souvenired as a memento by Sylvia Muir during her journey home to Australia while on board the *Manunda*.

AWM REL35613



1915

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A leader to the end: Brigadier Arthur Varley

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Arthur was 47 but because of his experience in the Great War, he was asked to serve for Australia once again.

Arthur Leslie Varley, born in Sydney in 1893, worked as a clerk before enlisting in the AIF in 1915. After being posted to the 45th Battalion, Arthur arrived in France in 1916, and in August took part in the fighting at Pozieres. He was soon promoted to lieutenant, and the following year was awarded the Military Cross for his actions at Messines in Belgium. Arthur was recognised for “his coolness under fire and utter disregard of personal danger.”¹ He was later awarded a **bar** to his Military Cross for his leadership in France while under heavy gunfire.

Arthur returned to Australia in 1919 and married Linda Middleton. Together they had three children: John (known as Jack), Robert and Linda (junior). Arthur’s wife died unexpectedly in 1925, and he later remarried and settled the family in Inverell, NSW. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Arthur was 47. Because of his previous wartime experience, he was selected to serve for Australia once again. His son Jack, aged 19, also enlisted.

Arthur took command of the 2/18th Battalion, which was sent to Malaya (now known as Malaysia). In January 1942 he was promoted to brigadier and given command of the 22nd Infantry Brigade. After the fall of Singapore, over 40,000 British and Australian troops – Arthur among them – were marched into captivity at the Changi prisoner of war camp. Many prisoners were sent in groups as labourers to build projects for the Japanese forces, such as airfields and railways. Arthur was given command of “A Force”, a work party of 9,000 men who left Changi in May 1942 to construct the Burma-Thailand Railway. Arthur did the best he could in the **gruelling** conditions to ensure better treatment of his men.



Arthur in Sydney before embarking for Malaya, 1941.

AWM 005515



Arthur soon after enlistment in 1915. He was almost 22 years old when he joined the AIF.

Image courtesy of Linda Douglas

1944

1945

1946

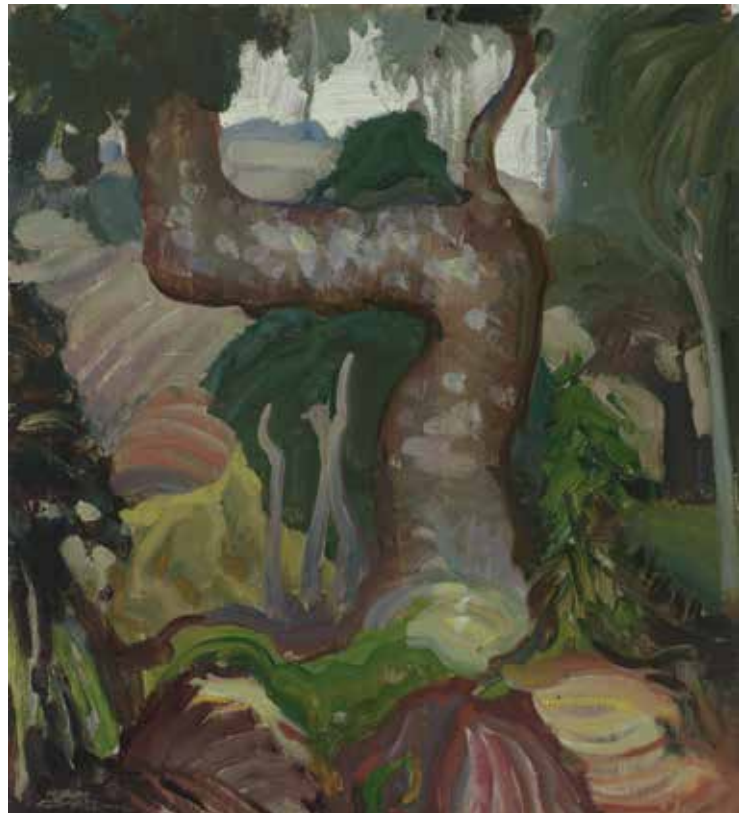
1950



Arthur in Changi, 1942.

This portrait was drawn by Murray Griffin, an Australian official war artist who became a prisoner of war and spent three and a half years in Changi. Murray produced more than 40 paintings and 150 drawings as a prisoner. He was resourceful when his supplies ran out, grinding clay for colours.

Murray Griffin, *Brigadier Arthur Varley* (1942, pencil on paper, 50 x 36.8 cm, AWM ART26425)



Murray Griffin, *Durian tree, Changi camp* (c. 1942–43, oil on hardboard, 35.7 x 31.2 cm, AWM ART24468)

Murray produced artworks featuring people and places. Why do you think he recorded both?



AWM REL32413

A Mother's and Widows badge belonging to Mrs Violet Glover. The star represents the loss of her husband, Alan Glover, who died in Burma.

Alan and seven of his friends were unsuccessful in their attempt to escape from the prisoner of war camp. The Japanese commander ordered them to be executed.

Arthur tried valiantly to persuade the commander to spare their lives, but none of the men survived. Arthur stayed with them until their deaths on 6 June 1942. He later wrote in his diary, "Just before death the spirit of the eight Australians was wonderful. They all spoke cheerio and good luck messages to one another, and never showed any sign of fear. A truly courageous end."²² Alan died a day before his first wedding anniversary.

Violet had been notified that Alan was listed as a prisoner. The letters stopped but she was not alarmed, as very few letters were reaching families in Australia. She would not hear of Alan's fate until more than two years later in December 1944, when survivors of the *Rakuyō Maru* recalled the eight men who had been killed for trying to escape.

Violet never remarried. She bought a small flat in Melbourne and worked as a hairdresser and then later in an office. Violet died on 18 August 2003, aged 91.



Violet attached these cotton flowers to the veil she wore on her wedding day.

AWM REL32408



1915

1917

1942

1943



Arthur's son, Jack.

Father and son were held in the same camp on the Burma-Thailand Railway.

The artist, another prisoner of war named James Collins, was asked by Arthur to draw portraits of soldiers while they were working on the railway. James produced almost 100 portraits of the men, many of whom did not return home. Arthur managed to scrounge materials that James could use for his drawings.

Why might Arthur have thought it important for these drawings to be made?

James Collins, *Lieutenant John Varley* (c. 1943-45, pencil on paper, 17.2 x 13.4 cm, AWM ART28403.048)



Arthur secretly wrote in a diary almost every day. He described the conditions the prisoners were experiencing and the many requests that he made to the Japanese commanders for food, clothing and medicines. Arthur wrote detailed lists of those who were ill and those who had died. At one point, he was responsible for some 9,000 troops. He was distressed that he was unable to provide the men what they needed when they were sick, or protect them when their lives were in danger.

AWM 3DRL/2691

When the Burma-Thailand Railway was completed, Arthur and his men were returned to Singapore, where Arthur secretly packed up his collection of diaries and buried them for safe-keeping.

The Japanese looked on prisoners of war as a valuable workforce, so they were often taken by ship to where they were most needed. The prisoners called these ships "hellships" because of the appalling conditions on board. Spaces designed to hold a small number of men or cargo sometimes held more than 1,000 prisoners. The ships were not marked to show that they were carrying prisoners. The Red Cross urged all warring nations to advise when and where they would be transporting prisoners. But in wartime, shipping routes are constantly targeted to limit the enemy's movement of supplies and troops, so the requests from the Red Cross were ignored. As a result, thousands of Allied prisoners died in attacks by Allied warships.

The *Rakuyō Maru* (with 1,318 Australian and British prisoners of war aboard, including Arthur Varley) and *Kachidoki Maru* (900 British prisoners of war) were part of a convoy carrying mostly raw materials that left Singapore for Japan. Sailing through the South China Sea, during the early hours of 12 September 1944 both ships were attacked by American submarines whose crews did not realise the ships held Allied prisoners. The *Rakuyō Maru* took 12 hours to sink. This was long enough for some men to evacuate to lifeboats or to hold on to the floating debris. But with the men already in poor health and no supplies to sustain them, 1,559 died after the sinking of the two ships. Arthur was one of those who perished and – a leader to the end – he was last seen in command of a group of seven lifeboats which drifted over the horizon, never to be seen again.

1944

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1946

1950

Some of the 159 British and Australian survivors from the *Rakuyō Maru*. Three days after the sinking, and covered in engine oil, they are being picked up by the American submarine USS *Sealion*.

AWM 305634

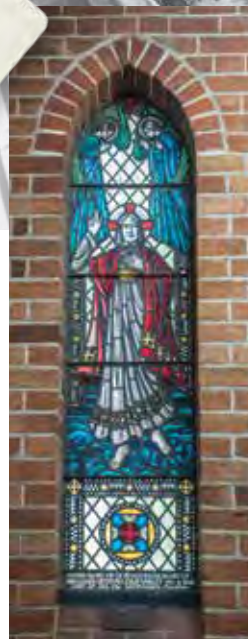


Australian Private Ted Buerckner was rescued after the sinking of the *Rakuyō Maru*. On board the USS *Sealion*, he was given these American Red Cross playing cards and a New Testament, which he kept for the rest of his life.

Why do you think Ted treasured these objects?

AWM PR03639.002

Image courtesy of Inverell District Family History Group Inc



Inverell in NSW had been Arthur's home when he returned from the First World War. He ran a stock and station agency and owned a grazing property called Kahmoo.

The town mourned the losses of Arthur and his son Robert. Stained glass windows in St Augustine's War Memorial Hall and Church were dedicated to their memory in 1951. This one remembers Arthur.

Arthur's son Jack Varley had enlisted early in the war, and was awarded the Military Cross during the fighting in Malaya. Jack survived three and a half years as a prisoner of war and returned to Australia in 1945. His younger brother Robert had also enlisted, serving with the 2/3rd Australian Infantry Battalion. Robert was killed in action in New Guinea in April 1945. He was 21 years old.

Arthur's collection of diaries was discovered in Singapore soon after the war by the Department of the Army. They were looking for **artefacts** to help them understand what had happened to Australians during the war. The diaries were given to the Australian War Memorial, and Arthur's carefully written words continue to be used by researchers to learn about the experiences of prisoners of war.

Arthur's name is listed on panel 12 on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial. The Roll's bronze panels record the names of more than 102,000 members of the Australian armed forces who have died during, or as a result of, war or peacetime operations. The panel does not mention Arthur's rank as a brigadier, or that he had twice been awarded the Military Cross.

Why might the names on the Roll of Honour include only a surname and initials?

TILNEY L. E.
TOLLIS K. B.
TURNER R. S.
TYRRELL R. C.
VARLEY A. L.
VASEY G. A.
VERCOE A. R.
VERNEY W. C.



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Caring for others: Lieutenant Commander Samuel Stening

Sam was the only medical officer at Oeyama prisoner of war camp in Japan. Responsible for 300 men, he had to consider the welfare of the group, but also needed to care for individuals who were suffering. It was a job he was determined to do, despite its challenges.

Samuel Stening, known as Sam, was born on 14 May 1910. He was the third eldest child in his family, with three brothers and two sisters. Growing up in Bondi, as a child Sam enjoyed hiking and trips to local beaches. From high school Sam enrolled in university to study medicine. After graduating from medical school, he worked in hospitals in Sydney, including the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children, now known as the Children's Hospital at Westmead. Sam was interested in caring for children, and decided to travel to the United Kingdom to continue studying to become a specialist **paediatrician**. In 1936 he travelled as the ship's doctor aboard a cargo ship, where he met Olivia Thomson, a fellow Australian. They later exchanged letters while he was studying and she was travelling around Europe.

Back home, Sam, like his three brothers, decided to join the armed forces. In March 1939 he enlisted with the Royal Australian Naval Reserve and in September was commissioned as a Surgeon Lieutenant for the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). Feeling that he would soon be deployed overseas, Sam began to make arrangements for the care of his patients in Australia.

Sam was on board HMAS *Waterhen* in the Mediterranean on 28 June 1941, when the destroyer was attacked by enemy dive bombers. Everyone on board survived. Sam made contact with his family through the navy to reassure them he was safe before news of the ship sinking was released.

Sam was posted to the light cruiser HMAS *Perth* on its journey from the Mediterranean to Australia. The men were informed that they would have 28 days' leave when they got home. During his leave, on 19 August 1941, Sam married Olivia at a chapel in Melbourne. After a honeymoon on Queensland's Gold Coast, Sam departed Australia aboard *Perth*.



Sam, c. 1941.

Images courtesy of Putch Lyle



Sam and Olivia on their wedding day.



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On 28 February 1942, *Perth* and the American cruiser *USS Houston* were heading to the coast of Java after the fall of Singapore. That evening in the Sunda Strait, the ships engaged Japanese warships. During the battle, *Perth* was hit by gunfire and torpedoes. So too was *Houston*.



Murray Griffin, *HMAS Perth fights to the last, 28th February, 1942* (c. 1942–43, oil on hardboard, 63.4 x 81.9 cm, AWM ART24483)

Perth's captain gave orders to abandon ship. The impact of an explosion swept Sam overboard, wounding him, but another sailor eventually dragged him onto a life raft. Of the 686 people on board, only 218 survived the war. The rest died during the action, soon after, or later as prisoners of the Japanese.

This sail was attached to a steel lifeboat used by survivors of *HMAS Perth* as they attempted to make their way back to Australia. But the men were captured by the Japanese after reaching Tjilatjap in Java.

While he was a prisoner of war, Petty Officer Raymond Edward Parkin decorated the sail, and other survivors of *Perth* signed it. The men went to great lengths to keep it hidden from the Japanese officers, and brought it home to Australia after the war.

Of the 310 men who signed the sail, 105 died in captivity.

Why might it have been so important to the men to keep the sail safe?



AWM REL22654

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The men who had survived the sinking spent hours in water that was covered in thick oil from the destroyed ships. A Japanese destroyer picked up many survivors, and among them was Sam. The men attempted to wash oil from their eyes and to treat their wounds. Though he was still enduring the pain of a fractured skull, a broken nose and **concussion**, Sam gathered the supplies he could find to assemble a medical kit, and provided aid to others.

Sam's medical kit was soon confiscated by Japanese officers, along with any other personal items, after the prisoners were taken ashore on 9 March at Serang on the island of Java. Here a local gaol, built to hold just 220 people, housed over 500 prisoners of war. As a result of the lack of hygiene and water, prisoners experienced dysentery. Without enough clothing to protect them from mosquitoes, prisoners also suffered from malaria. Nearby, a cinema housed hundreds more prisoners, and Sam aided in their care as well. After spending a month in Serang, he was taken with a small number of other prisoners to travel to Japan.

Over the next three years Sam was moved through different camps, often because he was a medical officer. Despite the challenges he faced, he continued to care for the other prisoners with the few resources he had.

These red cross badges were made from scrounged materials and worn by Sam while in captivity.

What might the red cross signify to the prisoners?

Prisoners of war at Zentsuji Camp, Japan, c. 1942. Sam's name is among those listed on the back of the photograph, although it is not certain which man he is.

AWM P04017.064

HMAS *Perth* and USS *Houston* were sunk during the battle of Sunda Strait. The ship's bell from HMAS *Perth* was discovered years later when divers visited the wreck. The bell was donated to the Australian War Memorial in 1976, when surviving *Perth* veterans attended a special ceremony to mark the occasion.

How might the veterans of *Perth* have felt when they saw the ship's bell years after the sinking?

AWM REL/07771/2



Sam's identification badge, worn while he was at Zentsuji Camp.

Objects courtesy of Putch Lyle



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In June 1944 Sam was sent to Taisho camp, near factories in Osaka. Sam was the camp's medical officer, caring for sick prisoners. The men held at Taisho camp were forced to work from early in the morning until the evening, performing hard labour and sometimes working at an electric furnace. If the Japanese guards had decided a man was fit for work, it was rare that Sam could convince them otherwise. Despite this, Sam persisted to advocate for those who were suffering, and sometimes he was punished for doing so.

On 6 and 9 August 1945, atomic bombs were dropped on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. The effects of the blasts were devastating, killing more than 100,000 Japanese people at the time. Tens of thousands more died as a result of radiation exposure. After the blasts, Sam was taken out of the camps to assist people who were suffering in Nagasaki.

After three and a half years as a prisoner of war in eight different camps, Sam finally began his journey home to Australia.

Though the **Geneva Convention** was in place during the Second World War, the Japanese government were not signatories to the convention, so did not follow its rules, including those regarding the treatment of prisoners. After the war, Japanese guards were charged with war crimes for **atrocities** they had committed. At these war crimes trials, hundreds of Australian former prisoners of war made statements. Among them was Sam, outlining the brutal treatment that the Japanese guards had **inflicted** on the prisoners. He recalled how punishments were sometimes carried out for little or no reason. Sam's statement explained that the men suffered both physical and mental torture, and how this had resulted in the deaths of some of those held captive.

Sam was awarded a Distinguished Service Cross in 1946 for his care of others after the sinking of *Perth*, despite being wounded himself. After the war he kept in contact with many other former prisoners of war with whom he had formed relationships and who he had cared for during his time in captivity. Passionate about caring for others, Sam returned to a career in paediatrics. For many years he and his colleagues volunteered their time and provided medical services free of charge to **Legacy**.

In 1949, he and Olivia adopted a daughter named Putch. She recalled that throughout her childhood, her father would share stories of his service and time in captivity with her:

Dad always felt that what he did in the war was simply to help who he could, however he could and in the only way he knew. He just stood by his principles of fairness and honesty.¹

Sam is remembered by his daughter as "gentle, very honourable, very caring and loyal."² She named her first child Sam in his honour.

Victory in the Pacific Day

On 15 August 1945, Japan accepted the terms of surrender from the Allies. This day became known as Victory in the Pacific day (VP Day) or Victory over Japan day (VJ Day). It was a time of celebration throughout Australia, as it signified that that the Second World War was finally over. This began the liberation of prisoners of war held by the Japanese military in camps across the Asia-Pacific region.



People on the streets of Perth, VP day.

WA Newspapers Ltd, AWM2018.641.1



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“Never give up hope”: The van Gelders

As children, Max, Hans and Carla van Gelder needed few toys because they were happy riding their bicycles and playing games outdoors. Those days were always remembered with fondness. But this carefree life changed dramatically when the Second World War came to their home in the Netherlands East Indies.

Max was the eldest of three children born to Rosaline, known as Rose, and Herman van Gelder in Holland in 1930. When he was six months old Max and his parents returned to their home in the Netherlands East Indies (now known as Indonesia) for Herman’s work with a **trading company**. Max’s brother Hans was born the following year, and youngest sibling Carla joined the family in 1934.

In February 1942, Max was eleven years old and living with his family in Semarang in Central Java. On 15 February, they were unaware of the fall of Singapore, only 1,000 kilometres away, and that the Japanese forces would soon invade the Netherlands East Indies. In those days, people got their news from radio broadcasts, but the radio and telephone lines had been cut, so no news got through. Max recalls Japanese soldiers marching through the streets soon after and that “from then on every day I was fearful of something terrible happening.”¹ As the family were Dutch, the Japanese now considered them to be enemies, and Herman, who was in the local **Home Guard**, was arrested and taken prisoner. His family did not know that he had been taken to a camp in the jungles of Sumatra. They received only a few letters from Herman over the next three years and the content was **censored**. But each letter in his handwriting let them know that he was still alive.



Hans (left), Carla and Max, in 1941 a few months before Japanese forces invaded Java in March 1942.

AWM P04882.001



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The van Gelder's home in Semarang was soon taken over by Japanese soldiers. Rose was given just one hour to pack their belongings. Taking only what they could carry, Rose and the three children travelled to her mother's home, about 350 kilometres away, and then settled in a village called Lawang where they hoped to be safe during the war. However, the Japanese soldiers thought Max was strong enough to work in their vitamin factory so they collected him every day to work there.

Max recalls, "Every day I lived in fear of brutal treatment at the vitamin factory, and at times I did not know if I would come home from there or even could survive the day. Many, many people died around me. We all suffered from starvation, disease and cruelty."²

This continued for about 16 months until one day he was not picked up. The Japanese had surrendered in August 1945 and the war was over.

Herman sent this letter in his native Dutch language to Rose on his release from a prisoner of war camp in 1945.

"Dear, not long until I will be back with you all, and we can pick up our lives again, help and assist each other and support one another. It's an incredible thought, and I can't quite get my mind around it.

*Darling and children, until then, stay healthy ..."*³

Unfortunately it would be another year until the van Gelder family were together again.

AWM PR03440



Did you know?

The Netherlands government ruled the colony of the Netherlands East Indies from 1816 until the Japanese invasion and occupation in the Second World War. Japan seized the colony so they could access the area's rich natural resources. Many citizens were forced into manual labour, and others starved due to food shortages. After the Japanese surrender in 1945, the Dutch wanted to reclaim the Netherlands East Indies. However, the Japanese occupation had motivated the Indonesians to fight for their independence. Fighting continued until in 1947 the **United Nations (UN)** called for a **ceasefire**. Australia sent representatives to help observe a ceasefire between nationalist and Dutch forces, becoming part of the first UN peacekeeping operation. Eventually the new Federal Indonesian Republic was recognised on 27 December 1949.



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Many Indonesians did not want to return to being ruled by the Dutch after the Second World War, and they arrested all the Dutch men, including Max, who was only fourteen but was quite tall for his age. He was taken to a camp for men, *Kamp Tawangargo*, while Rose went to the women's camp, *Kamp Tawangarsi* with Hans and Carla. Max remembers being given about a handful of rice each day and occasionally some vegetables. It was not enough food to sustain him so he and the other boys looked for ways to find more to eat. They planned an escape to visit a relative of one of the boys and ask for food. But the escape did not work out. They were caught by the Indonesian police, and locked up in the local jail for a few weeks. The boys had been beaten by the police and tore up their shirts for bandages. They received little food and only small amounts of water in the jail, but were finally returned to the men's camp.

The women's camp had cooking facilities and was able to provide extra rations for the men's camp. Young boys from the women's camp pushed a cart with the precious supplies between the two camps. Sometimes Hans was given this job, and it was a chance for Max to talk to his brother and ask about the welfare of his mother and siblings.

Hans explained that Rose had to stand for hours each day in a queue for bread. Max was sad to hear this and thought about how he could help her. He decided to make a stool for his mother to sit on while she waited in line for food. Max had no woodworking experience so he called upon his fellow internees to help. The timber he used came from old teak doors found in the camp. He set about making folding legs so she could easily carry the seat. Max was proud of his efforts and his mother cherished the stool long after the war.

On the top of the stool Max used broken pieces of glass to scrape away some of the red paint. He used a magnifying glass to burn the lines for a drawing of what he saw from his camp: a view of volcanoes, palm trees, a hut and rice fields. He added Rose's name so everyone would know it was her stool.



What might the stool have meant to Rose?

AWM REL33251

The stool has since been donated to the Australian War Memorial by the family. In 2021, Max and his family visited the Memorial to view the object.

Why might Max have wanted his grandsons to see it?

David Whittaker, AWM2021.4.22.21



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In late 1946, Max and the remaining survivors in the men's camp were forced to board an overcrowded, hot train with its windows boarded up. About a week later, they were surprised to find they had arrived in Jakarta and were welcomed by the Red Cross, who gave them a shower and clothing. The Red Cross discovered that Herman, Rose, Hans and Carla had also been released and were now reunited. Max was sent to join them, and at first his father did not recognise him as it had been four years since they had all been together. It would be more than ten years before the van Gelders learned that their release from captivity was part of a **prisoner exchange** agreement between the Dutch and the Indonesians.



Herman was suffering from malnutrition and it had badly affected his eyesight. The van Gelders returned to Holland on the MS *Oranje* to recuperate and receive medical care. There the children had to work hard to catch up on their schooling.

The journey to Amsterdam was through extremely rough seas and the ship almost capsized. Hans remembered furniture being thrown around the decks. While many passengers feared for their lives, Hans and Max considered the trip an adventure! It started a lifelong love of the ocean for Max. He craved the freedom of travel, so he joined the Dutch naval academy in Amsterdam. His later life and work became centred on travel and the ocean.

Max had visited Australia several times while travelling for work and in the end chose this country as his home in 1960, becoming an Australian citizen a few years later. He now enjoys swimming most days and spending time with his family. Max is the last remaining member of the van Gelder family which had been held captive during the Second World War. Reflecting on his experiences, Max says, "When they took me away, my mother said to me that I would experience and witness some horrendous things but to hold on to the kindness I would experience in others. I did just that."⁴

The van Gelder family after they were finally reunited in 1946, when Max was 16. From left, Carla, Hans, Rose, Max and Herman.

AWM P04882.002

This bracelet was made by Herman as a gift for Rose. He made it from scraps of Perspex and military badges while he was interned in a prisoner of war camp. Herman might have been punished for making it, or had the bracelet **confiscated**, had it been found. He kept it hidden and gave it to his wife when they were reunited in 1946.

Why might Herman have risked his safety to make this bracelet?

AWM REL33252



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“We coped as best we could with what we had”: Squadron Leader Ronald Guthrie

Ron was interested in the military through his father, who had served with the Light Horse during the First World War. He would take Ron to the nearest airfield, in Richmond, to watch the aircraft take off and land. Ron’s curiosity about the RAAF grew through his hobby of building model aircraft.

As a teenager during the Second World War, Ronald Guthrie, known as Ron, joined the Air Training Corps, before joining the RAAF. He was selected for pilot training and flew a Wirraway, graduating with the rank of sergeant. Twenty years later, he discovered that his father had written to Prime Minister Ben Chifley, worrying about his son serving in the war. Ron later believed that his father’s letter had changed the course of his life. He did not serve overseas in the Second World War.

During his training Ron learned a range of skills, including air traffic control. He particularly enjoyed the practical parts of his job, and loved flying different types of aircraft.

The Korean War began on 25 June 1950, when the forces of **communist** North Korea invaded South Korea. Australia became involved as part of the force sent by the UN to defend South Korea. In March the following year, Ron was posted to No. 77 Squadron, RAAF, in Korea. Despite feeling ill equipped for the job, Ron reflected, “You just did the job because it was there and had to be done. We coped as best we could with what we had.”¹

Ron in the cockpit of a Meteor Mk 8 aircraft.

AWM P00305.004





1944



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Did you know?

This RAAF storm ensign was flown by No. 77 Squadron at Kimpo Air Base in Korea. These small flags were used in place of larger flags in stormy weather or gale force conditions.

The roundel in the lower right corner of the ensign is a symbol used by the RAAF to identify its aircraft. Since the Korean War, the inner red circle has commonly been replaced by a red kangaroo.

AWM RELAWM40130



In Korea Ron flew a Gloster Meteor Mk 8. Ron recalled that on 29 August 1951, his aircraft was losing speed and struggling to keep up with others in his formation. It was then hit by fire from Russian MiG-15 fighter jets. Ron opened the **canopy** of the aircraft. When he was about 37,000 feet above sea level, Ron pulled the ejector lever under his seat, but it took him three tries to finally eject his seat from the aircraft. He scrambled to pull his goggles over his eyes and readjust his oxygen mask until he felt the flow of air. Ron was startled by the silence in the absence of gunfire and the noise of the engine. He undid his seat harness and kicked away the seat before pulling the **ripcord** of his parachute. It popped open above him, and Ron floated downwards, spending almost 30 minutes gazing at the horizon and the earth beneath him.



Polaroid B-8 flying goggles. Equipment such as this was used during the Second World War and the Korean War.

AWM REL/17907.003



Meteor jets were flown by Australians during the Korean War, but they were totally outclassed by the enemy MiG-15 fighters.

Ivor Hele, *Meteor jet* (1952, oil on canvas on plywood, 40.4 x 45.6 cm, AWM ART40326)



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Landing in a rice paddy between two Korean workers, Ron was captured by men who took him to an underground jail dug into a hill. In a cell with two North Korean women, Ron was grateful that they shared a wooden board that he could sit on. In return, under the cover of darkness, Ron shared his rations of sugar cane and corn with the women. On Ron's third day in the prison, he was visited by two Russian pilots; through translators, they told him that they had shot down his plane.

Ron spent some months in different prisons with varied living conditions. He experienced interrogation, lice infestations, restricted rations and harsh treatment from his captors. In one prison, Ron shared a cell with Korean and Japanese prisoners. He had not seen anyone from the UN forces, but had heard rumours that there were European prisoners in the next cell. As Ron was taken from this camp, he called out his name and that he was an Australian, hoping someone would hear and know he was alive.

At an interrogation camp in a village outside Pyongyang, Ron met Jack Henderson, an American pilot, and the pair spent hours sharing their experiences. Ron said, "The words came tumbling forth as we discussed family matters and recounted our details of service. Then we told about our capture and imprisonment. A bond quickly developed."² Eventually two other prisoners joined their cell, Tom Harrison and Tony Farrar-Hockley.

The four men made a plan to escape. They cut a hole in the wall of the cell, and during the day Tom would sit against it to disguise the hole from the guards. As Tom had recently had his leg amputated, he stayed behind on the night of the escape. The others climbed through and ran across a corn field. Tony was recaptured, but Ron and Jack kept going. After about five days they reached the west coast of Korea and were delighted to see the Yellow Sea. Under the cover of night, they stole a fishing boat to paddle across to a small island between two headlands. They spent a night on the beach, but were recaptured the next day. From there Ron was taken back to the prison and interrogated.



Bruce Fletcher, *Private Horace Madden* (1968, oil on canvas on hardboard, 76.3 x 63.5 cm, AWM ART40730)

Private Horace Madden, known as "Slim" or "Digger", enlisted at the age of 18 and served during the Second World War. He joined the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, in Korea in 1950. Horace was captured that same year during the battle of Kapyong.

He was well known among other prisoners for refusing to cooperate with his captors. For this, Horace was deprived of food and received brutal treatment from his captors.

Ron and Horace met when they were ordered to trek to Pyoktong. Before they set out, they were made to stand in lines and any padded clothing was confiscated. The men experienced appalling treatment, with only thin clothing to wear in freezing conditions. The food they carried was often taken and sold by their captors.

Ron described an act of selflessness and comradeship that Horace displayed during the long march to the Chinese border, "He traded off his watch for apples to the local peasants in villages we stopped at, for food for the rest of the prisoners."³



Horace was known for his cheerfulness and optimism, despite the conditions and the cruel treatment from his captors. He died from malnutrition and the effects of ill treatment. He was 27 years old. Horace was **posthumously awarded the George Cross for his heroism and selflessness in the face of hardship as a prisoner of war.**

1944

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Ron (second from left) with other prisoners of war during the harsh Korean winter at Pyoktong.

AWM P00305.002

Chinese-issued padded winter caps made with cotton were given to Australian prisoners of war during the freezing winters in Korea.

AWM2019.4.146.22



Ron was taken by jeep to another prison, where he was pushed inside one of several huts. He recalled, "There were about 30 or 40 prisoners who hardly looked up when we entered, as they were so frail and sick."⁴ They were soon told that they would be forced to walk to the Yalu River, more than 300 kilometres away.

Ron arrived at Pinchon-ni prisoner of war camp, where he was reunited with other Australians. He described how being able to share their experiences, and bring humour to a traumatic situation, boosted their morale. They endured a harsh winter, with temperatures dropping to minus 20 degrees Celsius. The combination of the freezing temperatures and maltreatment often made the prisoners ill. During his time in captivity, Ron's weight went down by about 32 kilograms.

While he was a prisoner in Korea, Ron wrote letters to his parents and family back home. He later described the joy he felt after receiving mail:

Finally my great moment arrived! I received two letters from my mother addressed to Flying Officer R. Guthrie, which indicated two things. At last people at home knew I was alive and it seemed that I had been promoted, unless my mother had made a mistake with my rank. I re-read every word, allowing my imagination to work full time. This was an emotional experience.⁵



1915

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1942

1943



Ron (centre, wearing a yellow scarf) on his return from North Korea.

AWM P00305.006



After he had spent more than two years as a prisoner of war, an armistice was declared. Ron was released and was taken to Freedom Village at Munsan-ni. He finally began his journey home to Australia.

As I placed my foot unsteadily on the steps I was immediately approached by two of the biggest American Military Policemen I had ever seen. These kind men took me gently under each arm – just as my legs buckled. They helped – almost carried – me down the steps and through a beautiful archway bearing the printed words WELCOME GATE TO FREEDOM. Tears rolled down my cheeks.⁶

Tents at Freedom Village, Munsan-ni, used to receive UN prisoners of war following their release.

What do you think the sign “Welcome Gate to Freedom” meant to the prisoners that had been released?

Donald Bushby, AWM P04641.101





1944



1945



1946



1950



(Left to right) John William Mackintosh, Ron and Jack Gorman embrace after Ron's release from North Korean prisoner of war camps.

AWM JK0862

Did you know?

Booklets like this one belonging to Ron were given to prisoners of war after their repatriation. The booklets explained what had happened in the years that they had been prisoners.

What sort of information do you think the prisoners of war would have wanted to know after their release?

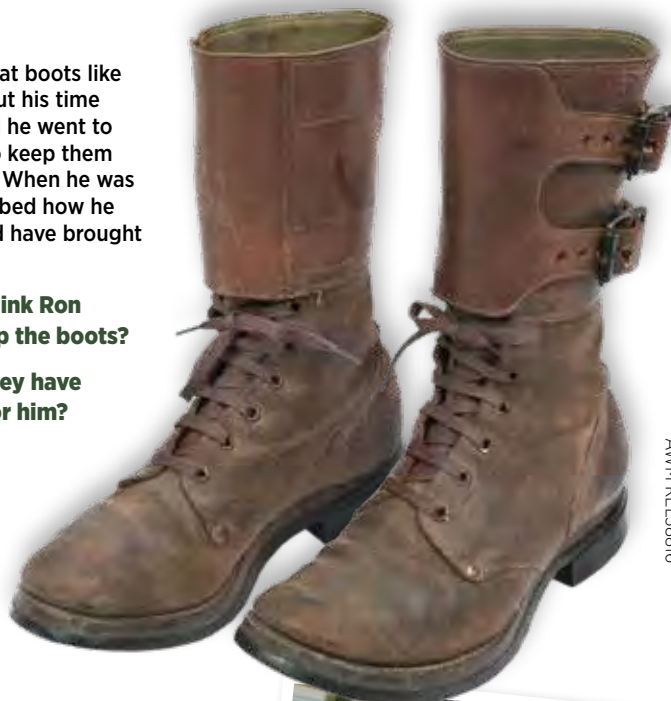
AWM2020.22.132



Ron wore combat boots like these throughout his time in captivity, and he went to great lengths to keep them safe from theft. When he was free, Ron described how he wished he could have brought them home.

Why do you think Ron wanted to keep the boots?

What might they have represented for him?



AWM REL38816

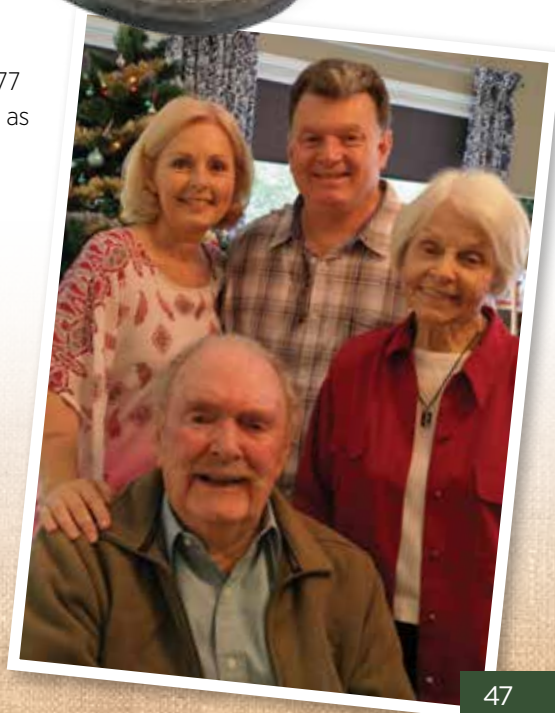
In September 1953, Ron was among former prisoners of war from No. 77 Squadron who were flown home to Australia. It was an emotional time as Ron was reunited with his parents and other relatives who had waited years for his return.

Ron joined Vance Drummond, a fellow prisoner of war, on a journey to Queensland, where he was introduced to his future wife, Beris. They were married the following January.

Ron became a flying instructor for the RAAF, and described the satisfaction of passing on his skills. After 37 years of service, Ron retired in 1980. Since retirement, he has studied **horticulture**, and enjoys a love of gardening.

Ron joined by wife Beris, daughter Lisa and son Karl for Christmas, 2017.

Image courtesy of the Guthrie family





1915

1917

1942

1943

Where did these stories take place?

1 Frederick Ashton

- Turkey

2 Herbert Horner

- France
- Belgium
- Germany
- England

3 David Harris

- Crete
- Poland
- Germany
- England

4 Maric Gilbert

- Ambon

5 Wallace Blatch and James Richard Braithwaite

- Malaya (Malaysia)
- Singapore
- North Borneo (Sabah)

6 Don Dowie

- Malaya (Malaysia)
- Singapore
- Burma (Myanmar)
- Thailand

7 Wilma Oram Young

- Singapore
- Sumatra

8 Arthur Varley

- Belgium
- Malaya (Malaysia)
- Singapore
- Thailand
- Burma (Myanmar)

9 Samuel Stening

- Sunda Strait
- Japan

10 The van Gelder family

- Netherlands
- Indonesia

11 Ronald Guthrie

- Korea





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Glossary

aerodrome A small airport or airfield.

Allies The countries that fought alongside Britain and Australia in the First and Second World Wars.

anaesthetic A substance that provides a temporary loss of sensation or awareness.

armistice A formal agreement to stop fighting.

artefacts Objects made by a human being, usually of cultural or historical interest.

atrocities A violent or cruel act performed by an individual, government or institution.

Australia House A building in London that houses representatives of the Australian government known as the High Commission.

bar A bar is added to a medal to indicate that the award has been granted again.

barracks A large building or group of buildings used to house military personnel.

canopy The pilot sits in the cockpit of an aircraft; over the pilot's head goes the canopy. It is clear and provides a pressurised environment.

captors People who keep others imprisoned or locked up.

casualty clearing station A medical facility close to the front line.

ceasefire An arrangement in which countries or groups of people that are fighting each other agree to stop fighting for a time.

celestial navigation The action of finding one's way by observing and knowing about the positions of the sun, moon, and stars.

censorship When information is officially concealed, either in part or in full.

communist One who believes in communism, a system of government based on the theory that all property belongs to the community and each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs.

concussion A mild brain injury caused by a blow to the head.

counter-attack An attack made in response to one by an enemy.

cribbage A card game usually played by two people, in which each player tries to form different counting combinations of cards.

debris The remains of something broken or destroyed.

dysentery An intestinal infection with symptoms such as diarrhoea with blood, cramping, fever and vomiting. If it causes dehydration, it can be fatal.

entanglements An extensive barrier, typically made of barbed wire and stakes, erected to deter enemy soldiers or vehicles.

evacuate To remove persons or things from an endangered area.

evade To avoid being detected or caught.

fall of Singapore The defeat of Allied forces on the island of Singapore by Japanese forces in February 1942.

fortress A large, strong building or group of buildings that can be defended from attack.

gaol A jail.

Geneva Convention A set of international laws made to protect prisoners of war, the wounded, non-combatants and civilians during wartime.

Great Depression A period of severe global economic hardship lasting from 1929 until the start of the Second World War.

gruelling Extremely tiring and demanding.





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Home Guard A citizens' self-defence force run by the Dutch colonial authorities.

horticulture The practice of growing plants for various needs.

inflict To cause harm, loss or distress.

interrogation Questioning others for information, often intensely or aggressively.

intimidation Threatening behaviour that causes fear.

kampung A Malaysian village.

Legacy An organisation that was formed after the First World War to help the widows and families of servicemen who had died during the war. Today they support 48,000 individuals and families across Australia.

malaria A life-threatening disease caused by parasites that are spread through infected mosquitoes.

malnutrition Lack of proper nutrition, caused by not having enough to eat.

midwifery Medical care given to women during pregnancy and childbirth.

oral history The process of learning about the past by interviewing people about their experiences and recording the interview.

Ottoman Empire This Turkish empire began in the 1300s and included large parts of the Middle East and south-eastern Europe. The empire was replaced by the modern nation of Turkey in the 1920s.

paediatrician A doctor who specialises in the care of children.

prisoner exchange A deal between opposing sides in a conflict to release prisoners.

posthumously After death.

prosthetic An artificial body part.

rations A certain amount of food or supplies distributed among a group.

recuperate To recover health or strength.

Reichsmarks A type of currency used in Germany from 1924 to 1948.

repatriation The act of returning (or being returned) to one's home country.

reservoir A large body of water used as a source of water supply.

reveille A signal, especially on a bugle or a drum, to wake personnel in the armed forces.

ripcord After jumping from a plane, the pilot pulls the ripcord to release the parachute.

scrounge To hunt up, or discover, by stealing.

stretcher-bearer A person who carries the sick or injured on stretchers, often under fire.

souvenir An object that recalls a place that has been visited or an event. As a verb, it means to take or steal a small thing to be kept as a souvenir.

staunch Very loyal.

supplemented To add something.

surrender To stop resisting an enemy or opponent and submit to their authority.

telegram A message that is transmitted along a wire system, then written or printed and delivered.

trading company A company that specialises in importing and exporting goods.

United Nations An intergovernmental organisation that aims to maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations, and achieve international cooperation.

voyage A long journey usually taken by sea.



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Cushion cover made by Corporal Pat Sullivan, an Aboriginal serviceman from Deniliquin, who began to embroider when he was imprisoned in Changi. Pat kept his one needle safe in this case made from bamboo.

AWM REL/03668



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Former prisoners of war arrive in Singapore from Thailand, supported by nurses from the Royal Australian Air Force Nursing Service.

AWM 119706

After years of suffering, many former prisoners of war returned with medical issues such as amputations, illnesses or psychological trauma. They needed ongoing support, which often came from each other as well as from their families.



While in captivity, they fought battles of their own with great honour and individual courage.

Maurie Pears and Fred Kirkland, *Korea Remembered*, Sydney, 1998.



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