3

THE COWRA BREAKOUT

DCS Sissons

Editors' note

This paper is the original English text of an article that Sissons contributed to the September 1984 issue of the Japanese history magazine *Rekishi to Jinbutsu*, marking the 40th anniversary of the Cowra breakout. He presented this paper as a public lecture on 5 August 2002 to a sizeable audience at the Australian War Memorial (AWM).

Having been recruited to the Australian Army, Sissons was based at the training camp in Cowra when the breakout occurred. He was sent with a search party to capture escaped Japanese prisoners. The paper does not elaborate on his personal involvement, other than remarking on a lack of heating in the training camp, while the prisoners' huts were heated. For Sissons, however, the breakout remained a significant research topic.

Publications such as Harry Gordon's *Die Like the Carp* (1978) and Fujio Nakano's *Kaura no totsugeki rappa* (1984), as well as some survivors' accounts, reveal various details of the tragic incident. Sissons' approach to the breakout is more methodical and thorough, however, and explores the breakout from Australian and Japanese perspectives, including how it started, progressed and ended. Sissons also reviews incidents involving military personnel and local civilians that took place during the apprehension of escaped Japanese prisoners. These remain sensitive issues, but Sissons recognised the importance of addressing them in an historical context.

The official inquiry into the breakout took place soon after the incident and reported the number of Japanese deaths as 231, a figure often cited in other accounts. Sissons re-examined the records and concluded that the number should be 234, including three later deaths due to injuries received during the incident. The AWM and the Cowra Japanese War Cemetery Database (www.cowrajapanesecemetery.org) accept Sissons' conclusion and have amended their records accordingly.

The Korean's warning

On 3 June 1944 a Korean prisoner at Cowra Prisoner of War (POW) Camp told an Australian interpreter that when he arrived at Cowra three weeks earlier he had overheard Japanese members of the draft being told that plans were afoot for a breakout.¹

At Area Command Sydney this information was regarded very seriously, and the Commanding Officer (CO) of the Cowra POW Camp garrison battalion (Lt Col MA Brown) was immediately summoned to a conference with the General Officer Commanding (Maj. Gen. EC Plant) and his staff. There, Brown argued that, if the 779 Japanese other ranks confined in his Compound B attempted a mass breakout, it was inevitable that many of them would be killed and that some would escape. He therefore urged that: (i) his battalion (which was armed only with rifles and light machine guns) be issued in addition with two medium machine guns, eight submachine guns and 100 grenades; (ii) the numbers in Compound B be reduced to 300–400 by sending the surplus to another camp.²

As both escapes and heavy casualties among POWs were unacceptable, Plant issued the additional weapons and sought the approval of Land Headquarters (in Melbourne) for Brown's second proposal.

The weapons arrived in Cowra on June 9th. On June 19th, Land Headquarters (LHQ) issued instructions that the number of Japanese at Cowra was to be reduced by separating the non-commissioned officers (NCOs) from the rank and file and moving the latter to Hay.³

1 Proceeding of [HQ NSW L of C Area] Court of Enquiry on the Mutiny at No. 12 POW Group, Cowra (National Archives of Australia (NAA) 1977/461 hereafter referred to as Christison Inquiry), Exhibit F.

2 12 POW Camp to HQ NSW L of C Area, 4583/SJ2/44, 10 September 1944 (Registry, HQ 2 Military District, S56/2/1302).

3 Adjutant-General LHQ to HQ NSW L of C Area, SM6481, 19 June 1944 (NAA MP742 255/9/435).

On August 4th notice of the move was given to the Japanese POWs in accordance with Article 26 of the 1929 Prisoners of War Convention. At 1.40 am the following day a breakout took place. The casualties were: Japanese — dead 234, wounded 105; Australians — dead four (of whom two were the crew of one of the newly arrived medium machine guns), wounded four.⁴ The move to Hay had become the occasion for what it was designed to prevent. Let us examine some of the considerations that influenced Brown to make his proposal and his superiors to adopt it.

‘Death is preferable to the shame of capture’

It is most unusual for POWs located thousands of miles from the war zone to attempt escape by making a frontal attack en masse on barbed wire entanglements covered by machine guns. Why then was the Korean’s warning regarded so seriously?

The Australian authorities were well aware that there was no question of the Japanese being driven to desperate action by inadequate food or accommodation, by overwork, or by brutality. The Japanese POWs were provided with the same rations as their Australian guards (3,753 calories per day)⁵ and consumed additional fresh vegetables that they had been encouraged to cultivate for themselves.⁶ Former prisoners still remember both the quantity and quality of these rations. Takahara Marekuni in his reminiscences ‘Senshisha no Kiseki’ (recently published in serial form in *Eimuzu*) writes: ‘*Busshitsumen de wa ... jūbun sugiru to itte mo kagon de wa nai*’ [It was no exaggeration to say that material supply was more than enough].⁷ Their standard of accommodation was similar to that of Australian troops except that their huts were heated while those of the neighbouring training brigade were not. They did no work beyond the servicing and maintenance of their own compound. The reports of the delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Dr GW Morel (a neutral Swiss citizen) appear to dispose of any suspicion of brutality. After his visit to Cowra of 22–24 March 1944 he wrote:

Nous avons pu visiter tous les Camps sans aucune escorte, et nous entretenir avec les prisonniers de guerre sans témoins ...

Le traitement général est excellent les rapports entre les prisonniers de guerre et la garnison sont cordiaux.

4 Christison Inquiry, pp. 13 and 14, exhibits W and AA as amended to incorporate the subsequent death of three of the wounded reported in the findings of the NSW Coroner’s inquest 31 October – 15 December 1944 (NAA 1977/460).

5 NAA, War Cabinet Agendum 525/1945.

6 At the time of the break-out, the number of vegetable plants under cultivation in the Japanese other ranks’ compound were as follows: Chinese cabbages 20,000, radishes 2,000, lettuces 500, cabbages 400, spinach 500, white turnips 300, cauliflower 150, onions 200 (NAA MP742 255/15/435).

7 M Takahara, ‘Senshisha no Kiseki’, *Eimuzu*, part 60, p. 34 (translation by Keiko Tamura).

Les hommes de confiance ont tout spécialement souligné l'attitude bienveillante et courtoise adoptée par les divers Commandants des Camps.

[We were able to visit all of the camps without escort and interact with the prisoners in the absence of witnesses.

The general level of treatment is excellent and relations between the POWs and the garrison are cordial.

People we trust have emphasised especially the benevolent and courteous attitude adopted by the various Camp commanders.]⁸

We must therefore seek elsewhere for an explanation of the breakout.

Military Intelligence was well aware that capture was regarded throughout the Japanese forces as shameful under any circumstances. This had been a recurring theme in the interrogation of prisoners in the field. Take, for example, that of Matsuoka Ryoju captured near Giruwa on 2 February 1943:

The PW expected to be killed on capture and would have preferred that to the disgrace of being a PW. Although, as a human being, he would naturally like to see his people again, he felt at present that, like all Japanese soldiers under similar circumstances, he would not return. In any case, it had always been the case to execute men on their return and he doubted whether any allowance would be made for the fact that he was young. Although parents would be glad to see their sons again they would, nevertheless, not expect them to remain alive after disgrace or capture.⁹

They were also aware of New Zealand's experience of the dangerous consequences that could attend such feelings of extreme shame inside a POW compound. There at Featherston in January 1943 in a compound of about 300 prisoners an extremist group had urged the officers to demonstrate their leadership by committing suicide and, when the latter failed to do so, had made threats against their safety. As a result it had been necessary to place in a separate compound 32 other ranks who were resolved on suicide. At Featherston the problems involved in maintaining order and discipline among prisoners who preferred to be dead were underlined a month later when the 300 went on strike and offered resistance to an armed detail sent to extract a working party. The casualties in the ensuing mêlée were: Japanese — 48 killed, 61 wounded; New Zealanders — one dead, 17, wounded.¹⁰

---

8 NAA A989 44/925/1/140 (translation by Arthur Stockwin).

9 GHQ South-West Pacific Area, Allied Translator and Interpreter Section, Interrogation Reports, no. 161 (Australian War Memorial (AWM) 312.11).

10 Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry on the Mutiny of Japanese POWs at Featherston, 25 February 1943 (NAA MP720/663/401/634).

Information of this nature was promptly disseminated by LHQ to subordinate headquarters and to units dealing with POWs.¹¹ A good example of the Australian Army's conventional wisdom on such matters is the report tendered by Col JW Mitchell, the Commander of the recruit training brigade (located a mile from the Cowra POW Camp) to his Divisional Commander following a conference with Brown's second-in-command that had taken place on June 8th:

The position was viewed by Comdr in daylight on Friday the 9 June (day following) and since all Japanese prisoners are kept in this POW Camp in Australia there wasn't the slightest doubt in his mind that these prisoners in a concerted rush, with blankets and paillasses thrown over the barb wire, would escape in some hundreds. Hundreds of course would be killed on the wire, but one has to remember that these Japs are fanatics and to die thus removes the stigma of captivity and according to their beliefs clears the way to their heaven; and to the Comdr's mind, so long as large numbers are grouped together the danger remains, and one could reasonably expect it on wet, drizzly, dark night, when immediately they clear the wire they become obscure and can then organise at a pre-contemplated place and proceed to do their mischief.¹²

Mitchell knew all about the ineffectiveness of wire in the face of an assault by a determined foe. When promoted to his current position he was by far the most experienced Regimental Commander in the Australian Army, having commanded a battalion on the Western Front for one-and-a-half years in the First World War and in the Libyan and Greek campaigns in the Second World War. (In view of his accurate appreciation of the situation, it is one of the ironies of fate that it was the Cowra breakout that cost Mitchell his job. The patrols sent out by his headquarters to recapture the escapees were unarmed. One of these was ambushed and its officer killed.)

'Firm and careful handling'

This knowledge of the ideology of the Japanese POWs and of its possible consequences led not only to the provision of strongly guarded camps, but also to the expenditure of considerable effort to remove unnecessary irritants in the prisoners' environment.

11 For example, the registration booklet of subject S56-2 at 2 Military District Registry shows that LHQ despatched information regarding the Featherson mutiny to HQ NSW L of C Area on 15 March 1943 (SM5295) and 9 April 1943 (SM7312) and that Area Command in each case forwarded this information to the POW camps at Hay, Cowra, Liverpool and Yanco and to the army hospital that treated Japanese POWs.

12 Proceedings of [First I Div] Court of Inquiry into the 'Search for and recapture of certain PWs ... [and] the death of Lt H. Doncaster' (Registry, HQ 2 Military District 556/2/1302), Exhibit 1: 'Alleged attempt to escape from P.O.W. camp: Report of action taken by Aust Recruiting Centre [4 July 1944]'.

The latter half of 1943 provides an illustration. On November 9th LHQ cabled to London that recently the 'truculent' behaviour of the Japanese POWs had led it to expect a repetition of the 'New Zealand riot' but that 'by firm and careful handling they have lately become more tractable'.¹³

Evidence has survived of the truculent behaviour. Late in June there had been a strike by the batmen in the Japanese officers' compound during which a Japanese officer struck the Australian Company Commander.¹⁴ In September the leaders of the other ranks compound had tendered a list of demands that included such frivolous items as: (i) that huts be inspected only once a week; (ii) that the issue of cigarettes (suspended as a punishment for untidy kits) be resumed; (iii) that POWs sentenced to detention be released; (iv) that, for recreation, walks outside the compound be arranged. When these demands were not accepted, the whole compound refused to parade. The 'firm' element in the Australian response was the sentencing the batmen to 21 days' detention and the officer to two years' imprisonment and, when the compound refused to parade, a 'show of strength' in which the guards were ostentatiously armed with batons.¹⁵ The 'careful' element is illustrated by a memorandum from the Deputy Adjutant-General II to the Chief of the General Staff in which 'in view of the paramount importance of maintaining discipline and yet of avoiding a repetition of the New Zealand incident' he requested that the incompetent Australian interpreter officer at Cowra be replaced by 'a skilled interpreter who understands both the Japanese and their language'. The officer in question was duly marched out and in his place came a succession of experienced linguists on loan from the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section in Brisbane. Most of these had resided permanently in Japan. Among them was Capt. RC Mann formerly of the Kobe Higher Commercial College. He served five months at Cowra¹⁶ and it was he that conducted the interrogation of the Korean.

Once the decision had been announced that the basis of selection for movement to Hay was to be the prisoner's rank, I feel that the perceived requirement of 'firmness' would have precluded any possibility of negotiating with the Japanese leaders on this issue. On the other hand, if in the course of making the decision the Australians had felt that segregation according to rank was likely to provoke mass suicides but that segregation by some other means (by lot, for example) was not, then they may well have opted for the latter. The object of the move was to reduce the numbers in Compound B. To utilise it in order to separate the men from the NCOs appears to have been no more than an afterthought. It was felt that the men would be more tractable if not under the influence of the NCOs and that in particular they would,

13 LHQ to Aust Army Rep London, ML3792, 9 November 1943 (NAA 1973/362 P26/9 Part 10).

14 Trial of Lt M. Naka by a Military Court-Proceedings (NAA CP 337/1 POW 1).

15 'Notes from camp intelligence reports' (AWM 780/3/2).

16 War Diary 22 Australian Garrison Battalion (AWM 8/7/47).

if on their own, no longer refuse to engage in productive work such as market gardening for the Australian consumer market. (For such work the prisoners would, of course, have received remuneration in accordance with Article 34 of the POW Convention.) This, however, was merely a desirable bonus, not a vital objective.

On the other hand, the safeguarding of the lives and the health of POWs was regarded by cabinet and the Army as a very important objective. There were several reasons for this: (i) the movement to ameliorate the lot of the victims of warfare had from the period preceding the adoption of Hague Conventions at the turn of the century been widely supported by the Australian community no less than by the wider British community of which it formed part; (ii) there were no principles in the prevailing religion, philosophy or way of life of the community by which violation of the principles underlying the Conventions could be justified; (iii) it was obvious that ill-treating POWs while conferring no benefits on the captor provided the enemy with a motive and an excuse to ill-treat the prisoners that fell into his hands. This latter consideration is a factor that operates in most conflicts. Indeed, but for it, it would be very difficult to negotiate Conventions of this nature. But in the Pacific War, it was a consideration of very great weight so far as Australia was concerned. In that conflict Australia sent against Japan an expeditionary force of roughly five divisions. As a result of the disasters at Singapore, Rabaul and Ambon some 22,000 Australian troops — more than an entire division — were, from the outset, prisoners in Japanese hands. In the words of the history of its wartime activities compiled by the Directorate of Prisoners of War and Internees (DPW&I) at Land Headquarters, 'The administration of all policy matters relating to enemy prisoners of war held by us was conditioned by the strong desire to adhere to the Prisoners of War Convention standards and thus minimise the possibility of providing the enemy with pretexts for retaliation against our own men'.¹⁷ LHQ lost no opportunity to keep this aspect in everyone's mind. Take for example the following passage in a directive issued by the Adjutant-General on 18 June 1943: 'The Commander-in-Chief attaches great importance to scrupulous adherence to the provisions of the Convention ... since any breach of these provisions is bound to react on the treatment by the enemy of Allied prisoners of war'.¹⁸ By this reasoning it was no less important that the enemy should also believe that Australia was scrupulously applying the Convention. Hence the wish to avoid another Featherston even though, to Australian eyes, the Featherston deaths were in no way the result of any act or omission by the captors.

17 AWM 780/1/6, p.vi.

18 NAA MP742 255/13/170. See also Group Comndt 12 POW Camp to HQ NSW L of C Area, 491/2, 26 July 1944 (NAA MP742 255/9/435).

No one on the Australian side, however, appears to have considered the possibility that the prisoners might regard the separation of the NCOs more seriously than the movement to another camp. To me this is not surprising. The message that I get from reading the account of the breakout written by one of the participants, Moriki Masaru, is that the separation of the NCOs was not a real issue. As Moriki says, 'It was not as if we had been together from the start. We had been thrown together by unlucky chance. We had had many separations and additions in the past'.¹⁹ It seems to me that, with the die-hard element bent on purging their shame by death, and with the remainder having no generally acceptable philosophical or moral arguments with which to resist the die-hards' urgings, the latter group would have been successful in bringing about the breakout on that occasion irrespective of whatever method of segregation had been proposed.

The report on the incident by the Australian authorities to the Japanese Government (through the Protecting Power, Switzerland) studiously avoids the claim by the Japanese leaders that the separation of the NCOs was the cause of the breakout: *mokusatsu* [to take no notice] is a technique as well known to the English-speaking peoples as to the Japanese (although we lack a word for it). In a confidential memorandum to the Department of External Affairs, the Department of the Army explained this omission in the following terms:

The PW leader commented unfavourably upon the proposed transfer, and it may have been a factor in causing the NCOs to execute immediately their pre-arranged plan of mutiny.

Two reasons for not introducing this aspect are:

- a. it is not desired to cause the Japanese at this stage of the war to become unduly conscious of the fact that they have Allied and Australian officers, NCOs and men mixed together in some camps, which state of affair is greatly to the advantage of the other ranks;
- b. in a note addressed by five officers in detention to Camp Leader Kanazawa the latter was enjoined to use the impending transfer as the reason for the mutiny, although from the context of the note and from Kanazawa's own evidence it is apparent that such use of the impending transfer is a pretext.²⁰

Where LHQ do appear to have come to an erroneous (but by no means ridiculous) conclusion is their belief that the consequence of continued Japanese defeats at the front would be to make the POWs in Australian camps more tractable. On 15 August 1944 they informed Area Command that 'It is considered that in view of the present state of the war the likelihood of Japanese POWs resorting to extremes is less than it

¹⁹ M Moriki, *Kaura no Shutsugeki* (Tokyo: Konnichi no Wadaisha, 1972), p. 181.

²⁰ Secretary Army to Secretary External Affairs, TOPSEC 1906 29 August 1944 (NAA A989 44/925/1/140).

was some time ago, especially if any disobedience of orders is promptly and firmly handled from the start'.²¹ (The matter under discussion with Area Command on this occasion was not the movement to Hay but LHQ's proposal that the free issue of cigarettes be discontinued so that POWs would have to end their ban on productive work, so that they could earn money with which to buy them. Nevertheless it illustrates the climate of opinion at LHQ.) Takahara's memoirs indicate that this factor could operate in quite the contrary direction — that in some of the POWs at Cowra the succession of Japanese defeats at Saipan and elsewhere evoked the response: 'We cannot sit idly by and watch Japan go down. Now is the time for us to take resolute action'.²²

The breakout

Cowra POW Camp was a 12-sided polygon resembling a giant hotcross bun of about 650 metres diameter, divided by the arms of the cross into four individual compounds each about 7 hectares in area. The Japanese other ranks, 1,104 in number, occupied Compound B. Each compound was surrounded by three barbed wire fences about 2 metres high and 10 metres apart. Attached to the inside of the middle fence were three coils of 'concertina' barbed wire with a further coil overhanging at the top. The area between the middle and the outer fence was filled with a tangle of barbed wire to a height of about 1.25 metres.²³ At the extremity of each arm of the cross there was a sentry in a tower about 6 metres in height armed with a light machine gun or rifle. There were also sentries armed with submachine guns posted on beats along the outer fence of the polygon. The camp was guarded by the 22nd Garrison Battalion consisting of troops whose age or medical condition disqualified them from frontline service. The battalion consisted of four rifle companies. B Compound was the responsibility of B Company.

As we have already observed, the battalion received two medium machine guns (Vickers) after the Sydney conference. These were allotted to B Company and sited as shown in Figure 3.1 with each gun clamped on its tripod to fire on fixed lines along the concertina wire inside the middle of the three fences.²⁴

21 SM 7500 (NAA MP742 225/9/435).

22 Takahara, part 63, p. 35.

23 Christison Inquiry, p. 4.

24 Christison Inquiry, Exhibit C.

Figure 3.1. Compound B, showing locations of breakouts

Source. DCS Sissons

On the basis of the location of each man's sleeping hut, the Japanese organised themselves into four groups to breach the fences at the four places shown in black on the diagram.²⁵ The two groups escaping into 'Broadway' (the wide lane separating two eastern from the two western compounds) were contained there. The two breaches of the external perimeter of the polygon were, however, more successful. Those who got through the northernmost of these were able to do so before the crew of No. 1 Vickers Gun took posts. Once they were through, they were able to attack No. 2 Vickers Gun (situated only about 50 metres from the wire) and kill its two gunners before they could fire more than 85 rounds.²⁶ The removal of No. 2 Vickers Gun left the wire unguarded where the eastern breach occurred. The grave risks involved in leaving this gun unmanned and unprotected by covering fire so close to the wire should have been very obvious to Brown and his officers; for the escape

²⁵ Christison Inquiry, Exhibit X (testimony of Yoshida Hiroshi, Leader of Squad 28).

²⁶ Christison Inquiry, pp. 33–37.

of Second Lt Naka Masao the previous year had shown them the speed with which the wire could be breached. Naka had escaped at 11 pm and was not recaptured until five hours later, by which time he was 7 kilometres from the camp.²⁷ At the Court of Inquiry convened to report on his escape, Naka gave a demonstration in which he crossed the three fences and the intervening entanglements in 2 minutes 43 seconds ‘casually smoking a cigarette throughout the performance’.²⁸

The loss of the gun could easily have had even more serious consequences than the death of its crew, both of whom continued to fight the gun until overrun — a feat of supreme devotion for which they were posthumously awarded George Crosses. It seems that the gunner was still firing when he was killed and that it devolved upon his assistant to deactivate the weapon. Untrained in the mechanism of the Vickers Gun, he did this by the practical but unconventional method of removing the ammunition belt and its feed-block, thereby saving the lives of many of his comrades. Had any of his assailants, however, been experienced machine-gunners, they would merely have replaced the feed-block and belt, recocked the weapon, and opened fire.²⁹

Col Brown was an experienced machine gun officer and was well aware of the basic fact that ‘machine guns have only limited means of protecting themselves’³⁰ and must have covering fire. The concept underlying his fire plan appears to have been that No. 2 Vickers Gun would be covered by five men and a light machine gun to its right and by No. 1 Vickers Gun. (It may perhaps be for this reason that No. 2 Gun was placed so close to the wire. If it were placed further back along its own line of fire, it might have become masked from No. 1 Gun by one of the huts). Brown, however, was short of troops. At the Sydney conference he had been given the two Vickers guns, but no additional men. He allotted the guns to B Company, whose establishment of other ranks was 107. Each Vickers Gun would need a crew of three men plus five men to provide covering fire for it. To man it for 24 hours a day would thus require an additional 24 men. Thus the two guns would require an increase in the company strength from 107 to 155. And so Brown decided that the gun crews and the men covering them would take posts only when the alarm sounded. And even then he had to rely on A Company for the covering party.³¹ In the event, by the time No. 1 Gun and the covering party had taken posts, No. 2 Gun had been overrun.

27 Record Book of Escapes of POWs and Internees (NAA B3813).

28 ‘Notes from camp intelligence reports, No. 6’ (AWM 780/3/2).

29 Christison Inquiry, pp. 36–37.

30 Great Britain, War Office, *Machine Gun Training* (London, HMSO, 1925), §91.

31 Christison Inquiry, Exhibit A.

It was, presumably, because of this defective fire plan that Brown and B Company's Officer-Commanding were removed from the Active List shortly afterwards. To us with the advantage of hindsight it seems clear that Brown should have had the men sleeping in pits besides the guns instead of in their huts. He may have been disinclined to contemplate this because the men were elderly. It would, however, have been more prudent for him to have done this and then, when his medical officers complained, to have referred the matter for resolution to Area Command.

In my opinion Gen. Plant and his staff must bear some of the responsibility for the debacle. First, in providing Brown with the guns but no additional men, they were saddling him with a problem of obvious difficulty. Secondly, having done this, they appear during the eight weeks that followed to have taken no steps (such as inspections or the despatch of liaison officers) to satisfy themselves that he was coping with the problem satisfactorily.

There were, as we have stated, 1,104 Japanese in Compound B at the time of the breakout. Of these the Court of Inquiry found that 588 got through the two breaches into Broadway, 378 got outside the camp through the other two breaches, and 138 remained inside Compound B. Of these 138, 20 committed suicide before or during the breakout.³²

The 588 who got into Broadway were in two groups. One moved north to attack the northern gates of the camp. Thirty of them were killed by rifle fire from the detail guarding A Company's offices or from the light machine guns in the towers above each gate.³³ The other group moved south. They had two objectives: (i) to force the southern gates of the camp; (ii) to release the 12 inmates of the Japanese officers' compound (D3) located at the south-west end of Broadway. Of this group, about 37 appeared to have died — including nine outside the officers' compound, seven inside it and three at the southern gates.³⁴ The officers' compound appears to have been effectively covered by the light machine gun in the western of the two towers at the southern entrance to Broadway. Four magazines (about 120 rounds) were fired from it.³⁵ The southern gates were protected by riflemen, firing into them. Some shots travelled the entire length of Broadway, injuring Australian soldiers manning a light machine gun outside the northern gates. That many of the POWs who escaped into Broadway survived is probably due to the shelter provided by the large storm-water drains there.

Of the 378 who got outside the camp, 334 were brought back by patrols — in other words they were found outside the immediate vicinity of the camp. Many got as far as 15 kilometres from the camp; some were not recaptured until eight days later.

32 Christison Inquiry, p. 120.

33 Christison Inquiry, p. 18.

34 Christison Inquiry, pp. 30, 118.

35 Christison Inquiry, p. 67. Takahara, part 67, p. 35.

Of these 334, 309 were alive and 25 were dead.³⁶ With, I think, five exceptions (to which I shall refer later), these 25 either committed suicide or died of gunshot wounds that they had received while getting through the wire. It seems that the bodies of the bulk of the remaining 44 (i.e. 378–334) were found in the paddock beyond the wire-netting farm fence.³⁷ Presumably they died of wounds received from the light machine gun and rifles hastily deployed between the compound and the farm fence, in front of B Company's huts.

Less information has survived about the location of bodies in or close to the barbed wire. We are, however, told that the bodies of 15 POWs were found at No. 2 Vickers Gun³⁸ and 23 in the concertina wire at the northern most breach. The casualties appear to have been lightest among those escaping through the breach to the north of Tower F. Only about four bodies appear to have been found there.³⁹ They were probably killed by Vickers Gun No. 2 before it was overrun. The guard in Tower F was armed only with a submachine gun (whose range was too short) and a rifle, and soon ran out of ammunition.⁴⁰

The court of inquiry

In 1942 the United Kingdom and German governments on the initiative of the former entered into an agreement that, whenever a POW was killed or injured, the Detaining Power should immediately hold an official inquiry at which evidence should be taken from eyewitnesses (including fellow POWs) and that a statement of the facts as disclosed by the evidence should be communicated to the enemy through the Protecting Power. The agreement was enlarged to include the British Dominions at their request. There had been a number of instances where British POWs had been shot and it was felt by the British and Dominion governments that such an agreement might have a deterrent effect on German guards. This agreement in 1949 became Article 121 of the international POW Convention; but during the Second World War it was merely a bilateral arrangement between the British and the German governments. Although Japan was not a party to the Agreement, the New Zealand and the Australian authorities nevertheless decided to adopt these procedures at Featherston and Cowra. The following signal, however, despatched by the Adjutant-General to the Commander-in-Chief Australian Military Forces within 36 hours of the news of Cowra reaching Melbourne, demonstrates that LHQ was prepared to accord no more than lipservice to the principles underlying the Anglo-German Agreement:

36 Patrols from the Training brigade brought in 145 alive and uninjured, four wounded and 17 dead (Christison Inquiry, p. 92). Patrols from the POW camp brought in 160 alive and eight dead (Christison Inquiry, Exhibit S).

37 Report by the Director, War Graves Service, undated (NAA MP742 132/1/211A).

38 NAA CP337/1 POW 39, p. 27.

39 Christison Inquiry, Exhibit R.

40 Christison Inquiry, p. 79.

Similar event occurred with Japanese PW in New Zealand last year. We have copies of governmental and diplomatic communications which clearly show policy successfully adopted by New Zealand in conjunction with United Kingdom. United Kingdom authorities then emphasized that affair should be handled normally by a military Court of Inquiry and if findings so justified charges should subsequently be laid against PW. *Essential function of Court is to produce a report which will be of maximum value diplomatically and show that shooting was fully justified and that onus entirely on PW. Local administrative aspects should not be introduced on any account.* [Sissons' emphasis]⁴¹

(This signal in fact misrepresents in an important respect the advice given by the United Kingdom to the New Zealand authorities; the relevant cable read 'if the [court of inquiry's] findings justify, charges would subsequently be laid against Prisoners *or guards* [Sissons' emphasis].)⁴²

Gen. Plant was instructed by the Adjutant-General to convene the necessary Court of Inquiry and to appoint a Col. FH Christison as its president.⁴³ Christison was a name unknown to the general public until 1981 when Alan Fitzgerald's *The Italian Farming Soldiers* appeared. One of the chapters of this book is devoted to the Rowville incident in which an Italian POW was shot dead by an Australian officer in March 1946 in very suspicious circumstances. Fitzgerald reveals that, in order to cover up this incident, the Army appointed a Court of Inquiry presided over by the same Col. Christison. This inquiry duly exonerated the officers involved. Times had, however, changed since 1944. By 1946 all Australian POWs in Italy had been repatriated. Furthermore, the Minister for the Army had already heard some very disquieting things about how Rowville was being run from a fellow minister who had a number of Italians in his constituency. On this occasion the Minister for the Army minuted the Court of Inquiry's report as 'the most unsatisfactory ... that I can ever recollect having read' and ordered a fresh investigation by a civil judge. On the advice of the latter, several officers at the camp were court-martialled.⁴⁴ It seems reasonable to infer that by 1944 Christison was regarded by higher authority as an officer whom they could rely on not to unearth unpalatable or inconvenient truths.

On the afternoon of 5 August 1944, before he departed for Cowra, Christison was called to LHQ where he received a briefing by the Deputy Adjutant-General II and the Director of POWs & Internees. Then, on August 8th, LHQ decided to despatch to Cowra an officer from the DPW&I 'for purpose of supplementing instructions given to Col. Christison as to handling of Court of Inquiry on [lines?] similar [to?]'⁴⁵

41 Landforces to Milbase Sydney A69531 of 6 August 1944 (NAA 1973/254 675/R1/2).

42 Dominions' Secretary to New Zealand 46, 27 February 1943 (NAA A1608 AK 20/1/1).

43 Landforces to Milbase Sydney A69494 of 5 August 1955 (NAA 1973/254 675/R1/2).

44 A Fitzgerald, *The Italian Farming Soldiers* (Melbourne University Press, 1981), pp. 153–65.

45 As in the original text.

incident in NZ in 1943'. This officer duly arrived in Sydney on August 9th with a TOP SECRET letter for personal delivery to Gen. Plant, who was requested to arrange for his immediate movement to Cowra.⁴⁶

The court heard witnesses at Cowra from August 8th to 15th, on which date it adjourned to Sydney to consider its findings, which it issued on September 4th.

Its principal finding was that:

The firing was stopped at the earliest possible moment having regard to the circumstances existing. It is considered that the firing was controlled and not excessive and that the casualties among the Japanese prisoners of war were not unnecessarily heavy.⁴⁷

It reached this conclusion after questioning a number of witnesses about the number of rounds they had fired and the time at which they had ceased fire. It also examined an analysis of the ammunition expended by the garrison battalion (Total: 11,922 rounds). But, in the years that have followed, some of the Australians who participated have come forward with credible information that there was some indiscriminate firing.⁴⁸ Nevertheless Takahara and Moriki's recollections of the hours they lay in Broadway that night lead me to the conclusion that, as an overall description, this finding is not unreasonable.⁴⁹ The fact that instead of firing on the group of 73 POWs who, having escaped through the outer perimeter, concentrated on the high ground above the Battalion Headquarters, the party sent after them were content to contain them until daylight suggests to me a high standard of discipline and humanity.

Less satisfactory is the court's finding that 'there is no evidence of ... the illegitimate use of force during the recapture of escapees by the Australian Military Forces patrols'. The *raison d'être* underlying the Anglo-German agreement was that (i) the knowledge that there must be an inquiry deterred the enemy (and one's own) forces from unlawful violence against prisoners; (ii) should this deterrent fail, the agreement enabled the Detaining Power to forestall enemy reprisals by demonstrating to the enemy by the trial of those responsible that such ill-treatment was contrary to its policy and would not be tolerated. The testimony of witnesses before the inquiry brought to light two cases of isolated shootings in circumstances which called for

⁴⁶ War Diary, DPW&I, LHQ (AWM 1/1/14).

⁴⁷ Christison Inquiry, Exhibit E.

⁴⁸ E.g., KS Mackenzie, *Dead Men Rising* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1975), pp. 265–67; H Gordon, *Die Like the Carp* (Sydney: Cassell, 1978), p. 120. Although *Dead Men Rising* is a work of fiction, its author was a member of the garrison battalion and present at the breakout. On certain matters (e.g., topography, camp-layout, and some descriptions of particular officers) the author sticks closely to the facts. There would appear to be no reason to believe that he is misrepresenting the general attitudes and behaviour of the troops.

⁴⁹ Takahara, part 67; Moriki, pp. 192–94.

investigation — classical examples of the kind of incident that the Anglo-German agreement required to be investigated. The Christison Inquiry, however, in each case showed a complete lack of curiosity, and called no further witnesses.

A sergeant told the court that, in the course of collecting dead and wounded in the area south-east of the camp, he had come upon a corpse with 'his brains half out of his head'. From the evidence it seems that this was at least 300 metres (and possibly a good deal further) from the camp.⁵⁰ This seems too far from the camp for aimed rifle fire during the hours of darkness. The most likely explanation would be that this Japanese was either killed lawfully by a burst of machine gun fire from one of the towers during the night or that he was shot at close range by someone combing the area on foot in daylight. The court appears to have made no effort to narrow the possibilities by re-examining the sentries on the towers or searching the immediate vicinity for spent rounds.

Late in the afternoon of August 5th unarmed patrols from the Training Brigade were deployed in an area about 10 kilometres north of the camp, where large numbers of Japanese had been reported. They recaptured about 70. One of these patrols was ambushed on a timbered hill shortly after dusk and its leader (a subaltern) clubbed to death. His corpse was brought back about midnight, whereupon a company from the brigade was armed and sent to the hill to search for any Japanese still there. They encountered the corpses of eight Japanese who had hanged themselves. Shortly after dawn (when the company was about to leave the area) the discovery of a badly injured Japanese was reported to the second-in-command. The latter testified to the court that:

I went down and had a look at him, and he was badly wounded. He appeared to have a wound somewhere down in the groin, and there was one in his back. He had been hit on the head, and I do not know whether he may have been shot. I could not see. He was in a pretty bad way. He was quite conscious and moving about a bit. I left him in charge of a sergeant and three men, and continued with the patrol ... later on I was informed that the Japanese had died.⁵¹

The court pursued the matter no further. Some years later, however, the staff of the Australian War Memorial discovered that there was more that the court could have found out, had it been so minded. When working through the office files of wartime units in search of items of potential historical value, they found a file on the subject among the records of the training battalion that provided the patrol. There we may see the overall report by the Battalion Commander to brigade on the battalion's activities during that day. He refers to the incident as follows: '1 found badly wounded, subsequently died while being carried by patrol.' The Company

50 Christison Inquiry, p. 72 (testimony of L./Sgt Schafer).

51 Christison Inquiry, p. 97 (Lt. WB Atkinson).

Commander's version is: 'One Jap who died resisting arrest was found at 664 308' [the grid reference for the point at which the body of the Australian subaltern was found, Sissons]. More straightforward is the original report of the Section Commander: '1 kill 0600 hrs by rifle' to which in different handwriting has been added the words 'trying to escape'.⁵² It was, no doubt, because of the presence of the latter suspicious phrase in so many of the notifications of death from German prison camps that the British Government had initiated negotiations for the 1942 Agreement.

That Japanese was killed at 6 am (Sunday, August 6th). At about 1.30 pm that day a civilian carrying a double-barrelled shotgun encountered six escapees near an outcrop of rocks on a farm named 'Claremont' about 7 kilometres from the POW Camp. He shot two of them dead. In a statement to the police he said that he had observed one of the Japanese at a distance of about 1.5 kilometres, had followed him, and was then surprised by the man and his companions among the rocks at a distance of only 6 metres. He claimed that he shot in self-defence when they moved to surround him and his son and to throw stones at them. Rumours that something of this nature had occurred reached at least one member of the Court of Inquiry the following day.⁵³

Although the court's terms of reference did not empower it to compel the attendance of civilian witnesses, they did authorise it to enquire into 'the conduct of any person or persons' in connection with 'all events, matters and facts related to or any way connected with the breakout'. An incident of this nature was obviously germane to their inquiry, and the court was free to invite information about it from civil witnesses (including the police) and to demand it from the soldiers who must have collected the bodies. Had it done so, it would have discovered that, in the course of recapturing the four surviving Japanese, a Warrant Officer in charge of an armed party from the Training Brigade shot dead one more of them.⁵⁴

It may well be that in each of these four incidents the killings were lawful; but until the court had heard evidence and examined witnesses it was in no position to say so.

The Adjutant-General could encourage his subordinates to engage in such tasks in a less than vigorous fashion only at the risk of certain deleterious consequences. As one incumbent of that office had described himself, the Adjutant-General was 'the conscience of the Army': now he was encouraging unconscionable action. It was also the Adjutant-General who was responsible for maintaining discipline throughout the Army: yet he was setting the example that offences should not be uncovered where this might prove inconvenient. Such an example must have

52 AWM 780/10/2.

53 Maj. HS Williams to Director POWs & Internees, LHQ, 8 August 1944 (Department of Defence, Archives and Historical Section, PC 264-11-1100 Item 43).

54 GOC HQ NSW L of C Area to LHQ 14235, 11 December 1955 (NAA AA 1977/460 255/6/425).

a demoralising and corrupting effect. But there was a more tangible danger. The government, the Services and the community were agreed that nothing in the treatment of Japanese POWs must afford the Japanese with a pretext for retaliating against Australian POWs. The implementation of this policy devolved primarily upon the Adjutant-General. As the writings of such people as Moriki and Takahara attest, he and his subordinates had carried it out with remarkable success. But they could maintain the system only by searching out its deficiencies. In order to find these and remove them, it was necessary to ascertain whether or not someone had blown out the brains of a wounded Japanese in the gully 300 metres south-east of the POW Camp: yet the court had been discouraged from doing so.

It is easy, at this distance in time, to be critical of the Adjutant-General and his advisers. But they had no legal duty to hold any inquiry at all; for Japan was not a party to the 1942 Agreement. Their object, to minimise the chance of retaliation against Allied POWs that any admission of ill-conduct might provoke, was responsible, laudable and humane. Indeed, it is hard to imagine any officer or official acting differently in the circumstances.

In so far as one of the underlying objectives of the 1942 Agreement was to lessen the possibility of retaliation, it is ironical that, in the name of this objective, liberties were taken with its procedures. I imagine that the same pressures will weigh equally heavily on those called upon to implement Article 121 of the present POW Convention, irrespective of their nationality. The strongest guarantee that Article 121 will be faithfully carried out is probably the independent right of any POW (including, of course, the eyewitness to a shooting) to complain directly to the representative of the Protecting Power. (Had this right not been already embodied in Article 42 of the 1929 Convention, the 1942 Agreement and its successor might have been difficult to negotiate.) So far as I am aware, no attempt was ever made by the Australian authorities to interfere with the operation of Article 42. Three POWs witnessed the 'Claremont' shootings. They appear to have made no complaints to the Protecting Power. They may have regarded the shootings as justified. Alternatively the shame of being a prisoner, that caused them to break out, may have prevented them from approaching the Protecting Power. Perhaps they are still alive today.

Australian attitudes to POWs

I have been asked in this article to refer to the feelings of Australians at that time towards the POWs of various nationalities held in Australia.

Excluding merchant seamen, the total numbers of POWs in Australia in the Second World War were: Italians 18,164, Japanese 5,103, and Germans 1,492.⁵⁵ All the Germans and more than a quarter of the Italians had arrived in Australia before

---

55 History of the Directorate of POWs & Internees, pp. 101, 106 (AWM 780/1/6).

Japan entered the war. The Japanese POWs were late arrivals. On 31 December 1942 there were 10 (of whom eight appear to have been naval airmen and two Korean *gunzoku* [civilian employee of the military]).⁵⁶ On 30 November 1943 there were 456.⁵⁷ On 1 July 1944 (one month before the breakout) the figure had reached 1,415, of whom 1,055 were Army, 122 were Navy and 238 were labour troops. (The nationalities among the latter category were: Chinese 90, Korean 82, Formosan 61, Japanese 4, Javanese 1).⁵⁸

The Australian authorities did not regard the Italian POWs with much anxiety. In January 1941 an Australian infantry division had captured 40,000 Italian prisoners at Bardia and another 25,000 at Tobruk after battles each of only two days' duration. They regarded these Italian POWs very differently from the way they regarded the Japanese POWs. Takahara's description of the Italian POWs could very well have been written by one of their Australian guards:

Although we were both soldiers of the Axis Powers wearing the same burgundy PW clothing, we could not even in our most generous moments regard them as a strong military force. They were cheerful, amiable, easy-going fellows. From morning till night the strains of the mandolin, the guitar and the violin emanated from their Compound. I suppose you could say that they maintained some semblance of a military organisation; but one and all they wanted nothing more to do with the War. They were much better off than at the front. They didn't care who won or lost. They spent their time wishing for a speedy end to the war and to be reunited with their fiancées back home.⁵⁹

In May 1943 the Australian cabinet approved a scheme for assigning Italian POWs to Australian farmers: it was argued that experience had shown that, if the Fascist agitator type were excluded, the Italian POWs were docile and, if firmly but humanely handled, good workers.⁶⁰ By this means, at virtually no risk to public safety, food production for the Allied war effort could be significantly increased. Soon the great majority of Italian POWs were living and working on Australian farms, unguarded.⁶¹

Even if they had been prepared to engage in work of this nature (which they were not), it is inconceivable that the Australians would have considered a similar regime for the Japanese POWs, whom they regarded as implacably hostile and ferocious. Once again Takahara convincingly portrays the atmosphere:

⁵⁶ Takahara, part 49, p. 35.

⁵⁷ NAA MP742 255/10/166.

⁵⁸ Cable, External Affairs (Canberra) to Australia House (London), 9847, 6 October 1944 (NAA 1973/362 26/9 Part 12).

⁵⁹ Takahara, part 50, pp. 38–39.

⁶⁰ Fitzgerald, 1981, p. 28.

⁶¹ Fitzgerald, 1981, p. 140.

When we passed by in our trucks, the children on the road-side stared silently at us, as we stared silently at them. Their faces were blank and hostile. But when Italians passed, the children would clap and wave and smile. The Italians in response would call out and throw them sweets. The children had been taught that short men with shaven heads were not human. Their parents, their teachers — everyone — told them spinechilling stories how 'The Japanese are beasts who if they encounter women torture them to death and if they encounter men cut off their heads'.⁶²

Australian attitudes to the Japanese sprang partly from long-standing anxiety that Australia was militarily vulnerable.

In 1911 Miho, a vice-consul at the Japanese consulate in Sydney, wrote in a despatch to his government that the Russo-Japanese war had had a profound effect on Australian thinking. He argued that originally the White Australia policy had meant merely the protection of Australian workers against the competition of coloured immigrants and had been expressed in such terms. But, with the approach of Federation, those whose interests were involved had to secure the support of voters to whom coloured labour was not a threat. They therefore came to base their appeal on race prejudice pure and simple; but not, as yet, on fear of invasion. He continued:

But with the Russo-Japanese War, fear of Japan entered into it. Today, hostility to Japan and fear of Japan is the backbone of the whole White Australia Policy. Before the war, although Japanese were kept out, this was done merely as part of the exclusion of Asians generally. Indeed, they tended to treat us with some of the indulgence that one extends to precocious children. But as soon as we were victorious they came to fear that we would invade Australia. They doubt our every deed. If they see our tourists taking photographs in the streets, they immediately think that they are spies. They fear Japan in the way that you fear a bogeyman in the dark because you cannot see natural phenomena around you.⁶³

These feelings increased as the century progressed and Britain's relative naval power declined. They accelerated as Japan moved southward. They intensified with the successive news of atrocities following the Japanese advance in China,⁶⁴ Hong Kong,⁶⁵ New Britain,⁶⁶ and Papua;⁶⁷ of the execution of captured Australian airmen;⁶⁸ and of the starvation and ill-treatment of Australian POWs on the Burma-Siam Railway.⁶⁹

62 Takahara, part 59, p. 38.

63 Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Nihon Gaikō Bunsho*, vol. 68, pp. 548–50.

64 *Argus* (Melbourne), 15 January, 3 and 22 February 1938.

65 Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, vol. 378, cols 930–31 (10 March 1942). *Argus*, 11 March 1942.

66 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 April 1942.

67 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 November 1943.

68 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 October 1943.

69 Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, vol. 396, cols 1029–30 (28 January 1944). *Argus*, 31 January 1944. In the cables received via the International Committee of the Red Cross notifying the deaths of individual Australian POWs on the railway, cholera, beri-beri and dysentery were appearing as causes of death by September 1943; *eiyo shutchoshō* (i.e. malnutrition), by July 1944 (NAA 1973/362 P26/9 Parts 9–12).

There is no doubt that deep hostility to the Japanese was widespread. HBS Gullett, who commanded a company in New Guinea, writes:

Because of the things [the Japanese] did to our dead and wounded we hated them. We never gave them a chance if we could help it. If an Italian or German were running away, one might let him go, but never a Japanese. You would kill him as you would a snake, because the next day you or a friend might not see him first.⁷⁰

Feelings of deep hostility to the Japanese were, no doubt, present in the troops posted to Cowra. In his successful defence of the camp leader (Sgt Maj. Kanazawa) on a charge of murder, the Defending Officer in his cross-examination of the guard who discovered the bodies of the two machine-gunners had no difficulty in bringing this to the surface.

Q. You don't like them [the Japanese] at all, do you?

A. No.

Q. Would you like to see them all shot?

A. It wouldn't worry me. A dead Jap is the best Jap.⁷¹

To me the important thing is that as a result of a mixture of policy, discipline, humanity and tradition, it was to a large degree kept under control.

It must not be thought that hostility was unlimited in its extent. Figure 3.2 is one of a number of advertisements published in the newspapers by the Department of Information in April 1942 as part of a campaign called 'The Japanese as he is', which sought to strengthen the war effort by fomenting anti-Japanese feeling.⁷² This experiment received so much criticism from the community that it was brought to a premature close and never repeated.⁷³ Typical of many was the protest by the League of Nations Union:

We shall have to live in a world which contains Japanese and Germans and Italians and, while we will fight to the death to defeat Nazism and Fascism, we would still wish to fight with such chivalry as is possible in modern war and to refrain from methods (whether in fighting or propaganda) which only the Nazis could approve.⁷⁴

70 HBS Gullett, *Not as a Duty Only: An infantryman's war* (Melbourne University Press, 1976), p. 127.

71 NAA CP 337/1 POW 39 (as quoted in Gordon, 1978, p. 211).

72 See the *Argus*, 2–14 April 1942.

73 J Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors: Censorship and propaganda in World War II* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1984), pp. 115–21.

74 *Argus*, 13 April 1942.

Trained to hate from childhood "Hate is the basis of Japanese militarism . . . hate for the foreigner because, because, because . . . hate—cold, calculated hate—which has been fostered for generations.

Young Japan learned to hate while we were playing with marbles and enjoying the freedom of democracy. Young Japan studied its army text books, with vicious enthusiasm—with hate based on propaganda which "taught" how Japan's legitimate demands had been thwarted on every hand by foreigners.

Soon, they were told—every son of Nippon would be given a chance of wreaking vengeance on all who attempted to obstruct the divine mission of the Emperor. The obligatory schooling of 10 or 12 was sent out to boys' practice with his heart full of this 'synthetic' hate. Before lunging at the hanging bag, he stuck a few straws on the top for hair and dabbed on a pair of blue, foreign eyes, and he hoped one day that it would be a real foreigner at the end of his bayonet—not an effigy—any foreigner, especially a white one.

... are they to ravage our homes?

In every country he has conquered, the Japanese has murdered, plundered, burned and tortured. Men and women have been sent to the sword, and their homes to the fire. No one has been safe from the cruel, bloodstained hands of Japanese soldiery. But, as Japan has sinned, so shall she pay.

We Australians (you and I), reared from birth in the ways of peace, stand now in righteous anger. Yes, there is anger in our hearts against the lies, brutality and murders of Japan, and in our hearts there is love for freedom greater than our love for life. We stand united with our Allies to protect our homes and our heritage. We shall throw back the Jap where he belongs.

We've always despised them —

NOW WE MUST SMASH THEM!

Figure 3.2. 'The Jap as he really is', Department of Information, March–April 1942

Source. *Argus* (Melbourne), 7 April 1942, p. 4

Takahara and Moriki write of the friendship they received from a number of the Australians they encountered. Takahara speaks of the unlimited kindness (*shinsetsu kiwamari nashi*) of the drivers and guards who escorted him along the long trek from Adelaide River to Alice Springs in the bitter and dangerous days immediately following the destruction of Darwin. The guards were always smiling. They talked with them. They gave them cigarettes and chocolates. They shared their newspapers with them.⁷⁵ 'Although we were prisoner and guard, there was absolutely no feeling of tension' (*Horyo to bampei to iedomo, kinchōkan nado wa mattaku naku*).⁷⁶ Moriki writes in similar strain of his guards at the Brisbane Military Hospital: 'they were amiable men with a very human humour' (*Hitonattsukoi, ningen-mi ga jika ni furete kuru yūmoa*). He describes how these men would exert themselves and clown in order to cheer up the dispirited POW and how one of them was so appalled when Moriki told him that no Japanese could ever return to his family that he offered to take him in on his farm after the war (*Kare no wareware ni taisuru taido wa, ningen-dōshi de atte, teki mikata to iu kanjō wa mattaku nakatta*).⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Takahara, part 31, pp. 26–27.

⁷⁶ Takahara, part 34, p. 26.

⁷⁷ Moriki, pp. 154–55.

Nor must it be thought that hostility was felt towards the Japanese alone, among the three enemy countries. 'A dead Jap is the best Jap' is an adaptation of the phrase 'A dead German is the best German' coined during the First World War and still much in use in Australia throughout the Second World War. Nor was anti-Italian feeling: it was an Italian POW, not a Japanese, that was shot at Rowville.

As I see it, anti-Japanese feeling was not a significant factor at the Cowra breakout. Had it been a riot by German POW the consequences would have been the same.⁷⁸

DCS Sissons
Department of International Relations
Research School of Pacific Studies
Australian National University
1 June 1984

---

⁷⁸ At Murchison on 21 September 1942 when German POWs objecting to their blankets being dyed red advanced on their guards the latter opened fire. Nine POWs were injured (NAA A 981 Treaties 738).

This text is taken from *Bridging Australia and Japan: The writings of David Sissons, historian and political scientist, Volume 2*, edited by Keiko Tamura and Arthur Stockwin, published 2020 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/BAJ.2020.03