



EDITION 26
NUMBER 1
SEPTEMBER 2025

Editorial

Articles

A Fool and His Gold: Representing Soviet
Jewishness in Vladimir Korsh-Sablin's *Seekers
of Happiness* (1936)

Saskia Heyn, University of Basel

Uren View vs Kappe Reality

Chris Murphy, Monash University

Eras

Eras is an online, peer-reviewed journal edited and produced by postgraduate students from the School of Philosophical, Historical, and Indigenous Studies (SOPHIS) at Monash University, Australia. Providing an international platform for innovative research, Eras encourages submissions from postgraduate, honours, and early career researchers.

We accept articles and book reviews in the fields of Ancient Cultures, Bioethics, History, Human Rights, International Studies, Jewish Civilisation, Philosophy, Religious Studies, and Medieval and Renaissance Studies. Submissions from other disciplines with significant historical content are also strongly encouraged, including Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Economics, Gender Studies, Indigenous Studies, Literature, Politics, and Sociology.

Table of Contents

Eras

Volume 26, Number 1, September 2025

Editorial

4 Editorial

Leah Anderson, Monash University

Research Articles

6 A Fool and His Gold: Representing Soviet Jewishness in Vladimir Korsh-Sablin's
Seekers of Happiness (1936)

Saskia Heyn, University of Basel

33 Uren View vs Kappe Reality

Chris Murphy, Monash University

Editorial

Leah Anderson
Editor-in-Chief
Monash University

The 26th volume of *Eras* would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of our peer reviewers, contributors, committee members, advisors, and readership. Thank you all for helping to bring together such an engaging and thought-provoking volume.

This edition carries a particular focus on historical studies. The contributions engage deeply with the past, not simply to document it, but to challenge, reinterpret, and breathe new life into the stories we tell about it. We are proud to provide a platform where such critical and creative approaches to history can be explored and debated.

I would like to use this space to extend a special thank you to our authors for trusting *Eras* with your work. Your research reflects not only intellectual rigor, but a strong commitment to making historical inquiry accessible and relevant. This volume features two standout articles. Saskia Heyn, from the University of Basel in Switzerland, offers a compelling exploration of Soviet-era Judaism through the lens of the 1936 film *Seekers of Happiness*. The second article, written by Chris Murphy of Monash University, interrogates the narratives of prisoners of war on the Burma–Thailand Railway. Both contributions represent *Eras*' ongoing commitment to publishing exceptional academic research.

I am also deeply grateful to the outstanding peer reviewers who made this volume possible. I personally reached out to dozens of individuals, many of whom generously offered their time or recommended colleagues, demonstrating the collaborative spirit that underpins this

journal. To every academic who took time out of their busy schedules to support this work, thank you for helping to uphold the integrity and quality of *Eras*.

Historical research is always a conversation across time, and this issue reflects many such conversations between authors and sources, reviewers and writers, and between past and present. To all who contributed, thank you. Your work continues to shape not only this journal, but the broader field of historical scholarship.

Leah Anderson,

Editor-in-Chief

A Fool and His Gold

Representing Soviet Jewishness in Vladimir Korsh-Sablin's *Seekers of Happiness* (1936)

Saskia Heyn
University of Basel

Abstract: From 1917 onward, cinema as a medium occupied a position of considerable privilege in the Soviet Union. In the 1920s and 1930s, it saw increasing degrees of state regulation as well as the imposition of Socialist Realist standards as the government used film to further its agenda. Vladimir Korsh-Sablin's *Seekers of Happiness* (1936) is an excellent example of a Socialist Realist work. Despite this, it is absent from cinema readers and cinema dictionaries, leaving the intersection between its narrative choices and its historical context uncharted. *Seekers of Happiness* makes use of the antisemitic "Wandering Jew" and "luftmensch" stereotypes in its depiction and productivises these stereotypes: the "Wandering Jew" becomes rooted in the fabric of a collective farm, and the "luftmensch" is given concrete tasks with tangible outcomes. The film is more than a product designed for mass entertainment – it is a translation of Soviet policy onto the silver screen. This article considers *Seekers of Happiness* within the historical framework of its development as part of a Kremlin campaign aimed at encouraging Jewish migration to Birobidzhan oblast, as well as its aim to provide a model for "good" Soviet Jewry and, as such, a reflection of Soviet policy towards the Jewish population at the time. Additionally, the film argues in favour of secularisation as well as intermarriage between different nationalities or races, both of which are considered forms of assimilation and integration into the broader Soviet project.

1. Introduction: The Birobidzhan Project

From many parts of the Soviet Union and from abroad, Jewish migrants from among the working people made their way in 1928 to the Soviet Far East, to the broad rich Taiga, to Birobidzhan that lay along the banks of the Amur River.¹

The Jewish Autonomous Oblast of Birobidzhan was established by government decree in 1928. Located in the Soviet Far East, approximately eight thousand kilometres from Moscow, it was conceived as a secular socialist counterpart to a potential Jewish state in Palestine. The Zionist movement had been outlawed in the Soviet Union under Lenin, and in 1927 the decision was made to “turn Jewish nationalist longings to the advantage of Russia” in the form of an agricultural colony in Birobidzhan.² The Jewish population was told that “Zionism [...] was a tool of British imperialism, while the Biro-Bidzhan [sic] scheme was a means of meeting the great [...] need” of stabilization in the form of a “territorially-rooted nationality.”³

At the time the Soviet Union was founded, no Jewish nation state existed (Israel was not founded until 1948, three years after the end of the Second World War), but nationalist voices among the diaspora were increasingly pushing for one. Francine Hirsch defines diaspora nationalities as those who were “connected to nation states or large ethnic communities [...] outside the Soviet Union.”⁴ Soviet Jews formed one such group, although they did not have anything resembling a national territory of their

¹ *Seekers of Happiness*. DVD. The National Center for Jewish Film, 2007 [1936], 00:03:13. Translations given in quotations are lifted from the subtitles of this edition, they are not my own.

² Eckman, Lester Samuel. “Soviet Policies towards the Jews: From Lenin to Stalin.” Essay. In *Austria – Hungary – Poland – Russia*, ed. Herbert A. Strauss, 1325-1341. Vol. 2 of *Hostages of Modernization*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 1993.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110883299.1325>, p. 1333.

³ Eckman, “Soviet Policies towards the Jews,” 1333.

⁴ Hirsch, Francine. “Race without the Practice of Racial Politics.” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 1 (2002): 30-43. <https://www.jstor.com/stable/2696979>.

own, either within the framework of the Soviet Union or outside of it. Birobidzhan was meant to be the solution to this: “Komzet leaders,” i.e., those responsible for establishing new Jewish kolkhozes throughout the USSR, “effectively used nationalist arguments in their appeals to Jews and sought to undermine the powerful Zionist sentiment among the Jewish masses by proposing an alternate homeland in Russia itself.”⁵ The underlying idea was that by providing Soviet Jews with a national territory, they would integrate more easily and more completely into the Soviet state. Unlike many of its contemporaries, the Soviet government pursued a policy of incorporation rather than assimilation regarding its Jewish minority. Birobidzhan was this policy made manifest, as it provided – at least in theory – a means to integrate a Jewish population into a Soviet system.

From its conception, the Birobidzhan project was riddled with problems. It was “not born of Jewish initiative,” and faced strong opposition from various Komzet leaders who argued that “the climate was too harsh, the soil unsuitable for cultivation, and the area too far from the centres of Jewish population.”⁶ Despite being pushed as a Jewish homeland, the territory never had a Jewish majority population, and initial harvests were abysmally poor due to flooding and inclement weather. How, then, does a government convince its citizens to move to such a place?

The answer lies with mass media presenting Birobidzhan as a promised land. *Seekers of Happiness*, directed by Vladimir Korsh-Sablin and released in 1936, follows a Jewish family as they move to a collective farm in Birobidzhan from an unspecified region abroad. While most of the film’s characters take to life at the kolkhoz like ducks to water, Pinya, the son-in-law, is a schemer who struggles to adjust to his new situation. *Seekers of Happiness* is a propagandistic film and, as such, provides an excellent means of analysing how a party program could be made palatable to a large group of people.

⁵ Eckman, “Soviet Policies towards the Jews,” 1333.

⁶ Levin, Nora. “Birobidzhan 1928-40.” Essay. In *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917* 1, 1:282-311. New York, London: New York University Press, 1988, p. 285.

The film functions in simple terms – at its core lie dichotomies of old versus young, capitalist versus socialist, good versus evil, all easily comprehensible:

Seekers of Happiness presented Soviet Jews from an ideal perspective. The traditional Jewish identity was represented by the older generation, namely, Roza's [sic] mother who opposes the intermarriage at the end of the film. The 'positive' Jew sings optimistic songs, as a clarinetist plays, pessimistically, "The Lament of Israel on the Banks of the Amur."⁷

Although it is a wonderful example of Soviet propaganda filmmaking, there is not much academic literature pertaining to *Seekers of Happiness*. It is absent from Soviet cinema readers and cinema dictionaries, and in the instances where it is mentioned elsewhere, it is often not treated with much depth.⁸ As such, the intersection between the film's narrative choices and its historical situation has largely gone unexplored.

The focus of this paper is how the Jewish population is depicted in *Seekers of Happiness* and how this fits into the overall framework of policies towards them within the Soviet Union at the time. In an initial section, the film is contextualized within the prevalent genre conventions of its time, along with how it was received by a wide audience. The following section focuses on two stereotypes of Jews that occur both within the story world of *Seekers of Happiness* as well as the framework of political discourse – the Wandering Jew and the *luftmensch*.⁹ A final section is dedicated to the Soviet means of

⁷ Shternshis, Anna. "Soviet in Form, National in Content: Russian Jewish Popular Culture." Essay. In *Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, p. 166.

⁸ See Kenez for discussions of genre, Senderovich for notes on antisemitic tropes, and Shternshis for audience reception. While Weinberg does mention *Seekers of Happiness*, he only does so tangentially.

⁹ For the sake of consistency, the names of characters are spelled/transliterated as they appear in the film's subtitles, unless quoted differently in a secondary source. The same applies to terms such as *luftmensch*.

responding to the presence of a Jewish minority and how these appear in the film: assimilation through agrarianisation, intermarriage, and secularisation.¹⁰

2. *Seekers of Happiness*: Genre and Audience Reception

From 1917 onwards, cinema occupied a position of some privilege compared to other media forms in the Soviet Union. Beginning in the late 1920s, however, the variety of films available decreased quite sharply, and imports of foreign films all but ceased under Stalin's rule.¹¹ While Soviet filmmakers continued to produce films, after 1932 their work grew more and more formulaic and repetitive due to the imposition of Socialist Realist standards upon them.¹² Peter Kenez notes that these standards are "bitterly hostile to experimentation with form, for this would impede immediate comprehension by the half-educated and therefore lessen the didactic value of the product."¹³ Additionally, formal experiments inevitably bring about "ambiguity of meaning, [...] [which] a totalitarian political order [such as the Soviet Union] cannot tolerate."¹⁴ It is important to bear in mind that in spite of its name, Socialist Realism does not depict actual reality – it is not a documentary or 'slice of life' genre. Instead, as Kenez aptly remarks, it "replaces genuine realism with an appearance of realism," thereby "preventing the contemplation of the human condition and the investigation of social issues."¹⁵ Socialist Realism exists with one sole purpose: to convince the viewer of the attainability of the Soviet project.

¹⁰ Of course, these answers are inherently intertwined. Soviet Jews did not exist in a vacuum, and so it was of paramount importance for the government to target the question of their nationality and status on multiple fronts.

¹¹ Kenez, Peter. "Soviet Cinema in the Age of Stalin." Essay. In *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*, edited by Richard Taylor and Derek Spring, 54-68. London, New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 55.

¹² Kenez, "Soviet Cinema," 55.

¹³ Kenez, "Soviet Cinema," 56.

¹⁴ Kenez, "Soviet Cinema," 56.

¹⁵ Kenez, "Soviet Cinema," 55.

Seekers of Happiness is one such Socialist Realist film. It is one of many artistic products of a Kremlin campaign “designed not only to publicize the Birobidzhan experiment but also to raise funds and to encourage migration to the region.”¹⁶ In typical Socialist Realist fashion, the film’s characters are “cookie cutters,” that is, they represent stereotyped ideas rather than complex, three-dimensional individuals. The idea was that there should be no other possible interpretation of Rosa, the daughter of a shtetl Jew other than that she is a representative of ‘good’ Soviet Jewry, a dutiful Communist and hard worker, and that the anti-hero Pinya and his avaricious actions can never be anything but an obstacle to the Soviet cause. The film’s final sequence is heavy-handed in its unambiguity: the good Communist Jews all get their happy end, the “pest” Pinya, the sceptical and selfish *luftmensch*, becomes a criminal and loses everything.

The Socialist Realist form follows the *Bildungsroman* template: “In the process of fulfilling a task, the hero or heroine, under the tutelage of a Party worker, acquires an increased understanding of self, the surrounding world, the task of building Communism, the class struggle, the need for vigilance, etc.”¹⁷ Under the guidance of chairman Natan – the film’s most prominently featured Party official – Rosa and her family assimilate into the community of the collective farm. Even Rosa’s initially hesitant mother ultimately agrees that life on a farm under Communism is superior to life in the shtetl. The underlying message is exceedingly obvious: “Those who are content to work in the kolkhoz find their place easily, but the man who searches for gold is disappointed and attempts an illegal border crossing, falling into the hands of the NKVD.”¹⁸ While *Seekers of Happiness* has its comedic

¹⁶ Weinberg, Robert. *Stalin’s Forgotten Zion: Birobidzhan and the Making of a Soviet Jewish Homeland*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, p. 32.

¹⁷ Kenez, “Soviet Cinema,” 56.

¹⁸ Kenez, Peter. “Socialist Realism, 1933-1941.” Essay. In *Cinema & Soviet Society 1917-1953*, 157-85. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 164. The NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs), established in 1917, functioned as the Soviet secret police from 1934 onwards.

moments¹⁹ (it is, after all, a work of middlebrow cinema, designed to appeal to a wide audience), it makes its political points with the utmost seriousness.

The film was exceedingly popular among Jewish viewers, who were happy to have a film depicting Jewish life in a positive light. Although it was by no means the only Soviet film to show Jewish characters onscreen, Anna Shternshis remarks that it was the exception to the rule that there is no evidence of the overarching popularity of Yiddish films.²⁰ *Seekers of Happiness* aside, “no other movie about Jews received as much attention at the time or made such an impact.”²¹

The reasons for its popularity were twofold: For one, *Seekers of Happiness* was “about Jews and Jewish life in the Soviet Union” – people were over the moon to see characters like themselves represented on screen, even if it was in the form of a propaganda film.²² Secondly, many viewers gravitated towards Pinya’s character. Actor Venyamin Zuskin “received both popular and critical acclaim” for his performance, and Pinya was viewed as “the most likable and memorable character in the movie.”²³

Interestingly, given Pinya’s popularity among viewers, the rigid narrative structure of the film appears to have backfired rather spectacularly. In a survey of 225 respondents, Shternshis notes that 211 were “able to quote Zuskin’s lines from the movie, even though many could not recall the details of the plot.”²⁴ Pinya’s downfall was met with sympathy rather than with righteous satisfaction on the part of

¹⁹ Such moments include the axe-murder of a mosquito and a sequence in which the Russian Korney very nearly gets his ears cuffed with a dead fish. They break up possible tensions and lend the film a decidedly comic slant.

²⁰ Shternshis, “Russian Jewish Popular Culture,” 166.

²¹ Shternshis, “Russian Jewish Popular Culture,” 166.

²² Shternshis, “Russian Jewish Popular Culture,” 167.

²³ Shternshis, “Russian Jewish Popular Culture,” 168.

²⁴ Shternshis, “Russian Jewish Popular Culture,” 168.

the viewer. Clearly, the messages of productivisation and assimilation the Soviet government was trying to push got lost somewhere along the way.

3. Productivisation: The “Wandering Jew” and the *Luftmensch*²⁵

Under the Tsarist regime, many Jews had dealt in commerce, crafts, or liberal arts, despite the varying levels of antisemitism displayed towards them by the government. Such professions did not fit into the society envisioned by the Bolsheviks, and these people “found themselves disenfranchised citizens (*lishentsy*)” under the 1918 Constitution of the Russian Republic.²⁶ Due to their status as representatives of “petit bourgeois professions,” the *lishentsy* were “considered to be ‘nonproductive,’” and, as such, they were “deprived of civil rights, employment, housing, and higher education for their children.”²⁷ In theory, it would have been possible to escape such a label by working it off over the course of five years, but this was often more easily said than done, particularly in light of a lack of employment opportunities available to those who fell into this group. This status led some affected by this rule to “[gravitate] to murky business dealings, further imperilling their fate,” and these forms of social and economic distress provided a “critical precondition for the appeal of [agricultural] colonization,” which was one of the possible means the Soviet government used to transform Jews into “useful citizens.”²⁸ Often, it was easier to simply pack up and start fresh elsewhere, rather than cling to the vestiges of a fallen regime.

²⁵ In the Soviet context, the term “productivisation” refers to a range of policies designed to integrate the Jewish population into Soviet society through “productive” (i.e. agricultural or industrial) labour. The goal was the transformation of Jewish life, moving it from the shtetl to the collective farm or industrial city, and thus rendering the Jewish population “useful” to the Soviet cause, while simultaneously improving their social and economic position within Soviet society.

²⁶ Dekel-Chen, Jonathan L. *Farming the Red Land: Jewish Agricultural Colonization and Local Soviet Power, 1924-1941*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2005, p. 7.

²⁷ Dekel-Chen, “Farming the Red Land,” 7.

²⁸ Dekel-Chen, “Farming the Red Land,” 8.

One potential issue the Soviet Union saw with its Jewish minority was “the ideologically suspect nature of Jewish economic life,” referring to the commercial ties some had built up under Tsarist rule.²⁹ The petit bourgeois status held by some was deeply problematic to a Communist government, and, as such, the function of Birobidzhan – aside from providing a national territory – was to “‘normalize’ Soviet Jews” and to turn them into proletarians: “To transform a people whom the Soviet government considered as parasitic into useful Soviets.”³⁰ A core aspect of “the program to ‘normalize’ Russian Jews” was “connecting them to the soil through agricultural labour,” which followed the idea that “a people could only be regularized through agricultural activity,” a deep-seated concept that the Soviets made use of.³¹ Birobidzhan, being an agricultural colony first and foremost, “was designed by the Communist Party to wean the Soviet Jews away from capitalist, ‘parasitic’ jobs.”³² Following this logic, Robert Weinberg notes, the government aimed to “resolve the Jewish question in the 1920s by refashioning the occupational profile of the Jews and transforming them into farmers.”³³

In *Seekers of Happiness*, the “ideologically suspect” or “nonproductive” Jew appears in the form of two common antisemitic stereotypes: the Wandering Jew and the *luftmensch*. Each of these stereotypes are dealt with and productivised in the film, with varying degrees of success.

3.1 The “Wandering Jew”

The figure of the Wandering Jew has its origins in the Early Modern period, and the associated story tells of a “Jerusalem cobbler condemned to interminable peregrinations [i.e., endless wanderings] for

²⁹ Weinberg, “Stalin’s Forgotten Zion,” 18.

³⁰ Maroney, Eric. *The Other Zions: The Lost Histories of Jewish Nations*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010, p. 123.

³¹ Maroney, “The Other Zions,” 137-138.

³² Maroney, “The Other Zions,” 137-138.

³³ Weinberg, “Stalin’s Forgotten Zion,” 18.

failing to allow Christ to rest at his doorstep on his way to Golgotha.”³⁴ Over time, it devolved from the story of a cobbler into a dehumanizing antisemitic stereotype, one that not even high-ranking Soviet officials were immune to. Lester Eckman notes the following:

Stalin’s agitators labelled them [opposition leaders Leon Trotsky, Lev Kamenev, and Grigory Zinoviev] ‘rootless cosmopolitans’ – people who did not care for socialism in one country, in their own fatherland. So pervasive was their hypocrisy that the word ‘Jew’ was not used, but the point in those denunciations of ‘rootless cosmopolitans’ was well taken.³⁵

Of course, such “rootless cosmopolitans” were not fit to be in government positions – how could they hold any form of political power, if they opposed the very thing the government stood for? Many Jews faced a similar conundrum. They were not truly welcome in the cities, where they were viewed as rootless, nor in the countryside, where they ran the risk of being viewed as representing the interests of an oppressor, often due to Party membership.³⁶

The figure of the Wandering Jew, in all its varying iterations, is by Senderovich’s definition “associated with the endless nature of Jewish displacement.”³⁷ The stereotype of the damned wanderer appears in several Soviet works of fiction, including in *Seekers of Happiness*.³⁸ In fact, the film opens on a boat traveling in the direction of Birobidzhan, with an extradiegetic folk song playing:

³⁴ Senderovich, Sasha. *How the Soviet Jew Was Made*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022, p. 169.

³⁵ Eckman, “Soviet Policies towards the Jews,” 1332.

³⁶ Eckman, “Soviet Policies towards the Jews,” 1332.

³⁷ Senderovich, “How the Soviet Jew Was Made,” 216. Some sources also refer to the Wandering Jew as the “eternal Jew,” the “ewiger Jude.”

³⁸ Other films that portray the Soviet Jew as an “ambivalent figure” include *The Return of Neitan Bekker* (1932) and *The Border* (1934), cf. Senderovich 2022.

The world is too large, too dull and too alien,

When one hasn't a place to apply one's effort.

I am tired of roaming around.

Will life be a song whither we are bound?³⁹

The viewer meets a Jewish family that is tired of wandering and, more precisely, wandering around without a purpose. “Here we are traveling and traveling,” wonders Pinya, “maybe we’ll never get there...”⁴⁰ Soon after, upon being asked why they are moving from abroad, Rosa reiterates that they all wish to settle somewhere where there is good work to be found – they have left their home abroad because “there’s no work there.”⁴¹ As Chairman Natan, speaking for the Soviet government, notes, “do you want to live well – then work.”⁴² The community will provide for those who pull their weight. At the collective farm, Rosa, Basya, and Lyova all eagerly pitch in. We see Rosa working horses, Basya farms hens, and Lyova chops wood. Even Dvoira, though old, helps out wherever she can. When Korney falls off a cliff by accident, she takes him into her home and prepares soup for him from a covey of birds brought to her by Shlyoma, a fellow member of the collective farm. It is made very clear that the kolkhoz functions smoothly precisely because of such mutual aid, and those who find a home there have no desire to leave once they have settled in. Pinya, Basya’s husband, is the only one to be sceptical.

Prior to their arrival at the collective farm, however, the family must continue their journey by train. On this leg of the journey, they encounter a rather melancholy clarinetist who plays “The Lament of Israel on the Banks of the Amur.” This clarinetist, arguably, is the film’s most overt (and derogatory)

³⁹ *Seekers of Happiness*. 00:03:40-00:04:08.

⁴⁰ *Seekers of Happiness* 00:04:30

⁴¹ *Seekers of Happiness*, 00:09:56.

⁴² *Seekers of Happiness* 00:10:05.

iteration of the Wandering Jew: deeply and vocally sceptical of the Birobidzhan project, he balks at the first sign of physical hardship and states he will only consider settling there “if it’s any good,” telling Lyova to write to him should it be worth his trouble.⁴³ Intriguingly, his jibes about not being “foolish enough to dig trenches in the Taiga and feed mosquitoes and tigers with [his] blood” are the closest the film gets to depicting just how tough life in Birobidzhan could get.⁴⁴ According to Senderovich, the clarinetist’s presence on the train “serves as an unwelcome reminder of the unsettledness inherent in all modernization projects, including the Soviet one.”⁴⁵ In spite of the shadow he casts on Birobidzhan, the kolkhoz “Rotes Feld” serves as a haven for reformed Wandering Jews. As the farm’s chairman notes, “people who have been dispersed all over the world for ages, come here, build their lives here, seek and find happiness, [and] are beginning to come alive again.”⁴⁶ Rather than having a “parasitic” relationship to society, the wanderers are now symbionts of the state. Rosa, with whom Pinya repeatedly clashes, proves herself such a strong worker that she becomes the collective farm’s best and most productive shock worker.

3.2 The *Luftmensch*

Soviet Jews found themselves caught between a stereotypical rock and a hard place. Eckman remarks that aside from being persecuted as “rootless cosmopolitans” in some places, “the petty trader, the speculator, the *luftmensch*, became a common stereotype of the Jews, at the same time that Jewish professors, doctors, teachers, and other [sic] were contributing much to the development and modernization of Russia.”⁴⁷ A *luftmensch* is a drifter, easily lost in airy intellectual pursuits, and, above all, someone who does not hold a single steady job – or, at the very least, not a “real” or “productive” job. Much like the “rootless cosmopolitan” or Wandering Jew, the *luftmensch* borders on

⁴³ *Seekers of Happiness*, 00:10:25. Lyova calls the clarinetist a bum following this interaction, indicating that the “good Soviet Jew” will inevitably turn on the eternal wanderer.

⁴⁴ *Seekers of Happiness*, 00:09:17-00:09:20.

⁴⁵ Senderovich, “How the Soviet Jew Was Made,” 217.

⁴⁶ *Seekers of Happiness*, 01:09:50.

⁴⁷ Eckman, “Soviet Policies towards the Jews,” 1332.

parasitic due to his unserious attitude towards proper hard work. In many idealized accounts, Birobidzhan is a place where “former luftmenshen [sic] [...] strike out in the primeval forest, chop down trees, build huts, dig wells, and erect homes.”⁴⁸

Seekers of Happiness's luftmensch character is Pinya Kopman. He openly resents the family's decision to move to a collective farm and only becomes enthusiastic about it upon learning that a Jewish worker at a different nearby collective farm has found a nugget of gold weighing in at a whopping 800 grams. He is fascinated by numbers and the accumulation of wealth, even inquiring after the price of the ship the family travels on.⁴⁹ He only appears positively surprised by socialist organizations when he receives several newspapers and information pamphlets free of charge. While other members of the family worry themselves sick trying to find him a job, Pinya tells them not to bother:

LYOVA Pinya, stop being a pest. I can't think.

PINYA Think about what?

LYOVA I am thinking how to set you up for some kind of work.

PINYA Don't bother. You and Rosa will do the working around here.

LYOVA And you?

PINYA Don't worry about me. I've got a head on my shoulders. I'll find something to do.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Levin, “Birobidzhan 1928-40,” 299.

⁴⁹ *Seekers of Happiness*, 00:04:38-00:04:53.

⁵⁰ *Seekers of Happiness*, 00:05:08-00:05:50.

Instead of being content with the job assigned to him at the collective farm, Pinya sets himself a task of his own. Armed with the knowledge that there must be precious metals in the soil of the kolkhoz, he steals a pan from Dvoira's kitchen so he can mine for gold in the banks one of the local rivers. His deep-rooted avarice – another antisemitic stereotype – becomes visible here, as he notes that “gold is money, and money is everything.”⁵¹ Pinya spends much of the film by the river, away from his work. When he is caught there by Lyova, Pinya initially attempts to hide the gold he has collected in the lining of his coat. Lyova presses on and Pinya caves, showing Lyova what he has collected. Pinya tells him that he aims to leave the kolkhoz with the gold he has found and that he intends to use the money it will bring him to open a factory and produce suspenders. His dream to be “Pinya Kopman, King of Suspenders” leads him to shirk his assigned work, abandon his post guarding the collective farm's vegetable patch and, finally, culminates in his arrest after attempting to flee across the Manchurian border.⁵²

Pinya's relatives call him a pest to his face multiple times, hinting at the fact that he merely leeches off the kolkhoz without making any meaningful contribution to its prosperity himself. His primary concern is with personal gain, which is placed in sharp contrast with the actions of Katz, the farmer who found gold at the collective “Der Shtern.” Katz, evidently a well-assimilated Soviet Jew, handed over the nugget to the chairman for the benefit of the collective, presumably to raise funds for farming equipment or the like. Pinya, on the other hand, squirrels his find away in a glass bottle and refuses to turn it over to Natan. Of course, the viewer learns Pinya did not actually strike gold – an acid bath at the hands of the border guard proves that he has found nothing but shiny, worthless dust.⁵³

⁵¹ *Seekers of Happiness*, 01:18:50.

⁵² *Seekers of Happiness*, 00:58:30-00:58:40. Following this confession by Pinya, Lyova attempts to confiscate the “gold” Pinya has collected in the name of the kolkhoz. After a brief scuffle, Pinya then beats Lyova unconscious with a shovel and leaves him for dead, catalyzing his attempted escape across the border to China. Lyova survives and is able to identify Pinya as the perpetrator of the attack.

⁵³ The border guard pours acid onto Pinya's find. It is highly likely that Pinya has stumbled upon a handful of pyrite, more commonly known by its colloquial name “fool's gold.” Pyrite is not the hardiest of substances, prone to tarnishing and fading given prolonged exposure to water or sunlight and will dissolve when it comes into contact with nitric acid. A fool and his gold, of course, are soon parted.

Of all the family members, Pinya is the only one who does not settle well into the collective. He asks Natan, the chairman, for a different job, and repeatedly butts heads with Rosa and Lyova over his perceived laziness. Lyova in particular is decidedly unsympathetic to Pinya's lofty goals: "You're lazy and you don't want to work," he tells him after claiming to understand Pinya's situation.⁵⁴ In addition to abandoning his work to go out searching for gold, Pinya "has trouble believing that the people giddily felling trees and blasting rock to build roads are actually Jews."⁵⁵ According to his view, "Jews [...] are people like him who aspire to make money rather than work in agriculture or construction for the sake of a nebulous collective good."⁵⁶

4. Forms of Assimilation: Intermarriage and Secularisation

From the moment it was first conceived, Birobidzhan was designed to be an agricultural colony. The region was quite sparsely populated, unlike other existing or planned agricultural settlements in the south of the Soviet Union, so the Soviet government would not have to contend with nearly as much local resistance to settlement as it did in, say, Ukraine and the Crimea. The Russian government had made previous attempts to settle in the area of Birobidzhan, but nothing substantial or successful had ever come of these prior settlements. As the land was comparatively empty, the Soviets hoped for a "two birds, one stone" situation: Not only would the land become useable and produce crops or natural resources for the Soviet Union, but it would provide an answer to the question of Jewish placement.

⁵⁴ *Seekers of Happiness*, 00:24:45.

⁵⁵ Senderovich, "How the Soviet Jew Was Made," 208.

⁵⁶ Senderovich, "How the Soviet Jew Was Made," 208.

The image of Birobidzhan as a Jewish territory was quintessential, as it was the region's main selling point. Conditions on the ground were less than ideal – winters were harsh, and summers were brutal, dense woodlands abuzz with mosquitoes and all manners of unpleasant insects. As such, advocates for the project hoped that “the image of a Jewish state would help in the recruiting of Jewish settlers, especially for Birobidzhan's collective farms.”⁵⁷ Clear emphasis was placed on agriculture forming the economic foundation of the project: The Jews must return to the land. No other practice would ever quite integrate them as well into the fabric of a socialist society, as a sense of connection to place is strongest if the place is built from the ground up with one's own two hands.

In spite of the government's best efforts, Birobidzhan was not established particularly quickly. While the decree proclaiming it as the Jewish Autonomous Oblast was issued in 1928, it was not until 1934 that settlement began in earnest. The region was plagued by problems such as hostile geography or ecology, but also a lack of workers properly trained to work on collective farms. It is all well and good to have people at a kolkhoz, but an improperly trained or entirely untrained worker might well do more harm than good on a farm if they do not know what they are doing. In addition to the potential for accidents involving farming equipment or heavy machinery, crops may spoil if tended, harvested, or preserved incorrectly.

4.1 Intermarriage

Within the Soviet framework, racial mixing was considered a sign of considerable societal advancement. The more advanced a society, the more “mixed” it would be, and “the sooner ‘race’ would disappear” as a defining category.⁵⁸ As such, it is no wonder citizens of differing nationalities would be encouraged to marry. Intermarriage in Judaism is particularly effective in effacing this

⁵⁷ Levin, “Birobidzhan 1928-40,” 304.

⁵⁸ Hirsch, “Race without the Practice of Racial Politics,” 36.

boundary, given its matrilineal nature. It was perhaps the most effective way to remove or blur racial and national distinctions. Depending on which parent is Jewish, this dictates the nationality of any eventual children. As the ultimate goal of the Soviet project was to efface such national boundaries, it was important to encourage intermarriage wherever possible. In addition to the issue of matrilineality, it is important to note that it is significantly easier for traditions and customs to fall by the wayside in mixed families than it is in homogeneous ones. It is only logical, then, that a propaganda film such as *Seekers of Happiness* would encourage marriage between characters of differing nationalities.

Intermarriage is not the only possible form of marriage the film's characters encounter. Out of the blue, Rosa receives a proposal from Shlyoma, an apparently dim-witted fellow Jewish worker who has been at the kolkhoz for some time. She turns him down, which visibly displeases both Shlyoma and Rosa's mother Dvoira. The viewer later learns that Shlyoma is quite bold in this regard, as he confesses to Natan that he loves Basya (who is still married to Pinya) and later asks an unnamed woman at a construction site if she will go to the park with him. Instead of indulging the overly forward Shlyoma, Rosa has her eye on Korney, who has been friendly with her since the family's arrival at the collective farm.⁵⁹ Korney is Russian, and Dvoira initially opposes his potential courtship of Rosa:

DVOIRA Rosa, what's going to happen? He's Russian.

ROSA Yes, he's Russian. But I don't know who's better – the Russian Korney, or the Jew Pinya?⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Cf. *Seekers of Happiness*, 00:16:47. Upon meeting Rosa for the first time, Korney calls her a "fine girl."

⁶⁰ *Seekers of Happiness*, 00:39:55.

Clearly, the film is in favour of Korney rather than Pinya. Korney is thoughtful and a hard worker, even offering Rosa his mosquito net at their first chance meeting so she can better protect herself. Pinya, as we have previously established, is airheaded, selfish, lazy, and rude to his peers, and his hunger for individual success is so great that it culminates in him breaking the law.

Like Dvoira, Korney's nameless father also opposes Rosa's and Korney's relationship – "we've never had this custom [of intermarriage]," he tells his son.⁶¹ The opposition from the older generation is worn down, in part due to a conversation Dvoira has with Natan (cf. 4.2 Secularisation) and, additionally, due to a conversation the two parents have with one another. This exchange between different cultures indicates a clear positive stance on intermarriage, and Korney's father notes that "we all come from the same roots."⁶² At the kolkhoz, "all nationalities are brothers [...] Jews and Russians, and Tungus [i.e., the local indigenous population who are not seen in the film]."⁶³

In addition to the ultimately positive portrayal of mixing nationalities through marriage, marriage between individuals of the same nationality receives a decidedly negative cast. Pinya is married to Basya, the second of Dvoira's two daughters. Unlike Pinya, Basya is happy to work at the kolkhoz and is incredibly upset when Pinya announces his intent to move on in search of greener pastures.⁶⁴ Basya begins to gravitate towards Natan, the chairman of the collective, and the presumably final nail in the coffin of her and Pinya's marriage is the revelation of the latter's assault on Lyova. While it is left unclear whether the two ultimately marry, Basya divorcing Pinya certainly would have been possible given the circumstances.

4.2 Secularisation

⁶¹ *Seekers of Happiness*, 00:45:06.

⁶² *Seekers of Happiness*, 00:49:35.

⁶³ *Seekers of Happiness*, 00:22:13.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Seekers of Happiness*, 00:20:50 and 00:34:00.

Under Soviet governance, religion was frowned upon, and Judaism was no exception to this rule. Following the logic of Lenin and Stalin, “the Jewish question would ultimately be solved by facilitating the integration of Jews into Soviet society.”⁶⁵ This assimilation would be greatly improved “with the disappearance of religion under socialism,” as secularisation would help things “proceed smoothly and weaken obstacles to Jewish acculturation and integration.”⁶⁶ According to Weinberg, the creation of Birobidzhan was deliberately and inherently secular in nature – it was, after all, “part of the Communist Party’s effort to set up a territorial enclave where a secular Jewish culture rooted in Yiddish and socialist principles could serve as an alternative to Palestine and resolve a variety of perceived problems besetting Jewry.”⁶⁷ Agriculture, not religion, would be the basis of settlement in the region. This form of colonization presented many Soviet Jews with “a major dilemma [...] – the desire to integrate into secular Soviet society versus the inherited loyalties to traditional, paternalistic life in the shtetls.”⁶⁸

The use of Yiddish over Hebrew was one core aspect of secularisation. Hebrew was considered the language of “bourgeois Zionists,” and Weinberg emphasizes that the use of Yiddish was meant to “ensure that the cultural politics of Soviet Jewry would hew closely to the dictum, ‘nationalist in form and socialist in content.’”⁶⁹ Hebrew, being among other things a religious language, was decried as counter-revolutionary and backwards. Therefore, the primary language of Birobidzhan would be Yiddish, and not Hebrew or Russian. Street signs were written both in Yiddish and Russian, but the official language of the region was Yiddish. The local newspapers were published in Yiddish, as was a good portion of pop culture material such as plays, poems, or songs. This was as supporters of the Birobidzhan project had hoped: They believed that “a territorial homeland for Soviet Jews would

⁶⁵ Weinberg, “Stalin’s Forgotten Zion,” 16.

⁶⁶ Weinberg, “Stalin’s Forgotten Zion,” 16.

⁶⁷ Weinberg, “Stalin’s Forgotten Zion,” 13.

⁶⁸ Dekel-Chen, “Farming the Red Land,” 8-9.

⁶⁹ Weinberg, “Stalin’s Forgotten Zion,” 59.

facilitate the development of a secular, Yiddishist culture rooted in socialist principles,” while simultaneously consolidating Soviet Jewry.⁷⁰

As a rule, linguistic prescriptivism is notorious for being ineffective, particularly at state level. It is immensely difficult to police how people speak, and forcing something to become an official language if it is not already widely used rarely goes to plan. The choice to use Yiddish as the local language rather than Hebrew was logical not only because Yiddish was less acutely associated with religion, but also the fact that, for millennia, Hebrew had been a dead language.⁷¹ Additionally, following its revival in the 19th century, Hebrew was generally associated with the Zionist movement, which the Soviet Union had previously outlawed based in part on its ties to British imperialism.

In *Seekers of Happiness*, secularisation does not occur on the linguistic front, although this is due more to issues of audience design given that the intended viewer was Russian-speaking. Where relevant, street signs and the like are written in Yiddish script, but the language spoken onscreen is Russian. Instead, throughout the film, party structures take the place of religious ones. The most prominent example of this is the replacing of the rabbi with a party official. Upon noticing Rosa’s interest in the Russian Korney, Dvoira is initially hesitant to let their relationship go ahead. She shares her concerns with Natan, the collective’s chairman, and asks him to keep Rosa from the fish harvest so she cannot see Korney. Natan tells her that as Rosa and Korney are both adults, there is nothing she can feasibly do to stop them from interacting with one another, and he cannot keep Rosa from the harvest on her behalf.⁷² Similarly, Shlyoma seeks Natan’s advice when he believes Basya has fallen in love with him.⁷³ In both of these instances, Natan takes on the advising role that would, in the context

⁷⁰ Weinberg, “Stalin’s Forgotten Zion,” 22.

⁷¹ In terms of religious versus secular and dead versus living languages, imposing Hebrew on the Jewish population in Birobidzhan would be roughly equivalent to implementing Classical Latin as the national language of Italy instead of continuing to use Italian.

⁷² *Seekers of Happiness*, 00:40:57.

⁷³ *Seekers of Happiness*, 00:51:19.

of a shtetl, be held by the local rabbi. Dvoira and Shlyoma, in turn, appear to accept this new structure, as they do not protest against the advice he gives them.

Additionally, there is no religious iconography to be seen – there are no mezuzahs mounted upon the doorframes, no one at the collective wears a yarmulke, nor is the Star of David visible at any point.⁷⁴ Instead, the characters are surrounded by symbols of Communism such as the hammer and sickle or portraits of Stalin. This further indicates that the state has fully taken over the functions of a religious institution, and there is no need to rely on religion as a crutch. The state provides everything its citizens could possibly require, including alternatives to religious iconography.

Of course, the dismantling of religious structures was not merely conceptual or social. Quite the contrary – under the rule of Lenin and by encouragement of Jewish communists, synagogues and other Jewish establishments were demolished or repurposed.⁷⁵ The idea was that this would further incentivize the assimilation of Jews into agricultural and secular communities, as religious institutions and practices could no longer serve as the bedrock of community life following their abolition. Considering Jewishness – not Judaism – had been granted the status of a nationality by Soviet definition, “one did not have to be religiously Jewish to remain a Jew.”⁷⁶ Secular assimilation was further emphasized by persistent propaganda, which continually hammered home “the national significance of the Jewish colonization of Birobidzhan.”⁷⁷ This national significance was twofold: for one, colonization of Birobidzhan by a Jewish population would help to answer the Jewish question, as well as rendering the previously hostile land itself usable so as to help provide for the country.

⁷⁴ A *mezuzah* is a piece of parchment fixed to the doorway upon which specific verses from the Torah are written. A *yarmulke* or *kippah* is the skullcap traditionally worn by Jewish men.

⁷⁵ Eckman, “Soviet Policies towards the Jews,” 1329.

⁷⁶ Gessen, Masha. *Where the Jews Aren't: The Sad and Absurd Story of Birobidzhan, Russia's Jewish Autonomous Region*. New York: Nextbook/Schocken, 2016, p. 19.

⁷⁷ Levin, “Birobidzhan,” 303.

5. Conclusion

When we lived in the shtetl, I [Dvoira] was considered a good housekeeper. I could divide a small herring into nine servings. But when I was cutting that herring, I felt as though it were my own heart. When the children are following your every move, and each one asks for a larger piece, you feel bad for each of them. And in the house, there is nothing but this one, tiny herring. I don't wish this on anyone. Could my late Vrom Ber ever have imagined that his old Dvoira would ever live to see such happy days. Eat, my dear guests, eat, my dear children! Pour the wine and let us drink, let us drink to our country, to those who gave us such a good life.⁷⁸

Seekers of Happiness is a textbook example of a Soviet Realist narrative on screen. It is exceedingly simple in its storytelling, both in terms of visual presentation and from a narrative standpoint, and it very clearly presents “assimilation [...] as the solution to the Soviet Jewish question.”⁷⁹ In order for their assimilation to be effective, its stereotyped characters must first and foremost become productive members of the new Soviet society. Both the Wandering Jew and the *luftmensch* are productivised through agricultural labour in the context of a collective farm. The Wandering Jew is anchored to the land in the form of the agricultural colony that doubles as a Jewish homeland, thereby putting a long wished-for end to the eternal wanderings he is subjected to. The *luftmensch* is productivised by being given concrete tasks – labour that is deemed actively and acutely useful to the community, such as chopping trees, tending livestock and crops, or clearing rocks to build a road, rather than being involved in lofty and unproductive intellectual pursuits. Additionally, the film presents secularisation and intermarriage as desirable outcomes, although it is not made clear whether they are a consequence of assimilation or a cause thereof.

⁷⁸ *Seekers of Happiness*, 01:24:05-01:25:22.

⁷⁹ Shternshis, “Russian Jewish Popular Culture,” 166.

As is befitting a government-sponsored film designed to encourage settlement, according to the storyline, the Birobidzhan project is a resounding success. The Jewish family integrates seamlessly into the social fabric of the collective farm (Pinya being the notable, and only, exception) and have no desire whatsoever to move on after settling there.

For Dvoira and her family, moving to Birobidzhan was the best possible course of action. Nowhere else, by film logic, would they have received such an unconditional and immediate welcome as they did at the collective. Most importantly, it was their own choice to move to Birobidzhan – the Soviet government did not force the family’s hand in any way, shape, or form, and even allowed them the freedom to choose which kolkhoz they wanted to work at rather than making the decision for them. A key aspect of long-lasting, sustainable settlement is its voluntary nature. Moving people by force, no matter how large or small the group may be, inevitably leads to resentment and resistance to the project, on the part of the settlers and on the part of those who may be driven away by settlement. Neither is conducive to a popular or strong long-term government.

The film not only juxtaposes relatives Rosa – the hardworking, assimilated Jew – and the *luftmensch* Pinya, but also places Pinya and the collective’s chairman Natan opposite each other. It sets “the anachronistic globe-trotting shtetl Jew, represented by Pinya” against “the Jew as a New Soviet Man, represented by Natan.”⁸⁰ Natan is “the exemplary Soviet citizen who displaces Pinya from his own family.”⁸¹ It is interesting, then, that Pinya should be the most popular and memorable character from the film, as this goes entirely against the grain of what *Seekers of Happiness* intends its audience to take away from a viewing. One is not meant to root for the lazy, thieving would-be killer.

⁸⁰ Senderovich, “How the Soviet Jew Was Made,” 217.

⁸¹ Senderovich, “How the Soviet Jew Was Made,” 176.

In this context, it would be interesting to take a more literary-analytical approach to the film in a further research step, thereby further embedding it in the cultural context of its time. Given that *Seekers of Happiness* is the product of a highly specific and targeted propaganda campaign intended to increase migration to the region, it conveniently omits almost all traces of references to the very real and tangible hardships faced by real-world settlers of Birobidzhan. As such, one could apply a contrapuntal lens to the film. Edward Said defines contrapuntal readings as follows:

The point is that contrapuntal reading must take account of processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded [...].⁸²

While usually applied to works produced in a more overtly imperial context, given the settler colonial nature of the Birobidzhan project, such a reading may well still yield intriguing results. A contrapuntal approach to *Seekers of Happiness* would allow for a different angle and an in-depth exploration of the deliberate and, frankly, glaring omissions of references to hardship, as well as of the local indigenous population (for example, the Tungus are only mentioned once, as a footnote, to underscore the apparently harmonious relations between the different nationalities living on kolkhoz soil).⁸³ Additionally, it would permit the viewer to take into account the subtle but pervasive ways in which music both punctuates and, in other instances, potentially contradicts the events portrayed onscreen. Folk music is a conspicuous element in this film, ever-present, and it is anything but meaningless.

⁸² Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
https://monoskop.org/images/f/f9/Said_Edward_Culture_and_Imperialism.pdf, p. 66.

⁸³ Cf. also Senderovich 2022: 208 for a contrapuntal approach to folk music in *Seekers of Happiness*.

A contrapuntal approach would also be interesting considering that Kenez's definition of Socialist Realist film is a negative one – he defines the genre more in terms of what it is *not* than what it is.⁸⁴ Socialist Realism does not depict an objective reality, nor does it show its audience a pure utopia, which is by definition an imaginary place. The Birobidzhan depicted by Vladimir Korsh-Sablin is, although it is highly idealized and romanticized, a simulacrum of what could be – a theoretically attainable and desirable possibility presented to a wide audience in the hopes that, when confronted with it often enough, public life would finally begin to imitate art.

⁸⁴ Cf. Kenez, "Soviet Cinema," 55.

6. Bibliography

- Dekel-Chen, Jonathan L. *Farming the Red Land: Jewish Agricultural Colonization and Local Soviet Power, 1924-1941*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2005.
- Eckman, Lester Samuel. "Soviet Policies towards the Jews: From Lenin to Stalin." Essay. In *Austria – Hungary – Poland – Russia*, ed. Herbert A. Strauss, 1325-1341. Vol. 2 of *Hostages of Modernization*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 1993.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110883299.1325>.
- Gessen, Masha. *Where the Jews Aren't: The Sad and Absurd Story of Birobidzhan, Russia's Jewish Autonomous Region*. New York: Nextbook/Schocken, 2016.
- Hirsch, Francine. "Race without the Practice of Racial Politics." *Slavic Review* 61, no. 1 (2002): 30-43. <https://www.jstor.com/stable/2696979>.
- Kenez, Peter. "Socialist Realism, 1933-1941." Essay. In *Cinema & Soviet Society 1917-1953*, 157-85. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Kenez, Peter. "Soviet Cinema in the Age of Stalin." Essay. In *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*, edited by Richard Taylor and Derek Spring, 54-68. London, New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Levin, Nora. "Birobidzhan 1928-40." Essay. In *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917* 1, 1:282-311. New York, London: New York University Press, 1988.
- Maroney, Eric. *The Other Zions: The Lost Histories of Jewish Nations*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
https://monoskop.org/images/f/f9/Said_Edward_Culture_and_Imperialism.pdf.
- Seekers of Happiness*. DVD. The National Center for Jewish Film, 2007 [1936].
- Senderovich, Sasha. *How the Soviet Jew Was Made*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022.
- Eras, Volume 26, Number 1

Shternshis, Anna. "Soviet in Form, National in Content: Russian Jewish Popular Culture." Essay. In

Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939, 143-81.

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Weinberg, Robert. *Stalin's Forgotten Zion: Birobidzhan and the Making of a Soviet Jewish Homeland*.

Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Uren View vs Kappe Reality

Chris Murphy
Monash University

ABSTRACT

This article contrasts two representations of the prisoner of war (POW) experience on the Burma-Thailand railway and examines the ways they contributed to myth-making in Australia. The first representation was provided by Tom Uren in his 1959 maiden speech to Federal Parliament; the second came in recounts by Australian members of 'F' Force under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel C.H. Kappe. Whereas Uren's account focused on the equity and effectiveness of systems adopted by Dunlop Force, Kappe's command was so dysfunctional that he achieved the dubious distinction of being one of the most despised POW officers of the Pacific War. The juxtaposition of these two representations of captivity on the Burma-Thailand railway highlights the ways Australians like to remember this chapter of our national history. I argue that, on the Burma-Thailand railway, there was a distinct divide between officers and enlisted men and yet, in the postwar period, there was widespread reluctance amongst former POWs to call out publicly those of their officers who performed poorly and who let them down in ways so fundamental it resulted in the deaths of a great many of their comrades. I consider the question of who set the agendas for official histories and consider reasons why a 'conspiracy of silence' on officer privilege seemed to hold so fast for so long. I conclude that there was and continues to be class bias in the public record as well as in academic writing. Products of that bias include this article, this writer and his research.

INTRODUCTION

In his maiden speech to the Australian Federal Parliament on 26 February 1959, ex-prisoner of war (POW), Tom Uren, recalled his experience at the Burma-Thailand railway camp known as Hintok Road which was adjacent to the Konyu cutting known later as 'Hellfire Pass'. As a POW, Uren was a member

Eras, Volume 26, Number 1

of Dunlop Force. According to his account: ‘We were living by the principle of the fit looking after the sick, the young looking after the old, the rich looking after the poor.’⁸⁵ As he tells it, some months after Dunlop Force’s arrival in the area, 400 British members of ‘H’ Force marched in.⁸⁶ In that party, the best of the tents were allocated to the officers with the enlisted men getting the dregs. The British did not tithe officers’ pay and did not implement measures to care for the sick when dysentery then cholera set in so that, after only six weeks, just fifty of the original 400 men marched out again and, of those, another twenty-five died subsequently. Uren concluded:

Only a creek separated our two camps, but on one side the law of the jungle prevailed and on the other the principles of socialism.⁸⁷



Figure 1: NX38458 Bdr Thomas Uren, 2/1st Fortress Hvy Batty.

SOURCE: UNSW Australians at War Film Archive

⁸⁵ Tom Uren. *Maiden Speech*. AustralianPolitics.com. 1959. Accessed 24 August 2024. <<https://australianpolitics.com/1959/02/26/tom-uren-alp-reid-aiden-speech.html/>>.

⁸⁶ While Uren’s speech does not identify the nationality of the party of 400, his comments in an interview with Pattie Wright do. See Pattie Wright. *The Men of the Line: Stories of the Thai-Burma Railway Survivors*. (Carlton, Victoria: The Miegunyah Press, 2008). pp.89-92.

⁸⁷ Uren. *Speech*.

Uren's well-polished recollection is emblematic of the popular Australian representation of the Burma-Thailand railway experience where mateship and unity ruled the day and helped ensure Australians did better than any other national group experiencing the dreadful conditions which prevailed. At the time and in subsequent years, this representation has been bound up with feelings of national pride and the railway chapter of the POW story has been framed in ways which reflect creditably on the character and performance of Australians. However, Uren's account should be contrasted with the recollections of Australian members of 'F' Force who were at Shimo Songkurai near the Thai-Burmese border where life was lived "red in tooth and claw".⁸⁸ According to those recounts, the Australian Force commander, Lieutenant-Colonel C.H. 'Gus' Kappe, who was paid considerably more by the Japanese though exempted from manual labour,⁸⁹ hid in his hut, fed himself more than the enlisted men and told them that was necessary because someone, i.e., Kappe himself, had to survive in order to tell the story of how they died.⁹⁰ He also told them not to come close when speaking to him lest they infect him with any of their many ailments.⁹¹ When cholera broke out, he relocated to another camp where he admitted himself to hospital in what the men of the other ranks were convinced was an effort to hide from the Japanese and further ensure his own survival.⁹² He was accused of lending money at extortionate interest for personal profit.⁹³ At the end of the railroad's construction, rather than being the last to leave, as a good leader should, he not once but twice put himself at the head of the queue to return to Singapore.⁹⁴ Even

⁸⁸ That memorable phrase is quoted from Ernest Gordon in Julie Summers. *The Colonel of Tamarkan: Philip Toosey and the Bridge on the River Kwai*. (London: Simon and Shuster 2005). pp.145-146.

⁸⁹ Lex Arthurson. *The Story of the 13th Australian General Hospital. 8th Division A.I.F., Malaya*. (2009). <http://www.pows-of-japan.net/articles/AUSTRALIAN_GENERAL_HOSPITAL.pdf>. p.53; & Lionel Wigmore. *The Japanese Thrust*. (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1957). p.548; & AWM. 9/2. [*Records of war crimes enquiries and trials, 1939-45 War*] *Report of Major R E Steele, Warrant Officer W Wallace, Sergeant R J Kennedy [on POWs] - Copy No. 4*. p.52.

⁹⁰ Alexander Hatton Drummond. *The Naked Truth*. n.d. AWM MSS1530. p.169; & Tim Bowden. "I Don't Think I Deserve A Pension – We Didn't Do Much Fighting'. Interviewing Australian Prisoners of War of the Japanese, 1942-1945." (Paper Presented at 'Prisoners of war: A conference on the Australian experience of captivity in the 20th century.' Australian National University, Canberra, Thursday, 6 June, 2013). p.45; & Peter Brune. *Descent into Hell: the Fall of Singapore - Pudu and Changi - the Thai-Burma Railway*. (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2014). pp.681-683; & Robin Rowland. *A River Kwai Story: The Sonkrai Tribunal*. (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2007). pp.181, 200-201, 205-206.

⁹¹ Brune. *Descent*. p.678.

⁹² Bowden. "Pension." p.45; & AWM. 554/7/4. *Kappe Report on 'F' Force in Thailand*. p.90.

⁹³ Bowden. "Pension." p.45.

⁹⁴ Bowden. "Pension." p.45; & AWM. ART26437. *Lt-Col. C.H. Kappe of 'F' Force*. p.53.

though he was despised by the men he commanded, at the end of the war he was promoted to brigadier and awarded an OBE for his wartime service.⁹⁵



Figure 2: VX48789 Lt-Col. Charles Henry 'Gus' Kappe, 'F' Force.

SOURCE: AWM C170467

These are two contrasting representations of the Australian Burma-Thailand railway experience. That they vary so markedly from one another and from the received public narrative⁹⁶ is consistent with Joan Beaumont's 1988 comments on:

⁹⁵ Hank Nelson. *P.O.W. Prisoners of War: Australians Under Nippon*. (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1985). p.61.

⁹⁶ Evidenced by Prime Minister John Howard's speech cited earlier. See also Hank Nelson. "Beyond Slogans: Assessing the experiences and the history of the Australian prisoners of war of the Japanese." in *Beyond Slogans: Forgotten Captives in Japanese-Occupied Asia*. ed. Karl Hack and Kevin Blackburn. (London: Routledge, 2008). pp.31-32; & Lachlan Grant. "Monument and Ceremony: The Australian Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial and the Anzac legend." in *Forgotten Captives in Japanese-Occupied Asia*. ed. Karl Hack and Kevin Blackburn. (London: Routledge, 2008). pp.41, 43-44. See the 'Foreword' to the film *King Rat* written by F.G. Gallegan in Karl Hack and Kevin Blackburn. "*The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *King Rat*: Protest and ex-prisoner of war memory in Britain and Australia." in *Forgotten Captives in Japanese-Occupied Asia*. ed. Karl Hack and Kevin Blackburn. (London: Routledge, 2008). pp.163-164.

the reluctance of almost all historians, official and amateur, to admit that differentiation between the officers and men actually occurred. It is not an exaggeration to say that at least an informal conspiracy of silence exists on this subject.⁹⁷

In this article I seek to make sense of these divergent narratives. First, I examine the reliability of each version and address the question of which, if either, tallies more accurately with the objective facts inasmuch as they are able to be determined. Furthermore, I seek to explain how this dichotomy between public representations and personal recollections of the POW experience arose.

Scholarly writing on the Burma-Thailand railway has long identified the divergence between Australian mythologising and practical reality. Although we know that there was considerable myth-making surrounding the Burma-Thailand railway, this article examines ways in which these myths evolved in different contexts and at different times. As previous scholars have shown, one of the key factors explaining this divergence was rank.⁹⁸ However, I acknowledge that my own research is symptomatic of the problem concerning over-representation of the officer class.

POLISHED PUBLIC RECOUNTS vs PRIVATE VERSIONS OF CAPTIVITY ON THE BURMA-THAILAND RAILWAY

The Hintok Road camp to which Uren in his Parliamentary maiden speech referred was one of a complex of four or possibly five camps in the area known variously as Hintok Mountain,⁹⁹ Hintok

⁹⁷ Joan Beaumont. *Gull Force*. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988). p.74.

⁹⁸ Gavan McCormack and Hank Nelson. eds., *The Burma-Thailand Railway: memory and history*. (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993). p.101. See also survival rates for 'H' Force in Joan Beaumont. "Rank, Privilege and Prisoners of War." *War & Society*. Vol.1, No.1 (1983). <<https://doi.org/10.1179/106980483790303126>>: p.86.

⁹⁹ Kenneth Harrison. *The Brave Japanese*. (Sydney: Rigby Ltd, 1966). <<http://guyharrison.squarespace.com/bravejapanese/>>. p.168.

English camp,¹⁰⁰ Hintok River,¹⁰¹ Hintok Jungle Camp,¹⁰² Malayan Hamlet,¹⁰³ Hintok Valley and Tiger Valley¹⁰⁴ camps.¹⁰⁵ Although Uren in his speech to Parliament made no reference to the nationality of those on the other side of the creek, he made it clear in a later recount that they were British.¹⁰⁶ Most likely, the commanding officer was Lieutenant-Colonel T.H. Newey.¹⁰⁷ Uren said it was not until the 400 British members of 'H' Force marched in that he saw the way things should not be done and he refers to indolent officers in that party acting in their own self-interest rather than for the welfare of their men. As mentioned, the consequence of that lack of leadership was a death rate of horrendous proportions—according to Uren's figures, in the order of 85 percent.¹⁰⁸ Uren's comments have been seen as evidence of the better performance and cohesion of Australian contingents and is consistent with views expressed by Lieutenant-Colonel Kappe¹⁰⁹ and other railway veterans including Russell Braddon,¹¹⁰ James Bradley,¹¹¹ Rowley Richards¹¹² and Robert Holman.¹¹³

¹⁰⁰ Edward E. Dunlop. *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop*. (Melbourne: Nelson Publishers, 1986). p.278.

¹⁰¹ UKWO. WO32/15769 *Enquiry into allegations against Representative Officer Limi Road Camp and No 1 P.O.W. camp Changi*. 1946. See statement by Maj. Duke, p.30.

¹⁰² According to Dunlop's former batman, 'Blue' Butterworth, Hintok Mountain, Hintok Road and Hintok Jungle camps were names for the same place 'depending on who you were'. While I accept that with regard to the Mountain and Road camps, I am not convinced it applies to the Jungle camp. See Wright. *Line*. p.85.

¹⁰³ Maj. A.E. Sagers. *To Hell and Back*. 1945. MSS 10288A. State Library of Western Australia. p.13; & Wright. *Line*. p.66.

¹⁰⁴ Desmond Jackson. *What Price Surrender? A Story of the Will to Survive*. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989). p.46.

¹⁰⁵ See also Rod Beattie. *The Death Railway – A Brief History*. (Kanchanaburi, Thailand: TBRC, 2015); & 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion Ex Members Association. *Hintok Valley Camp, 154.00km - Thailand*. 2022. Accessed 2 July 2022. <<https://2nd4thmgb.com.au/camp/hintok-valley-camp-154-00km-thailand/>>.

¹⁰⁶ Wright. *Line*. p.90.

¹⁰⁷ See Dunlop. *Diaries*. pp.258, 268-269; & Stanley S. Pavillard. *Bamboo Doctor*. (London: Pan Books, 1962). p.21; & Ray Parkin. *Into the Smother*. (Melbourne: Wartime Trilogy ed. Melbourne University Press, 2003).

p.514; & Alexander Hatton Drummond. *Papers, 1941-2001 [manuscript] Alexander Hatton Drummond 1911-1983*. n.d. MS 13716. State Library of Victoria. pp.250, 255; & Thomas Henry Newey. *Report on 'H' Force*. King's College, London: Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives. 1945. p.3.

¹⁰⁸ Wright. *Line*. p.90.

¹⁰⁹ AWM. *Kappe Report*. pp.4, 5, 16, 58.

¹¹⁰ Tim Bowden. AWM S03005. *Russell Reading Braddon as a gunner 2/15th Australian Field Regiment and a prisoner of the Japanese, 1941-1945, interviewed by Tim Bowden*. 1982. Part Two, 11:15.

¹¹¹ James Bradley. *Towards the Setting Sun: An Escape from the Thai-Burma Railway, 1943*. (Wellington, NSW: J.M.L. Fuller, 1984). p.109.

¹¹² Quoted in Nelson. *POW*. pp.55-56.

¹¹³ Robert Holman and Peter Thomson. *On Paths of Ash: The Extraordinary Story of An Australian Prisoner of War*. (Millers Points, NSW: Pier 9, 2009). p.114.

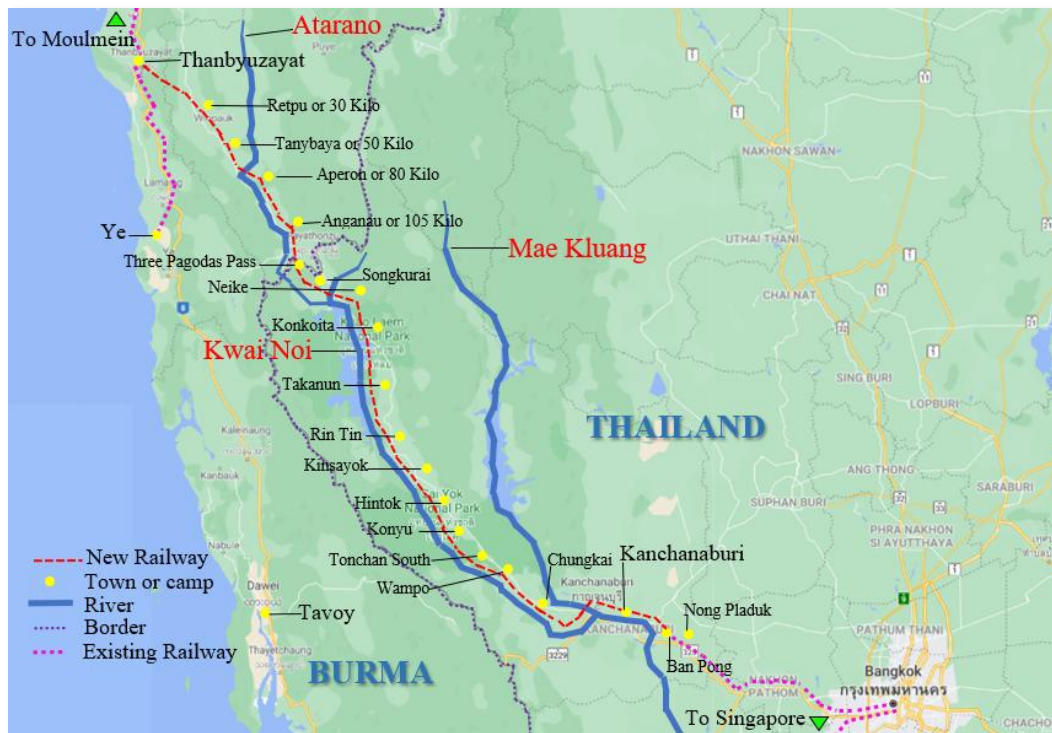


Figure 3: Map of Burma-Thailand Railway Showing Selected Camps

Source: Google Maps & Pattie Wright, 'The Men of the Line'.

In the postwar era, there was myth-making on many levels as former POWs sought to find personal meaning in their experience, sought to respect the dead and were careful about criticising the living. Attitudes changed before and after what has been described as the 1980s' "memory boom", ranging from supportive to uninterested to hostile and then to almost reverential.¹¹⁴ In Australia's popular memory figures like 'Weary' Dunlop came to encapsulate much of what we regard as best in our national character¹¹⁵ and the myth has been created that the Burma-Thailand railway was, as Prime Minister John Howard put it in a speech at Hellfire Pass in 1998, a place where "courage, comradeship, sacrifice

¹¹⁴ See Alistair Thomson. *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*. (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2013). p.1; & Christina Twomey. *The Battle Within: POWs in Postwar Australia*. (Sydney: NewSouth, 2018). p.13; & Joan Beaumont and Andrew Witcomb. "The Thai-Burma railway: asymmetrical and transitional memories." in *The Pacific War: Aftermaths, remembrance and culture*. ed. Christina Twomey and Ernest Koh. (London: Routledge, 2015). p.72.

¹¹⁵ Twomey. *Battle Within*. p.230.

and resourcefulness” prevailed.¹¹⁶ Veterans liked to say that Australians, as a result of mateship and their practical natures, did better than other national groups.¹¹⁷ But the figures don’t support that. In fact, on the railway, the mortality rates for British and Australians were similar: 21.1 percent and 20.5 percent respectively¹¹⁸—and this occurred despite significant numbers of British POWs starting work at the Thai end of the railway months before the first Australians¹¹⁹ and Lieutenant-Colonel Kappe’s conviction that Japanese personnel were “determined to do all in their power to break the British troops and to discriminate between them and the Australians.”¹²⁰ The Dutch did better than the two other main national groups and a reason for that seems to be that they were less affected by cholera than the British or Australians, partly because of earlier inoculations and their medical officers’ greater familiarity with tropical diseases.¹²¹ Notwithstanding, the notion that Australians did better in terms of survival rates than other national groups on the railway is a myth and, if extended to POW survival rates for all national groups in all locations in the Pacific War, the Australians did worse than the other main national groups (See Tables 1 & 2).

¹¹⁶ See also Prime Minister Paul Keating’s speech at Kanchanaburi in April 1994 and a 2001 speech by John Howard at the same place in Nelson. "Beyond Slogans." pp.31-32; & Grant. "Monument." pp.41, 43-44.

¹¹⁷ See comments by veterans to that effect in Bowden. *Braddon Interview*. Part One, 27:35; & Tim Bowden. S02997. *Samuel Austin Frank Pond as Commanding Officer 2/29 Australian Infantry Battalion and a prisoner of the Japanese, 1939-1945, interviewed by Tim Bowden*. 1982. Part Two, 5:45. Nelson. *POW*. pp.66-67. Stan Arneil. *One Man’s War*. (South Melbourne: Sun Books, 1980). pp.91-92. Rowley Richards. *A Doctor’s War*. (Sydney: Harper Collins, 2005). p.94. Don Wall. *Singapore and Beyond: The Story of the Men of the 2/20 Battalion*. (East Hills, NSW: Sec. 2/20th Bn Assoc., 1985). p.172.

¹¹⁸ See Table 1.

¹¹⁹ Memoirs of Britons who arrived in Kanchanaburi in October 1942 include Reg Twigg. *Survivor on the River Kwai: The Incredible Story of Life on the Burma Railway*. (London: Penguin, 2014); & John Coast. *Railroad of Death*. (London: The Commodore Press, 1946); & Edward ‘Ted’ Chaplin. *Singapore and the Thai Railway: Experiences of Captivity, 1942-1945*. 1945. <<https://docplayer.net/65477377-Singapore-and-the-thai-railway-experiences-of-captivity-edward-ted-chaplin.html>>; & Ian Denys Peek. *One Fourteenth of an Elephant*. (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2003); & Pavillard. *Bamboo Doctor*. See also Brune. *Descent*. p.613. Australians arrived in significant numbers at the Burmese end of the line in October 1942 but the death toll in Burma was somewhat less, presumably because deaths from cholera were less numerous there than in Thailand. See A. Bancroft and R.G. Roberts. *The Mikado’s Guests: A Story of Japanese Captivity*. (Perth, WA: Patersons Printing Press Ltd, 1945). p.119; & A.J. Sweeting. *Part III: Prisoners of the Japanese*. in *Lionel Wigmore. ‘The Japanese Thrust’*. (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1957). p.571; & Beattie. *Railway*. p.79.

¹²⁰ AWM. *Kappe Report*. p.37.

¹²¹ The Dutch suffered less than one percent mortality from cholera compared to 17 and 13 percent for the British and the Australians. See Beattie. *Railway*. p.79. For inoculations, knowledge of tropical diseases and hygiene regimes see Gavin Daws. *Prisoners of the Japanese: POWs of World War II in the Pacific*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1994). pp.190-191, 200, 209-210; & Pavillard. *Bamboo Doctor*. p.109.

National Group	Total Number	Total Deaths	Mortality Rate
British	30,000	6,318	21.1%
Dutch	18,000	2,490	13.8%
Australian	12,255	2,518	20.5%

Table 1: Mortality Rates for National Groups on the Burma-Thailand Railway¹²²

National Group	Total Number	Total Deaths	Mortality Rate
American	21,580	7,107	33 percent ¹²³
Australian	22,376	8,031	35.9 percent ¹²⁴
British	50,016	12,433	25 percent ¹²⁵
Dutch	37,000	8,500	23 percent ¹²⁶
Overall	132,134	35,757	27.1 percent ¹²⁷

Table 2: Mortality Rates for POW National Groups in the Pacific War¹²⁸

¹²² The figures for British and Dutch personnel are taken from Sweeting, *Prisoners*. p.588; & Roy Mills. *Doctor's Diary and memoirs: Pond's Party, F Force, Thai-Burma Railway*. (New Lambton, NSW: Self-published, 1994). p.13 of Foreword by Hank Nelson; & DVA. *Anzac Portal British Page*. 2020. Accessed 20 July 2023. <<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/burma-thailand-railway-and-hellfire-pass-1942-1943/workers/british>>; & DVA. *Anzac Portal Dutch Page*. 2020. Accessed 20 July 2023. <<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/burma-thailand-railway-and-hellfire-pass-1942-1943/workers/dutch>>. The figures for Australian personnel are taken from Sweeting, *Prisoners*. p.571; & R.W. Newton. ed., *The Grim Glory of the 2/19th Battalion*. (Crows Nest, Sydney: 2/19 Battalion A.I.F. Association, 2006). p.528; & AWM. *Encyclopedia POW Page*. AWM. Accessed 29 September 2021. <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/pow/general_info>.

¹²³ Sarah Kovner. *Prisoners of the Empire: Inside Japanese POW Camps*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2020). <<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2jfvchn.1>>. p.5; & R.P.W. Havers. *Reassessing the Japanese Prisoner of War Experience: The Changi POW Camp, Singapore, 1942-5*. (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003). p.3.

¹²⁴ Beverley Durrant. *Manuscript*. n.d. AWM MSS1641. p.1. According to Kovner, the number of Australians who died was 7,412. According to Sweeting it was 7,777. See Kovner. *Prisoners*. p.5; & Sweeting. *Prisoners*. p.649.

¹²⁵ Kovner. *Prisoners*. p.5. According to Havers the rate is 26 percent. See Havers. *Reassessing*. p.3.

¹²⁶ Durrant. *Manuscript*: p.1; & Kovner. *Prisoners*. p.5.

¹²⁷ Sandra Wilson et al. *Japanese War Criminals: The Politics of Justice After the Second World War*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). p.15.

¹²⁸ Most of these figures are contested. The most-authoritative and -frequently quoted source in scholarly writing is the International Military Tribunal Far East. Here I have sought to ensure I compared like with like so that, when calculating a percentage, I had, from the same source, the raw numbers of those captured and of those who died. See Daws. *Prisoners*. p.299.

The claim that Australian survival rates were better than those of other national groups is not the only myth told by railway survivors. A recurring theme in memoirs and interviews is the gentle manner of deaths of those who perished while forced to slave in Burma and Thailand. According to British 'H' Force survivor, Captain Hugh Pilkington:

Those that died on the Railway, and they were over 50 percent of our party, never gave in.... None of them seemed to suffer any pain and, in spite of the squalor and misery of their conditions, they all died peacefully. Gradually they drowsed off into the coma from which they never woke, with a smile, usually a very happy smile on their lips.¹²⁹

Similar comments were made by 'A' Force survivor, Robert Holman,¹³⁰ and 'F' Force survivor, Stan Arneil.¹³¹ In September 1983 a *Canberra Times* report claimed that, on the railway, "no Australian boy died alone" and that sentiment drew approving comments in a veterans' association magazine.¹³²

¹²⁹ Stu Lloyd. *The Missing Years: A POW's Story from Changi to Hellfire Pass*. (Australia: Rosenberg Publishing, 2009). p.177.

¹³⁰ Holman and Thomson. *Paths*. p.252..

¹³¹ Nelson. *POW*. pp.55-6.

¹³² Marc Leaver. "Letter to the Editor." *The Second Nineteenth*. Vol.24, No.3, September (1983): p.39.



Figure 4: POW Murray Griffin's depiction of a cholera ward.

SOURCE: AWM ART25104

When journalist, Martin Flanagan, heard an “old digger” in a television documentary speaking of “beautiful deaths on the line” he asked his father, Arch. It was some years before Martin received a reply: “Dad told me he didn’t agree with that. He said most men died alone, dirty and homesick.”¹³³ Since diaries in their raw state tend to be warts-and-all accounts,¹³⁴ the comments of British diarist, Lt ‘Tommy’ Atkins, are apposite. Atkins was in one of the first parties sent to the railroad and, on 22 December 1942 near Banpong, he described the plight of a friend, identified only as “MacDougall DK”,

¹³³ Arch and Martin Flanagan. *The Line: A Man's Experience; A Son's Quest to Understand*. (Camberwell East, VIC.: One Day Hill, 2007). pp.161-2.

¹³⁴ Examples of edited diaries include Rohan D. Rivett. *Behind Bamboo: Hell on the Burma railway*. (Camberwell, VIC.: Penguin Books, 2005); & John Nevell. *Diary*. n.d. AWM PR00257; & Chaim Nussbaum. *Chaplain on the River Kwai*. (New York: Shapolsky Publishers, 1988); & Arneil. *War; & Mills. Diary; & Dunlop. Diaries*. Although it was edited by the author (in 1977) and his son prior to publication, Albert Moreton's account is unusually raw. See Albert Moreton. *Surviving the War: the secret diaries of an English POW along the Thailand-Burma Railway, 1942-1945*. (Tokushima, Japan: Education Publishing Center, 2010). One of the few diaries available in its original state is Drummond. *Papers*. Roy Mills' comments on the editing process are particularly interesting. See Mills. *Diary*. pp.20, 54, 56.

who was suffering from malaria and dysentery. Atkins was with him “most of the afternoon and it was a nightmare”.

He messed himself last evening & during the night & is still lying there with it all over him. He is covered with a fouled mosquito net over him, and is terribly filthy & emaciated. He was rambling with something about his leave being due, going to the river to wash etc. but nothing of importance.¹³⁵

MacDougall DK died the following evening.¹³⁶

According to Lieutenant-Colonel, S.A.F Pond, former POWs were reluctant to speak truthfully about the circumstances of their comrades’ deaths “because they had seen people die under appalling conditions and they didn’t want to inflict that on the relatives.”¹³⁷ Lieutenant Doug Lush, who himself lived to 97, said late in his life:

We learned to keep the details about how some of our men had died whilst in captivity to ourselves.... If we had gone into the actual details of these deaths, nothing good could come out of it.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Madge Gillies. *The Barbed Wire University: The Real Lives of Allied Prisoners of War in the Second World War*. (London: Aurum, 2011). p.320.

¹³⁶ Gillies. *Barbed Wire*. p.320.

¹³⁷ Bowden. *Pond Interview*. Part Two, 10:10.

¹³⁸ Quoted in Mark Baker. *The Emperor’s Grace. Untold Stories of the Australians Enslaved in Japan during World War II*. (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2021). p.194. Stan Arneil made similar comments to Tim Bowden in 1982. See Tim Bowden. AWM S02961. *Stanley Foch Arneil as a sergeant 2/30th Australian Infantry Battalion and a prisoner of the Japanese, 1940-1945, interviewed by Tim Bowden*. 1982. Part Two, 10:10.

THE POSTWAR RETICENCE AND RESTRAINT OF SURVIVORS

While concern for relatives' sensitivity as a motive for restraint in recounts of the Burma-Thailand railway is understandable, the reluctance to publicly criticise officers in the postwar era is less readily explained. Officers in the postwar era told outright lies about their POW experiences and were allowed to do so unchallenged by enlisted men who were there and who knew better. However, before unpacking the complexities of this dynamic, discussion must first focus on the extent of the divide between officers and enlisted men on the Burma-Thailand railway.

During the Pacific War, not only were captive officers exempted from manual labour, but they were also paid considerably more by the Japanese throughout their captivity.¹³⁹ My own anecdotal experience suggests that few Australians these days—even those well-versed in the POW story—are aware that the Japanese paid working prisoners throughout their captivity. Why they did is less clear since their military leaders consistently refused to co-operate with the Red Cross¹⁴⁰ or observe the Geneva Convention.¹⁴¹ However, it is probable that they did so in line with the provisions of the Second Hague Convention of 1907, to which Japan was a signatory.¹⁴² Furthermore, providing payment to POWs

¹³⁹ Joan Beaumont. "Officers and men: Rank and survival on the Thai-Burma railway." in *Beyond Surrender: Australian Prisoners of War in the Twentieth Century*. ed. Joan Beaumont, Lachlan Grant, and Aaron Pegram. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2015). p.179.

¹⁴⁰ The Red Cross representative in Tokyo, Dr Fritz Paravicini, said as early as 15 May 1942 that 'major obstacles were placed in the ICRC's way'. See International Committee of the Red Cross. *ICRC in WW II: activities in the Far East*. 2005. Accessed 6 March 2023. <<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/misc/57jnwq.htm>>. See also Linda Goetz Holmes. *4000 Bowls of Rice: A Prisoner of War Comes Home*. (New York: Brick Tower Press, 2002). pp.166-167; & Linda Goetz Holmes. *Guests of the Emperor: The Secret History of Japan's Mukden POW Camp*. (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2010). pp.67, 72, 75, 77; & Baker. *Emperor's Grace*. pp.124-126; & Catherine Kenny. *Captives: Australian Army Nurses in Japanese Prison Camps*. (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 1986). p.134; & Cornel Lumiere. *Kura!* (Brisbane: The Jacaranda Press, 1966). p.70; & Moreton. *Surviving*. pp.110, 114, 141, 189, 204; & Mills. *Diary*. pp.141-142.

¹⁴¹ Denny Neave and Craig Smith. *Aussie Soldier: Prisoners of War*. (Wavell Heights, QLD: Big Sky Publishing, 2006). p.98; & Van Waterford. *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II: Statistical History, Personal Narratives and Memorials Concerning POWs in Camps and on Hellships, Civilian Internees, Asian Slave Laborers and Others Captured in the Pacific Theater*. (Jefferson, Nth Carolina: McFarland & Co., 1994). pp.34-35; & Holmes. *Guests*. p.68; & Kovner. *Prisoners*. p.5; & Wilson et al. *War Criminals*. pp.25-26.

¹⁴² See NAA. Series MP501/1, 255/702/1536. *Treatment of Prisoners of War by Japan*. Item ID: 384265. 1941. p.1; & David Coombes. *Crossing the Wire: The Untold Stories of Australian POWs in Battle and Captivity during WWI*. (Newport, NSW: Big Sky, 2011). p.169; & Daws. *Prisoners*. p.96; & Rowland. *Kwai Story*. p.2.

meant they could be claimed technically not to be slave labourers and added to their argument that they were subject to Japanese military law.¹⁴³

RANK	per MONTH	per DAY
Lieutenant-Colonel	\$ 220.00	\$ 7.33
Major	\$ 170.00	\$ 5.67
Captain	\$ 122.50	\$ 4.08
Lieutenant	\$ 85.00	\$ 2.83
Warrant Officer Class 1	\$ 80.00	\$ 2.67
Warrant Officer Class 2	\$ 32.00	\$ 1.07
Sergeant	\$ 20.00	\$ 0.67
Corporal	\$ 20.00	\$ 0.67
Lance/Corporal	\$ 10.50	\$ 0.35
Private	\$ 9.00	\$ 0.30

*Table 3: Pay rates for prisoners of the Japanese during the Pacific War*¹⁴⁴

Exemption from work and higher pay were critical factors in the survival of POWs in conditions as difficult as those encountered on the Burma-Thailand railway. The higher pay officers received meant they were able to purchase more luxuries, drugs and life-saving supplies from canteens established in

¹⁴³ Yuki Tanaka. *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War II*. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996). pp.17, 33-34; & IMTFE. *Transcript of Proceedings 9 January 1947*. 1947. pp.14,708-14,709; & David Palmer. "Japan's World Heritage Miike Coal Mine – Where Prisoners-Of-War Worked 'Like Slaves'." *Asia-Pacific Journal*. Vol.9, No.13, July (2021). <<https://apjjf.org/2021/13/palmer>>. No page numbers: search on 'slave labor'.

¹⁴⁴ Those who were sick or unable to work were not paid. See Newton. *Glory*. p.399; & Brune. *Descent*. pp.448-9; & Sweeting. *Prisoners*. p.548.

places like the 26 and 40 Kilo camps in Burma¹⁴⁵ and at Tonchan South, Rin Tin,¹⁴⁶ Hintok¹⁴⁷ and Songkurai in Thailand.¹⁴⁸ Many members of the other ranks suspected these canteens operated chiefly for personal profit and to the advantage of the officers who set them up; in effect, the charge was that they perpetuated the inequality between those of means and those without.¹⁴⁹ Military tour guide and editor of Captain Hugh Pilkington's diaries, Stu Lloyd, has estimated that, at the end of the railroad's construction, officers typically weighed 10kg more than enlisted men.¹⁵⁰ According to Gavin Daws, the reason officers insisted they bathe separate from enlisted men was to conceal the naked evidence of their privileged position, evidence he describes as being the product of "money and no work".¹⁵¹ One notorious illustration of Daws' point came from outside the Burma-Thailand railway; it was the case of Australian soldier, Private George Roy. On Hainan in October 1944, Roy had the temerity to shower in the officers' amenities. Rather than dealing with this matter in-house, Lieutenant-Colonel W.J.R. 'Jack' Scott handed Roy to the Japanese commandant for punishment. Guards suspended Roy by his arms and beat him with pick-handles so severely that he spent two weeks in hospital.¹⁵² While he survived captivity, Roy died shortly after repatriation.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁵ Thomas H. Fagan. *World War Two Diary of Thomas H. Fagan 105 General Transport Company POW 1942-1945*. (Albury: Albury and District Historical Society Papers No 31, 2018).

<<https://victoriancollections.net.au/media/collectors/53feae1c2162f1087018acb7/items/5c03651e21ea6712f4ca4d5c/item-media/5c0365721ea6712f4ca860b/original.pdf>>. p.33.

¹⁴⁶ The officer responsible for the canteens at these two locations was Briton, Captain Richard Pote-Hunt. See Newton. *Glory*. p.507; & R.W. Newton. "Grand Tour Report, Part Four." *The Nineteenth*. Vol. 3, No.4, December (1962): p.12.

¹⁴⁷ The officer responsible was former Sydney stockbroker, Captain Dick Allen. See Newton. *Glory*. pp.503-504.

¹⁴⁸ Enlisted men believed the officer responsible was Lieutenant-Colonel C.H. Kappe. See Bowden. "Pension." p.45.

¹⁴⁹ Bancroft and Roberts. *Mikado*. pp.112-113; & Bowden. "Pension." p.45; & Newton. *Glory*. pp.503-504, 507-508, 512, 514; & Lumiere. *Kura!* p.174; & Jackson. *Surrender*. p.26; & Parkin. *Smother*. p.430.

¹⁵⁰ See Lloyd. *Missing Years*. p.229.

¹⁵¹ Daws. *Prisoners*. p.110.

¹⁵² Beaumont. *Gull Force*. pp.181-182; & Roger Maynard. *Ambon: The Truth About One of the Most Brutal POW Camps in World War II and the Triumph of the Aussie Spirit*. (Sydney, NSW: Hachette, Australia, 2014). pp.170-171; & I.T. Campbell. "Training and Leadership in the 2nd AIF: a case study of Brigadier F.G. Gallegan." (MA (Hons) Australian Defence Force Academy, UNSW, 1991).

<https://www.unswworks.unsw.edu.au/primo-explore/fulldisplay/unswworks_52975/UNSWORKS>. pp.197-198.

¹⁵³ Beaumont. *Gull Force*. p.182.

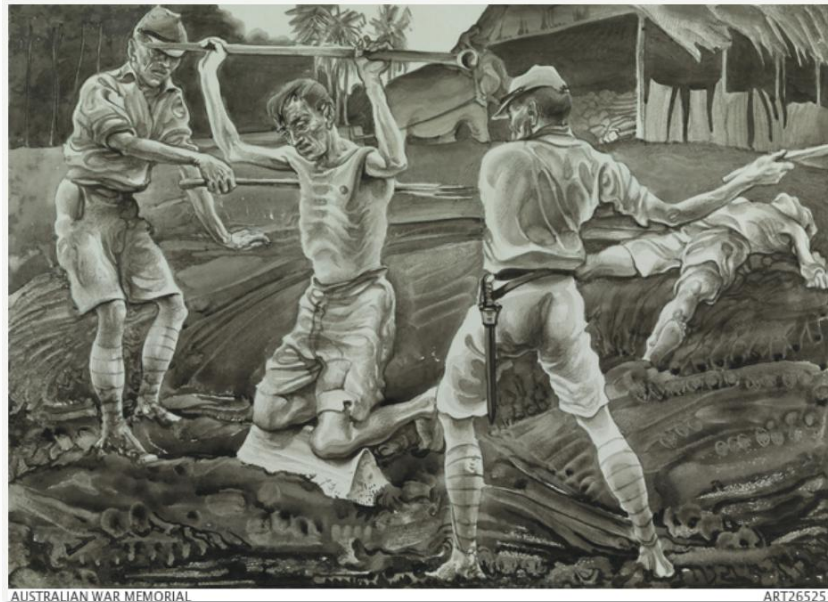


Figure 5: Murray Griffin's depiction of a beating.

SOURCE: AWM ART26525

The difference in survival rates between officers and other ranks is stark but it is difficult to find official figures demonstrating that—a point supporting Beaumont's comment about a “conspiracy of silence”. Consequently, researchers must rely on the work of scholars. Amongst ‘F’ Force, the group that experienced the worst conditions on the railway, the overall mortality rate was 44 percent¹⁵⁴ but, for British officers of that party, mortality was between 2 and 2.5 percent; for Australian officers, it was “less than one per cent”.¹⁵⁵ In her analysis of the situation, Beaumont provides three reasons officers survived in greater numbers than enlisted men: higher pay, exemption from manual labour and their leadership role, if performed conscientiously.¹⁵⁶ Hank Nelson observed that Japanese guards and engineers on the railway were at greater risk of dying than Australian officers—and, in fact, they were

¹⁵⁴ Paul Taucher. "Prosecuting Command: Allied Command Responsibility Trials of Junior and Mid-Level Japanese Officers After the Second World War." (Doctoral Thesis, Murdoch University, 2022). p.257.

¹⁵⁵ McCormack and Nelson. *Railway*. p.101. Nelson's source for this comment was evidence given under oath by Col. Kappe at the September 1946 trial in Singapore of 'Banno Hirateru and six others'. See Rowland. *Kwai Story*. p.301. There was a similar disparity in 'H' Force. See Beaumont. "Privilege." p.86. Across the whole of the Pacific, the death rate for POW officers was ten percent but that figure was probably skewed by the indiscriminate nature of drownings at sea. See Twomey. *Battle Within*. p.4.

¹⁵⁶ Beaumont. "Officers." pp.182-183.

about seven times more likely to do so.¹⁵⁷ These damning figures afford eloquent refutation of the myth of egalitarianism in the Second Australian Imperial Force (AIF), particularly insofar as its experience of captivity is concerned. They also suggest that the harmony and cohesion described by Uren was not the only experience on the Burma-Thailand railway.

In the postwar era, officer recollections tended to be inconsistent with enlisted men's experiences. Yet, in the public domain, officer-versions were rarely challenged. For example, Australian Lieutenant-Colonel R.F. Oakes described as "absolutely false" any suggestion that officers were better off than the men on the Burma-Thailand railway.¹⁵⁸ This was the officer whose Hintok railway camp was described by 'Weary' Dunlop as "a shambles".¹⁵⁹ Private Alex Drummond claimed Oakes was so cowed by the Japanese that he retreated into his hut and built a model boat.¹⁶⁰ Another account I would describe as self-serving and disingenuous is Lieutenant-Colonel C.H. 'Gus' Kappe's official report on 'F' Force; in it Kappe attributes the "high level" of "morale and discipline" amongst the Australians to the "firm organization" put in place by him.¹⁶¹ As has been mentioned, Kappe was awarded an OBE and promoted to brigadier for his railway leadership. Kappe died in 1968 and, when a representative of the Victorian Ex-POW Association expressed disappointment at the sparse POW representation at his funeral, the only public comment made in one ex-servicemen's magazine was the cryptic: "Shall we tell him?"¹⁶² In 1982, when Tim Bowden asked Lieutenant-Colonel S.A.F. Pond about the "controversial figure", Kappe, Pond replied: "he was a very good officer, a very capable officer, but I wouldn't enter into any controversy on the subject."¹⁶³ When asked about criticisms of 'F' Force Pond said, "I think the officers all did a job. I think the troops would agree with that too."¹⁶⁴ He went on to argue that, "The officers were continually with their men" and that he, personally made it his "policy to go out and see the troops

¹⁵⁷ McCormack and Nelson. *Railway*. p.19.

¹⁵⁸ Ivan Chapman. *Tokyo Calling: The Charles Cousens Case*. (Sydney, NSW: Hale & Ironmonger, 1990). p.347.

¹⁵⁹ Dunlop. *Diaries*. p.255.

¹⁶⁰ Drummond. *Truth*: p.207.

¹⁶¹ AWM. *Kappe Report*. p.5.

¹⁶² R.W. Newton. "Brig. Gus Kappe." *The Nineteenth*. Vol.9, No.3 September (1968): pp.18-19.

¹⁶³ Bowden. *Pond Interview*. Part One, 42:00.

¹⁶⁴ Bowden. *Pond Interview*. Part One, 40:10.

working”.¹⁶⁵ The questionable nature of that claim was exposed when Bowden commented that being “with their men” meant officers were frequently beaten; Pond responded: “I was never beaten on those occasions myself”.¹⁶⁶ That remarkable exemption from beatings stands in contrast to the 68 beatings received by one of the more conscientious railway officers, Captain Reg Newton.¹⁶⁷

According to author Richard Rowland, “It was not until the 1980s” that former enlisted POWs “began to tell their stories.”¹⁶⁸ Even so, Private George Aspinall felt his mates remained reluctant to name names publicly; on the other hand, their private discussions could descend into hate sessions.¹⁶⁹ Why enlisted men so long maintained their public reserve on the subject of officer-privilege is another question. As Aspinall saw it, “we were supposed to be soldiers” and “We perhaps tried to live up to a code, something set by our forefathers.”¹⁷⁰

In 1989, forty-five years after the end of the war, a former sergeant of the 2/19th Battalion, Marc Leaver, wrote a letter to the editor of Sydney’s *Sun-Herald* which was published under the headline, “Officer prisoners bludged in Jap POW camps”. The editor of the 2/19th Battalion Association’s magazine, Athol Hill, described Leaver’s comments as a “scurrilous piece of writing.”¹⁷¹ Another Association member, Ralph Bardsley wrote:

We had good officers, ordinary officers and perhaps not so good ones. To start raking up such muck in a general way that the present society would take a delight in pointing the finger at any

¹⁶⁵ Bowden. *Pond Interview*. Part One, 40:10.

¹⁶⁶ Bowden. *Pond Interview*. Part One, 22:50.

¹⁶⁷ AWM. 1010/4/109. [*War Crimes and Trials – Affidavits and Sworn Statements*]. 1945-1948. p.6.

¹⁶⁸ Rowland. *Kwai Story*. p.372.

¹⁶⁹ Bowden. "Pension." p.45.

¹⁷⁰ Bowden. "Pension." p.45.

¹⁷¹ Ralph Bardsley. "Letter to the Editor." *The 2nd Nineteenth*. Vol.30, No.4, December (1989): p.26.

officer who was a POW is a disgusting insult to the dedicated medical officers and others who were bashed to help our cause.¹⁷²



Figure 6: Chungkai War Cemetery as it is today.

SOURCE: Own photograph

Bardsley was concerned lest the families of Australian officers who died read “this degrading rubbish.”¹⁷³ And yet these men, Hill and Bardsley, who protested so volubly in defence of officers, had in wartime both been lowly privates.¹⁷⁴ Perhaps they had been so inculcated into the ‘groupthink’ mindset¹⁷⁵ that forty-five years later they were unconscious of that incongruity.

¹⁷² Bardsley. "Letter." p.26.

¹⁷³ Bardsley. "Letter." p.26.

¹⁷⁴ NX52472 Pte Ralph Bardsley, 2/19th Bn, of Drummoyne, NSW & NX35788 Pte Athol George Hill, 2/19th Bn, of Urana, NSW.

¹⁷⁵ ‘Groupthink’ is a kind of collective confirmation bias. See Ben Dattner and Darren Dahl. *The Blame Game: How the Hidden Rules of Credit and Blame Determine Our Success or Failure*. (New York: Free Press, 2011). pp.114-115.

There were, of course, occasional iconoclasts who, like Leaver, were willing to cross the invisible line and one example was Private Alex Drummond who, in the postwar era, was a founder of an organisation called the Old Comrades' Association. One of its foundational rules was that former officers were excluded from joining.¹⁷⁶ However, the Association was short-lived. An early postwar meeting ended in violence when Drummond was accused of being a communist; the Association folded four years later.¹⁷⁷ In his 1982 interview with Tim Bowden, only a year before his death, Drummond was still an angry and disenfranchised member of the ex-POW community.¹⁷⁸



Figure 7: Evidence that not all POW officers had it easy.

Australian doctor, Maj. A.W.M. Hutson, attending to a British captain

in Borneo, 16 September 1945.

¹⁷⁶ Drummond. *Truth*: p.141; & Tim Bowden. Emails and telephone conversations. 16 August 2021.

¹⁷⁷ Tim Bowden. AWM S02962. *Alexander Hatton Drummond as a private 2/29th Australian Infantry Battalion and a prisoner of the Japanese, 1941-1945, interviewed by Tim Bowden*. 1982. Part Three, 8:00.

¹⁷⁸ As examples, see his comments such as the officers' alleged refrain, 'They died that we may live' in Bowden. *Drummond Interview*. Part Two, 0:00, Part Two, 28:30, Part Two, 43:45, Part Two 51:15, Part Three, 8:00.

SOURCE: AWM C201341

A range of reasons could be advanced to explain the other ranks' long-term reticence publicly to criticise individuals or call out instances of bad behaviour including thievery,¹⁷⁹ physical punishment of wrongdoers by officers¹⁸⁰—and sometimes even by other enlisted men¹⁸¹—or to speak on a range of taboo subjects such as cowardice,¹⁸² the kindnesses of guards¹⁸³ and instances of homosexuality in the POW population¹⁸⁴ or between POWs and guards.¹⁸⁵ These shared silences or omissions from public recollections probably reflect the values of the era, what Alice Hoffman has described as the tendency for people to give answers which conform “with acceptable norms”¹⁸⁶ and part of the recollection process Alistair Thomson calls “composure”;¹⁸⁷ moreover, some veterans were keen to move on and let bygones be bygones,¹⁸⁸ but there was also a feeling that the former POWs needed to present a united

¹⁷⁹ A single passage in the 2/19th Battalion's history describes over thirty thefts experienced by a single formation on the railway. See Newton. *Glory*. p.488. See also Chaplin. *Railway*: pp.19-20. Wall. *Singapore*. p.172; & Don Wall. ed., *Heroes of F Force*. (Self-published, 1993). p.31; & Parkin. *Smother*. p.477.

¹⁸⁰ See UKWO. *Report on Newey*. pp.31, 33; & Newton. *Glory*. pp.399, 488; & Nelson. *POW*. p.62. David F. Smith. *Yasme Nei: Memoirs of F Force Thai-Burma Railway*. (Self-published, 1996). p.90.

¹⁸¹ The ‘fairly controversial’ vigilance committee on Ambon late in 1944 is one example of a structured process of physical punishment administered by enlisted men. See Beaumont. *Gull Force*. p.184.

¹⁸² Veiled references to the behaviour of some Australian troops on the eve of the fall of Singapore is a prime example. Compare the comments of Col. E.G. Keogh with those of British writer Peter Elphick. The former referred to them vaguely as “stragglers”; the latter as “deserters”. Newton. *Glory*. p.230; & Peter Elphick. *The Pregnable Fortress*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995). p.306.

¹⁸³ The same Marc Leaver of Yenda, NSW, who incurred censure for his comments on officers, was publicly castigated for commenting on the kindness of a Christian guard. See Peter Wellington. "Letter to the Editor" *The 2nd Nineteenth*. Vol.29, No.2, June (1988): p.44.

¹⁸⁴ See Yorick Smaal. *Sex, Soldiers and the South Pacific, 1939-45: Queer Identities in Australia in the Second World War*. (London: Palgrave, Macmillan UK, 2015). p.73. Showing his status as a damaged survivor, this is a taboo Alex Drummond broke in his 1982 interview with Tim Bowden when he named names. Bowden. *Drummond Interview*. Part One, 4:10, Part Two, 18:00 & 22:30.

¹⁸⁵ The most notorious incident involved the death by shooting of Sgt Ronnie O'Donnell at the 18 Kilo Camp in Burma on 26 December 1942. For the frankest accounts of this incident, see Richards. *Doctor's War*. p.108; & Lumiere. *Kura!* pp.173-175.

¹⁸⁶ Alice M. Hoffman. "Reliability and validity in oral history." *Today's Speech*. 22, Winter (1974). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/01463377409369125>: p.25.

¹⁸⁷ Thomson. *Memories*. pp.11-12.

¹⁸⁸ For examples see Nevell. *Diary*: pp.252-253; & Bowden. *Braddon Interview*. Part Two, 28:30; & Stan Arneil. *Black Jack: The Life and Times of Brigadier Sir Frederick Galleghan*. (South Melbourne: MacMillan, 1983). p.27; & Peter Henning. *Doomed Battalion: Mateship and Leadership in War and Captivity. The Australian 2/40 Battalion 1940-45*. (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1995). pp.306-307; & Leslie G. Hall. *Blue Haze: POWs on the Burma Railway. Incorporating the History of "A" Force Groups 3 & 5 Burma-Thai Railway 1942-1943*. (Kenthurst, NSW: Kangaroo Press, 1996). p.7.

front to the public who had little understanding of the reality of captivity.¹⁸⁹ Some of this appears to have been motivated by unit loyalty, vested interest in the telling of a positive tale and the need to put a strong case for assistance to government agencies such as the Repatriation Department with the concomitant belief that disunity in the ranks would undermine that objective.¹⁹⁰

Veterans' tendency to circle the wagons became apparent early in the postwar era as indicated by the comments of Major John Wyett when he was required to give evidence at the November 1945 Ligertwood Royal Commission into the circumstances of Major-General Henry Gordon Bennett's escape from Singapore on 15 February 1942. In his 1996 memoir, Wyett wrote that, by escaping, Gordon Bennett "did a grave disservice to the proud name of the 8th Division".¹⁹¹ However, at the Royal Commission, Wyett strove hard to ensure his evidence was not unduly damning for Gordon Bennett because he objected to the government "muddying the waters with a public enquiry open to the press" and sought to protect:

The reputation and good name of the [8th] division [which] were of more concern to me than that of its former commander [i.e., Gordon Bennett].¹⁹²

CLASS BIAS IN FACT, IN HISTORIES AND IN SCHOLARSHIP

¹⁸⁹ See Ralph Bardsley's comments on 'degrading rubbish' cited above. See also Walter Holding. *World War II Experiences of WX17634 Pte W Holding*. (n.d.). <https://www.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-01/Holding_Walter.pdf>. p.56; & George Shelly. "Letter to the Editor." *The Nineteenth*. Vol.13, No.2, June (1972): p.36; & Russell Braddon. *End of a Hate: a sequel to 'The Naked Island' with which is incorporated Song of War: a short story*. (London: Cassell, 1958). p.19.

¹⁹⁰ Twomey. *Battle Within*. pp.54, 75, 88; & Michael McKernan. *This War Never Ends: The Pain of Separation and Return*. (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 2001). pp.142-145; & R.W. Newton. "Repatriation – Procedure on Claims." *The Nineteenth*. Vol.8, No.1, March (1967): pp.14-16; & David Hinder. "Claims to the Repatriation Department." *The Nineteenth*. Vol.13, No.1, March (1972): pp.8-12.

¹⁹¹ John Wyett. *Staff Wallah At the fall of Singapore*. (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1996). p.211.

¹⁹² Wyett. *Staff Wallah*. p.204

One of the first POW officer recounts of the railway was written by Briton, Lieutenant John Coast. It began with an apology to the ORs because they “had a worse time than the Officers” and added the “hope that some of them [enlisted POWs] will write a history from their viewpoint.”¹⁹³ Despite Coast’s exhortation and the 78 years that have elapsed since he made it, the written record continues to over-represent officer-recounts. American novelist and Pacific War veteran, James Jones, believed military history is “written by the upper classes for the upper classes.”¹⁹⁴ That assertion led him to conclude:

If that is so, then the whole history of my generation’s World War II has been written, not wrongly so much but in a way that gave precedence to strategists, tacticians and theorists, but gave little more than lip-service to the viewpoint of the hairy, swiftly aging, fighting lower class soldier.¹⁹⁵

For some time, oral historians working in the military realm such as Alistair Thomson,¹⁹⁶ Michael Roper,¹⁹⁷ David Chalk,¹⁹⁸ Studs Terkel¹⁹⁹ and H.T. and T.F. Cook²⁰⁰ have sought to rectify this imbalance. In the sphere of Australian Pacific POW history, the work of Joan Beaumont²⁰¹ and Hank Nelson and Tim Bowden²⁰² had similar objectives. My own bibliography reflects the officer-bias referred to by Jones; it currently contains 101 war-related memoirs or biographies.²⁰³ Of these, 46 (i.e., 45.5 percent) were written by or about enlisted men. The remaining 53 texts (i.e., 52.5 percent) were

¹⁹³ Coast. *Railroad*. p.8.

¹⁹⁴ James Jones. *WWII: A Chronicle of Soldiering*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014). p.60.

¹⁹⁵ Jones. *WWII*. p.60.

¹⁹⁶ Thomson. *Memories*. pp.10-11, 343-345.

¹⁹⁷ Michael Roper. "Re-remembering the Soldier Hero: the Psychic and Social Construction of Memory in Personal Narratives of the Great War." *History workshop*. Vol.50, No.1, Autumn (2000). <<https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/2000.50.181>>.

¹⁹⁸ Coombes. *Wire*.

¹⁹⁹ Studs Terkel. *The Good War: An Oral History of World War Two*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

²⁰⁰ Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook. *Japan at War: An Oral History*. (New York: The New Press, 1992).

²⁰¹ Beaumont. *Gull Force*. pp.6-11.

²⁰² Tim Bowden. "Talking of Trauma: The Making of the ABC Radio Series Prisoners of War, Australians Under Nippon." *The 2nd Nineteenth*. Vol.25, No.2, June (1984): p.11; & Tim Bowden. *Stubborn Buggers. The Survivors of the Infamous POW Gaol that Made Changi Look Like Heaven*. (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2014). pp.247-248.

²⁰³ These texts were selected primarily on the basis of availability.

written by or about officers. So, while that seems to show a slight preponderance of officer-centric recounts, it must be remembered that amongst Pacific prisoners of war from the Second AIF, the ratio of officers to men in infantry battalions was about 1:23, i.e., 4.3 percent.²⁰⁴ Therefore, having 52.5 percent of recounts written by or about officers means officer-perspectives are over-represented by a factor greater than twelve times that of enlisted men.

James Jones' reference to the "hairy ... fighting lower class soldier" is a salutary one for scholars seeking fairly to depict the experience of the majority of servicemen in two world wars. However, the reasons for this imbalance are probably more structural than deliberate. Officers in the Second AIF tended to be drawn from the better-educated recruits, usually those having finished high school or attended university.²⁰⁵ Their greater literacy was more likely to lead them to commit their thoughts to paper. During captivity, they had more time to write diaries and in the postwar era they were more likely to craft personal memoirs in forms suitable for subsequent publication or to be connected to others who could.²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, readers would do well to note the advice provided by Richard Travers based on his analysis of the attestation forms of every member of the 2/1st Battalion: from those data he concluded there was no such thing "as a stereotypical digger, or a single Anzac myth".²⁰⁷ While this may appear to indicate I claim the moral high ground, in the interests of full disclosure, it should be noted that the subject of my own research is a member of the officer class—a fact which puts me squarely on the problem rather than the solution side of the equation.

How one navigates these turgid waters is a question researchers more experienced than me may answer.

In the meantime, I thrash about in an ocean of anecdotal evidence seeking to grasp hold of "hard

²⁰⁴ Beaumont. "Privilege." p.86.

²⁰⁵ Richard Travers. "The Original 2/1st Battalion: A Quantitative Study of an Australian Fighting Unit." (MA, UNSW, Australia, 2014). <http://unsworks.unsw.edu.au/fapi/datastream/unsworks:34684/SOURCE02>>. pp.110-111; & Beaumont. *Gull Force*. pp.27-29; & Twomey. *Battle Within*. pp.17-18; & Bowden. "Trauma." p.15.

²⁰⁶ This is a point supported by my bibliography if it is a representative guide: it contains seventeen self-published or unpublished memoirs of which six were written by officers and eleven by enlisted men, suggesting that officers who wrote memoirs were almost three times more likely to have them published commercially.

²⁰⁷ Travers. "2/1st Bn." p.15.

facts”.²⁰⁸ Perhaps in a case of the cherry-picking those comments by implication condemn, I find assurance in the folk wisdom of those who lived through events more challenging than any I have faced in my six and a half decades. While it may not convince others, I hear a ring of authenticity in comments two veterans, the first of whom, Erik Leeuwenburg, was a Dutch interpreter who, in Burma, worked with Australians in ‘A’ Force. After the Japanese surrender, he had an encounter with a “very pukka” British colonel in Bangkok. He was convinced this officer was representative of a class strangely absent during captivity “when responsibility meant danger”; but “The day the war was over, with great pomp, they immediately took charge again.”²⁰⁹ The second comes from Australian Lieutenant Walter Summons who, as a 26 year old recently liberated POW, wrote:

I am not suggesting that every member of the A.I.F. who was captured by the Japanese was a little hero, but I do say that the vast majority of these prisoners displayed an amazing amount of courage in adversity.... It is hard to get to know a man if you only meet him casually, but when you live and sleep with him, when misfortunes fall indiscriminately on everybody, then each man’s worth is made apparent, and character is revealed in all its nakedness.

Those who endured the miseries of existence under the Japanese had their faith in the fundamental qualities of man confirmed, and learned to regard many of the usually admired attributes as trivial and worthless.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ As described in Lindsey Dodd. *Feeling Memory: Remembering Wartime Childhoods in France*. (ProQuest Ebook Central: Columbia University Press, 2023).

<<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/monash/detail.action?docID=7184437>>. p.17.

²⁰⁹ Lumiere. *Kura!* p.174.

²¹⁰ Walter Irvine Summons. *Twice Their Prisoner*. (Melbourne: Geoffrey Cumberlege, OUP, 1946). pp.160-161.

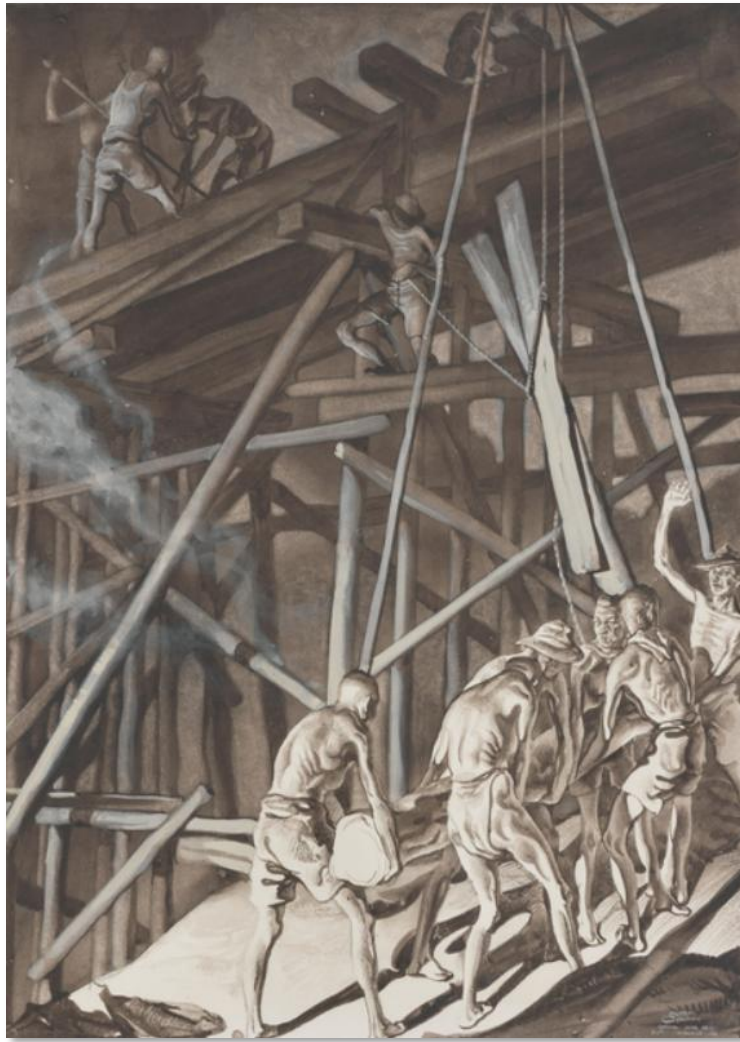


Figure 8: Murray Griffin's depiction of bridge-building on the Burma-Thailand railway.

SOURCE: AWM ART25107

CONCLUSION

Conditions for captives on the Burma-Thailand railway were grim. In such circumstances, it would be foolhardy to presume there was not selfishness amongst all ranks and there is evidence to indicate that was the case. As Private Keith Memory Firth observed, although:

mateship was something very valuable, unfortunately, and I suppose we were all guilty of it, quite often it was every man for himself. When you get down to a pretty low ebb and it's your own self you're trying to save, you'll give yourself a bit of preferential treatment even if it's unfortunately at someone else's expense.²¹¹

The question then becomes one of where the emphasis is placed in subsequent recounts and summations. Does one selfish act outweigh several examples of selflessness or do a few examples of extraordinary selflessness—such as men volunteering to remain in isolation tents to nurse those afflicted by cholera²¹² or entering an infected *romusha* camp²¹³ at grave personal risk to bury the dead and clean the area²¹⁴—outweigh many instances where self-interest prevailed? No mathematical formulae guide such calculations. Private Dick Armstrong was quoted in 2009 saying that it was while nursing cholera patients on the railway that:

most of us began building around ourselves brick walls of self preservation through which we allowed no one except our fellow prisoners to enter. In many cases we still maintain those 'walls of privacy'; even today.²¹⁵

Tom Uren's well-polished Parliamentary anecdote reflects the need of those who survive traumatic experiences to make sense of their memories and to invest them with meaning.²¹⁶ It could be argued

²¹¹ Henning. *Doomed*. pp.291-292.

²¹² Richards. *Doctor's War*. pp.151-152; & Arthurson. *13th AGH*. pp.63-65; & Mills. *Diary*. pp.160, 163; & Wright. *Line*. pp.87, 496-497.

²¹³ *Romusha* is the term used to refer to the Asian labourers who worked on the railroad. Estimates of their numbers vary but are in the order of 100,000. The numbers of their dead vary even more, ranging from 50,000 to 75,000. See Yoshihiko Futamatsu. *Across the Three Pagodas Pass: The Story of the Thai-Burma Railway*. (Folkestone, UK: Renaissance Books, 2013). pp.38-39; & Sweeting. *Prisoners*. p.588.

²¹⁴ This was at Tonchan South. See Newey. *Report*. p.5; & Peek. *Elephant*. p.181.

²¹⁵ Rosalind Hearder. *Keep the Men Alive: Australian POW doctors in Japanese captivity*. (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2009). p.197.

²¹⁶ Alistair Thomson. "Embattled Manhood: Gender, Memory and the Anzac Legend." in *Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia*. ed. Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994). p.17; & Cook and Cook. *Japan*. p.17; & Terkel. *Good War*. p.401; & Laurens van der Post. *The Night of*

that it stands to Uren's credit that he saw positives in those events and took from them a hopeful message. However, that is not an exemplar for historians who should seek to reflect reality rather than project the reality we seek. In relation to the Burma-Thailand railway, where so much of the story is tied up in myth and notions of national character and where clarity is clouded by the stories veterans didn't tell, those they liked to tell and those we liked to hear, the task of fairly and accurately representing that reality is particularly challenging. Scholars seeking to gain an impression of conditions overall must deal with veterans' different experiences, interpretations and levels of candour; also at play are our own interpretations of that material so that it is as if those events are now immersed in a fog which shifts and disperses as researchers move through them, but which continues to obscure the whole.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

2/4th Machine Gun Battalion Ex Members Association. "Hintok Valley Camp, 154.00km - Thailand." 2022. Accessed 2 July 2022. <<https://2nd4thmgb.com.au/camp/hintok-valley-camp-154-00km-thailand/>>.

Arneil, Stan. *Black Jack: The Life and Times of Brigadier Sir Frederick Galleghan*. South Melbourne: MacMillan, 1983.

———. *One Man's War*. South Melbourne: Sun Books, 1980.

Arthurson, Lex. *The Story of the 13th Australian General Hospital. 8th Division A.I.F., Malaya*. 2009. <http://www.pows-of-japan.net/articles/AUSTRALIAN_GENERAL_HOSPITAL.pdf>.

AWM. "Encyclopedia POW Page." AWM. Accessed 29 September 2021. <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/pow/general_info>.

the New Moon. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1971). pp.29, 121, 146; & Flanagan. *Line*. pp.161-162; & Wright. *Line*. pp.436-437; & Beatrice Trefalt. "Finding the Remains of the Dead: Photographs from a Japanese Mission to New Guinea, 1969-1970." *The Asia-Pacific Journal*. . Vol.20, No.10., 15 May (2022). <<https://apjjf.org/2022/10/Trefalt.html> >: p.17; & Henning. *Doomed*. pp.317-318; & Vivian Bullwinkel. "Matron Vivian Bullwinkel's Address at Cooma Reunion." *The Nineteenth*. Vol.5, No.2, June (1964): pp.10-11; & Braddon. *Hate*. p.177.

- . AWM54 554/7/4. *Kappe Report on 'F' Force in Thailand*.
<<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2647972>> Accessed: 19 December 2020.
- . Image ART26437. *Lt-Col. C.H. Kappe of 'F' Force*.
<<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C170467>> Accessed: 30 June 2021.
- . 9/2. [*Records of War Crimes Enquiries and Trials, 1939-45 War*] *Report of Major R E Steele, Warrant Officer W Wallace, Sergeant R J Kennedy [on POWs] - Copy No. 4*.
<<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2722197>> Accessed: 24 May 2021.
- . AWM54 1010/4/109. [*War Crimes and Trials – Affidavits and Sworn Statements:*].
1945-1948 <<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2633267>> Accessed: 24 April 2020
- Baker, Mark. *The Emperor's Grace. Untold Stories of the Australians Enslaved in Japan During World War II*. Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2021.
- Bancroft, A., and R.G. Roberts. *The Mikado's Guests: A Story of Japanese Captivity*. Perth, WA: Patersons Printing Press Ltd, 1945.
- Bardsley, Ralph. "Letter to the Editor." *The 2nd Nineteenth*. Vol.30, No.4, December (1989): p.26.
- Beattie, Rod. *The Death Railway – a Brief History*. Kanchanaburi, Thailand: TBRC, 2015.
- Beaumont, Joan. *Gull Force*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988.
- . "Officers and Men: Rank and Survival on the Thai-Burma Railway." In *Beyond Surrender: Australian Prisoners of War in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Joan Beaumont, Lachlan Grant and Aaron Pegram, pp.179-199. Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2015.
- . "Rank, Privilege and Prisoners of War." *War & Society*. Vol.1, No.1 (1983): pp.67-94. <<https://doi.org/10.1179/106980483790303126>>.

Beaumont, Joan, and Andrew Witcomb. "The Thai-Burma Railway: Asymmetrical and Transitional Memories." In *The Pacific War: Aftermaths, Remembrance and Culture*, edited by Christina Twomey and Ernest Koh. London: Routledge, 2015.

Bowden, Tim. AWM S02962. *Alexander Hatton Drummond as a Private 2/29th Australian Infantry Battalion and a Prisoner of the Japanese, 1941-1945, Interviewed by Tim Bowden*. 1982 <<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1006614>> Accessed: 31 January 2023.

This entry was generated through inserting a Personal Communication citation for ———, Emails and Telephone Conversations. Personal Communication references should appear only in the notes. Remove field codes in the final document and then remove this entry.

———. "I Don't Think I Deserve a Pension – We Didn't Do Much Fighting'. interviewing Australian Prisoners of War of the Japanese, 1942-1945." Paper Presented at 'Prisoners of war: A conference on the Australian experience of captivity in the 20th century.' Australian National University, Canberra, Thursday, 6 June, 2013.

———. AWM S03005. *Russell Reading Braddon as a Gunner 2/15th Australian Field Regiment and a Prisoner of the Japanese, 1941-1945, Interviewed by Tim Bowden*. 1982 <<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1008233>> Accessed: 7 August 2023.

———. AWM S02997. *Samuel Austin Frank Pond as Commanding Officer 2/29 Australian Infantry Battalion and a Prisoner of the Japanese, 1939-1945, Interviewed by Tim Bowden*. 1982 <<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1008207>> Accessed: 31 March 2023.

———. AWM S02961. *Stanley Foch Arneil as a Sergeant 2/30th Australian Infantry Battalion and a Prisoner of the Japanese, 1940-1945, Interviewed by Tim Bowden*. 1982 <<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1006613>> Accessed: 28 June 2021.

- . *Stubborn Buggers. The Survivors of the Infamous POW Gaol That Made Changi Look Like Heaven*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2014.
- . "Talking of Trauma: The Making of the ABC Radio Series Prisoners of War, Australians under Nippon." *The 2nd Nineteenth*. Vol.25, No.2, June (1984): pp.11-33.
- Braddon, Russell. *End of a Hate: A Sequel to 'the Naked Island' with Which Is Incorporated Song of War: A Short Story*. London: Cassell, 1958.
- Bradley, James. *Towards the Setting Sun: An Escape from the Thai-Burma Railway, 1943*. Wellington, NSW: J.M.L. Fuller, 1984.
- Brune, Peter. *Descent into Hell: The Fall of Singapore - Pudu and Changi - the Thai-Burma Railway*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2014.
- Bullwinkel, Vivian. "Matron Vivian Bullwinkel's Address at Cooma Reunion." *The Nineteenth*. Vol.5, No.2, June (1964): pp.10-11.
- Campbell, I.T. "Training and Leadership in the 2nd AIF: A Case Study of Brigadier F.G. Galleghan." MA (Hons), Australian Defence Force Academy, UNSW, 1991.
https://www.unsworks.unsw.edu.au/primo-explore/fulldisplay/unsworks_52975/UNSWORKS.
- Chaplin, Edward 'Ted'. *Singapore and the Thai Railway: Experiences of Captivity, 1942-1945*. <<https://docplayer.net/65477377-Singapore-and-the-thai-railway-experiences-of-captivity-edward-ted-chaplin.html>>.
- Chapman, Ivan. *Tokyo Calling: The Charles Cousens Case*. Sydney, NSW: Hale & Ironmonger, 1990.
- Coast, John. *Railroad of Death*. London: The Commodore Press, 1946.
- Cook, Haruko Taya, and Theodore F. Cook. *Japan at War: An Oral History*. New York: The New Press, 1992.

- Coombes, David. *Crossing the Wire: The Untold Stories of Australian POWs in Battle and Captivity During WWI*. Newport, NSW: Big Sky, 2011.
- Dattner, Ben, and Darren Dahl. *The Blame Game: How the Hidden Rules of Credit and Blame Determine Our Success or Failure*. New York: Free Press, 2011.
- Daws, Gavin. *Prisoners of the Japanese: POWs of World War II in the Pacific*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1994.
- Dodd, Lindsey. *Feeling Memory: Remembering Wartime Childhoods in France*. ProQuest Ebook Central: Columbia University Press, 2023.
<<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/monash/detail.action?docID=7184437>>.
- Drummond, Alexander Hatton. *The Naked Truth*. AWM MSS1530.
- . *Papers, 1941-2001 [Manuscript] Alexander Hatton Drummond 1911-1983*. MS 13716. State Library of Victoria.
- Dunlop, Edward E. *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop*. Melbourne: Nelson Publishers, 1986.
- Durrant, Beverley. *Manuscript*. AWM MSS1641.
- DVA. "Anzac Portal British Page." 2020. Accessed 20 July 2023.
<<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/burma-thailand-railway-and-hellfire-pass-1942-1943/workers/british>>.
- . "Anzac Portal Dutch Page." 2020. Accessed 20 July 2023.
<<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/burma-thailand-railway-and-hellfire-pass-1942-1943/workers/dutch>>.
- Elphick, Peter. *The Pregnable Fortress*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995.
- Fagan, Thomas H. *World War Two Diary of Thomas H. Fagan 105 General Transport Company POW 1942-1945*. Albury: Albury and District Historical Society Papers No 31, 2018.
<<https://victoriancollections.net.au/media/collectors/53feae1c2162f1087018acb7/item>>

[s/5c03651e21ea6712f4ca4d5c/item-media/5c03655721ea6712f4ca860b/original.pdf](https://www.erasjournal.com.au/s/5c03651e21ea6712f4ca4d5c/item-media/5c03655721ea6712f4ca860b/original.pdf)

>.

Flanagan, Arch and Martin. *The Line: A Man's Experience; a Son's Quest to Understand*.

Camberwell East, VIC.: One Day Hill, 2007.

Futamatsu, Yoshihiko. *Across the Three Pagodas Pass: The Story of the Thai-Burma Railway*.

Folkestone, UK: Renaissance Books, 2013.

Gillies, Madge. *The Barbed Wire University: The Real Lives of Allied Prisoners of War in the*

Second World War. London: Aurum, 2011.

Grant, Lachlan. "Monument and Ceremony: The Australian Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial

and the Anzac Legend." In *Forgotten Captives in Japanese-Occupied Asia*, edited by

Karl Hack and Kevin Blackburn, pp.41-56. London: Routledge, 2008.

Hack, Karl, and Kevin Blackburn. "*The Bridge on the River Kwai and King Rat: Protest and*

Ex-Prisoner of War Memory in Britain and Australia." In *Forgotten Captives in*

Japanese-Occupied Asia, edited by Karl Hack and Kevin Blackburn, pp.147-171.

London: Routledge, 2008.

Hall, Leslie G. *Blue Haze: POWs on the Burma Railway. Incorporating the History of "a"*

Force Groups 3 & 5 Burma-Thai Railway 1942-1943. Kenthurst, NSW: Kangaroo

Press, 1996.

Harrison, Kenneth. *The Brave Japanese*. Sydney: Rigby Ltd, 1966.

<http://guyharrison.squarespace.com/bravejapanese/>.

Havers, R.P.W. *Reassessing the Japanese Prisoner of War Experience: The Changi POW*

Camp, Singapore, 1942-5. London: Routledge Curzon, 2003.

Header, Rosalind. *Keep the Men Alive: Australian POW Doctors in Japanese Captivity*.

Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2009.

- Henning, Peter. *Doomed Battalion: Mateship and Leadership in War and Captivity. The Australian 2/40 Battalion 1940-45*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1995.
- Hinder, David. "Claims to the Repatriation Department." *The Nineteenth*. Vol.13, No.1, March (1972): pp.8-12.
- Hoffman, Alice M. "Reliability and Validity in Oral History." *Today's Speech*. 22, Winter (1974): pp.23–27. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/01463377409369125>.
- Holding, Walter. *World War II Experiences of WX17634 Pte W Holding*. n.d.
<https://www.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-01/Holding_Walter.pdf>.
- Holman, Robert, and Peter Thomson. *On Paths of Ash: The Extraordinary Story of an Australian Prisoner of War*. Millers Points, NSW: Pier 9, 2009.
- Holmes, Linda Goetz. *4000 Bowls of Rice: A Prisoner of War Comes Home*. New York: Brick Tower Press, 2002.
- . *Guests of the Emperor: The Secret History of Japan's Mukden POW Camp*. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2010.
- IMTFE. *Transcript of Proceedings 9 January 1947*. 1947 <<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/b5f69e/pdf>> Accessed: 10 March 2024.
- International Committee of the Red Cross. "ICRC in WW II: Activities in the Far East." 2005. Accessed 6 March 2023.
<<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/misc/57jnwq.htm>>.
- Jackson, Desmond. *What Price Surrender? A Story of the Will to Survive*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989.
- Jones, James. *WWII: A Chronicle of Soldiering*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014.
- Kenny, Catherine. *Captives: Australian Army Nurses in Japanese Prison Camps*. St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 1986.

- Kovner, Sarah. *Prisoners of the Empire: Inside Japanese POW Camps*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2020.
<<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2jfvchn.1>>.
- Leaver, Marc. "Letter to the Editor." *The Second Nineteenth*. Vol.24, No.3, September (1983): p.39.
- Lloyd, Stu. *The Missing Years: A POW's Story from Changi to Hellfire Pass*. Australia: Rosenberg Publishing, 2009.
- Lumiere, Cornel. *Kura!* Brisbane: The Jacaranda Press, 1966.
- Maynard, Roger. *Ambon: The Truth About One of the Most Brutal POW Camps in World War II and the Triumph of the Aussie Spirit*. Sydney, NSW: Hachette, Australia, 2014.
- McCormack, Gavan, and Hank Nelson, eds. *The Burma-Thailand Railway: Memory and History*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993.
- McKernan, Michael. *This War Never Ends: The Pain of Separation and Return*. St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 2001.
- Mills, Roy. *Doctor's Diary and Memoirs: Pond's Party, F Force, Thai-Burma Railway*. New Lambton, NSW: Self-published, 1994.
- Moreton, Albert. *Surviving the War: The Secret Diaries of an English POW Along the Thailand-Burma Railway, 1942-1945*. Tokushima, Japan: Education Publishing Center, 2010.
- NAA. Series MP501/1, 255/702/1536. *Treatment of Prisoners of War by Japan*. 1941
<<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=384265>> Accessed: 2 November 2024.
- Neave, Denny, and Craig Smith. *Aussie Soldier: Prisoners of War*. Wavell Heights, QLD: Big Sky Publishing, 2006.

Nelson, Hank. "Beyond Slogans: Assessing the Experiences and the History of the Australian Prisoners of the War of the Japanese." In *Beyond Slogans: Forgotten Captives in Japanese-Occupied Asia*, edited by Karl Hack and Kevin Blackburn, pp.23-40.

London: Routledge, 2008.

———. *P.O.W. Prisoners of War: Australians under Nippon*. Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1985.

Nevell, John. *Diary*. AWM PR00257.

Newey, Thomas Henry. *Report on 'H' Force*. 1945

<<https://archives.kingscollections.org/index.php/newey>> Accessed: 1 September 2024.

Newton, R.W. "Brig. Gus Kappe." *The Nineteenth*. Vol.9, No.3 September (1968): pp.18-19.

———. "Grand Tour Report, Part Four." *The Nineteenth*. Vol. 3, No.4, December (1962): 3-18.

———, ed. *The Grim Glory of the 2/19th Battalion*. Crows Nest, Sydney: 2/19 Battalion A.I.F. Association, 2006.

———. "Repatriation – Procedure on Claims." *The Nineteenth*. Vol.8, No.1, March (1967): pp.14-16.

Nussbaum, Chaim. *Chaplain on the River Kwai*. New York: Shapolsky Publishers, 1988.

Palmer, David. "Japan's World Heritage Miike Coal Mine – Where Prisoners-of-War Worked 'Like Slaves'." *Asia-Pacific Journal*. Vol.9, No.13, July (2021).

<<https://apjif.org/2021/13/palmer>>.

Parkin, Ray. *Into the Smother*. Melbourne: Wartime Trilogy ed. Melbourne University Press, 2003.

Pavillard, Stanley S. *Bamboo Doctor*. London: Pan Books, 1962.

Peek, Ian Denys. *One Fourteenth of an Elephant*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2003.

- Richards, Rowley. *A Doctor's War*. Sydney: Harper Collins, 2005.
- Rivett, Rohan D. *Behind Bamboo: Hell on the Burma Railway*. Camberwell, VIC.: Penguin Books, 2005.
- Roper, Michael. "Re-Remembering the Soldier Hero: The Psychic and Social Construction of Memory in Personal Narratives of the Great War." *History workshop*. Vol.50, No.1, Autumn (2000): pp.181-204. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/2000.50.181>>.
- Rowland, Robin. *A River Kwai Story: The Sonkrai Tribunal*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2007.
- Saggers, Maj. A.E. *To Hell and Back*. MSS 10288A. State Library of Western Australia.
- Shelly, George. "Letter to the Editor." *The Nineteenth*. Vol.13, No.2, June (1972): p.36.
- Smaal, Yorick. *Sex, Soldiers and the South Pacific, 1939-45: Queer Identities in Australia in the Second World War*. London: Palgrave, Macmillan UK, 2015.
- Smith, David F. *Yasme Nei: Memoirs of F Force Thai-Burma Railway*. Self-published, 1996.
- Summers, Julie. *The Colonel of Tamarkan: Philip Toosey and the Bridge on the River Kwai*. London: Simon and Shuster 2005.
- Summons, Walter Irvine. *Twice Their Prisoner*. Melbourne: Geoffrey Cumberlege, OUP, 1946.
- Sweeting, A.J. *Part III: Prisoners of the Japanese*. In Lionel Wigmore. 'The Japanese Thrust'. Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1957.
- Tanaka, Yuki. *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War II*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996.
- Taucher, Paul. "Prosecuting Command: Allied Command Responsibility Trials of Junior and Mid-Level Japanese Officers after the Second World War." Doctoral Thesis, Murdoch University, 2022.

- Terkel, Studs. *The Good War: An Oral History of World War Two*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.
- Thomson, Alistair. *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*. Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2013.
- . "Embattled Manhood: Gender, Memory and the Anzac Legend." In *Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia.*, edited by Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton, pp.158-173. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Travers, Richard. "The Original 2/1st Battalion: A Quantitative Study of an Australian Fighting Unit." MA, UNSW, Australia, 2014.
- <http://unsworks.unsw.edu.au/fapi/datastream/unsworks:34684/SOURCE02>.
- Trefalt, Beatrice. "Finding the Remains of the Dead: Photographs from a Japanese Mission to New Guinea, 1969-1970." *The Asia-Pacific Journal*. . Vol.20, No.10., 15 May (2022). <<https://apjif.org/2022/10/Trefalt.html> >.
- Twigg, Reg. *Survivor on the River Kwai: The Incredible Story of Life on the Burma Railway*. London: Penguin, 2014.
- Twomey, Christina. *The Battle Within: POWs in Postwar Australia*. Sydney: NewSouth, 2018.
- UKWO. WO32/15769 *Enquiry into Allegations against Representative Officer Limi Road Camp and No 1 P.O.W. Camp Changi*. 1946
- <<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C2548920> > Accessed: 13 December 2023.
- Uren, Tom. "Maiden Speech." AustralianPolitics.com. 1959. Accessed 24 August 2024.
- <<https://australianpolitics.com/1959/02/26/tom-uren-alp-reid-maiden-speech.html/>>.
- van der Post, Laurens. *The Night of the New Moon*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1971.
- Wall, Don, ed. *Heroes of F Force*. Edited by Don Wall: Self-published, 1993.

- . *Singapore and Beyond: The Story of the Men of the 2/20 Battalion*. East Hills, NSW: Sec. 2/20th Bn Assoc., 1985.
- Waterford, Van. *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II: Statistical History, Personal Narratives and Memorials Concerning POWs in Camps and on Hellships, Civilian Internees, Asian Slave Laborers and Others Captured in the Pacific Theater*. Jefferson, Nth Carolina: McFarland & Co., 1994.
- Wellington, Peter. "Letter to the Editor ". *The 2nd Nineteenth*. Vol.29, No.2, June (1988): p.44.
- Wigmore, Lionel. *The Japanese Thrust*. Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1957.
- Wilson, Sandra, Robert Cribb, Beatrice Trefalt, and Dean Aszkielowicz. *Japanese War Criminals: The Politics of Justice after the Second World War*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.
- Wright, Pattie. *The Men of the Line: Stories of the Thai-Burma Railway Survivors*. Carlton, Victoria: The Miegunyah Press, 2008.
- Wyett, John. *Staff Wallah at the Fall of Singapore*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1996.