70th anniversary of the Cowra breakout
5 August 1944

By August 1944 there were 2,223 Japanese prisoners of war in Australia, including 544 merchant seamen. Of these, 1,104 were housed in Camp B of No. 12 Prisoner of War Compound, near Cowra in central-west New South Wales. They were guarded by the 22nd Garrison Battalion.

On Friday 4 August, in response to information that the Japanese were discussing a mass breakout, notice was given that all Japanese prisoners below the rank of lance corporal would be transferred to the Hay Prisoner of War Camp. At about 2 am on Saturday 5 August a prisoner ran shouting to the camp gates. Soon afterwards an unauthorised bugle was heard, and prisoners armed with knives and improvised clubs rushed from their huts and began breaking through the wire fences. Sentries opened fire but several hundred prisoners escaped into open country, while others set fire to the camp buildings.

On the night of the breakout three Australian soldiers were killed and another three were wounded. Privates B.G. Hardy and R. Jones, who were overwhelmed while manning a machine-gun post, were posthumously awarded the George Cross. In the following nine days 334 prisoners were retaken. In all, 234 Japanese were killed and 108 were wounded.

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Toyoshima was the pilot of a Japanese Mitsubishi Zero b11-1 aircraft, from the Japanese imperial navy aircraft carrier hiryu, who participated in the first air raid on Darwin. During the raid on Darwin his plane was damaged and he made a crash landing on Melville Island. He was disarmed and captured by aborigines from the snake bay settlement who then took him to Bathurst island and handed him over to Sergeant Leslie J. Powell, 23 field company, royal Australian engineers, who using Toyoshima’s service pistol escorted him into captivity. Powell had been sent to Bathurst Island to maintain demolition installations on the island and was unarmed. Toyoshima was later to die in the breakout of Japanese prisoners from the Cowra POW camp on the night 1944-08-04/05. The
bugle he blew to signal its start is held in the AWM collection. He posed as Tadao Minami, claiming to be a sergeant pilot flying from Ambon to Darwin and under this name was allocated the first number (pwj 910.1) for a Japanese POW captured on Australian soil. His was the first intact zero captured by the allies.

REL/04058
Bugle used to signal the start of Japanese POW breakout at Cowra: Toyoshima Hajime

Bugle recovered by the Camp Commander of the Cowra POW Camp, Major Edward Vivian Timms of Sydney, after the mass breakout attempt by Japanese prisoners on the night of 4/5 August 1944. The bugle was used at about 2 am by one of the leaders of the escape attempt, Toyoshima Hajime, to signal the start of the breakout.

Toyoshima had been the pilot of a Japanese Mitsubishi A6M2 Zero fighter (tailcode BII -124) from the Japanese Imperial Navy Aircraft Carrier 'Hiryu', who participated in the first air raid on Darwin. During the raid his plane was damaged and he made a crash landing on Melville Island, where he was disarmed and captured by Aborigines from the Snake Bay settlement who then took him to Bathurst Island and handed him over to Sergeant Leslie J Powell, 23 Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers.

Toyoshima became Australia's first Japanese POW and once the breakout was over, his body was discovered, dead by his own hand, in a ditch just outside the perimeter wire. The actual origins of the bugle are unknown, but Timms recovered it, took it home, and hung it in his sitting room. Timms served in the First World War under his stepfather’s name (King) with 1 Battalion at Gallipoli and had returned to Australia by 10 October 1915. He re-enlisted for the Second World War on 7 June 1940 and was discharged on 21 June 1946.
Cowra, NSW. 8 August 1944. The front page of the Cowra Guardian newspaper featuring an article concerning an incident at the No. 12 Prisoner of War (POW) Detention Camp located near Cowra, in which a number of Japanese POWS were involved in a break-out.

Compass and leather case: Captain M A Brown, 12 Light Horse Regiment, AIF.

This compass and leather case are associated with the service of Montague Ambrose 'Monte' Brown. Brown was born near Bega, NSW in 1899 and was educated at St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill. On leaving school he returned to the New South Wales south coast where he was active in the pre-war Australian Army militia, serving with 1 Light Horse as a trooper from 31 December 1909. On 1 April 1910 he was promoted to corporal and three months later to sergeant. In July 1912 he transferred to 28 Light Horse where he promoted to regimental sergeant major on 1 January 1913. Brown was offered a commission to 2nd lieutenant on 1 August 1913.

With the declaration of war in 1914 he was an early volunteer in the AIF. However, upon joining he reverted to the rank of trooper. He left Sydney in 1915 with the 12th Light Horse, bound for Egypt. The AIF eventually recognised his experience with the militia and on 4 May 1915 Brown was promoted to 2nd lieutenant. He was then dispatched to Gallipoli with his regiment where he was promoted to full lieutenant on 19 August 1915. With the end of the Gallipoli campaign, Brown returned to Egypt with his unit.
Brown served in Egypt and Palestine and on 9 September 1916 was promoted to the rank of captain. In 1917 he was transferred to the Indian Army for a five year engagement with the Imperial Government. During his time in India he served as a captain with 9 Hodson's Horse Cavalry Regiment and saw active service during the third Anglo-Afghan war between May and August 1919. On 8 November 1922 Brown's period of service with the Indian Army ended and he returned to Australia.

During the 1930s he lived in western NSW, and also spent time in the Hunter Valley. Brown served as a major with 16 Light Horse between December 1926 and August 1935. While with this regiment he was a Commanding Officer of 16 'Hunter River Lancers' Light Horse Regiment, with its Headquarters in East Maitland. After service with this unit he transferred to the 16 Machine Gun Battalion.

Considered too old for active service upon the declaration of the Second World War in September 1939, his first posting saw him first serve at the Prisoner of War and internment camp at Berrima in the Southern Highlands of NSW. After this posting he became the Group Commandant of the 22nd Garrison Battalion at the newly built Prisoner of War Camp No.12 at Cowra NSW. During his time at Cowra, the infamous 'Cowra breakout' occurred on the night of 5 August 1944. Brown left the military in 1947 and passed away in 1975.