New publication *Beyond surrender* deconstructs myths of the prisoner-of-war experience

Australian National University Professor Joan Beaumont and Australian War Memorial historians Dr Lachlan Grant and Aaron Pegram will tonight launch their new joint publication *Beyond surrender: Australian prisoners of war in the twentieth century*.

For the first time, *Beyond surrender* explores the depth and diversity of the Australian prisoner-of-war experience, from the First World War through to Korea.

Over 35,000 Australians were captured in the conflicts which spanned the twentieth century, and each had unique experiences. *Beyond surrender* relives the realities of their captivity and examines the diversity of the Australian “behind-the-wire” experience, dissecting fact from fiction and myth from reality.

Australian War Memorial Historian Dr Lachlan Grant said the focus of prisoner-of-war stories in popular memory has always been drawn towards Second World War prisoners of the Japanese, particularly in those places where conditions were notoriously horrific, such as the Burma–Thailand Railway.

“*Beyond surrender* brings together new research on prisoners of war from all conflicts, from prisoners of the Turks and of the Germans in both world wars, and considers these against the dominant narrative of Asia and the Pacific.

“Even among prisoners of the Japanese there was great diversity between the camps, from Changi to the horrors of the railway, to work and camps on the Japanese mainland, where Australians faced similar conditions to those faced by prisoners of war in Germany.”

Australian War Memorial Senior Historian Aaron Pegram said *Beyond surrender* examines the impact that different types of camps, commandants, and locations had on surrender, survival, prison life, and the prospect of escape.

“Virtually every book and movie about captivity in Germany revolves around the idea that prisoners of war spent their every waking hour trying to escape. In the First World War some Australian prisoners did succeed in escaping, but they were very much a minority,” Mr Pegram said.

“*Beyond surrender* shows that the experiences of escapees do not represent the total prisoner-of-war story. A far greater and more significant story is that of the vast majority who remained in Germany until the Armistice.

“Escape stories transform what is essentially a story of surrender, inaction, confinement, and repression into an exciting battle of wits between captor and captive. Our book challenges some of these basic assumptions, and makes the point that daring tales of tunnellers and plucky evaders mask the realities of what life was really like for Australian prisoners in Germany in the First World War.”

*Beyond surrender* is based on papers delivered at the conference *Prisoner of war: an Australian experience of captivity in the twentieth century*, held by the Memorial in conjunction with the ANU in June 2013.

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