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Capturing captivity: Australian prisons of the Great War

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Capturing captivity: Australian prisons of the Great War

Abstract

Over 4000 Australian soldiers were taken prisoner during the course of the Great War. Their experiences have been largely unexplored. A small number of these men wrote about their experiences, and in doing so, they had to negotiate particular social and literary contexts. As such, their accounts were deliberately structured, retrospective texts. These accounts often reveal a tension between experiences and expectations, a tension that often resulted in exaggeration, embellishment and inaccuracy. This thesis approaches these memoirs, not as factual and historically accurate accounts, but as documents that are revealing in light of elements of exaggeration and selective representation. It focuses on key moments and themes within these narratives and argues that, irrespective of the accuracy of these memoirs, they reflect the diversity, depth and ambiguity of responses to captivity. These accounts fundamentally challenge assumptions of passivity and inactivity on the part of the captive that have tended to characterise literature examining the experiences of Australian soldiers taken prisoner during the Great War.

Degree Type

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Bachelor of Communication and Media Studies (Honours)

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School of History and Politics

CAPTURING CAPTIVITY

Australian Prisoners of the Great War

Honours thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the degree
BACHELOR OF COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES (HONOURS)
from
UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG
by
Julia Smart BCM
School of History and Politics
2013

SYNOPSIS

Over 4000 Australian soldiers were taken prisoner during the course of the Great War. Their experiences have been largely unexplored. A small number of these men wrote about their experiences, and in doing so, they had to negotiate particular social and literary contexts. As such, their accounts were deliberately structured, retrospective texts. These accounts often reveal a tension between experiences and expectations, a tension that often resulted in exaggeration, embellishment and inaccuracy. This thesis approaches these memoirs, not as factual and historically accurate accounts, but as documents that are revealing in light of elements of exaggeration and selective representation. It focuses on key moments and themes within these narratives and argues that, irrespective of the accuracy of these memoirs, they reflect the diversity, depth and ambiguity of responses to captivity. These accounts fundamentally challenge assumptions of passivity and inactivity on the part of the captive that have tended to characterise literature examining the experiences of Australian soldiers taken prisoner during the Great War.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work except where I have given full documented references to the work of others, and that all the material contained in this thesis has not been submitted for formal assessment in any formal course and the word length is 18 395.

Julia Smart

22nd of May 2013

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*For George Harry Hemming,
Who taught his grandchildren to count in German.*

INTRODUCTION

On the cool, crisp morning of June 9 1917, 20-year-old Corporal George Harry Hemming walked the battlefields around Messines, in Belgium, searching for his wounded comrades. In the dark before dawn, Corporal Hemming stumbled into an unseen shell crater: into midst of seven German soldiers, and into German captivity. On October 1 1918, after 16 months as a prisoner, Corporal Hemming escaped. Hemming and Sergeant P.J. Fleming, in readiness for an opportunity of escape, capitalised on the brief inattentiveness of their guard, and quickly donned the German caps they had kept hidden on them, covered the brown bands on their arms that marked them as prisoners and walked boldly out of town.¹

Corporal Hemming neither wrote about, nor published, a record of his experiences as a prisoner of war in Germany. He preferred to very briskly and efficiently document his experience of captivity in his compulsory repatriation statement. Corporal Hemming's decision not to personally or extensively document his experiences was not a singular one amongst repatriated Australian prisoners of the Great War. Very few chose to write memoirs, even fewer chose, or were able, to have their memoirs published.

This reticence to publish is reflected in the historiography of the Great War. Very few scholars have examined the experiences of these men; Peter Stanley described them as being “invisible in the Australian story of the war.”² Joan Beaumont argued that this was due, in part, to a sense of shame associated with captivity generally. Prisoners of war are symbols of military ineptitude or failure, their capture challenging an idea “that has long been central to our national self-image, that our

¹ Statement by Repatriated Prisoner of War Corporal George Harry Hemming AWM30 B10.1

² Peter Stanley on behalf of Australian Department of Veteran Affairs and Australian War Memorial, ‘Stolen Years: Australian Prisoners of War’, (Canberra: Government Publication, 2002) p. 4

soldiers are especially competent fighters”.³ Or, as Robin Gerster put it: “Isolated by the stigma of his capture from the elevated military endeavour [of the First AIF], the POW was confronted with the difficulty of knowing what to say – and how to say it.”⁴

The prisoner of war as worthy of study in his own right only came to the fore in the aftermath of the Second World War, when thousands of surviving Australian soldiers emerged from Japanese prisoner of war camps, shockingly malnourished, with an appalling rate of death and terrible tales of suffering, cruelty and hardship. As Jennifer Lawless has argued, the contemporary and stereotypical image of the Australian prisoner of war “is invariably the skeletal prisoners who emerged from the Japanese camps.”⁵ They overshadow the experiences of the 4082 members of the First AIF taken prisoner during the Great War. This is not to say that they have been completely ignored. Certain writers have looked at their experiences, however this small number of writers are often lost in the mainstream of Australian Great War literature that has the combatant as its focus.

Patsy Adam-Smith’s *Prisoners of War: From Gallipoli to Korea*, Richard Reid’s *In Captivity: Australian Prisoners of War in the 20th Century*, and Denny Neave and Craig Smith in *Aussie Solider: Prisoners of War* have examined the experiences of prisoners of the Great War.⁶ The primary focus of these works, however, is the experiences of Australian POWs across all conflicts in which Australians have been involved.

³ Joan Beaumont, *Gull Force: Survival and Leadership in Captivity*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin (1990) p. 1-3

⁴ Robin Gerster, *Big-noting: The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1987), p. 143

⁵ Jennifer Lawless, ‘The Forgotten Anzacs: Captives of the Turks’, *Southerly*, vol. 65, no. 2 (2005), p. 27

⁶ Patsy Adam-Smith, *Prisoners of War: From Gallipoli to Korea*, (Ringwood: Penguin Books Australia, 1997 [1992]); Richard Reid, *In Captivity: Australian Prisoners of War in the 20th Century*, (Canberra: Department of Veterans Affairs, 1999); Denny Neave and Craig Smith, *Aussie Solider: Prisoners of War*, (Wavell Heights: Big Sky Publishing, 2009)

A few more specifically focussed works exist. David Chalk's 'Talks with Old 'Gefangeners'' specifically examined the experiences of Australian prisoners of the Germans and, building on Chalk's work, David Coombes has recently published a book dealing specifically with the experiences of Australian prisoners of the 4th Division.⁷ Rosalind Crone also examined the treatment of Australian prisoners of the Germans, and Aaron Pegram has focussed on these prisoners in several articles published in *Wartime: The Official Magazine of the Australian War Memorial*.⁸ While more specific and closely focussed, these accounts focus primarily on the treatment of these prisoners, do not acknowledge prisoners of the Turks.

Jennifer Lawless, in her study of the prisoners of the Turks, noted that existing literature tended to focus only briefly on the POWs of the Great War and that, when examining the men who were prisoners of the Turks, authors tended to take a small number of published accounts of captivity as representative of the wider experience. Rosalind Crone made similar criticisms of the existing literature in her examination of the prisoners of the Germans. She argued that reliance on the stories of "a few former *Gefangeners*" suggested an inclusiveness that was questionable, leaving captivity "largely unexplained."⁹

Stereotypes and assumptions dominate much of the literature. The Turks, for example, treated prisoners cruelly whilst the prisoners of the Germans were well treated, an assumption that is based primarily on disparate casualty rates, supported by a small number of published memoirs as historical evidence. Stanley, for example, claimed that the Turks treated their prisoners with "ill treatment and outright brutality

⁷ David Chalk, 'Talks with Old Gefangeners', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, vol. 14 (1989); David Coombes, *Crossing the Wire: The Untold Stories of Australian POWs in Battle and Captivity During WWI*, (Newport: Big Sky Publishing, 2011)

⁸ Aaron Pegram, 'Bold Bids for Freedom', *Wartime: Official Magazine of the Australian War Memorial*, vol. 52 (2010) pp. 32-37; Aaron Pegram, 'Giving the Game Away', *Wartime: Official Magazine of the Australian War Memorial*, vol. 57 (2012) pp. 40-45; Aaron Pegram, 'The Arms of Black Melancholy', *Wartime: Official Magazine of the Australian War Memorial*, vol. 46 (2009) pp. 38-42

⁹ Rosalind Crone, 'In the Hands of the Hun: Australian Prisoners of the Germans in The Great War', (2002) MSS2092 Australian War Memorial, Canberra. p. 1

comparable to the experience of prisoners of the Japanese”.¹⁰ Jennifer Lawless, however, critically interrogated these stereotypes and assumptions about the prisoners of the Turks, and drew attention to elements of exaggeration and misrepresentation present in selected memoirs.¹¹ She showed assertions like Stanley’s to be poorly supported by additional evidence outside the memoirs, and cautioned against “the hazards of using published accounts as historical evidence without sound corroboration from other sources.”¹²

Though Lawless’ primary focus was to identify elements of inaccuracy and exaggeration in order to point out the pitfalls of using such subjective and structured texts as historical sources, she aptly demonstrated the active, deliberate and retrospective construction of captivity present in these memoirs. These were not neutral, objective historical accounts: they were not only inaccurate but were, at times, blatantly fictitious. As Robin Gerster has argued, the war memoir, “exhibits an effortless facility to move from documentary, personal and public to flagrant fiction.”¹³ However, as Yural Noah Harari has noted, these sources can also be revealing *because* of their inaccuracies, embellishments and exaggerations.¹⁴ The memoirs of former prisoners are not simply military memoirs; they are also captivity narratives, which Linda Colley has argued, are “imperfect, idiosyncratic, and sometimes violently slanted texts.” In her study of the influence of captivity in shaping the British empire, Colley has argued that these texts are a rich source for examining the “the mixed fortunes and complexities of their dealings with other peoples.”¹⁵

¹⁰ Stanley, ‘Stolen Years’, p. 94

¹¹ Lawless, ‘Forgotten Anzacs’, pp. 29-32

¹² Lawless, ‘Forgotten Anzacs’, p. 28

¹³ Robin Gerster, *Big-Noting: The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1987), p. 15

¹⁴ Yural Noah Harari, ‘Military Memoirs: A Historical Overview of the Genre from the Middle Ages to the Late Modern Era’, *War in History*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2007) p. 308

¹⁵ Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), pp. 14-15

These arguments have informed the writing of this thesis. It uses the published representations of captivity of twenty men, of varying rank, taken prisoner by both the Turks and the Germans over the course of the war. It examines what Australian prisoners of the Great War said or didn't say, and how they chose to say it, the forms in which they were published and the audiences the men were writing for, and, by looking more closely at the texts, argues that there was greater diversity in the POW experience of the Great War than the general literature allows. Repatriation statements, service records and Red Cross files have also been consulted to elucidate or clarify points in the memoirs. Eighteen of the men were in the AIF. Two were not. Lieutenant Cedric Waters Hill was serving in the British Royal Air Force when he was captured. E.H Jones was a Welsh officer, serving in the Indian Army, and escaped with Hill. In 1919, Jones wrote *The Road to En-Dor*, which detailed their escape. The men feigned madness, claiming they were under the influence of "The Spook", whom they had brought forth using an Ouija board. It had been reprinted sixteen times by 1930.¹⁶ Hill's own memoir, however, *The Spook and the Commandant*, was not published until 1975.

The memoirs of these men are used to varying degrees throughout the thesis, so a brief introduction to each, in order of capture, is warranted here. Fuller details can be found in the Appendix at the end of the thesis. Private Reginald Francis Lushington was captured by the Turks during the landing on April 25, 1915. Lieutenant-Commander Henry Gordon Stoker, in charge of the Submarine AE2, was captured by the Turks on April 30, 1915. Leslie Henry Luscombe was captured by the Turks during the August Offensive in 1915, as was Corporal George Ernest Kerr. Captain Thomas Walter White was captured by the Turks when his plane was brought down near Baghdad on November 13, 1915.

Private Robert Barrett Shiels was captured by the Germans on July 19, 1916, during the Battle of Fromelles. Trooper George William Handsley was captured by the Turks at Romani, on August 4, 1916. Private Frank Hallihan was captured by the Germans

¹⁶ Lawless, 'Forgotten Anzacs', p. 29

on August 26, 1916 at Mouquet Farm on the Somme, while Signaller John Harold Dawkins was captured by the Germans, also on the Somme, on October 31, 1916. So too was Lieutenant Arthur E. Dent, on November 14, 1916.

Captain William Ambrose Cull was captured by the Germans during an ill-fated attack on Malt Trench on February 26, 1917. Private Thomas Taylor was captured by the Germans at the Battle of Bullecourt on April 11, 1917. Also captured during this battle were Sergeant William Groves, Private Alfred Gray, and Captain John E. Mott. Private Herbert Horner was captured four days later by the Germans on the April 15, 1917. Captain Ronald Albert Austin was captured by the Turks when his plane was brought down on the March 19, 1918, and Sergeant John Halpin was captured by the Turks on May 1, 1918.

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 1 examines the reasons why prisoners chose to write and publish, the social environment surrounding their writing and the way they positioned their work as an historical record. Chapter 2 examines a key moment in captivity literature – capture – and how the men explained the shift from combatant to captive. Chapter 3 examines how the men represented their captors in the close and intimate relationship necessitated by captivity, and ambiguities this interaction could foster. Chapter 4 examines the way the men often refused to accept that captivity brought with it passivity, and the way in which they demonstrated their active, resistive role through a variety of means, ranging from escape and malingering, to humour and larrikinism. Chapter 5 examines the role of rank in captivity and how rank could, and did, produce vastly different experiences of captivity for the men.

CHAPTER 1

Writing Captivity

As noted in the Introduction, the experiences of the 4082 members of the AIF taken prisoner during the Great War have barely been documented, either by themselves or others.¹ Those few who did choose to write wrote for a variety of reasons, both stated and unstated. Some of these soldiers were no doubt motivated by thoughts of fame or profit, others by a sense of moral obligation, political or military pressure, or just purely by the need to make sense of and justify their experiences. Their narratives were largely unprecedented in an Australian context; the experience of surrender and capture was itself almost entirely foreign, as was the experience of captivity. The Great War was the first time Australia fought as a distinctive, independent Australian entity, under its own command. The newly formed Australian Imperial Force had flexed its military muscle for the first time, and a small percentage had subsequently thrown up their hands for the first time.

Surrender to an enemy and subsequent captivity came with an element of shame. Soldiers, unlike civilians, give up their means to attack and defend themselves, putting their lives at the mercy of an enemy they had previously sought to kill. To surrender was also dishonourable, emasculating and humiliating. This attitude was clearly evident in the 'Inquiry into the Treatment of Australian Prisoners of War by the Germans', which was published by Australian Department of Defence in 1919. The report, consisting of statements made by returned prisoners of war, did not reveal the identities of any of the soldiers quoted.² In not revealing the names of the men who testified, the Department of Defence protected the reputation of the soldiers in question and clearly implied that the less said about captivity, the better.³

¹ Australian War Memorial, 'Encyclopedia: Australian Prisoners of War – First World War', <https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/pow/ww1/> (accessed: 06.04.2013)

² Denny Neave and Craig Smith, *Aussie Solider: Prisoners of War*, (Wavell Heights: Big Sky Publishing, 2009), p. 27

³ The sense of shame associated with captivity, along with the sense of what a soldier should publish, was carried over into the Second World War. A review of *The Naked Island*, the memoir of Second World War prisoner Russell Braddon, was published in *Stand-to* in 1952. This review stated with regret that, "in previous wars the theory that the less said about prisoners of war the better was

In the wake of the Great War, there was an active push against literature that diminished the reputation of the AIF. The Returned Soldiers' and Sailors' Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA) commenced a concentrated campaign to effectively manage the image of the AIF. In 1930, *Reveille*, the official journal of the New South Wales branch of the RSSILA, published an article that vehemently denounced authors "who defame Australian soldiers". The article stated that, "some of the so-called war novelists have shown a great deal of low cunning in endeavouring to build up a circle of readers for the nauseating muck that they have let loose on the market."⁴ *Reveille* wanted to have these authors censored.⁵ While this did not refer directly to prisoners of war – indeed *Reveille* refused to specify the authors of this "nauseating muck" – it set a clear standard with regard to publication. Furthermore, it reflected wider social expectations of public military stoicism when it came to recording personal experiences of the war. Soldiers, then, were to publish in a very particular way, if they were to publish at all.

The expectation of stoicism and restraint in published accounts was particularly pertinent when it came to prisoners of war. Their experiences had been distinctly different to that of the fighting man. Robin Gerster argued that the "POW's exclusion from the potent fighting elite did severe damage to his self-image."⁶ Captivity was a highly personal and internal battle, and prisoners were wary of appearing melancholic or self-indulgent in their memoirs. In his preface to the memoirs of Trooper George Handsley, Sergeant Foster wrote, "Of the personal

generally accepted". The writer, known only as 'Ek Dum', noted disdainfully that "the new type of P.O.W. book which has become so popular – and profitable – recently ... can usually be summed up in the sentences: "I was a P.O.W. Oh how I suffered."" Ek Dum also noted that "Mr Braddon's experiences in Japanese prison camps was very much like that of thousands who dismissed them afterwards with a shrug and decided for their own health of mind to forget it as quickly as possible and help others, brought near unbalance by what they had endured, to do the same. See 'Ek Dum', 'Naked Islands and Naked Souls' *Stand-To*, June-July, 1952, p. 22

⁴ 'War Books: Trapping In Readers', *Reveille*, March 31, 1930 p. 48

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Robin Gerster, *Big-noting: The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1987), p. 20

injury and suffering my comrade was forced to undergo he has little to say”,⁷ despite the fact that Handsley’s suffering largely filled the 64 pages of the memoir.

This may also account for the hesitant manner in which Sergeant William Groves explained why his particular story of captivity had not been told before 1932, claiming it was partly due to “the natural reluctance of the men concerned,” to describe seemingly unbelievable experiences which were largely melancholy in nature.⁸ The telling of these experiences “conjures up no memories of joy such as do other aspects of war life in retrospect.” The experiences of a prisoner, unlike those of a fighting man, brought forth “memories of broken men, broken spirits, a broken enemy nation – melancholy memories, memories not to be brooded upon.”⁹ Groves’ almost apologetic explanation reflects Gerster’s argument that the POW memoirist could only be properly understood in the face of the “trenchantly masculine ideology” of Australian war literature, from which their captivity excluded them.¹⁰

In his introduction to *Both Sides of the Wire*, a recent edition of the memoir of Captain William Ambrose Cull, Aaron Pegram reflected the issues raised by Gerster. He noted that Cull’s story is unlike the stories of the Great War that most Australians are familiar with: “It is not a story of courage or heroism,” he wrote, “because Cull certainly did not see it in such a way, but rather a story of the adversity, perseverance, tragedy and resentment of a young Australian who spent thirteen months as a prisoner of war in Germany.”¹¹ POW memoirists clearly had to negotiate this particular social and literary context, and “without a tale of conventional daredevilry to tell, the P.O.W., in some circles at least, was faced with a problem of ‘public relations’.”¹²

⁷ George Handsley, *Two and a Half Years a Prisoner of War in Turkey*, (Jones and Hambly, 1920) Preface by Sergeant J.R. Foster

⁸ William Groves, ‘Things I Remember: A Prisoner of War looks back’, *Reveille*, (January 31, 1932), p. 13

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ Robin Gerster, *Big Noting*, p. 20

¹¹ Aaron Pegram, in William Ambrose Cull, *Both Sides of the Wire: The memoir of an Australian officer captured during the Great War*, edited by Aaron Pegram, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2011), p. xviii-xix

¹² Robin Gerster, ‘The Rise of Prisoner-of-War Writers’, *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, (1985), p. 271

Yet it is clear that some men did want to write about their experiences, and they did so. In addition to the published accounts of captivity, there are numerous private memoirs at the Australian War Memorial, many of them clearly intended for publication. This is unsurprising in one sense: captivity literature in a wider context has functioned as a central means by which people have understood and come to terms with the experience of captivity, and indeed understood the world and their own place in it. Australians, however, would have been largely unfamiliar with the genre, despite the fact that their British predecessors had not hesitated to write, and sell, accounts of captivity in various parts of the world. The most well known and distinctive of these would be the Indian captivity narratives of New England, that have come to signify a distinctive element of American identity,¹³ though these are but part of a long and rich history of captivity in the British Empire.¹⁴ In publishing accounts of captivity, however, Australian POW memoirists of the Great War were largely working within a cultural and literary vacuum.¹⁵

As noted in the Introduction, accounts written by captives are somewhat problematic as historical sources. Memoirs are inevitably subjective and often slanted documents, though they masquerade as reliable historical accounts. They are deliberately and retrospectively structured, and written from memory, which in itself is naturally slippery and often vague. Rarely do authors write without a conscious, or unconscious, purpose; very rarely do they seek publication without a purpose. These accounts, however, have use and value outside of their adherence to fact and accuracy. Fundamentally, they reveal the way individual men experienced and interpreted captivity, and the ways in which they understood that experience to function within post-war Australian society. With regard to the famous memoir of Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, Paul Fussell claims that it is the exaggeration and alteration

¹³ Joe Snader, *Caught Between Worlds: British Captivity Narratives in Fact and Fiction*, (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2000), p. 2

¹⁴ See Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2002)

¹⁵ Existing work on Australian captivity literature includes that of Christina Twomey, on Australian civilian prisoners of the Japanese, Kate Darian-Smith, Roslyn Poignant and Kay Schafer. These texts have focussed primarily on civilians however, rather than military men. Darian-Smith, Poignant and Schafer's work was largely in vein of Indian captivity narratives, focussed on the captivity narrative as part of wider colonial anxieties, tensions and identities, with the white, Christian woman as the protagonist. See Kate Darian-Smith, *Captured Lives: Australian Captivity Narratives*. (London : Sir Robert Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, 1993); and Christina Twomey, *Australia's Forgotten Prisoners: Civilians Interned by the Japanese in World War Two*, (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2007)

from fact that gives the book its colour, stating that “if it were really a documentary transcription of the actual, it would be worth very little ... It is valuable because it is not true in that way”. Fussell points to Graves’ paradoxical statement, that “the memoirs of a man who went through some of the worst experiences of trench warfare are not truthful if they do not contain a high proportion of falsities.”¹⁶

Australian soldiers taken prisoner during the Great War who did write did so for many reasons; many made it clear that publication was in some way encouraged, required or expected by others. Private Thomas Taylor, for example, claimed that “the work of putting these experiences on record was undertaken at the oft-repeated request of a host of friends and acquaintances, as well as a few of influence and judgement.”¹⁷ Private Alfred Gray stated that, “having been asked by a good many to relate my experiences as a prisoner of war in Germany, I now attempt to do so.”¹⁸ Gray was at pains to state in his introduction that his reasons were not self-interested: “I wish it to be distinctly understood that I do this not for any personal glorification, but simply with the object of stating the plain facts for the information for those sufficiently interested to read my story.” Private Herbert Horner explained that his memoir was prompted by a personal, practical purpose in terms of satisfying the curiosity of friends and family without having to repeat himself. He also added duty to the list, “a duty to those who have lost friends in the war, particularly in captivity”.¹⁹ Unlike many prisoners, Horner had kept a diary and, “in spite of the Hun’s efforts to destroy those tell-tale pages”,²⁰ he was duty-bound to utilise this resource in order to give “to give a plain, unvarnished account of our experiences.”²¹ Sergeant William Groves, however, wrote for a different audience. Having serialised his memoirs in *Reveille* throughout the 1930s, it is

¹⁶ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1975]), p. 207

¹⁷ Thomas Taylor, *Peregrinations of an Australian Prisoner of War: The Experiences of an Australian Soldier in Germany and Bolshevik Russia*, (E.W. Cole Book Arcade, 1920), “Introductory”.

¹⁸ Alfred Gray, ‘In the Hands of the Hun: Experiences of Private Alfred Gray, of Kyneton’, 2007, Gray, Alfred (4203, Private, 14 Battalion), MSS1690 Australian War Memorial, Canberra, p. 1

¹⁹ Herbert Horner, *Reason or Revolution?: An Australian Prisoner in the Hands of the Hun*, (Jones, 1920), “Apology”

²⁰ *Ibid*

²¹ *Ibid*

clear William Groves expected his story to be read by fellow soldiers and their families rather than friends or those of influence or judgment.²²

Captain Thomas Walter White was apologetic, stating that his “excuse for putting a war story before the public is that I feel that the gist of a diary recording the doings and sufferings of prisoners of war in Turkey should be published, if for no other reason than as a tribute to those who died.”²³ However he was careful to note in the preface to his 1935 edition that his narrative was not self-motivated, but that “It was General Birdwood who first suggested I record my war experiences”.²⁴ An additional motivation is revealed later in White’s memoir where he noted that, “the heavy mortality among prisoners-of-war in Turkey is not generally known, and the reputation that the Turk earned on Gallipoli as a stubborn foe and clean fighter, biased [sic] the British public in his favour. Disclosures subsequent to the war, however, and the fact that so few of the Turk’s prisoners survived their captivity, caused a change in public opinion.”²⁵ White no doubt intended, and considered, that he contributed to this shift in public opinion.

Sergeant John Halpin’s memoirs reveal that he, too, considered himself duty-bound to publish. He noted in the Foreword of his memoir, *Blood in the Mists*, that, “This book is a contributory message to the cause of peace.” His memoir depicted “a phase of war not yet disclosed, the tragedy of the lower ranks of the A.I.F.” His article in *Reveille* similarly stated his motive for publication; that “though two Australian officers have published graphic accounts of their experiences as prisoners of war in Turkey, much remains to be told to lift the veil of tragedy which shrouded the lot of the lower ranks.”²⁶ However, his Dedication to *Blood in the Mists* touched on an underlying motive, similar to that of White’s. Halpin’s Dedication reads, “Seventy-three members of the Australian Imperial Force were captured by the Turkish arms. Of this number forty-two were repatriated.”²⁷ The Turks took 232 members

²² Groves, ‘A Prisoner of War looks back’, (January 1932), p. 13

²³ Thomas Walter White, *Guests of the Unspeakable: The Odyssey of an Australian Airman – Being the Record of Captivity and Escape in Turkey*, (Crows Nest: Little Hills Press, 1990 [1928, 1932, 1935]), p. 8

²⁴ *Ibid*, Preface to the 1935 edition

²⁵ White, *Guests of the Unspeakable*, p. 95

²⁶ John Halpin, ‘Captives of the Turk’, *Reveille*, (March 1934), p. 25

²⁷ John Halpin, *Blood in the Mists*, (Sydney: The Macquarie Head Press, 1934), “Dedication”

of the AIF prisoner over the course of the Great War. The approximate casualty rate of those prisoners was approximately 25%, doubtless a high casualty rate, yet nowhere near that stated by Halpin.²⁸

This primary, underlying motive hinted at in Halpin's dedication was not openly or clearly stated in either of Halpin's accounts. It was made apparent in a later letter to the editor written by Halpin, titled "Praise of the Turks: A "Captive" in Reply", published in *Reveille* in August of 1934. In this letter, Halpin railed against Private Tom Kelly's expressions of admiration for Turkish soldiers, noting disparagingly Kelly's description of the Turks "as generous foes, splendid fellows etc. etc.". Halpin stated, "Let those who wish to publicly express their appreciation of our erstwhile foes weigh the experiences of comrades in the conflict as a whole, not overlook the dead who fell, not as victims of the cleanly bullet or bayonet, but before unleashed savagery, brutality, and bestiality, and the onslaughts of which they were helpless to oppose." After reiterating his much-inflated casualty rate, Halpin went on to state, "with some knowledge of fact, that *probably 85 per cent. of British prisoners captured by Turkish arms died of starvation, cruelty and neglect.* [sic]"²⁹ Whilst his stated purpose is swathed in notions of duty, Halpin's underlying motive was far more personal: a hatred of his captors.

Private Reginald Lushington similarly railed against the positive image of the Turks in the post-war years. Lushington noted, that, "These things are hard to write about," but that it was necessary to do so, for there were "a benighted few who persist in believing that the Turk is a clean fighter. Surely a clean fighter should show consideration to his captives, and how do those who write about the good qualities of the Turks explain the 11, 000 missing on the Dardenelles? Do they know that the Turks killed hundreds of prisoners after being made captives?" Lushington went on to note, "The Turk is a savage and the country is savage," bitterly claiming, that, "throughout Asia Minor are the graves of our lads."³⁰

²⁸ Australian War Memorial, 'Encyclopedia: Australian Prisoners of War – First World War', <https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/pow/ww1/> (accessed: 06.04.2013)

²⁹ John Halpin, 'Praise of the Turks: A "Captive" in Reply' *Reveille*, (August 1934), p. 6

³⁰ Reginald Lushington, *A Prisoner with the Turks 1915-1918*, (Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1923), p. 64

Some captives simply believed that their story was worth telling. Lieutenant Arthur Dent rather pragmatically noted that, “although my experiences were not so drastic as some, especially those who were taken prisoners in the early part of the war, still, I think that such as they are, they will not prove uninteresting.”³¹ William Groves believed that his tale “is as great a story – not the writing of it, I mean, but the actual happenings – as the war produced.”³² Yet Groves was compelled to add other reasons, reflecting the right to publish discussed earlier. He wrote, “apart from its value as a record, [it] is of further value as a contribution to the history of the period.”³³ This particular story, he added, had “been almost forgotten – if indeed it were ever fully known”, and its telling was all the more important given that the original AIF were fast dying out.³⁴ For Groves, and his fellow POW memoirists alike, this was not simply a story worth telling; it was a story that *needed* telling.³⁵

Like their imperial predecessors, the Australian prisoners of the Great War who chose to write published their accounts of captivity however they could. A few were able to secure publication of their memoirs in hardcover, some only in booklet form. Others serialised their memoirs in publications such as *Reveille* and *Aussie: the Australian Soldiers' Magazine*. Other soldiers did not achieve, or even attempt, publication in their lifetime. Upon discovery of his grandfather George's, diary, written whilst a prisoner of war in Turkey, Greg Kerr used this as the basis of his book, *The Lost Anzacs: A Tale of Two Brothers*, though George himself had never attempted publication.³⁶ Lieutenant Cedric Waters Hill did not live to see his memoir published in 1975, passing away whilst it was in production. Private Robert Barrett Shiels likewise chose not to publish his memoirs in his lifetime; they were discovered and published by his son in 1987, after his death. Shiels had decided to write his memoirs after the start of the Second World War; by the end of the war he felt his work had lost

³¹ Arthur Dent, *Fourteen Months a Prisoner of War*, (“The North Western Courier” Print, 1919), p. 1-

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³² Groves, ‘A Prisoner of War looks back’, (January 1932), p. 13

³³ *Ibid*

³⁴ *Ibid*

³⁵ For most of the memoirists studied for the thesis, their time in captivity was their principal subject. Two, however, made only passing reference to their captivity, framing it merely as part of the wider experiences of their life, Lieutenant-Commander Herbert Stoker's *Straws in the Wind*, and Lieutenant Leslie Harold Luscombe's *The Story of Harold Earl - Australian*

³⁶ Greg Kerr, *Lost Anzacs: The Story of Two Brothers*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997)

significance, deciding, “the P.O.W.s of the Japanese had more to tell about captivity than he”.³⁷

The structure and content of each memoir, then, is not only fundamentally linked to the purpose of the author, but also to the medium of publication. Those who serialised their memoirs treated their experience as occurring over various action-filled episodes, rather than as a single, cohesive narrative. Signaller John Harold Dawkins in particular, publishing a series of “Episodes” in *Aussie* magazine (“The Cheerful Monthly”) in 1921, treated his captivity as rather an amusing and entertaining affair, titling it “An Aussie in Wooden Shoes: The Seriously Humorous Experiences of a Prisoner of War in Germany”.³⁸ John Halpin’s memoirs show how the men could be conscious of medium, as his memoirs appeared in two forms. His memoirs were initially published in a series of articles in *Reveille* from March 1934, and differ vastly from the book that followed later in that same year, *Blood in the Mists*. Writing for *Reveille*, and aware that his readership would consist mainly of returned men, Halpin’s tone was conversational and frank. *Blood in the Mists*, however, is structured as a first-person narrative; it is melodramatic, verbose, detailed and embellished when set beside the accounts published in *Reveille*.

Greg Kerr’s interpretation of his grandfather’s diary reveals the vast difference in form and content that can take place when a diary becomes a memoir, particularly when a third party comes into play. Even where memoirs are based on diaries, often over time the writer finds the information in the diaries inadequate, as the passing of time has given new meaning and significance to what was recorded at the time.³⁹ While George’s original diary was potentially intended at some point to form the basis of a memoir, it would likely have been restructured in the event of publication. In the case of *The Lost Anzacs*, this material has been given *entirely* new significance and meaning by Greg Kerr. It is often at odds with the source material, and many of Greg Kerr’s claims of cruelty and mistreatment experienced by prisoners of the Turks fail to be borne out by George’s diary entries. This tension between the protagonist and either an editor or narrator is a common feature of captivity literature; in the

³⁷ Robert Barrett Shiels, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, (Mt. Eliza, Victoria: Private publication by Noel G. Shiels, 1987), p. 31

³⁸ John Dawkins, *Aussie*, February 1921 p. 40

³⁹ Paul Fussell, *Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 310-311

case of Indian captivity narratives, the voice of the woman protagonist is often distinct and at odds with that of the male narrator.⁴⁰ This tension is rare, however, among Australian POW literature of the Great War. The majority of prisoners wrote their own memoirs, and were subsequently not in conflict with an external narrator.

A common feature of Australian captivity literature of the Great War is its insistence, often vehement, on the veracity of the account. Soldiers made it clear that what they wrote was nothing but the truth. William Groves, for example, frequently made assertions as to the truth of his account, stating initially, “This is a true account of the personal experiences of a band of Australian soldiers,”⁴¹ and later that “the experiences here recounted are true, true in every detail; of that I give my personal word.”⁴² In Groves’ case, he pointed out that the men with whom he shared his captivity would be quick to pull him into line, should he be lying or exaggerating. John Halpin’s memoir was “True in its entirety”, while Herbert Horner claimed of his memoir that “there is no fiction in this narrative, and stories which are hearsay are carefully described as such.”⁴³ Thomas White similarly pointed out at the beginning of his narrative that “the facts herein contained are true to the best of my belief and only the reported conversations may differ in words though not in meaning.”⁴⁴ Thomas Taylor was equally at pains “to impress on the reader that nothing but actual facts and my personal knowledge and experiences have been chronicled.”⁴⁵ Alfred Gray, in his turn, claimed that, “the story of privations and sufferings endured is neither magnified nor adorned. They are the experiences of the writer.”⁴⁶

Sergeant Foster prefaced Trooper George Handsley’s memoir by stating that it “is intended to present a true, detailed account of the hardships our fighting men had to suffer at the hands of a cruel and merciless enemy. No attempt has been made to make this narrative a literary

⁴⁰ Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, *Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1998), p. xiii

⁴¹ Groves, ‘A Prisoner of War Looks Back’, (January 1932), p. 13

⁴² *Ibid* p. 31

⁴³ Herbert Horner, *Reason or Revolution?: An Australian Prisoner in the Hands of the Hun*, (Jones, 1920), “Apology”

⁴⁴ White, *Guests of the Unspeakable*, 1928 edition

⁴⁵ Taylor, *Peregrinations*, “Introductory”

⁴⁶ Alfred Gray, ‘In the Hands of the Hun’, Front Cover

achievement, and ... I have taken great care to avoid any exaggeration. The whole account of his experiences is true in circumstance and detail.”⁴⁷ Foster was at pains to divorce this account from those of “literary achievement”; by implication, historical credibility and truth do not stem from literary pursuits. Similarly, Thomas Taylor tersely noted that he made “no claims of literary ability, therefore no apologies are necessary for any shortcomings in that direction.”⁴⁸

Perhaps reflecting the lingering sense of shame accompanying capture, perhaps seeking some official acceptance of their status as prisoners, perhaps seeking affirmation that being a prisoner had not lessened their military worth, or perhaps reflecting the fact that these men were officers, two men included forewords and prefaces from military figures. White’s memoir, for example, featured a foreword and preface by Sir John Monash and Major-General Sir G. V. Kemball respectively.⁴⁹ Both men commended him on his literary prowess in constructing an interesting and engaging narrative. Their endorsement also implied that White’s narrative – effectively a standard colonial narrative of the clever white man escaping captivity and outwitting the dim Turk – was a valuable, and accurate, historical and military source. Also endorsed by military men, William Cull’s initial memoir, *At All Costs*, referred to quotes from military personages attesting to the character of the author as a soldier.⁵⁰ Cull, seriously wounded before being taken captive, was permanently disabled and subsequently unable to serve in combat again. He was repatriated through prisoner exchange early in 1918. It is likely Cull felt his permanent exclusion from combat as a result of his disability and captivity damaged his personal credibility as an author, and a soldier. In a recent edition of Cull’s memoir published in 2011, however, these original endorsements have been removed in favour of a general introduction by its editor, Aaron Pegram, which puts Cull, and his captivity, in a historical context.⁵¹ His right to publication, and his claim to accuracy, is no longer derived from military attestations as to his character.

⁴⁷ Handsley, *Two and a Half Years a Prisoner of War*, Foreword

⁴⁸ Taylor, *Peregrinations*, “Introductory”

⁴⁹ White, *Guests of the Unspeakable*, Foreword and Preface

⁵⁰ William Ambrose Cull, *At All Costs*, Foreword

⁵¹ Cull, *Both Sides*, Introduction

The experience of captivity was fundamentally unfamiliar to the Australian soldier of the Great War. Those who were captured, and chose to write about their experiences, negotiated a difficult path between the shame associated with capture, expectations placed on how returned men should write about the war, a need to tell their stories as part of the broader picture of the AIF, and even the medium and audiences they were writing for. The chapters that follow look more closely at how they explained their capture, how they regarded their captors and their status as prisoners, and how their memories and representations of captivity could vary depending on their rank.

CHAPTER 2

Capture

“A prisoner of war is a man who tries to kill you and fails, and then asks you not to kill him.”

Winston Churchill¹

Australian soldiers, like all the soldiers in Britain’s imperial forces, were issued with instructions pertaining to the appropriate protocols and procedures to observe upon the surrender of an enemy. They were not given similar guidance when it came to the possibility of their own surrender or capture.² As John Halpin wrote, “Captivity did not enter my mind. Strange that of all possible eventualities, capture was never discussed in Palestine. It was as a thing that simply could not come to pass.”³ The historian S.P. MacKenzie has argued that the deafening silence surrounding the surrender of troops was aimed at discouraging surrender, as “any formal discussion of how to behave as a prisoner of war might make surrender, as opposed to fighting to the last, appear a not entirely dishonourable option.”⁴ Yet men evidently still surrendered to the enemy throughout the Great War.

Surrender was a dangerous process, one fraught with peril for the surrendering soldier. The point at which a soldier crossed the threshold to captivity was hazy and indistinct. Violations of this process occurred frequently,⁵ and surrendering soldiers often did not survive to become prisoners. Those who did survive surrender entered a

¹ Arnold Krammer, *Prisoners of War: A Reference Handbook*, (London: Praeger Security International, 2008), p. 2

² S.P. MacKenzie, ‘The Ethics of Escape: British Officer POWs in the First World War’, *War in History*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2008), p. 2

³ John Halpin, ‘Captives of the Turk’. *Reveille*, (March 1934), p. 25

⁴ MacKenzie, ‘The Ethics of Escape’, p. 2

⁵ Tim Cook, ‘The Politics of Surrender: Canadian Soldiers and the Killing of Prisoners in the Great War’, *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 70, no. 3 (2006), p. 640

state that was fundamentally unfamiliar; they were no longer soldiers in a traditional sense. They were captives.

The moment of capture, as a point of transition, was a significant moment. For many of the prisoners studied for this thesis, the moment of capture was therefore a key point in their memoirs. They had to describe the fundamentally jarring experience of being taken captive, explain the inexplicable and unexpected, and make sense of their transition from the role of an active agent in war to the role of a passive captive. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that many prisoners represented their capture in terms of inevitability, finding themselves in a set of circumstances over which they had no control and in which they could not reasonably have done anything other than surrender. The reasons given could be physical, strategic, pragmatic or a combination of factors, but all reflected a sense of inevitability, vulnerability and even, in Halpin's case, a sense of abandonment.

The battle in the moments preceding John Halpin's capture was deliberately painted in terms of utter disarray. Halpin described the confused retreat of the light-horsemen, the prelude to his capture, in his memoir in *Reveille*, writing "a confusion of impression seem to struggle from consciousness when one is being fired at and cannot retaliate. That at least was my experience when my old roan neddy seemed to leap skyward suddenly, and just as suddenly I lost all interest in that retirement."⁶ The chaos and confusion, then, left Halpin hopelessly vulnerable to capture. He depicted this somewhat more poetically in describing the same event in *Blood in the Mists*:

I mutter a prayer, clutching at the tautened straw of hope, like one who sees life slipping from him in a waste of blood, and with flashing thoughts of home...of love... of Heaven, as my horse shoots upward from a bursting ball of fire... of Hell as the earth is rushing at me through the darkened clouds of senselessness.⁷

⁶ Halpin, 'Captives of the Turk', (March 1934), p. 25

⁷ John Halpin, *Blood in the Mists*, (Sydney: The Macquarie Head Press, 1934), p. 86

The Battle of Bullecourt in April of 1917 saw the largest total number of Australian soldiers, approximately 1 170 men, taken prisoner during any battle of the Great War.⁸ They included in their number William Groves, Alfred Gray and Thomas Taylor. Isolated, without ammunition and cut off from their lines, these men made it clear that their choices were as simple as death or capture.

Groves devoted several episodes of his serialised memoir to the specifics of the battle and his eventual capture, in order to convey the point with absolute clarity. After the first wave of attack, Groves and his fellow soldiers found themselves inside the Hindenburg Line, though in a very tenuous position.

Three-quarters at least of our whole division appeared to have been put out of action; between us and our people was that hellish death-trap of barbed wire; we were *in* the enemy's lines; but our numbers were so small that we couldn't hope to hold out for long against any prolonged counter attacks; and these were as certain to come as was the night.⁹

Unable to retreat and yet insufficiently armed or manned to advance, Groves and his small band were eventually taken prisoner.

Although less loquacious in their descriptions, both Gray and Taylor echoed Groves' sentiments. Gray wrote that the Germans had "put down a terrible barrage behind us, and it became impossible to retire, and as our ammunition was all used there was no alternative but to surrender or be shot down."¹⁰ As his mates fell about him, Gray waited for his turn. Then, "the officer in charge of us told us to throw down our arms and surrender. There was then only one officer and eight men left in our trench, and

⁸ Australian War Memorial, 'First Battle of Bullecourt: First Battle of Bullecourt, 11th April 1917' www.awm.gov.au/units/event_110.asp (accessed 02.04.2013)

⁹ William Groves, 'Captivity: A Prisoner of War Looks Back', *Reveille*, (February 1932), p. 29

¹⁰ Alfred Gray, 'In the Hands of the Hun: Experiences of Private Alfred Gray, of Kyneton', 2007, Gray, Alfred (4203, Private, 14 Battalion), MSS1690 Australian War Memorial, Canberra, p. 2

as the officer led us over the parapet I thought we should all be shot.”¹¹ Taylor simply stated that “as the day wore on, we found ourselves forced back by sheer weight of numbers, and late afternoon found another “Digger” and myself wounded, and, in an endeavour to reach our own lines, taking refuge from the incessant snipe, snipe, in a shell-hole.”¹² Unable to gain their own lines, Taylor and his companion were eventually discovered and taken captive by a German soldier.

Robert Barrett Shiels and his fellow soldiers had found themselves similarly cut off on July 19, 1916, during the Battle of Fromelles. Writing in the 1940s, Shiels described his situation very matter-of-factly. A sergeant and another man attempted to return to the their lines. Within a few moments the sergeant returned alone, his companion having been killed. The sergeant told them that, “the trench behind was full of enemy troops. They had apparently managed to get behind us via the communicating trench ... we were thus cut off from the rest of our troops.”¹³ Shiels and his fellow soldiers were ordered to make one last desperate charge, during which he was hit in the back and leg by shrapnel, and stumbled into a shell hole. Deciding to wait there until he could find a way back to their lines, Shiels was ultimately discovered and taken prisoner.

Arthur Dent was physically incapacitated. Upon waking in No-Mans-Land in the aftermath of battle, freezing, and very much alone, Dent commenced repeated attempts to return to his own lines despite being seriously wounded. This endeavour caused him to periodically lose consciousness. He emphasised the seriousness, and subsequently the inevitability, of his situation, noting, “It is little to be wondered at that my circulation almost stopped. I was shot through both lungs, the liver, the shoulder and left foot, and bleeding all the time both internally and externally.

¹¹ *Ibid* p. 3

¹² Thomas Taylor, *Peregrinations of an Australian Prisoner of War: The Experiences of an Australian Soldier in Germany and Bolshevik Russia*, (E.W. Cole Book Arcade, 1920), p. 5

¹³ Robert Barrett Shiels, *The Kaiser's Guest*, (Mt. Eliza, Victoria: Private publication by Noel G. Shiels, 1987), p. 1-2

Besides all this I had almost exhausted myself in frequent attempts to regain the lines.”¹⁴ Dent had no choice but to be taken captive.

For Herbert Horner, the decision to surrender had somewhat more of an element of pragmatism to it; Horner was not physically incapacitated, nor was his life in immediate danger. Even so, for Horner, surrender was no less inevitable than the cases discussed above. Upon seeing Germans advancing upon their position in the early hours of the morning, Horner was aware that his officer and another man were still sleeping in a nearby cellar. He assumed the Germans, upon seeing the cellar, would choose not to take the risk of encountering several men and would simply throw a grenade into it rather than take captives. Horner decided to reveal himself to save his comrades.¹⁵

I crept down to the ground-level, where there was a door-way, and stood up. The nearest Fritz noticed me, and instantly smiled, seeing that I was unarmed – an easy capture. I smiled also, from sheer force of habit... Neither of us spoke. I stepped out, and they were all around me like bees.¹⁶

The surrender of Captain William Cull was not merely a matter of personal incapacitation. For Cull, the blame also lay higher up the military chain. Cull and his men had been sent in an attack upon the German trenches without artillery support. For Cull, the attack was doomed from the beginning. It was “just a maddening melee – pure martyrdom, with doomed but dauntless men tearing hopelessly at the impregnable wire with bare and bleeding hands.”¹⁷ He and his men found themselves up against the German wires under the light of their flares. Cull himself became “hopelessly entangled and held” in the enemy’s wires. A German bomb, exploding

¹⁴ Arthur Dent, *Fourteen Months a Prisoner of War*, (“The North Western Courier” Print, 1919), p. 5

¹⁵ Herbert Horner, *Reason or Revolution?: An Australian Prisoner in the Hands of the Hun*, (Jones, 1920), p. 47

¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁷ William Ambrose Cull, *Both Sides of the Wire: The memoir of an Australian officer captured during the Great War*, Edited by Aaron Pegram, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2011), p. 87

underneath him, threw him from the grip of the wires. At this point, Cull remembered “calling out: ‘God! My hip’s smashed.’ I tried to move and crawl out, but my body seemed to be paralysed, my legs were quite useless, life and the power of motion remained in my arms alone.”¹⁸ Cull was undoubtedly in a hopeless position. Under the light of the flares he noted seeing his “poor fellows” helplessly tangled in the enemy’s wire.¹⁹ As two of his men tried to help him back to their lines, Cull gave the order for those who were able to retreat, and for his men to leave him.

I asked Martin to put me in a shell hole, if there was one near, and to get away himself. I saw the flash of a bullet as it struck their wire. With the velocity somewhat lessened, it caught me an angle blow across the forehead, and the blood for a moment blinded me. To my mind, this was the finishing stroke. ‘That’s done it anyhow,’ I said. ‘Just wipe the blood out of my eyes, drop me in a shell hole, and you get away.’²⁰

William Cull had given himself up for dead. Losing consciousness, he awoke to the sounds of helpless men groaning, with “a feeling of stunned helplessness”.²¹ Cull makes it clear that, because he was physically utterly incapacitated, there was no way he could have avoided capture.

When describing his capture, William Groves strongly objected to describing it as ‘surrender’. He wrote, “none of us will agree that our giving up was a surrender in the accepted sense of deliberately throwing down one’s arms in war; for no arms remained for us to throw down. It was an unavoidable surrender of the body, but not the spirit, or the will – that we all felt and continued doggedly to feel all through captivity.”²² He spoke for all the men studied for this thesis. Their surrender was in no way voluntary: it was inevitable.

¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁹ *Ibid* p. 88

²⁰ *Ibid*

²¹ *Ibid* p. 89

²² Groves, ‘Captivity’, (March 1932), p. 44

Although the men stressed the inevitability of their capture, their recollections and representations of the moment of capture and the initial stages of captivity often varied. For some, these were moments of confusion and disorientation. For others, these moments were characterised by fear and apprehension of how they might be treated by their captors, along with a sense of vulnerability and the feeling that they no longer had a purpose in life. All, however, shared one common element – a sense of humiliation.

As noted earlier, when John Halpin and his ‘old roan neddy’ had parted company because of a shell, he had been knocked unconscious. He described his return to consciousness in *Blood in the Mists*:

All at once I am gripped in a paralysing fear, and cry out. That is not soldierly. I clutch at my throat to stifle childish whimperings. It is bared. The thin string of my identity disk is no longer around my neck, but that is removed only from a corpse – from dead meat...Dimly, then with sudden thought – comrades have abandoned me as dead.²³

Lieutenant Luscombe, captured on the Gallipoli peninsula, conveyed a similar sense of disorientation and confusion upon his return to consciousness in the wake of battle, although not Halpin’s sense of being abandoned. Upon waking, Luscombe “had a peculiar sensation of someone standing over my body where I was lying and directing another man to put my boots back on my feet.”²⁴

The initial moments of captivity differed for different prisoners. For some, expectations and apprehensions of violence on the part of their captors were realised. With his capture, and a swift boot up the backside from a German sentry for reaching for his cigarettes without permission, Groves noted: “So began our first close contact with the people who had been our active enemy in the fighting-line, and were now our

²³ Halpin, *Blood in the Mists*, p. 87-88

²⁴ Leslie Luscombe, *The Story of Harold Earl – Australian*, (Brisbane: W.R. Smith and Paterson Pty. Ltd., 1970), p. 40

captors.”²⁵ German soldiers attacked Frank Hallihan and his fellow soldiers after their capture: “They flew at us with rifles and anything they could get hold of to take our lives.”²⁶ Alfred Gray’s initial interactions with a German sergeant were somewhat tense. Searched for valuable documents, the German sergeant discovered a letter on Gray containing a caricature of the Kaiser, that Gray noted “nearly proved the end of me, as the German officer “got his hair off” again and said he had a good mind to have me shot.”²⁷ Gray’s interactions with the German sergeant illustrated for him one element he probably never previously considered: his vulnerability as a captive.

Robert Barrett Shiels’ experience, however, was somewhat different. When Shiels initially stumbled into a shell hole, exhausted, he “decided to stay where I was with my rifle pointed towards our lines”, with the object of returning to the Australian lines under cover of darkness. After falling asleep, Shiels woke and took heed of his surroundings, only to be discovered by a party of Germans who, upon seeing him, “started shouting something to me which I naturally couldn’t understand”. Figuring the game was up, Shiels stayed where he was. After a time, a German man who appeared to be an officer came toward Shiels.

He asked me in fairly good English if my rifle was loaded, I then realised why they had not rushed me, they must have thought I was covering them with my rifle and I had to admit to myself that the German officer was a brave fellow.²⁸

Shiels later made an attempt to make a break for it but failed, and was casually “halted by a sentry who motioned me to go along the road”. He was struck by the fact that his captors “gazed at me more with amusement than hostility.” However, like Gray, Shiels was aware of his vulnerability as a prisoner and that he must follow their orders “as there was no chance of escape with so many troops around.”²⁹

²⁵ Groves, ‘Captivity’, (March 1932), p. 60

²⁶ Frank Hallihan, *In the Hands of the Enemy: A Record of the Experiences of Frank Hallihan, 21st Battalion, in German Prison Camps*, (Robt. W. Jones, Ballarat: Baxter and Stubbs, 1920), p. 2

²⁷ Gray, ‘In the Hands of the Hun’, p. 3

²⁸ Shiels, *Kaiser’s Guest*, p. 2

²⁹ *Ibid*

For some, the disorientation of capture gave way to the disheartening realisation of their captivity, and the overwhelming sense that their lives, as soldiers and as men, had lost their purpose. For Thomas White, this moment was the moment of physical confinement; when the doors literally slammed shut, White and his companion comprehended “that, though we had fulfilled our mission, we would be of no more use to our army for perhaps the duration of the war.”³⁰ For Herbert Horner “It was not until I was safely landed in Fritz’s trench that I realised that the game was up for me.”³¹ Captivity, for Reginald Lushington, was such “an ignoble ending to all our brilliant aspirations, death seemed almost preferable.”³² Frank Hallihan’s response to he and his group being threatened and attacked by German soldiers after capture was almost recklessly apathetic; they no longer cared if the Germans hurt them, or even killed them, as “we were of no more use.”³³ William Cull wrote, “with my campaigning ended, hope gone, and it seemed but little of life left, I was carried into the enemy trench, prisoner of war.”³⁴ Herbert Horner touched on the one element that underpinned their new status as captives, when he noted – “the humiliation of being a slave to these people – “there ain’t no language”!”³⁵

For William Cull, the sense of humiliation expressed itself in what his fellow soldiers would think of him, being taken captive. “The thought was so bitter that for a moment I cared little whether I lived or died. Even if the Huns treated me humanely, it was a terrible price to pay for life.”³⁶ For William Groves, the humiliating details of his capture were too onerous to impose upon the audience. Reiterating the inevitability of his capture, Groves wrote,

³⁰ Thomas Walter White, *Guests of the Unspeakable: The Odyssey of an Australian Airman – Being the Record of Captivity and Escape in Turkey*. (Crows Nest: Little Hills Press, 1990 [1928, 1932, 1935]) Appears on p. 41 of the 1932 and 1935 editions. This particular sentence differs in both the 1928 and 1990 editions of White’s book. It reads: “And as the heavy doors were slammed on the howling throng we realised we were no longer free men.” (p. 53)

³¹ Horner, *Reason or Revolution?*, p. 51

³² Reginald Lushington, *A Prisoner with the Turks 1915-1918*, (Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1923), p. 6

³³ Hallihan, *In the Hands of the Enemy*, p. 2

³⁴ Cull, *Both Sides*, p. 91

³⁵ Horner, *Reason or Revolution*, p. 54

³⁶ Cull, *Both Sides*, p. 90

And the end – the obvious end – the only possible end, was at hand. I will not burden you – for it is a burden indeed to me – with all the details of the surrender. In truth I do not recall them all.³⁷

Groves did remember, however, “vague ineffable weariness, conscious of the humiliating futility of all our desperate effort... and the humiliation of our new position.”³⁸

Many prisoners were uneasy about implications of cowardice associated with being captured. Hallihan, for example, emphasised that the inability of he and his fellow prisoners to defend themselves did not automatically correlate with cowardice. Hallihan and his fellow prisoners, “although in German hands ... showed we weren’t particular whether dead or alive, but we would strike back if they struck.”³⁹ Groves similarly wished for nothing more than “a further opportunity of meeting them in even combat.”⁴⁰ Early encounters with the enemy as captors rather than foes on the battlefield certainly illustrated the shift in identity from soldier to captive, but importantly this shift in power relations did not necessarily correlate to cowardice for the new captive. These men were powerless, but not necessarily submissive.

The moment of capture was imprinted on the minds of the captives. Being taken prisoner was a jarring experience, with a very sudden reversal of circumstance. William Groves reflected with disbelief upon the swift shift of their state of affairs: whilst he and his fellow soldiers were captives, “back behind our lines were warm huts, burning braziers, the laughter and life of friends. This time the previous day we had known and enjoyed these things.”⁴¹ During his first day of captivity Herbert Horner “experienced a state of soul ... that I have never known before; and I hope I shall never have to pass through it again.”⁴² Frank Hallihan wrote that he “shall never

³⁷ Groves, ‘Captivity’ (February 1932) p. 24

³⁸ *Ibid*

³⁹ Hallihan, *In the Hands of the Enemy*, p. 2

⁴⁰ Groves, ‘Captivity’, (March 1932) p. 60

⁴¹ *Ibid* p. 65

⁴² Horner, *Reason or Revolution*, p. 51

forget those few hours. We looked back at Albert in the distance ... and all we could think was: "What we would give to be there."⁴³ Yet these men were prisoners and would remain so until the end of the war.

⁴³ Hallihan, *In the Hands of the Enemy*, p. 2

CHAPTER 3

The Intimate Enemy

The interaction between captor and captive has historically been acrimonious. For reasons of practicality prisoners were often not taken at all; when prisoners were taken, their fates were often unpleasant. By the time of the Great War, however, an increasing awareness of the economic value of prisoners in terms of labour, amongst other things, had resulted in the development of basic legal frameworks governing their rights and treatment. Captives were therefore expected to be treated humanely: provided with adequate food, shelter, clothing and medical treatment, and, when required to work, given tasks appropriate to their condition and not directly related to, or in close proximity to, the war effort. Though technically not legally applicable, not having been signed by all parties to the conflict, these agreements represented a general understanding and acknowledgement of the basic rights of the prisoner.¹ It was in this context that Australian POW memoirists encountered their enemies as captors.

The relationship between captive and captor was a prolonged, conflicted and unwillingly intimate interaction. Prisoners relied upon their captors for survival in many ways, yet these same captors also often threatened that survival, and they fundamentally remained the enemy. Racial and propagandist stereotypes provided an important way to understand and represent captors for many of the prisoners. Yet, when coming face to face with individuals, these could often falter. Some members of the enemy could undoubtedly confirm the stereotype, but others could, and did, challenge it. This subsequently lends an air of ambiguity and ambivalence to

¹ Joan Beaumont, 'Rank, Privilege and Prisoners of War', *War & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1983), p. 70. Serbia and Montenegro had not ratified either of the two agreements that pertained to the treatment of prisoners: The Hague Conventions and Regulations respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land of 1899 and 1907. These might not have been legally relevant but formed the basis of treaties regarding the care of prisoners between various belligerents throughout the war, which spawned later conventions regarding the treatment of prisoners of war.

representations of the enemy, as the men studied for this thesis attempted to convey the scope and complexity of their interactions with their captors.

Most Australian POW memoirists of the Great War made it clear that they had not expected good treatment from their captors. Thomas White, captured by the Turks, hardly expected decent treatment from a nation “given only to the exercise of warlike pursuits and the extortion of money from its subjects”.² William Groves believed that the Germans’ “reputation in the handling of prisoners was not one to inspire confidence or pleasure in the prospect of spending an indefinite period in his tender care.”³ Herbert Horner noted that he and his fellow soldiers “could not expect any friendship in Germany. We came to Europe to fight against them, and we must take the consequences.”⁴ Horner’s initial experience of Germany was certainly not encouraging: from the train he reported seeing a German woman drawing her finger across her throat threateningly, and drily noted, “Welcome to Germany!”⁵ These expectations shaped how many of the men remembered their captivity.

Some of the prisoners simply chose to represent their captors according to the stereotypes promoted by wartime propaganda. The memoirs of George Handsley and Frank Hallihan are particularly revealing in this sense. The enemy, for Frank Hallihan, was utterly beyond redemption. Huns in every way, Hallihan noted “a lot of people wonder who was responsible for these crimes that the Germans committed. The prisoners know, and could bring thousands to book. But every German has the same hate for the English, so they are all responsible.”⁶ His depiction of the Hun, and “Hun-land”⁷ was overwhelmingly negative, and his dislike of his German captors

² Thomas Walter White, *Guests of the Unspeakable: The Odyssey of an Australian Airman – Being the Record of Captivity and Escape in Turkey*, (Crows Nest: Little Hills Press, 1990 [1928, 1932, 1935]), p. 96

³ William Groves, ‘Captivity: A Prisoner of War Looks Back’, *Reveille*, (March 1932), p. 60

⁴ Herbert Horner, *Reason or Revolution?: An Australian Prisoner in the Hands of the Hun*, (Jones, 1920), p. 77

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ Frank Hallihan, *In the Hands of the Enemy: A Record of the Experiences of Frank Hallihan, 21st Battalion, in German Prison Camps*, (Robt. W. Jones, Ballarat: Baxter and Stubbs, 1920), p. 15

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 22

unrelenting. Throughout his memoir, Hallihan largely refused to identify any of his captors as individuals, unless they served as a particularly telling example of the cruelty and stupidity of the Hun. Even then, Hallihan's identification largely took the form of disparaging nicknames or general, impersonal identifiers.

George Handsley was entirely dismissive of instances of kindness or good treatment from the Turks. During his time as an officers' orderly, Handsley planned an escape attempt, which failed. On returning to the officers' quarters, Handsley was discovered by a patrolling guard, who marched him back to the sentry guarding the officers' quarters. Handsley expected punishment, though he received none. He later discovered that the sentry guarding the officers' quarters had informed his comrade that Handsley had been sent to the village in pursuit of supplies for the officers, instead of turning him in. Rather than acknowledge that the sentry's actions could have been an example of good will or even simple decency, Handsley dismissed it, noting, "this was done to save his own skin, as the penalty for letting a prisoner escape was death."⁸

Throughout his memoir, Handsley made little of any occurrence that might detract from his pervasively negative representation. In one instance he noted that he and his work party were "fortunate in having a lenient guard," but that "reports came through that prisoners in other gangs on the line were being brutally treated. On one occasion, a whole gang of one hundred prisoners was flogged."⁹ In another instance, Handsley depicted the prisoners having been forced to work, with any man who raised his head whipped. Handsley noted that "to retaliate meant certain death", despite noting no instance where this actually occurred.¹⁰ Handsley was also quick to claim this kind of harsh treatment was uniform; "on comparing notes" with other prisoners upon repatriation, Handsley asserted that "all the camps were alike, in that prisoners were

⁸ George Handsley, *Two and a Half Years a Prisoner of War in Turkey*, (Jones and Hambly, 1920) p. 55

⁹ *Ibid* p. 37

¹⁰ *Ibid* p. 38

subjected to cruelty and semi-starvation.”¹¹ There was no place for a lenient guard or an obliging sentry in his memoir.

For William Cull, many of the Germans he encountered personified the stereotypical brutal Hun. As noted in the previous chapter, Cull had been severely wounded before his capture: his wounds included “the total loss of the right hip bone, thigh and pelvis both shattered, and the lower part of the abdominal wall on the right side torn away, so that I was partly disembowelled.”¹² One particularly sadistic German surgeon who treated Cull typified the brutal Hun. This man “proved to be one of the most absolute beasts whom I have ever encountered; a man with about as much humanity as one might expect from a Bengal tiger.”¹³ In cleaning and dressing Cull’s wound,

He drew rough-cloth, see-saw fashion, back and forward through my side while I ground my teeth in agony and prayed that I might not gratify him with a groan. While probing the wounds he would look at me with a grin and ask, ‘Does this hurt?’ I could just manage to gasp, ‘No,’ though fully aware that such an answer meant more brutality.¹⁴

William Cull described this German surgeon as “a particularly vile product of German Kulture.”¹⁵

Transferred to a camp in the cold March of 1917, Cull was left on a train platform in minimal clothing rather than being placed on the train straight away.¹⁶ Once on the train, he was unable to climb into a bed. The guards roughly lifted him up and tossed him in the bed, a move that could have killed him. He was later given a blanket, placed at his feet. He clearly could not reach it to cover himself, and, “with a grin they

¹¹ *Ibid* p. 61

¹² William Ambrose Cull, *Both Sides of the Wire: The memoir of an Australian officer captured during the Great War*, Edited by Aaron Pegram, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2011), p. 100

¹³ *Ibid* p. 102

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ *Ibid* p. 103

¹⁶ *Ibid* p. 106-7

left it there. My body was blue from exposure; the cold almost numbed the pain. They watched me while I worked slowly, patiently and painfully with my left toe, trying to edge the blanket up within reach of my hand.”¹⁷ For Cull, this “was just German cruelty” and, he ended bitterly, “The one gift I would have taken in preference to all other then was just five minutes of my former strength, and those two Huns alone to share it with me.”¹⁸

John Halpin employed another stereotype in his description of his captors. He made consistent reference to their apparent depravity by frequently and strongly implying acts of sodomy, bestiality and perversion. Halpin described one young prisoner in particular, “little Patsy”, as being a target for the perversion of the Turk, on account of his innocence, youth, and apparent femininity.

His eyes blazed with alarm, a deep, unfathomable fear. “For God’s sake save me,” he breathed helplessly. “Turks ... the sin of Sodom ... perversion ... bestiality... you understand?”...His words spluttered vehemently, incoherently, as he searched our faces with a pleading gaze as of innocence being ruthlessly sacrificed.¹⁹

For prisoners like Halpin, “now used to sights of Turkish discrepitude and veiled bints”, Patsy’s “rosy cheeks were almost feminine in their loveliness.” The terrified and inconsolable Patsy was the symbol of innocence under threat from the vile Turk, and “in the hearts of every man was registered a vow to save Patsy from defilement at the hands of these barbarians.”²⁰

Other prisoners also recorded harsh, cruel and inhumane treatment, either to themselves or others, at some point during their captivity. William Groves and Henry Stoker, for example, were subjected to harsh treatment in reprisal for the allegedly

¹⁷ *Ibid* p. 107-8

¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁹ John Halpin, ‘Captives of the Turk’. *Reveille*, (September 1934), p. 10

²⁰ *Ibid*

poor treatment of enemy prisoners. Australian prisoners of the Germans also took particular offence to the treatment of French and Belgian civilians who attempted to assist the prisoners, and subsequently chose to draw attention to this treatment in their memoirs. "One woman tried to thrust a packet of cigarettes into my hand," noted Alfred Gray, "but a brute of a guard immediately struck her in the breast with his rifle butt, causing her to sink to the ground in agony. My blood boiled at this act, but I was powerless to do anything."²¹ Herbert Horner was similarly disgusted by this behaviour, and stated that, "these Barbarians show no respect for old age, nor women nor children."²²

There is little doubt that the men did meet with instances of ill treatment, yet the memoirs leave a sense that these were undoubtedly emphasised, if not sometimes embellished. Some, however, were blatantly exaggerated. Herbert Horner, for example, noted that a group of his fellows, "looked thin after only twenty-four hours in the hands of the Hun."²³ Arthur Dent similarly made much of an incident whereby their camp dog was seen unaccompanied and subsequently shot by a German civilian "as a typical instance of the callous brutality and officiousness of the German."²⁴

Underpinning the stereotypes promoted by wartime propaganda was racism and its implication of racial inferiority. This was also evident in the memoirs studied for this thesis. William Cull saw the average German as conspicuously lacking in both "his mental equipment and moral standpoint ... that 'sporting instinct' and sense of fair play which is so conspicuously animates the Briton. It is especially lacking in the Prussian, who could in no circumstances be a sportsman. His code is better suited to crime than chivalry."²⁵ In the Turkish camps, guards often assisted prisoners to buy food or other items and were appropriately compensated. Private Reginald Lushington

²¹ Alfred Gray, 'In the Hands of the Hun: Experiences of Private Alfred Gray, of Kyneton', 2007, Gray, Alfred (4203, Private, 14 Battalion), MSS1690 Australian War Memorial, Canberra, p. 5

²² Horner, *Reason or Revolution?*, p. 58

²³ *Ibid* p. 56

²⁴ Arthur Dent, *Fourteen Months a Prisoner of War*, ("The North Western Courier" Print, 1919), p. 25

²⁵ Cull, *Both Sides*, p. 127-8

saw these interactions as a demonstration of racial superiority, with the prisoners having the upper hand. He wrote, “at times it was rather like a comic opera to see a British prisoner leading the way through a town in order to buy something, and the old grey beard of a guard trotting behind mildly remonstrating and being told to shut up.”²⁶ Lushington even boasted about doing limited work without harassment, as he and his fellow prisoners had long since “sized up the Turkish guards.”²⁷ Handsley used Christmas to demonstrate the racial inferiority of his captors. For Christmas, the prisoners were given relative freedom to prepare for the festivities. As far as Handsley was concerned, their Christmas feast would be eaten in the civilised, British fashion rather than the “Turkish mode of eating” where “a large dish is placed on the ground, containing food, and all dive into the mess with their fingers.”²⁸ The British prisoners, by contrast, would be using utensils.

For John Halpin, there was a pecking order in terms of race. German soldiers, fair and Christian, were depicted as vastly preferable to Turks. He recorded that after being abused and spat on in a Turkish town, German soldiers arrived and “cleanse us from defilement as they gaze at us. They give us cigarettes, and we grip their hands in gratitude. Several return to the lorry, and they bring us food – steaming rice and meat... and spoons.”²⁹ Like Handsley, Halpin saw eating utensils as the mark of a superior race. Yet even then, Halpin felt the need to qualify his observations. After another encounter with German soldiers, whom he described as “mostly big-hearted fellows, eager to bridge the enmity of national hate, in their generosity as individuals, to ourselves - as prisoners,” he added, “they - our friends – are leaving us to kill our brothers”.³⁰ Though vastly superior to the Turk, the German was still an enemy.

Halpin’s animosity towards the Turks was so marked that when he did strike kindness, he rationalised it through race. These individuals were not Turks. A Turkish guard,

²⁶ Reginald Lushington, *A Prisoner with the Turks 1915-1918*, (Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1923), p. 97

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ Handsley, *Two and a Half Year*, p. 39

²⁹ John Halpin, *Blood in the Mists*, (Sydney: The Macquarie Head Press, 1934), p. 120-121

³⁰ *Ibid* pp. 207-9

who Halpin described as “the smiling, friendly Posta” (Turkish guard) Ismail Hakki, was later revealed as Greek, and a spy for the British. A woman in a Turkish town who whispered words of encouragement to the prisoners and was subsequently struck by a guard, was “fair and unveiled”, as compared to the “veiled bints” he and his fellow prisoners had hitherto been exposed to. She was doubtless “a Christian, waiting against the day of deliverance.”³¹ Similarly, a young Turkish gunner attracted the sympathy of Halpin. In *Blood in the Mist* he wrote about a young man, afraid and unwilling to go to battle, who was summarily executed by a Turkish officer.

The gunner falls... An outstretched arm is round my neck. We are lying face to face, and with measured pulse the severed jugular pumps a reeking, steaming flood, and slowly dies.³²

In this tragically intimate moment, Halpin noted that the man’s “fairish, hairless skin is not Turkish.” He was “perhaps an Armernian, a son of Syria or Christian Lebannon, born and conscripted beneath the sinister shadow of the Crescent.” Racial similarity allowed Halpin to portray this callous execution as an example of Turkish barbarity. This story, however, is conspicuously absent from Halpin’s memoir published in *Reveille* where, as noted earlier, he was writing for a different readership.

Halpin’s actions, in rationalising and excusing kindness, reflect an element common in the memoirs studied for this thesis, which is especially evident for the men who used stereotypes and generalisations to negatively portray the enemy: a sense of ambiguity when it came to individuals. Halpin used race to explain what he had seen and experienced. William Cull, however, was more forthright. Although he gave a vivid account of poor treatment and assertions of bad character on the part of the enemy, his memoir also contained frank acknowledgement of good treatment during his time in captivity. Cull noted that his daily torture sessions with the German surgeon provoked sympathy from a German soldier. The process of watching Cull being tormented by the surgeon literally sickened the soldier, who waited for the surgeon to leave before he expressed his pity, and shook his head disapprovingly.

³¹ *Ibid* p. 122

³² *Ibid* p. 92

From that day onward, the soldier acknowledged Cull every morning, and covered his eyes at every dressing change.³³ Similarly, when Cull was denied the request to have copious amounts of dried discharge shaken from his mattress, an orderly did it for him surreptitiously, with the promise of Cull's secrecy lest he be punished for assisting a prisoner.³⁴ Even the German surgeons were not all like the monster Cull had depicted in his account described earlier. Cull required ongoing treatment for his wounds and was seen by other surgeons. He noted:

They seemed to be professionally interested in my wound, some of them sympathetic, but one of them laughed and appeared to enjoy the spectacle of an enemy so badly mangled. 'You have something to suffer,' one of the surgeons said. 'Drink this,' and he offered me brandy. On my refusing he said, not unkindly, 'You must drink it, or I'll pour it down your throat.'³⁵

They dressed his wounds well and attempted to cover his eyes while they did so, concerned that Cull would be down-hearted if he saw the state of his wounds.³⁶ William Cull was not alone in his experience of vastly different treatment at the hands of the enemy, nor was he alone in the ambiguity of his representation.

Although both Horner and Dent made a habit of broadly referring to the cruelty and inhumanity of their captors; both prisoners, in fact, recorded largely fair treatment and reasonable interactions with their captors. Horner in particular was rather complimentary of various German individuals he encountered, both soldiers and civilians. As such, he consistently distinguished between the individuals he encountered and "the brutal, uncivilised Hun."³⁷ One man in particular earned Horner's upmost respect. On a break from work, the men were marched back to their camp to find there was no food for them. When they were to be sent back to work, Horner wrote:

³³ Cull, *Both Sides*, p. 100

³⁴ *Ibid* p. 103

³⁵ *Ibid* p. 108-9

³⁶ *Ibid* p. 103

³⁷ Horner, *Reason or Revolution?*, p. 69

... but the German sergeant who was now in charge of us would not allow the sentries to take us to work, as we had had nothing to eat. “‘Nix essen, nix arbeit!’ he said. (No food, no work.) He was the best German sergeant we had at any time. We called him “Fatty.” Like many others, he would not allow anyone to refer to the war. He cursed all those who had anything to do with causing it. He told us it had ruined his business as farmer and butcher.³⁸

However, without detracting from the good nature of “Fatty”, Horner was careful to note he found, when comparing his experiences with those of others, “that we had a much better time than the average; and Fatty’s consideration for us made our stay at Audenarde much better than it might have been.”³⁹ Yet it seems that Horner had the good fortune to rarely encounter the Huns he spoke of.

Private Lushington’s view of the Turk was seemingly fairly clear: the Turk was “an uneducated, unreasonable human being, with a born heritage [of] innate cruelty”.⁴⁰ The Turks were little more than a cruel, barbaric people, who deliberately killed prisoners after they surrendered, stripped their captives of all their clothing and belongings and then made them march miles upon miles, semi-clothed and starving. His memoir subsequently contained many references to poor treatment and neglect. Yet one particular individual challenged Lushington’s negative view of the enemy: a Turkish Commandant treated Lushington and his fellow prisoners with an exceptional amount of kindness. “Old Grey Beard”, he wrote, was “one of the few Turks in my three and a half years of imprisonment whom I can look back upon with any kindly feelings.”⁴¹ He noted that the prisoners were so grateful for this treatment that “when one of the boys called out, ‘Three cheers for the Commander’, it was given with such heartiness that it brought tears to his eyes.”⁴² Upon their transfer to a new camp, Lushington reflected:

³⁸ *Ibid* p. 66

³⁹ *Ibid* p. 70

⁴⁰ Lushington, *A Prisoner with the Turks*, p. 29

⁴¹ *Ibid* p. 79

⁴² *Ibid* p. 88

This man, who had been in charge of us for eight months, had gained our respect for his fairness; he had not robbed us, had done his best to break the monotony of our lives by games of football and concerts. He had punished the individual when punishment was deserved, and not punished the whole camp, which was our previous experience.⁴³

Lushington's praise of this man's good qualities is unambiguous; however, it is clearly framed within Lushington's wider experiences of poor treatment. This instance of good treatment was subsequently used to emphasise the bad.

Lieutenant Leslie Luscombe also found an exception to the general rule in Second Lieutenant Mehmet Hussein, whom he described as being, "wonderfully considerate and likeable in every way." Luscombe encountered Hussein, now a Captain, at the end of his captivity and noted that "It was obvious that Hussein was broken-hearted by the defeat that his beloved country had suffered."⁴⁴ Luscombe noted that:

Ancora Mehmet Hussein provided an outstanding and altogether fine example of a true patriot fighting devotedly to repel the foreign armies that had invaded his beloved Fatherland. We parted sadly, each knowing that this would be a final farewell. I felt then, and still feel now, that if all countries in this deeply troubled world were peopled by men of the type of this young Turkish officer then future wars would be impossible.⁴⁵

Even in absence of significant and exceptional kindness on the part of one particular individual, some prisoners were willing to acknowledge that not all of their captors were bad: indeed, some of them were not so different from the prisoners themselves. William Groves, upon being severely beaten by a German sergeant in front of both prisoners and sentries alike, wrote, "not all the Germans applauded the little episode of barbarism and spite. Some were too essentially human and decent for that. But they

⁴³ *Ibid*

⁴⁴ Leslie Luscombe, *The Story of Harold Earl – Australian*, (Brisbane: W.R. Smith and Paterson Pty. Ltd., 1970), p. 48

⁴⁵ *Ibid*

dared not do or say anything.”⁴⁶ The enemy, on the whole, was essentially neither bad nor good: Groves was careful to note that in writing his memoir that he was “not inspired by any desire to preach a hymn of hate against our former enemies and captors; no decent Digger wants to do that.”⁴⁷ Even Halpin found Turks he encountered in a hospital ward were “affable fellows”; even though he felt compelled to add qualifiers: they were “lacking every sense of personal cleanliness or sanitation”, and were “dull-witted”.⁴⁸

Some prisoners also drew a distinction between the men who were their guards and front line men. They shared what William Groves called “the common bond of oppression”⁴⁹ by the military machine. Groves believed that the frontline soldiers “were at heart, I think, really sorry for us. Of this we got a hint now and again, but they themselves, driven relentlessly before the militaristic machine, dared not make an open show of it.”⁵⁰ After being captured, Groves and his fellow men were taken to a church to sleep. The body of the church was already packed with prisoners, but the vestry doors were locked. Their sentry, who was an infantryman, “knew the horrors of the front line and the burden of fatigue”. To make more space, he smashed the locked doors with his rifle-butt. For Groves, this was an act of “a decent human being wanting to show a little mercy to his enemies... and in we rushed”.⁵¹

The hardest guards, by comparison, were the reservists, of whom Groves drily noted, “the best medicine they could have had to soften them a little would have been just one week up in that front line.”⁵² William Groves noted the similarity between prisoners and their enemy rank and file with a certain degree of pity:

Human sheep and goats, that indeed was what the poor devils were in the eyes of the military gods; while to the same authority we prisoners were apparently

⁴⁶ Groves, ‘Captivity’, (May 1933), p. 18

⁴⁷ Groves, ‘Captivity’ (January 1932), p. 31

⁴⁸ Halpin, ‘Captive’ (July 1934), p. 15

⁴⁹ Groves, ‘Captivity’, (March 1933), p. 18

⁵⁰ Groves, ‘Captivity’, (June 1932), p. 5

⁵¹ Groves, ‘Captivity’, (May 1932), p. 29

⁵² Groves ‘Captivity’, (January 1933), p. 29

very lowly beasts, to be kept closely guarded behind an impassable barrier of barbed-wire and bayonets.⁵³

Those held captive by the Turks echoed Groves. Captain Ronald Austin wrote that the Turks treated other rank prisoners, “little worse than they treated their own men”; conscripted peasants “who had no interest in the war at all”. The officers, he claimed, took at least half of the men’s pay before they received it and the “Turkish soldier lived, as the saying goes, ‘on the smell of an oil rag’.”⁵⁴ Private Lushington similarly noted, “the ordinary Turkish soldier was often as not in rags; he received no pay, and we always gave them our boiled wheat when we didn’t want it.”⁵⁵

The relationship between captor and captive was a complex matter, made more complex by the fact that facets of the individual prisoner’s experience that had to be carefully negotiated in print, considering the issues discussed in Chapter 1. Most of the memoirists discussed in this chapter made the point that instances of kindness did occur: they may have been rare, and largely from particular individuals, but they did occur. The enemy was not unambiguously bad. This acknowledgement of kindness runs counter to the prevailing narrative of unrelenting mistreatment, harsh conditions and deprivation. The simple fact that many of the men chose to record instances of compassion or care reflects the ambiguity and ambivalence of what was, in the end, an intimate relationship.

⁵³ Groves, ‘Captivity’, (March 1933), p. 18

⁵⁴ Ronald Austin, *My Experiences as a Prisoner*, (McCarron, Bird & Co. 1919), p. 43

⁵⁵ Lushington, *A Prisoner with the Turks*, p. 97

CHAPTER 4

The Passive Prisoner

“It must not be supposed that a prisoner of war is a discontented mooney creature, who sits all day and bemoans his fate.”

Arthur Dent¹

Captives were inevitably subject to the mercy of their captors in some sense. In becoming captives they had surrendered their liberty; they were physically confined and controlled by their enemy. However, confinement of the body was only one element of the prisoners' liberty that was surrendered. The transition from soldier to captive was not necessarily a full transition to complete surrender, submission and passivity, nor did it necessarily remove the sense of duty the men had felt as soldiers on the battlefield. For many Australian POW memoirists of the Great War, captivity was simply the continuation of hostilities in a different form. William Cull, for example, noted that the captives he encountered “were still fighting the Bosche with an ingenuity and determination which puzzled even while it exasperated him.”² By emphasising the active and inventive nature of their experiences, prisoners cast themselves as more than passive victims of cruelty and ill treatment at the hands of the enemy. They were active, resistive and still very much in the fight.

Escape, of course, was the most obvious of these duties. Lieutenant-Commander Stoker certainly saw it that way after the departure of Australian troops from the Gallipoli Peninsula. On March 23, 1916, Stoker and two fellow officers, Cochrane and Price, escaped from the Turkish prison camp Afion Kara Hissar under the cover of darkness. At large for eighteen days and within view of the sea, they were forced

¹ Arthur Dent, *Fourteen Months a Prisoner of War*, (“The North Western Courier” Print, 1919), p. 22

² William Ambrose Cull, *Both Sides of the Wire: The memoir of an Australian officer captured during the Great War*, Edited by Aaron Pegram, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2011), p. 112

to beg for food from a goatherd, who not only fed them but also reported them as escaped prisoners.³ Court martialled after their recapture, Stoker and his companions simply replied to the question as to why they had escaped: “it was our duty.”⁴ E.H. Jones echoed Stoker when he wrote that in not attempting escape, prisoners “put the lesser before the greater good, our duty to ourselves, as prisoners, before our duty to ourselves, as men, and to our country.”⁵ Thomas Walter White saw fellow officers who had given their parole and agreed not to escape as “surrendering the last remaining prerogative of a prisoner” which “undoubtedly lowered British prestige in the eyes of the Turks”. To White, it was “incomprehensible ... why these officers were not court-martialled on their release.”⁶

Many prisoners hoped that they might escape to return with valuable information to their own lines. Herbert Horner, on crossing the Hindenburg Line wrote, “I found myself taking mental notes of everything because I still thought there was a possibility of getting away when night came on, and I wanted to take back any information that I could secure.”⁷ Even after a significant time in captivity, men still wanted to escape to provide inside information. Frank Hallihan longed, “for the winter to be over so as I could make a bid for freedom and tell my people and others just the full state of affairs in the Hun-land, and I was determined to do my utmost to get there.”⁸ John Dawkins saw potential military glory in escape: “Fancy a man earning the distinction of the Victoria Cross for escaping and carrying valuable

³ Herbert Gordon Stoker, *Straws in the Wind*, (London: Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1925), p. 274

⁴ *Ibid* p. 278

⁵ Elias Henry Jones, *The Road to En-Dor: Being an Account of How Two Prisoners of War at Yozgad in Turkey Won their Way to Freedom*, (Pan Books, 1955 [1919, 1920, 1921, 1922]), p. 94

⁶ Thomas Walter White, *Guests of the Unspeakable: The Odyssey of an Australian Airman – Being the Record of Captivity and Escape in Turkey*, (Crows Nest: Little Hills Press, 1990 [1928, 1932, 1935]), p. 210-211

⁷ Herbert Horner, *Reason or Revolution?: An Australian Prisoner in the Hands of the Hun*, (Jones, 1920), p. 52- 53

⁸ Frank Hallihan, *In the Hands of the Enemy: A Record of the Experiences of Frank Hallihan, 21st Battalion, in German Prison Camps*, (Robt. W. Jones, Ballarat: Baxter and Stubbs, 1920), p. 22

information across to his own side – What glory!”⁹ Escape, then, was not only a duty: it was also about rehabilitation. Returning to their own lines with valuable information on the enemy framed the whole period of captivity in strategic, military terms, akin to any other military activity seeking strategic information. A daring escape could effectively erase the captivity entirely, along with the shame and humiliation of capture. Captain John Mott managed to escape captivity in Germany. It is telling that his memoir focuses solely on this feat. Escape, for Mott, was the only part of his captivity worth recording.¹⁰

Escape was also seen as a means of frustrating the enemy’s material demands for their war effort. Even if the attempt should fail, pursuit and recapture of the captive, as well as additional security measures and men to prevent further escapes, could use up valuable and ill-spared enemy resources.¹¹ Yet, the notion of material frustration of the enemy – of being a drain on their manpower and resources – was not restricted solely to escape: as the Australian POW memoirists were keen to show, it could take many forms. Prisoners were very much aware of their status as important economic assets in terms of labour, and strove to waste more of their captor’s money than they made.

Some prisoners worked slowly and lazily, “because neither threatening language nor clouts with the butt of the rifle could induce the *gefangener* to move with alacrity in the service of his captors.”¹² Even when work was done it was often minimal, or done remarkably poorly. Lushington noted, “We did no work beyond rolling the stones we were intended to break, down the hill side.”¹³ Herbert Horner was placed in a job at an ammunition dump, “cleaning salvaged machine-gun ammunition a good deal of

⁹ John Dawkins, “An Aussie in Wooden Shoes: The Seriously Humorous Experiences of an Australian Prisoner of War in Germany”, *Aussie: The Australian Soldiers’ Magazine*, (September 1921), p. 35

¹⁰ John Eldred Mott, *Experiences and Narrow Escapes of Captain J. E. Mott*. Chiswick Press, 1917.

¹¹ MacKenzie, S.P. MacKenzie, ‘The Ethics of Escape: British Officer POWs in the First World War’, *War in History*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2008), p. 4-5

¹² Dawkins, ‘An Aussie in Wooden Shoes’, (August 1921), p. 49

¹³ Reginald Lushington, *A Prisoner with the Turks 1915-1918*, (Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1923), p. 19

the time. Many thousands of rounds had been slightly damaged, and had to be cleaned, and packed into cases, and given to the machine-gunnners.” Horner and his fellow prisoners, not surprisingly, had objected to this work, but, when forced to do it discovered their own way to sabotage the enemy’s war effort. They discovered that “the bullets could easily be removed, and the powder poured out, then the bullet replaced. We treated a great many that way, and packed them in with the rest! No one could tell the difference, but it would stop the machine-gun!”¹⁴

William Cull noted a group of soldiers given the task of planting peas, who, to the casual observer, were undoubtedly going through the process correctly: digging each hole, planting the seed, and covering it up. In reality, nothing was deposited in any hole save for one at the end, into which all the seeds from that row were deposited. Cull noted with no small degree of sardonic amusement, that, “when those peas grew it was the most amazing result in agriculture that a German farmer had ever known.”¹⁵

Some prisoners refused, outright, to work. When Frank Hallihan and his fellow prisoners, for example, were told they were required to fulfil a particular quota of work, in filling four wagons per day, Hallihan noted that, “We told them that we couldn’t do them – and another thing, we wouldn’t!”¹⁶ Lushington and his fellow prisoners similarly often stoutly refused to work. In having dropped their tools, Lushington noted, “we knew enough Turkish to explain our actions, “Yok ekmek, yok chalish” meaning no bread, no work.”¹⁷ William Groves and his fellow prisoners became similarly adept in their captor’s language. They learnt the German words for “food” and “work”, which Groves noted were, “curiously enough ... always associated, for the legend we constantly heard from the guards was “nicht arbiet, nicht essen” (no work, no food), to which we soon learned to reply quite openly, to the

¹⁴ Horner, *Reason or Revolution?*, p. 62

¹⁵ Cull, *Both Sides*, p. 113

¹⁶ Hallihan, *In the Hands of the Enemy*, p. 10

¹⁷ Lushington, *A Prisoner with the Turks*, p. 19

amazement of our dull-witted old guards. “Nicht essen, nicht arbiet” (no food, no work).”¹⁸

One prisoner, at least, saw food as another way to undermine the enemy’s war effort. Dawkins noted that the prisoner “argued virtuously to himself that the next best service he could render his country was to eat as much of the enemy’s food as he could lay hands on...” And he gave a good example of what he meant. When Dawkins was required to help unloading carts of German goods, he noted “tall was the thieving when it happened to be army provisions.” Dawkins often pondered the fact that he “had the daring to do it” and drily noted, “If I only had the daring now in civilian life I doubt not that I would make a most successful shop-lifter.”¹⁹

Malingering and feigning illness was another avenue taken by prisoners when it came to their sense of duty as captured soldiers. White, for example, took great joy in feigning injury, in order to be exchanged to Constantinople where he hoped he could escape. White had injured his ankle during his captivity, but “unhappily my ankle had completely healed”, which left him in the unfortunate position of “proving fit immediately before the exchange season.”²⁰ White subsequently embarked upon attempting to inflame the old injury. His success each night “gave joy to my malingering heart.”²¹ Lieutenant Luscombe drily noted the same phenomenon upon viewing a party who were up for exchange: “About half of this party were genuinely in ill-health. The other half were genuinely good actors.”²² Frank Hallihan pretended to be sick. Excused from work and taken to the doctor, he calculated, with some relish, what his faked illness had cost his captors.²³

¹⁸ William Groves, ‘Captivity: A Prisoner of War Looks Back’, *Reveille*, (January, 1933) p. 29

¹⁹ Dawkins, ‘An Aussie in Wooden Shoes’, (August 1921), p. 49

²⁰ White, *Guests of the Unspeakable*, p. 221

²¹ *Ibid*

²² Leslie Luscombe, *The Story of Harold Earl – Australian*, (Brisbane: W.R. Smith and Paterson Pty. Ltd., 1970), p. 99

²³ Hallihan, *In the Hands of the Enemy*, p. 21-2

For William Cull, of course, the reverse was true. His wounds and treatment fuelled a dogged determination to live. An orderly who came to take his pulse would continuously assert that he could not feel Cull's pulse, or heartbeat, as it was too faint. The orderly repeatedly told Cull, "You are about done, and will die tonight."²⁴ Cull noted that, "I found myself 'biting into the bullet' again. That reiterated, 'You'll die tonight' roused me, perhaps, better than anything could have done. I determined that, in as far as my will had power to control the matter, I would not die. Shutting my teeth against it I whispered over and over again, 'I won't die!'"²⁵ William Cull's very survival was, in itself, an act of defiance.

The prisoners also used other ways to show that captivity did not necessarily mean passivity. The larrikin element has been noted, and debated, in the broader historiography of the First AIF.²⁶ Although it is not the intention of this thesis to examine that debate, it is clear from the texts studied for this thesis that the men were both aware of, and used, the larrikin spirit in dealing with their captivity.

After Bullecourt, the Germans paraded their prisoners through the town with the assistance of a band. William Groves and his fellow captives countered them by singing one of their regimental songs. Groves noted, "we sang loudly, though certainly without much joy, to the amazement and discomfiture of our guards and the complete breaking down of the effect of the proposed dramatic entry."²⁷ When passing through Lille, Groves and his fellow prisoners noticed they were being filmed. As they passed the cameraman, "Snowy and Ginty ... looked squarely at the camera, and then most solemnly raised their extended fingers to their nose in the true

²⁴ Cull, *Both Sides*, p. 95

²⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶ Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War*, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974); Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Robin Gerster, *Big-noting: The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1987); John Laffin, *Digger: The Legend of the Australian Soldier*, (Melbourne: The MacMillan Company, 1986 [1959; 1960])

²⁷ Groves, 'Captivity', (March 1932), p. 65

Australian fashion of expressing ridicule.”²⁸ Dawkins put on a similar show of defiance, stating, “we marched four-deep and in step, whistling “Keep the Home Fires Burning” and “Tipperary,” just to show our Fritz guards that we could march.”²⁹ George Kerr also noted an instance where he and his fellow prisoners deliberately went outside their huts to sing ‘Brittania Rules the Waves’ and ‘God Save the King’ “at the top of our voices”.³⁰

Prisoners were often simply just naughty and cheeky. Upon returning from a visit to a nearby town, accompanied by a sentry, Robert Barrett Shiels and his mate decided they were rather thirsty. Having spotted a hotel on the outskirts of town, the men decided to make a dash for it, in the hope that they could get inside and get a drink before the sentry had time to load his rifle. They managed, and, with the sentry, sat down for a drink. Two bottles of liquor later and “really merry”,³¹ they decided to head back to camp – but only after the three of them had managed to find the sentry’s rifle. They returned to the camp, “walking three abreast down the road singing lustily and taking it in turns to carry the sentry’s rifle.”³²

When asked to give their professions to an interpreter, Private Lushington and the rest of the men “smelt work, and many amusing trades were given. ‘Caretaker’ said one, ‘goalkeeper’ said another, ‘golf caddy, diver etc,’ were given by the cunning ones, who were not going to commit themselves in any way.” “The Turkish War office”, he wrote, “must have been surprised at the amount of talent they had at their disposal.”³³ Orderlies sent to purchase goods for officers in Turkey were often able to exchange goods on credit, with a note detailing the exchange and promise to pay. White noted one instance where one shopkeeper “who clamoured for payment from a shopping

²⁸ Groves, ‘Captivity’, (September, 1932), p. 28

²⁹ Dawkins, ‘An Aussie in Wooden Shoes’, (August 1921) p. 48

³⁰ Kitchin-Kerr, George Ernest (Corporal) 1915-1917, PR00953 Australian War Memorial, Canberra

³¹ Robert Barrett Shiels, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, (Mt. Eliza, Victoria: Private publication by Noel G. Shiels, 1987), p. 13

³² *Ibid* p. 14

³³ Lushington, *A Prisoner with the Turks*, p. 33

party was found to possess a chit which told its own story. “Received one oke of peckmez by a hungry soldier. God will repay.””³⁴

William Cull gave his German captors some cheek about the power of their bombs. While examining his wounds, the German soldiers noticed that he was grinning, and one of them asked him why. Cull responded, ““I was just thinking how very ineffective your grenades are. If that had been a Mills bomb I would’ve been blown to fragments. Your old thing only bent me.””³⁵

Alfred Gray and his fellow prisoners managed, during the course of their captivity, to procure a piano. After the signing of the Armistice, knowing they could not take it with them, the Commandant offered them the same price they had originally paid him for it, which was, of course, significantly less at this point due to the depreciation of German currency. The prisoners politely requested some time to consider his offer, and promptly smashed the piano to pieces for firewood.³⁶ Gray and his fellow prisoners could simply have left the piano behind, they could have asked for a higher price or taken what the Commandant offered, and doubtless could have acquired firewood elsewhere. But the destruction of the piano was about more than money, and more than practicality. In destroying what had been a prized possession in captivity, these men also destroyed something less tangible: they destroyed a symbol of their captivity, and in doing so they defiantly marked their status as free men.

Finally, the prisoners also used humour and irony as a form of resistance. Most Australian POW memoirists studied for this thesis strove to make light of hardship, and to emphasise the humorous as well as heartbreaking elements of their captivity. Private Lushington and his fellow captives actively kept each other’s spirits up; ““Laugh, damn you,’ someone would say to a comrade who was looking in despair at

³⁴ White, *Guests of the Unspeakable*, p. 202

³⁵ Cull, *Both Sides*, p. 94

³⁶ Alfred Gray, ‘In the Hands of the Hun: Experiences of Private Alfred Gray, of Kyneton’, 2007, Gray, Alfred (4203, Private, 14 Battalion), MSS1690 Australian War Memorial, Canberra, p. 10

his surroundings.”³⁷ Upon being searched and having their valuables confiscated, William Groves recalled, “some wag remarking very dryly after it was all over. ‘Oh, well, they’ve left the gold-fillings in a man’s teeth!’”³⁸ Kept in poor, cramped and unsanitary conditions, sleeping on a stone floor with no mattresses, Groves noted that “every now and again one of the boys, finding difficulty in getting to sleep on the hard, cold floor, especially in wet, adhesive clothes, would pass some such ironical remarks as: - “Gee whiz! this mattress is a bit too soft. I must get the servant to change it.””³⁹

As noted in Chapter 3, Lieutenant-Commander Stoker was punished in reprisal for the alleged ill treatment of Turkish prisoners at the hands of the British. He was kept in solitary confinement, in a tiny, dingy cell with but a small window, and a bed infested with bugs. He noted, however, that his confinement was not really solitary at all, “for there was one very important personage who was kind enough to relieve my solitude very frequently. His name was Archibald.”⁴⁰ Lest the reader begin to think him mad, Stoker clarified. Archibald was not a person, but “the biggest rat I have ever seen or imagined in my life. If I attempted to depict his size nobody would believe me. Who would believe my statement that he was the size of a half-grown rabbit?”⁴¹ Stoker depicted, in detail, his nightly battles with the bugs in his bed as though he were waging war,⁴² and at one point, devoted several pages to a humorous and entirely imagined conversation about him, which occurred between the key players in his cell: Archibald, The Door, The Floor, The Window, The Bed and the King of the Bugs in his bed, “His Bugesty”. “His Bugesty” wished to claim Stoker in retribution for the wanton slaughter of his fellow bugs, whereas The Bed simply wanted him gone and The Floor was tired of his pacing, but The Window – although kind and helpful – was too high to allow him to climb out, whilst the Door wouldn’t let him out.

³⁷ Lushington, *A Prisoner with the Turks*, p. 81

³⁸ Groves, ‘Captivity’, (May, 1932), p. 29

³⁹ Groves, ‘Captivity’, (October, 1932), p. 17

⁴⁰ Stoker, *Straws*, p. 200

⁴¹ *Ibid*

⁴² *Ibid* p. 202

The harsh treatment experienced by prisoners was undoubtedly in many instances dire, and far more serious than their light-hearted depictions had revealed. Stoker, echoing Arthur Dent quoted at the beginning of this chapter, and many of the other men studied for this thesis, believed that, “a tale of woe is dull writing – and reading.”⁴³ However, after the war, Stoker attempted to apply to the Turkish government for compensation for the ill treatment he had received as a prisoner, which belied the light-hearted tone of his memoir.⁴⁴ Emphasis on the humorous alongside the heartbreaking, however, had to do with more than the interest of a projected audience. Fundamentally, this decision to emphasise the active, inventive, resistive and humorous elements of captivity was a way to challenge the accepted image of the captive as passive, powerless, and a victim. The humorous representation was, in some sense, a continuation of the active and resistive action taken during captivity.

In continuing to resist their enemies, prisoners showed that their surrender and captivity was purely physical. As E.H. Jones noted, “it was not the supremacy of the Turk but our own recognition of it and our resignation to captivity that made us moral as well as physical prisoners.”⁴⁵ In continuing to resist, on any level, soldiers refused to surrender completely to their captivity. William Cull believed that “though their bodies had been captured, their spirit had not surrendered.”⁴⁶ Frank Hallihan similarly noted, that, “although we were in the enemy’s hands and at his mercy, we held our own as far as it was possible, and gave him as much trouble as we could,”⁴⁷ while Lushington asserted that, “we were not going to let them break our spirit, even if they did our bodies.”⁴⁸ Resisting the enemy, even in the smallest way, gave prisoners a

⁴³ *Ibid* p. 156

⁴⁴ Stoker, H.G.D. Transcripts of correspondence pertaining to H.G.D. Stoker’s claim for compensation for ill treatment while a POW 1915-1918. Personal papers in possession of the family of Henry Hew Gordon Stoker. Gratefully used with permission of Walter Jenkins and Dermot Malley.

⁴⁵ Jones, *Road to En-Dor*, p. 95

⁴⁶ Cull, *Both Sides*, p. 112

⁴⁷ Hallihan, *The Hands of the Enemy*, p. 14

⁴⁸ Lushington, *A Prisoner with the Turks*, p. 19

sense of purpose. Groves probably summed it up when he wrote that there was “a sense of satisfaction in frustrating the efforts of one’s opponent”.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Groves, ‘Captivity’, (May 1932), p. 29

CHAPTER 5

Rank and Captivity

In each chapter of this thesis, common themes have tended to weave through the accounts of different men, despite different forms of expression and interpretation. There was, however, one element of their captivity that fundamentally divided the men studied for this thesis: the issue of rank. Respect for rank, even in captivity, resulted in disparate treatment between officers and men, and officers found themselves in a distinctly isolated and privileged condition compared to their men. This very separate experience of captivity through rank is unmistakable in the memoirs studied for this thesis; in constructing their accounts, prisoners negotiated this difference in ways that strongly reflected their own position within this system.

Historically, a perceived affinity between fellow officers, on the basis of “social and professional solidarity”, irrespective of allegiance, meant that enemy officers tended to have more in common with each other than with their lower rank soldiers.¹

Respect for rank could transcend enmity. Captain William Cull reflected this when he described a German orderly, who had previously abused him, discovering his rank was Captain and subsequently taking his hand and apologising sincerely for his previous behaviour. Cull noted that “even in the case of an enemy rank claims respect in Germany.”² The social, cultural and professional distinction between officers and men, observed by Cull, was reflected and reinforced in successive legal agreements as the “supposedly more egalitarian twentieth century progressed.”³

By the Great War, regard for rank was fundamentally built into the prevailing legal standards for treatment. Officers and men were kept physically separate, and unlike

¹ Joan Beaumont, ‘Rank, Privilege and Prisoners of War’, *War & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1983), p. 68

² William Ambrose Cull, *Both Sides of the Wire: The memoir of an Australian officer captured during the Great War*, Edited by Aaron Pegram, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2011), p. 98

³ Beaumont, ‘Rank and Privilege’, p. 69

the men of the rank and file, officers did not have to work. They were allowed comparative freedom, comfort and better pay, as well as orderlies from the lower rank prisoners and a certain degree of automatic respect from their captors on the basis of their rank.⁴ This disparity in treatment also extended to the punishments prisoners could expect. While these standards were not always adhered to, by the end of the Great War “it was widely conceded that officers were entitled to a wide range of privileges during their time as prisoners of war.”⁵

Physical isolation meant that officers were often unaware of the conditions of captivity for the other ranks. This inhibited their ability to assist their men, something they were often acutely aware of, and also, in some cases, constituted a failure in their leadership. As Joan Beaumont has suggested, in accepting their separation, officers were “abrogating their responsibilities of leadership.”⁶ It is not surprising, then, to note that many officers studied for this thesis ensured that their memoirs included attempts to breach the separation of officers and other ranks.

Lieutenant Luscombe, for example, described how, in one camp, the officers communicated with their men using a Greek priest, who visited both camps, as their intermediary. Once aware of any suffering or ill treatment, officers were then “in a position to make representations to the Commandant to induce him to take steps to minimise this brutal treatment,”⁷ and to help them out as much as possible. Captain Thomas Walter White similarly noted attempts to overcome this separation, and when the officers were made aware that members of the other ranks were in a poor condition, White and his fellow officers, “wrote strongly-worded letters to the Commandant regarding the hospital treatment.”⁸

⁴ *Ibid* p. 70-71

⁵ *Ibid* p. 71

⁶ *Ibid* p. 85

⁷ Leslie Luscombe, *The Story of Harold Earl – Australian*, (Brisbane: W.R. Smith and Paterson Pty. Ltd., 1970), p. 87

⁸ Thomas Walter White, *Guests of the Unspeakable: The Odyssey of an Australian Airman – Being the Record of Captivity and Escape in Turkey*, (Crows Nest: Little Hills Press, 1990 [1928, 1932, 1935]), p. 99

Despite attempts to communicate with their men, it is clear that the officers were largely unaware of the conditions of their men throughout their captivity. Captain Ronald Austin was not made fully aware of the plight of the lower ranks until he arrived in Egypt prior to repatriation, where he was told “that 80 per cent of the men who had been taken prisoner by the Turks had died, and it had been chiefly through neglect on the Turks’ part and bad treatment.”⁹ While his own captivity was relatively benign, the men he was supposed to be responsible for, as an officer, had suffered. Austin emphasised the dire plight of the other ranks:

The men used to be sent on working parties, and if it was work they thought they should not do, and they refused, they were given no food until they did work. Then when they worked, they very seldom received any pay, and lived practically on half rations, and the food, at that, was very bad. They used to get run down in health, and suffered from dysentery, owing to no medicine or change of food. If that did not kill them, they would get malaria, which often recurred. They had no clothes given to them, and were dressed in rags; also they used to get typhus.¹⁰

Many officers similarly noted this difference in treatment between officers and men, though doubtless having been only vaguely aware of the extent of this difference throughout their captivity. Briefly mistaken for a member of the other ranks, Lieutenant Arthur Dent noted that the experience “enlightened me to the difference between the treatment accorded to the officers and that given to the men. Such difference is wide, very little consideration being shown to the latter.”¹¹ Dent subsequently cautioned that “it must be borne in mind that the officers were treated far better than the men, and some of the latter who were captured early, tell some awful tales of privation and suffering.”¹² Captain William Cull strongly implied that

⁹ Ronald Austin, *My Experiences as a Prisoner*, (McCarron, Bird & Co. 1919), p. 43

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ Arthur Dent, *Fourteen Months a Prisoner of War*, (“The North Western Courier” Print, 1919), p. 12

¹² *Ibid* Preface

his being taken prisoner rather than killed was a result of his rank.¹³ Concerned their experiences might be erroneously regarded as the norm, these officers were careful to emphasise the differences between their treatment and the treatment of their men, which they discovered after their release.

Officers *were* unmistakeably privileged in captivity. Captain White's primary deprivation, for example, largely seemed to be focused on his notion of civilisation. Upon being taken to a hotel, White noted with incredulity that there was "a dining-room possessing tables with *tablecloths* and bedrooms containing *bedclothes and beds*. It was the nearest approach to civilisation we had seen for months."¹⁴ He was less happy when taken to a café, where, he wrote, "it would have been difficult to find a more disreputable or fly-speckled café than the one to which we were led, but we ate with relish all that was placed before us."¹⁵ A firm believer in the military caste system, White very clearly drew a line in terms of expectations of his own preferential treatment. Arriving at one particular camp, White expressed outrage that, "the stupid Moulassim [sic] had forgotten to wire ahead so that we were not expected, nobody knew our exact destination." No arabahs could be procured for transport as a result, and White and his fellow officers were forced to walk.¹⁶ The fortnightly luxury of a Turkish bath, however, "in the streaming atmosphere and sense of comfort and cleanliness within the domed vaults of the *hammam*, the half-hour's repose that followed our scrub being spent swathed in towels and blankets in the garish drying room with various other animated mummies,"¹⁷ allowed White to forget the burden of captivity.

Aware that his account reflected his privilege, White was careful at one point to caution the reader "lest it should appear in the light of these diversions that life ... was a bed of roses," that it was expensive to purchase food, and that this food was of a sub-standard quality. The bread "was principally remarkable for its soddenness and

¹³ Cull, *Both Sides*, p. 90

¹⁴ White, *Guests of the Unspeakable*, p. 128

¹⁵ *Ibid* p. 139

¹⁶ *Ibid* p. 146

¹⁷ *Ibid* p. 102

the amount of straw and grit it contained”; furthermore “*peckmez*, an extract from grapes that resembled molasses, was our substitute for jam and butter. Meat was a rarity and rose in price...”¹⁸

There is a sense of defensiveness in White’s memoir which may account for the emphasis he placed on the ill treatment of the other ranks and his attempts to alleviate their plight. Yet even then, it was clear that the officers were privileged. When his men were to embark on a march, White and his fellow officers applied for leave to go with them, though “two of us were too ill to walk while another still suffered from dysentery,” in the hope that they might be of assistance. The officers, however, would not march: they would be provided with transportation. White wrote that he appreciated this provision in the hope that “if we accompanied the column [the transportation] would be of material use to the men.”¹⁹

Poor treatment, the struggle for material existence, work and deprivation characterised the memoirs of the other ranks, contrasting markedly to that of the officers. William Groves noted that “petty mindlessness and inhuman selfishness” were “the two most marked characteristics of prisoners of war psychology”,²⁰ while John Halpin noted, that, “ours is the functioning of the strongest instinct – the instinct of self-preservation”.²¹ The prisoner, as described by John Dawkins, had eyes that “had become shifty. Hunger-sharpened, they took in everything on the road and at the sides of the road as he slouched along to his daily toil. Should he spy a cigar-end or a lonely potato in the gutter he made a mad rush for it. Probably some of his comrades had spied it too, and a general *melee* ensued until the guards arrived on the scene and dispersed the scramble.” He might have been a soldier, he might have been something

¹⁸ *Ibid* pp. 164-165

¹⁹ *Ibid* pp. 103-104

²⁰ William Groves, ‘Captivity: A Prisoner of War Looks Back’, *Reveille*, (September 1932), p.17

²¹ John Halpin, *Blood in the Mists*, (Sydney: The Macquarie Head Press, 1934), p. 109

else before the war, “But as a *gefangener* he was just a hungry animal, struggling to live in a place where it was hard – very, very hard – to live.”²²

It is not surprising, then, that many other rank prisoners expressed a certain ambivalence, if not outright hostility, toward the notion of rank. Private Herbert Horner was one. He strongly objected to the system of privilege through rank in the Australian army. When Horner took ill upon the voyage over to England, he noted disgustedly that,

There was no consideration for the fellow who had nothing to eat for eight days; although on the same ship a few weeks later I saw an orderly clean his uniform and boots, and cut up some fancy little triangular pieces of toast, and take them up to an officer who was “slightly indisposed.”²³

Horner attributed military losses to the incompetency of the officers, and suggested that “a safe rule would be to see that officers who send orders up to the Front get no more intoxicating liquor than the men who risk their lives carrying out those orders.”²⁴ Alcohol “in officers’ dug-outs ... was more treacherous than a German spy.”²⁵ Horner emphasised the value of a man on his own merits, stressing the pivotal importance of the common Australian soldier to the functioning of the wider military. Rank was not an indicator of competence or decency. He noted that in the army “A private is judged by an officer, who may be an evil-living man, while the soldier may be a pure man.”²⁶

His temper had not improved when being repatriated home. He recorded one instance where two young men who had lost limbs during the war were travelling back to

²² John Dawkins, “An Aussie in Wooden Shoes: The Seriously Humorous Experiences of an Australian Prisoner of War in Germany”, *Aussie: The Australian Soldiers’ Magazine*, (June 15 1921), p. 48

²³ Herbert Horner, *Reason or Revolution?: An Australian Prisoner in the Hands of the Hun*, (Jones, 1920), p. 14

²⁴ *Ibid* p. 45

²⁵ *Ibid* p. 91

²⁶ *Ibid* p. 120

Australia and were not allowed to return to the ship using the officers' gangway, which, unlike that of the men, had a net underneath it should these young men fall. Horner stated, that, "We boast of being "British," but our own officers would not permit cripples to pass a few yards of unoccupied saloon deck. The unfortunate lads could not get up any other way in rough weather; so they had to remain like cattle in the hold, through the selfishness of our own officers."²⁷ Horner claimed that one young crippled man subsequently called the officers "Huns" in his frustration; Horner noted that he "thought the word was not out of place."²⁸ For Horner, the divisiveness of rank within the army reflected a key problem with the structure of the Australian military – what he called "Our Militarism" – in that it was fundamentally "not Australian". For Horner, rank was the enemy and its curse was not restricted to the AIF; "the only fault to find with many of the Germans", he wrote, "was the dread of their officers."²⁹

Herbert Horner's open antagonism to rank, however, was rare in the memoirs studied. As Beaumont argued, the "informal consensus by ex-prisoners of war and official historians alike seems to be that the delicate question of differentiation between prisoners of war on grounds of rank is best left tacitly ignored."³⁰ In light of this informal silence on rank, expressions of discontent and ambiguity toward this system took more subtle forms in the memoirs of most other rank prisoners. Two forms of expression in particular were common: many prisoners employed a kind of surrogate criticism, in the form of negative or disparaging observations of rank as it functioned in other armies; others completely omitted the officers – and by implication, rank – from their memoirs, emphasising instead a responsibility to their peers.

Sergeant William Groves certainly noted the workings of rank in the German army with amusement, and a certain degree of disdain. He noted mockingly, that, "a German officer without his clanking sword would be as incomplete as a peacock

²⁷ *Ibid* p. 118

²⁸ *Ibid* p. 119

²⁹ *Ibid* p. 52

³⁰ Beaumont, 'Rank and Privilege', p. 67

minus his gorgeous plumes,”³¹ and sardonically noted the effect of a German officer’s presence: “every humble sentry, pulling himself up and clicking his heels, stood rigidly to attention at his approach, viewing his passing with an appearance of awe that rather amused us in a cynical way.”³² Observing a soccer game played by their German guards, he was highly amused by the reactions of the men to their sergeant: whenever the sergeant “got near the ball all the other players would respectfully draw away, allowing the sergeant a free passage to the goal.” The prisoners “began to laugh and shout ironical advice to the players.”³³ The provoked sergeant lectured the prisoners, yet Groves cheerfully concluded that, “the average German couldn’t play Soccer; at any rate when one of the opposing side was a sergeant of cavalry.”³⁴

As noted earlier, many other rank prisoners simply neglected to mention officers, instead emphasising a notion of responsibility to one another in absence of rank. Despite the rather bleak picture painted by Groves and Dawkins cited earlier in this chapter, the memoirs also made it clear that prisoners assisted and supported one another, often sharing cigarettes and food. Private Reginald Lushington described a practice common amongst the men. When a prisoner was undergoing punishment and was restricted to a ration of only bread, their fellow prisoners would surreptitiously remove the inside of the bread and fill it with meat in order to help them endure their punishment.³⁵ Being a captive may have necessitated a degree of selfishness, but it also conversely fostered unity and solidarity. To be without it, or to be cast out, was the greatest blow. Dawkins was briefly under suspicion from his fellow prisoners for stealing bread. “It was awful”, he wrote, to be suspected by one’s own particular cobbles.”³⁶ Mateship was so fundamentally important that men were afraid to lose it. Groves noted that penalty paid by the prisoner who accepted comforts for divulging information to the enemy – “in doing so he left – and lost – his mates; and forfeited his self-respect and their mateship.”³⁷ According to Groves, few prisoners made this

³¹ Groves, ‘Captivity’, (January 1933), p. 29

³² Groves, ‘Captivity’, (March 1932), p. 61

³³ Groves, ‘Captivity’, (March 1933), p. 18

³⁴ Groves, ‘Captivity’, (March 1933), p. 18

³⁵ Reginald Lushington, *A Prisoner with the Turks 1915-1918*, (Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1923), p. 43

³⁶ Dawkins, ‘An Aussie in Wooden Shoes’, (July 1921), p. 48

³⁷ Groves, ‘Captivity’ (May 1932), p. 29

choice. For Groves, his days of captivity were valuable because of this sense of unity: they were days “in which man saw right into the heart and soul of his fellow man; days in which the veneer of social status or opulence counted for nothing in an assessment of the qualities that make a man despised or accepted.”³⁸

In the supposedly egalitarian Australian army, nowhere was rank more evident than in captivity. It was a fundamentally divisive element, which characterised Australian captivity literature of the Great War, implicitly and explicitly. The need to illustrate the often marked differences in treatment between officers and men served as a catalyst for the memoirs of many other rank prisoners. Disproportionate rates of publication between officers and men could foster an image of captivity that was unrepresentative;³⁹ the other ranks therefore needed to record their *own* experience of captivity, lest the accounts of officers be taken as the standard of treatment. Officers were careful to note this difference, and some reflected a certain degree of shame in their preferential treatment whilst their men suffered. Only White, who may have objected to, and emphasised, cruelty and inhumane treatment of the other ranks, clearly did not object generally to preferential treatment on the basis of rank. As Beaumont has noted of the officers, “whatever their disadvantages, their conditions were vastly superior to those of the other ranks.”⁴⁰ That was certainly true for the men studied for this thesis.

³⁸ Groves, ‘Captivity’ (August 1932), p. 33

³⁹ Beaumont, ‘Rank and Privilege’ p. 67

⁴⁰ *Ibid* p. 75

CONCLUSION

Robin Gerster claimed that John Halpin's memoir exemplified "the defensive, almost cringing, posture assumed by the ex-prisoner" in a "national war ethos so aggressively supportive of a heroic view of battle."¹ Surrender and captivity was undoubtedly a shameful and humiliating experience, and prisoners amply reflected this in their memoirs. Yet these memoirs – though at times slanted, biased, exaggerated and even fictitious – reveal a much more complex picture of captivity than that suggested by Gerster.

These memoirs negotiated the difficulties of writing about captivity: they sought to justify their accounts and explain their capture, and captivity, their reactions to their captors and their perspectives on the divisiveness of rank. These accounts shared many similarities, but they were also distinctly different. These memoirs, then, were a constant negotiation between the reality of their experience and the appropriate way to represent that experience. It is telling that some prisoners outlined their reasons for publishing under a section titled, "Apology".² Surrender was, after all, a shameful, emasculating experience.

The reasons prisoners gave for writing could vary, though a common theme was that publication was requested or required by a third party, whether that third party was duty itself, or more commonly, friends, family and fellow prisoners. This is an important feature of these texts. The captivity narrative was necessarily introspective, individual and highly personal, with the prisoner as the main protagonist. Emphasising external influences on publication could combat associations of self-

¹ Robin Gerster, *Big-noting: The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1987), p. 143

² See: Thomas Walter White, *Guests of the Unspeakable: The Odyssey of an Australian Airman – Being the Record of Captivity and Escape in Turkey*, (Crows Nest: Little Hills Press, 1990 [1928, 1932, 1935]); Herbert Horner, *Reason or Revolution?: An Australian Prisoner in the Hands of the Hun*, (Jones, 1920)

indulgence and self-pity. Not heroic in a conventional sense, these texts are at times melancholy, bitter and self-reflective.

Nowhere was the shame and humiliation of captivity more apparent in these accounts than the moment of capture. Prisoners made it clear that becoming a captive was an unexpected, jarring, and fundamentally disillusioning experience, representing a sudden change in status from combatant to prisoner. Yet few of the memoirists admitted to voluntary surrender. Rather, they strongly suggested that their capture was inevitable. William Cull, for example, made it clear he had no chance of avoiding capture, as seriously wounded as he was. Yet even here there were some marked differences, as each prisoner's idea of inevitability could vary. Herbert Horner's approach was far more pragmatic when compared to Cull's, though equally unavoidable as far as Horner was concerned.

The shame and humiliation of capture was therefore mitigated by its apparent inevitability. William Groves emphasised this distinction in his privileging of 'capture' (being overtaken by circumstances beyond their control) over 'surrender' (which suggested cowardice). The enemy surrendered; the men of the First AIF were captured. Inevitable bodily surrender, then, was not tantamount to weakness, cowardice or a passive acceptance of their new status. Though a prisoner he was still a soldier. As Groves put it, the men surrendered their bodies, but not their spirit.³

That was evident in the way the men recorded their initial reaction to capture and their account of their captivity. The memoirs are filled with stories showing how they defied their captors, outwitted them or mocked them. Escape, for many, was a duty (although few achieved it) but there were other ways to resist the captor. Reginald Lushington simply refused to work, or did his work rather poorly, while John Dawkins made it his goal to eat as much as he could, steal as much as he could and move as slowly and lazily as he could. William Groves and his fellows defiantly sang

³ Groves, 'Captivity: A Prisoner of War Looks Back', *Reveille*, (March 1932), p. 44

their regimental songs when being paraded through a French town, while William Cull's very survival was an act of defiance.

Negative accounts of ill treatment and cruelty presented no challenge to the POW memoirist: they could easily be framed in terms of wartime propaganda and racial stereotypes. Many of the memoirs reflected that fact, John Halpin, William Cull and George Handsley being notable examples. Cull could offer specific examples, like the German soldiers and the sadistic surgeon, even the orderly who persistently insisted that would be dead by morning. Yet many of the others relied more on stories they had heard from others, rather than their own experiences, to flesh out the portrait of cruel enemy, particularly the officers. Some men, like Handsley, refused to see kindness in their captors. Others, however, did, even William Cull. Leslie Luscombe, for example, had nothing but high praise for Captain Mehmet Hussein.

This posed a genuine problem for the memoirists. To discover that members of the enemy were essentially human, and not very different from the prisoners themselves, was a disconcerting experience for these men, and the story they wanted to tell. They resolved the dilemma in a very simple way: the captors who showed kindness or consideration were the exception to the general rule. Herbert Horner's "Fatty" and Reginald Lushington's "Old Grey Beard" were two examples of this. They had treated their prisoners well, though, importantly, others had not. Halpin, however, took this to extremes, by claiming that those he regarded positively were not Turks: they were white and Christian.

Although Joan Beaumont's comments on the divisions between officers and other ranks were based primarily on her broader study of POWs in terms of the international legal frameworks, which have reinforced rank and privilege in captivity over successive conflicts, her observations were certainly true for the memoirists studied for this thesis. The officers were a privileged group. Spared work, and given a greater amount of freedom, they were also physically separated from the other ranks. That meant that during their captivity they often had little knowledge of how the men

fared. Their stories of the ill treatment of the men were normally found out after their captivity, which produced an apologetic note in many of their memoirs.

The other ranks, however, rarely mentioned the officers in their memoirs. As far as they were concerned, the officers had become invisible. Instead, they concentrated on what was happening to them and even, at times, expressed an affinity with the common rank enemy soldiers, who they perceived to endure a similar oppression to that of the prisoners. The tensions between the two groups, and their approaches to representing captivity, were exemplified in the memoirs of Captain Thomas Walter White and Private Herbert Horner discussed in Chapter 5.

There is more, then, to the POW experience than Gerster has acknowledged. The memoirists studied for this work showed many similarities in their representations of captivity, but also key differences. The shame of captivity, and its humiliation, undoubtedly shaped their representations, and while many accounts are defensive, rarely are they cringing. Instead, they are also stories of resistance, humour, validation and an attempt to present, to perhaps an unwilling public, a different aspect of the Great War.

APPENDIX

Private Reginald Francis Lushington enlisted on 24 September 1914 at the age of 23.¹ One of only five men captured on the day of the landing, and subsequently one of Australia's first prisoners of the Great War,² Lushington remained a captive of the Turks for the duration of the war. Lushington's account of captivity depicts cruelty but also kindness, and as Lawless noted, Lushington was "inconsistent in his attitude to the Turks".³ His booklet memoir, *A Prisoner with the Turks 1915-1918*, published in 1923, was dedicated to his mother.

Lieutenant-Commander Henry Hew Gordon Stoker, known as Dacre to his family, was an Irish born man who trained in the British Navy. Almost by chance, Stoker was granted charge of one of Australia's first two submarines, the AE2. This submarine, under Stoker's direction, was one of the few to penetrate the Dardenelles, before being captured and the entire crew being taken captive on 30 April, 1915. Stoker's memoir *Straws in the Wind* was published in 1923, and focussed on Stoker's captivity within the wider context of his life. Henry Stoker tended to take a rather humorous, balanced and pragmatic view of his captivity. He was at times rather critical of both war and diplomacy, and saw the foolishness and wastefulness of war as "rather a pity".⁴

Leslie Henry Luscombe applied for a commission in the AIF on 11 April 1915, at almost 24 years of age.⁵ Lieutenant Luscombe was captured on the Gallipoli

¹ Lushington, Reginald Francis – 507 (Military Service Record) B2455 LUSHINGTON REGINALD FRANCIS, National Archives of Australian, Canberra

² Jennifer Lawless, 'The Forgotten Anzacs: Captives of the Turks', *Southerly*, vol. 65, no. 2 (2005), p. 34

³ *Ibid* p. 35

⁴ Herbert Gordon Stoker, *Straws in the Wind*, (London: Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1925), p. 219

⁵ Luscombe, Leslie Henry (Military Service Record) B2455 LUSCOMBE LESLIE HENRY National Archives of Australian, Canberra

peninsula on 8 August 1915, during an attack on Hill 971.⁶ Luscombe's curiously titled memoir, *The Story of Harold Earl - Australian* was not published until 1970, and only one of its nine parts deals with Luscombe's captivity.

Corporal George Ernest Kerr, variously titled Kitchin-Kerr, enlisted on 22 September 1914.⁷ A 23-year-old Kerr was captured with Lieutenant Luscombe and his men on 8 August in 1915. Wounded upon his capture, Kerr walked with a limp for the rest of his life. Having kept a rather extensive diary for part of his captivity, Kerr's experiences formed the basis of *The Lost Anzacs: A Tale of Two Brothers* written in 1997 by his grandson, Greg Kerr. While George had never himself attempted publication, his diary makes it clear that it was something he had considered. Kerr was a self-confessed pessimist who took a rather balanced view of his captivity and often found it all rather grimly funny. His diary makes "many keen and humorous observations of the petty annoyances and rivalries that develop amongst young men in a confined and monotonous environment"⁸ and largely avoids orientalist stereotyping, according to Lawless. His diary differs vastly from his grandson's reworking. As Jennifer Lawless noted, "Greg Kerr's dramatic journalistic flourishes do not stand up to historical scrutiny and some of his commentary needs to be treated with caution."⁹

Captain Thomas Walter White enlisted in the first group of the Australian Flying Corps at the age of 26.¹⁰ Gunned down over Baghdad on 13 November 1915, White and a fellow officer were taken prisoner.¹¹ His memoir, *Guests of the Unspeakable: The Odyssey of an Australian Airman – Being the Record of Captivity and Escape in Turkey* was initially published in 1928, and was militarily endorsed. White retains a tone of self-righteousness and superiority throughout his memoir. As Lawless noted, he was "unable to transcend the racism of his generation and perpetuates patent

⁶ Repatriation Statement of Lieutenant Leslie Harold Luscombe, AWM30 B1.20

⁷ Kerr, George Ernest – 888 (Military Service Record) B2455 KERR GEORGE ERNEST National Archives of Australia, Canberra

⁸ Lawless, 'Forgotten Anzacs', p. 37

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ White, Thomas Walter (Military Service Record) B2455 WHITE T W National Archives of Australia, Canberra

¹¹ Repatriation Statement of Captain Thomas Walter White AWM30 B3.1

falsehoods”.¹² She noted that White’s memoir “cashes in on the reading public’s long-standing orientalist prejudices.”¹³ His memoir was militarily endorsed and undoubtedly had a political dimension: in 1932 he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, and had a prominent political career. Knighted in 1952, White was Australia’s High Commissioner in London from 1951 to 1956.¹⁴

Private Robert Barrett Shiels enlisted on 24 June, 1915 at the age of 22 years.¹⁵ He began writing his memoir in the 1940s. He never published, however, and his son, Noel, eventually published in 1987. Shiels was captured at Fromelles on July 19 1916.¹⁶ He was humble and frank, and titled his memoir *The Kaiser’s Guest* on account of the sewing of K.G. (for *Kriegsgefangener*, which meant prisoner of war in German) onto the clothes of prisoners who, like him, had attempted to escape. These prisoners were subsequently called a “Kaiser’s Guest”.¹⁷

Trooper George William Handsley enlisted on 4 August 1915 at the age of 30.¹⁸ He was captured at Romani, on 4 August 1916.¹⁹ His memoir, *Two and a Half Years Prisoner of War in Turkey* was told to Sergeant Foster and subsequently published around 1920, though the exact date is unknown. Handsley was uncompromisingly negative about his captors, and depicted his captivity as an experience of unrelenting cruelty and neglect.

¹² Lawless, ‘Forgotten Anzacs’, p. 30

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ Thomas Walter White, *Guests of the Unspeakable: The Odyssey of an Australian Airman – Being the Record of Captivity and Escape in Turkey*, (Crow’s Nest: Little Hills Press, 1990 [1928, 1932, 1935]), p. 6

¹⁵ Shiels, Robert Barrett – 2675 (Military Service Record) B2455 SHIELS, ROBERT BARRETT National Archives of Australia, Canberra

¹⁶ Robert Barrett Shiels, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, (Mt. Eliza, Victoria: Private publication by Noel G. Shiels, 1987), p. 1

¹⁷ *Ibid* Author’s Note

¹⁸ Handsley, George William – 1590 (Military Service Record) B2455 HANDSLEY G W National Archives of Australia, Canberra

¹⁹ Repatriation Statement of Trooper George W. Handsley AWM30 B2.2

Private Frank Hallihan enlisted on 11 January, 1915 at the age of 24.²⁰ He was captured by the Germans on 26 August, 1916 at Mouquet Farm on the Somme.²¹ His booklet memoir, *In the Hands of the Hun*, was published in the 1920s. It was remarkably frank and at times rather blunt; Hallihan was unrelentingly negative toward his captors.

Signaller John Harold Dawkins enlisted on 16 July 1915 at the age of 23.²² He was captured on the Somme over a year later, on 31 October 1916.²³ Dawkins published his memoir in *Aussie: The Australian Soldiers' Magazine*, over a series of issues, starting in 1921. Appropriately titled, 'An Aussie in Wooden Shoes: The Seriously Humorous Experiences of an Australian Prisoner of War in Germany', his memoir is often comical, witty and light-hearted. This is fitting, given its publication in a magazine that called itself "The Cheerful Monthly".

Lieutenant Arthur Ernest Dent was captured on 14 November 1916, on the Somme, near Flers.²⁴ Like Cull, he was injured upon his capture and subsequently spent the first period of his captivity in hospital. Arthur Dent's was aware that his memoir, *Fourteen Months a Prisoner of War*, published in 1919, lacked some of the appeal of other memoirs, in that it did not detail hardship or attempted escape. He nonetheless self-consciously hoped it would still be of some interest. He was repatriated on 27 December 1917.²⁵

²⁰ Handsley, George William – 1590 (Military Service Record) B2455 HANDSLEY G W National Archives of Australian, Canberra

²¹ Repatriation Statement of Private Frank Hallihan AWM30 B6.16(1)

²² Dawkins, John Harold – 3029 (Military Service Record) B2455 DAWKINS: J H National Archives of Australian, Canberra

²³ Repatriation Statement of Signaller John Harold Dawkins AWM30 B14.10

²⁴ Arthur Dent, *Fourteen Months a Prisoner of War*, ("The North Western Courier" Print, 1919), p. 2

²⁵ *Ibid* p. 38

At 20 years and 9 months, **Captain William Ambrose Cull** enlisted in the AIF in May of 1915.²⁶ He was captured in the early hours of the morning of February 26 1917 in an attack on Malt Trench, on the Somme near Bapaume.²⁷ The title of Cull's memoir, published in 1919, was a direct reference to the attack that cost him his liberty and, in light of his injuries, his mobility: despite the likelihood of their defeat, Cull had been told to attack *At All Costs*. Without artillery support, Cull and his men threw themselves at the well-fortified German defences. In this attack he suffered serious injuries that left him permanently disabled – Cull described himself as having been “partly disembowelled” – and his captivity was the end of his active military career. His memoir was introspectively bitter as well as externally so. In 2011, Aaron Pegram edited and re-published Cull's memoir under the title *Both Sides of the Wire*, maintaining almost all of Cull initial text. William Cull eventually passed away in 1939.

Private Thomas Taylor enlisted in the AIF on 6 March 1916, at the age of 20.²⁸ Taylor was captured, amongst the 1170 Australian soldiers taken prisoner during the First Battle of Bullecourt. Taylor's memoir, *Peregrinations of an Australian Prisoner of War: The Experiences of an Australian Soldier in Germany and Bolshevik Russia* was published in the early 1920s, and detailed Taylor's escape into Russia. Taylor's ill-fated escape may have been the highlight of, and motivation for, his memoir, but in fact rather than speeding up his date of repatriation, it significantly delayed him. Taylor and his three Russian companions escaped on 3 November 1918, only eight days before the signing of the Armistice.²⁹ He was not repatriated until exactly two years after his capture, on 11 April, 1919.³⁰

²⁶ Cull, William Ambrose (Military Service Record) B2455 CULL W A National Archives of Australian, Canberra

²⁷ William Ambrose Cull, *Both Sides of the Wire: The memoir of an Australian officer captured during the Great War*, Edited by Aaron Pegram, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2011)

²⁸ Taylor, Thomas Edward – 5782 (Military Service Record) B2455 TAYLOR T E National Archives of Australian, Canberra

²⁹ Thomas Taylor, *Peregrinations of an Australian Prisoner of War: The Experiences of an Australian Soldier in Germany and Bolshevik Russia*, (E.W. Cole Book Arcade, 1920), p. 26

³⁰ *Ibid* p. 47

Private Alfred Gray enlisted on 2 August 1915 at the age of 22. Also captured at Bullecourt, Gray's account of captivity *In the Hands of the Hun: Experiences of Private Alfred Gray, of Kyneton* is brief, remarkably straightforward and even-handed, if at times somewhat inarticulate.

Sergeant William Charles Groves enlisted in the AIF at 18 years and 11 months of age, on 6 July 1915.³¹ Like Gray and Taylor, Groves was captured at Bullecourt. Groves' account of captivity was published in *Reveille* over a series of articles during the 1930s, titled 'Things I Remember: A Prisoner of War Looks Back'. In this particular publication, Groves dealt exclusively with the period of seven months under which he and his fellow prisoners were experiencing reprisals, or punishment, at the hands of the Germans. Groves gave a rather balanced account and was careful to note that this approach was made much easier by hindsight; it was only now that he could reflect with a degree of equanimity and the benefit of the wisdom that came with time and age.³²

Captain John Eldred Mott enlisted on 12 August 1915 at 38 years of age, and was captured during the Battle of Bullecourt in April of 1917.³³ His 16-page memoir, titled *Experiences and Narrow Escapes of Captain J.E. Mott* was published in November of 1917, and dealt exclusively with his escape from captivity; it is clear that Mott felt his escape to be the only significant part of his captivity.

Private Herbert Horner enlisted in the AIF on 22 February 1916 at 41 years of age. He was unmarried and a farmer who had previously led an isolated life.³⁴ Horner was captured by the Germans on 15 April 1917.³⁵ Horner harboured a degree of bitterness

³¹ Groves, William Charles – 4199 (Military Service Record) B2455 GROVES W C National Archives of Australian, Canberra

³² William Groves, 'Captivity: A Prisoner of War Looks Back', *Reveille*, (March 1934) p. 32

³³ Repatriation Statement of Captain John Eldred Mott AWM30 B10.13

³⁴ Horner, Herbert – 245 (Military Service Record) B2455 HORNER, H National Archives of Australian, Canberra

³⁵ Herbert Horner, *Reason or Revolution?: An Australian Prisoner in the Hands of the Hun*, (Jones, 1920), pp. 47-9

for having his enlistment delayed on account of his teeth, noting that “our unreasonable military refused to admit that a mistake had been made in rejecting healthy men who had not the required number of teeth. That this was a mistake is proved by the fact that many who did not possess the required number of teeth have gone through the whole three and a half years without a day’s illness.”³⁶ His memoir *Reason or Revolution?: An Australian Prisoner of War* was published in 1920, and was the account of a man used to living by his own rules. He had problems with the military structure and a high regard for the virtues of the common soldier, though a low tolerance for gambling, alcohol and immoral behaviour.

Ronald Albert Austin enlisted on 20 March 1916, at the age of 22, initially with the 8th Light Horse.³⁷ Eventually, Austin was promoted to Captain and served with the Australian Flying Corps, and was captured on 19 March 1918.³⁸ He made it clear his experience was brief, as well as somewhat privileged, as an officer. His booklet memoir, *My Experiences as a Prisoner*, was published in 1919. Lawless noted that Austin, “regards his own captivity experience with equanimity”.³⁹

Sergeant John Halpin successfully enlisted in the AIF on 26 March, 1917.⁴⁰ 26-year-old Halpin had been previously rejected for service on account of his chest measurement, and was subsequently sent a white feather. Both Halpin’s younger brothers – he had “rocked them to sleep in babyhood,”⁴¹ – had already been accepted and sent away for service. His youngest brother, Tommy, was wounded at Pozieres and died on 28 July 1916. Tommy was only 22.⁴² John Halpin was captured on 1 May of 1918,⁴³ whilst serving with the light horsemen in Palestine. He felt the shame of his

³⁶ *Ibid* p. 11

³⁷ Austin, Ronald Albert (Military Service Record) B2455 AUSTIN R A National Archives of Australian, Canberra

³⁸ Repatriation Statement of Captain Ronald Albert Austin AWM30 B3.3

³⁹ Ronald Austin, *My Experiences as a Prisoner*, (McCarron, Bird & Co. 1919), p. 32

⁴⁰ Halpin, John – 2421 (Military Service Record) B2455 HALPIN J National Archives of Australian, Canberra

⁴¹ John Halpin, *Blood in the Mists*, (Sydney: The Macquarie Head Press, 1934), p. 258

⁴² Halpin, Thomas Francis – 4670 (Military Service Record) B2455 HALPIN T F National Archives of Australian, Canberra

⁴³ Repatriation Statement of Sergeant John Halpin AWM30 B2.11

captivity keenly, and emphasised the hardship and suffering of other rank prisoners in his 1934 memoir, *Blood in the Mists*. Halpin also serialised a memoir in *Reveille*, and though events depicted in the two accounts correlate, their mode of delivery is vastly different.

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