

Help needed to tell POW story

HISTORY

THE power of social media and online newspapers is assisting North Queensland researcher Joanne Tapiolas in writing the history of Italian prisoners of war in Queensland during WWII.

A little-known part of Queensland's history is the story of 1500 Italian prisoners of war who worked on farms in 10 locations in Queensland.

The men were soldiers in the Italian army and navy who were captured or surrendered in the battles of North Africa in 1940-1941.

From Eritrea, Ethiopia, Libya and Egypt, more than 18,000 were sent to Australia during the war. The Italian POWs were repatriated to Italy in 1946-1947.

From 1943-1946, Italian POWs were sent to work for Queensland farmers, to assist with domestic and military food production.

Lying with the farming families, the POWs dreamt of the opportunities that life in Australia could provide for them and their families.

Many Italian POWs discussed the possibility for their farmers to assist them to return to Australia after the war. Adolfo D'Addario returned

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JOANNE TAPIOLAS, Italian POWs researcher.

to Monto sponsored by Geoffrey Pownall, Paolo Raffa was nominated by Beaudesert priest Father O.B. Steele and Constanzo Melino returned to the farm of Mr Charles Carey of Scrubby Creek, Gympie.

“I would like to contact North Queensland families whose grandfathers or fathers had been POWs and then returned to Queensland to make a better life for themselves and their families,” Ms Tapiolas said.

“Their stories are part of Queensland's history and it is integral that individual stories are told.”

It is estimated that 10 per

cent of Italian prisoners of war returned to Australia including Italians who worked on the Commonwealth Vegetable Project at Home Hill and the nine rural communities in southeast Queensland: Stanthorpe, Nambour, Gympie, Gayndah, Texas, Kenilworth, Kingaroy, Monto and Boonah.

“My research indicates that some of the Italian migrants who came to Queensland post-war were returned ex-POWs,” Ms Tapiolas said.

Doug Kelly of Avr recollects that some of the Italian POWs returned to the farm at Home Hill to visit his grandfather Hamilton Kelly, before moving north to the Ingham and Innisfail districts.

There are also several recollections of Italians returning to visit where they lived as POWs before going to the northern cane fields where they had relatives.”

If you would like to share your family's story or have information to share, Joanne Tapiolas can be contacted at

joannetapy@gmail.com Further details of the project, *Footprints of Italian Prisoners of War in Queensland*, can be accessed at italianprisonersofwar.com



A group of Italian prisoners of war (POW) interned at No. 12 POW Group in Cowra on September 16, 1943: 48615 S Padovano, 49570 A Diolosa, 49883 R Panetta, 49631 M Mignozzetti, 46566 A Rossi, 48703 A Vacca, (front) 49455 F Fallani, 49891 A Papa, 48336 C Tanzariello, 49305 E Alunni. Each man had a POW number.

Picture: AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL: LEWICKI IMAGE 03147/08