

Home Hill's almost forgotten history

LOCAL historian, Joanne Tapiolas, is writing the history of the Italian Prisoner of War Camp which was situated Up River Home Hill.

"The camp was known as O6 Prisoner of War Control Hostel Home Hill and operated from April 1944 to November 1945," Ms Tapiolas said.

The background to this interesting history is that more than 18,000 Italian prisoners of war who were captured in Egypt, Libya, Eritrea and Ethiopia were shipped to Australia for the duration of the war.

The Australian government put in place a scheme to utilise the Italian POWs as workers on farms.

There was a labour shortage due to locals enlisting in the armed forces.

In south east Queensland, two to three Italians were billeted with local farmers growing produce for the civilian markets.

The Home Hill Hostel, however, was different.

The Prisoner of War camp was part of a Commonwealth Vegetable Project in the Burdekin to provide vegetables for military requirements in the north.

The project was staffed by AMF staff, Land Army girls and Italian POWs.

"The project did not consist of just one property or one area of the Burdekin, but involved the leasing of 11 farms on both sides of the Burdekin and two properties in Home Hill," she said.



Home Hill POWs Back: from left - fourth 46707 U. Sestili, fifth 45618 F Farabegoli sixth 45294 F Cipolla Front: second from right 46045 B Mori Cowra. NSW. 16 September 1943. Group of Italian prisoners of war (POW) interned at No. 12 POW Group

Picture: COURTESY OF AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL 0901 49/07

To accommodate the Italian prisoners of war, O6, a self-contained hostel was built.

This facility was home to the 250 Italian POWs sent to the Burdekin and they worked in groups under the supervision of AMF staff on several farms growing and harvesting vegetables.

"The hostel was a substantial complex with nine sleeping huts 72' by 18', ablation blocks,

latrines, mess huts, offices, sheds, kitchen, QM store, ration store, parade ground, recreation hall and sick bay quarters," Ms Tapiolas said.

On the Ayr side of the river, James Webber, Donald Stanley Camegón and Mrs Webber Jnr.

On the Home Hill side of the Burdekin, farms were leased from George McIntosh, Hannah Cussons, Hamilton Kelly, Ernest Kelly, Robert Kelly, Mrs Pamela Pedder, George Fowler and Samuel Wallace Gibson.

The total farm land under the project was 1502.95 acres. It is just on 73 years since the first group of 115 Italian Prisoners of War came into the Home Hill hostel on April 28, 1944 and a remarkable coincidence that the son of one of the Italian POWs has travelled

from Taormina, Sicily to Home Hill to retrace the footsteps of his father Francesco Cipolla.

Nino Cipolla has always wanted to know more about the places where his father was stationed and Ms Tapiolas' project 'Footprints of Italian Prisoners of War in Queensland' has been able to take him on an important historical journey and to stand on the banks of the Burdekin and look out at the view that his father saw, all those years ago.

Ms Tapiolas is looking to make contact with local residents who have memories and stories of the Italian prisoners of war at Up River Home Hill.

"The government documents give the black and white details: the facts and figures and dates. Local stories and memories will add 'colour' to this history," she said.

DETAILS OF THE PROJECT, "FOOTPRINTS OF AUSTRALIAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN QUEENSLAND 1943 TO 1946" CAN BE VIEWED AT ITALIANPRISONERSOFWAR.COM

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