Wartime Monto

Q9 Prisoner of War Control Centre Monto (Q9 PWCC)

Coominglah State Forest – Civil Alien Corps Coles Rd/Other Monto Areas

Report prepared by Monto QPWS MUST Ranger Brett Dowling.

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Background – During WW2, due to manpower shortages, wartime government controlled and directed groups of available workers to priority projects and essential industries.

In the Monto district there were two distinct groups of workers:

1. Italian prisoners of war captured in the North African Desert Campaign were utilized as a labour force on local properties to assist with agricultural production and
2. Australian resident aliens who were employed by the Civil Aliens Corps under the auspices of Allied Works Council in the area of forest operations within the Monto District. The Civil Aliens Corps was established on 3rd May 1943 and disbanded in May 1945. *Members of the Civil Aliens Corps were required to work on projects of a non-combatant nature managed by the Allied Works Councils. These included projects such as road construction or the forestry industries*. NAA: B884

Few written records were ever compiled of the presence of the Italian POWs and the Civil Aliens Corps in the Monto area during WW2, making research material and site identification difficult.

Q9 PWCC Monto

It is known that a centre known as Q9 Depot consisting of tent lines was set up on vacant land near the Monto RSL Hall (as per conversation with Warren Dowling).

The Italian prisoners of war worked outside of the Monto township on diary/grazing properties.

At least two Italians: Vincenzo Pace and Nicola Morelli worked for Thomas Lawerance Rupert Dowling during WW2 at a time on his property at “Hurdle Gully” on the Three Moon Creek near Coominglah SF.

The Italian POWs were supervised by the farmers and/or farm managers and a compliment of armed military guards were available at the prisoner of war control centre in Monto should troubles arise.

Although most of the Italians were friendly in nature, it is known that one Italian POW was forcibly removed from the Dowling property after repeated incidents of failing to cooperate.

Some Italian POWs complained that the Australian troops had confiscated their watches and other personal belongings when they had been captured in North Africa and were a little bitter due to this.
A Rat of Tobruk veteran called Lyell Bramley who worked/resided on the Dowling property post WW2, had stated to the Dowling family that most of the Italians had chosen not to fight and had surrendered peacefully when cornered by allied troops.

Bramley stated that when the offensive was launched against Rommel’s Africa Korps, the artillery barrage was deafening and horrendous and that it was after this that hundreds of the Italians had surrendered.

Mr Bramley had also commented on the high quality of the military equipment supplied to the Italian soldiers (rifles and vehicles were beautifully made) when he encountered them in North Africa (as per comments Warren Dowling).

Mr Bramley had contracted malaria when he was later sent to the jungles of New Guinea and used to break into heavy sweating outbreaks accompanied by headaches. While he was recovering from these periodic post malaria symptoms, he would often have to stop work momentarily and would talk about his experiences in North Africa.

• The Monto POW Centre was known as Q 9 Prisoner of War Control Centre.
• Q9 opened on Tuesday 1st August 1944.
• Q9 military staff (guards) lived and established their offices, stores and living quarters inside the Monto RSL Hall. At the back of the property, military tents and ablutions were set up to house Italian POWs on a short-term basis.
• The Italian Prisoners of War were allocated to work on farms in the area.
• Farmers could not use prisoners as farm labourers when there was an Australian in the district that could perform the work.
• In most cases a manpower shortage occurred as a result of many farmers/farm labourers enlisting into the AIF and other services (ie RAAF and RAN) and were serving overseas.
• Farmers were generally encouraged to engage a minimal of two Italian POWs as they (POW’s) were rumoured to work harder in these circumstances.
• A Tuesday 7th November 1944 newspaper article indicates 92 POWs working in the Monto district.
• Newspaper article indicates the approximate closing date of Q 9 Centre in December 1945
• Captain Oborn was one of the commanding officer (Could be Osborn if typo error). [Cpt LC Obern (Oborn)]
• Warren Dowling recalls the surnames of two Italian POW’S working on the Dowling , Hurdle Gully property as Pacey and Morrellie (Pace and Morelli).
• Pace and Morelli were not hostile in any way and even participated in duck shooting events with the property owner’s teenage children.
• Warren Dowling however does recall an incident of one Italian POW was forcibly removed from the Dowling property by Q9 military staff (name unknown).
• Warren Dowling stated that many of the Italian POWS returned after the war particularly to North Qld locations.
• Government policy dictated by the Geneva Convention was that prisoners of war had to return/be repatriated to their country.
• Warren Dowling’s mother, Vera Dowling (Nee Wagner) often remarked on how white and well kept the Italians maintained their teeth.
Vicinity of WW2 Military POW Supervision Base Camp near Monto RSL Hall known as Q9 PWCC Monto.

Postcard of Monto c 1960s.

Site of RSL Club and ex Q9 PWCC Monto
**Allied Works Council- Civil Aliens Corps**

A group of registered aliens employed by the Civil Aliens Corps worked within forest camps in the Coominglah State Forest.

These forest workers were supervised by a separate group to the Q9 PWCC.

4th May 1943 The Age

**Civil Aliens Corps**
CANBERRA, Monday. — The formation of a civil aliens corps, in which refugee and enemy aliens between the ages of 18 and 60 may be directed to serve, is provided for by amending regulations. Alien refugees from their own country will be allowed 28 days after reaching the age of 18 years to volunteer for military service. If they do not volunteer they will be called up for the corps. Provision is made for exemption of some aliens on occupational grounds. It was stated to-day that the experience of the Allied Works Council in controlling and employing hundreds of refugee and enemy aliens in all States had shown the need for forming such groups into a composite corps. The corps would be entirely distinct from the civil constructional corps. Its members would be employed on important works.

Some local speculation exists in respect to one of the workers may have been murdered by fellow worker within Coominglah State Forest (As per Ranger Dowling conversation with Steve Mcgregor-DAF). To date little evidence has surfaced to confirm if this was rumour was true or not.

In 1944, Valentino Furlan an Italian internee working in Coominglah State Forest applied for naturalisation as he had been living in Australia for fifteen years prior to his internment (The result of his application is unknown).

Oral/physical evidence indicates the presence of a Forest Camp near the Towers/Gympie Messmate Plot area and possibly another camp along Coles Road near Hurdle Gully.

In 2016 Ranger Dowling spoke with Seymour’s Forest Harvest Supervisor John Seeney of whom informed him of the possible location of a camp and bridge construction works carried out by Italian POW’s during the war years within the Coles Rd area.
At the time, John Seeney told Ranger Dowling that he had stumbled upon the camp area many years ago, however in recent times he had not managed to relocate the site.

Some of this information had been derived from former conversations between John Seeney and now deceased former Forestry worker, Bill Roth.

On thirteenth of March 2017, Ranger Dowling phoned John Seeney regarding identifying the location of the bridges/ camp along Coles Road after Dowling’s brother (Scott) had informed him that Seeney had told him that he had rediscovered a site on Coles Road.

John Seeney informed Ranger Dowling that he had blazed a Bloodwood tree in the vicinity of the suspected Civil Aliens Corps camp area of which was also very close to the construction sites of two bridges along a now disused road.

Please note the following points in respect to search results conducted by Dowling in March 2017.

- The blazed Bloodwood tree was identified on a corner of Coles Rd within Coominglah State Forest at GPS Point S 24.85658° - E 151.01645° at an altitude of 345m above sea level.
- An area in between the blazed tree and Roth’s boundary fence (20 metres distance) was the approximate location of where the camp was described to have been located (As per Bill Roth’s advice).
- Although no physical evidence of broken glass or relics was observed, some crude evidence of site drainage in the area was observed.
- Several old cut tree stumps were observed and a dead tree with clear evidence of old axe mark scars was sited.
- At least two holes that may have been toilet pits.
- Some sandstone rock that may have been constructed as a fireplace.
- On the opposite side of Coles Road to the blazed tree and suspected campsite, evidence of an old road exists.
- Along this section of road, some remains/relics of two bridge crossings can still be observed.
- Bridge 1 is located at GPS Coordinate S 24.85731° E 151.01657°
- Some adzed timber still remains in situ on the northern bank of Bridge 1 crossing.
- Bridge 2 is located at GPS Coordinate S 24.85868° E 151.01640°
- A stone edged road south of Bridge 2.
- A damaged stone cobbled creek crossing, suspected of also being constructed by the POW’s is located on Cole’s Road at GPS Coordinate S 24.89137° E 151.01640°
Blazed Bloodwood Tree at GPS Coordinate S 24.85658° - E 151.01645°

Approximate location of Italian Forestry Campsite Coles Rd.
Bridge 1 Bank Retaining.

Bridge decking spikes in creek, bridge 1 Cole’s Rd.
Adzed timber remains near Bridge 1.

Stone Cobbled Crossing – Coles Rd GPS Cord S 24.89137° E 151.04480°
Stone retained road edge south of Bridge 2.