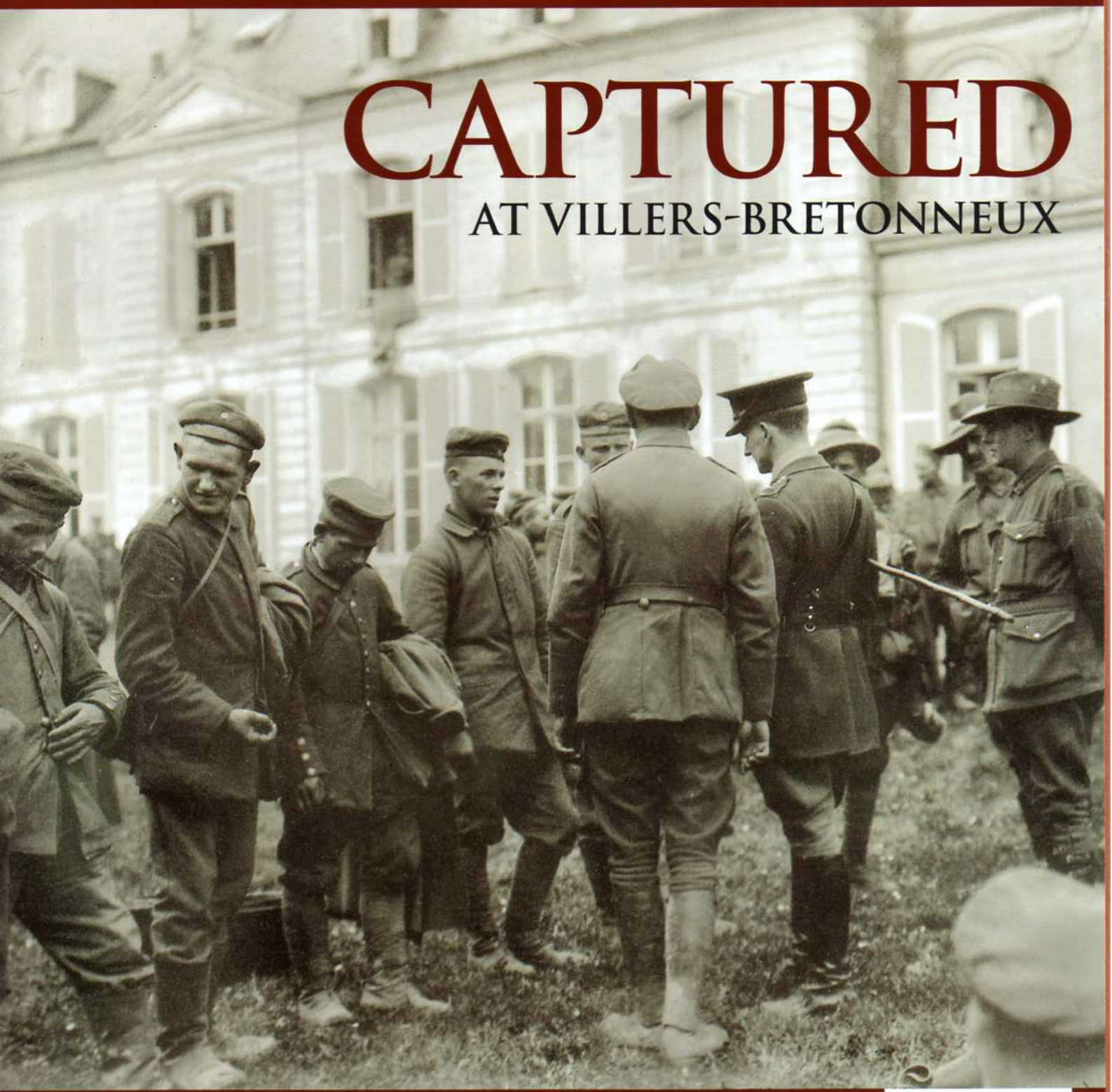
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Homeward bound?

Almost a century ago 17 young Scots embarked for Australia on what they thought was a one-way voyage to begin a new life as farmers, but the First World War seemed to give them a chance to return home. **By Elspeth Grant**

South Australia was enjoying exceptional prosperity in 1912. Owing to new fertilisers and irrigation, the state's agricultural sector was experiencing unprecedented growth. The vast new West Coast and Murray Mallee farming districts had begun to produce large profits, with buyers rushing to snap up Riverland irrigation allotments, and the construction of a spider web of railways across the state was proceeding apace.

The region's potential growth seemed to be limited only by a lack of labour as ever-increasing numbers of single men abandoned seasonal agricultural work in favour of more regular employment in Adelaide's factories. To shore up the declining population in rural areas, the state government turned to outside sources, offering to subsidise the passage of experienced farm labourers from Britain. This effort went nowhere, as South Australian farmers refused to employ the men, arguing they would have to unlearn their British ways before they would be of any use.

Instead the government eagerly adopted a scheme proposed by London-based empire-builder Thomas Sedgwick to import boys aged 15 to 19 from Britain's overcrowded industrial cities. The boys would be apprenticed for three years to learn Australian farming techniques. The state government would hold most of their wages in trust so that when they finished their apprenticeship they would have some savings to invest in share-farming and would be, as the government confidently declared in Parliament, on "the first rung of the ladder towards settling down on farms of their own".

The first shipment of 81 boys arrived in South Australia on 23 June 1913. Seventeen



Left: Troopship HMAT *Geelong*, upon which Joseph McQueen embarked for Egypt. The same ship had previously carried eight other Kibble boys to South Australia during 1913, including George McPhail.
AWM H11611

Author
Elspeth Grant, a great-granddaughter of one of the Kibble boys, was a Summer Vacation Scholar at the Australian War Memorial in 2008. She is pursuing a PhD at the University of Adelaide.



Above: Exterior view of the Lewes Detention Barracks, where McQueen was gaoled. AWM D00890

boys from the Kibble Reformatory School in Paisley, Scotland, arrived between October 1913 and July 1914. These boys had been sent to the reformatory after being convicted of petty crimes in their early teens. William Hamilton, for example, had pawned his siblings' watches and spent the proceeds in music halls. Although this criminal past concerned the government, it begrudgingly accepted ex-reformatory pupils to help meet the South Australian farmers' rapacious demand for apprentices.

Almost immediately the immigration scheme came under threat, when the state suffered through a severe drought; 1914 still holds the state record for the lowest rainfall figures during the growing season. The government offered to drastically reduce the apprentices' wages to relieve pressure on the farmers and to keep the scheme afloat. But even the reduced wages were too much and some newly arrived apprentices were forced to seek work elsewhere.

Whether the drought would have caused the apprenticeship scheme to fail entirely will never be known because on 5 August 1914 Australia entered the First World War. The government cancelled the passage of the next group of apprentices and those already in South Australia were permitted to enlist when they met the minimum age requirement.

Two of the Kibble boys, George McPhail and John McCulloch, were already members of the state's militia and helped to supervise the Torrens Island Internment Camp. Between February 1915 and January 1916, all bar one of the Kibble boys enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). Who would have thought the young migrants might return to Europe so soon?

The Kibble boys did not go to Europe immediately, of course, but went to Egypt with the AIF; McPhail was appointed acting sergeant during the voyage owing to his previous military experience. Most of the boys saw action on Gallipoli before they proceeded to the Western Front at the start of 1916. There they experienced, as one boy put it, "enough to last me the rest of my life".

Perhaps the combination of the awfulness of trench warfare and the closeness of home made some of the Kibble boys reluctant to return to their units after leave. Certainly they were not alone in this: as the conflict lengthened, increasing numbers of AIF soldiers went absent without leave. Moreover, the Kibble boys would have viewed "Blighty leave" differently from the average Australian soldier; for them it was not so much a chance to rest and recover as it was a chance visit home. Whatever the reason, five of the boys were court-martialled for taking extended absences in Britain during 1917–18. John Glen, for instance, overstayed his two weeks' leave by a month and was sentenced to 60 days' detention. Four of the five absentees were apprehended in their hometown of Glasgow.

It may even have been that the boys had enlisted in the AIF because the war presented a chance to return to Scotland. They had gone to South Australia to make a better life and their journeys were supposed to have been once-in-a-lifetime voyages. The drought, however, had convinced them a better life was not in the offing and the AIF seemed to offer them the free passage home they could not otherwise have afforded.

Unfortunately, they were to be disappointed: it was AIF policy to repatriate its soldiers to Australia at the war's end. Of course, not everyone returned: two of the Kibble boys died on the Western Front; Laurence Semple was missing and is commemorated on the Menin Gate Memorial in Ypres, Belgium; three were buried near the British hospitals where they died of wounds or disease; and William Hamilton died while receiving treatment in Glasgow and so was buried next to his father, who had died while Hamilton was a child.

The remaining boys returned to South Australia but not to farming. The state government invited them to participate in its soldier-settlement scheme, its latest attempt to boost the rural population – none accepted.

JOSEPH McQUEEN'S COURT MARTIAL

Private Joseph McQueen of 27th Battalion was diagnosed with trench fever and an inflamed knee on the Western Front in August 1917, and was transferred to Southwark Military Hospital, London. McQueen returned to active duty after two months' treatment and was assigned duties at various depots in Britain. On 10 July 1918 he went missing.

On the previous day, the Arbuckle Pit at the Stanrigg Colliery in Scotland had collapsed and trapped 19 miners. There might have been more losses if not for 17-year-old John McCabe, who ran through the shafts shouting a warning, rather than making escape his priority; he was awarded the George Cross for this brave act. One of the victims was McQueen's uncle. McQueen joined his cousin and her young daughter at the accident scene and volunteered for the rescue effort. It soon became clear they would be recovering corpses. His uncle's body was brought to the surface on 29 August.

On 18 November, McQueen surrendered at AIF Headquarters, London. He was possibly under the commonly held but mistaken belief that an amnesty would be granted to illegal absentees after the war ended. Instead he was court-martialled.

In his defence, McQueen testified he had written to his commanding officer for permission to attend the accident scene but did not receive a reply. He stated that he had caught the flu in the cold and wet subterranean conditions, and had surrendered as soon as his health permitted. He further claimed that the last body had only been exhumed from the pit on 7 November 1918. The sympathetic manager of the colliery corroborated his story even though the last body had really been recovered six weeks earlier, on 22 September.

The manager concluded his letter to the tribunal with "Trusting this will find your sympathy": it did not. McQueen was sentenced to nine months in Lewes Detention Barracks. The remainder of his sentence was remitted when he was freed on ANZAC Day in 1919. Upon release, he was obliged to embark for his port of departure, Adelaide, rather than return to Scotland.



Left: Friends Joseph McQueen (left) and George Bickerstaff, who embarked for overseas service with B Company, 27th Battalion, AIF, c. 1916. Image courtesy State Library of South Australia

ONE MAN'S FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

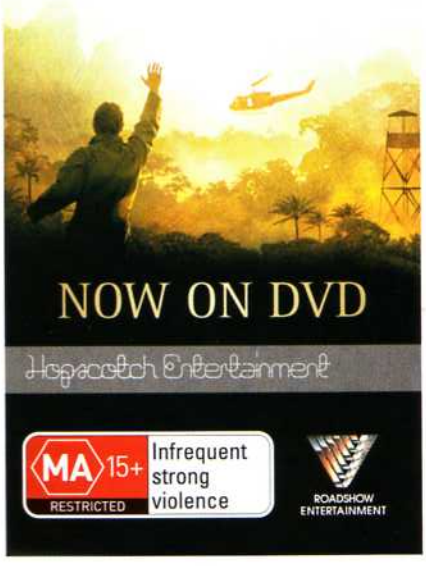
From legendary filmmaker Werner Herzog comes the extraordinary true story of a German-born American Navy pilot, Dieter Dengler (Christian Bale), who crash-landed in Laos during the Vietnam War. He was imprisoned in a POW camp and brutally tortured before organising a death-defying escape for a small band of POWs. Packed with extras including audio commentaries, stills gallery and behind the scenes footage.

'An amazing story ... Christian Bale is brilliant.'
Entertainment Weekly

★★★★

'Emotionally loaded. Christian Bale is phenomenal.'
Sunday Telegraph

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MA 15+ RESTRICTED Infrequent strong violence

ROADSHOW ENTERTAINMENT

THE MAP-MAKER OF COLDITZ

The Australian War Memorial has recently acquired personal effects belonging to Lieutenant J.R. "Jack" Millett, including rare escape maps. Millett, a prisoner of war in Germany during the Second World War, came to be known as the map-maker of Colditz.

"The collection of photos, medals and maps is very comprehensive," said Nick Fletcher, Senior Curator of Heraldry and Techonology. Until now, the Memorial has not held any master maps used to make mimeograph copies for prisoners attempting their escapes.

"The public has been very interested in this new collection and we are working very hard to preserve the large collection as quickly as possible. It is unlikely the maps will ever be on permanent display because they are so fragile, but eventually they will be available to be viewed (under supervision) in the Research Centre," Mr Fletcher said.

Read more at http://blog.awm.gov.au/awm/2008/01/30/colditz-collection/



Left: Senior Curator Nick Fletcher examines the Millett collection.

NEW TEMPORARY EXHIBITION

Opening on Friday 6 June, *Icon and archive: photography and the world wars* surveys the Memorial's impressive and highly significant collection of photographs.

Our photographic collection contains scores of extraordinary images, several of which have printed an indelible vision in the memory of many Australians, and have become an integral part of our national story.

Icon and archive will provide visitors with a sense of the power of these "icons" held in the Memorial's collection, as well as of the depth of the archive itself.

MEMORIAL SUMMER SCHOLARS



Left: Director Steve Gower with Rachel Imms, Elspeth Grant, and Meleah Ward.

Each year, the Australian War Memorial selects three gifted history students, who are given intensive supervision at the Memorial to undertake significant research projects. The Summer Scholars always make an important contribution to the Memorial's research program, and this year is no exception.

Rachel Imms (Australian National University) researched the military response to Cyclone Tracy, which will be incorporated in the Official History of Australian Peacekeeping, Humantiarian and Post–Cold War Operations. Meleah Ward (University of Adelaide) examined the relationship between Australian and American troops on the Western Front in 1918, work that will support the development of an exhibition at the Australian Embassy in Washington DC later this year. Elspeth Grant (University of Adelaide) studied working animals in conflicts from the Boer War to present for a new travelling exhibition, *A is for animals*.

The 2008 Summer Scholars presented the results of their research on 14 February. They were congratulated by the Memorial's Director Steve Gower, who said, "Rachel, Meleah and Elspeth have worked very hard over the previous six weeks, when most university students are enjoying their holidays, and I commend them on their efforts."