

## Sergeant Leonard George Battams and the Loveday Internment Camp

By Samantha Battams, 2021

Leonard George Battams (1905-1998), my step-Dad's father (Granpop), came from a family that served in the Australian army, with his grandfather, uncles, father and all of his brothers serving in the First or Second World Wars, or both.

His grandfather and father went to Pompoota Station, the first training farm for soldier settlers, after they returned from WW1 and before settling at Moorook where they were granted blocks of land by the government. Moorook means 'bend in the river' and was part of the lands of the Erawirung, who came under the broader Meru tribe.

Two of Leonard's Uncles remained behind in Europe, buried in France and Belgium. The soldier settlers were issued with two tents per family (one for cooking, the other for sleeping in).



Photo: Families arriving at Pompoota Station, 1917 (Wachtel, 1982)

Leonard was athletic, winning many swimming races in the Murray River and playing in the Moorook Football Club in its premierships of 1926 and 1932. Leonard married Meta Otilie Boormann in 1924, whose Christian name was tattooed on his upper arm. The Boorman family hailed from Posen, Prussia and arrived SA in 1841, six years before Leonard Battams' forebears. However Meta's parents did not speak English at home. Whilst his brothers served in the Australian army overseas, Leonard served in Australia due to his large family of 7 girls and 2 boys (born 1924 to 1940).

Leonard quickly moved from Private to Corporal to Sergeant in the army and was a gardener and guard at the Loveday Internment Camp, first enlisting in October 1941 at Wayville and immediately working at the Prisoner of War camp at Loveday, part of the 25<sup>th</sup>/33<sup>rd</sup> Garrison Battalion.

*“In 1941, the P.O.W. Group was formed at Loveday under Lt. Colonel Dean. By 1943, 1,374 armed personnel and 5,382 prisoners (Italian and Japanese) were in residence. The war had produced a shortage in labour. Subsidiary camps were developed in wooded areas at Moorook West, Katarapko and Woolenook Bend, where prisoners-of-war were set to work to cut wood for the irrigation pumps. These three camps resulted in 56,372 tons of fire wood being cut in a little over two years.*

*Two hundred and one Italian prisoners-of-war were moved to a virgin Moorook West property on 21 February 1943. They built a guard fence and facilities, and they were moved away via Yinkanie Railway. 138 Japanese internees were sent to Moorook West on 1 March 1943. The prisoners-of-war received 13 cents per day, and the internees 9 cents per day. When transported from camp to camp, the internees clad in brightly coloured clothes waved cheerily to children from the back of trucks. This camp closed on 28 January 1944 and the Japanese internees were moved to Woolenook Bend (A.E. Whitmore, Barmera).”*

*From: Moorook, Bend in the River, Joan Watchell, 1982*

Leonard only received 4 days weekend leave every couple of months, so his wife Meta was largely left on her own to raise the 9 children during the war years. Leonard also had some land and his son Len junior described doing hard labour on the farm and pulling a plough when he was just 9 years old – about the time that his father started in the POW camp at Loveday. He also described holes in shoes being filled with cardboard, using newspaper as toilet paper, and ‘bread and dripping’ lunches.

There were three subsidiary camps of Loveday, including at Moorook West where wood was cut for irrigation pumps, where Leonard may have been located. In 1943, eight months after becoming a Sergeant, Leonard was charged with neglecting to obey Loveday orders – although his army record does not detail what orders were disobeyed. The gardening work must have been very hard physical labour, and he suffered from hernias on a few occasions and had to go to the Army General Hospital at the camp.



Photo: Leonard George Battams upon enlistment (Source: NAA)



Photo: At Loveday internment camp. Leonard George Battams is on the left. Source: S.Battams

Leonard would likely have known some of the POW interns of German descent via his wife's family, and it would have been a very conflicting time for those in the SA regions where German communities were integrated with other European settlers.

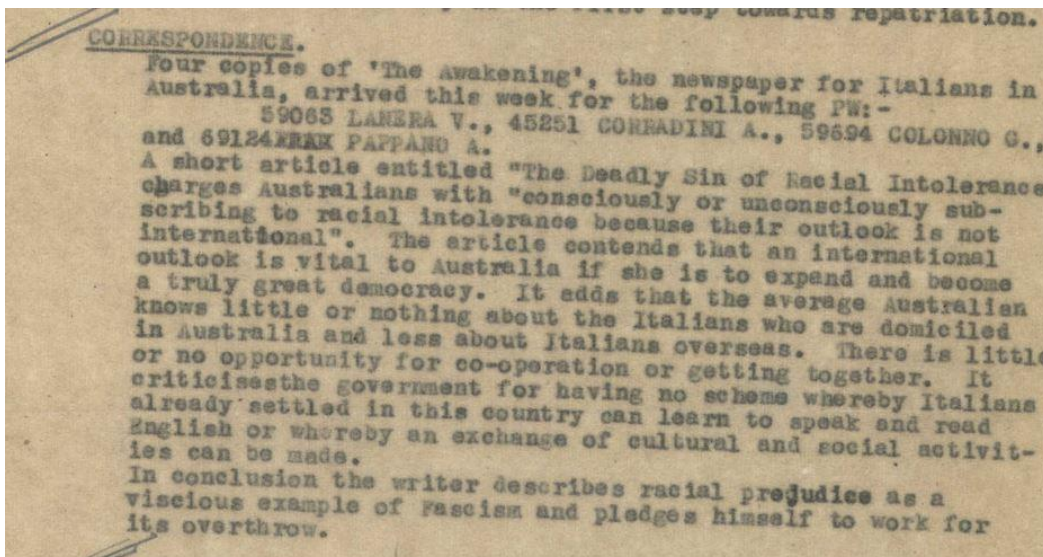


Image: Intelligence report from Loveday internment camp Source: NAA

All correspondence to and from the camp was monitored. There was an interesting intelligence report from Loveday which reports on an Italian newspaper with an article titled 'The Deadly Sin of Racial Intolerance.' The article discusses the lack of international outlook of Australians, causing them to 'consciously or unconsciously' subscribe to 'racial intolerance' and it describes 'racial prejudice as a vicious example of Fascism.'

Leonard had a shoe/clothes brush in a wooden casing carved into a dog – with the tongue being the handle of the brush which had been given to him by a Japanese prisoner of war at Loveday. Hearing that Leonard could be violent, I wondered if this gesture was ‘a curse or just a carving.’ It was something that he treasured, the gift in the harsh context that seemed to be meaningful.



Photo: Wood carving of a dog with the handle being a shoe/clothes brush, carved by a Japanese POW (S.Battams)

... says the history of internment during the wars in the state saw many injustices committed, including putting those in prison for simply having the wrong surname.

"Lots of those interned would have considered why they were there," he says. "You wonder about the motives of those that voiced suspicions of others."

"It could have been they had a personal vendetta against someone or be a business rival and this was an opportunity on very little evidence to see them suffer."

Other reasons for why someone was interned were more straightforward.

"If you were a young man and a customs vessel came out of Port Adelaide and gave Captain August Strycker the news the two countries were at war. He was told that he, his crew, his vessel and his cargo were now under Australian control. The German crew members were put on parole and moved into a house in Port Adelaide."

Within days Australian authorities were told to arrest and detain Germans who had military training and might be called up to serve.

Soon, as war escalated, SA authorities – free to interpret which enemy subjects showed "suspicious or unsatisfactory" conduct – took firmer action.

While few Australian-born Germans would be interned, there were search of timber to help construct improvised eight-man tents more livable."

A new commandant of the Torrens Island camp, Captain George E. Hawkes, a 37-year-old bank teller from Glenelg, instituted brutal treatment of the internees.

It reached a crisis when he ordered the cat o' nine tails flogging of two escapees.

A military inquiry followed, where Captain Hawkes was exonerated. However, an independent investigation by the US consul-general uncovered a litany of cruel treatments at the camp, documented by Dubotzki's photographs.

Prof Monteath says there were shameful acts committed in SA internment camps, with the most violentations happening under the regime of Hawkes at Torrens Island.

"On his watch, guards used bayonets on prisoners and a prisoner was shot and injured but it happened out of the public eye," he says.

"At the time, these were secret facilities people were not supposed to know anything about. No one had much of an interest shining a light on things then – or since."

"There are connections with what happened at the time of wars with what happened in Australia before then and even in the present day because we're still putting away people on islands."

In World War II, an entirely new concentration camp was created in SA, this time on the... be the largest camp complex. Authorities numbers by War I but... tered the numbers... Loveday camps... from all... for Gertr... nese, wh... with the... By 1... 5382 in... The gation

## Curse or just a carving?

PROFESSOR Peter Monteath's colleague at Flinders University, Associate Professor Samantha Battams, has a personal connection to the Loveday camp as her stepfather's father, Leonard Battams, a sergeant from the 25th/33rd Garrison Battalion, worked there.

"Grandpop worked at Loveday internment camp as a gardener and guard from 1941 when it opened until 1945," Ms Battams said.

"He was English but married someone of German descent (Meta Bormann) and it would have been a conflicting time as her parents still spoke German at home."

"I've seen in records that he got

**Peter Monteath and Samantha Battams with the carving.** Picture: TRICIA WATKINSON

Image: From The Advertiser, to promote Peter Monteith's and colleagues (Mandy Paul & Rebecca Martin) book on internment: Captured Lives (2018)



Photo: Meta, Stanley and Leonard George Battams (circa 1945). Stanley died in a motorcycle accident when he was 17 years of age at the corner of King William Road and North Terrace in Adelaide (in 1957). Len junior always kept this photo in a central place on display at home (S.Battams).

In May 1945, Leonard applied for discharge and was discharged from the army. He later worked as a gardener and groundskeeper at St Peters School, when author Colin Thiele was Headmaster – he gave him a book with a signed dedication to him when he left.

Meta died in 1979 and Leonard lived until the age of 93, dying in 1998.

Many times I have been asked if the Battams Rd somewhere was named after the Battams family, and yes, Battams Rd Marden, Stepney, Royston Park, Glossop and Moorook are all named after the Battams family!