

# ITALIAN POWs

In April 1943, a recommendation was made to the War Cabinet to adopt a scheme for the employment of unguarded Italian Prisoners of War (POWs) on farms, to relieve the Australian labour shortage during the war. At the time, there were 4668 Italian POWs in Australia. It was claimed that in general, Italian prisoners were reasonably good workers, if they were treated properly.

Work on private farms was paid as skilled work (15d per day). In addition, the POWs received, under a reciprocal arrangement with Italy, a fixed allowance of 2/6 per week and a free issue of thirty-six cigarettes or thirty-five grams of tobacco per week.

Although a POW could be considered cheap labour at a cost to the employer of £1 per week, there was also an obligation to provide suitable lodging and full board which involved some additional expense. The employer was required to provide three meals a day on the same scale as for an ordinary farm labourer who lived-in, and any additional clothing for work, such as gumboots and waterproof coats.

The employer was advised to treat his POW humanely and with respect but to keep him busy, and to see that he did not fraternise with members of the public, particularly women. The local headquarters for the POWs was located in Hoskins Street, Temora. All those in the district could meet together there. They were not allowed to go into town by themselves, but they could visit each other. Supervisors came around to give them clothes, tobacco and cigarettes.

The POW on Erich Forck's property was named Munzio Marotta. He was born in 1910, and became a stone mason by trade. He was transferred to the Temora area in June 1944. Munzio lived in a shed on the property. The Forcks provided him with a water tank and facilities to wash his clothes. There was a stove in the corner, but he ate with the Forcks in their home.

In 1946 he was transferred to Cowra. When the war ended, they collected the POWs, and put them in a camp at Liverpool, so they would not clash with the Australian soldiers when they returned. Munzio was left there for a further 12 months. The Forcks were advised to restrict their company. They did receive a letter from Munzio in 1955.

During his time with the Forcks, he was reluctant to build the grain shed for Erich, but in the end, Munzio started to build this impressive stone structure. He used some type of clay not cement, only a little in the foundation. As some kind of tradition, he put a coin underneath one corner. It was to be high enough to drive a truck in to unload. The war ended before he could finish it.



Italian POWs gathered for tennis at Trungley Hall