

Excerpt from:

So..... Where were you when WWII ended? A Mosaic of stories by Australians living both here and overseas in 1945

By

Shirley Brabham

Morry GOLDBERG - Born 1926, Home: Newtown, NSW

'I joined the army when I was 18 and was just three months into doing my basic training in Cowra when the Japanese Prisoners of War decided to stage a breakout.

The prisoners were treated well by the Australians but there was a difference in food and culture and they also felt a very deep shame at being captured.

Around 2am on 5th August 1944, not long after we came back from a ten-mile route march, we were warned to be prepared as there was a bit of unrest in the camp and trouble was expected. A short while later all hell broke loose when the Japanese made their break. There was firing in all directions. It was a pitch black night and we were ordered out to look for the escapees. We were stretched out and crawling through the scrub when I heard a noise and I thought "here's one of the bastards." I only had a bayonet as we had not yet been issued with rifles. The noise was getting closer and I was desperately trying to convince myself that I could use the bayonet if I had to. Closer and closer it came and then I could see it was a cow with a small bell on it!

Many Japs who chose not to join in the breakout either committed hari-kari or were killed by their own. Of the others, two hundred and thirty one Japanese were killed and they had managed to kill four of our men. All who escaped were rounded up within a week or so. Some came forward with their underpants tied to a stick; the only white thing they had to make a surrender flag. Many had escaped towards the railway hoping to hijack a train.

It was very unpleasant having to bury them, twenty to a trench. The Red Cross had supplied clean blankets.

I left Australia to serve in Morotai where we linked up with the American troops. About two weeks later I was shipped to Tarakan and joined the 9th Division, 26th Brigade, 2/48th Battalion. This Battalion became the most decorated in the 2nd AIF. It won four Victoria Crosses as well as numerous other awards.

When word came through the war had ended, I didn't hear about it immediately. I was out on patrol. It was not until I came back into camp and was in my tent that word filtered through to me. I felt a sense of relief that it was finally over and all my thoughts were for getting back home. There was nothing much we could do as we still had enemy all around us that probably DID NOT KNOW Japan had surrendered, and we were not referred to as the 'Tarakan Hunt Club' for nothing! A whole bunch of guys were trying to celebrate the best way they could but the bloke in the next tent to me got carried away, went berserk and fired off his rifle. Now that would have been fine, except for the fact that at exactly the same time, I decided to stand up from my bed and his bullet whistled about 30 cms past my head! I could understand his happiness, but I needed to go in and 'have a quiet word!' I didn't appreciate almost being shot at that stage. I was just 19.

.....