

Prigioneri di Guerra 75'.<sup>5</sup> All ranks were held here: Army, Navy and Air Force. Still the same rotten food. A cup of coffee made from burnt bread crusts for breakfast and nothing more. Lunch was a bowl of thin soup with perhaps some rice in it. That was all. Evening a repeat of the lunchtime soup plus a roll of bread not much bigger than my fist. These bloody rolls were rationed to us five at a time so therefore we divided into fives for most of that camp I think.

We took it turn and turn about to be first to choose one roll and of course always took what looked to be the biggest. Not that there was much difference. I was with Private Bill Brazil, Corporal Bert Stokes and Private Jack Hill. They had been with the 2/32nd Battalion caught at Alamein on 17th July 1942. They had known Uncle Jim Lindsay in the battalion in training days and it was a pleasure to be with them. I remember getting angry with Bill Brazil one day when it was his turn to choose the first roll. He was holding them in his hands before choosing, and that angered me as unhygienic. As if it mattered in that filthy place.

Red Cross food parcels were issued, but only one per two men per week. Vin Dillon<sup>6</sup> from Melbourne and I shared ours. He had been a barman at Melbourne's Young & Jacksons Hotel before enlisting. Nobody – nobody on this earth – can ever remotely appreciate what these parcels meant to starving men. They were our life blood.

Our 450 had another pilot here too – Al Markle from Canada. Al had been 'knocked off' a week or so after me whilst strafing the retreating Afrika Korps and their Italian allies but he was in better shape than I was because he had promoted himself to Flying Officer, and was therefore enjoying much better food than we others. He gave me a few delicious dried figs one day but that was all. I hope I would have done better by him had our situation been reversed, but of course we'll never know.

Lice, bloody lice. First fall of snow I had ever seen just on Christmas. We were packed in the huts like bloody sardines. One thin palliasse and two blankets each, but don't remember it being overly cold. Roy Britton, Doug Willock, Bill Grandage, Sedawie were more of the diggers I knew there. Bill Salter, or William Edward Gladstone – 'Wegs' for short – was a journalist from a Perth newspaper in civvy life. 'Dory' Cox, also from

Perth, knew my Officer relations there. They were all from our 9th Division and all 'Rats of Tobruk' from 1941.

The senior British officer was a bloody RN captain whose ship had collected a torpedo. And I mean bloody! Just that. At Christmas a large number of parcels had arrived, and this *bloody arch bastard* decreed that the officer prisoners and the permanent camp prison staff could have one parcel each but we others could still only share one parcel between two! Our rage and hatred of this man was unbounded but of course we could do nothing. In Australia many years later Bill Brazil told me his reason was, and I quote:

“He was afraid one parcel each might make us sick.”

The bastard! The bloody mongrel!

Rain and cold. The latrine walls were covered with fingermarks of crap. I still managed to use a stick or a stone.

I had two or three spells in the camp hospital when my leg began to swell and hurt. It went after a day or two but then walking started it up again, so it was back to the hospital.

The Italian doctor used to amuse us by saying in broken English, “You must all keep this place clean,” and then promptly spit on the floor. By the way, the lice were just as thick in the hospital as they were in the rest of the camp.

A guard of honour one day for a Yugoslav prisoner who had died. The coffin was the cheapest looking one I had ever seen, just crudely cut pine boards. But nobody wants prisoners – they are a plain nuisance to their hosts, who, of course, can't afford to let them go to fight again. So they get the absolute minimum of everything.

February 1943 and a crowd of us, mostly Australians and South Africans, were marched out to the station and into a train. We headed south to a village called Tutturano, not far from Brindisi. I for one was not sorry to leave Bari. It was a rotten place and I was also glad to get away from that bloody naval captain and his officer cohorts.

We marched through Tutturano Village, the main impression of which