
Bill Bunbury's latest published history, *Rabbits and Spaghetti*, derives from a series of three ABC Radio National features on Italo-Australian internment and war experiences. It has evolved from that into four discrete studies: of Italian war time internment in Australia, the experiences of Italian POWs in Australia and of Australian POWs in Italy, and a study of Australians on the run in Italy, many fighting alongside Italian Partisans. These four sections are complemented by a moving postscript concerning life after the war for these particular men and their families.

The intriguing title is an apposite blend of two varieties of 'that most unifying aspect of human culture — food' (p.11). As the author tells us, Italian prisoners of war were struck by the *milione de conigli* evident on South West farms and swiftly adapted Italian *pasta* recipes to accommodate this abundant protein source. The title is also a metaphor for the social blending which occurred between enemy soldiers, in Australia and Italy, and the local populations. This is a story of war, and there are meaningless deaths and atrocities recorded (although none, it seems, perpetuated by Australians). Its theme is simply articulated by one who survived both Italian POW and German labour camps: 'war is a madness' (p.210). Yet it is also a story of friendship and support, great courage (Italians who risked their lives, for example, to save Australians on the run from Germans and Italians fascists), and extraordinary forgiveness (in the words of more than one internee, 'After all we was the enemy'). As the postscript and Australian history itself suggests, the postwar era saw a massive emigration of Italians to Australia, and some of those emigrant men brought their reluctant brides out to the country where they had once served as prisoners of war. Many were sponsored by their former *de facto* gaolers.

The book's subjects are in one sense universally masculine: soldiers and male internees. Yet it is impossible to tell of internment or of the experiences of Italian prisoners of war on Western Australian farms (most of the material is West Australian) without recognising, as Bill Bunbury does, how their experiences were integral to those of their own families, or those they stayed with. On many South West farms, the Italian prisoner of war was the only man on the property; and he would work alongside the farmer whose husband was serving in uniform while she served the war effort at home. Italian families in Western Australia were meanwhile left without a male breadwinner, with the father interned and perhaps a son, while yet another son, through some mad logic, wore Australian uniform. All these voices, male and female, parent and child, are recorded for the reader and given equal weight in the construction of war time experience.

It is probably this issue of 'recording voices for the reader' which caused me greatest difficulty with this book. I have often heard Bill Bunbury say that radio is a visual medium and, coming across excerpts I had already listened to on the radio, I was struck to realise just how much more impact these snippets had.
when heard rather than read. I also found it impossible to read the text without 'hearing' the familiar Bunbury voice. This may be a difficulty which exists only for the dedicated 'That's History' listener. But I also felt that the book's structure and presentation were very heavily shaped by its material's earlier aural incarnation. The book is largely structured in the form of lengthy quotations, linked by a narrative which contextualises and explains. Perhaps I would have liked more background into the histories behind the events touched upon, and into the many many characters who are featured. Ultimately, I found the host of voices confusing. Sections which highlighted the experiences of an individual, such as the heroic John Peck, I found more to my taste.

This is not a book which follows the route taken by the 'traditional' historian; nor does it carry that load of supplementary documentation which the oral historian generally appends to oral material, to assure 'authenticity'. Free of footnote, index or bibliography, Bill Bunbury's material is left, it seems, as if it could indeed 'speak for itself'. Such comments, however, should not be read as detracting from what the publishers rightly describe as a 'lively, highly readable collection of historical snapshots, in both words and photographs' (and I should make note of the excellent range of photographs included in this text). Bill Bunbury's work, both aural and written, adds enormously and enjoyably to understandings of our past. And perhaps I should conclude by noting that the publication of this book, like his earlier ones, begs the question, when will it become commonplace to start reviewing non-written accounts of our history? Bill Bunbury's radio documentaries might be a good place to start.

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