INTRODUCTION

In the early hours of the morning of 25 April 1915, the first wave of Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) troops landed on the Gallipoli peninsula. Alongside the British and French, the landing of the Australians and New Zealanders signified the second allied attempt to penetrate the Dardanelles and seize the Ottoman capital of Constantinople. Within hours of the dawn assault the war was already over for hundreds of soldiers on Gallipoli, killed or wounded as they attempted to get off the beaches and ascend the sheer cliff faces with which they were confronted. By the end of the day the war was also over for Private Frederick Ashton, a young West Australian from the 11th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force (AIF) – but under very different circumstances. Ashton had joined the firing line near Shrapnel Gully after bringing ammunition to the troops, but was almost immediately tasked with finding a stretcher-bearer for a wounded soldier. As he picked his way through the disorienting landscape he became confused and, in his own words:

> When I looked around me I could see no sign of our former firing line, nor could I see anyone – they seemed to have vanished completely. I tried to get back to Shrapnel Gully . . . but had lost all sense of direction altogether . . . I heard a shout, and on looking up, saw about 8 or 10 Turks covering me with their rifles . . . At the same time bullets were coming from the rear on the right. I immediately threw up my hands.[1]

Ottoman soldiers stripped Ashton of his weapon and personal effects, marched him behind their lines, and sat him in a tent under guard. A few

hours later he was joined by three other Australians, Private Reginald Lushington, Lieutenant William Elston and Captain Ron McDonald, who were captured together near Pope's Hill. Together, these four men were the first Australians to be taken prisoner by their Ottoman enemy, and the first Australians taken prisoner in the war.

During the course of the First World War, an additional 194 Australians joined Ashton, Lushington, Elston and McDonald as prisoners of the Ottomans. Captured during the Gallipoli campaign and in the other so-called sideshow actions in Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Sinai–Palestine, these men from the infantry, Light Horse and Camel Corps, navy and Flying Corps were held in prison camps throughout the Anatolian heartland of the Ottoman Empire. Their experiences varied according to rank, the time and place of their capture, and the camp to which they were assigned. Some were able to live out captivity in relative comfort while others endured tough conditions and poor treatment. At the time of the Armistice in late 1918, fifty-five lay in graves scattered throughout the empire.

The extended imprisonment of Australian servicemen in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War was unprecedented. The South African Boers had taken a limited number of colonial troops prisoner during the Boer War of 1899–1902, but the guerrilla-like nature of that conflict, especially in its latter stages, made administration of prisoners of war (POWs) difficult for the mobile Boer commandos, and most men they captured were stripped of their weapons and horses and left to find their own way back to their lines.[2] Captivity in the Ottoman Empire was also challenging. Men taken prisoner by the Ottomans suddenly found themselves thrust into a new position – captive rather than combatant – and living under the rule of a culturally, religiously and linguistically different enemy in a crumbling empire riven by internal disunity and ethnic tension. In these constrained circumstances, ensuring the provision of aid to the prisoners and maintaining connections between prison camp and home proved difficult, while, when the war ended, the aftermath of captivity – dealing with the dead and with the physical and psychological effects on the living – also posed certain challenges.

Despite the novelty and intrigue of their story, the POWs have long remained on the margins of Australian history and memory of the First World War. This is partly because captivity in the First World War was, for Australians, a minority experience. During the four years of the war, 412 000 Australians enlisted in the AIF, of whom nearly 60 000 died while more than 150 000 were wounded. In contrast, fewer than 4000 were taken prisoner: 198 by the Ottoman Army and the remainder by the

Frederick Ashton, captured on 25 April on Gallipoli, was one of the first Australians taken prisoner by the Ottomans. Here he is pictured with other Australian POWs at their prison camp at San Stefano, near Constantinople. Standing left to right: Ashton, David Boyle, Reginald Lushington, Thomas Chalcroft and Keith Cahir. Sitting left to right: Martin Troy, Robert McColl and Harry Foxcroft. (AWM C01052)

Germans on the Western Front, particularly after the attacks at Fromelles in 1916, Bullecourt in 1917 and Dernancourt in 1918. After the war, in the face of such overwhelming grief, loss and hardship, the fate of a relatively minimal number of POWs was soon overshadowed.

This neglect of POW experiences was compounded by the developing mythology of the fighting Anzac that became central to public commemoration in the post-war period, and which left little room for those who failed to meet the idealised prescription of the battlefield hero. This included POWs, for surrender and imprisonment, and the sense of powerlessness and passivity that are often conflated with it, sat somewhat awkwardly against the triumphalist celebration of the supposedly innate soldiering qualities of the Australian soldier. Then, after the Second World War, the prisoners of the Japanese dominated Australian understandings of wartime captivity. The high death rates of many of the Pacific prison camps, the images of emaciated, brutalised men and women, and the stories of suffering and cruelty they so vividly told, coupled with the scale of numbers involved – 22 000 Australians were taken POW by the

Japanese from 1942 onwards – was, for Australia, one of the greatest tragedies of the Second World War. A keen scholarly interest in their experiences, first fostered by historians Hank Nelson and Joan Beaumont in the 1980s, has ensured that over time these POWs attained an almost legendary status in Australian war history, to the effective exclusion of those who endured captivity at the hands of different enemies in different wars.[3]

But shifting trends in the study of military history and the war and society nexus has led to a refocusing of scholarly and popular interest in marginalised voices and perspectives, including, more recently, First World War POWs. Influenced by a growing international literature that has explored the captivity experience through the lenses of violence and propaganda, forced labour, cross-cultural interactions, escape attempts and the psychology of surrender, Australian historians have also turned their attention to the experiences of those taken prisoner during the First World War.[4] Most focus has been directed to the POWs of the Germans, such as David Coombes' *Crossing the Wire* (2011) and Aaron Pegram's several book chapters and journal articles. The prisoners of the Ottomans have received some consideration, mainly from non-academic writers who have used the diaries and memoirs of several ex-POWs to produce accounts of their lives in captivity, such as Greg Kerr's *Lost Anzacs: The Story of Two Brothers* (1997) and Fred and Elizabeth Brenchley's *Stoker's Submarine* (2001) and *White's Flight* (2004). Academic studies are limited to a few book chapters and articles and one published monograph, Jennifer Lawless' *Kismet: The Story of the Gallipoli Prisoners of War* (2015).[5]

These publications, particularly Lawless' book, provide a solid basis for understanding what happened to the POWs; however, there is still much more to be said about the captivity of Australians in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. Most of the existing literature centres on the experiences of those captured on Gallipoli, reinforcing the dominance of the peninsula in Australian war historiography and excluding the experiences of prisoners captured elsewhere in the Middle East. It also focuses on the specifics of imprisonment – locations and conditions of POW camps, interactions with captors, and escape attempts – but, as Michael McKernan, Janette Bomford and Christina Twomey have shown in their studies of Australians taken prisoner by the Japanese during the Second World War, wartime captivity affects far more than just the captive.[6] The role of external aid and welfare agencies, the reaction of those at home to servicemen being taken prisoner, the effects on family and friends, the commemoration of the dead, and the process

of repatriation and return to civilian life are also significant factors in understanding the totality of captivity.

Captive Anzacs builds on the existing work on the POWs of the Ottomans and broadens the lens to examine these different elements of the captivity experience. It focuses on how Australians were affected by captivity in the Ottoman Empire, intimately and more broadly, and how they responded to the many challenges it posed. The book explores how the prisoners felt about their capture, how they negotiated the circumstances of their confinement, and how they dealt with the legacy of their time as POWs. It also details the provision of aid and support to men in the camps, how their captivity was represented in the Australian press, the strain felt by the prisoners' families, and the ways in which those who died in captivity were commemorated after the war. These important insights into the consequences of capture and imprisonment – and how those affected by this wartime reality managed, shaped, adjusted to and ultimately coped with its constraints and difficulties – reveal that despite being a minority experience, captivity during the First World War had widespread and, for some, long-lasting effects.

Such analysis relies on piecing together a rich, although fragmented, archive of personal, official and published records while remaining alive to their potential limitations and restrictions. Central to the exploration of any POW experience is the writings of the prisoners themselves, including diaries and letters. Prisoners were not supposed to keep diaries in the Ottoman prison camps, but a few men managed to maintain records of their daily lives. Letters sent by prisoners to family and friends at home, now found in service records, Red Cross reports and private collections, also offer interesting glimpses into camp life. While diaries and letters often convey the immediate feelings of the prisoner, they must be viewed with caution as they often contain elements of self-censorship and reflection that can skew the representation of events and experiences. Correspondence during the war was ritualised, formulaic and codified, often written more to mask the truth than reveal it.[7] For the historian, however, silences and gaps – the things that could not be said – still prove useful. Indeed, Michael Roper argues that often it is the silences in personal records that convey the most:

> We can learn to read the emotions of sons between the lines of letters home … They dropped clues in their omissions, abrupt changes of topic, things alluded to but ultimately left unsaid, and contradictory comments about their spirits … The result was a characteristically

> oblique style of communication which can nevertheless reveal much about the emotional experience of Army life.[8]

Reading between the lines of POW diaries and correspondence, in similar fashion, can reveal much about the emotional impact of imprisonment.

Memoirs also offer a valuable window into the captivity experience. Eight Australian POWs wrote memoirs after the war, including former Flying Corps officers Ron Austin and Thomas White, and soldiers Reginald Lushington, George Handsley and John Halpin.[9] Several British prisoners also published accounts of their time in captivity after the war, such as renowned archaeologist Leonard Woolley.[10] While their stories are unique and evocative, they too must be approached with care. Based largely on memory, which can be subject to distortion, suppression or exaggeration, they are also generally written well after the events they describe and are given a specific, shaped narrative structure for the benefit of the audience. The motivations of the author must also be considered; as Robin Gerster suggests, POW memoirists often 'big-note' their experiences by overemphasising escape attempts or denigrating their captors in a form of 'belated revenge'.[11]

Corroborating these sources alongside other records can overcome some of these potential issues. This book has drawn on official records from the Australian Governor-General's office, the Red Cross, the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission and the Department of Repatriation or, as it was often referred to at the time, 'the Repat'. These files and papers offer important insights into the ways in which external parties provided aid and support to the POWs and their families at different stages of the captivity experience, from the moment of capture through to return and resettlement into civilian life. Again, however, care must be exercised, as official records can also promote a specific agenda. This is particularly the case with post-war Repatriation files, which, as historian Stephen Garton notes, are 'more likely to be a repository of complaint than compliment'.[12] Nevertheless, when read together with service records compiled by the Department of Defence, these official records reveal a detailed chronology of a man's imprisonment and the wider ramifications of his time in captivity.

Newspapers and family papers add another element to the story. During the war Australians relied primarily on newspapers for information – wireless was not introduced in Australia for news and leisure purposes until the 1920s – and it was in newspapers that casualty lists, letters from soldiers, advertisements for charitable fundraisers, and letters

to editors were published. It is in newspapers therefore that one can learn how the POWs were represented and perceived at home during the war as well as the reception they received upon their return. Private collections of family material – correspondence, photographs, genealogical records and the like – also shed light on the effects of imprisonment on families, the ways in which former POWs settled into life after the war, and how captivity, and the war in general, were remembered as time went on.

This book is structured to present a comprehensive overview of captivity in the Ottoman Empire and its aftermath. The first three chapters focus on the prisoners themselves. Chapter 1 examines the transition the men made from combatant soldiers, sailors and airmen to captives, and demonstrates that becoming a POW was a process that began with capture and, after time spent journeying to sites of imprisonment, ended with the prisoners' reflections on their fate. It explores the preconceptions and perceptions the prisoners entertained about their captors, how they responded to their initial treatment behind enemy lines and en route to a prison camp, and their responses to their new status. Once a camp was reached the prisoners faced an indefinite time in imprisonment in a radically different environment. The circumstances of their confinement caused much anger and anxiety. Chapter 2 explores how cultural clashes over food, accommodation, travel, work and medical care were of immediate concern, while challenges to the Australians' sense of racial and cultural superiority and the generalised restrictions and constraints of captivity led to mental and emotional strain. Chapter 3 reveals how the prisoners negotiated and responded to these issues and implemented measures to normalise their conditions, emphasising that the captives were not passive recipients of imprisonment but that they actively worked to manage and shape their situation.

Chapter 4 marks a shift in the focus of the book to those outside the prison camps who were also affected by captivity in the Ottoman Empire. It examines the actions of the Australian, British and Ottoman governments, the role of neutral protecting powers and the efforts of the Red Cross and other aid organisations, and explains how these different parties worked together to manage the provision, implementation and administration of relief.

How Australians at home felt about, and responded to, the capture and imprisonment of Australian servicemen in the Ottoman Empire is the focus of chapter 5. It examines how captivity was represented in the press, how these representations shifted over time, and how the government and charitable associations drew on heightened public awareness of

Australians in enemy hands to encourage enlistment and fundraising. This chapter also reveals the effects of captivity on the prisoners' families, and how they felt about, and reacted to, the peculiar absence of their loved ones.

The Armistice with the Ottoman Empire in late October 1918 signalled the end of the war, and therefore the end of imprisonment. Chapter 6 details the POWs' reverse transition out of captivity. It also examines the fate of those who did not survive, and demonstrates the challenges faced by the Imperial War Graves Commission as they worked to identify and relocate POW graves, as well as the allies' attempts to prosecute the Turks for their actions during the war – including towards prisoners.

The final chapter addresses the legacy of imprisonment. Once the prisoners returned to Australia, they resumed civilian life, yet for many their time as POWs continued to resonate. The post-war health of the former prisoners is a key focus, including the longer-term physical and psychological effects of extended captivity, and the ways by which the men and their families interacted with 'the Repat'. The place of POWs in the memory of the war, and how and why captivity was eclipsed by other experiences, is also explored.

In marrying together battlefield, prison camp, home and aftermath, the chapters move beyond a simple narrative of Anzacs behind barbed wire to situate the POW experience in a wider and interconnected set of histories: the operational conduct of the war; the effects of the conflict in the Ottoman Empire; the rise of official and volunteer aid; the impact of war on families; the processes of return and repatriation; and the development of modes of commemoration. In doing so, *Captive Anzacs* offers a more rounded, nuanced appreciation of the POWs of the Ottomans, of how people responded to the challenges generated by their capture and imprisonment, and of the totality of this intriguing episode in Australian First World War history.