The front of an identification card (Personalkarte) belonging to Flight Sergeant John Ansell, RAAF, listing his personal, service, Prisoner of War (POW) and next of kin details.
Teachers’ Information

**Background**

To fully appreciate this topic and the accompanying DVD, students will need an understanding of the various conflicts mentioned. The research topics that follow are suggested for either individual activities or small group work.

You could use the topics in a library research period or give them as homework assignments.

Depending on your class level and subject area, you might expect students to come up with a brief overview or you could expand the topic over a longer period with more detail and spin-off activities.

**DVD Chapter 2 - Capture**

**Summary**

This chapter explains the shock of capture for individuals and introduces the first-hand accounts of interviewees from the *Australians at War Film Archive* that will form the background of the DVD. It details the differences that can occur at the point of capture depending on the physical circumstances at the time and it explores the feelings of defeat and depression that can overwhelm the person who has just become a prisoner of war.

Duration 13 minutes 37 seconds

*The script of this chapter can be found in printable text form on the CD-ROM*
Teacher Guided Activities
Activities 1 & 2

Research and creative writing

Find out the background to the Second World War using the questions below as the basis for your research.

- Why did the war come about?
- What was happening in the world in the years before 1939?
- What were the actual ‘triggers’ to the outbreak of fighting?
- What were the attitudes in Australia to the war at the start of the war?
- What were some of the reasons that caused Australians to enlist?

As you undertake this background research the following websites will be of assistance:

- www.australiansatwar.gov.au

When you have selected and organised your information, use it to write a one page script for a documentary about the beginning of the war in Australia. Your script will be the narration for the film. You may wish to include the images and footage you would also use in the making of the film. Your finished script might look something like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narration</th>
<th>Images</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On 1 September 1939, Adolf Hitler’s German forces invaded Poland. Two days later, Britain (including Australia), France and other Allied countries declared war on Germany, and a new world conflict began.</td>
<td>Film footage of the German Army invading Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A photograph of Prime Minister Menzies announcing Australia’s involvement in the war.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research and writing

On the DVD, the narrator talks about two ships that depart from Singapore ahead of the invading Japanese forces, carrying Australian Army nurses. The ships are called the Empire Star and the Vyner Brooke.

Follow these links to read more about those events.

The fall of Singapore:

The Empire Star and the sinking of the Vyner Brooke:

You are a newspaper reporter assigned to go to the docks to interview the nurses on the Empire Star when they arrive in Australia. Write your story about what happened to them in Singapore and on the voyage and their fears for their fellow nurses on the Vyner Brooke.

When the articles are completed, have three students present them to the class. How different are their interpretations of the information?
Malcolm Keshan's story

So I thought, 'I've got no option'.
So I just threw the gun out and
I turned around slowly.
I was a prisoner of war.

Research and analysis
Empathising

Twenty-one-year-old year old Sergeant Malcolm Keshan was captured in 1941. Using the information provided in the interview and your research into Australian attitudes to the war, write a series of letters from Keshan to his mother.

■ One letter would be about his arrival in Greece and one would be written after his capture. Remember that he would have remembered the exact details of his capture. Be sure that his letter conveys to his mother his feelings and recollections of the day.

■ Another letter could be written after he has been a prisoner for some time. Again, be sure that your letters are true to what actually happened.

■ To complete this task accurately, you will need some ideas of what life was like as a prisoner of war. Some further research, such as reading Malcolm Keshan’s full transcript at: http://www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.gov.au/aawfa/interviews/469.aspx may be required.

■ Each letter should be about 200-300 words.

■ Consider whether these letters would have been censored? If so, why?

Make a list of details that might have been subject to censorship. Include how you think a letter might have looked if it had been censored.

Make a photocopy of your letter and censor it. Consider the difference between your first letter and the information you conveyed to the censored copy. Do the two letters convey the same meanings and emotions?

Malcolm Keshan (front, centre) with mates in Stalag 383.
Private collection.
Rex Austin’s story

At the age of twenty, Flight Sergeant Rex Austin was flying a Lancaster bomber over Germany in 1944. When his plane was hit, he parachuted onto a field, losing his boots, landing heavily and breaking his ankle.

“So I sat myself back down on the ground again and pulled the parachute over the top of my head and said, ‘That’s it, that’s it.’”

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**Explanation**

- Explain how Austin’s story helps you understand the difficulties involved in fighting an air war during the Second World War.

- You are the best mate of this airman and you are both left stranded in the field. Write out the conversation you had when you landed and again one hour later while you were waiting to be captured.

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**Discussion**

- What fears might either of you have had at that moment? Script a dialogue that describes how you would respond to your mate’s feelings of fear.

- In Rex Austin’s words, *I wouldn’t say I was petrified, but I was cold, wet and miserable.* Why would Rex Austin not have been frightened? Would you?

- Think about what you do when you are afraid. As a group, prepare a table that lists your fears and strategies to overcome them.

**Fears** | **Strategy**
---|---
Eg Alone at night | Put on music; turn on the lights, read a book.

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*Europe, c.1945. A direct hit by flak on a RAF Lancaster bomber aircraft.*
Sheila Bruhn's story

We were hungry, thirsty and dusty. Children were crying. Pregnant women were tired. It was chaos.

When she was only seventeen, Sheila Bruhn, with other captured civilian women and children, was marched for 13 kilometres in the hot sun to Changi prison. They had been told to pack enough for ten days. Sheila took her six exercise books that she used as a diary, her father’s English dictionary, a book of Shakespeare and a book of poems.

Discussion

- You are one of this group being taken to Changi. What items would you pack to take to Changi? Why would you choose these items?
- If you were a child or a pregnant woman, how might this change your choice of items?
- Why do you think Sheila Bruhn took her diary, dictionary, Shakespeare and a book of poems? Would these items have proven to be useful for her?
- Compare Sheila Bruhn’s account of being captured to the experience of Pat Darling on the Vyner Brooke. Discuss the idea that luck or fate has a lot to do with your experiences during the war.

Activities

A. Sheila Bruhn mentions in her interview still having nightmares, even long after the war had finished. Devise a self-talk strategy and a mind game that could be used to distract POWs from revisiting the pictures of horrors in their minds.

B. Sheila Bruhn kept diary entries of her wartime experiences. You are Sheila, write three of her diary entries focusing on the time spent in Changi. Include some images of daily life among the women and children and how you survived the physical and emotional difficulties you encountered.

Pat Darling’s story

… one just thought, you know, ‘Thank goodness they’re human.’

This is Pat Darling’s response to being captured by the Japanese. Like many servicemen and women, until her capture as a POW, she had never met the enemy face to face.

Discussion

- Use Captain Janet ‘Pat’ Darling’s account of her experiences to prepare a series of visual panels. Use charcoal, paint, crayons, pencils or other items to create images that might represent her experiences, thoughts and feelings.
- Do you think women are more vulnerable as prisoners of war? Why or why not?
- Design a flow chart that shows the events Pat Darling underwent from her departure from Singapore to the moment when she was shown a reflection of herself in the mirror after her capture.
- How does Pat Darling’s account of her capture help you understand the difficulty of stereotyping all enemies as the same type of person?
- What made the Japanese medico ‘human’? Why would Pat Darling be worried that her Japanese captor would not be ‘human’?
Sensory map

Prepare a Y chart that highlights how Sheila was feeling, what she was seeing and what she was hearing during her capture and the march into Changi.
Lieutenant Charles Yacopetti, fighting in the Korean War in 1953, describes being wounded before he ‘woke up face down with a Chinaman sitting on my back’.

**Interpretation and analysis**

- You are the army officer responsible for notifying the families of injured and captured soldiers.

  Write a dialogue between yourself and Charlie Yacopetti’s family as you tell them of the circumstances of his capture.

- What is your personal opinion of Charlie Yacopetti’s treatment after he was captured? Does he give any indication of what he thought about it?

**Discussion**

Read the following excerpt from an interview with Charlie Yacopetti and consider the following question. Answer in individual essays or in classroom discussion.

I got up and started to follow them and that’s when I got a couple of bursts of machine gun fire, one hit me on this ankle and another one hit me across here [he indicates his chest]. And I went down and my Bren gunner, Bert White, picked me up and said, ‘C’mon, I’ll carry you out Skipper.’ Things were going hazy and I could see that as far as I was concerned I’d had it, this was it, ‘Charles Yacopetti, this is your day.’ So I said to Bert, ‘Drop me, you need to fight the patrol out.’ He was the Bren gunner, he’s got the bulk of the firepower the patrol had. So he obeyed, he dropped me. And if you read the official history, I was left in a weapon pit there with my bayonet fixed on my Owen gun facing them, which is bullshit, I passed out.

- Debate the significance of this quote for historians. Is there any way you can come to a conclusion about how to reconcile the official history with the personal recollection?
Private Alexander Barnett and Private Lloyd Moule were both captured by the Germans in North Africa in 1941. The Germans were known to say, ‘For you, the war is over’ when they took prisoners, in an attempt to further humiliate the soldiers. But many men, at that moment, could not be made to feel any worse by their enemy than they already did. Capture could bring with it depression, a sense of utter failure and the prospect of a bleak future. Consider these statements from both Alexander Barnett and Lloyd Moule:

‘You think you’ve let somebody down … you feel you’ve done something wrong.’

– Alexander Barnett

‘You feel completely hopeless; it’s a terrible feeling to find that you are a prisoner of war.’

– Lloyd Moule

**Discussion**

- Review the interviews with Alexander Barnett and Lloyd Moule.
- List as many words as you can that would describe their feelings when they found themselves forced to surrender.
- Why do you think these men felt like this?
- Compare their feelings of being captured with two other interviewees in this DVD chapter such as Rex Austin and Malcolm Keshan.
- Were the men right to feel that way? How might they have overcome their negative feelings?

**Research**

- For many returned servicemen and women, the horrors and loss of war remain stamped on their minds. Investigate the mental health condition known as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The following websites provide information on the condition.


- Prepare an information brochure for family and friends of servicemen and women that details facts regarding the nature, extent and health services available today to support people diagnosed with PTSD.
Extension Activity

Read this account by Lieutenant Gavin Campbell who also survived the sinking of HMAS Perth.

I looked down and I saw the propeller still turning and I thought, ‘This isn’t for me.’ So I went further forward and straddled the guard rail ready to jump, and a torpedo hit on the port side, forward of me… It was then that I had a falling sensation. Up in the air and floating through the air. For how long, I don’t know. I remember when I came to I was in the water and fortunately my Mae West [lifejacket] kept me afloat. There were rafts and driftwood on the water and I decided I’d swim over to one of the rafts. It was then I started to kick my leg to swim and had a stab of pain on my left side. I thought, ‘What’s happened?’ So I very gingerly reached down my leg and it wobbled. I’d broken my leg… So I thought, ‘What do I do? I’m in the water. I’ll make my way across to a raft’…

There were other people on it of course. So I thought, ‘I’ve got to get on it somehow.’ I hauled myself up on this still with my leg wobbling around and a bloke came along swimming and said, ‘Are you all right?’ And I said, ‘No I’ve broken my leg.’ He said, ‘What do you reckon we can do?’ I said, ‘The only thing we can do is cut some splints.’ I had on overalls and so I said, ‘Cut the leg off the overalls and then cut it into strips and we’ll use those as ties around the splint.’ He said, ‘OK, I’ve got my seaman’s knife, I’ll go and get some driftwood.’ By this time there’s broken cases from the Japanese ships drifting around. So he picked up a couple of pieces and split these down for splints. Brought them over and cut the leg off my overalls and put them on. That kept the leg steady.

Who else in this DVD chapter shared the experience of not realising they were wounded?

Compare their stories with Gavin Campbell’s.

Find out why people who sustain serious injuries do not necessarily feel pain or realise what has happened to them straight away.

Does this phenomenon apply outside wartime situations? If so, what sorts of situations can you think of?

Consider how you would feel if you thought you had survived a plane crash or ship’s sinking, only to find that you are badly injured and vulnerable to capture or death.

Write a diary entry (some time after the event) to describe your experience and feelings.

And now for something completely different

Design a foldout brochure that details how to manage a fracture. In the brochure include the following:

- The definition of a fracture;
- The different types of fractures; and
- The process of splinting a fracture of the lower leg.

Use sketches, diagrams or photos from the internet to highlight the process.

A bit of fun

- Research Mae West.
- Explain why some life vests were given her name.

1944, China Sea. Oil soaked British and Australian prisoners of war who survived the sinking of the Japanese transport Rokyu Maru by the submarine USS Sealion, being picked up three days later by that submarine.
Creative writing

- What the heck am I doing here? Most soldiers can’t allow themselves to imagine being taken prisoner. So if capture happens, it can be a shocking moment. Create a summary that explains the feelings of Australian veterans when captured by the enemy. Support any generalisations you make with specific examples.

- Write a poem or other creative form of writing called ‘Capture’ that encompasses some of the feelings and emotions you have heard about in this section.

- Write a newspaper front page with the headline: CAPTURED! You need to devise an appropriate sub-header and leading paragraph with ‘capture’ as your theme. Create a picture for your front page editorial that reflects the theme.

- Interview two of the following people for a front page article:
  - the German soldier who captured Malcolm Keshan;
  - the Japanese medico who was a member of the group who captured Pat Darling and the Australian Army nurses; and
  - one of the locals who watched Sheila Bruhn and the other civilian women and children being marched into Changi prison.

Think about the type of questions you would ask each of your chosen people that would catch potential readers’ attention. Remember - you are after sensational news on your front page to encourage people to buy your newspaper.

- Select a veteran from Topic 2 of the DVD. You have the opportunity to interview them again about their experiences, especially about things that are not included in the DVD.
  - Write FIVE questions that you would ask them about their experience of being captured.
  - Using information from the DVD or your own research, write the answer that you think your interviewee would give.
  - Write a profile on your chosen interviewee. Each profile should include the following information:
    - the place and date they were captured;
    - their job or role in the war;
    - how they were captured; and
    - their thoughts and feelings at the time – how did they react to being taken prisoner?

Compare and contrast

Choose two of the experiences of being captured from the DVD chapter for compare and contrast. In the overlapping ovals, place the key facts and feelings from each of your chosen experiences. In the overlapping part of the circles, write down the similarities between these two experiences.

Note for teachers:

This can be a group task or an individual task. Allow the groups to feed back their findings – the teacher can collate the ideas. If small groups have chosen a variety of experiences, the Venn diagram can be extended to comprise several overlapping ovals. The important thing is to highlight the similarities between the experiences.

For example:
Facts and feelings about capture

Name the two POWs you have chosen from Topic 2 to make comparisons.

In the diagram below, write the key facts and feelings that each POW felt at being captured. Where they are the same or similar, use the intersecting portion of the ovals to note the similarities.