



FEATURE STORY

COWRA BREAKOUT: AMOS FAMILY STORY

By Mitchell

St Raphael's Catholic School, Cowra, NSW, Australia



The prisoner of war camp at Cowra, 1944 (AWM 064284)

The POW camp that operated in Cowra at the time of the war housed mostly Japanese prisoners. During World War II, the Amos family owned many of the farms in the area. On the 5th of August, 1944, the Japanese broke out of the Prisoner of War camp in Cowra. The local townspeople were notified of the incident and prepared for the worst.

Lyal Amos was only a young boy when the breakout happened. As the Amos family were spread across many of the farms in Cowra, they decided to all meet at one house. The women and children remained indoors while the men surrounded the house with loaded weapons.

The men heard the horses in the barn moving and making frightened sounds and they thought that possibly the Japanese prisoners were the cause of the sounds. The men called the police. They fired rapidly into the hay pile from which they heard noises. When the men examined the haystack, they found Japanese bodies which had been killed by the gunfire. The next morning Lyal's father went down to the creek. There he found one body with a knife in his stomach. The soldier had performed an ancient form of suicide, called 'seppuku'. Lyal also found a man with a noose around his neck, dangling from a willow tree.

The Amos family kept the knife as a memento of one of the most terrifying nights of their lives. It was later donated to the Australian War Memorial. Their experience wasn't unlike the experiences of many other families on the farms surrounding the camp. However, not all encounters with escaping Japanese prisoners were violent.

The Breakout was a tragic incident, with the site of the old Prisoner of War camp a constant reminder to the town of the dark side of the war, and the need for peace and friendship between nations.