

## Faculti Summary

<https://faculti.net/between-death-and-commemoration/>

The study focuses on the experiences of Australian prisoners of war (POWs) under Japanese captivity during World War II, particularly those who died while constructing the Thai-Burma Railway. Following the rapid Japanese military advances early in the war, many Allied troops, including 22,000 Australians, were captured and forced into labor on this infamous railway project. The conditions in the work camps were dire, with inadequate food, shelter, and medical care, leading to high mortality rates among POWs due to diseases like cholera and malnutrition.

By mid-October 1943, approximately 12,000 Allied POWs had perished, including around 2,700 Australians. After Japan's surrender in 1945, Allied war graves officials and former POWs returned to the railway to locate and identify the deceased, which was essential for documenting the missing and gathering evidence for potential war crimes trials.

The research emphasizes how Australian POWs handled the deaths of their comrades, documenting the processes of burial and memorialization in challenging conditions. It highlights their determination to honor the dignity of the deceased through traditional military practices despite their own dire circumstances.

The study draws from a wide array of sources, including official military records, POW diaries, and later memoirs published by former POWs, to illuminate the complexities of their experiences and emotional responses to death and loss. It reveals that the prisoners actively engaged in caring for one another and maintained a sense of humanity even in captivity.

The findings underscore the important role of the post-war War Graves team in relocating the remains of deceased POWs to official cemeteries, a process often supported by former Japanese soldiers. Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how the experiences of death impacted POWs themselves, shifting focus from a broader societal perspective to the individual and communal responses within the camps.