Katrina Kittel, *Shooting Through: Campo 106 escaped POWs after the Italian armistice* (West Geelong, Victoria: Barrallier Books Pty Ltd, trading as Echo Books, 2019), 336pp. Paperback. \$35. ISBN: 978-0-6485540-4-2.

Escape and evasion from the enemy are staples of war stories. Glorified in novels and movies, they excite the imagination and provide examples of what is possible in terms of human endurance.

8 September 1943 was a watershed date for tens of thousands of Allied prisoners of war held in camps in Italy during World War Two. The majority had been captured in North Africa by Germans, handed to their Italian allies, and shipped to internment camps throughout Italy. On this date, Italy changed its allegiance from Germany to the Allies, thus becoming the enemy, and sending Italy into violent tumult. The Germans swiftly established a fascist-controlled puppet state in the north loyal to Mussolini, conscripting men into militias. Conversely, the Italian resistance burgeoned into a major partisan movement, struggling not only against the Germans, but against their fellow countrymen. It was nothing short of a civil war.

Into this potent brew were added thousands of Allied prisoners-of-war who, after fleeing their now abandoned camps and dodging subsequent German roundups, roamed at large in the countryside hunted by fascist sympathisers. They were not completely alone, however. Although unsure of whom to trust, many found protection and assistance among Italian civilians, often peasants, who risked their own lives to provide shelter, food, clothes, and money.

Katrina Kittel, in *Shooting Through: Campo 106 escaped POWs after the Italian armistice*, skilfully brings to life the stories of Australian (and some Aotearoa New Zealand) escapees, ordinary men who found themselves in extraordinary circumstances, where they had to rely on ingenuity, resilience, and luck to avoid recapture. Kittel focuses specifically on the men of Campo 106 in the Piedmont rice plains west of Milan, whose proximity to the Swiss Alps meant a potential avenue of escape into the safety of neutral Switzerland. There is a personal reason for this that tantalisingly frames both the beginning and final pages. Kittel's late father, like many escapees, spoke little of his experience, although nuggets of information came from diaries and souvenirs. This project is also an attempt to understand the complex forces that shaped a beloved parent.

Using interviews, archival evidence and memoir, Kittel meticulously traces the journey of these men from capture to imprisonment in Italy to escape and the aftermath. She introduces the daily lives of prisoners within a work camp that at least provided nourishing food, and carefully outlines the political developments that heralded the circumstances for evasion. Her often lyrical prose accentuates the hardships the men faced as they embarked on perilous climbing over icy mountain peaks lined with slippery precipices, so vividly rendered that the reader feels they are alongside them. Although she does not spare us the physical and psychological terrors the men endured, Kittel reveals her subjects as primarily, pragmatic problem-solvers, who relished their independence from military strictures. She creates a narrative that integrates her own unobtrusive perspective with the colourful slang of escapees. Her chapter headings, too, resonate with the idiosyncratic, unmistakably Antipodean voices of the men, 'Coffee Plonk', 'Charlie Did the Talking', 'I'm Sorry Mate We've Bungled it' to name just a few. This accentuates the wry humanity of the 'blokes' determined to succeed in their mammoth undertaking.

The centre pages of the book are dedicated to photos that provide faces to the escapees, but Kittel does not ignore the Italian families and individuals who acted

as helpers and mountain guides. It is a vivid reminder that this account is, above all, a story of human connection and simple acts of courage that transcend military, political, and linguistic divisions.

Most of the stories finish successfully in Switzerland in the early months of the Armistice, but the ordeal lasted much longer for others. In 1944, when routes over the mountains had been blocked, 10 evaders from Campo 106 were killed by fascists. In a particularly poignant chapter, Kittel documents the betrayal and deaths of these men, and the long-lasting effects, thus conveying the real dangers they risked in the act of choosing freedom over incarceration.

Kittel has woven an important slice of social and military history with the voices of men whose stories should never be forgotten. Her fine research (in both Australia and Italy), attention to detail, compelling descriptions and respect for her subjects make her book a worthy addition to the canon.

Susan Jacobs, Independent Scholar