

# Remembering Two Cities: Generational Memories of the Greta Army and Migrant Camp, 1939–2020

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The Greta Army and Migrant Camp in regional New South Wales has been the focus of many reunions, anniversaries and commemorative events even though there are few tangible remains or markers of its two histories. Migrant former residents remember their time at Greta camp differently depending on their age, prior experiences, and length of stay. These generational differences and family histories have influenced the types of memories and narratives shared at subsequent anniversaries and reunions. While the now privately owned Greta camp site provides some storytelling and heritage challenges, it is an important place of personal and public remembering, as illustrated during the 2019 anniversary events that opened up the camp to other historical interpretations. Built upon oral history interviews, ethnographic observations and newspaper analysis, this article discusses memories of war, migration, and life at Greta camp, and the way official discourses and generational and community memories have shaped heritage, memorial and remembering processes at Greta camp.

Outside of the Greta township in regional New South Wales, on the traditional lands of the Wonnarua people, is the site of the Greta Army and Migrant Camp that operated from 1939–49 and 1949–60 respectively.<sup>1</sup> Like other camps of this era, Greta camp was in a regional and geographically remote location, some 183 kilometres northwest of Sydney, inland from Newcastle. The migrant camp has been the subject of numerous reunions, anniversaries and commemorative events, even though there are almost no tangible remains or markers of its history on the now privately owned property. The absence of physical links to the past and its private ownership have shaped the types of remembering and pilgrimage that have occurred around the site. In addition to its two histories – as an army camp and then a migrant camp – Greta camp is remembered in different ways by former residents depending on their age, past experiences, and length of stay. Multiple reunion events between 1988 and 2019 offered former residents the opportunity to reminisce and share personal memories and family recollections; while large anniversary events have often had national frameworks applied by organisers and spokespersons.

The Greta Migrant Camp has not attracted the same scholarly or public attention as other migrant camps such as Bonegilla, although the site's commemoration and memorialisation continue to be an ongoing concern within community groups.<sup>2</sup> Christopher Keating's 1997 *A History of the Army Camp and Migrant Camp at Greta, New South Wales, 1939–1960* remains one of the few histories of the Greta camp. Alex Schulha

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1 I acknowledge that I am discussing events and places located on the lands of the Wonnarua people. Their history and connection to the land on which the Greta camp site is located is an important part of the social, cultural and environmental history of this place. Aboriginal history has been largely neglected within local histories of this area, and there has been a significant lack of information readily accessible. Although it is beyond the scope of this article, recent historical work has started to redress this. See for example Mark Dunn's recent history of Aboriginal and convict interactions within the Hunter Valley: Mark Dunn, *The Convict Valley: The Bloody Struggle on Australia's Early Frontier* (Crow's Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2020).

2 See for example: Joel Fitzgibbon, 'Speech: Federation Chamber: Greta Army and Migrant Camp: Monday, 17 September 2018', NationBuilder, 17 September 2018, [http://web.archive.org/web/20200811150311/http://www.joelfitzgibbon.com/speech\\_federation\\_chamber\\_greta\\_army\\_and\\_migrant\\_camp\\_monday\\_17\\_september\\_2018](http://web.archive.org/web/20200811150311/http://www.joelfitzgibbon.com/speech_federation_chamber_greta_army_and_migrant_camp_monday_17_september_2018)]; Anthony Scully and Rick Hind, 'Greta Migrant Camp Kids Return, Lamenting Lack of Monument 70 Years Since First Wave of Arrivals', *ABC News*, 24 June 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-24/kids-of-greta-migrant-camp-lament-lack-of-onsite-monument/11240072>; Mike Scanlon, 'Push for Monument at Greta Migrant Camp Site', *Newcastle Herald*, 26 April 2019, <https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/6088088/life-at-greta-migrant-camp/>.

recently published his long-awaited volume *Beneath the Shadow of Mount Morgan – History and Stories of Greta Camp 1939–1960*, which includes the reminiscences of former residents.<sup>3</sup> He spent decades researching the camp and travelling within Australia and overseas to collect stories and information for the book that was officially launched in 2019. While Greta has been included in other scholarly examinations of migration and migrant heritage in Australia, it is usually in combination with other camps or as a cursory inclusion in broader examinations of Australian migration. Few historians appear to have travelled to Greta. This is made immediately evident in their pronunciation of the name of the camp and nearby town.<sup>4</sup> This article will contribute to existing discussions of the value of life history approaches to interviewing, memories of war and migration, and understandings of the way official discourses have often been applied to shape heritage and memorial processes.

This article examines personal testimonies and the public remembering of Greta Migrant Camp through an analysis of oral history interviews, ethnographic observations and newspaper articles. Oral history interviews with former residents of the migrant camp were conducted in 2015, around the time of the 66th anniversary of the Greta Migrant Camp. These interviews used a life history methodology and, as such, memories of Greta were shared along with recollections of life before, during and after migration to Australia. This life history approach captured other significant moments within a migrant's life and allowed the meaning of camp experiences and memories to be understood in relation to other life experiences. Interviewees' recollections largely focused on memories of arriving in the camp, the influence of the two-year government work contract, and positive or negative recollections of life in the camp that were significantly contingent on the age and past experiences of the migrants. The second part of the article discusses the way Greta camp has been remembered through reunions, commemorative events and anniversaries. Private ownership of the site and the lack of physical remnants of the past have presented challenges to remembering and memorialisation processes. For years, Greta has been the only migrant camp in New South Wales without a monument on site. But despite

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3 Alex Schulha, *Beneath the Shadow of Mount Morgan – History and Stories of Greta Camp 1939–1960* (Ashtonfield: Alex Schulha, 2020).

4 Greta is pronounced gri:tə (Traditional IPA), or Greet-a.

these storytelling and heritage challenges, former residents and their children – and more recently the military, and historical and cultural institutions – have continued to engage in public and personal remembering, keeping memories of the camp alive, and opening up the camp to other historical interpretations.

### THE MILITARY CAMP

Former grazing land on the outskirts of Greta township, although many miles away from the site of combat, became a place inextricably linked to war; first as a place of soldier training and then as ‘host’ – or ‘home’ – to displaced persons escaping war-torn countries and homes in Europe. The Greta township was a small community around Anvil Creek in the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>5</sup> The area was a site of viticulture but was particularly known for coal mining, which commenced at Anvil Creek in 1862, the same year the railway reached the town.<sup>6</sup> The town continued to grow and boasted a school, four churches and four hotels by the end of the 1870s.<sup>7</sup> A significant coal seam was discovered in 1886.<sup>8</sup>

At the time World War Two broke out, Greta was on a major rail and road artery in a somewhat undeveloped area with relatively cheap land and a tradition of military training within the area. The army needed additional facilities for training the 6th Division of the AIF (Australian Imperial Forces) because many existing facilities were already occupied.<sup>9</sup> In November 1939, 2,930 acres of land were compulsorily acquired from farmers in the Allendale-Greta area and construction began immediately with the first unit arriving at the camp 15 December 1939.<sup>10</sup> The army camp was just south of Greta township and the railway line, nestled at the foot of Mount

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5 ‘Greta, NSW’, Aussie Towns, accessed 25 November 2021, <https://www.aussietowns.com.au/town/greta-nsw>.

6 Val Randall, *Greta: The Town and Its People: 150 Years* (Greta: Wild & Williams Printers, 1993), 2; The railway line opened from Lochinvar to Branxton, passing through Greta, 24 March 1862. The station was originally called Farthing. ‘Greta, NSW’

7 ‘Greta, NSW’.

8 ‘Greta, NSW’.

9 ‘Greta’, Australian War Memorial, accessed 29 November 2021, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/PL2483>.

10 ‘Greta’, Australian War Memorial.

Molly Morgan.<sup>11</sup> The troops claimed they liked Greta camp well enough but it was considered too far away from civilisation, causing many to take their leave in Newcastle.<sup>12</sup> The camp earned its two nicknames during the military history of the camp: 'Chocolate City' from the brown weatherboard buildings and 'Silver City' in reference to the corrugated iron Nissen huts constructed at the site.<sup>13</sup> Most of the soldiers that trained at Greta camp served in the 6th Division and were deployed primarily to the north, including New Guinea.<sup>14</sup> After the war portions of the camp were returned to grazing land, but the camp continued to be used to train soldiers who served in the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan.<sup>15</sup> Around 60,000 soldiers from the 2nd AIF trained at the camp between 1939–1949.<sup>16</sup>

With the end of the war the army wanted to dispose of excess land and by 1948 plans were underway to transfer the Silver City portion of the camp to the Department of Immigration for Displaced Persons.<sup>17</sup> In 1949 other migrant reception and training centres were bursting at the seams with 22,000 migrants expected to disembark in Australia between July and October.<sup>18</sup> The time frame between the site being used as a location to train soldiers for war and being a place that received people displaced by the same war was considerably short. Soldiers were still in residence at the camp weeks before the arrival of new migrants. Silver City was vacated in April 1949 while recruits training at Chocolate City were expected to vacate by 31 May 1949.<sup>19</sup> It is therefore unsurprising how many migrants still remember the poor condition of the camp when they first arrived. The first group of 600 migrants arrived 7 June

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11 Randall, *Greta*, 118.

12 Christopher Keating, *A History of the Army Camp and Migrant Camp at Greta, New South Wales, 1939–1960* (Sydney: Uri Windt, 1997), 27.

13 'Greta', Australian War Memorial.

14 David Hurley, 'Greta Army Camp and Greta Migrant Camp Anniversary Weekend', 9 November 2019, <https://www.gg.gov.au/about-governor-general/media/greta-army-camp-and-greta-migrant-camp-anniversary-weekend>.

15 Hurley, 'Greta Army Camp and Greta Migrant Camp Anniversary Weekend'; Keating, *History of the Army Camp*, 31.

16 Fitzgibbon, 'Speech: Federation Chamber: Greta Army and Migrant Camp: Monday, 17 September 2018'; Hurley, 'Greta Army Camp and Greta Migrant Camp Anniversary Weekend'.

17 Keating, *History of the Army Camp*, 31, 38.

18 Keating, *History of the Army Camp*, 38.

19 Keating, *History of the Army Camp*, 38.

1949 from the Bathurst Migrant Reception and Training Centre and were followed shortly after by arrivals directly from Europe on 19 August 1949 who disembarked the *Fairsea* at Newcastle and arrived at Greta via the railway.

### THE MIGRANT CAMP

Between 1948 and 1954 over 170,000 ‘Displaced Persons’ (DPs) arrived in Australia assisted by the International Refugee Organisation on a two-year government work contract.<sup>20</sup> ‘Pushed’ from their homeland by ‘forces out of their control’, displaced persons often arrived in Australia without the ability or desire to return home.<sup>21</sup> Post-war urban housing shortages and rural labour shortages meant migrants were sent away from urban centres and society’s gaze to immigration reception and training centres in regional and rural areas, such as Bonegilla in Victoria and Greta.<sup>22</sup> Migrants were encouraged to fill vacancies and not compete with local Australians for jobs; consequently DPs were often employed in inferior jobs where prior skills and training went unrecognised.<sup>23</sup>

As other migrant centres were under pressure, Chocolate City became a temporary Reception and Training Centre to speed up processing, thus enabling ships to sail directly to Newcastle.<sup>24</sup> In post-war Australia, arrivals were processed through reception centres and sent away to workplaces, while smaller holding centres (often called migrant camps) were designed to be short-term places for women and children to stay until a migrant worker had made alternative accommodation arrangements

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20 James Jupp and Marie Kabala (eds), *The Politics of Australian Immigration*, Immigration and Australian Foreign Policy (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1993), 17; Ian H. Burnley, *The Impact of Immigration on Australia: A Demographic Approach* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 32, 97; Laksiri Jayasuriya, *Immigration and Multiculturalism in Australia: Selected Essays* (Netherlands: School of Social Work and Social Administration the University of Western Australia, 1997), 59; Jayne Persian, “‘Chifley Liked Them Blond’: DP Immigrants for Australia’, *History Australia* 12, no. 2 (2015): 82; Geoffrey Sherington, *Australia’s Immigrants 1788–1988*, 2nd ed. (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), 136; Joy Damousi, *Memory and Migration in the Shadow of War: Australia’s Greek Immigrants after World War II and the Greek Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 48.

21 Jock Collins, *Migrant Hands in a Distant Land: Australia’s Post-War Immigration* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1988), 48; Persian, “‘Chifley Liked Them Blond’”, 81–82; Jayne Persian, *Beautiful Balts: From Displaced Persons to New Australians* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2017).

22 Persian, *Beautiful Balts*, 78.

23 Persian, “‘Chifley Liked Them Blond’”; Persian, *Beautiful Balts*; Collins, *Migrant Hands*, 23.

24 Keating, *History of the Army Camp*, 39.

for his family.<sup>25</sup> Thus, migrants were processed at Chocolate City where men were allocated to employment, and dependents were allocated to the holding centre in Silver City.<sup>26</sup> Silver City had a capacity of 2,866 and Chocolate City 4,700.<sup>27</sup> Val Randall, author of a history of Greta, recorded that the tariff was 35 shillings per week for adults, 12 shillings sixpence for children, although most men were under the two-year contract that often took them away from Greta camp to places of employment including cane fields in Queensland, steelworks, railway, or the Snowy Mountain Scheme.<sup>28</sup> Christopher Keating reported 11,958 displaced persons arrived at Greta between August 1949 and December 1950. Initially two separate camps with different purposes, fluctuations in arrival numbers meant Chocolate City would switch between reception or holding centre depending on the need. Around 100,000 migrants passed through the camp during its operation, having arrived from countries including Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, Ukraine and Yugoslavia.<sup>29</sup>

## REMEMBERING GRETA MIGRANT CAMP

Greta camp was a significant place for many displaced persons as this was a site of many first impressions and encounters with Australia and a continuation of migration processes. Oral history interviews with former residents of the camp revealed memories shaped by generational characteristics and family situations. People who were young children and longer-term residents often recalled relatively fond memories of the camp, whereas adults, parents, and older children and teenagers recalled this time as a challenge and a mostly negative experience. Memories of arrival frequently featured in many recollections of this time, arguably because reality did not meet the

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25 Bruce Pennay, *Imagining School at Benalla's Migrant Camp*, vol. 90 (Royal Historical Society of Victoria, 2019), 90, 62.

26 Keating, *History of the Army Camp*, 45, 46.

27 Keating, *History of the Army Camp*, 47.

28 Randall, *Greta*, 119.

29 Randall, *Greta*, 199; Keating, *History of the Army Camp*, 37; Michelle Meehan, 'Greta Army & Migrant Camp', *Your Hunter Valley*, 1 November 2019, <https://www.yourhuntervalley.com.au/post/2019/11/01/greta-army-migrant-camp>.

expectations and hopes held by those who had left war-torn homes and countries only to arrive in yet another camp that had an unbearable resemblance to European refugee camps – or worse still, concentration camps.<sup>30</sup> The army camp was built for soldiers (single men) and reflected hierarchical structures of the military,<sup>31</sup> whereas migrants were fleeing situations destroyed by war and often arrived in family groups. No attempt was made to retrofit the army camp to cater to the needs of family groups, thus forcing the separation of families upon arrival in the camp.

Ingrid was among the first group of migrants who arrived in Newcastle on the *Fairsea* on 19 August 1949 and was taken directly to Greta camp via the ‘red rattlers’.<sup>32</sup> She was born in Germany in 1939 and arrived in Australia as a 10-year-old with memories of bombs dropping during the war. Ingrid was critical of her experiences in Greta camp, commencing with her recollections of arriving in the camp. Over 60 years later Ingrid could still remember ‘the first sight of the camp, we’d been in so many camps, but this was the worst of the lot’. She recalled that ‘the parents were all so bitterly disappointed because it wasn’t prepared, the camp wasn’t prepared for families, for migrants to come, they had done nothing’.<sup>33</sup> The camp was ‘like the troops hadn’t left them. There were empty barracks, broken windows’, with stretcher beds along the walls, no rooms, and no privacy. Attempts to separate the men, women and children were met with ‘an uproar’ as people declared ‘if we can’t be together now then we will go back again, we don’t want to stay here’.<sup>34</sup> Her reflections revealed how the army-built camp did not suit the needs of migrant families.<sup>35</sup> Ingrid recalled that people initially adapted by hanging ropes from one end of the hut to the other and draping blankets from them to create cubicles and sections for families to provide some privacy. There was subsequently a petition and discussions with the administrators in charge. Later, carpenters were able to create rooms within

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30 Keating, *History of the Army Camp*, 46, 47.

31 Keating, *History of the Army Camp*, 56–57.

32 Albrecht, Ingrid, NAA: SP1121/1, Albrecht, Ingrid.

33 Ingrid Rudolph, interviewed by author, Telarah, 16 June 2015, tape and transcript held by author.

34 Ingrid Rudolph, 16 June 2015.

35 The army origins of migrant camps prompted similar discussions and reflections at Bonegilla. See: Alexandra Dellios, ‘Separation, Family and Unsettling Settlement’ in *Histories of Controversy: The Bonegilla Migrant Centre* (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2017), 25–53.

the structure but 'that all took time'. There were 'two people to a room, a little room, and if you were three like our family you were assigned 1.5 rooms, so you had to share'.<sup>36</sup> This is an early example of how the limitations of a camp constructed for the purpose of training troops would become an ongoing point of contention for migrant residents. Their needs were a stark contrast to the military thinking that mandated the original construction. Troops training for war were equipped to face extreme environments with minimal resources and comforts of home. Now the same structures were meant to house displaced families.

Ingrid's memories of life in Germany and experiences of war and displacement shaped how she recalled her time at Greta camp. She was shocked to be placed in yet another camp in Australia, particularly one that was in the middle of 'the bush'. She found 'everything was so alien, so different'. Lessons at the school camp were only in English so she couldn't understand anything. Food in the mess hall was 'slopped on [your plate] like you see in a prison'. Every day she told her mother 'I want to go back to Germany, I want to go back, I don't want to stay here'.<sup>37</sup> Her memories of the camp conveyed a sense of isolation and the expanse of the Australian environment in comparison to Europe. Congregated in the camp, migrants were separated from the local townships and had limited access to local news. The camp itself was so large that 'you needed buses to drive you around'. Buses were also the main form of transport and connection to communities beyond the camp.<sup>38</sup> Ingrid recalled memories of life beyond the camp such as walking to Greta town for lollies and biscuits, journeying to high school in Maitland, and being singled out as 'alien' and a 'New Australian' when visiting Maitland.<sup>39</sup>

Migrant hopes or assumptions about the future were thwarted by their arrival in yet another camp, and oftentimes hampered by the impact of the two-year work contract. After separation and displacement, migrants again faced the possibility of being separated from their families as male workers were accommodated near their

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36 Ingrid Rudolph, 16 June 2015.

37 Ingrid Rudolph, 16 June 2015.

38 Ingrid Rudolph, interviewed by author, Telarah, 21 February 2015, tape and transcript held by author.

39 Ingrid Rudolph, 21 February 2015; Ingrid Rudolph, 16 June 2015.

assigned places of employment while their ‘dependents’ resided at Silver City in the holding centre.<sup>40</sup> Many DPs were employed to work in factories and industrial companies regardless of their prior skills and training.<sup>41</sup> John migrated to Australia with his family in 1949. He obtained work at the Masonite Factory in Raymond Terrace and was able to return to Greta camp to visit his parents each weekend where his father worked as a gardener.<sup>42</sup> Other families were able to avoid separation by securing employment within the camp. Tania was 23 years old when she arrived in 1950. She shared that ‘in the beginning it was very hard for us’ because she did not speak English, did not enjoy living in the camp, and worried about her family being separated. She was relieved her family was able to stay together when her husband was given work in the Greta camp kitchens because as a skilled soccer player he was sought after for the Greta team.<sup>43</sup> Ingrid’s stepfather had promised his family a ‘good life’ in Australia where he expected to continue to work as a lawyer, but his qualifications were not recognised and there was ‘never the money or the opportunity’ for him to retrain. Instead, he worked at the camp as a cleaner and his wife as a nurse. When they left the camp, although he ‘was an academic’, ‘he had to work in a factory’ and was employed at the Bradford Cotton Mill – the same place Tania’s husband eventually worked – and Ingrid’s mother worked at the Belmore Hotel.<sup>44</sup> Employment within the camp kept their family together and likely facilitated connections with the local area that shaped their decision to remain within the area once they left the camp at the end of their two-year work contract.

The camp was a place of restriction, or at least obligation, rather than choice in the minds of the older generation of migrants. Tania spoke of being ‘free’ after her

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40 Alexandra Dellios, ‘Displaced Persons, Family Separation and the Work Contract in Postwar Australia’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 40, no. 4 (2016): 418, 420.

41 Keating, *History of the Army Camp*. For example, George Klim was a trained English teacher but worked for Dunlop tyres, see: George Klim, interview by Barry York, 1996.

42 John Szczudluk, interviewed by author, Maitland, 20 February 2015, tape and transcript held by author.

43 Tania Kuszelyk, interviewed by author, Maitland, 23 February 2015, tape and transcript held by author.

44 Ingrid Rudolph, 16 June 2015.

husband finished his two-year contract.<sup>45</sup> The contract cast a shadow over many recollections of migration to Australia and time spent in the Greta camp. This may be why many DPs who were adults or older children and teenagers upon arrival recall negative or challenging experiences as part of their recollections of life in Greta camp. They carried the memories of war and displacement with them to the camp, shaping their impressions and perspectives upon this time in their lives. Time at Greta camp was part of a longer life history narrative and larger migration process that made time at the camp transitory or temporary rather than an idyllic home.

Greta camp was not home to Terese's family. They passed through many migrant camps, including Bonegilla, Cowra and Greta, as they followed Terese's father who was separated from them and relocated to different locations for employment. This caused great difficulty and disruption for their family.<sup>46</sup> After the trauma of wartime separation in Poland, the loss of a brother, and experiences in a concentration camp before miraculously reuniting with her parents when the war was over, 'home' was not Greta camp. Home was 'where my parents were' and when they were finally able to be together away from the migrant camp.<sup>47</sup>

Christopher Keating described the camp as a temporary 'stepping stone into the community', and argued that psychological and cultural stresses of migration were 'eased by a staged move, via the camp, into jobs and houses in the wider Australian community'.<sup>48</sup> Keating noted that 'post-war migrants were brought to Australia for their labour, and it was through work that they would eventually move out into the wider community' often once the two-year government contract was up.<sup>49</sup> The stress of migration was not always eased by residing in Greta camp. Sometimes the transitory nature of the camp added to stress. While at times Greta or other camps like Bonegilla might have been framed as a place of beginnings, in some situations Greta was not the start of settlement in Australia, but another temporary location in an

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45 Tania Kuszelyk, interviewed by author, Maitland, 18 June 2015, tape and transcript held by author.

46 Terese Dron, interviewed by author, East Maitland, 19 June 2015, tape and transcript held by author.

47 Terese Dron, 19 June 2015.

48 Keating, *History of the Army Camp*, 55.

49 Keating, *History of the Army Camp*, 59.

ongoing process of migration or displacement that commenced long before setting foot in Greta or Newcastle.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the site is a beginning place for people who were born at the camp. With an average of 45 babies a month, around 10,000 babies were born at Greta camp.<sup>51</sup> Their memories shape many of the reunion and commemorative activities that will be discussed in the following section.

Greta camp was a challenging and temporary space for some migrants while for others it was a place of positive memories and a childhood shared with others in community. Whether a military or a migrant camp, it is important to remember that Greta was virtually a town in its own right. Although hastily constructed and supposedly a temporary place – both for people and as a site – it featured facilities including a hospital, an ambulance, a fire truck, a school, kitchens and dining halls, two cinemas, at least three churches, and buses that would run between the two camps.<sup>52</sup> Although it was temporary accommodation, it did not feel like that for younger children who arrived at the camp or were born there. This was the life they knew. It was not designed as a place to put down roots, but many younger generations did just that, and their memories offer unique insights into life at Greta camp. Not all children comprehended or shared their parents' experiences prior to arriving in the camp nor their perspective on camp life. The camp was a home and a safe place to roam and explore with other children their age and with a similar background. It was a 'safe haven' removed from wider societal and cultural expectations or constraints in the surrounding towns.<sup>53</sup> Idyllic memories were often recalled by those who were young children while residing at the camp.

Nina was among the earliest arrivals at Greta camp, arriving as an eight-year-old with other migrants from the Bathurst Immigration Reception and Training Centre in June 1949. She recalled a positive experience of camp life that provided her with

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50 See discussion in Alexandra Delliou, 'Marginal or Mainstream? Migrant Centres as Grassroots and Official Heritage', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21, no. 10 (2015).

51 Mike Scanlon, 'Permanent Home for Greta Camp Monument', *The Newcastle Herald*, 2 November 2020, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A640184490/STND?u=unimelb&sid=bookmark-STND&xid=cb-88c4bf>, Gale.

52 Randall, *Greta*, 119; Scanlon, 'Permanent Home for Greta Camp Monument'.

53 Similar themes are present within Pennay's analysis of childhood memories of Bonegilla and Benalla camps: Pennay, *Imagining School at Benalla's Migrant Camp*, 70–73.

a sense of stability and home in contrast to her previous experiences of displacement and mobility, unpacking and packing on the journey from Russia and China to Australia via a temporary placement in the Philippines.<sup>54</sup> Nina commented the camp provided ‘good nutritious meals’ – ‘nothing fancy’ but ‘we were fed, we were fine’ – and although the camp could be ‘a bit cold and a bit uncomfortable [...] camp life itself wasn’t really that bad’.<sup>55</sup> There were ‘all these adventures’ to be had with her sisters and other children in the surrounding bush and creeks. Nina did admit that there were a ‘few incidents’ and that it was not always safe to go to the bathroom block alone at night, but consciously constructed a positive narrative of her time in the camp saying it was ‘good to have something stable’ at the camp where ‘everything was organised for us’. Nina’s home was where her mother was. Her mother worked in the camp kitchens, and as a single-parent family upon arrival in the camp, Nina had more positive recollections of the excitement of men returning from work to visit the camp and then waving them off again upon their departure.

The contrasting memories of Greta camp as a positive place of stability, home, exploration and adventure, or a challenging and negative experience that thwarted ideas of migration and settlement in Australia, demonstrates the different way people have remembered and reflected on the past. Alistair Thomson has discussed how we compose memories to make sense of past and present lives. This composition process is complicated by the way our private memories can have public consequences.<sup>56</sup> Nina composed memories of the camp that largely focused on positive recollections that emphasised stability, exploration and adventure as she knew her family was no longer on the move. She admitted there were difficult experiences as well, but she explicitly mentioned that she tried to focus on the positives: ‘it really wasn’t a bad life if you look at the positive things’. On the whole, she chose to remember her experience positively. This composition of her personal memories shaped the way

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54 Nina Nikolaeff, interviewed by author, Telarah, 16 June 2015, tape and transcript held by author; Migrant Selection Documents, NAA: A12094, 198–201; Haven Nominal Passenger Roll, NAA: J25, 1953/4599.

55 Nina Nikolaeff, 16 June 2015.

56 Alistair Thomson, ‘Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia’, in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 344.

she participated in public processes of remembering at reunion and remembering activities in 2015.

The Greta Migrant Camp closed in 1960 after 107 residents gathered for a final meal on 5 January before departing for Villawood.<sup>57</sup> It was officially closed 15 January.<sup>58</sup> By February, Nissen huts along with other buildings and structures were sold, dismantled, often recycled, and scattered throughout the Hunter area.<sup>59</sup> The army resumed control of the camp in 1962 and it was used intermittently for training purposes until it was sold at auction in 1980. All that remains of the former camp site are concrete foundations to indicate where buildings stood or where the roads ran.

### REUNIONS AND ANNIVERSARIES

The absence of tangible markers of the past has influenced the memorial and remembering processes surrounding Greta camp. Greta camp was bought in 1980 by the Windt family; Otti Windt migrated to Australia in 1959. The Burra Charter was written in 1979 and migrant heritage emerged slowly in the late 1980s.<sup>60</sup> The 1980 sale of the property was likely too early to be shaped by heritage discourses that were emerging and strengthening through the 1980s. When the army relinquished control of Bonegilla in 1999, a collection of huts including dining rooms and laundries remained.<sup>61</sup> The tangible presence of these buildings combined with more developed heritage discourses likely shaped the public history of Bonegilla in important ways largely absent from the Greta camp site. Once Greta was sold it largely returned to grazing land although there were property development plans. Nonetheless, the Greta camp site has remained largely unchanged since the 1980s.

Yet, for a place with no memorial or markers, there has been a lot of remembering. The first significant reunion was organised by the Newcastle Ethnic Communities

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57 Randall, *Greta*, 120.

58 Keating, *History of the Army Camp*, 79.

59 Randall, *Greta*, 120; Scanlon, 'Permanent Home for Greta Camp Monument'.

60 Dellios, 'Marginal or Mainstream?', 1069.

61 Dellios, 'Marginal or Mainstream?', 1074.

Council in 1988.<sup>62</sup> The bicentennial year was significant for many reunions and commemorative events across Australia, so it is unsurprising Greta camp also had commemorative processes. Another reunion was held for the 50th-anniversary celebration of the Greta Migrant Camp in August 1999. It featured a Kosovar refugee dance troupe from Singleton Safe Haven, a welcome event and cocktail party, a film screening, a 1940s gala dance, and the unveiling of a commemorative plaque at former Honeysuckle railway workshops in Newcastle to mark the arrival of the *Fairsea*.<sup>63</sup> The comments by the Newcastle and Hunter Region Ethnic Communities Council chairman John Gebhart reveal two motivations that shape moments of public remembering. It was hoped over 5,000 people would attend over the weekend to ‘reminisce about old friendships and shared experiences’, and to affirm ‘one of the most significant events in Australian history, the great post-war migration which has transformed the nation, provided a transfusion of innovation, creativity and dedication, and set Australia on the road to a dynamic and promising future’.<sup>64</sup> Reunions facilitate reminiscences and the opportunity to revisit connections forged between individuals and communities. The testimonies of many participants echo this sentiment.<sup>65</sup> Anniversary events can also focus on the institution or larger organising body and often feature larger historical narratives. It is often the organisers who apply national or multicultural frameworks to remembering events as though justifying the event and continued significance of the camp.

The 60th anniversary in 2009 featured over 1,000 never-before-seen photographs collected from former residents by the Windt family, assisted by the Newcastle Ethnic Communities Council, and displayed at an exhibition at Wallsend Library.<sup>66</sup> The photos were officially entrusted to the Newcastle Regional Library at the exhibition’s launch. Alexandra Dellios observed that the exhibition’s success relied on

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62 Keating, *History of the Army Camp*, 80.

63 Paul Maguire, ‘50th Anniversary Celebrations Start for Greta Migrant Camp’, *The Newcastle Herald*, 18 August 1999, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A292253606/STND?u=unimelb&sid=bookmark-STND&xid=5efe0219>.

64 Maguire, ‘50th Anniversary Celebrations Start for Greta Migrant Camp’.

65 See: Dellios, ‘Marginal or Mainstream?’, 1079.

66 Alison Branley, ‘Snapshots of Immigrant Life’, *The Newcastle Herald*, 3 September 2009, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A279064823/STND?u=unimelb&sid=bookmark-STND&xid=52820cd7>.

the involvement and support of former residents who donated their photos. The photographs were 'attached to and evoke memories of personal migration journeys, but they are framed by the wider, officially sanctioned narrative of the exhibition'.<sup>67</sup>

Another reunion event was held in June 2015. Rather than the initial arrivals who encountered the army camp in its unmodified form, most of the organising committee were children born to migrants at the camp or later arrivals, such as Elizabeth Matt whose family history was featured in newspapers for the event. She was born in 1947 Coburg, Germany, to parents who had witnessed and experienced World War Two and forced labour in Germany; her mother had been deported from Ukraine to Germany to work. The growing family arrived at Greta camp in 1952 and stayed until 1960.<sup>68</sup> She recalled positive memories of the camp, playing with other children, and enjoying the entertainment the camp had to offer including the cinemas and the ample bushland.<sup>69</sup> Mrs Matt said leaving the camp was 'awful'. Her 'life was at that camp'; it was a place where she 'had grown up with her friends, it was happening and alive, we all lived together, we were a community. Suddenly, it was over'. Her family moved to a house on a 'little block of land' in Anvil Creek, that 'was a prison to me, I felt isolated'.<sup>70</sup> The years at the camp were 'very happy times for me...the best years of my life'.<sup>71</sup>

The shift to a younger generation of organisers has shaped the purposes of reunion and anniversary events and the types of memories being shared. Discussions in February that year often looked to past reunions as a model to guide the exhibitions and features for the one to come in June. Items from previous exhibitions (and possibly entire displays) were included at the 2015 reunion weekend. A ready catalogue and collection of materials fit for exhibition speak to the existence of gatekeepers or unofficial stewards of Greta camp's history and its commemorative activities. The

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67 Dellios, 'Marginal or Mainstream?', 1080.

68 Rebecca Berry, 'Greta Camp Memories: A World Away / Photos, Video', *Maitland Mercury*, 11 June 2015, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A417633940/STND?u=unimelb&sid=bookmark-STND&xid=13f7f105>.

69 Berry, 'Greta Camp Memories'.

70 Berry, 'Greta Camp Memories'.

71 Berry, 'Greta Camp Memories'.

history of reunion activities elucidates repeated narratives and memories shared about the camp. The same people are often interviewed by the local press. Irene Lupish was an organiser of the 2015 event and her husband Vitaly (or Victor) built a model of the camp in 2000. Victor was 14 years old when he arrived in 1949 with his family from Belarus, and he has frequently been interviewed by the local press during the last two decades, often recounting the same stories and memories. He is enthusiastic to share his stories and provides the press with information and quotes that readily fit into positive narratives in newspaper pieces that cover reunion events. These articles rarely explore other stories and camp memories. Rather than locating new original voices, it is convenient for media coverage (and sometimes historical discussions) to identify these willing narrators and voices of authority as representative of Greta's past and present memories. The repeated commemorative efforts suggest there are people who want to continue to meet and maintain connections that were created through Greta, and that the focus is on reminiscence and catching up with old friends.

It is noteworthy that plans for a 65th anniversary in 2014 were cancelled due to lack of time and funding and postponed until June 2015 when it went ahead largely without organisational backing from groups such as the Newcastle and Hunter Region Ethnic Communities Council. The event was impacted by the ongoing dance between personal and public remembering, and community and organisational interests. The organisers held the event during Refugee Week to ensure it went ahead and to garner additional support and publicity. Some people refused to take part because they feared the event would be buried beneath other celebrations that week, and because they opposed a refugee narrative being applied to their understanding of the camp's history.<sup>72</sup> The 2015 reunion revealed tensions between the historical narratives and frameworks that could be applied to the camp, and the histories and understandings held by former residents and by their children. These contextual details likely shaped the types of voices and memories shared during the

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72 'Plans to Celebrate the 66th Anniversary of Greta Migrant', *Maitland Mercury*, 16 January 2015, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A398324224/STND?u=unimelb&sid=bookmark-STND&xid=b5cddf8>.

event, namely those from younger generations with largely positive recollections of time at Greta camp who had a desire to reconnect with friends.

Most of the visitors were largely pilgrims and participants in the camp's history or their children. The focus centred on family and personal histories with an emphasis on reunion and connection. Visitors were thus actors or teachers rather than the recipients of information. Portions of the 1984 film *Silver City* were screened at the opening of the 2015 event, and Victor's model of Greta camp was the centrepiece of exhibition displays that were erected at the Greta Workers Club for the weekend.<sup>73</sup> Victor has at times been the 'unofficial' historian of Greta camp; indeed, building a model arguably cemented his interpretation and memories of Greta camp, making him a perceived authority on Greta. But there are others with different memories and stories of the camp. During the 2015 event Nina and Terese pointed out discrepancies between Victor's model of the camp and their memories. Nina said it was 'disappointing' to see details missing such as the laundry that probably 'wouldn't have been significant enough for him to remember'.<sup>74</sup> The women explained this was in part because of the different experiences and tasks men, women and children had in the camp.

The notable absence of tangible markers at the site continued to shape the way the camp was remembered and the types of possible commemoration and celebration events. In 2015 permission was secured for shuttle buses to convey people around the camp site and look at markers erected for the day to correspond with maps and to jog memories. People were only allowed off the bus at specific locations because of insurance issues. The bus was filled with a chorus of chatter as people peered out the window and pointed to familiar landmarks or numbered signs, providing

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73 Directed by Polish-Australian Sophia Turkiewicz (screenplay by Thomas Keneally), *Silver City* was an important film for its place within a wave of women's films from the 1970s and for its engagement with changing multicultural Australia. Portions of the film set at Greta camp were shown at the opening of the 2015 reunion weekend. The audience appeared to react positively to the depiction of the camp and there were passing comments to the film made over the course of the weekend, however, no one referred to the film during in their interview. For further discussion see: Alexandra Dellios, 'Constructing Public History, Framing Collective Memories: Bonegilla Migrant Reception and Training Centre' (PhD thesis, The University of Melbourne, 2014).

74 Nina Nikolaeff, 16 June 2015.

commentary to their travelling companion or the entire bus about what they remembered and where specific buildings once stood. As the site has been privately owned since 1980, this was one of the few times many people had been able to return to the property.

In 2017 an upcoming reunion again prompted the publication of Greta camp memories in the local newspaper. Paul Szumilas told the *Maitland Mercury* about his enjoyable childhood at Greta Migrant Camp running around playing games with other children. He recalled ‘it was great for us kids. Most of us didn’t know what our parents had been through’.<sup>75</sup> As all the men were away working ‘we grew up with lots of mums’.<sup>76</sup> He is possibly the only person in local newspapers to link his experiences with Australia’s recent treatment of asylum seekers.<sup>77</sup> It was reported there was a reunion in 2016 that attracted 50 people, and there were hopes for double that in 2017.<sup>78</sup> Once again, the memories of children enjoying the camp were foregrounded as a way to promote frequent reunions.

Newspaper coverage of these reunion activities lends support to the notion that these are events where former residents can reconnect and share stories and memories of their experiences at Greta camp. But as discussed above, the ‘apparently private process of composing safe memories is in fact very public’.<sup>79</sup> Nina’s composition of a positive childhood enabled her to be comfortable participating in the 2015 reunion and anniversary, pointing out where buildings were and talking to others about adventures and explorations shared with other children in the camp. Thomson has observed that where memories do not conform to those accepted by the general public, people seek out other groups that ‘affirm our identities and the way we want to remember our lives’.<sup>80</sup> It is possible other migrants were less comfortable participating in public anniversaries or reunions and did not attend because their

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75 Lachlan Leeming, ‘Memories of a Greta Camp Kid’, *Maitland Mercury*, 13 October 2017, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A511537260/STND?u=unimelb&sid=bookmark-STND&xid=09b5c67b>.

76 Leeming, ‘Memories of a Greta Camp Kid’.

77 Leeming, ‘Memories of a Greta Camp Kid’.

78 Leeming, ‘Memories of a Greta Camp Kid’.

79 Thomson, ‘Anzac Memories’, 344.

80 Thomson, ‘Anzac Memories’, 344.

experiences in the camp were negative. The overwhelming presence of positive childhood memories of the camp raises questions about who continues to participate in these reunions or commemorative occasions and whether there is space for memories to be shared that do not conform to these current public narratives.

### 2019 - THE ANNIVERSARY YEAR

The year 2019 was significant for the Greta camp. Multiple events were held locally throughout the year to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the military camp and the 70th anniversary of the migrant camp. A consultative committee of people intending to organise anniversary events first gathered in 2018 to ensure they did not schedule events on the same days. The year 2019 saw a range of events by different people focusing on various aspects of the camp history. Similar themes were present in commemorative events that performed the same function as previous reunions. The 'Back to Greta' event hosted by the Cessnock Library on 7 June 2019 brought over 100 people back to the former army and migrant camp site on the very date migrants first arrived at Greta camp 70 years earlier.<sup>81</sup> Commencing with a reception and enormous 'Back to Greta' cake at the Cessnock Library (approximately 23 kilometres southwest of Greta), two buses then took people back to the site. Visitors were given interpretive maps, and everyone was able to keep a commemorative map.<sup>82</sup> Victor Lupish again recalled his rehearsed stories of arriving at the camp; and the comments of Mr Graf – who lived for 10 years at the camp – also echoed the observations of visitors at previous reunions.<sup>83</sup> He said 'for kids growing up together, with the different nationalities, it was fantastic...it was like Disneyland for kids'. Although he did proceed to comment that 'for my late mother and the elderly it was pretty tough, I suppose, compared to Europe'.<sup>84</sup> On the tour of the camp site he was able to recall and point out where former buildings and structures stood, just as Nina had in 2015. The event was organised by Kimberly O'Sullivan,

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81 The council completely covered the cost of the event, so it was free to participate. There was significant interest in the event and some people travelled from interstate to attend, but caps on numbers meant not everyone was able to participate.

82 Kimberly O'Sullivan, email correspondence with author, 27 November 2021.

83 Scully and Hind, 'Greta Migrant Camp Kids Return'.

84 Scully and Hind, 'Greta Migrant Camp Kids Return'.

the Local Studies Librarian at the Cessnock Library. Kimberly knew the site was going to be sold and was aware this might be the last chance for members of the public to access the site.<sup>85</sup> She was cognisant that many people returning to the camp were children of the first generation of migrants.<sup>86</sup> She noted that ‘they grew up here. This was their childhood. And I’ll say it was idyllic. It was like [they were] in this wonderful village’.<sup>87</sup> This was a different experience for adults who arrived in the camp. Kimberly reminded people of the larger post-war context to the 2019 anniversary events and the ‘wonderfully successful story of multiculturalism in Australia’.<sup>88</sup>

While there were strong parallels to previous commemorative and anniversary events, what was significant about 2019 was the acknowledgment of the two histories of the Greta camp as an army camp and a migrant camp. Kimberly believed that the joint histories of the camp should be addressed during the anniversary year. In addition to the ‘Back to Greta’ event, the Cessnock Library hosted a multi-month exhibition of the camp including an exhibition on the history of the Greta Migrant Camp previously held at the Newcastle Museum.<sup>89</sup> A brand new exhibition was created that showcased the social impact and history of the camp within the Cessnock local area. The exhibition ‘When the soldiers came to town: a social history of the Greta Army Camp and its impact on Cessnock’ featured at the same time as the migrant camp exhibitions and explored the impact of the large camp on the regional area made up primarily of men not from the local area but from Sydney.<sup>90</sup> For the first time, this exhibition brought together the two histories of the camp.

Another notable event was held in November for the 80th anniversary of the military camp. An estimated 8,000 people gathered for the official opening on Saturday morning. The two-day event hosted by the Central Hunter Business Chamber and the Hunter Multicultural Communities was held on the Camp Road property, the

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85 O’Sullivan, email; Scully and Hind, ‘Greta Migrant Camp Kids Return’.

86 Scully and Hind, ‘Greta Migrant Camp Kids Return’.

87 Scully and Hind, ‘Greta Migrant Camp Kids Return’.

88 Mike Scanlon, ‘Life at Greta Migrant Camp’, *The Newcastle Herald*, 27 April 2019, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A583649302/STND?u=unimelb&sid=bookmark-STND&xid=c8f51422>.

89 O’Sullivan, email.

90 O’Sullivan, email.

former site of the Greta army camp.<sup>91</sup> The event included a ‘full military parade with the Royal Australian Navy Band, Defence Force personnel, Veterans and dignitaries’, flyovers of military aircraft, ‘displays of ex-military vehicles, infantry and light horse drills’, plus historical talks, displays and the Hunter Multicultural onsite museum.<sup>92</sup> The Governor-General, David Hurley, remarked in his opening speech that ‘the men who trained here fought for our nation, for democracy and for freedom. As a dividend of their efforts, tens of thousands of people were able to come to Australia through the Greta Migrant Camp after the war’.<sup>93</sup> He continued: ‘Greta Camp symbolises two significant eras in Australia’s history – the fight for freedom in the Second World War and the amazing endeavour to create a new nation in the aftermath of the war’. He commented that ‘if you were a child in the camp at the time, you could not have realised how important a role your parents played in shaping post-war Australia’.<sup>94</sup>

The speeches and military displays at the anniversary event demonstrate how national and official tropes were applied to the camp that day. These coordinated activities and displays were likely the showpiece of the weekend, although there was also an acknowledgment of migrant or ‘ethnic’ pasts through dancing displays and food. The advertisements and descriptions of the weekend appear more like displays for consumption rather than a place to recall personal or family stories and interactions with the camp site.<sup>95</sup> It seems unusual that an event of this scale was able to be held on the privately owned property usually so hard for migrants to access. Once again, similar (if not the same) photos and exhibitions that featured at the 2015 anniversary were included, and Victor’s camp model was again the centrepiece of the exhibit showing visitors the past layout of the camp. Migrant experiences and histories were present, but primarily through ‘ethnic’ events, whereas the military displays meant

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91 Meehan, ‘Greta Army & Migrant Camp’.

92 Meehan, ‘Greta Army & Migrant Camp’.

93 Hurley, ‘Greta Army Camp and Greta Migrant Camp Anniversary Weekend’.

94 Hurley, ‘Greta Army Camp and Greta Migrant Camp Anniversary Weekend’.

95 For discussions of ethnic food and multiculturalism see, for example: Rick Flowers and Elaine Swan, ‘Multiculturalism as Work: The Emotional Labour of Ethnic Food Tour Guides’, in *Careful Eating: Bodies, Food and Care* (London: Routledge, 2015).

official and national tropes started to encompass the camp potentially suffocating other (unwelcome) memories.

Memories of the military and migrant past of Greta camp sit uncomfortably next to each other. The 2019 speeches framed the camp as significant because of its involvement in war and national histories, alongside developing multiculturalism. Bringing the two histories of the camp together has the potential to be productive and redress some of the silences of the camp in the past, but is it appropriate to mark the anniversary of the camp with military marches and parades when this was also a place 'home' to people displaced and traumatised by war? This was a place where men trained to become soldiers for combat and a place that mere years later (weeks after soldiers left) was supposed to be a site of welcome to 'New Australians' displaced by war. Greta camp is a place where personal and family memories intersect with public histories and national narratives.<sup>96</sup> It is during anniversary events most particularly, rather than ex-resident organised reunions, where these competing memories collide. A military event only emphasises this collision further. As Thomson has written, 'the challenge for Australian society is to develop public ways of remembering war that help veterans of all wars to come to terms with their experiences, and that does not celebrate war or privilege veterans above civilians, or men above women'.<sup>97</sup> It would be interesting to learn not just how many people went to the different reunion, anniversary and historical displays in 2019, but how many people attended multiple events that emphasised different memories and pasts of the Greta camp. Just as there are two 'cities' – 'Chocolate City' and 'Silver City' – there are two camps, the army camp and the migrant camp, each enveloped within specific processes of remembering, pulled towards different narratives and public histories depending on the organisers and the teller of the story.

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96 See, for example Kate Darian-Smith, 'War Stories: Remembering the Australian Home Front During the Second World War', in Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (eds), *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), 137.

97 Alistair Thomson, 'Embattled Manhood: Gender, Memory and the Anzac Legend', in Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (eds), *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), 171.

## CALLS FOR MEMORIALISATION

The privately owned property and site of the former camp has been a constant feature in discussions and remembrances of Greta camp. When I interviewed Nina after attending the 2015 anniversary, she reflected that ‘it would be nice to at least have one building, something that people could sort of relate to, but it’s not really practical’. She was grateful the owners of the land allowed them to ‘have these get together’ and ‘go and have a look’ because ‘it’s still part of your life, it’s still part of your memories’. She speculated that maintaining a hut might ‘shame the government’ as people would ‘see just how bad things really were’ because as her son pointed out ‘you were virtually living in a tin shed’.<sup>98</sup>

George Goloszuk made the pilgrimage to Greta for the June 2019 ‘Back to Greta’ event and expressed a similar desire to have ‘even one building’. He was born in the camp and returned with family members including his wife, daughters and grandchildren. He said it was ‘just a pity that we couldn’t have restored some of this as some sort of heritage site...because that would have been really great. I think it’s a significant part of Australia’s history’.<sup>99</sup>

Interestingly though, there are still buildings present in the landscape today that were preserved in various ways after being sold in the 1960s. Tahlee Bible College (located on the northern shore of Port Stephens, northeast of Newcastle) received 10 huts and a cinema from Greta camp; a Nissen hut converted to a workshop by Standen’s Engineering is still in Branxton; and a YMCA hall was given to the Cessnock Council. In 2021 this hall – now the Branxton Community Hall – was renovated and received a new kitchen.<sup>100</sup> The Rutherford aerodrome outside of Maitland also has an administrative building that was once a Greta camp chapel.<sup>101</sup> These buildings

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98 Nina Nikolaeff, 16 June 2015.

99 Scully and Hind, ‘Greta Migrant Camp Kids Return’.

100 Scanlon, ‘Permanent Home for Greta Camp Monument’; ‘Branxton Community Hall’, Central Hunter Business Chamber, <https://centralhunterbusiness.com.au/branxton-community-hall/>; ‘Branxton Community Hall Gets a Kitchen Makeover’, *The Singleton Argus*, 28 October 2021, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A680361515/STND?u=unimelb&sid=bookmark-STND&xid=525aa511>.

101 Mike Scanlon, ‘Second Life for Greta Migrant Camp Structures’, *The Newcastle Herald*, 28 September 2020, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A636672206/STND?u=unimelb&sid=bookmark-STND&xid=dbebf29e>.

were the subject of discussions in local newspapers with residents writing in identifying buildings and providing snippets of information and stories about them. Nonetheless, while tangible remnants from the camp, they are not official heritage sites, so the constant call by some locals and ex-residents has been for something prominent and official.

Alex Schulha was born in Greta camp to Yugoslav and Ukrainian parents and has advocated for years for a monument to mark Greta camp.<sup>102</sup> He was dismayed that Greta was the only migrant camp in NSW without a monument, and has argued that ‘visitors coming here are disappointed’,<sup>103</sup> because ‘there’s nothing on the site to say this was the Greta Migrant Camp’.<sup>104</sup> For years the only tribute to the site’s history was the stretch of road between Talga Road and the Greta Railway Station nearby to the former site, that the Cessnock Council renamed ‘Camp Road’.<sup>105</sup> There was a small monument placed in the centre of Greta in 1994 that acknowledged the people who ‘made their beginnings in Australia at Greta camp’ and their ‘contribution to and enrichment of Australian life’ that ‘is remembered with pride and appreciation’.<sup>106</sup> This is often critiqued as being too small or too far away from the actual site of the camp.

Speaking in parliament in the lead up to the 2019 anniversary year, MP Joel Fitzgibbon placed Greta within a national framework to explicate its importance and argued that 2019 presented an opportunity to ‘enlarge that monument, to make it more visible to passing visitors’:<sup>107</sup>

Our post–World War Two migration program shaped modern Australia, and Greta played a big part in our national development. [...] Sadly, a visit to

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102 Scanlon, ‘Life at Greta Migrant Camp’.

103 Scanlon, ‘Life at Greta Migrant Camp’.

104 Scully and Hind, ‘Greta Migrant Camp Kids Return’.

105 Meehan, ‘Greta Army & Migrant Camp’.

106 ‘Greta Migrant Camp Memorial’, Monument Australia, <https://monumentaustalia.org.au/themes/landscape/settlement/display/21404-greta-migrant-camp-memorial>.

107 Fitzgibbon, ‘Speech: Federation Chamber: Greta Army and Migrant Camp: Monday, 17 September 2018’.

the site of the camp provides no hint of its national significance. Those with family links to the camp who make a pilgrimage to their place of heritage will find no marking on the site, let alone a sign signifying its previous national significance.<sup>108</sup>

Our local communities remain enriched by the ongoing presence of many of the new arrivals, their children and their grandchildren. In addition to commemorating and celebrating the 70th anniversary, we hope to ensure that people who have an affinity with the former camp have somewhere and something prominent to visit. We must facilitate their pilgrimage and keep the memories and histories alive.<sup>109</sup>

He also expressed hope that a monument would increase tourism to the town as people understand the local area's (and presumably national) historical significance.<sup>110</sup> Once again we see state representatives positioning Greta within a national story and multicultural narratives, and a process of official migrant heritage being bound by national narratives and notions of multicultural progress and success.<sup>111</sup> While reunion events emphasised personal and family memories and stories of life in Greta camp and perhaps a desire to maintain some tangible connection to that past, official representatives and experts want a more 'prominent' monument to mark national histories for potential pilgrims and tourists.

## CONCLUSION: 2020 INTO THE FUTURE

There were two notable developments surrounding the Greta camp in 2020/2021. After around 40 years of ownership the Windt family sold the 404-hectare site to the Medich family in December 2020. The Sydney-based developers already owned other sites in the Hunter area. The price was not disclosed but it was understood the

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108 Fitzgibbon, 'Speech'.

109 Fitzgibbon, 'Speech'.

110 Fitzgibbon, 'Speech'.

111 Alexandra Dellios, 'Personal, Public Pasts: Negotiating Migrant Heritage – Heritage Practice and Migration History in Australia', in Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (eds), *Remembering Migration: Oral Histories and Heritage in Australia* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 220, 223.

site was sold for \$38–40 million.<sup>112</sup> The new owners do not appear to have immediate plans to develop the site, but plans for development have existed for a long time as the previous owners had rezoned the land and gained approval for ‘1364 residential dwellings, 85 tourist villages’, a hotel, golf course and club house, retail precinct, education precinct, amphitheatre, and vineyard.<sup>113</sup> Mr Schulha, now the Vice President of Hunter Multicultural Communities, was able to give a company representative a tour of the site and was told there were no plans to develop the site for at least five years, and that at this stage the rifle range will be preserved, with the possibility of turning it into a gallery or museum.<sup>114</sup> Security has been tightened and access to the site is forbidden.<sup>115</sup> The second was that in 2020 construction commenced on the ‘first-stage of a modest monument’ near Camp Road, Greta.<sup>116</sup> The plan included some original bricks to be built into the structure, and the costs were to be shared between Cessnock Council and Greta Tidy Towns Committee.<sup>117</sup> As this discussion has shown, there are multiple voices and memories of Greta camp. No doubt there are some ex-residents thrilled at the prospect of a monument finally being constructed at the site, but as scholarship has shown, memorials can at times fix in place only one version of the past, silencing alternative recollections and voices.

Remembering was facilitated through photograph collections and displays, models of the camp, bus tours and talk, but this supportive scaffolding was all impermanent. To some extent this process of remembering honoured the temporal nature of the site, as a place temporary and impermanent in a soldier’s life and in a migrant’s life. It was a place of transformation and transition for many people who passed through the camp, in many ways a liminal space experienced before war or before settlement

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112 Donna Sharpe, ‘Millions for Greta Camp Site’, *Cessnock Advertiser*, 10 March 2021, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A654372009/STND?u=unimelb&sid=bookmark-STND&xid=24178afe>.

113 Sharpe, ‘Millions for Greta Camp Site’; ‘Greta Camp Complex Progress’, *Cessnock Advertiser*, 12 August 2008, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A295687869/STND?u=unimelb&sid=bookmark-STND&xid=c25295c8>.

114 Sharpe, ‘Millions for Greta Camp Site’.

115 O’Sullivan, email.

116 Scanlon, ‘Permanent Home for Greta Camp Monument’.

117 Rick Allen, ‘Greta Migrant Camp Celebration: Toy Koala Back Home After 71 Years’, *Maitland Mercury*, 14 August 2020, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A632385112/STND?u=unimelb&sid=bookmark-STND&xid=08023412>.

in Australia. For some though it was more than a temporary space, it was a home and place of significant emotional connections to people and community. Remembering Greta camp is important and complex. On the one hand, perhaps the absence of a memorial and tangible heritage allowed memories of Greta to shift and change as different generations facilitated reunions and remembering events. Or perhaps this too easily allowed other stewards, or 'official' authorities to apply national, military, or multicultural frameworks and discourses to the camp site, erasing or obscuring the personal, familial and community memories of Greta. Hopefully a new monument will not fix one memory or experience of the camp in place but will continue to allow for multiple voices, experiences and memories to be shared.

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