

PRISONERS' SKILLS PRODUCE ORNAMENTS FROM JUNK

"The skill of some of the Italian prisoners of war who worked in my section at the Cowra P.O.W. Camp in 1943-46 was remarkable, and their extra-ability was in some cases unbelievable."

This was said to the NEWS by Mr Bob Burge of Murrumbidgee St. Young, in a second story on some of the POW's he had under him while section Sergeant of the camp's engineering section.

Peter Pieraccini was a draughtsman by occupation and you would go a long way and meet many men before you would find anyone to be any-way near as clever as Peter.

"Peter drafted the working drawing and supervised the construction of a sundial clock.

"The clock, erected in concrete, was set in front of camp commanding officer Brown's quarters.

"Peter was also a sculptor and painter.

"He painted in oils from memory Windsor Castle and gave the painting to me.

"Sgt Peter Persotti, an electrical engineer with degrees, planned and erected a perimeter lighting system for the camp — inside and outside.

"The work was carried out by other POW's under him which I had to officially supervise.

"The artifacts that these fellows made from scrap materials were really amazing.

"The metal for figurines of women came from aluminium pistons and was melted down and moulded in moulds made by design expert Peter Pieraccini.

"The moulds were made out of plaster of paris and the scraps of metal were melted down in a plumber's pot. After the cooling period was over the metal ingots were then shaped and polished.

"From second-hand parts and scrap material and the conversion of second hand small electric motors, Nicola Sagala, of Rome, made a circular saw and then a planer.

"With this skeleton plant the POW's made a great deal of furniture for the officers and staff quarters as well as cupboards of all types, etc.

"Sgt Bessoti made an electro-magnet hand for a jeweller to pick up his watch parts. He gave it to me. It was so good for what it was made for that I gave it to the late Mr Frank Mitchell, of Young. It had its own transformer.

"Peter Pierpaoli, of San Cataldo (Sicily), was a sheet metal worker. He was a wizard of his trade. He made washing up tubs, ablution benches, troughs for various uses, buckets, watering cans — all hand made.

"Plant to manufacture anything like this was non-existent.

"It was Peter, after making bending equipment, who showed me how to bend and make angles for downpipes and gutters.

"Antonio Cerretti, of Venice, was by trades a bricklayer and carpenter. He had a remarkable eye for construction. He could make-do and improvise in an extraordinary way because building materials at that time were hard to come by.

"Nickola Posobon, of Milan, was a word turner. As clever as they come. He would draw the parts of a violin or a banjo and then proceed to make the instruments according to his design. He used fox-wedges to put the instruments together. Not a nail or tack would be used.

"Nick made a jewel box out of pieces of wood and concealed a wood lock in its construction. He gave the box to Katie.

Nicola Sagala was a fine furniture maker and cabinet maker.

He brought with him artifacts made while a POW in India from Indian ebony and bones.

He made a beautiful trinket case which he presented to Katie Burge and also a very specimen of cabinet art in a glove box with contrasting inlays. Both were made at Cowra.

"The late Dr Noel Newton was a camp medical officer at the time. He

was a great favourite of the POW's for his diligent care of them. One day Doctor told me he was desperately short of some surgical tools.

"I spoke to Peter Pieraccini about it. He went and got Sgt Denasi.

"Sgt, as soon as he found out from Doctor what he wanted, wasted no time to make them for his theatre use. The instruments were unobtainable at the time.

"Sgt Denasi had been foreman technician in the Fiat factory at Toronto, his home town.

"After war broke out he was commandeered to go to Germany where he worked in the Stuka dive-bomber factory.

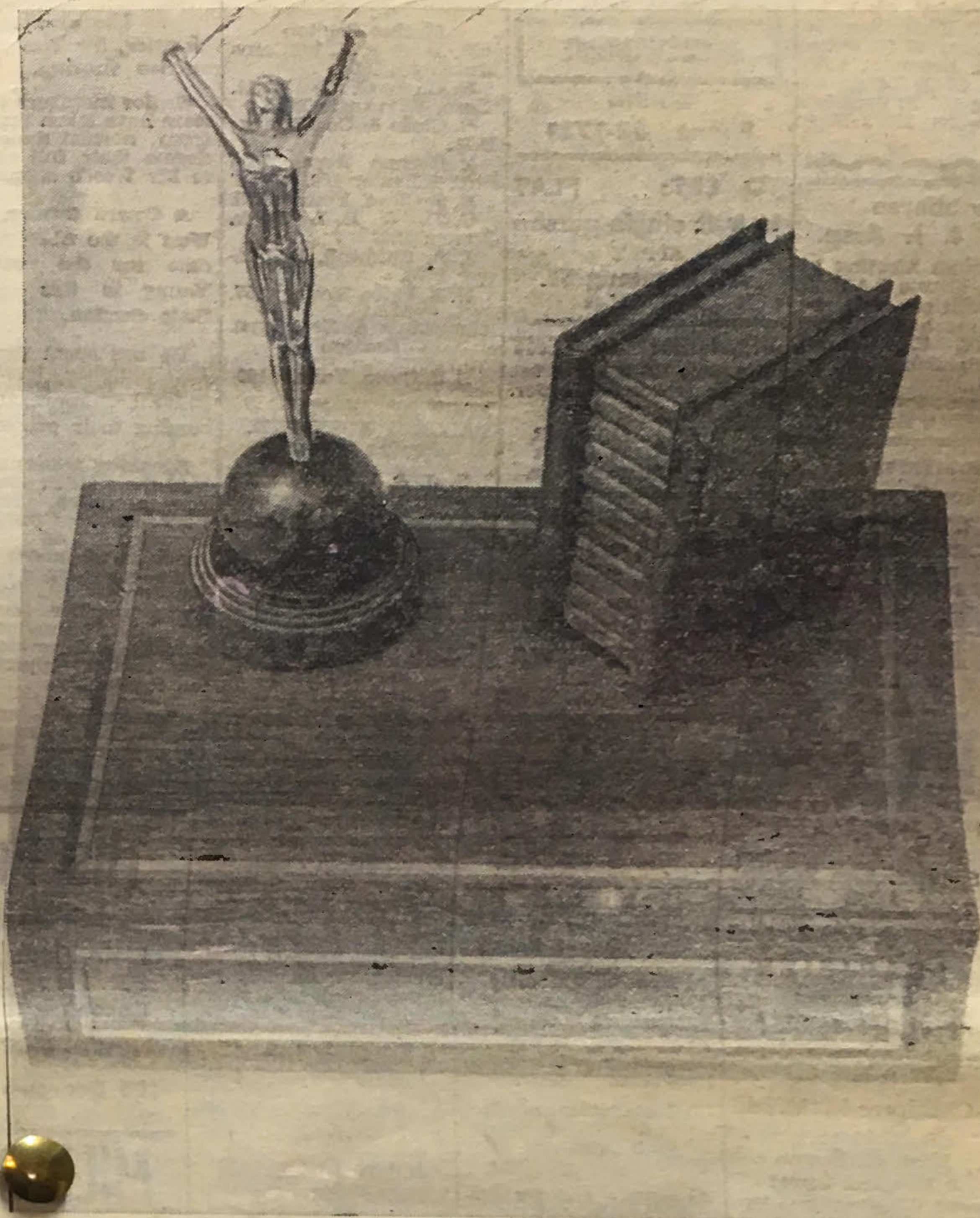
"Given the tools and materials there was almost nothing that this fellow could not make," said Bob.

PS — The late Dr Noel Newton, in post-war years became a Macquarie St Surgeon Specialist. He was widely known in the Young and Cowra districts where he made many special visits in the course of his profession. He died in 1974.

[Because of the eminence he achieved in his profession Dr Newton could have been widely known in many other places of the south west — Ed SW News.]

THE PHOTO FRAME at the rear and the album frame in front were also made by Nicola Sagala.

ABOVE: The glove box of Australian maple with other timber inlays was made by Nickola Posobon. He also made the jewel box (pictured on glove box) which has a secret lock reached by sliding one of the wood pieces seen here. The jewel box is made to appear as a book made by Peter Pieraccini from melted-down pistons is described in the article.



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