



## **CEW Bean Prize Citation – 2018**

**Dr Aaron Pegram**

**‘Surviving the Great War: Australian Prisoners of War on the  
Western Front, 1916-18’**

**PhD, Australian National University**

Aaron Pegram’s thesis provides the first comprehensive study of the well over 3,000 Australian prisoners of war of the Germans on the Western Front during the First World War. The thesis is based on deep empirical research, and he has been careful in his selection of sources, focusing on new or relatively unexamined material rather than relying on the oral histories created in the post-WWII period which are, necessarily, influenced by later ideas and tropes of captivity. In this way, Pegram provides fresh insights into the burgeoning field of captivity studies and takes a nuanced and innovative approach to it, adding significantly to this field of research.

The thesis is structured around the different phases of capture; this format, and Pegram’s strong writing style, make for an engaging and detailed examination of the experience of capture and imprisonment. As well as being well-crafted and drawing on extensive source material, this thesis represents a clear and important intervention in the literature, touching on a broad sweep of Australian First World War history, including the process of capture, wartime prisoner agreements, the Red Cross, prisoner escape and treatment in German captivity. In particular, Pegram explicitly places the process and experience of capture and imprisonment alongside the conduct of the war, stating that ‘capture was also a function of the dynamics of the battlefield’.

Additionally, and importantly, the thesis challenges the overused narrative of victimhood and trauma in military history, shedding light on the agency of these men and how they coped with their captivity. Pegram’s thesis is a worthy recipient of the CEW Bean Prize for Military History in the postgraduate category.