

# 1. Too Independent

Looking back over the years, I cannot recall any single prisoner whom I have known who would have made a greater impact on the general public than Arthur Ernest Halliday. If I happened to be some place where strangers would become aware of my background, I would be asked about Halliday. Speaking with these people, the mention of his name seemed to conjure up an image akin to Ned Kelly or Al Capone, but in my career, I have known many more criminals much more vicious or treacherous than Halliday. A product of the hungry depression days of the 1930s, perhaps under different economic conditions he might never have seen the inside of a gaol.<sup>2</sup>

(Roy Stephenson, Superintendent of Boggo Road Gaol, 1971-74)

Arthur Ernest Halliday was born in Sydney, New South Wales, in April 1910. His childhood was a hard one. By the time he turned twelve his parents were both dead, and he was sent to live in an orphanage for a few years. After this he went to work on a relative's farm, but left after a while because he felt that they were using him.

For several years afterwards he roamed the bush, town-to-town and station-to-station, working at "shearing, fencing, timber-cutting, rabbiting and general farm work".<sup>3</sup> He also tried a bit of gold prospecting near Goulburn. Under the wide-open skies Halliday would have gained the sense of freedom and independence that would be denied him for many of his subsequent years. Much later in his life he would try to recapture those feelings in similar bush surroundings.

Halliday was five feet ten inches tall and his life of labour had given him the lean muscular frame that later led to him receiving the nickname 'Slim'. According to police records of the time, he had a "quiet and pleasant disposition", dressed "fairly well", and was "of clean and sober habits". They also noted that he frequented dance halls.<sup>4</sup> Later on in life he was to recall these times:

It could have all been different. I was in some town in New South Wales, passing through. I met this girl at a dance. She wanted me to stay. Her father was a ganger, and she thought she could get me a job on the railways. But I was too independent.<sup>5</sup>

The rhythm of his early life in the Australian outback was disrupted by the Depression of the 1930s, and work became harder to find. Halliday was later to blame those miserable years for his drift towards petty crime:

Essentially I'm a displaced worker. I was never a parasite or a bludger. All I wanted to do was work. I was denied work in the Depression. Then I got involved in jails.<sup>6</sup>

His crime 'career' was a distinct spiral, with the crimes getting progressively worse as the years passed. It began very quietly in the summer of 1935 when, heading north to Queensland for the sheep-shearing, he picked up his first conviction in the New South Wales town of Goulburn. He was charged with trespassing on the railways, and was given a £1 fine or two days hard labour. He chose to do the two days. This type of offence was very common at the time with drifters in the Outback.

The following month he was caught evading train fares near Boggabilla, New South Wales, and this time he received a £2 fine or 4 days hard labour. Then, just a couple of weeks later, he was caught evading fares again, this time further north in Caboolture, Queensland. At the local Police Court, Halliday received a few days in prison for a crime that he considered as 'nothing'. Embittered, he resolved to commit more crimes when he got out. This sense of injustice would become a constant theme with Halliday, gradually escalating with each sentence he received.

## 1936: The road to Boggo

In April 1936 Halliday was working on a station near the Queensland town of Dirranbandi, when he committed a string of offences that brought his first long spell in prison. He had been employed by a local ring-barking contractor when, after leaving the job one day, he stole his employer's chequebook and went into town. Halliday cashed four cheques, using the employer's name, and committed £50 worth of fraud.