



## **The Brown-Out Strangler** **Private Eddie Leonski US Army**

During WW2 Melbourne was in a Brown-out; one light per household and limited public lighting in the streets, where street lamps were hooded or turned off with curtains closed. Not a full black-out but enough to prevent Japanese Airmen from identifying easy bomb targets on the ground – this occurred through all the war years until August 1945.

Over a two-week period during the brownout between 3-18 May 1942; Private Edward 'Eddie' Joseph Leonski of the US Army prayed on the women of Melbourne.

Growing up in New York City from a dysfunctional family his alcoholic father left the home he shared with his mother and five siblings; the mother took up with another alcoholic partner and she spent time in a mental home suffering from Incipient Schizophrenia. Eddie was close to his mother and seems to have a penchant for drinking and for mental illness himself – his pedigree firmly linked to his future and eventual outcome, maybe a definitive product of 'nature and nurture' all in one.

A weightlifter from an early age the 24-year-old good looking Eddie didn't have to try too hard with the ladies.



Posted to Australia from the United States, Eddie was not an outstanding soldier; his alcohol fueled benders in Melbourne got him the attention of the US Military Police; his Absent Without Leave in March 1942 resulted in his internment in a lockup for a month. Not the last time Eddie would spend behind bars.

During this time Eddie started out like all serial killers, with minor infractions leading to ultimate murder; in his case assaulting women before he went extreme. He attempted to strangle several women however on each occasion was interrupted.

On 3 May 1942 at 2AM, a very drunk Eddie found 40-year-old Ivy Violet McLeod waiting for a tram outside a Dry-Cleaning Store. Eddie strangled her to death and removed all her clothes – he tucked her feet under her thighs in preparation of rape however was disturbed at the scene when he heard footsteps.



Around a week later Eddie was dining in a restaurant when he spoke with Pauline Thompson; married mother of two and a Policeman's wife. In an age of chivalry Eddie escorted the woman home, during this time she started singing; when she stopped singing Eddie was furious and strangled her to death. She was found by a Night Watchmen on the steps of her home on Spring Street Melbourne; near naked, legs apart however not raped.

# Death Railway

## T O U R S

"I got mad and then tore at her, I tore her apart". (Eddie Leonski).

Eddie told one of his mates what he had been up to the past fortnight; but the mate didn't believe him at first. Several more attempted murders occurred by Leonski which culminated in the third and final murder of Gladys Hosking (41 years old).

Gladys was found in yellow mud – the same mud that existed at the time outside Camp Pell – the American Station; she was treated the same as the other

victims pointing to the conclusion it was the same systematic killer. Eddie presented drunk back at his barracks the morning of the discovery; covered in the same yellow mud.

Eddie Leonski had a penchant for women's voices – he would go into a trance after an alcoholic fueled bender and start talking as a woman. He would put his mouth over the victims whilst strangling them and suck in their last breath – in his belief he could take their voice.

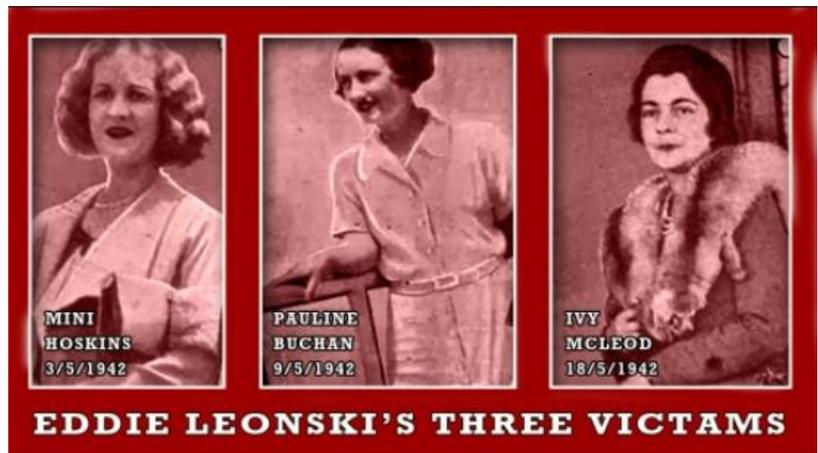
'Fredric Wertham, a noted forensic psychiatrist who never met Leonski, believed he was insane and the murders were prompted by his twisted relationship with his mother:

*"That his three victims were all women considerably older than he was is psychiatrically most significant. He unconsciously linked their voices with his mother. The whole psychological explosion occurred in a period of deprivation when he was away from home and separated from his mother – but not from her dominating image. The deeds constituted symbolic matricide".*

The above sounds like a Hitchcock Movie. Eddie Leonski gave admissions to the murders; it was said he owned up immediately to Police Investigators. Identified in a line-up by surviving victims, he was found guilty of three murders and sentenced to death by the US Military on 16 July 1942. His death warrant signed by General MacArthur himself.

Situated at D Division Pentridge Leonski would hang on 9 November 1942; swift justice at a time when the US Army dealt with their own; to avoid unnecessarily poor relations between two countries, at war and united against a common enemy: Japan.

Eddie would sit in his cell for the months he waited to die, reading Oscar Wilde, it was said he went to his gallows singing a popular song of the time (and ironically): 'It's a Lovely Day Tomorrow' by Vera Lynn. Check it out here: <https://youtu.be/zjX72vIpxsg>



# Death Railway

## T O U R S

Initially buried in Springvale Cemetery in an area local Gravediggers would call him, "The Lone Ranger" because he was buried away from all others; he was later moved to Hawaii.



On 17 February 2018 my wife and I participated in a D Division Ghost Tour. Pentridge closed in 1997 and some buildings retained under National Trust; other areas of the prison converted to units and sold off the plan.

On the tour we got to visit Chopper Read's cell; the condemned cell where prisoners were moved to including Eddie Leonski on his final night on 8 November – to be hung next morning on 9 November. Ronald Ryan being the last man hung in Victoria in 1967.

Cell number 52 is like all other cells; small, cold and life-less with rounded architraves and a small door you must enter side-ways if you have broad shoulders. On the ground is a Witch's Circle drawn on the wooden floor – I'm not sure of it's authenticity or if Eddie was responsible for it.

A volunteer was requested from the 25-people doing the tour; our guide asked for a person who was 'connected' or had any special abilities with the 'other side' so to speak. One lady came forward and said she would volunteer – that she read palms and cards.

She sat in the cell with the door closed for several minutes and we had a chat with the tour guide with low voices about Leonski and his history. After the time elapsed the lady came out of the cell somewhat dizzy and flustered. She said it felt like someone was kneeling on her chest and with two hands she started to grab at her throat. She said she was feeling pressure around her neck.

The Tour Guide told her of the cell inhabitant and we were all quite amazed at the connection. Upstairs to level two we visited the condemned person's cell and stood on the balcony adjacent to the hangmen's noose – the thick cut wood still present where 11 would be stretched in Pentridge's history (including one woman).

Cells inhabitants adjacent Eddie Leonski would later tell Wardens they could hear a woman talking at all hours of the night.

### **Bibliography**

<http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00247b.htm>

<http://www.executedtoday.com/2013/11/09/1942-eddie-leonski/>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/12004306>