

12,000 miles behind barbed wire

The internment of Giorgio Enrico Scola



Edited by Julian Scola

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By
Giorgio Enrico Scola

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This document was compiled in 2024 and draws mainly from the diary written in 1940 by Giorgio Scola. See Editor's Note for a more detailed explanation.

MY FATHER

My father was born Giorgio Enrico Scola, in San Remo, Italy in 1916 of Italian parents. He died George Henry Scola in England in 2006.

He became a British citizen, swearing an oath of allegiance to the Queen in 1953 and was awarded an Imperial Service Medal in 1982 for thirty-two years' service to the government as a Draughtsman/ Assistant Architect.

But in 1940, aged 23, he was arrested and detained by the British authorities. He was one of some 4,000 Italian men, aged 16-70, rounded up from the 20,000 strong Italian community in Britain. He was almost certainly on a MI5 list of dangerous enemy aliens. He was lucky to survive. This is his story, from his own diary.

“At about six p.m. I hear on our wireless at home Mussolini's speech declaring war as from tomorrow. Naturally this news upset Mother and John when I informed them. I have no doubt, John, Peter and myself will be interned soon. John expects it to be tomorrow morning - I complete the packing of my bag commenced two days ago, in anticipation.

Monday 10 June 1940

ARREST

“At 7 am, we are awakened by two plain-clothes policemen, and though startled, I am hardly surprised. They very obligingly give us time to dress and have breakfast and then make a quick search of the house, removing some maps and books and other documents.

“We are taken by car to Henley Police Station where our papers are examined and thence, we find ourselves at Reading Barracks. The policemen are quite decent to us, and they confide that we shall probably be sent to one of the islands. We spend the morning on a tennis lawn under guard — here we meet a dozen or so Italians and Germans of the district.

“We have lunch & supper. served by soldiers on tin plates on rough trestles - the food is the same as for the Army. We can buy cigarettes, chocolates, magazines etc. Our razorblades and knives have been taken and our passports, registration books, etc. This first day seemed very long, and we wonder what lies ahead of us! Naturally, I cannot sleep the first night which seems endless.

Tuesday 11 June

“After a soldier's breakfast we buy papers and toward mid-morning we are all packed onto a coach for an unknown destination - nobody will say a word! There are several policemen and two armed sentries aboard. We stop at a country pub on Salisbury Plain for an alfresco meal which everybody enjoys - it almost seems like an outing. We pass Salisbury, Axminster, Exeter, Torquay, to Paignton. Naturally, John and I eagerly follow the route but, even after Exeter, we are mystified as to our destination.

Editor's note - Germans and Austrians in South-East and East England had already been arrested and interned in May 1940 as fear of invasion mounted. This is probably why my father, and his brother(s), expected to be arrested.

All subsequent text boxes are editor's notes with brief background or explanatory information.

“Towards evening we arrive at our camp (former Dixon's Holiday Camp). The camp is surrounded by barbed-wire and guarded with sentries with fixed-bayonets. We are by now desperately hungry, but we are first thoroughly searched by the military who remove razorblades, my guidebooks, photograph albums, various letters, etc. for which I sign. At last, we are given something to eat. We are allotted three to a hut, which John and I share with ‘vedovato’ [Italian for widowed] of Maidenhead. We are given three blankets and sleep on the floor of our hut. We get to sleep feeling rather resentful at our treatment. There is no lighting in the chalet. Mains water is provided by taps outside the chalets and there are fairly good showers, baths and lavatory accommodation. All our money was taken away.

Wednesday 12 June

“Behind the rows of chalets is a fairly large grassy space on which we can exercise and sun-bathe. We get three quite inadequate meals per day with tea occasionally. The soldiers, particularly the sergeants and officers, are quite decent.

“Adjoining our camp there is a German camp, which is luxurious in comparison to ours - they have even planted flowerbeds and lettuces. The kitchen staff is entirely made up from our own number who obviously do well for themselves. Even on the first day we feel the monotony. Before evening most of us are given a proper mattress on which we sleep in comparative luxury - of course, we miss sheets and pillows etc.

Thursday 13 June

“To our relief, we are allowed to send home special ‘camp’ letters. Routine day with time to kill. Since leaving Reading we have not been allowed to hear from the outside world in any way.

Friday 14 June

“A very inadequately stocked canteen is opened but sells out of nearly everything the first day.

Saturday 15 June

“We buy from the canteen, through our credit account, and since we are always hungry, we buy, if possible, up to the maximum of 1-6d. per day of chocolate, biscuits, cheese, fruit, etc.

“The weather is very fine, and I get quite brown. I make a few friends. There are some Jews amongst us, but these keep to themselves. We are always hoping for letters to come for us, but nothing ever comes. We hear various rumours as to the war which keeps us more or less up to date. Except for occasional jobs such as cleaning the latrine and peeling potatoes, I have nothing to do. I write two more letters, one to Helen, my friend. Between ourselves we are always discussing our prospects, and we always find something to grumble at. Roll call is now instituted morning and evening. On the last couple of days, the canteen is transferred to the bar of the large meeting hall, and now even beer is sold - we are also able to play at the trestle-tables. During the week the Germans next door leave, presumably for the Isle of Man.

Tuesday 18 to Sunday 23 June

“On Monday morning we are roused very early and after the usual breakfast we are told to pack up everything, and before leaving we are given a hunk of bread and meat, which is our food allowance for the journey ahead. There are various rumours as to our destination. We, that is about 250 Italians, are taken in groups by coach to the station in Paignton - great crowds line the streets in curiosity.

“I spot The Wrekin [a Shropshire hill with prehistoric fort] in the distance, then Crewe, Manchester, to Bury. The landscape is depressing and dirty.

WARTH MILLS

“It is dusk and in the drizzling rain we are herded together on the road outside the station. Our spirits are at the very lowest ebb with this latest move. Our bags are put on to a van and under heavy guard we are marched through the drab streets of Bury to a ghastly-looking factory or mill which has lights almost fully ablaze - our hearts sink. As before on these journeys we are all desperately hungry, not having eaten since near Torquay and only had some tea at Shrewsbury.

“In a large wooden-floored upper working room of the mill in which we are all to be accommodated, a tin plate, bowl and fork and spoon is given to us, and we get something to eat which barely satisfies us. We are each given a straw mattress which with two blankets we finally try to get some sleep, on the floor, we are all perplexed and rather annoyed. Before falling asleep we are startled by an air raid warning but after a few minutes we get the all-clear.

Monday 24 June

“On getting up the following morning we have to queue up and are escorted in small groups under armed guard to the washhouse and lavatories. These are tumble-down, filthy and indescribably primitive as well as being hopelessly inadequate. The WCs defy description. After this ordeal we have to queue up for about twenty minutes for a most inadequate breakfast which we have to eat as best we can. We are told by others already installed here that this place is a condemned mill and there are approximately 1,800 crowded into it. Some of the internees form the permanent staff who do all the cleaning etc and these have camp-beds to sleep on in some terribly overcrowded ground-floor rooms.

“After breakfast we are thoroughly searched and even my food is stolen, we also have a medical test. John and I and many other young fellows are told to move down to a ground-floor workroom which has a stone floor. In this room people spit freely as well as swearing continually. But in comparison to the previous accommodation the air is good. The meals, as they are cooked by the many Italian chefs here, are good but entirely inadequate. Consequently, we live for mealtime. The canteen is barred to the Paignton group as we are not given any of our money back, and it is galling to see others buy whatever they please and eat it in front of us. John and I try to make a bed with some dirty wooden boards taken from the rubbish dump, this is to keep us off the filthy stone floor.

“Time passes on leaden wings as there is nothing to do here except eat and sleep and walk round the dusty and cramped fly-blown yard, this is terribly crowded, and we are often pressed up against the barbed wire surrounding the camp. Later in the week we are allowed out twice a day in the soldiers' camp where there is grass to walk on.

“Typical meals are as follows: Breakfast - a slice of bread with margarine and jam and some porridge and bowl of strong coffee. Lunch - Generally minestrone and boiled meat, potatoes and beans, and bread. Supper - fish or cheese and jam, a slice of bread and coffee. In the yard there is nearly always a whiff of either the latrines or dustbins.

“We are still awaiting letters - how we curse the authorities! We are all longing to leave this hell and on Saturday we hear a rumour that some are leaving probably for the Isle tomorrow. From time to time, we hear rumours on the progress of the war. Later in the day just 17 from the Paignton group, including myself, but not John, is selected to go with a very large group tomorrow after lunch. Naturally we are both very indignant and John appeals to the Major in command, but he says the matter is beyond his control. This seems a bit much and very unfair - why separate us?

Tuesday 25 to Saturday 29 June

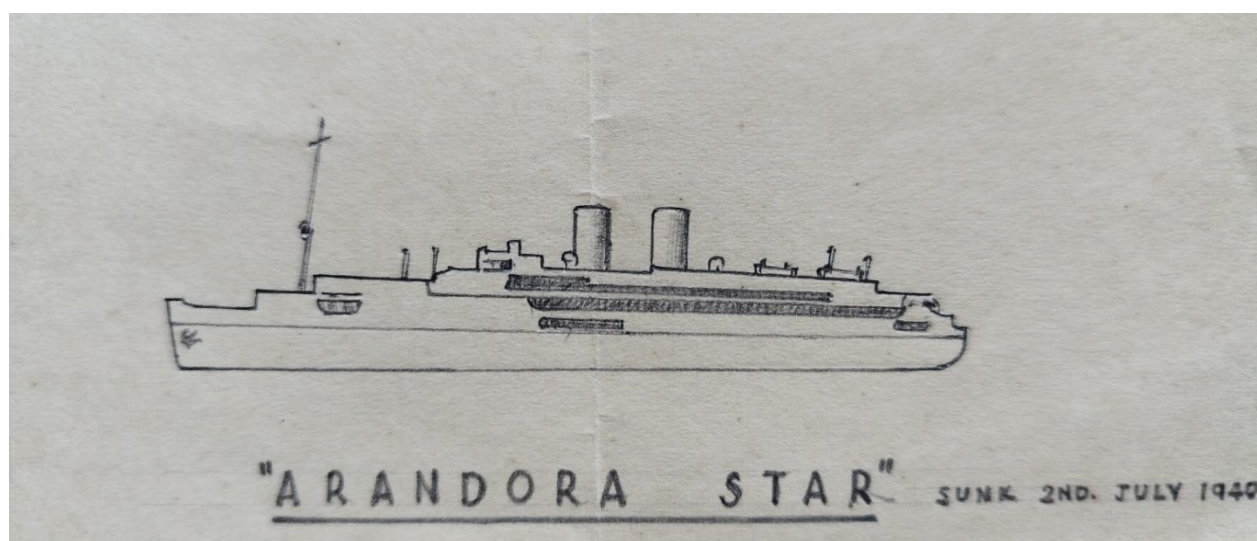
Warth Mills, a derelict cotton mill in Bury, was described by Francois Lafitte as ‘by far the worst internment camp’ in his book ‘The Internment of Aliens’ (see ‘Further reading’ for the reference). Lafitte writes “All our accounts of this notorious ‘transit camp’ tally: it is a disused factory falling to pieces, rat-infested, with rotten floors, broken windows and a broken glass roof.”

ARANDORA STAR

“On Sunday, after the usual meal, we have to deposit our money, matches or lighters and our group of about 750 marches from the camp to the station after an enthusiastic send-off from the remainder, watched by many local inhabitants. John sees me leave and I can see he looks rather unhappy. I feel very depressed leaving John and everybody else I know behind, but I am helpless! I am convinced that we are going to Liverpool and thence to the Isle of Man, and sure enough we go through Manchester and through pleasant, flat countryside on to Liverpool and down through the goods station to the quayside.

“To my horror I find a large liner (the Arandora Star) alongside and after the medical officer looks everyone in the eyes, we mount the gangway and are taken down to our cabins (though not everyone is lucky in this respect). I am allotted to one which I have to share with three other rather ‘antipatico’ [disagreeable] middle-aged men and as I am young, I sleep on the floor. We have to remain below for several hours till the evening when I look over the side to the Liverpool skyline. Although I still hope that we shall be landed at the Isle of Man, everything points to a long journey which means Canada — however, this seems unbelievable! Despite our anxiety we must make the best of our predicament and after a scramble to eat well after midnight (in the terrible confusion on board), I try to get some sleep — it is very hot and cramped and I sleep in my clothes.

Sunday 30 June



Drawing by Giorgio Enrico Scola

“We are wakened early, and I immediately go on deck to find that there is high land to port, which I take to be the Welsh coast. After a sketchy and improvised breakfast I remain on deck most of the day eagerly trying to follow our route - the ship takes a zig-zag course all day - towards midday the high mountains to port slip away and shortly what appears to be an island appears on the starboard

bow - it is high land and I begin to hope that this is the Isle of Man and that we shall after all be dropped here. However, we round the coast and make off in a North-Westerly direction keeping the land in sight to starboard.

“Italian and German internees are all mixed up on board and we are very much overcrowded. Later we get the run of the deck, which in some places is patrolled by sentries (men from Dunkirk). The ship is painted battleship grey throughout. Now although furious about it, we are all more or less resigned to going to Canada. As I am hungry, I accept an incredible sandwich of jam and sardines from a colleague which I find revolting! I spot just one familiar face on board. Just before dusk we see the last of land to port, which I believe to be Northern Ireland, I lie down to sleep in the stuffy cabin in my shirt and trousers only.

Monday 1 July

“Whilst dozing round about 6.50 am. I am shaken by a loud dull thud which makes the whole ship tremble, whilst the lights go out simultaneously. I realise that we have either been mined or torpedoed, consequently without losing a moment I wake up the one man still asleep in the cabin and help him to find his life belt in the pitch darkness, as well as putting on my own. There is a babble of sound out in the dark corridor but grabbing the fellow's hand I tell him to follow me, but after a little while in the general confusion he lags behind and disappears, I go on and find my way up to the upper boat deck which is already fairly full.

“There is no sign of any organised attempt by the crew to control matters and in fact no crew is visible. Nearby whilst a boat is being frantically lowered the ropes on one side give way and the boat tips to vertical emptying its human cargo. Another nearby boat has its lowering tackle damaged and won't budge. Strangely enough I do not get a picture of the scene as a whole, nor do I scan the water below - however there is scarcely any trace of real panic and I was told afterward by many an eye-witness that the majority of those on deck stayed there 'till it was too late to save themselves - others instead jumped overboard with some falling in the water, but others killing themselves instantly on rafts and lifeboats below. Another thing which claimed many victims was the reckless way pieces of wood, rafts, etc were flung overboard onto the crowded water below. It also seemed evident that many must have been trapped down below in the dark cabins and corridors, and many a soldier was left still on guard.

“I stand near the rail awaiting my chance, as I realise that my best chance is to get into the water as soon as possible with the ship listing and knowing as I do that the chance of a quick rescue is considerable, I see my opportunity in a line which has been tied from the rail to a boat down below and already one or two are shinning down it. I await my turn, slip over the side just as I am and so down the rope - before the boat is reached, I lose my grip and fall into the water very close to the side of the ship. I cough and splutter in the salty water, but luckily two pairs of helping hands soon attempt to haul me aboard, but due to the cumbersome lifebelt, they fail - they then try again and with a superhuman effort on my part they manage to haul me in puffing and exhausted.

“I then gradually help with others to haul one or two struggling in the water, into the boat - one is in serious danger of being crushed between the ship and the boat. After a few minutes I drop down into the bottom of the boat feeling absolutely tired out and not a little seasick due to the motion of the boat - from now till when we are rescued, I almost lose all interest in the proceedings as I feel absolutely ghastly.

“The boat is soon full, and the order is to leave the fast-sinking ship and from time to time I hear that one or two in the water are picked up in an exhausted state. Then there is a general cry that the ship is going down stern first to its last plunge, but even this doesn't rouse me from my stupor. After a time, it appears that the plug is missing and the water is rising fast in the boat, and after a frantic

search it is found. I and several others feel alternately sick and sleepy, as well as trembling in the cold wind - as I haven't anything in my stomach. I choke and splutter in my efforts to vomit. By dint of hard rowing our boat keeps near the rest of the lifeboats and rafts.

“Before midday, to our unbounded joy a Sunderland flying boat circles over us and drops a message saying that a ship is on the way. Between one and two pm. a ship is sighted, and it turns out to be a destroyer which gradually picks up all the survivors and between 3 and 4 pm we row alongside and are helped over the side of the Canadian destroyer ‘St Laurent’.

“We are eagerly helped below by the willing sailors who provide many with old clothes as well as rum, biscuits, and hot cocoa. I get some cocoa and shed my wet clothes in exchange for a warm blanket in which I doze in the sailors’ mess for an hour or so. Then I go down into the boiler room to dry out but find I have to stay down there for the night with several others - I wear down an endless night squatting on the steel floor of the overcrowded room (I have about a square yard of wet and greasy floor space). We are guarded by armed Canadian sailors who swap yarns with us and help us in every way they can - we get some biscuits and cocoa during the night but at last, when morning comes, although most of the others get a good breakfast, we get nothing.

Tuesday 2 July

The Arandora Star was torpedoed by U-47 commanded by Gunther Prien according to the book ‘Collar the Lot’ (see ‘Further Reading’ for the reference). 486 Italians and 175 Germans died. Among the dead were Decio Anzani, secretary of the London branch of the Italian League for the Rights of Man, catering workers from the Ritz and the Savoy, Karl Olbrisch a former metal worker and Communist member of the German Parliament, and Louis Weber a leading anti-Nazi in the German Seamen’s Union. Home Secretary John Anderson said that the Italians on the Arandora Star had been selected by MI5 (which may have been the intention but was not the result). The authors of ‘Collar the Lot’ claim that the sinking of the Arandora Star led to the British internment and deportation policy to be reversed.

“In the morning, we leave the destroyer at Greenock on the Clyde. Bare-footed and ill-clad most of us 254 odd Italian survivors are paraded out on the cobbled quay in the cold morning - nearly 60 of our number go to hospital. About 500 Italians have perished including some that I knew. Naturally I have lost all the belongings I had with me including my diary but some on board lost small fortunes. With people looking on, we are marched under guard through the streets like a column of tramps and are taken to a barracks (a converted factory) overlooking the river. I am desperately hungry and after waiting an hour or two in a crowded hall we all get a slice of corned beef on bread and hot tea — it does taste good! I am very cold until blankets are provided — some old clothes are distributed later sent by the local priest. We get an inadequate tea and supper which we have to eat with our hands. We have to sleep terribly crowded together on the wooden floor without mattresses. There is no mention of us being officially refunded in any way for our losses and we haven't even the means to keep clean. The German survivors are accommodated in another room.

Wednesday 3 July

“We are wakened very early to our disgust as we are very tired after our experiences and are given starvation rations for breakfast. We are told that we shall leave this morning. Each of us is then given a complete set of Army clothes, minus however an overcoat for which we long later. We pack up our miserable little bundle of rags and are then taken to the station at Greenock in small groups by lorry. Lunch, which consists of corned-beef and ships' biscuits, is provided. At Carlisle we stop at a platform and are stared at by bewildered civilians who are surprised to see our guards, and so to Birkenhead.

“I was almost hoping to return to Bury again where I might join John, but when we arrive at Birkenhead my heart sinks as it seems probable that me shall be ferried across to a waiting liner and be sent out again without any rest. But to everyone's relief we are taken in coaches through the town, and out into the country where we soon turn into a large tent encampment known as Arrowe Park - it is very spacious, and the air seems very bracing. We all wish that we could stay here 'till the end of the war and also rest for a while.

“I am quartered with three others in a bell tent which is very spacious and cosy. We are given the usual blankets and culinary equipment and the cooks that are left amongst us get to work at the open-air stoves and produce simple but tasty inadequate food, similar to Bury. Before retiring I take a good walk round the grounds which are full of tents. The washing and lavatory accommodation is ample, very hygienic and efficient. However, we still have no soap, toothbrush, etc.

Thursday 4 July

“Normal camp routine. We send a letter home to say that we are safe. I help to do some cleaning as well as help in packing up some tents. Everyone is contented here because it is so pleasant and restful after what we have been through. The bulk of our number are middle-aged or older and there are about a dozen young fellows - most of them being in the catering business. I am a rare exception.

Friday 5 July

“After breakfast we hear that we are leaving today. We might have guessed this was too good to be true, that things were too pleasant and easy here. We fear the worst and that means Canada. All the younger people including myself are put to work to clean up the camp - they certainly make good use of us though the sergeants are not unkind. After a generous lunch which consists mainly of a minestrone, the same coaches as before pick us up and we proceed through Birkenhead and, to my surprise, under the Mersey Tunnel and on to a dismal-looking drill hall in the working-class district of Edgehill - everyone breathes a sigh of relief that, at least, we have got a little longer. All the local inhabitants and kids look on as if we are wild animals at a circus. We are all crowded into the large drill hall which has very little natural light. The authorities give us the usual blankets and most of us get straw mattresses which we spread onto the stone floor - every available square inch of floor-space seems to be occupied. Washing accommodation is again rather primitive and inadequate. For exercise we are allowed out in the parade ground surrounded by armed guards. The food appears to be much the same as that of our guards. I sleep reasonably well.

Saturday 6 July

“We live in comparative luxury after what went before - we have almost three ample meals each day, newspapers are allowed, clothes can be ordered by some (which they later regret), telegrams are sent by those who still have some money with them, and we even have a radio. On top of this the second Lieutenant is really decent and does everything he can to help us, the soldiers too are inclined to be friendly and help to buy the lucky ones cigarettes, etc. Even some of the inhabitants nearby manage to buy bread and chocolates for those who have the money. We are all wondering how long it will be now before we are once again at sea. For sheer boredom this is perhaps the worst place except for Bury. The hours seem endless.

Sunday 7 July

“Usual routine day. We are allowed to write a letter. The brightest periods of the day are mealtimes.

Monday 8 July

“We hear from semi-official sources that we shall be leaving tomorrow and are assured by an officer that we shall definitely not be going to Canada but somewhere not too far. This is cheering news as we are confident that this means the Isle of Man.

Tuesday 9 July

DUNERA

“After lunch we clean up the place and then line up outside in the street watched by a large crowd — however two of our number, Bianchi and Treves, leave on their own for Edinburgh and probable freedom, I wonder how they have wangled it. In our strange clothes or uniforms with all our possessions in miserable little bundles in our hands we make a pathetic picture struggling through Liverpool. To make things worse it begins to rain and like many others without overcoats, I get soaked. We are escorted by armed guards. In the grimy and bleak working-class districts, the inhabitants are not unfriendly, but in the main shopping streets we are stared at very coldly by the more affluent people.

“Naturally I am both curious and anxious to know where we are going - it turns out to be the docks and to my horror we turn into the same dock where we started on our ill-fated voyage. I still hope that one of the smaller Isle of Man steamers will sail from here. Surely the authorities wouldn't have the nerve to send us on a long voyage without even an overcoat, not to mention toilet necessities, etc? I then notice one of the 14,000-ton Anchor-Donaldson liners at anchor in mid-stream, which fills me with apprehension. We are soon herded into a shed on the dockside and packed together like sardines, we have to wait impatiently for several hours during which we are given a jam sandwich. We are all depressed, but we can do nothing about it. To my surprise, a fairly large modern-looking motor vessel comes alongside the dock and ties up right in front of us. The ship is painted grey throughout. It seems to be full of troops. I then notice some barbed wire being unloaded and some large cases being loaded on board.

“We are then searched almost apologetically by an officer for watches, lighters etc. Then it is time to go aboard and before going up the gangway we are one by one roughly manhandled and not only our belongings, but our person is minutely searched, and the contents of our pockets ruthlessly emptied. Any word of protest is greeted by a blow of some sort, even officers taking part. Luckily, I have nothing of value to lose so my greatest loss is my diary, but many lose watches, mementoes, etc. This behaviour is quite unbelievable especially as we have done nothing to warrant it, or was our crime the fact that we were saved from the Arandora Star, whilst most of the soldiers aboard perished? This is a hard pill to swallow. I might add that we have been assured, as on previous occasions, that all our deposited belongings, letters, etc. will be sent on to our permanent camp. At Birkenhead and Liverpool, they had telegrams and letters awaiting us, but these were deliberately withheld it would seem.

“As we are roughly hustled below by a bunch of hard and cruel-looking soldiers I notice the name of the ship is the Dunera. It later appears that she is now a troopship. With many an oath we are all herded to our allotted tables in one large mess room aft - over 200 of us in a space about 50 ft x 30 ft x 7 ft in height [approx. 15x9x2 metres]. Artificial light and ventilation are provided. On a lower deck little more than a corridor serving also as a gangway is provided to enable several hundred of us to see the light of day and to get some fresh air - this space is enclosed to our horror with barbed-wire so that any hope of escape is slight. We look round our stuffy prison with looks of despair - perhaps a fortnight under these conditions, coupled with considerable danger, makes the future look pretty black. Whilst thinking in this vein a clique of sergeants and soldiers begin a further search of us and everything we may have left - this is my fifth since internment. I am roughly searched by a private and then as I return to my seat a sergeant accosts me with the intention of despoiling me again - I give him a firm answer which infuriates him - "I'll teach you to be civil, I'm a sergeant I am" he roars. I am almost contemptuous with him as it is obvious that all the sergeants are full of bullying, coarse, foul-mouthed threats! They are apparently enjoying this high-handed treatment. This time all cigarettes, valuables, money, rings, paper and toilet necessities are flung on the floor and then collected by a gang of soldiers into sacks!

“Later on, we are given some food which again we eat with our hands. As in the case of the Arandora Star, nothing is organised yet. To my disgust, we are not given any form of bedding, and we all have to make the best of things for the night by laying on the wooden boards, some on the tables, on benches and I under a table. I presume we will leave in the early morning.

Wednesday 10 July

“I manage to snatch a little sleep despite the awful conditions, and I am up at dawn to see if we have moved. I am surprised to find that we are well out at sea, but low-lying land can be seen to starboard.

“I go below again and on returning on deck I find to my great relief that we are accompanied by the liner Antonia which I noticed at Liverpool and escorted by a destroyer which always keeps ahead of us - we sail a zig-zag course as on the Arandora Star. At last plates, cutlery and dishes are provided and for the four daily meals I make it my job with another helper to bring down the food from our galley. This generally means queuing for about twenty minutes at every meal - the rest take it in turn to wash up with hot salt water under trying conditions. The food is good but badly cooked and though plentiful in comparison with past experiences, is still inadequate. In the evening, we are all provided with hammocks and two blankets. Some sling these from the ceiling whilst others spread out on the floor, there is scarcely room to move about the mess at all. I try to sleep in a hammock for the very first time, but as the heat is enormous, I hardly sleep a wink.

Thursday 11 July

“Some time after breakfast when most of us, including the Germans in the mess below, are still in our quarters, we are horrified to hear a loud explosion, quickly followed by another - our nerves already on edge with the previous experience behind us. One and all make a rush for the door at the head of the stairs, which is found to be locked - there are shouts and cries but all to no avail until two or three men get hold of a piece of wood and attempt to batter down some wooden panels. The air is stifling, and I am almost crushed - everyone fears the worse: that we are sinking and that we won't have a chance to escape. The ram breaks through and as one man is starting to get through to the deck, several soldiers rush up pointing fixed bayonets through the opening and tell us to calm down as everything is alright - none of us believe them and refuse to go down, at which one threatens to fire. As there is no move, we hear an ear-splitting noise which temporarily deafens me and with this we decide to go back to our mess-room.

“Later when everything gets back to normal, various rumours come through - some say it was exploding depth-charges, a torpedo that didn't explode and an internal explosion. We never learn the truth! This naturally makes us jittery for the next few days and every sound makes us start.

“During those first days owing to the considerable motion of the ship, I don't feel up to scratch, generally having a headache, and not eating at all normally. Up on our restricted deck space which is well wired-in, we come into contact with refugees and Germans (including Nazis and captured merchant sailors), some of these are accommodated under similar conditions forward and others are below our mess room, most of them have come from the Isle of Man. Altogether there are about 2,000 internees and refugees aboard, several hundred soldiers and an Indian crew.

Friday 12 July

“By only a fraction did the Dunera avoid sharing the fate of the Arandora Star. Moments after the U-56 fired, Oberleutnant Harms observed the Dunera make a 40° turn to starboard. It is clear that the turn was merely a standard precautionary manoeuvre, and not the result of a lookout's warning. Harms did not know just how close he came to sinking the Dunera, making the brief, rueful observation in his log that the torpedoes had passed ahead of the Dunera and exploded harmlessly some way beyond.”

Collar the Lot by Peter and Leni Gillman

“We begin to settle down to the unbearably monotonous routine, the highlights being mealtimes. Although I am very curious to know in which direction we are going, as the sky for some days past has been overcast, I cannot make use of the sun - many say that we have been going North-West, but from the last glimpse of land noticed on Thursday, I believe we rounded Southern Ireland and have probably been heading West or South-West.

“The Antonia and the destroyer leave us, and we trust it won't be to our fate, however I feel that we are out of the most dangerous zone. What disturbs a little is if we are going to Canada why don't we keep in convoy all the way? I hardly sleep at all at night, consequently during the daytime I invariably feel washed-out.

Saturday 13 July

“On Sunday morning we have a service in remembrance of the victims [of the Arandora Star].

“The lavatory accommodation provided is quite inadequate for the numbers that have to use it, most of whom have to surge through our mess to reach it. There is virtually a continuous procession to and fro throughout the day. The best feature of the washing facilities are the hot and cold sea-water showers which is very helpful in keeping us clean.

Sunday 14 July

“By now we are beginning to be reconciled to our miserable conditions but as the weather is improving and we get quite a lot of sun, I notice that we are heading South or South-West, still zigzagging. This goes on for some days till, despite much scepticism and ridicule, I come to the conclusion that we are definitely not going to Canada! At last, nearly everyone comes round to this conclusion except some blinding themselves to the facts.

“Later on in the week we begin to notice dolphins jumping out of the blue waters, as well as shoals of very small flying-fish. The soldiers change into tropical kit complete with sun-helmets; special canvas wind-catchers are lowered down into the holds to provide more air. This causes much speculation and some anxiety. Naturally I am on the limited space on deck as much as possible, but we are so packed together behind the barbed wire that it is almost better below. To my joy a twenty-minute period of exercise is provided nearly every morning now on the upper decks and as we march round, we are shouted at by idle sergeants and sentries and threatened by four machine-guns, one at each corner of the deck. I have to walk round in my heavy hobnail boots which I find very tiring.

“We hear that our belongings which were confiscated have been thrown overboard by the soldiers, assisted by some of our own number. Some say many suitcases were bayoneted and the contents flung out. Some of the confiscated clothes are distributed in our mess and I get a pair of black sports knickers [loose-fitting short trousers].

“Fertile imaginations, perhaps backed by something more reliable, suggest that we may be going to Australia or the West Indies. If it is Australia, then the journey may take two months - I can't believe it! There is just nothing to do all day long except eating - meals are rather inadequate and quite unimaginative. Nothing is ever cooked properly, being either burnt or not even cooked.

“We, the survivors of the Arandora Star are not supposed to shave as our razors were supposed to have been taken, nevertheless many make good use of the razor. On Sunday before breakfast, volunteers are called for to scrub the decks - I volunteer as it is a new experience but find it really tiring work, not being used to vigorous exercise. At tea an apple each is provided - I welcome the first fresh fruit I have eaten since Paignton.

“There are strong rumours that we are going to Australia, calling at Freetown, Sierra Leone, and Cape

Town. I am resigned now to anything and there seems to be a good reason of the war finishing before we land.

“On Monday, after exercises, going down to our mess both we and the Germans (mainly refugees) are hustled down the stairs by a mixed squad of privates and sergeants, we see our belongings strewn all over the floor and tables. One by one we are thoroughly searched with considerable roughness, and many have rings, money, cigarettes, etc. removed. One refugee is partly pushed and partly kicked down our stairs because he says he cannot take his ring off unless they cut off his finger. Another gets a bayonet wound in the back for answering back, whilst another gets a resounding slap on his face. The gang leave us to tidy up and we find razors, watches, etc. It is plain robbery by the sergeants. Most of the crew are quite decent and even help to smuggle things in from their canteen. The soldiers on board take turns of sentry duty outside our barbed-wire enclosure. In comparison with some of the Germans, they are rather poor specimens - some are quite small and even cross-eyed. The food generally is now more tasty and ample.

Extracts from Tuesday 16 July to Monday 22 July

Three British officers were court-martialled for their treatment of the internees on the Dunera. A sergeant major was given a year in prison after being found guilty of ten charges of theft, and the Commander of the British troops on the ship was severely reprimanded. Internees made 1,600 claims for compensation and the British Government paid out over 30,000 pounds (the equivalent of over 1.6 million pounds today). In a memo to the Australian authorities the Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Scott, gives his view about the internees, describing the Nazi Germans as “fine types, honest and straightforward, and extremely well-disciplined”, the Italians as “filthy in their habits, without a vestige of discipline, and are cowards” and the German and Austrian Jews as “subversive liars, demanding and arrogant”. All from ‘Collar the lot’ by Peter and Leni Gillman.

“On exercise I am amazed to see a news bulletin from Cape Verde pinned up on the soldiers' deck and this, together with the rumours that we expect to be calling at Freetown tomorrow, make me accept the Australia suggestion.

“Many ridicule this idea, but the fact that the sun is almost overhead at midday is conclusive enough. I try to sleep on the floor as it is unbearably hot in the hammock, and I have had very little sleep since coming on board. I can sleep if it is calm but if there is much movement, the vibration and the swish of the waves keep me awake however tired I may be.

Tuesday 23 July

“After breakfast I, with many others, crowd on deck in anticipation of sighting land and, we soon sight in the distance some high peaks which are just discernible in the slight haze. Ahead I am surprised to see a forest of masts and funnels, of ships apparently at anchor offshore. At about mid-day we drop anchor perhaps a mile offshore, surrounded by dozens of ships of all types - in fact it seems as if quite a large part of the British mercantile fleet is sheltering here. At dusk after being re-fuelled by a supply ship, we weigh anchor and leave Sierra Leone.

Wednesday 24 July

“Although there are all classes and types of people here and we have an excellent opportunity of making acquaintances, I have not made any real friends as I find little in common with either the refugees or some of the Italians here. I am quite friendly with a German-Jew called Fritz, he says that from his experiences of a camp in Kent and here on board, he has not a very favourable opinion of the English. The only Italian who I can converse sensibly with is one Boggio who is quite an expert in finance and economics. Unfortunately, nearly all the rest of the Italians are in the restaurant or cafe

business ranging from managers to waiters. As in the previous camps, I have heard more swear-words than are good for any man. Most of them appear to be fairly patriotic and steady in their political outlook. There is one other Italian I find quite interesting who was a teacher and had been working in a school at Southampton and Reading.

“This morning, I hear from Fritz that, last night, a lone sergeant without any weapons came down to their mess and removed many watches and rings from the sleepers. But perhaps he dreamt it? The small group of Nazis are quartered in the same mess as the refugees, but although they keep to themselves, they are not particularly aggressive toward them. Now there is more fresh water available for drinking, but we are expected to keep clean with hot salt water without soap. Since a day or so before we arrived at Freetown, we have enjoyed the great privilege of having our enclosure considerably enlarged and extended from one side of the ship to the other. A rumour is spread that in about five days’ time we shall be calling at Victoria in the Cameroons to fill up with fresh water.

Thursday 25 July

“Today is just one of many typical days of our routine and can be described as follows: we are unofficially roused at about 6.30, after which we have to queue up if we want a wash (sometimes it is almost impossible due to the crowds). Before breakfast I generally bring down the food which is served at about 9 am. I may spend the morning partly on deck and partly below reading. Whilst a work-party washes the floor of our mess, we go out for our exercises which average about 20 minutes (at first, we are ordered to walk barefooted) between 10 and 11 am. At about this time there is sick parade for those who want to see the doctor, there are always quite a few in the hospital. At about midday we have lunch and, in the afternoon, many including myself lie down.

“Twice a week, at tea-time, we get an apple each. Tea is at 4 pm. After this I may have a shower and then simply wear down the time till supper, at 7 pm. At about 9.30 pm we are all cleared from the deck, and this is the signal for the Rosary to be said in our Mess by one of our internees. Then, as before breakfast, we get a flood of the Germans surging through our mess to get to the lavatory. We then gradually settle down to sleep and if we can sleep, the long monotonous day is over.

“Every day a certain number of us are allowed to sleep on deck, which is a great advantage whilst the weather is warm. Down below the atmosphere is generally stifling. For a few days now I have found a place for my hammock under the table and since the boat has been fairly steady since leaving Freetown, I sleep a little better but invariably wake up once or twice during the night - I have no change of clothing for the night, and I just take off my socks and boots.

“A large number of refugees and internees wear nothing but a pair of improvised trunks, but I reserve these for warmer weather. In the evening, I am exasperated to find that my hammock has been pinched so tonight I have to lie down surrounded by others’ boots, feet, brooms, etc. on the dirty, bare boards - I spend a most uncomfortable night and hardly a moments sleep. Today I hear a rumour that tomorrow we shall be calling somewhere on the Gold Coast.

Friday 26 July

“I wake up with a headache and feel thoroughly washed out - I can't even wash properly. I go out on deck and watch dawn breaking - it is a cold dull day. After our customary morning trot round the deck, I sight low-lying land a long way off on the port bow. It is the port of Takoradi on the Gold-Coast.

Saturday 27 July

“Fresh water is at last available today for washing.

Sunday 28 July

“In the morning, I have my first haircut since being interned, but therefore miss exercises. There is nothing to do all day unless I am lucky enough to get hold of a book. Am getting sick and tired of this inactivity and stagnation. Partly because I am tired, and partly out of boredom, I have a nap on the floor and then have a shower to clear my head.

Wednesday 31 July

“Had a terrible night - kept awake by the swaying and continuous creaking of the ship - I get up feeling dizzy. It is a dull, grey morning with a heavy sea running. The meals are being cut down in quantity and the bread obviously cooked on board, is hardly baked at all. Freshwater is graciously turned on for a few hours today and will, in future, be provided twice weekly. By tea-time I am feeling miserable with a headache and a sour stomach. I stay on deck as much as possible to clear my head, I have little supper and decide to sling my hammock again tonight since it is quite impossible for me to sleep on the floor.

Thursday 1 August

“I slept a little better last night, but still feel pretty rotten and only nibble at the meals. I can't face exercises but instead visit the Doctor. He gives me a medicine which has very little effect. I carefully pick my food, and I feel better by the evening. To my disappointment the sea gets rougher again at dusk and the ship sways badly. The course still seems to be South-East. If we are heading for Cape Town, we should arrive about Tuesday or Wednesday. During the last few days, the soldiers have been discarding their tropical kit. Many of the soldiers on sentry duty, though simple folk, are quite friendly and often ready to have a little chat through the barbed-wire - it appears that they have been misled and are as fed-up as we are with this involuntary voyage.

Friday 2 August

“Last night I had perhaps the best sleep yet had on board - but I think this is due to the fact that it is much cooler. I feel a little better today but feel I need good medicine, a proper bed for the night and to be able to clean my teeth regularly! I am beginning to regain my appetite. It is estimated by some of the German sailors aboard that we are doing an average speed of 13-14 knots per hour, about 340 miles per day. Since leaving Freetown I have not noticed any zigzagging. Food is running short as, for example, for supper tonight, we get a bare two spoonsful of macaroni for supper.

Saturday 3 August

“I sleep quite well, but the whole mess is rudely awakened at daybreak by the bullying voice of a sergeant who threatens to "let off" if thirty volunteers don't turn up for scrubbing the decks.

Sunday 4 August

“The numbers for morning exercise have dwindled in the last few days but I go whenever I feel up to it. My heavy boots don't make for ease in walking. On deck, this morning, I had an illuminating chat with a German refugee who owned a spinning-mill in Germany. His people were still in Germany but apparently like many others of his kind, his main concern appeared to get to America as soon as possible. In between meals, many in our Mess are hungry enough to chew raw carrots and onions with apparent relish. Cigarettes and tobacco are so much in demand that those clever enough to have hidden their money are ready to pay heavily for them, and others cadge openly even for dog-ends, some even swap an apple for a cigarette.

Monday 5 August

“Our table manages with Luigi Beschizza to wangle a double ration at teatime. There is a rumour circulating that the ship has engine trouble and that we are running on a single propeller. This seems reasonable since, for no apparent reason, we have slowed down considerably.

Tuesday 6 August

“I scan the horizon for a sign of land but am disappointed. In the morning, for no apparent reason, the ship does a complete turn to starboard and then continues on its course. In the afternoon, another ship is sighted and again we execute a complete turn this time. I believe that we are nearing the coast and possibly Cape Town. Before turning in for the night, I notice to my joy a distant flashing light to port.

Wednesday 7 August

“After the usual semi-sleepless night, though the boat is quite steady, I wake up early to scan the horizon for land. On the port bow a light can be discerned, which after breakfast, reveals itself to be a lighthouse standing on low-lying land. Feeling very cold without any overcoat, I am surprised to find a broad and magnificent panorama of what I take to be the suburbs of Cape Town looming out of the mist.

“The ship finally docks just before mid-day. We then have an unusually tasty lunch of corned beef with potatoes and two slices of bread, followed by peaches and custard.

“It appears that Dakar, Malta, and British Somaliland have been taken by the Italians. Loading is carried on into the night under the arc-lamps, and this almost proves that we are destined probably for Australia, unless a miracle happens!

Thursday 8 August

“As I have managed to find myself a place on the floor, I slept pretty well during the night, having had the best sleep yet. Whilst it is still dark before breakfast, I go on deck to find the lights still ablaze throughout the city. We are not allowed out on deck for exercise. To my dismay after tea, tugs come fussing round us and soon we are being towed out of the dock.

“It rapidly gets dark and after supper, though we are a long way out, the high coastline can still be distinguished and Cape Town is clearly defined by a string of lights! I lie down on the floor again but hardly sleep a wink all night due to the heavy rolling and the abnormal throbbing of the engines.

Friday 9 August

“I wake up with a slight headache but luckily the rolling is not so severe. I am counting the days to the end of this apparently interminable voyage - we are all longing to set foot on terra-firma again and I am quite sick of the sea. As I believe the next port of call will be Freemantle, I work out that we should arrive by about this Sunday fortnight, 16 days from Cape Town. It seems too good to be true that we shall be disembarked there, but we are just hoping. One or two in our mess are suspected of harbouring bugs and have their clothes fumigated. Later we all get a cursory examination, but though I have some red spots which itch considerably, I am passed as OK.

Saturday 10 August

“I was vaguely conscious of hearing some groans from someone who apparently fell from his hammock. We are evidently heading nearly due East, as we should for Freemantle. This morning instead of the usual exercises, the Italians and quite a few Germans attend the first properly organised service with Communion on the top deck. A priest officiates. There is an excellent German choir. The soldiers look on but are unarmed by order of a pleasant Italian-speaking officer. In the afternoon I am introduced to Matania, a brother of the famous artist, we discuss the possibilities of publishing an illustrated book based on these experiences. I can picture it with the title, ‘12,000 miles Behind Barbed-Wire’.

There was a Francesco Matania onboard. The famous artist referred to in the diary was probably Fortunio Matania, who was illustrator for many posters and adverts and whose work appeared in numerous British and American magazines

“At tea-time enquiries are made to the distribution of the food, as there are complaints from us of ‘camorra’ [mafia] by the German-Jews in the Mess below us. We believe there is a conspiracy between them and the Jewish helpers in the kitchen staff. Apart from this there is occasional friction between us Italians and the refugees and some sharp words are frequently exchanged. The Nazis however are very quiet and very sensibly leave them alone. There is a rumour circulating that at least ten soldiers deserted at Cape Town. To my amazement this afternoon I notice a solitary cock in the crews' quarters but later I also see a hen. Nearly all the Italians are convinced that the war will not last long but then I have always thought this since we were interned, and yet?

“Every night by 9.30 everyone is cleared off our enclosure on deck and this is the signal for the Rosary to be said in our own Mess. This is solemnly observed by most of the Italians. We then get a great flood of Germans and refugees crowding into our Mess en-route to the packed lavatories. Incidentally our mess-room and lavatory are perfunctorily washed daily by the internees. Till we are all abed there is great confusion in the Mess. This evening one of the refugees had the cheek to come round hawking 2d. bars of chocolate for 3d, each - he got the bird! Money is scarce!

Sunday 11 August

“I slept very fitfully last night due to the usual tossing of the ship. Today and again on Thursday the fresh water (which is a dirty brown colour) is turned on in the lavatories - there is a constant stream of people in and out all day. I manage to wash a shirt and some other items, but these are not really clean. Otherwise, routine day. I now take a hot seawater shower without soap, every night to refresh myself - this is my only luxury.

Monday 12 August

“I notice many in our Mess making up cigarettes by means of dog-ends and orange paper wrappers. Others barter their apple for a few cigarettes. The lack of even one proper wash per day and of a toothbrush and paste, not to mention a razor, is making me feel rather irritable. I suppose this is a day of depression for me, but I and many others are getting fed up with the food from the kitchen as it is often burnt or otherwise uneatable, also the close confinement and the deadly routine.

“My hope is that this is the last lap and that we are intended to disembark in Western Australia. We are still heading east as I would expect. In the afternoon, much to our surprise, some of the Germans and ourselves are carefully counted on deck like a lot of sheep. I hide my diary as there may be another search. Looking over my belongings an inventory would show: one Army jacket and trousers, shirt and boots; two pairs of socks; one pair woollen pants; one pair black knickers; one handkerchief; one pair flannel trousers; and one scrap of soap.

Tuesday 13 August

“A special mass for ‘Ferragosto’ [Assumption, a public holiday in much of Europe] is celebrated on the deck. Our food rations have gradually been decreased these last few days and after tea and supper I feel particularly empty - on an average we only get one slice of bread per meal now.

Thursday 15 August

“Some albatrosses still with us and flying round most gracefully - now we must be nearly halfway across the Indian Ocean? There are conflicting rumours, but no-one knows for certain where we shall be landed - we are all vitally interested! ‘Scopa’ an Italian card game, seems to be the most popular way of killing time and many play nearly all day, but I prefer the deck and a good book when I am lucky enough to be able to get one! Again, there are rumours that the Italians are within 40 miles of Cairo, as well as having occupied Berbera, the capital of British Somaliland - recently some 5,000 planes are supposed to have bombed England?

Friday 16 August

“This is our eighth day out of Cape Town. Some of our companions report seeing the soldiers’ news-bulletin which indicates that the North-East and South-West suburbs of London have been heavily bombed all day and that many towns have been raided. Britain claims to have brought down nearly 150 ‘planes and that the RAF have bombed most of the countries in Europe.

Saturday 17 August

“I sleep very uneasily during the night and am often woken by the frequent shuddering of the ship. At the Church service on deck, the boat suddenly lurches so heavily that we find ourselves slithering en masse. The Army Captain who speaks Italian and organises the service, persuades us to crouch on the deck. Later I have conversation with a German-born resident in London who is stateless, apparently, he was holidaying in France when the war broke out and for at least six months was interned there and then released and sent to England, only to be reinterned after a few days and then sent to the Isle of Man. My thoughts often turn to the old happy life at home which seems so good now and I think of Mother, John, and Peter. I am beginning to seriously miss them.

Sunday 18 August

“Early morning, whilst I am dozing, there is a sudden terrific lurch followed by a tremendous crash of falling crockery, pots, pans etc. from the galley. Without reasoning for a moment, a rush is made for the stairs by many in our Mess and this is stopped upstairs by a sentry on duty – the stairs are soon blocked by the crowd. This was, in any case, senseless since escape or hope of rescue at night is slight. Despite the fact that I am also quite worried, I keep calm and look on from my hammock and then notice that the engines are only just ticking over, this suggests engine trouble to me which, with the heavy seas that are running, causes me some anxiety. I notice this does not seem to occur to anyone else! The whole mess and the German Mess below us are in an intense state of nerves. I decide it is better to lay in my hammock and await events and the stairs are not abandoned for over half-an-hour, much to everyone's disgust. The day that follows is routine, very cold and windy and as I have no warm clothing, I can only stay on deck for a few minutes at a time.

Monday 19 August

“I pass the night on the floor till early in the morning when I become quite alarmed by some tremendous lurches, one of which literally hurls sleepers across the floor of the Mess. As I happen to be awake, I manage to brace myself to a table - simultaneously with this human avalanche many of our possessions in racks above our heads rain down on us and the kitchen overhead seems to be breaking up. Every time the ship rolls there are tremendous crashes which disturb us all. I even entertain the possibility that this time the ship may have gone over a little too far, however it does right itself after a painful second or two. Right up till breakfast there is a constant clattering above our heads with every roll. At breakfast we are still swaying heavily enough to make eating rather difficult, and many have no appetite!

“I feel terribly tired as I haven't slept for several nights and am quite fed up. The confinement and monotony and lack of real friends is beginning to tell.

Tuesday 20 August

“At the usual exercises in the morning, I am surprised to hear a couple of toots on the ship's siren and then notice many of the soldiers over the side - as I walk round the decks, I see one or two lifebelts drifting astern and the ship begins to circle round presumably looking for someone overboard, but I can see no sign of anyone in the water. Later there is considerable discussion amongst us and the refugees when one of them says that it was a young Austrian Jew who jumped overboard whilst on exercise. For an hour or more the ship circles in vain.

Wednesday 21 August

“Working parties are selected to clean the walls, floors, etc. of our Mess room and lavatory and this reinforces the rumour that we shall be landed at the next port of call, presumably Freemantle. Nothing unusual - boring routine. There are strong rumours that we shall be arriving at Freemantle next Tuesday.

“Boggio and I mutually agree that we are tired of our present companions for obvious reasons — we have nothing in common. More than once recently one or two of our group have come to blows over nothing and today over a matter of extra food from the kitchen which had been reported to an officer, and these were sent to prison for a couple of days.

Thursday 22 August

“Routine day - the sea is perhaps the roughest we have yet experienced, with giant waves bearing down upon us. After the Rosary I turn into my hammock but cannot possibly sleep - there are too many noises, the kitchen equipment begins to clatter again, the kitchen is practically wrecked, and the floor is strewn with tomorrow's food. We do get some excitement!

Friday 23 August

“Routine day but at breakfast-time we get such a violent lurch that, whilst it is being served, the open port-hole in the galley kitchen lets a wave in, which soaks many occupants - much of our breakfast coming down the stairs is spilt and so quite dangerous for those following - there is considerable confusion particularly as everybody's nerves are on edge and all are talking at once. Exercises are cancelled due to the heavy motion. During the night I prowl around feeling somewhat disturbed for the safety of our ship - frankly I feel rather jittery. Luckily before morning, I manage to snatch an hour or so of sleep through sheer exhaustion.

Saturday 24 August

“At the morning Church-service, the priest announces that in a day or so we shall be landed. Before lunch on the aft-deck a sea-burial is carried out of a refugee who died in hospital last night.

Sunday 25 August

At mealtimes the kitchen is now serving up all that is left, and we eat pretty well.

Monday 26 August



HMT Dunera arrives in Australia, National Museum of Australia

AUSTRALIA

“We sight a military plane which clearly suggests we are nearing land. Before 9 am I sight low-lying land on the starboard bow and as we get nearer, a tall chimney or lighthouse dominates this stretch of coastline.

“A pilot-boat signals to us and we come to a dead-stop, a mile or two offshore and here two Australian passenger steamers pass us heading for the breakwater into the harbour. After lunch we internees and refugees are summoned on deck, where we are required to pass through a group of untidy-looking Customs officials (who had apparently come aboard). They examine just our bared arms. For me "this medical visit," as also the fact that all the soldiers aboard are in the highest spirits, seem to indicate that this is our destination. One member of the Indian crew tells us that this is Freemantle.

“We draw alongside the quay where a crowd of soldiers, officials and civilians await our arrival. To me it seems that the soldiers are there to escort us to our camp but several minutes pass and we get no orders to pack anything which is quite a disappointment to me after much expectation. I notice that these Aussie soldiers are generally magnificent, bronzed men in contrast to our own guards aboard - this also applies to some extent to the civilian onlookers as well.

“Later on in the afternoon, to my dismay, I notice food being loaded aboard including fruit, vegetables and cheeses, much as at Cape Town, this is carried on well into the night.

“One of our guards complains that they have come 12,000 miles all the way to Australia and have not been given any leave, I suspect that this is to prevent what occurred at Cape Town. A little before sunset a working party of 20 young men is called for and, I and another Italian named Bertoia jump to it. To our joy we are conducted down the gangway, and we can boast of being the first Italians to set foot ashore for nearly seven weeks and the only ones at Freemantle.

“However, we are set to the back-breaking work of loading up the ship with meat, cheese, vegetables etc. Meantime I miss suppertime but later I am lucky enough to get an extra helping from the kitchen. As I pass to and fro down the gangway, the soldiers crowded on deck are all in the best of humour and singing uproariously, leaning over the side - we mix quite freely with them and to escape would not be difficult in the confusion. On my way down to the cold stores, with boxes of tomatoes, the soldiers nearby quite openly help themselves and still lower down, my load is further depleted by a crowd of refugees on the make [meaning intent on gain]. Since everyone appears to be helping themselves, I decide to also but can only acquire a tomato and a nibble of fresh celery.

“Some of our number who have seen the local papers report frequent bombings of England and particularly of London — also a press campaign by Italy against Greece and the inevitability of war between the USA and Japan over the Dutch East Indies. There is also a rumour that some on board will be landed in Melbourne and others in Sydney - if Melbourne, this should be about another 6 days ahead.

Tuesday 27 August

“Whilst at breakfast the ship casts off and we slowly get towed out towards the harbour mouth. At exercises I revel in the magnificent weather, but we are running into a very long swell. I pass a little time chatting with another Italian internee who was working in England for the big film companies as an effects man.

Wednesday 28 August

“This morning, I observe that we are travelling approximately east southeast, so probably have already rounded the south coast. I believe we are heading for Melbourne, about 1,800 miles away.

Thursday 29 August

“Today is my birthday and I recall that my last one was also spent at sea on the way back from New York. How I long for the company of Mother, John, and Peter and I wonder just where they are now.

Friday 30 August

During the morning one of the Italian-speaking officers on board takes the thumbprints and personal particulars of all us Italians and Germans on board, who are presumably to be landed at Melbourne. Otherwise, normal, dull, routine day.

Saturday 31 August

“Barely a moment's sleep all night, partly due to the ship's motion and partly to a colleague alongside me who had diarrhoea - he faints up against me and so cramps my own accommodation space. Diarrhoea seems to be the scourge of all us internees and refugees, as most have had it from time-to-time during this voyage - at least two have already fainted as a result. Luckily my worst complaints have been headaches, worries, mental boredom and stagnation. In our Mess we are convinced that the Nazi-Germans and ourselves will disembark in Melbourne tomorrow or thereabouts — so there is much subdued excitement that the end of the voyage is in sight!

“There are strong reports that London has been bombed continuously for hours and many parts are in flames — I feel apprehensive for my own family! By evening and throughout the night the sea is whipped up into huge angry rollers - I cannot sleep a wink.

Sunday 1 September

“Dawn and breakfast-time come as a relief. It is so cold that most of us spend a long morning almost entirely down below. There is considerable discussion amongst ourselves as to when and where we shall be landing, and ultimately where we will be camped. Routine day but brightened at tea-time, when our leader declares that we are expected to land tomorrow and after breakfast tomorrow we must clean and tidy up the Mess and collect our belongings together, to be ready. Our leader suggests that we make ourselves as spick and span as possible. If Melbourne is our destination, land should be visible before tomorrow morning.

Monday 2 September

“Slept soundly all night and woken by some early risers who have been packing since about 5 am. I notice that the ship is quite steady, and this means that we must be in sheltered water. I go on deck to find that there are many lights all round us.

“It becomes very misty, and land is almost invisible but then it lifts towards mid-morning enough for us to see signs of habitation quite close to the port and the docks ahead. We go below and finally pack, say farewell to some of the German friends we made aboard, and so with a great sigh of relief we proceed in groups up to the deck, then line up to go ashore.

“The Dunera has after almost eight weeks reached our destination, and we are alongside a quay of Port Melbourne (12,600 miles approximately). Here about 600 including refugees, Nazis and ourselves, land whilst the rest are to proceed to Sydney. Before we go down the gangway, our number is checked but, to my surprise, there is no search. With feelings of subdued excitement and considerable expectation, I and some of the young friends I have made on board, are

escorted into a somewhat antique and shabby-looking wooden coach of the open type at the station nearby. The coach is labelled second-class but is far inferior to an English third-class coach.

“The whole train is heavily guarded by ex-service Aussie troops who immediately greet us more as strangers than as enemies. Even before we leave the quayside station, the soldier sitting on my right has handed round cigarettes rolled by himself to anyone who wants them. He is almost sympathetic when he hears our story. He, like many of the other soldiers, has no dislike for Italians or Germans as such. Neither does the war seem to trouble them very much. Like the others we saw at Freemantle, they are rough, big, sunburnt, good-natured men who are broad-minded and ‘simpatico’ on the whole.

“The train headed by a rather simple tender-engine trundles very jerkily off the quayside whilst we all get a last head-on view of the squat Dunera and so proceed past oil tanks and then to one of the principal stations in Melbourne, where we come to a halt.

“Meanwhile we are in continuous conversation with all the nearby soldiers in a most easy and natural manner and they act as guides, pointing out various buildings and features of interest. They obviously have a quiet pride in their capital. The train is anything but smooth-running and actually lit by gaslight. The soldiers, unlike those in England, quite openly tell us that we are going inland, a little over 100 miles, to a newly built camp. Since we have not had any dinner, we are all distinctly hungry and the soldiers cheer us by suggesting that we are very likely to be given some food at Seymour, about 60 miles up the line.

“Mile after mile rattled by and we pass several smaller stations, whilst the soldier next to me points out all the various things of interest and other interesting facts about this part of Australia - the scenery is quite unlike anything I have seen in Europe or America.

“Most of these soldiers seem intelligent and interesting to talk to. All around can be seen flocks of sheep and cattle, but the pasture is very parched and almost white in colour.

“At last, we draw into a very provincial and wild-westish town of Seymour, where we are overjoyed to find provisions laid out for us on the platform. The Australian officers get off and direct the pretty waitresses who supply each of us with a neatly wrapped packet containing two delicious sandwiches of sliced sausage and a slice of fruitcake and a cup of tea. Both the soldiers and ourselves are very satisfied and we are almost embarrassed by their apparent friendliness, when the soldiers start handing round packets of Turf cigarettes. This augurs well for our treatment at the camp and now we are all in the best of spirits. After Seymour we reach the end of the journey when we draw up at Murchison East Station.

TATURA CAMP

“In the field adjoining the station, I notice a fleet of small coaches apparently ready to take us directly to the camp about 10 miles away. We Italians wait and wait for a couple of hours until sunset inside the train, whilst a small crowd of women and kids gather to watch this unusual sight.

“We are told by the soldiers that it is a brand-new camp and that we shall be the first arrivals, and they are certain that we will be treated well, giving us plenty of food, etc. Hardly has the sun set like a fiery ball in the west than the fleet of coaches returns. Clouds of dust mark their trail along the dirt roads they pass. In good spirits our group board the coaches and are soon speeding along the rough roads in the pitch darkness, with our lights ablaze. It becomes very cold indeed and we have no coats with which to keep warm.

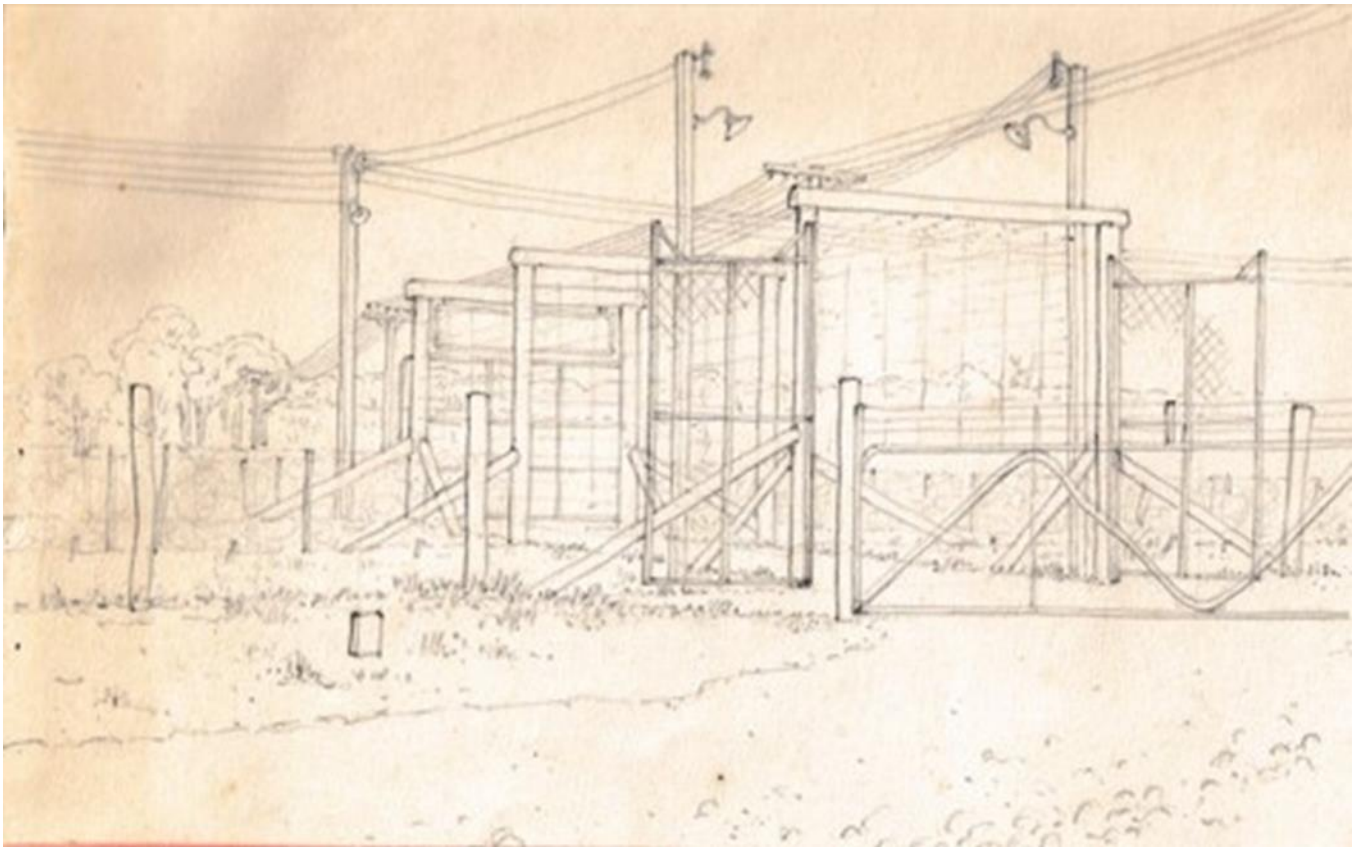
“After many twists and turns, we at last turn into the campgrounds, firstly passing some corrugated iron huts outside the elaborate but low barbed-wire enclosure. We learn later that this is Tatura Camp No. 2B, and that there are other camps close by already inhabited by German and Italian residents in Australia. Our guards are all ‘old’ soldiers who appear quite spick and span. We are then escorted through a tunnel of barbed wire with gates and into the Italian section of the camp. This consists of several rows of corrugated iron huts set on a hillside, some yards apart.

“We are accommodated in huts according to groups already formed on the Dunera and I find myself in Hut 1 with most of the youngest fellows. This hut is on the perimeter of the camp close to the barbed-wire enclosure. The huts are the simplest possible wood-frame structures with external walls of galvanised corrugated iron and roofed with asbestos sheeting, having an air-space all-round the room under the eaves covered only with chicken-wire - the huts are constructed with wooden vertical posts having a floor raised a foot or two above the ground - below the wooden floor a sheet of shaped tin is fixed horizontally for protection against insects and snakes. Internally the huts are quite bare except for the row of back-to-back built-in bunks which are provided with wire springs — there is a continuous row of hooks along the outside walls. For bedding a straw palliasse and 4 new blankets are provided.

“Soon many of us visit our washhouse with showers, toilets and dining-hut - we are pleased to note a couple of soldiers busy preparing our first meal. Supper is soon served in the usual aluminium mugs and plates and consists of cold meat, bread, butter, and jam, with hot tea, provided in such generous portions that we can't finish everything. After our experiences in England and on the ship, we can hardly believe such generosity. The soldiers seem to be trying their hardest to help and even one of the English officers, who have surprisingly escorted us here, tell us to eat everything!

“Our number from the ship minus those that went separately to hospital, is checked but to my surprise there has been no search, and at about 10 pm. It is ‘lights out’ and so turn in feeling quite contented and considerably optimistic about the future. After dark the camp is ablaze with lights, which are controlled from outside the camp. After 10 pm, since the camp is in darkness, the authorities require anyone moving about the camp to take with him an oil-lamp which is provided in every hut. I sleep properly for the first time for weeks!

Tuesday 3 September



Tatura Camp 2 Entrance— Drawing by Giorgio Scola

“The camp is woken early but I wake earlier still because of the intense cold. It is with the greatest difficulty that I can persuade myself to dress, so I have to pile on almost all the clothes available before making a beeline for the washhouse, etc. The washhouses, showers and toilets are simple constructions standing on a concrete base — plumbing is simple but efficient and the wastewater is carried away down-hill in open channels. The WCs are simply galvanised iron buckets which are emptied every morning.

“There is a glorious sunrise at about 6.30 am. and the whole day is magnificent, getting cold again towards evening. The camp is situated on sloping ground facing North and, in this direction, a pleasant but unexciting view of expansive rolling country with low hills dotted with the inevitable gum trees and covered with parched grass. The camp is surrounded by a double fence of barbed wire with watchtowers at intervals and electric light standards. The dining room consists of one large hut fitted with rows of wooden tables and the cookhouse is well equipped and efficient with wood-burning stoves and it faces the main "piazza" of the camp. For breakfast we have some excellent porridge, sausages and bread and butter and jam, also coffee in ample proportions. We are very satisfied, but our leader Borghi puts a damper on it by announcing that the food will be cut but still quite ample. Our own London chefs had taken over now and the very taste of everything more than proves it! Throughout the first day everything is in the process of being organised and there are frequent meetings to make various announcements. At one of these the rules of the camp are read out as well as the daily routine, as follows: 6.30 am reveille [wake up sound], 7.30 am assembly, 7.45 am breakfast, 9.30 am hut inspection, 12.30 pm dinner, 4.45 pm assembly, 6.00 pm supper, 9.30 pm hut inspection, 10.00 pm lights out.

“We are glad and relieved to hear that various facilities and necessities will be provided as soon as possible - we shall be allowed to write home twice-weekly, have visitors (if feasible), and buy papers when we get some credit from whatever source. Adjoining our camp is the German one

and both are patrolled day and night by veteran soldiers — these tough sun-burnt men tend to be friendly and pleasant. After darkness falls, until the evening inspection at 9.30 pm, I find it rather tedious with little to do.

Wednesday 4 September

“Physical exercises class is organised and held indoors for the first time, led by Baldelli (a schoolteacher and poet). Today a few of the more energetic in our hut begin to plan a layout for a garden in front of our hut, whilst I begin making a sundial on the flat top of one of the many logs of firewood heaped in front of the kitchen.

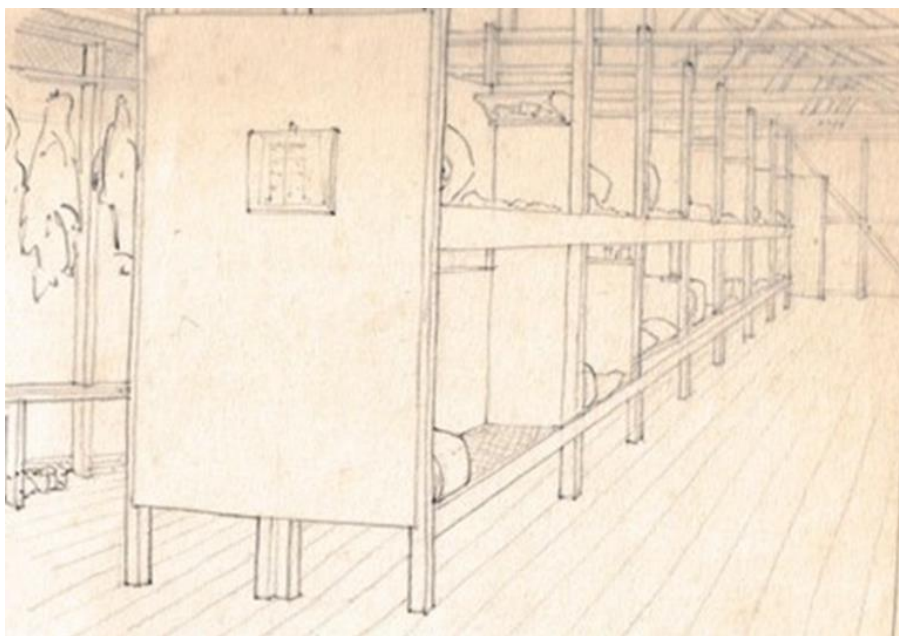
“A system is arranged for keeping the camp as clean as possible, thus every day in rotation a number of men are responsible for the ‘external duties’ which consist of washing out the WCs and the washhouse etc, also cleaning up the ground all-round the huts. Today as in the weeks that followed, we begin to catch the sun and take the bright blue sky for granted.

Thursday 5 September

“By Friday, we are getting accustomed to the daily routine, and I always find something to do, but I am determined to make my brain work. Today we are marched out of the camp in groups to the Quarter-Master's Store where each of us is supplied with a second hand Army fatigue suit and a pair of long pants.

“Whilst I am finishing work on the setting of my sundial in our embryo front garden, the clever film effects man, Guidobaldi, pips me at the post by making a Roman sundial and fixing same on the corner of our hut, incidentally it is pretty accurate! I later find he is a very handy and skilled craftsman all round and a hard worker. To my delight, our meals were ample and varied including eggs, rabbit, pastry, risotto and minestrone. The Melbourne daily paper which we saw on occasions gave exaggerated accounts of our ‘dangerous past’ as either fifth columnists or ‘agents’ captured at Dunkirk! During the voyage we were also supposed to have enjoyed ourselves with concerts and hours of sun-bathing on the decks! My own observations are very different to these. This afternoon I am pleased to see welcome signs of civilisation outside the camp in the form of flash American cars and one or two women visitors.

Friday 6 September



Tatura Camp 2 Interior – Drawing by Giorgio Scola

“On Monday the craving generally for tobacco is assuaged, temporarily, with the distribution of five cigarettes each, given by an unknown donor. Later heard they were sent by an Italian in Camp No. 1. We hear that there are snakes in the district.

Monday 9 September

“We are marched to the stores and each of us is provided with a maroon-coloured Army coat and pair of brown Australian boots. We are also given an official printed card to send home, my first available means of communication with home since leaving Liverpool some nine weeks ago. Criticism (warranted and unwarranted) of the self-appointed ruling clique, especially of the presumptuous "Intelligence Committee", of which I have been proposed as a member. On Wednesday I accept the position of Secretary of the newly formed Sports Committee which is composed of all the young athletic lads in our hut.

“I am very hard-up for pencils and paper, not to speak of many other necessities, and unless money comes out of the blue, I see no hope of getting these.

“After a delay of many days, the Japanese envoy arrives as representative of the Italian Government, but he says very little can be done to help us although he will get in touch with Tokyo in an effort to raise a fund amongst the Italians there. However today, we are provided, with a razor and two blades, toothbrush and paste, soap and a brush and comb amongst five people. There is a rumour circulating that more Italians are on the way from England to this camp.

Tuesday 10 – Thursday 12 September

“I receive a telegram sent by Mother from Reading on August 29th with birthday greetings. I am overjoyed at this first message from her since I was interned. Our front garden finished off at last.

Friday 13 September

“There is considerable interest in our 2nd Sports Day - I compete, of course! I send off a pre-paid telegram to Mother and later an airmail letter, with money loaned by some of our internee ‘financiers’.

Saturday 14 September

“The first Mass and Confession celebrated in Australia, held in our ‘chapel’, one of the huts, and celebrated by a military priest. By Monday, complaints regarding the insufficiencies of normal necessities are growing loudly.

Sunday 15 September

“What has struck me recently is the apparent incomprehension of many of us Italian internees here. For example, many are quite glad to hear of the destruction of London, whilst forgetting that there are many of their own relatives there and many already helping the English war effort, including the Army. Nearly everybody is extremely confident that England will be beaten, and we will soon return home. I can hardly agree with this!

“Baldelli suggests starting a paper, something quite separate from what the ‘intelligence committee’ already have in mind. His point is that even if we have to write it on lavatory paper, let the youth of Hut No. 1 make a start. The interested youth set up a kind of ‘paper committee’ consisting of six members and we decide to call it ‘Gioventu’ [youth].

“The Military Paymaster who promised to turn up some time ago to help starting a canteen is still absent and it appears to us that the Military Authorities (or is it the British Government?)

are doing their hardest to wash their hands of any responsibility towards us. In fact, we are classed as 'prisoners of war'. I hear indirectly that there have been more heavy air-raids on London and that invasion appears imminent.

Tuesday 17 September

"For the first time, groups will be taken out in turn for about an hour's march out and round the camp — we can regard this as a great concession! Talks on Philosophy are now almost nightly features as is the Rosary recital.

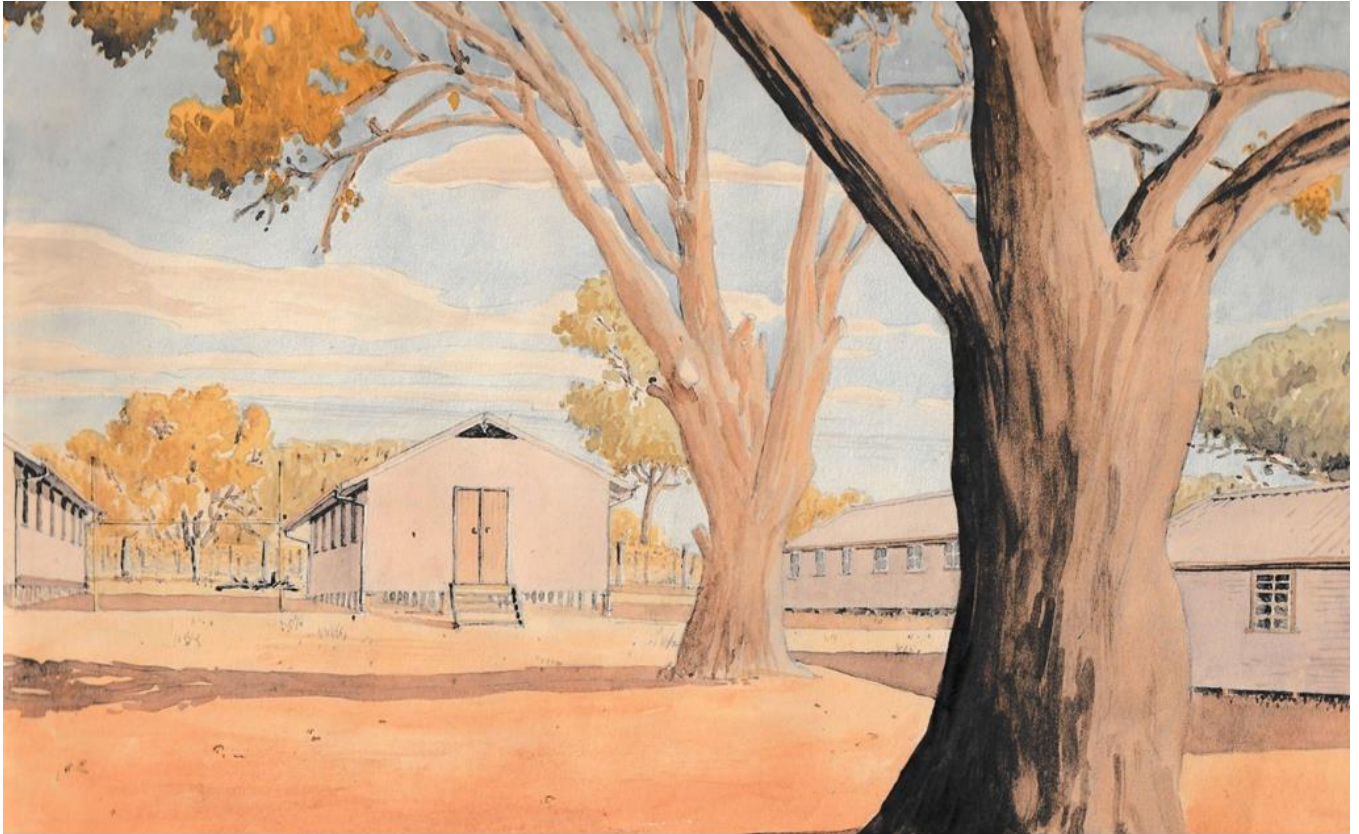
Wednesday 18 September

"Those internees with money deposited here loan the camp a few pounds so that everyone has a shilling to spend at the newly opened canteen - there is a tremendous rush on cigarettes, etc.

Thursday 19 September

"The formation of the paper is discussed by the committee, including Baldelli and myself as writers. Our first and original copy is to be printed by hand and submitted via our leader to the Military Authorities for approval. It will be published every Tuesday, if humanly possible, despite lack of paper, ink, etc.

"The patients of the sick-bay on the Dunera, including the two doctors (Italian) arrive at the camp and tell of their wonderful treatment at a nursing-home outside Melbourne, also the news of the continuous bombing of London with hits on many well-known buildings and particularly Buckingham Palace, with up to 8,000 killed. The Italians are reported to have advanced 150 miles into Egypt (although Egypt is not officially at war), and they are soon expected to clash with an Australian force.



Tatura Camp 2 and sports field – Watercolour by Giorgio Scola, April 1941

“The Military Authorities are apparently trying to work out a scheme whereby we can be put to some work.

Friday 20 September

“The paper ‘Gioventu’ is finally ready, and with some trepidation, we hand it to our leader to pass on to the Commanding Officer.

Sunday 22 September

“The Sports Committee decide to hold a special Sports Day for the older men soon, to include also the ever-popular ‘Gioco delle Piastrelle’ [shovel board].

Monday 23 September

“At the Assembly, our Camp Leader commends the Youth of the Camp for its initiative in producing a camp paper and hands back the first copy of "Gioventu" duly passed by the Military Authorities. The editorial staff including myself are quite elated to find that our paper is in great demand within the camp.

“The Intelligence Committee now announce that lessons in foreign languages will start shortly.

Tuesday 24 September



Tatura Camp 2 Chapel – drawing by Giorgio Scola

“Camp Leader announces that all the pre-paid telegrams which were despatched recently were not actually sent off due to new regulations - the Camp expresses its resentment against the Authorities concerned.

Thursday 26 September

“More tobacco sent to us as a gift from internees in adjacent Camp No1 and distributed. During this second week the whole camp has been required to complete a form labelled Prisoner of War, giving all personal particulars including thumbprints, plus an identification number stuck on our chests.

Friday 27 September

“The Camp held the finals of the ‘Gioco delle Piastrelle’ and after a comic procession, the winners were presented with a cup made of bones, turnips and carrots.

Sunday 29 September

“The Sports Committee hold an amusing Sports event, the Fair of the Madcaps. We read in the papers of destructive raids on Berlin by the RAF.

Monday 30 September

“German lessons start this morning under the tuition of a Professor from the German Camp - seventy of us enrolled and lessons will be three times weekly.

“From a three-day old paper, we learn that Japan has concluded a defensive alliance with the Axis Powers (Germany and Italy). This may bring the war closer to Australia as Japan already has a foothold in Indochina. The U.S.A. also seems on the brink of war.

“Today a three-foot snake was killed just outside the Camp wired enclosure.

Tuesday 1 October

“Days of camp routine follow until our first Christmas in internment, 1940. On this occasion we have an elaborate and enjoyable Christmas dinner!

“A Home Office Liaison Officer, Major Layton, arrives in camp with the object of interviewing those internees who are seeking release and return to the UK.

Monday 28 April 1941

Major Julian Layton had been involved in the refugee welfare movement before the war and had travelled to Europe to help refugees obtain the papers necessary to enter Britain. In the war he sent to Australia to liaise with the authorities over the internees and tasked to deal with claims for compensation for loss of personal effects during the voyage of the Dunera to Australia. All information from ‘Collar the lot’.

“Our Italian Group and the German internees are transferred to Camp No.4.

Friday 16 May

“A first group of Italian internees who have been officially released leave the camp.

Sunday 25 May



Tatura Camp 4 – Watercolour by Giorgio Scola

LOVEDAY

“Our Camp group are moved via Melbourne to Loveday Camp No.9 in South Australia.

“During the day, several Army lorries arrive in our compound - many of us then help to load on our now voluminous luggage and on the remaining lorries we pack ourselves, escorted by sentries. We again head for Murchison East Station (where we first arrived many months ago).

“At the station platform, well cordoned by sentries, several of us load our heavy luggage onto a special train. The train is soon returning down to Melbourne and towards evening, the train pulls into Spencer Street Station, Melbourne. There, standing up on the platform, we are watched by crowds of people nearby as we are provided with a meal from the refreshment room.

“Then we are ordered back onto the same train and soon pass through the outer suburbs of Melbourne - generally our group is divided into six per compartment including two fully armed sentries. Like this, we must pass the night. An amusing incident occurs when a sergeant comes round to tell the sentries not to sleep both at the same time.

“At our destination is the usual number of military guards and young soldiers who help with our luggage. The luggage is loaded onto horse-drawn carts, with an internee as custodian on each cart, the rest of us have to march along sandy dirt roads flanked by the guards. Soon, over a low ridge, we spot a large camp set in the bush. We pass some scattered homesteads and some civilians. We also pass through the deep lush green of vines. The garrison at the camp is very youthful. They inform us that this is Loveday Camp No.9 and that the discipline is severe, there are only Italians here. Once again, we are searched including our hand luggage and anything over a shilling has to be surrendered. These repeated searches are quite irritating and humiliating and make me feel resentful. We have a medical examination and are ordered to strip, whilst our clothes are being inspected. Soon we are marched into the camp itself where we are faced by a crowd of Australian-Italian internees already in residence.

“Our group is divided into separate groups for each tent being provided. Many pour into my tent and we are introduced one-by-one as we are trying to settle in. These resident internees appear patriotically Italian and do their best to make us feel at home here and generously press all manner of things upon us ranging from cigarettes to camp-beds, as they know that our belongings are still outside. They soon inform us that there are 900 internees here and the camp is well and efficiently administered and run with also a good canteen and kitchen. Everyone has his duty of service to do in a spirit of comradeship, but at times they can be rather boisterous, and incidents do occur with the military.

“This camp is much larger than the Tatura camps but more untidy and for the numbers here, rather cramped and lacking many facilities. There is a football pitch within the enclosure and with a lack of trees and need of shade, many bowers made of leaves and twigs have been erected.

“The residents have made gardens on one side of the camp and beyond, one can see a deep-green background of vineyards. On this first evening, a concert is held in our honour and our own baritone, Ratania, makes a hit! Round this camp the sentry-boxes outside the wire enclosure are equipped with machine-guns and, after dusk, searchlights are turned on groups of internees inside the camp. Tonight, we sleep for the first time since leaving England on the ground under canvas.

Tuesday 9 December

“I explore the camp under a terrific sun, noticeably hotter than Tatura. Later I learn that the temperature reached 104° [40c] in the shade. Fruit particularly is very cheap at the canteen, with lemons the size of Jaffa oranges costing two-a-penny.

Wednesday 10 December

“The following day I am concerned to find myself spitting blood early in the day and nose-bleeding later. A Doctor tells me it is due just to the intense heat. Still later our group is told that we shall again be leaving tomorrow for a nearby camp and must take tents, blankets and even mess-room tables with us. Obviously, our group has no desire to move again to who-knows-what and an appeal is made to the Military Authorities, but in vain!

Thursday 11 December

“We collect our small belongings together as our heavy luggage has not yet been returned to us, we dismantle tents and bid farewell to new friends made here. Our belongings are now loaded on to lorries and as a group we march out through the camp gates to an enthusiastic send-off by most of the residents. I am quite moved by this spontaneous tribute. After a mile or so of tiring ankle-deep dusty road, flanked by military guards, we turn off same to an untidy-looking camp (Loveday No 10) in a barren scrub landscape. Here again there are resident internees, but we don't have any welcome reception from them. Our group is directed to an empty part of the camp, and it is left to every six of us to pitch a tent apiece. Between the intense heat now and the general difficult circumstances, we seem to be stuck in a most undesirable position.

“As we begin to settle down, we find ourselves mixing with some of the Italians here. They inform us that there are a number of mainly Southern Italian sailors from ships scuttled near Australia and some civilians from Palestine, as well as nearly 500 Germans and Austrians also from Palestine and Iran - most of these are business, professional or learned men and sailors. All are quartered in huts and more of these are under construction. The resident Italian leader welcomes us, but the German leader is hesitant to approach us until he knows more about us. After some discussion, our group approves that the existing Italian leader should be in charge of all the Italians. He is a well-educated man from Palestine and speaks fluent German. Many of our chefs take places in the open "Italian" kitchen. The camp when completed should accommodate 1,000 people.

Saturday 20 December 1941

“The German internees already have various study courses in full swing and some of us are asked to collaborate with these courses.

“An escape tunnel is discovered and later flooded.

Saturday 4 April 1942



Loveday Camp, June 1942 – Watercolour by Giorgio Scola

“Our leader announces that our group will shortly leave for Tatura again.

Saturday 5 September

“We are marshalled at the gates for counting and, once again, bid farewell to many good Italian and German friends made here and are warmly cheered on our way as we march along dirt roads to the railway line we left nearly nine months ago.

“Once more arriving at the train, our boyish guard escort form a cordon around our group as we board it. Soon we are off and retracing our steps of the outward journey. We see women waving at the train from flimsy single-storied houses. I wonder if they realise we are prisoners? Of men there is virtually no sign.

“By evening the train joins the main Adelaide line but carries on past the junction to pull up opposite a small military camp - here we are provided with a meal and permitted to stretch our legs alongside the track. I just toy with the idea of escape.

“At sunset, the train moved off towards Melbourne. We all, including the guards, settle down for the night and the latter rarely come around so leave many of us unobserved for long periods. The train speeds through the night and then comes to a dead-halt in the dark open countryside where it stops for a full minute - most of the windows are wide open and again the thought comes ‘What about darting out and slipping under the train, but then what?’ The night passes slowly till dawn when we pass through some spectacular pastoral and hilly country, until we finally reach Melbourne. After breakfast on the platform, we resume the journey northward for the second time in two years and arrive, once again, back at the hated station of Murchison East.

“We soon learn that we are destined for Tatura Camp No.2, which we believe to be a transit camp for those due for release. We arrive back at Tatura in Compound A. Here we find all the original Dunera Jews in both compounds, the huts are very dirty and unkempt! Our heavy luggage is brought in, perfunctorily searched, and then somehow, we settle in rather dispiritedly.

Wednesday 9 September 1942

“At Christmas a choral Mass is celebrated by a Catholic priest, and, for the holiday, our group is presented with an extra two or three casks of beer!

“I apply for the first time to Major Layton for permit to return to Britain.

Monday 6 September 1943

“I re-make an official application to the Home Office

Monday 27 September

“The first Italian, Pelagatti (Australian), to leave this camp after the cessation of hostilities between Britain and the Kingdom of Italy.

Wednesday 6 October

“Our leader, Borghi, with 13 others, is released to leave for Britain.

Tuesday 30 November

“60 of our group obtain the authority of the Home Office to return to Britain in order to appear before a Tribunal. I am not included in this group!

Thursday 13 January 1944

“I receive a refusal to my first application.

Saturday 15 January

“Together with a party of 28, I receive orders to prepare to transfer to another camp.

Tuesday 22 February

“This party leaves again for Loveday, South Australia. Journey there as on previous occasion via Melbourne and Murray Bridge. We arrive at Camp 14D next evening. This is a mixed Italian and German camp, divided into four large compounds. Japanese are next door.

Wednesday 8 March

“I receive a further refusal.

Thursday 6 April

“The group of eighteen from England are seen by the Overseas Internees Investigation Board, presided over by Justice Hutchins of Tasmanian Supreme Court. Here, I declare that I am ready to do any work of which I am physically capable.

Friday 13 October

My father's application to return to Britain was sent two months after Mussolini was arrested on the orders of the King of Italy, but before any announcement of an armistice between Italy and the Allies (in September 1943), and before Italy declared war on Germany (in October 1943).



'Somewhere in Australia' November 1944, Loveday SA – watercolour by Giorgio Scola

PERMISSION TO RETURN

“Four of us, leaving only two, receive permission from the Home Office to return to Britain.
Sunday 24 December 1944

“In a group of 14, I leave the camp by train for Tatura again, at Murray Bridge, in the evening, we have the pleasure of an escorted walk around the town, our first spell of semi-liberty in over 4 years. We get the train for Melbourne and thence on to Tatura Camp No.2, arriving about mid-night.

Tuesday 9 January 1945

“With a small group, I was escorted by train first down to Seymour Junction, there we changed to an express from Melbourne with Sydney as our destination. After several hours we arrived at a tented camp outside Sydney. Again, there we cooled off very impatiently for another few weeks.

Early February

“On a sunny morning on March 5th, 1945, I stood on the threshold of a fresh phase of life. Soon the various decks of Trans-Atlantic liner were my promenade and vantage point.

“The Dominion Monarch is a fast and modern motor vessel fitted to hold many passengers of various categories. However, it is wartime, and she looks bare and stripped for war: no luxury anywhere and the only normal note is a neglected swimming-pool set in the afterdeck. Everything about her hints of the business of war: her paint and her guns are the obvious things. Most of her passengers too are part and parcel of this war: war brides on their way to join husbands in a strange land, scores and scores of them, evacuees, refugees, and many others returning to their own lands.

“On deck I expected the customary bustle of departure, but our ship was already sliding away from the quayside with minimum of fuss. No waving crowds below, few shouts from the crew, and only the passengers showed some excitement and vitality.

“With the sun setting astern of us, I retired to our cosier quarters. My own quarters below, with our few companions, were strongly reminiscent of steerage accommodation [the lowest category of accommodation, usually with cramped and poor conditions]. In one long but low compartment, a deck or two above the waterline, men slept, ate and passed the day. The upper decks, which provided cabin accommodation, were principally allotted to the women and children, but even these were very overcrowded. Our first day ended on a sinister note as the ship's loudspeaker announced at sunset: "It is now black-out time, all port-holes and windows to be closed and all smoking on deck must cease!" To leave the confined quarters below, I escaped to the freshness and freedom of the open decks whenever it was possible.

Monday 5 March 1945

“By the time the third day dawned, ship life had become almost familiar. As for the life we lived, it was the life of a cruise, minus the very vestige of luxury. Time was the enemy to be slaughtered.

“The insistent buzz of the electric alarm was calling all passengers to the morning boat-drill, fastening our lifejackets and making for our allotted places on the boat deck,

“After some thirteen days at sea, I sighted land and from my plotted route, I guessed that we would be arriving at the Pacific end of the Panama Canal. This sounded most interesting to me. Before long, our ship was berthed in Balboa, approx. 7,720 miles from Sydney.

“As we left Balboa, unfortunately we internees we were confined to our quarters below deck. The whole journey-through the Canal took us almost a day and night to reach Colon on the Atlantic seaboard.

“With only a short pause our ship left Colon and was evidently steaming North-West into the Caribbean. After a day or more, my plotting revealed that we were passing between Cuba and Haiti, but I did not notice any sight of land on either side. It seemed evident to me that we passed to the west-side of some of the Caribbean Archipelagos and the Bahamas. We were travelling north up the eastern seaboard of the USA.

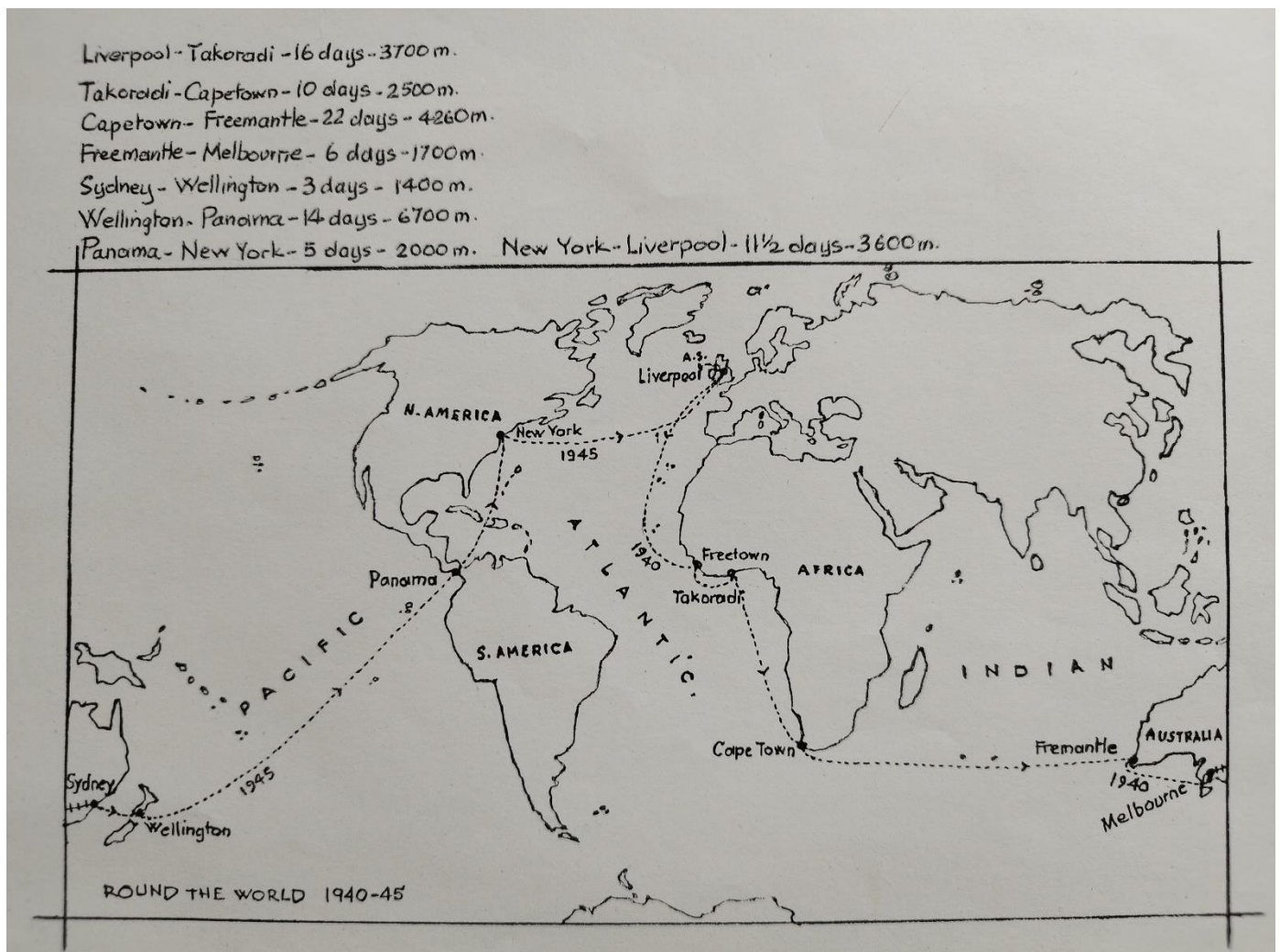
“Eventually I found myself gazing at the entrance to New York harbour within sight of the Statue of Liberty and soon with the serrated skyline of the city ahead of us. I had myself left this very scene nearly six years before in 1939, when I left New York with my mother on the Cunarder S.S. Mauritania. Then we had been bound for Southampton after a short visit to my uncle and cousins, who lived in Hackensack, New Jersey.

“We internees were not allowed ashore but the view from the deck was so un-warlike that it was a pleasure after our long confinement. Watching from the upper decks one could see new passengers coming aboard and movement of freight being loaded and unloaded.

“Before long, our ship showed signs of impending departure, tugs fussed around, a deafening toot from the ship's siren and gradually we slipped away from the quayside and made our way down the Hudson River to the outer harbour. Soon after passing the Statue of Liberty, I heard a megaphone call out the message ‘Good Luck, Dominion Monarch!’

“I found this encouraging because we were setting out to cross the Atlantic, once again, where German submarines might still be lurking! We internees were allowed on a limited part of the deck, but I did not feel unduly restricted, as here we were able to come to close quarters with the ordinary passengers.

“I was somewhat apprehensive about this crossing in view of my previous experiences.



Drawing by Enrico Scola

“Eventually we arrived in Liverpool [on 19 April 1945 according to ship history website benjido.co.uk] where our journeys originally started, 12,790 miles approximately from Sydney, having travelled round the world!

“We internees were quickly disembarked under the watch of an Army guard and then, with an escort, taken by coach several miles inland the coach turned into a hutted Army-type camp, and

we were soon allocated in groups to individual huts. After some time settling into this new accommodation, some food was prepared by the cooks of our own Italian group, so another phase of our internment had begun. Of course, we were expecting an announcement by the Camp Authorities that the next step would be our release and departure for our homes. There was silence however and we protested to the authorities! A few days passed in this otherwise pleasant spot.

“Suddenly the order was given to pack and soon we were again ordered to board some coaches and once more passed through Birkenhead and Liverpool and arrived fairly soon at Fleetwood. We were quickly transferred to a passenger ferryboat, and I realised, to my dismay, that we were certain to sail to the Isle of Man. Sure enough, we headed across the Irish Sea and after a few hours arrived at Douglas, the capital. We were soon directed to the station nearby and then set off on the antiquated steam-train to the port of Ramsey, on the East Coast. This was our destination, and we were all marched off, under guard, and through a line of barbed-wire fencing into former peace-time hotels, which lined the sea front.

“Here again, so many people were allotted to each separate building and several people to each room. Unwillingly most of us had to accept this situation and just had to settle down! Many of us complained to the Camp Commandant and some to the Home Office, but there was no positive response. We wondered whether our internment would ever end. The weeks passed slowly, and I was restless because we were still cooped up behind barbed wire, with little prospect of freedom. After all, the war in Europe was over so what was the point of keeping us and having to feed us? We had expected to be at liberty on our return and since we were now offered the opportunity of doing manual and generally gardening work outside the camp, I volunteered just to leave the camp daily for a few hours and so see normal life around us.

“I was taken on several occasions by bus with Army escorts to work on farms and gardens well away from the camp. Once, when I joined a group of fellow internees on a local beach, we were allowed to have a swim. I found the water so cold after the general heat of Australia that I had to come out almost at once. These experiences, always under guard, were something special to me.

“At last, late in August, together with some other colleagues, I received an official paper from the Home Office stating that I was to be released from internment, but G. Boggio, who had been a friend for all the years in Australia, was not freed and in fact remained a prisoner for months afterward! Within a day or so we packed the few belongings we had acquired since our return from Australia and the day of departure finally arrived. Soon the camp was left behind and we were off as free men on the little train back across the Isle of Man to Douglas. The crossing was a real breath of free, fresh air and I was soon back on the mainland. Then on the train south to London, where I changed from Euston Station to the familiar sight of Paddington.

“How strange the big city seemed after my years of absence! Then it was straight back to my hometown of Reading; a short bus ride through the familiar streets and I was back in the home I was forced to leave over five years ago! What a delight it was to see my mother again and embrace her! Soon afterwards I met my brother John, who had been to Canada instead, and had had quite a different experience to mine during the war. My brother Peter had instead finished off his degree studies in Cambridge.”

EDITOR'S NOTE

The account above was written by my father during WW2.

It was typed from the original handwritten copy by Maureen Howell in April 1991 with the title "My war time years 1940-1945" and attributed to "Giorgio Enrico Scola aged, at that time, 23 years". The details of his arrest and detention, the sinking of the Arandora Star, the journey on the Dunera and internment in Tatura until 2 October 1940 were all from his diary written at the time. But the account after 2 October he describes as "mainly a chronicle of dates and significant personal events" as he had "mislaidd detailed day to day notes of my experiences". He does specify that while some experiences were original writings, most of the journey back to Britain and his enforced stay in the Isle of Man had been added "recently" (presumably when he decided to get the diary typed in 1991).

My father loved travel, and I edited the diary to focus more on his internment experiences and less on chronicling his travels. I have added watercolours and sketches he made, and his hand-drawn map of his war years' journeys. I put this document together in 2024, adding also the chapter headings and a contents page as well as this Editor's Note, the opening text 'My Father', the text boxes giving explanatory information and the note below on internment and remembrance.

The cover photo was taken in Tatura Camp in January 1943. My father is in the front row on the far left (wearing a beret).

For more information contact internmentdiary@gmail.com

INTERMENT AND REMEMBRANCE

"On Monday 10 June 1940, Benito Mussolini declared war on Britain and France. Overnight, all 20,000 Italians resident in the United Kingdom saw themselves classified as enemy aliens and, of those, men who had lived in Britain for less than 20 years, and who were between the ages of 16 and 70, were considered for internment. Many of those resident in London and the south-east were interned immediately, as invasion fears heightened, and as British troops retreated home from Dunkirk and the fall of France was imminent."

<https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/internment-of-enemy-aliens-in-1940-the-fate-of-italians-resident-in-a-britain-at-war/>

The Italian declaration of war "sparked a night of anti-Italian street rioting. Italian shops were raided across the country, and 4,200 'suspicious' British-Italian men were arrested and sent to prisoner camps. Anti-Italian feeling spread across the country, isolating many of its Italian families."

<https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/online-exhibitions/readings-little-italy/readings-little-italy-italian-migration-britain>

It was not the original intention of the British authorities to carry out mass internment, and there was considerable debate as to whether it was necessary. Tribunals were set up in 1939 to decide whether Germans and Austrians should be interned, subject to restrictions or remain at liberty. Very few were initially interned. But with scare stories of '5th columnists' (people who would assist the enemy) and the growing fear of invasion, Winston Churchill, who had only been Prime Minister for a month, gave orders in June 1940 to 'collar the lot'. Some 27,200 'enemy aliens' were interned and 7,350 were deported.

About 75% of the Germans and Austrians in the UK were refugees, but this did not stop many from being interned and deported. A number of Italian anti-fascists were also interned with some deported.

My father was separated from his brother at Warth Mills for reasons he did not understand at the time. According to the book 'Collar the lot' the War Office sent the names of 1500 members of the British branches of Italian Fascist Party (obtained by MI5) to the internment camps with instructions to find them for immediate deportation. My father was a member of the Party. But by no means all Italians on the Arandora Star, or on the Dunera, were Fascist Party members. Instead, many appear to have been picked, seemingly at random, to make up numbers.

Whether all Fascist Party members were really committed to fascism (and opposed to Britain) is doubtful and was disputed at the time within the British Government. After the Arandora Star tragedy, the Home Office persuaded MI5 that membership of the Fascist Party did not disqualify Italians for release from internment. It is widely said that the sinking of the Arandora Star led to the reversal of the internment and deportation policy.

My father's older brother John was taken to Canada but returned to the UK a year later. He worked as an interpreter for the Army. His younger brother Peter spent a year interned on the Isle of Man before being released. According to his daughter Francesca, Peter visited my father at the end of the war while my father was still being held on the Isle of Man and wrote to the Home Office demanding his release.

Neither the Foreign Office nor the Home Office knew that those who survived the Arandora Star had been deported on the Dunera, according to the book 'Collar the Lot'. They apparently found out from a letter sent by a soldier shocked by the treatment of the Italian survivors. On 23 July 1940 (little over three weeks after the sinking of the Arandora Star) my grandmother wrote a letter to my father saying, "At last I am informed that you have been sent to Australia."

The internment of Italians was an unnecessary and ill-thought through policy introduced at a time of near panic. The failure to distinguish between refugees and sympathisers of the Nazi and Fascist regimes was lamentable, as was the inability to recognise that many Italians in Britain had strong links to where they lived and worked and no interest in fascism. The loss of life on the Arandora Star was tragic, and avoidable.

The British authorities have been criticised for not displaying a Red Cross on the Arandora Star to show it was not a legitimate target. It is also said, including by the then Italian Consul General to the UK in a book by the Arandora Star Memorial Trust to commemorate 75 years since the tragedy, that the Arandora Star looked like a military vessel, not one carrying civilians, because it was painted battle grey and had a very visible gun emplacement.

"Between 1939 and 1945, 3,500 Allied merchant ships and 175 Allied warships were sunk, and 72,200 Allied naval and merchant seamen lost their lives. The Germans lost 783 U-boats and approximately 30,000 sailors, three quarters of Germany's 40,000-man submarine force.

<https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/world-war-ii/1942/atlantic.html>

On the World War 2 naval conflicts in the Atlantic (known as the Battle of the Atlantic)

My father never expressed any resentment over his treatment and said he was safer and better fed in Australia than many people who lived in London through the war. He loved Britain, and his diary expresses his disagreement with internees who were apparently glad to hear that London had been bombed. He also almost never spoke about his internment or his ordeal on the Arandora Star and the Dunera.

Ironically, my father could have avoided internment! In 1939, he, his brother Peter and their mother went to the USA to visit her brother who lived in New Jersey. They were invited to stay to avoid the widely anticipated war in Europe. Instead, they returned to Britain in August, shortly before war was declared.

After the war, my father found work surveying sites for reconstruction as he had studied Architecture at The Polytechnic in Regent Street, London before the war. He never resumed his architectural studies and never became an architect but worked until his retirement as a Draughtsman/Assistant Architect, in the Civil Service from 1950. He married my mother Fiammetta Cattaneo, an Italian citizen who survived the war despite living in the heavily bombed port city of Genoa. They had three children - my brother Charles, sister Marina and I - and lived together until my father died in 2006.

The victims of the Arandora Star have not been forgotten. Although there has been no official British commemoration or apology, the survivors - including my father - were honoured by the Italian state in 1990 with the equivalent of a knighthood.

There are memorials to the victims of the Arandora Star in St Peter's Italian Church in Clerkenwell, London, and in Glasgow and Cardiff Roman Catholic Cathedrals. Annual commemorative masses are held in all three places. There are also memorials at Pier Head on Liverpool waterfront, in Middlesborough Town Hall, and on the Scottish Island of Colonsay.

The tragedy is also remembered in Italy, with a memorial chapel in Bardi (Emilia-Romagna), a memorial plaque in Barga (Tuscany), a memorial in Bollengo (Piedmont) and annual commemorative events in at least Bardi and Barga. There have been other events in recent years commemorating the sinking of the Arandora Star in a number of places in Britain and Italy.

The Warth Mills "notorious internment camp housing thousands of falsely imprisoned Italians and German Jews in deplorable conditions" (Bury Times 23 June 2018) was the subject of an exhibition at the Fusilier Museum in Bury in 2018. A memorial to the internees was also unveiled at the former site of the camp. The camp was used from June 1940 to house internees destined to be deported and by 1941 was a Prisoner of War camp (with better living conditions).

The internment camps in Australia are remembered at the Tatura Irrigation and Wartime Camps Museum and the Loveday Internment Camp Display at the Barmera Visitor Information Centre.

The victims and survivors of the sinking of the Arandora Star are remembered by over a thousand family members, friends and others on the Arandora Star Facebook group.

Britain was not alone in interning 'enemy aliens' during World War Two. The US detained 31,000 people of German, Italian and Japanese ancestry, and persuaded several Latin American countries to deport people of the same origin to the US for internment. Canada and Australia also interned Germans, Italians and Japanese living in their country, as well as accepting internees from the UK.

Germany, Italy and Japan also had internment camps. In addition, Nazi Germany, it should never be forgotten, ran forced labour, transit, concentration and extermination camps.

Many reputable sources cite an estimate that 70-85 million people, military and civilian, died in World War Two (there are lower estimates, still running into tens of millions).

FURTHER READING

There is plenty of material on internment by the British during World War Two, including in Australia, on the sinking of the SS Arandora Star and the journey of the HMT Dunera.

These include

- Collar the Lot, Peter and Leni Gillman, Quartet Books, 1980
- The Internment of Aliens, Francois Lafitte, Penguin Books, 1940 (reprinted by Libris in 1988)
- Marched In, Lurline and Arthur Knee, Tatura and District Historical Society, 2008
- British Internment and the Internment of Britons, Edited by Gilly Carr and Rachel Pistol, Bloomsbury, 2023

For shorter accounts see

<https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/internment-of-enemy-aliens-in-1940-the-fate-of-italians-resident-in-a-britain-at-war/> Internment

<https://beta.nationalarchives.gov.uk/explore-the-collection/stories/the-loss-of-ss-arandora-star/>

<https://www.mariner.ie/the-sinking-of-arandora-star/> Sinking of Arandora Star

<https://www.bbc.com/news/10409026> The Dunera



My father on the right in 1949 or 1950, with his brother John and mother Matilda