

The Good Weekend

Wartime story out... Aboard the 'he ship' camera to Sydney

IN SEPTEMBER, 1940, one of them wrily described His Majesty's Transport *Danera* as the "pink-pocket hutchback". The book is based mainly on accounts collected by Parkin from 23 of the refugees and the documents and articles published at the time, including The *Danera* Statement, a memorandum submitted to the United Kingdom High Commissioner in Australia.

E. Harman, a former Chief Rabbi of Munich, complained of the conditions on the ship, one of them being restricted on his head round the mast, and three him overboard.

Two internees found out of bounds were tied to a post, and one was beaten until he bled.

"His screams of pain could be heard from afar," wrote one of the prisoners.

When harrowed internees were being exercised on the upper deck, a guard threw an empty bottle among the passing men. "The bottle broke and the internees were driven over the splinters with bare feet," said a witness.

Among these "dangerous" men were university professors, rabbis, lawyers, poets, composers, musicians, chemists, financiers, journalists, film producers, actors, stage designers and a Roman Catholic priest.

The background to this unhappy fiasco of humanity was that when war broke out in 1939 England had about 130,000 aliens, many of whom were German and Austrian Jews who had fled from Nazi persecution and oppression. As the war intensified, hostility to the aliens grew and Britain began to intern them, fearing that some were security risks.



Danera, the prison ship which brought more than 2,000 internees to Sydney in 1940.

In a book after the war the captain of the *Libau* related that, though his portico he thought he saw people jumping overboard and had the impression a mutiny had broken out.

When night fell he sent a few of his sailors in rubber boats to pick up any survivors. All the sailors could find, however, was a number of suitcases floating on the water in which they found numerous letters written in German and mailed from Germany to civilian internees in England.

The *Libau* commander then radioed a message to other *U-Boats* in the area informing their captains that *Danera* was carrying German POWs, and requesting them not to attack the ship.

Some of the internees had already survived one torpedoing. They had been on their way to Canada in *Arandora Star* with 1,600 British and 600 German and Austrian aboard. Only 881 were saved.

Despite their physical degradation the internees led a stimulating intellectual life. They studied, they wrote, they played language studies, plays, music, covered every aspect of the ongoing and religious services.

Subjects for talks ranged from the life of May Beattie to a big German shipping firm, modern painting (by a leading surrealist), the influence of C. P. E. Bach on Beethoven (by a maestro).

'Hess has escaped!'

An internee camp officer who drank too much and an internee named Yashov Hess provided one light-hearted moment for the unhappy *Danera* victims.

One evening the officer said to a camp spokesman, Dr. Lewis: "Hess has escaped!"

"That's impossible, sir," said Dr. Lewis. "I saw him myself last night on board."

"In a fact," said the tipsy officer, "I myself heard on the radio that Hess has escaped."

"But how did he escape?" asked Dr. Lewis.

"By plane," said the officer. "But they caught him."

"Where?" Dr. Lewis asked.

"The England," was the answer.

Yashov Hess was found in his hat at *Titania* internee camp near Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess, who had flown from Germany, was under arrest in England.

PERSONAL DESCRIPTION

Height: 6' 0" in
Build: Slender
Complexion: Fair
Colour of hair: Dark Brown
Colour of eyes: Blue
Remarks: Well educated, intelligent, and of high character.
Signature of holder: [Signature]
Finger: [Finger] Finger: [Finger]

Part of the Certificate of Registration of Internee issued to Harry Jeddels on arrival in Australia aboard *Danera*.

The internees were dependent on military for air, and that in overcrowded conditions through the tops.

Danera, of 12,345 tonnes, had been converted to a troopship and gear designed for 50 soldiers who also later migrated to Australia.

The officers and soldiers who guarded us were mainly those who had escaped from Denmark. They were embittered. At the time I thought that they hated us for their spokesmen and were taking their revenge on us.

There was only one ship's doctor and hardly any medical supplies. One internee who became ill and joined the doctor's queue said he noticed that the same bottle from the same bottle was the only "medicine" given to every sick man. The spoon was not washed or wiped after each patient.

The doctor ordered this man into the ship's hospital but all the beds were occupied and the hospital was so small there was no room to lie on the floor between the beds so "I pushed myself under a bed to lie down."

Dr. Franz Eschenberg, a lawyer, complained to the guards that they had been robbing everything, he replied that everything carried in hand or boxes in the pockets was taken.

Lovers valuable things like gloves, table lamps, food, pipes, books and private papers were thrown carelessly on the ground. Valuables were stuffed into sacks or into the pockets of the searching soldiers.

Some men emptied water were lying on the floor. Hundreds of gold wedding rings and 1,200 watches were taken.

Hans Harman, a school headmaster who later migrated to Israel from Australia, and other papers, whether they understood them or not, were torn up and thrown away.

"Yes in the German context."

The internees on *Danera* included Nazi and Italian prisoners of war. As the ship reached Cape Town, in South Africa, one of the POWs was found in an English soldier's uniform and suspected of trying to escape.

Kurt Fischer, a scientist, who had been held at Buchenwald and was released when influential relatives got him a permit to enter England, saw the prisoner dragged out.

"Then we could hear the terrible sound of the whistling, accompanied by the agonised screams of a tormented human being, which reminded us of Buchenwald where people received 25 lashes for quite minor transgressions."

Despite their grim life, the internees had one slice of luck on the voyage. Their days out from Liverpool, *Danera* was attacked by a German submarine. But as her *U-Boat* (later *U-30*) was made to stop completely except for short punts and come to the upper deck. After about 20 minutes we were ordered to return to our quarters.

"Lo and behold! Unless we had seen the results of our own actions, none of us would have dreamed that such behaviour by civilian people was possible."

All our clothing was strewn about everywhere. The linings had been torn from coats and trousers and whatever was in them taken by our 'guards'.

"Moreover the guards were disappointed and angry at the fact that so much of value was found and, as an act of revenge, they pushed and jostled us and tried to assault and provoke us."

"One of my friends, Bruno Simon the well-known sculptor, showed me a bayonet stab in the side."

Two internees died during the voyage and a third committed suicide by jumping overboard during an exercise period on the deck.

Organised a choir

Father Walter Keing, SJ, a Roman Catholic priest, spoke on Goethe's *Faust*, a well-known author spoke on Spengler's *Decline of the West*, an anti-music critic spoke on primitive society, and a former industrialist gave an address on secret weapons.

"I doubt whether any artists could have matched the performances," wrote Felix Wender, a music critic in Australia. Wender's father organised a choir and he and Wender tracked their members to give up with bits of music from the classics. And they were on literary paper.

"This resulted at times in the most extraordinary imitations of names of items from Herodotus and Mozart's *G Major Mass*, supplemented by speeches from those months and never has the lively internee paper been so crowded as it was on those days."

Wender also made the first sketches for a one-act *Aida* to come to the ship by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir Eugene Goossens.

When the bagged internees reached Australia they were cheered by the friendly faces of Australian soldiers and the kind treatment.

Most of them went to an internee camp at Hay, NSW, some to Tatura, Victoria. Applications soon began to secure their freedom and over the next two years most were released. Some returned to England and joined an Army Pioneer unit, about 800 became members of the Eighth

Employment Company of the Australian Army, some migrated to Israel.

Two parliamentary White Papers in England admitted that mistakes had been made in the fact the internees became known as "The Mistaken." The British Government apologized for the mistaken deportation and compensation for the internees. The *Danera* internees were given a grant of £100 for their maintenance and a grant of £100 for their maintenance and a grant of £100 for their maintenance.

Dr. Lewis, a medical officer, was able to write the story of the *Danera* internees.

"It was all very unpleasant, possibly unjust, even unhelpful, but by comparison not half as bad as being in a concentration camp, being bombed and, as a result, being on the Stalingrad front from first to last."

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Enjoy!

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
9	10	11	12	13	14	15

TODAY at 2 pm - The Railway Children, a good classic movie from E. Nesbit's book of the same name, written in 1906. Full of children and coincidences. Macquarie University Theatre, North Ryde. Adults \$2, children \$1.30, and more.

YOU can always meet Oscar to collect things. Richard Strauss, one of the last Romantic composers, based his opera *Salmoe* on Oscar Wilde's writings. It's sung at German. Gala night on Wednesday at the Opera House, 7.30 pm.

RUN right up the scale from infant violence to the Sun Aria finale at the 42nd City of Sydney Ennalsod, from Monday until September 28. Sun Aria semi-finals on September 18, at the Opera House, semi-finals on September 22 at the Town Hall, 21.40.

CRIMINALS' music - rock, funk, but NOT western - can be heard in the Martin Place amphitheatre next week. Free performance by Roadplay, Carl Myriel and The Lambs, at 12.15 pm and 1.15 pm on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday - Thursday at noon and 1 pm.

The scariest family life of the Twenties is explored in *Lang Day's Hersey*. Into NIGHT, from O'Neill's powerful autobiographical play. It is directed by the distinguished American Robert Lewis, who the account should be convincing. Performed by Ensemble Theatre artists and presented by the Sydney Theatre Company. From Friday to October 20, at the Opera

House Drama Theatre - Monday to Saturday 8 pm, with Saturday matinees at 2 pm.

THE tribulation, romantic and otherwise of a young Jewish singer in war-torn Vienna, Switzerland and New York are described in *Tangle Lake Lake*, a cabaret featuring Robyn Archer. At the Seymour Centre, from next Thursday to September 29.

WALITZKI philanthropist, singing legends and other interweaves of the public may attend an illustrated lecture. The Secretary, Director of Arts Programs, by Jak Kelly, Associate Professor of Physics at the University of NSW, Tomorrow at the Australian Museum, College Street, 3 pm. \$1 admission includes light refreshments. Ring first 211 3911.

BANGLADESHI Cultural Night, an informal evening of talks, colourful dances and carols (from mild to hot) next Friday for Community Aid Abroad. The Australian-Bangladesh Travellers Association will present a film about the country and people around Dhaka. Booking must be confirmed by Wednesday: 235 7663, 101 (Lobby) at the reception desk, corner of Botany and Coward Streets, Macquarie.

LADY Macquarie, a second form, began a new career today with Betty Ray Cruise. The *Atorney General* Mr. Walker will be at her launching at the St George Theatre Company, from next Friday to October 20, at the Opera

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Obtain further information from Henry Woods, AGSM, P.O. Box 1, Kensington, N.S.W. 2033. Telephone: (02) 662 2600.

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Enjoy!

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