

Dunera News

Issue No. 116
October 2023

Vale Bern Brent



83rd Anniversary Events in Sydney and Hay



Left: HMT Dunera model creator Tom Wolf and Sandy Wolf, Dunera descendant
Right: Hay re-enactment

A publication for former refugees from Nazi and Fascist persecution (mistakenly shipped to and interned in Australia at Hay and Tatura, many later serving with the Allied Forces), their relatives and their friends.

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Foundation Editor:

The late Henry Lippmann OAM

Editor:

Eva Betts, Crayon Creative

Editorial Responsibility:

The Committee of the Dunera Association

The views expressed by writers of particular articles are the responsibility of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Dunera Association.

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Dunera Association Inc Committee 2022-23

President - Ron Reichwald

duneraboys@gmail.com
0401 048 558

Vice President - Dr. Seumas Spark

(St Leonards, VIC)
duneraboys@gmail.com

Secretary - Jacquie Houlden (regional NSW)

duneraboys@gmail.com

Assistant Secretary - Kate Garrett

Treasurer - Geoff Winter (Canberra)

duneraboys@gmail.com

Immediate Past President - Dr. Peter Felder

Jack Strom

Janet Arndt

John Ebert (Sydney)

Kristin Otto

Michelle Frenkel (Shepparton, VIC)

Alan Lion (UK)

Dr. Karen Wayne

Ed Lippmann (Sydney)

All committee members reside in Melbourne
unless otherwise stated.

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS

Please consider contributing an article to Dunera News.

From family anecdotes to historical research, any contributions are gratefully received.

Simply email duneraboys@gmail.com noting you have a contribution for the newsletter.

From the President



Welcome to issue 116 of *Dunera News*. Unfortunately, as I write this, Israel and the Middle East are facing a most tragic conflict which has caused

much pain and suffering to many people. We can only hope and pray for a speedy end so that all peoples in this region can live in peace and harmony.

This issue will highlight the Sydney and Hay 83rd anniversary functions, a special article on the life of our late Dunera Boy Bern Brent, an article on the work of Duldig Studio and its connection to the Queen Mary Internees, as well as our regular *From the Archives* column. Please refer to our *Save the Dates* for all 84th anniversary events in 2024. I have also included an appeal for committee renewal.

We have introduced a *From Our Facebook Page* column. In each issue we will select an interesting contribution, as this highlights the

importance of our Facebook content. Our page now has over 650 members and we receive fascinating material from all over the world, much of which is invaluable to historians.

This will be my final *Dunera News* as your President. After four years, I have decided to retire and hand over to my successor, who will have fresh ideas for the Association and the Dunera community at large. It has been an absolute honour to have served you, particularly through the pandemic. I will continue to assist as required in my position as ex-officio on the committee.

I wish you all good health for the festive season and in 2024 and look forward to seeing you at our 84th anniversary events.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ron Reichwald'.

Ron Reichwald

SAVE THE DATES

84th Anniversary Events 2024

Tatura, VIC - Sunday 14 April

Sydney, NSW - Sunday 1 September

Hay, NSW - Saturday 7 September

Melbourne, VIC - Sunday 10 November

A Dunera Life - Bern Brent

Dr Seumas Spark

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Most of the 2050 or so Dunera internees – or Dunera boys, as they are commonly known – were German and Austrian Jews, many of them refugees from Hitler’s regime. In 1940, on Churchill’s orders, these “enemy aliens” were arrested in Britain and deported to Australia, where they were to be held for the duration of the Second World War. The Dunera was the ship that brought them to Australia, and Bern Brent, who died last week at 100 years of age, was among the internees on board.

I was lucky enough to work with Ken Inglis and friends on *Dunera Lives: A Visual History*, published in 2018. The book is an attempt to tell something of the Dunera story through 500 images, one of which attracted far more comment than any other. This was a grainy black and white photograph from Bern’s collection taken on 14 December 1938, a month after the anti-Semitic violence of Kristallnacht.

The photo shows 15 year old Gerd Bernstein (Bern’s original name), dressed in a suit, raising a glass to his family. His mother Helena, father Otto and maternal grandmother Sophie Maas sit at a table in their Berlin home at Wielandstrasse 17. A picture of young Gerd hangs on the wall. The faces most exposed to the camera are those of grandson and grandmother. Gerd looks thoughtful and hesitant, even sad, while on his grandmother’s face I see both love and terror – love for him and terror for what the future holds for her Jewish family. The next day Gerd left Berlin on a Kindertransport bound for Britain. On 17 December, alone in Britain just two days after leaving home for a strange and unfamiliar country, he turned sixteen.

His parents survived the war despite his father Otto’s imprisonment in Theresienstadt concentration camp from 1942 to 1945. Otto was the sole survivor among the hundred people with whom he was transported to Theresienstadt; Sophie died there.

After the visual history appeared, Bern and I discussed readers’ reactions to this photograph and the intense, heavy sadness it prompted in many, me included. Bern would have none of it. He thought this response muddled, our emotions skewed by knowledge of the Holocaust.

In Bern’s mind, this photograph showed a moment in the life of his family, no more and no less. To view the photograph through the lens of the Holocaust was a mistake, and he made a point of reminding me that in 1938 the Nazis had not yet embarked on the systematic destruction of European Jewry.

Bern’s position on the photograph reflected his historical preferences. The substance of any history, Dunera’s included, is in the detail. He saw history through a lens that allowed little room for the floating of partly conceived ideas and none at all for speculation, no matter how worthy the intention. If there were

a place for emotion, it was after the facts were established. Perhaps his approach could be called traditional. I can't imagine Bern thinking much of the modern belief that histories can be retold on the basis of emotions.

Whatever the merits of Bern's approach, it made him a wonderful informant. His view of the past as the stuff of hard facts meant that he spoke only about what he knew. If he didn't know the answer, he said so. If he thought the question irrelevant, he made that clear too, and then explained why. He punctured myths, of which Dunera has more than its share, and raised questions that forced historians and others to think anew about key moments in the story.

Recently, I asked him about an incident that looms large in Dunera history and memory. On the voyage to Australia, British guards treated the internees with calculated brutality in a gross, and in some cases criminal, dereliction of duty. The Dunera canon tells that guards, as part of this sustained assault, forced internees to walk over broken glass strewn across the deck of the ship. The glass was there, Bern told me, but he doubted it was placed deliberately, and he and others simply stepped around it. While the weight of evidence about this incident is against him, I know that Bern, as a historian of the Dunera, never spoke idly. On that basis alone, his account demands consideration.

Ken Inglis cherished Bern's clarity and commitment to accuracy. They corresponded from the start of Ken's Dunera project – which also led to a second book, *Dunera Lives: Profiles*, in 2020 – exchanging emails regularly until Ken's death in December 2017. Their voluminous correspondence, now part of the Inglis Dunera papers at the National Library of Australia, reveals two scholars in respectful and admiring conversation, one testing notions and ideas, the other encouraging or discouraging those possibilities.

While Bern was an oracle on Dunera, on one aspect of the story he had no answers. When the Dunera internees arrived in Australia, most were incarcerated first at Hay in western New South Wales. Because the camps there could house only 2000 people, around ninety-five of the internees, seemingly chosen at random, were taken instead to Tatura in Victoria's Goulburn Valley, along with other men who had travelled on the Dunera and been deemed dangerous by British authorities.

Bern was part of this Tatura rump, and there he stayed for the duration of his internment, which lasted until January 1942. Thus, he knew nothing of camp life at Hay. Ken would chuckle at this inconvenience, suggesting that Bern had been remiss in not arranging his internment to suit the needs of future historians.

Bern exerted a strong influence on the writing of the two volumes of *Dunera Lives*, saving us from mistakes and misinterpretations, and suggesting lines of enquiry that emerged as themes in the books. He was our most prolific and important informant. If our telling of a story differed from the one he knew, he always gave our version a fair hearing. On the odd occasion, we might even have convinced him.

On other occasions, not at all. In *Dunera Lives* we took a strong line on Winston Churchill's role in the Dunera affair. While Churchill's wartime government would later issue an apology of sorts to the Dunera internees for the appalling treatment

they suffered, by that time many had already concluded that British liberalism was a chimera. Bern was of the opposite view. He held that Churchill had no choice but to act as he did, and that to suggest otherwise was to allow historical judgement to be derailed by the luxury of hindsight.

This position was entwined with another view to which Bern stuck fast. The Dunera had delivered him to Australia, where he made a rewarding and productive life. As he said often, there was nothing for him in post-war Europe, whereas in Australia, as a young man with energy and purpose, he was able to embrace education and new beginnings, free of the restrictions and prejudices that had shaped his life in Germany.

For Bern, his good fortune was the story, and this mattered more than issues such as the question of Churchill's culpability. He thought the Dunera the luckiest thing to ever happen to him. Perhaps the fact that his parents survived the Holocaust also influenced this position.

Bern was an unusual Dunera boy in other ways too. While happily Australian, he maintained strong links to his homeland. He returned to Berlin and Germany often, visiting past haunts and chasing up friends. He continued to speak and read German, and listened to German news on the radio. A couple of years ago Bern wrote to tell me about the Exilmuseum in Berlin, after he had heard mention of the nascent institution on a German radio program. He wondered if the museum's curators would be interested in learning about the strange story of the German and Austrian exiles who in 1940 found themselves interned in rural Australia. They were.

For other Dunera boys, such engagement with Germany and Austria was anathema. Their wartime experiences and knowledge of the Holocaust poisoned their feelings for the land of their birth. Many never returned to Germany and Austria; many chose to avoid Germanic culture and language.

Bern too knew the pain of persecution and the tragedy of the Holocaust. Anti-Semitism forced him and his mother to flee Germany for Britain. Hitler's regime murdered his grandmother and imprisoned his father. But never did he allow the pain and injustice of the past to determine the direction of his life. It was a remarkably brave choice, and one that not all Dunera boys were able to make, or even wanted to.

Bern's longevity conferred a sad and perhaps unwanted title. He was the last Dunera boy in Australia, and among the last anywhere. It is thought that there is a Dunera boy alive in France, and another in New York, and possibly others of whom my colleagues and I don't know, though it is unlikely that these "unknowns" would number more than one or two.

Bern accepted his position with grace, acknowledging the dubious honour as a responsibility rather than a burden, which surely it was. To the best of my knowledge, he never refused a request for an interview, and was diligent in answering questions from scholars and members of the Dunera diaspora. Perhaps he saw duty in these tasks; the Dunera had led him to a good life in Australia, and provided both a scholarly purpose in his later years, and enduring friendships. On what proved to be his last weekend, Bern travelled to Melbourne,

where he delighted in the company of Peter Danby's family. Danby, originally Peter Danziger, was also a Dunera Boy, though the friendship was older than that, the two having met in Britain. Bern was accompanied by Peter and Joanna, two of his three children. The Brent–Danby friendship is now carried by the next generation. In September 2022, I took the British author and activist Jennifer Nadel to meet Bern in his Canberra home. Jennifer's father, George Nadel, was a budding scholar when he was deported to Australia on the Dunera. She knows little about his internment, but enough to realise that George's post war silences hid deep trauma. For Jennifer, Dunera has been a difficult and painful word.

Aside from their Jewish heritage, George Nadel and Bern had little in common. George was born Austrian, Bern German. Both had a passion for history, though they were driven by differing approaches and emphases. George, who went on to found and edit the venerable journal *History and Theory*, was an academic who practised history in more formal worlds and ways than Bern. If Bern were ever a reader of that journal, I imagine him warming more to the history than the theory. Bern saw the Dunera as a ship of salvation; for George, the Dunera seems to have heralded only misery.

And yet both men survived the Dunera, and by 2022 Bern was one of very few people anywhere in the world who could talk directly of the experience. Through Bern, Jennifer was given a privileged glimpse of a past about which George never spoke. As we drove away from Bern's home, she said that his German-accented English, and certain of his mannerisms, evoked fond thoughts of her father.

When I wrote to Jennifer to tell her of Bern's death, she immediately recalled his bearing and presence, and the importance to her of their meeting. Bern's willingness to act as a conduit to the past, to talk openly and directly about Dunera, helped many people like her to better understand the story and their part in it. In so doing he aroused emotions. I wonder what he made of that.

Jennifer described meeting Bern as a privilege. It's the right word. To have known, talked and corresponded with him was a privilege, and something I cherish. Ruhe sanft, lieber Bern.



Bern Brent with Ron Reichwald at Tatura in 2016.

83rd Anniversary Commemoration, Hay

1-3 September 2023

Antonia Lehn

I don't recall when I first heard of the Dunera Boys, but I realised that I had met several of them – namely Professors Fred Gruen and Peter Herbst at the ANU, and Bern Brent through the Canberra Goethe Society and a German writers' group. I have also been able to assist Elisabeth Lebensaft with translation and editing of articles relating to the Dunera Boys. I must also mention Geoff Winter, Dunera Association's Treasurer, whom I first met while working at the Australian Bureau of Statistics in the 1980s, and who has kept me informed of Dunera events and activities.

When I saw the notice for the Hay Commemoration, I decided to take the opportunity to join it. Hay is quite a charming historical town, and our initial meeting was for dinner at a bistro on the Friday evening.

Saturday commenced at the Hay Railway Station, with a symbolic re-enactment of the internees' arrival. Locals had dressed in historic costumes and somberly marched from the carriage along the platform, under the command of a soldier. True to historical accounts, the soldier passed his rifle to one of the internees while he rolled a cigarette. The audience included a significant number of locals, and the gathering was welcomed by the Hay Mayor, Cr. Carol Oataway. The local tourism team provided a generous morning tea. There was ample time to visit the Dunera Museum in two railway carriages. The museum was well curated and explained the sequence of events regarding the Dunera Boys' passage and arrival in Sydney, followed immediately by the train trip to Hay. The railway station itself has been beautifully restored and maintained, even though no trains have been operating there since 1981. Then it was time for the walk (or drive) along the Dunera Way to Camps 7 and 8, to the tune of the Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves, from Verdi's *Nabucco*.

After lunch Ron Reichwald and David Houston led a tour to the cemetery where we visited the grave of Dunera Boy Menasche Bodner, followed by a visit to the Hay Gaol Museum. Dinner was at the Bishop's Lodge Restaurant.

The weekend concluded with a visit to the Bishop's Lodge Historic House and Rose Garden, including a morning tea hosted by the Bishop's Lodge Committee.

I found the whole weekend a profoundly moving experience. It is heartening that two generations of descendants of the Hay Dunera Boys made the journey, mostly from Melbourne. It was also reassuring that the local Hay people are equally committed to the maintenance of the Museum and the memory of the Dunera Boys. It was a privilege to meet David Houston who, as a child, still remembers seeing the arrival of the train as a five year old in 1940.



1	2	
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9		

1. Ron Reichwald speaking at Hay railway station
2. Locals role-playing Dunera Boys alighting from train
3. Grandchildren of David Houston & son Rowan
4. Aubrey & Selma Seknow
5. Ted Curcuitt rounding up the Internees
6. Seumas Spark and son with Paul & Julie Haarburger
7. David Houston
8. Morning tea at Hay railway station showing Gaylene Stevens from Hay Dunera Museum Committee
9. 'Internees' being marched

Quest for Committee Renewal

Dunera Association at the Crossroads

Ron Reichwald

Dunera Association finds itself in a similar position to that of the late 1990s. At that time, the committee was on the verge of winding up the Association as the members saw no future with the accelerated passing of Dunera Boys and no new blood foreseen for the committee.

Mike Sondheim was President at the time and he sprang into action. It was his foresight that resulted in the recruitment of Dr Peter Felder, Rebecca Silk, Geoff Winter and myself onto the committee. I took over as Secretary from Horst Jacobs, who tragically passed away quite soon after. In fact, the previous committee had already dispersed nearly all the Association's funds to various charities as part of the winding up process.

I now call upon our membership to carefully consider a commitment to join the committee. Most of our committee members are first generation descendants/friends, approaching the stage of life that translates to possible retirement from the committee. We now require second and third generation members on the committee - in other words, grandchildren of Dunera Boys/Queen Mary Internees or friends need to step up. We have several such persons on the committee but we require more. Without this influx of younger members, Dunera Association might cease to exist.

The upcoming AGM will take place via Zoom at 8pm on Monday 20 November 2023. Notice of meeting and nomination forms will be sent to all members closer to the event.

Dunera Boy as Hero on TV

Peter Dehn, Berlin

The German semi-documentary *Nazijäger - Reise In Die Finsternis* [Nazi Hunters - Journey Into Darkness] has been nominated for an Emmy Award in the International Academy of Television Arts & Sciences Documentary section 2023. The film, premiered last year on public TV channel Das Erste, competes with entries from Brazil, the UK and Qatar. The winner will be awarded on the 20th of November in New York.



Nazi Hunters - Journey Into Darkness
Nazijäger – Reise in die Finsternis
Source: Norddeutscher Rundfunk

Anton Walter Freud is one of the main characters of the film. Sigmund Freud's grandson, and a native of Vienna, he was arrested in British exile during his mathematics exams, interned on the Isle of Man and deported on HMT Dunera to Australia. He was able to return to England as early as 1941, where he joined the Pioneer Corps, but transferred to the Special Operations Executive (SOE) intelligence service. With the War Crimes Investigation Team (WCIT) No. 2, he tracked down Nazi criminals such as Auschwitz concentration camp commandant Höß and the men responsible for the poison gas Zyklon-B, as well as doctors involved in the Bullenhuser Damm infanticide and brought them all to justice.

The film tells the story of these investigations and combines contemporary witnesses and fictional elements. Anton Walter Freud, played by Franz Hartwig, appears in numerous scenes. The film was directed by Raymond Ley (script with Hannah Ley) from a draft by Dirk Eisfeld.

From Our Facebook Page

Posted by Diana Mohr – 19 September 2023

A Message from the UK-based Dunera Interest Group:

A few months ago, a small working party was set up to resuscitate the 1980s "Dunera (Europe) Association," whose members then comprised of ex-fellow Dunera internees. Membership of the newly-formed Dunera Interest Group is open to anyone at all with an interest in the Dunera story and UK war-time internment.

If you would like to learn more about the new group, please go to the website, dunera.org.uk

Membership is open to all: click on Join our Mailing List. The first Zoom talk has been arranged for 8pm on Monday 16 October (UK time) and will concentrate on the UK Government's policy on war-time internment. Full details can be viewed on the website from which registration can be made. There is no charge for both attendance at the talk and registration as a member of the mailing-list.

Anyone with an interest in the Dunera story is welcome to join. *You must answer two security questions.* We now have 562 members.

Sydney Event

Ron Reichwald

On 27 August 2023, 65 people attended the Tribute Museum on Jones Bay Wharf to commemorate the arrival at this location of the Dunera Boys 83 years ago. This event was generously co-hosted by Mr Paul Signorelli AM of Doltone House who provided a sumptuous high tea.

When attending this event over the years, it has not escaped me that my late father, Martin Reichwald, would have had no clue as to how his life and the lives of his fellow Dunera Boys were to change in this foreign country once he disembarked HMT Dunera. These men, who had been uprooted mercilessly from their homes in Britain, treated like animals on board the Dunera, and who embarked on a 19 hour train journey across the New South Wales plains to the edge of the outback were probably thinking, "Is this for real? Am I on planet Earth?". We cannot even imagine their thought processes. Yet here we were, in the most comfortable of surroundings, trying to visualise the experiences of our beloved forefathers; all quite surreal, particularly in front of Tom Wolf's model of HMT Dunera.

We were fortunate to yet again have some quality guest speakers, namely Associate Professor Ian Maxwell and Dr Joseph Toltz, both from the University of Sydney, who spoke on the topic 'Sounds of Europe: the Dunera Boys' final revue, *Sergeant Snow White*. This was a fascinating presentation on the background and presentation of the various iterations of *Sergeant Snow White*, including its contribution to avant-garde theatre in Australia. The final presentation of this work at the Union Theatre, Parkville in 1943 was a culmination of previous productions and it is from this last production that both presenters are working on attempting to produce a podcast based on the play. Should funding be available, both Ian and Joseph would like to explore a possible stage production. On a personal note, in one of the audio visuals showing some of the players, my late father was shown as one of the seven dwarfs.

This event will be held in the Tribute Museum each year thanks to Paul Signorelli. The venue is perfect and most appropriate for the occasion. I hope many of you will visit Jones Bay Wharf, either for our annual event or at other times.

From left to right: Geoff Winter, Peter Felder, Paul Signorelli & Ron Reichwald; Guest Speakers - Associate Professor Ian Maxwell & Dr Joseph Toltz; HMT Dunera model creator Tom Wolf & Sandy Wolf, Dunera descendant



Queen Mary Internees And The Duldig Studio

Eva de Jong-Duldig, Founder, Duldig Studio, Melbourne

“‘Luxury’ internees have disembarked in Sydney on their way to a country internment camp... The internees are Germans, Eurasians and Italians. They will be kept in Australia for the duration... Police and naval launches supervised the transfer of the internees from the liner to a ferry boat in mid-harbour.”

The Daily Telegraph 28 September 1940, describing the arrival of the Queen Mary from Singapore with 266 German and Austrian ‘enemy alien’ internees.

In 1990, together with Lotte Layton, I organised a reunion of the Queen Mary Internees to celebrate our arrival in Australia fifty years earlier. The historian Dr Paul Bartrop, who attended this reunion, initiated further research and published an article titled, ‘Incompatible With Security: Enemy Alien Internees From Singapore In Australia, 1940-45’, in the *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* in 1993. The process of uncovering information about the Queen Mary Internees continues to the present day.

Through dedicated programs and publications, the Duldig Studio, a public museum in Melbourne, has played a significant part in this process. Its rich collection of documents, photographs and works of art from Singapore and Tatura were kept intact by my parents, the artists Karl Duldig and Slawa Horowitz-Duldig. They formed the basis of the exhibitions “A Malayan Bungalow” (2012) and “Art Behind the Wire” (2014) which focussed on Singapore and Tatura respectively. The “Art Behind the Wire” catalogue by historian Melinda Mockridge received a Victorian Community History Award, while the related Duldig Studio videos, [Europe meets Asia](https://youtu.be/AZsu9u8ZYvc); (<https://youtu.be/AZsu9u8ZYvc>) and [Art behind the wire](https://youtu.be/_OZCJSILMvM); (https://youtu.be/_OZCJSILMvM) were part of a documentary series which won the Victorian Community History Award for Interpretation in 2016.

In 2020, to celebrate the 80th Anniversary of arrival of the Queen Mary Internees in Australia, the Duldig Studio produced a webinar titled “Laugh and Forget”. Featuring family stories told by surviving former child internees and descendants of former internees, this webinar generated world-wide interest. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCBY4ghP6co>

My 2017 family memoir *Driftwood: Escape and survival through art*, which is principally based on the Duldig Studio collection, includes extensive chapters on the Duldig family’s Singapore and Tatura experience. Adapted from the above

book, *Driftwood The Musical*, also included a scene on the internment experience. It was performed to packed houses in Melbourne and Sydney in 2022 and 2023. <https://driftwoodthemusical.com.au/about/>

The Duldig Studio recently loaned a Karl Duldig Tatura drawing to the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne for its current exhibition, and a chapter on the Queen Mary Internees will be included in a forthcoming publication by Cambridge University Press.

For more information contact: enquiries@duldig.org.au or visit www.duldig.org.au

Visit the Dunera Association website - 'Connecting The Dunera Boys, Queen Mary Internees, Family and Friends Worldwide' <https://www.duneraassociation.com/>

Letter To The Editor

Dear Editor

I am happy to respond to the call to send articles for the next newsletter.

For my website www.dunera.de, after a comprehensive relaunch, numerous articles about Dunera Boys and the historical background are in preparation. Among them is a detailed discussion of the legend that HMT Dunera was escorted by a German U-boat after its torpedo attack to protect the German prisoners on board from other German ships. I would appreciate it if you would print the attached brief summary of the article in the Dunera Newsletter.

See the following 'Two Torpedoes Against The Dunera' page 15, and previous item 'Dunera Boy As Hero On TV' page 11.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Best regards,
Peter Dehn

Two torpedoes against the Dunera - misses and false conclusions

Peter Dehn

The reports about the torpedo attack on the HMT Dunera are highly contradictory. This is linked to the legend that a German submarine protected the ship, and the presumed German prisoners on board, from attacks by the Nazi navy. The origin of this untruth can be traced back to a dubious source with Nazi affinities - the novel *SOS Rettet unsere Seelen* [Save Our Souls] by a S. Ch. Clerque¹, published in West Germany in 1953. Dunera Boy Hans Marcus commented on the legend back in 1987 saying, "It seems that none of the people who heard about this book ever saw it."² For an article on his new website www.dunera.de, Peter Dehn, son of Dunera Boy Heinz Dehn, also researched this topic, among others. Here is a summary of that research.

One may say that a novel is a fictional story and has no documentary character. However, the author S. Ch. Clerque states in the introduction that he has "retold his book on the basis of the notes of a German interned in the last world war". Thus, the fiction is assumed to be authentic. Already on the first page Clerque shows a conception of authenticity that is very close to the Nazi propaganda of the time. About the beginning of WW2, Clerque writes: "England issues an ultimatum, which is met with silence. Then it declares war on Germany." That the ultimatum was preceded by the invasion of Poland by the Nazi Wehrmacht (and the Gleiwitz lie as the ostensible reason for it) is omitted.

Clerque is a master of omissions in order to create "facts" in his sense. An example: Among the 3,000 prisoners on board the "Dunera" were "also a thousand German emigrants"³, Clerque writes. These people, so the resonating insinuation, are bad people who abandoned their homeland in hard times. They are not discussed again in the book. By using the aforementioned figure, Clerque insinuates that the majority on board belonged to a species of peace-loving apolitical German civilians who suffered under British imprisonment. In this way, Clerque gives his novel characters a claim to a majority and suggests historical dimensions of such a circle of honourable people who were threatened with death by the British on the "Arandora Star". "Jews", "Italians", "Hitler opponents", "Nazis" or "World War" etc. are in any case completely foreign to Clerque.

1 S. Ch. Clerque *SOS Rettet unsere Seelen* [Save Our Souls], published in 1953 by Erich Arndt Verlag, Hagen in Westphalia.

2 Hans Marcus, "The U-Boat Commander and the Dunera." In *Dunera News* No. 12, June 1987, p. 14.

3 Clerque as above, p. 267.

Another purposeful omission is the responsibility of U-boat commander Günther Prien, who was elevated to hero status by the Nazis, for the sinking of the “Arandora Star” and the more than 800 fatalities. Clerque also does not shy away from racist remarks: he claims that the watch crews of the Dunera consisted of “Indians with flickering eyes in their dark faces”⁴.

The facts

As is known, the HMT Dunera had left Liverpool for the north on 10 July 1940. The ship, unacceptably overloaded with about 2,500 internees, 300 guards and the sailors, was west of the northern tip of Ireland on the morning of 12 July, when Otto Harms, commander of the German submarine U-56, gave the order to launch two torpedoes. Now contradictory accounts begin. Like other Dunera Boys, Klaus Wilczynski recalls “the terrifying impacts.”⁵ Harms, however, notes in his war diary that one torpedo missed because the Dunera veered away and only the second had struck the hull without exploding. “Steamer propeller heard well abeam on starbord, destroyer runs toward boat at high speed, but then apparently turns away again and disappears”⁶, Harms further noted and ordered diving. As Navy documents indicate, U-56 remained on the scene for several more days. It was not until 16 July that the submarine left this sea area for the base at Lorient, where U-56 arrived on the morning of 21 July.⁷ The Dunera, following all reports, immediately continued her trip on a southern route west of Ireland and reached her first stopover at Freetown, Sierra Leone, on 24 July.

The lies

These facts are clear and documented. Clerque first relocates the events to the sea area off Nigeria (perhaps to imply Nazi naval dominance off Africa). Clerque further claims that the U-boat appeared at the scene of the attack later after dark. People were seen jumping off the boat and objects were thrown into the water. The captain had suitcases fished out and opened, and was shocked to discover that they contained, among other things, letters and documents in German, all well preserved. Now the sea-heroic man of honour decides to radio his submarine colleagues to protect the Dunera. According to the novel, he himself sets the best example and orders to accompany the Dunera on its way along the African coast and to ensure its safety. “Only under the protection of the German ship U 81 does the Englishman reach the open waters without danger”⁸, Clerque concludes his fairy tale ode to the chivalry of the Nazi navy.

Unfortunately, this blatant lie has found its way into many reports and documentary publications. Occasionally, the dissemination has the appearance of “silent mail”. In one case, for example, it is even claimed that the author

4 *ibid.*

5 Klaus Wilczynski “Das Gefangenenschiff” (The Prison Ship), published 2001 by Verlag am Park, Berlin, p. 71.

6 War diary of the U-56, Captain Harms, entry of July 12,1940, 9.40 am. German Federal Archives RM 198/44.

7 *ibid.* entry of 21.7.1940, 9.43 am.

8 Clerque as above, pp. 301/302.

Clerque was the captain of the submarine. To this day, unfortunately, Clerque's brown fiction is quoted unchecked. Beyond the facts mentioned, this not only contradicts further facts, but in some questions also common sense.

As an aside, it is interesting to note that the Nazi Navy was dealing with a "torpedo crisis" in 1939 and 1940: according to the *Military History Magazine*⁹, the failure rate of German torpedoes was 17 percent in both years.¹⁰ U-56 had already been affected in October 1939 under Wilhelm Zahn. He reported about the attack on the British battleship "HMS Nelson": "But no detonation took place. All that could be heard aboard the submarine was the metallic impact of the torpedoes on the steel hull."¹¹ Even Prien had similar experiences.¹²

Unfortunate neighbourhood of an anonymous author

How to classify the legend according to which a German submarine protected the Dunera? And who is its author S. Ch. Clerque? Clerque was not the captain of the submarine that attacked the Dunera, although this is claimed. In the German Library¹³, where proofs of books must be delivered, the name appears otherwise only in connection with a single penny booklet of the series "Sabrina - the modern novel"¹⁴. This series was edited by Erich Arndt, the publisher of the Clerque book.

A search of naval literature leads to a group of tried-and-true Nazi naval war journalists. In their post-war publications, they similarly downplayed the war, whitewashing the role of the German military in stories that were ostensibly authentic as well as of adventurous writing, bending history along the way but nevertheless ignoring Hitler, his gang of criminals, and aspects of contemporary history. Like-minded and disinterested people in publishing houses opened platforms for these authors, for example for "non-fiction books" about the naval war or penny dreadfuls such as "SOS - Schicksale deutscher Schiffe" (SOS - Fates of German Ships) - a spinoff of the notorious magazine series "Der Landser", a "gateway drug into the neo-Nazi scene", according to historian Ernst Antoni.¹⁵ Unfortunately, the identity of S. Ch. Clerque cannot be proven.

This article is a highly abbreviated version of an article written for the website www.dunera.de. For its relaunch in late 2023, Peter Dehn and his son Paul are preparing a series of biographies of little known Dunera Boys and some contributions on the history surrounding the Dunera and the Jewish exile in Australia.

9 Heinrich Schütz "Die Torpedo-Krise im Zweiten Weltkrieg" (The Torpedo Crisis in World War II). In "Militärsgeschichte" (Edition Military History Office of the German Armed Forces) No. 1/2009, p. 12f.

10 *ibid*, page 16.

11 *ibid*, page 13.

12 Michael Thomae "Die U-Boot-Waffe im 'Unternehmen Weserübung' 1940" (The submarine weapon in 'Unternehmen Weserübung' 1940) in "Militärsgeschichte" 1/2009, p. 14.

13 Cf. Catalog of German National Library, retrieved June 30, 2023.

14 Cf. Heftromanarchiv, retrieved June 26, 2023.

15 Ernst Antoni in Dirk Wilking "Der Landser - Wie ein Mann ein Mann wird", p. 61ff. quoted from Wikipedia Germany about "Der Landser", retrieved Sep 15, 2023.

From the Archives

Dunera News No. 28, October 1993

New Work On The Internees From Singapore

Dr. Paul Bartrop

The November 1993 issue of the JOURNAL OF THE AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY will contain the first major article to be written on the internees who arrived from Singapore on the “Queen Mary” in late September 1940. Frequently overlooked in accounts by the overseas internees sent to Australia during the war years, the story of the so-called “Singapore Internees” is both different from, and just as interesting as, the larger experience of those that arrived on the “Dunera” just a few weeks earlier.

To summarise, the story of the Singapore internees can be divided into a number of major phases. The colonial government of the Straits Settlements, aware that as a military fortress it could be unwise to leave enemy aliens at large during a time of war, saw the need in 1940 to intern such of its citizens who were of German, Austrian and Italian nationality.

Most of the former two categories were Jewish refugees who had escaped Nazism and found a haven under the British flag. Now they were seen to pose a threat to the Empire which had given them sanctuary.

The “threat”, as it turned out, was only viewed on the basis of its potential; no sooner had the “enemy aliens” been rounded up and interned, than the Singapore authorities declared that they posed no real risk at all. Were it not for Singapore’s special military status, it was held, trustworthy people of enemy origin would have been able to remain at liberty (though subject to surveillance and restrictions).

Taking them into custody, however, presented a problem. The tropics were not viewed as being healthy for the prolonged confinement of Europeans, and yet, the decision having been made to intern enemy aliens, they had to be housed somewhere.

Not only that, but the amount of available space was extremely limited; even if the climate had been acceptable, there was nowhere for the internees to be adequately housed.

The solution was to transport them away from the Straits Settlements, and Australia presented itself as the most logical place of secure internment. Britain had already made an arrangement with the Australians for the receipt of a large number of its internees; the government at Singapore now sought and received permission to do the same thing.

The article to appear in November 1993 outlines the rest of the story, taken directly from the Australian government documents of the day. There are many

similarities here to the DUNERA story: the internees' s quest for release; the Australian government's refusal to allow this on grounds that the interning government should release them back in their country of origin: the hastening of release possibilities after entry of Japan into the war; and, for men, fruitpicking, followed by the formation of the Eighth Employment Company.

The Singapore story is at variance with that of the "Dunera" on several important counts, however. To begin with, the Singapore internees were to a large degree comprised of family groups which by definition included women and children. Their fate was obviously different to those of the DUNERA internees, as they could not be incorporated into the Army. Another issue, chronicled at length in the forthcoming study, concerns a riotous disturbance involving the Singapore internees at Tatura in September 1941., This, as will be shown, may have resulted in the internees' release being delayed by several months. Finally, there is the issue of the internees' repatriation: once the Japanese took over the Straits Settlement there was no way for the internees to return, so they had to stay in Australia. Most ultimately settled permanently in Melbourne, where they became absorbed into the Jewish community and, like the DUNERA internees, made a large and worthwhile contribution to their new society.

The forthcoming article is entitled "Incompatible with Security: Enemy Aliens from Singapore in Australia, 1940-45". It forms part of a larger study that is being prepared on the Singapore internees, details of which will be revealed.

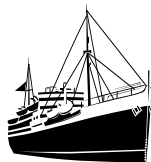
Where the Name Dunera Originates

George Lederer inquired about the origin of the name DUNERA.

Below is the answer he received.

Turning to your question about HMT Dunera: I have telephoned P&O's information department, and they tell me that the ship was named after a village in Gurdaspur, which is a district of Punjab, India. If you have access to a good atlas, you might find the name Gurdaspur at 32 · 05'N , 75 · 25'E. The village of Dunera is not in my atlas - presumably too small a place - but Gurdaspur is right up in the North of India, about 45 miles north-east of Amritsar and 20 miles south-west of Dharmasala, where His Holiness the Dalai Lama is based.

So there we are; no Celtic mythology or anything like that after all, but the name of a village which presumably meant something to someone in the British India company. P&O have no record of why the ship was so named, so the reason for the choice is anyone's guess. Perhaps they wanted a name beginning with D. There were a lot of Scottish people in BI; perhaps the name held an echo of Scotland. Perhaps someone fell in love with the village, or its surroundings, or one of its inhabitants. Who knows? But if we cannot find a reason for the choice of name; at least you now have its authentic origin. Do let your former shipmates know.



Dunera News

First published in 1984 this is a unique resource of information relating to the internment of refugees from Nazi oppression deported to Australia from Britain and Singapore in 1940.

PDFs of all back issues can be found on the Dunera Association website.

The association welcomes contributions of letters or articles for future issues of Dunera News: Please email duneraboys@gmail.com or visit www.duneraassociation.com

Find us on 

Friends of the Dunera Boys Public Group

Admin and Moderators:
Nathan Oppy & Michelle Frenkel

This group is an international forum for discussing all things Dunera. The group would love to hear your stories or associations with the Dunera or Queen Mary internees.

If you have any questions about your families' connections to this subject then this is the place to post your query; the group members have an unequalled knowledge between them.

Useful contact and links

Dunera Museum at Hay

Carol Bunyan (Canberra)
Volunteer Researcher
carolbunyan1940@gmail.com

Dunera Hay Tours

David Houston (Hay)
davidhouston23@bigpond.com

Duldig Studio

www.duldig.org.au

Tatura Irrigation & Wartime Camps Museum

www.taturamuseum.com
taturamuseum@gmail.com

Dunera Stories

Online resource for stories and artwork of Dunera and Queen Mary Internees
www.dunerastories.monash.edu

The Dunera Association Inc

www.duneraassociation.com
duneraboys@gmail.com

The Secretary - Dunera Association
PO Box 4104, Frankston Heights
Victoria 3199 Australia