

Before the outbreak of W.W.II the fear of a Fifth Column had caused considerable concern in Britain. During the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939, General Franco advanced with four columns of soldiery on Madrid, and often boasted of his 'Fifth Column' inside the Capital, which spread false rumours and misinformation from their positions of authority, thus reducing the will of the population to resist the attacker. The many German-Jewish refugees, who had been allowed to come to England since Hitler's access to power in 1933, could, in the minds of military intelligence, constitute a perfect Fifth Column, if an Invasion of England was to take place.

To avoid a repetition of the senseless internment of thousands of Germans living in England before the 1914 War, it had been decided in 1939 by the British Cabinet to set up Tribunals under Magistrates to screen and sort out all refugees according to three categories. "A" category were the most suspicious and were interned immediately, "B" category were doubtful and had to register and report regularly to the Police, and "C" were innocent. I was "C" and these Tribunals were universally considered as an enlightened and highly sensible solution of the 'Fifth Column' problem. But this attitude only lasted until the spring of 1940, when the war situation became serious, British troops had to be evacuated from France and an invasion by German Armies became a dangerous probability. It was discovered after the end of the War, that indeed elaborate plans had been made by German generals to attempt such an enterprise.

By May 1940 Winston Churchill had become British Prime Minister and being deeply concerned about security, he was said to have issued his famous, or infamous, instruction about refugees "Collar the Lot". It was the Home Secretary of the time, Sir John Anderson, who was charged with the execution of this order to intern all, irrespective of Category.

It was the unforgettable Sunday 12 May 1940, when, during the early hours of the day, policemen all over Great Britain informed all refugees, even category "C" holders, that they should pack a few things "Just enough for a few days" as the general order was phrased. Although I was not registered at the Camp where I visited my father during the Whitsun weekend, I was caught in the net which extended from the ages of 16 to 60. My father, over 60, escaped and could stay at the camp. I said Goodbye to him "for a few days", but I would never see him again. This I did not know at the time and I thus began my internment with much resentment, as I had been Category "C", but with few real worries.