

## Internment—Mixed Thoughts

## Title 22

There was universal condemnation of internment by all ‘German-Jewish refugees from Nazi oppression’, who had been deprived of their personal liberty in July 1940. The unimaginative treatment by the British Military Authorities was bitterly resented and this lasted until the end—it was much aggravated in Canada and no doubt also in Australia. Many efforts were attempted by the internees themselves to ameliorate their often absurd conditions.

A typical episode was the following: The very mixed background of those in the camps, from royalty and professional soldiers to orthodox Jews, led to bizarre events. As only kosher food was permitted to certain Jews, except in conditions of war, the issue of herrings and porridge in the Huyton Camp was refused. However, a scholarly Rabbi declared that if Jews were besieged in their own town, the laws concerning kosher food could be relaxed, but unfortunately the ‘walls’ of the Huyton Camp belonged to their enemy. The solution was simple: A deputation called on the Commandant, offered to purchase a few meters of barbed wire for a few shillings, and thus they acquired the legal status of being ‘properly besieged’ and could eat what was offered.

Not all problems could be so easily solved. On arrival in Canada all refugees were officially classed as ‘Prisoners of War’ and had thus a few privileges but also many restrictions. According to the various Geneva Conventions governing the treatment of Prisoners of War, they must receive the same food and clothing as the soldiers who captured and guarded them. After the war-time diet to which all had been subjected while interned in England, the situation changed dramatically in Canada. I shall never forget the picture, when on the first Friday in Camp L in Quebec, a truck full of whole salmon arrived, as the correct food for the day in a catholic country. Similarly when the autumn came and thick clothing became essential, all of us were issued with warm woollen outfits, but their blue colour was marked with large red circles on the back of the jackets, as shooting targets for any who might try to escape.

The worst restriction imposed by the Geneva Convention then in force, was the censorship of all mail, incoming and outgoing. Only single sheets of special paper were allowed to be sent out, all prominently printed with ‘Prisoner of War Mail’. As these were not acceptable, it was decided to eradicate the printed text and substitute ‘Civil Internees Mail’. As all of us were most anxious to inform our relatives at home of our safe arrival in Canada, an obvious imperative after the publicity about the loss of the *Arandora Star*; the resentment rose to fever pitch, when after a few weeks all mail was returned by the censors.