

Camp Hay (Australia) Internment Camps

In September 1939 there were approximately 80,000 mostly Jewish German speaking refugees in Britain primarily from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. By May 1940, Britain was confronted with anxiety and fear of an imminent German invasion. A mass alien internment program was put in place for category "A" – those posing the most dangerous threat of being Nazi sympathizers and/or spies. The primary focus was on German speaking men 16 to 60 years old. When Italy joined the war on June 11, 1940 adult Italian men were included.

In cooperation with Canada, between June and July 1940, four ships sailed to Canada with several thousand internees. The 4th ship, the *Arandora Star* with 1,200 internees en route to Canada was torpedoed by German U-Boat and sunk, killing more than half on board. A fifth and final ship, the *Dunera* departed on July 10, 1940. In agreement with Australia, approximately 2,091 mostly Jewish internees and 451 German and Italian POW's (2,546 in total) thinking they were going to Canada, were diverted to Australia.

The English Escort Guard of 7 officers and 309 other ranking crew created an environment of atrocious treatment that later led to the court martial of several officers. The internees later referred to the ship as the "Hellship Dunera."

The *Dunera* stopped at Port Melbourne to disembark the German and Italian POW's (Tatura Camp) then sailed to Sydney. After arriving in Sydney on September 6, 1,981 men were put on sealed trains for the 16-18 hour ride to Hay.

The nickname "Dunera Boys" refers to the internees that arrived in Hay and were placed in two randomly named camps; Camp "7" or Camp "8" designed to hold no more than 1,000 internees each. Generally, the internees (including approx. 1,547 Jews, 137 Catholics, 158 Protestants) determined themselves who went to each camp.

Camp 8 held about 745 non-Orthodox Jews with a mixed balance of Catholics and Protestants. Camp 7 had 9 Rabbis, 3 Cantors, 2 Ministers and a Kosher Butcher set up outside the camp in the town Hay.

Camp 7 internees issued their own money (scrip) in March 1941 (Feller AU-910b blue 6d.)

