

The Enemy Within - Internment and POW Camps in Victoria 1939-45.

On Monday 25th February I attended the opening ceremony of the exhibition at the Shrine of Remembrance called: **The Enemy Within - Internment and POW Camps in Victoria 1939-45**. The exhibition runs from Friday 22 February until Sunday 28th July with free admission.

The exhibition was opened by Antun Babic, Consul-General, Consulate General of the Republic of Croatia, Dean of the Consular Corps in Melbourne and the guest speaker was Dr. Silke Beinssen-Hesse who spoke about her personal experiences as a child internee. She and her family were interned in Tatura Camp 3, (Compound A). Camp 3 was near Rushworth and housed civilian Internees, mostly German family groups.

Background: There were eight POW and Internment camps in the Tatura district of Victoria. The Tatura camps covered the internment of German-, Japanese-, and Italian-speaking Australian citizens, as well as civilians brought from overseas e.g. the Templers from Palestine and German missionaries from New Guinea. Approximately 4,000 Prisoners of War, mainly Italians and Germans were detained at Camp 13 Murchison POW Camp. Some Japanese POW's were moved to Camp 13 after the Cowra Breakout in 1944.

On Tuesday afternoon (26th Feb) Richard Stubbs (ABC Radio) interviewed Jean McAuslan (Manager, Exhibitions and Collections) about the exhibition and this interview answered one question I had – what prompted the exhibition at this time? Jean had visited the Tatura museum a few years ago and was surprised to find so many artefacts and it was this visit that triggered an interest in creating this exhibition.

The exhibition consists of a number of photos and also exhibits borrowed from the Tatura Museum, including items produced in the family camp. It was interesting for me to see which photos and artefacts of the very many available were chosen for the exhibition.

Some have greater relevance to me, i.e. the photo of the Kindergarten group includes my husband Erich Frank as a 2 year old in 1947.



In one display case there is a dress knitted by my mother in law - Emma Frank for her daughter Gretl. The family was interned at the Tatura Camp 3 (Compound B) when Gretl was almost two years old and includes her first schoolbook – handwritten on a toilet roll and stored in a converted jam/fruit tin. A photo of the Roland, Kurt and Max Frank families is also on display in that case.

The Kurt Frank family was released from the camp in November 1947 when Gretl was 8 and Erich 2 years old.



Other photo displays have relevance to my father - Lothar Böhmer, a 'Kochsmaat' in the Merchant Navy (Handelsmarine) who was captured in Iran in 1941 and who spent from 1941 – 1947 in various Australian camps as a POW; the bulk of the time in Murchison Camp 13. During his time in the camps, he formed lifelong friendships

with many POWs, including many of the crew of the H.S.K. Kormoran, all of whom were repatriated to Germany in 1947. As a civilian internee, dad was allowed to stay in Australia. He attended the Remembrance Day services in Tarura in November each year and made a point of visiting the 'Kormoran' memorial each time. This tradition was very important and so 3 generations of Bohmers; my dad, brother and nephew attended the Tatura service together in the last few years, usually only finding the memorial using GPS!

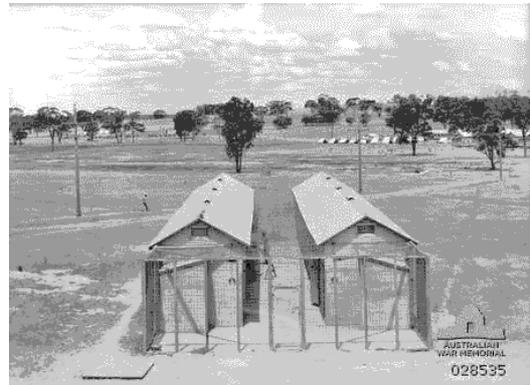


Photo displays of the 'Kormoran' memorial and the Detention block, where dad was 'awarded' 28 days – the maximum possible, for being 'in possession of butter and cheese'. He was upset by this detention as he believed it was unjust – as a cook in the camp, he had access to these food items and was using the butter to make his birthday cake!

The Enemy Within - Internment and POW Camps in Victoria 1939-45.

<http://www.shrine.org.au/Exhibitions/Temporary-Exhibitions/The-Enemy-Within>

Tatura museum link: http://www.taturamuseum.org.au/prisoner_of_war_internment_camps.html

Doris Frank
Bayswater