

Australian Postal History & Social Philately



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PRISONER OF WAR, NO. 7 CAMP, EASTERN COMMAND, HAY N.S.W.

This censored air mail cover sent to New York from a German P.O.W. at Hay has a total postage of 3 shillings and eleven pence (2 shillings Roo, 1 shilling Lyre Bird, 9 pence Platypus and 2 pence Armed Services & Nurse). The stamps are cancelled with a dateless SYDNEY/ 3/ N.S.W. AUST. roller cancel with the slogan USE THE/ POSTAL EXPRESS/ MESSENGER SERVICE. It has a purple PASSED BY CENSOR/ S. 51, a purple PRISONER OF WAR SERVICE as well as a red CALIFORNIA CLIPPER handstamp. There is a black manuscript Via AIRMAIL/ CLIPPER/ AUCKLAND, SAN FRANCISCO, NEW YORK/ BY AIR TO SIDNEY (sic). It is addressed to Mrs Emily Heppner in the Bronx, New York City (Figure 1).

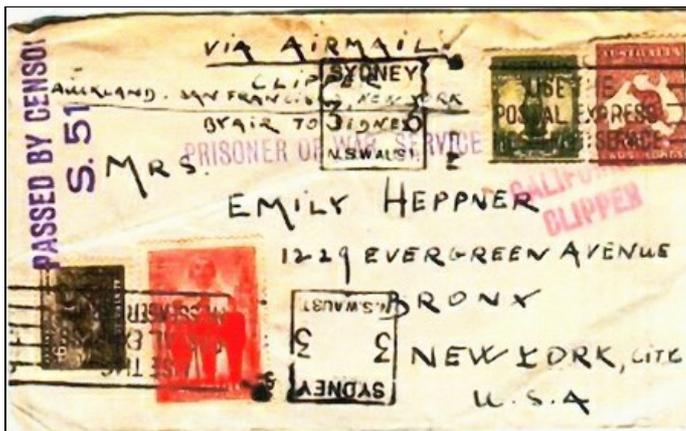


Figure 1: Click to enlarge.

The reverse has several examples of the undated postmark plus a purple handstamp REPLY SHOULD BE ADDRESSED/ (NAME) _____ / NO. 7 CAMP, EASTERN COMMAND/ C/O DISTRICT CENSOR, 45 RESERVOIR STREET, SYDNEY. The sender's meticulous manuscript reads: Herbert Heppner / No 56581/ HUT 5, COMPOUND () / CAMP 7/ EASTERN COMMAND, N.S.W./ C/o DISTRICT CENSOR, 46 (sic) RESERVOIR STREET, SIDNEY (sic), AUST. (Figure 2).

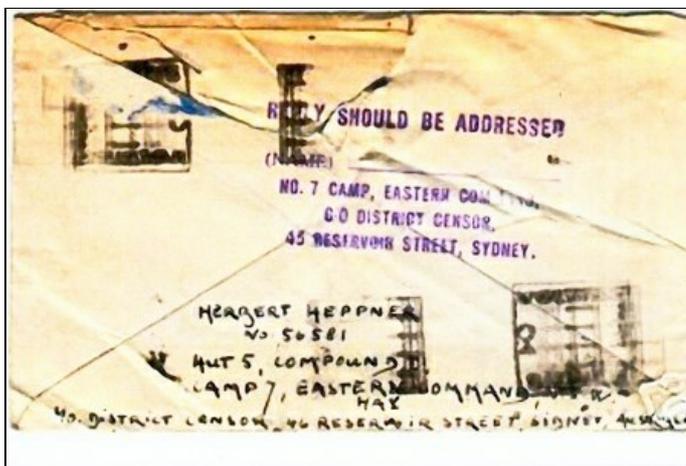


Figure 2: Click to enlarge.

The vendor supplied the following background information (corrected for typo errors): "Empty envelope that once contained a letter from Herbert Heppner interned in Australia, to his mother Emily Heppner in New York. Herbert was a German Jew who escaped the Nazis only to be arrested in England as an enemy alien. He was then sent to Australia on the infamous HMT Dumera and interned at the Hay POW camp number 7. Included are copies of documents from the Australian National Archives recording Mr. Heppner's detention and release as well as some personal details about the man. This cover is a bit of real history behind the movie "Dunera Boys".

Three additional P.O.W. covers related to the Hay N.S.W. Internment Camps are less exciting. The first cover was sent from Sydney with a roller cancel on 1 February 1941 and it was addressed to the Hon Secretary, Australian Jewish Welfare Society in Melbourne. The reverse was not seen, but the vendor stated it was from Camp 7. The front had a purple PASSED BY CENSOR/ S. 59 as well as a purple boxed PERMISSION/ GRANTED and red SERVICE/ Prisoners of War/ C.S. Thane, Lt. Col/ Comdt. HAY (Figure 3).

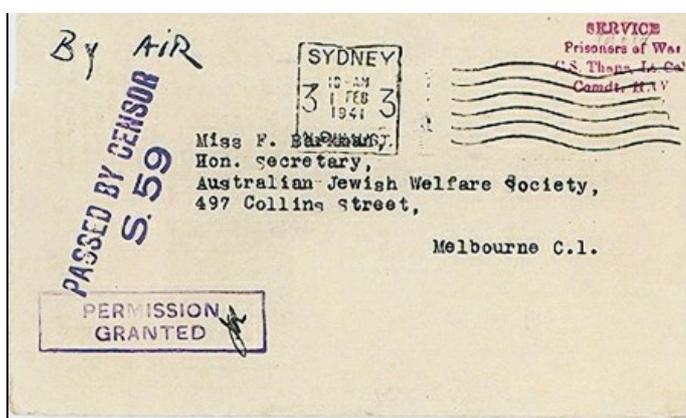


Figure 3: Click to enlarge.

The PRISONERS OF WAR POST/ AIRLETTER has the preprinted blue 7d KGVI stamp postmarked HAY/ (date illegible)/ N.S.W. and was sent to Bari, Italy (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Click to enlarge.

The reverse shows that it was sent by P.Of. War 52383/ 8 CAMP HAY N.S.W. Australia, signature illegible, and there was a handstamp 8 PW CAMP/ HAY PW GROUP/ HAY. There was an arrival backstamp at Bari, Italy (Figure 5).

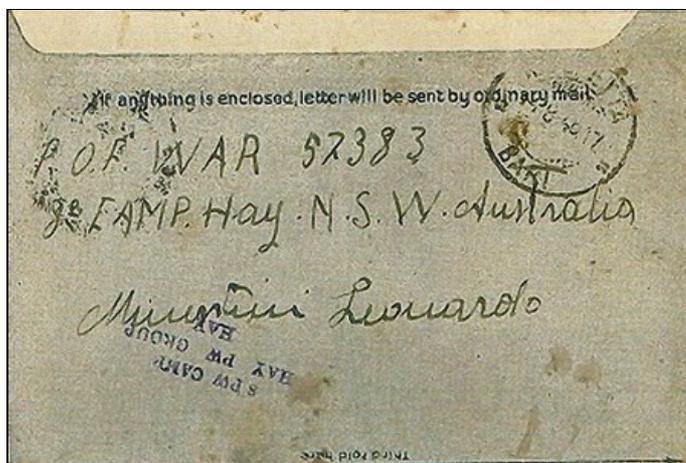


Figure 5: Click to enlarge.

The cover had a purple handstamp PASSED BY CENSOR/ S. 134, there was a red RED CROSS handstamp and a less distinct handstamp of the Camp Commandant, C.S. Thane, Hay. It was sent to Italy (Figure 6).

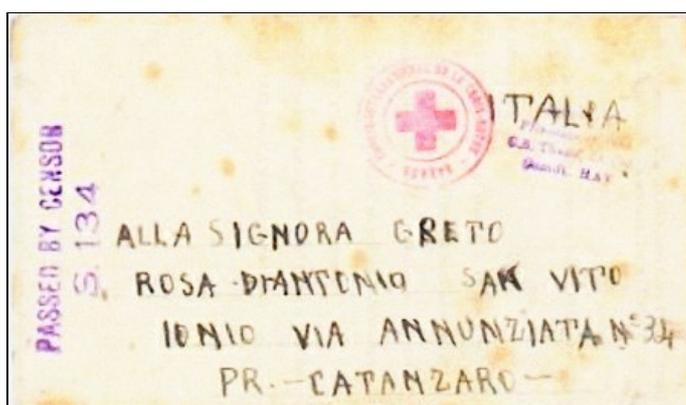


Figure 6: Click to enlarge.

The reverse showed that it was sent by Soldato (Soldier) Polimeno Giovanni No 13812(-), PRISONER OF WAR CAMPO/ HAY No 7 NEW SOUTH/ WALES - AUSTRALIA-. There was a red label OPENED BY CENSOR and a purple PASSED BY CENSOR/ S. 134. The double circle postmark was applied in Italy (Figure 7).

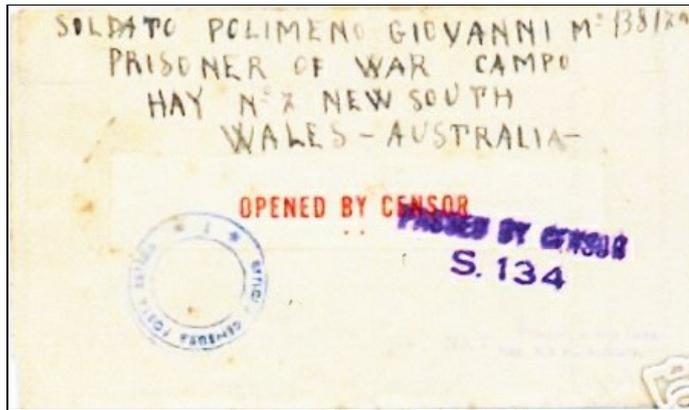


Figure 7: Click to enlarge.

These four covers involved two types of prisoners of war interned at Hay, N.S.W., Jewish civilians interned in Great Britain and transported to Australia (the first two items) and Italians, either civilians or captured during WWII (the last two items). Commandant Lieutenant Colonel C.S. Thane, O.B.E., VD was the commanding officer of the 16th Garrison Battalion at the Hay War Detention Camps, 6, 7 and 8, and his handstruck stamping is a common finding.

The circumstances of Australia's acceptance of German and Italian internees from the UK can be found in a document headed Overseas Internees - Accepted by Commonwealth for Custody in Australia. It was initiated by a telegram received in Canberra by the High Commissioner for the UK in June 1940 and the Australian Government accepted in July 1940 the request to take Italian and German detainees from the UK. The military transport ship H.M.S. Dunera was loaded with 2,542 so called 'enemy aliens' on 10 July, 1940 at Liverpool, England. Nearly all the passengers were political or racial (Jewish) internees, a majority of whom had fled to England from their homelands which had been occupied by Nazis and Fascists. At that time, no chances of infiltration were being taken in the United Kingdom, and they were treated as potential spies. Dunera Boys was applied in particular to the Jewish refugees. The ship is shown in Figure 8.

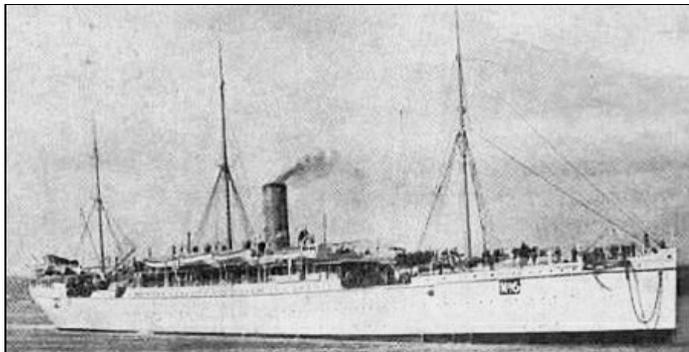


Figure 8: Click to enlarge.

Conditions on the ship were appalling, the passengers were not allowed to leave the ship during stopovers and were rarely permitted on deck, and conditions were unsanitary. Almost two months later, the ship arrived in Melbourne where 545 'potentially dangerous' passengers were offloaded. The remainder continued the journey to Sydney from where they were transferred by rail to Hay in Central Western New South Wales. Here they were interned in two camps - numbers 7 and 8. The three high-security Hay POW camps were constructed in 1940 and Hay was largely chosen because of its isolated location.

The use of the Gaol as a detention and hospitalisation facility that serviced the POW camps from 1940 to 1946 brought aspects of the camps into the town's heart. The internees were under the guard of the 16th Garrison Battalion of the Australian Army. Later in 1940 began the arrival of Italian civilian internees. In February 1941, in the wake of the Cowra POW break-out, a large number of Japanese POWs were transferred to Hay and placed in the three high-security compounds. During 1946 the POWs who remained at Hay were progressively released or transferred to other camps, and the Hay camps were dismantled.

The internment at Hay of the Dunera refugees from Nazi oppression in Europe was an important milestone in Australia's cultural history. About half of those interned at Hay eventually chose to remain in Australia. The influence of this group of men on subsequent cultural, scientific and business developments in Australia is difficult to overstate; they became an integral and celebrated part of the nation's cultural and intellectual life. The 'Dunera Boys' are still fondly remembered in Hay; every year the town holds a 'Dunera Day' in which many surviving internees return to the site of their former imprisonment.

Addendum (added in preparation of the above): I am indebted to Stanley Moore the vendor of the cover shown in Figures 1 & 2, who provided me with copies of two Australian Internees reports. Herbert Heppner was born in Hamburg, Germany on 12/6/1909 and he gave his address as 34 West Side, London N.W. 4, on entry to Australia in the report dated 4 October 1940. His occupation was described as Automobile Engineer and religion as Jewish. His place of capture was London on 17/5/40 and he was interned the same day in the UK at Kempton Park by the police. The reason given for internment was "Enemy Alien" (Jewish Refugee) (Figure 9).

AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES
REPORT ON PRISONER OF WAR INTERNEE

Identification No. **E.39733** Surname **HEPPNER** Other Names **HERBERT** Nationality **GERMAN**

2. Date of Birth **12/6/1909** Private Address **34 WEST SIDE**
 Place of Birth **HAMBURG** Business Address **HENDON LONDON N.W.4**

Occupation **AUTOMOBILE ENGINEER** If registered, State Place
 Religion **JEWISH** Registration No.

3. Place of Capture **LONDON** Date of Internment **17/5/1940**
 Date of Capture **17/5/40** Place of Internment **KEMPTON PARK**
 From whom received **POLICE**

Height **6'** Weight **145lb** Complexion **FAIR** Hair **BROWN** Eyes **BROWN** Marks and Peculiarities **NIL**

4. Reason for Internment:—
"ENEMY ALIEN" (JEWISH REFUGEE)

Figure 9: Click to enlarge.

His description included a height of 6 feet and a weight of 145 lbs. He had no personal effects, was not married, with no issue. His next of kin was Emily Heppner of New York. His date of entry to Australia was 28/8/40 by the ship Dunera, the port of disembarkation being Sydney. He had no armed service. His father was Siegfried Heppner and his mother's unmarried name was Emily Salomon. The form was signed by the Adjutant at the Internment Camp, Hay (Figure 10).

5. If medically examined? **no.** 6. Personal Effects:—
NIL

Medical Report No. _____

7. Marital Condition:— **SINGLE** Next of Kin **EMILY HEPPNER.**
 Name of Wife _____ Her Address **1229 EVERGREEN AVE**
NEW-YORK U.S.A.

Children: Male _____ Female _____

8. How long resident in Australia
 Date of Entry **28/8/40** Ship **DUNERA** Port of Disembarkation **SYDNEY.**
 If any property in Australia (if so, specify place and extent) _____

9. Statement of Service:—
 (Reserve, Colour, Naval, etc.) **NIL**

10. Special Observations
 Father's Name (in full) **SIEGFRIED HEPPNER**
 Mother's pre-marriage name (in full) **EMILY SALOMON.**

Signature of Adjutant **[Signature]** Internment Camp, Hay
 Date **11/3/1940** Camp Commandant
 Date **16 SEP 1940**

Figure 10: Click to enlarge.

Much of this information was also recorded on the next form, with the new information in the lower half of the form showing his transfers to other internment camps, although there were no reasons given. In sequence, the camps were at Tatura, Victoria, Loveday, near Barmera South Australia and Liverpool, N.S.W. from whence he was released and embarked for England on 18/11/41. This movement from one camp to another does not denote that he was a high risk or troublesome internee, and his early release suggests that he was considered low risk (Figure 11).

AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES
PRISONER OF WAR — SERVICE AND CASUALTY FORM

Identification No. **E39733** District **NSW** Surname **HEPPNER**

Rank _____ Other Names **Herbert** Nationality **German**

Date of Capture **17.5.40** Place of Capture **London** Marital Condition **Single**
 Date of Birth **12.6.09** Place of Birth **Hamburg** Next of Kin **Emily Heppner**
 Trade or Occupation **Automobile Engineer** Address of Next of Kin **1229 Evergreen Ave New York U.S.A.**
 Religion **Jewish** Relationship **Mother**

Identifications—Colour of Hair **brown** Eyes **brown**
 Distinctive Marks _____

REPORT

Date	From (where)	To (where)	Authority	Of Order
10.7.40	Tatura	Loveday	A.A.P. 1112	11/11/40
6.9.40	Loveday	Liverpool	A.A.P. 1113	11/11/40
20.8.40	Liverpool	England	A.A.P. 1113	11/11/40

Remarks: **Left from England to Sydney**
Reached in to Italy
Down to Barmera
Increased in from Bar

12. 8. 41	E. C. Searns	Spain to London	11. 8. 41	Baker	10. 8.	J. Smith
13. 8. 41	E. C. Searns	Madrid to San Sebastian	12. 8. 41	London	11. 8.	H. D. Jones
14. 8. 41	"	Spain to London	13. 8. 41	"	"	"
15. 8. 41	E. C. Searns	Madrid to London	14. 8. 41	London	"	"
16. 8. 41	"	Madrid Embarkment for England	15. 8. 41	London	"	"

Figure 11: Click to enlarge.

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