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Second World War Captives

At The National Archives, we hold records that tell fascinating stories of real people who lived through the horrors of the Second World War.

In this episode, historians Will Butler, Ela Kaczmarek, and Roger Kershaw explore documents – some of them previously unseen by the public – that describe the experiences of prisoners of war and civilian internees held captive during the conflict.

The episode accompanies our exhibition, *Great Escapes: Remarkable Second World War Captives*, which is open at The National Archives in Kew until July 21, 2024. The official companion book to the exhibition: *Great Escapes* can be purchased from our [bookshop](#).

Documents from The National Archives used in this episode: [WO 208 3501](#), [HS 9/544/3](#), [HO 215/263](#), [HO 405/26498](#),

For more information about the records covered in this episode, look at our research guide to [British and Commonwealth prisoners of the Second World War and the Korean War](#). For help navigating our catalogue, you can watch our [top-level tips on using Discovery](#).

Listeners, we need your help to make this podcast better! We need to know a bit more about you and what themes you're interested in. You can share this information with us by visiting smartsurvey.co.uk/s/ontherecord/.

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Transcript

Chloe Lee: We all know war stories from Hollywood blockbusters, nerve-wracking intelligence missions or improbable lucky escapes. And we might think those characters at the centre of them are pure fiction, just the movies - but sometimes there is also a bit of truth...

What if I told you that within the archive here at Kew, there are fascinating stories of real people who lived through the horrors of the Second World War?

This is On The Record at The National Archives, uncovering the past through stories of everyday people.

I'm Chloe Lee, a Migration and Citizenship Researcher at The National Archives.

My colleagues here in Kew have put together an exhibition called Great Escapes: Remarkable Second World War Captives, using some of the unique documents we hold to tell the stories of people who were imprisoned during the war.

If you can't make it to the exhibition, OR just want to hear more from the specialists that uncovered these stories, we've put together this episode of On the Record.

In this episode of On the Record, I'm going to hear the stories of four people that we couldn't include in full in the exhibition. I've invited three specialists into the podcast studio to tell me their stories, using some primary sources, photographs and even secret spy letters.

Let's get started.

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My first guest is Will Butler, a specialist in British society during the First and Second World Wars and the history of the British Army. Welcome to the podcast Will.

Will Butler: Thank you very much, Chloe, thank you for having me. How are you?

Chloe: I'm good and how are you? The builders are in for your big piece of work coming out soon.

Will: They are. It's incredibly exciting. It's great to see the work come together after many months of research, fascinating research, of course.

Chloe: That's great. And who are you here to tell me about today?

Will: I'm here to tell you the story about Arthur Britton, who was a stretcher bearer at Dunkirk in France in May 1940, became a prisoner of war during that month, and also was eventually appointed the prisoner of war camp pastor. So he was responsible for the religious needs of his fellow prisoners of war.

Chloe: I see. So what is the story? Can you tell us a little bit more?

Will: Yeah, of course. So Arthur is a really interesting character. I fell in love with his story and wanted to tell that story in detail as much as I could. So he was from County Durham in northeast England. He was a motor fitter before the war and at the time of his captivity, he was 37 years old. So he was a little older than a lot of the soldiers around him, he initially was responsible for military logistics. So he was actually sent to France at the end of September 1939. So very close to

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the start of the war. And then by March 1940, he was transferred to what was called the 14th field ambulance, and was responsible for transporting the wounded essentially. And throughout the chaos in May 1940, the Allied retreats towards Dunkirk and the eventual withdrawal from mainland Europe for Allied forces, he found himself as a prisoner of war, he was initially reported as missing. And then eventually, according to his records, was reported as a prisoner of war on the 24th of May 1940. And he's spent five almost five full years in captivity. So essentially one of those tens of thousands of individuals, who were in captivity for almost the entire duration of the war.

Chloe: And you mentioned he was a bit older than the rest of the kind of people that would have been maybe captured alongside him. Can you tell us, how do we know about this story?

Will: So we hold at The National Archives, his prisoner of war identity card. We have a series of cards here, about 200,000 of these cards that we hold, some of which have a photograph of the individual and Arthur's does have a photograph and that always brings things to life that little bit.

Chloe: Can you remember what he looks like? What does the photograph give away?

Will: He was a similar age to me now, and I always feel that he looks a lot fitter. He's smiling in the photograph, which is interesting. These cards were created after individuals became prisoners of war. At that stage, it's early on in his prisoner-of-war, life and experiences. He looks fairly healthy. He looks fit at that stage. And obviously, that does change over the duration of the war. He's held in central Poland for most of his captivity, and again, he pops up in a few different records that we hold at The National Archives. We have his service record here, which gives us some information about that. But he also then turns up in a number of the camp records that we hold. So the Red Cross, which is a charity organisation responsible for looking after in some kind of way, the

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welfare of prisoners of war, and they carried out inspections of camps all over Europe and indeed the world. And Arthur turns up in some of those reports as well, partly because of his role as a Presbyterian minister, essentially, in the camp.

Chloe: And you mentioned there's 400 prisoners alongside him in this camp, and that he became the pastor. What was daily life, like in those POW camps for him?

Will: He was in a particular camp, he was in a working camp, the full name, which apologies for my pronunciation is the Bau und Arbeitsbataillon 21, BAB 21 for short. This was a working camp, whereby prisoners were put to work, in this case at an oil refinery. So it's an industrial complex, and prisoners were permitted to work under international law, if they were prisoners of war, they could be put to work, especially if they weren't an officer, which Arthur wasn't. And the individuals around him weren't either. And they had to work six days a week, they were given a small payment for that work. But actually, because of Arthur's role as the pastor, it got him out of some of that work.

Chloe: Because he had duties.

Will: He was nominated in that way.

Chloe: His fellow prisoners would have appointed him, voted him it kind of thing, essentially.

Will: Essentially, and before the war, he had a role in his local Presbyterian Church in County Durham. And so obviously, that puts him in a good position to be able to function, carry out that

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function. And there was a small chapel essentially, in the camp where he would then hold the Sunday services at the camp for those around him.

Chloe: What impact did it have on Arthur, if you've got any more information about that?

Will: Absolutely. There are a few events that happened during his time as a prisoner of war, that that are kind of crucial in terms of shaping his own experience. In particular, because the camp was on an industrial complex, it was vulnerable to air attack and actually, the US Air Force bombed the camp a few times. During 1944, in particular, and there was a particular raid, which occurred in early December 1944, which killed a large number, or a relatively large number of those prisoners held, Allied prisoners held in the camp, it killed 26 individuals, later 28, and injured a further 28. And again, we are able to get in the records, to pick up Arthur's story in some of the letters that are written as a result of this raid, and he's specifically listed with two others and quoted as “voluntarily carrying out the necessary but painful task of preparing the dead for burial”.

And I think that's very clear that his role as the pastor of the camp, he's taking on this responsibility, this very serious responsibility, and very difficult task beyond his everyday, caring role that he has.

And we know that Arthur took these experiences with him beyond the war, as did a large number of prisoners of war, and internees took these experiences into their post-war life. I've been lucky enough to be in contact with Arthur's grandson who's provided us with some additional information. It is always fantastic to research the stories in the archive, but then to be able to have someone who can bring a little more colour and life to the individual that you're researching—

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Chloe: The living archive.

Will: —is incredible. And one of the things that he gave me, or he gave a copy of to me was a newspaper clipping. So when Arthur was appointed as the pastor of the camp, news of that was disseminated to his local area to his next of kin. And the fact that he was appointed the pastor was reported in the local press. And we know and I know from his grandson, that newspaper clipping Arthur carried with him in his wallet for the rest of his life. And I think that's a real kind of testament to that experience, the pride that he had in the position that he had in the camp as well, and the kind of legacy of that experience on him for the rest of his life.

Chloe: Will, what is it like for you as a researcher to connect these original documents, which in themselves are very moving with people in real life?

Will: Realistically, it's a real privilege in a lot of ways to have these conversations with people who are connected to the documents and to the individuals that I research on a daily basis. And we have this kind of contact quite often here at the National Archives, people are here all the time researching their family history, and, of course, they want to tell us their stories. But it very rarely happens the other way that I'm doing the research on an individual and then I'm able to actually make contact with a relative or a relation of the person I'm researching and we have to obviously treat that delicately. But the hope is that we do those stories justice, and particularly in the context of the exhibition, I certainly hope that we've been able to do that.

Chloe: That's great. Thank you, Will, for sharing that with us today.

Will: Thank you very much for having me, Chloe.

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Chloe: Next up is my colleague, Ela Kaczmarska, a specialist in Polish and modern Jewish history. Welcome to the podcast, Ela.

Ela Kaczmarsk: Hello. Nice to be here.

Chloe: So whose story you're sharing with us today?

Ela: This is the story of Peter Gardner. He was a Spitfire pilot. And he bailed out of his Spitfire in July '42. And so he spent some time in Oflags before he was transferred to Stalag Luft III. And then he became involved in intelligence work. And he wrote some secret messages, which we found.

Chloe: I heard you made quite an amazing discovery in the archive.

Ela: I'll confess, actually, it was Will who made the discovery, he was looking at files or a visit by some delegates. And this file was dated 1953. And when he opened it, he realised there was more to it than information on South Korea. So he passed the research over on to me because the first document you come to in this file is a handwritten copy of a code. One of the codes which MI9 devised in the early years of the war. And the code that has been transcribed into this file is the one that's most extensively used.

So obviously, this person who was involved in decoding, perhaps for the Korean conflict, had copied and used the same code. So Will handed it to me. And I think, when we look more closely into the file, we realise that we don't even know how this information got into that file. But we realised that this was a really unique find.

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It was full of really lovely letters, which were written from a prisoner of war to his mother. And then there were these photographs, not large photographs, small photographs. We found them in these old brown envelopes.

Chloe: So these were just loose, how big were they? Can you describe them?

Ela: These were just loose, there must have been the size of half a postcard, probably about that size. But within that little envelope, were things like: I found a little hand-drawn map on tracing paper, of the area of Saarbrucken, for example, that's in Germany. And also this little bit of tissue paper, which was so delicate, it obviously had been through conservation at some point in its lifetime being here at the archives. But it was you couldn't read it, you couldn't read it with the naked eye. And it looked as if somebody had literally just put little dots on this bit of tissue paper. And then of course, we found the photostats, which must have been created at the same time. And they were transcripts of what was written on these bits of tissue paper. And these in fact, were the secret messages that were sent from the camp, Stalag Luft III, which is now in Poland, near a town called Poznan.

Chloe: So this bundle, effectively, of photographs and tissue paper, letters. They're all from a POW, I assume from POW camp. Can you tell us a bit more?

Ela: Yes, they are. They're written by Peter Gardner to his mother, these letters. And he must have had some arrangement with his mother about writing letters home because there are codes within the actual letter he sends to his mother. And this is really how the story of Peter Gardner's secret messages emerged, the fact that probably, he was working in the intelligence side of things

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from the camp. And these messages would have definitely eventually got to MI9, because there are handwritten memos at the bottom, which suggests that they have actually seen them.

Chloe: So can we assume them? That's why we have them in our archive because they passed from his mother into the hands of government and intelligence services.

Ela: Yes. So we don't have the original letters than the mother received. But we have the photostats of them, the copies of them.

Chloe: Photostats are basically copies.

Ela: Yeah, it was like the old-fashioned photocopying you used to do on banding machines. They tell us an awful lot, they just talked about initially they just talked about "I miss you", "It's like Blackpool here, a sea of brown bodies". So the contents of the letter just don't really fit to what a prisoner of war camp should look like. So he's obviously passing the sort of secret codes, I think on very, very likely onto his mother, his mother would have said, Okay, there's something in this letter, which means I have to pass this on because there's something in the photograph. And the photographs, what he did with other forgers in the camp, I would imagine, is that he dismantled the photograph, the backing, and he slid this little piece of tissue paper, which was absolutely tiny, in between the photo and the backing.

Chloe: So what we've got are these letters that seem not quite like the kind of letters you would write your mother if you were in a camp? What in those letters? And can you give us maybe an example, Ela?

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Ela: So the letters to his mother are quite personal. So it's "my darling mummy", and so on. It's really what's in the secret message that counts here. And the secret messages, if I just describe a bit of what they look like: lots of punctuation, there are no paragraphs there are about the size of perhaps in an A4 sheet, most these letters, they're quite lengthy, lots of numbers, lots of single words as well. So they will have contained details such as food rations, morale in the camp, acknowledgements of receipt of parcels, requests for specific items needed for intelligence work, so things like black ink. And there's a really lovely quote here, which is just an example of what you can expect to find in these secret messages. So I'll read that out to you. "Escape organisation forgery department had marked success with various documents supplied to a number of escapees on the 5th of March, but have considerable difficulty obtaining originals to copy. Therefore, request tracing of identity card for foreign workers in Germany, leave past, ditto, suggest suitable paper as flyleaves in books, request also powdered Indian ink, three very fine mapping nibs."

Chloe: Wow. So he's really supporting escape, Peter.

Ela: He is. Yeah, he's absolutely supporting escape. But he's also in these coded messages, characterising a lot of new arrivals. These new arrivals are mentioned in some of his secret messages. And they describe individuals, and some of them are Polish some of them South African, whichever airman arrived at the camp at the time, would have a sort of characterisation by Peter Gardner, or by other intelligence officers, and supplying Peter with the information, which he then put into his secret message. And he would describe, first of all, he would say, the squadron number of the airmen and their air base, and then he would follow with a little comment. So we've got one here: he's described as silent and unapproachable. There's another one saying, "Foxy and bitter."

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Chloe: Wow. What a description.

Ela: Then you've got obviously intelligent and informed and one here from North Holt, “young, quite helpless type”. So you really want to ask yourself, why is he making this analysis? And I would imagine when this letter gets back to whether it be MI9 or via the airbase, or what have you, they would consider whether that person would be suitable, or not suitable for intelligence work within the camp.

Chloe: So is he acting like a kind of recruiter?

Ela: Possibly, it's difficult to say because not only does he talk about individual people, he talks about the lists of books that they need to have. And of course, a lot of books were used for coding purposes. He's asking for certain things, which unless you really know how to decode using the coded messages, which I understand many researchers have tried to do. It's not an easy task.

Chloe: That is really like something out of the movies. So like turn to page 29, third line down, three across. That sort of thing.

Ela: Yeah, we've got an example of a dictionary that was used for coding, which we found in our archives, and it's still difficult to understand how these things work. Well. We do know that there were many people in the camp who knew how to learn. Messages were hidden in various ways, prisoners of war were allowed to have letters sent to them. And they were also allowed to have letters that they could send out too, hence Peter's letters to his mother. So they could be disguised in many different ways. A lot of letters had their own code. So some people had already arranged

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with their loved ones that they would use some kind of coding system before leaving on a mission, for example. But the main codes that were used for intelligence purposes were those that were devised. As I mentioned, by MI9, there were ten codes in total. And coding really was literally by way of writing later on the codes were actually used for radio.

Chloe: So you've mentioned MI9, for those of us that aren't so familiar with the intelligence services. Can you tell us how did intelligence gathering work, during the war and specifically for POWs in camps like this?

Ela: It became clear very early on that there had to be an intelligence unit which dealt with escape and evasion. So what happened was that the chiefs of MI5, MI6, and the Naval Intelligence Division, they all met to discuss the establishment of MI9. And that came into being in December 1939. Intelligence was necessary for many reasons. Primarily, actually, a lot of investment had gone into training servicemen with the relative safety net of the protection from the Geneva Convention, evading capture and attempting escape was very much encouraged.

And the escape and evasion lectures actually began in January 1940. These essentially were very practical tips for the evader and escaper, which focused on cultural differences and behaviours, learning basic phrases and foreign languages like French, German, Spanish, Polish.

Chloe: So any service men would just attend lectures

Ela: Yes, so anyone would, they have to attend lectures, they would have lectures, for example, the aim would have at the air bases and these lectures would be delivered by trained officers, and many of them actually had escaped, had actually experienced escape very early. And Airey Neave

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was one of those who in fact, Airey Neave was recruited by MI9. But there were people who were delivering, who had some experience of escape and evasion. They were given a handbook. Handbooks were not distributed to every officer at all. They were quite selective who they gave them to. And these handbooks had to be updated on a regular basis with the intelligence that was coming out of the camps, and from people who had successfully evaded capture and those who were successful in their escapes.

Some of the things that were really key to the success was knowing the locations of the camps and their surrounding areas. And that was obviously paramount to any escape. So these routes needed to be discovered and duly mapped. As well as maps there were escape aids, we now commonly refer to them as gadgets. These were smuggled into camps in various ingenious ways.

Chloe: Ela, what was it like to make that discovery and find those kinds of things in the archive?

Ela: When I managed to read the file cover to cover, I decided to look into other documentation, possibly about Peter Gardner. And one of the things we found out that actually, he was a good friend of Guy Griffiths and Guy Griffiths, who was also in Stalag Luft III. And we could actually match up the fact that one of the photographs that he sent to his mother with the hidden message behind it was of Guy Griffiths. And I think this led us to explore other avenues of risk — and that was really exciting.

Chloe: Yeah, it seems like there are lots of different ways out of this one find, codes, intelligence

Ela: Tentacles coming out all over the place.

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Chloe: Thanks, Ela, for coming in. Great to hear this story from you.

Ela: And thank you for the opportunity.

Chloe: Now for our next story, I'll need to welcome a new guest into the studio. Roger Kershaw, a specialist in modern migration records at the National Archives. Hi, Roger.

Roger Kershaw: Hi, Chloe.

Chloe: Great to have you here today — who here to tell me about?

Roger: I want to talk about the foreign nationals who were in Britain when the war broke out and how they were treated. First is a woman called Theresia Tecla Maria Kuck, who was from Germany, and the second is an Austrian named Peter Stadlen. When Britain declared war on again, when Britain declared war on Germany in 1939, overnight, over 70,000 Austrian and German nationals resident in the UK were deemed to be enemy aliens, over 40,000 were male, and over 30,000 were female. Internment tribunals were set up to examine them all and decide what to do with them.

Chloe: We're gonna touch back on what we mean by this term enemy aliens because it seems to come up a lot, but first, who was Theresia?

Roger: Theresia Kuck was one of the Germans who had to be examined to determine whether she posed a threat to Britain. Now what we know about Theresia is that she was born in 1903, in Oldenburg, Germany. She left Germany in 1922, because of the German recession, and she

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wanted to gain what she called world experience. And initially, she worked in Holland as a nurse and midwife before moving to the UK in 1931.

Chloe: So here we've got someone, a woman of the world trying to get away from economic hardship and in, where she was born, her home. She's in Britain, so why was she interned, a nurse someone of this kind of role or calibre?

Roger: On the 29th of August 1939 Theresia applied for naturalisation. A few weeks later, following the UK declaration of war on Germany, as an 'enemy alien' Kuck sat before an internment tribunal, where she made clear her anti-Nazi and pro-British feelings. And the board was satisfied that she posed no threat to UK security, and was granted category C on the 7th of November by Judge Austin Jones at Bromley tribunal. Even though she wasn't interned, she had to follow certain rules.

Chloe: And that's part of the category C that she gets. Can you explain the differences between the categories for enemy aliens at this time?

Roger: Sure. So category A was where somebody was deemed to be a threat and they were interned, they were put into an internment camp and they were kept under supervision. Category B was somewhere in between both, category C, which is where a decision was made not to intern. So Category B, for example, people would be monitored more closely, and they'd have to report more regularly than those in Category C.

Chloe: And did anyone spring to Theresia's defence throughout this whole process?

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Roger: They did, but it wasn't until June the spring of 1940. So in 1940, Theresia was employed as a housekeeper to Hugh Shaylar. Hugh Shaylar was a parliamentary agent for the Labour Party, and he was living in Sidcup. She was cohabiting with him and assisting him with secretarial work. And he was married but he was living apart. And they met as early as 1935, we know that, at Buckhurst Youth Hostel. There were several complaints made to the police at the time alleging that there were unscreened lights at their dwelling and both were members of a nudist camp. And in fact, Kuck had visited a nudist camp on the Isle of Wight in 1940. But she hadn't notified the police that she'd done that and that's something she should have done.

Chloe: So she should have done that as part of being Category C. See, she would have had to report where she was going, her movements, things like that?

Roger: Exactly, because she was still an 'enemy alien'. So what happened, in July 1940, there was an order for her internment and it was issued.

Chloe: And is that because she broke the rules of her categorisation?

Roger: Exactly. She broken the rules around her alien registration in several respects, and even though her neighbours had complained on moral grounds, that wasn't really part of the decision. As she lived in an area of strategic importance, the committee thought it was in the interest of the country that she was interned.

Chloe: I see, and did to us your story have a wider impact?

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Roger: It did. Initially, Theresia was sent to Holloway, and she was waiting internment to the Isle of Man, where she went in 1940 and she was transferred to a women's internment camp at Port Erin. And in August 1940, a local MP Jenny Anderson wrote to the Home Secretary Osbert Peake, asking that she be released as she didn't pose any threat in Shaylar even petitioned, John Anderson. Now John Anderson was the Secretary of State of Home Affairs, and the Ministry of Home Security, and he was actually nicknamed the 'home front Prime Minister'. And Kuck's appeal was heard in September 1941. And there was a recommendation for her release, and that was authorised by the Home Secretary in October of that year. And we have a full transcript of this hearing and it also includes the examination of evidence offered by Hugh Shaylar.

Her case is like thousands of others, and they helped pave the way for Osbert Peake's white paper, which was called Civilian Internees of Enemy Nationality. And that paper identified categories of persons who could be eligible for release by 1942 fewer than 5,000 remained interned mainly on the Isle of Man. So after the war, like so many other internees Theresia settled in Britain, and she successfully applied for naturalisation in 1953 and Hugh Shaylar was one of the referees supporting replication, which was successful. They never married but we know that she changed her name to Theresia Tecla Maria Kuck Shaylar, in later life.

Chloe: Okay, that's such an interesting story that we have here at the archive. So Roger, What records do we have of her?

Roger: So we actually have her personal file, and that includes reference to her life before, during and after internment. And this record was actually closed until 2054. But I applied under the Freedom of Information Act, and they opened it early, and anybody can do that.

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Chloe: So that next person that you mentioned, was Austrian, can you tell me a bit more?

Roger: Yes, his name is Peter Karl Theodor Stadlen. Peter also has a personal file, and his file was recently opened again under the Freedom of Information Act. And it tells the story of those foreign nationals who were actually deported. Peter was born in 1910, and he was a Jewish refugee from Austria. He fled to the Netherlands in March 1938, following the Anschluss, which is when Nazi Germany annexed the neighbouring country of Austria. Peter was a renowned concert pianist, and he performed in Amsterdam before moving to the UK in July 1939. And we know that like 1000s of others resident in the southern strip of England, Peter was interned in June 1940. And he was taken to a camp on the Isle of Man and many campaigned for his release, including the British composer Ralph Vaughn Williams. Now he described Peter as a musician of the highest quality, and that his presence in this country is a great addition to our cultural life.

Chloe: So Peter's in turns on the Isle of Man with Jewish refugees, anyone else, Roger?

Roger: Yes, Jews, refugees, but also actually pro-Nazi Germans.

Chloe: So you've got a real mix of people. They're all interned in the same camp. And then what happens?

Roger: They were deported to Canada and some were deported to Australia, but they actually mixed the pro-Nazis with the Jewish refugees. And Peter was one of those who was deported to Australia.

Chloe: So despite people campaigning for his release, he was still put on that boat to Australia.

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Roger: He was, he went to Australia. And on that same journey was another Jewish refugee called Heino Alexander. And we've got his personal diary at The National Archives, and we've recently translated, and he describes a harrowing journey.

Chloe: What language was he writing in?

Roger: German and we had it translated so I can just read one of the passages. This is what he says.

Now on 10th July towards the evening, we have reached Liverpool and saw from a distance the ship that is to take us to Canada. Then the reception on the Dunera was a shock. All the luggage we had with us, we were allowed only 80 lbs, was torn out of our hands and dumped in a huge pile. Our pockets were searched, and things stolen. We even got kicked and hit with rifle butts if anyone was not quick enough. Then we were driven down by the troops on the ship, rounded up like cattle and packed onto individual decks. The worst thing was that we were sitting behind barbed wire. Here below deck it was shocking. Everything, absolutely everything was taken from anyone who appeared even a little well-to-do. Papers and important documents were torn up and thrown away. We numbered some 2,600 people, crammed together like cattle.

Chloe: Wow. So that really is such a harrowing story from told by Heino. And we can't even imagine Peter's journey to escaping to Britain, escaping in 1938, and then to be forced onto the ship. But you said they were heading to Australia, but you just mentioned Canada.

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Roger: They were to go to Canada. But unbeknown to them only a few days earlier, another ship called the Arandora Star had been torpedoed, and over 800 people had lost their lives.

Chloe: So that route was deemed too dangerous for deportees.

Roger: That's right. So they turned their attention to Australia.

Chloe: So was that route to Australia less dangerous?

Roger: No, it wasn't and in fact, it took longer, it took a total of 58 days. And Heino records in his diary on the 12th of July, so only two days after sailing. He says this:

Early in the morning, I was wakened by a dreadful noise and shortly after came a terrible crash. Afterwards we learned that two torpedoes had been fired at our ship but thank God, due to the height of the waves, did not reach their target. We could not have hoped to be rescued, for first of all, we were locked in behind barbed wire and we would all have been squashed to death and secondly there were guards at all the exits to the deck with their guns loaded and would have shot down anyone who tried to break through the barbed wire. There were clearly not enough lifeboats on board for everyone. We never had any lifeboat drills so you can guess what would have happened in the event of an emergency.

Chloe: It sounds absolutely harrowing to be on board that ship. So did Peter arrive in Australia? What happened after that?

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Roger: Peter arrived in Sydney in Australia. And he was taken to a camp in New South Wales, which is called the Hay Internment Camp. And he stayed there for about a year. And then he came back to the UK.

Chloe: And what happened to Peter after the war?

Roger: He was released like thousands of others. And in 1947, like Theresia, he took out British Nationality. And we've got his naturalisation file as well. So he became a British citizen in 1947, and he actually became a music critic for *The Daily Telegraph*, and he remained in this country until his death in the 1990s.

Chloe: Thanks so much Roger for coming in. I think that's such an important element of these stories to cover. No problem. Thanks, Roger. And to Will and Ela too. That's all we have time for in this episode.

These are just four stories that sit alongside those featured in the exhibition Great Escapes, which is open at The National Archives until July 21 2024 The exhibition explores the human spirit in times of captivity during the Second World War. It's free, and it's right here at our building in Kew.

Chloe: Thanks for listening to On The Record from The National Archives. To find out more about The National Archives, follow the link from the episode description in your podcast listening app. Visit nationalarchives.gov.uk. to subscribe to On the Record at The National Archives so you don't miss new episodes, which are released throughout the year.

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