

NEWS

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Adelaide's WWI prisoner of war camp on Torrens Island

ABC Radio Adelaide

By [Brett Williamson](#)

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[Photo: Internees lining up for water rations at the Torrens Island Internment Camp \(vn4703393-s117\). \(National Library of Australia: Paul Dubotzki\)](#)

Torrens Island in the Port River estuary near Adelaide was once the site of a concentration camp.

At a time when approximately 10 per cent of South Australia's population was of German descent, the Torrens Island Concentration Camp was created to imprison those who were seen to be a threat to the nation.

Shortly after the British Empire joined WWI, residents in Australia of German heritage were told to report to their local police station and were placed on weekly parole.

"That was extended to Austrian subjects when Austria joined the war," senior curator of the Migration Museum, Mandy Paul said.

On October 9 1914, the Torrens Island Concentration Camp opened.

At first, only German men who had been travelling on German ships or who served as military reserves were imprisoned with the camp originally hosting around 100 men.

It was not long before all men of German and Austrian descent of military age were classified as a risk and numbers in the camp grew to more than 400.

"The camp itself was rows of tents behind barbed wire," Ms Paul said.

With many employers and unions refusing to employ men of German or Austrian descent, some men chose to be voluntarily admitted to the camp with the promise of accommodation for the men and reparations paid to their families for their term of imprisonment.

THE DIARY OF A PRISONER OF WAR

German born Frank Bungardy had been living in Australia since 1909. He married an Australian woman and fathered two children.

He was a miner, painter and talented prize-fighting boxer who carried the nickname Bungardy the Bruiser.

At the time war broke out between England and Germany, Mr Bungardy was working at the British Mine in Broken Hill.

Mr Bungardy's diary, held in the State Library of New South Wales, details his love of the country he had called his new home and his confusion to the reaction of the government when he was arrested on January 8 1915 for 'failing to report'.

He was allowed 30 minutes to go home, say goodbye to his family and collect a few personal belongings under the watchful eye of a detective.

"I left my home, a weeping wife, and my weeping children, bound for the railway station to catch the Adelaide Express."

Mr Bungardy arrived at Torrens Island to a reception very different than the one he had left.

"We were ordered under curses and most objectionable expressions such as 'you German bastards'."

"If I had been a free man, the honour of my dear mother would have compelled me to strike this man dead as soon as the words left his lips."

Mr Bungardy was shepherded into the barbed wire enclosure and allotted a round tent with six other men.

A prisoner of war seems to have no rights and not be entitled to justice.

extract from Frank Bungardy's diary

"We made the best of it and lay together like pigs in a sty during the night," he wrote.

Mr Bungardy's diary was one of only a few records kept of the Torrens Island Concentration Camp, providing an insight into conditions.

Food was limited, prisoners were restless and things soon escalated, with military-style discipline and punishment under the direction of Commandant Hawkes in early 1915.

In his diary, Mr Bungardy wrote of prisoners being prodded, occasionally stabbed with bayonets, and regularly hearing warning shots fired over their heads.

[Photographs taken by fellow inmate Paul Dubotzki](#) revealed corporal punishment inflicted on two prisoners when they were returned to the camp after escaping to the Adelaide Hills.

The two were reportedly tied to trees and flogged 20 times each with a cat-of-nine-tails.

Mr Bungardy also wrote of a prisoner being stabbed several times and another shot in the leg.

"A prisoner of war seems to have no rights and not be entitled to justice," he wrote.

On August 10 1915, the prisoners of the Torrens Island camp were removed from the island and transferred to a central prisoner-of-war camp in New South Wales.

"Our life during our internment in South Australia was of absolute terror," Mr Bungardy noted on his departure.

He escaped en route to the German Concentration Camp in Sydney, and was later arrested at Moss Vale, NSW, and transported to Liverpool near Sydney.

After the war ended, the Australian Government deported 6,150 prisoners to their countries of origin or descent.

Mr Bungardy made a desperate plea to remain in the country to be with his wife and family, but was deported in October 1919.



Photo: Motor launch landing internees at Torrens Island Internment Camp (vn5016734). (National Library of Australia: [Paul Dubotzki](#))



Photo: [Internees collecting firewood on Torrens Island \(vn4703393-s116\)](#). (National Library of Australia: Paul Dubotzki)



Photo: [Internees at Torrens Island Camp \(vn4703393-s117\)](#). (National Library of Australia: Paul Dubotzki)



Photo: [A group of internment camp staff with women and children. There is confusion over the origins of the women and children in this photo, with one source stating they are members of Adelaide's Cheer Up Group and another stating they are relatives of officers \(vn4703393-s115\) \(National Library of Australia: Paul Dubotzki\)](#)



Photo: [Accommodation at the Torrens Island Internment Camp \(vn5016744\). \(National Library of Australia: Paul Dubotzki\)](#)

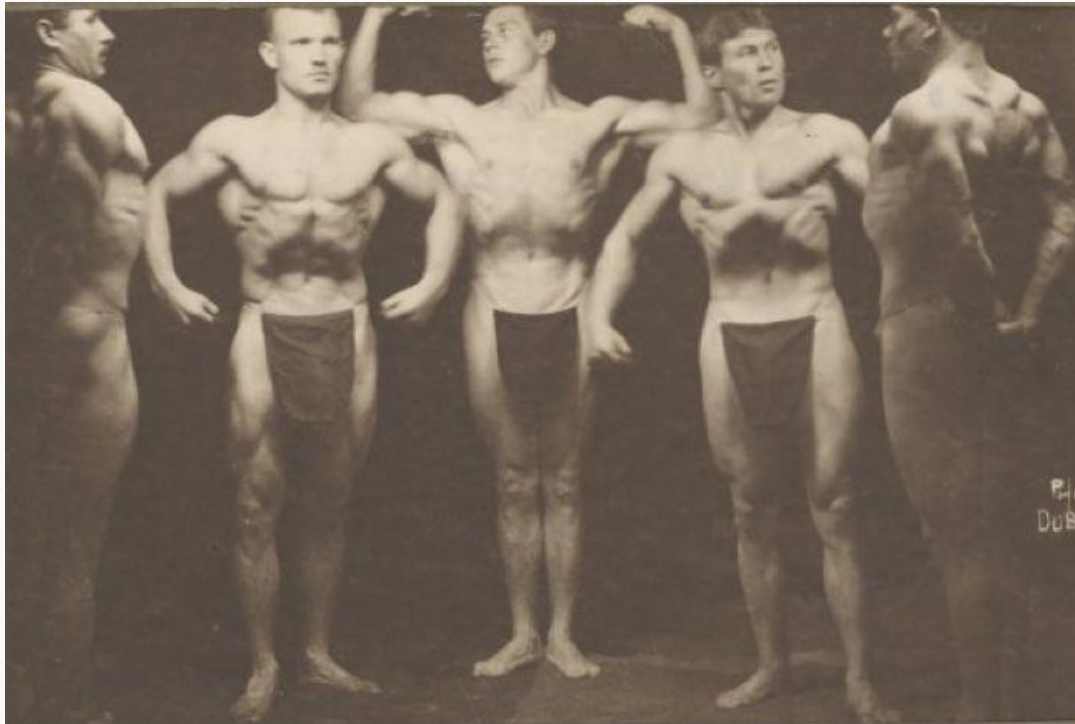


Photo: [Prisoner athletes pose for the camera at Torrens Island Internment Camp \(vn2296450\)](#). (National Library of Australia: Paul Dubotzki)

Gallery: [A gallery of images from the Torrens Island Camp](#)

AN INSIGHT INTO THE TORRENS ISLAND INTERNMENT CAMP

The Migration Museum of Adelaide will host the exhibition *Interned* from October 11 2014 to August 16 2015.

"It's really the visual images of the photos and the immediacy of the words that Bungardy wrote that brings it to life," Ms Paul said.

The exhibition also contained letters from the families of interned men pleading for their release.

"Every now and then you come across a heartbreaking letter that has been written to the authorities saying 'please let my husband go, he's done nothing wrong, you have taken him away from me, we've got these fatherless children, I am destitute'," Ms Paul said.

A collection of stories, official records and photographs compiled by Mandy Paul, Associate Professor Peter Monteath and Rebecca Martin will be published late November 2014.

Topics: [world-war-1](#), [prisons-and-punishment](#), [port-adelaide-5015](#), [adelaide-5000](#)

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Images taken from Torrens Island by prisoners

Source: http://digital.sl.nsw.gov.au/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?embedded=true&toolbar=false&dps_pid=IE569878

Base Source: <http://acms.sl.nsw.gov.au/album/albumView.aspx?acmsID=872725&itemID=997156>

Photos taken during
Internement on
Torrens Isl. S.A.

2 photos of the flogging of Civil. Internees
1 " " " stabling with bayonet
1 " " " arrest yard flogging
the soldier who carried out the
All Civilian Internees on Torrens Isl
near Adelaide S.A. 4th Military District
Commonwealth of Australia



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The ill treatment of a Prisoner,
15 Stabs in anatomy through a Bayonet
by a Sergeant. Jorrens Island. S.A. July 1915.
The black in Picture is Blood. Stabs distinctly to
be seen. Ill treatment proved without justifi-
cation, as pris returned to Camp 5 minutes
after arrest, being mistaken identity
III



Civilian Internee Forder
 after the flogging for
 trying to escape, handcuffed
 to the branch of a tree
 & his clothes lowered
 to the ground, received
 20 strokes with the Cat
 & Nine tails, & then
 after attended to by Military
 Surgeon on Fookahotel
 who admitted into the Camp
 Photo taken shortly after
 admittance in the Camp

1915
 Mark on photo is rem of
 sentence passed by Capt. H. H. H.
 to Capt. Hawker. S.A.

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"Some of our Guards," on
F. C. C. Foreman Island, S. A.

marked X is the Soldier who dealt out
the flogging. Private Shiele of Mount Pembier
S. A. 4th Military District

Private
Shiele
Foreman
Island



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