PART 3

THE YEARS IN ENGLAND

C H A P T E R X

I N T E R N M E N T :

K I T C H E N E R C A M P

PART 3

THE YEARS IN ENGLAND

CHAPTER X

INTERNMENT: KITCHENER CAMP

A. The Train Ride

Something happened already on the way to Belgium. We were at the German border on the railway train, in the middle of the night. The train had left Koeln at midnight, 12 or 1 o'clock in the morning, and we came to the German border near Aachen. There they let the whole train go into Belgium except for the two cars in which we were: 120 Jewish men, destined to go to England. And they lined us up on the station platform for an inspection. This was no hardship, except that we missed

our sleep that night. It was in July, warm and pleasant and not raining. We had to wait for our turn with our luggage, which was thoroughly inspected. They looked at our wallets, with the allowed 10 marks. They wanted to see our things, our suitcases, whether we would smuggle out anything.

Well, it so happened that I never "rushed" when it came to authorities, especially to Nazi authorities. So I lined up near the end of that long line. There was only one train, I think, in the middle of the night which continued on its way without us. We were still not fully inspected, so we had to wait till early morning. When the second or third train came, our two cars were then attached, and we were allowed to go across the border. However, the Nazis hadn't quite finished their inspections, so that the last 10 or 15 people were allowed to go back into the cars unexamined, and I was one of those.

And how lucky I was! What I did not know was that in my wallet, in a little interior pocket, were 20 German marks! They were in a kind of a "secret" pocket, which, of course, if you looked thoroughly, you could easily find. Those 20 marks I had never put in myself! Somebody, loving me very much, but exposing me at the

same time to great danger, must have put them in there, without telling me. If he or she would have told me, I would have refused to take the additional money. If I would have had the money, I might have shown fear in my face at the border, and I wouldn't have survived this thing. The Nazis probably would have sent me straight back to concentration camp. Only this time, I wouldn't have gotten out anymore, most likely . . .

Somebody did it! Maybe a relative. I don't know: perhaps my family in Kassel? Or even Fraenze, though that is not very likely. Maybe her uncle or aunt in Eschwege? Somebody put 20 marks in. And luckily I wasn't examined! -- When we came to Belgium, a few minutes later, and stopped on the Belgian side (where there was no thorough inspection at all), someone of the Kitchener Camp people asked me whether I still had some stamps, because he wanted to write to his wife in Koeln, who was left behind then (but I think she "made" it later and got out.) So I looked into my wallet, I still had a few German stamps. I hoped the Belgians were generous and let them through to Germany. I found the stamps in this inner pocket or somewhere near there. And to my shock, I found the 20 marks! Well, no harm was done, although actually for a time, I had been in grave danger, danger of life.

And when we came to Kitchener Camp, everybody with his 10 marks, I had 30 marks, straight away! On the first day in England, I was "a rich man" - what shall I tell you, I was a rich man! I could afford things which many others could not afford straight away. But, of course, I was very slow with spending my money, I assure you: I have never been too "splashy", except in recent years, when I bought what I thought I want to have. I don't have to worry so much anymore about reserves, for emergencies. But even now, I do not buy the most expensive cars, or go on the splashiest vacation trips: we tried, and still try, to keep our money together.

1. A Meeting on the Train

Let me continue now with my trip to England. When we were across the border into Belgium, early in the morning there was already daylight. I put on my Tefillin and said my morning prayers. I walked through the two cars to see whether I might find any acquaintances, but I didn't.

However, I found one man who also put on his Tefillin.

He was the only one besides me amongst the 120 men in the two D-Zug cars, in the two express-train cars, who did that. I introduced myself and found out that he was also a teacher and a cantor, whose last place had been Mainz, near Frankfurt, the orthodox congregation of Rabbi Dr. Bamberger. His name is Walter Hes. And he was also on the way to Kitchener Camp.

We applied immediately, when arriving in Kitchener Camp, to be put together into the same hut, these barracks. We became close friends then, and we're still close friends now, here in New York, so many years later. This was in July of 1939, over 40 years ago!

Walter Hes told me that he had a wife; they had no children yet. She was temporarily on a visit to Holland to see her parents, who were of German-Jewish origin, but who had reached Holland, probably as refugees. The fact is that soon afterwards, it was a day or two before the first of September (when World War II broke out in Europe), I walked with Walter Hes (I almost "forced" him) to the local post office. In Kitchener Camp was a little post office, and a larger one was in Sandwich, the nearest village. He sent a telegram to his wife in Holland saying only 'come immediately'. And she did, thanks G-d. She was one of the very few last people

whom the British authorities admitted just at the outbreak of the War. Anyone who came a few days later wouldn't have been allowed in anymore and was considered an "enemy alien". Well, Luise was reunited with her husband. We also became close friends.

She took up a servant's job in a house, I think, a big house, not too far away, and Walter was able sometimes to pay her a visit. To make things easier, I gave them my old bicycle on loan. Fraenze from Germany had sent me soon after my arrival in Kitchener Camp an old bicycle. Somehow, it got to me and I made little trips on it. But once in a while, I gave it to my friend Walter Hes so that he could see his wife Luise.

We also had a curfew in our camp, the Kitchener Camp. It was not really a military camp. But we were all refugees, 3,600 men from Europe, mostly from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, most of them Jewish, and there had to be a certain discipline; so there was this curfew. Every night, there was a "roll-call" taken in our hut. We could be already in bed, but a man, I think it was Dr. Appelbaum from Stettin (whose wife, unfortunately, was deported later on from Stettin), read out all the names of the people in the hut. I don't know anymore how many we were. There were camp-bunks:

metal beds, one on top of the other, to save space.

One night, when he called out the name 'Hes', I answered "here". I answered "here" twice that night, once for Walter, once for myself. And if this Dr. Appelbaum recognized my different voice, he didn't say so, he played the game. That night, my friend Walter Hes didn't come back at all.

B. Life in Kitchener Camp

Now, a little about Kitchener Camp. Well, it wasn't too hard there, really not. We got there through the efforts of Jewish organizations like "Bloomsbury House" in London. They had made great efforts and collected large sums of money to help us, to sustain us.

("Bloomsbury House" - The Central Office for Refugees on Bloomsbury Street, London W.C. 1. Possibly under the auspices of the Association for/of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain. Later known as "Woburn House".)

Actually the British government also helped; I give them credit. There was this huge unused military camp from

the First World War, called Kitchener Camp. In the First World War, they actually had British soldiers in there; but now it was empty. It was in rather poor shape, because nobody had ever maintained it. The metal roofs were leaking, it rained in during the night sometimes into our beds. Some people, jokingly, went to bed with open umbrellas. But it wasn't too bad.

Slowly, everything got fixed up beautifully. We did it ourselves. We worked, all of us worked, it was all arranged nicely. There were street-builders: they built streets, with cement, beautiful streets, so that we wouldn't have to walk in the mud when it was raining. And of course, they fixed the roofs. They really improved the Camp, they made it into a place, a huge place where people were able to live.

There was one place, though, which was a tent, a big tent: it was erected especially for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur services in the Fall of 1939. In addition, there were various smaller places where we prayed. We also had our own little post office, which I have mentioned already.

There was a huge kitchen and a mess-hall where people ate. My first job in the Camp was that of a waiter. Of

course, you didn't go around in a beautiful uniform: you were standing at a table, with big bowls, and you had your ladle, and you passed down metal plates with soup and with vegetable and with meat. The "boys" were sitting on long tables, next to each other, on benches (no chairs) and everybody got his food.

In there, a hall, we had Shabbos services; we had an orthodox group, a big group of people, from all places, all kinds of places, Austria and so on. It happened after a while that when the "Gabbai", the man in charge of our group, Mr. Brunner from Vienna, when he was able to leave the Camp, relatively early, to go to London - I don't know how he did it - they needed a successor as "Gabbai", the one who ran that orthodox service and whatever was connected with it. Before he left, he recommended me for the job, I didn't ever apply for such a job. And I was accepted.

Of course, there was no pay in it, except that my weekly allowance was increased: first it was six-pence, for which I just could buy, before the outbreak of the War, a few stamps to write to my family in Germany. Later on it was increased to Sh 2 / 6, that is, two and a half shilling. But when I got this job, it was like a kind of supervisor, like a foreman, I got five shillings a

week, which was already a lot of money for me, a quarter of a pound.

I later on even got an assistant, because I couldn't manage all alone anymore; and I took as my assistant Walter Hes. His help was especially necessary when it came to Pesach of 1940, where we had to arrange a Seder, a kosher Seder, two nights, for 400 men: and I was in charge of that. However, it was just then that Walter and Luise were able to emigrate to the U.S.A. They got on a boat, arriving in New York just before Pesach. (Oberkantor Eschwege was on the same boat.)

It was not the easiest thing to get all the matzos, to get the kosher wine - the administration didn't want to give me kosher wine at first, because it cost more money. Well, I was a pretty stubborn fellow, and in the end, I got everything. Four hundred men we were not normally, in the Kosher Department. But some guys came running, and they said, "At least on Pesach, I must be able to eat kosher." So on Pesach, we were 400 men in the Kosher Department.

One of them was a huge fellow, Heinrich Leser from Berlin. He was in charge of the "shower" all week long. But on Friday afternoons, it was mainly the orthodox men

who stood in line to have a shower before the Sabbath. Leser came to me and said, "My wife, working in the household of a Rabbi Cohn (or Cohen - of Margate or Ramsgate), is a pious woman. If she hears that I am not eating kosher even on Pesach, it is likely that she will divorce me! Please help me!"

So he had to get tickets for kosher meals, like some others, for all eight days of Pesach. The man showed his appreciation later on when I lined up on Friday afternoons to get my shower. He took me out of turn, and let me in immediately, whenever there was a shower available. And it didn't help the others whether they liked it or not: he was such a giant, he was in charge: in I got!

He became one of my close friends. He died unfortunately in 1967. It happened that in the summer of 1967, while we were on vacation in London, Ani and I wanted to pay the Lesers a surprise visit. On a Shabbos afternoon, we walked from our Hotel Aviva on Platt's Lane, to the Lesers' home (162 Chomley Gardens, London N.W. 6) which was not far away from us. The woman almost didn't let us in. When I asked for her husband, she became fearful. Finally, she cried from inside the flat that he had died, and she let us in. Since then,

Mrs. Else Leser wrote to us all these years to Rosh Hashana. When we again were in London in 1979, after Pesach, I couldn't see her but I talked with her on the phone; she was still pretty well. But now, in August 1981, a friend wrote to me that she has passed away and that she had asked him to inform me when she would die (after a long sickness). Else Leser was a lovely woman, and wife (widow) of my good friend Heinrich Leser. A giant he was, but really a good fellow.

C. The Pioneer Corps

While I was in Kitchener Camp, I had a peculiar experience. Soon after the outbreak of the Second World War, the British government accepted volunteers from our group to join the Pioneer Corps. The Pioneer Corps was a corps that wasn't supposed to carry weapons; but it was there to help the British army in England or overseas behind the front with all kinds of odd jobs.

My first reaction was that it was my duty as a Jew to support the British against the Nazis; so I joined up. I took all my luggage, I think even a mattress, and moved from my hut to the other side of the Camp, where

the military was established by then. And I enrolled.

But I was there only one night, and I wasn't sworn in yet. I had a very restless night; and the next morning, I asked some questions. There was the Senior Jewish Chaplain to H. M. Forces, Dayan Mark Gollop. He was connected with the Hampstead Synagogue, off West End Lane, in Dennington Park Road, in West Hampstead, London. He was already a man of over 50, in uniform, and a high officer. And, of course, he tried to convince us that this was a good cause.

So I said, "I'm willing to commit myself for one year, but for longer -- I can not."

"Why not?" he asked.

"Because my family is still in Germany, and if I have any way of being reunited with them, say in the United States (and the law said in those days, maybe still today, that the husband has to be there first before the family can come - and, by the way, that was a rule they had in England, too), then my family can not get out to the U.S.A. on account of me being still in the British army!"

And this Dayan - he was standing on a stage, in a big assembly hall, answering our questions - said, "Oh, in one year, the War will be over!"

And I shot back, disrespectfully - "How do you know?"

Well, he didn't know and he couldn't answer my question satisfactorily.

Therefore, I went to the sergeant and I said, "Excuse me sir, I haven't signed up yet, I was only contemplating doing it, can I still withdraw without getting penalized?"

He said, "You can go back to where you came from, and nothing will happen, we don't even have you in the records yet; or if we have, we will just ignore you."

And I said, "Thank you very much, sir!"

I took all my belongings, and marched in daylight back to my civilian camp on the other side. And there, of course, there was an uproar. I didn't quite feel like a hero though, when I returned back there, and I never "joined" any army after this.

It was probably, probably I say, the right thing to do. I'm not quite sure now, when I know the full story. But when we are confronted by situations which can not be "looked through" completely, because at some point in the future these events really have a bearing, sometimes of great importance, we've got to make a decision, right or wrong. And we hope, naturally, that the decision is right.

In consequence of which, of course, later on when the internments came, and all civilians from our Kitchener Camp had to go to the Isle of Man, I was one of those. This did not happen to the ones who had joined the Pioneer Corps.

By the way, some of those who joined the Pioneer Corps had to change their German-sounding names, so that in case they should ever fall into captivity, the Nazis would not immediately recognize that these were German Jews, and possibly punish them severely, or even kill them. We have a cousin, Ani has a cousin, whose name was Walter Fiebermann, like her mother's name. His name was changed, and he is ever since, Walter Ford. He works for "British Airways" here in Kennedy Airport. (FN's Note: Walter is now retired.) I think he still has his British passport; and he may even have been in

the Pioneer Corps, or may have been on the front, somewhere, against the Nazis. I seem to remember that sometimes, in the confusion and hasty retreat, even members of the Pioneer Corps were on the front line.

I have mentioned that in the Camp I received, first, 6 pence per week as "waiter." And when I became the "Gabai", in charge of the whole orthodox department, I earned 5 shillings. When I almost joined the army, I was told that there I would get 14 shillings a week, and it went to my head . . .

I went to the canteen which we had in the Camp, and bought myself a beautiful salami sausage, which cost a lot of money. I spent almost a whole week's "income" on this thing! I think it was from Barnett, or some other butcher, strictly kosher butcher in London. When then I finally did not join the army, it was almost impossible for me to go back to my plainer, more modest standard of living!

This goes to show, that people can manage with very little. But once they're used to a better life, financially, it is very hard to go back to the more modest or poorer standard.

CHAPTER XI

INTERNMENT:

THE ISLE OF MAN

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A. Transfer to The Isle of Man

When Hitler, in May of 1940, over-ran Holland, Belgium, Luxemburg, and soon, also most of France, we, the Kitchener Camp civilians, were sent by train to Liverpool, and then by boat to the Isle of Man for internment.

When the British soldiers and officers in charge saw us first, they did not yet know our background, and they may have thought that we were Nazis. But the treatment was a bit rough only in Liverpool, on the way from the train to the boat, and during the first days on the Isle of Man. After that, it was not bad at all.

The boat trip takes several hours from Liverpool to the Isle of Man, across the Irish Sea - sometimes in stormy

weather. At that time, there was also the additional danger of attacks by Nazi U-boats.

As to the initial treatment, we must not forget that this was the time of terrible defeats of the Allies on the European continent. There had been disasters in Holland and Belgium and Luxembourg, and now already the Nazis were far into France. There had been Dunkirk, which also was a very glorious thing, when we think of the evacuation of these soldiers, this absolutely almost miraculous achievement, by the British Navy and even small boats. Everybody was fearful, and nobody trusted anyone who had come from Germany. We have to try to understand this. We were taken to the Isle of Man at the end of May 1940, at a real horrible time for the British and their allies.

* * *

Traveling with us to the Isle of Man was Captain (later on, Major) Julian Layton, the former director of Kitchener Camp. He was the Home Office Liaison Officer. He was a Jew, and there was a rumor that his family name had been Loewenstein. We also heard that his parents or

grandparents had come from Germany and may have been related to the famous Frankfurt Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (in whose honor the Breuer-Yeshiva in our immediate neighborhood in New York is named.)

Very soon after our arrival at the Mooragh internment camp, in Ramsey, Isle of Man, Mr. Layton, at his request, received many copies of an excellent English magazine, the Picture-Post. Just at that time, they had printed an article about Kitchener Camp and its people (with pictures). It described the miserable times we had gone through under the Nazis: in prisons and concentration camps, and that many of us had to "run" for our lives. And just shortly before we were interned, the British Government had sent a letter to Kitchener Camp in which they expressed that we were to be considered "FRIENDS OF THE CROWN." This was, of course, a most ironic twist.

Still, after the leading military officers in our Camp on the Isle of Man had read the article of the Picture-Post, and had told their soldiers, the sentries, about it and our background, the mood changed very soon. And generally speaking, there developed quite a friendly atmosphere.

Mr. Layton deserves praise for his efforts on our behalf. The British Government, probably realizing his skill, sent him later on in the same capacity to internment camps in Australia, as their Liaison Officer, promoting him to be a "Major": Major Layton.

B. Conditions in the Camp

"Our" camp in Ramsey consisted of hotels, because in peacetime, this was a fine resort area for the British, and it probably is now again. We were put into these hotels. There was a very nice promenade near the beach, near the sand. But, at the beach, the British had put up a double line of barbed wire, one or two yards apart. And in the gangway - which was so created - in between those two barbed wire fences, marched British sentries, every once in a while, to see that none of us would try to escape.

Besides, the Isle of Man was separated by 35 miles of ocean, the Irish Sea, from the mainland, from Liverpool and places north! Who could have tried to escape, to swim 35 miles in an ocean, in rough seas! However, this was all in theory, it was a friendly atmosphere. We

were even, after a while, allowed out of the fence to the beach, and those who could swim were allowed into the water for a while and could even enjoy a swim. It wasn't bad at all.

I was in charge of House #3. I don't know anymore how many houses there were, but I know there was a House #17, for sure. There were a few kosher houses. The Kitchener Camp people were the first to come to that camp: the rest of the Camp was still empty, but was occupied soon after with Jews from all over the British Isles. Ours was the first kosher house, for those people who cared for kosher food, religious services and atmosphere.

Because I had been "Gabbai" already in Kitchener Camp, I became what they called there the "house leader" for this particular house. Later on, there came some groups with rabbis, some with famous rabbis, as internees, and they lived in bigger houses. "My" house was occupied by 53 men, including myself. I was practically in full charge, and when there was anything to be done with regard to the military command, I was the spokesman. It wasn't too bad because my English was quite good.

The man I mostly had to deal with was this officer

Layton, who knew me already anyhow. But I also remember, there was a Captain, a higher-up officer, a Scotsman, a real rough person. However, even he became most friendly with me. He loved to talk with me, and we laughed together, we joked together. He told me that he respected religious people, and that he was already in "Whitechapel" and also in Amsterdam. He said that he had met fine Jewish people, and I should tell him whatever I may need, and he would try to get it. So I told him that I needed kosher pots and pans, because all my people were religious people, and we could not use the pots and pans which we found in our house, as they had been used already, and therefore were not kosher. The captain really got me new pots and pans, beautiful, nicer stuff than anybody else had in the whole camp, because everything was brand new. But we still had little to eat.

After a few days in internment, having no substantial kosher food, we got a little weak. I made a speech in our dining room, and I said, "If you want to live vegetarian and try to stick it out till we get more, that's fine with me. But if anybody feels sick, gets headaches, and says he wants to go at least temporarily to the other houses, and eat their non-kosher food, that's fine with me too." I think not one soul left!

They all stuck it out. It was only for a few days. However, this we could not know beforehand.

And regarding the food: I had a very fine discussion with this Jewish officer Layton. This is a story which I'm pleased to report. I'm sure that members of my family, of my immediate family, know it already. It was, as I still think so many years later, G-d himself who gave me a right answer for this officer.

He walked with me along the promenade. We came to talk about kosher food. I said to him, "Sir, my people are hungry. They suffer, because they refuse to eat the meat which is given to us here. You have to try, please, to do something for them, for us, for me too, for myself."

He stopped. He looked at me. He said, "Have you ever been to a concentration camp?"

I said, "Yes sir. I was in Dachau."

"What did you eat there?"

"Well, I ate everything."

"Non-kosher foods, too?"

I said, "In Dachau? Of course, non-kosher food. There was nothing else to keep us alive."

And he shot back, "And why do you ask then for kosher food here?"

I answered, like lightening, "Sir, I thought there was a difference between Dachau Concentration Camp and a British Internment Camp!"

The man got red all over the face. I think he also got angry, or maybe, he got ashamed, that he provoked me into answering him that. He didn't even say goodbye that day. He left me standing on that beautiful promenade, and off he went, without saying one word.

But three days later, with the next boat - the boats from Liverpool came only twice a week, I think - with the next boat, there came the first salami sausages for us. And also, I think, margarine. And this came from Liverpool, and was arranged through Rabbi Unterman. (He later on went to Tel Aviv and became Chief Rabbi in Israel.) Once we got a little of that stuff, our whole menu changed.

We had a few people who were very good cooks. I don't know how they did it. One of them, I remember, Stein, had been even a teacher, but suddenly, he was an excellent cook.

So we didn't suffer from that time on. Everything was straightened out within the first week. And then, more and more supplies came, and finally, even real meat came, not only sausages; but naturally, this took a little while.

In our house, in the dining room, we had daily services, mornings and nights, and not only Shabbos. We had people who could read the Torah, of course. I was only one of them, there were others, teachers, cantors, all kinds of people were there. And we even had a Sepher Torah, which was an almost miraculous thing! One of the guys, I think he was a Hungarian Jew, was a broad-shouldered man, a butcher, who always ran around with a long knife - I was really sometimes afraid <u>for</u> him, and <u>of</u> him, because you never knew whether he was just wild, or whether he might use this "bloody" thing one day. And he, when we left the Kitchener Camp, I think, without asking anybody's permission, had the foresight to take this Sepher Torah along; he was so strong, that

he carried with his suitcase also this Sepher Torah. And he "shlepped", and he brought this Sepher Torah to our new home, that means, to our house, House #3, in our camp in Ramsey, on the Isle of Man.

This was a point even for the railway which was on the island, and I think the Camp's name was Mooragh Internment Camp. There were other camps established later on the island. Ours (Ramsey) faced the mainland, Liverpool, and the other camps, on the other side of the island, actually faced Dublin and Ireland. Internment camps on the Isle of Man were Ramsey, Onchan and Douglas. On the mainland was Huyton, near Liverpool; Lingfield, near London; and Chelsea, in South London.

The story goes that the Irish, while they were officially neutral, were really pro-Nazi. They left their lights burning at night. From Dublin, you could see far out into the Irish Sea. The Irish didn't observe the blackout regulations - well, they were not at war. It is claimed that these lights shining across the sea helped the Nazi U-boats.

While we were in the camp, there was mostly no big excitement. People got their letters, but many of them felt very lonely. They had their families still on the

Continent or in England. One, Braunhold, whom Ani later on also knew, had been originally a teacher in Berlin. His wife gave birth on the English mainland while he was on the Isle of Man. Naturally, some women were pregnant before their husbands were interned. And these men sometimes were very depressed.

A man like I, who, unfortunately, had no immediate family in England, I felt quite fine there. I had some kind of "preferential treatment" by way of my functions as a house leader. Still I was responsible to the military there, things had to be running smoothly. That was what was expected of us.

As a special privilege, we, the house leaders, were at several occasions taken out of the camp and allowed to walk for 2-3 hours in the beautiful countryside near the camp. Only one officer accompanied us, but soon he excused himself and met us later again to walk with us back to the camp. (There was even a rumor that while we were left alone, he met a lady-friend.)

Another preferential thing was that I probably was the only one in the whole house who had his own room. It was a tiny room, with just enough space for a bed, but also for a small desk and a chair, because I had to keep

some files, keep some records. And although it wasn't so easy, you could step out, almost climb out through the window, and there was a very tiny terrace, a balcony, from which you could look sidewise and see the beautiful ocean! And that's where I was alone, there was no space for two, enjoying nature very, very often. And I even had a key to my room, so that there should be no intruders.

That was absolutely in constrast to all the others: there were at least two, sometimes four and six people in one room, depending on the size of the room. Every few weeks, I insisted on a new vote for house leader. I have to report, truly, that I was re-elected every time again, although there was an attempt, once or twice, to elect somebody else. I want to report that too; but the other party never got more than 5 or 10 votes, out of the 52.

I had an assistant, who was an elderly man, a physician, a Dr. Cohen, a very fine man, a very quiet man; he really got along with everybody. He sometimes even examined our health, but he didn't have too much to do.

C. Rabbi Dr. Van der Zyl

On the Isle of Man, the man in charge of the civilians, as a civilian camp leader, was Rabbiner, or Rabbi, Dr. Van der Zyl. He was a reform rabbi, originally from Berlin. He was already our camp leader, civilian camp leader, in the Kitchener Camp. He had the highest civilian position in the Internment Camp. I was a house leader, which was quite a nice thing; but I was not the head of the civilians. All the house leaders of these many hotels had a chairman, so to speak, and that was Rabbi Dr. Van der Zyl. The man knew me well and I knew him.

It came up that he lost his "Reader of the Torah", a Mr. Levi, in the Internment Camp on the Isle of Man when Mr. Levi was sent on to an Internment Camp in Canada. Dr. Van der Zyl had his own Shabbos services in a basement room of a hotel, where there was also a stage. It was used in peacetime for cabaret and other entertainments. There, he had his Shabbos morning services, somewhat shortened, that means, a reform service. For instance, they read only 3 portions of the sidrah every

week, while the orthodox way is to read all 7 portions.

Now, immediately when I heard that this man Levi was to be sent away, I went to Rabbi Dr. Van der Zyl and offered him my services: to read the Torah in his reform service. Well, there was no organ there, there even was no 'mixed seating' because there were no women in our camp, so that these were not questions which had to bother me religiously. Of course, there was no payment, this was all in an honorary capacity. The only point was, can I read a shortened version of the Torah? So I told him, "I'll do the leinen. But my condition is, and I have only one condition: it must be the full text, unshortened, all 7 portions. But I promise you, I will do it very fast, so that your services will not take much longer than in the past."

The man accepted my offer; whether he loved me for it, I do not know. He may have accepted me, maybe, just because he had no choice! He had nobody else there who would do it. As a matter of fact, many of my orthodox friends, they almost "killed" me! They said, "How can you do that!?" My defense was, "Do you think these reform Jews would then come running to our services, and start "shaking" from morning to noon? They wouldn't do that, they would stay at home, they would not pray at

all!" I think I did the right thing, at least they came to Shul every Shabbos morning. And these many years later, I still think I did the right thing and I have no regrets whatsoever.

And this little thing, without wanting to boast really, shows a little bit about my attitude toward religion. Which means, in trying to be observant myself, I have developed certain attitudes, certain philosophies over the years, and I find, it is most important to carry on tradition. Otherwise, the Jewish people would not have survived and can not survive in the future. However, I want to understand the others too, to be their friend, to be helpful to them, just like many of them have been helpful to me or to us.

Little did I know then, and could I possibly have known then, that this offer, to do the reading of the Torah for these reform people, so-called reform people, would be of great benefit to me, within weeks, or maybe almost within days thereafter. When the next transportation of internees occurred, I was on the list to be sent overseas, having no close family relatives in England.

And I found out that this transportation wouldn't go out to Canada, where I might have gone. From Canada,

I felt, it might be easier to come to the United States, and then to get Fraenze and the children out. But when I heard - by sheer luck - (a friend who worked for the Camp Commander told me in strict confidence -- he whispered it to me . . .) - that this transportation would go to Australia, I lined up again and again - altogether three times - at Mr. Layton's office, to get the permission to stay. And three times, he practically threw me out of the room!

Then I went to Dr. Van der Zyl, and Dr. Van der Zyl went in, he didn't have to wait for his turn, and he told Layton, "This is a man we need here. He can not be sent away." And that was that.

And only then was I asked, "But your luggage is already on the boat?!" (This was probably not the boat going to Australia, but the one just taking us to Liverpool, from where we would then get on a bigger boat.)

So I said, "Well, if it has to be, send my luggage to Australia, or wherever it goes!"

And they laughed; and very soon after, there came a British soldier, a sentry, and he really was sweating, carrying my, I think, two heavy suitcases back to House

#3, to our civilian hotel house. Nobody laughed, but I was quite happy to have my things back.

If it would have come to the worst, I'm sure the British government on the Isle of Man would have supplied me with other things which I would need, which I would have needed to dress decently.

That episode had a happy ending. -

By the way, this happened on the 10th of July, of 1940, and the 10 and the 7 (of July) makes 17. This brings me to a subject, which I may have mentioned, or will mention later. In my life, I believe, without wanting to be superstitious, that the figure 17 is of some importance, not meaning necessarily good things only, but things important to me. And, of course, I often worked out this 17 "by hook and by crook", which is, of course, utterly ridiculous. For instance, I was born on the 11th of June; 11 and 6 is 17. Fraenze was born on the 8th of September: 8 and 9 is 17. On May 12th, I "popped the question", if Fraenze would marry me (=17); and in the "Australia - Canada" story you have July 10th, which is 17.

Unfortunately, Fraenze and the children later were

deported in 1943, if you add the figures up, it's also 17. There are many, many more things which come up, occasionally, even up to this moment. Of course, it's probably all rubbish and nonsense, and I don't want to be superstitious! But there are things which are just there, and I have no way of explaining them, except to say, "forget the whole business, it's just too ridiculous!"

But I can say, in my defense, that our sages sometimes considered such Hebrew arithmetic quite seriously, and that the Hebrew word for "Good" = TOV also adds up to 17! (9 + 6 + 2)

By the way, I could mention here that actually one of the boats sent overseas, to Australia or Canada, sank through U-boat torpedoes, and a lot of people perished. I had met one Jewish man in Kitchener Camp from Vienna, I think, Singer, who was on that boat, and he drowned, like many others.

But in my case, it wasn't a question of the danger. It was the question, and I may have mentioned this earlier, that once I would be in Australia, everything would be so much harder: to transfer the papers for my going to the United States, from England to Australia - in war

time! - It would delay, and even, endanger, Fraenze and the children in Germany. Unfortunately, all these hopes and efforts to bring them out of Germany, in the end, were to no avail . . .

(Three boats were sent to Canada. The "Arandora Star" was torpedoed and 400 Jews drowned. - The "Dunera" had a very close "call," but after a terrible trip made it safely to Australia. (See the book The Dunera Internees by Benzion Patkin, Melbourne, Victoria, and also by S. C. Clergue, Commander of a German U-boat that had actually fired torpedoes at the "Dunera", in his book: S.O.S. Rettet unser Seelen (Save our Souls.))

D. Lutz Hilburn

There was also, on the Isle of Man, my good friend Lutz Hilburn, originally Ludwig Heilbrunn, from Kassel. He is an engineer, who is still in London, and we have been together several times now. After Ani and I got to America, we were back in England twice, in 1967 with Flori and Clara, and in 1979 (alone), and we saw Lutz, and his lovely wife, Ruby. He is still an engineer, although now, because of his big firm has a rule that

people have to retire at 65 or 70, he's called now a "consultant". He probably makes even more money now than before. He still works quite hard, goes very often on business to Germany, and only his job-title has changed. (FN's Note: Dear Lutz passed away on September 26, 1983.)

I think before the internment he was in charge of 1,100 or 1,200 people. I believe he worked at Dunlop, a German firm connected with rubber, rubber tires and other rubber products. Long ago, he invented something of rubber for the British battleships, so that everytime they shot their heavy guns, the tubes of their radios wouldn't get smashed by the vibration. He used a similar principle later on for the London subway, for the London Underground trains. I think he didn't get rich from this, because the firm got the money for the patent's use. He just got the credit and maybe he got a little bonus or a big bonus.

Now, he was there too, on the Isle of Man, but he got out very soon, because his firm requisitioned him for important war work. He also worked for a cousin, Goldschmidt (from Schluechtern), who was then in Leicester, and I think is still there. I mentioned the name before.

(This Goldschmidt was one of the men who had financed the private school in Schluechtern where I was teaching for one year. Knowingly, I've never seen this man Goldschmidt, but I have met other members of his family. He was most active in general and in Jewish causes, was well-to-do in Germany, but became real "big" in England.)

Before Lutz got out of our Internment Camp, there was a funny little story. It is not very important, but it is nice to remember such things. We walked along the promenade, and we talked, and he said, "Erich, if we could steal a little plane, I think, I know how to get it into the air, we could escape. But don't ask me how I could land it once we're in England, because I really don't know how to get that blooming thing down on the ground again safely!" And we had our laughs, even in internment.

He had a younger brother there, Friedel, who was at that time maybe only 18 years old, and was also interned with us. Later on, Friedel became a doctor. Unfortunately, he died very young. By then, he was already married, but had no children. I think the man, the brother, wasn't even 35 years old when he died: he must have had

some heart trouble. I remember that their father lived to at least 65 or 70 years of age. When Lutz had to leave the camp quite suddenly - it went so fast - the last he told me was, "Please watch my brother Friedel a little bit." He considered Friedel his "baby brother." Well, his brother Friedel wasn't even in my house. Lutz also was not in my house. He was in a different kosher house, because they arrived a little later than we did. This Friedel was a lovely fellow, and of course, he never gave me any trouble.

Now that is a little bit about The Isle of Man.

E. Leaving the Internment Camps

After a while, the British regretted what they had done with us, or to us. And they wanted to "get rid" of us again, i.e., they wanted to set us free. The Manchester Guardian and other papers wrote about this, that the internment of us refugees was a shameful situation. There were letters to the editor. And then the British government published some kind of "White Paper", or what they called it, and they tried to establish reasons by which one could be discharged and sent back to the

mainland. And maybe even to be allowed to find a job with a labor permit; because by that time there was no more question of going back to Kitchener Camp.

Kitchener Camp had been dissolved, except for the military sector. All the work restrictions for us had been relaxed, because there was such a shortage of workers. Refugees could find jobs now, cleaning up the rubble which was caused by the air raids, by the bombing in London and in other places, or making torches / flashlight batteries, which were in urgent demand because of the blackout. You couldn't just walk in complete darkness, you needed a little bit of light, at least as long as there was no air-raid going on.

By the way, I know a man, Arthur Plaut, and his wife, who came from Themar. This Plaut was in England alone, just like I. (He is here now in New York, re-united with his wife, Elly, who was a close friend of Fraenze.) Although a refugee from Germany, he got a job in Shropshire, in a sugar factory, and they had 7-day, 12-hour shifts. He worked 84 hours each week (!) sometimes day-shift, sometimes night-shift. Most of the sugar went by boat to Russia, to Murmansk, which is a harbor which doesn't freeze up for quite as long as other places do, up there in Russia and Siberia. He

also made lots of money in those days.

So there came these relaxations by which we could be released. The camp doctor, himself an internee - I believe from Austria - said to me, "Neumann, you come to me. I'll examine you. I'll find that there's something wrong with your urine, and I'll get you out in two weeks." I said, "No such thing. The fellows who got me into this, without any reason, without any good reason, they have to let me out too, without reason."

The "reason" was finally established by the government, because they really wanted to "get rid" of us. So they said, we have to let Neumann out "to prepare for his emigration to the United States." Well, I had some affidavit papers, things were pending. So they shifted me and others to Lingfield, near London, so that I could receive my visa and go to the United States.

However, it didn't work that fast. There were technicalities. We arrived at Lingfield at the beginning of the Christmas vacation, 1940: the American Consulate in London was closed when we were to go there. And by the time they opened again, at the beginning of January 1941, the regulations had been changed, they had been made tougher. You had to first have an accommodation on

a boat before you could get your visa. So I was still interned on the mainland for three more months, in Lingfield, Surrey and also in Chelsea, London.

Well, in Lingfield, we lived then in places which were really stables for horseraces. But it was quite comfortable there, out in the country, south of London. Then the authorities transferred me (and probably others - I forgot) to the basement of a school in Chelsea, I think, south of the Thames. There was then already some bombing, which we had to experience. Well, we were in the basement: I don't know how safe it was, but it was safer than upstairs.

Then, finally, without a visa, I really didn't have a visa (!), they just let me out of internment in March of 1941. They saw, the thing doesn't work out with this emigration to the U.S.A. yet. It was only in June 1947, more than six years later, till I finally left England.

When I came to London in March 1941, I knew already of an address. There had been a fellow interned with me who said, "When you come out, you just find where I am. There is a woman, where I have a room. She is a married woman, but her husband is a soldier and he's almost never there. There is also the brother of that woman,

a Mr. Adler. She has enough space; she can put you up. There is another bed in the room of this Mr. Adler." So I lived at first, after my release, in 48, Endymion Road, Hornsey, N. 4, London. The only "bad" part was that this Mr. Adler was always snoring at night!

The first night there, anti-aircraft guns were fired in the park. The vibration was so enormous, that I almost fell off the chair. It took some time till I got used to this new thing.

And I went to "Bloomsbury House", and they gave me 22 shillings and 6 pence (Sh 22/6) per week as support till I found a job.

* * *

("Bloomsbury House" probably refers to The Central Office for Refugees possibly under the auspices of The Association for Jewish Refugees in Great Britain. See CHAPTER X, B. Life in Kitchener Camp.)