“SING ME THAT LOVELY SONG AGAIN’ Helga Griffin Extracts

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72 Iran was invaded 1941. Reza Shah abdicated to his son Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi who ascended the Peacock Throne 16th September 1941.

The Girschik family (Rudolph & Elfriede, with Helga and Peter. Another child Herbert was born in the camp) left Karind for Basrah Internment camp in the south. The British encouraged internees from Iran to send their families ‘home’

75 William Slim (Commander of the Aus force in Iran) ‘Unofficial History’ was convinced that the 3000 or so citizens of Germany working in Iran were in the service of the Nazi government.

76 ‘Rona’ a British ship made slow passage along the meandering river in September 1941 to the Persian Gulf and to Bombay where they were interned.

77 All were ordered to board ‘Rangitiki’, a large New Zealand ship via a gang plank placed between the two vessels. Cabins were assigned to families while nearly 500 men were crowded together. A famine in India had caused change of plan and they were being sent to Australia.

78 Officially they were prisoners of British government, but Britain was to repay Australia for the cost of internment to get them out of the Middle East, where they were simply in the way. A military garrison would receive them in Australia.

The crossing from India via Colombo to Singapore and from there to Australia with a Scottish military garrison with an armed warship steaming in front, and two others followed behind.

80-81 Dr Fuchs, a Jewish doctor was on board. Franz Zubeck, Professor of Music at the Tehran Conservatorium with Madame Zubeck, a fashion designer.

82-83 Berthed in Adelaide harbour. They boarded a steam train to Melbourne and by bus to Tatura, arriving in late November 1941 to No.3 civilian family camp.

86 The whole camp sat on six hectares of land and was surrounded by two widely-spaced, high fences of spiked wire with coils of barbed wire sprawled between them. Four gates in the carriageway gave entry to the four compounds. Only one other couple from Iran, with their son, came with them into this compound. The contingent from Iran was only twelve people in all.

Rudolph Girschik confinement would last 4-1/2 years and Elfriede and children exactly five. Helga was 6-1/2, Peter 3-1/2 years younger. Herbert was about 2 when they left.

88 The camp was divided into four diamond shaped compounds: A, B, C and D. D was shut off from the others because that was where most of the Jewish people were housed.

Tatura was a dusty, hot place in summers and winters were unpleasantly cold. The camp was in a hollow.

90 The camp was under surveillance twenty-four hours a day from observation towers.

91 At night bright search lights moved over the four compounds to cover every exposed area

Every morning and before dinner all the men had to line up for roll call.

92 Camp 3 was only one of several camps in the region: Tatura, Rushworth, Murchison, Maroopa and Waranga.

Single civilian men lived separately.

101 There were few well-educated people in camp 3 – little opportunity for fruitful, intellectual and morally purposeful activity – rather Nazi-style political organisation was imposed.

102 ‘ideological allegiance’ amongst its interned community, Camp 3 at Tatura was referred to as ‘Das Lager’

107 The camp stood in fly-ridden, pastoral country and personal hygiene was difficult to maintain among a community of over 800 prisoners – about 200 in each camp.

151 Rudolph Girschik (her father) told Helga that before the men were released from the camp each family was examined for its political status. A Committee of Inquiry presided over by Justice Simpson, a judge from Tasmania examined possible deportations for Nazi die-hards, and what to do with those who wanted to be repatriated to stay in Australia. People with contentious claims were released later, after investigation by another Judge Hutchins.

151 Our father was told that we would make good migrants, but he held out to have us repatriated to Iran. The official response was that no ships were going to the Persian Gulf. He did not know that the British government had pressured Iranian authorities not to allow the former ‘enemies of Britain’ back into oil-rich Iran.

157 My father left camp alone to look for work in Melbourne. My mother had a terrible time after he left. We were moved to Camp D to make room for the Japanese. Children were always in the way and the youngest, Peter not yet two years old, used to appear in people’s rooms uninvited. The Committee that supervised public order strongly rebuked her. My mother had no one to protect her from the bullies.

They had to remain in camp until the father found work and accommodation in a city with extreme housing shortage and an aversion to renting to a family with children. He could not find work appropriate to his qualifications which were not recognised.

Not long before Christmas 1946 they joined him. Helga was 11-1/2, Peter 8, Herbert almost 2.

162 Wilhelm Zapf, an Austrian from Graz, an ex-officer of the Austrian Imperial Army in WW1 was an ex-internee from the single mens’ camp, who had worked as an engineer in Iran.

257 Aunt Else (younger sister of Elfriede) married an ex-internee from the single mens’ camp, Alfred Erlange, a Berlina by nurture who had worked in Iran. His father had been a Jewish business man who had married a Christian woman.