

RG 59 - General Records of the
Department of State

Records of the
Special War Problems Division

Inspection Reports on
War Relocation Centers, 1942-1946
[Box 2 of 3]

[Lot File No. 58 D 7]

Box 20

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFICATION REVIEW PROJECT

NND 893002

RECORD GROUP	ENTRY	BOX
59	Lot 58 D 7	20

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

NA Form 1409 (4-85)

Ellis Island

ca

[Translation]

C/RMT/MH

United States of America

Ellis Island Camp

Distributed
by SWP to

Visited by Mr. Alfred Cardinaux on December 3,
1943.

War Bay - 2 Number of internees: 185 internees, of whom:

Belmays
148 are German men
30 are German women
7 are Italian men (will soon be
transferred to Camp
Missoula, Montana)

Date *10/21/44 ETR* Spokesman: Ernst Kerkhof

Many improvements have been made since our inspection of April 12, 1943. The men's dormitory is in a big hall on the ground floor. This hall opens on a terrace to which the internees have access. A partition, 2 meters high, divides the hall into two sections, one of which is used as a dormitory and the other as a recreation room. The big windows which open onto the terrace allow the ventilation and lighting of the whole hall in spite of the partition.

Several very large and very comfortably arranged rooms communicate with the above-mentioned hall. One of these rooms is used as a library.

Showers, wash-rooms and toilets, as well as a laundry room where the internees wash and iron their clothes, have been installed near the dormitory.

There is no change in the women's dormitory.

The families of the internees who visit the camp quite frequently bring them provisions. A kitchen with a refrigerator has been installed where the internees can prepare supplementary meals and store their provisions.

MEDICAL CARE:

At the time of the inspection there were 6 men and 2 women in the hospital. Among them was Conrad Pfennig, second mate of the ship "Columbus" who was transferred from Fort Stanton camp to be repatriated.

FOOD:

The internees eat in the big dining room on the second floor. The kitchen and dining room are run by a New York restaurant keeper. The internees, as well as the employees of the Department of Justice, find the food quite mediocre. We spoke to the chief of the Immigration and Naturalization Service of the Department of Justice in Philadelphia, who told us that this restaurant keeper had a long-standing contract with them but that it would expire this year. The authorities have already planned a dining room and kitchen for the internees and employees of the Department of Justice who were assigned to the station.

It must be noted that the food is not bad but all say that the food would be much better if the meals were prepared by the internees themselves (among whom there

-2-

are some professional cooks).

WORK:

At the time of the inspection 50 internees were working in different ways at the administration and up-keep of the buildings of Ellis Island. They are all paid 80 cents a day. The chief of the camp said there was work for more internees providing the latter accepted it. We therefore pointed out to the internees that such an occupation would be profitable and advised them to accept work.

AMUSEMENTS:

Since our last visit a new playground has been arranged. Thus, there is now one for the men and another for the women. The internees are shown movies twice a week.

LIBRARY, EDUCATION:

We have sent "soldatenbriefe", and song books as well as other books of the German Red Cross. The internees, having organized a choir, have greatly appreciated the song books.

GENERAL REMARKS:

We had an interview with the spokesman and the chief of the camp, Mr. Foman, during which we saw that the authorities and the internees were on very good terms.

The health and morale of the internees are perfect.

TC-1728

Distributed

(TRANSLATION)

TC-16840 Mentz

Z.C./FPD/JRH/GD

United States of America

Justice *Ellis*
Kelly
ELLIS ISLAND IMMIGRATION CENTER, NEW YORK

Repatriation of Italian Civilian Internees

OCT 17 1945
Date *gp* Visited on May 30, 1945 by Messrs. M Zehnder and A. Cardinaux.

The Department of State permitted the Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit the Italian civilian internees (for the most part seamen of the Merchant Marine) shortly after they sailed.

It was possible to make the visit on May 30, in the afternoon, on the eve of the departure of the repatriation steamer. The Italians were all gathered in a very large building of the Ellis Island Immigration Center (a small isolated island off New York); they had already gone through various inspections. They had just been transferred here from various centers and camps all over the United States (part of them 1 or 2 days before our visit); a few of them were already at Ellis Island before.

According to the data given by the Immigration Center questionnaire, 530 Italians are intended for repatriation. About half of them are natives of southern Italy; the other half come from northern Italy, including about 200 seamen from the Trieste district, whose immediate repatriation will encounter difficulties, under present conditions.

Most of the Italians complain that a large part of the effects which they had with them has been confiscated; these effects were taken from them by the customs officials, without compensation or delivery of receipts. In the case of a few internees, the American authorities verified that valuables were missing from the envelopes brought from the camps. Only the occupants of the civilian internee camp at Gloucester City had been warned and had suffered no loss.

The orders and prescriptions concerning articles that the prisoners may take with them vary considerably in the different camps:

In a few camps, the repatriates were authorized to take 50-55 in other currency, only 25. The remainder had to be carried in the form of travelers U. S. Government checks or war bonds. As for articles of value to be taken, they included everything that could be put into a space measuring 12 square feet. During the customs inspection, the repatriates had almost everything not intended for their immediate personal use taken from them. Thus, all cigarettes, soap, radions, bedding and women's garments were removed. Various repatriated were particularly disappointed, because they had even been advised in their former camp to take with them as many articles of value as possible; whereas, these were confiscated without compensation upon their arrival at Ellis Island. Most of them no longer had time to get rid of their effects for money and had to abandon the idea. A certain number of repatriates (we presume that it is a question here of persons being deported) and barely two hours' time in their camps, because of the fact it had often been necessary to fetch them from very far away, where they were at work, to send them off. According to information obtained at the office of the Director of the Immigration Center, the camp itself had been notified four days before the departure of the repatriation convoy.

- 2 -

It is obviously a question, in the case of this repatriation, of precipitate organization, for it would have been important to inform the repatriates in good time, and while they were in their camps, of the United States export regulations, to prevent them from incurring unnecessary losses. The Chief of the Ellis Island Immigration Center assured us that, in a report on this repatriation, he would request precise instructions for the camps, with a view of future repatriations, on order that all questions relation to articles to be taken may be uniformly regulated in the camps themselves.

As regards the "deportees", it is a question of persons who entered illegally, and of aliens who already have behind them an extended prison term (usually one year) and who are being sent back to their country of origin. According to information from a private, ex-officio source, it is planned to deport, also, to their former country of residence, other occupants of civilian internee camps, as undesirable aliens. We have not heard that these measures have already been put into effect. At the time of the entry of the U.S.A. into the war, aliens considered as potentially dangerous were like wise placed in internment camps, so that persons in this category may possibly be affected by deportation to the country of their origin, in case this measure is put into effect.

While we were at Ellis Island, the regulations regarding goods and departures were revised, and placed on the same footing for all repatriates:

Authorization to take \$50.00 incurrency or foreign exchange
Effects worth \$50.00 in dry goods
Foodstuffs worth \$10.00
Travelers' checks or war bonds ad lib.

It is forbidden to take technical equipment; such as, apparatus radio, etc.

All seamen had their seamen's papers taken away (for the moment, without receipt); we were assured, however, that these documents would be returned to their owners.

This certificate constitutes for seamen their most important identification paper from the professional point-of-view. It is possible that the American authorities are placing these papers in safe deposit temporarily, for security reasons.

Certain restrictions were relaxed, shortly before departure, according to information given by the American Director. This was the case, for example, with regard to a "deportee", whose departure was postponed to the next repatriation convoy, as his wife is expecting a baby soon.

As far as we know, men only have been repatriated, which may have caused the separation of families, when the other members of the families remain in the U.S.A.

Assistance of the International Committee of the Red Cross to the Repatriates

The Delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross gave to one of the Italian repatriates an (outside) garment and a little underwear, for the man in question possessed nothing except what he was wearing (trousers, shirt and a light sweater).

Shortly before the departure, it was possible to give, besides 12,000 cigarettes, cards, and other games.

- 3 -

We drew up for the ship's doctor a list of the ill whom we knew of already through previous visits to the camps (patients who, because of ailments which were also confirmed by the American lists, had endeavored to obtain their repatriation).

This list contains 8 patients: 1 case of cardiac insufficiency, 3 ulcers (including a stomach resection), 1 case of rheumatism, 1 of rectal fistula, 1 of amputation of the left leg, with stiffening of the right knee, after an accident during transportation to work.

Among the repatriates there is also a 12-year-old boy, who seems to have arrived in the United States as a stowaway.

CONFIDENTIAL

~~SECRET~~
~~by 1000~~

Justice - Kelly

APR 22 1946

ELLIS ISLAND IMMIGRATION FACILITY
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

DISTRICT DIRECTOR OF IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION:
Mr. W. Frank Watkins.

OFFICER IN CHARGE OF ELLIS ISLAND FACILITY: Mr. Lloyd Jensen.

CHIEF OF DETENTIONS AND DEPORTATIONS: Mr. Philip Forman.

CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER: Dr. F.M. Faget.

SPOKESMAN: Heinrich Dammann.

COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE: Hans Walter.

DATE OF VISIT:

March 29, 1946 - by Dr. Werner Bubb, Delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross, accompanied by Van Arsdale Turner, of the Special Projects Division, Department of State. This Center was first visited on March 16, 1942 by Dr. Marc Peter, Delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross in the company of Mr. Bernard Gufler, Chief, Special Division, Department of State. Mr. Gufler's comprehensive report on that visit fully covers the physical aspects of the Facility. Such slight changes and improvements as have since been made are noted in the report on a visit to the Facility made by Messrs. M. Zehnder and A. Cardinaux of the International Committee of the Red Cross on May 30, 1945. The subsequent report of a visit made on July 30, 1945, by Mr. Egidio Ortona, Second Secretary of the Italian Embassy and Mr. Louis S.N. Phillip of the Special Projects Division, Department of State, covers only such special questions as had arisen in connection with the repatriation of Italian nationals.

-2-

FINDINGS:

Persons Detained: On the date of the visit 998 aliens were under detention in the Ellis Island Facility. This total was broken down by the Chief of Detentions and Deportations as follows:

Enemy Aliens:

Males	382	
Females	<u>32</u>	414

Aliens Undergoing Expulsion Proceedings

Males	437	
Females	<u>6</u>	443

Aliens Undergoing Exclusion Proceedings

Males	104	
Females	<u>9</u>	113

Aliens Held for Safekeeping, etc.

Males	27	
Females	<u>1</u>	28
Overall Total		<u>998</u>

Of the 414 enemy aliens, 399 were stated to be Germans and 15 of various other nationalities.

*that
interners*

The group of 443 aliens undergoing expulsion proceedings includes 11 Chinese, 167 Indonesians and miscellaneous others.

5

The 113 aliens undergoing exclusion proceedings are of various nationalities. The members of this group, it was explained, do not enter into the wartime picture.

The 28 other aliens held for safekeeping are also outside the wartime picture, although included among them are 12 Japanese who will be returned to Japan. Actually, the transfer of this latter group will occur about the 16th of April. Sailing from the West Coast is set for the 24th.

It was further explained that those illegally in the country are being moved as rapidly as possible. As fast as authorization comes they are sent unescorted to a Gulf port. Nevertheless, quite a few are still here.

On the other hand, the Involuntary Repatriates who could go but won't, are likely to be here for an indefinite time, because they have inaugurated a court fight to try to stave off repatriation.

Of special groups only two were mentioned. A group of 12 from Bolivia is ready to be returned, but difficulties have arisen with regard to transit visas, particularly with the Colombian authorities. Of the 49 in the group from Peru, 15 or 16 are scheduled for hearings which must be held before this group can be moved. This group arrived from Fort Lincoln on February 15. The two internee groups that were sent to

- 3 -

Germany in December and January consisted mainly of persons formerly held at Crystal City.

It should be noted that one Italian is being held. He was transferred here from Gloucester City during the month of December. The Latin American group contains about 60 persons.

All of the detained aliens are housed in one large building, which is located on the north side of the island and contains in addition to the alien detention quarters, the offices and other administrative and supply functions of the Facility. Originally intended to house only small numbers of detainees for brief periods this somewhat antiquated building is now crowded well beyond its capacity in the efforts being made to provide shelter for the present large group of detainees. This is particularly true since the closing of the Facility at Fort Lincoln, Bismarck, North Dakota, and the transfer of its inmates to Ellis Island. Already filled well beyond capacity it practically bulged the walls to take care of these new arrivals, the latest groups of which came to the Island in January last and on February 15.

The designations of the space assigned for sleeping quarters, etc., are peculiar, somewhat confusing and bespeak the overcrowding that has occurred. The ORR (Old Record Room) contains 138 men, and 51 family groups and single women are quartered in rooms above the ORR. The group from Bismarck is quartered on the ORF (Old Record Floor). B-room contains sailors and others held for deportation. Most of the ORR group are North American deportees.

On a walk through the living quarters in the company of the spokesman, the following facilities were visited:

Old Record Room: A large hall on the main floor. It has been divided lengthwise by a low partition which divides it into two sections, used as a dormitory and a recreation room, respectively. Ventilation and lighting are good, but the army cots, arranged in groups of four, are set too close together. There is no privacy, and the overall impression is one of temporary makeshift--too long protracted. The adjoining showers, wash rooms and toilets are modern but are at best not more than adequate. There is plenty of hot water at all times. A comfortable and fairly well stocked library and a game room also adjoin the dormitory. A kitchen and refrigerator have also been installed, to facilitate the preparation of food brought to the internees by their families. It is run in cafeteria style. Adjoining is a day room.

Canteen: This is conducted by the internees themselves and gives the appearance of being well stocked.

Dispensary: Here a Coast Guard doctor or Public Health Service doctor holds sick call each day except on Saturdays and Sundays.

Dormitory Rooms Upstairs: Here are several dormitory rooms, all overcrowded, and 20 or 25 private rooms for families. These were not visited but they are probably adequate since no

- 4 -

complaints were heard. There were plenty of complaints in the men's dormitories, however, and they seemed to your representative to be fully justified.

One room, approximately 35x35 holds 64 men. The two-story cots are much closer together than is customary in PW camps conducted by the Army and the square foot space per man is much lower than the Army minimum. The room did not look clean and the complaints that there are bedbugs were too numerous to pass over without mention. Bed linen is changed once a week.

A second room about 35x40 has housed as many as 72 and has about 50 now. Artificial lights are necessary in these rooms and one of them is frequently cursed with smoke and soot from nearby chimneys.

A third room, of larger proportions, contains 106 men and has for their use 4 washbowls and 8 toilets.

A fourth room approximately 25x60 holds 85 men.

A unit of four small rooms is used as sleeping quarters for 20 men and has no toilet or washroom facilities.

No lockers are in use in these rooms; there would not be space for them. The occupants claim they cannot wash their clothes since there is no place to dry them. A further handicap is the fact that the walls of these rooms are tiled to a height well above the head, so that it is not possible for the occupants to hang up their belongings. The resulting untidiness cannot fail to affect both the general health and the morale of the occupants. That it has done so is unquestionably true.

Except for the dayroom, the women's quarters were not visited. The impression was gathered, however, that they are at least an improvement over those provided for the men.

Talk with the Spokesman: The spokesman was unprepared, since he had not received the letter addressed to him ten days before by the IRC office and had not been informed of our proposed visit. Although he is the regularly elected spokesman for the entire group, he brought into the conference Hans Walter, a committee representative, and a Dr. Springer who had been spokesman at Fort Lincoln and is now the leader of the group of 140 who were transferred from that Facility.

It was evident immediately that morale is extremely low. Upon analysis there appeared to be three fundamental causes: 1. The closeness and general unsatisfactoriness of the quarters in which they are confined. 2. The uncertainty regarding the length of time they must remain here. 3. The prospect of further internment upon arrival in Germany.

With regard to (1) above: It is as difficult for the internees as for your representative to understand why an almost ideal Facility such as that at Fort Lincoln should have been closed and its occupants brought here while the length of time before repatriation is still uncertain and the prospect still rather remote.

- 5 -

With regard to (2) above: The IRC Delegate was informed by a company leader, with the backing of the spokesman and the others, that the feeling is strong among the internees that during the prolonged legal proceedings resulting from court action taken by attorneys on their behalf, some arrangement might be worked out by which permission would be given to men having families on the outside to visit them from time to time. Numerous instances were cited of the hardships the situation has worked on those who will remain behind in this country as a result of the continued close confinement of the heads of families. The question was also asked whether some form of parole could not be arranged during this period of waiting.

As to the confinement itself, the Delegate was told that a number of those who have been interned here for long periods are rapidly cracking up and should be given psychiatric care. Apparently a number of the internees have been here for long periods, and the case was cited of one man who was in jail for 1 1/2 years and has now been imprisoned or interned for a total of six years. It was stated that he is now slightly insane.

With regard to (3) above: It was stated that the internees know definitely that those who have returned voluntarily to Germany were immediately reinterned upon arrival. The place of internment was stated to be at Asbeck, near Heidleberg, in an old castle readied for the purpose. It was pointed out to the Delegate and your representative that under the circumstances, much as they dislike Ellis Island, it is most unlikely that any of them will return to Germany voluntarily.

Two recent rulings have also occasioned a lowering of morale. In the large visiting room the tables are arranged on opposite sides of a partition. It is not particularly high but it is a strain to talk over it, especially if the room is well filled, as is usually the case on Saturdays, the heaviest visiting day, when 120 or more persons are in the room. This partition has apparently always been a part of the fixtures of the visiting room, but for a number of months the rules were relaxed and visitors were allowed to sit beside the internees on benches within the inner enclosure. On the day of the visit this privilege was withdrawn and it again became necessary to talk across the partition. It is understandable that the internees should regard this as a particular and unnecessary hardship. "That a man interned 2 1/2 years cannot even sit beside his wife for an hour a week is truly hard," one of them explained. They were inclined to blame the local administration, although in actual fact the decision came from up above. It was regarded as necessary, the Officer in Charge explained, because of the number of new elements now confined at the Facility. The rule with regard to visiting is two hours per week in units of one hour, though usually the visitor can visit once for two hours. Anyone can visit, upon a request made by an internee.

A second recent ruling prevents the internees downstairs from visiting those upstairs, although the upstairs group is permitted to come down. This is a hardship, the spokesman and group leaders claim, because the music room is upstairs and the concerts are held there. The Officer in Charge stated that the ruling was made because of the fact that there are now

- 6 -

several new frauleins on the floor above who were recently taken off arriving steamers as stowaways. Apparently their presence has caused some fluttering in the dove cotes and special precautions have become necessary. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the rule does work a hardship on the group downstairs and it has helped to further lower the already low morale.

The following matters were also discussed with the spokesman and his group:

Baggage: The spokesman had not heard of the Alien Property Custodian's entrance into the picture, and your representative took it upon himself to switch the subject to

Food: This was stated to be sufficient, but poorly prepared by a Civil Service group which cooks for all of the internees on the island, including seamen, stowaways, etc. The menu is not posted in the messhall.

Clothing: It was stated that the clothing issues are handled by an employee from the supply room who doubles in censorship and sometimes does not come down for several weeks at a time. There has apparently been some difficulty regarding shoes and it was stated that an order is out that they will not be issued. Nevertheless, and in spite of the fact that it was said no regulations have been promulgated regarding clothing issues, there are obviously no clothing shortages. Each of the women is allowed \$4.00 per month for clothing purchases.

Religious Services: Both Protestant and Catholic services are held once a week. Pastors and Priests are arranged for by the Welfare Group of the Social Service activities on the Island.

Movies: Two are shown each week, one supplied by the Government and one which the internees procure themselves.

Medical Care: In addition to the sick call mentioned above, seriously sick medical cases are sent to the Ellis Island hospital. Surgical cases, however, are sent to the Naval Hospital on Staten Island. Dental work, such as fillings, is done at the Ellis Island hospital after a check-up. More difficult work is referred to civilian dentists in New York City. For this the Immigration Service pays up to \$25.00.

The spokesman stated that he had heard from some of the internees who had been there that the medical work done for internees at the Ellis Island hospital is not sufficient, and that long delays had occurred in some instances before necessary operations were performed. He cited the case of a hernia operation long postponed and that of a man named Holzhauser who, he stated, had fractured his shoulder and had entirely lost the use of his arm because treatment was long deferred. Of this case more later.

Pay: Enemy Alien cases receive \$3.00 per month. The group of deportees is not paid.

Mail: The internees are allowed to write two letters per day of two pages each. They are not allowed to write to Germany except on IRC message forms. Previously, apparently, they were allowed to send both mail and packages through UNRRA, but for the past six weeks this has been no longer possible.

- 7 -

Before leaving the Island the IRC Delegate and your representative visited the hospital and interviewed three of the four internees who are under treatment there. The fourth is a mental case and was not seen. Two of the others deserve mention, one because he is a diabetic who requires constant and uninterrupted insulin treatments and thereby creates a problem. If he is returned to Germany what provision can be made for a continuation of these treatments?

The second case is that of Holzhauser, mentioned above. His shoulder was not broken as stated by the spokesman, but it was badly wrenched and dislocated. The treatment given was to place the arm in a cast in a position at right angles or thereabouts to the body. The cast remained on for a period of six weeks or more, which apparently was too long, for the arm continues to stick out and is useless. The IRC Delegate, himself a physician, made an examination and believes that with time use may return, but he was evidently at a loss to understand why the cast should have been allowed to remain on for such a length of time. Perhaps, though your representative is not certain, it was because, as the Chief of Detentions pointed out previously, "the hospital is under the control of the Public Health Service which feels these detainees are an imposition."

COMMENTS:

That the overcrowded conditions observed during the visit should make an unfavorable impression on the IRC Delegate was inevitable. This impression was alleviated to some extent by the cooperation and attitude of the officials in charge and the realization that they are doing what they can for the welfare of their charges under the difficult circumstances now existing. Nevertheless, it is obvious, and the officials readily admitted the fact, that the facilities at Ellis Island are not satisfactory for the detention of the present number of persons for an indefinite period.

That this unsatisfactory situation has previously existed is evidenced by Mr. Gufler's report of his visit with Dr. Marc Peter of the IRC on March 16, 1942. Under paragraph XIV, under the heading Suggestions, he stated:

"It is suggested that steps be taken to reduce the time of detention of persons held at Ellis Island to a minimum. It is thoroughly satisfactory as a temporary detention station but was neither intended, designed nor built to be a place for lengthy confinement. It should be noted in this connection that Mr. Yule, the Officer in Charge of Ellis Island, as well as Mr. Forman, the Officer in Charge of the detainees, stated that in their opinion the period of detention at the Island should be reduced and pointed out the advisability of keeping the detention quarters there are nearly empty as possible for emergency purposes. In this connection they remarked that should some catastrophe occur which would necessitate the sudden arrest and detention of large numbers of enemy aliens, it would be advisable to have plenty of space for them available at the Island."

- 8 -

It is realized that the conditions of overcrowding which existed then and exist now have not held during the entire period. But the main premise, that the Island's facilities were not planned, built, nor intended for the detention of large numbers of persons for indefinite lengths of time, nevertheless holds true. It is also probably true that some of the persons who were then in detention on the Island are still there.

It is respectfully suggested that this unsatisfactory situation be given full and immediate consideration and if there is likelihood that the court proceedings now in progress will be protracted, as it appears they may, that arrangements be made for lightening the load at this Facility by a transfer of some of the internees to another and better appointed Facility or Detention Station.

Van Arsdale Turner
VAN ARSDALE TURNER

SPD:VAT:erk