

*Tape two, side one:*

NL: This is tape #2, side #1 of an interview with Mr. Harold Stern, September 10, 1981, Nora Levin interviewing.

HS: When nothing could be found for me to work at, next, a lady whose family had a little factory producing fountain pens and mechanical pens in Frankfurt, and it was a very small place, but the company was still going, and so they said, "Yes, Harold can work here, but in order to teach him the business, you have to pay towards it." So instead of earning money working there, we paid just to have myself occupied. I learned how to cut pencils on lathes, how to polish them and...

NL: Did you find it interesting?

HS: It was quite nice. I had very nice company and it was a place to go to and, under the circumstances, I was thinking of having a place to go to instead of getting up in the morning not knowing what to do. The foreman came from very far away every morning and it was, the man came from the Odenwald, which was a big distance away from Frankfurt. He must have gotten up very early. But there were two other, three other young Jewish men there. One was from Poland, and got deported into no man's land when the Poles were transferred suddenly by Hitler into Poland.

NL: Did you ever hear from him?

HS: Yes, that too is a very interesting story. And then came November 10, finally, and the two owners of the company were put into concentration camps. They came back and left Germany, of course, immediately. In the meantime, well, maybe two months later, everything fell apart. The factory was taken over, and here we were again we were sitting there. I think that was 1938, and by that time things were very desperate. My grandmother-- no, an aunt of mine was living at the other end of my street in Frankfurt, and I went to visit her one afternoon, having nothing to do. She was the sister of my father, and when I got there, she was just finishing with her English lessons, which were given by the best friend of my late father. We exchanged a few words, and then I left, and that friend of my father's, whom I had only seen intermittently over the years because he lived far away in a different suburb, said to me, "Harold, if I can be of any help to you, (he wanted to tell me about the birds and the bees and anything at all) I would be very happy to. There are things you might want to discuss with me you don't want to discuss with your mother," and I said, "You know, the only way you can help me is to get out of here, but I don't expect you can do that anymore for me than you can do it for yourself." The man was married to a Gentile lady, and he himself had lost his job as a writer for a New York paper, and also had nothing else to do but give English lessons. He said to me, "You know something, Harold, I don't know whether it is worth anything, but it is worth a try. When we were young men, your father and I and a third young man went abroad, and this third man settled in England and went into the banking business and stayed there. He is an Englishman now, lives in London, and maybe you will write to him. I haven't heard from

him for a long time. Tell him that I mentioned his name.” Now at that time, there were children’s transports going to England for children under the auspices of the Quakers, Society of Friends.

NL: Jewish children?

HS: Yes. The Society of Friends was extremely helpful in rescuing children, and under their auspices some children went to Holland, some to England, some to France. I think what it was, certain people in these foreign countries had declared themselves willing to take in the children. It is a very interesting chapter, because for years, people in Germany relied to some extent on the aid and assistance of the Quakers from abroad, especially from Holland, to organize these transports.

NL: Do you have any idea how many Jewish children were saved? I’ve never heard of this.

HS: No, but you can find that out, I am sure. But I was too old for a children’s transport. I was already over 16 years old and over the age. My mother and I had been registered on one and the same quota number, and a very early quota number in Stuttgart to go to America.

NL: Can you tell me when Mother first registered? Do you have any idea? Did she wait until ‘38?

HS: Oh, absolutely not, when you first could register. We had a very early number, we had number 11,022.

NL: Now, you had said something before about the long lines.

HS: We were waiting and could not get out, even when our quota number came due. The papers were not all right, because too many people who gave us the affidavit in this country had given so many affidavits that the consulate people laughed in Stuttgart when we mentioned their names. They wouldn’t give us a visa to leave.

NL: Let me interject for a moment. Give me some idea of the numbers of people who used to wait in line to apply for emigration.

HS: The American Consulate was not in Frankfurt. The nearest Consulate was in Stuttgart, which serviced a great part of western and southern Germany. I imagine there was another one in Hamburg, and, of course, in Berlin.

NL: You had said before that people waited in line three stories up the building.

HS: That was something else. That was in the police station. Every Jew had to get something called the *Kennkarte* which was a special Jewish identification with a “J” in it. All the men had later in their passport their name, with “Israel,” and the ladies with the name “Sarah.” So if my mother’s name was Alice Stern, her name would then be Alice Sarah Stern for identification purposes. Well, the only other way for me to get out to England was with a guarantee in a bank in London, with a job as a so-called trainee in an English factory, with the understanding that as soon as my number and visa came up for the United States, I would leave England for the United States.

NL: You had written to this old friend of your father’s?

HS: Well, this was the situation. I had written to him and within a week I had an answer that he would do everything possible he could do. He found me a job immediately and was contacted by a friend of my mother's who was then in London and relatives of ours. One went to the Bloomsbury House which was the clearing station for Jewish immigration in London, and the other lady arranged for money to be paid into the account. It was fifty pounds. My father's friend became my guarantor and deposited the fifty pounds in a bank, and a distant relative of mine who was a medical student in England at the time, from a very small stipend that he had himself, paid off a pound per week to pay back the guarantor. In this way I got to England.

NL: What? March '39.

HS: March, '39.

NL: And Mother, of course, remained.

HS: My mother stayed in Frankfurt and had to split her apartment with a German dentist, an Aryan dentist, apparently a very young man who was, from what I understand later, very, very nice, who established his dental practice in the front rooms and she had the back rooms until she would be able to move out. I left Germany in March 1939 and had the job waiting for me. My guarantor, Mr. Worthing, picked me up at the station in London and had found a room for me in the East End of London, in Dalston. I think I arrived on a Friday, and on a Saturday we went, my landlady's daughter took me around. The people in that particular section of London were a totally new breed. They were not only British, but they were first or second generation immigrants into England and spoke more Yiddish than English.

NL: And you didn't know Yiddish.

HS: So once again I could not learn too much English.

NL: Sounds like a conspiracy.

HS: Of course, they spoke it, but they used it only outside. They could not understand that a Jewish person doesn't speak Yiddish. And among themselves they always spoke Yiddish. I understood less of their Yiddish than I understood their English. When I went to the factory everybody spoke Cockney. And there again, no English. Gradually my ear got attuned to it.

NL: What work did you do?

HS: O.K. The people for whom I worked had a factory in Pentonville Road. The owners were former German Jewish people who had moved from Nuremberg to London and had for some years been naturalized citizens of England. They had a very nice thing going with one branch by that time established in England and one branch in New York State. They had under one roof lots of different businesses. They had one department which made shoelaces and boxed them. And the next department made a kind of powder that when you added it to water makes an orangeade or lemonade with a fizz. The next department produced games, like Snakes and Ladders, which is an English game for kids, and another one made firecrackers, and another produced Christmas stockings.

NL: A multipurpose business! And what did you do?

HS: And for all this there was a department that produced boxes, and things were boxed and sent to Canada and all over the world, mostly utilizing merchandise produced in Germany and Japan and so on. Well, I was working in the box-making department and after a few weeks of carrying papers and cartons, I was privileged enough to work on something called the guillotine, which today we call a papercutter.

NL: This was a promotion.

HS: Yes. This went on for quite a while, several months. In the meantime I heard from my mother occasionally, and I met some friends in England who subsequently moved in with me, the same house, and at one fine point we reached September 1939, and I was on my way to see my guarantor in Hempstead. At that point people were talking, in the train, what Hitler's answers would be after the ultimatum that Chamberlain had given him after the invasion of Poland. And with this, the sirens went off and the train stopped for a moment and went on and somebody said very dryly, "Well, this is Hitler's answer." A marvelous British understatement. They're so wonderful. So I arrived at my station and, of course this was the middle of a Sunday afternoon, it was about 12:00, and the streets were swept clean of people. I arrived on Finchley Road, which is a main street in Hempstead, and wanted to go to my guarantor who lived on top of a department store in a very nice apartment building, but had to duck into a doorway in order not to be seen by the air raid wardens. That was the time that started for everybody to start seeking shelter. When the "all-clear" sounded ten minutes later, and I proceeded to my guarantor and I said to him, "With this war on now, what am I going to do?" And he said, "Harold, there is nothing I can do for you. You have to fight your own battle now." This was a great education. He was very nice throughout and very helpful. The rest of the day I spent with another man, an English teacher of mine from Frankfurt who, at that time lived just around the corner from these people in Hempstead. When I came home that evening about 6:00, my landlady and her daughter had flown the coop. They got so panicked that they immediately packed a few things and went into the country together with other relatives. I never saw her any more, ever again.

NL: Were you able to get into your room?

HS: Oh, yes. My friends were there with a short wave station and watching things that way, and, in the meantime, there was a raid on the Kiel Canal and it was very heartening, but didn't result in very much, and then I cooked some of the food that was still available in the house, and after a week of this, I was working and nobody else touched anything, I said to myself, "Why should I go shopping for food and why should I do all this? If nobody else is interested in it, I will move out." So I moved.

NL: Your friends also had moved out?

HS: No, they were still there, but nobody made a move. The landlady had gone and it was really an untenable situation. How can you live in a house with a landlady gone? We were not equipped to keep house. We all had our jobs!

NL: You had taken your meals with her before?

HS: Yes, she provided dinner and breakfast for one pound a week. I couldn't argue with this, but I only made 30 shillings at the time, out of which one shilling and sixpence went for health insurance. But a streetcar or bus ride was only tuppence, two pennies or one penny. So I found myself a room closer to where I worked in North London, and these people were...it was an interesting situation. These were very poor working-class people, and the house had no electricity and no telephone. I understand even to this day telephones are not as common as they are in this country, when it comes to England. But electricity was provided by gas jets. My room had two canaries, and when I woke up at night and I heard them scratching I was happy. This was the only way I could find out that no gas was escaping. Still and all, I was corresponding with Germany still because somehow my mother had found somebody in Denmark who forwarded correspondence between different parties.

NL: What was her life like in '39? Did she still have the means to exist? Was there food rationing for her?

HS: Yes, eventually things got very rough for the Jews living in Frankfurt, or Germany altogether. They were forced to move into boardinghouses and give up their apartments and move into single rooms. Each one had a single room, which, I suppose, was all a measure to get them closer together for later events.

NL: Her number obviously had not been called for immigration?

HS: It was absolutely useless. So she ended up in a boarding house that my grandmother had lived in before my grandmother moved to Holland. My mother saw my grandmother off to the airport in Frankfurt, and my grandmother went to Holland, where she joined two cousins of mine in Amsterdam, and my mother still kept the friendship of a very nice Jewish man who liked her very much apparently and wanted to marry her, as a matter of fact. But she also had the friendship of a Gentile lady, who used to be the housekeeper and companion of a lady in Frankfurt, who, before that, had moved to California. Without these two people my mother could never have left Frankfurt, because, after she had moved out of the apartment, she then could not move around as freely as before. There were curfews for Jews and curfews for others. You were not allowed to buy groceries until late at night. I happen to know that our former landlord, a Gentile, was beaten up by party members because he had dared to sell fish and food to Jewish customers. These are things that usually don't come out very often, but they do exist. My mother had bought a lot of new furniture, because she had intended to go to New York and open a boarding house. So we were sitting there, with all this disillusion taking place, in great grandeur with fruit-wood modern furniture, Oriental carpets, everything...she was hoping to bring it out. We almost succeeded. What happened was, everything was put into a great big box, which is called lift-van, and my mother paid for it to go to America, and it was all paid for with the exception of a few Guilders that had to be paid in foreign currency to pass through Holland. This was a device by the Nazis to get in foreign currency. The trip from

Holland to New York was paid in German *Marks* to the German shipping agency. Whatever you took out, you paid extra money, which was called gold discount, which was an extra way of the Nazis to get Jewish money, usually from accounts that were already blocked anyhow. All this almost worked, but our relatives in Holland, and my mother never stopped talking about it, did not have the money to pay those ten Guilders or 15 Guilders. So my mother stored this whole thing in the free port of Hamburg, waiting for an occasion to get it out later. In the meantime, she was pursuing her own emigration. I was in England, of course. Finally, it became obvious that there was no way of sending this out anymore. The war had started, she wanted to leave Germany, couldn't get the stuff out, so she said to her friend, "You know what, I am going to get all the stuff back, and you can put it into your apartment, and you can administer it for me or enjoy it."

NL: This was her non-Jewish friend.

HS: Yes, "Until such time when and if we meet again." And there was all this furniture, and all the housewares, and it was brought back from Hamburg to Frankfurt, and put into the apartment of that very, very lovely lady, and when they opened it up, of course the oriental carpets were missing, the stamp collection was missing, which seems to be silly to talk about under the circumstances and in view of what had happened afterwards. It's just to illustrate how things worked. So my mother, after many trials and tribulations, finally got her visa and went to Berlin in a sealed train in August or September, 1941.

NL: She was in Germany until 1941?

HS: Yes, but America wasn't in the war yet, and people left Germany on the Trans-Siberian Railroad to Japan and then to America.

NL: Yes, but in the '30's, not so much in the '40's. This was a very late departure, was it not?

HS: There was a time, with the Stalin-Hitler Pact, where people...

*Tape two, side two:*

NL: This is tape #2, side #2 of an interview with Mr. Harold Stern, September 10, 1981, Nora Levin interviewing.

HS: My mother left Germany with one of the last steamers leaving Portugal for America. In order to do this, they were all gathered at a certain place in Berlin at the station, and went with a sealed train through occupied France and Vichy France and Spain to Lisbon, where they boarded their transport for America. My mother said good-bye to her brother in Berlin on that occasion. He was later on hunted by Gestapo agents.

NL: He couldn't get out?

HS: No. He was really very, very daring. He had a very nice Christian girlfriend who stuck by him and wrote to us after the war that she saw him being, well—he was actually apprehended on his roof with bloodhounds. They took him to Gestapo headquarters, and she stayed outside the Gestapo headquarters all night, and she never saw him again. Another thing that happened in the family was that my mother had a sister in Germany who was a musician. She taught piano and had a very deep friendship with a critic who was fairly well known in musical circles, who wrote musical articles in the daily papers, and who had also written books on music. That was the oldest sister of a family of four children. She was a little bit of a nervous person and never married and all she had was her music. She lived with my grandparents. The attachment to that family of the critic was a very deep one, and they felt very, very congenial to her and she to them. But these people lived in the Taunus mountains somewhere, a little distance away from Frankfurt, and one fine day they said to her, “We are very sorry, but you know, we cannot have you here anymore.” This was a terrible blow for that poor soul and she never quite recovered from it. She lived with my grandfather, who, by that time, was, of course, very much retired and just made a living with the support of my mother. She felt very much misunderstood by everybody and, of course, after the death of her own mother she was pretty much alone. I understand that after I left Frankfurt, they had to put her in a sanitarium, and my mother went to visit her from time to time, and when she spoke to one...on one of her visits, she spoke to one of the doctors there. She was in a public sanitarium in Niederrad which is near Frankfurt, and the doctor said to my mother, “I have to tell you, we are required to send your sister East.” She had tried to commit suicide twice, the first time she only broke her leg jumping out of the window, the second time I don't know what happened, but this was the time that Hitler had instituted the elimination of people who were a drain on the “German *Volkskörper*,” so to speak. [German population -ed.]

NL: Euthanasia.

HS: This man actually said...and my mother said, “Well, what can I do? Can I take her into my house again? Can she live with us?” The doctor said, “I am very sorry, Mrs. Stern, but we have strict orders, and your sister will not feel anything. We are going to put her on a train, and she is going to get a needle, and that will be all we can do.”

NL: He told her this?

HS: My mother didn't talk about a lot of things. It was one of the few things that came out, and she only mentioned it once.

NL: This is the first time I have ever heard of an admission by a German that this euthanasia was in existence.

HS: Well, my mother had a very good way of relating to people wherever she went. She got to people, and people respected her, and she had a very pleasant appearance, and she knew how to talk to people. She was a business woman. She was a civilized human being, and she dressed nicely and was attractive so...

NL: Now back to you, Harold. You had left your landlady...

HS: O.K. I stayed with these people and now we get into 1940 more or less.

NL: Was there any pressure on you from the British authorities to leave? Was there some labeling of you as an enemy alien, anything of that sort?

HS: I want to come to this. In the meantime the war went through Dunkirk in Europe. The British troops came back. Everything went against England. Paris had been occupied, and the Jewish refugees in England were classified. There were three classifications: A, B and C. The A category was simply Nazis, Fascists, and real German Gentiles who were caught in England with the German Mercantile [Merchant?] Marine, political business, diplomatic business, and these were clear-cut cases. I don't think that the British quite knew what they were doing in those days, and it was admitted later on in the House of Commons, too. The classifications of B and C: You had to, every refugee had to appear before a tribunal with a judge, to be classified for the future and for the security of the State, of course. They all were not only violently anti-Hitler and pro-British, but I would say that 95% had volunteered for National Service, which was the only thing you could do, under the circumstances, as an enemy alien in England to prove your willingness to fight Hitler. These judges had very unspecified instructions, and the B case was...if you were a B category, you had more of a curfew, less chance of moving around, and you were supposedly declared a little bit more dangerous, if at all, than the C cases.

NL: Could you work in the B category?

HS: Oh yes. Many of the judges, not knowing what they were doing, in the interest of their country, imposed the classification of B category on people who were perfectly innocuous, and other judges just went ahead and classified these German Jewish refugees as C cases. It really was a very arbitrary matter, and I brought testimonials from the people I worked for, and from my landlord and I happened to become a C case. I think what helped me was the fact that I was in a district of London where there were very few refugees, and that judge simply set me up.

NL: It was accidental then?

HS: Well, there were a lot of C cases, but the B cases were all interned on May 16, 1940.

NL: What happened on that day?



HS: On that day all the B cases were picked up by Scotland Yard or by the army, let's call it British authorities, and they were taken to the Isle of Man, and the C cases were still running around freely. I was still working, and, I think, it was June 10, I am not quite sure, I was cutting papers on my papercutter, when the son of one of the owners of my factory, who never talked to me; they were very remote, came to me and said to me, "Harold, they're interning all the refugees. Maybe you want to go home."

NL: Home?

HS: Well, you know.

NL: In England.

HS: Yes, of course. My home was ten minutes from the factory. I said, "Thank you very much for the information," and that was the last time I saw him. I went home, took my camera and my bank book to my guarantor in Hempstead, came back, and then I said to my landlady, "You know, I am going to pack. It is possible that I will be picked up sometime between today or tomorrow, and I want to have my suitcases packed. When somebody knocks at the door don't get alarmed." They were very simple people, you know. So she said, "All right." When I happened to them, so to speak, I had brought in a totally different world, something they had never seen, something they had never heard, and I was able to really become very good friends of theirs. They were very nice to me. One funny episode happened. There was a man living in that house who was a little bit of a drunkard, a bachelor. He had a room there, and he was employed by the London County Council. His job was to check the manholes in certain districts of London and see that everything went all right. I didn't know what his real classification was. It was one of those jobs, but he could never get it through his head that I was a refugee. To him I was "dyed-in-the-wool German" and an enemy. And whenever there was a setback for the Germans and, unfortunately, there were very few setbacks, when there were any, he would talk to me and say, "Your country isn't doing so well, is it?" I told him, "It's not my country. I am on your side. What are you talking about?" He did that several times and finally my landlady and my landlord said, "Don't talk to Jock, he'll never understand."

NL: I presume a number of British had this feeling.

HS: Well, you had to be very dense under the circumstances. But this man was very, very stupid. It was sheer stupidity. You couldn't convince him. There was somebody else who lived in the house who felt sorry for the refugee boy. I was between 18 and 19 years old. He took me to a music hall to entertain me on a Saturday afternoon. This happened, too. One night in the winter, long before this internment business happened, there was a knock on the door. Nine o'clock at night, and my landlady said, "Scotland Yard is here, and they want to talk to you." I said, "Scotland Yard? What would they want from me?"

NL: You had left your job already?

HS: That was in the evening.

NL: In the fall of 1940.

HS: Yes, but I had not left my job. I worked in my job in London until the last day before I was interned.

NL: But your boss had said...

HS: But I am switching back now to four months earlier, and Scotland Yard knocked on the door, and two very nice gentlemen came in and said to me, "We have some information. Do you have a typewriter?" I said, "Yes, I have a typewriter. There it is." And I got a little bit apprehensive, because I was corresponding with my mother by way of Sweden, and having been brought up in Germany, I very nicely put everything in a folder, punched date by date, not only her letters, but all the copies of my letters. I was brought up like that, and I guess it gets into your blood, and you don't do it differently. I said, "Well, here is the typewriter. What else do you want to see?" And I was ready to show them all the correspondence. There was nothing in there that was in any way inimical. I could have done without it. Why start up a hornet's nest. So they looked at everything and I said to them, "Do you feel you want to see some of my correspondence?" They said, "No." And then I said to them, "Look, to whom and to what do I owe this pleasure?" They said, "Well, apparently there is somebody in this house who hears you using the typewriter, and he called us and informed us that you were doing that, and that you were corresponding with the enemy." That was that idiot. So you can get into all kinds of situations. Before I moved from the East End to North London, I was in a very Jewish neighborhood. And after two weeks I hear the *Horst-Wessel* Song [the Nazi anthem] in English, and speeches and people at my next street corner. I didn't believe it.

NL: These were English Fascists.

HS: They were English Fascists. It was the Mosley group, who, of all the places in London, picked my street corner to demonstrate and hold their meetings. So you can imagine. Well, anyway...

NL: And they were not being stopped? Even after England declared war on Germany?

HS: Well, I guess they were stopped, but then I moved out a week later. What happened afterwards, I don't know. I heard later on that Jewish people banded together and beat them up or something. This was even a tough Jewish neighborhood where I was. These people were not taking it anymore. But there were quite a few experiences. So, I went...when I left...to get back to the day before my internment, I told my landlady that I may be picked up, and sure enough I was picked up the next day.

NL: This was in June?

HS: This was in June 1940, and I was taken to a police station and got processed, or a general gathering place, where I met a lot more German Jewish people, and then we went on a truck to a race course in London.

NL: Did anyone tell you why you were being taken out of your homes?

HS: They were rounding up everybody. If you were familiar with the situation of the B case, of course, they just processed you to be interned as a C case. At that time the

Home Office was under Herbert Morrison, and he claimed he couldn't guarantee the safety of Britain with all the German refugees running around, after what had happened in Holland, with the nuns in the trains who had hairy hands and suddenly threw off their habits and became the real Nazis. So, it was a very bad time. We got to a race course called Kempton Park and after a few...we slept in the grandstands...it was the summer, and from there went to an internment camp near Liverpool. The name of the place was Huyten. Huyten was a working settlement that had just been finished before the war to harbor workers' families. It was like a new development for low-income people but, instead, at this time it was occupied by thousands of people who were interned, and who slept on the ground in the empty houses.

NL: These were Jews and non-Jews?

HS: They were mostly Jews. The non-Jews had been interned much earlier. They were on the Isle of Man, and, by that time, one transport of internees had already been sunk on the way over to Canada. The name of the boat was the *Arandora Star*, and at one time...it was lunch time or mess time, and quite a few of the people who had been floating in the water came back to the camp where we were, too.

NL: They told you their experiences?

HS: Well, they were in a separate area, I think. I never met them. But then...also a lot of them were not only Jewish, but they had been German Nazis, and Mercantile Marine, and so on, and Italians, too. After a few days there, we were on parade, roll call, and the leadership of the camp told us that a boat was leaving Liverpool the next day for Canada and, if we wanted to volunteer to go to Canada, we would then have a much easier time immigrating to the U.S. from there, and this was July, 1940. The war was lost, so to speak, on the Continent. It was pretty hopeless. I didn't have any people in England except for an aunt, and there was no reason for me to stay in England. So I volunteered for that transport together with many others. The next day we were taken to the Port of Liverpool and we boarded the ship in the evening and left for, supposedly, Canada. The garrison on that ship were mostly members of the dregs of the British Army, people who had done time in the penitentiaries, people who had only one eye...there's nothing wrong with having one eye...but they were the opposite of the cream of the crop, so to speak. No political understanding at all. On this ship were people from the Kitchener Camp, which had been emptied, and all these people were interned. The Kitchener Camp was the refugee camp established in England to receive those who had come from Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen and other concentration camps, on their way to America, as a transfer station. However, not only were we treated very badly on this ship, people had their life's belongings with them, documents of books they had written, jewelry, anything of value was stripped from them. The luggage that they had was opened up, and partially thrown into the sea, partially the soldiers took it for themselves. Those who protested were roughly handled, and we finally got on our way.

NL: Do you have any idea how many people there were in this transport?

HS: The ship's name was the *Dunera* and was a 12,000 ton ship and I think there were 3,000 people.

NL: And your impression is that there were other ships like this leaving England with German Jews on them?

HS: No, not too many. I think we were perhaps the last or next to last boat.

NL: But there had been others?

HS: Yes, but there were boats that went to Canada, and I know people reached Canada on boat. I don't know anything about this, unfortunately, because I never really pursued this. We never heard about anything like that under the circumstances. But then we started out in a convoy, several other ships, and the second night out...we were in the Irish Sea...by that time people were very, very sick, very desperate, the food was very bad. We were not allowed on deck, the rumors got worse and worse about how people had been treated. It had no proper accommodations, people slept on hammocks hanging in the upper deck and lower deck, or on the floors or on the tables. It was totally overcrowded. I'm trying to find a picture of the boat. Anyway, we were...when people were at their worst and sickest, we were attacked by German U-boats. Until this day I can still hear the clatter of the depth charges that our ship threw off. But we got through it all right. After two or three days we were allowed on deck for twenty minutes, barefoot, marching around. We couldn't get to our belongings at all. We had one suit, what we had on our backs, no toothbrush, no comb. A few people rescued some things, and had put some things in their pockets and that's what they had. What we did have, however, was constantly hot showers and sea baths. You know, hot showers and salt water. Amazingly, we kept somewhat healthy. Of course, the food was so bad and so rare that people were very hungry and after a while...

*Tape three, side one:*

NL: This is tape #3, side #1, of an interview with Mr. Harold Stern, September 10, 1981, Nora Levin interviewing. We last left your narrative, Harold, where the ship received instructions to turn back. Do you have an idea why this decision was made?

HS: I have no idea. I presume that Australia had made arrangements to receive prisoners of war, and since there were no prisoners of war to send at that time, they just sent us being the most available material. The Canadian camps were probably filled and perhaps it was the safer route to go to begin with. Also, England was very dependent on boats coming back from Australia as much as from Canada and from India with raw materials and food, and all that. So by shipping us there there may be all kinds of reasons why they changed their minds. We never found out.

NL: What date was this approximately? How long had you been on the seas?

HS: We were on the seas for about ten weeks. It was a very long trip because first we went half-way across the Atlantic and, then, we went along the west coast of Africa. I am trying to think which the first port was. The first port was a little town called Takuradi, which today is Ghana, and we stayed there for a short period of time, two or three days, and then we went down the coast to a city called Freetown, which must be Bechuanaland, because the butter that was served afterwards on the ship was called Bechuanaland butter. I remember that distinctly.

NL: Was the food getting a little better as you...?

HS: Not really. Maybe we got an apple for a change, which we hadn't seen for a long time, and we got butter, which we hadn't seen for a long time. But generally speaking there wasn't any improvement. There just wasn't very much that could be done. The boat was equipped for a certain passage that took on no provisions, and then we went to Capetown.

NL: Was the treatment being meted out to you somewhat decent?

HS: No, we were still allowed only 20 minutes on deck. There was no way of protesting. In fact some of the soldiers amused themselves by throwing empty beer bottles under the feet of people walking on the deck barefoot.

NL: How do you account for so much hostility? Did they think you were Germans?

HS: Of course. We were enemy aliens. They had come through Dunkirk.

NL: They had no conception of what was happening to Jews?

HS: This was too sophisticated a situation for anybody to grasp. No one had heard of German refugees, probably. In spite of the fact that they were religious people, Orthodox people, people with long beards, people with Orthodox clothing.

NL: Were there any children on the ship?

HS: Oh, no, only men. There was one section that was full of Germans and Italians, and then the rest of the people on board were all German refugees or Austrian refugees.

NL: You didn't mix?

HS: They were kept in a separate area, which was arranged beforehand somehow.

NL: You said there was a somewhat better internal organization of this group.

HS: Well, one gets used to everything, of course. By that time people were ready to clean up the various messes. People learned to live with the conditions. I mean it wasn't that the garrison came down to beat anybody up any more, but people had lost everything and were very despondent. They didn't know where they were going, what was happening to them...

NL: You heard no news about what was happening elsewhere?

HS: No, no. Nothing, just rumors. We had no fresh fruit whatsoever. You had a table with twenty people, which was folded down and set to eat. At one time we had an apple for each one. While you had this arrangement, two people always had to go to the kitchen to get a bucketful of tea and a bucketful of food. Well, you could rest assured that by the time the person came back from the kitchen, his apple was no more there. It happened to me. Was no big shakes...what is one apple? But this is how people lived, and there was a lot of selfishness on the part of some people and, I must say, I was amazed that a lot of people who had been through concentration camps were totally selfish, and others, who had led completely different lives, people who had been to colleges in England...we had some very fine persons there...One was a son of the Bleichroeder family, so they behaved totally humane and helpful, and tried to do everything they could to make life easier. About that time there were a lot of intellectual people there, and, of course, politically oriented people, so they started lectures, or they read from the Bible with commentaries. So, at least, you had some food for thought and didn't linger like animals waiting to be fed. It got more bearable except for the hunger and the general situation. Well, we got to Capetown and were there for three days. We were never allowed on deck in the harbor but we lined up to look out at the Table Mountain through a latrine window, at least, so we saw a beautiful city with the mountain in back of it beautifully lit up.

NL: So far away...

HS: Yes. Then we went to Perth and Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney. At Sydney we disembarked. This whole trip took ten weeks. Then we got off and we looked pretty bad and very disheveled. We were practically loaded from the boat onto a passenger train, and in the evening the passenger train left. For the first time, we were handed a box lunch with fresh fruit, sandwiches, things we hadn't tasted in months.

NL: Who arranged this? The municipality or...?

HS: No, the Jews didn't even know we were there. They couldn't know. This was all government and military supplied. Of course there was plenty of good food in

Australia. We didn't have to skimp on anything, but they had expected Italian and German soldiers, prisoners of war, and instead of the paratroopers, they got the people from the Kitchener Camp, and the German refugees, and the Orthodox Jews, and they had quite a surprise. They didn't know what to do with us. I mean the government was completely baffled. As we were on the train, we took a very long trip and, while it was very nice and warm when we got on the train, it got colder and colder overnight and we found out later on that we went through mountains and it was just a trip from Sydney in New South Wales into the interior. As we woke up in the morning, the heat was terrific and, by that time, we really were in the Outback. We saw ostriches, kangaroos, and our spirits lifted a bit, but then there was no more vegetation to speak of. It wasn't really desert, but very, very sparse. There were eucalyptus trees here and there, and, as we drove through these little stations along the way, we saw signs "Beware of tarantulas," "Beware of such a snake, such a spider," and it was a totally new exotic setting. So we finally arrived about noontime in a very, very flat landscape. That was the city of Hay in New South Wales.

NL: How many days had you been on the train?

HS: We had been on the train from 6:00 at night until 12 noon the next day.

NL: Sounds like a long, long journey.

HS: We got unloaded, so to speak, and in the distance, there was a great big compound with barbed wire, with huts reflecting the sunlight in a sparkling fashion. It was just like everything was waving in the heat, and we marched into that place, and had our first hot meal, which the army there had prepared, and then went into those different huts and tried to arrange to stay together in groups of friends, and that was O.K. After we had eaten and before we went into these camps, we were waiting to be allotted to those different areas and a tremendous sandstorm arose. It went through everything, and even after we got into the huts later on, which were two bunks in rows one on top of the other. Because of the heat, you could not have the huts closed up with a full wall under the roof. There was a space between the outer wall and the roof, which was filled in with chicken wire to let the air come in all the time and to circulate, and the sand and the dust blew right through. By that time we were dreadfully exhausted and [wondered] why should we be in this camp? For what reason? But there we were...

NL: Did anyone address you? To tell you what lay in store for you?

HS: I think the authorities were so surprised about what they were getting that they had simply nothing to say, and, of course, very shortly a camp leadership emerged, and there were enough doctors, lawyers, even members of the British Bar, totally anglicized, who had a way of talking to the authorities. Within a very short time we got life organized in these camps. Lecturers were springing up, lecture series, and after a while it became almost pleasant but in an unjustified fashion. We didn't know, of course, why we shouldn't, as enemies of the Germans, why we should be behind barbed wire sitting in Australia.

NL: Were you put to work?

HS: No, not really. There was so much to do in camp, digging ditches around the huts, for instance, to have the water flow off...

NL: But this was on your own initiative?

HS: Yeah. Our strength came back. We had a medical hut, of course. We had medical doctors from Vienna and Berlin, all kinds of specialists. There were musicians. Everything.

NL: You had concerts?

HS: We had nothing, of course, to work with. After a while people in Melbourne became aware of us. We wrote to the Jewish community there. They were very surprised. Of course, they had read about us in the papers, but somehow it quite didn't sink in, and there was one organization which was simply marvelous. It was the Australian Christian Student Movement under a Miss Margaret Holmes, who took us under their wings, and they fed us all kinds of books, lecture books, and supplied us with material as if we were a university. The Australian Christian Student Movement. I met Miss Holmes in New York many years ago. But it was due to their specific effort that we really could continue our education and kept our minds active.

NL: How do you account for this interest, Harold? Was it Miss Holmes who took this project upon herself?

HS: I don't know if she is still alive. But she was a marvelous, marvelous woman. And she had all of these resources at her disposal. Of course she was not the only one. There was a Zionist organization, the Jewish Welfare Board. Again, some of them wanted to have nothing to do with us. There was one rabbi in Melbourne who said, "Why are these people coming here, why don't they shake the dust off their shoes and go back where they come from?" And others just couldn't do enough. I myself was told from America that I had relatives in Melbourne, to whom I wrote. I had never known about them back in Frankfurt, and they had converted to non-Jewish in Frankfurt. I didn't know about them, but it was a lovely family, and they sent me my first toothbrush and sausage and other things like that. At least I had somebody to write to there, and later on, after I was released I had wonderful times with them.

NL: You couldn't be in touch with Mother, I suppose?

HS: Well, yes. My mother was still in Germany.

NL: She didn't leave until '41?

HS: And this was '40. I had never expected to see my mother ever again, because in the meantime, this lady wrote to me from Frankfurt. I was together with her brother in the internment camp. She wrote to me [how] bored she was, how there was nothing for her to do, and one fine day...The correspondence was with the Red Cross...Prisoner of war. Then one fine day, I didn't hear from her anymore. The last I heard from her was, "Don't forget me," and we went from that camp, which was in Hay, to be a better climate camp in Tatura in Victoria. That had a more moderate climate. Well, in this camp we could work outside, planting tomatoes, and work in the kitchen, and do all that sort of thing.



NL: Why did the encampment from Hay move to Tatura?

HS: There were two camps in Hay, and somehow these camps got dissolved. Part of it went to a place called Orange which I wasn't lucky enough to get to. I understand it was lovely. And we went to Tatura, where another two camps were established, and this was a better climate and much more moderate and nice. But, of course, you didn't especially enjoy being interned, because you knew what was going on.

NL: That is to say, you knew how the war was going?

HS: We knew how the war was going; we had newspapers, the radio constantly; you had even mails from Europe through prisoner of war camps. My mother was in touch with the wife of another guy in my camp, in Frankfurt, and she told me later on that this poor woman was actually recruited for working service in Frankfurt. Every morning she had to get up at 5:00 in the morning to do some kind of slave work in the factory an hour and a half away from Frankfurt, and that lady never got out anymore. Her name was Stern, too, by the way. So they exchanged information, whatever little there was.

NL: How long did you stay in Tatura?

HS: I was interned altogether twenty months, considering the time in England, the few weeks in England and the boat and being released. But I was out on a working party one time in Tatura and came back, and when the gate opened, that friend of mine who just came to visit us a month ago, came to me and said, "Harold, you have a telegram and I didn't want you to open it. I took the liberty to open it in case it was bad news. But it is good news. Your mother has arrived in the States." That was in September, 1940 just before December and Pearl Harbor.

NL: 1941?

HS: Yes. 1941. So we knew what was going on in Europe, that all the Jews were rounded up, and about the gas chambers and all of that. My friend, who had his sister still there and his parents, got terribly schizophrenic, had a nervous breakdown, later on had to go to a sanitarium, and to this day he is still very much on the nervous side. Because of what was going on in Europe. So, if we, we in the internment camp in Australia, knew what was going on in Germany, nobody can tell me that nobody knew what was going on in Europe.

NL: Of course in September '41 the massive deportations had not yet taken place.

HS: Well, they had started, because my mother already had in Frankfurt packed her bag in readiness for a transport, they were told. [There were transports from Germany to Lodz and Riga at this time.] The only thing that saved her was an Allied air attack on Frankfurt. The result was that the people in Frankfurt had better things to do than rounding up Jews and deporting them. She was supposed to go to Gurs, [A concentration camp in France.] I understand, in the Pyrenees.

NL: To Gurs? I see. I know they were sending German Jews to Riga and Lodz in 1941. I didn't know about Gurs. So she was saved from that?

HS: Yes. Everything was just a coincidence. It's all a miracle that we are here today. And then, well, came December, and the war broke out with Japan, and after a while the Australian authorities remembered, "Ah, there are other friendly enemy aliens sitting behind barbed wire?" Under Australian law, you could not join the army as a foreigner and become a citizen. Under Australian law, you could join a non-combatant unit in the army, but you did not become a citizen. You had to wait your five years, as an inhabitant of the British Empire, no matter where, until they granted you citizenship, be it in Australia or anywhere else. I said to myself, I'm not going to sit here vegetating for the rest of my life for the war, and I am certainly not going back to England. What I had forgotten to tell you was that, after we had been sent to Australia, there was a tremendous outcry in the British Parliament about the internment of aliens, and there was a tremendous debate. Subsequently everybody got released, was returned to their homes, to their jobs; the people were allowed to join the Pioneer Corps, and some of them even joined Paratroopers, and they sent a Major Layton to Australia as a high commissioner to set things right for the people who were sent there. He interviewed every single person. This is quite a story. This man was born in Germany, and at an early date had moved to England where he changed his name, had joined the army and subsequently became, was put in charge of the Kitchener Camp. And that was Colonel Julian Layton. He was a very nice man.

NL: He knew a great deal about Germany.

HS: Yes, of course, he was born there. I can't vouch for it, but they say his name was Loewenstein in Stuttgart. He had left Germany quite early and had become a British citizen. He, of course, had a marvelous position there as an intermediary between these poor people and the British authorities. So, he was then a Major Layton, and later became a Colonel Layton, and came to Australia, and whatever people had lost, they only had to tell him what they had lost, whether it was a hundred pounds or a suitcase or whatever. It was put down and, if it could be verified and was not too much of an amount, that was all refunded as much as possible by the British. On top of that, people were allowed to go back to England and join the Pioneer Corps. That was the beginning. And others went to Palestine. There are some interesting things to tell. One of the transports that went back to England was sunk in the Indian Ocean and everybody drowned. I had a couple of friends on that boat, too. It's very hard to forget these things because these people were, you know you lived with them on a daily basis. One lived in the bunk next to you, or the other one was a little bit crazy and brushed his teeth every two hours, and, suddenly, you know, they all drowned. One was a Communist from Czechoslovakia who pulled me out of the river when I had a nose bleed. These are the little things. But the guy who was in charge of this garrison, he got court-martialed England when he came back. The O'Neil fellow.

NL: On the ship?

HS: Yes. He got court-martialed and he died in prison.

NL: And what were the German Jews going to Palestine to do?

HS: They were Zionists.

*Tape three, side two:*

NL: This is tape #3, side #2, of an interview with Mr. Harold Stern, September 10, 1981, Nora Levin interviewing.

HS: They were Zionists.

NL: Oh, they did this on their own volition. In other words...

HS: Oh, they were Zionists...Apparently there were several transports all the time, but after I had left the camp I joined the army, I was not aware of this anymore. Where I was in the army, we were all in one group, it was called the 8th Employment Company and we were all the people from those camps. The 7th Employment Company consisted of resident aliens in Melbourne and Sydney, comprising the few Jewish refugees who were living in Australia then, and Greeks and Italians and Yugoslavians, what have you. So there was a mish-mash of people such as you have never seen. There were people who didn't even know how to use a toilet, farmers from Macedonia...

NL: What did you do in the army, Harold?

HS: Well, we did mostly transport work which is like you would be in a munitions camp and get shipments ready for New Guinea. And one very important aspect of Australia is the fact, at least at that time, today it is different, in colonial times each state had its own railroad, and why it happened nobody knows, I guess, but each state had a different gauge. So Victoria has a different railroad gauge than New South Wales, and South Australia has a different gauge than New South Wales. Then you come to the border, and on the border of New South Wales and Victoria is a little town called Albury, quite a little town. This is the point where the trans-shipments take place. You have a platform. On one side is the platform with the Victorian gauge, on the other side is a platform of the New South Wales gauge, and what happens is that, across the platform, you load from one train into the other train by means of dollies or hand-to-hand or whatever you have. And, of course, with the war effort, this was a very important operation. So we did a lot of that. We were stationed in Albury. Then there is another place called Tocumwal which was a munitions depot. Then, we did quite a bit of work in and around Melbourne, being attached to warehouses where the Americans were establishing their headquarters, and different people were attached to various phases of storage and trans-shipment. I remember, I had a very nice job for a while in a big depot with tools. At that time, America had brought over a tremendous amount of material, and what we had to do is fill orders for different areas that went to New Guinea. We would dip these, for instance, a heavy shipment of metal files, we would wrap these files in oil-proof paper, seal it up, dip it in hot wax, let it cool and then put them altogether in boxes. We sometimes had to cut down the boxes. It was a very nice job. Got it ready for shipment to New Guinea and Rabaul. I was in the army for 4-1/2 years, and it's the price you pay for safety, I suppose. We had quite a nice time in Melbourne. We were not in any danger. The Jewish community took us very much to heart

when we came out of the camp. The synagogues gave teas and receptions. The universities opened their doors. The correspondence courses flourished.

NL: About how many Jews do you think were there, in the whole country? Thousands?

HS: In the whole country, of course, there was quite a population, in Sydney and Melbourne. There were not many refugees in Australia, and I can tell you why. It was very difficult to get to Australia because you needed a certain amount of money, similar to Palestine, to get there, and very few people made it.

NL: There were also immigration restrictions, I think.

HS: Very much so, and it was made very difficult because in my time the popular idea was that babies are Australia's best immigrants. This has changed so much today, but it is a totally cosmopolitan population in the big cities. People come from all over and are very happily received and welcome, and it's no longer as insular as it used to be.

NL: Were you released or you released yourself?

HS: Well, we could volunteer for the Australian Army for the Labor Corps, so to speak. It was later called Employment Company and, of course, we had to be utilized so, just at that time you had to join the army, there was a big shortage of work personnel in Australia, because everybody was in the army and overseas, and people had disappeared in Borneo, Malaya, and it was a pretty terrible time with a lot of setbacks. Many of them were in Egypt and Palestine, too, with the British forces, so the country was pretty hard up for manpower. That time, fruit had to be harvested. So before we got into the army, we had to pick fruit in different areas of Victoria. First we picked peaches and then apples, and then we were then allowed to join the army, finally.

NL: And so you were in the army until after the war's end?

HS: Oh, way after, because the release was by points, and they were applied in not too generous a fashion for us. Anyway, our Captain was a Captain Broughton and for historical reasons, I think, he deserves a mention. He was a wonderful, wonderful person. He was a Maori from New Zealand, a very devout Catholic, who was a member of the Australian forces, a career soldier. Being a Maori, he was looked down upon a little bit by his peers. This man developed a father image for us and knew everybody personally, made it his business to know everybody personally. This was a group of about five hundred people, approximately, who joined this unit. And he just was the nicest guy. He supported everybody, whatever they did in education, and he was so revered, he could ask anything from anybody and people would do it. He was much better than his junior officers, who sometimes thought they were a little bit better than he was because they were Anglo-Saxon. But he had more education and more understanding and feeling than you could ever hope to get from somebody who is that far away from European events. He had fought in the First World War. In the Battle of the Argonne.

NL: And he was your commanding officer until the very end, until you were mustered out?

HS: Captain Broughton, I think...No, not to the very end, but almost to the very end. They replaced him with somebody else who wasn't half as nice or understanding. He was too nice to us, and so he was released and he died a few years after the war somewhere in the Outback, at some station in the middle of Australia somewhere. But nobody will ever forget him.

NL: I am glad you told us his story so now we have it preserved. And so when were you mustered out?

HS: Well, let me think. By that time, of course, we lived a great deal of time also in Melbourne and it wasn't so bad. The people who didn't want to live in camp itself lived outside of camp in boarding houses or somewhere else. We really lived a life which bordered on being a border-line soldier or border-line civilian, whichever way you want to take it. The main thing is that we turned out for roll call and did our work during the day, and after that we were free to do what we wanted. Once in a while we had to stay overnight in camp to be on guard or something like that, to keep up a military appearance, but the work was the more important part of it. So in 1946 or '47, I was discharged, and I had a job waiting for me in Melbourne in a shoe store with friends of mine, who had a shoe store in the northern suburbs, and, in the meantime, I had applied for a landing permit for my mother to come in, and had received that. My mother however, was not too willing to leave America.

NL: Where was she living in America?

HS: She lived in New York, and she was working in a factory, and, had I known then the conditions under which she was working and existing, I would have insisted on her coming to Australia. As it was, people told her, "Are you crazy? You are here in New York and you want to go to Australia? Your son is a young man; let him come to America." By that time I had British citizenship, I was an Australian citizen. I had spent my formative years in Australia, England, and I was very much in favor of...maybe not happy, but I knew nothing else.

NL: You were comfortable.

HS: Yeah. I was a little bit bored in Australia because there really wasn't very much going on. It was a little bit like the South here. Very provincial, very waspish, very segregated. You had either the country club or you had very poor people, and highly educated people or highly under-educated people. Another thing was that the bulk of the educated...[tape jumps]. Because my mother felt she didn't want to come to Australia, I felt this may be a good opportunity to come to this country, because on the German quota, I could then be a blood relative of my mother who had by that time become an American citizen. I was able to travel right away and I came here and stayed here.

NL: You came to New York.

HS: Yes.

NL: And you say you came on the German quota? Or was there a DP quota?

HS: No, no. I was not a DP in that sense. I was under German quota, number one, which was not being used right after the war. It was in 1947, and then I was allowed relocation so, either way, I had it made, so to speak. I flew to California and landed in Oakland, and my mother met me there and after a week or two, she went back to New York and I stayed in San Francisco for a while and then I went to New York.

NL: And you lived together?

HS: Not really. She lived in a rooming house hotel on 79th Street near Riverside Drive and I didn't stay there very long. After I got myself a job I moved to another place.

NL: But you were in the same city?

HS: Yes.

NL: And then you eventually made your way to Philadelphia or did you stay in New York?

HS: I lived in New York for twelve years.

NL: What sort of work did you do?

HS: Well, you know how it is when you start out. You are a perfect greenhorn. Everything you do is wrong.

NL: You had to start from the beginning again.

HS: Yes. It was very annoying because when I left Australia, I was at least a manager of a shoe store, and I knew my way around and I had good prospects. What is more, I could have gone to college there under the G.I. Bill of Australia, as an ex-soldier, so to speak. But here I was in New York, and I had to make a living, and see that my mother was somehow taken care of. So, it was not a matter of pursuing my education. I really hated it. My relatives who, by that time, had been establishing themselves, were of no great help, because they were in fields where I didn't fit in, and they would use their connections to ask people to employ my nephew or, "Can you employ my cousin?" but really when you had arrived a little bit somewhere I found this very degrading. I started out in my first job in a shoe factory, and you were working for these people who were also refugees but had gotten somewhere in the meantime, and they pitied you for being a new arrival, and somehow, something gets into the blood of refugees or new arrivals. They think everybody, somehow they think that if you arrive, you have to go through the same thing and the same hardships that they themselves had. They won't give you a lift up at the middle of the ladder; it has to be at bottom of the ladder. Their attitude is: we all went through it, you will make it if you are half-way clever or smart, and you will do as we did. So you get no big deal out of it.

NL: So it took a number of years to make an adjustment? Thank you very much, Mr. Stern.

HS: It was a real pleasure telling you that.

NL: What a valuable and precious account.

HS: Please call on me if you need any further details.

NL: Thank you very much.