

‘An Escape Tunnel is Discovered and Later Flooded’

Giorgio Scola's diary has an entry date 4 April 1942, 'an escape tunnel is discovered and later flooded'. Among his hand-written notes is one sheet of paper with a longer account. Below the transcript is a photo of the original handwritten account.

Thursday (April 1942)

Soon after breakfast many of the internees start rushing to one of the huts where all the Australian Germans are grouped. There is a big crowd there, and the M.E. Germans form a group, storm the place, and proceed to kick out one by one all those inside. After having been called no doubt, one of the Australian officers appears on the scene, and as everyone is fighting within the room, he threatens to shoot if the room is not instantly cleared. The ‘punitive’ German squad takes no notice of him, even though he draws his revolver from the holster. Meantime the Italian group remain onlookers as it is generally realized that it is of concern only to the Germans. Later it is learnt that the majority of the Australian Germans wanted to work outside and took it upon themselves to throw out the beds of those who had refused to agree with them. Before long, a large detachment of soldiers march into the camp, complete with bayonets and steel helmets, approach the hut and first commence to disperse the ‘punitive’ Germans and then round-up and escort the ‘victims’ out of the camp for their own safety. Then towards inspection time (9.30 am), another large squad of soldiers arrive, and straight away surrounds Hut 44, and proceed with a harsh and thorough search of the hut and all the inmates’ luggage. Then to many of the assembled internees’ surprise, they go even further by bringing up picks and shovels with which they start digging under and between the huts. Whatever the reason, they discover a tunnel and with it stacks of carefully preserved and prepared provisions, special tools and ingenious equipment. Some of these things are said to have been procured by a sympathiser outside the camp. During these proceedings, two further lorry loads of reinforcements have been arriving in the camp and some of these picket the suspected huts. With some rather high feelings raised, and one or two jeers, at least 6 Germans are punctured in their backsides by some perplexed and nervous sentries. In the afternoon, further huts are searched, and then the soldiers start to dig up the tunnel from the other side of the wires – the tunnel is seen to reach out 30 to 40 yards beyond. Then they start flooding it with irrigation water, probably to make sure of blocking it. Later high officials arrive on the scene as well as some photographers. It seems that the plans to escape were almost nye, when the discovery was made. To avoid incidents, the Australian Germans were sent elsewhere after this affair.

— There were 6,000 or 7,000 aliens on the island in February and their numbers were decreasing by deportation and the release of C3 (unfit) aliens.

Thursday (April 1942).

Soon after breakfast many of the internees start rushing to one of the huts where all the desertion Germans are grouped. There is a big crowd there, and the M.E. Germans form a group, storm the place, and proceed to kick-out one by one all those inside. After having been called no doubt, one of the Australian officers appears on the scene, and as everyone is fighting within the room, he threatens to shoot if the room is not instantly closed. The punitive German agent takes no notice of him, even though he draws his revolver from the holster. Meanwhile the Italian group remain onlookers as it is generally realized that it is of concern only to the Germans. Later it is learnt that the majority of the Australian Germans wanted to work outside and took it upon themselves to throw out the beds of those who had refused to agree with them. Before long, a large detachment of soldiers marches into the camp, complete with bayonets and steel helmets, approach the hut and first commence to disperse the punitive Germans and then round-up and escort the "victims" out of the camp for their own safety. Then towards midday (9:30 am), another large squad of soldiers arrives, and straightaway surrounds Hut 44, and proceed with a burst and thorough search of the hut and all its inmates' luggage. Then to many of the assembled internees' surprise, they go even further by bringing up picks and shovels with which they start digging under and between two huts. Whatever the reason, they discover a tunnel, and with it stacks of carefully preserved and prepared provisions, special tools and other ingenious equipment. Some of these things are said to have been procured, by a sympathetic outside the camp? In the afternoon, two further long loads of reinforcements have been arriving in the camp and some of these picket the suspected huts. With some rather high-feeling raised, and one or two pigs, at least 6 Germans are punctured in their back-sides by some perplexed and nervous sentries. In the afternoon, further huts are searched, and then the soldiers start to dig up the tunnel from the other side of the wire - the tunnel is seen to reach out perhaps 30 to 50 yds beyond. Then they start flooding it with the irrigation water, probably to make sure of blocking it. Senior high-officers arrive on the scene as well as some photographers. It seems that the plans for escape were almost ripe, when the discovery was made. To avoid incidents, the Australian Germans were sent elsewhere after this affair.