



Prisoner of war camps vs. internment camps

Description

Canada had 40 internment/POW camps across the country during WWII

By **Byron Toben**

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My recent review of the play [Paradise By The River](#) dealt with **internment camps** for Italian-origin Canadian citizens, landed immigrants, and even some temporary visitors and refugees. However, in addition to these internment camps there was another set of World War II camps designated for prisoner-of-war captives.

Several of these originally set up in Britain were soon overflowing as the war turned against the Nazis. To alleviate this, such camps were also set up in Canada and Australia, and inmates held in Britain were transferred to those larger countries.

As the delays for refugees were more time-consuming, many refugees were re-designated as “prisoners of war.” This category change included some European Jews who had been born in Germany or Austria-Hungary, and even very young children who had been thought to have been saved by the “Kindertransport” efforts earlier in the war.

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The mixture of Nazi military captives with Jewish refugees was distressing to the latter. Respected journalist **Catherine Solyom** tracked down several survivors, then in their 90s, of these POW camps and wrote an [excellent overview](#) of the situation in the *Montreal Gazette* on June 30, 2018. (She has since been appointed as a member of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.)



German POWs in Sherbrooke internment camp – Image: Library and Archives Canada

The older Nazis, who had been captured from the Afrika Corp when the war was going their way, threatened the mostly young Jews to “cut their throats” after Hitler won. The younger Nazi conscripts, after the tide had turned, were not so intimidating.

In all, there were some 40 camps across Canada, the majority in Ontario and Quebec. Ironically, German submarines torpedoed at least one transport ship, killing many of their own military prisoners as well as innocent refugees. Such is the confusion of war.

I do not think these POW ironies lend themselves to a new theatrical drama, but perhaps a TV documentary.

Feature image: interned Canadian Ukrainians, Glenbow Museum & Archives



Byron Toben, a past president of *The Montreal Press Club*, has been *WestmountMag.ca*'s theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites *Rover Arts* and *Charlebois Post*, print weekly *The Downtowner* and print monthly *The Senior Times*. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.



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