Austrians in Trinidadian internment during the Second World War
The case of the Stecher family

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Introduction

I first met ninety-year-old Hans Bernd Stecher in his house in Goodwood Park, several kilometres to the west of Port of Spain, Trinidad, in September 2013. Hans had arrived on the English-speaking Caribbean island as a fifteen-year-old boy together with his parents, an aunt and an uncle in late 1938.[1] They had fled from National Socialist persecution in Austria in the hope of reaching Maracaibo in Venezuela, where Hans's great-uncle Jakob had lived since the early 1930s, following his own flight from Romania.[2] Jakob had informed his relatives in Vienna that the British colonial government had recently opened its borders to refugees from the "Third Reich," which was why they had headed, in the first instance, to Trinidad. They had assumed that the final leg of the trip would be relatively straightforward, given the island's close proximity to Venezuela.

However, rather than travelling on to Venezuela, which in actuality was not a simple journey as it entailed crossing a tropical wilderness (the Gulf of Paria, the Orinoco Delta) in a region that had little public or private transportation, the Stechers decided to remain on Trinidad, not least because English was the official language, as opposed to Spanish. Until the outbreak of the Second World War, the island's 500 or so Austrian and German refugees either tried to integrate within Trinidadian society (few refugees had settled on neighbouring Tobago) or attempted to migrate to the United States or Latin America.[3] However, Great Britain's declaration of war on 4 September immediately transformed anyone with a German passport from refugee to "enemy alien." Thereafter, they were monitored closely by

1 Interviews with Hans Stecher, Goodwood Park, Trinidad and Tobago, 21 and 26 October and 9 and 29 November 2013, transcripts in author's private archive.

2 Interview with Stecher, 21 October 2013.

3 Nathan Eck, "The Rescue of Jews with the Aid of Passports and Citizenship Papers of Latin American States," Yad Vashem Studies 1 (1957): 125–52.

the colonial government, even though most of them had been victims of Hitler's inhumane policies and divided into three categories: Category A (immediate internment); Category B (subject to certain restrictions); and Category C (exempt from both internment and restrictions).[4] However, following the Wehrmacht's invasion of Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium and ultimately France in the spring of 1940, the British government deemed it necessary to tighten its laws against "enemy aliens" on its territory, including its colonial possessions.

Consequently, in June 1940, the Trinidadian police arrested the now seventeen-year-old Hans Stecher in downtown Port of Spain and interned him with his father and his uncle Wilhelm on Nelson Island, about three kilometres from the main island in the Gulf of Paria. Meanwhile, his mother and aunt were sent to neighbouring Caledonia Island. The small islands' old quarantine stations served as internment camps for Trinidad's male (Nelson) and female and child (Caledonia) "enemy aliens" for the next three to four months, until they were all transferred to Camp Rented in the St James district of Port of Spain. Some of the 500 or so internees (mostly those of Austrian or German descent) remained in detention until the end of the war, while others were freed, often due to the support they received from Jewish aid agencies, such as American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JOINT) and the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). Stecher and his family – along with many other Austrians – remained in Trinidad after the end of the war and eventually became British citizens. (Trinidad and Tobago remained a British colony until its independence in 1962.)

This paper provides a detailed account of the experiences of some of the Austro-Jewish refugees who were interned on Trinidad during the Second World War. It is based on research conducted in the National Archives in Kew, London, the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago in Port of Spain, the Archives of the Jewish Community in Vienna, the Archives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee,[5] the Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and the National Archives of Gibraltar in addition to information provided by Hans Stecher in a series of interviews and meetings in fall 2013 and winter 2014. These investigations focused on the refugees' flight from Europe (juridical and political backgrounds, escape routes and acculturation processes), their daily lives until their detention in 1940 and, finally, their daily lives in the internment camps.

4 1914 Aliens Registration Act (4 & 5 Geo. V c.12) <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/collar-lot-britains-policy-internment-second-world-war/> (5 June 2021).

5 <https://archives.jdc.org/>.

Juridical and political backgrounds and escape routes

With the "*Anschluss*" in March 1938, the situation for Jews in Austria became dangerous and unbearable. Flight became the only option for many, but that still left the issue of where they might go, because a visa was needed for most of Austria's neighbouring countries, as well as a lot of money and/or a surety. Moreover, Italy was not a safe destination because of the cooperation between Berlin and Rome, and the same was true of Hungary, which was under the fascistic government of Admiral Horthy. Meanwhile, Switzerland's immigration laws were strict and rigorous, especially with respect to fleeing Jewish refugees, who were granted asylum only if they could prove they were under personal threat due to *political* activities; peril due to race, religion or ethnicity was considered insufficient grounds for admission.[6] Consequently, the only viable possibilities for most of Austria's Jews were Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. A much smaller number had the resources to reach the Americas, but they still had to travel to a European port city. Initially, even German ports, such as Hamburg and Bremen, as well as the likes of Amsterdam, Le Havre, Bordeaux, Marseilles and Lisbon, offered passages to New York, Havana, Veracruz, Barranquilla, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Port of Spain and others. But the National Socialists changed the emigration rules frequently, imposing further restrictions each time. Austrian Jews could still travel on their Austrian passports in the immediate aftermath of the "*Anschluss*," However, by the time the "Decree on passports for Jews" was issued on 5 October, 1938, at the latest, the German authorities only issued German passports and all passports held by Jews were declared invalid. Passports for travelling abroad became valid again only after the passport authorities had marked them with a stamp (a red "J") denoting that the passport holder was a Jew.

Prior to the Second World War, the main goal of National Socialist policy against Europe's Jews and other persecuted groups was to force them from the continent and seize their assets. However, many lower-class victims of this policy could not afford the visas, vaccinations, insurance, taxes (e.g. the Reich Flight Tax), train and shipping fares, accommodation and cash deposits they needed in order to flee. The most important of these prerequisites was a valid visa for a destination country. Demand for visas increased rapidly in the wake of the National Socialists' intensification of their expulsion policy in the late 1930s, which prompted US president Franklin D. Roosevelt to launch an initiative with the aim of mitigating the global refugee problem. Representatives from thirty-two countries and twenty-four voluntary organisations duly attended an international conference in the small French town of Évian-les-Bains from 6 to 15 July 1938. However, while most of the delegates expressed sympathy for the Jews and other persecuted victims of National Socialism, they failed to

6 Jean-Francois Bergier et al., Final Report of the Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland: Second World War (Zurich: Pendo, 2002).

find a solution. France and the United Kingdom, in particular, had received large numbers of refugees in the first half of 1938 and demanded a fairer distribution of the émigrés. Yet, of the thirty-two participating nations, only the Dominican Republic agreed to accept more Jewish refugees – 100,000 in total. However, in fact the country didn't even accept a thousand refugees.[7]

In the months leading up to the Évian Conference, the British Colonial Office had formulated several settlement proposals for refugees with particular skills and/or certain amounts of capital.[8] At the conference, the leader of the British delegation, Edward Turnour, 6th Earl Winterton, suggested the British colonies of Northern Rhodesia, Kenya and Tanganyika as possible host territories for Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria.[9] Enquiries about the British West Indies as alternative places of exile were ignored by the British delegation, even though the Colonial Office had previously considered British Guiana and British Honduras (Belize) for that purpose.[10] For instance, British officials felt that Guiana could be presented as an alternative to Palestine in order to counter US claims that Britain was not doing enough to solve the "refugee crisis."[11]

By contrast, the British colony of Trinidad and Tobago in the south-eastern Caribbean was rarely considered in these Colonial Office discussions for two main reasons: first, the islands were in a state of political unrest due to the activities of the Afro-Caribbean union leader Tubal Uriah Butler (1897–1977);[12] and, second, the

7 Allen Wells, *Tropical Zion: General Trujillo, FDR, and the Jews of Sosua* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Hans Ulrich Dillmann / Susanne Heim, Fluchtpunkt Karibik. Jüdische Emigranten in der Dominikanischen Republik, Berlin 2009.

8 Joanna Frances Newman, "Nearly the New World: Refugees and the British West Indies, 1933–1945," unpublished dissertation, University of Southampton, 1998, 59; Joanna Newman, Nearly the New World: The British West Indies and the Escape from Nazism, 1933–1945 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019).

9 Frank Shapiro, Haven in Africa (Jerusalem – New York: Gefen, 2002), 35, 44.

10 Anthony Sherman, Island Refuge: Britain and Refugees from the Third Reich 1933–1939 (London: Elek, 2020); Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939–1945 (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1999); Martin Gilbert, "British Government Policy towards Jewish Refugees (November 1937–September 1939)," Yad Vashem Studies 13 (1979): 127–69.

11 Louise London, "Jewish Refugees, Anglo-Jewry and British Government Policy, 1930–1940," in The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry, edited by David Cesarani (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 163–90; Louise London, "British Immigration Control Procedures and Jewish Refugees 1933–1939," in Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-speaking Jews in the United Kingdom, edited by Werner E. Mosse (Tubingen: CB Mohr, 1991), 485–517.

12 Kirk Meighoo, Politics in a Half-made Society: Trinidad and Tobago, 1925–2002 (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2003); Jerome Teelucksingh, Ideology, Politics and Radicalism of the Afro-Caribbean (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). See also: The Report of West Indian Royal Commission [The Moyne Report], Cmd 6607 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1945); Howard Johnson, "Oil, Imperial Policy and the Trinidad Disturbances 1937," Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 4 (1975) 1: 29–54; Howard Johnson, "The Political Uses

colony's oil and gas industry was crucial to the British military complex. However, it was precisely this second factor that made the islands so attractive to immigrants. Together with Venezuela, Mexico and Texas, Trinidad was in the vanguard of global oil production in the interwar period, which attracted a number of Chinese and Syrian immigrants to the island throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. These new arrivals prompted the colonial authorities to restrict access, as the British parliamentarian Arthur Creech Jones explained in a telegram to the under-secretary of state for Dominion affairs, Malcolm Macdonald, on 17 July 1938:

> As regards Trinidad, it is true that there are good many Chinese and a certain number of Syrians, most engaged in petty trade, small general stores and the like. In 1936 the immigration legislation was tightened up and an Immigration Ordinance passed, No. 4 of 1936. This Ordinance does not discriminate in term against any nationalities, but it is stated in a confidential despatch from Sir M. Fletcher of the 4th of March 1937, that the Ordinance is frankly designed for the purpose of preventing entry into the colony, and it is aimed more particularly at Chinese and Syrians.[13]

In his "confidential despatch," Arthur George Murchison Fletcher (the island's governor) had suggested that the problematic ordinance – which had triggered a protest from the Chinese ambassador in London – should be replaced with a quota system. He had also raised the possibility of "sheltering a number of people (900 German Jews) whose ultimate destination is America" on Trinidad.[14] This figure was greater than the total number of immigrants to the colony over the previous five years. In response, Norman Bentwich from the *Central Council of Jewish Refugees* (CCJR) in London had suggested turning the island into a "country of first refuge."[15] The government rejected that proposal on 12 December 1937 although it did confirm that Trinidad could continue to be a hub for German-Jewish refugees en route to the United States. This route was not cheap: the price of a transit visa for Trinidad was £ 52 (equivalent to about £ 2,135 today)[16] and all disembarking passengers were obliged to pay a deposit and had to be in possession of an onward steamer ticket.[17] Crucially for the Stecher family and others who could afford to make their way to

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of Commissions of Enquiry (1): The Imperial Colonial West Indies Context: The Forster and Moyne Commissions," Social and Economic Studies 27 (1978) 3: 255–75.

13 CO 295/603/II, Immigration Restriction, 1938, Fol. 1a, 2r, National Archives, UK.

14 Ibid., Fol. 2a.

15 Ibid., Fol. 2r.

16 <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result> (10 September 2021).

17 Letter from the Colonial Office to Arthur Hilton Poynton, 18 November 1938, in CO 295/603/II, Fol. 3a.

Trinidad, however, on 1 December the Colonial Office had sanctioned some "small-scale settlement" on the island.[18]

Unfortunately, the island had an "acute shortage of all types of housing and employment throughout the colony,"[19] so it would be difficult for the German and Austrian refugees to find places to live, especially if ongoing discussions in London resulted in a host of evacuees arriving from Malta and Gibraltar, too.[20] This was one of the reasons why discussions were held regarding the construction of camps.

Ultimately, Trinidad's border remained open to refugees for a period of just three months, from 1 October to 31 December 1938. The deposit for entry was £ 50 (equivalent to £ 1,967 today)[21] per person, which the colonial authorities estimated was sufficient to cover living expenses for a year.[22] The scheme was so short-lived largely because Fletcher's successor, acting governor George Huggins, was against Jewish immigration to the island.

The Stechers' flight from Europe and their daily lives in Trinidad prior to detention

Hans Stecher could trace his family's origins to Czernowitz in Bukovina (now Chernivtsi in Ukraine) and Klausenburg (now Cluj in Romania) – two regions that formed part of the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time. His father Viktor (born in Czernowitz on 16 November 1884) left his hometown to study law at the University of Vienna around 1904, while his mother Sophie (née Baltinester, born in Czernowitz on 14 January 1898) moved to the city ten years later, shortly after the outbreak of the First World War. They were among hundreds of thousands of Jewish migrants who relocated from east to west in the Habsburg Empire in the first two decades of the twentieth century. However, many of their relatives remained in Ukraine, Poland and Romania.

Viktor and Sophie Stecher married in 1921, and Hans Bernd was born two years later. By then, Viktor had been working as a lawyer in Vienna for six years, and he would continue to do so until the "*Anschluss*" of March 1938.[23] However, from that

18 Ibid.

19 Telegram from the Officer Administering the Government of Trinidad to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1 December 1938, CO 295/603, No. 272, Fol. 9.

20 Trinidad was discussed as a possible destination for these evacuees alongside Ceylon, Mauritius, Ghana, South Africa and Jamaica. See CO 323/1799/1, Fol. 22a, National Archives, UK.

21 <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result> (04 November 2021).

22 Interview with Stecher, 21 October 2013.

23 H.Ä. Liste der Rechtsanwälte Wien, 19 April 1917, Hans Stecher's private archive.

moment onwards, he knew that he would face persecution due to his support for the recently outlawed Social Democratic Party, so escape seemed the only option.

The Stecher family reached Port of Spain on 13 October 1938,[24] then lived as "free aliens" in Trinidad until their internment, which began on 16 June 1940. Nevertheless, Hans and his immediate family – his parents, his aunt Wilhemina and his "uncle" Wilhelm (who was actually one of Viktor Stecher's cousins) – all feature on a list of 301 "enemy aliens" that the Trinidadian authorities compiled on 2 November 1939.[25] Also on the list are the Tauscher family – Erich (one of Hans's uncles, a Viennese merchant and watch repairer), his wife Bertha, and his two daughters Gertrude and Alice. Nationalities are not specified, but careful cross-referencing with the archives of the Austrian Jewish Community in Vienna,[26] the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), the archives of the Jewish Development Committee (JDC) and additional archives in Trinidad, Curacao, the United States, Germany, and Austria has revealed that these two families were far from the only Austrians on the island. For example, Gustav Freud (a relative of the famous Viennese neurologist Sigmund Freud), the Fischer family (Ernst Otto, Inge and Lucy), Otto and Irene Malameth and the Hammerman family (Esther, Helene and Baruch) were already on Trinidad. Another 200 Austrian refugees would join them after the list was compiled.

Hans and his parents, his second cousin Siegfried (a dentist who had trained at the University of Vienna) and his aunt Wilhemina had left Vienna's West Station and travelled via Nijmegen to Amsterdam in September 1938.[27] They were forced to leave "Uncle" Wilhelm behind on the platform because his immigration papers were not in order.[28] Hans remembered this moment vividly: "There stood Uncle Wilhelm, a very sad figure because he had to say goodbye to us and stay behind alone."[29] (Fortunately, though, Wilhelm's escape to Trinidad was merely delayed: he arrived on the island about a month after the rest of the family.) Everyone in Hans's party carried two to three suitcases that contained their most treasured possessions, including many books. When the train passed the border control in Nijmegen on 16 September,

24 Interview with Stecher, 21 October 2013.

25 "List of Enemy Aliens in the Colony of Trinidad," 2 November 1939, 6924/24, National Archives, UK.

26 Kartei zur Auswanderung, Auswanderungsfragebögen, Archiv der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde, Wien.

27 Hans was a pupil at the Gymnasium Zirkusgasse in Vienna-Leopoldstadt until 7 May 1938. See Iris Franziska Meister, Die Judenschule. Nationalsozialistische Bildungspolitik am Beispiel des BG Wien II, Zirkusgasse (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011).

28 The terms under which Jews were permitted to travel are outlined in Viktor Stecher's passport, Hans Stecher's private archive.

29 Interview with Stecher, 21 October 2013.

"it was a fantastic feeling of freedom."[30] After arriving in Amsterdam, the Stechers rented an apartment for a week prior to the departure of their ship.

En route to Trinidad, the ship stopped in Madeira, where goods were offloaded, and several passengers disembarked. It then continued on to Suriname, which was the first true taste of the Tropics for many of the remaining passengers. In Paramaribo, the Stechers visited the famous Neve Shalom Synagogue on Keizer Street, built in 1723, and therefore older than any of Vienna's synagogues. The next stop was Georgetown, in British Guiana, where Siegfried left the ship. He had struck up a friendship with a rich British-Guianese couple during the voyage and they had invited him to stay on their estate in Berbice. However, he eventually left the colony because of work-permit issues (Austrian degrees were not recognised in the British Empire) and ended up studying medicine at Exeter University in the UK. Several years later, in the 1950s, he returned to the Caribbean to take up a position as a medical officer in Port of Spain's General Hospital.

Upon arrival in Trinidad in 1938, the remaining Stechers still intended to join Viktor's uncle Jakob in Maracaibo, Venezuela. However, Hans was the only member of the family who could speak Spanish, having learned it at school in Vienna, whereas Viktor and Sophie could both manage reasonably well in English and French, so they swiftly chose to remain on the island, even though their welcome had been lukewarm, at best. Hans recalled: "They were always afraid to admit people, always afraid to allow people to enter […] [I]t is a very short-sighted view."[31] Similarly, in his first letter from the island, Otto Malameth wrote: "There are a lot of European diseases, of which I would like to name but two – unemployment and anti-Semitism […] [G]ood old acquaintances, albeit with a Trinidadian twist."[32] Nevertheless, in spring 1939, Viktor Stecher helped Erich Tauscher to establish a watchmaker's shop – the Viennese Watchmaker – in downtown Port of Spain, and business was soon booming.

Even though most of the Austrian families on Trinidad were not especially religious, they tried to maintain their Jewish traditions and community life as best they could. For instance, in 1938, a small group rented a house in Victoria Street, Port of Spain, and converted it into a synagogue. After the war was over, they moved to larger premises on the corner of Edward Street and Park Street where they could

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Roberto Kalmar Lachs's private archive.

hold more professional services and accommodate Jewish sailors from the nearby US naval base at Chaguaramas.[33]

Because of the already mentioned course of war in spring 1940 (Blitzkrieg) the British government decided to establish an internment camp in St. James (Port of Spain) for all enemy aliens in the country. With the surrender of the French Army in June 1940 they reopened the old quarantine stations on Nelson and Caledonia Island as internment camps because the construction work on the camp in St. James was far to be over.

June 1940, when all of the island's Austro-Jewish "enemy aliens" were arrested and informed: "You are going to be interned at the governor's pleasure."[34] The Stechers' turn came in the early hours of 16 June. Each member of the family was allowed to pack just one suitcase before they were marched from their St Vincent Street apartment to the police headquarters on Sackville Street, although one of the officers did take pity on Hans and allowed him to take his pet dog, too. The Stechers were suspected of being "German Nazi spies" due to their apartment's close proximity to the police station, so they were kept under lock and key.[35] Hans recalled: "There was a terrible smell in the cell; we couldn't sleep."[36] During my interviews with him, he was always keen to stress that the arrests came as a profound shock to the whole family precisely because it was the first time that any of them had suffered discrimination since their arrival on Trinidad almost two years earlier.

Detention and daily life in the internment camps

Hans, Viktor, Wilhelm and Warry the dog were transferred by small boat from the fishing village of Carenage, to the west of Trinidad's capital, to Nelson Island on 18 June 1940, after a second sleepless night in the police cells. The same boat had already taken Sophie and Wilhemina to Caledonia Island, about 300 metres to the north, and therefore just about within shouting and waving distance. They would remain on their respective islands for about the next 100 days, while they waited for work to be completed on the permanent Camp Rented.

A total of 126 male internees[37] – including Erich Tauscher, who had been arrested a few days before the Stechers – were housed in buildings that had previously ac-

33 The United States established a naval base at Chaguaramas, west of Port of Spain, in 1942 as well as two airforce bases at Waller Airfield (close to Valencia) and Carlsen Airfield (Caguanas) as part of Churchill and Roosevelt's destroyers-for-bases deal of 2 September 1940. The naval base remained active until 1969.

34 Interview with Stecher, 21 October 2013.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

commodated generations of East Indian indentured labourers while they served out their quarantine prior to starting work on Trinidad's sugar plantations. Hence there have been "camp construction" on Nelson Island as well as on the other five islands of the Mini-Archipelago (Craig, Lenagan, Pelican and Rock Island) opposite of Port of Spain. We can learn from a few texts by Trinidadian historians, such as Anthony de Verteuil, about the history of the five islands from the early British period at the end of the 18th century up to Decades later, in the 1970s, leaders of the local Black Power movement were incarcerated in the same buildings.[38] Hans recalled that the residents of 1940

> had to chip wood for the government, which was really hard work because it was really hot on the island during the day. Furthermore, we had to cook our own food. I remember boiling coffee in old iron kettles that had been used in the sugar industry. I also remember stirring eggshells into the coffee with an oar. I still don't know why I had to do that![39]

No all the enemy aliens arrived the two islands on the same day. The watchmaker Erich Tauscher (who has been a victim of the November Pogrom) has been detained some days earlier than the Stecher's. The old quarantine station on Nelson Island was already used as a prison.[40] The 126 internees lived in barracks that opened onto an internal courtyard, as opposed to cells, and they slept on plank beds in family groups. Moreover, there was no fear that their detention might be a precursor to eventual deportation back to the "Third Reich."

In addition to the Stechers and Tauschers, many other Jewish refugees from National Socialist Europe were interned on the Nelson and Caledonia Island, including Alfred, Wilhelm and Richard Bronner, Norbert, Resi and Heinrich Frisch, Bernhard Mahler, Emil Welwart, Kurt Seinfeld, and the aforementioned Ernst Otto Fischer, some of whom attempted to maintain a Jewish way of life within the camp. One of the few Christian internees whom Hans could remember was Karl Alfred, who befriended the Stechers and had no issue with the other residents' Jewish activities.[41]

When all of the internees – men, women and children – were finally transferred to Camp Rented in early October 1940, the Jews and Christians were housed in separate wooden barracks, but they could interact freely with one another. Most of the Christians were German Protestants. Some had been born on the island to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German immigrants, while others had

38 Anthony de Verteuil, Western Isles of Trinidad (Port of Spain: The Litho Press, 2002).

39 Interview with Stecher, 21 October 2013.

40 Nelson Island did have one bona fide prisoner, however. The union leader Tubal Uriah Butler was kept in solitary confinement on the north-west tip of the island for the duration of the war.

41 Interview with Stecher, 21 October 2013.

migrated there between 1933 and 1938. Oscar Moser – a member of the former group – was the only known supporter of Hitler's government; as such, he had been interned before the others, in September 1939.

In June 1941, nine months after Camp Rented had accepted its first internees, the facility suddenly had to accommodate a further 751 refugees from the French steamer *Winnipeg*, which had been en route from Marseilles to Guadeloupe when it was intercepted by the Dutch warship HNMS *Van Kinsbergen* and redirected to Port of Spain. Of the new arrivals, 210 were German, 284 were Austrian, 27 were natives of other enemy nations and 72 were officially stateless. Extra tents had to be erected to house the hundreds of new internees. The rest of the ship's passengers were not classified as "enemy aliens," so the government quickly extricated them from the camp and facilitated their onward migration, mainly to the United States.[42]

German submarines attacked two British merchant ships in the Gulf of Paria in 1942, which prompted the colonial authorities in Port of Spain to tighten restrictions on the island because of the real military threat.[43] The colonial government ordered a complete curfew for Trinidad which also meant closing the schools.

Each day in Camp Rented was similar to the one before. After the morning roll-call, the wardens checked the barracks and the residents cleaned them until they were spotless. Then the agricultural and manufacturing work would begin and continue for the rest of the day. The Jewish internees kept Shabbat on Saturdays and organised cultural activities on Sundays. Only school-age children were allowed to go to school in town; the rest of the internees were obliged to remain within the confines of the camp. Seventeen-year-old Hans Stecher attended Queen's Park Savannah Public High School, where he fully integrated with his classmates. He would often purchase leather for a detained Hungarian Jew and smuggle it back into the camp when the school day was over. In return, his fellow-internee trained him to be a saddler.

Conclusion

Most of the Austro-Jewish refugees who were arrested in June 1940 remained in captivity for a total of three and a half years (including the initial three months on Nelson and Caledonia islands). Only a handful made successful applications for visas that enabled them to continue their journeys to the United States. One such was Erich Tauscher, who reached New York in 1941. When the other internees were finally released from the camp in 1943 and 1944, they were placed under a form of parole that

42 Eric Jennings, Escape from Vichy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 46–51.

43 Gaylord T. M. Kelshall, The U-Boat War in the Caribbean (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute Press, 1994).

obliged them to report to the police station each day and subjected them to travel and work restrictions as well as a night-time curfew. These measures continued until the end of the war.

As soon as the restrictions were lifted in 1945, Viktor and Hans opened a leather goods shop in downtown Port of Spain. Six years later, they applied for and received British citizenship.

Figure 1: Tombstone of Hans Bernd Stecher, Woodbrook Cemetery, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Source: Christian Cwik, Private Archive, Port of Spain, 6 February 2018.