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# Tatura Prisoner of War Camp

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## Location

1320 Stewart Road, Tatura, GREATER SHEPPARTON CITY

## Municipality

GREATER SHEPPARTON CITY

## Level of significance

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## Heritage Listing

Vic. War Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 4, 2000

NUMBER ONE INTERNMENT CAMP

1320 STEWART ROAD TATURA and 1275 CRAWFORD ROAD TATURA

VHR Number H2048

File Number HER/2002/000306

Other Names NO.1 INTERNMENT CAMP

Municipality Greater Shepparton City

Extent of Registration : 1. All of the land marked L1 on Diagram 2048 held by the Executive Director being all of the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 9528 Folio 467.

2. All of the above and below ground archaeological relics on the registered land including (but not limited to): Cafe Welblech, the skittle alley, the Cell building, the drainage channels, and the garden beds and garden path remnants.

Other Listings 1 Greater Shepparton City Planning Scheme

Heritage Act Categories Archaeological place;Heritage place

Click on the arrow below to view the Item Categories.

Item Categories

Item Group Item Category

Military Internment Camp

Click on the arrow below to view the Statement of Significance. Note: Some records may not yet have a Statement of Significance.

Statement of Significance

What is significant?Number One Internment Camp is located on the eastern side of Waranga Reservoir, 20 kms south of Tatura. It was Australia's first purpose built internment camp for housing enemy aliens and/or prisoners of war. Camp 1 was established in 1940 and was closed in 1947. The camp housed male civilian internees, first of German origin and later of Italian origin who had been resident in Australia. The camp is a superb archaeological site with most of its features such as huts, ablution blocks, kitchens, tennis courts, gardens, ponds, skittle alley, cafe hall, sewerage works and security fencing easily recognised.

How is it significant?Number One Internment Camp is of historic, cultural, social and archaeological significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?Number One Internment Camp is historically significant for its association with the Australian internment policy of the first half of the twentieth century. Camp 1 was the first of eighteen purpose-built camps, a number of which were constructed in the Goulburn Valley. Crucial to the significance of the camp is its capacity to demonstrate to all visitors a direct impact of World War II on Australia. Although many of the internees were Australian residents, they were thought to be a potential security risk to the nation because of the country of their birth or their affiliations. The ruins and the landscape illustrate clearly the physical environment faced by internees and the organisational arrangements of World War II internment camp.

Number One Internment Camp is historically significant due to the impact it had on persons of German origin in Victoria. Germans represented one of the major national groups in the early waves of immigration to Australia. Although numerically fewer than British or Irish settlers, they nevertheless had a substantial impact in forming the Australian society. Internment demonstrated to them that they were not considered a part of Australian society, which was at that time dominated by British values and politics.

Number One Internment Camp is archaeologically significant because it contains an abundance of archaeological evidence on the layout and operation of the camp and life within the camp. Local historians have recorded the memories of former German and Italian Internees who have returned to 'revisit' a period of their life which had a profound effect on them. The compactness of the camp, and the quality and depth of surviving sources of information (archaeological, historical and oral history) bestows the ruins with tremendous social significance as touchstones to the experience of wartime internment.

Construction dates 1940,

Hermes Number 126156

Property Number

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## Historical Australian Themes

Providing administrative structures and authorities - defence

## Usage/Former Usage

Not extant

## Veterans Description for Public

The Tatura Prisoner of War Camp is typical of the prisoner of war camps established in Victoria during the Second World War, which consisted of 'P1' type accommodation blocks. It was established in land owned by John B. Noonan. The Camp known as "Camp 1" is located on the eastern side of Waranga Reservoir, 20 kms south of Tatura. It was Australia's first purpose built internment camp for housing enemy aliens and or prisoners of war. Camp 1 was established in 1940 and was closed in 1947. The camp housed male civilian internees, first of German origin and later of Italian origin who had been resident in Australia. The camp retains most of its features including huts, ablution blocks, kitchens, tennis courts, gardens, ponds, skittle alley, cafe hall, sewerage works and security fencing easily recognised.

Camp 1 became the Chief Army Administration Camp. The camp eventually housed the hospital and dental headquarters for all camps of the Tatura group. The first internees to come to the camp were 63 Germans who walked to the camp on 25th January 1940 from Dhurringile, which had served as internment accommodation first.

The internees were housed in army huts. At the beginning, there were 14 huts, with 16 men to each hut, in Camp 1 Compound A. Later 8 further huts were erected and 2 bath-tubs put in for 250 men. The huts were unlined. One room was converted into an orderly room and canteen, another into temporary camp hospital also mess halls, open shower rooms, open wash house and latrine. By 1943 conditions improved, the latrines and ablutions connected to a sewerage plant and sanitation provided.

Compounds A and B were separated by barbed wire. Compound B was established in the eastern side when 640 local German internees were brought to Camp 1 from every part of Australia. Camp 1 was unofficially called the "Nazi Camp" and authorities who were convinced of the "dangerousness" of an internee sent them to Tatura. When Italy joined Germany in the war against Britain in June 1940, 22 Australian Italian internees were also brought to Camp 1.

The Camp Commandant was in charge of the overall operation of the camp with delegated duties to army personnel. The guards at Camp 1 were generally returned First World War servicemen who had re-enlisted. The internee compounds were democratically run. Internees were responsible for their compound and managed their own administration. The compound administration furthermore included Secretariat, Arrangements Service, Orderlies, Post, Gardens, Hygiene, Canteen, Finance and Selling, Kitchen, Messes, Welfare, Hospital, Sport, Culture, Music, Library, Workshops, Exhibition, Cinema and School Halls.

The Cafe Wellblech was one of the strangest episodes in the camp's history. Originally it had been an army hut, used for storage. The Germans obtained permission to convert it to a cafe, built a four feet high stonework promenade around the front entrance, opening it early in 1942. Large tubs containing foliage and plants were placed on the promenade and tables and chairs. On summer nights an area was reserved for the orchestra. Waiters, smartly dressed, served black coffee and German cakes. Inside, the panelled walls of the cafe bore scenes of the Rhine valley and Berlin. Behind the counter shelves were heavily stocked with preserved foods and delicacies. In front of the counter were tables and chairs to accommodate some 30 diners.

In 1944, the Australian authorities sounded the alarm for the camp's first escape, with other escapes following. The Welblech Cafe was not suggested to be the headquarters for the escape society, but there was evidence to indicate it was a clearing-house for illegally gained currency notes. The chief function of the escape society was to accumulate currency notes for careful distribution to genuine potential escapees. The Welblech Cafe was raided twice, but only at the second raid a member of the search party pulled a large almost loose nail partly from the flooring. The search party saw a small, square foot section apparently of solid concrete bordering the open fire-place slowly swing downwards, as though on a hinge. In the six-inch deep cavity revealed were a number of small compartments, empty. On further examination it was revealed that this small cellar, below floor level was completely enclosed by the chimneys foundation.

The internees were occupied with various tasks, including gardening, providing services such as cleaning clothes and washing, with firewood cutting and gathering, road making at the camp, drainage work or general maintenance at the camp. The internees were paid for the work they completed. Probably one of the main problems in the camp was boredom. To distract the internees, two tennis courts, a skittle alley, a small pavilion with a flat roof for sunbaking and two hobby workshops were eventually built. Leisure activities at the camp included exhibitions, library, regular picture shows and sporting festival. The German internees at camp even published a little pro-Nazi fortnightly newspaper called Brennessel (stinging nettle), begun in 1941.

The camp was wound up after the Second World War. In August 1946 there were orders issued to concentrate all internees held at Camp 1 into one compound and transfer the Officers to another Camp. The final closure seems to have occurred between 1946 and 1947. By May 1947, the garrison at No. 1 camp was reduced to two men. At the end of the year twelve of the huts were sold to district returned soldiers. Other huts were purchased by firms and businesses or were acquired by the Forestry Commission.

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*