

Ludwig Friedrich Gelles (1922-1943)

by Edward Gelles

Ludwig Gelles was born in Vienna on 3rd June 1922 to Dr David Gelles, advocate of that city and Regina (Renee) Gelles nee Griffel. He was the elder brother of Edward Gelles, who was born on 24th November 1927 (1).

Ludwig was educated at the Akademisches Gymnasium in Vienna. At the time of the *Anschluss* in 1938 he would have been within 2 years of taking his *Matura* (matriculation) and entering the University. Ludwig came to England with his parents and younger brother on 13th August 1938 as refugees from Nazi persecution. His paternal uncle Dr. Max Gellis and maternal uncles Zygmunt and Edward Griffel were in London at that time, the Griffels moving to the United States before the outbreak of the Second World War.

The Gelles family settled in Bayswater (6 Queens Court, Queensway, W2) and the children continued their education. Edward was sent to a boarding school and was away from home when in the darkest days of June 1940 many German and Austrian Jewish refugees were rounded up and interned as “enemy aliens” and some were sent to camps in the Isle of Man. These included my father, my uncle Max, and brother Ludwig. This tragic mistake of failing to distinguish refugees from Nazi persecution and possible Nazi sympathisers was quickly rectified. My father was released within a matter of weeks, but by then my uncle and brother had been sent to Australia on S.S. Dunera (2). They were ultimately released in Australia. Uncle Max remained there. He had some business connections and was prominent in amateur chess circles, representing Australia in several international chess matches. After the war he returned to Vienna and resumed his legal practice. He wrote a definitive book on Austrian Company Law which has gone through six revised editions under his name

At the end of 1942 Ludwig was so homesick that he could not be dissuaded from returning to England. As the attached Australian form shows, Ludwig embarked for New York on 29th January 1943. There he stayed with his uncle Edward Griffel but insisted on continuing his hazardous homeward journey. The ship taking him across the Atlantic was torpedoed and sunk not far from these shores (3)

- (1) Edward Gelles, *An Ancient Lineage* (Valentine Mitchell 2006), p.189, 194.
- (2) Paul R. Bartrop ed., *The Dunera Affair* (Jewish Museum of Australia 1990)
- (3) Australian Military Forces, *Internees Service and Casualty Form* –attached.

Regina Gelles nee Griffel with her elder son Ludwig (ca. 1927)



INTERNEES PRISONER OF WAR — SERVICE AND CASUALTY FORM

Identification No. **E. 39563**

District **U.K. (E. 7356)**
Surname **GENLES**
(Block Capitals)

Rank _____ Other Names **Ludwig**

Date of Capture **27/6/40** 6.40
Place of Capture **London** 4
Date of Birth **5th June 1922** 29
Place of Birth **Vienna** 21
Trade or Occupation **Student (Engineering)** 210
Religion **Jewish** 3

NATIONALITY **Austrian** 6
Marital Condition **Single** 3
Next of Kin **Nene Gelles**
Address of Next of Kin **6, Greens Court (Queens Court) QUEENS, London, W.2**
Relationship **Mother**

MEDICAL—
For Report: ha ✓ 2
Identification—Colour of Hair **Brown** Eyes **Brown**
Distinctive Marks **Nil**

NOTHING TO BE WRITTEN IN THIS SPACE.

REPORT		Record of all casualties regarding appointments, transfers, postings, attachments, etc., forfeiture of pay, wounds, amputations, admission to and discharge from Hospital, Casualty Clearing Stations, etc., Date of disembarkation and embarkation from a theatre of war, and any matter affecting a prisoner of war	Date of Casualty	Place of Casualty	Authority A.A.F. A.112, or other Document	Signature of Officer Certifying Correctness of Entries
Date	From whom received					
6.9.40	S. D. B. B. B.	Spd from England to Sydney	9.4.40	31	M. Kell	
8.11.40	C. C. B. B.	Marched in to Bay	6.9.40	Bay	A. 113	R. K. H. G. J.
12.1.41	G. G. B. B.	Swam to Danube	20.5.41	Bay	A. 113	R. K. H. G. J.
26.5.41	C. C. B. B.	Marched in from Bay	20.5.41	Tatara	20	H. Hall
2.7.43	"	Released to U.K. via Liverpool (Sold 29.1.43)	27.1.43	"	"	Smithells