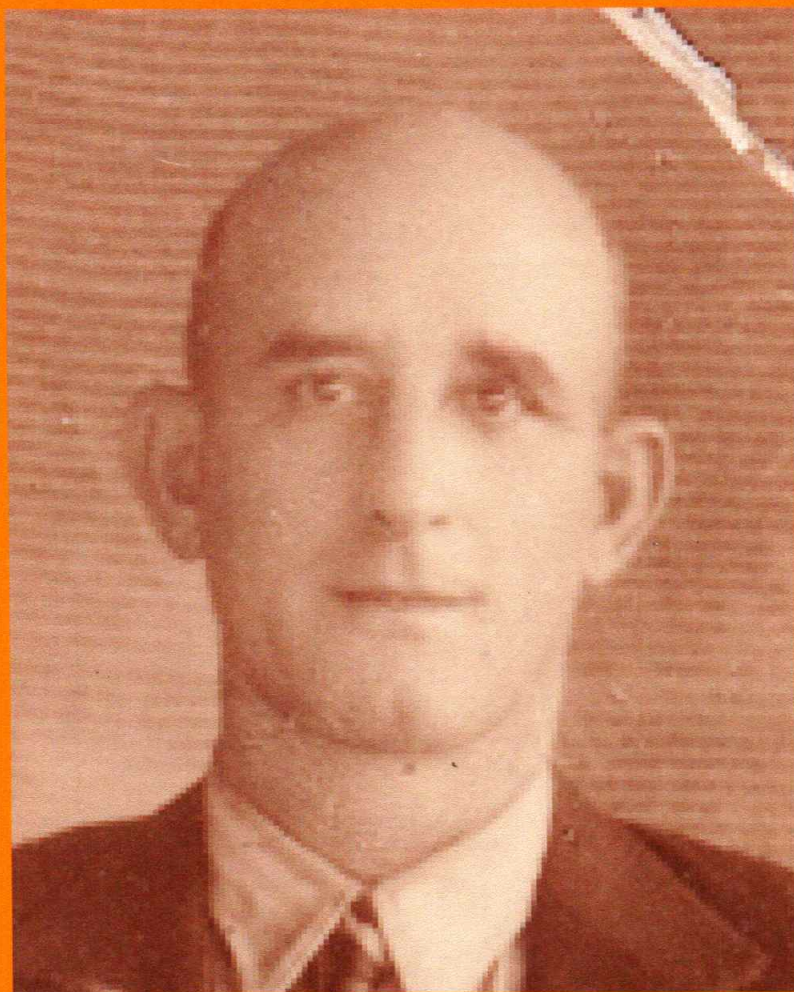


'Like Most Italians'

**The World War II Imprisonment of
Salvatore Vignolio**



by Tom Lockley and Kevin Vignolio

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Introduction

Kevin Vignolio has led a very active life, and like most active people, retirement does not suit him well. In his mid-seventies, he occupies himself with various kinds of voluntary work including spending every Wednesday at the Australian Aviation Museum at Bankstown in Sydney.

Like Kevin, I also enjoy being around old aeroplanes, which have been a lifelong interest. One day in early 2005 Kevin showed me some documents about the internment of his father, Salvo, during World War II. Kevin's father had been born in Australia, and during his 47 years of living in North Queensland had never given the slightest hint of any disloyalty to Australia.

Nevertheless in 1942 he was sent to an internment camp for ten and a half months, on the unsubstantiated word of a policeman who said he had been told that Salvo had made some disloyal statements. The constable was supported by his sergeant. Salvo's friends and family were outraged, and even the military authorities had serious doubts that the policeman's honesty.

It is clear from the documents that the internment was an act of petty revenge by two corrupt policeman. Yet it took a long time to have Salvo released, and an even longer time to have his name fully cleared.

This is not a major story. Russell Crowe will not be rushing for the film rights. But it deserves to be told, if only as a warning of the injustice that may easily occur in war, when values are warped, and suspicion and thoughtlessness reach absurd heights.

Both the policemen are long since dead. There seems little doubt of their guilt and their vindictive motivation. But they may have descendants, and rather than upset these innocent people, we have called them Constable X and Sergeant Y. Another negative informant is referred to as 'Mr B' for the same reason.

One of the most frightening aspects of the story is the way that 'evidence' which in fact is trivial or non-existent is allowed to mount up. The evidence against Salvo himself was flimsy, and indeed almost certainly was completely made up by the police. However the police strengthened their case by alleging that he was an associate of an internee, Angelo Simonelli, brother-in-law of another internee, Francisco Pavetto, and brother-in-law of 'Bartolo Parravicinio', a 'pro-Fascist suspect'. (This man was never arrested, because there was absolutely no evidence against him, and the police have got his name completely wrong). A third sister, probably Josie, was 'living with another Italian named Moretti'. All this implies that Salvo is part of a large fascist ring, but the truth is that there is no reasonable evidence against any of them, and Francisco Pavetto had already been released.

It would be great if, in our more enlightened times, we no longer allowed such things to happen. In Australia we pride ourselves on the rule of law, and every time we allow an injustice to occur, we demean our country's highest values. It would be good to be able to say that we have indeed learnt, but sadly there are current instances that demonstrate that we still have a way to go.

May we face the future with a wisdom that is based on the lessons of the past. 'He who does not study history is destined to repeat it.' For example, are we now in danger of regarding all Arabs with suspicion, when the fact of the matter is that virtually all our citizens of Arabic extraction are fine citizens who are completely against all forms of terrorism?

As a cautionary tale, here is Salvo Vignolio's little bit of history.

Tom Lockley

May 2005

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1: Italians in North Queensland

The first sugar in North Queensland was grown in 1872. It is an ideal climate for sugar cane growing, the soil is very fertile, and the rainfall is reliable. The mill at Macknade was the third to be erected, and its sugar won first prize at the Paris Exhibition in 1878. It was owned by the Neame Brothers. The Macknade Mill became part of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company in 1989, and the present day mill at Macknade stands on the site of the original mill.

A major problem was finding workers to do the very difficult and dirty job of cutting cane. Before being cut, the cane was burnt, and the work was very hard and dirty. The Australian Aborigines were not interested, and it was hard to find 'white' men to do the job. The traditional solution was to recruit islanders, mainly from New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. These were known as 'Kanakas'. Some of these certainly came willingly, but there are some credible stories of kidnapping and similar 'recruitment' procedures, and Australia cannot take much credit from the process.



This rare picture shows a group of Kanakas preparing a field for sowing cane, in the late 1800s.

At the time Australia was in the grip of the 1890s depression, which was responsible for the birth of the Australian Labour Party and for the formalisation of the 'White Australia' policy. These were interrelated; the idea was that Chinese and others would be expelled so that 'whites' would not be threatened by competition for employment.

In 1892, the Government of the day wanted to deport all Kanakas immediately, but the cane growers objected to this and sugar plantations were able to retain the cane cutters and labourers for the next ten years. In 1907, the Commonwealth Government passed legislation to expire all indentured service, and Kanakas and their families were deported to their island homes.

With plenty of notice about the problem, the growers began to look elsewhere, for 'white' men who might work in the canefields, and in Italy there were many unemployed workers who would take a chance in the new world.

The first Italian immigrants were 335 men, women and children from Piedmont, Lombardy and the Veneto arrived on the *Jumna* at the end of 1891. These were the first of an influx of Italians which has grown to the extent that over 40% of the inhabitants of the Hinchinbrook Shire are of Italian descent. These pioneers were brought out to assist in the sugar industry's transition from a plantation economy to a small farm and central mill system. Some remained in the sugar industry, where they were joined by a small number of Sicilians and thus the foundations of the north Queensland Italian community were laid.

Maurizo Vignolio had been born in 1858 in the town of Romano, Canavese Province of Torino, North Italy. There was not much chance of advancement in this area at the time, and many of the young men emigrated. At first, Maurizo went to Argentina, where he worked in a brick works. Many of the Vignolio family settled in South America, but he himself returned to Italy in late 1890. At the age of 33, he married Maria Calegario in 1891. She was twenty years old, relatively old for marriage at that time. Maurizo was also above the usual age for marriage.

Maurizo and Maria made their way from Turin to Genoa, about 160 miles, probably on foot. From there they took ship to Australia, arriving about nine months after they left Turin. They were probably encouraged to come to Australia because of news that there were many opportunities for work in this distant country. They soon left for Australia on the sailing ship *Guema* with other Italians bound for the sugar fields.

When their ship arrived in Brisbane in 1892, Maria was taken off the boat to hospital, where the couple's first child, daughter Angela, was born. They then moved to Smithfield, north of Cairns, Queensland, where Salvatore Domenico Vignolio was born in July 1983. As described in the next chapter, another five children were born over the ensuing years.

The use of Kanakas was being phased out as part of the 'white Australia' policy, and certainly in the period from 1910 onwards, the Kanakas were replaced by gangs of immigrants, notably Italians. His children remember him talking about work, in the early days as a supervisor of Kanaka gangs. This was at Ripple Creek, just north of Ingham. The family lived in a tent. This was a very cruel time, especially as far as the Kanakas were concerned. It was quite usual for the supervisor to whip the workers as required. Michaela Guiseppina (Josie) was born here.

When the Kanakas finally left, conditions for the canecutters improved greatly (from incredibly cruel to just very bad), and workers' salaries increased to a rate much higher than that which the indentured Kanakas had experienced. For a while, Maurizo earned his living as cane cutter. He then bought a cane farm at Foremile, near Halifax. The living was rough: the farm house was a hut with a grass roof and dirt floors. They did not stay on the farm; it is said that Maurizo had bought

race horses, which lost a lot of money, and so the farm had to be sold. It was bought by a Chinese family named Matraka.

The family moved to Halifax, where the remaining children were born. The family lived in the back of a shop known as 'Ganzulian Shop' and for the dirt-floored rooms they paid a rent of two shillings and sixpence (25 cents) a week.

Picture: an early Italian cane-cutting gang.



Maurizo was obviously not content to be a farm labourer. He worked at the mill at Macknade, now owned by the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, and continued to save his money. By the 1920s, now about 50 years old, he was the proprietor of a boarding house in Halifax. He continued work at the mill and helped his wife and daughters run the boarding house at weekends. It was necessary to raise the house because of flooding, and it was moved to the main street where it stood for decades.



Salvo and Rose shared their wedding with Salvo's cousin, Solutra Robino, recently arrived from Italy, and schoolteacher Peggy Giddings. Salvo and Rose are on the left at the front, Sol and his wife at the right at the wedding party held at Braemeadows.

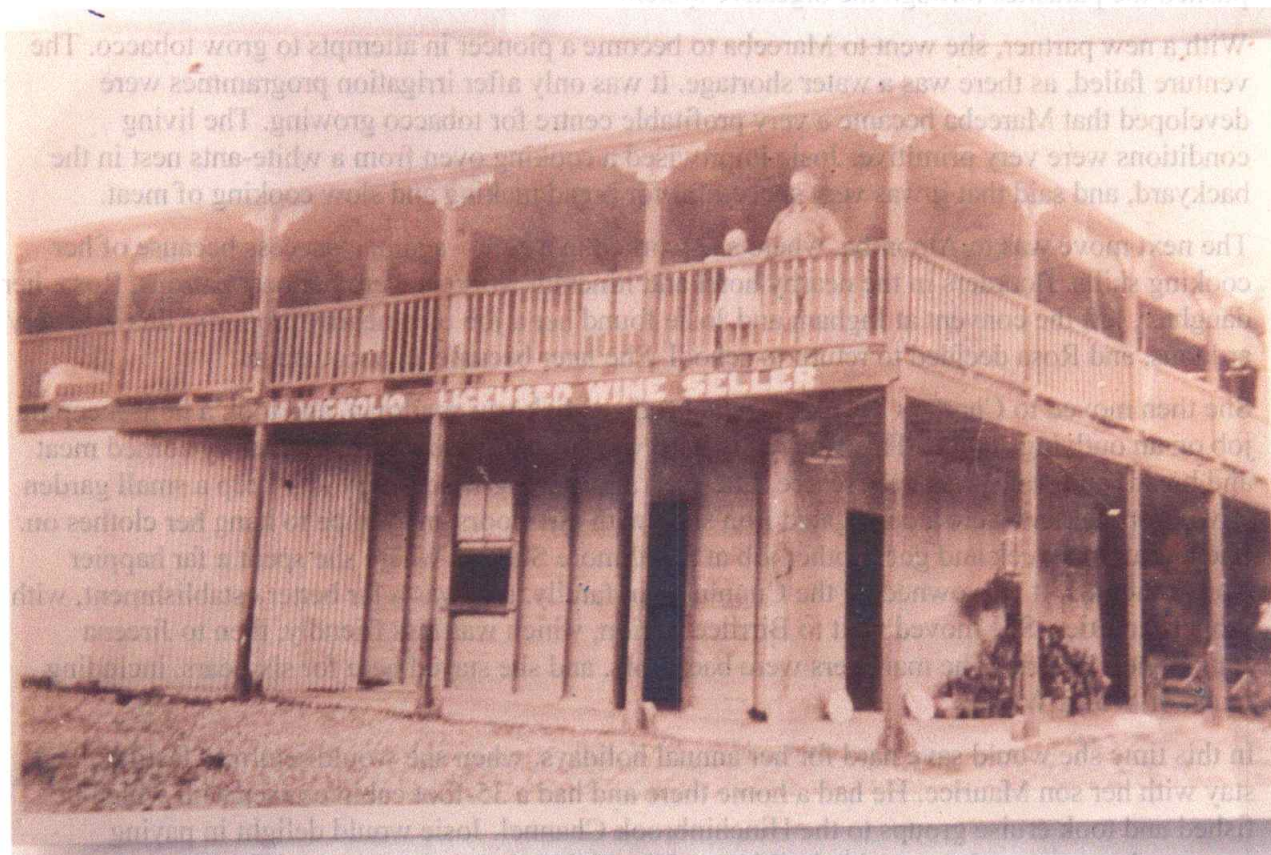
Josie Vignolio's story

Michaela Guiseppina (Josie) Vignolio was the third child of Maurizo and Maria. She was born at Ripple Creek in 1895 and the family shortly thereafter moved to Halifax.

It is hard for us to imagine the hardships of the time, but the general levels of poverty can be glimpsed by Josie's early life. At the age of nine Josie was sent to work 'for keep' for various families. This was a common fate of girls at the time. She worked for a Captain and Mrs Reader at Lucinda, then for the Adams and Dunningham families, who were teachers at Halifax. By the time she was 13 she was a very capable housekeeper.

Mrs Borello, who, like Maria Vignolio, was a midwife, left Ingham to go to Chartres Towers to set up practice, with a house with accommodation for expectant mothers. Josie went with her to work as housemaid. Mrs Borello had a high reputation as midwife. After a few years she returned to Ingham, where her husband had a profitable farm at Lannercost.

Josie continued with her domestic work, and also helped run her parents' guest house and wine shop. At the age of 17 she married Evasio Scagliotti, and her sister Angela married Frank Pavetto. The two couples bought a cane farm at Breameadows near Halifax. Angela looked after the farm house while Josie worked as a cook for the cane cutting gangs. The sisters quarrelled over this: Angela felt that Josie should give her half her wages. Josie's first son Maurice was born during this period. The farm was eventually sold to the Robinos, thought to be cousins of Evasio.



The wine bar in the late 1920s.

Evasio and Josie then went into partnership with Ornesto and Pietro Covasio in another cane farm. Ornesto returned to Italy and the farm was sold. Evasio and Josie moved to Halifax where Mario, their second son was born. They bought another farm, in partnership with Pietro, at Cons

Mick, her brother, returned from Charters Towers, and when he suddenly died his siblings were dismayed to find that he had left his home to his sister Josie rather than sharing his legacy among them all. But for the first time Josie now had some financial security.

She moved in with her son Mario, who had been divorced. Another son, Maurice, had bought a Quonset Hut, ('igloo') left over from the war, in which he established a movie theatre and dance hall. He purchased Salvo's projection equipment. His wife Norma and Josie ran a very successful café within these premises. Their pies were famous throughout the district. They did well financially, but the two women quarrelled in the kitchen and Josie returned to Halifax.

She was still remarkably healthy. She rode her bike around town well into her eighties. The family tried to hide it after a fall, but she found it and continued riding. Apart from a brief problem time in 1976, she remained a remarkably fit lady. Eventually, however she moved to the Warrena Home for the Aged, and she was happy here, especially when she was allowed to help in the kitchen. Things went quite well here until Sid and his wife moved to the Atherton tablelands. They had previously lived only a few minutes away and called in regularly. Desperately unhappy, she left the home and moved to a small cottage next door to Maurice and Norma, then living at Kurumbine Beach. She happily began a garden, but there were two problems: a broken arm (unsympathetically treated by a thoughtless doctor) and she also quarrelled with Norma. She stayed with her son Sid and her daughter-in-law Rina and eventually a suitable place was found in an aged home, Carinya, in Atherton. Here she settled quite well.. She was regularly visited by many members of her family, and was alert and enjoyed life. Cataract operations at the age of 89 and 90 were a great blessing: She had always been fond of reading, and for someone with such little formal education was remarkably knowledgeable. Her eyes failed permanently in mid-1990, and she seemed to lose interest in living and died on January 31, 1991.

Two of her sons served in the Australian army during the war, and this was brought out in evidence at Salvo's detention hearing. It was certainly of help to him, and it is also of interest that her ex-husband was not interned at all.

Her family was as follows:

1. Maurice: son from first marriage was Gerry, agricultural pilot, killed at age 41; children from second marriage (to Doreen Mizzi): Ian and Elena.
2. Mario, married to Ruby, living at Halifax with wife and two children
3. Adele, married, lived in Stanthorpe, had one child Alec; died of complications of a second pregnancy during the second world war.
4. Rose married James Brennan, had a son Robert and lived in Townsville.
5. Sid, married Rina Tibaldi, (to whom we are indebted for all the information in this section and much of the information in section 1), moved to Mount Isa where they had a son named Ray, and moved back to Innisfail after seven years.

this purpose. This was far more successful in the cities than in the isolated areas such as northern Queensland, where life went on much as usual. At the same time there was a growth in anti-Italian sentiment in many parts of Australia; as jobs became more and more scarce, Anglo-Australians tended to give some of the blame for this to the growing numbers of Italian immigrants.

Mussolini also wished to re-establish the Roman Empire. Britain had a huge overseas empire, and he wanted overseas possessions as well. In 1935 he moved to attack Abyssinia, which had been held by Italy in the late 1800s. This was clearly an illegal action, and the League of Nations condemned it. But no definite action was taken against Italy: the country was still supplied with oil and the military forces still were allowed to use the Suez Canal to conduct their campaign. The result was that Italy gained control of Abyssinia. However the cruelty of the Italian invasion, and its illegal nature, caused Italy to lose favour among many countries and people. The Italian military forces involved were huge, but were not well organised or well led. Poison gas was used, and this was widely condemned.

Italy was allied with Germany, whose Nazi dictator Hitler had copied Mussolini's methods in his rise to power. However Italy did not join in World War II when it broke out in September 1939, one of the reasons being that the Italian armed forces were not ready for action. Hitler's forces were easily victorious in the early stages of the war, defeating Poland and then France. On June 11 1940 Italy entered the war. This action was seen by the Anglos as 'a stab in the back' – not unreasonably it was felt that Mussolini had waited until it seemed that the Germans would be victorious and had joined in so that he would share in the 'loot' of a German victory.

At this time in Australia anti-Italian feeling ran very high. As early as 1939, plans had been made to arrest Italians, and non-naturalised Italians were quickly rounded up and interned when Italy entered the war. Frank Pavetto was one of these. Attendance at any of the vice-consular meetings held for expatriate Italians during the 1930s was seen as evidence of fascist tendencies. The situation became worse in early 1942 when the rampaging Japanese had joined the Germans and Italians and seemed poised to attack Australia.

In 1942 the number of Italians interned in Australia reached a wartime high of 3 651. But thereafter as the danger of Japanese invasion subsided, they were gradually released, and by September 1944, only 135 hard core fascists remained in the internment camps.

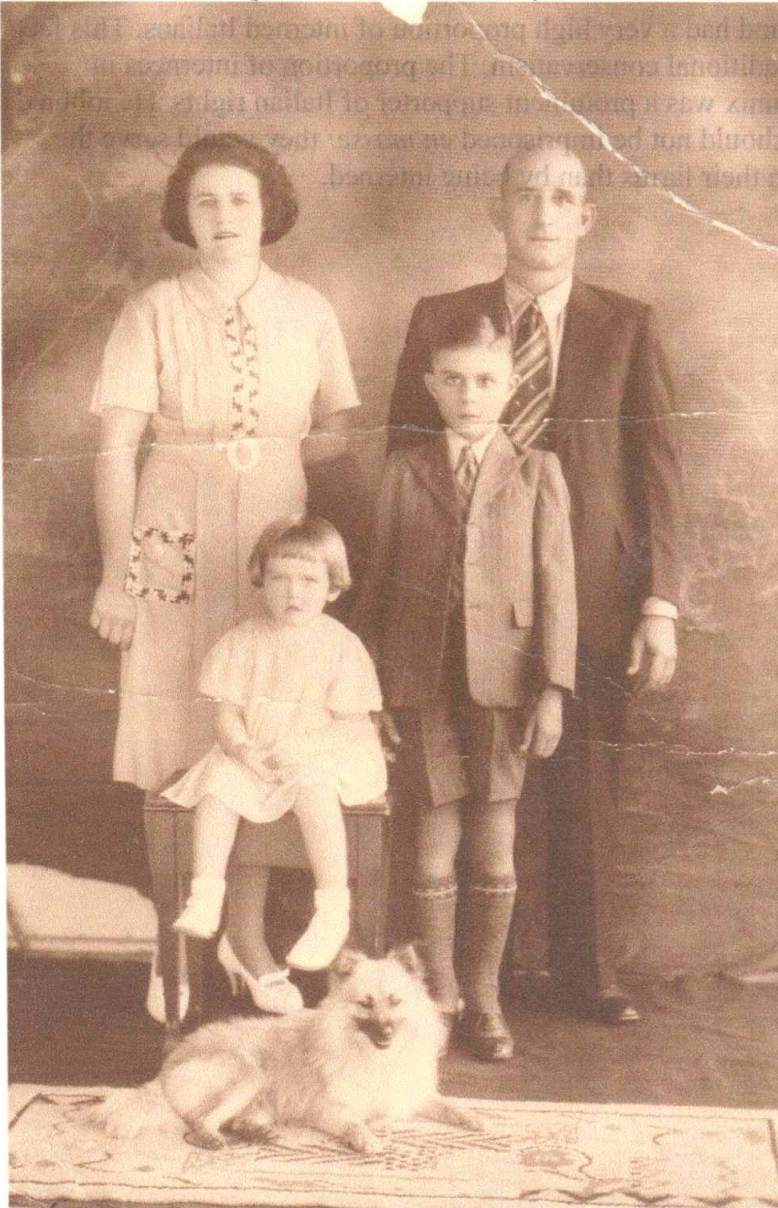
Mussolini's military actions were, by and large, disasters. Abyssinia was lost to the British, and there were huge defeats in Africa. The Italian invasion of Greece almost failed and had to be rescued by the Germans, much to the annoyance of Hitler, whose invasion of Russia was thereby delayed.

In 1942 Italy was bombed by the RAF, and July 1943 the Allies took Sicily, and within a few weeks they controlled the island. On July 24-25 Mussolini's government collapsed as a wide coalition of political groups asked the king to take over the government. Mussolini was arrested, and within a few months Italian forces were supporting the Allies against Germany.

By this time the Italian image in Australia had improved. There had been many Italian prisoners of war sent to Australia, and their behaviour was excellent. There was increasing realisation that the Italians had been badly treated in the dark times of 1940-42.

5: The start of the problems

In 1939 things began to go badly for Salvo. The international situation was worsening. Italy was a member of the Axis powers, consisting of Germany, Italy and Japan, and when Germany went to war in September 1939, tensions started to develop. It was clear that Italy might join the war, and that non-naturalised Italians living in Australia would immediately be arrested and interned; this happened to the German citizens at the beginning of the war. Even people who had fled Germany because they were opposed to Hitler were interned, and there was a lot of ill-feeling against all Germans. This antagonism was also felt by the Italian community.



Picture: the family in about 1938. Rose, Salvo, and in front Nola and Kevin with the dog Goff.

There was also problems with the cinema. One of the most interesting Australian films of the 1970s was 'The Picture Show Man'. It documented the struggle between two film operators; the older operator was challenged by a new operator, supported by a large company, who moved in to his territory. Salvo was involved in his own picture show war. In 1940 the cinema building was up for sale, and he could not afford to buy it. A large cinema chain moved in to the area, and offered him a very small price for his machinery. He did not accept, and the whole affair cost him a lot of money.

During the period in which these things were happening, Salvo was being hassled by the local police. The local sergeant, Sergeant Y, and other police, especially Constable X, were demanding free entry for all police and all their

families to all films. The police would, not very subtly, indicate that they had the power to be very harsh on Italians who crossed them.

When Italy joined the war on June 11 1940 Australia's war plans were quickly put into action. Salvo's brother in law, Francesco Pavetto, was immediately arrested and interned. He was the husband of Salvo's sister Angie. Many of Salvo's acquaintances, including one Angelo Natale Simonelli, were also interned.

6. The prison camps

There were several camps near Loveday, in South Australia's 'Riverland', and Salvo spent some time here before being sent to Cowra. At all the camps, the conditions were similar: there were weatherboard barracks. The huts were fairly basic, made of weatherboard with corrugated iron roofs. Thirty men slept in each hut, in bunks, usually on two levels. Within each hut was a small common area, and there were a few recreational huts, a church hut, kitchens, eating areas and ablutions blocks.



Cowra Camp, 1942

The huts at Cowra were arranged in rows within a large square; the square was divided into four by wide diagonal passages, and there were, for the Italians, minimal numbers of guards. Food was adequate and the prisoners were able to negotiate the menus.

Many of the interned men spent their time in the camps strolling in discussion with other men, playing cards or tending to the gardens. Unlike POW's, the internees were not forced to work, although they were often asked to help with the construction of camps.

The prisoners however kept themselves occupied in other ways, and early internees actually planted a vineyard, olive groves and orchards, which, by the end of the war, were quite extensive.



Volunteer prisoners working in the fields at an early stage.

7: Imprisonment and freedom

What happens next is clearly documented in the papers obtained from the Australian government by Salvo's daughter Nola in 1996. The most significant documents are reprinted in full in section 10.

The paper trail begins on 15 July 41. The standard procedure for government departments was the letter 'through channels'. The lowest person in the organisation would write the letter and each succeeding rank would endorse it. Constable X wrote a letter, which was forwarded by Sergeant Y to the Inspector of police at Townsville. (see document 1, page 29). In two pages it set out the case against Salvo. Basically, he was the brother in law of internee Francesco Pavetto. There were hearsay reports of two treasonable statements. He had said that he had only let police in free to his movie show to keep Pavetto out of internment. He was also a supporter of Angelo Simonelli who had been interned. Salvo had been protected because he was born in Australia.

The inspector of police then asked for more information including statutory declarations from witnesses to treasonable statements, and on 22 July 1941 Halifax police re-sent the letter, including a statutory declaration from Constable X, (document 2, page 31). It was claimed that declarations could not be obtained from other witnesses to Salvo's treason. All this was sent to one 'Major Wake', probably an officer of the Commonwealth department of security, on 30 July 1941.

On 8 August 1941 appears a report, unsigned, from 'IO Townsville', presumably a security officer. It is basically a rehash of Constable X's submission, with the same information. It is rather negative in tone.

In early September Constable X himself left the district. At about the same time the Ingham theatre company took over the running of the films. A certain Mr Morris, who had worked as projectionist in Salvo's cinema also left the district, probably to join the army.

On 6 September 1941 a report was forwarded from Capt RH Jensen, IO Townsville. He had informants throughout the area, and one, coded 'TR30 of Halifax' had given Salvo a good reference, including the phrase 'he seems too devoted to his home and business to worry about anything else'. Jensen said that Salvo would be watched and 'tried out' but there was no room for suspicion at that time.

However on 15 November 1941 he submitted another report, including the words 'sister married to F Pavetto, released internee and another married to Bob Parravicini, suspected pro-Fascist, is mixed up with Italians who are known to have Fascist tendencies'.

A further report on 18 December 1941 described an interview with Ray B of Macknade, V's former partner in the picture show, Brown had 'heard no disloyal utterance' but B thought that 'like the majority of Italians would be loyal to this country only as long as it suited his own ends'. We see a nice bit of prejudice here; Brown and Salvo had quarrelled about financing and running of the cinema.

On 5 February 1942 Salvo was arrested. A copy of the arrest warrant was sent with him to the Ingham lockup. This was signed by Sergeant Y, Halifax police, and was sent on by H Stolz, Townsville inspector of police, to Northern Army Command with a warning that an expense claim would be also be forwarded.

On the same day a letter was sent by a captain, possibly R R Hennessy, (the signature is unclear) to ISGS Northern Command Brisbane. In company with police, he had searched the Vignolio home as required; he had been told to look for documents, radios and anything else that might be suspicious. No suspicious correspondence was found; Salvo owned a 6 valve all wave Hot Point wireless and Chevy touring car no Q125-778, had 200 pounds in War Savings Bonds in Queensland. He was 'one of the few Italians I have met who I would judge to be loyal and Australian in his outlook. He is married to an Australian born girl and appears to live as British Australians do. If the report on Salvo held by ISGS is by Constable X late of Halifax I think that there may be some doubt as to its reliability. A number of civilians spoken to me gave me to understand that this Constable is not quite reliable. It will be noted that MHO reports favour this man'. This probably a reference to such reports as that of September 6, 1941.

It appears that Salvo had probably first been sent to Loveday camp in South Australia, and then on to the camp at Cowra but there is no exact record of the dates for this. He was certainly held in the Ingham lockup for four days following his arrest.

Meanwhile Salvo's wife Rose had been taking strenuous action to have her husband released. She had sought the support of friends within the town, who were very supportive.

On 13 March 1942, Salvo lodged an appeal for release on the basis of his Australian birth and citizenship. He also mentioned the fact that he had a good record as citizen, had never been associated with any political affiliations and had committed no act of disloyalty.

It is worth noting that at this time the war was not going well for Australia. In fact, April 1942 was probably the worst time of all. The Japanese had rampaged through Asia; Malaya and Singapore had fallen with ten thousand Australian soldiers made prisoners of the Japanese. Indonesia, then the Dutch West Indies, had been taken, and battles were under way in New Guinea. Darwin had been bombed, and the damage was severe. American aid had not yet begun to arrive in any big quantities. It is understandable, given the hysteria against all Germans, Italians and Japanese, that not much was done to release detainees. Rose approached the local member of Parliament, but he did not help until just before the appeal was due to be heard. Action on behalf of internees was not necessary a good electoral move for him.

In 7 April 42, an early letter from Cowra, Salvo wrote to his wife about the need to get financial papers from the bank - life insurance policy and shares in Equitable and Probate Insurance. The war Savings Certificates should be left at the bank. This letter was intercepted and copied by the camp authorities. Despite the pressures of the war, the prison censors had taken the time to copy the letter, and in due course Rose was interviewed about its contents. It is probable that this experience gave her an idea of how to get messages to the authorities later on.

Rose did not cease her efforts, but things moved rather slowly. It was only on 8 September 1942 that Security Service in Adelaide mentioned Salvo's *Application for Leave to Object against deportation* in a letter to the Security offices in Brisbane and Sydney.

On 15 September 1942 some public servant who is unnamed made a précis of Salvo's file. The summary identifies Salvo, summarises Constable X's claims and evidence, and came to a conclusion that there is no evidence he is subversive, though there was a report that his ex-partner in the movie business had not heard statements of disloyalty but did not trust him'. This was the main new negative evidence in the report.

When her husband was arrested, Rose had immediately gone to her local Member of Parliament to seek help. She did not have much success until on 30 November 1942 when G W Martens MP, of the Federal Members Rooms, Sydney wrote to the Attorney General in Canberra letter forwarding a letter from Rose Vignolio and asking for a review of the case. The letter outlined his

On 31 May Corporal McAuliffe, investigator for Townsville security service made another report. He also was happy to criticise Constable X – his ‘origins were unknown’ and he ‘was married to a Eurasian woman’, clearly grounds for suspicion in themselves! Sergeant Y and Constable X had reputations for extortion, Sergeant Y was now at Barcaldine and Constable X in Brisbane, working from Roma Street police station in plain clothes. Constable X had told ‘the Greek (café proprietor), Penklis’ that he would have Salvo interned. McAuliffe also noted with approval that Salvo had taken out a 200 pound Liberty Loan on release from internment’

On 26 August 1943 the Deputy Director of Security at Brisbane agreed that there was ‘some support for Mrs Vignolio’s claim of victimisation’. As a final step, orders were given to interview Morris, the former projectionist.

On 6 September 1943 Security Sydney at last forwarded a copy of a statement (document 8, page 44) signed by Morris and witnessed by Major J S McGown. In his statement he said that he had discussed the case with Constable X in Brisbane and had told the Vignolios about the conversation but could not remember what he had said. This sounds very suspect! There are two possible alternative explanations for this amazing statement: either he did not want to ‘rock the boat’ by testifying against a policeman, or some sort of deal was done which enabled the message to get through ‘unofficially’.

The last document is dated 22 December 1943. It was obvious to all that the internment was unjust, and also at that stage the whole complexion of the war had changed. Italy had surrendered; a (very) few hard-core Fascists continued to fight on the German side, but the majority of Italians were glad to see the end of Mussolini, and many Italians joined in the fighting against the Germans. In the Pacific, the Japanese had been stopped everywhere, and were being driven from New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Australia was clearly out of danger, and the climate was good for reconciliation with the Italian community.

The affair died down completely, and the usual peaceful life of the north Queensland town of Halifax was resumed.

A casualty of the war years and the early post war years were some magnificent trees. Some were removed when a new bridge was built over the river, and huge pine trees in the school playground were also cut down because it was feared they would be dangerous.

Within a few months of the start of the Japanese war the Americans began to arrive. I think that certainly my interest in aircraft began at that time, because soon the skies were full of many exciting kinds of military planes. The Australian Wirraways, who were practicing for army co-operation work, would come over very low and we could even see the pilots. One American aircraft crashed into Hinchinbrook Island in 1943 on a day of low cloud and in heavy rain, and was not found until 1945. I remember many other crashes.



The mighty B-17 was just one of the many types of aircraft that operated from Townsville.

One local lady, an islander, was an official aircraft spotter, and she would report aircraft movements to Townsville.

There were lots of mysterious activities associated with the military. Some of the local men from Halifax were coast guards, and they would go away for a few days at a time.

Engineers travelled to the close islands and made targets on them, which the US planes would attack.

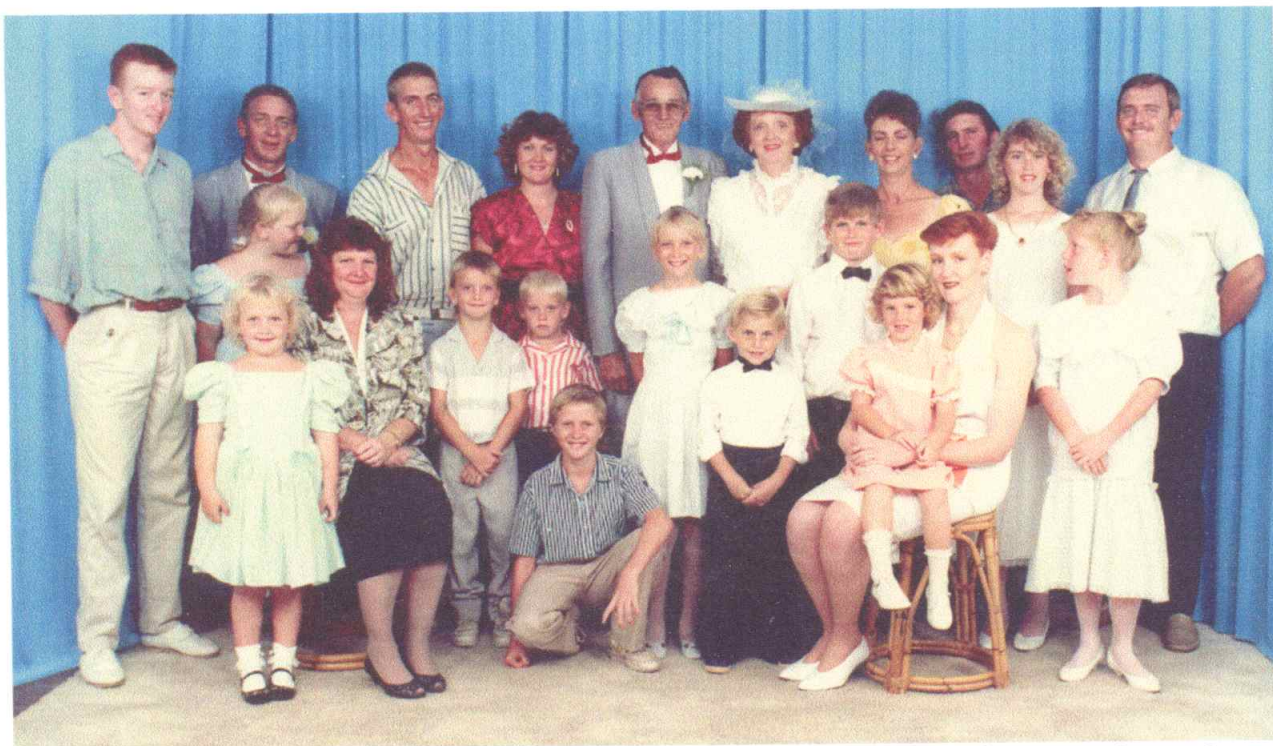
Most families were well established by the beginning of the second world war, but many were disrupted when the men were interned and sent south to camps. Sometimes the wives decided to accompany the men, and sometimes they decided to stay in Halifax.

Townsville was a huge air base and a point of departure for soldiers heading for combat in the pacific. They enjoyed coming to Halifax on leave. A few married local girls; my cousin Mary, who was nearly six feet tall, married an American soldier who seemed to be about eighteen inches taller. They live in the US and not surprisingly have very tall children!

Particularly towards the end of the war, some of the young Italian boys joined up. There was a shortage of men, and the workers who came in to cut the cane had a good time with the deserted women.



Family group at Kevin's daughter's wedding



The extended family continues to prosper. Nola, Kevin's sister, has many descendants.

Document 1: The original charge, 15 July 1941

Forwarded by Constable X and Sergeant Y.

COPY.

380/41.

Townsville District,
HALIFAX Station.
15th July, 1941.

CONFIDENTIAL.

Relative to: - Salvatore Domenico VIGNOLIO, of
Halifax - activities and sentiments.

-----COO-----

Sergeant B/o Mullins,
Halifax.

For further attention
and report. Can any
statements of
Statutory Declarations be
obtained to confirm the
within statements from
either civilians or
Police. If so, obtain
and forward.
W.J. Carseldine.

Inspector.
18/7/1941.

Sir,

I have to report that the abovenamed, Salvatore Domenico VIGNOLIO, a married man, 48 years of age, is a wharf labourer employed at Lucinda Point, near Halifax, and is also the proprietor of the local picture theatre at Halifax.

VIGNOLIO is the son of the late Maurizio VIGNOLIO and Maria VIGNOLIO, of Halifax. He was born in Queensland. His parents were residents of Halifax for a period of about 40 years, and he has himself resided here for about this period. His parents came to Australia from Italy, his father becoming naturalized.

One of the sisters of this man is married to Francesco PAVETTO, of Macknade, who was interned on the 11th June 1940 and released during October of that year. Another sister is married to Bortolo PARRAVICINI, a Fascist suspect of Halifax, and a third sister is living with an Italian named MORETTO at Babinda. Mrs. Giovanni IMARISIO and a Mrs. SCAGLIO TI, the latter residing at Stanthorpe, are also sisters of this man.

Salvatore Domenico VIGNOLIO has come under the notice of the Police here by reason of the anti-British sentiments expressed by him. I have been informed that during the recent screening of a short feature released by the Department of Information dealing with the activities of the A.I.F. in Egypt, VIGNOLIO remarked, "These things are the best comedies I get, look at the bludgers, you can almost smell them here, no wonder Britain is on her last legs".

It has also been reported to me that VIGNOLIO has expressed anti-British sentiments in connection with the attendance of members of the fighting services at this theatre whilst in uniform. It may be mentioned that this is one of the few theatres where a definite charge is made when men in uniform attend the theatre. Full admission price is demanded by VIGNOLIO from all uniformed men attending his theatre.

A local resident of Halifax who is well known to the Police as a very reliable person has reported to me that recently a member of the R.A.A.F. attended this theatre, from Macknade, and VIGNOLIO said, "I'll let none of these bastards in free, unless I was sure they would drop dead inside, that might save somebody a job over the other side".

I have learned, in addition, that when Police have been in this theatre he said, "I only let these bloody Johns in free to keep Frank out". It is apparent that he was referring to PAVETTO, his brother-in-law, the inference being that the Police would reciprocate and take measures to assist PAVETTO to remain free at large and avoid re-internment.

Inspector of Police.
Townsville.

Constable [redacted]
For attention and report
Serg. [redacted] 6/2187

Document 2: supporting information sent by X and Y on 22 July 1941.

Inspector Carseldine had asked X and Y to send more evidence, in the form of statutory declarations. Constable X rewrote the hearsay allegations of document 1 in the form of a statutory declaration, which he signed, but said that everyone was too scared of the Italians to supply declarations themselves.

6/ TPV COMMISSIONER

Forwarded. It would appear that Salvatore Domenico VIGNOLIO is a person definitely disloyal and a probable danger to the British Empire. I would recommend his internment.

Statutory Declaration from Const. Hocken is attached. No other declarations or statements could be obtained on account of fear of reprisals

J. CARSELDINE.
Inspector.
26.7.41.

Police Dep. Qld.
29 Jul. 41 36581
COMMISSIONERS
OFFICE.

Confidential.

Major Wake.
For consideration
& favour of action.
S.D. herewith.

C.J. CARROLL.
COM. OF POLICE.
30.7.41.

1(b)
For attention pls.

R.F.B.W.
5/8

CONFIDENTIAL.

Townsville District
HALIFAX Station.
22nd July 1941.

Relative to:- Salvatore Domenico VIGNOLIO of
Halifax. Vide attached file. Inspector's Ref. 1017WB

Sir,

I have to report respecting your minute on attached report that Statutory Declarations or statements cannot be obtained from the persons supplying information contained in the report referred to.

The reason for this is that the persons furnishing this information do not wish their identity disclosed fearing reprisals from Italians if it is suspected that they have supplied information of this nature to the Police.

I have furnished a Statutory Declaration setting out that the information contained in this report was received from proven reliable sources and that the matter contained in the report is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, true.

Original Statutory Declaration, together with copies (4) attached.

Inspector of Police,
TOWNVILLE.

Constable. No. 3404

Submitted, although information is obtained on these matters, from reliable sources, the persons concerned are not prepared to have the information furnished in writing, as they do not desire their identity disclosed. It has been pointed out to the persons concerned that any information they supply to the Police, even if in writing, that same is treated as strictly confidential, but even under these conditions it has not been possible to get signed statements.

Sergeant. 2/c 2167

M.Y. 18/4/88

Salvatore Dominico VIGNOLIO.
Macrossan Street, Halifax.

British.
Born, 31 Jul 93, Cairns, Q.
Wharf Labourer, and ex-picture show proprietor.

PRECIS OF FILE.

1. Came under notice by reason of alleged expressed anti-British utterances. During the screening of a film released by the Department of Information dealing with the A.I.F. in Egypt, he is reported to have remarked "These things are the best comedies I get, to look at the bludgers, you can almost smell them here, no wonder Britain is on her last legs".
2. He is also alleged to have remarked to a member of the R.A.A.F., concerning persons in uniform attending his theatre, "I'll let none of those bastards in free unless I was sure they would drop dead inside, that might save somebody a job over the other side".
3. T.R. 54 Madnade reports that by reason of his sisters marriages he is well mixed up with Italians who are known to have Fascist tendencies.
4. Is no longer a picture show proprietor, now working on Lucinda Wharf. No evidence available that he is subversive.
5. T.S.P., report that his ex-partner in the picture business has not heard him make any disloyal utterances, but is of the opinion he would be loyal as long as it suited his ends.
6. Anti-British sentiment in connection with the members F.F. attending his theatre.

There was a transcript of a letter written by Salvo early in his imprisonment:

Date letter examined: 7/4/42.
No. 8075.
Date: 2/4/42.
From: S. VIGNOLIO, Internment Camp, Gaythorne.
To: Mrs. S. VIGNOLIO, Box 6, Halifax. (WIPK)

Written in English.

Re my private papers you got from the Bank. Look after them to the best of your ability. Their should be my Life Insurance Policy, and 500 shares in the Equitable and Probate Insurance Coy., they are about the most important papers. However re the £200 War Savings Certificates, get the first and last numbers from the Bank Manager, and leave them at the Bank as the responsibility is too great to have them at home.

Names mentioned:

Remarks:

The military report: there were other similar documents. Note the comment on Constable X.

52

AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES- NORTHERN COMMAND.
Box 507 Townsville,
5 Feb, 42.

I.S.G.S.,
Northern Command,
Victoria Barracks,
BRISBANE.

SEARCH OF PREMISES.
Salvatore Donenico VIGNOLIO.

An order to Enter and Search issued under National Security (General) Regulations, by Captain Archdall, O.C., N.C. Sectt, Aust. I Corps, was executed by the Halifax Police, Sub-Inspector Connolly of Townsville Police and I.O. Townsville being present.

No correspondence was taken.

VIGNOLIO possesses a 6 valve all wave hot point wireless and also Chev Touring Car. No. Q.125-778.

He has £200 in War Savings Certificates in the Q.N. Bank, Halifax.

VIGNOLIO is one of the few Italians I have met who I would judge to be loyal and Australian in his outlook. He is married to an Australian born girl and speaks and appears to live as British Australians do.

If the Police report on VIGNOLIO held by I.S.G.S., is by Const. [redacted] late of Halifax, I think there may be some doubt as to its reliability. A number of civilians spoken to gave me to understand that this Constable is not quite reliable.

It will be noted that M.R.O., reports favour this man.

(Sgd) R.H. Jensen, Capt.
I.O. Townsville.

The next documents summarised the case made by Constable X and Sergeant Y.

The only new evidence was contained in this document:

6. APPENDIX F. Report by Sgt. R.J. Pike, F.S.P., 15 Dec. 41, submitted by Capt., R.H. Jensen, I.O. Townsville, 18 Dec. 41.
- (a) Report of interview with Mr. Roy B. [redacted] of Macknade, *Business Partner*
 - (b) B. [redacted] was in partnership with VIGNOLIO in a Picture Theatre in Halifax.
 - (c) During his association with VIGNOLIO, B. [redacted] did not hear the latter make any disloyal statements, nor did he indicate his sentiments.
 - (d) B. [redacted] expressed the opinion that VIGNOLIO, like the majority of Italians would be loyal to this country only as long as it suited his own ends.

Mr B had quarrelled with Salvo over ownership of the theatre.

This document indicates that Salvo had been under observation even before the arrest, and had been regarded as being of no possible threat.

AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES - NORTHERN COMMAND.

Box 507 Townsville,
6 Sept, 41.

I.S.G.S.,
Northern Command,
Victoria Barracks,
BRISBANE.

Salvatore Domenico VIGNOLIO - Halifax.

Reference M.I. 18/4/1688, of the 30 Aug, 41.

The following report on the abovenamed has been received from
Tr. 30 or Halifax.

"This person is Australian born and educated in this district schools. He owns and has owned the picture show business in Halifax for years. He also works the boats, loading and unloading at the Port of Lucinda and makes good money. He is married to a British Australian born woman and has a child, an adopted child and I have never heard him make use of anti-British statements. He seems too devoted to his home and business to worry about anything else.

I shall watch his future movements and try him out, but at present I think there is no room for suspicion".

Two other M.R.Os., were asked for a report on VIGNOLIO at the same time but so far no reply has been received by this subsection.

(Sgd) R.H. Jensen, Capt.
I.O. Townsville.

What other police were there that you knew?---There was Harry Moy, Jack Tobin, he was not there very long, and previous to him, there was a constable named Hocking.

How did you get on with them?---All right.

Did you get on all right with Moy and Hocking?---Yes, they used to walk in and out of the picture theatre.

Was Hocking there when Sergt. [REDACTED] was there?---Yes, I was a member of the Rifle Club for years.

What do you think of Australia. What are your sentiments, so far as Australia is concerned?---This is the only country I know.

What do you think of the A.I.F. and the Air Force?---I have two nephews in the A.I.F., my sister's boys. They were both in Egypt and one returned at the beginning of this year, and the other one in the middle of the year.

What do you feel about the A.I.F. and the Air Force?---I admire them.

Are you anti-English?---No.

Can you speak Italian?---A little bit. I learnt it more since I have been interned than I ever knew.

Who makes that report on the last page, Capt. Paterson. He just has "Capt.".

CAPT. PETERSON: That is a letter that has been compiled by an officer who normally instructs me in Queensland. It is not his own information. It is a letter he has written for information.

THE CHAIRMAN (to the Objector): Have you a brother-in-law called Pavetto?---Yes.

There was some suggestion of interning Pavetto, has he been interned? ---Yes.

You knew there was a likelihood of his being interned?---No, in fact, I do not talk to any of my brothers-in-law.

You had a row with them?---Yes.

How long ago?---With Pavetto, years and years ago.

Did it matter to you whether he was interned or not?---I did not take any notice of it.

It is stated here that you said "I only let the bloody Johns in free to keep Frank out", meaning to keep Frank Pavetto out of internment?---That is absolutely untrue, Your Honor. Since I have had the theatre, the police themselves always went in, but not their families.

Did you refuse other police to allow their wives and families to go in free other than Sergt. [REDACTED]?---There was a policeman who asked me.

Who was it?---A policeman called Arnold Still. That was roundabout 1935.

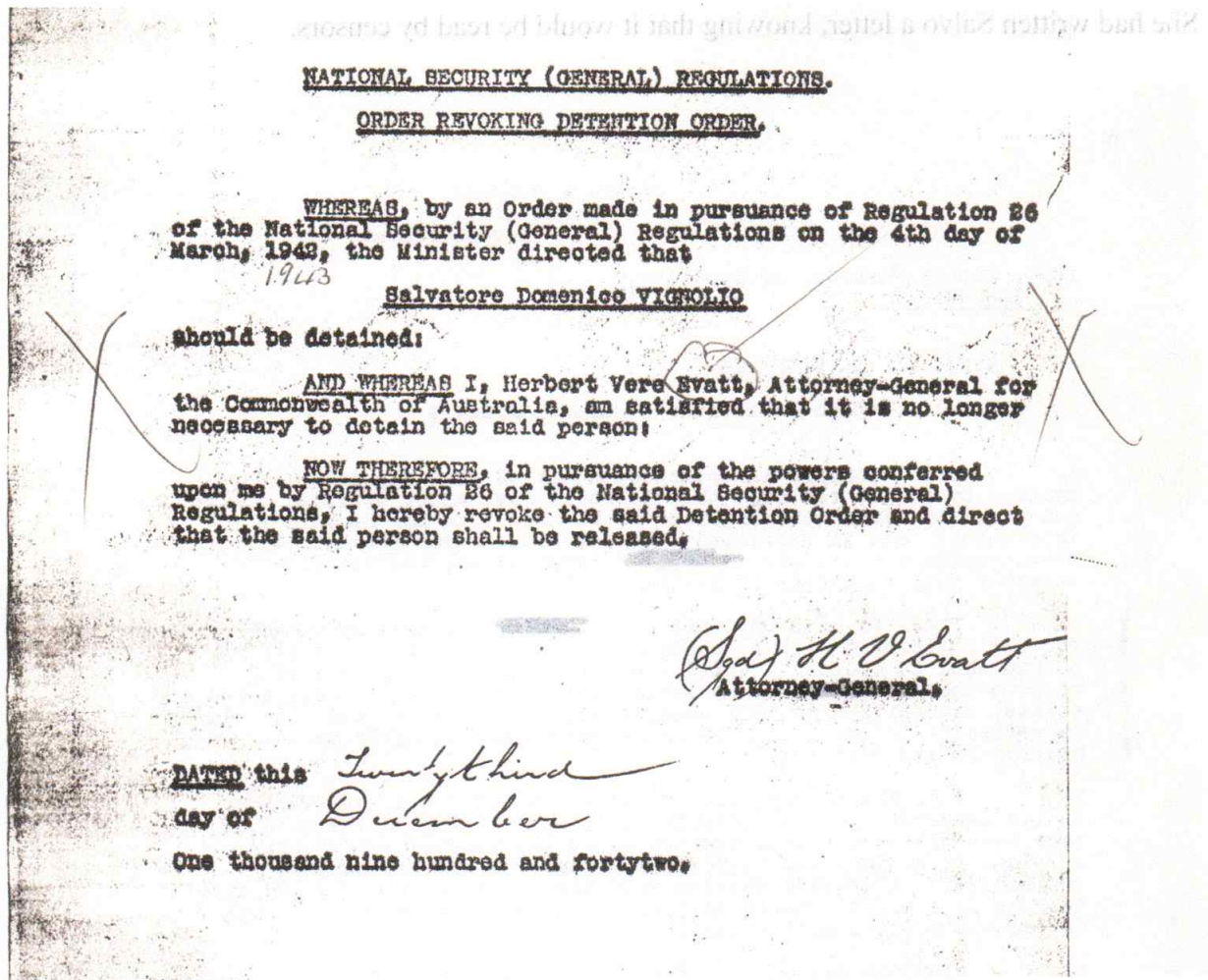
It was well known to the police who subsequently came there that you
FM/F/3b.

3.

S.D.VIGNOLIO. 1042/42.

7.

Document 5: Revocation of the detention order



H V Evatt was the wartime Attorney-General. He was a brilliant lawyer who later helped write the UN charter, led Australia's delegation to the first United Nations meetings (1946-48), and served as president of the General Assembly (1948-49). He was less successful as leader of the Labour Party in the 1950s. He opposed the referendum aimed at outlawing the communist party, and the Labour Party split that resulted caused Labour to be in opposition until the time of Gough Whitlam. He remains an interesting person of undoubted high moral values, but not a good politician!

Document 7: 31 May 1943 – another interview with Rose and Salvo

Further follow-up of Rose's complaints:

COPY

Security Service,
TOWNSVILLE.
31/5/43.

O/C.,
Investigation Section,
Security Service,
TOWNSVILLE.

Q30661 Salvatore Domenico VIGNOLIO.

1. Mrs. VIGNOLIO was interviewed in the presence of her husband at her home on 27th May, 1943.

2. The incident referred to in para one of her letter to the Director-General dated 4th March, 43, was explained as follows - VIGNOLIO and a friend named Tom BRIGGS were standing near the Hinchinbrook Cafe, Halifax, when Const. [redacted] approached and told them to keep quiet as he would arrest them on a charge of drunkenness. VIGNOLIO and BRIGGS had been drinking but claimed to [redacted] that they were not drunk. [redacted] walked away and Briggs said, "It seems we can't have a drink but he [redacted] can get drunk and lie on the road all night". [redacted] overheard the remark and arrested Briggs at the same time saying something about having VIGNOLIO interned.

3. Reference para. 2. No information is available locally which would indicate [redacted]'S origin. He is married to a woman who appears to be Eurasian. Italians in Halifax district openly state that both Const. [redacted] and Sgt. [redacted] made a practice of graft and extortion. This statement is so widespread that a full departmental enquiry seems justified - [redacted] is at present stationed at Barcaldine. [redacted] is said to be attached to Roms St. in plain clothes.

4. Reference para. 3. There is reason to believe that [redacted] told the Greek, Penkles, that he would intern Vignolio but Penkles is unwilling to make a statement to that effect.

5. Morris referred to in Mrs. VIGNOLIO'S letter is QX 44410 Pte. Gilbert Morris, 5 A.A.W.- A.E.M.E., stationed at Charters Towers.

6. It may be of interest to note that VIGNOLIO has invested £200 in the Liberty Loan since his release from internment.

(sgd.) H. McAuliffe, Investigator.

About this book....

All information about the Vignolio family came from family sources or from the documents obtained by the family in regard to the detention. Apart from Kevin's notes, the work of Rina Scagliotti contained invaluable information about Maurizo as well as the story of Josie's interesting life. We included this because it shed light on the living conditions of the time, and to underline the fact that the members of the family were too concerned with making a living to be involved in any kind of politics, much less in fascist plots. The story of Josie is a testament to the power the human spirit and of the dignity of labour. It had to be retold, even if only in this abbreviated form.

The material in section 1, apart from the specific information about Maurizo, came from internet websites concerned with the early sugar industry in Queensland. By far the best of these is http://www.hinchinbrooknq.com.au/indst_sugar_earlyyears.htm

I included the material on the international situation between the wars (section 3) to give some context to the events leading up to the war. The facts are as stated, but the interpretations are mine; there are many who look back to the past as a time of black-and-white judgements, but it was never so. I believe that the same people who approved of fascist principles in the twenties and early thirties would take the forefront in the persecution of expatriate Germans, Italians and Japanese in the wartime.

General material on the camps came from Teruhiko Asada's book 'Cowra' published by Angus and Robinson, 1972, and these websites:

http://www.teachingheritage.nsw.edu.au/b_expressing/wb2_italpris.html

home.st.net.au/~dunn/pow/campcowra.htm

http://www.takver.com/history/fantin_francesco.htm

Tom Lockley

