



Mike and Stefani: Production Letters

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13th September, 1949

Dear Kevin,

1. I have completed the survey of the DP camps in Germany, IRO installations, and the Australian Selection teams. The only team I haven't visited is the one at present operating in Austria, and I consider that the amount of time spent travelling to its location and back would not be justified by the additional (if any) knowledge gained. I may see this team later when it moves closer to Germany, but I don't think that it is important in relation to the film. My chief reason for trying to see ALL of the Australian Selection people was to find one or two people who would be suitable for inclusion in the film. At the same time it was convenient to visit them all (except the one mentioned) because in doing this I also had to visit the various Area Headquarters of the IRO groups operating all over Germany. It has been a long and mostly tedious business and I am glad that it is over. An itinerary is attached for your information.

2. Towards the end of the itinerary I met up with General Galleghan who is on leave at Ehrwalt (on the German-Austrian Border). This was pre-arranged so that I could discuss the whole project with him before settling down to write a script and begin arrangements for production.

3. The General seems to be pretty much in agreement with my ideas about the film. He confesses that he was not particularly pleased when he heard that we were coming over as he could see no value in the kind of film showing the various processes of documentation and selection. However, since I have given him my views on treatment he has become quite enthusiastic about the project and is keen to help. While this is encouraging it still does not open up the way for me to go straight ahead with the production.

4. As I explained in my previous letter, the job is a much bigger one that I anticipated, and I find it difficult, from this distance, to put the facts clearly before you. To begin with, I don't know how much money is available for this production. If there is a limit of say, £2,000, we can't make the film referred to in the correspondence between Mr Heyes and General Galleghan as "a record of a great experiment... that will command international interest... and assist our local assimilation campaign." The most we could do would be to make a film along the lines of "We Found A Home". This, I am quite sure, would be no more than touching the fringe of the subject's possibilities. Quite frankly I don't know how much it would cost to make the film properly, but I think that the sponsors should be prepared to go to £5,000 as the ultimate and completed cost.

5. General Galleghan suggested that IRO would be prepared to contribute some part of this amount because a successful film on the lines that we visualise would do a good job for IRO as well as for Australia. It is too early to say just how far IRO would come into the project financially but there seems every reason to believe that the contribution might be substantial. Nothing can be done about this until the IRO council meetings in Geneva early next month, when, I feel sure, General Galleghan will bring the matter forward if you people in Canberra have no objection.

6. A more immediate offer of help has come from the British Information Service in Germany. This is an agency of the British Occupation Government to which is attached a Film Division. The Film Division has a small studio in Hamburg equipped with the necessary sound cameras and lighting gear, and has also a library of material that includes some DP sequences. I am arranging to go to Hamburg for a few hours this week to get details of what is available and possible costs. When I get back I will attach a postscript to this letter.

7. My main personal problem is that of the actual production assistance. As you know, if this film were being made at home we would have a unit of at least four people on it backed up by the Burwood organisation and an established administrative system. Here I am on my own once I leave Berlin and have to do everything but put petrol in the car. Reg has to stick to his cameras and, because of the language difficulty and his temperament, is not able to take much part in general organisation. The result is, of course, that shooting will be a very slow process.

8. I believe that when we are ready to shoot, IRO will lend us an officer from its Public Relations Office to help out with the organisational liaison in the various camps. If this can be done it will be a great help. On the other hand if this is not possible I will find the job too much for me unless I can get experienced assistance of some kind. The point is that this is to be a film about individual people - it has to be properly acted if we are going to bring out the significant and personal human relationship between the DP characters and the audience in Australia and elsewhere. The film is not to be a generalisation - it is not to illustrate a mass problem: on the contrary its very purpose is to make Mr. Joe Smith in Australia realise very deeply that Otto Pzarkis is not only a man to be pitied but a man to be admired and understood and liked. You can't do this by showing DPs being herded around in camps or being given cakes of soap. You have to do it by showing Otto as a man clinging to dignity in a sea of indignity; as being a man with ideas and ideals and sensitivity: as a man not so much attempting to fly from misery as a man ambitious to live freely and by his own endeavours. You can't do this by the employment of conventional shots of crowds of DPs, or shots in the dining room and in the medical examination centre, or in the barrack rooms that are their homes. The shooting of this film is going to be a full-time job without the organising and telephoning and arranging for cars et al. But it can be a grand film and everything that we put into it will be tremendously worthwhile.

9. When we finally select our family group there will be other problems that may involve some expenditure. The departure of these people for Australia will be delayed for our purposes by possibly two months and unless you are a DP you can't imagine what this means. We shall have to offer them more than assurances of preferential treatment in Australia if we are to get their whole-hearted co-operation. It will be necessary to give them some sense of immediate security and some additional comforts so that although they will continue to be identified with the mass of the DPs, they will also be in receipt of some tangible compensation for their sacrifice (and sacrifice it is when you see your friends going off to Australia and leaving you behind). This again is a problem that has to be faced when it becomes more immediate: in the meantime I would be glad if Mr. Heyes could send me a little note (preferably signed by the Minister) saying that any DPs who delay their departure from Europe in the interests of the film, and who give whole-hearted co-operation in its making, will be adequately compensated in Australia. As a beginning I would make the term of their two-year contract begin from the moment we take them over in Germany.

10. So much for generalities: I am in Berlin catching up on paper work and finding out about these British studio facilities. I spent the whole day yesterday trying to work out travelling expenses etc. in five different currencies. Apparently the accountant in London hasn't been advised about our rates and the thing is a little confused. Reg is in Frankfurt. He has been making some hand tests of material already shot, and has spent a day repairing the ravages of travel evident in the wire-recorder. Tomorrow he goes to a camp to make two complete recordings of an Australian Selection officer in action. I need these to help me in writing the script. Then he is going to shoot some undirected material round about Frankfurt for the rest of the week.

11. I will go back to Frankfurt by train over the week-end and Reg will meet me with the car. He will take me as far as a place called Leipheim where there is a small IRO centre within half-an-hour's car drive of six camps. I propose to stay at Leipheim with the IRO team (headed by an Australian woman) for about a week during which time I will concentrate entirely on the script. At the same time the IRO people in the six camps will be on the look out daily for the ideal family or component parts thereof. By staying in this one place I will be able to hop into a car and run out to the camps at the ring of a telephone: I'm sure its[sic] the only way by which we shall find the people we are looking for.

12. While I am at Leipheim Reg will go on to Bad Eibling (near Munich) where there is a children's camp. We made a preliminary survey there last week but couldn't shoot anything owing to various domestic upheavals at the camp. This camp is directed by an Australian and there are a number of children there who are going to Australia in due course. I won't be able to direct any shooting myself but in order to keep Reg occupied I have asked him to make an item for Jack Allan and then come back to Leipheim to pick me up.

13... Once the script is written and the main characters located we can get down to planned production, in the meantime it would be useless for me to go chasing around with Reg looking for single shots and items. It is better that he shoot up some film and keep himself active and interested in the job - so far it has been very trying for him and he is not very happy. You can imagine how miserable you would get just travelling around the country day after day for thirty days and listening to conversations of which you couldn't understand a word.

14. Attached is a very rough outline of the film as I see it. As soon as possible I will send a full script and, I hope, some positive information about the shooting programme. Meanwhile you can be sure that everything is being done to see that the project is being pushed forward as quickly as possible.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

RMW

Reference para.6.

P.S. I have seen the British Information Service film people in Hamburg: they are very interested in a film on the lines that I have suggested, and will be glad to lend technicians and equipment if authority can be obtained from the head of the British Information Service in Berlin.

I was already aware that this authority would be needed, but on General Gallegan's advice I went to Hamburg first to see what the film section could offer before making a formal request.

I have a card from the General introducing me to the Berlin people, but as the General himself will be back within a few days I will suggest to him that he make the approach seeing that we are dealing with a Military Government.

If we can get practical assistance from the British and financial help from IRO we should be suitably armed to tackle the film as outlined. The factors of time and cost that have rather worried me will be largely taken care of if we can arrange this collaboration, and we should find that our tentative schedule and estimate will not be exceeded by much, if any.

It will take a week or so to negotiate these arrangements. In the meantime the film people in Hamburg are going to look for some footage of early material dealing with bombing raids, the original trek of the refugees, and the early DP camps. They were also able to put me on to locations along the zone border where refugees are still coming in from the East, so we may be able to get some authentic and effective shots of this phase.

ITINERARY COMPLETED SEPTEMBER 1ST TO SEPTEMBER 9TH

- September 1: Visited 3 camps in the Leipheim area. Interviewed likely families. Left Leipheim at 1400 hours drove to Tuttlingen in the French Zone to see Australian Selection team...arrived 1700 hours. Spent evening with the team.
- Fri.2: Visited ARO SP camp in French Zone. Arranged passes, currency, petrol tickets, etc. for travel through French Zone. Watched Australian team at work. Left Tuttlingen 1400 hours. Drove to Lindau shooting scenes en route.
- Sat.3: Left Lindau 0700 hours for Innsbruck. Shot scenes en route. Arrived Innsbruck 12 noon. Saw IRO HQ and had talks. Went on to stay at nearby village for the week-end. Prospected for scenes.
- Sun.4: Shot a sequence of harvest thanksgiving procession round a Tyrolian village.
- Mon.5: Left Innsbruck after further talks with IRO about activity in the area. Decided not to visit Australian teams because of distance. Went to Ehrwalt to meet General Galleghan.
- Tues.6: Conference with General Galleghan all morning while Reg and driver went up the mountain to take shots. Afternoon took a couple of scenic shots. Evening, further discussions with General Galleghan.
- Wed.7: Left Ehrwalt 0700. Called in at Gemisch, prospected for locations but weather prevented shooting. Went on to Munich to see HQ IRO in this area. Talks.
- Thurs.8: Left Munich 0900 for Bad Eibling. Went right through the children's camp. Made arrangements to shoot a Diary item later on. Looked for children likely to be included in a composite family if necessary. Noted two prospects.
- Fri.9: Left Bad Eibling 0800. Drove right through to Frankfurt noting several locations. Heavy rain. Reached Frankfurt 1500. Attended to administrative details.
- Sat.10: Flew to Berlin leaving Reg in Frankfurt with a programme.

DP FILM - SCRIPT OUTLINE

(1) Where did the DPs come from

- (a) A DP is a man, woman or child who in ordinary times would be living the traditional life of an ordinary European man, woman or child. This DP would live in a provincial town or village and would differ from an Australian mainly in some minor distinctiveness of domestic convention and habit. Instead of drinking in pubs he or she would drink in cafes. The design of their houses would be different as would be the layout of their towns. In the farming districts their methods and equipment would appear somewhat old-fashioned but picturesque to Anglo-saxon eyes. Their countryside has a different contour and is more varied within narrower limits than ours. In some districts there is a marked difference in conventional dressing. In rural districts particularly, it is evident that the various churches have a more direct influence on the lives of the people than they do in our own country.

Among the people living in one such provincial district as illustrated, we find a girl - the daughter of a local tradesman or professional man. She might be a school-teacher or nurse, or she might be just looking after her father.

On the other hand, our DP might have lived in one of the bigger cities of Europe: Warsaw, Buda-Pest, Prague or some such. He would be used to a certain garishness of architecture, to side-walk cafes, to horse-drawn cabs, cobbled main streets, rows of little shops, city squares etc. In such a town there will be a young man who came from one of the country districts to study at university or more likely, to get a job of some sort. This young man is going to marry the girl from the country.

The girl comes up to town. There is some sort of mild celebration. The girl and the young man, and his brother with wife and son, are taking tea or coffee or wine on the side-walk. There is a gayness and vivacity about these people.

That is a picture of the kind of people who became DPs, and of the background against which they grew up and lived. But there is a shadow over all of this. The shadow of warplanes in the sky; and the incessant hysteria of the radio announcer breaking in on the music, to talk about war and conscription.

But the young man and the young woman (who, for convenience, we shall call Pina and Filitza) are married and there is a small daughter. And there are modest rooms in a modest house in a street that is lined with trees.

(2) Why they are DPs

Then there was a war that raged across Europe. Men were conscripted into armies. Were captured and put into other armies. Escaped across ever-shifting borders. Were rounded up and sent across Europe to other lands as forced labour. Whole populations were moved from one country to another to make room for battlefields. Thousands just fled from their homes and wandered across the continent.

Towns were smashed and women left desolate - their menfolk somewhere in Europe as soldiers, prisoners, forced labourers, underground workers, or corpses... who could tell?

When the war finished there were 8,000,000 refugees in Europe thronging the roads towards the camps established by the Allied authorities. In these camps the refugees were sorted out. made clean, healed of their sicknesses, rested, and if possible, repatriated back to their own towns and villages with enough food and clothing to keep them going for a while. When this job was finished there were 1,000,000 people left in the camps. These people could not go back because their countries no longer existed: or if they did exist, they were ruled by new masters - masters unacceptable to the refugees. These 1,000,000 people were the DPs. If these people had all been young and healthy and unattached, the rest of the world would have absorbed them easily. But many were family groups - old men and women, and young children, Cripples, dying people, women looking for lost husbands, men looking for lost wives and children.

(3) The first camp

A million people in hundreds of camps scattered all over Germany and parts of Europe. The people live in huts and barracks. They are fed like an army but not as well. Two or even three families share a small room, partitioned off in some cases with furniture or blankets. In one of these shared rooms is Filitza and her small daughter... Filitza the gay young lady from the Pronvinces (sic)... Filitza the school teacher... the young lady who married the boy in the city back home. She was an attractive lass, full of the joy of living. Now Filitza is a number - a DP - living on the charity of an International Organisation. There is no word of her husband Pina. Her father, she knows, was killed. She doesn't know about anybody else, except her daughter, who is with her in the DP camp.

Two agency officials at a flimsy wooden table in a hut. The table is littered with papers and files. There are notices on the wall - mainly in German but also in other European languages. There is an interpreter sitting alongside. There is a drone of voices speaking several languages. The officials are writing down particulars on a form. You hear them speaking as they write. "Filitza Girst - Ruthenian - aged 28 - married - refugee - daughter aged 3 - husband missing - last heard of at POW camp".... and so on.

Filitza is at the table being 'Registered'. Many questions - so many questions: questions that will be asked of her a thousand times within the next two or three years. In the room are dozens of other refugees going through the same process. Young people, old people, family groups, women alone with young children - all kinds of people. Outside in the corridors, and further outside in the camp area are hundreds of these people standing about in groups... waiting to be registered, to be interviewed, to repeat the same answers to the same questions that they will answer a thousand times before they escape from all this. People waiting, standing around in groups: some of them will wait for three or four years.

Filitza walks back through the camp to her corner of a room. She walks past the waiting people, the longing people, the people with their baggage, people clustered around notice boards, people talking, waylaying officials, screaming at children. And the loud-speakers never stop. Achtung! Achtung!... always Achtung.... Go there, come here, sit down, stand up.

Filitza walks through it in a half-dream. She goes to and sits looking out of the window onto the camp, watching people.

Suddenly the voice from the loudspeaker takes on a new urgency. All movement in the camp stops. The voice is reciting a list of names. "Maria Strauss of Warsaw is looking for her son Eric.... Erne Politsky of Lintz is looking for his father..." and so it goes on: but Pina's name doesn't come over. No one asks for the whereabouts of Filitza Girst and her baby.

Filitza lies down to rest in her corner of the room. The loudspeakers go on. The questions run through her head... who are you... where do you come from.... who is your husband.... where were you born.... WHY were you born?

For weeks there is nothing to do but wait - and answer questions. There is no privacy anywhere - not even in the corner of the room. Filitza asks for a job in the camp - she speaks German and a little English besides her own language - she will be useful to the officials. Each morning she takes her daughter along to the nursery and leaves her with hundreds of other children. Then she goes off to work. She sits at a table in the big room where the refugees file through for registration. All day long they pass by and she hands them forms to fill in. All day long she looks for Pina. And one day the boss calls her in and tells her to sit down. They have found Pina and he is coming to get her.

Filitza and Pina and the daughter are re-united: but there is a fourth member of the family now. Pina has brought with him his nephew - the son of his brother who was the lad at the café that day, before the war, when they were celebrating. Pina's brother is dead - killed at the war. The boy's mother is dead too. Pina has brought the boy with him. Pina went back home as soon as he was released from the Prison Camp. He went back to find Filitza - but all that he found was the wreckage of a village and a few old people who didn't know anything except who had been killed. So Pina went back to the house where he and Filitza had lived when they were married - and that was gone too. And his sister-in-law was dying. And a new regime ruled the country. And because Pina wanted to go on living and to find his wife he knew that he would have to leave - quickly and secretly.

Now Filitza is not alone. Now she can start again as part of a family unit and work out a new destiny. She has ceased to be the most hopeless form of human life and has become "Resettleable".

(4) The Second Camp

They go to a new camp. This is a step up socially but it is not yet home - not by a long chalk. The only difference is that your feet are on the road and you have some-one to walk with.

At the new camp you are a family and get half a room instead of a corner. But you still have to answer questions and stand in line and wait.... until it seems that the meaning of eternity is waiting. But at least you are now Mrs Girst... you are not just a woman with a child and no man.

The official (sic) are good people. They are doing their best and they represent one of the most decent, humane gestures ever made by the world to the individual. But they are not God! They cannot work miracles: They have to work out your salvation in triplicate complete with fingerprints and a urine test. So you wait in line and get yourself dusted with DDT, and have blood tests, and x-rays, and medicals: you answer questions - and since you have become a family these questions are more involved. Sometimes you don't know whether to blush with shame or to swipe the questioner across the face! "Is this the father of your child?"... (control yourself Pina)... "Have you a marriage certificate... and a birth certificate for the child? "Who is this boy?"

There is some confusion over the boy. Thank God Pina was sensible enough to bring the proper papers with him. It is difficult but it could be worse. There will be much formality and form-filling until Pina can legally adopt the boy. It is not the fault of the Agency... it is the law: and the law is bigger than the individual. And until the law has run its course Pina and Filitza and the children must remain refugees.

And during this time UNNRA (sic) and the other agencies fold and IRO is born. And various nations like Australia come into the picture and present avenues of hope to people like DPs.

The camps become more organised. The DPs cease to become just an amorphous problem and become, instead, factors in lottery. You are interviewed to see if you are eligible to be a D.P. People like the Grists (sic) are fairly lucky: they are by no means the favourites in the race for freedom and a chance to start again: they have not, for instance, the same chance as the single men and women who can offer youth and skill and strength to the nations who award these prizes. They are not so lucky as the compact little families complete with birth certificates who represent 'two workers and three potential workers'. But they are heavens and heavens ahead of the family with a blind father, or a consumptive child, or a war-maimed bread-winner.... heavens and heavens ahead.

They are maybe a little ahead of the average when all things are considered. Pina and Filitza can both work in the camp. The boy can go to school, and can help domestically. The baby is healthy and will be happy in the kindergarten.

In this new camp Pina becomes a block-leader. That is to say, he is responsible to the Camp Commandant for the cleanliness and orderliness of the block of huts or barracks in which he and Filitza are living. He organises working parties to keep the place ship-shape.

He is the channel through which the officials communicate with the other DPs in the block. He draws the rations for the block and apportions them out. He sees all that goes on in the block. He is familiar with tragedy, the humour and life of the block.

Filitza is better placed too. There are schools for the children and even schools for the adults who wish to learn languages... the languages for the countries to which they hope to emigrate. So Filitza becomes a school-teacher once again, and teaches Polish children and Hungarian children and little Slavs and Ukrainians and Latvians and Estonians and Letts to speak German, because they are DPs and must have a single language, so that they will at least be able to speak to each other.

(5) The beginning of the road

An information office is set up in the camp and announcements are made to the effect that this country is willing to take coal-miners, and that country wants domestics, and the other country will take good family groups for rural work.

The information centre is run by the YMCA. Material is supplied by IRO and is dished out by a small group of DPs who have volunteered for this work. Round the walls are posters and various charts of information about different countries. There are announcements about lectures and film shows. There are booklets if you are interested. You can ask questions.

And in this IRO team there are people called councillors. You can go to them with your problems and they will tell you just what chance you have of getting to America or Canada or Venezuela or Australia. They will tell you the requirements of the Governments of these countries and just where you fail to meet them.

Pina and Filitza spend some time in the Information Bureau. They look at the posters and the pictures... and take home a booklet (among others) about Australia. At night, in the recreation hut, they go through this booklet and you can see them beginning to wonder if it is something more than a crazy idea that they should take a chance on this almost unknown land so far away.

We must not be misled into believing that Australia is the Golden Mecca of these people. Next to going home they would all like to go to America - the idea is traditional with Europeans. But you have to be sponsored to get to America. South America also offers possibilities - so does Canada and it isn't so far away. Australia is more of a gamblers chance but under some circumstances the requirements of the Government are easier to meet.

All day long the IRO councillors sit in the wooden huts and listen to tales of tragedy and hope. These IRO people may be French, Dutch, Danish, American... might represent any one of the fifteen member nations of IRO. But they are not so much concerned with the requirements of national government as with the future of the individual DPs.

Pina and Filitza go along. Of course, they have to wait - but they are used to it. There are many more people sitting patiently along the walls for an interview with their future. Just nearby there is an old couple sitting in front of the councillor. You can almost see them back home on the farm... but you know that they will never see their farm again. They have a letter from their son in Australia. He writes now to say that he is doing fine and soon he will be able to arrange for the old folk to join him. The Councillor is experienced... he has seen this story so often. He tells the old people... "Sure, that's fine. As soon as your boy writes to say that he has found a proper home for you, and that he's making enough money to support you... then we'll get you out to Australia as fast as we can... in the meantime you'll have to stay in Germany."

The old man is respectful but insistent: he smooths out the letter from his boy and pushes it in front of the Councillor, pointing to some lines with a stubby finger. Interpreter and councillor go into a huddle: the councillor grins - "this boy sure likes Australia": but it's no good - the references to the old folk are too indefinite.... They will have to wait: they cannot understand how IRO and the Australian Government can be so stubborn.... "surely these people don't think that our Jascha would let us down". But these people don't know 'our Jascha'... and to them he is Case 1157984 Resettled in Australia (thank God.... that's one less to worry about).

So Pina and Filitza sit in along the wall waiting their turn for counselling, and watching the others go up: all kinds of people - all kinds of problems. The fine-looking family who fail to qualify for any scheme because there is a T.B. father -. What do they do.... stay in Germany and try to make a living among ex-enemy strangers - or emigrate and leave the old man behind?..

The councillor lays out his wares: England offers this and will take you on these conditions: America requires that you be sponsored: Canada wants miners, rural workers, timber men: France will take you: Chile, Venezuela, Australia. What about Australia.... a land with a future.... just fine for young Jan and the daughter.... a good country for a healthy young couple like you two.... Pina and Filitza... what about Australia? Doubts.... it's a hell of a long way....but there has been a lot of talk about Australia since letters started coming back from the first DPs to go there. Well Pina and Filitza.... think it over.

They think it over: down at the ration centre in the morning Pina talks it over with other men. At the school Filitza is saying goodbye to some kids who are leaving the camp as settlers.... one or two are going to Australia.

They decide to apply for resettlement in Australia. Another trip to the counselling officer. The Girsts become a definite case now. They have a file with pictures and finger prints: everything about them is written down: the legal department has a cross reference about the adoption of Jan: the eligibility people are satisfied: Pina has evidence that he didn't fight on the wrong side during the war: Filitza has her marriage lines. They have had all of the right injections and dustings with DDT. They are medically fit according to IRO standards (but that doesn't mean Australian Mission standards).

So (to coin a phrase) the die is cast. The Girst family has decided to submit itself for "Processing".... it has applied for submission to the Australian Mission. If it fails to get through it cannot have a second try for Australia - once rejected always rejected (until recently).

This means another move... another camp. The few belongings are packed up... travelling rations drawn... farewells to people who have become neighbours and friends. If they don't get through the 'Processing' they will be back in this camp within a few weeks... Good Luck Pina.... Good Luck Filitza.

(6) The Processing Camp

The life in these camps is much the same basically and there is no need to go into much detail. The processing camps are bigger and there is a purposeful air about them. There is still the interminable waiting... the filing through rooms and corridors.... the questions.... the forms.

Pina and Filitza and the children arrive at the new camp and go through the routine: they get out of trucks at the reception shed: file past the man who checks them against a list: into a room where people squirt DDT inside your clothes: a quick medical inspection to see that you aren't lousy or suddenly ill with an infectious disease: you get a card telling you where to camp: ration cards to be handed in to the block leader: and so you file out again. A lorry takes you to the block: Pina and Jan go for the luggage: Filitza settles into the new home - maybe it is even half a room this time with a small stove.

Next day the 'Process' begins. Registration: certificates and forms to be made out: the waiting in line... tired feet.... tired minds.... people pressed all round you.... the babel of language..... the questions. Some of it is funny and some of it is cute (if you can forget for a moment what it's all about).

Then you wait for a notice to come round telling you to report for medical inspection by IRO. This time it is a medical inspection: it takes two or three days.... it's rightly called 'Processing'. DPs go through on the continuous belt principle: X-rays, blood tests, this test, that test, eyes, ears, throat, nose.... by the time you get through you have a string of doctor's (sic) signatures that would get you into heaven....

At this stage maybe half of the applicants are eliminated. Our family is 'deferred'.... Jan has spots that might be anything.... he is put into the camp hospital for observation: but in a few days he is OK again and the 'process' can go on. IRO have cleared the family and now it's a matter of getting through the Australian Selection Team.

But you can't go through today, or tomorrow, or even this week: maybe you wait three weeks before you are called up, and in that time the life of the camp goes on. There are births, deaths and marriages, fights, intrigues, scandals. There are classes in English for adults, schools for children - if you have a little English the Australian selectors will be more sympathetic.

Then you get a call to see the Australian Doctor. He has the IRO reports in front of him and knows more about you than you know about yourself. He is looking at your X-ray. An underling gives you an unexpected eye-test then sends you behind a screen for the usual undressing. It's just bad luck if you fail at this stage but you never can tell - the Australians can produce the most unpredictable reasons for rejecting.

If you are lucky you can go up for the final selection interview on the same day.... if you're lucky. But it's seldom more than two or three days before the great moment arrives.

(7) The Interview

This is the day when you win or lose - the turn of the road. On this day a young man from this place Australia decides whether you Pina Girst, and you Filitza Girst, and you, young Jan, and little Maria.... whether you are going to be admitted to the ranks of the respectable people of this world. No wonder you are nervous. No wonder you drop things as you hear your name called and you stand up to face this ordeal. Gently but with signs of anxiety you shepherd your family along the corridor - past the finger boards sticking out above the long line of doors - "Mexico, New Zealand, Canada, India, United Kingdom, Chile... Australia."

You go into the room hesitantly. The young man at the table doesn't look up. For a few seconds you stand about nervously. A girl comes hurrying in - she speaks German and tells you to sit down. There are two chairs in front of the table facing the young man. You and Filitza sit on them. Filitza takes Maria on her lap. Jan stands beside you. When you move the chair to get comfortable it makes a noise that sounds to you like the roof falling in. The young man still doesn't look up...he is going through lots of papers. You recognise your photograph on one of them. It can be no more than a few seconds before he shows any sign that he knows you are there... but it seems an age. You smile at Filitza re-assuringly, Maria is apparently dumb with wonder... you hope she stays that way. Jan looks serious. You study the young man. He looks pleasant enough but not particularly friendly... he doesn't welcome you with open arms. The young woman sits beside him and waits. She smiles at Filitza and makes a face at Maria. We relax a little.

Without looking at us the young man speaks to the girl in English. She turns to you and speaks German, and the young man looks at you for the first time... watching as you answer.

They are mostly the same questions: he has the answers already written down in the papers before him. Maybe he is trying to trick you into giving a wrong answer. "Where do you come from... what work did you do at home.... where does your wife come from.... where were you married.... when was the child born.... what evidence have you that Jan's parents are dead.... where are the adoption papers." This part is not so hard... you begin to feel confident. The questions come out quickly, first in English, then in German.

Then, when you are thinking that it is not so bad he says straight at you, in English, "Show me your hands." You put them out and he says, "You speak English?" You are modest... you say, "A little." "And your wife?" You feel proud and say, "Yes, she is better than me for English." After that we get along better. We speak a mixture of English and German... but mostly English. "When did you first go into a refugee camp?" I tell him and he checks the date against my paper. "When did you do this.... why did you do that.... have you ever worked for the Germans.... what work have you done in DP camps?" You get confused about some of the dates and give wrong answers. You know that you are wrong and you can see everybody looking at you - the young man without expression; the young woman who wants to help you but can't say anything; Filitza and Jan. The young man speaks, "It says here that you came back to Germany in April 1943?" Of course, that's right.... how could you have got so confused. You lick your lips nervously. Filitza brushes the hair from her forehead and sighs. You wonder what the young man is thinking.

He looks down at the papers and without moving his head says to the interpreter girl, "Ask him if he has ever been in trouble with the police." Before she can say it in German you say indignantly, "No." He looks up and says "Are you sure?" He seems so certain that you begin to wonder whether you have or not.... surely he doesn't know about the time you had that argument with the camp police and were hauled before the commandant.... after all that was nothing, and the policeman was in the wrong. You say, "No, never." He writes something down.

Then he begins to question Filitza. He asks about her parents, what they were, where they lived, are they alive, how did they die. Maria begins to wriggle... she has been quiet so long. Filitza tries to keep her quiet and answer the questions at the same time. Then he turns to Jan. "Can you speak English?" Jan looks right at him and says, "Yes, sir, a little." "How old are you?" - "Thirteen, sir." "Do you go to school... can you read and write.... what do you want to be when you grow up?" Jan says, "A farmer, sir." The young man looks surprised. "Why do you want to be a farmer?" Quite seriously Jan answers him, "Then I can have a horse and a dog, sir." The young man smiles and you suddenly feel that it is all right. You look proudly at Jan and feel grateful to him. The tension relaxes. Filitza whispers something to Maria. The young lady smiles at them. The young man writes on more papers. Then he looks straight at you and says, "Why do you want to go to Australia?"

Dear God - why do you want to go to Australia - does this young man understand who and what we are - does he know what it is to be a man and not a man - to be a husband and not a husband - to be a number. You can hardly speak - "I want to go to Australia to work.... to make a home for my wife and children - to give them a chance to be people again - that life may be good and happy for them." You cannot say any more - you don't have the kind of words to say what is swelling up in your heart. In a moment you will be crying.

The young man suddenly becomes businesslike. He picks up a card and says, "You understand the terms of the contract.... that you will work at the direction of the Australian Government for two years.... that you may be separated from your wife and children until you can provide a home for them?" He looks at Filitza and we both nod. We understand. He pushes the card across to me.... "Sign here." Everyone is watching me and can see my hand trembling.

I hand back the card and the young man blots my signature. Then he looks up. "Okay.... be ready to leave for the staging camp in five days.... good luck."

We all get up... it's all over.... we are going to Australia. The young woman shows us to the door... we turn and say "Thank you" to the young man. He smiles and says to Jan, "I hope you get your horse, son." Then he turns back to his papers.

NOTE: The foregoing interview is, with the exception of the arrival in Australia, the emotional climax of the story, and from the purely dramatic point of view the action should speed up from here on so that the people at least get onto the ship before the momentum drops. Once on the ship there is a change of background and way of life, and it will be legitimate to slow down in preparation for the ultimate build-up to the arrival in Australia. However, in actual fact, quite a lot happens between the interview and embarkation. We shall therefore shoot the continuing processes in order to have a complete record, although it is most likely that we shall find it advisable in the interests of film construction, to drop much of what follows from the point that we have now reached.

(8) Leaving Germany

The DPs have left the Selection office. The Selection officer is putting their papers together. He makes a neat bundle of them and then stamps them "Approved." The papers go into a file of other approved cases.

In the central resettlement office of the camp there is a blackboard covering the complete wall. It shows the number of DPs in the camp, at what stage they are in their 'processing'. How many are going to here or there. How many have nominated for Australia... how many have failed to get through.... how many are approved.... the date of the departure to the staging camp.... and so on. This is an interesting board. A new number is marked in the space "DEPARTURE FOR AUSTRALIA".

A train pulls out from the siding. It is full of DPs. The Girst family are among them.

The entrance to Seedorf Staging camp. The Australia-bound DPs are settling in for a short stay. The same old routine goes on but it is speedier and less detailed. There is allocation of rooms, the ration cards, the inevitable medical inspection.... then the waiting. This time they wait for an exit permit.

Every day the DPs gather round the notice board to see if they have been called up for the final move. When their names appear they start another routine. Medical check, identification labels are handed out, rations for the journey issued, baggage is searched by the German customs. This customs inspection is quite interesting: some DPs have a couple of suitcases. Some big families have home-made packing cases containing frying pans, blankets, flat irons - all the accumulated paraphernalia of three or four years of scrounging. There are holy pictures and national costumes - a dozen bars of soap hoarded and hidden. On all of the packing cases, in big letters, is written the name of the DP and, in bigger letters still, AUSTRALIA.

The baggage goes from the customs inspection to the train at the siding. Towards evening the people go to the train and make themselves comfortable. They have been doing this for years and they have it down to a fine art. The little children in blanket hammocks slung across the compartment - all sorts of tricks.

And then, eventually, the train sets off for Italy... Naples.... Bagnoli Camp. The journey may provide some interest - the adjustment to new conditions - the change of scenery - the feeling of really going somewhere at last.

(9) Bagnoli Camp & Embarkation

I haven't been to Bagnoli and am not familiar with the details of procedure there, but I imagine that the emphasis is on distinctive preparations for entry into the Australian scene. The goal of the DPs is more specific. The question of film treatment of this sequence will have to be left until later on. May be able to use the sea for a change of background.... looking out into the future.

(10) The Voyage

The first sight of the ship... a symbol of release. The wonderment of the children as they come aboard and view this new kind of home. The passing disappointment as people become aware of the cramped living quarters - but it's not for long, and in the meantime there are many physical compensations - thoughts of lying on the deck in the sunshine - the fresh air - escape from the interminable routines of camp life.

Pina, Filitza and the children settle in. Pina goes with the men - Filitza and the little girl with the women - we'll find out later about Jan: he may be too young to go with the men and too old to go with the women.... it's not important.

In some ways the sense of being part of a mob is even greater on the ship than in the camp - the privacy is even less than before: but the answer is the same - it isn't for long and at least we are going somewhere - the end of the journey is in sight. There are new neighbours in even closer confines than before. Society is more intimate than ever. We shall be seeing these same people a hundred times a day every day of the voyage.

The ship leaves Naples: the mooring ropes are cast off - the last tangible link with Europe. Slowly the ship eases away from everything these people have known, in their lives, in their history, in their tradition. A thousand years is being left behind. In twenty years a new generation of their children will be learning about Europe from school-books. Everybody is quiet.... there is no great jubilation: it is not easy to leave your home for ever whatever the circumstances.

Life on board settled down to an easy routine. According to age and disposition the people adopt a new pattern of filling in time. The luxury of doing absolutely nothing. The old men who get together to talk or play cards. The youths and girls showing off their figures in sun-clothes. Youngsters finding everything an adventure and the ship a new world to explore. Jan attaches himself to the sailors. The belle of the boat attaches herself to one of the officers.

The even tenor is relieved by events like boat-drill, concerts, organised games and contests: At boat drill the old folk look old wearing life-jackets: the youngsters love it and get in the way. There is a Thanksgiving service of some sort and some inspiring words spoken.

The excitement of going through Suez. New landscapes and people. The bum-boats and the bargaining for oranges and souvenirs. The first sight of something significantly Australian is the Anzac war memorial on the canal. Other ports of call - Aden and possibly Colombo: and so on until one day the coastline of Australia is a smudge on the horizon.

That night there is a final farewell concert. With the music of the choir filling the background Pina and Filitza lean over the rail looking back along the path of the moon on the water. They are very close to each other and have no need to speak.

At dawn the land is close (NOTE: we shall have to decide whether we arrive in Perth, Melbourne or Sydney - dramatically there can be only one landfall in Australia): The early risers wake their friends. Some of the youngsters, like Jan, are helping the sailors prepare for arrival. People gather at the rail and look and point. There is a wide variety of re-action to these last moments - comic capers, tears, the philosophic calm of old people, the horse-play of youngsters. The belle of the ship says goodbye to her officer. Jan makes the rounds of his friends among the crew and the galley staff. The ship passes through the Heads (Sydney, I hope) and steams into the harbour... the gateway to a new life.... a life with space around it, where you can walk alone, where you can stand and look at things: where you can work and earn money and be equal in all things fundamental.

Pina and the children stand together on the deck. Somewhere in the ship people are singing brave songs. The ship goes on down the harbour, past the ferries towards the bridge. The sky-line builds up to the city.

This will be your land... these will be your people.... You will share their freedom... and your children will become as their children. And you will give them your strength and skill and the good things of your history and tradition that are a part of you. The past is dead... you will live again.

NOTE:

This is no more than a rough outline of the subject. You can see that there is a tremendous amount of material and a considerable amount of pruning will have to be done. No attempt has been made in this outline to fill in details of action and incident - that will be done in the final writing of the script. The ending will need a lot of thought in point of image, otherwise it will be anti-climatic (sic). It may be advisable to sacrifice detailed authenticity up to a point and telescope some of the camp-life sequences to avoid repetition although, in fact, the monotonous repetition of everyday camp-life is one of the most significant influences in the life of a DP.

You may think that in this outline there has been too much emphasis on the depressing aspect of the whole story of DPs. In the treatment I shall attempt to introduce as much lightness as possible, but in all honesty I think it is essential to get as near to the truth as possible.... and the truth is very grim. I am afraid that we in Canberra who have had contact with the Natasha type of DP might have a slightly distorted appreciation of the true picture. Our first lot of Balts were the pick of the million, not only from the point of view of their character and appearance and intelligence but from the point of view of their own resilience (sic). They were the easy people to re-settle and they represent a very small proportion of the problem. They are not on the whole people who will create an assimilation problem or upon whom we need to expend the utmost of our sympathy and understanding. However, see how indigestible (sic) my outline is, and let me know that you think about it. I am sending a copy to Stanley Hawes so that you can get his opinion without delay.

R.M.W.

Commonwealth of Australia
DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION
Central Secretariat,
Post Office Box 12,
Canberra

Reference DGI/49/K.184
7th October, 1949.

Dear Stanley,

The attached copy of Ron Williams' letter of 13th September and film outline reached me last Friday and I very much regret the delay in sending it on to you. Gavin Casey wanted to read the outline and took it home over the week-end. He then developed flu and was out of action for a few days.

The Secretary, Department of Immigration, Mr. Heyes, and I raced through the script last Friday and sent Ron a cable authorising him to proceed with a major film of three to four reels costing, if necessary, up to £5,000. We said in our cable that any contribution which I.R.O wished to make to the film would be welcomed but that, in any event, we would proceed with our plans, the Department of Immigration footing the entire bill if necessary.

I have since written a long letter to Ron saying that, in my opinion, his outline calls for a major film and that a two-reeler adopting the March of Time techniques would be inadequate for our purposes. I also said that while we were anxious for the film to be completed as quickly as possible, we would not impose a time limit on him and Reg Pearse.

It seems obvious to me that Ron has run up against a considerably tougher proposition than (sic) he expected. However, with the aid of the British Information Service film authorities in Hamburg and with the use of their facilities, he should be capable of shooting footage which we can assemble at Burwood into a really important film.

Would you be good enough to send me a copy of any comments you make to Ron on his outline. My major comment to him was that in the camp sequences he should take care not to provide ammunition for the many critics of such international organisations as U.N.R.R.A. and I.R.O. I said that while we would not condone any departure from the truth, we would not wish major emphasis to be placed on the more depressing aspects of life in D.P. camps in Europe.

Yours sincerely,

Kevin Murphy
DIRECTOR-GENERAL

S. Hawes, Esq.,
Producer-in-Chief,
Film Division,
Department of Information,
BURWOOD, N.S.W.

3 Nov.1949

To the Director-General

Notes on treatment by R.M.Williams for film on D.P.'s

Introductory

This treatment must be considered primarily in the light of the difficulties of production, which on such an assignment are enormous. A small unit, which even if expanded by the addition of staff from the British Information Services will still not be large, is faced with a major production, too far from its base to get much help from us, operating in a foreign country where language adds to the difficulties, in spite of Williams' probable linguistic ability and in a country, moreover, which is still considerably disorganised and damaged as a result of the war. Consequently the director is on his own, as he must have realised when he initiated the project. We will gladly give him any help we can, but at this distance it cannot amount to very much. No doubt he feels keenly the lack of colleagues with which to discuss the production and its problems, both aesthetics and practical. As we cannot very well send anyone from here, his best hope is to get a competent and sympathetic associate from the British Information Services.

Comments on Treatment

1. In the light of the foregoing remarks the first thing which strikes me about the treatment is that it requires, for adequate production, far more resources and time than Williams has at his disposal, or is likely to have.
2. The treatment shows many flashes of insight, a deep humanity and great sympathy with the plight and emotions of the D.P.'s. Section 7, for instance, reveals deep understanding of their situation though there will be directional problems in transferring this from its present literary form into film terms.
3. The length appears to me likely to be more than four reels. Williams himself evidently realises this for he says that parts of the present treatment will have to be eliminated. This makes it even harder to pass an opinion on it. The construction of the treatment is such that each sequence depends for its meaning on those which precede it and this will make it hard to shorten at the cutting stage.
4. In view of the length of the film - even if limited to four reels - it is pertinent to consider what distribution is proposed for it.
5. A fundamental criticism of the treatment is that it concentrates on one family. Williams says, "The film is not to be a generalisation - it is not to illustrate a mass problem: on the contrary...." And so he has picked one family and follows it through many stages. But in this way I feel that he is likely to miss the real significance of his subject, which is surely the mass movement of unhappy people from Europe to a new life in more fortunate countries. This is one of the great mass movements of history and Australia is playing a distinguished and noble part in it. Surely the film should deal adequately with this mass movement and should reveal the achievements and dignity of Australia's action, and the great contribution which the country is making, even granted that she gains something herself from it, to the alleviation of human suffering.

Granted that Williams is right in seeing that the treatment must be human, must show D.P.'s as human beings, must not be completely impersonal, I think he has gone too far both from the point of view of production possibilities and of filmic construction. There are easier and equally effective ways of getting humanity and warmth into the treatment. If he were to tell the mass story, which is relatively easier to shoot, he could introduce his family at three or four key points, and get his effect that way. Moreover he can personalise the D.P.'s, and at the same time extend the range of his treatment, in some such way as this. In a general sequence of the D.P.'s in a camp the camera could pick out from the crowd of the depressed humanity several individuals. Over close-ups of these individuals the commentary would say something of their past. One unhappy creature may have been a famous surgeon. The camera could examine his hands rough, calloused, bruised, as they peel potatoes or hold a spade to dig a latrine. These hands have performed many delicate cancer operations at the such and such hospital, they have saved the lives of such and such notable people. Or they may be the hands of a famous pianist, which have played in handsome concert halls to the delight of distinguished audiences – or the hands of an artist – or a watchmaker. Now these hands are damaged beyond hope – or perhaps more fortunately they are only temporarily injured, their old skill still lying beneath the roughened exterior waiting to be brought back to life in new surroundings in a new country.

The camera could go on to examine the broken legs of a champion athlete, the bloodshot eyes of an artist; could listen to the husky voice of an opera singer; could watch the listless movements of a once prosperous farmer, Mayor of a small community before the war.

(These examples are admittedly facile; it will be difficult to find any so obvious. But they show the line of approach.)

The last of these individuals could be Filitza – The commentary talks about her happy past as a schoolteacher in an Estonian village. Suddenly, with a quick sound and visual flashback, we hear the sound of the school bell and see her at her school before the war, the children come running up - one gives her a bunch of flowers - or an apple. She ties the bow on a small girl's hair, helps a little boy tie his bootlace.

Or perhaps it is Sunday morning - the church bells are ringing (this again gives the sound cut.) The villagers are walking up the hill in little groups to Church - stopping to talk to the neighbours at their doorways - among them the camera picks out Filitza escorting two or three smiling children. (I assume a suitable undamaged village can be found.)

Then the commentary talks about Pina - her betrothed and we see him going to work in the town where he lives. We would see the characteristics of a European pre-war town, as suggested by Williams in Section 1. We feel the happy carefree atmosphere – he nods to friends in the street, raises his hat to the Mayor's wife, enters his office, takes off his shirt cuffs and settles down to work.

Then back to Filitza in the D.P. Camp. "It is a long time," says the commentary "since Filitza has heard any news of Pina, her husband. The little school house in Eidelbruck is a thousand years away."

6. The great number of sound sequences, especially the interviews and interrogations, will present difficulties. Presumably Pina and Filitza will speak German, and this will mean careful planning of the dialogue so that, through an interpreter who is probably present at all such interviews, the audience gets the idea of what is going on.

Linked with this is a dramatic problem. I feel that the constant succession of dreary formalities, interviews and interrogations, besides tending to obscure under a picture (undoubtedly true) of the miseries of D.P.'s, the more important aspect of the positive achievement of relieving their plight, will result in a film which may itself be dreary and monotonous. It needs a decision whether to concentrate on the discomforts of D.P.'s, or on the more hopeful aspects of mass migration.

7. Following one family right through the film means that the family chosen will have to be actors of considerable quality, if they are to show the necessary development of character and to carry such a large number of scenes.

I stress development of characters, which needs time in the film, as without it such scenes as the reunion of Pina and Filitza will be meaningless.

The necessity of having the family present when shooting at so many locations will also increase the organisational difficulties enormously.

I suggest that the various interviews in different camps could be strung together into one sequence of reasonable length by wiping from each interview to the next, keeping each one fairly brief. The commentator could explain the development from interview to interview, from camp to camp, thus reducing the need for sync dialogue. Variety of interest could be given to this sequence and the commentary broken up, by repetition by the interpreters at each interrogation of one or two key questions – always the same questions time after time. e.g. “Who is the father of this child?” “Where were you born?” Perhaps the constant “Achtung - Achtung” of the loud speakers could also be introduced into this sequence, which in any case would have to be broken in the middle for the reunion of Pina and Filitza.

It also seems to me that the existing treatment, by following in such detail the succession of camps and interrogations, tends to be restricted by the four walls of a camp hut, when it should have a breadth and openness to it if it is to convey the sense of freedom gained. It is possible however, that the contrast between the earlier scenes and the later ones of arrival in Australia may do this.

8. In general the treatment bogs down in detail. Drastic pruning will make a better film, and one that is easier to shoot. More concern is needed to the underlying motivation of the story and less with its drab details.

Williams himself is obviously aware of many of the points I have made, as is shown by his note on page 12.

Miscellaneous

Can the request in par 9 page 2 for special treatment for a selected family be met?

I suggest that you permit Williams to have his rushes processed in London, as this will enable him to see his material within a reasonable time of shooting and so will be of great assistance to him. He will not be able to return for reshooting once he leaves Europe.

Possible line of approach

I will try to indicate a practical line of approach to the story. At the same time keeping the main lines of Williams' treatment. This will obviously have to be sketchy and incomplete, but may suggest a production pattern.

This approach is more akin to the short "March of Time" version, than to the longer and probably more desirable film. But it is less a matter of what is the best film to make, than of what is the best film that can be made. I feel strongly that it will be better to make a less ambitious film adequately, than to attempt an "epic" which is too difficult to produce properly.

1) Start with Section 3. "These are the D.P.'s" I don't think we have to go visually into the war as the reason for their being D.P.'s. What cannot be taken for granted can be explained by the commentary.

Study certain individuals, thus getting the human side into it, as suggested in my Note 5, Page 1. Move from this into the former lives of Filitza and Pina (see my Note 5) and back to the D.P. Camp.

Establishing life at a D.P.Camp, as outlined in Paras 1,4,5,6 of Williams (3), and possibly bits of later sections.

2) Then move into the fairly fast moving sequences of interviews and interrogations as per my Note 7.

Break into this to give the finding of Pina and his re-union with Filitza.

Then on again with the rest of the interviews in the same way, but with a certain difference of atmosphere, conveyed by the camera catching glances between Pina and Filitza, or seeing them surreptitiously holding hands, because they are now united.

These interviews, though brief, should be shot in such a way that the presence of many D.P.'s is shown, not just the two main characters.

3) At the end of these interviews they are at a better camp - see final paragraphs of Williams (4). Some of the life here can be shown - the schools, the working parties, and so on. Again let us see the other people as well as Pina and Filitza to get some of the general story. Here the decision by Pina and Filitza to apply for resettlement in Australia is shown. Some compression of Williams' 5, 6, and 7 is necessary, and can be achieved, in my opinion, without distorting the essentials of procedure. The details, though important in themselves, are not necessary in this story.

For instance at the moment when they decide on Australia, wipe quickly to the Australian doctor at the Processing Camp (Williams' Para.7). Then wipe again to the interview (Williams' 7). This interview which is important, and well treated by Williams (though at considerable length) should be the only interview which is shown at any length.

4) The Departure

Once they have been accepted for Australia let us get them away quickly.

Perhaps as soon as the doctor has said "I hope you get your horse son," we see the expressions of relief on our family's faces, then move quickly to the Departure Board (Williams' (8) para.2), then into a fast moving sequence made up of two or three shots only of each of the following parts of Williams' treatment: The departure of the train; the arrival at Seedorf Staging Camp; the baggage of the D.P.'s; the departure of the train for Italy; Bagnoli Camp and Embarkation.

A sequence on the ship, not following the voyage in detail as suggested by Williams (10) but somehow getting a symbolic atmosphere of release, freedom and anticipation - with some feeling of dramatic suspense - leading to the actual sight of Australian soil. Now they are no longer D.P.'s - they are New Australians.

These last two sequences (4) and (5), should be general sequences in order to get the sense of mass movement of people. Pina and Filitza will be seen amongst other people, but the main feeling should be one of triumphant solution to a great mass problem, as well as the solution of many personal problems.

Australian Military Mission
BERLIN

28th November, 1949

Dear Stanley,

I was very glad indeed to get your notes on my treatment (if you could call it such) of the D.P. film and it was just what I needed - some sort of reliable measuring stick against which to stand my ideas. The one thing that I have missed more than anything on this assignment has been somebody to talk to about the film: Reg is fine at his job and a good bloke to work with, but I am not sufficiently articulate to be able to express myself clearly to him when dealing with abstractions.

There are not many other film people working over here in our line, and in any case I haven't spent much time in the cities. The film side of the British Information Services has been more or less eliminated by general budget cuts, and does not constitute the kind of consultative centre or film group that I would find useful. The major British film activity over here is the translating and distributing of British feature films in the German theatres, and there is nothing much else going on.

However, I have found a B.I.S. chap in Hamburg who is likely to be of considerable help. He does not have much of a history as a director and is in about the same class, from the point of view of experience, as men like Lee Robinson in our own show. His job has been to develop a German documentary group in the British Zone, using German technicians and making films of German significance. His work is imaginative and humanistic, but somewhat undergraduate: at the same time it shows that he has recognised and overcome many operational problems peculiar to occupied Germany. Unfortunately for him and for the idea of documentary his work has been severely criticised by his superiors on the grounds that it is over-emotional and politically brash, and at the moment he is in considerable disfavour. It is for this reason, probably more than for any other, that B.I.S. has agreed to lend him to me for about six weeks. He is going to be organisationally useful, and I find him easy to talk to, so that there are hopes that the job will move forward more rapidly from now on.

Your notes show clearly that you have a thorough understanding of the major problems of this production, and that you have been able to see the weaknesses in my approach to the subject: I only wish that you were sufficiently close at hand to be able to take a look at the story material on the spot, so that you could give some advice on the details of production.

Before I go on to refer to your notes point by point I would like to make some general observations about D.Ps. and I.R.O., and what is commonly called the D.P. problem.

In the main D.Ps. are political and religious refugees who refuse, for reasons considered legitimate by U.N.O., to return to their own countries. The majority of them are poor because there is no work for them in Germany. At the same time they are materially better off than tens of thousands of free citizens living in the slums of Europe and the English-speaking world. Their big problem is not how to stay alive, or even how to improve their immediate material circumstances: they have been living under UNNRA(sic) and IRO care for up to five years, and although conditions in the first six months of peace were unquestionably primitive and are still sub-standard, they have been living for the past three or four years in national communities of up to three thousand persons, under thoroughly well organised and not uncomfortable social conditions. These communities are maintained by IRO budget contributions and the top administrative authority rests with half a dozen IRO officials who constitute an executive in each community. Almost all detailed administration from the allotment of accommodation to medical services is carried out by the D.Ps. themselves. All of these camp-working D.Ps. are paid by IRO, and are ordinary wage earners like free-living citizens in any other community. Many other D.Ps. work for IRO administrative departments as clerks, stenographers, car drivers, mechanics, interpreters, cooks and so on, while others get jobs on the German labour market. Few of them feel any particular gratitude to IRO: in fact the general opinion among D.Ps. is that the bulk of the international staff of IRO (particularly in the various H.Q. groups) is made up of parasitical despots. Neither do they regard with any great affection or admiration the governments of IRO member nations, who profess to great humanitarian principles and gestures in regard to the 'suffering D.Ps.' and yet refuse to relieve the condition of any suffering D.P. who is not a good economic or biological investment. This is the general opinion among D.Ps: I don't share this attitude, although I see clearly the reasons for its existence, but if we are to make a film about D.Ps. we must thoroughly understand the D.P. point of view which, I think, is possibly more relevant than the point of view of IRO or its member nations.

Most D.Ps. have been living a static life for three or four years. After the first period of despair, fear, misery and uncertainty, they settled down to a life in which the ups and downs were roughly those of normal families. It is not until the question of immigration arises that the D.P. comes face to face with the realities of his peculiar situation. So it is that the two main periods of dramatic significance in the life of a resettlable D.P. are: (1) that first period of material and emotional violence in which he ceased to be an ordinary free-living citizen and became dependant upon the protection and charity of an international organisation, and (2) the last period of his life in Europe when he faces the emotional and physical strain of having to justify his fitness to rejoin normal society.

You will notice that I use the phrase 'resettleable D.P.' It is important to recognise the fact that the average D.P. life story is not a Woman's Weekly romance of Rags to Riches or even a story tracing the progression from Despair to Hope. There are tens of thousands(sic) D.Ps. who have not a hope in the world,(unless IRO member nations really honour their humanitarian protestations), of starting a new life anywhere except as paupers in an unfriendly Germany - a status that will be less than that which they have now. It is only against the background of this knowledge that an outsider can appreciate the real feeling of the D.P. who gets to Australia, He is not obsessed with a spirit of adventure - he doesn't in a good half of the cases really want to go to Australia: what he really wants is to be freed from the fear of being left to starve in Germany when IRO ceases to function or, worse still, to be repatriated by an unsympathetic German Government to his country of origin. As one intelligent D.P put it to me 'It is Australia or Siberia or starvation.' I am not suggesting that all or even a majority of the D.Ps. now in Australia made the move reluctantly. There are several things to remember in this respect. First of all, the early 'New Australians' were hand picked young men and women without insuperable family problems. Also the total number of D.Ps. in Australia is about 10% of the D.Ps. resettled by IRO, about 5% of the total D.Ps., and does not even represent a cross section of the mass problem.

I don't want to stress the negative aspect for I believe that Australia has contributed more to the solution of the whole D.P. problem than most (if not all) other countries. I do, however, want to make it clear that unless we make a thoroughly dishonest film we cannot take the simple line that Australia and other member nations of IRO are joined together in a noble attempt to alleviate a mass of suffering humanity. Again I must protest that I am not blind to the splendid positive aspects of Australia's participation in IRO, and you can be assured that I will lose no opportunity of stressing these aspects: but I must tell you that from the point of view of many D.Ps. Australia is the gambler's shot when attempts to get to America have failed, and that, quite literally, very many IRO officials regard Australia as a kind of modern Van Deiman's(sic) land where they can dump the people who constitute IRO's problem. I heard of one IRO official last week who threatened an unco-operative D.P. that if he did not behave she would have him registered for Australia. (Note: I reported this incident to IRO and to our Berlin office, and more action is being taken in the matter.)

All of the foregoing, I know, is stratospheric in relation to the concrete problem of making a film, but I write it for your interest, and to give you some indication of the ideas and influences that affect my thinking in this environment. It all boils down to whether we are making a film from the point of view of Australia, IRO or the D.Ps., and, importantly, what is the purpose of the film. You will probably remark, logically, that we should include all three points of view, and with this I agree: but I would add that where the three points of view diverge, that of the D.P. is the logical one to follow.

This does not mean that the D.P. point of view is the most objective one, but I think it must be stated. Furthermore I believe that by stating the D.P. point of view when it is critical of Australia or Australian policy in respect of D.Ps., our own case can be presented more strongly as logical argument rather than as ideological(sic) statements.

As to the purpose of the film:- from the standpoint of my recent experiences and close identification with the D.P. problem, I can see only one real objective, and that is to present the case for the D.P. clearly to the Australian people. I agree absolutely that the story of 'the great mass movement of unhappy people from Europe to a new life in more fortunate countries' is an epic one, and that Australia's part in it is worthy of record, but I do not agree that the 'individual' story is of less consequence than the 'mass' story: on the contrary I think that the mass story has no meaning or consequence unless it rests on the story of the individual. I am afraid I cannot think in terms of masses of people - I suppose it is all a matter of personal philosophy. To me the individual is all-important, the mass being the background against which his life is lived. In telling the story of the individual D.P. it is not possible to avoid mass background so there is no fear of this aspect of the whole idea being overlooked.

I think that the outside world has a misconception about the D.P. way of life. I suppose that at least 80% of them live in blocks of flats, and although it is true that these flats were originally barracks, they are nevertheless hardly distinguishable from blocks of workers' flats anywhere in Europe. It is true also that they do not have a multiplicity of rooms, but the accommodations are individually private, centrally heated, and provided with fuel or electric cooking stoves. It is only when the D.P. moves into a resettlement camp, in the process of migration, that he becomes a communal liver, that is, of course, generally speaking. Take, for example, the case of our film family. They have been living at Leipheim camp for two and a half years. They have one room on the ground floor of a three storey brick and concrete barrack block, and own an electric cooker on which they prepare all of their meals. Bathrooms, lavatories, washing places, etc., are shared on each floor as in a hotel. They have a garden plot just outside their room along the barrack wall. Every Monday morning the husband goes off to Augsburg, fifty miles away, where he works at a petrol filling station. He comes back on Friday night with his wages and spends the weekend 'at home' with the wife and family. Since they have been working with me on location they have been in a continuous fret to 'get home' - to Leipheim. It is probably true to say that were it not for the desperate fear of Communism that these people have half of them would go back to their own countries as fast as they could.

However, to put an end to this rambling monologue, a look at your notes. Under the heading 'Comments on Treatment' (paragraph 1) - you are quite right about the treatment requiring more production time and resources than I have at my disposal, but this treatment (?) was, in fact, an attempt to sort out the mass of research material and to set down some line of factual continuity. It was written at a time when I found it difficult to draw an average thread from the confused and tangled mass of individual experiences. The result was less a treatment than an impressionist narrative. When I actually got down to the business of organising production I realised immediately that some drastic simplification would be necessary. At this stage I discovered 'the family', and began to shape this narrative of mine around their actual experiences. During the process I found it permissible(sic) and convenient to discard some great and ungainly chunks of my collected material, but at the same time discovered important significances in the individual experience of this family that demanded to be written in to my story as being illustrative of the general emotional experience of all D.Ps. I find that these individual experiences, different in detail but common in general to all D.Ps., provide a more striking and definite image of the life of a D.P. than could any commentated generalisation. However, that is not the point of your paragraph: I am conscious of the impossibility of transferring my original treatment to the screen under present conditions, and will simplify the story as I go along.

Your paragraph 5 comes back to the question of the individual and the mass. I have said earlier in this letter I can't agree that in following a family I 'am missing the real significance of the subject', unless we are simply making a film about moving 5% of a mass of D.Ps. from Europe to Australia. On the basis of mass movement there would be more significance in a film on the migration of people from the U.K., which provides us with twice as many migrants as does IRO. I grant, again, that the mass movement aspect is historically and geopolitically spectacular, but it does not convey the real story. Consider, for instance, the fact that when IRO winds up it will more or less abandon to fate more than twice the number of D.Ps. resettled in Australia. There can be no talk of 'distinguished and noble parts' being played by any nation when the cold facts are that those abandoned people are being refused the chance 'of a new life in more fortunate countries' by the very nations who comprise IRO. I know, as well as anybody, the logical and national reasons for this set of circumstances and I am prepared to defend them, but I question the emphasis on mass movement in the light of these facts.

Surely, Stanley, the story of individuals that can be told truly (as representing the story of part of a mass) is a better story than that of a mass, told with essential reservations.

On page 2 of your notes, pursuing this same line or argument, you suggest telling the mass story and introducing the family at three or four key points. Without question this is the easiest approach (I note with feeling that you underline relatively), but my own view is that the mass of the D.Ps., the 'incidental cases' mentioned by you, and the machinery of IRO, must be brought in (fully, of course) as variations and accompaniment(sic) to the central, significant and continuous theme of the story of a D.P. - which is, when all's said and done, the story of the mass of D.Ps. In this first paragraph of your page 2 you say 'the camera could pick out from the crowd of depressed humanity several individuals.' You then go on to give illustrations -the famous surgeon digging holes or peeling potatoes, etc. It's just not like that Stanley. If there are any famous surgeons they have either gone to America, Chile, Venezuela or India (Australia won't let them practice (sic)), or else they are employed by IRO to look after D.Ps. in the camps. If they haven't immigrated or found jobs with IRO they are either incapacitated or lazy. If incapacitated they will never be a part of any mass migration: if lazy they will continue to sit in a D.P. camp and play cards until such times as IRO folds up. No-one has to peel spuds or dig holes unless he wants to.

The famous pianist has certainly gone to America or else playing in an American Army cabaret somewhere in the Zone. The average pianist is probably giving lessons to D.P. children like any average pianist in a suburb of London or Sydney. The watchmaker mends watches and the photographer photographs babies and wedding groups - it's just like home except that the economic level is low. For instance, I was taken to a Ukranian social evening last week. On one side of me sat a Polish ex-film star (she showed me her stills); on the other side was her husband, a feature producer in Warsaw. Had we been sitting in the Australia lounge instead of a camp assembly hall you couldn't have picked them from the average Australian crowd that gets into the Australia. There was a doctor, a lawyer and journalist (there are sixty seven D.P. newspapers printed in Germany). You just can't tell a D.P. from any other person until you begin to talk to them as individuals, and then you begin to realise that they are a human phenomenon - not as a mass, but as a lot of separate people. If you were to tell a D.P. that he was a bit of depressed humanity he would punch your nose.

To continue: I shall have to handle the establishment of the two main characters as simply as possible, mainly because the weather has packed up and it will be useless planning fixedly premeditated sequences in specific locations. We must be careful to avoid obviously German backgrounds, and the weather is too unreliable for us to sit down on an Austrian (or other exotic) location to shoot a planned sequence. Consequently I will have a general idea in mind and will shoot as closely to it as possible when weather and location coincide - it may even have to wait until I get to Naples.

Your paragraph 6: The sync sound sequences are going to be tough. The obvious thing is to do them at Burwood, except that we would not have an experienced 'Interviewer' available unless one of the men in Germany returns to Australia. Fortunately my two main characters speak some kind of English, but with them, as with most D.Ps., interviews are conducted through interpreters (sometimes two), in possibly three languages - English, D.P. German and the original tongue (Ukrainian, Polish, Czech, Latvian, etc.) In the case of the Australian Selection Interview all questions are put in English, & the answers go back via the interpreter, also in English. In this case the audience at least gets the general drift. I appreciate the danger of a succession of dreary interviews, but have the intention (but possibly not the capacity) to use these interviews to bring out the major problems and pre-occupations of D.Ps. generally. For instance, in the 'Eligibility' interview the point is made that first of all you have to qualify to be a D.P., and that there are five million infinitely more miserable refugees in Germany who haven't got the coveted D.P. status.

Similarly in the 'Resettlement' interview it is not always a question of deciding where you will go but if any country will take you. This is the drama of the thing - living in a camp is way down the bottom of the list of pre-occupations: the 'miseries' are emotional, not physical.

We come to paragraph 7 of your notes: again you are right - our principal characters need to be actors of considerable ability and, of course, they are not: but they are better than one might hope for under the circumstances. I'm not quite sure what you mean when you talk about 'development of character': I imagine that you mean much as I do when I talk about development of mood - I suppose it amounts to the same thing visually. The main difficulty in this regard is the continuous conflict between their personal and private 'mood of the day' and the 'mood of the day' required by the film. The personal mood of the day is unpredictable, and dependent upon factors that to us might seem irrelevant and even ridiculous. It is mysterious in its genealogy and stubborn in its insistence. It is part of the D.P. character and only time will rationalise it. So far the acting part has not been a great worry. I have not demanded any great histrionics and have been content to get editible material rather than sustained virtuosity. We have to get used to each other before we can do anything ambitious, and we may find eventually that my ideas are wholly impracticable. In this case I shall fall back upon your formula which, I admit, is far more efficient than mine is. But I'm not sure that I agree with you (purely academically) 'that it is better to make the less ambitious film adequately than to attempt an epic which is too difficult to produce properly'. However, that is a philosophic gambit that might be developed in a few months hence with appropriate refreshment. In the meantime I know that it is sound sense for me to keep my head in, and down, and to produce an adequate film rather than a good idea.

Today I am in a wonderfully argumentative and disagreeing mood and turn to page 4 of your letter with relish. My whole soul revolts at the flashback idea, i.e.

- Seq. 1. D.P. camp. These are the D.Ps.
 2. The pre-war life of our family.
 3. Back to the camp.

I understand that it is sometimes expedient and occasionally effective to make a chronological detour but I really don't hold with it Stanley. I suppose that my training as a journalist, and sympathies as a student of music prejudice me against any deviation from belief that things should start at the beginning and end at the end. I think I may have been a little too... [line missing]

...your objection to starting the film with our characters in their normal peace-time surrounding, then showing or stating the fact of war and its immediate effect on their lives, and so on naturally into the assumption of D.P. status, and the long road back to normalcy.

I agree almost entirely with what you say on the rest of page 4 and will go so far as to say that for some of the interiors we should concentrate on other people, being content to see our main characters among those waiting.

And now, to be truly magnanimous, I could not agree more with your recommendation that 'once they have been accepted for Australia we should get them away quickly'. I only wish that IRO worked on the same principle. As far as those sequences are concerned which follow the 'acceptance', I shall cover them fairly thoroughly as a matter of record but ultimately edit along the lines that you suggest.

I'm almost sorry that we have nothing much left to argue about - it's a pity you are not here so that we could discuss this thing from a standpoint of common experience - the real D.P. story is very unlike the popular concept, mainly, I think, because the Public Information Section of IRO has concentrated almost entirely on the achievement of IRO in relation to shifting people in bulk, and has given the impression that the D.P. is a problem rather than that the D.P. has a problem. However, you must be getting tired of this meandering.

I have seen the first rushes. Apart from general background material of landscape and European life (all of which is adequate) we have seen several sequences of our family. I am quite satisfied with the material and with them - in fact I think that they are amazingly good in a restrained sort of way. I've probably flattened them out. The negative quality and 100% certainty of Reg Pearse's shooting justifies his being here simply and solely as camera operator. If only I had an able assistant I would have no worries.

Maybe the Englishman from Hamburg will solve that one but I'm afraid it's getting too late for the weather: (I'm not quite sure what this last sentence means - it would come trippingly from the tongue of Groucho Marx). What I really mean is that the weather is lousy and it's impossible to get any sort of continuity into a programme of exterior shooting. I've persevered with the exteriors for the opening (pre-war) sequences and have pretty well finished them. I am shifting the unit to the Augsburg Leipheim area today where I have lined up some interior shooting. The trouble is that most of the things that happened to D.Ps. in the IRO resettlement programme (see my treatment 3, 4 and 5) have long since ceased to happen and it is almost entirely a matter of reconstruction. However, with the help of the Englishman and a number of friendly and co-operative IRO area officials this part of the job may be easier than it seems to be at the moment. However simply we treat the whole thing the actual shooting will be difficult to arrange. Every sequence requires the co-operation of any number of D.Ps. from a dozen to a hundred and from their point of view there is no obvious reason why they should put themselves out on our behalf.

I'll let you know in a week or two how things are going: in the meantime Stanley thanks again for your interest, it was good to hear from you. Best wishes to all at Burwood and affectionate greetings to Jessica.

Sincerely,

[signature]

R. Maslyn Williams.