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COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE

From Enemies to Friends:

German Prisoners-of-war in Michigan during World War II

By

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Table of Contents

Abstract

During World War II, the United States government created a program, with the assistance of other Allied forces to house, care, and feed foreign Axis troops in the United States. Sent on Liberty ships to American shores, approximately 425,000 German prisoners arrived between 1943 and 1945. Stationed in camps across the country, these prisoners interacted with the citizenry and directly challenged their ideology.

For prisoners sent to Michigan, the citizens willfully violated War Department guidelines concerning prisoner treatment. The violations were not inhumane. Rather, the disobedience came from being too friendly, supplying prisoners with food, conversation and clothing, which was expressly forbidden. Violating the orders from the War Department showed the humanness of the American citizens and created opportunities for personal relationships.

Through these violations, German prisoners and Michigan farmers established relationships challenging the Nazi ideology. Enemies became friends, upsetting previous stereotypes of the German people during World War II. The notion of Germans being Nazis needs to be challenged in the educational setting, as the narrative proves otherwise. In Michigan, German prisoners were men, not Nazis. They missed home and shared their struggles after the war with their new American friends. The story of the prisoners held in Michigan, needs to be told, both as a narrative and within the overall history of German prisoners-of-war.

Acknowledgements

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I would also like to thank the National Archives, College Park, Maryland, as they helped pull many documents and sent copies throughout my research process to uncover the specifics behind building the camp enclosures and the subtleties of prisoner reeducation.

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Chapter One: Understanding Prisoners-of-war

In the fall of 1943, a small rural community in Michigan faced turmoil. Enemies were arriving on their doorstep, disrupting the high school football season. The local community was required to bus students to a nearby high school to play football, a disappointing thought, as the football season was an important event to the small, rural community. The enemy's arrival required changes to Shelby High School's football season. This change was because of World War II and decisions handed down by the War Department. Throughout the season, German prisoners-of-war (POWs) occupied the football field. The Allied forces captured these men in North Africa and sent them to Michigan. This was to ease the labor shortage and create room in other Allied countries that struggled to feed, clothe, and house enemy troops. Instead of a regular football season, the players spent most of the season playing "home" games at the next town over, about five miles away. Marge, a teenager in 1944, recalled working at the local ice cream shop, talking with the guards, while her stepfather managed the local canning factory.[1] "They [the German prisoners] were just amazed at how well they were treated; how well they were fed; and how well they were taken care of."[2] These POWs spent about three years in the rural community, from the spring to the fall harvesting seasons. They worked hard and spent the winter housed at Fort Custer, a military training center founded after World War I. It is located outside Battle Creek, Michigan, at the center of the state. Today, Fort Custer remains a training center and an active military installation, under the command of the United States Army.[3]

[1] Esther M. and Marge P. Interview by Abigail Runk. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan (2018).

[2] Ibid

[3] *Fort Custer Military Museum & Historical Center*. Edited by Michigan Fort Custer, (2021).

The German POWs entered the United States in 1942, after the U.S. started the North African campaign to capture Italy, prior to the D-Day operations in 1944. Joining the Allies, American involvement helped turn the war towards an Allied victory, given the shipments of supplies and men. Upon capturing Germans and other Axis troops, the question of where to house these individuals arose.[4] As France and Britain struggled with space, the United States, along with Canada, hesitantly agreed to transport, house, and feed POWs according to the standards set by the Geneva Convention.

The outline of the Geneva Convention demanded countries treat prisoners-of-war amicably. Within the United States, this meant supplying prisoners with the same comforts given to American troops. Accusations of coddling and preferential treatment arose from citizens because of this development, as residents maintained that the prisoners experienced better treatment than soldiers.[5] Japanese American citizens also faced on American soil, yet their experience, though humane, was less fair. The enemy prisoners in the camps expected care in the same vein as U.S. servicemen, as outlined in the Geneva Convention. Japanese Americans imprisoned under Executive Order 9066 did not receive the same treatment.[6]

The demand for similar care resulted a backlash from the United States' government. Americans were envious as rationed products, such as meat and cigarettes appeared in the prisoners' possession. War Department regulations forbade the exchange of cigarettes with prisoners.[7] However, the War Department maintained that no coddling happened and the

[4] Jean-Michel Turcotte. "To Have a Friendly Co-Operation between Canadians and Americans': The Canada-United States Relationship Regarding the German Prisoners-of-war, 1940-1945.", *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 28, no. 3 (September 14, 2017): 383. https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2017.1347433.

[5] Mary Spargo. "Prisoner Coddling Denied; U.S. To Stick to War Rules." *The Washington Post*. (April 27, 1945).

[6] Greg Robinson. *By Order of the President*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). 1.

[7] "To Users of Prisoner-of-war Labor." (1944). German War Prisoners. WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan.

treatment fell within the confines of the Geneva Convention.[8] Besides following the guidelines, the War Department wanted to treat the German POWs fairly to ensure equal, or similar, treatment of American POWs in Europe. Yet, the War Department and the United States government did not want American citizens to have knowledge of the German POWs in the United States. Because of this, the narrative in American and German history is little known. However, the story remained in people's memories.

Scholars and researchers have explored general histories on the topic of German POWs in the United States, most notably Arnold Krammer's *Nazi Prisoners in America,* first published in 1979, with the most recent edition published in 1996. Other notable overarching studies include Judith Gansberg's, *Stalag: U.S.A.*, which was also published in 1979. Authors have written few books on German POWs. However, recent scholarship includes many regional and state studies Most of the current scholarship is published in journal articles, including Kevin Hall's "The Befriended Enemy: German Prisoners-of-war in Michigan", published in 2015. This study, along with Dr. Gregory Sumner's, *Michigan POW Camps in World War II* and Ethan Reardon's self-published *WWII German POWs in Michigan: Planned Reeducation vs. Fair Treatment,* published in 2018 and 2019, respectively, represents the current publications of Michigan's treatment of German POWs. However, a statewide study is lacking, given that Hall does not review camps from the middle or northern portions of the state, Sumner focused on Fort Custer and their prisoners; and Reardon's primary argument concerned the War Department's reeducation program. Hall and Sumner both argue that the treatment by American citizens resulted in friendships between the two groups.[9] Reardon argued that despite attempts by the

[8] "To Users of Prisoners-of-war Labor."

[9] Kevin Hall. "The Befriended Enemy: German Prisoners-of-war in Michigan." *Michigan Historical Review* 41, no. 1 (2015): 57-58. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5342/michhistrevi.41.1.0057. Dr. Gregory D. Sumner. *Michigan Pow Camps in World War II*. (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2018). 1-2.

United States government to persuade German prisoners to abandon National Socialism through a concentrated reeducation program, the labor program used to alleviate a labor shortage was more effective in changing the prisoners' minds.[10]

A complete analysis of all Michigan POW camps has not been conducted, nor has there been an evaluation of prisoner letters throughout the state. Both Hall and Sumner reference surviving prisoner letters to German farmers. Still, no complete narrative of camp life, the different camps in the state, nor an understanding of the relationships between prisoners and Michigan farmers exists. This study hopes to bring the entire narrative of the prisoners' experiences in Michigan to the forefront. It can provide details relating to the construction of the camps, the lifestyle of prisoners, important events of the POWs, and the impact of the relationships between the German POWs and Americans. Through the discovery of unpublished letters written by former German prisoners, the primary sources indicated that the United States's citizens circumvented the Geneva Convention in their treatment of POWs by exceeding the expected treatment. Additional sources include oral testimonies and newspaper articles detailing the treatment of the prisoners along with the initial misgivings and apprehension of American citizens. Although prisoners expected care similar to that received by American servicemen, American citizens supplied additional food, clothing, and access to uncensored materials, in violation of the stipulations set by the War Department.

Focusing on the state of Michigan, which had thirty camps from 1943 to 1945, approximately 5,000 German men remained behind barbed wire. [11] Yet in Michigan, few sites, such as Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps, housed the POWs. As the POW program

[10] Ethan Reardon. *WWII German POWs in Michigan: Planned Reeducation Vs. Fair Treatment*: (Mission Point Press, 2019). 1-2.

[11] "List of German Pow Camps in Michigan." Fremont Historical Society. Fremont, Michigan.

began, the U.S. War Department, used former CCC camp sites as prisoner barracks. Thus, the "barbed wire" associated with POW camps, did not exist in Michigan. Camps existed in fairgrounds, factory grounds, and even high school football fields. The War Department allocated one guard for every ten prisoners, allowed work details, and provided recreational opportunities.[12] Yet, these camps were interesting to American citizens, who wanted to see the enemy. Despite rules against the POWs becoming public spectacles, it was common for people to watch their arrival at the camps, or stand at the fence lines, hoping for a glimpse of the men. Some camps existed within German–American communities. Camps in Frankenmuth and Berrien Springs, Michigan both serviced farmers of German heritage who understood the language.[13] This shared linguistic culture allowed relationships to form between prisoners and farmers, lasting decades.

Interpretations of German Prisoners in Michigan

Following the United States' involvement in World War II, the Allies reached a decision concerning German Prisoners-of-war. U.S. assistance allowed the Allies to regain and liberate German-occupied territory. However, this left a question about what should be done with the remaining prisoners. Reluctantly, the United States agreed to transport and house Axis prisoners in the United States for the duration of the war. This reluctance grew out of a desire to keep the enemy away from the civilian population. However, France and Britain's ability to care for the large number of captured troops had peaked. Transported back to America in the same ships (Liberty ships) carrying soldiers to the front, approximately 300,000 to 400,000 prisoners

[12] Dr. Gregory D. Sumner. *Michigan Pow Camps in World War II*. (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2018). 128

[13] Frankenmuth, Michigan is known as "Little Bavaria" within Michigan, where residents still read German. In Berrien Springs, the Teichmann Family had a working knowledge of German, given the family heritage. Untranslated letters in German still remain at local historical societies, addressed to the families.

reached American shores. Of those, about 5,000 German men, along with other Axis prisoners, were imprisoned in Michigan. They worked on local farms to offset the ensuing labor shortage.

Historians have rarely written local, state, and national histories related to Michigan and German POWs. They completed many of the studies in the 1980s to early 2000s. Researchers could interview surviving prisoners and local farmers. There is no complete study of all aspects of the prisoner camps, encompassing government documents, prisoner letters, and surviving testimonies. The previous publications on Michigan prisoners-of-war focus on camp life, the reeducation program, or the idea of an enemy. There are no cross-references between the works, as they were published around the same time, creating a gap in the historiography where the works need to be analyzed in the same space, incorporating more details about the camps' construction, prisoners' lives, and the unpublished stories that have survived. However, an overarching theme concerning the POWs exists- Americans treated prisoners very well.

Secondary sources concerning German POWs in America range from books to journal articles, across a wide range of topics. Some are in-depth analyses of the camps, some focus on a particular camp or state, while others mention German POWs as an element of the labor force. The early studies, such as Gansberg's study, gave a general overview of the topic, to explain this missing narrative of American history. She argued that the American government violated the Geneva Convention through its reeducation program. At the same time, she attempted to give a narrative history of the fortunes of German prisoners held in the United States. Following general-studies, regional and state studies, such as Lewis Carlson's, *We were Each Other's Prisoners* (1997); Ruth Cook's, *Guests Behind Barbed Wire* (2007); and Allen Koop's, *Stark Decency* (1988), explored the individual experiences of POWs within a specific camp or state. Current studies focus on the individual camps, individual prisoners, or an element of POW

studies, such as the reeducation program. As historians have conducted further research, there emerged a drive to narrow the study of German POWs to a more personal level. The research into the prisoners held in Michigan fills a gap in the narrative literature concerning POWs in the state. Scholars have completed limited research on the educational value of German POWs, but no narrative account exists.

One of the first studies on German prisoners was Wilfred Reiners's, *Soviet Indoctrination of German War Prisoners*, written in 1959. Written with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, this source reviewed Soviet techniques of indoctrination to compare with American prisoners held by Communist China during the Korean War.[14] Reiners argues that Soviet indoctrination involved using several objectives, sometimes simultaneously: "fulfillment of ideological legacy; using prisoners-of-war as propaganda instruments; using prisoners-of-war as political instruments; and training an elite group."[15] These objectives had a direct impact on some POWs, resulting from the manipulation of prisoners' environments, direct attacks upon their belief systems, and the unintended living conditions while in captivity.

Following Reiners's study, Judith Gansberg wrote the first, full-length book concerning the German POWs in America in 1977. Gansberg, a faculty member at the time of publishing, at Southeastern University in Washington D.C., reviewed the American influence on West Germany, through the experiences of German prisoners-of-war. Describing the experiences of the approximately 370,000 German POWs, she outlined the experiment to combat Nazism, through a curriculum approved by the War Department and created by the Prisoner-of-war

[14] Wilfred O. Reiners. *Soviet Indoctrination of German War Prisoners, 1941-1956*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Center for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1959. 3.
[15] Ibid.

Special Projects Division.[16] Outlined under the Geneva Convention, the United States abided by specific rules, which allowed prisoners access to food, work, and a place to sleep. However, at the urging of Eleanor Roosevelt, the U.S. also embarked on a democratic reeducation program, a "denationalization" violation under the Geneva Convention.[17] Despite this scope of the Convention, the schools and other prisoners were affected by their experiences in the United States. Gansberg asserts that the German prisoners were more concerned with rebuilding and selecting a type of government, because of their experiences in America and their education, allowing them to see and solve current problems.[18] She notes, however, that "the system was not perfect."[19] Many soldiers were more concerned about their families than spreading democracy.

While incorporating general overviews of the topic of German POWs in America, John Hammond Moore continued the study into the German POWs with his book, *The Faust-ball Tunnel: German POWs in America and Their Great Escape* (1978). Rather than just explaining the missing narrative, Moore describes the escape of twenty-five prisoners from a camp in Arizona, to begin the process of more in-depth studies of regional camps and individual stories. They built a tunnel underneath the exterior fence, disguised as building a volleyball (*faustball*) court.[20] This historical narrative is little known, yet remains one of the few mass escapes, though the guards recaptured the men. Rather than an interpretation, Moore focuses on telling this story, which is hardly known outside of Arizona.

After Gansberg's work, the topic of general studies continued with Arnold Krammer's quintessential book, *Nazi Prisoners-of-war in America*, published first in 1979, and subsequently

[16] Judith M. Gansberg. *Stalag U.S.A.* (New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1979). Front Cover
[17] Gansberg, 2.
[18] Gansberg. 185-187.
[19] Ibid.
[20] John Hammond Moore. *The Faustball Tunnel*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1978). 113-115.

revised in 1991 and 1996. One of the few in-depth studies concerning the POW camps, Krammer argues that it was difficult to distinguish between Nazis and non-Nazis prisoners. In addition, each camp experience was distinctive.[21] Encompassing similar research methods to Gansberg, with prisoner interviews and reviewing government documents, it is one of the major sources on the German POWs, as Krammer outlined the camps and prisoners in each state, offering a narrative interpretation of their experiences.

Ron Theodore Robin's *The Barbed-Wire College: Reeducating German POWs in the United States during World War II*, and Lewis H. Carlson's *We were Each Other's Prisoners: An Oral History of World War II American and German Prisoners-of-war,* followed Krammer's account on German POWs. Robin's account continued the idea of the reeducation program. Considered successful by the U.S. government, Robin argued that the program was ineffective and determined the reason for the positive affirmation was the professors mobilized for the reeducation curriculum believed they had accomplished a highly important assignment. They considered it more important than formal military missions by democratizing the enemy.[22] Although a violation of the Geneva Convention, the goal included providing an alternative political ideology to National Socialism.[23]

As the reeducation program would have changed a prisoner's outlook, the experience of being a prisoner on American soil, would also have been life changing. Carlson's book tells the personal stories of German and American POWs. Making use of Germany's Day of National Mourning[24] in Michigan, and word of mouth, Carlson located and obtained permission to

[21] Arnold Krammer. (*Nazi Prisoners-of-war in America*. Scarbourgh, New York, 1996). xiii.
[22] Ron Theodore Robin. *The Barbed-Wire College: Reeducating German POWs in the United States During World War II*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995. ix.
[23] Robin. 3.
[24] *Volkstauertag*

interview former POWs. Sharing a common background and similar experiences, Carlson argued that the experience was a central part of their lives.[25] Spending three to four years in American captivity, the prisoners saw a living example of democracy, while also experiencing the same care given to American soldiers or family friends. They were well-fed and given recreational time, which kept them safe from the front lines.

As Carlson began piecing the oral histories together, many historians began regional histories concerning the German POWs. One study concerning Iowa's German POWs was *Signs of Life (Lebenszeichen),* edited by Michael Luick-Thrams. Luick-Thrams attempted to present the historical and human sides of the German POW experience. Using letters and photos, Luick-Thrams argued this topic is little known, yet the collection of 282 letters, showed Camp Algona's daily life and how the prisoners dealt with their circumstances.[26] Similarly, Matthias Reiss published a journal article, "Bronzed Bodies behind Barbed Wire," concerning the masculinity of the German POWs within the middle regions of the United States. Reiss (2005) argues that the bodies of the German POWs, specifically their masculinity, determined their treatment in America.[27] The perception of German POWs as expert, disciplined, and fit soldiers, similar to American soldiers, garnered sympathy from their American captors. The people treated the German POWs, as they expected to be treated.[28]

Capture by a foreign nation did not guarantee excellent treatment. However, as historians continued studying the German prisoners, the consensus of comparable treatment with American

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[25] Lewis H. Carlson. *We Were Each Other's Prisoners: An Oral History of World War II American and German Prisoners-of-war*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1997. viii-ix.

[26] *Signs of Life (Lebenszeichen): The Correspondence of German POWs at Camp Algona, Iowa 1943-1946,* edited by Michael Luick-Thomas. (Mason-City IA, 2002).

[27] Matthias Reiss. "Bronzed Bodies Behind Barbed Wire: Masculinity and the Treatment of German Prisoners-of-war in the United States During World War II." *The Journal of Military History* 69, no. 2 (April 2005): 476. https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.2005.0122.

[28] Ibid.

servicemen grew. Barbara Heisler continued the trend of similar treatment with American soldiers in the article, "The "Other Braceros": Temporary Labor and German Prisoners-of-war in the United States." Rather than only using migrant workers from South America, the War Department authorized the use of German POW labor in 1943 to offset the labor crisis brought about by the war. Accessing archival records, Heisler argued that the German POWs became "like our own boys," referencing the idea that Americans did not see differences between the German POWs and the American soldiers sent to war. Instead, the similarities between the two groups resulted in POWs being treated similarly as American servicemen, while the *braceros*[29] remained outsiders in the community.[30] In addition, a recent article by Katherine Jellison, "Get Your Farm in the Fight: Farm Masculinity in World War II", furthered the discussion of masculinity among the POWs and the farmers. Facing a labor shortage, the farmers used masculine images to convince boys and young men to remain on the farm. However, when that failed, they used military labor through the POWs. The government used the masculinity of foreign laborers to portray an ideal farmer as white, muscular, and using his body to fight.[31] The primary goal was to retain farmers to deal with the labor shortage, but it resulted in camaraderie with the foreign workers. This masculine portrayal left behind an image of a white, male farmer, not one of a different ethnicity.

Heisler followed up with an additional article on the German POWs titled, "Returning to America: German Prisoners-of-war and the American Experience." Conducting in-depth interviews, Heisler maintained that the treatment similar to that of American soldiers and

[29] Workers from Mexico and other Central and South American countries.

[30] Barbara Schmitter Heisler. "The "Other Braceros": Temporary Labor and German Prisoners-of-war in the United States, 1943-1946." *Social Science History* 31, no. 2 (2007): 239. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40267939.

[31] Katherine Jellison. "Get Your Farm in the Fight: Farm Masculinity in World War II." *Agricultural History Society* (2018): 5. https://dx.doi.org/10.3098/ah.2018.092.1.005.

camaraderie at the hands of American captors, both the soldiers guarding them and the Americans they worked for, prompted many former POWs to return to American shores as naturalized citizens.[32] Being given food, clothing, and other staples left an impact on the German prisoners, as they experienced captivity far from home and away from danger. Being seen as friends rather than enemies left favorable impressions of the nation and its citizens.

However, a complete narrative concerning the general experiences of German POWs in America was lacking until Antonio Thompson's *Men in German Uniform: POWs in America during World War II.* Using archival research, interviews, and the previous articles, Thompson asserted how the United States dealt with, and was primarily successful, in housing almost 400,000 German POWs. Thompson presents two arguments: that the "U.S. adhered to the Geneva Convention;" and that, despite the various nationalities of men in German uniform, the "United States was able to navigate the problems of adherence."[33] In addition, the United States experienced benefits, as the Americans gained a temporary workforce and fought against an ideology through practice. The German POWs benefited from the treatment that gave access to recreation, work, and religious services to alleviate the boredom of capture.[34]

The experiences of the German POWs in America varied drastically from the experiences of Germans held by the Soviet Union and even of Americans held in the Pacific Theater. Adelbert Holl, a soldier in the German Army, became a captive of the Soviet Union.[35] Holl experienced horrifying treatment for seven years, given the lack of food, clothing, and working

[32] Barbara Schmitter Heisler. "Returning to America: German Prisoners-of-war and the American Experience." *German Studies Review* 31, no. 3 (October 2008): 537. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27668591.

[33] Antonio S. Thompson. *German Jackboots on Kentucky Bluegrass: Housing German Prisoners-of-war in Kentucky, 1942-1946*. (Clarksville, TN: Diversion Press, Inc., 2008). xii-xiii.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Adelbert Holl. *After Stalingrad: Seven Years as a Soviet Prisoner-of-war*. Translated by Tony Le Tissier. (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword, 2016). 4-7.

conditions he experienced. In addition, due to the friction between Germany and the Soviet Union, following the extermination tactics of the Eastern Front, their captors considered German prisoners second-class, not caring much whether they lived or died.

Likewise, in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps, American servicemen experienced hunger, beatings, and death marches as the Japanese saw surrender as dishonorable. Experiences of American servicemen exist within stories, such as *Unbroken* (2014) by Laura Hillenbrand and *Sorties into Hell* (2003) by Chester Hearn, discussing the high rates of death seen among American soldiers in the Pacific.[36] Hillenbrand told Louis Zamperini's story, while Hearn recalled the experiences of American soldiers on Chichi Jima, which "testify to the harsh reality that those in command knew their actions violated all the conventions of war and humanity and were legally and morally wrong".[37] In comparison, the United States extended similar care to German POW, treatment comparable to American active duty personnel.

Although many countries had signed the Geneva Convention, agreeing to follow the precepts of prisoner treatment, one missing signor, Russia (USSR), arguably allowed the atrocities seen on both sides of the Eastern Front. It is not an excuse for the inhumane treatment of prisoners, but by not signing the document, the Soviet Union was not bound by the same statues. Japan, though a signer, considered surrender dishonorable. They were unprepared for the number of prisoners captured, leading to some of the harsh conditions experienced by the prisoners.

[36] Laura Hillenbrand. *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*. (New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2014). Chester Hearn. *Sorties into Hell: The Hidden War on Chichi Jima*. (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003).

[37] Hearn, xv.

Although general, overarching studies of the German POWs existed, another element within this narrative concerned the political side of prisoner-of-war studies. Neville Wylie wrote *Barbed Wire Diplomacy.* concluding that the political relationship between Britain and Germany rested on their concern for POWs and the official policy of their respective governments.[38] Matthias Reiss continued the political theme, incorporating social changes, in his article, "Solidarity Among "Fellow Sufferers" (2013). A senior lecturer in England, Reiss asserted the differences between the treatment of German POWs and the African American soldiers. Building on work completed in 2002 and looking at the relationship between German POWs and African American soldiers, Reiss demonstrated that despite the differences in treatment, the POWs, and soldiers, both at the bottom of the economic and social ladder, developed harmonious relationships.[39]

Political contributions into prisoner-of-war studies continued by looking at other North American allies. A piece written by Jean-Michel Turcotte, a professor at Ruhr University, asserts that both countries, the U.S. and Canada treated prisoner treatment and containment as priorities and objects of concern. Not listed as a primary ally during World War II, Canada also helped house POWs.[40] The two countries agreed on POW treatments and attempted to follow the Geneva Conventions.

While studies adopting political and cultural lenses continued throughout the early 2000s, the more popular aspect of regional and state research on German POWs began growing. In his

[38] Neville Wylie. *Barbed Wire Diplomacy: Britain, Germany and the Politics of Prisoners-of-war, 1939-1945*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). 4.

[39] Matthias Reiss. "Solidarity among "Fellow Sufferers": African Americans and German Prisoners-of-war in the United States During World War II." *The Journal of African American History* 98, no. 4 (2013): 532. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5323/jafriamerhist.98.4.0531.

[40] Turcotte, 383-384.

book, *Stark Decency,* Allen Koop studied Camp Stark in New Hampshire. Combing through local, state, and national records, as well as letters and interviews, Koop determined that the German POWs experienced humane treatment from the Americans, similar to that of American servicemen. However, this decency was the human element and compassion that demonstrated a light within the darkness of World War II.[41] James Fickle and Donald Ellis continued regional studies by reviewing the southern lumber industry and the impact of the labor program, in an article published in 1990. Using essays, articles, books, and personal interviews, Fickle and Ellis concluded that America did not fully follow the Geneva Convention; instead, it created a successful labor program, despite a language barrier that prevented full integration and efficiency.[42]

Historians continued to examine other areas of the United States through further studies. The historian Glenn Thompson also continued this trend of regional studies, with his publication, *Prisoners on the Plains*, a narrative of the German POWs in the Great Plains states. Thompson documented the United States" requisition of land for prison camps, the experiences of the workers, and their impact on soil restoration during the 1940s, after the Dust Bowl of the 1930s.[43] While Thompson focused on the central United States, another historian continued regional studies by focusing on Florida. Rober Billinger, Jr., a professor of History at Wingate University, documented Florida's POWs in his book *Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State,*

[41] Allen V. Koop, *Stark Decency: German Prisoners in a New England Village.* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 1988), ix-xi.

[42] James E. Fickle and Donald W. Ellis, "Pows in the Piney Woods: German Prisoners-of-war in the Southern Lumber Industry, 1943-1945," The Journal of Southern History 56, no. 4 (November 1990): 695, 721-722, https://www.jstor.org/stable/22119033.

[43] Glenn Thompson. *Prisoners on the Plains: German POWs in America*. (Holdrege, NE: Phelps County Historical Society, 1993). 3,5.

published in 2000. Billinger discussed the fact that the subject of German POWs remained unknown, because of the War Department's desire to limit knowledge of the POW program.[44]

As regional studies progressed, the focus no longer remained only on a geographic area. Looking into the labor market, Tomas Jaehn continued regional studies, by reviewing the northwestern region of the United States and the impact of the POW labor program in the area. Jaehn, the director of the Fray Angelico Chavez History Library, asserted that America followed the Geneva Convention and that the explanation of limited publications resulted from a "lack of high drama".[45] Because of the belief that many individuals would not find the story interesting, Jaehn provided an in-depth review of Camp Rupert and the labor program, indicating the POWs were essential to production. Without the German POWs, there would have been a massive loss of agricultural products, both foodstuffs available for the war and those needed by the civilian population to survive.

While Jaehn focused on Camp Rupert, another state study conducted by Betty Cowley documented the POWs in Wisconsin. Cowley's publication, *Stalag Wisconsin*, argued that the POWs experienced humane treatment, while being essential to the production of crops in Wisconsin.[46] David Fiedler, in *The Enemy Among Us*, continued the state study trend, through his book on Missouri's POWs. Fiedler argued that the Missouri POWs experienced good treatment, and the relationship with Missourians grew from one of fear to fondness.[47]

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[44] Robert D. Billinger, Jr. *Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State: German POWs in Florida*. (Tallahassee, FL: University of Florida Press, 2000).1.

[45] Tomas Jaehn. "Unlikely Harvesters: German Prisoners-of-war as Agricultural Workers in the Northwest." *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 50, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 57. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4520253.

[46] Betty Cowley. *Stalag Wisconsin: Inside WWII Prisoner-of-War Camps.* (Oregon, WI: Badger Books, 2002). 5-8, 11-13.

[47] David Fiedler. *The Enemy among Us: POWs in Missouri During World War II*. (Columbia, MO: University Press, 2003). 2-4.

As historians expanded into the southern United States, the trend of state and camp-based studies continued. Michael R. Waters, a professor of anthropology and geography at Texas A&M University, documented the prisoner experience at Camp Hearne. Using government documents, letters, and personal interviews, Waters asserted that the POWs experienced decent treatment under American control. Interviewing former POWs, Waters gave many former prisoners a chance to tell their stories.[48] Texas's POWs story continued with Jeffrey L. Littlejohn and Charles H. Fords *The Enemy within never did without.* Littlejohn, a history professor at Sam Houston State University, and Ford, a professor of history at Norfolk State University, argued that Huntsville's camp served as the model camp (similar to Fort McClellan, Alabama) and created a high standard of treatment for German POWs.[49]

Because Camp Hearne modeled an acceptable prisoner camp, similar to Fort McClellan, the study of Alabama's POWs was necessary. Ruth Beaumont Cook documented Alabama's POWs. In 2007, Cook reviewed Camp Aliceville in Alabama, arguing that this is a little-known story and that the procedures of Aliceville relate to contemporary issues of the War on Terror, as many German POWs did not return home as quickly as others, given the United States desire to protect American soldiers in Germany.[50] Jack Shay also reviewed Alabama's POWs in *The Fort McClellan POW Camp.* Shay argued that Fort McClellan gained a reputation as a "model camp," where both foreign and domestic officials commended the camp and the treatment of the prisoners.[51]

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[48] Michael R. Waters. *Lone Star Stalag: German Prisoners-of-war at Camp Hearne.* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004). xi-xv.

[49] Jeffery L. Littlejohn and Charles H. Ford. *The Enemy within Never Did Without: German and Japanese Prisoners-of-war at Camp Huntsville, 1942-1945*. (Huntsville, TX: Texas Review Press, 2015). i.

[50] Ruth Beaumont Cook. *Guests Behind the Barbed Wire: German POWs in America: A True Story of Hope and Friendship.* (New York, NY: Crane Hill Publishers, 2007). 7, 15-18.

[51] Jack Shay. *The Fort McClellan Pow Camp: German Prisoners in Alabama, 1943-1946*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2016). 7-8.

Additional studies included publications on POW camps in Kentucky and Massachusetts. Both agreed that the German POWs experienced fair treatment, yet the goal of these publications was to bring awareness to these little-known narratives in their respective states. As Billinger mentioned, the War Department did not want Americans to be fully aware of the situation. Antonio Thompson discussed the POWs in Kentucky. Thompson, a history professor at Austin Peay State University, authored *Men in German Uniform.* Thompson's dissertation argued that Kentucky benefited economically and culturally from housing POWs in the state. The POWs demonstrated a willingness to work hard and brought the war to the American home front. Yet, Thompson maintained the general theme of the humane treatment received by the German POWs.[52]

While Thompson maintained the theme of decent treatment by prisoners in Kentucky, John Bonafilia documented camps in Massachusetts. He argued that German POWs" experiences in Massachusetts affected future relations with the country, as they learned about democracy and created lasting relationships with Americans.[53] Using personal interviews and state and government documents, Bonfilia demonstrated that the prisoners felt more affected by their direct treatment from Americans, rather than the War Department's reeducation program and special projects.[54] Yet, neither work documented the camp experience and the day-to-day operations of the prison camps. Both discussed the camps' impact on its occupants but limited the narrative understanding behind their construction and the argument of fair treatment.

[52] Antonio S. Thompson. *German Jackboots on Kentucky Bluegrass: Housing German Prisoners-of-war in Kentucky, 1942-1946*. (Clarksville, TN: Diversion Press, Inc., 2008). 1-4.

[53] Thompson, 45-46.

[54] John C. Bonafilia. ""Hospitality Is the Best Form of Propaganda": German Prisoners-of-war in Western Massachusetts, 1944-1946." *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 44, no. 1 (2016): 45-46.

Along with the regional studies at the micro-level, personal stories and biographies were used as secondary sources, and the story of German POWs in America was continued. Arnold Krammer assisted Georg Gaertner in writing a memoir and explaining the story of his great escape in 1945. Escaping from a prison camp in New Mexico, Gaertner evaded capture for thirty-seven years. Mentioned in the recent edition of Krammer's *Nazi Prisoners-of-war in America,* the two men connected as Gaertner reached out to turn himself in.[55] Fluent in English, Gaertner adapted to life in the United States and lived as a fugitive. He eventually married and had children.[56] He was the only German POW never to be apprehended after the war and repatriated.

Although studies on German POWs have been conducted in each region of the United States, studies on the POWs in Michigan remain limited. William Lowe wrote his master's thesis on the German POWs in 1995. Titled "Working for eighty-cents a day," Lowe documented the labor shortage and payment to POWs in Michigan, determining that despite the low wage, the POWs earned enough money to send back home and afford items from the camp commissary.[57] Studies on Michigan's German POWs continued with Lauren Hahn's, "Germans in the Orchards" (2000), which documented the experiences of POWs who worked for a local farmer in southwest Michigan.[58] Since no new interpretations exist, given its narrative format, it was one of the first articles to discuss POW letters to Michigan farmers. Kevin Hall, a doctoral student at Central Michigan University, continued this idea, writing "The Befriended Enemy: German

[55] Arnold Krammer. *Nazi Prisoners-of-war in America*. (Scarbourgh, New York, 1996). xi.
[56] Georg Gaertner and Arnold Krammer. *Hitler's Last Soldier in America*. (New York, NY: Stein and Day, 1985). 11-12.
[57] William R. Lowe. "Working for Eighty Cents a Day: German Prisoners-of-war in Michigan, 1943-1945." (Eastern Michigan University, 1995). 2.
[58] Lauren Hahn. "Germans in the Orchards: Post-World War II Letters from Ex-Pow Agricultural Workers to a Midwestern Farmer." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 33/34, no. 1 (2000-2001): 170, 177. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1315350.

Prisoners-of-war in Michigan" (2015).[59] Hall used letters from Frankenmuth and Muskegon, Michigan, demonstrating the cordial relationships between German POWs and Michigan farmers.[60] These direct experiences changed the perception of America as an enemy.[61] The first book published on German POWs in Michigan arrived in 2018, authored by Dr. Gregory D. Sumner, a history professor at the University of Detroit, Mercy. Documenting the experiences of prisoners in the camps, Sumner argued the work program created lasting relationships, as Americans embodied their ideals.[62] Ethan Reardon, a master's student at Central Michigan University, privately published his thesis titled, *WWII German POWs in Michigan: Planned Reeducation vs. Fair Treatment.* He asserted that the labor program, the process of POWs working on American farms, reeducated German POWs more successfully than the War Department's reeducation program.[63]

As the topic of German POWs in the United States has received new life and interest, research into the German POWs in Michigan has grown. However, research is lacking on the violations of War Department stipulations, as documented by the German POW letters throughout the state. Some of the Michigan publications mentioned prisoner letters and although they were analyzed, historians have not evaluated all the surviving documents. In many current publications, letters from POWs remain uncited. German POWs in the United States experienced humane and similar treatment to American servicemen, as demonstrated by the various regional and state studies completed. However, scholars can conduct more research and studies to fully

[59] Kevin Hall. "The Befriended Enemy: German Prisoners-of-war in Michigan." *Michigan Historical Review* 41, no. 1 (2015): 57. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5342/michhistrevi.41.1.0057.
[60] Hall 57-58.
[61] Hall 78.
[62] Dr. Gregory D. Sumner. *Michigan Pow Camps in World War II*. (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2018). 9,14.
[63] Ethan Reardon. *WWII German POWs in Michigan: Planned Reeducation Vs. Fair Treatment*: (Mission Point Press, 2019). 1-5, 64-65.

tell the narrative of German POWs in Michigan, their experiences, and their impact on American history during World War II.

Research Questions & Methodology

The following questions must be answered on the topic of German POWs in Michigan. The primary question is: Did the German POWs" experiences exceed the confines laid out within the Geneva Convention, allowing prisoners to form relationships with American farmers, directly lessening their belief in National Socialism? Additional questions include: Did the U.S. follow the Geneva Convention concerning the use of POW labor? Why did the German POWs experience better treatment than their counterparts, leading to accusations of coddling? How could the historical narrative reestablish prisoner-of-war studies and integrate the teachings within the confines of World War II?

Answering these questions requires reviewing the Geneva Conventions and its stipulations, along with the War Department regulations and why camps existed in Michigan. Under the Geneva Convention, enlisted men of the German Army could work on menial tasks and be used as labor. As such, prisoners worked during the spring, summer, and fall months at approximately thirty subcamps throughout the state. During the winter months, POWs stayed at the state's main military installation, Fort Custer. Sent out to work in the crop fields, the prisoners harvested various crops, including apples, cherries, beans, and other staples for the war effort.[64] They established relationships with many farmers, happily working in the fields. One Michigan resident recalled prisoners continued to work, despite being told not to, though this showed the problem of a language barrier.[65] Relationships are further established with correspondence between farmers of German ancestry and German prisoners, who exchanged

[64] Esther M and Marge P. (2018).
[65] Ibid.

letters for years.[66] The camps placed in Michigan helped relieve the labor shortage in farming communities. However, camp placement alone does not detail prisoners' experiences.

To reveal the prisoners' treatment and experience, the primary methodology is to find and translate letters written to Michigan farmers following repatriation. Falling into the realms of military and social history, this project culminated in a state-wide search for letters and experiences throughout the thirty POW camps.[67] Many of the uncovered letters are still in German. However, the consensus of letters, approximately one hundred fifty, determined that the prisoners experienced humane treatment at the hands of their American captors and employers. They experienced treatment similar to that of servicemen or hired hands, rather than enemy combatants. Historical societies and local archives contained additional letters. However, time, care, and age, rendered the handwriting illegible, making translation difficult. In addition, War Department documents, accessed through the National Archives, detail camp construction, prisoner rosters, and POW treatment under the Sixth Service Command.[68] Although more legal, these documents revealed good to excellent conditions allotted to the POWs within Michigan.

Civilians gave the prisoners additional food, blankets, and other amenities in violation of War Department stipulations. The prisoners had opportunities for recreation and English language classes. One camp raised money and built a swimming pond, though they later had to fill in this amenity, as the community presented backlash.[69] Another camp, outside Frankenmuth, placed in a German-speaking community, allowed the prisoners to build personal relationships,

[66] Letters in Frankenmuth, Michigan range from 1946-1980s; Muskegon letters range from 1946-1990; Berrien Springs POW letters range from 1946-1980s.

[67] "List of German Pow Camps in Michigan." Fremont Historical Society. Fremont, Michigan.

[68] National Archives Documents from the Office of the Provost General, Record Group 389, have 6-9 boxes of records concerning Axis POWs and Michigan camps.

[69] Dr. Gregory D. Sumner. *Michigan Pow Camps in World War II*. Charleston, SC: History Press, 2018. 56.

share culture, and speak about their treatment.[70] Prisoners discussed their treatment with American citizens while accepting food and goodwill. Part of the reason behind American's goodwill may have been an inability to differentiate between soldier and enemy.[71]German soldiers replaced American men sent to war, both of whom were young men. The average age, as prisoners arrived on American shores, was twenty-four.[72] Citizens felt disdain, as they sent men into the fight and prisoners were being treated exceptionally, in their eyes, through food rations, clothing, and recreation time. This led to accusations that the War Department was coddling the German prisoners.[73] This created a situation, where Americans struggled to perceive the German prisoners as enemies. Neither did Michigan farmers equate German soldiers with Nazis. They were considered soldiers or workers, depending on the individual farmer. Fraternization was common, as young girls stood at the fence and attempted to talk with the prisoners. There is even a story of two girls running off with two German POWs for a late-night fling.[74]

Ony one scholar has published a book about Michigan's German POWs and detailing their experiences. This monograph, by Gregory Sumner, a professor of History at the University of Mercy, Detroit, called *Michigan POW Camps in World War II,* described prisoners' overall experience during captivity. Sumner conducted interviews with surviving descendants of farmers and attempted to track POWs through an annual event held at Fort Custer National Cemetery in November. In addition, Sumner gathered and reviewed newspapers, while uncovering letters written by POWs to farmers in small historical societies throughout the state. However,

[70] *Correspondence to Otto Herzog.* FHA95.40.163-184. Frankenmuth Historical Society. Frankenmuth, Michigan.
[71] Reiss. "Bronzed Bodies Behind Barbed Wire". 475.
[72] William May. "German Prisoners Sing Loudly, Richly at Shelby." *Muskegon Chronicle.* (August 4, 1944). German War Prisoners WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan.
[73] Spargo. (1945).
[74] Sumner. *Michigan POW Camps in World War II*. 98.

untranslated letters in Muskegon, and others in Berrien Springs, offered further insight into the relationships forged between prisoners and farmers. More analysis of the narrative relationships is necessary to fully understand the relationships built and how German prisoners grew from enemies to friends. Understanding this relationship allows further analysis of the overall narrative of German prisoners in the United States, further connecting this little-studied area of American history to the overall story of America in World War II.

Letters found at the Berrien Springs Historical Society, Oceana County Historical Society, Frankenmuth Historical Society, and the Lakeshore Museum Center, provided a survey of the different regions of Michigan. Many letters remain untranslated. Volunteers copied and translated letters housed at the historical society in Frankenmuth into English. Additional sources uncovered in Blissfield, Michigan, a historical society not cited by Dr. Sumner, help to understand prisoner deaths and their individual experiences.

An additional article, published in 2015, also utilized letters from Muskegon Country and Frankenmuth, Michigan to document German POW's experiences and their relationships with American farmers.[75] Both publications will be instrumental, as this study into POW's experiences will follow a similar methodology, though an analysis of all the camps, to uncover how Michigan followed the Geneva Convention and the different letters that exist document the German POW experiences, after the war.

The process of reviewing this topic will involve an analysis of around one hundred fifty letters. As Sumner and Hall reviewed interviews and letters, this study applied a similar methodology. Letters found in Berrien Springs, Frankenmuth, Muskegon, Sparta, and Blissfield,

[75] Hall. 57.

Michigan, assisted in analyzing individual stories. Interviews conducted in Shelby, Michigan, and found online augmented the letters. However, the argument varies by focusing on the prisoners' experiences and the stipulations of the War Department, which were routinely violated by the American public. In addition, the preliminary conclusions showed that relationships between American farmers and prisoners, which often lasted decades, directly impacted how Americans perceived the prisoners. They became workers, instead of Nazis. They remained men, rather than enemies. One Michigan resident, Otto Herzog, wrote letters back and forth with the prisoners who worked on his farm. His family donated his letters to the Frankenmuth Historical Society in 1994, written in German and translated, documenting the closeness between the men, as they discussed weather, conditions in Germany and America, and their families. In one letter, a family discussed the birth of their son, named after their American friend.[76]

Yet, beyond this, they became family friends, despite a historical narrative and memory where all German citizens during World War II supported Nazism and Adolf Hitler. Evaluations of the War Department documents, specifically documents from the Office of the Provost General, including letters written concerning POW treatment, as well as treatment of Japanese American internees, demonstrated the excellent treatment and excellent facilities created for POWs on American soil. These surviving letters, experiences, documents, and letters challenge the proposed narrative of Nazism, even elevating the treatment of POWs above the required status.

Reviewing this semi-known element of Michigan history, the narrative of German POWs returns to the narrative of the German POWs" experiences. This can be used to compare the

[76] Otto Herzog. *Correspondence from Otto Herzog to 'Liebe Freunde.'* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. FHA 95.40.281A-E. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. September 4, 1947

situations among other German POWs, particularly those on the Eastern Front or among Allied camps in Europe. American history survey classes can reincorporate this story. Many classes concerning World War II gloss over the fact that America held POWs. Instead, the focus is on the Japanese Americans, interned in camps. This is also a comparable element concerning the German POWs, as both groups stayed behind barbed wire, yet their experiences differed concerning interactions with other American citizens.

Overall, given the primary information source, the United States exceeded the confines of the Geneva Convention. Using German POW labor, the farmers of Michigan established rapport with the Germans, resulting in letters between former prisoners and farmers until as late as 1995. The prisoners experienced recreational activities and full bellies, compared to other internees in America, or their counterparts in POW camps throughout the world. Comparing the chronological data from the letters to secondary sources and additional journal articles on prisoner-of-war studies, it is possible to determine the validity of the prisoners' experiences. In addition, teaching this narrative in U.S. History courses allows Americans to discover unknown elements of their past.

Intended Chapters

Following this introduction, chapters will begin with an overview of the reeducation program attempted by the United States government to determine if the program violated the Geneva Convention. Establishing a reeducation program grew from a desire to challenge the ideological tenets of National Socialism. The War Department attempted to use the program to train former prisoners to assist in the rebuilding of Germany after the war under democratic principles. Documents remain limited concerning this program. However, two monographs stored by the National Archives summarize the program, with additional references to letters and

documents sent by the War Department and other personnel throughout the program. Intended questions revolve around the success of the reeducation program and the premise behind its existence.

A third chapter discusses an overview of prisoner experiences at Fort Custer, the major base camp in Michigan. By detailing Fort Custer, analysis of the additional sub-camps showed the differences between the camps, including the residents in the area. In this chapter, the primary question addressed is: How did the experiences of the POWs impact the relationships between the prisoners and the farmers? An additional question is, why did the German POWs experience better treatment than their counterparts, leading to accusations of coddling? Important documents in this chapter included mining Record Group 389 and the Office of the Provost General to determine the building, execution, and leadership of Michigan camps.

Chapter four reviews prisoners' letters, demonstrating their experiences and desires to return to America following the war. Prisoners developed close relationships with American farmers, as many farmers sent care packages to former German Prisoners-of-war multiple times. A small section will review the backgrounds of many German prisoners, as understanding German culture explains their behavior in American camps. Questions to be answered include: How do the letters demonstrate the relationships between American farmers and German prisoners? Why did the farmers send packages back to German prisoners?

Following an overview of German prisoners in Michigan, a comparison between German prisoners on the Eastern Front, Japanese American internees, and American POWs helps determine the depth of prisoner treatment and goodwill exhibited by the United States in Chapter Five. It is possible to determine if American POWs received similar treatment by the Germans, as Germans experienced by the Americans. American officials believed adherence to the Geneva

Conventions helped the American POWs" experiences. If the Germans had experienced fair treatment, the American overseas would have experience the same. Questions within this chapter are: Why did German POWs experience humane treatment in the United States? How did this compare to the treatment of Japanese Americans and Americans under German captivity? What complaints did American citizens send to the War Department concerning POW treatment?

A final narrative chapter (Chapter Six) will discuss the challenges to the Nazi narrative. As the United States appeared to exceed the stipulations of the Geneva Convention, and American farmers and citizens continued to give presents and food to the POWs; clearly, the prisoners were men, not seen as an enemy or Nazis. The personal relationships trumped American propaganda, where the evils of Nazism overshadowed the average person in the army. This chapter will discuss the following questions: Did the German POWs' experiences exceed the limits in the Geneva Convention? Did the U.S. follow the Geneva Convention concerning the use of POW labor? Did American farmers follow the confines of POW treatment laid out by the War Department, or did they violate these orders?

Along with challenging the Nazi narrative, the final chapter will summarize the research questions, arguments, and positive experiences of the prisoners. The major question of this chapter is: How can teachers tell the story of German POWs, placing them into the historical narrative and teaching within the confines of World War II? Subsequent questions include: How can historical memory challenge the narrative? Why should this new narrative change? By incorporating experiences, background, and camp information, it will be possible to determine the extent of the United States" fulfillment of the Geneva Convention. In addition, the overall thesis/argument, maintain that the United States citizens exceeded the confines of the Geneva Conventions, creating relationships between German prisoners and American farmers,

demonstrating the power of personal relationships is stronger than propaganda, as men changed from enemies to friends. Instead, they were men who believed in fighting for their country. The goal is to provide readers new knowledge, and a challenge to not view all Germans as Nazis, but rather to see German prisoners as men.

Chapter Two: Challenging Nazi Ideology

> I swear by almighty God this sacred oath: I will render unconditional obedience to the Fuehrer of the German Reich and people, Adolf Hitler, Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht, and, as a brave soldier, I will be ready at any time to stake my life for this oath.[77]

This oath, recited by German Wehrmacht soldiers and officers, swore their loyalty to the leader of the Nazi Party, Adolf Hitler. The Fatherland (Germany) was secondary. Thus, began the process of Nazi indoctrination, as the military in Germany became politicized. While the historical narrative places the blame for this oath at Hitler's feet, the German military leaders created this oath.[78] In a letter to Defense Minister von Blomberg, Hitler wrote, "I wish to express my thanks to you...for the oath of loyalty which has been sworn to me".[79] However, many argue that Hitler supported for the order, rather than instigated this change. Nazi propaganda used stories of German victories, criticism of democracy, racial ideologies, and Allied defeats to shape soldiers" beliefs.[80] Ministerial announcements by Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels saturated German airways.[81] Raised in a paternalistic, authoritarian society, men grew to follow orders without question.[82] Capture by Allied forces directly challenged this ideological mindset. The Nazi ideology collapsed when prisoners witnessed the humane treatment by Allied soldiers and civilians. Instead of ruins and horrible people, the German prisoners experienced regular people who gave them the same treatment they expected from others.

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[77] Adolf Hitler: The Fuehrer Oath. *Jewish Virtual Library.* (2021). https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-fuehrer-oath

[78] German Military Oaths. *Holocaust Encyclopedia. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.* (2023). https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/german-military-oaths.

[79] Ibid.

[80] See Josef Goebbels diaries. Josef Goebbels. *The Goebbels Diaries, 1942-1943.* Translated by Louis Paul Lochner. (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1996).

[81] Ibid.

[82] For more information on child rearing in Germany, see Lloyd Demause. "The childhood origins of World War II and the Holocaust." *The Journal of Psychohistory.* Vol 36. No. 1. (summer 2008): 3-4,8-9.

After a boat ride, and transportation by train in a foreign country, the German prisoners experienced a surprise. The United States was huge. They left ports on the East Coast, general way stations in New York, Virginia, and New Jersey, and headed west, through miles of farmland and cities. After being held in Britain, they were now in enemy hands and a different country. The size of the United States, the manufacturing areas, and the buildings amazed the German prisoners. Prisoners reported that the United States was functioning and producing war materials faster than Germany. Seeing manufacturing, farming, and other areas used in war production showed the lies of the propaganda the soldiers had been told in Germany. They had been told by Nazi Propaganda Minister, Josef Goebbels, that American cities on the eastern shore were in ruins. However, the exact opposite was true.[83] Buildings were being erected; ships built; and produce processed. Traveling through the country, the prisoner witnessed a different perspective from Nazi Germany's ideology. The captors acknowledged the prisoners as human beings, not just prisoners. The prisoners defied the concept of enemies and developed a greater sense of humanity through education and personal relationships.

The humane treatment challenged the construct of "enemy". This began as prisoners boarded trains to their new encampments. The prisoners were well-fed, given new clothes, and experienced a simple, yet what they considered a luxurious, ride. For some, these rides were the first time they had new clothes, good food, and access to showers, in a long time.[84] Interestingly, the prisoners often rode in train cars, almost as normal passengers, despite their prisoner-of-war uniforms.[85] As this was still a period of active segregation, African Americans, even soldiers,

[83] Antonio Thompson. *Men in German Uniform: POWs in America During World War II*. (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2010). 30-33.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Matthias Reiss. "Solidarity among "Fellow Sufferers": African Americans and German Prisoners-of-war in the United States During World War II." *The Journal of African American History* 98, no. 4 (2013): 538. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5323/jafriamerhist.98.4.0531.

were required to ride in the back of the train. The noticeable distinction between servicemen and prisoners based on skin color caused complaints and concerns to be raised. The treatment of African American soldiers surprised German prisoners, who didn't realize the irony of the German government creating second-class citizens in their own country. Within Nazi Germany, these were Jewish, or those of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. In America, segregation created an abstract enemy and second-class citizens based on skin color. Enemies existed; they were prevalent. Yet, Americans determined that the German prisoners did not fully fit this bill. Instead, they were like American servicemen; they were the same boys they sent overseas, given their racial features and mannerisms.[86] These perceived similarities lowered the conceptual threshold of a defined enemy. The prisoners were just boys, or regular people. This similar psychological and physiological outlook contributed to the push for a reeducation program by the War Department and the Prisoner-of-war Special Projects Division (POWSPD). By examining the creation and application of the reeducation program, it is possible to determine the impact of democracy-led information on German soldiers, as well as how this program changed the underlying preconceptions of an enemy. Soldiers interested in American democracy were a greater asset to rebuilding Germany and created relationships with American citizens through their interactions.

Train travel, perceived luxuries, and racial differences were not the only surprises for German prisoners. Upon arrival at Fort Custer, Michigan, the guards escorted the prisoners to their barracks area, which was also known as the stockade. This was a square area, consisted of barracks, laundry, mess hall, canteen, and all amenities or living standards, acceptable for United

[86] Matthias Reiss. "Bronzed Bodies Behind Barbed Wire: Masculinity and the Treatment of German Prisoners-of-war in the United States During World War II." *The Journal of Military History* 69, no. 2 (April 2005): 477-478. https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.2005.0122.

States-based prisoners-of-war. Designated as the 1611th Service Command Unit, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Edwin C. Reynolds of Jackson, Michigan, and Major Charles E. Gilbert of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the camp also held additional buildings such as the Kleines House[87] and sports areas.[88]

The overarching factor of these accommodations was the Geneva Convention of 1918, as holding powers needed to provide similar accommodations, clothing, and food as they did their own servicemen. Prisoners who did not have the standard, white, black-stenciled P.W. or blue uniform, with white stenciled letters were issued. What followed was a medical exam and an assignment to a specific barrack. Some prisoners had a rudimentary understanding of English, while others had no knowledge.[89] The prisoners, immersed into American culture and democracy through daily interactions, encountered a personal "reeducation" without a standardized program. One POW noted that it was surprising to see American officers friendly with lower-level servicemen. They saw and heard Americans criticize their government, due to their right of freedom of speech, a concept unheard of in Nazi Germany, where all dissention faced elimination.[90] Having been told that the Americans tortured prisoners and not feed them properly, the humane treatment and care were unexpected. The violations of War Department guidelines came through citizens willingly giving additional items to prisoners, despite governmental orders and the Geneva Convention only requiring the necessities to be given.

Although the prisoners knew of the Geneva Convention's regulations, seeing them fully enacted (to the best of the United States's ability) was probably surprising and refreshing, as

[87] Little Theater
[88] Phillip Proud. "A Study of the Reeducation of German Prisoners-of-war at Fort Custer, Michigan, 1945-1946." (University of Michigan, July 1949). 9.
[89] Proud, (1949). 9-10.
[90] Proud (1949) 73-75.

stories of prisoners' treatment by other nations were less than ideal. Even though the public immersed themselves in, and adhered to, regulations concerning prisoner treatment, they wanted to wage an ideological war to reeducate "Nazi prisoners' and eradicate Nazism, replacing it with American democracy or democratic ideology that could help in the rebuilding of Germany.

There was limited success with the program. Historians have offered both positive and negative assessments of the reeducation program's success and even legality. Classified as secret, the program created tensions and miscommunications between various departments of the United States Army and the servicemen in charge of the POWs. Many conflicts arose between the work and reeducation programs established under the War Department and POWSPD[91], as each saw their project as a higher priority designation. The work program was necessary for the agricultural worker shortage, assisting in the war effort to ensure food for the troops and citizens. The reeducation program was designed with future goals in mind, hoping to change perceptions. Yet, both groups may have needed the same men, and the War Department considered the labor problems more important than education. Nevertheless, the reeducation program was an important element, involved in the changing "enemy" to "human being" or "friend", as both German prisoners and American captors learned more about each other and blurred the "enemy lines" between them.

Housing 500,000 German POWs in the United States posed various challenges, including the idea of creating a reeducation program. Re-educating nearly half a million troops in American democracy while also creating a program all prisoners could understand and be engaged in, was a daunting task. The 4,000-5,000 foreign troops housed in Michigan created a

[91] Prisoner-of-war Special Projects Division

unique situation where civilians and U.S. servicemen interacted with prisoners, sharing ideas about culture, democracy, and other matters. This allowed the Nazi ideology to be challenged, both in the camp and upon returning home to Germany. Reeducation was an important step for the ideological "battle" facing Americans, as they wanted to change prisoners' mindsets.

` In addition to housing the prisoners and feeding them, provisions which led to criticisms of the War Department, the question of "reeducation" arose. Reeducation had to be separated from indoctrination as the United States feared reprisals from Axis foreign powers, the potential indoctrination of American troops, and public scrutiny for alleged violations of the Geneva Convention.[92] Allowing for "intellectual diversions", the Convention granted that all "belligerents shall encourage intellectual diversions and sports organized by prisoners-of-war," as much as possible. However, the Convention does not provide a clear definition for the term "intellectual diversions," allowing for different interpretations.[93] As prisoners practiced their religion under the constructs of military authority (i.e., could not violate military orders or police orders), there was a push to create intellectually stimulating activities besides sport and work for the prisoners to engage in.

This program led to accusations that the United States violated the Geneva Convention, both from the secrecy of the program and the gray area concerning intellectual diversions. The literature argues both for and against the alleged violations, with no satisfactory conclusion. Judith Gansberg's study, *Stalag: U.S.A.* argues in the negative that the United States did not violate the Convention by creating a reeducation plan, acknowledging that the program was

[92] John Mewha. The Prisoner-of-war Reeducation Program in the Years 1943-1946. Manuscript. (February 1953), Record Group 391, Entry p. 10, Reeducation Monograph-Copy 2. National Archives, College Park, Maryland, U.S. Army. 3.
[93] International Committee of the Red Cross, "Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners-of-war. Geneva, 27 July 1929.," (1929), https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/305.

successful. Ron Robin's book, *The Barbed-Wire College: Reeducating German POWs in the United States during World War II,* argued the opposite, acknowledging the reeducation program was a violation but that it also had the goal of affecting postwar Germany. The program experienced limited success. Establishing the reeducation program helped educate German prisoners about the tenets of democracy. Still there was little success, as personal relationships formed, and seeing democracy through action and humane treatment had a greater change on the ideological mindset than education could have. As German prisoners formed friendships, the positives of a democratic lifestyle changed the prisoners' minds, while supporting the American aims of a postwar democratic Germany.

As the program was voluntary, whether there were violations of the Geneva Convention by the United States government came down to the individual prisoners. Yet, the minimally tracked results showed a program that succeeded teaching the German POWs more about democracy and American culture. In some ways, the reeducation program was more insightful and better challenged the notion of enemy than the work program.[94] However, both programs, as they allowed interactions with Americans, directly challenged both the Nazi perception of Americans, and the Americans" perceptions of "Nazis" (the German people). Enemy prisoners grew to encompass a social construct, as the prisoners became men and friends.

Living Behind Barbed Wire

After arriving at an American POW camp, the prisoners were placed in barracks and could volunteer for work assignments and use recreation time. Despite being prisoners, the experience of being held in American custody was equivalent to a summer camp, as they worked and filled their days with activities. Prisoners could write home, receive packages, and have

[94] Ethan Reardon. *WWII German POWs in Michigan: Planned Reeducation Vs. Fair Treatment*: (Mission Point Press, 2019).1.

sizable rations and canteen coupons. Cigarettes were available, and although prohibited, prisoners talked with women and local farmers, as shown by the Ottawa escape in 1945, when two young prisoners ran off with two American girls.[95] In some canteens, beer or low-alcoholic beverages were available for purchase.[96] In another camp, in Ottawa county, Michigan, POWs saved money into a collective fund and built a swimming hole for the summer.[97]

Compared to other German prisoners in different theaters, American-held German POWs had an easy confinement. Ernst Floeter, recalled in his interview, recorded in 2008, that he wanted to be captured by the Americans.[98] After hearing stories of treatment under the Soviets, he retreated towards the Allied-American lines to ensure his capture by their forces. After the war, he returned to the area where he experienced imprisonment and lived in Grand Ledge, Michigan until his death.[99] Judith Gansberg, supported these assertions, as one former prisoner she interviewed described his treatment being better in American camps, rather than the Free French or British prisoner camps during the repatriation process following the war.[100] Despite the ideological accusations against American treatment of POWs, the letters written home, demonstrated the care taken to treat prisoners fairly. The War Department supposed that this helped see more German soldiers in active zones surrender to Allied forces, as they knew the Americans would treat them well.[101]

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[95] See Chapter Three: Experiences Behind the Wire. "War Prisoners, Aided by Girls, Flee, Caught." *The Owosso Argus-Press.* (July 21, 1944).
[96] "Bowersock Describes Life of German PWs in Hartford." *Day Spring*, (June 22, 1944).
[97] Dr. Gregory D. Sumner. *Michigan Pow Camps in World War II*. (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2018). 128.
[98] Ernst Floeter. "Oral History Of: Ernst Floeter." interview by Robert Garrett. Grand Ledge, Michigan. *Seeking Michigan*. October 7, 2008, 2008. Grand Ledge, Michigan. https://seekingmichigan.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p4006coll17/id/8.
[99] Floeter interview.
[100] Judith M. Gansberg. *Stalag U.S.A.* New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1979. 8-10.
[101] Thompson, (2010), 20.

American POWs held in foreign countries experienced treatment that varied from those held in the United States. The United States" absolute adherence to the Geneva Convention led to many complaints to the War Department concerning coddling and extra food, as news about American G.I.s" treatment in Europe and Asia reached home. Many believed that foreign POWs should experience the same treatment Americans were experiencing in foreign lands. Yet, the American public did not fully know about the treatment of German prisoners. In the beginning, the German authorities ensured that American POWs in Germany experienced humane treatment and followed the stipulations of the Geneva Convention. As the war progressed, it became harder for Germany to supply adequate food rations and clothing for POWs, as well as their own citizens. Japan, though a signor, did not fully follow the stipulations; and the treatment of German POWs in America and American servicemen in Japan was radically different. Nevertheless, the United States government and the War Department maintained the standards of the Geneva Convention, particularly in the transportation and care of the POWs. Later chapters will compare these different groups. Towards the end of the war, the German prisoners in Michigan saw their food rations reduced twice as supply lines changed, and prisoners returned home. This caused concern, as some prisoners believed the reduction in food was revenge for the atrocities discovered in Europe.[102] The War Department denied this accusation.

Nevertheless, the food worries and international prisoner treatment were far from the minds of the German POWs in Michigan as the prisoners arrived in camps. In the Upper Peninsula, the camp locations centered on former Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps, where the Army Corps of Engineers converted the barracks into prisoner housing. As the local newspapers wrote in their columns of the arriving "Nazis," columnists wrote of the underlying

[102] Thompson, (2010). 130.

prejudices of a Nazi enemy. [103] Work in the U.P. encompassed logging, working in sawmills, and other outdoor work, due to the labor shortages in the wood pulp industry. This work was a potential violation of the Geneva Convention which stated, "It is forbidden to use prisoners-of-war at unhealthful or dangerous work."[104] Logging has its own sets of dangers, as seen on televisions shows in the American media. A former U.P. POW, Stephan Rozwadowski, "...worked there [Sidnaw camp] as woodcutter in winter 1944 till spring 1945. We lived there in barracks, which were not fenced."[105] He enjoyed his stay and planned to revisit the area in 1998. However, his plans changed when his health declined.[106] As Michigan prisoners worked in the wood industry, and Germany had Allied prisoners working in other war areas, prisoners working in "dangerous work" were defined by the confining power. But this did not lessen the anxiety of reprisals and violation accusations. C. A. Van Coevering, an adjutant stationed in Western Michigan, wrote to farmers in Muskegon in September 1945, that he had received,

> a release from the Army telling us to be very careful what kind of work we use P.W.'s on. I imigine [*sic]* everything that we have done this year has been D.K., but now that crops are about in, be careful! The release states "Not to be used on any kind of construction work, even though it be around the farm."[107]

As the war ended, "dangerous work" could be considered as something as benign as construction work, or finishing an engine, given the possibility of injury. Yet, the prisoners spent the fall and summer continuing to work in the pulpwood industry, considered highly dangerous work before the war ended.

[103] "Nazis Arrive at U.P. Camps to Cut Wood." *The Daily Mining Journal.* (February 14, 1944).
[104] International Red Cross (1929). Article 38.
[105] Stefan Rozwadowski. "Letters from Rozwadowski to Thompson Family." 1997-1998. Sidnaw Historical Museum. Sidnaw, Michigan.
[106] Ibid.
[107] C.A. Van Coervering. *Tri County Farm Labor Association*. 1945. Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan.

In the lower portions of Michigan, barracks in the subcamps were tents taken from the United States Army to ensure foreign troops received similar equipment to American troops. However, as Michigan winters could be harsh, German POWs were transferred to Fort Custer or other southern camps for the duration of the cold season. Later, Fort Custer would become the way station for prisoners during the repatriation process in 1945 and 1946; something not prioritized while prisoners remained in the United States. Fort Custer, the primary military installation, would also become the central location for Michigan's reeducation program.

Even though prisoners experienced humane treatment, had access to recreation and education, this did not mean life inside the camps was "sunshine and roses." Hunger was a constant complaint. Karl Jung, a prisoner working on the farm of Otto Herzog, spoke to the family concerning the state of his men. Having twenty-four men to feed, he explained their situation. He asked for assistance with food, a direct violation of the Farm Emergency Labor Program (FELP) guidelines, which stated that citizens could not give food to the prisoners. Karl Jung recalled the generosity of the Herzog family follows:

> At that time, our hunger caused us pain, and you were the first farmer in the Frankenmuth area that served us good food in large quantity. I still can see the picture in my mind when the P.W.'s in their ravenous hunger fell over the piles of beefsteaks in your workshop and your dear wife brought one full bowl of food after the other.... We thought your homemade wine was a rarity in America.[108]

Writing after the war, Jung stated, "You and your family probably thought I was a big mouth. Normally it is not my way to ask strangers for something, but I did it for 24 hungry comrades."[109]

[108] Karl Jung. *Correspondence between Karl Jung Family and Otto Herzog.* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. July 21, 1947.
[109] Karl Jung. August 31, 1947.

Nevertheless, American farmers saw regular people who were hungry and helped where they could. Under the FELP guidelines, the United States government permitted treats or extras for prisoners.[110] Treats were special, and additional items, not sent with the POWs to the camp. Lunches consisted of a sandwich, with the employers and farmers supplying clean water, as ordered by the War Department.[111] Prisoners in Frankenmuth, Michigan experienced additional food, from local farmers and citizens. Frankenmuth resident, Virginia, recalled that her family fed the POWs on her family's farm. They would also give beer to the prisoners "when the guard was not looking".[112] Her uncle allowed the prisoners to eat at his dining table, a huge violation of fraternization and FELP policies.[113] Yet, prisoners in the Upper Peninsula, at Camp Sidnaw, recalled having hot lunches prepared, as they returned to the camps for lunch.[114] This was done, because of the worksites' proximity to the prison camp. When the prisoners were working over fifteen or twenty miles away from the camp, the prisoners' lunches consisted of traditional sandwiches and other cold items.[115] These stipulations resulted from complaints by the International Red Cross (IRC), the War Department, and the prisoners, themselves. Specifically, concerning lunches, the recommendation for prisoners inside the encampment were to "[s]et the time for the noon meal at prisoner-of-war camp so all details work until 1200 and can walk (or ride) to lunch and be on time for mess call."[116]

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[110] "To Users of Prisoner-of-war Labor." (1944). German War Prisoners. WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan.
[111] Ibid. Duane Ernest Miller. "Barbed-Wire Farm Laborers." *Michigan History*, September/October (1989): 14-16
[112] Anita Boldt. "Prisoners of World War II Oral History & Research." 1991. Frankenmuth Historical Society. Frankenmuth, Michigan.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Dixie Franklin. "German POWs Enjoyed Camp Sidnaw." *The Daily Mining Gazette.* September 12, 1981.
[115] Franklin, Dixie. "German POWs Enjoyed Camp Sidnaw." *The Daily Mining Gazette.* (September 12, 1981).
[116] Lyle T. Dawson & Robert W. Hess. *Subject: Report of Visit to Prisoner-of-war Camp, Fort Custer, Michigan.* (June 25, 1945). National Archives College Park. Subject Files, 1942-1946. Record Group 389. A1 461. Box 2659. 290/34/28/03.

Though hunger was a constant thought among prisoners, few complained. The humane treatment and food stability assisted with making prisoners amenable to Americans. It did not fully aid in a successful reeducation program, but it benefited the program by demonstrating the practical democratic values Americans tried to teach German prisoners. Harry Baer, a prisoner working on the Bill Bishop farm in Muskegon, Michigan, recalled that he was never hungry while a prisoner.[117] As the war progressed, and stories came home of American servicemen's treatment, the newspapers reported differences between American and German prisoners. Filled with negative connotations, the frequent War Department backlash, concerning coddling, food, and an easy lifestyle concerned the American public. It was stated:

> These German prisoners have fared as well or better than the average American family. They are not annoyed by rationing. The army has first call on food and the prisoners have shared it. Officers in charge of the camp will tell you that America is abiding by Geneva conference rules. These rules require that prisoners-of-war shall receive the same food served to the captor army. The Germans themselves are familiar with the rules and are quick to protest any seeming deviation.
>
> The Germans do their own cooking in the fair's 4-H building and use the adjoining state building as a dining hall. There is no lack of food; all they need to do is cook it. We have seen the best of meats in ample quantities cooking on their army stoves, the same equipment the army uses. We have seen creamery butter in pound cartons stacked high, with German prisoners unwrapping and cutting it into generous squares; generous indeed compared to the wafer-like slices Americans receive in public eating places or the ounces rationed to American families.
>
> The prisoners can cook all of the potatoes and other vegetables they want. They prefer cabbage and get plenty of it. Bread supplies are ample. They even get ice cream once or twice a week, and occasionally cake goes with it. There are steaming urns of coffee and cream and sugar. Each prisoner is entitled to two bottles of beer a day. The beer is familiar American brands, labeled "military 3 per cent beer" and is tax free.[118]

Cochrane's description of the prisoners' treatment and access to resources showed his dissatisfaction surrounding German prisoner treatment. Yet, there was an understanding in the

[117] Harry Baer. Collection of Letters from Harry Baer to Bill Bishop. (1948), Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan. March 6, 1948.
[118] Don F. Cochrane. "Yanks Hungry; Nazis Well Fed! Captured Airman Tells Story! Contrast to Local Prison Camp!" *The Coloma Courier.* (October 13,1944). North Berrien Historical Museum. Coloma, Michigan.

War Department, that the United States was to follow all the stipulations of the Geneva Convention, particularly concerning the care, housing, labor, and other areas of POW life. They feared reprisals or attempts to propagandize American troops.[119] The persistent fear of potential indoctrination of Americans, reigned in the War Department and other American servicemen who wanted to strip away Nazi ideology to teach the German prisoners democracy. This idea was so ingrained that the *Christian Science Monitor* published an article in 1944, in which the author asked, "Why Not Teach Them Democracy?"[120] This question would become the fundamental basis of the reeducation program, enacted by the United States.

Concerned about the mental neglect of Italian prisoners, Joseph Harrison, stipulated the prisoners suffered from a lack of stimulating activities. Activities, such as having a democracy class and teaching prisoners about American ideals, would enhance the view of the American people by the Italians and assist them in rebuilding a democratic Italy, following the end of the war.[121] This concept also related to the care and treatment of German prisoners. An end goal was to help teach the finer points of democracy, and hopefully convince the prisoners to rebuild Germany democratically after the war. A side consequence was also influencing additional countries under Nazi or Fascist control, as many of the men within the German Wehrmacht were of many nationalities.[122] The American press advocated for the reeducation program, along with civilian backing. Given the potential judgments, the Army and the War Department were resistant, especially as they did not want the prisoners to realize the purpose behind the program. Keeping the program strictly voluntary and utilizing heavy censorship helped the War

[119] Speakman, (1948). 5.
[120] Joseph G. Harrison. "Why Not Teach Them Democracy?" *The Christian Science Publishing Society* (October 16, 1944).
[121] Harrison (1944).
[122] Thompson, (2010). xiii.

Department avoid accusations of creating a propaganda program. But it was not foolproof. One prisoner asked to speak to the Assistant Executive Officer (AEO). However, the soldier he spoke to, recalled the prisoner referring to this officer as the "American Propaganda Officer."[123] This caused concern, as the prisoners were supposed to be unaware of the duties assigned to the AEO. Fear existed that the reeducation program was construed as a propaganda program in a violation of the Geneva Convention.[124]

Reeducating the Nazis

Housing POWs according to the Geneva Conventions, the United States allegedly violated subsequent regulations by creating an educational program. This program, designed by the Special Projects Division, worked to challenge Nazi ideology and teach democracy, hoping to influence the German system of government after the war. Calls for reeducation began in 1943, as prisoners were transported to the United States. The brainchild of the War Department working with Dr. C.W. Hepner, and other professors, the reeducation program encountered setbacks, questioning, and limited success. Using different mediums, the goals of the reeducation program hoped to challenge Nazi ideology, creating a positive mindset concerning America and democracy. The government defined the reeducation program as:

> the task of obliterating Nazi ideological manifestations in our prisoner camps and instilling within the Germans who were confined in this country a regard for the tenets and methods which undergird our American democracy that would transcend the propaganda and vagaries of the Hitler regime...[125]

Yet, the definition did not fully encompass the various goals laid out by the War Department for the reeducation program. One primary aim instilled by the Army included educating the POWs about America. One Army officer stated,

[123] Speakman (1948). 16.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Proud,(1949). 7-8.

> The primary object of this program was to teach German POWs about America. Through this large opinion-forming group, it was hoped ultimately to carry to all German people the truths which had been withheld from them for a generation. If they really learned about America, its government, its tradition of freedom, then their ethical and historical reeducation would be assured...[126]

The program was successful in teaching the POWs about America. The prisoners learned about the country and its culture and interacted with soldiers and civilians. English classes began at both the primary installation at Fort Custer, Michigan, and the subsequent branch camps allowing the prisoners further opportunities to converse with Americans. This allowed them the ability to practice foreign languages, while also gathering more information on culture and opinions against Nazism. It was two-fold given that Americans could about German culture and the opinions of the POWs concerning Nazism. As the reeducation program began, democratic teaching encompassed many areas: work, school, recreation, and conversation. Although not called a propaganda program, per se, the fundamental technique of showing democracy in action was an immersion program, where democracy, even in minute form, was being observed. Something as simple as stating an opinion, contrary to the government's narrative (i.e., criticizing governmental policy) was surprising to the prisoners. This freedom of speech was something they had not encountered before.

Creating a Program

Falling under the designation of the POWSPD, the organization fell under the command of the Provost Marshal General's Office (PMGO)[127] within the War Department. As the public began clamoring for the German prisoners to be reeducated in the hopes of building a new democratic Germany, the government created an education program. It was not without pitfalls, however, as some commanders in the PMGO wondered why this education was necessary.

[126] Proud, (1949). 6.
[127] Provost Marshal General's Office.

Creating an Assistant Executive Officer (AEO) was a priority, as this individual would be responsible for the creation, implementation, and tracking of the reeducation program in the main and sub-camps throughout the United States. The primary AEO for Michigan at Fort Custer handled the distribution of films, books, and other materials related to the schools and other elements of the program.[128]

Selected among servicemen, the newly christened AEOs traveled to a ten-day seminar training program at Fort Slocum, New York to educate them on different aspects of the requirements necessary to fully integrate this program. Under the guidance of T.V. Smith and Howard Mumford Jones, the training course presented lectures, discussions, and seminars on the following subjects:

1) Mission and Background of the Program
2) Staff Functions
3) German Propaganda
4) German History
5) Nazi Film Propaganda
6) Psychology of Prisoners-of-war (Attitudes and Morale)
7) The American Film as a Medium in the Intellectual Diversion Program
8) Psychology of the Germans
9) Book Procurement (Reading Materials)
10) Education in Germany
11) Educational Activities in Prisoner-of-war Camps
12) "We or They" (The democratic theory of human nature vs. the Nazi theory of human nature)
13) Intelligence Activities in Prisoner-of-war Camps
14) Staff Studies
15) "Der Ruf"
16) Prisoner-of-war Camp Newspapers
17) Orientation of U.S. Guard Personnel
18) Publications: Technical Details
19) The Prisoner-of-war Camp Chaplains
20) Field Problems
21) Media (Radio, Music, Art, Theater)
22) The German Army
23) Prisoner-of-war Administration

[128] Mewha (1953). 36b.

24) Special Staff Problems[129]

This was a large amount of information, in a short period. The government understood the new AEOs lacked knowledge with this program, or its integration. However, the goal was not to create experts, but rather to educate the men, as they attempted to teach the prisoners of the procedures and implications of the program.[130]

In 1950, Major General F.H. Osborn recalled that the original catalyst for the creation of the program came from discussions with Mr. McCloy, a soldier in the PMGO. Although he no longer recalled who originally broached the subject of German POW reeducation, it was a topic that interested both, as they discussed this during 1942 and 1943. Yet, both men concluded that nothing could be started without backing from the PMGO and other administrative entities.[131] McCloy approached then Provost Marshal General Lerch, to discuss the program. Osborn recalled Lerch being very receptive to the idea, giving them the go-ahead, to attempt the creation with effective results, as the program began in late 1944 and 1945.[132] Osborn suggested that the head of the program be Edward Davison, who was then an instructor at the I&E school in Lexington, Virginia. He transferred to the PMGO, where he started creating the reeducation program. Specifically, the goal was to have the "prisoners exposed to the facts of American history, the workings of a democracy, and the contribution to America made by peoples of all national origins".[133] Upon being asked about his involvement, former Provost Marshal General B.H. Bryan (instated after Lerch), in 1950 recalled aspects of the program that the American

[129] Proud, (1949). 4-5.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Major General F.H. Osborn. *Letter to George E. McCracken.* 1950. National Archives College Park. AH Correspondence and Interviews. McCracken-Lewis-Sparrow. Center of Military History (CMH), Background. Files to 2-3.7AH. "Reeducation of Prisoners-of-war." Box 1. (July 22, 1950).
[132] Osborn. (July 14, 1950).
[133] Mewha (1953) 6.

public needed to keep in mind, as they researched to understand the creation, implementation, and results of the program. Bryan mentioned specifics concerning propaganda as he wrote:

> In the reeducation of prisoners, propaganda is an essential; however, it must be viewed from a definitely common-sense point of view. It must be remembered at all times that those steps taken in the prisoner-of-war camp are automatically authorized for use by the enemy with regard to American soldiers who are in enemy hands. In this connection the theorists, the educators and the newspaper people brought terrific pressure to bear upon the Provost Marshal General to inaugurate steps which, in inaugurated in the German camps, would have caused the most violent protests from those who were advocating such action.
> In all phases of an education program the conduct of that program must be secondary to the work or productivity of the prisoners. In this connection, the very best educational campaign which could ever be carried on would be to have prisoners see how the American lives, what he has, how he procures what he needs, and how he disposes of his products. By learning the answers to those questions, he learns the very essence of American life. Further, he learns that the American is, in general, free to act as he desires so long as his actions do not impinge upon the remainder of the community. In other words, the best reeducation program is a wide and extensive work program.[134]

There was an intense need to ensure the government did not direct any propaganda towards the prisoners. Direct propaganda violated the rights of the Geneva Convention. It also made acceptance of the information difficult, as prisoners sympathized less with American democracy when they believed it to be propaganda. Likewise, prisoners experienced disappointment at finding out the United States produced war material, utilizing propaganda in favor of democracy, and not admitting the shortcomings of democracy would also displease prisoners who listened to the propaganda.

In addition, a monograph, by John Mewha, titled "The Prisoner-of-war Reeducation Program in the Years 1943-1946", dated November 1, 1945, specifically stated that "to force propaganda upon the prisoners would have been illegal under the terms of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners-of-war", thus barring a propaganda program,

[134] B.M. Bryan. Letter to Capt. Geroge E. McCracken dtd 1 Aug 50 (August 1, 1950). National Archives College Park. Center of Military History (CMH), Background. Files to 2-3.7AH. "Reeducation of Prisoners-of-war." Box 1.

but not forbidding a voluntary program, in which prisoners agreed to attend classes with "freely available factual information."[135] The word "propaganda" is interesting, given the orders to discourage the program from being seen as propaganda and orders not to call the reeducation program "propaganda".

Instead, this program was to be known as "reeducation", which was also not a favorable term, or "reorientation", with the stated goal of reorientating German prisoners back into their country following the end of World War II. The U.S. government's fear of reprisals led to the movement to conceal aspects of the reeducation program from the prisoners and those outside of the POWSPD. In addition, the government only considered the German POWs for this program, as Osborn recalled, writing to Captain George McCracken, "the Italian prisoners were not included because neither Mr. McCloy or I thought of it, and I don't know that anyone suggested it to us. We were afraid that an unregenerate Germany might again upset the peace. We had no such fears about Italy."[136]

Despite this lack of fear, Italy's capitulation in 1943created a call for a reeducation (reorientation) program to assist these captives returning home. This argument was the basis for Harrison's article "Why Not Teach Them Democracy?" Though the public demanded reeducation for all prisoners, the government prioritized reeducating German prisoners. This still presented an issue of legality; General Gullion noted that "The Treaty [Geneva Convention] protects prisoners from public curiosity and religious propaganda but does not prevent education in Americanism or in democratic principles".[137] This lack of oversight regarding the specificity of the Geneva Convention, allowed the POWSPD to move forward creation of the program, with

[135] Mewha (1953). 3.
[136] Osborn, (July 22, 1950).
[137] Mewha (1953). 9.

approval from the War Department. The protection from "public curiosity" was minimal, as it was common for civilians to watch POWs and observe their behavior. This started as soon as prisoners arrived in Michigan, as prisoners who arrived by train in 1943 were public spectacles.[138]

Once the government affirmed the decision to create this program, and officers were assigned, building the curriculum began. This was an arduous task, given the threat of reprisals, cultural and linguistic differences, and determining the aspects of education that would hold the prisoners' interests and be beneficial once the prisoners returned to civilian life. Looking into course developments, it was determined the prisoners needed exposure to the "soundest fundamentals for the introductory or missionary phase of the indoctrination which ...will gradually give way to the direct teaching phase...," as noted by a memo from General Osborn, dated April 12, 1943.[139] Despite the fear of reprisals and indoctrination, the word, "indoctrination" continued appearing within government correspondence.[140] Primary among the subjects to be taught to the prisoners, as part of this "indoctrination" was "American History with emphasis on the developing techniques of democracy."[141]

The democracy taught through the program relied upon "example and observation", whereby the prisoners would have "frequent contacts, of superior types of American citizenship". [142] Yet, this idea of fraternization, without instilling propaganda would prove difficult, as similar Allied reeducation efforts developed in Britain focused on a program similar

[138] "P.O.W. Camp Recalled in "Historical Sketches of Berrien Co."," *Tri-City Record*.
[139] Memo for General Osborn, 12 Apr 43, sub: Indoctrination of Enemy Prisoners, original now filed SPSP 383.6 (12-11-42) Sec. 1, AGO Records, 705 Columbia Pike; as cited in: Mewha (1953). 10.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Mewha (1953). 11-12.
[142] Ibid.

to the prisoners' lines of experiences. The belief was instilled that using a program similar to prisoners was the best form of propaganda. The War Department held that contact with American citizens through the labor program and working on farms or in processing plants, would be the best form of reeducation and the most effective, allowing prisoners to observe conditions for themselves and draw their own conclusions.[143] The most crucial element was secrecy. As the War Department expected inquiries, they released the following statement: "The War Department has a thoroughly thought out program of education now in operation. Any publicity as to the details of the program would defeat the War Department's purpose."[144] This was to protect the underlying goals of the reeducation program, while focusing on the work program, which was deemed more profitable. The government ordered a total blackout of information, as fear of the German government uncovering the program would lead to an

> abandonment of the adherence to the terms of the Geneva Convention...to be successful... would have to be one that could not be characterized as blatant, war-serving propaganda... if the American public were allowed to know... the prisoners would have the same source of information.[145]

The prisoners' access to English periodicals, both as a teaching aid and general knowledge, demanded strict guidelines for handling information. Censorship requires sensitive information to be withheld. The reeducation program found a loophole, as newspapers and periodicals used in the education program did not have to be approved for distribution by the Provost Marshal General. Therefore, the reeducation program required secrecy, as its details, goals, and the underlying reasons behind its development, needed to remain unknown to the prisoner population.

[143] Mewha (1953). 15.
[144] General Lerch, 22 Jul 44, copy in Control Division, ASF 383.6, reorientation, AGO Records Pentagon. As cited in: Mewha (1953). 25.
[145] Mewha (1953) 33.

Funds created for the program were already being used before reallocation into the reeducation program. Monies expensed on "educational purposes; motion pictures and slides...facilities for classrooms; prisoner-of-war director of studies; assistance from recognized and approved American educational institutions; correspondence courses...lectures by military personnel....and camp newspapers," allocated by the government, had started the education process.[146] The expenditures showed it would be possible to entirely create a strictly voluntary reeducation program, with minimal changes to the system already in place. During a prisoner's stay, they received intellectually stimulating material through books, newspapers, and courses. The academic and recreational activities were subject to censorship. They had to be approved by the War Department, but the underlying systems were already in place to wage the ideological war. As the Secretary of State noted on March 30, 1944, in a letter to the Secretary of War, the prisoners were "a factor in our post-war problems."[147] Meaning, it would be imperative for the United States to engage in ideological warfare and prepare the prisoners to return to a war-torn country while maintaining a new democratic mindset. It was a program designed to help the prisoners, not win approval nor discipline them.[148]

Teaching Democracy

The Factory

After authorization was completed, the work began to create the curriculum for the reeducation program. Established in October 1944, nicknamed "The Factory", a special camp was created to work on the reeducation program. Beginning in a former CCC camp in Elmira, New York, until a move in 1945 to Fort Philip Kearny, Rhode Island, the Factory employed

[146] Mewha (1953). 26.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Mewha (1953). 38.

specially selected POWs.[149] Tasked with "translation into the German language of program aids and materials,... editing an production of...*Der Ruf*, [The Call]" the prisoners appeared to be in good spirits, allowed to govern themselves, while still under military supervision; volunteered for the position; and did not attempt escape while working in this camp.[150] The government emphasized that the prisoners would receive no extras and no special treatment if they volunteered for this duty. Additional duties included:

a. Continuous review and analysis of prisoner-of-war camp newspapers.
b. Review of Office of War Information material prepared for distribution in Germany and material prepared by other government agencies for psychological warfare purposes.
c. Review of films and recordings produced by commercial and government agencies.
d. Review of miscellaneous prisoner-of-war publications, such as camp newspapers, song books, and daily news summaries.
e. Review of material in regard to prisoner-of-war camp security and the elimination of subversive activities.
f. Independent study and advice regarding post-war conditions in Germany and reconstruction of Europe.
g. Organization of a special experimental educational program for the benefit of the prisoners detained...
h. Review of music and plays.

Divided into multiple sections, each played a role in creating curriculum and content sent to each respective POW camp, enacting the reeducation program. Utilizing films and other media required an entire department of individuals to approve, buy, review, and translate materials. A common complaint by the prisoners was the lack of German subtitles for American films shown in the camps. This problem remained throughout the program, given the time needed to fully translate and transcribe subtitles. Another important department of the Factory was English studies, where the Director of Studies created an English language program and worked with other departments to ensure accurate translations. The Director of Studies was a selected prisoner from within the group, who was paid from prisoner funds. Prisoners selected to work in the

[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.

Factory needed to know multiple languages. German was a primary language, but not the only language spoken within the encampments. Given the mediums used in the program, a thorough knowledge of English was also required.[151]

Courses created for the program included English language, the American Statesman,[152] Geography, and American Literature, among others. Instructors taught each course in English, with translations of signs or German textbooks to allow more prisoners access to the information. As students advanced in the courses, the content opened to more panel discussions, where the prisoners were free to express their opinions and perspectives on the topics they were learning about.

Camp Magazines and Newspapers

As the Factory cranked out materials, one element distributed to all camps was *Der Ruf,* a magazine created, edited, and administered by prisoners-of-war with information for the prisoners. Begun for prisoners to remain in touch with each other, the magazine was requested by prisoners who asked for "materials that deal objectively with United States history, institutions, traditions, and ways of life".[153] Its purpose was to help further the reeducation program through prisoner contribution and letters. It gave prisoners news of political and military events, facts concerning the American lifestyle, information on the German home front, educational pieces, and general entertainment.[154] A concentrated effort ensued to ensure information was realistic and factual, as information coming from Germany showed positive

[151] Mewha (1953). 38.
[152] A mixture of history and discussion-based civic course designed for those in Advanced or Interpreter English at Fort Custer Michigan. See Proud (1949). 6. Chapter 3 gives the introduction to the analysis given by the group.
[153] Proud (1949). 58. Speakman (1953) 40-41.
[154] Proud (1949). 58-60.

advances of the German Army or notices of ruined and bombed American cities. These reports commonly existed among newly arrived German soldiers.

Though the priority was furthering reeducation, the policy behind the paper was to create a magazine for the broadest prisoner audience. It reflected the prisoners' point of view, while attempting to foster "traditions based on the principles of justice, decency, independent thinking, and personal freedom".[155] Issuing 11,000 copies for the first issue, reactions among the camps varied. Some prisoners in charge attempted to prevent distribution and used scare tactics and threats of violence to prevent other POWs from reading the publication. Yet, the presentation of the magazine pleased many prisoners.[156] Some prisoners were curious about the publication, rather than enthusiastic, given their political leanings; but camp administrators determined the magazine would be a tool to gauge the effectiveness of the reeducation program, and the prisoners' attitude towards the subject.[157] Editors targeted those who reacted positively about the reeducation program, as they would be receptive to the democratic ideas outlined in the courses and publication materials. Sold originally for twelve cents, with an increase in 1945 to sixteen cents, the magazine generated a profit. Partly done to maintain objectivity and avoid accusations of creating propaganda, the prisoners were responsible for purchasing the publication. Requiring prisoner payment placed responsibility and decision-making into the hands of the prisoners, making the distribution voluntary. The magazine was a success, as publications increased throughout the camps, with 75,000 copies needing to be printed after the fifteenth issue of the magazine.[158]

[155] Speakman (1953). 35.
[156] Mewha (1953). 43-45.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Mewha (1953). 44.

Not only were German POWs allowed access to college courses and technical classes, but Americans influenced prisoners through democratic-led newspapers and other courses. Camp newspapers were unique to each camp, with around eighty papers published around the fall of 1945. Some were more pro-Nazi than others and required additional censorship by the POWSPD. The POWSPD created a guide for camp newspapers which determined camp newspapers should be "a medium for self-education as well as a source of factual information; editors should be impartial and objective and let prisoners judge for themselves what is right and wrong".[159] This included balancing German and Allied communiques (military news) to allow the prisoners an unbiased perspective and the ability to draw their own conclusions. Interestingly, the POWSPD encouraged publications by Thomas Mann, along with forums to allow prisoners to discuss opinions and create a majority, with the hopes of "coordinat[ing] educational activities".[160] These forums and discussions would give prisoners a voice and further the goals of the reeducation program, as democracy is based on conversations and majority opinion.

Overall, the establishment of POW camp newspapers worked well. Prisoners were receptive, and the work was completed without incident. In one case, at a camp in Douglas, Wyoming, officials permanently suspended the camp newspaper, as the prisoner-editors refused orders to stop publishing Nazi propaganda. To ensure a somewhat cohesive publication among the newspapers, in June 1945, the government decided to publish a "clipsheet"; a document recommending articles for reprint or general information it felt all prisoners should know. This

[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.

decision hoped to alleviate poorly written articles, a lack of information in others, or situations where no camp newspaper existed.[161]

Called *Die Auslese* (The Selection), this clipsheet attempted to utilize as much prisoner-led material as possible. Using suggestions from prisoners at the Factory, *Die Auslese* also supported the underlying goals of the reeducation program by attempting to eliminate Nazi doctrines, promote the positives of pre-Nazi Germany; and create an emphasis on democratic ideals, specifically America's.[162]

Camp Education Courses

Before the formal creation of a reeducation program, it was not uncommon to find schools or education courses in POW camps. The prisoner community valued education; as a result, people from various backgrounds and educational levels learned through self-created classes or recreational activities. These ranged from political discussions, language courses, woodworking, and so on. Permitted by Americans, these prison schools could issue certificates equivalent to the Gymnasium (high school/junior college) to prisoners who furthered their education. There was a danger of schools becoming Nazified, as these schools were outside American military control. Thus, a plan based on specific parameters and principles attempted to curb growing dissent in the prisoner education system. These principles required aid from American authorities, as they developed basic classes; a director of studies was to be chosen based on qualifications and paid for his services; teachers had to be qualified; universities would assist with the American-based education programs; and prisoners had to obtain permission to

[161] Speakman (1948) 47.
[162] Ibid.

attend certain courses offered by military installations; or for correspondence courses offered by universities.[163]

One area that prompted much conversation was the history courses. Discussions after class could be very vocal. One such instance involved a lecture on the American Civil War. Prisoners found it ironic that Americans would teach about slavery and have racial segregation, (which prisoners saw during some train rides), while they also attempted to teach on democracy to prisoners who were behind barbed wire. This was a complex concept that the prisoners did not fully grasp. They did not understand the situation of the African American people in the United States. One instructor at the special school at Fort Getty stated, as many instructors found the topic difficult to talk about, "I was content (1) to point to its [slavery of African Americans] history, (2) to parade the progress that the Negroes have made since slavery, and (3) to ask for suggestions from them as to how we Americans can move faster and more securely in solving our major "minority problems"."[164] The instructor stated that the African American community may construe American democracy as "fascism", allowing parallels to be drawn between America during the 1800s and Germany under the Nazi regime.[165] Courses at Fort Custer centered on geography when creating the history courses. As students in Advanced English and Interpreter's English navigated their course, they also discussed historical topics, such as George Washington and democracy.[166] This education continued to expand through articles in the camp newspaper, which offered history lessons in easy-to-understand language.[167]

[163] Speakman (1948) 48-49.
[164] Gansberg (1979). 128-129.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Proud (1949). 75-85.
[167] "Die Letzten Amtshandlungen Washington's" (July 21, 1945). *Die Brücke.* 1945-1946. Newspaper. Fort Custer, Michigan. Obtained through the Center for Research Libraries.

The Film Program

Along with education courses and printed material, the use of film as a medium for reeducation and showing American democracy, proved to be the most effective. Originally made from a catalogue by the prison advocate, the films chosen during the early imprisonment years, mainly supported the ideas of Nazi propaganda. Films displaying crime and 1920s gangs supported the information disseminated to the troops about American life and how Americans treated people. The solution was to include films to create respect for America. These films focused on presenting democratic principles, where the films would be entertaining, show family life, and fit a variety of genres. At the beginning of this recreational activity and reeducation medium, the war's progress dictated the films shown to the POWs. As the tide turned toward Allied victory, films such as the *Why We Fight* series informed prisoners of why Americans fought in the war, the atrocities being committed within Germany and beyond; and the reality of the war being lost by Axis forces.[168] The decision to show realistic films aimed to show the problems of National Socialism and, hopefully, change the political leanings of the POWs and challenge the Nazi ideology to make prisoners more receptive to democracy, to advance the goal of creating a democratic Germany after the war.

Falling under the auspices of the Signal Corps and Army Motion Picture Service, the films' selection, its distribution, and allocation of equipment was slow. As requests required procurement, receipt, and distribution of film prints (negatives), training of operators; and payment, the prisoners found the process cumbersome, thus creating complaints about the system. The movies shown were not the source of the complaints, but rather the process of obtaining films. Another problem resulted from Hollywood. Producers complained about

[168] Speakman (1948) 56.

creating, distributing, and converting 35 mm film for “entertainment” for war prisoners. They believed the process was unnecessary, as it was expensive to convert film prints and American citizens were realizing the maltreatment of Allied prisoners. Given the enemy status of German prisoners, converting film for them to watch movies, while other citizens were fighting appeared psychologically demoralizing. There was an underlying push to have German prisoners suffer the same treatment as Allied prisoners overseas.

The prisoners received additional intellectual diversions through radio programming. Although unable (expressly forbidden) to have radios in their barracks, it was common for music, announcements, or other communications to be played for the prisoners over the loudspeaker. Only a little effort existed in this area concerning reeducation, though the radio programs played American and pro-democratic programming. Radio was more of a tool, a means by which to assist in reeducation, as the prisoners could listen to English while learning the language and hearing news broadcasts.

Each of the mediums used, through film, radio, and other publications, played a role in helping the War Department reach its goals of educating prisoners on American culture and democracy. This goal complimented the secondary goal of reeducation of ensuring a democratic Germany would grow out of the rubble of Nazi Germany, following World War II and Adolf Hitler. These intellectual diversions through these mediums supported reeducation, but there was limited success in the overall change to the Nazi mindset. The War Department pointed to increased publication of *Der Ruf* as the success of the reeducation program and the growth of democracy among the prisoners. However, despite the complete success of changing a mindset, as considered by the War Department, additional questions about the triumph of the publication remain. The increased publications could be because of interest, a lack of other reading

materials, or, as purported by the War Department and the POWSPD, that the prisoners' ideologies were changing toward democracy and supporting the ideals of the American government.

Reeducation in Michigan

The study of the reeducation of German prisoners in Michigan is lacking in comparison with information concerning the national program. Philip Proud, a former American serviceman working in the reeducation program, conducted the most comprehensive study on reeducation at Fort Custer. His first-hand access to the prisoners and seeing the program's impact offered a unique perspective on the program. His thesis on the subject "A Study of the Reeducation of German Prisoners-of-war At Fort Custer, Michigan, 1945-1946", completed in 1949, demonstrated the attempt of the reeducation program on a small scale. However, it would not be as effective as the work program, given the limited interactions between German prisoners and Americans. Proud's work, though informative, leaves much to be desired concerning the creation and implementation of the program at Fort Custer. In addition, the author's first-hand experiences with the prisoners requires careful reading. Nevertheless, it appears to be the only work written specifically for the POWs reeducation program in Michigan.

Written to demonstrate the methods used for the reeducation program, rather than arguing that the German POWs were reeducated with democratic principles, Proud asserted that "the teaching of the democratic way of life is well-nigh impossible without a constant exposure to democratic principles and practices, and participation in them. Without these, it seems illogical that changes in a system of values and beliefs would occur".[169] There was little hope the program would succeed, as changing one's values and beliefs was harder than simply exposing people to

[169] Proud (1949). Preface

a different worldview. Ethan Reardon, researching the subject in 2019, arrived at a similar conclusion, stating that the work program was more effective as it allowed more interactions with American civilians, while the reeducation was "hampered by poor decisions on content and put together too late into the war to have much of an effect".[170]

Despite these negative assertions, the government still believed it necessary to "reeducate" the "Nazis" and provide activities while they remained in captivity. The primary element of the program was to ensure housing and adequate locations from which to teach. Proud's overriding goal was to show the techniques used to achieve reeducation at Fort Custer and in Michigan.

Under the commands of Lieutenant Colonel Edwin C. Reynolds and Major Charles E. Gilbert, the two men attempted to reeducate the POWs. Also including a Catholic and a Protestant chaplain among the staff, the accommodations of Fort Custer encompassed, roughly three blocks, with an attempt to be somewhat comfortable. The camp forbade outside visitors, and only one gate allowed access into the POW area. The AEO assigned to Fort Custer in 1944 was First Lieutenant Paul W. Schwiebert, with Phillip Proud joining as an aide in May 1945.[171] Having completed the courses at Fort Slocum and undergoing training on the reeducation program, the men began their duties, focusing on Fort Custer, Michigan.

One primary feature of the program was the study of English. Facilitators believed that studying English would remove the language barrier, making it easier to inform and teach prisoners about democracy. A second aspect Schwiebert headed was the redirection and restructuring of the POW school at the Fort. Removing Dr. Karl-Heinz J., the Nazi director of

[170] Reardon (2019) 1-2.
[171] Proud (1949). 16-17.

studies from office, and replacing him with Friedrich H., a dependable and cooperative German, it became possible to educate prisoners, as the previous director had focused on using political tactics to ensure prisoners ignored lessons on American democracy and culture.[172]

Many problems existed in the camp school. Some centered-on language, funds, nationalities, and even offerings. The prisoners ranged in age from 17 to the early 60s and represented a variety of professions. Sometimes, prisoners held degrees, allowing them to be teachers; but they were also looking for some intellectual diversions during their captivity. Some solutions to these problems included reducing the courses, which had no value to the reeducation experiment. Proud determined that "All signs and instructions within the stockade were printed in both German and English... Assistance to the English program was lent by the camp newspaper which printed materials for varying levels of comprehension."[173] Course content offered twice a day, with a simpler curriculum to allow everyone the opportunity to understand the message.[174]

Die Brücke [The Bridge], a German POW written newspaper for Fort Custer, became an important news source, alongside *Der Ruf.* Filled with American history lessons, as well as arguments about the importance of democracy, the paper assisted the reeducation program by further educating prisoners on American values. The first edition began explaining democracy and the country's founding, which allowed German prisoners to understand the value of democratic thought and the creation of American democracy.[175]

[172] Proud (1949). 70.
[173] Proud (1949). 71-72.
[174] Proud (1949). 72.
[175] 0"Macht und Recht" (July 14, 1945). *Die Brücke.* 1945-1946. Newspaper. Fort Custer, Michigan. Obtained through the Center for Research Libraries.

Normally around eight pages, sometimes more, the handout encompassed many topics. One primary topic was the freedom of choice and benefits associated with practicing democracy, in contrast to the totalitarian ideology of Nazism. This newspaper, though informative about the wider world, was a direct challenge to Nazi ideology, even though the editors wrote the newspaper under the supervision of the United States Army. Its publication, roughly once a week, allowed prisoners access to information on the outside world, films being shown in the camps, letters and news from Germany, and updates on international politics.

Even though not all issues of *Die Brücke* have survived, the newspaper benefited the reeducation program, by publishing American principles. Primary among them, were historical lessons on American government and democracy. Published on July 7, 1945, one article discussed American politics and the special lifestyle that American freedom encompassed.[176] It was a special freedom because of the unique political structure of American government, as the article delved into the details on election history, as well as the legislative and judicial branches.[177]

Another area of the newspaper contained prisoner contributions which could be pieces describing regions in Germany, such as Thuringia. Prisoners would also write synopses of films and radio programs being shown that week at the camp. A popular film in July 1945 was "You Were Never Lovelier" with Fred Astarite and Rita Hayworth, from 1942.[178] But, the newspaper did not just keep the POWs busy or used light-hearted material to avoid homesickness; it also

[176] "Amerikanische Geschichte." (July 7, 1945). *Die Brücke.* 1945-1946. Newspaper. Fort Custer, Michigan. Obtained through the Center for Research Libraries.
[177] Ibid.
[178] "Aus dem Leserhreis." (July 7, 1945, *Die Brücke.* 1945-1946. Newspaper. Fort Custer, Michigan. Obtained through the Center for Research Libraries.

informed them about international politics and situations in Germany, as the Allies attempted to rebuild the country.

On July 14th, 1945, the prisoners learned of the meeting of the Big Three (Britain, America, and Russia), to discuss Germany's fate. The article noted that Germany's fate hung on the outcome of this meeting and that Germany was denied a seat at the table, because of Hitler's belief that the Third Reich would solve the world's political problems. Believed to be a romantic notion, the article informed prisoners that the country's fate was purely in the hands of the Big Three's representatives. They also learned of President Harry Truman 's visit to San Francisco to create a national charter, which was sent to the Senate for ratification.[179] This would be the beginnings of the United Nations.

The following week, July 21st, the prisoners learned of the Potsdam meeting and the first official meeting of President Truman, Premier Churchill and Premier Stalin to make the final decisions regarding Germany's capitulation. The primary issue was the ongoing conflict with Japan. Premier Stalin was curious about his country's involvement in those talks, but he was unwilling to voice his continued commitment to assist the United States. Taking place at Kaiser-Wilhelm-Platz, the heads of states determined that Poland, Czechoslovakia (today Czech Republic and Slovakia), Austria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, and Greece would become independent nations, able to establish their own laws.[180]

Prisoner contributions in July 1945, discussed Germany's future. An underlying question: Who was at fault? General Lerch wrote a piece for *Die Brücke* dissecting freedom. He argued

[179] " Aus dem Leserhreis." (July 7, 1945 *Die Brücke.* 1945-1946. Newspaper. Fort Custer, Michigan. Obtained through the Center for Research Libraries.
[180] "Sonderbericht" (July 21, 1945). 1945 *Die Brücke.* 1945-1946. Newspaper. Fort Custer, Michigan. Obtained through the Center for Research Libraries.

that National Socialism and Nazim had brought catastrophe to Germany and the crime for the war lay at Hitler's feet, as the crime was not against the world, but against Germany's men, women, and children.[181] Hitler's action robbed Germany of her respect in international politics and it would take many years and effort to restore her honor. He concluded that all people should understand that peace and freedom are better than war, noting, "Freedom of Speech; Freedom of Religion; Freedom from Want; Freedom from Fear"[182] as the most critical areas of freedom.[183]

Contributor Ludwig Schrik continued the conversation about determining fault under the headline "*Erkenne Dich selbst.* [Know Yourself]"[184] As many people were discussing the fault for the war, General Eisenhower gave a press conference in which he stated that peace was necessary and not to make the same mistakes concerning peace, as seen during the Treaty of Versailles after World War I. However, Schirk noted that he did not know the solution to the problem of keeping the peace and avoiding making those same mistakes. He suggested that the German people to know themselves and understand (and tolerate) that other nations (peoples) exist and have a right to live.[185] But, other contributors warned prisoners to not fall into a false belief that meant immediate peace after the war. They wanted prisoners to understand that peace would be difficult to maintain and come by, as many countries blamed Germany for the atrocities of the war. The Allied powers were worried about the continued ("invisible") teachings of

[181] "An Alle". (July 7, 1945) *Die Brücke.* 1945-1946. Newspaper. Fort Custer, Michigan. Obtained through the Center for Research Libraries.
[182] "Freiheit der Rede; Freiheit der Religion; Freiheit von Not; Freiheit von Furcht"
[183] Ibid.
[184] "Erkenne Dich selbst" (July 7, 1945) *Die Brücke.* 1945-1946. Newspaper. Fort Custer, Michigan. Obtained through the Center for Research Libraries.
[185] Ibid.

Nazism behind closed doors, done by "dark men at work."[186] The author concluded that the Russians (Soviet Union) were trying to take over Germany with Communist ideas.[187]

This could be justified as former prisoner Karl Kleff reported in his letters that Russians were the enemies of the German people.[188]Many prisoners who returned to the Russian zone shared the sentiment against the Soviet Union. Many complained of hunger, poor living conditions, and being miserable.[189] Robert Forster described living month to month, with barely enough to eat, after being repatriated.[190] Horst Baumann lived in similar circumstances, with "living costs" being very expensive.[191] Jürgen Kracht desired to "hit the Russians", as he heard of bombing raids after his return to Germany and the Russian zone. Being a former pilot for the German military, he hoped to immigrate to the United States, if he could find a sponsor. But he also accepted his fate, as he determined he must trust that the Russians would be good and honest.[192]

As prisoners understood reeducation, it was a foundation for the program to help the prisoners use democracy as a building-block to reconstruct Germany as a democratic nation. These articles continued explaining these democratic ideals as they discussed Washington, the formation of the United States" government, and other areas of the American Revolution and the

[186] „*Dunkelmaenner am Werke"* "Siegermachte Verwalten Deutschland" (July 28, 1945) *Die Brücke.* 1945-1946. Newspaper. Fort Custer, Michigan. Obtained through the Center for Research Libraries.
[187] "Siegermachte Verwalten Deutschland" (July 28, 1945) *Die Brücke.* 1945-1946. Newspaper. Fort Custer, Michigan. Obtained through the Center for Research Libraries.
[188] Karl Kleff. Collection of letters from Karl Kleff to Melvin Kraft. (1947-1948). Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan. October 17, 1948.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Robert Forster. "Letter from Robert Forster to Mr. Royal." (1948). German Prisoners in WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan. November 17, 1948.
[191] Horst Baumann. Collection of Letters from Horst Baumann to Bill Bishop. (1947-1948). Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan. March 15, 1948.
[192] Jürgen Kracht. *Correspondence between Jürgen Kracht and Otto Herzog*. (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. September 19, 1948.

American Civil War. One article discussed the Liberty Bell, the location in Philadelphia and how fifty-four delegates signed the Declaration of Independence, with two additional signatures added later.[193] Specific to the idea of democracy was the preamble of the Declaration, the lines reminding people that Americans have certain God-given rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness":

> "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that life, freedom and the pursuit of happiness are born for this."[194]

The prisoners read the whole preamble to establish the basis for the democratic rights practiced by American culture. The words demonstrated that people had these inalienable rights and could govern themselves, a precept which created American democracy. As the articles in *Die Brücke* heavily leaned toward positive democracy, the newspaper immersed the prisoners in this democratic mindset.

As the articles continued to discuss the future of Germany, they asked what the new world of Germany would be. As National Socialism died, what new government would emerge? *Die Brücke* wanted prisoners to support democratic self-government. In particular, the idea was to create a new government using principles organized on happiness and prosperity. One idea promoted among the prisoners was "Our thoughts in the future must be worldwide."[195] The prisoners needed to think of the future, incorporate independent thought, and embrace a new ideological ideal.

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[193] "Amerika Rueckblick Auf den Unabhaengigkeitstag" (July 14, 1945) *Die Brücke.* 1945-1946. Newspaper. Fort Custer, Michigan. Obtained through the Center for Research Libraries.
[194] "*Wir halten diese Wahrheiten fuer selbstverständlich: dass alle Meschen gleich geschaffen sind; dass sie von ihrem Schöpfer mit gewissen unvermeuserlichen Rechten ausgestattet sind; dass Leben, Freiheit und das Streben nach dem Glueck dazu geboren"*
[195] "*Unser Denken in der Zukunft muss weltweit sein"*

Education, in cooperation with *Die Brücke,* helped challenge prisoners and give them the intellectual diversions the War Department believed they needed. Courses varied at the Michigan POW camps. Under the Director of Studies, paid through prisoner funds, Fort Custer (Camp Custer) had eight English classes with 120 students, with the following number of students listed in taking additional courses within the camp:

5 classes Mathematics- 70 students
2 classes History–40 students
Biology- 10 students
Forestry- 15 students
Latin- 10 students
Agriculture- 15 students
2 classes Stenography- 30 students
Typewriting- 20 students
Physics- 10 students
Economics- 50 students
Geography- 20 students
Harmony- 35 students
German Language- 25 students
Arithmetic- 7 students[196]

Camps also offered French, Spanish, German Literature, and Bible classes in 1944.[197] Howard Hong reported that the camp had adequate facilities for teaching classes, and he found great interest among POWs in participating in correspondence courses with local university faculty at the University of Michigan. Hong reported an interest in creating an inter-library loan program, allowing the prisoners more access to reading materials, as the need for duplicate copies and

[196] Howard Hong. *Report of Visit to Prisoner-of-war Camp Fort Custer, Mich.* (September 28-30, 1944) National Archives College Park. Subject Files, 1942-1946. Record Group 389. A1 461. Box 2659. NND 740063
[197] Ibid.

additional volumes grew. Despite the 1900 general reading books, and 300 textbooks, the prisoners continued to request more reading materials.[198] However, not all the camps in Michigan, followed the same standards set by Fort Custer.

Camp Pori, a branch camp in the U.P., also valued education. Creating courses in English, German, French, mathematics, economics, shorthand and music history, the prisoners could have intellectual stimulation while working in the logging, forestry, or processing industries. Howard Hong, as he traveled to evaluate these camps to ensure proper adherence to the Geneva Convention, noted that Camp Pori had study groups for "machine construction, electricity, technical drawing and agriculture", further allowing prisoners to enhance their education, while also interacting with American soldiers, civilians, and their ideological ideas. [199]

Camp Au Train's school courses were cancelled, given the hostility towards ministers in the camp. Camp administrators disbanded summer school programs, with a small group of eight students allowed to study in the winter. These courses were specific to engineers and related to mathematics, technical drawing, physics, and chemistry.[200] Instead of education courses, the prisoners received alternative intellectual diversions, centering on painting, music, and carving. The camp featured an orchestra and "Maennerchoir" [men choir].[201]

Camp Coloma, in the southwest corner of Michigan, lacked the ability to create educational opportunities for prisoners. When Howard Hong gave his report on Coloma in

[198] Howard Hong. *Report of Visit to Prisoner-of-war Camp Fort Custer, Mich.* (September 28-30, 1944) National Archives College Park. Subject Files, 1942-1946. Record Group 389. A1 461. Box 2659. NND 740063.
[199] Howard Hong. *Report of Visit to Prisoner-of-war Camp, Pori, Michigan.* (1945). National Archives College Park. Decimal Files, 1943-1946. Record Group 389. A1 459-A. 255 Camp Pori, Michigan. Box 1619. 290/34/16/04.
[200] Howard Hong. *Report of Visit to Prisoner-of-war Camp, Au Train, Michigan.* (May 31, 1945). National Archives College Park. Decimal Files, 1943-1946. Record Group 389. A1 459-A. 255 Aytrain, Michigan. Box 1609. 290/34/16/03.
[201] (All male choir). Hong (May 31, 1945).

August 1945, he found the only leisure activities were evening sports and religious services. Books existed but were sparse. According to Hong,

> No books "other than fifteen which Chaplain De Bruin of Custer had brought out, no musical instruments, no organ for services, no phonograph (one radio), no classes, and only one soccer ball and one volley ball." Books needed of all types, musical instruments for the many players; replacements for sports balls, need chess sets. Other needed items sent to base for approval.[202]

Hong's report indicated a lack of intellectual diversions for prisoners as outlined in the Geneva Convention. Camp Coloma rectified this through book donations and a rotating library with Fort Custer. As this camp was a sub-camp, it was primarily operational during the summer and fall months. When the fall harvest ended in 1945, the local paper reported the prisoners' assistance, where only forty prisoners worked in the processing factory.[203] Official numbers showed that Camp Coloma may have housed roughly 900 prisoners during its 1945 season.[204] However, Hong's report determined the camps needed improvements to stimulate the prisoners, rather than just giving them work opportunities. Education and distractions were also necessary.

Michigan's education system for prisoners worked on teaching prisoners the cultural information concerning American democracy and its social culture. Full indoctrination never happened; nor did the prisoners fully accept democratic ideals. The primary camp at Fort Custer influenced more prisoners, given its size and ability to create courses relevant to their experiences. The smaller sub-camps attempted to follow the national guidelines for the reeducation program, as laid out by the PMGO; however, as seen from Coloma, this was sometimes lacking. Prisoners fulfilled their need for intellectual diversions in many ways besides

[202] Howard Hong. *Report of Visit to Prisoner-of-war Branch Camp, Coloma, Michigan.* (August 1, 1945). National Archives College Park. Decimal Files, 1943-1946. Record Group 389. A1 459-1. Box 1613. 290/34/16/03.
[203] "Coloma Fruit Exchange Has Had Biggest Peach Year." *The Coloma Courier.* (September 21, 1945).
[204] "War Prisoners Have Been Big Help in Harvesting Fruit Crop." *The Coloma Courier.* (October 26, 1945).

education. They took courses in practical elements: machining, carpentry, repairs, etc. They experienced opportunities to express themselves through art and music. Although education was the primary aim of the national reeducation program, its success was extremely limited. Many prisoners writing back to American farmers desired to return to the United States. Prisoners writing to Otto Herzog, routinely asked about the immigration policies, to leave Germany and return to the United States.[205]

Despite a desire by prisoners to leave Germany after repatriation, there were changes among returning prisoners who had completed the reeducation program in the United States. Prisoners selected to work at the Factory or Fort Eustis were pre-selected to be repatriated home. The courses provided information on creating a democratic government. However, the prisoners still faced challenges. The country was in ruins. Bombed-out cities, high inflation, and limited goods, made creating a new democratic Germany a struggle, as the people lacked basic needs. Feeding a family or finding a job was more important than encouraging people to vote and changing the German governmental system. Nevertheless, the War Department, working with the PMGO, could report on some improvements with the German government, towards democracy, as they sent individuals after the war to gather results about the reeducation experiment.

Influences of Reeducation

Although the War Department failed to fully reeducate German POWs, there was success in spreading information on democracy and growing friendships between Americans and Germans. There appeared to be a lessening of pro-Nazi sentiment in the camps and among prisoners, according to documents and surviving letters. However, only the individual can

[205] Jürgen Kracht. *Correspondence between Jürgen Kracht and Otto Herzog*. (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. September 19, 1948.

determine the true nature of this change. The program allowed Germans to see and experience American democratic culture. Prisoners also voiced opinions after the war concerning the problems they saw, and some attempted to right the atrocities committed by the Wehrmacht.

As the Factory prisoners began returning to Germany and their homelands, many prisoners returned to Soviet-controlled areas. Those prisoners who returned to Germany with certifications issued by Fort Eustis encountered problems. One prisoner described his condition upon returning to Germany:

> ... But now I must confess that I am entirely lost in the turmoil which goes on over here in the old country. If nothing is done this year in the way of economic aid the whole idea of all the school work in Getty, Wetherill, and Eustis is lost and the money too, spent by the U.S. government. Maybe also the democratic ideals, at least as far as Europe is concerned. I do hope that this outlook is too pessimistic...[206]

German officials were unwilling to honor the certificates sent by the United States which allowed prisoners to work in government positions or law enforcement.[207] After the war, as American attempted to track down prisoners to fully see the progression of results, they located less than one percent of the former prisoner "graduates" who would help Germany rebuild. The military government did not honor the certificates. Partially, this was because of the secrecy of the reeducation project, leading to a lack of importance, and second, the government had too many other issues in their zone to find documentation on the project and determine the reliability and political ideologies of these particular prisoners.[208]

Officials visiting Germany, who tried to see the direct results of the reeducation program, noted "the success of democratic concepts in Germany is very closely related to the condition of

[206] Proud (1949). 112.
[207] Speakman (1948). 131, 137-138.
[208] Proud (1949). 140-142.

the economy."[209] As these prisoners returned home, their acknowledgment by the Military Government officers varied and was completely unpredictable. Using their "diplomas" from the reeducation schools and program, the prisoners found the certificate worthless. This could have been due to the officers' attitudes. Still, suitable jobs were available with the Military Government, in law enforcement or education, whereby the prisoners could use the special democratic knowledge they had received to change the hearts and minds of Germans for a better future.[210]

The local American newspapers claimed the reeducation program was successful in influencing the prisoners as they rebuilt Germany. One claimed that prisoners were being placed in positions of power, "helping spread democracy in Germany."[211] Another stated that around 25,000 prisoners were classified as anti-Nazis before repatriation, which designated them for specialized training. Officials praised prisoners repatriated to the American Zone as they filled a "political vacuum," because of the average German who had no political leanings. [212] However, this was not always the case. Polling results showed that the German prisoners changed mentally, with the majority experiencing some change of attitude. Official documents argue that roughly three-fourths of the 378,000 German prisoners housed in the United States were affected and influenced by the reeducation curriculum and interactions with American citizens.[213]

As continued surveys and questionnaires arrived in Germany to determine the program's effectiveness, many German citizens indicated that they felt Germany's democracy was lacking due to economic, political, and social conditions. Prisoners returning shared the high inflation,

[209] Proud (1949). 113.
[210] Speakman (1948) 127-128.
[211] Proud (1949). 114.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Proud (1949). 115-116.

lack of clothing, monetary issues and other daily problems. August Weyand wrote back to Frankenmuth, Michigan explaining the new currency situations in 1948, as the country prepared to change currencies to battle inflation. Clothing, food, and all essential items remained very high in price. Weyand did not have high hopes for the changes, as he had yet to see changes in Germany.[214] Given the daily struggles, making political decisions, or even interest in politics was far from people's minds. As Maslow's hierarchy of needs determined that food and shelter were the highest priority, self-actualization, or in this case self-government, would be far less important to prisoners who were trying to feed themselves and their families.

One official investigation was conducted by William G. Moulton, employed by the War Department, who spent his time during the war working in the PMGO. It reviewed the attitudes of prisoners after the war. Tasked with finding information for the Office of Military Government for Germany, he spent fifty days in the country trying to locate 129 former prisoners who had completed the United States" reeducation program, hoping to ascertain the effectiveness of the program.[215] One hundred and six men told their story, but they represented atypical former prisoners. Many of these individuals had written back to farmers or the former schools in the U.S. after the war. This increased dialogue with the enemy nation; showed to Moulton that the prisoners were pre-disposed to democratic, or at least pro-American sentiments, something not seen within the average German citizenry.[216]

Former prisoners had created a "*Demokratische Gesellschaft"*, a community organization where the members discussed ideas of democracy and rebuilding Germany to fit this model. But,

[214] August Weyand. *Correspondence between August Weyand and Otto Herzog*. 2004. Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. August 11, 1948.
[215] Speakman (1948). 133-134.
[216] Ibid.

again, this interest portrayed a pro-American sentiment, not necessarily the effectiveness of the reeducation program.[217] Moulton noted that few of the men worked in the military government, as had discussed in their paper. Yet, many prisoners who participated in the *Gesellschaft*-led discussions and sponsored two conferences for the upcoming 1947 winter proposed solutions for Germany. The group of former prisoners, "gave very considerable assistance to members and non-members alike (especially newly-discharged prisoners-of-war) in helping them to obtain clothing, residence permits, etc."[218] Moulton's observations noted that the prisoners:

> Upon their discharge these men faced the same problems as all returning prisoners-of-war: locating families, finding jobs, getting residence permits, etc. and like other Germans, they lacked adequate food and clothing. A few of them were still in 1947 wearing their black-dyed prisoners' clothes and seemed to possess little else; most of them had visibly lost weight since their return from the United States. In one respect, the lack of food and the thousand and one complications of German life in that period presented special problems for these men, since they were prevented from engaging in the spare-time activities, which, while they were still special prisoners, they had hoped to pursue.[219]

Interestingly, Moulton and Speakman both reported that prisoners apologized as they discussed their predicament of not being able to do more with the privileges, they had obtained from being special prisoners in the reeducation program. Given their living situations and daily struggles, not focusing on democracy and nation-building was acceptable. Yet, these prisoners took away some positive impressions of American culture, government, and the possibility of rebuilding Germany democratically. Moulton recorded some general opinions as follows:

> ...Most widespread was the belief that the United States must give economic assistance to Germany if democracy is to thrive. Some added to this the statement that present economic conditions are driving the Germans toward communism...
>
> ... United States must give cultural assistance to Germany, in the form of newspapers, magazines, books, student and professor exchanges, etc. Some urge this more strongly than economic help, because they feel there is more likelihood of its being done. Many

[217] Speakman (1948). 134-135.
[218] Speakman (1948) 136.
[219] Ibid.

> pointed out that the French and the Russians are flooding their zones with valuable cultural material and find it hard to understand why the richest nation on earth, if it really wants to democratize Germany, is not doing likewise... Towards America itself they had a feeling of respect and affection--even of nostalgia....[220]

Clearly, the Americans and their culture left an impression on the young prisoners who remained within their borders. Although the goals of teaching the prisoners about American democracy and culture appeared fulfilled, the likelihood was far less successful. Prisoners struggled to survive daily. There was little American assistance, financially or otherwise. The lack of continued education and resources placed prisoners on an uphill battle, given that prisoners reported Russian and French influences daily. Other influences drowned out American culture if prisoners lost continued access to the resources they had while at the reeducation schools or in the POW camps.

Even though the reality of German conditions after the war muddied the goals of the reeducation program, there was limited success in reeducating the German POWs. Many gained a better understanding of American culture. Some embraced more democratic ideals. One prisoner, writing back to Cummins Speakman, praised his time in the United States, as he learned more about different political views and this proved to be a "great help already in the first discussions I had back home."[221] These discussions also centered on prisoner treatment, as prisoners recalled the food, clothes, and genuine care they experienced in the United States. Albert Weizinger recalled the items given to him while working in the Upper Peninsula.[222] Karl Kleff wrote of his reminiscences of his time working in Muskegon to his family.[223]

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[220] Speakman (1948) 139.
[221] Speakman (1948). 112. As cited in: Mewha (1953). 149.
[222] Albert Weizinger. "Mary Lee Letters." Sidnaw Historical Museum. Sidnaw, Michigan. December 9, 1948.
[223] Karl Kleff. Collection of letters from Karl Kleff to Melvin Kraft. (1947-1948). Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan. October 13, 1948.

In addition, the influences of democracy and American culture appeared in the prisoners' reactions to the *Why We Fight* series and the video footage about the concentration camps and the damage inflicted on Germany through the war. The reaction of the prisoners was to issue a "Peace Appeal by German Prisoners-of-war in the U.S. A. to the German People."[224] The purpose of this appeal was to convince the people to stop fighting. They believed the fight was no longer worth the suffering experienced by the German people. They were "voluntarily motivated by the anxiety for your destiny in the homeland and by the imperious necessity to be called to action to enforce an immediate peace." [225]

They urged the people not to be blind and "come to your senses". As the Allies raced into Berlin, "Germany, our homeland, has now become itself that what is our armies have made out of other countries: theatres of war operations."[226] The war was over, in their eyes. They called the people the guilty ones. Should they defend Germany to their last breath? Doing so guaranteed death. Adolf Hitler was the destruction of Germany as the prisoners stated "Hitler knows that his role is lost. He only prolongs the war."[227] Urging people to put down their weapons, they appealed to the people to end the war.

The prisoners kept their hope. It would be possible to rebuild without Hitler, making Germany better and more democratic. Ending the fighting would allow the people to retain their undamaged property. "The more remains preserved, the quicker our own wounds and the

[224] *Peace Appeal by German Prisoners-of-war in the U.S.A. To the German People.* (March 12, 1945). National Archives College Park. Record Group 389. A1 467. Box 1522.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid.
[227] *Peace Appeal by German Prisoners-of-war in the U.S.A. To the German People.* (March 12, 1945). National Archives College Park. Record Group 389. A1 467. Box 1522.

wounds of other nations will heal."[228] The prisoners believed it was possible to rebuild their country and rise from the rubble of their country.

They still embraced American values and culture. The prisoners' hope was also based on their experiences in the United States. They wanted to reassure the people that they were still German; "Listen to us! Germans are speaking...".[229] They understood the cultural nuances of German society, but they also saw the importance of American cultural democracy in creating a more assertive Germany. They petitioned the people to put down their arms and surrender, in direct opposition to Hitler's orders to fight to the last breath. They were trying to preserve the county and rebuild a more educated Germany.

> We know that the allied nations can well differentiate between the Nazis and the German people
>
> We here are prisoners-of-war are enjoying a better living than you have in the homeland Nevertheless our greatest desire is to return to you. We are willing to share your sorrow and labor with courage and hopefulness for the reconstruction and peace/ We want to see you again. Act accordingly! Our lives were spared for your interests, preserve you own lives for us!
>
> Bring it to an end and the terrible war will be a thing of the past. There is a future for us but it must be without Hitler. There is a future, but only for those who are kept alive. For nothing else but immediate peace.[230]

This support for Americans, their perceived enemies, further broke down the barriers and concepts of an enemy. It ensured that the Americans would be humane when working with German citizens. The foundation of democracy, as seen through American values and the prisoners' experience could be used to give the people hope and a new ideology for life.

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[228] Ibid.
[229] Ibid.
[230] *Peace Appeal by German Prisoners-of-war in the U.S.A. To the German People.* (March 12, 1945). National Archives College Park. Record Group 389. A1 467. Box 1522.

Conclusion

Determining violations regarding the use of a reeducation program is multi-faceted. Direct violations appeared through the word “propaganda” in surviving government documents and fraternization between prisoners and American citizens. Yet the program was voluntary, staffed by prisoners-of-war, shielding the War Department from accusations of propaganda. Criticisms of the program included its ineffectiveness due to its late beginnings and the lack of understanding of Americans who did not see the necessity for the program, despite the arguments from the public and newspaper media of German and Italians prisoner that needed education in democracy. The overriding goal of rebuilding Germany into a democratic country and teaching the prisoners on the importance of American democracy and culture fueled the reeducation program.

This reeducation program challenged the idea of an enemy because of the prisoners’ immersion in American culture. As they learned about democracy, the prisoners realized the differences between National Socialism (Nazism) and American democracy. The prisoners developed friendships lasting decades. Americans saw the German prisoners as boys, with similar mannerisms. They were not different; they were just people.

The United States POWSPD created an education program specifically for prisoners (originally German) with the goal of rebuilding Germany according to a democratic model. Democracy and understanding American values were at the forefront of the project’s goals. But it remained secret, and the government declassified the program after Germany’s capitulation and surrender in 1945. The program lasted into 1946, as prisoners began returning home to use these new tools they had learned. The results varied, as the War Department and PMGO attempted to follow-up with prisoners once they returned home. Some prisoners used the tools to

have conversations about their positive experiences and humane treatment. Some would work in the government and with the occupying military government to change Germany into a democratic nation.

The majority showed respect for America and its people, justifying the reactions to the success of the program. But it was still an individual decision, as the ideological battle between National Socialism vs. American democracy remained in prisoners' heads. Many prisoners had positive experiences with their American captors, writing them letters for years after the war. Americans influenced the prisoners through humane treatment, by seeing them as men rather than enemies to be destroyed. They would reach out for help from the Americans because of their experiences, demonstrating a successful program where prisoners saw the importance of American culture and how the United States' democratic lifestyle affected their dealings with prisoners-of-war.

Chapter Three: Experiences Behind the Wire

Day after day, the seas toss the ships. After being captured and held in the desert, prisoners boarded transports and headed back to the United States. From these same ships American soldiers had just disembarked on European shores. Now, they transported German prisoners to America. Sitting in a dark area, the men waited for the journey to end, which would take about three weeks. They were the best soldiers in the world, so they thought. Yet, here they sat, inside a ship under the command of an enemy power. Carried off to an unknown land, one major problem involved the language. The American soldiers did not speak German; but a command of "Sit Down!" at gunpoint certainly helped the German soldiers understand certain phrases. Their treatment was acceptable. There were no beatings or starvation, just a constant swinging of the ship, and drudgery, as the trip continued. Boredom was a constant companion, and soldiers struggled to write home. It would be weeks before their families learned of their capture. With each league, these men came closer to the United States, the enemy, of whom the men had little knowledge. How would they fare in an unfamiliar country? What about the language barrier? How long would they remain captives? This, and many questions, came through men's minds. The "greatest soldiers of Germany" were no longer superior in the world. How did this happen?

Heinz Richter, a German POW held for a short time in Michigan, recalled his capture. Having heard that the Americans treated their prisoners better, he stayed near their lines, being captured and held in Scotland for a few weeks.[231] Sent to the United States aboard the *Queen Mary*¸ he remembered seeing the Statue of Liberty: "I was struck by both confidence and fear.

[231] Anton H. Richter. "A German P.O.W. At Camp Grant: The Reminiscences of Heinz Richter." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 76, no. 1 (1983): 61. WWw.jstor.org/stable/40191706.

America-who would have thought that I would see the country of which so much was told."[232] These men, taken from the battlefield, would now experience time as prisoners-of-war.

Instead of swift victories in the European theater, the prisoners experienced periods of boredom and isolation, as the United States government transferred prisoners to rural areas, hoping to maintain a separation between civilians and prisoners. However, the isolation of prisoners was not without some positives. Some prisoners created relationships with civilians, others tried to escape, and some would never leave American shores. Yet, as the camps began, each prisoner became part of a system that impacted their relations and created chances to learn.

Marching in the German Army, under General Erwin Rommel, stationed in North Africa, German soldiers first experienced American captivity in 1942.[233] The famous Afrika Corps, a combat unit distinguished in American newspapers, made advances under the "Desert Fox", conquering swathes of North Africa, using blitzkrieg tactics. Yet, former POW Steven Roswadowski recalled that General "Irwin" Rommel was called back to Berlin, with General DJ von Arnim taking his place.[234] This recall thwarted a high-value capture, as the Allies advanced, following a turning point in the war. With the 1942 Allied invasion of North Africa, the United States started acquiring prisoners. As the United States entered the European theater following the D-Day invasion in Normandy on June 6th, 1944, they captured more Axis prisoners. Nonetheless, after the Italian and North African campaigns, approximately 35,000 captured soldiers arrived in America.[235] Of these hardened "Hitlerites," as a local Muskegon, Michigan

[232] Ibid.
[233] Kevin Hall. "The Befriended Enemy: German Prisoners-of-war in Michigan." *Michigan Historical Review* 41, no. 1 (2015): 57. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5342/michhistrevi.41.1.0057.
[234] Hub Braun. *Stefan Roswadowski, P.O.W., Camp Sidnaw.* (1998). Editor: Andrezej Rozwadowski. Sidnaw Historical Museum.
[235] Arnold Krammer. *Nazi Prisoners-of-war in America*. (Scarbourgh, New York, 1996). 2-3.

newspaper called them, three hundred fifty men arrived in Benton Harbor, Michigan as the first sanctioned POWs in the state, starting in 1943.[236] They represented a small portion of the 350,000–400,000 men captured and transported to the United States.[237] Overall, Michigan would house between 4,000 to 5,000 prisoners-of-war between 1943 and 1946.[238] Each camp demanded strict adherence to the Geneva Convention and the War Department required compliance from those American employers who used POW labor. Nevertheless, despite the best intentions, citizens violated these orders, as prisoners lived within the camp enclosures, interacted with civilians, or tried to escape. However, the prisoners who experienced American captivity would remember these interactions fondly, as they returned from the war. Their humane treatment, and care (albeit distant), would remain a stable memory for the prisoners, even as the United States tried to reeducate them and mold their ideologies into more democratic ideals. The consensus was that the United States could follow the spirit of the Geneva Convention, despite some humane undermining by American civilians. German prisoners experienced humane treatment from the United States government, casting America and its ideals in a favorable light. However, more than the government's demands for humane treatment of prisoners, establishing friends and relationships between prisoners and civilians had a greater impact on them during their American captivity.

News of their arrival was published in the paper, causing commotion in the town. Citizens came to the train station, watching the prisoners march to their camp.[239] Surprisingly,

[236] William May. "German Prisoners Sing Loudly, Richly at Shelby." *Muskegon Chronicle.* (August 4, 1944). German War Prisoners WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan. Duane Ernest Miller. "Barbed-Wire Farm Laborers." *Michigan History*, September/October (1989): 14.
[237] Arnold Krammer. *Nazi Prisoners-of-war in America.* (Scarbourgh, New York, 1996). xiii.
[238] Alan Clive. *State of War: Michigan in World War II*. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1979). 48.
[239] Miller, (1989). 14.

residents noted the men seemed like American soldiers sent overseas. Could these be the hardened Nazis, the fanatic enemies, they had heard so much about over the radio? They looked like boys, both in age and stature. One group of prisoners, arriving in Camp Evelyn near Wetmore, Michigan in the Upper Peninsula, caused quite a stir, when the soldiers marched to an awaiting convoy of trucks. The upheaval was not about their behavior, but the detaining of residents and travelers, who could not leave until after all the guards secured the prisoners in vehicles.[240] Similarly, when the first troops arrived in the Benton Harbor and Coloma, Michigan areas, the prisoners marched into trucks, while the passengers waited, separately to avoid mingling and potential escapes.[241]

The soldiers showed hardened resolve and belief in their country, as they marched into the confines of the barbed wire encampment outside of town. Most were young men, with an average age of twenty-two or twenty-three. One was only fifteen.[242] Standing at attention, they saluted the American officers, the men who would determine their lifestyles while in confinement. Yet, the process to become a German Prisoner-of-war (POW) in America had only begun.

Being captured by the Allies did not mean an immediate trip to the United States. Instead, prisoners transported behind "enemy" (Allied) lines faced confinement within stockades and interrogation. Removing German prisoners to America did not sit well with the United States" government. They disliked the idea of bringing enemies to their shores, as it might influence the

[240] "Nazis Arrive at U.P. Camps to Cut Wood." *The Daily Mining Journal.* (February 14, 1944).
[241] "P.O.W. Camp Recalled in "Historical Sketches of Berrien Co." *Tri-City Record*. North Berrien Historical Museum. Hartford, Michigan.
[242] Philip Heisler. "Nazi Prisoners in America Still Proud and Confident." *The Sun* (Baltimore, Maryland) (1944). ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun.

American people[243]. Yet, as Allies, they felt obligated to assist in prisoner care. As an ally to Great Britain and France, countries unable to provide adequate housing and care and to treat prisoners within their borders, the United States was asked to alleviate the situation. An agreement reached between the Allied powers, including Canada, resulted in the United States government acquiescing to the request to house prisoners overseas. Partly because of space constraints and food limitations, the Allies wanted to transport prisoners away from the front lines and free up additional soldiers, who could be reallocated to infantry duties rather than being tasked with prisoner duties.[244] Furthermore, the size of the United States allowed more prisoners to be captured and housed, according to the other Allies- the United Kingdom (Britain); Canada; and the Soviet Union.[245] Housing prisoners overseas also prevented further espionage and sabotage by captured Germans, should they escape. From the other Allies" perspective, this was a win-win situation.[246] The U.S. did not share the same sentiments, as it involved creating a program to house, clothe, feed, and care for incoming POWs. The nation was ill-prepared for the influx of German POWs, where the prisoners experienced "a tangled web of problems involving feeding, clothing, securing, registering, interrogating, entertaining, and even re-educating the prisoners."[247] The greatest difficulty for the United States resulted from a language barrier, as few U.S. servicemen spoke German or Italian, whereas some of the German POWs spoke some English.

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[243] Krammer (1996) 2. Jean-Michel Turcotte. "To Have a Friendly Co-Operation between Canadians and Americans': The Canada-United States Relationship Regarding the German Prisoners-of-war, 1940-1945.", *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 28, no. 3 (September 14, 2017): 385. https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2017.1347433.

[244] Jean-Michel Turcotte. "To Have a Friendly Co-Operation between Canadians and Americans': The Canada-United States Relationship Regarding the German Prisoners-of-war, 1940-1945.", *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 28, no. 3 (September 14, 2017): 385. https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2017.1347433.

[245] Ibid.

[246] Turcotte, 385.

[247] Arnold P. Krammer. "German Prisoners-of-war in the United States ", *Military Affairs* 40, no. 2 (April 1976): 68. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1987148.

Should the prisoners obtain approval to be transferred to the United States, they marched into trains from the front to a port, where they spent weeks waiting to embark. They were "assigned numbers, fingerprinted, photographed, given medical attention, interrogated for military information, given receipts for nonessential personal property, and placed aboard available ocean transport to the United States."[248] Upon arrival at a U.S. port, the men once again faced interrogation, placement, and additional travel. The interrogators attempted to separate the hardened Nazis from the regular prisoners to limit ideological spread. Through questioning and recordings, American servicemen tried to determine a prisoners' ideological mindset. The government believed that sending hardened National Socialists (Nazis) to the camps in the United States would cause a rise in Nazism among the prisoner population.[249]

There was limited success in separating the prisoners based on ideology. The prisoners experienced overwhelming awe from the size of the country. The industrial capabilities of the United States destroyed the ideological idea of Germany winning the war, faster than working with prisoners through education. One prisoner begged to pass by the ruins of Chicago, having heard that Germany had laid the city to waste.[250] One American soldier, transporting the prisoners, recalls him asking; as the German newspaper stated the city had turned into rubble.[251] No evidence supported the prisoner, concerning whether he saw Chicago, but the reaction would have been shocking. Arriving in a port showed the prisoners the large cities, expansive buildings, and industrial factories, and traveling through the country to rural areas verified the farms and wealth of the country. Escape was futile, given the expanse of the country and the language

[248] Ibid.
[249] Derek R. Mallett. *Hitler's Generals in America: Nazi POWs and Allied Military Intelligence.* (Lexington KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2013). 2-3, 53-57. Krammer (1996) 4-6.
[250] Jack Tucker. "Here's More on Pow Camp at Tri-City." *The Saginaw News*. (October 15, 1978).
[251] Ibid.

difficulties. One prisoner, when asked why he never attempted escape stated, “It’s not the guards or snow fence that keeps us in- it’s the Atlantic Ocean.”[252] The United States had placed an insurmountable obstacle between the prisoners and their country.

The main precept behind German captivity was the Geneva Convention. Revised after World War I, the countries agreed to and signed the agreement in 1929. The most important updates from 1907 to 1929 were “the prohibition of reprisals and collective penalties, the organization of prisoners’ work, the designation, by the prisoners, of representatives and the control exercised by protecting Powers.”[253] Signed by the primary representatives of Germany, the United States of America, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Great Britain, India, Bulgaria, Chile, China, Columbia, Cuba, Denmark, Iceland, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Spain, Estonia, Finland, France, Hellenic Republic, Hungry, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Mexico, Portugal, Nicaragua, Norway, Netherlands, Persia, Poland, Rumania, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Siam, Sweden, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Turkey, Uruguay, and Venezuela, the document encapsulated the provisions and stipulations concerning POW treatment, along with the rights and responsibilities of the Protecting and Hostile Powers.[254] It remained an overwhelming presence throughout World War II, as the United States vowed to follow the Convention, both to show humane treatment and avoid reprisals (or ill treatment of American POWs) in Germany.

A Unilateral Agreement-Planning for Arrival

A joint agreement had to be established before the first prisoners’ arrival. In addition, the United States needed to plan, augment, and build camp locations. Publishing the “Regulation Governing Civilian Enemy Aliens and Prisoners-of-war” in April 1942, the United States began

[252] Jim Mencarelli. "The Peach Ridge P.O.W.S." *The Grand Rapid Press*. (September 15, 1974).
[253] International Committee of the Red Cross, "Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners-of-war. Geneva, 27 July 1929.," (1929), https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/305.
[254] Ibid. Introduction.

creating a regulatory program to be followed by the military concerning the treatment of POWs. But it was not without drawbacks. As noted by Arnold Krammer's comprehensive study on the German POWs in America, "Governmental agencies and their bureaucracies had spent the year trying to define the hierarchies and areas of responsibility over the prisoners, without the benefit of previous guidelines."[255] The different departments, lack of communications, and retraction of orders, demonstrated through the Record Group 389 files and housed in the National Archives, show a confusing maze of legalities and military orders that are hard to decipher. Even more confusing than the military orders was the lack of cooperation between Allied forces concerning the treatment of POWs. Even in the United States, there was a lack of cooperation as "the United States simply refused to enter into any agreement which might adversely affect its ability to act independently throughout the war."[256] A minimal understanding existed that prisoners would arrive. Still, because of a lack of personnel and preparedness, the overall process ensured the War Department, and the Prisoner of War Division would create its program while prisoners arrived.

As the United States military, under Generals Omar Bradley and George Patton, fought across Italy and North Africa, the first Axis prisoners became American-held POWs. At first, it simply involved a weapons check. As few Americans spoke German, much of the conversation involved hand gestures, shoves, and the gun barrel.[257] Yet, there still existed an unspoken camaraderie among the soldiers, as many shared similar ethnic backgrounds, or racial skin tones. Prisoners transferred to America expressed shock at the treatment of African American

[255] Krammer. (1996) 1.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Krammer, (1996), 3.

soldiers.[258] Even migrant laborers expressed the favorable treatment of German POWs, despite their enemy status.[259] *The Coloma Courier*, authored by Don Cochrane noted that the prisoners in America experienced better treatment than "Yankee" prisoners in Germany. Reports of butter, unrationed chocolate, and even cigarettes appeared to be readily available.[260] POWs rode in the front of trains.[261] They also received food rations similar to American servicemen's or could exchange meat for more vegetables and bread.[262] The foreign workers, considered second-class, as migrant workers did not experience the same "luxuries" and treatment.[263] Guidelines were relaxed as prisoners marched into stockades with minimal guards. One couple that had POWs on their farm in Frankenmuth, Michigan, recalled having thirty prisoners and only one guard.[264]

Becoming a POW

Processing prisoners was just the first step; much of it involved paperwork. Under the Geneva Convention, prisoners only needed to supply their name, rank, and serial number. Soldiers could voluntarily disclose additional information, but it was not required.[265] Each prisoner gained a new serial identification number once they arrived in United States" custody. These numbers included references to their theater of capture, rank, and place (number) of capture.[266] The first area of the serial number designated the theater of capture. The number 81

[258] Matthias Reiss. "Solidarity among "Fellow Sufferers": African Americans and German Prisoners-of-war in the United States During World War II." *The Journal of African American History* 98, no. 4 (2013): 536. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5323/jafriamerhist.98.4.0531.
[259] Barbara Schmitter Heisler. "The "Other Braceros": Temporary Labor and German Prisoners-of-war in the United States, 1943-1946." *Social Science History* 31, no. 2 (2007): 245. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40267939.
[260] Don F. Cochrane. "Yanks Hungry; Nazis Well Fed! Captured Airman Tells Story! Contrast to Local Prison Camp!" *The Coloma Courier.* (October 13,1944). North Berrien Historical Museum. Coloma, Michigan.
[261] Reiss, (2013), 538.
[262] Donald J. Rutherford. "German Prisoners-of-war Arrive at Custer: Large Group Is Brought to Fort." *Battle Creek Enquirer*. (October 27, 1943).
[263] Heisler, (2007). 245-247.
[264] Anita Boldt. "Prisoners of World War II Oral History & Research." (1991). Frankenmuth Historical Society. Frankenmuth, Michigan.
[265] International Red Cross (1929).
[266] *P.W. Form #18: Pow Classification Questioneer.* National Archives, College Park. Record Group 389. Subject Files, 1942-1946. Box 2659. 290/34/28/03.

referred to North Africa; 5 fell under the Western Defense Command, while 31 designated the European Theater.[267] Interestingly, the United States did not transport as many prisoners from the Pacific theater to camps, partly because of a lack of space on the Pacific islands, as well as the Japanese soldiers" reluctance to surrender. The letter following a numerical designation referenced the country of origin: G for German; A for Austrian; I for Italian, etc.[268] Additional numbers referred to the number of their capture. For example, should a prisoner be number 8205, from Germany, captured in the European theater, the serial number would be 31G-8205. Prisoner rolls are stored in the National Archives at College Park. However, the information filed by prisoner name and serial number, without further details concerning camp transfers or other identifiable information, makes locating prisoners difficult. Because of repetitive names, determining a POW based on name without additional identifiable information is challenging.

However, this process was not foolproof. Many prisoners arrived in the United States without an assigned serial number, resulting in a secondary serial system for U.S. processed prisoners. This system incorporated "the number of the Army Service Command-number 1 to 9-representing the military districts into which the United States was divided, "W" for War Department, and the first letter of the country for which the prisoner served."[269] These serial numbers became a lifeline, as prisoners sometimes had similar names and spelling, which confused the American servicemen in charge of them. A two-week journey by ship resulted in additional rail journeys, as prisoners traveled to camps throughout the United States.

Initially, the War Department began establishing camps in the southern United States to prevent a climate shock, as Americans captured many troops in North Africa. Yet, the camps in

[267] Krammer, (1996). 4.
[268] Ibid.
[269] Krammer (1996), 4.

Florida for example, were in tropical, humid areas. Robert Billinger's study of the Florida POW camps offered a glimpse of this little-know period in Florida's history. Working on sugarcane fields and harvesting other crops in the muggy areas, the prisoners complained about the conditions.[270] Many prisoners developed diseases as they were unaccustomed to the climate. As the number of POWs in the United States increased, the camps moved further north and west, into regions agriculturally based and remote. The camps in Michigan, as one POW recalled, was like living back home. The weather and temperatures were very similar to the conditions he had experienced in Germany and Poland, before serving in Africa.[271]

In Michigan, the War Department established approximately thirty camps, the primary one being Fort Custer, a former World War I military installation, in Augusta. The first group of prisoners arrived at Fort Custer to build much of the enclosure in 1943. The prisoners were transferred under orders from the Sixth Service Command, from Camp Grant, Illinois. Originally, Michigan did not fit the designation of an agricultural state to warrant housing POWs. However, after review by the War Department, the Provost Marshal General Office, and the Sixth Service Command, concluded that Michigan had an agricultural shortage that needed to be alleviated through prisoner labor.

Without the addition of prisoner labor, much of the crops of the 1943-45 seasons would have perished. Migrant workers could not travel to Michigan, as in previous years, due to gas rationing, tire rationing, and better employment opportunities.[272] Many newspapers, particularly

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[270] Robert D. Billinger, Jr. *Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State: German POWs in Florida*. Tallahassee, FL: University of Florida Press, 2000. xiii, 3-4.
[271] Dixie Franklin. "German POWs Enjoyed Camp Sidnaw." *The Daily Mining Gazette.* (September 12, 1981). Hub Braun. *Stefan Roswadowski, P.O.W., Camp Sidnaw.* (1998). Editor: Andrezej Rozwadowski. Sidnaw Historical Museum.
[272] "P.O.W. Camp Recalled in "Historical Sketches of Berrien Co."

The Holland City News, praised the POW labor for saving the peach, sugar beet, and apple crops.[273] This praise may have influenced the strengthening of relationships between prisoners and their American employers. Using POW labor to bring in foodstuffs, both for the American people and soldiers, was legally acceptable under the Geneva Convention. However, "Prisoners Save Crops" as a headline is odd, given that they were just workers. This creates a gray area concerning enemies and acquaintances, as the farmers got to know their workers and saw their work ethic. Had the government not tapped prisoner labor, existing farm laborers would have been inadequate to gather in the harvests during the war years.[274]

Understanding a State's Obligations

Michigan began accepting prisoners in 1943. However, creating camps and following the Geneva Convention was an arduous task. Stipulations required POWs to be treated similarly to American servicemen.[275] In addition, the War Department feared reprisals, if foreign POWs experienced mistreatment.[276] Specifically, the Geneva Convention stated, that the prisoners needed to "...at all times be humanely treated and protected, particularly against acts of violence, insults and public curiosity. Measures of reprisal against them are prohibited."[277] Given that local papers discussed their arrival, the people gawked and fraternized; the prisoners became objects of "public curiosity."[278] The POWs retained the right to keep personal artifacts under the guidelines of Article 6 of the Geneva Convention, which states explicitly:

[273] "Sparta Prison Camp to Close." *The Holland City News.* (October 27, 1944).
[274] "Sparta Prison Camp to Close" "P.O.W. Camp Recalled in "Historical Sketches of Berrien Co."
[275] John Brown Mason. "German Prisoners-of-war in the United States." *The American Journal of International Law* 39, no. 2 (April 1945): 201. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2192341.
[276] John C. Bonafilia, ""Hospitality Is the Best Form of Propaganda": German Prisoners-of-war in Western Massachusetts, 1944-1946." *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 44, no. 1 (2016): 44.
[277] International Red Cross. Article 2.
[278] Mason (1945). 214.

> All effects and objects of personal use except arms, horses, military equipment and military papers shall remain in the possession of prisoners-of-war, as well as metal helmets and gas masks.
>
> Money in the possession of prisoners may not be taken away from them except by order of an officer and after the amount is determined. A receipt shall be given. Money thus taken away shall be entered to the amount of each prisoner.
>
> Identification documents, insignia of rank, decorations and objects of value may not be taken from prisoners.[279]

However, Arnold Krammer argued, in *Nazi Prisoners in the United States,* that American soldiers violated this stipulation, as American servicemen routinely took regalia off German POWs.[280] Articles 9-11 stipulate the care and treatment of prisoners regarding housing, food, clothing, and treatment of personnel. The most important stipulation was that the camp display the "same conditions as soldiers at the base camp", meaning that all German POWs expected similar treatment to American servicemen; a rule which they were very knowledgeable about.[281] This stipulation caused concern and scorn among American citizens, as they considered prisoner treatment to be better than that of American servicemen. This "preferred treatment" (as thought by American citizens) led to charges of "mollycoddling", charges that the War Department frequently stated were false.[282] The War Department continued to adhere to the Geneva Convention, and claimed the prisoner treatment was the same as that of American servicemen in the United States. But Don Cochrane noted in *Coloma Courier* that this sentiment had not vanished by 1945.

[279] International Red Cross, Article 6.
[280] Dr. Emma G. Peters. *WWII Pow Camps in Blissfield, MI, 1944-1945*. This source was obtained from Blissfield Depot Museum. The letters of Konrad Kreiten are still in her possession. Krammer, (1996), 6.
[281] International Red Cross. Article 9-11.
[282] Mary Spargo. "Prisoner Coddling Denied; U.S. To Stick to War Rules." *The Washington Post*. (April 27, 1945).

Instead, Cochrane noted the comments of returning American POW, Sergeant Harold Sheahan. His comments on the quality of food demonstrate why American citizens felt the German POWs received better treatment and accommodations. According to Sheahan,

> If the Germans had to live on the food they gave us prisoners-of-war, the war would have been over long ago. They would have starved to death. For breakfast they gave us a kind of tea made from the bark of a tree. We finally asked for just plain hot water. At noon we got barley soup, nothing by hot water and darned little barley. At night we got about four potatoes a man and once in a while some sausage or liverwurst. And turnips and rutabagas—I never want to see another as long as I live.[283]

Sheahan's experience only represents one person, leaving it uncertain if this was the overall experiences of American POWs held under German command. However, Sheahan's experience adds validity to the worries and complaints of the citizenry, although there was limited information regarding the treatment of American servicemen overseas existed for civilians. The newspapers had yet to disseminate this information to the American public. As the papers printed stories like Sheahan's, it called into question the treatment of German prisoners in the United States, furthering the criticisms against the War Department of coddling the troops. According to the War Department, the United States was following the Convention, nothing more, nothing less.[284] If Sheahan experienced a starvation diet, it would not be fair that German POW's rations included butter, candy, and special food. The internal grumblings of loyalty and patriotism would be intense, should American soldiers experience different treatment, or be second class, compared to the German prisoners housed in the United States.

Building Fort Custer and Satellite Camps

October 27, 1943, was an eventful day for Augusta, Michigan, as the residents learned of a new development: Fort Custer, the largest military post in the state, had received its first

[283] Don F. Cochrane. "War Captives on Our Farms! Army Seeks Base Camp at Hartford; Growers Forsee Bumper Fruit Crop!" *The Coloma Courier.* (March 31, 1944).
[284] Spargo. (1945).

shipment of POWs.[285] No longer would the enemy be an ocean away or in another state. Instead, they were right on their doorstep, preparing to work on local farms and businesses in the area. Residents were fearful of having an enemy so close. Newspaper articles attempted to quell this fear by citing commanders of the newly created satellite camps on record. Ralph Ahlskog, of the U.S. Forest Service, dispelled fear in the Upper Peninsula in 1944, by stating,

> The Army will have full control of the prisoners. There will be approximately 200 at each camp. They will work eight hours a day, with travel time in addition. They will be transported about 25 to 30 miles and the employers for whom they work will furnish tools and transportation.[286]

These first arrivals had the responsibility of erecting the camp structures that still needed to be created on the grounds. Built to house 2000 men and two guard companies, Major General Robins, when discussing erection plans with the Provost Marshal General's Office, stated "the only new construction required other than necessary alterations will be the erection of standard guard towers and three additional buildings."[287] Heinz Richter, one POW transferred from Camp Grant to Fort Custer during the building process, recalls his experiences of entering the United States and helping to erect the camps. As he arrived, he marveled at what he saw in New York harbor, "...gigantic skyscrapers... I was young, and I came from a small town in southeast Germany. Now I was overpowered by all these new and beautiful things, but I was also afraid since I didn't know what would happen to me."[288] Upon volunteering to work building Fort Custer, he described his journey to this region of the country as follows:

> In spring of 1944 my friend Hans and I volunteered to join the group which was to build a new POW camp in Battle Creek, Michigan. We thought we would like to see more of the U.S. We went by train, and I was able to see the majestic skyscrapers in

[285] Rutherford, (1943).
[286] "Nazis Due in U.P. Camps This Week." *Marquette Daily Mining Journal.* (January 12, 1944).
[287] Thomas M. Robins. *Transmittal of O.C.E. Form 105; Office, C. Of E., 20 January 1944.* (January 20, 1944).). National Archives College Park. Subject Correspondence Files Relating to Construction/Conditions of POW Camps. Record Group 389. A1 457. Box 1421. 290/34/15/02.
[288] Richter (1983). 62.

> Chicago...Upon arriving in Battle Creek, we proceeded to Fort Custer. There were approximately forty of us. I got a job as a mechanic in the auto shop. I was happy about that because I was interested in working with the large trucks.[289]

As the prisoners arrived from Camp Grant to erect the principal POW camp in Michigan, they projected calm and perhaps even contentment and happiness. Under the command of Major E.F. Richter, the prisoners seemed to be

> ...in high spirits when they arrived at Fort Custer, and they sang German songs as they marched under heavy guard from the train...to the barbed wire enclosed area, which until a week ago was occupied by the 6th Service Command's rehabilitation training center.[290]

This was odd to the citizenry, as these men were prisoners. However, as noted by many newspapers, the POWs were happy to be away from the war and after arriving in Michigan, had already experienced better treatment than they had expected. One former POW recalls sleeping on a real mattress in a barracks under American captivity, while in the German army, he had to be satisfied with straw.[291] Colonel Ralph Wiltamuth, in charge of a prisoner detachment additionally stated:

> The German prisoners will receive the same considerations given our own prisoners...We will endeavor to treat them in the manner we would desire to be treated if we happened to fall into German hands.[292]

This treatment of German prisoners like t American servicemen, fell within the parameters of the Geneva Convention. However, further details from the War Department and the Farm Emergency Labor Program (FELP), a subsection created specifically to deal with the agricultural labor shortage, showed that prisoners remained separate regarding work. They were not the same as migrants or other American employees. But that still was not enough for Americans, given the backlash concerning overindulgence, coddling, and gifts that were supposedly given to POWs.

[289] Richter (1983) 67.
[290] Rutherford (1943).
[291] Richter (1983) 64.
[292] Rutherford (1943).

Reports such as Don Cochrane's headline of "Prisoners Well-Fed", touched at American heartstrings, as Cochrane described the meat, vegetables and butter available to prisoners without restriction.[293]

One particularly important rule of POW captivity concerned fraternization between prisoners and women. An FELP document stated the first three rules American employers (all of which were violated) needed to adhere to: 1) cannot be allowed within communication distance of women or girls; 2) treats (cigarettes or coffee) are not allowed; and 3) clothing, money, or newspapers are "FORBIDDEN."[294] Interactions between Americans and POWs were to be extremely limited. The intermingling between the two groups was to be at a minimum to reduce espionage, yet this was not always easy to accomplish. Employers talked with employees and staff talked amongst themselves. At a plant in Owosso, Michigan, who employed teenage girls stated that it was routine to drink with the men and talk with the POWs employed there.[295] The War Department expected the guards to maintain order and reduce the interactions between civilians and POWs. Yet, it was not uncommon to hear stories of guards sleeping in the fields, while the POWs labored in the fields. Nor was it rare to see the prisoners eat meals with Michigan families during the noon break and getting to know their employers.

Arriving inside the camp, building enclosures and other needed facilities, the Army allocated POWs for work duties to surrounding farms, canneries, and factories. Their primary goal - reduce the labor shortage in the area. *The Holland City News,* in 1944, told the local

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[293] Don F. Cochrane. "Yanks Hungry; Nazis Well Fed! Captured Airman Tells Story! Contrast to Local Prison Camp!" *The Coloma Courier.* (October 13,1944). North Berrien Historical Museum. Coloma, Michigan.
[294] "To Users of Prisoner-of-war Labor." 1944. German War Prisoners WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan
[295] "Relatives of Girls Testify against Them." *The Owosso Argus-Press.* (January 1, 1945).
This would be denied in a court of law in 1945, as the teenage girls in question would be charged with conspiracy. (See Escaping the Camps).

community that it needed to employ twenty-nine German POWs "as an emergency measure to alleviate labor shortage."[296] According to the paper, if local labor agreed to work, the community would not use prisoners.

Using prisoner labor to solve the labor problem was extremely important in Michigan, an agricultural state. This was especially true in rural communities, such as Shelby, Michigan, which attempted to collect the harvest from 1942 to 1943 using females and high school students, only to discover there was no desire among that section of the population to work on farms, as higher-paying jobs were available in war-related industries.[297] As Shelby farmers attempted to hire and recruit high school students, a common phrase was "Father makes more money in a hour than I do all day."[298] Another issue was the differences between the work ethic of kids from the city and those from the country, as noted by an unnamed Shelby area farmer, who stated,

> I find that the average city child, not being hardened up to farm work and being able to obtain cleaner and more pleasant work at a corresponding earning, are reluctant to go out in the field and work on their knees. I feel that this condition will continue to exist just as long as there are better classes of jobs open to youngsters.[299]

This loss of labor, intensified by better-paying jobs in the cities for minority workers, left farmers scrambling to deal with years of "bumper" crops and no hired hands to bring them in. Rutherford, a reporter for the *Battle Creek Enquirer*, reporting on the German POWs' arrival, clarified that the German POWs were primarily there to help with the labor shortage and bring in the harvest.[300]

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[296] "Employ 29 German War Prisoners at Heinz Co." *The Holland City News*. (1944).
[297] "Victory Farm Volunteers," 1944.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Rutherford, (1943).

Assigned blue uniforms, the men wore clothing like that of American servicemen. However, one notable difference was the addition of white, with stenciled "P.W." markings, showing their status as a prisoner-of-war. They were also easy to identify should they attempt to escape. Seen similarly to Americans, Rutherford comments on their decorum and discipline in the unit. He further describes the arriving unit as one which maintains strict standards. "Achtung", a German soldier barked out as officers approached a group of prisoners awaiting physical examinations, and the men all quickly jumped up and snapped to attention. They remained at attention until Major Richter told them to be at ease."[301]

This description of the prisoners seems optimistic, as though the idea of an "enemy" did not exist. Instead, there is an inkling of respect, as the army noted the men as rigid in following military decorum. Both sides showed the other respect. Yes, the men were from a foreign country. Yet, the discipline and respect given to American servicemen appears impressive to the reporter. Similarly, respect and favorable impressions, recorded in 1945 by Robert Mess and Lyle T. Dawson, members of the U.S. Army displayed mutual esteem. At the time of their report, Fort Custer reported the following number of German prisoners, "Officers: 1; NCO: 1; EM: 5225"; where NCO designated a Non-Commissioned Officer; and EM stood for Enlisted Men.[302] The report concluded that the camp, and surrounding areas, including the Percy Jones General Hospital were short-staffed. Commenting on this situation, Mess indicated that

> Most employment is food manufacturing and packing; a large majority goes direct to armed forces. Only cut-back was on valve manufacturing which released about 300 women. Women have not been placed, some doubt is expressed that they will accept

[301] Rutherford, (1943).
[302] Robert Mess and Lyle T. Dawson. *Report of Visit to Prisoner-of-war Camp, Fort Custer, Michigan.* (June 25, 1945). National Archives College Park. Subject Files, 1942-1946. Record Group 389. A1 461. Box 2659. 290/34/28/03.

> employment at lower wages being paid for general female employees and many are housewives who probably won't work anymore.[303]

The labor shortage concern in 1943 had yet to be rectified by 1945, despite the addition of POW labor. Many farms and businesses still faced manufacturing problems in the food supply, as workers remained in short supply. They reported that the German prisoners were well-behaved and handled discipline internally. However, disciplinary problems persisted at Fort Custer in 1945. The problem regarding discipline lay with American soldiers, as many of the men returning from overseas had issues with the treatment and care afforded the German prisoners. As noted by Mess and Dawson,

> Discipline of a majority of the American enlisted personnel is not as good as it should be, but it is believed little can be done about it for the following reasons:
>
> offenders are returned overseas men who dislike adapting themselves to camp life at the prisoner-of-war camp and regard orderly barracks, etc., as basic training or recruits.[304]

Captain Mallory, in charge of the detachment of men assigned to Fort Custer, was trying to correct this problem. Considered capable by Mess and Dawson, his solution included attempting to control the situation in a disciplined manner. Mallory noted that obtaining information, material, and equipment from Special Services was difficult, particularly as it pertained to creating a dayroom and athletic facilities for the American enlisted men.[305] They were bored. And, days of "babysitting" German POWs whose time spent with work, reading, and recreation irritated the servicemen. Originally designed to house 500 to 1000 men, Fort Custer would expand between 1944 and 1945 to a capacity of 3000 to 5000 men.[306]

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[303] Mess & Dawson, (1945), 1.
[304] Ibid. 2.
[305] Ibid.
[306] Thomas M. Robins. *Transmittal of O.C.E. Form 105; Office, C. Of E., 20 January 1944.* (January 20, 1944). National Archives College Park. Subject Correspondence Files Relating to Construction/Conditions of POW Camps. Record Group 389. A1 457. Box 1421. 290/34/15/02.

Satellite Camps

Apart from Fort Custer, the approximately thirty camps throughout Michigan encompassed many prisoners, as most of the work done within the agricultural fields, required prisoners to be closer to their place of employment. The camps were located in

- Camp Allegan, Allegan County
- Camp Au Train, city of Au Train (Upper Peninsula)
- Barryton, Mecosta County
- Benton Harbor, Berrien County
- Blissfield, Lenawee County
- Caro, Tuscola County
- Coloma, Berrien County
- Croswell, Sanilac County
- Fort Custer, Galesburg
- Dundee, Monroe County
- Camp Evelyn, Alger County
- Freeland, Saginaw County
- Fremont, Newaygo County
- Camp Germfask, Germfask, MI[307]
- Grant, Newaygo County
- Grosse Ile Township, Wayne County
- Hart, Oceana County
- Camp Lake Odessa, Ionia County
- Mattawan, Van Buren County
- Mass, Ontonagon County
- Milan, USFR, Monroe and Washtenaw Counties
- Odessa Lakes, Tuscola County
- Camp Owosso, Shiawassee County
- Camp Pori, U.P
- Camp Raco, U.P. Sault Ste. Marie
- Romulus Army Air Field, Wayne County
- Shelby, Oceana County
- Camp Sidnaw, Sidnaw, Michigan (Upper Peninsula)
- Sparta, Kent County
- Fort Wayne, Detroit, Wayne County
- Waterloo, Jackson County

[307] Debate remains upon how much of a German POW camp this was, given it was also the only Conscientious Objector camp for American citizens in the state. Records indicate only a handful of POWs spent time there, as the U.S. government was more concerned with separating out the objectors and saboteurs from the general American population. See: John Pepin, *Pow Camps in the U.P.* (Marquette, Michigan January 2000). Russell Magnaghi. "Prisoner-of-war Camps in the Upper Peninsula." *Harlow's Wooden Man* (1979): 8.

- Wetmore, Alger County[308]

Each satellite camp housed between 100 and 500 men per camp. Located primarily in rural communities, the prisoners worked for local farmers picking crops (notably sugar beets, asparagus, cherries, and beans), or worked in local canning factories to reduce a pressing labor shortage. The men experienced excellent treatment in the satellite camps. Scholars have argued the care and reciprocity was better than their care at Fort Custer.

Because Michigan had a significant German American population, it is not surprising that many farmers spoke or read German, as their parents were immigrants from the "Old Country". Surviving letters between the German prisoners and their American employers validate the relationships they developed over the years. One surprising development was the choice to house prisoners in Saginaw, Bay City, and Frankenmuth, Michigan. Known as the Tri-Cities, this area boasts a large percentage of people of German descent. Frankenmuth, known as "Michigan's Little Bavaria," still has many residents that can still read German today.[309]

Each camp in Michigan was a little different. All camps needed to follow certain stipulations laid out by the War Department and the Geneva Convention. However, the care of the prisoners, the discipline, and the day-to-day routine varied within each camp. Each sub-camp used POW labor differently. The camps in Hart and Shelby primarily had prisoners working on beans and at a local canning factory. The camp in Blissfield put prisoners in a sugar beet factory, where they worked with the pulp. The prisoners of camps in the Upper Peninsula worked logging and in sawmills. A common theme seen among POW letters is the excellent care and comradery

[308] "List of German Pow Camps in Michigan." Fremont Historical Society. Fremont, Michigan.
[309] Upon a visit to the Frankenmuth Historical Commission (Frankenmuth Historical Society), the author was introduced to Rosemary, a resident of Frankenmuth who translated many surviving letters, who read German, but could no longer speak the language. In addition, many of the signs or store names still retain their German heritage.

experienced with Americans. Farmers treated the prisoners as equals rather than enemies. One POW, Harry Baer, in Muskegon requested that Mr. Bill Bishop hold his old Buick for him, as he planned on buying the vehicle as soon as he returned to the United States.[310] Without a relationship between the prisoners, one where equality and understanding continued, it would be uncommon for prisoners to ask Americans to keep items in the hope of buying them later. Baer continued correspondence with Bishop, detailing life in Germany under Soviet Union (USSR) control and begrudgingly, asked for assistance with clothing or food, given the family's financial situation.[311]

The building of camaraderie began as the army built and filled the camps. After the establishment of Fort Custer, the Army built the first satellite camps starting in 1943. One of the first camps was in Benton Harbor, Michigan. The prisoners' arrival caused a stir, based on the turnout to see them disembark from the train. Arriving on October 2, 1943, the prisoners marched as a unit, under guard to their stockade. The camp later became a model prison, as well as Camp Caro, for prisoner camps throughout the state to follow.[312] Prisoners recalled a simple lifestyle at the camp. Many prisoners worked on the local farm of William Teichmann. Coming from a German family, Teichmann still spoke and read some German. Many POWs wrote back to the Teichmann family after the war, both to check in on the family and ask for assistance.[313] Teichmann responded by sending care packages of foodstuffs, such as chocolate, flour, and sugar.

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[310] Harry Baer. Collection of Letters from Harry Baer to Bill Bishop. (1948), Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan.
November 22, 1948
[311] Baer. May 1, 1948
[312] Hall, (2015). 61, 63.
[313] Many of the letters addressed to the Teichmann family remain untranslated, as they are in German. The letters uncovered and translated were based upon the legibility of the handwriting, as many letters have smeared.

Following the success of camps Custer, Benton Harbor, and Caro, more prisoner camps sprang up across the state. These smaller satellite camps rectified transportation issues by moving prisoners from the main camp of Fort Custer to fields and factories in the state. The average number of prisoners ranged from 100 to 500 men in each camp. Many camps began in 1944, with prisoners arriving in time for spring planting. Camps created during this period included Sparta, Coloma, Blissfield, Hart, and Oceana. Some of the smaller camps each have a unique story concerning the prisoners and the locals.

The camp in Sparta began on September 1, 1944, receiving prisoners at the request of the Peach Ridge Growers, a local organization responsible for the peach fields in the area.[314] The establishment of the camp brought anxiety to the community, as the "enemy" was on their doorstep.[315] As the POWs came to the area, the community records residents as "apprehensive."[316] Residents worried about their safety; however, an FBI agent reassured them in a newspaper article on August 31, 1944, which stated the men "were not criminals."[317]. Many in the community had relatives fighting overseas in the European theater, which caused resentment against the POWs moving into their area. One woman in Sparta had five sons serving in the war. The community feared she would have a hard time, adjusting to prisoners so near her home. However, she showed her resolve and had no issues.[318]

Yet, as time passed, this would lessen for some citizens as they worked with the prisoners. Rather than being apprehensive, reporters noted:

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[314] "To Move Prisoner Camp to Sparta." *Muskegon Chronicle.* (1944). German War Prisoners WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan. "A Message from the Camp." *Holland City News.* (October 1944).
[315] Mencarelli, (1974). 2.
[316] Sharon B. Miller. "Prisoner-of-war Camp in Lake Odessa 50 Years Ago Remembered...." *The Lakewood News*. (June 6th, 1995).
[317] Mencarelli, (1974), 3.
[318] Mencarelli, (1974). 4.

> Local residents rather than the prisoners have annoyed army officials in some sections where the captives have been employed. Maudlin sentiment has prompted civilians to coddle the aliens, to do them favors and present them with gifts. That is typical American sympathy for the unfortunate, but in this instance it is ill-advised. The army supplies them with everything essential to their needs and more of the so-called luxuries than they knew in their own army camps.[319]

As soldiers came to the area and the prisoners worked at the Heinz and Gerber companies, they acknowledged that "the community deserves such credit for all the courtesies and pleasures extended to them, and hope others in the Armed Services are received in their new surroundings as well as the soldiers have been received here."[320] Gerber Canning Company, in Fremont, Michigan, known as the "baby food capital of the world" needed these laborers to furnish products for the American people. The prisoners working at these plants would stay on site, or travel back to the camp, along the highway.[321] The sentiment of prisoner relations changed as they got to know the men working on the farms.

But the situation was not without drawbacks. Community sentiment was against the use of prisoner labor, as the government sent local boys to war. One Sparta family had sent five children to war, only to lose them all. The community considered having POWs on their doorstep an insult. Yet, the prisoners were well-mannered; and upon hearing of the loss of another son, stood at attention and honored his sacrifice.[322] The men saluted the mother, standing in solemn silence.[323]

The satellite camp in Coloma, Michigan began in 1945. According to residents, the prisoners were well-behaved on two farms owned by the Wilson and Black families. Their work

[319] Cochrane. "War Captives on Our Farms! Army Seeks Base Camp at Hartford; Growers Forsee Bumper Fruit Crop!," (1944).
[320] "A Message from the Camp" (1944).
[321] Mencarelli (1974). 1-2.
[322] Mencarelli (1974) 2-3.
[323] Ibid.

ethic helped save the harvest and there were few escapes happened from the area.[324] Excavations in the early 2000s, revealed small artifacts belonging to the POWs, including a pair of dog tags.[325] The historical society has not run tests to determine the name of the owner of the tags, as the name is illegible. Brought in to assist with a severe labor shortage around Coloma, Hartford, and Sodus, 262 prisoners arrived in a special train with apprehension. After the initial announcement in the newspaper on May 4th, 1945, the citizens had time to prepare for their arrival. Yet, it was unclear how many camps would be located in the area. The papers reported "Just how many camps will be established is as yet undetermined and will doubtless depend largely upon the damage that was wrought by the bad freezes..."[326] Because of the unknown number of local camps, officials attempted to assure locals of the minimal danger associated with prisoners being housed in the area.[327] However, there was a problem securing fencing to encompass the parameters of the camps and contain the prisoners. To remedy this, the federal government was required to supply the fencing, as local agencies in charge of finding sites could not buy the essential items. This provision initially fell to the local agencies and farmers, as they were required to provide the essential items for a POW camp out of their own pocket.[328] The desperate need for labor forced local farmers to cover for their employees' basic needs. In Michigan today, local farmers who utilize migrant labor continue to supply living quarters. However, the lack of funding required changes to this stipulation to rectify the labor shortages and continue to house prisoners.

[324] "War Prisoners Have Been Big Help in Harvesting Fruit Crop." *The Coloma Courier.* (October 26, 1945).
[325] This was discovered on a visit to the historical society in Coloma, Michigan. Upon discussion with the director, it was noted that no tests had been run on the dog tags to see if a name could be recovered.
[326] "Prisoner-of-war Camp to be Located Here." *The Coloma Courier.* (May 4, 1945).
[327] Ibid.
[328] "Emergency Farm Labor Program." (1944). German Prisoners Worl War II. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan.

There was apprehension about this camp, as residents worried about the community. Using the land of Mrs. C.A. Shoup, for a subsequent camp in Berrien County, considered an ideal site to set up a camp, she was naturally nervous. However, officials assured her that "the "enemy camp" would be under guard and groups going to each farm by trucks would have a guard as they moved back and forth."[329] For the most part, both groups surprised each other. The prisoners found conditions agreeable and enjoyed working on the farms more than idleness. The farmers who could converse with the German-speaking prisoners found much in common and felt they were good workers.[330]

The Hartford camp was created at the Hartford Fairgrounds. Ironically, the local historical society housing information on the POWs is next door. This camp in Hartford began in 1944, housing between 300 to 500 prisoners. Captain Homer Bowersock stated in 1945, that the German and Italian POWs, brought in as emergency labor, stayed "here", meaning Michigan and the United States, for three important reasons:

> it is more economical to bring them to this country than to ship food overseas for them; it is dangerous to keep a large group of the enemy in the rear of fighting troops; and American soldiers overseas may be better utilized otherwise than in guarding prisoners-of-war.[331]

This gave the citizens more information concerning *why* the prisoners were coming to the United States, right on their doorstep. However, it did not specify *how* the residents would be safe and protected from the prisoners. Security being a top priority, an inspection report in 1944, discussing the expansion of Fort Custer, noted that proper security measures to protect the citizenry were in place. These included using existing facilities, erecting guard towers, and

[329] Dorothy Stark Cannell. "German Prisoners Picked Fruit Here." *Tri-City Record.* (July 20th, 1994).
[330] Ibid.
[331] "Bowersock Describes Life of German PWs in Hartford." *Day Spring,* (June 22, 1944).

enclosing the facilities and factories in barbed wire.[332] However, this did not stop the prisoners from being a spectacle, given their proximity to local highways, where citizens would park their cars to get a glimpse of prisoners.[333] A government report noted that when erecting camps, trees needed to line the enclosure to prevent this behavior. While Fort (Camp) Custer was being built, this created an issue, as the military wanted trees cut for fencing issues, but also needed them for the road.[334] Marge, a young teenager during World War II, recalled:

> There wasn't a big deal about security; not that they weren't covered. They were watched and all the rest of the things, but there was a tremendous amount of freedom... amount of the fact that they had their own tents, their own places, the place they stayed, and they ate.[335]

Security may have been a priority for the War Department, but manning thousands of POWs in rural communities was not a simple task. The average ratio of guards to prisoners was one guard to ten men, although they documented incidents of this ratio being higher. A beet farm in Frankenmuth, owned by Julius Yoba, reported having thirty prisoners under the care of one guard.[336]

Even more shocking to residents, further justifying accusations of "special treatment" was the availability of specific items. They could access books, music, sports facilities, and even a nickelodeon (nickel jukebox) to pass the time in captivity.[337] To Americans experiencing the rationing of tires, gasoline, butter, and other essentials, hearing of foreign prisoners having access to recreational activities, full meals, and amenities, would have ruffled feathers. Yet,

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[332] Frank Brown. *Report of visit to POW Base Camp, Fort Custer, Michigan on 3 April 1944.* (April 3, 1944). National Archives College Park. Subject Files, 1942-1946. Record Group 389. A1 461. Box 2659. 290/34/28/03.
[333] Mencarelli (1974) 4.
[334] Ralph Wiltamuth & Major F.R. Inskip. *Subject: Transmittal of O.C.E. Form 105*. (January 18,1944). National Archives College Park. Subject Correspondence Files Relating to Construction/Conditions of POW Camps. Record Group 389. A1 457. Box 1421.290/34/15/02.
[335] Esther M. and Marge P. Interview by Abigail Runk. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan 2018.
[336] Boldt (1991).
[337] "Bowersock Describes Life of German Pws in Hartford"

despite these complaints, farmers, employers, and individuals who interacted with the German POWs noted their good temperament and found them pleasant to be around. They were regular people. These revelations furthered the relationships between the two groups, while also limiting the propaganda concerning the enemy. The concept of the enemy became blurred as the human experience and camaraderie overrode patriotism. It was better to treat people with respect, as they were average people. The prisoners and Americans both learned to dissuade themselves of the idea of an "enemy". Marge and Esther, residents of Oceana County, Michigan, summed up the perspectives and ideas of Americans when they stated the prisoners "did not feel like the enemy."[338]

This was a shocking revelation, given the propaganda heard around the United States. The government reminded citizens of the importance of the war effort and patriotism ran deep, the Writers" War Board attempted "to promote government policy and popular support for the war effort while the government itself technically refrained from propaganda", by writing pieces to raise support among the citizenry for the war effort. This propaganda developed by the government, both as a deterrent of behavior and to subvert German propaganda in Germany, helped support American patriotism. Using such mediums as posters, radio shows, false stamps, the United States attempted to thwart enemy morale.[339] Creating the Office of War Information (OWI) attempted to counteract the negative attitude towards propaganda left by the World War One Committee on Public Information. They adopted a "strategy of truth", whereby the goal included "disseminat[ing] information to the public while refraining from attempts to persuade

[338] Esther M. and Marge P. Interview. 2018
[339] See stamps bearing an image of Hitler, as used with the Reich, but bearing a different message. Becky Little. "Inside America's Shocking World War II Propaganda Machine." National Geographic. December 19, 2016. Accessed July 21, 2018. https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/12/world-war-2-propaganda-history-books.

directly."[340] The United States wanted the citizens to formulate their own opinions, but they wanted to ensure those opinions matched those of the government. Patriotic fervor, love of country, and fear of the Nazis showed in propaganda, influencing the minds of the American people. They still could protest against the government, which was guaranteed through their freedoms, but it was socially unacceptable to openly criticize the government during war.[341]

The farming community was one specific area where propaganda and American patriotism focused. To promote the importance of farming, citizens (particularly male) encountered, "visual images designed to persuade young men to stay on the farm echoed the iconography intended to recruit men into the military".[342] Images of men farming, in similar stances to those in soldiers" uniforms, encapsulated the heart of the problem: there were not enough laborers. Yet, as noted by a local farmer, the citizens were less inclined to work on the farm, given the better opportunities working in the war effort. Despite efforts to show that farming was as important as being a soldier, the propaganda was only minimally successful. This forced the War Department and the United States government to find a subsequent labor force; hence, the arrival and use of German POWs on American soil. Nevertheless, a contradiction arose, as the people were told not to fraternize and to remain aloof from the prisoners because they were the "enemy". Citizens were to remain loyal to the United States and not engage in activities (though humane) with the prisoners. And yet, foreign workers saved their crops. The Sparta camp reported that the "farmers well satisfied with work, harvested crops which would have been damaged."[343] The workers were just regular people. They had served in the German

[340] Thomas Howell. "The Writers' War Board: U.S. Domestic Propaganda in World War II." *Historian* 59, no. 4 (1997): 795.
[341] Abigail Runk. "They Did Not Feel Like the Enemy: German Prisoners-of-war in Michigan." (Southern New Hampshire University, 2018).
[342] Katherine Jellison. "Get Your Farm in the Fight: Farm Masculinity in World War II." *Agricultural History Society* (2018): 5. https://dx.doi.org/10.3098/ah.2018.092.1.005.
[343] "Sparta Prison Camp to Close"

Wehrmacht, yet they were just young boys and redefined the definition of enemy. Some would become friends with Americans. The humane treatment and loss of enemy status rendered patriotism moot, given that the citizens could no longer see the prisoners as just enemies. War became a human experience, not a tragedy in a far-off land. During the war, Esther, a teenager of Oceana County stated "They were not the enemy. They didn't feel like the enemy."[344] This statement concurs with the idea that the German POWs, despite being the enemy, became workers in America. They were equals, although the War Department preferred the citizens remained separate and focused on supporting the American troops.

Similar to the Hartford and Coloma camps, the camp in Blissfield, Michigan also followed the Geneva Convention. The army erected the camp on a local farm, near the canning and pulp factories the prisoners worked at. However, a tragic train accident in 1945 deepened the memory of the camp at Blissfield. The residents remember workers who arrived upbeat. Erected twice, in 1944 and 1945, residents recall the camps more for the accident than for the prisoner experiences. The local historical society puts on a memorial service and maintains artifacts and photographs of the camps for tourists, historians, and locals to ask questions about.

The prisoners' arrival in 1944 caused a stir in town, as it was an unfamiliar experience. Similar fears of worry about safety and security were common, but unfounded as fewer prisoners were sent here than to other camps and there were no documented escapes. Two hundred fifty prisoners disembarked in the community in 1944. They seemed in good spirits as they marched into trucks. Residents remembered them singing, as they would sing in the back of trucks and while walking from camps.[345] Stationed on the farms of George Rohrbuck and the Lievens

[344] Esther M. and Marge P. Interview. 2018
[345] "Site #2 George Rohrbuck Farm Pow Camp." 2020. Blissfield Depot Museum. Blissfield, Michigan; "Site #3 Lievens Farm Pow Camp." (2020). Blissfield Depot Museum. Blissfield, Michigan. "Bowerstock Describes Life of German Pws in Hartford".

families, the POWs experienced excellent treatment. Stationed first in 1944, on seven acres of the Lievens" property, the men enjoyed recreation, while also working in the sugar beet fields and local factories in the area. Numbering around five hundred prisoners total throughout the season, they sang songs and the residents recall driving out to the camp on Sundays to hear them sing.[346] Lasting only two months, bad weather ruined the crops, and the camp workers marched through town into their compound composed of tents. During periods of quiet, the men played soccer, a game that many residents went to watch. One local boy recalled his family telling him they would go to the prison to watch a football game. However, the boy was unaware that soccer was called football in other countries. He sounded confused because that was the first time he had seen a soccer match.[347] He watched prisoners play soccer, rather than American football, a sport he was familiar with.

The second growing season in 1945 required a different location for the POW camps. Officials decided not to return to the Lievens" farm, because of latrine digging and the family's pig raising. Having so many latrines and pigs might spread Cholera, so the army built a temporary outer camp on the farm of George Rohrbuck.[348] Located on streets in town, this camp encompassed a few square blocks. The area was between Victory Street, Grant Street, and Mount Vernon Street, with the front gate on North Lane Street in Blissfield. Today, the area is residential, with little remaining of the camp. The consensus is that the residents treated the men well. Many residents recall watching soccer games. The local historical society has photographs depicting POWs playing soccer in 1945. Composed of about 350 prisoners and sixty guards, the

[346] "Site #3"
[347] Ibid.
[348] "Site #3" "Site #2".

camp was on the smaller side. But they still experienced similar treatment that of American servicemen.

The rural area of the camp resulted in some lax procedures. The men could walk through town. As they walked and sang, people would stop on the streets and clap. It was not uncommon to find a prisoner enjoying Sunday dinner in one of the residents" homes.[349] Limited accounts exist, as these encounters are from residents" memories. However, as noted in a *Time* magazine article in January 1945, it was common for prisoners and civilians to mingle, even so far as to have "necking parties".[350]This was a direct violation of the rules against fraternization set by the War Department and the Provost Marshal General's Office. Still, it appears these incidents went unreported until long after the prisoners had returned home. There was no espionage or sabotage, just a desire to get to know the men and help them deal with their situation. It was lonely as a POW and mail was infrequent. One POW, Konrad Kreiten, in letters sent to Dr. Emma Peters in 1992, argued that he could not send mail and faced food shortages while a prisoner in Blissfield.[351] This accusation remains unconfirmed through formal documentation or oral histories.

October 31, 1945, rocked the Blissfield POWs and the local community. On this day, as a Michigan North Central train was carrying passengers, it hit a truck and trailer carrying twenty-four POWs. The truck was heading back to the camp on the Rohrbuck farm an hour early, for a Halloween party when it collided with the train. Driven by Pfc. Edward B. Loughrin of Cadillac, Michigan, the incident occurred at ½ SE Crossing.[352] Sixteen POWs lost their lives. Killing

[349] "Site #2"
[350] "The Lonely Ones." *Time.* (January 22, 1945). https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,791884,00.html.
[351] Peters. 5.
[352] "16 PWs, Soldier Killed by Train*." Battle Creek Enquirer,* (November 1, 1945).

eleven of the sixteen men instantly, as reported by the *Battle Creek Enquirer*, the "locomotive plowed into the open stake truck and scattered men and bodies more than 300 feet along the right-of-way. Bodies of three prisoners were found on the pilot [front] of the locomotive".[353] Survivors were taken to hospitals in Adrian, Michigan and others in Ohio. Five additional prisoners and Pfc. Loughrin also died days later from their injuries.[354]

The accident tore through the small community, as well as the prisoners. The Rohrbuck farm held funeral services, where the community also came to pay their respects. One service was Catholic, while the other Protestant. According to Commander Richard Belmont, the accident site had wooden crossing signs, who reported being stunned by the news. The *Battle Creek Enquirer* article on November 1st, noted "visibility along the tracks in both directions from the road is not obscured." "The Michigan Central passenger train, which was en route from Toledo to Adrian, was in the charge of Engineer Ford S. Winbrenner and Conductor W.B. Sherman."[355] The crossing still exists, where people can visit the site. There are no markers, save a lone cross, but it is outside of town, by a gas station, making it easy to locate.

The Army buried the prisoners with honors in Fort Custer National Cemetery, where each year, a *Volkstauertag*[356] service honors those men, as well as other POWs who died while in American captivity. None of the POWs buried in Fort Custer died by execution or in attempting to escape. The accident of October 1945 killed the greatest number of POWs in the state. The men who died were as follows:

Karl Acker,25
Richard Ackermann, 35

[353] Ibid.
[354] "16 Pws, Soldier Killed by Train". "Site #5 Accident Site." (2020). Blissfield Depot Museum. Blissfield, Michigan.
[355] Ibid.
[356] German Memorial Day

Ernst Ahrens, 21
Phillip Allmann, 35
Franz Allmer, 31
Rolf Arnold, 29
Karl Arzberger, 31
Ferdinand Auer, 18
August Baumgartner, 34
Hans Becker,
Kurt Behring, 31
Norbert Berghofer, 26
Heinz Bialetzki, 23
Kurt Bernock, 26
Paul Beiersdorfer
Anton Beckman[357]

Each man's family was notified through the Red Cross, as the commander at Fort Custer gave the information to the Swiss legislation, as required by the Geneva Convention. Seventy-five years later, there is still confusion concerning this event, as the *Battle Creek Enquirer* recorded the accident heavily. With the cemetery located a few miles from Battle Creek, the historical narrative changed the accident site from Blissfield to Battle Creek, Michigan. However, the residents remember the bodies being dragged along the tracks. One odd issue about the accident is the lack of an investigative report.[358] Crime scene photos are also unavailable, leading to rumors of the information being classified. Yet, additional research proved this to be false. More than likely, this was a public relations dilemma, handled by the Army to ensure that the men who died would be respected and the American military would not be bad-mouthed, as the POWs died after the end of a conflict. Due to the fact they were still in American military custody, the responsibility for protection fell on the United States. Prisoners dying before being repatriated

[357] "16 PW's, Soldier Killed by Train,"
[358] Upon research within the National Archives and FOIA requests through the state of Michigan, no investigative report has been discovered, nor have crime scene photos been apprehended, despite residents remembering the history teacher at Blissfield High School taking the photos.

home would be controversial or create ill perceptions between Germany and the USSR, following World War II.

Although not as large as Blissfield, smaller camps in Oceana County, in Hart and Shelby, Michigan, also affected their communities and residents for a couple of years. Today, some residents still recall their arrival and the soldiers who visited the ice cream shop (the dairy) after shifts, while the German soldiers sang on the weekends, as their convoys traveled through town.[359] There were escapes at these two camps, although officials captured the men quickly. Housing approximately 200 men, the camp in Hart was located at the Hart Fairgrounds. The fairgrounds still exist today, though no remains are visible.

In Shelby, the camp was located on the high school football field. This caused issues. For the entire football season of 1944, the Shelby football team had to be bussed to Hart High School to play their games. Sadly, the bumper season extended into the fall, forcing the locals to commute to the next town to experience this pastime. There was no discomfort or unhappiness at the prospect; it was simply a necessity. But residents do laugh now, given that the government exposed students to the camps on the football fields daily. Despite this concern, the residents were told, not to treat the prisoners as an "exhibit", according to one local paper.[360] Further violating the laws in place within the Geneva Convention and the War Department circulations, it was common for locals to give the prisoner cigarettes and try to make conversation, while they parked next to the fence line.[361]

[359] Esther M. and Marge P. Interview.
[360] May, (August 4, 1944)
[361] Ibid.

The residents still established relationships with the prisoners. Working in a local canning factory, the prisoners developed relationships with Mr. Royal. After the war, the prisoners would write back to the Royal family asking for food or giving updates on their lives back in Europe. In one letter written by Willy Buck, he mentioned his desire to returned to the United States, calling the country "lucky".[362] One prominent element of Buck's letter revolves around the descriptions of his German homeland. They suffered and experienced constant hunger. Money was tight and foodstuffs not readily available.[363] Many POWs stationed in Michigan, whose letters survive, wrote to their American employers asking for food and relief, such as Liesel Schlitt, sister to a former POW. She wrote to the Bartz family of Berrien Springs, requesting information (an address) of an American family who could help support them as "they were always hungry".[364] She did not feel she could ask the Bartz's, as they might have desired to send items to her brother. [365] Many families sent rations and packages after the war, helping to support the prisoners as they attempted to get back on their feet. One farmer, Otto Herzog, a German-American living near Frankenmuth, Michigan, sent many care packages to former German POWs. His surviving letters detail his life on the farm, the rations he sent, and the camaraderie he developed with the men working on his farm. In one instance, a package sent to a German family contained: "beef noodle soup; mushroom soup; chicken soup; chicken gumbo; beef soup; honey; velveta [*sic*] cheese; Bar Pates; 6 packages candy; 3 packs vita salt; 10 carmal [*sic*]".[366] Costing $2.92 for all the items, the total cost of the package, including shipping came to $4.18

[362] Willy Buck. Letters from Wily Buck to Mr. Royal. (1948). German Prisoners in WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan.
March 7, 1948.
[363] Willy Buck. March 7, 1948.
[364] Liesel Schlitt. "World War II Prisoner-of-war Letters to Henry and Edwin Bartz, 1946-1949." (February 23, 1948). Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan.
[365] Ibid.
[366] Otto Herzog. *Collection Books.* (February 24, 1947). Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan.

(in 1947 dollars; or about $55.86 today). Being willing to spend their own money to assist former prisoners (employees) demonstrates the relationship between local residents and the POWs. Some may argue that it was simply a humanitarian thing to do, such as donating to Ukraine in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2022. But, as these were individual packages, selected by the family, including letters asking about their well-being, the probability of establishing an acquaintance or friendship is more likely. Correspondence with the Otto Herzog family continued with many POWs until the 1950s; one family went so far as to name their child Otto, after their "American Onkel."[367]

Escaping the Camps

Despite the many numbers of prisoners held in the United States, there were few escapes. Officials captured many within a few hours; most escaped prisoners in Michigan spent about a day free. Prisoners from Owosso, Michigan, escaped the evening of July 20th to be captured the next morning after a manhunt by the Michigan State Police.[368] Only one prisoner in the United States eluded capture. Prisoner Georg Gaertner escaped a POW camp in the western U.S., boarded a train for California, and blended into American society. He turned himself in, in 1989, and later published a book titled, *Hitler's Last Soldier in America*¸ with the assistance of Arnold Kramer, the author of *Nazi Prisoners in America.* From Kramer's 1989 book, he recalled that after the book's publication, he received a call from Mr. Gaertner verifying he was still alive and living in the United States.[369]

[367] Rudi Jirka. *Correspondence between Rudi Jirka and Otto Herzog.* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. September 4, 1948.
[368] "War Prisoners, Aided by Girls, Flee, Caught." *The Owosso Argus-Press.* (July 21, 1944).
[369] Krammer, (1996). x.

Such daring escapes did not happen in Michigan. The most publicized escape involved a pair of teenage girls, who ran off with POWs for a joy ride. This Michigan escape resulted in the girls being charged by the United States government, but other escapes also took place from many of the smaller camps.[370] Rules existed to deter prisoner escapes, but they still occurred. Within Michigan's Upper Peninsula, the residents learned of the process of preventing escapes through the local paper:

> If a prisoner attempts to escape or pass a defined limit, the regulations provide that the sentinel or any member of the guard who sees him will shout "halt". If the prisoner fails to halt immediately, the sentinel or guard will shout halt a second time, and if necessary, a third time. Thereafter, if there appears to be no other effective means of preventing his escape, the sentinel or guard will fire upon him.[371]

Yet sometimes soldiers ignored this rule, as prisoners could leave the camp, or walk off the work site. No soldier shot prisoners in Michigan trying to escape. Nor were there any extravagant escape plans, as seen by POWs escaping in Arizona who attempted to build a tunnel under the fence boundaries with the goal of escaping into Mexico. John Hammond Moore's *The Faustball Tunnel* recorded the story of this daring escape. [372]

Escapes from the smaller camps resulted in newspaper articles explaining who escaped, physical descriptions, and documentation of their capture. On average, these escapes lasted for a few days at most. Within the Hart and Shelby camps, escapes happened on various worksites throughout the area. Encompassing sit-downs, or walking off the site, it was rare, as residents recalled being unable to stop the men picking beans when the factory had too much in the coffers.[373] One escape that made the local paper happened on August 12, 1944. Two prisoners,

[370] Dr. Gregory D. Sumner. *Michigan Pow Camps in World War II*. Charleston, SC: History Press, 2018. 93-97.
[371] "War Prisoners to Work in U.P. Woods." *Daily Mining Journal.* (December 18, 1943).
[372] John Hammond Moore. *The Faustball Tunnel*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1978). 113-117.
[373] Esther M. and Marge P. Interview.

Egon Berger and Willi Ernst, walked off their worksite at a local farm owned by the Makin family. Aged 19 and 21, respectively, the prisoners were hunted down quickly by the local military police, citizens, and the FBI.[374] The first documented escape from the Shelby camp, the commander of the Sixth Service Command, headquartered in Muskegon, Michigan, believed them to be hiding out in a local wooden patch, close to the worksite.[375]

Officials recaptured the men a few days later. Michigan's rural communities limited the possibility of escape. The language barrier and the clothing, outlined with white P.W. lettering, made it difficult to remain hidden. The geographical distances also made escaping difficult to contend with. German POWs did not fully realize the size of the country.

Another escape happened around the city of South Haven. Wilhelm Wall, aged 21, walked away from his post on September 10th, 1944.[376] He left Artie Overhiser farm, eight miles northeast of South Haven. Recorded as 5 ft 6, 125 pounds and with blond hair, he reported at the farm from the branch camp in Allegan. Officials described him as wearing khaki pants with a P.W. (white markings) raincoat.[377]

Remaining at large for four days, he lived on raw corn and other items foraged from the land.[378] Clayton Ruell, a farmer of South Haven, picked Wall up on a country road two miles west of Grand Junction, Michigan, about ten miles from the escape point. However, Wall did not leave to return to Germany. Instead, he wanted to remain in the United States. He had even requested an assignment to fight against the Japanese.[379] No reports survive of German POWs,

[374] "Hunt Escaped Shelby Prisoners." *The Muskegon Chronicle*. (August 12, 1944). German War Prisoners WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan.
[375] Ibid.
[376] "English-Speaking Pw from Allegan Missing." *Battle Creek Enquirer*. (September 11, 1945).
[377] Ibid.
[378] "South Haven Farmer Catches Escaped Pw." *Battle Creek Enquirer.* (September 14, 1945).
[379] Ibid.

switching sides and fighting under American forces. Ruell vainly made his request, as the government classified him as an enemy combatant, protected under the Geneva Convention, requiring repatriation back to his homeland at the conflict's conclusion.

Escapes in the Upper Peninsula (U.P.) were more common, with prisoners walking off the sites from Camp Sidnaw and Camp Evelyn, located in the center of the U.P. One of the early escapes happened on May 20th, 1944. Reporting on the escape on May 22nd, the two prisoners left Camp Sidnaw sometime on Saturday. The prisoners were Johann Kosler, 22, and Gearhart Troschmas, aged 19. To determine the prisoners' whereabouts, the newspaper reported Troschmas' physical description as "6 feet, 3 inches in height and weighs only 117 pounds".[380] Headed under Sergeant Ario Baylor, the state police, centralized in Sidnaw, and began fanning out in search of the missing men. The newspaper reported their attempt to penetrate "a Michigan state police road blockade late Saturday afternoon, and the result was complete victory for the state police, conservation officers, and civilian assistants," which resulted in their capture.[381] However, this description did not fully explain how, or why, the men tried to attack the roadblock, when they could have simply walked around it through the woods. The police found the prisoners near the Kenton ranger station, within an hour's time. The prisoners stated that they were reported missing because they simply had taken a walk.[382]

The public learned of a second escape on June 5th, 1944. Three German POWs left their worksite between 9 pm on Saturday, June 3rd and 11am, Sunday, June 4th. Authorities believed the fugitives had civilian assistance, as they were looking for a "1936 automobile with wire

[380] "Two Fugitive Nazis Caught at Kenton." *The Daily Mining Journal.* (May 22, 1944). Upper Peninsula Digital Network. https://uplink.nmu.edu/islandora/object/nmu%3A94322.
[381] Ibid.
[382] Ibid.

wheels, which was seen near Rumely, where the German prisoners have been working, and later the Au Train camp in which they are quartered."[383] The escaped prisoners were Karl Theis, 30, Adams Wagner, 25, and Erich Hoessel, 23. The local paper gave a physical description of each man, to aid law enforcement in apprehending the fugitives. The local authorities and the *Daily Mining Journal* described the men as follows:

> He [Theis] is five feet, nine inches in height, weight 161 pounds has gray eyes, blonde hair and a ruddy complexion. Adams Wagner, 25. He is five feet, seven inches in height, weighs 143 pounds, has blue eyes, wavy brown hair, and is partly bald. Erich Hoessel, 23. He is five feet, eight inches in height, weighs 157 pounds, has blue eyes, brown hair (straight and combed back), fair complexion, small eyes, and a thin face.[384]

One important note regarding this escape was Hoessel's knowledge of the English language. This allowed him to communicate with civilians and to be harder to detect, should he lose his P.W.-marked clothing issued by the Army. Upon being reported missing, officials erected roadblocks and the state police, along with the FBI, began searching the areas where the POWs were last seen. Captured on June 6th, 1944, authorities apprehended the three men along Michigan's M-28, near Rumely, at a location known as "The Pines", "...a roadside cabin resort, between Shingleton and Seney on M-28, owned by Frank Davis..."[385]

As a supervisor of Camp Evelyn recognized their uniforms, he stopped, chatted, and offered them cigarettes. The men stood against one of the main buildings and residents viewed them from the road. After conversing with the prisoners, Davis drove into Seney, a town about 25 miles from Shingleton, to report their location, unaware that similarly Mr. Davis, the owner of The Pines was "playing host".[386] While the supervisor drove off to report his discovery of the

[383] "Three Nazis at Au Train Camp Escape." *The Daily Mining Journal.* (June 5, 1944).
[384] "Three Nazis at Au Train Camp Escape".
[385] "Three Nazi War Captives Apprehended." *The Daily Mining Journal.* June 7, 1944, Upper Peninsula Digital Network. https://uplink.nmu.edu/islandora/object/nmu%3A94336.
[386] Ibid.

prisoners, Mr. Davis awoke, saw the prisoners, and invited them in. The newspaper reported he "...went outside, invited them in, built a fire and told them to make themselves comfortable."[387] Unable to notify the authorities himself, Davis continued having a conversation with them. The police surprised everyone when Trooper McCracken of the state police, and Mike Generau, conservation officer from the McMillan district, arrived and took the prisoners into custody. They surrendered without resistance; "they frankly admitted who they were, said they had no intention of giving themselves up and seemed surprised when the officers arrived."[388] Captured without incident, the prisoners returned to the camp.

Later in June, three additional prisoners escaped from the U.P. camp near Rumely – Claus Born, Franz Schneck, and Adam Wagner.[389] Making their getaway on Tuesday, June 27th around noon, the men left the worksite. They quartered at the prisoner-of-war camp at Au Train; but officials assigned them to the camp in Rumely for daily labor.[390] After the alarm sounded and was broadcasted on the radio, the state police, working with the FBI and conservation officers, began searching the area. By midnight on Tuesday, the prisoners remained at large. The state police also started manning roadblocks attempting to locate the prisoners and prevent further disappearances.[391]

The men remained free throughout the night, being caught early the following day by officer near Skandia, about seven miles from Rumely.[392] Caught by Detectives J.C. Carstensen and Harold Moore, of the state police and Walter Mayworm, of the prison force, they

[387] Ibid.
[388] "Three Nazi War Captives Apprehended".
[389] "Officers Find No Trace of Nazi Fugitives." *The Daily Mining Journal.* (June 29, 1944). Upper Peninsula Digital Network. https://uplink.nmu.edu/islandora/object/nmu%3A94355.
[390] Ibid.
[391] Ibid.
[392] "Three Escaped Nazis Caught near Skandia." *The Daily Mining Journal.* (July 1, 1944), Upper Peninsula Digital Network. https://uplink.nmu.edu/islandora/object/nmu%3A94358.

apprehended the men by tracking them along an access road. There were no overt signs. However, the men, who manned a roadblock along U.S. 41 noticed tracks. They followed these tracks, "until they turned off the road into the brush. Then the officers spread out, began a search and in a few minutes came upon the fugitive Germans."[393] Again, as was common in other escapes, the prisoners surrendered without incident. According to the officers, they "didn't appear to be too disappointed at being caught".[394] Still wearing parts of their German army uniforms, the men had little food between them when caught. They returned to the camp, but authorities kept the details of the prisoners' whereabouts private and did not disclose the punishments to the public.[395]

The greatest scandal involving prisoner escapes in Michigan, resulted in charges against two young girls. The press sensationalized the case, which happened in the Lower Peninsula, even leading local newspapers to report that the Nazi prisoners were still enemies.[396] The girls' punishment and legal consequences, would hopefully help others recognize the problems of fraternization amongst prisoners and civilians. *The Owosso Argus-Press* noted that they hoped,

> these girls realize the seriousness of their action and that it will serve as a warning to others to regard these prisoners as enemies of this nation. If the case was reversed and two German girls had been caught with a couple of American prisoners-of-war, the fate of the German girls would probably not be in doubt. It is true that these German prisoners are for the most part ordinary fellows, who are not particularly dangerous in themselves. But they are captured soldiers, who have served in the armies fighting this nation and the civilian population of this community must always bear that in mind.[397]

[393] Ibid.
[394] "Three Escaped Nazis Caught near Skandia"
[395]Ibid.
[396] "Captured Nazis Are Still Enemies." *The Owosso Argus-Press.* (July 22, 1944).
[397] Ibid.

The ordeal began when Kitty Case, aged 20 and Shirley Druce, aged 19, assisted two prisoners, Gottfried Hobel, 20, and Erit Classen, 20, left the H.R. Roach Canning Company near Owosso, Michigan.

The girls were also employees near the plant. They would talk with the prisoners on breaks, a violation of both the War Department's and the employer's policies, given that civilians and American workers were to remain separate. Being young teenage girls, they found the young men attractive and planned to rendezvous at a close location for a getaway. On July 20th, 1944, they set the plan in motion. Along for the ride was Case's younger sister Phyllis, who drove the car. Recounting later to local authorities, Kitty made Phyllis drive them around, with the threat of violence against her, if she didn't do as she was told.[398] Authorities did not find Phyllis Case to be an accomplice to the crime, as they determined she lacked knowledge of the event.[399]

The plan involved Alberta Case, Kitty's mother, who struck up a conversation with the employer, while Hobel and Classen snuck out the back of the canning factory into a ditch. The girls took the car and picked up the prisoners outside the perimeter fence. This plan came to fruition as the girls spoke to the prisoners, setting a date for 5:30pm.[400] Sneaking past the fence and jumping into the car, the two girls, two prisoners, and one driver headed out of town.

As Phyllis recalled, Kitty threatened to "hit me over the head if I didn't drive as instructed.[401] Driving first to Hancroft, then continuing in a general southwesterly direction, up and down crossroads, they drove around in the car until about 8:30pm. At one time, the prisoners and two girls were going to get out of the car near the Travelers" Inn on M-78 but were afraid to

[398] "Relatives of Girls Testify against Them." *The Owosso Argus-Press.* (January 10, 1945).
[399] "War Prisoners, Aided by Girls, Flee, Caught."
[400] "War Prisoners, Aided by Girls, Flee, Caught."
[401] Ibid.

because of several houses close-by.[402] They reached the vicinity of Colby Lake, between Perry and Shaftsburg, where the pair got out of the car. This was Phyllis's excuse to leave, who claimed the car was near empty and only had enough gas to return to Owosso. After the couples left the car, Phyllis returned to Owosso, alerting her stepmother Alberta of the situation. Alberta notified authorities around 10:30pm.[403]

The police immediately set up roadblocks and sent radio notifications hoping to catch the escaped fugitives. However, they remained elusive for over twenty-four hours. Being young, this may have been simply a teenage hook-up. But the consequences of their actions had serious repercussions. Kitty and Shirley were employees of the H.R. Roach Canning Company, which allowed them to fraternize with the prisoners. But, according to witnesses, the employer noticed their behavior and warned against it. This continued, along with drinking, leading to their termination.[404] While on trial for conspiracy, the girls claimed there was wild drinking at the plant. In rebuttal, plant manager Phillip S. Palmer noted that possibly only "a little drinking that I know nothing about".[405] Richard Tyler, a supervisor, said he discharged the two girls for drinking before they reported for work, leading to being able to help the two prisoners' escape.

This would not be Hobel, or Classen's, only attempt to escape from the Owosso plant. While Kitty Case and Shirley Druce awaited trial in the Bay City jail, the two men along with two additional prisoners escaped on August 15th, 1944.[406] Fleeing at noon, two of the prisoners were recaptured by noon the next day. Those two men were Gottfried Hobel and Heinz Sauer, both twenty. [407] Other workers noticed the prisoners missing at about 4:30pm, from a farm south

[402] Ibid.
[403] Ibid.
[404] "War Prisoners, Aided by Girls, Flee, Caught,"
[405] "Jury Convicts Owosso Girls of Conspiracy." *The Owosso Argus-Press*. (January 13, 1945).
[406] "4 Nazis Flee Guards, Two Are Captured." *The Owosso Argus-Press,* (August 16, 1944).
[407] Ibid.

of St. Johns, where they had been working, and the search for them began. Found by the State Police at 11pm that night, the prisoners captured near Ovid, Michigan returned to camp early the next morning.[408]

Erit Classen and Werner Adam, also twenty, remained at large. Leaving a farm, located one mile east and four miles north of Bannister in Gratiot County, they responded to the 12:00pm roll call, but by 12:30pm, workers reported them missing.[409] Captured the next day, authorities subsequently transferred the prisoners to the southwestern United States. The camp at Owosso was closed on October 4, 1944, and the prisoners were returned to Fort Custer.[410] While local papers continued to report on escapes, the case surrounding two teenage girls who assisted two German prisoners remained at the forefront of the community's minds.

In January 1945, the scandal reignited around the Owosso girls and the German prisoners. Charged with "conspiracy to defraud the government of its legal function in retaining lawful custody of prisoners-of-war", the trial began on January 9th and lasted until January 13th.[411] Kitty Case and Shirley Druce were both charged with the same crimes, yet Case being older, received a harsher sentence. Under Judge Frank Picard at Bay City, the federal court case had key witnesses in Phyllis and Alberta Case, including both relatives and minor participants. Phyllis Case, on the witness stand, stated that "they drove to Corunna and finally wound up at Colby Lake in Woodhull Township."[412] This location was where, the next morning Sheriff Ray Gellatly and Under Sheriff Charles Downe found the prisoners and girls.

[408] Ibid.
[409] "4 Nazis Flee Guards, Two Are Captured,"
[410] "Prisoner Camp is Closed Today." *The Owosso Argus-Press.* (October 4, 1944).
[411] "Relatives of Girls Testify against Them."
[412] Ibid.

Another piece of damning evidence presented by the District Attorney, Thomas Thornton, were notes exchanged between the girls and the prisoners. These notes, found in discovery, were added to the story. According to Kitty, she had fallen in love with Hobel and testified that he promised to return to America and marry her.[413] Upon their capture, the group was in a chipper mood. The newspaper noted they were jovial. As they were "posing for their pictures this morning, the Case girl said she wanted to get as close to Hobel as possible and asked for a print of the picture."[414] This leads further credence to Case being in love with the prisoner. The scandal of the trial led to additional rumors. Rumors circulated that Hobel and Classen would return as witnesses. However, in local news, officials never confirmed this rumor, given the prisoners were transferred to New Mexico due to their many escapes.[415]

Kitty, testifying in her own defense, noted her love for Hobel. She also testified that "He [Hobel] asked me to stop drinking at the factory as he was afraid, I might get "fired"."[416] Kitty also testified that a few days before the escape of the two German prisoners, Hobel gave her his picture with a love message written on the back of it, however, no record survives of prosecutors using this picture as evidence.[417]

After testimonies, jurors found both girls guilty of the charges. Although the trial ended in January, the court deferred the sentencing, which carried a penalty of up to two years, until February 13th, 1945. The jury comprised eight women and four men, who reached a verdict after four and one-half hours" of deliberation.[418] Upon the verdict's decision, Judge Frank A. Picard told the girls that "you are lucky you were not charged with something more serious under the

[413] "Trial of Girls to End Today, at Bay City." *The Owosso Argus-Press.* (January 12, 1945).
[414] "War Prisoners, Aided by Girls, Flee, Caught,"
[415] "Relatives of Girls Testify against Them,"
[416] "Trial of Girls to End Today, at Bay City
[417] Ibid.
[418] "Jury Convicts Owosso Girls of Conspiracy"

circumstances."[419] Yet, defense counsel Robert Cook of Owosso termed the "girls' escapades" a "call of youth". However, Chief Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas P. Thorton replied "The only call of youth known today is the call to the colors of the country".[420] The message was made: American authorities refused to tolerate youthful indiscretion during a period of war. Patriotic duty was more important.

However, the defense contended that "the girls were unaware of the seriousness of their act and argued that flirtations were frequent between regular employers and prisoners assigned to the Roach canning plant, where the two girls formerly worked".[421] Kitty testified of several meetings with the prisoner both at work and near the camp, where the Nazis spent their leisure hours, which possibly indicated a lack of control over prisoner/civilian fraternization.[422] This directly violated the rules of the War Department. Even, in Michigan, the rules that in Shelby, Michigan, the government forbids fraternization. After testimonies and other proceedings, the newspapers reported that a "quick verdict had been expected but it was believed by observers in court that the long delay in reaching an agreement was due to sympathy on the past of some of the jurors".[423] Everyone was young, once. Teenage hormones and flirtations did not stop because of the war. With local boys working in cities, or serving overseas, the only "boys" available were the young prisoners working alongside American girls. The sympathy may also in part be owed to the severity of the crime, something seen as being a youthful prank. Teenagers sneak off to have fun. Why would these teenagers be any different? However, because of the different

[419] Ibid.
[420] Ibid.
[421] "Jury Convicts Owosso Girls of Conspiracy"
[422] Ibid.
[423] Ibid.

nationalities and the country's war footing, this rendezvous was illegal and carried harsh sentences if broken.

By February 13th, 1945, Kitty Case and Shirley Druce faced their sentencings in federal court. The court sentenced Kitty Case to one year and three months and her co-conspirator to one year and one day. As they had served one month already in the Bay City jail, local papers reported that the girls qualified for time served.[424] Sentenced under Judge Picard, the Attorney General's department would determine the specific prison for their crimes. However, he noted that once one-third of the sentences had been served, both girls would be eligible for parole.[425] Locals noted:

> they were fortunate they were not charged with treason, the maximum penalty for which is death. "It may be that you have brought home to the people of Michigan that there can be no fraternizing between civilians and war prisoners', he [Judge Picard] told the girls.[426]

Upon serving their sentences both girls moved away from the area because of the scandal. Kitty Case moved to Georgia and Shirley Druce moved to California.[427] Both married and had families. Despite their youthful troubles, the girls still lived successful lives. Druce kept this incident a closely guarded secret. Her children did not even learn the story until after she passed away in 1975. Her daughter-in-law, Melinda, recounted that the oldest "knew (Druce) could never vote or get a passport to get out of the country, but she never knew why."[428] Court records are lacking, and no notes remain as evidence. However, this incident directly impacted these two girls. They did not fully understand the consequences of their actions; and they paid for it.

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[424] "Owosso Girls Get Terms in Federal Prison." *The Owosso Argus-Press.* February 13, 1945.
[425] "Owosso Girls Get Terms in Federal Prison."
[426] Ibid.
[427] Sumner (2018), 108.
[428] Michael Peterson. "Woman's Hidden History Recalled by Family." *The Argus-Press* (January 19, 2010), https://www.argus-press.com/news_local_top/article_fac5ad07-01fd-5cbb-9492-a5a01e2e70c6.html.

Death of the Prisoners

Some prisoners attempted to escape from Michigan camps to be transferred further inland, while others escaped in another way. Sadly, their escape came from death. The greatest number of deaths were among the sixteen POWs who died in October 1945. But other prisoners also passed away during their stints in American captivity. No maliciousness resulted in these deaths, but the government buried them at Fort Custer Cemetery in Augusta, Michigan. The local paper reported on each prisoner's death, giving minor details of how they died.

Obergruppenführer (Obgfr). Johann Scheck died on June 23rd, 1944, after being jerked from a truck by a guy wire that was dislodged from a storm, the previous Sunday night (June 18th, 1944). He was en route to a farm near Jackson, Michigan as part of a work detail.[429] This accident occurred near Clear Lake. The incident injured a second prisoner as well, but as of June 24th, he was recovering from his injuries at Fort Custer. Both prisoners lived at a POW camp in Waterloo, Michigan, with Scheck receiving a full-honors military funeral.[430]

Another POW death happened in October 1944. Obergefreiter Franz Janoszek died by a train as he attempted to escape from Fort Custer. Reporting of his death, on October 1st, authorities told the public this was his second escape attempt from the location.[431] His first escape happened on September 3rd, when he appeared missing from a work detail on a farm near Eau Claire, Michigan. His recapture on September 7th earned him notoriety as the longest escaped prisoner in Michigan, up to that point.[432] The second attempt happened on Sunday, October 1st, where they reported him missing around 10:30am. By 8:30pm that night, the papers

[429] "Military Services Conducted at Fort for War Prisoner." *Battle Creek Enquirer.* (June 24, 1944).
[430] Ibid.
[431] "Nazi War Prisoner is Killed by Train." *Battle Creek Enquirer.* (October 2, 1944).
[432] Ibid.

reported his death. According to Jefferson A Page, the engineer of 65 Central, the prisoner left the grass alongside the rail and lay across the tracks. He died from decapitation.[433] A Board of Officers investigated the death, while officials transferred his body to Fort Custer for burial.

In May 1945, another prisoner died. Grenadier Wilhelm Marschellek died on May 10th, while playing a game of soccer at Fort Custer.[434] Having the same rank as a U.S. Army private, he was worked at Fort Custer, on the night shift in the Quartermaster laundry. Captured in Italy, he left behind a wife. Being only thirty-one, officials requested an autopsy, and an American officer was assigned to investigate. They reported no foul play. He received a military burial, following the Geneva Convention stipulating full military funerals. Yet, because of State Department regulations, no Nazi flags draped the coffin or were used during the ceremony.[435]

Another POW, Ludwig Kurtz, passed away in June.[436] Aged fifty-one, the local commander, Major John W. Moore, disclosed that since May 1945, Kurtz had been hospitalized at Fort Custer. Having pre-existing heart problems, the prisoner spent his last week at the Percy Jones General Hospital on the Fort Custer base.[437] Reports reported no foul play. It appears he died from a heart condition. Following protocol, officials interred his body in the Fort Custer Military Cemetery.

Alois Wadle followed Kurtz in death in September 1945. He died from leukemia, spending his last days at Percy Jones Hospital on the Fort Custer Base.[438] The paper published little information about this prisoner, except that he was forty-eight and a member of the Catholic Church. As with the other prisoners, they buried him in the Fort Custer Military Cemetery.

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[433] Ibid.
[434] "German Prisoner Dies During Game at Custer," *Battle Creek Enquirer* (Battle Creek, Michigan), May 11, 1945.
[435] "German Prisoner Dies During Game at Custer."
[436] "German Prisoner, 51, Dies at Fort Custer." *Battle Creek Enquirer.* (June 9, 1945).
[437] Ibid.
[438] "P.W. Dies at Custer." *Battle Creek Enquirer.* (September 15, 1945).

Listed as the eighth prisoner to die (as this was before the large train accident), the prisoners were well-cared for and treated humanely. In addition, as Kurtz and Wadle's deaths show, both received medical care under the Geneva Convention and had access to medical treatment while a prisoner-of-war.

Sadly, one prisoner's death happened one day prior to his return home. Gefrieter Joseph Ensgraber, age forty-two died of a heart attack. This happened the day before he was to be transferred via train to the eastern seaboard for repatriation. The death was reported on June 20th, 1946, and Ensgraber was buried among his other deceased compatriots at Fort Custer.[439] As the *Battle Creek Enquirer* reported, the last prisoner transports for repatriation left on June 21st, 1946, at 10am, in a special convoy of two trains.[440]

Camp Life

As prisoners arrived in the United States, they left train stations and entered camps. Yet work did not dominate their lives. There was time for recreation, games, classes and writing home to their families through the Red Cross.

As part of the Geneva Convention, prisoners could send letters home to their families. However, the host country had the right to censor outgoing and incoming mail, in the name of national security. Family members could send care packages to German POWs. However, accusations of this being unapproved linger from Konrad Kreiten's letters.[441] Further research failed to uncover evidence to justify this experience, but it could be because of insubordination, for which camp officials held his packages for a time.

[439] "Pw Here Dies on Eve of Leaving for Home." *Battle Creek Enquirer.* (June 20, 1946).
[440] Ibid.
[441] Dr. Emma G. Peters. *WWII Pow Camps in Blissfield, Mi, 1944-1945*. 5-6.

As prisoners had time to fill, classes helped ease the boredom. Many prisoners brought games from home, such as those prisoners in the U.P. camps who kept their board games. Working on farms was another way to pass the time, allowing prisoners opportunities to see the country and mingle with the citizenry under scrutiny. Laboring on Michigan farms and factories was voluntary, but many prisoners saw this as an opportunity and a way to relieve boredom. These interactions led to friendships and fraternization. As with the case of the Owosso girls, it even led to criminal charges. Much of the mingling between prisoners and civilians, both inside and outside the camps was minimal, consisting of small talk. Humans are social creatures. Employers wanted to know about their workers, even if they are from a foreign country. The government permitted general conversations, but information was still to be kept close to the vest. Friendships continued to develop, however. Frequent letters from former POWs, upon repatriation, demonstrate camaraderie between the two groups. Prisoners took home plenty of recollections. They saw the food on American tables and the working of American farms and factories, while they were in captivity. In addition, the United States attempted a reeducation program, focused on those prisoners who agreed to learn about democracy. This program hoped to influence returned prisoners who would vote and affect the country's rebuilding, with a goal of "provid[ing] ideological alternatives to National Socialism for the cross section of the German nation represented in the prison camps".[442] The two objectives involved the reconstruction of professional concerns and political struggles in universities during the 1940s, with assumptions linked to "the decline of the liberal arts and the beginnings of the anticommunist university purges" and tracing the American concept of enemy reeducation, formed by academics and

[442] Ron Theodore Robin. *The Barbed-Wire College: Reeducating German POWs in the United States During World War II*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995). 3. Ethan Reardon. *WWII German POWs in Michigan: Planned Reeducation Vs. Fair Treatment*: (Mission Point Press, 2019.) 1.

adopted by military. This revealed a "complex and uniquely American relationship between academic, pedagogical presumptions and the policies adopted by government clients".[443]

Ultimately considered a failure, the program under the German POWs Special Projects Division, created courses similar to freshman college courses to educate German prisoners on democracy and persuade a "significant block of trustworthy Germans to spearhead change in Germany itself".[444] Democracy permeated the course work by German citizens, but also showed itself in the newsletters published by the prisoners.

Fort Custer POWs received permission from officials to publish newsletters for each other, under the direction of the camp commander and subject to censorship. Within these publications, prisoners recounted their favorite movies, films, available nickel shows and information on the war's progress and some American history lessons. Published between 1945 and 1946, these newsletters offer glimpses of camp life, beyond the doldrums of reading books, writing letters, and working. Issue 24 of *Die Brücke,* released on July 7th, 1945, discusses the American idea of Four Freedoms, on an article called "Freiheit der Rede; Freiheit der Religion; Freiheit von Not; Freiheit von Furcht".[445] These freedoms of speech, religion, from want, and from fear all educated the prisoners on President Franklin Roosevelt's idea of freedom and the freedoms which some prisoners wanted for their country.[446] Nazism and National Socialism had resulted in catastrophe. The crime of Nazism was really against the men, women, and children, the newsprint explains. They were further arguing that Germany has been robbed of its respect throughout the world and that it will take a lot of time and effort before it earns its respect again.

[443] Robin (1995) 4.
[444] Robin, (1995). 9-10.
[445] "Macht Und Recht." *Die Brücke.* (July 14, 1945.) Fort Custer, Michigan. Obtained through the Center for Research Libraries.
[446] Ibid.

All must understand that peace/freedom is better than war.[447] Calling this an American right, the prisoners also explained American politics and society as a history lesson in a subsection titled "Amerikanische Geschichte" [American History], where they determined that the freedoms in America create a special lifestyle.[448]

Prisoners reposted various articles from around the world concerning the war in *Die Brücke.* This kept the prisoners informed of international happenings. But military authorities censored this information and presented America in a positive light, while diminishing the power of Germany and Adolf Hitler's leadership. The prisoners wrote pieces depicting their life inside the barbed wire enclosures.

Another area where prisoners could occupy their time and replace boredom involved practicing their religion. Although they represented different sects inside the camps, Catholic or Protestant priests from the area performed services. They came to camp each week. Allowing for religious services was a stipulation of the Geneva Convention, specifically, Article 16 states:

> Prisoners-of-war shall enjoy complete liberty in the exercise of their religion, including attendance at the services of their faith, on the sole condition that they comply with the measures of order and police issued by the military authorities. Ministers of a religion, prisoners-of-war, whatever their denomination, shall be allowed to minister fully to members of the same religion.[449]

Within the U.P., Camps Evelyn and Sidnaw held religious services on Sundays, with local pastors coming to the camp for services.[450] Held in English and German, the prisoners could adequately practice their faith. As faith brings hope, having formal services may have aided in

[447] Ibid.
[448] Ibid.
[449] International Committee of the Red Cross, "Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners-of-war. Geneva, 27 July 1929.," (1929), https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/305.
[450] A. Cardinaux. "Two Labor Detachments: Camp Evelyn and Camp Sidnaw." (May 3, 1944). Sidnaw Historical Museum.

maintaining a prisoner's mental health. Services at Camp Pori, another U.P. site, came about at the behest of priest Anthony Walchter of Baroga, who came monthly for services. Reporting on the religious services at the camp, Howard Hong, noted that the men responded to the ministry services, with the "majority indifference [being] the main obstacle and at the same time constitutes the field of labor."[451]

Fort Wayne's POWs saw a civilian priest, with the recreation rooms being turned into a chapel during the day of the week, the priest visited. Interestingly, these services happened "during the week", not on Sunday.[452] Captain Walter H. Rapp completed a service report on Fort Custer on February 8-9, 1945. His notations concerning religious services, demonstrate that the United States followed the regulations of the Geneva Convention. It was noted specifically that:

> Captain Fromm is American Chaplain attached to POW camp. Assisted by one POW Protestant minister and one POW Catholic priest. They conduct religious services once a week for each faith and Bible studies weekly.[453]

The additional inclusion of bible studies allowed the prisoners to continue their studies and practice their faith. This lifted the men's hearts and showed the willingness of the United States, though required by law, to tolerate the practice of faith. Although physically practicing faith is important, prisoners could keep their faith even without services. The power of prayer, performed silently, without interference may also lift souls and help prisoners throughout their ordeals. Heinz Richter recalled: "I worried a lot about them and about my relatives. I prayed day and night."[454] Faith was an important aspect among the German prisoners, even upon

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[451] Howard Hong. *Report of Visit to Prisoner-of-war Camp, Pori, Michigan.* (1945). National Archives College Park. Decimal Files, 1943-1946. Record Group 389. A1 459-A. 255 Camp Pori, Michigan. Box 1619. 290/34/16/04.
[452] Frank Brown. *Report of visit to POW Base Camp, Fort Custer, Michigan on 3 April 1944.* (April 3, 1944). National Archives College Park. Subject Files, 1942-1946. Record Group 389. A1 461. Box 2659. 290/34/28/03.
[453]Paul A. Neuland. *Memorandum for the Director, Prisoner-of-war Special Projects Division*. February 23, 1945. National Archives College Park. Record Group 389. Subject Files, 1942-1946. A1 461. Box 2659. 290/34/28/03.
[454] Richter (1983) 68.

repatriation, as they wrote of keeping their American peers in their prayers. August Weyand, writing to Otto Herzog in 1948, many years after the war, stated that he prays for God to protect the Herzog family.[455]

Conclusion

Each prisoner had a unique experience, as the government erected camps, used and held prisoners. Lasting from one to three years, these camps saw thousands of prisoners pass through their gates, waiting to return home at the war's end. Although the camp confined them, the prisoners still could reach the outside world through interactions with American citizens, as they built relationships. The outside world came to the prisoners through radio, newsletters, and conversations. The United States followed the Geneva Convention, allowing prisoners access to religious services, recreational activities, education, and employment. The humane treatment given to the prisoners helped create relationships among the citizenry. American civilians' willingness to view the prisoners as men, not just enemies, created fond memories and redefined the enemy.

As the camps arose and workers were dispatched, the line between friend and enemy changed. The more prisoners worked and befriended their American employers, the more likely they would build relationships. Conversations resulted in small talk. Locals surprised prisoners as many American farmers spoke or understood German. Many farmers would write back to their former workers after the war, although the prisoners would write back in German, hoping they could read them. Budding relationships and the ability to communicate across the oceans

[455] August Weyland. *Correspondence between August Weyand and Otto Herzog*. 2004. Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. November 101, 1948.

shows the importance of the connections forged in the United States during captivity. However, these surviving letters also document the hope and destruction of Germany after the war.

Chapter Four: Letters Beyond the Wire–American Help following World War II

At the end of the war, the United States sent home the German prisoners-of-war. Some did not return to Germany right away, spending one to two years in prisoner camps in England or France. The experiences of prisoners varied upon their return to Germany. Still, many stayed in contact with their American employers, writing letters requesting assistance because of the strained circumstances they found themselves in. These snapshots give a first-hand account of the hardships the German people and returning veterans faced as they attempted to rebuild. It further shows the relationships built between prisoners as they described their lives, requested help, and shared personal thoughts of the new government, as various POWs found themselves sent into the Russian Zone. Along with demonstrating the relationships between prisoners and Michigan farmers, this chapter focuses on the reluctance of prisoners to request assistance, while also showcasing the hardships of returning from war. Despite being enemies of the United States, the prisoners were still human beings, not just committed Nazis.

Prisoners began returning home in late 1945. However, the home they returned to was not the same place they had left in the early 1940s. Instead of growing cities, some were rubble. Dresden experienced firebombing, leaving little of the original structures. Karl Jung returned to Limburg Germany to find the town's cathedral still standing.[456] But this was not the case for all prisoners repatriated after the war. Jürgen Kracht returned and lived with his family in a ruined building. Bombing raids destroyed the original building.[457] The returning soldiers lost everything- their homes, their fortunes, and some, their families. They had nothing left. Jobs were sparse, food exorbitantly priced, and clothing was in short supply. Survival and living day-

[456] Karl Jung. *Correspondence between Karl Jung Family and Otto Herzog.* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. July 21, 1947.
[457] Jürgen Kracht. *Correspondence between Jürgen Kracht and Otto Herzog*. (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. September 19, 1948.

to-day became the most essential part of life. This created a sense of desperation in the former prisoners-of-war. To survive, they would reach out to those individuals who had assisted them in America. The citizens willingly gave extra food and other items while remaining captive in their country. Perhaps they would do the same to help them, now that the war was over.

As letters arrived from former prisoners requesting assistance and basics to live, the prisoners began with letters to explain their plight and to show they remembered their promise to Michigan farmers to write. Letters display that families who had requisitioned POW labor in Michigan during World War II sent over clothing, cigarettes, and canned food to assist their former "employees" from the labor program. This was partially done as humanitarian aid. Prisoners who returned from Germany entered a humanitarian crisis, as the American Military Government in Germany was unprepared to accept hundreds of thousands of returning troops. Not only were there food and fuel shortages, but it was also believed that seeing "devastated German cities and towns would "undoubtedly inflame" the returning prisoners."[458] Another element stemmed from the prisoners' relationships with their American managers. Because Michigan civilians saw the prisoners as men, an aspect that resulted in routine violations of War Department stipulations, friendships bloomed and Michigan farmers took a general interest in the lives of the prisoners, even after the war had ended.

By reviewing the letters sent back after the war through about 1950, it is possible to observe the transitional period in Germany, through the eyes of those soldiers and their families who had just returned from war. This section of the story concerning German POWs in America revealed the care Americans provided German prisoners. It can also expand the

[458] Arnold Krammer. *Nazi Prisoners-of-war in America.* (Scarbough, New York NY, 1996). 233.

interconnectedness of German-American relations. The United States did not exist in a vacuum. After the war's end, the United States, as well as other Allies assisted in the rebuilding of Europe. Germany was among those nations. With a desire to rebuild in peace after a devastating war that left millions dead and injured, supporting families trying to survive in hellish conditions was the "human" thing to do.

Michigan farmers rose to the occasion. Some farmers sent packages regularly, containing canned goods and other items, such as soap and clothing, both for the prisoners and their families. Each time, a letter came to update the prisoners on America. Many prisoners sent back letters, with humble requests or updates to the international political situations unfolding in Germany and the surrounding areas. As many of the Michigan German POWs returned to the area controlled by the Soviet Union, it also gives historians a glimpse into the conditions under Communism, a different ideological outlook than Americans were used to.

Friendly Correspondence

Germany's capitulation left the country stranded. Industries did not function. Farms and cities were left in ruins. Infrastructure and economic stability were nonexistent. Food and fuel shortages cast a gloomy shadow over the outlook of German citizens immediately following the end of World War II. Rebuilding the country would take work. One element to assist in the early reforms was the IHKs (*Industrie- und Handelskammer*).[459] Because these organizations were outside the control of the Nazi regime, they reformed themselves quickly to their pre-Nazi incorporations, defined through being "representative institutions of self-government with

[459] Chamber of Industry and Commerce. Cited in Diethelm Prowe. Economic Democracy in Post-World War Germany: Corporatist Crisis Response, 1945-1948". *The Journal of Modern History.* September 1985. vol 57, No. 3: 454. https://www.jstor.org/stable/18796688.

extensive public functions...completely autonomous and separate from the stat".”[460] This did not fix the totality of the problems in the German economy, but sped up the rebuilding process.

Central to the issue was food insecurity and supplies. The lack of food, both because of the high prices and lack of supplies, resulted in people living on starvation rations.[461] Assistance came through the Military Governments in place and the International Red Cross, but it was not enough to fix the situation. Food parcels sent from the United States to individual families helped on a familial level. The hyperinflation caused by the end of the war resulted in the Allies financing approximately 67% of imports, mostly food.[462] Historian, Arnold Krammer argues that the inflation was not as bad as the economic issues faced in Germany after World War II. They believed that the economy was relatively stable between 1945 and 1948, when the German economy started showing signs of recovery.[463] However, this did not make it easier for German citizens to survive. Without American benefactors, former German prisoners would have struggled to survive. Their continued support throughout the initial recovery period helped as they supplied food, clothing, and other essential goods while also providing a listening ear to families struggling in a foreign country.

After the war, Michigan farmers told the prisoners to write them after the war, as Heinz Kubier specifically noted "You told me to write you."[464] This care and concern of Americans to encourage the German prisoners helped them through the return home, and, sometimes, helped them survive the years immediately after World War II. Their gifts of clothes and food showed

[460] Prowe, (1985). 454.
[461] Ernst Kiefer. "Letter from Ernst Keifer to Mr. Royal" (1948). German Prisoners in WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan. January 23, 1948.
[462] Gabriella Barber and Emily T. Carlstrom. "The Impact of American Economic Aid on Post-World War II Germany". (2020). *Senior Theses.* https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/senior_theses/321. 6.
[463] Ibid.
[464] Heinz Kubier. "German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1946," Box 77. Berrien County Historical Society. Berrien Springs, Michigan. September 14, 1946.

this care, but also became a lifeline for many families who eagerly awaited a *Lebenspacket* (life package) from their American helpers.[465] Families established relationships as prisoners updated Americans on their hardships and conditions seen in Germany. Letters to American farmers came primarily during the years of 1946-1949, as various hardships existed immediately following the war's end. Roughly one hundred fifty letters remain scattered throughout the state of Michigan, which are instrumental in determining the hardships prisoners faced upon returning home after repatriation.

The letters received from the POWs varied. But they were all received by farmers throughout Michigan. Some had German heritage, allowing them the ability to communicate with prisoners, such as Otto Herzog and his family in Frankenmuth, Michigan. William Teichman and his family also shared German heritage, allowing for better communication between the prisoners and the farmers. Having children, the prisoners would interact with them and tell stories. Despite being enemies, many prisoners had children, and seeing children playing reminded them of their families left behind. Bill Bishop's farm was in Muskegon County (exact whereabouts unknown). He also had children and additional hired help, whom the prisoners recognized and became friendly with.

The prisoners stationed in the Upper Peninsula, wrote back to a local family. Mary Lee, whose husband owned the farm, received the letters. The prisoners remembered her husband, referred to as Captain Lee, because of a bear incident. According to one prisoner's letter, the

[465]Josef Knorr. "Letter from Josef Knorr to Oceana Canning Company." German Prisoners WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan. September 16, 1947.

American Captain kept two bears in cages near the Sidnaw camp.[466] They provided the prisoners with food, similar to other Michigan farmers in the Lower Peninsula of Michigan.

Written on November 24, 1946, Karl Schulz, a POW stationed in Berrien Springs, Michigan, described his current position and the limited knowledge of his family. Leaving the United States on March 13, he arrived in Antwerp, Belgium on March 23rd, 1946. Schulz remained there until they transferred him to England, where he worked on an agricultural farm, still designated as a POW. Karl described having a farm, before the war, in western "Prussia," near Danzig, noting that it is now part of Poland.[467] He explained that his wife and three children are in the British zone. When the Russians invaded, they left with nothing, and currently lived near Dusseldorf, Germany. They were without money or other basic life essentials. He contended he had gone through a "pointless war." Yet, he remembered fondly the times spent on the Teichman farm in the summer and fall of 1944. He had hoped to be returned to his family that Christmas (1946) but writes that it is not a possibility, and he reflects it did not feel like *Weihnachsten* [Christmas] when there is no family around.[468]

The prisoners cemented relationships with their employers, asking about their farms and reminiscing about the time spent employed on American soil. Kurt Schutz spent time housed in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Working under the command of William Teichman, he built a relationship with Teichman because of Teichman's knowledge of German. Writing just after Christmas 1947, December 28th, Kurt Schutz noted it had been three years since he had been a POW on the Teichman farm, showing he left the farm in 1944. However, this was not the end of

[466] Stefan Rozwadowski. "Letters from Rozwadowski to Thompson Family." 1997-1998. Sidnaw Historical Museum. Sidnaw, Michigan. February 8, 1948.
[467] Kurt Schutz. "German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1946." Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. November 24,1946.
[468] Ibid.

his story. Upon leaving the U.S., he spent time in an English (British) POW camp, finally being released to return home in August 1947.[469] Yet, Schutz also accused Russia and Poland of stealing his homeland.[470] Thankfully, he found his wife and children in the British Zone of Germany, but they were without money and other basic life essentials. Although a farmer by profession, there were no prospects for this. Instead, he worked in a factory as an Einsfabrik; However, before the holidays, he broke his leg in two places. He summarized this hard existence in his statement "Here in Germany, it looks sad; we all wait and hope for a better time."[471] His hard times continued, as he describes only being able to find items through the black market. Nothing is available, since he made his humble request. He asks that the family send old and worn-out clothes, especially for the children, ages 6-10.[472]

Another POW, stationed on the Teichman farm in Berrien Springs, also sent letters. Heinz Kubier, wrote on September 16, 1946, he was living with his aunt and uncle in Immendorf.[473] Approximately 10 months earlier, he had worked on the Teichman farm picking peaches. Separated from his parents, they now lived in the Russian Zone. He wrote, "I have been discharging on 4th of July and am now a civilian."[474] Yet, life was still difficult as "Now we are very poor men, because our house is bombed and everything is burned. But only one thing I have

[469] Kurt Schutz. "German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1946." Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. December 28, 1947.
[470] Ibid.
[471]"Hier in Deutschland sieht es sehr Traurig aus; wir alle warten und Hoffen auf eine bessere Zeit." Kurt Schutz. "German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1946." Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. December 28, 1947.
[472] Ibid.
[473] Heinz Kubier. "German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1946," Box 77. Berrien County Historical Society. Berrien Springs, Michigan. September 14, 1946.
[474] Ibid.

is my health, and that's what me makes happy."[475] Also asked for cigarettes, he finished his letter thanking Teichman for his generosity "in advance."[476]

While some prisoners exchanged correspondence for years, Georg, a POW held in Berrien Springs, only sent one letter. He wrote a brief note to the Teichman family from Worms on November 6, 1946. Stationed on the Teichman farm during the year 1944 – 1945, he worked picking crops. Writing to both "Mr. and Mrs. Teichman", as well as the "dear children", he states "First let me send you greetings, and do not think have forgotten [*sic*] you. Instead, I think of you often."[477]

Correspondence arrived from the families of former POWs to Michigan farmers as well. Herma Jirka, Rudi Jirka's wife, a former POW on Otto Herzog's farm in Frankenmuth, wrote, she "... feel[s] the need to spill out my heart in thankfulness to you, dear good Uncle Herzog, even if I don't know you personally. Our German language is rich in expressions, but I still don't find words to tell you how I feel, how thankful I feel."[478] One letter dated September 4, 1948, explained that little Otto, Herzog's namesake, was now seven months old. Arriving on September 14, 1948, Jirka noted that times in Germany remained bleak. She described her situation as follows:

> The next worry is the clothing for the coming winter. We can get everything but it is very expensive. The wages are just enough for groceries and even not enough for that. I believe, my dear Uncle Herzog, you can hardly imagine my situation I am in. We see full display windows and can't afford to buy things.[479]

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[475] Ibid.
[476] Ibid.
[477] Georg. "German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1946". November 6, 1946. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. November 6, 1946.
[478] Ibid.
[479] Rudi Jirka. *Correspondence between Rudi Jirka and Otto Herzog.* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. September 4, 1948.

Jürgen Kracht, also worked on the Teichman farm in 1945. His first letter dated January 15th, 1947, Jürgen Kracht described himself as "a POW, working with my comrades in the sugar beet harvest for you and we all promised to write you. A while ago already, I wrote to Hans Ulrich and asked him to give you, my regards."[480] He could not give an update on his comrades, as they were all separated upon leaving the farm. He is not doing well, as "Hunger and cold are our daily companions, added to which is each person's personal sorrow."[481] One sorrow he mentioned was his required return to university, as he cannot be a pilot, his career before the war.

Otto Ruf, another POW, stationed in Berrien Springs, also requested items from Teichman in his letter, dated December 15, 1946, he requested a photograph, from his time on the farm, as the one he had taken into Germany, military officials confiscated, citing censorship.[482] He wanted to share his experiences with his family. Noting that "Heimat, welch ein schones Wort,"[483] he returned home to find his family, but was very sad about German living conditions.[484] He claimed conditions were worse in Germany that he expected and discussed, yet he is sure that Mr. Teichman would know of these conditions from the "Amerikanische Zeitungen [American newspapers]."[485] Prisoners reported that conditions in Germany were not great. Germany's economy was faltering with inflation extremely high, and the country had six times more money in circulation because of deficit spending.[486] The influx of foreign aid helped

[480] Jürgen Kracht. *Correspondence between Jürgen Kracht and Otto Herzog*. (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. January 15, 1947.
[481] Ibid.
[482] Otto Ruf. "German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1946." Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. December 15, 1946.
[483] Home such a great word.
[484] Ruf. December 15, 1946.
[485] American Newspapers. Ibid.
[486] Barber and Carlstrom. 5.

stabilize the country and allowed citizens to recover economically. But it still did not diminish all of their troubles right away.

The economic troubles were not heavily on Otto Ruf's mind as he began his journey home. His journey home took until 1946, though the war ended in May 1945. This was the case for various POWs, as reparation took time. While waiting, the United States continued to use the labor from the camps as they moved the prisoners eastward to begin the journey home. Otto Ruf's journey began after leaving the camp in Hartford, Michigan, one within about ten miles of Berrien Springs. Leaving this area in November 1944, he said they had reassigned him to fell trees in northern Michigan and noted that the camp was near Green Bay.

Geographically, the only camp close to Green Bay, Wisconsin in Michigan, would be Camp Sidnaw. However, no camp rolls exist to determine if Otto Ruf also spent time in this camp. He left the tree assignment in February 1945, when he transferred to Fort Sheridan, Illinois, followed by another transfer in December 1945 to Fort McCoy in Wisconsin. He waited there until June 1946, when he waited for transfer again to Fort Custer, Michigan, followed by a trip to New York, where he remained in a holding camp. Leaving New York by ship, he traveled for nine days until reaching France. Spending four weeks in a camp in France, he could finally return home in August 1946.[487]

The decision to keep prisoners in foreign camps after the war was due partially because of economic instability of Germany and other European countries after the war. Another reason revolved around punishment for the German people, who had drawn the world into a war. Because Germany started the war, and military authorities discovered human rights violations in

[487] Ruf, December 15, 1946.

the concentration camps, the victors believed that the German people should be made to suffer. As more information came to light about concentration camps deaths, the general belief of a concentration camp's educational value diminished. It was no longer accepted that German civilians and soldiers were unaware of the morality behind German government policy. Historians have uncovered that many civilians and soldiers knew of the concentration camps. Those who served on the Eastern Front participated in the killing of Jews and others. The German government placed the concentration camps in cities and prisoners would work in the local factories. Instead, Ian Kershaw argued that self-preservation won over denouncing the German government as an explanation of why civilians and soldiers who knew of the killings did not speak up.[488]

While some prisoners repatriated to Germany, others spent time in foreign camps. Yet, even upon returning to Germany, some POWs found their families separated and living as refugees. Fritz Kaehne, a POW, had spent time stationed on Otto Herzog's farm in Frankenmuth. He began some correspondence in 1949, lasting until 1950. Fritz's wife wrote the first surviving letter. She started her letter by sending them Christmas greetings and wished them a happy new year. Referring to other letters that had not survived, she noted that she and her husband were refugees from East Prussia. They had lost everything; "in 5 minutes we were totally poor. We were only initiated in our young marriage two years ago."[489] She had fled with a small child, their son Dieter, with the clothes on their backs and a handbag, in thirty-two-degree weather. It was a scary and difficult time, but she maintained her faith, writing,

[488] Ian Kershaw. *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). 8-11.
[489] Fritz Kaehne. *Correspondence between Fritz Kaehne and Otto Herzog.* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. January 19, 1949.

> Yes, God put hard times on us but with God's help we can fight though it; today we still are fighting through it. But I truly believe God sees that we don't give up and [we remain] true and faithful in our belief in Him. With Him we will stand the test again and He will help us, and God sent a big help already. He kept my husband well.[490]

Thankfully, she found her husband, and it thrilled him, she kept the child safe, as "many mothers lost their children in the escape."[491] Although this happened four years prior, she mentions that she "cannot forget because we ended up so poor in every way."[492] She has also been ill, but not because of a shrinking diet.

While Kaehne's family reunited, Hans Schmid experienced additional labor camps in France. Hans Schmid wrote two letters to Bill Bishop and his family in Muskegon County: one in 1947 and another on April 16, 1948. His letter in 1947 described how he had left America in 1946. However, he did not return home. He first became a prisoner in France.[493] He thanked Bishop for the care packages he received, referring to Bishop as his "American oncle (*sic*)."[494] The harvest in Germany was poor, leading to terrible food in the country and fewer rations available for the people. He requested a photo of Bishop and of the POWs to share with his family. The second letter, dated April 1948, offers more familiarity. After receiving the most recent care package, he returned the favor by sending stamps to Bill's son Dick.[495] At the time of Schmid's letter, the Marshall Plan was coming into effect and was bringing changes to Germany.

Letters for Aid

Upon their return to Germany, the prisoners wrote back to their American "employers." Many letters detail their hardships of returning to Germany, locating family, and attempting to

[490] Ibid.
[491] Kaehne, January 19, 1949.
[492] Ibid.
[493] Hans Schmiel. Letter to Bill Bishop from Hans Schmid. (1947) Lakeshore Museum, Muskegon, Michigan. September 26, 1947.
[494] Ibid.
[495] Ibid.

live after the country's fall. Yet, in these letters, camaraderie and hope still survived. A good deal of assistance was requested, such as food and other items, because of the cost or lack of availability in Germany. Without the lines between enemy and friend being blurred, prisoners would be less likely to propose help. Yes, the prisoners were desperate upon returning home and seeing their country in ruins. However, without an established acquaintanceship, asking an enemy for help seemed outrageous.

The *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle) that took place in Germany from the late 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s was due to the influx of foreign aid following World War II helped the German economy to recover. Yet, it was not without drawbacks; as the Marshall Plan came into effect and a new currency reform was enacted, former prisoners described their lack of faith in the system. Else Jung stated her family lost everything, as the government adjusted the Deutschmark's value.[496] Jürgen Kracht lamented that with the currency reform, the "little people" lost everything and could only earn enough for a simple life, compared to the capitalists. According to Kracht, the capitalist already had much and lived like high rollers. But he also did not see where he could complain or get angry, as they (the people) could change nothing.[497] Initially assisting the German government with building roads and helping on the railroads and telephone systems, the United States government required that the Germans take control of their economic restructuring. As foreign powers ruled the economic sector of Germany following its collapse, rebuilding economy was difficult. The narrative stated that immediately following the end of the war, the ruined economy sent the country into chaos, while creating an anti-capitalist, socialist push for economic stability. The "plans were far less revolutionary...more consensus-

[496] Else Jung. *Correspondence between Karl Jung Family and Otto Herzog.* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. July 22, 1948.
[497] Kracht, July 21, 1947.

orientated," allowing the country to determine its economic choices as foreign powers relinquished control. [498] The passage of the currency reform in 1946 "helped to control many of the inflation-related problems", such as food prices and the black market.[499] It also helped increase consumption and production, stimulating the economy to begin the recovery process.[500]

However, before the full overhaul of currency reform, prisoners continued to reach out to Americans for assistance. Another family that received letters were the Bartzs, a local Michigan family in Berrien Springs. Although their farm was smaller than the Teichman's, they also requisitioned POW labor. The surviving letters are few, but they still give details of the prisoners' return and the struggles they endured after the war.

Liesel Schlitt wrote on February 23, 1948, about how she felt embarrassed. She was ashamed of having to write a "begging letter." Yet she was desperate for help. Asking the Bartz family of Berrien Springs, Michigan, if they could send her the address of an American family who would help support them, she asks them to send packages for their general well-being.[501] They needed food for a growing girl. "My daughter goes to school from 6am-3pm and is always hungry," she writes.[502]

She shared her life story to help the family understand her predicament. Born in Hanover, she grew up and married a chemist. Her brother, the POW working on the American's farm, discussed his experiences there. He said he "felt good there" and that he would write once he

[498] Diethelm Prowe. "Economic Democracy in Post-World War Germany: Corporatist Crisis Response, 1945-1948". *The Journal of Modern History.* September 1985. (vol 57, No. 3). https://www.jstor.org/stable/18796688. 452.
[499] Gabriella Barber and Emily T. Carlstrom. "The Impact of American Economic Aid on Post-World War II Germany". (2020). *Senior Theses.* https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/senior_theses/321. 9
[500] Ibid.
[501] Liesel Schlitt. "World War II Prisoner-of-war Letters to Henry and Edwin Bartz, 1946-1949." Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. February 23, 1948.
[502] Ibid.

returned home from Germany.[503] Liesel reports he had lost various possessions, and she was unwilling to asked Bartz for assistance, as they may wish to send something to her brother.[504] In addition, she reported that although the family had moved to Berlin, the war forced her and her daughter to flee to Bodenwerder, while most of their possessions stayed behind.[505] She was currently a single mother, as her husband could only visit on weekends, because of his job.

Despite being written over seventy years ago, her embarrassment is obvious. She did not like writing to Americans to request help. She was even uncomfortable with asking the Bartz family for information and felt that she could not ask them to support both her and her brother. She was desperate for assistance, as she had nothing left. Seeing the country with nothing, the cities laid to waste, exorbitant food prices, and no employment, must have been terrifying for a young mother. Food prices were the hardest to deal with. In 1938, the price of butter (around 500 grams) was 1.57 DM. By November 1945, this had increased to 1.80DM. However, in the British Zone and Berlin in 1947, these prices had skyrocketed, nearly two hundred times higher, with prices ranging from 240-250DM and 250-350DM, respectively.[506] These prices made it extremely difficult for families and individuals to feed themselves, making them reliant on foreign parcels, the International Red Cross, and foreign investment to stabilize inflation.

Willi Güde, another POW, working on the Bartz farm in Berrien Springs, also reached out for help. Writing his letter in response to a note from the Bartz family on February 3, 1948, he said he was glad to hear they were doing well. “I remember when you only had one boy,” he

[503] Ibid.
[504] Ibid.
[505] Schlitt. February 23, 1948.
[506] Barber and Carlstrom (2020). 6.

wrote, and he "wishes to be with them, working on their farm."[507] Currently in Great Britain, he doubted he will return to Germany, as he needed a fresh start. He explained that all his family had perished in the war. However, he had one request: he asked if the family would send a few old clothes. He believed he was the same size as Henry Bartz. "Shirts, jackets and stockings" were specific special requests, given the difficulty in procuring those items in Germany.[508]

The Wilhelm family also continued writing to American farmers, writing to the Teichman family in Berrien Springs, Michigan. In a letter dated January 13th, 1948, they wished the family a happy new year. Yet, the father writing the letter was not a POW on Teichman's farm during the war. Rather, he describes himself as a "unknown soldier," one who got Teichman's address from a comrade who had worked on the farm.[509] Wilhelm was married with a wife, forty-two years old; a son of fifteen, and a daughter, aged eighteen. As his comrade had already written Teichman for a request, he put together his "begging letter," requesting that Teichman send food and clothes. He described his situation, "If we can emigrate, because my wife is a half-breed and we have the advantage of being able to emigrate: in the hope of not having done anything wrong and that it is God's will to protect my family from hardship and misery."[510] Noting his wife is a "Mischling"[511], a "half-breed," in Nazism terms, he hoped he could leave the country to avoid misery and hardship.[512] This is a surprising element to admit, even in a "begging letter". Because of the emphasis on blood under the Nazi regime, "blood

[507] Willi Gude. "World War II Prisoner-of-war Letters to Henry and Edwin Bartz, 1946-1949". Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. February 10, 1948.
[508] Gude, February 10, 1948.
[509] Wilhelm Family. "German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1947" Collection. Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. January 13, 1948.
[510] Ibid. "Wenn mann Auswandern kann, da meine Frau Mischling and wir den vorzug haben zu auswandern können: in der Hoffnung, kein fehlbitte getan zu haben und es Gottes Wille ist um meine Familie vor Not und Elend zu schützen"
[511] Nazi definition for someone who is half-Jewish.
[512] Ibid.

statuses" had already been determined. However, as noted in Victor Klemperer's autobiography during the war, it may have spared some of the pain for his wife.[513] Other Christians of Jewish descent could not avoid persecution.

As Nazism rose, an invisible war began between the German churches and the government. The central division of Protestant and Catholic sects was a primary target, as the government attempted to create a national, unified church with doctrinal tenants aligned with National Socialism.[514] This attempt failed. Doris Bergen argues the failure resulted from antisemitism in the Christian churches. As Robert Erickesen stated, the congregants were unwilling to speak up for their neighbors out of fear, resulting in a type of complacency.[515] Both congregants of Catholic and Protestant churches could practice their faith and support the German government. There was an underlying fear of those of the Jewish religion, as well as of Communists. But this fear did not stop resistance against the national church which the government suggested.[516]

The Christian church in Germany, spent much of its time compromising with Nazi ideology. However, there was also resistance to the Nazi regime by the Churches as individuals attempted to live up to the moral Christian values they believed in. One famous Nazi resister was Dietrich Bonhoffer. He would resist the Nazi government and assist the Jewish community; he

[513] See Victor Klemperer's books, *I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years, 1939-1945*.
[514] Doris L. Bergen. "Catholics, Protestants, and Christian Antisemitism in Nazi Germany". *Central European History*. Vol. 27, no. 3. (1994): 339. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4546438.
[515] Robert P. Ericksen. "Resistance or complicity? Balancing assessments of German churches under Nazism" *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte.* Neue Fragen und Sichtweisen auf den Widerstand. Kirche und Gesellschaft in Skandinavien und auf dem europäischen Festland / Resistance revisited and requestioned. Church and society in Scandinavia and Europe Vol. 28, no. 2 (2015), pp. 248-249. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24713117.
[516] Franklin F. Littell. "The German Churches in the Third Reich". *Yad Vashem.* Sourced from: Carol Rittner, Stephen D. Smith & Irena Steinfeldt, The Holocaust and the Christian World, Yad Vashem 2000, pp. 44-47. https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/academic/the-german-churches-in-the-third-reich.html.

was later executed or his faith.[517] Another form of resistance was survival. As individuals survived the concentration camps, they kept their faith and culture. One group would retain their culture but convert to Christianity. Known today as "Messianic Jews", many of these individuals spent time in concentration camps, while continuing to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.[518]

Despite attempts to eradicate a religious sect and combine religion in Germany into one organization, Hitler and the Nazi government failed. As prisoners returned home, the conditions of their friends and families were unhappy with the choices of the preceding government. Not all prisoners would disclose faith or familial blood status in their letters, as they asked for American assistance. Some POWs shared stories to help Americans remember them. Walter Hessing, another POW stationed on William Teichman's farm, also sent correspondence spanning years, elaborating on the conditions seen in the war-torn country. Hessing, writing first in January 1947, identified himself as the POW who rode on the front fender of the car, to and from the prisoner camp in Coloma, Michigan. Although the family-owned farmland was in Berrien Springs, the camp in Coloma was the closest sub-camp to the property. He stated he fixed the *Sprechenmachine* (telephone) for the family.[519] He began the journey home in January 1946. But he wanted to remain working on Teichman's farm. He stated Teichman wanted to keep him on his farm as part of another unit of five men, before he transferred to work on the neighboring farm of "Herr" Domenick Stuffle.[520] His return to Germany was unrecorded, but he mentioned

[517] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "The German Churches and the Nazi State." *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. (2021). https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-german-churches-and-the-nazi-state. See also Eberhard Bethge's *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography.* Or Dietrich Bonhoeffer's, *The Cost of Discipleship.*
[518] Aaron Abrahamson. "What Happened to Jewish Believers in Jesus in Nazi Germany?" *Jews for Jesus.* (2016). https://jewsforjesus.org/blog/what-happened-to-jewish-believers-in-jesus-in-nazi-germany
[519] Walter Hessig. "German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1947". Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. January 15, 1947.
[520] Ibid.

how sad he was to see the condition of Germany. He hoped to return to America, but only when both his wife and son could join him. It was currently impossible for the family to leave Germany; and when it be possible, he would be too old.[521] He must "live on in misery," though he places the blame on other men. Nevertheless, he had promised to write to Teichman, and was, thus, fulfilling his promise.[522]

Franz Armbruster, another prisoner, wrote back to Bill Bishop on June 4th, 1947, to share stories and ask for help. Bishop, a farmer in Muskegon and the surrounding areas, had POWs work on his farm during 1944 and 1945. Not much biographical information survived describing Armbruster, but he interacted with the hired help on Bishop's farm. Armbruster was thankful he found his wife and son healthy once he returned from the war. He remembered his excellent treatment on the farm as the food and rations in Germany were horrible. Everything fell under a ration, he wrote. The German government only allocated him fifty grams of fat a month and there was no coffee, sugar, or flour.[523] He predicted many people would die of hunger in Germany because of a lack of food. As a personal touch, he explained his son had his first communion. But the celebration was dismal, as there was no cake, shoes or socks for the boy to enjoy this milestone.[524]

George Brandenstein, another POW stationed in the Muskegon area, also sent a brief note to Bishop. Little information survived in the archives, except he had just returned home in April 1948 to Germany, showing that he was a POW in a foreign country after repatriation from

[521] Ibid.
[522] Hessig, January 15, 1947.
[523] Franz Armbruster. Letter from Franz Armbruster to Bill Bishop. (1947). Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan. June 4, 1947.
[524] Ibid.

the United States.[525] Heinz Krimphove, another POW in the group sent to Bishop's farm, also wrote back to Bill Bishop on May 11, 1947. He had worked on the farm during September 1945.[526] His quick note explained he returned home to Germany but was first imprisoned under the French. His home had perished; and he had little chance of getting a job. Because of this, he asked how he could come to the United States after his discharge.[527]

Along with letters written to farmers in Muskegon, Frankenmuth, and Berrien Springs, letters describing prisoners' conditions have also survived in Oceana County, Michigan. These surviving letters showed friendships, desperation, and the hardships faced upon a prisoner's return home. The prisoners employed at the two camps in Oceana County, one at the Shelby High School Football field and the other at the Hart Fairgrounds, traveled to local farms to pick fruit or work in the Royal Canning Factory. Today, the sites of the plants are owned by Petersen Farms. Returning from Germany, six former POWs described their appreciation to "Mr. Royal" and their treatment in Michigan.

The Royal family owned the Oceana Canning Company and was well-respected in Oceana County. Being a farming family, they took pity on the soldiers, seeing them as men, rather than enemies. The family did not speak German, as evidenced by the surviving letters (they remain untranslated professionally), and communication was difficult. However, a neighbor could speak and read German, as the area around Oceana County contained various residents of German heritage.

[525] George Brandenstein. Collection of Letters from George Brandenstein to Bill Bishop. (1948). Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan. April 5, 1948.
[526] Heinz Krimphove. "German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1946" Box 77. Berrien County Historical Society. Berrien Springs, Michigan. May 11, 1947.
[527] Krimphove. May 11, 1947.

Josef Knorr wrote a letter in September 1947. One of the earliest letters, Knorr expressed he wanted to show the "faults" experienced in Germany.[528] He had returned home, but he would gladly come back to America because he was always hungry. To help Mr. Royal remember him, he described himself as the POW who "kept your factory so carefully and painfully neat."[529] There was a great need in Germany, Knorr explained. There were no clothes, shoes, stockings, or food. He requested Mr. Royal to send him a *Liebepacket* (care package), such as preserves and canned goods, since he was struggling to make money.[530]

Willy Buck wrote to Mr. Royal in 1948. Willy called himself the "little German boy," as a way for Mr. Royal to remember that he worked for 4 months at Camp Shelby.[531] He claimed that the best time of his life as a prisoner was in Shelby working in the factory. Buck thanked Royal for the help given as a prisoner, and he shared the poor conditions in Germany. In 1946, Willy Buck left the military but returned home to a ruined Germany. He wrote that conditions were dreadful, leading to a desire to return to the United States. Buck called it a "fortress of peace."[532] Living in the French Zone, he did not have enough to eat or clothes, a similar predicament described by other German POWs who wrote back to Michigan. In Germany he saw sufficient ruins of a "lost war that begun with the Nazis."[533] Finishing with the United States is a "very lucky country," he desired to stay (i.e., return and live in America).[534]

Many POWs wished to return to America. Willi Weiskrichen was another POW who wrote back in 1947. He had decorated the office of Mr. Royal at the Oceana Canning Company

[528] Knorr. September 16, 1947.
[529] Ibid.
[530] Knorr. September 16, 1947.
[531] Willy Buck. Letters from Wily Buck to Mr. Royal. (1948). German Prisoners in WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan. March 7, 1948.
[532] Ibid.
[533] Ibid.
[534] Ibid.

in 1944.[535] He was a painter. On July 20, 1947, he arrived home from the British Zone.[536] He had spent two years under American captivity and one year under the British. He described severe conditions at home in Germany, and much hunger. Because of this, he wanted to get out of the country, as the conditions were "catastrophic."[537]

In 1948, Ernst Kiefer wrote to Mr. Royal to update him. In a letter dated September 17th, 1948, he described working on Royal's farm and in the factory during 1944.[538] As he left in Autumn, he had promised to write. From Michigan, he journeyed to New Mexico and then transferred to North Carolina. He returned to Germany in 1947 but was very sad to see his homeland. The towns lay in ruins and the food in the country was rationed low at about 800 calories a day.[539] His current job was working in his father's vineyard. He claimed the military authorities forbade citizens from sending packages abroad, so he could not fulfill his wish to send the Royal family homemade German wine. He expressed desire to return to America and work on farms, similar to jobs he performed as a POW.[540]

Another POW, the Hungarian, Robert Forster, wrote to Mr. Royal. He had worked with Arthur Taetz and carried a photo as a souvenir.[541] Written on November 17, 1948, he remembered his "treasured house," but feared that he probably would not see it again, nor another house like it, because of damage in Leipzig, his hometown.[542] Leipzig was in the Russian

[535] Willi Weiskrichen. "Letter from Willi Weiskirchen to Mr. Royal." (1947). German Prisoners WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan.
[536] Ibid.
[537] Weiskirchen, 1947.
[538] Ernst Kiefer. "Letter from Ernst Keifer to Mr. Royal" (1948). German Prisoners in WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan. January 23, 1948.
[539] Ibid.
[540] Ibid.
[541] Robert Forster. "Letter from Robert Forster to Mr. Royal." (1948). German Prisoners in WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan. November 17, 1948.
[542] Ibid.

Zone, and Forster described how, even three years after the war, the people were still living hand to mouth. Christmas was approaching, but there was not enough to eat.[543] He was very thankful for the packages sent from Royal and other American benefactors because he had no clothes to wear. He had lost everything, including his apartment. He required additional support, "just a little something," as he could not purchase anything because of the high prices for all the items.[544] Forster's situation was similar to many other POWs, who described poor food, economic, and clothing situations.

Richard Blessing wrote to Mr. Royal on November 27, 1949. Blessing left American shores on January 19th, 1946, as he repatriated home. But he did not return home. Instead, he arrived in France on February 2nd, 1946, where he worked on a farm as a prisoner until May 1948.[545] Mr. Royal made a good impression on Blessing and said he took good care of him. Upon returning home, he returned to work at his old company on December 8th, as he had previously worked there for twenty-five years.[546] Yet, returning home was not without its problems. As reported by many other POWs, all items in Germany were very expensive. It was hard to buy food, and it was even worse to find it.[547] Low rations and poor harvests took a toll on the country's ability to provide adequate nutrition to its citizens. Buying clothes was another difficulty because of the high costs. He claimed he had not been able to buy these items for the last nine years, leading an acute need.[548]

[543] Ibid.
[544] Buck, March 7, 1948.
[545] Richard Blessing. Collection of Letters from Richard Blessing to Mr. Royal. (1949). Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan. November 27, 1949.
[546] Ibid.
[547] Ibid.
[548] Ibid.

Paul Schulein wrote back to families in Sidnaw, Michigan. Everything in Germany was difficult, as they needed more food and clothing.[549] He would be very grateful to have some old clothes from the states, as well as use his 147-pound check to buy food and other necessities. The check had not yet arrived, and he requested food, clothing or for Lee to investigate his check situation.[550] He wrote letters in February and December 1948.[551] The previous letter and package had arrived in an undamaged condition. He was very thankful for the shortening and sweaters that were sent. Receiving a sweater was very helpful, as winter had arrived and he had to walk 1 ½ hours to work each day.[552] He worked on the railroad, but his earnings were less than what he made as a POW, he claimed. He thanked him for the offer to help him come to the United States, but he was unwilling to leave his parents, who he could help survive the poor conditions in the American zone by working.[553] With plans to continue working on learning more English to write better letters, he mentioned American soldiers were arriving every day to allow him the opportunity to continue learning the language.

Schulein's second letter, dated December 16th, 1948, thanked Lee "for all this sign of friendship, which is a great help to me."[554] The food situation was still dire. Sugar, wheat and milk were in short supply. Yet, there was good news. His brother had returned home from the Russian Zone as a captive.[555] They had held him since 1945. Schulein continued working for the railroad, but he now lived in a different country. Politically, "my nearby home country change to France...There is now a border beedwen [between] my friends inside Germany and here."[556]

[549] Willi Schumann. "Mary Lee Letters." Sidnaw Historical Museum. September 16, 1947.
[550] Schumann, September 16, 1947
[551] Paul Schulein. "Mary Lee Letters." February 23, 1948. Sidnaw Historical Museum.
[552] Ibid.
[553] Ibid.
[554] Schulein. December 16, 1948
[555] Ibid.
[556] Ibid.

Thanking the Lees for their support, he was very grateful for their help and willingness to share their provisions with him abroad.

The Kraft farm in Sparta, Michigan, also requisitioned POWs. The community was leery about bringing POWs into the area, as many families had sons and brothers in the war.[557] To ease their fears, Howard Bibbitt of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reported to the local newspapers that the POWs were "not criminals and village residents need not worry about their safety or the possibility of escape".[558] Kraft could speak German, as documented by his letter. However, a one prisoner noted that he could not read the language, prompting letters in broken English.[559]

Karl Kleff was a POW in Sparta, Michigan, at the farm of Marvin Kraft during the 1944 harvest season. First writing back in 1947, he stated he had worked on the farm during August and September 1944. He was away from home for 3 ½ years, but, Kraft treated him fairly while he worked for him.[560] After the war, he found his family healthy, but said daily living was getting worse, similar to the conditions outlined by Karl Jung and other Michigan-held POWs.[561] "Wherever you look there is nothing, we live from hand to mouth", Kleff writes, requesting a care package from the Kraft family hoped to ease some of their predicament. They sent care packages, as the local historical society notes. In these surviving letters, Kraft even sent an old suit to Karl Kleff for his wedding attire.[562] Like Jung's letters, Kleff stated that there were products to buy; there was no shortage, but the prices were too high for an average German,

[557] "A Message from the Camp." *Holland City News.* October 1944.
[558] Jim Mencarelli. "The Peach Ridge P.O.W.S." *The Grand Rapid Press*. September 15, 1974. 2.
[559] Karl Kleff. Collection of letters from Karl Kleff to Melvin Kraft. (1947-1948). Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan. July 1, 1947.
[560] Kleff. undated
[561] Ibid.
[562] Ibid.

keeping items out of reach. He asked about Kraft's opinion on world politics. He thought Russia was in a critical situation, as he wrote the Russians are the "enemy for all Christian people." His belief was that the Russian people wanted no church. In Kleff's opinion, this was bad for everyone.[563] The story of Richard Wurmbrand corroborated Kleff's opinion.

A resident of the Soviet Union, he endured years of solitary confinement and physical punishment in the Gulags for his faith. The Communists "took possessions from everyone." The capitalists were dispossessed and the poor people in the population also suffered exorbitantly.[564] Wurmbrand reflected that nearly everyone had a family member in prison. Christianity in the Soviet Union required the creation of underground churches. Active persecution and threats of violence forbade people from helping those family members sent to prison for practicing and preaching Christianity. Wurmbrand's own son Mihai, became an orphan, as the Soviet Union jailed both of his parents. The woman who attempted to help him also suffered beatings and served a prison sentence.[565]

Although not a primary component of the letters to Americans, former prisoners and their families felt safe sharing their political views and faith. For those prisoners in the Soviet Union, sharing this faith was risky and resulted in prison or many severe beatings. Yet, the prisoners proved they would persevere and continue living their lives, regardless of their circumstances. Assistance from the Americans helped save their lives, but their faith sustained them.

Care Packages to German POWs

As farmers saw letters begging for help, various families and individuals sent care packages back to former POWs. Otto Herzog, a farmer in Frankenmuth, Michigan (aka "Little

[563] Kleff, October 17, 1948.
[564] Richard Wurmbrand. *Tortured for Christ.* (Voice of the Martyrs, Bartlesville, OK, 1967). 28.
[565] Ibid. 45.

Bavaria"), employed German POWs during the war. Having a basic understanding of the German language, he could converse with the prisoners and request that they write back to him. Not only did he save the letters, but the Frankenmuth Historical Association also received the logbooks detailing his care packages that were sent to various families in Germany.[566] The correspondence between Herzog and many prisoners, translated and stored, some spanning decades, demonstrated the relationships established between Herzog and the men.

Rudi Jirka, a former POW, began correspondence with Otto Herzog in 1947. The first letter dated July 15, 1947, updated Herzog on his situation. Otto Herzog wrote it arrived at his home on July 22nd, 1947. Jirka had received a package. Inside were two packages of cigarettes, two chocolates, sugar and a jar of honey. They also found a can of syrup, which had opened, soaking the contents.[567] They appreciated the contents, as Rudi's mother had just left the hospital the previous week. She had four operations, which had weakened her.[568] Rudi and his wife, Herma, were expecting a child. However, he was apprehensive, as he lamented "what that means in these hard times, I can only blame myself." They do not have any supplies for the baby; clothing and soap were also in short supply. Jirka asked, "If you could help us a little in this case, we would be very appreciative and thankful." The baby was due in February, and that year, considered the coldest winter in a long time, demonstrated the family's desperate need. They had no supplies and were asking the family for any assistance they could give. They even requested

[566] Otto Herzog. *Collection Books.* (February 24, 1947). Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. February 24, 1947.
[567] Rudi Jirka. *Correspondence between Rudi Jirka and Otto Herzog.* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. July 15, 1948.
[568] Ibid.

help from other families as "Maybe you can ask some neighbor farmers if they have a little to spare for the start of our coming baby."[569]

Otto responded to Rudi, writing as a salutation, "Liebe Freund." Writing to Rudi, he discussed the baby's name, Otto. Herzog wrote, "Now, even if I am not a grandfather, ha, ha, we just have to wait to see if it will be a boy. With the name Otto, you can't change much. If you start with the last O then it is still Otto, ha, ha."[570] Herzog shared his humor of hearing of Rudi and his wife naming their son after him because of Rudi's experiences in America. Naming their child after an American employer shows that there was a special bond between them. Herzog must have made an impression on young Rudi.

On September 19th, 1947, a letter arrived from Rudi Jirka, expressing thanks for "all these baby clothes for our new arrival. At the same time, we received the first care package. A hundred thousand thanks for it."[571] According to Jirka, "We jumped in the air with the little baby clothes."[572] The family had been struggling, only able to buy "the most necessary and simple things."[573] Both Jirka's wife and mother were doing well. They asked to see if Herzog would accept being the baby's sponsor. Jirka was very thankful for this connection with Herzog. He noted that "My mother always says: "Herzog is a replacement for my husband who passed away." Now if you were here, all of us would hug you and wouldn't let you go."[574] Rudi and his

[569] Ibid.
[570] Otto Herzog. *Correspondence from Otto Herzog to 'Liebe Freunde.'* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. FHA 95.40.281A-E. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. September 4, 1947.
[571] Jirka, September 12, 1947.
[572] Ibid.
[573] Ibid.
[574] Ibid.

family showed gratitude and expressed personal things, particularly in their living conditions, which would have been hard to admit, as humans are proud and want to be independent.

In June 1948, the Jirka family sent a brief note, where Rudi enclosed a picture of his wife and son and explained, "I had a chance to take a picture of my wife and little Otto. It did not turn out well, but I hope you and your family will enjoy it. In the picture you can see my wife made a blouse out of the apron you sent."[575] His family was still ill, but the gifts from "Uncle Herzog" helped. Rudi continued writing in July 1948, describing life. "All my hopes to receive some mail from you are without success, but with great joy, we received a package a few days ago from you."[576] His wife had lost weight, and his mother was also very ill, with little hope of getting better.

Another letter on September 20, 1948, expressed gratitude as "another sign of life came," a package from Herzog containing 7 cans of beef and navy beans.[577] In addition, he followed up with a description of little Otto, "your name carrier" writing: "He is 8 months old and pretty big. It is easy for him to sit and stand alone. If the progress goes along as nice, he will start walking soon. He has 4 teeth. Most of the time he is happy, as long as he is healthy."[578] The family finished the letter with a note that Jirka hoped to hear from Herzog, as "all my letters were unanswered."[579] Correspondence between them diminished, but the packages continued to arrive, allowing the family some help in their difficult times. These familial details, even naming their son after an American farmer, represent a friendship, or close relationship.

[575] Jirka, June 20, 1948.
[576] Ibid.
[577] Jirka, September 20, 1948.
[578] Ibid.
[579] Ibid.

Another letter arrived, dated November 13, 1948, from Rudi Jirka and his family. Jirka noted he had finally received a letter from Herzog, who told him "It brought joy to us."[580] Sadly, the update on Jirka's mother was not pleasant, as he had no choice but to admit her into a nursing home, as "they told me that terminal ill people can only go a nursing home. I had to do that. There is no way out."[581] Grocery prices remain extremely high. Milk, lard, and meat were luxuries that were in short supply. Jirka's wages are not enough for groceries; his wife rarely could purchase vegetables. Everything was very expensive. "The stores are full of things but only for the ones that have money enough to pay high prices. A worker can only look at the display windows."[582] High-priced items, a result of poor fiscal policy by the German government, as well as price controls maintained by the British and American military governments in the occupied zones, meant that returning prisoners could only live on meager rations.[583] With upwards of six to seven times more money in circulation than the government could support, the prices of goods could be 100%-250% higher

A second letter from the Jirkas dated November 23rd, 1948 (arriving on November 29, 1948), updated Otto Herzog from Herma's perspective. Times were still difficult. She had just turned twenty-one; "A little old, or not? (Don't laugh; I am already afraid of getting older. For that, I only get frowns from my husband)."[584] Little Otto is now ten months old. Herma is sending pictures back to the Herzog family, noting that "...what do you say about our little boy's

[580] Jirka, November 13, 1948.
[581] Ibid.
[582] Jirka, November 13, 1948.
[583] Gabriella Barber and Emily T. Carlstrom. "The Impact of American Economic Aid on Post-World War II Germany." University of South Carolina, 2020. https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1324&context=senior_theses. 3. David R. Henderson. "German Economic Miracle." *Econlib.* (2024). https://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/GermanEconomicMiracle.html.
[584] Herma Jirka. *Correspondence between Herma Jirka and Otto Herzog.* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. FHA 95.40.2__ Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. November 23, 1948.

size? My parents claim he turned out that well because, on the way to this world, he ate so many CARE packages from America. Ha, ha, ha, isn't that strong?"[585] Sadly, the update on Rudi's mother remained unfortunate. She continued to suffer in the nursing home, which Rudi visited every Saturday. Herma cannot visit, as the facility forbade any children. "The cancer spread further in her body. Added to it, the food supply is a shame what these sick people have to put up with.... Of the little we have; we save something for her and take it to her."[586]

Another letter from Rudi and his wife arrived during Christmas 1948. The family was very grateful for the Christmas presents sent.

> First of all, I want to thank you for the nice Christmas present you sent our son, Otto, my dear Uncle Herzog. These are all items we needed very much for our little Otto. Right away we put the socks on and the tiny shoes. The blue shirt fits perfectly. But this isn't all, with your wonderful little shoes, happened a little miracle. Little Otto made his first steps. What do you say to that, dear Uncle and Aunt?[587]

Rudi's mother was still alive, living in the nursing home. The family's sadness was apparent, as they described that the doctors could not treat the cancer; it "...is still a puzzle to them."[588] She now spent most of her days unconscious and the family expected her to pass soon.

The Jirka family wrote back in April 1949. There was no mention of Rudi's mother. The presumption was that she had finally passed away from her illness. Herma and Rudi wrote back a thank-you letter. They had just received a package from Herzog containing a brown work coat for Herma, two cans of beef, chocolate, syrup, honey, sardines, soup, and rice.[589] They devoured the sweet treats as Herman noted, "all three of us are sweets lovers." Otto continued to grow; he was walking now. At the time of writing, Otto had twelve teeth. The family was looking forward

[585] Ibid.
[586] Jirka, Herma. November 23, 1948.
[587] Jirka, Rudi. December 30, 1948
[588] Ibid.
[589] Jirka, Herma. April 30, 1949.

to the upcoming spring. They sent a beer stein and a lighter with a Vienna crest of the Stefan-church tower. The family wrote, "We hope you will enjoy these items. It should only show our thankfulness to you."[590]

The former German prisoners appreciated the food and clothing gifts from Michigan farmers. Without these gifts, these German citizens would have had difficulty surviving the immediate post-war years. Items sent to Germany were not extravagant. They were basic. As the Herzog family sent baby items to the Jirka family and little Otto, they were second hand from neighboring families and others. As a sign of gratitude, families sent back pictures and small items they could afford. As living in Germany was difficult, due to food and job shortages and high inflation from the previous fiscal policy, sending items back to America showed sacrifice and thankfulness by the prisoners and their families. They did not keep their thoughts and fond memories to themselves. Many prisoners mention how they shared their experiences with others. Their experiences stayed with them. The willingness of Michigan farmers to share their goods with prisoners, even while an enemy, demonstrated the humaneness the farmers saw in the prisoners. Each person deserved basic respect, care, and treatment.

Like the Jirka family, the Kracht family also wrote back to Herzog, both to ask for assistance, but also to continue correspondence, updating the family about their lives under a decimated Germany. Jürgen Kracht spent his confinement in the Lower Peninsula, employed in the Frankenmuth area. He was another POW in correspondence with Herzog, and a recipient of many care packages. A letter dated April 21, 1947, demonstrated Kracht's gratitude for the recent arrival of another package. "You can hardly imagine the joy there was here when we

[590] Ibid.

opened the package. For the most part there were items that we rarely see here and are a welcome change to the poor menu of our current nutritional situation."[591] The package arrived on his son's birthday, allowing them to give him something sweet (raisins) as a special treat. Kracht recalled, "You can imagine that he enjoyed them better than anything else did."[592] Kracht stated it took eight weeks to arrive, about the average time for packages between the United States and Germany. He promised to send photos with his next letter, as it would take a month before they were ready, and there was a chronic lack of materials.

As promised, Kracht followed up with another letter after a second package arrived from the Herzog family. Dated April 28th, 1947, he wrote that he was very pleased: "I have the joyful duty to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your package...It is almost impossible to put my thankfulness into words."[593] Spring had arrived; Kracht made special note of the cherry blossoms. Yet, things were still difficult in Germany. Referring to the inability to send cigarettes and tobacco, Kracht had much to say. He had read about it in the newspapers, it was an attempt to stop the black-market trade. According to Kracht, "This is only empty talk. The people still have enough cigarettes and tobacco to sell for the new money. Only the common man here, who once in a while get 20 cigarettes to smoke from overseas, can't have them anymore." [594] The British American Tobacco (BAT) assisted with the recovery of the tobacco industry. The BAT's business strategy and drive to return to pre-war levels, supplying citizens with tobacco products, helped them "to overcome military resistance to big business, oppose high tobacco taxes, and push for greater foreign tobacco imports. It ultimately helped the company lay foundations for

[591] Kracht. April 21, 1947.
[592] Kracht. April 21, 1947.
[593] Ibid.
[594] Ibid.

expansion."[595] As the economy stabilized and tobacco products became readily available, Kracht would be pleased.

Yet, despite the depressing news about cigarettes, Kracht shared some exciting news. He was getting engaged. He finished his studies on March 1st, and was planning on getting married on May 4th, 1948, "so that my son finally has a mother. It is better for him than to grow up without a mother."[596] Herzog received the engagement notification dated July 22nd as confirmation of the upcoming event in Jürgen Kracht's life.

In August 1947, Herzog sent a letter to Kracht expressing joy at his engagement. He and his family said that they "wish you all luck. Hopefully nothing goes wrong."[597] He also outlined additional packages sent, numbered eight through fourteen. Package Eight sent on June 16th, Care Package Nine on July 16th, and Package Ten on July 18th contained overall pants, a pair of shoes and seven pairs of socks. Packages Eleven through Twelve were sent on July 28th and August 4th, respectively, containing pants and other items for Kracht's son. The Thirteenth package contained a sweater. Finally, Package Fourteen sent on August 11th contained underwear, a pair of gloves and a pound of raisins.[598] To update Kracht on the planting at the farm, he explained they were currently harvesting the wheat, barley, and oats. The beans and corn need rain, while they are hoping to finish harvesting the hay, should the rain hold off.[599]

Herzog also remained in contact with the Kaehne family in Germany. Although their letters share pleasantries and daily life updates, the primary themes throughout the letters are

[595] Thomas J. Kehoe & Elizabeth M. Greenhalgh. "'An indispensable luxury': British American Tobacco in the occupation of Germany, 1945–1948." *Business History*. Vol 61, no. 8. (2019): 1326. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00076791.2018.1425391.
[596] Kracht. April 21, 1947.
[597] Herzog, August 18, 1947.
[598] Ibid.
[599] Ibid.

food insecurity and gratitude for Herzog's support. Fritz Kaehne was a POW stationed on Herzog's farm, and part of the men whose photograph remains.[600] In one letter, dated May 5th, 1949, the Kaehne family wrote back with gratitude for the recent package of clothing they had received, noting "One can really show off with them here, People turn and look at us and I am so delighted with all the finery."[601] The food situation was dire, according to Kaehne. They anxiously awaited the food package that was arriving "because it hurts quite a bit to be hungry.... Those few groceries from the monthly rations only last 1 week if you eat to be somewhat filled up."[602] The last package also included raisins, a treat also sent to Kracht's son. Kaehne gave them to his son, as they were nutritious. Children also experienced food insecurity according to Kaehne. "Our children do not get milk fat, only 600 grams for the whole month. Every second child here has T.B.C. [abbreviation for tuberculosis] and I am very afraid of that."[603]

On January 3rd, 1950, the family received a package of clothing. Hilda, Franz Kaehne's wife, was very thankful, as she wrote, "I needed one as much as a piece of bread. It took away the worry of how to keep warm."[604] Dieter, their son, received a new pair of shoes and boots. Fritz got socks. Raisins and butter were also in the package, which was followed by a food package that arrived on January 8th, 1950. The family was extremely appreciative, writing, "A thousand thanks for it. It is sad that we are so far apart. We want to give you all a big hug. You make us so happy."[605] They hoped for a pleasant spring, as it would help people become less ill. Fritz continued the letter by requesting that Mr. Herzog send a bike tire repair kit. His bicycle needed repair: "I have a bicycle that I am riding to work and the tires are so bad that sometimes I

[600] The photograph is housed at the Frankenmuth Historical Society in Frankenmuth, Michigan.
[601] Kaehne. May 5, 1949.
[602] Ibid.
[603] Ibid.
[604] Kaehne. February 4, 1949.
[605] Ibid.

am not sure if I will make it back again...The ones here [tire repair kits] don't glue well and we can't get tires either."[606]

Another recipient of Herzog's help was the Weyand family. There was no specific information about the family, besides Weyand being part of the men who worked on the farm. Spanning a few years, much of the correspondence discussed the food packages, the family's appreciation and small updates to their living situations. A letter, dated November 10th, detailed another package the Weyand family received. The recent package left them "speechless that you sacrifice so much for us."[607] Containing five packages of sugar and twenty-five pounds of flour, this package was appreciated, as Weyand reports "Germany is still not getting much better."[608] He believed the new currency may not have been the right change, praying that "may our dear God save you from a bad war as has raged with one. One cannot repeat what one hears, that there is talk about war again."[609] He still desired to move to America. The last letter in December, sent the Herzog family Christmas greetings, wishing them a "Happy New Year and also good health."[610]

Karl Jung's wife, Else, also wrote letters to Otto Herzog. Jung was a POW for a few seasons on Herzog's farm. Not only did Otto Herzog communicate with the former prisoners; he also sent letters to their families. Her first letter dated July 22nd, 1947, described the hard conditions her family experienced in Germany. They had received a package on June 19th

[606] Kaehne. February 4, 1949.
[607] August Weyand. *Correspondence between August Weyand and Otto Herzog*. 2004. Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. November 10, 1948.
[608] Ibid.
[609] Ibid.
[610] Weyand. December 9, 1948.

containing meat, lard, honey, and beans. There were also dresses for the girls, for which they felt "heartfelt thanks".[611] She described life in Germany:

> As before life is hard and difficult for us. Through the currency reform we lost all that we had worked years for. We have so little money available now that can only buy the most necessary things like groceries bought with the ration card. Now in our stores it seems they get goods overnight that had not seen the light of day for years. Now they offer everything in their display windows, but they are so expensive that we can't buy them. The price of urgently needed necessaries is ten times higher, for example, matches, shoe polish, shoestrings, and many other items we use all the time. Prices for groceries are double the normal prices. We stand in front of the display windows, would like to buy this or that, but can't afford it.
>
> Grocery rationing is still tight. Meat and butter we hardly know anymore. You can imagine how we felt over the can of lard. I thank you especially for the honey. It is also healthy for the children and a useful cold remedy.[612]

Her husband, Karl, was working a stressful job. He needed to travel by car, leaving at 7:30am, returning at 9:00pm at night. According to Else, he only ate a slice of bread, as no warm food is available. She looked forward to cooking him an actual meal with meat once he got home that night. She described German weather and the harvest, as they were cutting grain (wheats, oats, and rye). They were predicting a good harvest once the rain stopped. The previous year, the harvest withered, because of a lack of rain for five months. The harvest might not work well, if the rains persist, as Else noted "Our heavenly Father does not seem to like the Germans, I don't think he wants to know us anymore."[613] She also mentioned similar fears, as Von Schoenborn and Jirka, as there was talk of war. Else described her fears, stating, "You can imagine how scared we are for the outcome. Will there be war? That would be horrible. We would all perish. We can only pray God will let this pass and give us lasting peace."[614]

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[611] Else Jung. *Correspondence between Karl Jung Family and Otto Herzog.* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. July 22, 1947.
[612] Ibid.
[613] Ibid.
[614] Ibid.

The assistance given to the Jung family was something they appreciated. He wrote:

> how housewives have to fight and worry to get the comparatively meager provisions available by [ration] card in the story. In spite of the allotted ration-stamp high point of 1400 calories daily, it does not mean you are always able to obtain that in the stores. Hundreds of people are lined up in front of a grocery store to pick their goods if there is enough in stock, but often there is not enough there. Most of the time, housewives have to go home empty handed and rack their brains as to what to bring to the table for their families at the next meal.[615]

The food situation was troublesome in Limburg and the Jungs were very thankful for the packages Herzog sent and his willingness to be a benefactor and help them. Given the situation, people were losing weight because of a lack of nutrients. Yet, Karl Jung says that his family was able to gain weight because of the groceries having a higher fat content. "This is like a miracle," Jung writes, "You saved my wife's life by doing these generous deeds."[616] Her health was slowly improving, but she must get shots every other day, which required her to remain in bed. To further explain the meat situation, Karl wrote:

> In our newspapers we read that several million cans of horsemeat will be shipped from America to Germany to ease the meat problem. To help out until next harvest, 200,000 tons of corn is on the way from you, also soy flour and coarse-ground peanuts, which can be used to bake bread. In this way we can increase the daily calories...you can understand the fight for daily bread and how thankful we are for your generosity and help.[617]

Without Herzog's help, the family would have been in even more dire straits. The addition of groceries and high-fat foods allowed them to maintain their stamina and health, while others struggled. To thank them, Else Jung took great pains to locate bracelets for Herzog's three girls. Described as "little chains are supposed to be real silver," he hoped the girls would wear the bracelets and think of their German friends.[618]

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[615] Jung, Karl. February 24, 1948.
[616] Ibid.
[617] Jung, Karl. May 13, 1948.
[618] Jung, Karl. May 13, 1948.

Exchanging gifts between families, such as girls exchanging gifts of bracelets, shows the continued appreciation of the families Otto Herzog and others sent items to German families. Gifts expressed their appreciation and the personal relationships growing between the families. Personal details of births, deaths, and marriages show the familiarity between the prisoners and Michigan benefactors. These details show that life after the war continued, and Americans continued to take an interest in the prisoners. In 2015, a man in Tennessee found old letters in a cereal box from German prisoners that described similar experiences to those of Michigan prisoners.[619] This similarity helps confirm the overall care of prisoners under United States" custody. Yet, despite the care of each family, letters continued to arrive describing the horrid conditions prisoners returned to.

Walter Andreas, a POW stationed in Muskegon County on the Bishop farm, received packages from the family once he returned home. He appreciated another care package, recalling Fred Bishop. The food situation was still dire. They were surviving on about 1500 calories a day.[620] He had a strong desire to return to America, but his wife was afraid of the ocean, meaning they could not emigrate at the moment. A last letter arrived from Andreas, dated November 21, 1948. Again, it was a thank you note for the recent care package they received. Andreas was "very surprised at the contents."[621] Inside the package was bacon, braised beef; liver loaf; shortening; sugar; apricots; raisin; flour; chocolate; milk powder; egg powder; and soap.[622] Andreas expressed this was extremely helpful, as they could not find these items in Germany.

[619] "Letters Found in Cereal Box Show Rare Look at German POWs After WW2". *ABC News*. (2015). https://abcnews.go.com/US/letters-found-cereal-box-show-rare-german-pows/story?id=32421560.
[620] Walter Andreas. Letter from Walter Andreas to Bill Bishop. (1948). Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan. November 21, 1948.
[621] Ibid.
[622] Andreas. November 21, 1948.

Another Muskegon-based POW was Horst Baumann. The Bishop family received letters dating from 1948 to 1950. His first letter, written on March 5th, 1948, described his present condition. He missed his life as a POW in America.[623] He was currently living in France as a POW. The country rationed many items. Another letter dated May 3rd, 1948, gave sad news in a few lines. He wanted to return to America, as conditions in France were poor. He expressed, "But I wish all things will go allrigh [*sic*] again and all men can live in freedom."[624] Life as a prisoner was difficult. There was little food, and no known day of being able to leave for home. Wanting peace would continue to give Baumann hope, as he awaited returning home. Yet, he did not want to return home, as he would be required to live in the Russian Zone. He did not want to do this, even though he had been away from his family for five years.[625] Baumann wrote the last letter in 1950. Baumann was happy for Bishop's friendship.[626] His time on the farm was much better than in French captivity. He worked after the war in a coal mine. He remained in contact with George Brandenstein. However, living in the Russian Zone was difficult. The people lived from hand to mouth, as living costs were high in the Russian Zone.[627] Clothes rations remained in effect in 1950. He desired to return to Michigan, as he thought it was a beautiful part of the United States.[628]

An additional POW helped by the Bishop family was Harry Baer. In May, Baer requested additional care packages. The British government held him in England as a POW, before he was allowed to return home to Germany. The food situation appeared worse than in London and

[623] Horst Baumann. Collection of Letters from Horst Baumann to Bill Bishop. (1947-1950). Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan. March 5, 1948.
[624] Horst Baumann, "Letter from Horst Baumann to Bill Bishop," Letter, 1948.
[625] Ibid.
[626] Baumann, April 12, 1950.
[627] Ibid.
[628] Ibid.

people were starving. But, on a cheerful note, he had finally seen his brother after five years.[629] July saw another request for care packages. He lived in the Russian Zone and explained that food in this area was poor.[630] If he lived in the Western Zones, he believed the food would be better. Yet, he still remembered his time as a prisoner in Michigan. He said it was an enjoyable time, and he was not hungry.[631]

The Lee family of Sidnaw, Michigan, sent care packages to the prisoners. In one package, she sent: "1. qt. tallow (mutton or venison); 1 qt. Pine pitch; 3/4 at. Balma gillian buds; and 1 oz. Turpentine."[632] These seem to be odd ingredients, yet enclosed was a recipe to make a salve: including, "Grind tallow- dry out. Put all in the kettle and boil until forms a soft boil in cold water. Strain through think cloth."[633] She sent these items as part of a care package to assist a POW with an ailment, though no records show which prisoners this was gifted to. The recipients were unrecorded, but the surviving letters from former POW Stefan Rozwadowski show the Lees helped many people and were a point of contact in Rozwadowski's attempt to return and visit Sidnaw in 1998.

Friends From Enemies

As prisoners and American farmers exchanged letters with each other, they developed friendships. In one case, Otto Herzog became a godfather for young Otto Jirka, Rudi Jirka's son. The letters between prisoners and farmers detailed their life stories and continued hardships, but also happiness and perseverance that they overcame to continue to live after the war.

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[629] Harry Baer. Collection of Letters from Harry Baer to Bill Bishop. (1948), Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan. May 1, 1948.
[630] Ibid.
[631] Ibid.
[632] Mary Lee. "Mary Lee Letters." (1949). Sidnaw Historical Museum.
[633] Ibid.

On September 19th, 1947, a letter arrived from Rudi Jirka expressing thanks for "All these baby clothes for our new arrival. At the same time, we received the first care package. A hundred thousand thanks for it."[634] Rudi and his family showed gratitude and expressed personal things, particularly about their living conditions, which would have been hard to admit, as humans are proud and, most times, independent.

Written on November 15th, Jirka notes he had finally received a letter from Herzog, telling him "It brought joy to us."[635] Sadly, the update on Jirka's mother was not pleasant, as he had no choice but to admit her into a nursing home, as "they told me that terminal ill people can only go a nursing home. I had to do that. There is no way out."[636] Grocery prices remain extremely high. Milk, lard, and meat are luxuries that are in short supply. Jirka's wages were not enough for groceries, and his wife rarely could purchase vegetables. Everything was very expensive. "The stores are full of things but only for the ones that have money enough to pay high prices. A worker can only look at the display windows."[637]

Albert Weizinger was a prisoner who spent time in Sidnaw. Writing back to the Lee family, their correspondence explained Weizinger's situation and perseverance. A letter dated February 14th, 1948, offered insight into Albert Weizinger's plight and his gratefulness for the packages. "I don't know how I can make up for it to you. I can only say thank you very much and I'm very grateful to you. I know you were always a very fine man and very helpful to us,

[634] Jirka, September 19, 1947.
[635] Ibid.
[636] Jirka, Rudi. November 15, 1948
[637] Ibid.

you have done all your best you could do."[638] Looking at the package, he was "reminded [of] that good times we had had in Sidnaw."[639]

Living with his sister- and brother-in-law, he talked about his experiences in America, especially farming as his brother-in-law was a farmer, although he had to work as a mechanic. Both men would like to come to America. He hoped to return soon but could not emigrate from Germany. "I made some inquiry about it, only such old person will have the permit whose children are living in the States."[640] Returning home, he discovered that the war had destroyed his town. "Everything is bad here in Germany and the destruction of Hamburg is terrible."[641] His most pressing need was pants and shirts, like they had in Sidnaw. His brother-in-law also had a request: a pair of shoes.

Reinhold Lupp wrote to the Bartz family of Berrien Springs, Michigan many times, indicating an acquaintance, and signifying a relationship/friendship. He even stated that he "wishes to be friends."[642] Describing his circumstances after leaving the farm, Lupp penned, that he ended his designation as a POW on October 20, 1947. Working on the farm in the fall of 1946, he left America on February 5th, 1947. However, he did not immediately return to Germany. Instead, the military governments reallocated him to a POW camp in France, where he remained for eleven months.[643] When he finally arrived home to Germany, he described it as no longer being a "home". While they placed him in the British Zone, his mother and father were in the Russian Zone.

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[638] Albert Weizinger. "Mary Lee Letters." Sidnaw Historical Museum. Sidnaw, Michigan. February 14, 1948.
[639] Ibid.
[640] Ibid.
[641] Ibid.
[642] Reinhold Lupp. "World War II Prisoner-of-war Letters to Henry and Edwin Bartz, 1946-1949". Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. November 4, 1947.
[643] Ibid.

Herbert Rossberg sent letters to the Teichman family of Berrien Springs in 1947. After arriving home, he found his family. As Herbert wrote, "Thank God."[644] He also made three wooden cross for the Teichman family; one for his wife and two for his daughters, sent with the letter.[645] Reminiscing about his treatment, he thought of the good and full tables and hoped to return to America. He would not hesitate to leave Germany because of the extremely poor conditions. Hoping the family would have a good harvest, he shared his encounters with the family, giving him spare peaches from the crop. "The memory of the stay will remain with me.", as Rossberg wrote.[646]

Another former POW, Werner Muller also wrote back to the Teichman family. Although he was having a difficult time in Germany, he updated Teichman on his life. One feature of his letter concerned his repatriation process. After leaving the Teichman farm, he transferred to Camp Ellis, then Camp Sheridan, both in Illinois. He remained in Illinois until January 1946, when he returned to Fort Custer in Battle Creek.[647] Finally, he left the United States on July 4th, 1946; yet his return home saddened him. Muller described it as he had returned home, but Germany was no longer home because of the destruction.[648] He thanked Teichman for his help in sending him underwear during the winter, and socks as a parting gift. They meant a lot to him. He wrote: "I think of you often, when I hear of America. I cannot find any more gracious people than them".[649] Muller's letters showed his fond memories of America for the items he received

[644] Herbert Rossberg. "German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1947." Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. January 1, 1947.
[645] Ibid.
[646] Ibid.
[647] Werner Müller. "German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1947". Box 77. Berrien County Historical Society. Berrien Springs, Michigan. February 27, 1947.
[648] Ibid.
[649] Ibid. "Ich muss immer und immer wieder an Ihnen denken, wenn ich Amerika höre, denn ich fand nirgends so eine menschliche und liebenswürdige Aufnahme, als bei Ihnen"

and the positive tone in his letters. However, this did not diminish the adverse circumstances he describes. Cigarettes were difficult to find. “I have only had two packs in three months,” he complained, as he is also seeking clothes.[650] With winter approaching in Germany, he was only wearing his P/W uniform that had been assigned during captivity. Having no access to clothing items for purchase, he continued to use what he had within his possessions.

Ralph Fienpel, another POW stationed in Berrien Springs, Michigan, continued discussing immigration in his letter six months later, in June 1947. Like Mueller, Fienpel also wanted to return to America, and explained his situation with a desire to immigrate. His struggles matched those of the other prisoners. After returning home to Germany, he had a great desire to return to America. However, the ability to immigrate was only available to those who were “racially or politically persecuted people.”[651] He had worked on the Teichman farm in the fall of 1944, and he was always hungry. Stating the German economy was terrible, he predicted Russia would soon take over.

Although Fienpel wished to return to America for a better life, some POWs did not share the same desires. One POW who held this desire was Heinz Brunsfeld, a POW working in Berrien Springs, Michigan. While not wishing to return to America, Heinz Brunsfeld described himself as a helper to Teichman, while he worked on the farm. Germany was “hungerden” (starving).[652] Conditions were very poor. Returning to Koln, he located his family but was having a difficult time finding work. He expressed that he would move if he found work.

[650] Müller. February 21, 1947.
[651] Ralph Fienpel. “German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1947” Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. June 16, 1947.
[652] Heinz Brunsfeld. “German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1947.” Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. July 28, 1947.

Brunsfeld wrote that his fondest or "best time" as a POW was on Teichman's farm.[653] Yet, he also asked for a small package for his family, given their poor living conditions. Brunsfeld also asked about the "ship in a bottle" that was donated to Teichman from the seven men hired from the Afrika Corps.[654]

Responses from the Teichman family remain hidden, yet the personal information sent by the prisoners showed they felt comfortable sharing details. Although perhaps this was to generate sympathy, Brunsfeld's questions about his donation and Fienpel's description of his wife showed some level of personal acquaintance. Why would one disclose a wife's status, according to the Nuremberg Laws, especially as she had Jewish blood, which was considered racially impure by the preceding government? Why ask about a small handmade donation if not to share details and memories? Teichman showed that he cared for his workers (i.e., the prisoners), asking him to write. It did not mean he could respond to all the requests for help, but he attempted to build relationships with them. His daughter recalled and noted in Kevin Hall's "The Befriended Enemy: German Prisoners-of-war in Michigan," that she would eat lunch with the POWs in the orchards. Pictures still survive, showing Teichman's daughter seated with the POWs while eating.[655]

As prisoners wrote to Teichman and described details of his life, prisoners continued sharing details with their former American employers. On March 25th, 1947, Jürgen Kracht continued telling his life story after the war. Wishing that the Herzog family would never experience the same fate as his family, he acknowledged that he "can now appreciate a

[653] Müller February 27, 1947.
[654] Ibid.
[655] Kevin Hall. "The Befriended Enemy: German Prisoners-of-war in Michigan." *Michigan Historical Review* 41, no. 1 (2015): http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5342/michhistrevi.41.1.0057. 71.

friendship like yours even more since it meant so much when we were powerless in a foreign land."[656] He placed the blame on his mistrust of his country. "...when a soldier does his duty for six years like a decent person should and comes back home where the people only show scorn, then you loose trust in people."[657]

Sadly, losing trust was not the only setback Kracht experienced. He returned home to find that his wife had died. He had planned to marry in 1944, but after serving in the war and waiting over two years, he found his wife had died in 1945. She died in childbirth, leaving Kracht with a two-year-old son. Thankfully, he had discovered his parents and sister were alive, though they lived in "primitive conditions, as we share part of our residence with refugees from Poland."[658] He had returned to school, working for the School of Architecture while using free time to earn a little money. He described the monetary situation in Poland:

> To date life is getting so expensive here that under normal circumstances one couldn't stand it anymore. We only buy the necessaries to eat. I have not bought any clothing yet. Alcohol is not available. We receive 40 cigarettes for 6 weeks as allotted. If I want to buy an extra one, it will cost me 6-7 marks, 200 times the normal price and for that money one has to work hard one whole day.[659]

Despite his circumstances and studying architecture, life went on. In raising his son, there is not much difference between children in America and children in Germany. Kracht described his life with a toddler through an apology; "Hopefully you can read my letter today, because my little boy found my fountain pen Sunday. When a two-year-old is through with something, you cannot

[656] Kracht, March 25, 1947
[657] Ibid.
[658] Ibid.
[659] Ibid.

use it anymore. So, I had to take an old one to write with until I am able to buy one again."[660] Kracht signed off, noting that he planned on smoking one of the "good" cigarettes sent to him.[661]

Otto responded on May 21, noting that Kracht's March 25th letter arrived on April 28th, 1947. "It was so sad. I can only say that things will get better," he wrote, as the circumstances Kracht described were heartbreaking.[662] Herzog was happy to help in their circumstances, "You write each time, about how you can make things good again, when we send you something. Don't get gray hairs over it. We know there is a need and we should have some to spare."[663] It pleased him that Kracht's son enjoyed the raisins in the last package and planned to send more in the next package. He elaborated on farming, noting that corn was not planted because of the wet ground, with oats, barley, and sugar beets already planned.[664]

Kracht shared his feelings concerning the unrest in the region after the end of the war. This unrest began at the start of the Cold War. It gives a unique perspective on the political situations in Germany. Kracht wrote,

> We are afraid of a new war. I myself do not believe it will happen even if it looks like it could. I cannot understand why there are people who don't want to avoid war under any circumstances after all the hardship and destruction it cost. Maybe these people did not experience any suffering. They should understand that if it comes to another conflict, they would be the first ones to receive the revenge of the common people who have suffered long years already and this revenge would be brutal.[665]

Kracht's assessment expressed his unease about the situation. It also matched that of other POWs who wrote letters back to American farmers about the tense situation in the Soviet Union

[660] Kracht, March 25, 1947.
[661] Ibid.
[662] Herzog, May 21, 1947.
[663] Ibid.
[664] Ibid.
[665] Jürgen Kracht, *Letter from Jürgen Kracht to Otto Herzog* (Braunschweig: 2004).June 23, 1947.

(USSR). Overall, Kracht wrote, he and his son were well. His son was ill for a short time but is back to "running around the room again."[666]

As the new year of 1948 began, Kracht wrote again to Otto Herzog, expressing thanks and additional updates on his life. His wedding was a few days away, leading to a heavy workload. He was excited to be married and "things are slowly but surely going upwards."[667] He followed up in a letter dated February 15th, 1948. After nearly a month, the newlywed Kracht apologized for the gap in letters. Married life preoccupied him.

> You probably are a little angry with me because I let you wait so long, but you were young once and will know as a new husband, you think of everything else except what you should. I have the feeling that I am not alone in thinking that way. Men in general have that weakness. In the beginning of the marriage, we are like turtledoves and later on like raccoons. But I have to confess that I am very happy at the moment.[668]

Kracht still had worries, but they seemed small, as he could forget about them, as he focused on his new wife and family. He still had hope, writing "Thank God that we are not people who get crushed easily. For now, we still have our humor which keeps us upright."[669] He sent Herzog three small wedding photos to show thankfulness for the correspondence and friendship the two had developed over the years.

Herzog wrote back in March 1948. Making special note of the "freshly baked husband", he wished him luck in their new lives together. He also sent them a wedding present, new bed sheets, along with sugar, raisins, dates, soap, and chocolate chips in a new care package.[670] He was glad that Kracht had kept his humor, mentioning Gotz von Berlichingen's quote, which

[666] Kracht. June 23, 1947.
[667] Ibid.
[668] Kracht. February 15, 1948.
[669] Ibid.
[670] Herzog. March 29, 1948.

equates roughly to the English equivalent of "kiss my butt".[671] Regarding war, Kracht's January 12th letter mentioned, Herzog noted, "Yes, there is nothing more stupid happening than what is happening in this world," as the tensions in Europe had reached American ears.[672]

In March 1948, Jürgen and his new wife, Marie-Luise, sent a letter to the Herzog farm. Jürgen expressed thanks for the most recent package. He apologized for not writing because of his work and that "...I am a young husband and they are the most demanding beings in this world. You might know, yourself, what a fresh-baked housewife can demand from a poor man and "the camel" must also do all the overflow [work]."[673] The war left the country with a shortage of men, leading Kracht to remark that the girls should be happy to find a man. He finished the letter with a promise, that when things were normal again, both he and his wife would travel to Frankenmuth to thank Herzog and his family personally.[674]

As the Herzog family continued correspondence with many families, each family's tales showed their resilience despite their daily struggles. Yes, they still asked for goods, as the economy was still recovering. The influx of aid and the creation of the Marshall Plan in 1948 helped begin the economic recovery, but prisoners and their families still needed to live while this transition was taking place. Others echoed Kracht's misgivings about the stability of the new currency. Gerolf Von Schönborn was one. As he returned home, he marveled at the goods in the stores, but there was no money to purchase the items. The people were living in a shortage, where money lacked value.[675]

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[671] Herzog, March 28, 1948.
[672] Ibid.
[673] Kracht. March 29, 1948.
[674] Ibid.
[675] Diethelm Prowe. "Economic Democracy in Post-World War Germany: Corporatist Crisis Response, 1945-1948". *The Journal of Modern History.* September 1985. vol 57, No. 3: 451-453. https://www.jstor.org/stable/18796688.

Letters continued to be sent to the Herzog family. One POW who contacted the family was Gerolf Von Schönborn. An undated letter survives from Von Schönborn, and described his appreciation and surprise at a letter and the care package he received. The letter had arrived fourteen days prior, with the two food packages arriving that day. "With this [letter] I would like thank you and your wife for your very generous goodwill and assistance: all the best to you and thanks from the bottom of my heart."[676] The food packages impressed him greatly, as he thought the food "high quality": "I have never seen groceries of such high quality here.... The homemade cookies are wonderfully fresh and taste especially good. The soup and canned food I eat on the evenings when we only receive dry bread. The chocolate, soap and cigarettes are special things that I will enjoy very much."[677] He had received news about the end of his time as a POW. The older men were being released. As Schönborn was only 32 years old, he complained that "I have to wait another year."[678] It was difficult, he stated: "You can imagine what a hard blow that was for me, as it was when I was given over to the French. Now I just have to patience for another year. The Americans saw to it that releases have begun."[679]

Referencing his original letter from June 1946, he responded by sending two packages on February 24 and March 21, 1947. However, he noted, "I was told that a parcel could take 3 to 4 months to get there, many [take] longer."[680] Along with being in good health and being delayed in sowing his crops, Herzog mentioned he had heard from two other members of his group of POW workers — Jürgen Kracht and Rudolf Jirka.[681] Another letter, dated May 29th, followed,

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[676] Gerolf von Schoenborn. *Correspondence between Gerolf Von Schoenborn and Otto Herzog*. 2004. Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. (1948)
[677] Ibid.
[678] Ibid.
[679] Ibid.
[680] Otto Herzog. *Correspondence from Otto Herzog to 'Liebe Freunde.'* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. April 12, 1947.
[681] Ibid.

where Herzog acknowledged reception of a previous letter. They had put together another food package containing, "...honey again, cheese, raisins, 2 soup, 2 sardines, 5 Vita Serto (chocolate), 3 packages of Cigarettes, a package of homemade cookies and a small package of store-bought, [and] 6 small [packages of] candy."[682] The rations had improved in France, but they were still meager and he appreciated the additional goods from America.

He wished Herzog a good harvest, as "I see in the newspaper that the United States is expecting a record harvest this year. So, maybe you will benefit from the hard work you put in."[683] In Germany, the weather had been dry, leading to a less-than-successful harvest. "We worry about the upcoming winter. We hope it will be better than the last. So many starved or froze to death, especially older people," wrote Von Schönborn, expressing the dire straits of the people, even two years after the war had ended.[684]

He updated Herzog on the German people's condition and his personal plight. He was trying to be remain optimistic, explaining:

> I don't want to complain, but I am sure you as a man and father know how it feels if you don't know what to eat 10 minutes before meal-time with your wife and three little children. Tonight, for instance, our Sunday evening meal consisted of 3-4 potatoes and a pickle for each person. During the weekdays we often have to find, with great difficulty, some potatoes and a piece of dry bread for a meal. Meat and sausage is an extreme rarity. Most of all we have no fat. [685]

They remained hopeful for better times. Only one letter arrived in 1949. Dated May 7, 1949, in approximately four weeks, the family received three packages. They received honey, meat, lard, dresses, sugar, and other items. Jung was empathetic in emphasizing "be assured that we appreciate your generosity."[686]

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[682] Herzog, May 29, 1947.
[683] Ibid.
[684] Herzog. March 29, 1948.
[685] Ibid.
[686] Jung, Karl. May 1949.

Although the last year or two had seen an improvement in Germany, it was still impossible to live without worrying about food security. As Jung reported,

> One can now buy different grocery items imported from abroad, but the prices for these wares are so high that a mere mortal can hardly afford them. For example: meat and sausage without the [ration] card is 5-6 Marks per pound, fat 8-10 Marks per pound, flour 1 Mark per pound, sugar 2,50 Marks per pound, coffee 14-16 Marks per pound. With ration [stamps] these items are correspondingly cheaper, but it is not the same quality and above all such small quantity and insufficient for living.[687]

Germany still had a low income. On average, workers received 200 Marks per month.

As the German people continued to suffer, prisoners continued to write Michigan farmers. George Balzer wrote to Bill Bishop and his family in 1946 and 1947. His first letter explained he had arrived home on March 14th, 1946.[688] This early date showed he was required to be a prisoner in another country during the repatriation. He was currently working as a construction engineer. Remembering his treatment on Bishop farm, he left work at the celery field to work on Harry Becker's farm in Decatur, picking sugar beets.[689] He asked if Bruno, a helper on the farm, was still there and stated that the food in America was better than Germany. Asking about the farm's status showed there was a personable side to the relationship between Bishop and his prisoners. Why would the prisoners ask about the status of their employers" endeavors, if they did not get to know them?

His brief letter on November 30th, 1947, shared exciting news. He had had a baby girl, Erika, born on November 5th.[690] He wanted to return to work on Bishop farm. As a prisoner, he

[687] Jung, Karl. May 1949.
[688] George Balzer. Collection of Letters from George Balzer to Bill Bishop. (1946-1947). Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan. November 11, 1946.
[689] Ibid.
[690] Balzer. November 30, 1948.

worked in Decatur, but also worked on another small farm in Whitehall. He stated that his treatment and the food were good.[691]

Willi Schumann continued to write to Michigan farmers, similar to his compatriots. He wrote back to Mary Lee on September 16th, 1947. Schumann lived in Hamburg and could leave England in August 1947 after being held as a British Prisoner-of-war, after repatriation from the United States. Finally, coming home on August 3rd, he said "My family was very glad then we had not seen each other since 1943."[692] He had suffered loss, as he lost his mother and two brothers. He also lost his home in the war. Leaving the United States Easter Monday, 1946, "we were full of hope to go home, but it was a mistake."[693] He arrived in Liverpool and sent to a large camp, encompassed around with barbed wire near Oxford. From there, he transferred to Coventry, and separated from his comrades, except for two: Fritz the carpenter and a man from Pori. As a prisoner, "It was a very hard time. We were also short on food and cigarettes and no tobacco. We were living in barracks with double beds, no chairs, only two small stereos and little coals in winter. Our payment was not so good as in America for a weekly wage we could buy 30-35 cigarettes."[694]

Prisoners who did not immediately return to Germany spent time in England or France. Yet, their time in further captivity was not as enjoyable, according to the surviving prisoner letters. Wages were lower, and the Allies treated the German prisoners poorly compared to their treatment in the United States. The food shortages as Europe attempted to rebuild did not assist in the matter.[695] Recent scholarship indicates the prisoners in Britain were well-treated

[691] Balzer. November 30, 1948.
[692] Schumann. September 16, 1947.
[693] Ibid.
[694] Ibid.
[695] Prowe, (1985). 451.

physically, though the additional confinement "marked their feelings and sentiments in a way which will not be soon removed."[696] As they returned home, they recalled their Michigan friends. Alan Malpass argued that upon returning to Germany, many German prisoners applied for immigration status to return to England. Since the government used their labor in the agricultural sector during the war, employers viewed them equivalent to local farm workers, a sentiment also felt by local Michigan farmers, who had developed personal relationships with the prisoners.[697] The care demonstrated by Michigan farmers for their former workers showed the personal relationships developed with prisoners as they became friends, despite their enemy status.

Faith in the Hardships

Each POW who wrote back to their American employers showed the hardships they returned to. Some did not return home for years, as they served additional sentences in Britain or France as a prisoner-of-war. Each letter detailed the poor conditions of the food, clothing, economics, and politics. As prisoners found their homes in Poland, or the Russian Zone, their lives changed. Karl Kleff noted the Russians were enemies of Christian people.[698] But the people kept their faith. Various prisoners gave thanks to God for the Americans' help and for remaining healthy during the trying times they experienced.

Hilda Kaehne discussed her faith with the Herzog family. Her final surviving letter, dated September 6th, 1950, found the family had moved back to Radebeul. Hilda described family tensions with her mother-in-law, following the death of her father-in-law and her efforts to persevere.

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[696] Alan Malpass. *British Character and the treatment of German prisoners-of-war, 1939-48.* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). 178.
[697] Ibid. 180-181.
[698] Kleff, October 17, 1948.

> My mother-in-law threw us out after the death of my father-in-law. Now we are going back to Radebeul again, but first they wanted us to move with everything, here. Yes, she wants my husband alone. He was supposed to work and give her the money and I was told to leave with my child. But thank God, my husband stayed with us and supports us. This she did not like either. She did a lot of hateful things to us and wanted to throw her son out on the road. I am all stressed out mentally and physically. I hate quarrels. I love peace and unity. It is only normal that a husband stays with his family. That's how it is.[699]

She kept her faith throughout this ordeal, explaining, "I know our God is helping me with all that."[700] She asked about the Herzog family's health, hoping they would write soon. Despite her circumstances, Hilda attempted to remain content and find joy in the small things, "I love to sit by the warm stove and knit..."[701]

Albert Weizinger also maintained faith through his ordeals. His family was having a hard time locating food and clothing. But they kept their faith, writing "Thanks God they are still healthy" though they live in "great sadness" and must make do in their circumstances.[702]

The surviving letters described how the Americans treated the prisoners well. Many wished to return to America, even to work on the farms of their previous employers to change their fortunes. It is unclear how many returned. One POW, Ernst Floeter, returned to Michigan in the 1950s, visiting his previous camp sites and becoming an American citizen.[703] The exact number of prisoners who returned to America is unknown, but scholars estimate that approximately 5,000 prisoners returned after the war, ad noted by Arnold Krammer. Barbara Heisler recognizes this number is "plausible, but unreliable", given the Immigration and

[699] Kaehne. September 6, 1950.
[700] Ibid.
[701] Ibid.
[702] Ibid.
[703] Ernst Floeter. "Oral History Of: Ernst Floeter." interview by Robert Garrett. Grand Ledge, Michigan. *Seeking Michigan*. October 7, 2008, 2008. Grand Ledge, Michigan. https://seekingmichigan.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p4006coll17/id/8.

Naturalization Service did not track the number of ex-POWs who emigrated after the war.[704] The treatment the POWs received, helped persuade them to return to an enemy land.

Prisoners were influenced by their American "employers" and friends, who helped them after repatriation and gave them food and friendship throughout their time in America. Writing back to Michigan farmers, the farmers could understand the dire situations of former POWs with lives upended by the war, imprisonment, and their return. The soldiers returned to a homeland they did not recognize. Allied forces had stolen the land, according to some. For others, Germany as a "home" no longer existed. Too many, the desire to return to America was palpable, given the food, people, and stability available in the enemy's country. The prisoners were human. They were suffering as they returned to a devastated country. But their friends in America assisted and made the situation a little more bearable. Without the establishment of acquaintanceship or friendships, farmers would have been less willing to help former prisoners who were different. Despite the unfamiliar language and culture, treating one's fellow man as a human, followed the Golden Rule and relationships developed between German prisoners and American farmers.

[704] Arnold Krammer. *Nazi Prisoners-of-war in America*. (Scarbourgh, New York, 1996). 257. Barbara Schmitter Heisler. *From German Prisoner-of-war to American Citizen: A Social History with 35 Interviews*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2013. 6.

Chapter Five: Comparable Treatment

German POWs in Michigan were not the only group to experience confinement during World War II. In the United States, in addition to German and Italian POWs, Japanese Americans under Executive Order 9066 also faced trying times as internees. Overseas, American servicemen in Europe and the Pacific would share the prisoner experiences, yet their treatment differed depending on the theater. German POWs captured by other Allied forces, especially the Soviet Union (USSR), experienced different treatment than their American-held counterparts. Each group experienced time "behind the wire"; their experiences changed them; and yet, each group had a unique experience, allowing historians to compare prisoner/internee treatment and give insights into how the United States treated those they confined during war time. Throughout World War II, approximately 130,000 American troops were POWs worldwide, while roughly 425,000 German troops were POWs in the United States, approximately another 51,000 Italian troops and a few Japanese troops.[705] Millions of other German Wehrmacht would become POWs in the European Theater.

Compared to other groups, Japanese Americans and German prisoners in America received better treatment than their compatriots. American POWs in Japan and German POWs in the Soviet Union, experienced the most inhumane treatment, while American POWs held in Europe, under German control experienced treatment similar to their German counterparts in America. However, prisoner stories reveal a lack of care about food, something which German POWs in America rarely complained about.

[705] It is estimated less than 1,000 Japanese troops were sent to the United States. Elizabeth Vallone. "Italian Prisoners-of-war in the United States." L'ideamagazine. (2015). https://lideamagazine.com/italian-prisoners-of-war-in-the-united-states/.

Fearing reprisals, along with signing the Geneva Convention, the United States attempted to house, clothe, feed, and treat POWs with great care. Germany attempted to do the same. Japan, while also a signor of the convention, according to American POWs, did not follow through with the stipulations established for POW treatment. Scholars attribute much of this to the cultural differences concerning surrender and honor. Despite differences in treatment, each group shared the common experience of being confined under a foreign power. Each group underwent testing through their experiences. Yet, the challenges of cultural and language barriers did not deter the United States from treating people humanely and supplying them with basic needs. They attempted to follow the Geneva Convention, allowing American citizens to challenge ideology and break down barriers concerning the "enemy".

By comparing the different prisoner groups, it is possible to place the story of the German POWs in the United States back into the narrative of American history. It also allows for a comparative history, looking at treatment and experiences to fully determine if the United States gave humane treatment to the enemies imprisoned within their borders. Although not POWs in the traditional sense, the Japanese American internees spent their time during World War II behind barbed wire, under the care and direction of the War Department. Their story still impacts the POW narrative, as their treatment is like that experienced by German POWs. The rations, supplies, and activities resembled each other, though as the war progressed, the internees could volunteer for work or military service.

Using personal interviews, letters, and memoirs, it is possible to bring to life personal prisoner experiences. These experiences help determine an overarching conclusion concerning prisoner treatment in the various theaters of war. Specifically, reviewing Japanese American internment, American prisoners in both the European and Pacific theaters, and German prisoners

in the Soviet Union, allows for a fuller comparison of adherence to the Geneva Convention and general prisoner treatment. It is possible to view each group alongside the experiences of German prisoners-of-war in America, to determine if the German prisoners experienced the most humane treatment among the different prisoner groups of World War II. Their access to food, clothing, and the care spent on their general well-being were better than the treatment experienced by other groups of prisoners during World War II.

Japanese American Internees

At the outbreak of World War II, and the United States" entry into the war, the unease about Japanese Americans living on the West Coast grew. The attack of Pearl Harbor, on December 7th, 1941, caused those fears to grow. Government officials feared potential espionage after Pearl Harbor and recent immigrants' potential loyalty to Japan.[706] The government officials froze accounts, restricted movements, and confiscated all weapons. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, along with members of Congress who agreed, issued Executive Order 9066, relocating Japanese Americans from their homes to internment camps, built on similar principles as the German POW camps, scattered throughout the country. Yet, the internment camps were primarily in the southwestern or plains area of the United States. The authorities isolated and placed internees in remote areas to limit espionage and sabotage. However, recent scholarship, such as Susan Kamei's, *When Can We Go Back to America? Voices of Japanese American Incarceration During WWII,* argues that American history incorrectly labeled the camps as internment camps when they were, in fact, concentration camps for Japanese Americans. This publication challenged the internment narrative by referring to the systematic removal of

[706] Susan H. Kamei. *When Can We Go Back to America? Voices of Japanese American Incarceration During WWII*. (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2021). 1-2.

Japanese Americans as “incarceration” and placing them in similar circumstances and terminology as German POWs – behind barbed wire and incarcerated.[707]

Executive Order 9066, signed on February 19, 1942, authorized the creation of Military Zones, where the Secretary of War determined those individuals eligible to enter or live in the area. Although this order gave executive powers to the Secretary of War and his commanders, there was no specific order related to Americans of Japanese descent. Instead, “persons”, considered a fifth column were to be removed. As the front against Japan advanced and the underlying racial tensions grew, “persons” represented Japanese Americans, or visiting Japanese citizens. The relocation did not include Italian Americans or German Americans on either coast. Among the residents of Michigan, there was a significant population of German Americans, where German POWs were held. If Executive Order 9066 had been implemented in those areas, civilians would not have been available to break down barriers or working alongside prisoners.

The details laid out in Executive Order 9066 required government officials to care out specific mandates. Enacting the President’s order, the Secretary of War was to

> ...prescribe military areas in such places and of such extent as he or the appropriate Military Commander may determine, from which any or all persons may be excluded, and with respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War or the appropriate Military Commander may impose in his discretion.[708]

He was also required to give notice and provide basic needs in relocating individuals from said zones. Jeanne Wakatuski Houston recalled how at seven years old, her father was removed from

[707] See also articles by: Gary Y. Okihiro and Julie Sly. "The Press, Japanese Americans, and the Concentration Camps." *Phylon* 44, 1 (1983). https://dx.doi.org/doi.org/10.2307/274370. Mayya Komisarchik, Maya Sen, and Yamil R. Velez. "The Political Consequences of Ethnically Targeted Incarceration: Evidence from Japanese American Internment During World War II." *Journal of Politics* 84, 3 (2022). https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=a53f14b0-5c02-4e2d-b9f2-e25e1128a553%40redis.

[708] Franklin D. Roosevelt. *Executive Order 9066.* (1942). Washington D.C.

their home and sent to a camp in North Dakota. The family was given a forty-eight-hour notice to vacate their home on Terminal Island, before being relocated to Camp Manzanar in Northern California.[709] This sudden notice of departure resulted in Japanese families selling goods for pennies on the dollar. Some attempted to store items and land with friends or other family, hoping to regain their wealth after the war. People rarely encountered such cases. The U.S. government offered to house and store items of internees. However, there was such distrust of the government that many families were unwilling to place their goods in government protection. Sadly, the few that did, found their goods were better protected after the war.[710]

This was not the case with German prisoners in the United States, or in Michigan. Prisoners retained their insignias and minor personal effects. There were complaints of missing regalia, but these were few.[711] Personal effects were to be printed on receipts and returned at repatriation. At the war's end, the government paid German prisoners for their work at a wage of eighty cents a day.[712] Although internees also earned money for their labor and services, the conditions of the camps differed. While German prisoners spent time in camps in states such as Minnesota, Michigan, and others, Japanese Americans spent their imprisonment primarily in the southwestern areas of the United States.

> The Secretary of War is hereby authorized to provide for residents of any such area who are excluded therefrom, such transportation, food, shelter, and other accommodations as may be necessary, in the judgment of the Secretary of War or the said Military Commander, and until other arrangements are made, to accomplish the purpose of this order.[713]

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[709] Houston, Jeanne Wakatsuki & James D. Houston. *Farewell to Manzanar.* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Books, 1973). 17.
[710] Noboru Shairai. *Tule Lake: An Issei Memoir*. Edited by Eucaly Shirai and Valerie Samson. Translated by Ray Hosoda. (Tokyo, Japan: Kawade Shobo Shinsha, 1981). 43.
[711] Arnold Krammer. *Nazi Prisoners-of-war in America*. (Scarbourgh, New York, 1996).6.
[712] William R. Lowe. "Working for Eighty Cents a Day: German Prisoners-of-war in Michigan, 1943-1945." (Eastern Michigan University, 1995).5,78, 109,
[713] Roosevelt. *Executive Order 9066.*

Upon receiving the notice to vacate, authorities loaded internees onto buses and, sometimes, trains headed for the interior of the United States. Houston's family, the Wakatsukis, ended up at Manzanar in northern California.[714] Tule Lake, also in California, was the destination for Noboru Shirai, a visiting grad student with an American wife.[715] Leaving San Francisco early in the morning, Shirai recalled a somber scene among the adults; while the children saw the removal as an adventure. The adults, who were American citizens, felt a deep sadness as their government was forcing them to leave their homes, possessions, and families because of their ancestry, which labeled them as enemies.[716]

In contrast, the German prisoners arriving in the United States in 1942, were enemies. They were residents and fighting for a hostile country. In the case of Nisei, they had been born in the United States, and they qualified as American citizens. They were not foreign enemies. However, they looked different, which could lead to a further study concerning ethnicity and incarceration. Because the people considered the German prisoners' bodies similar to Americans, whereas Japanese Americans were physiologically different, the treatment and psychological expectations of American citizens differed.[717] Camp locations illustrated the differences between the internees and German prisoners. The government allowed prisoners to modify food rations to include food they would eat, including more vegetables. The camp authorities served the Japanese Americans, Army rations, with little concern for cultural norms.[718]

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[714] Houston. 18-20.
[715] Shirai. 47.
[716] Ibid.
[717] Komisarchik, (2022). Matthias Reiss. "Bronzed Bodies Behind Barbed Wire: Masculinity and the Treatment of German Prisoners-of-war in the United States During World War II." *The Journal of Military History* 69, no. 2 (April 2005): https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.2005.0122.475-477.

[718] Houston 26-28. Don F. Cochrane. "Yanks Hungry; Nazis Well Fed! Captured Airman Tells Story! Contrast to Local Prison Camp!" *The Coloma Courier.* (October 13,1944). North Berrien Historical Museum. Coloma, Michigan.

In the application of Executive Order 9066, the Secretary was to:

> ...take such other steps as he or the appropriate Military Commander may deem advisable to enforce compliance with the restrictions applicable to each Military area hereinabove authorized to be designated, including the use of Federal troops and other Federal Agencies, with authority to accept assistance of state and local agencies.
>
> ...all Executive Departments, independent establishments and other Federal Agencies, to assist the Secretary of War or the said Military Commanders in carrying out this Executive Order, including the furnishing of medical aid, hospitalization, food, clothing, transportation, use of land, shelter, and other supplies, equipment, utilities, facilities, and services.[719]

The authorities began enforcing compliance by removing individuals who were considered enemies. FBI or military servicemen would pick up these individuals. Japanese community leaders, such as military veterans, priests, and teachers at Japanese language schools were all included in the arrests.[720] The authorities sent Jeanne Houston's father to a camp in Bismarck, North Dakota. He later joined his family in Manzanar.[721]

As Executive Order 9066 was carried out, authorities shuffled families like the Wakatuskis and Shirais into their new living quarters. Manzanar was a desolate place. The Wakatuski family was one of the first to arrive, without Jeanne's father, and they found little waiting for them. The construction workers quickly put together the barracks with wooden planks, leaving gaps that let in the wind and caused freezing temperatures. The authorities assigned families to barracks with little privacy. She remembered her brothers attempting to gather lumber scraps and hanging blankets to create rooms. But it was still possible to hear everything within the barrack.[722]

[719] Roosevelt. *Executive Order 9066.*
[720] Shirai. 31-33.
[721] Houston.7-8, 40-41.
[722] Houston. 18-20, 23.

Shirai experienced similar conditions upon arriving at Tule Lake. It was common for fights to break out among new arrivals and older residents over who would obtain lumber scraps to make the quarters livable. The Army had not supplied enough wood to build the barracks without holes and many internees would steal the materials needed to create a more habitable space.[723] It was a common to see people covering holes as best they could to keep the cold out.

The War Department's provision of food was lacking, as Japanese Americans arrived in the camps. Rice was a staple food, but internees realized, that the U.S. government did not understand Japanese food culture. Similar to the meals provided to German POWs, the U.S. government issued army mess kits. The U.S. government served sausages, green beans, and steamed rice with apricots on top to the internees for one meal. The mixing of sweet foods on rice was not a food served in Japanese culture.[724] People in Japanese culture usually served rice with salty or savory food.[725] The food was poor, as many people became ill with diarrhea. Food spoiled easily; being left out and kept in small kitchens. Many cooks did not have a background in preparing food for hundreds of people.[726]

Facilities were lacking as people arrived at these camps. The barracks had holes, leading to confiscation (stealing) of lumber to make rooms. The construction team hurriedly built the latrines, causing holes in the ground, poor plumbing, and no privacy. The allocation of more supplies to the camps eventually changed this. But as prisoners arrived, their conditions were worse than those of the German POWs arriving in the United States. This was not something

[723] Shirai. 54-57.
[724] Houston. 18.
[725] Ibid.
[726] Houston. 27.

experienced by German prisoners, whose facilities were former Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) barracks, such as the camp at Sidnaw, Michigan.[727]

The construction of Tule Lake followed the same design as Manzanar. The barracks consisted of four rooms, with one family in a room. A stove was available, but no tables or chairs. As the internees remained in the camp, they would use lumber scraps and requisitions through the Army to build tables for the rooms.[728] Work was available for workers, but tensions existed between those individuals from Southern California and Washington and Oregon. As Shirai remembered, individuals who were not qualified often filled the existing jobs on a first-come, first-served basis. Higher-paying jobs were the first to be filled. Pay was originally the lowest amount granted by the Department of Public Works. After complaints from internees, the pay was raised; where "Eventually professionals were paid $19 a month, non-professionals were paid $16 a month, and part-time workers got $12 a month."[729] Adults received a clothing allowance of $3.75 a month, with children granted a clothing allowance of $2.50 a month.[730]

But Tule Lake differed from the other camps, given the turmoil and rebellion that erupted. Following rumors concerning food shortages, clothing rations, and military takeovers, the people at Tule Lake revolted. The people's discontent over food arose due to ration shortening and the limited amount of clothing (and other items) available at the commissary. They were told it was due to supply chain issues, and that the supplies were coming; however, the people did not fully trust the United States Army.[731] The continued military presence, and the issues surrounding the death of inmates, prompted further security measures inside the camp. In

[727] Dixie Franklin. "German POWs Enjoyed Camp Sidnaw." *The Daily Mining Gazette.* September 12, 1981.
[728] Shirai. 59-62.
[729] Ibid.
[730] Ibid.
[731] Shirai. 95-97.

addition, because of the loyalty questionnaire, Tule Lake became a dissident camp for those who were hoping to return to Japan, for being unwilling to swear loyalty to the United States.[732] This questionnaire went to all camps to lessen the number of internees. The questions which caused so much discontent was

> Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States, in combat duty, where ordered?
>
> Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any and all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power, organization?[733]

Internees struggled to answer these. Some wanted to return to Japan, others were still loyal to the United States, but distrusted the government, given their current situation.[734] It placed the internees between a "rock and a hard place". If they answered "yes", they would be subject to military service or work details. If they answered "no", they could be subject to repatriation to Japan or moved to a camp for enemies. Tule Lake was such a camp.

As these new arrivals from other camps came into Tule Lake, the previous tensions around jobs, supplies, and food resurfaced. The new arrivals also wanted to self-govern the camp, as previously done, before authorities declared martial law because of strikes. The military was unwilling to work with the internee representatives. This led to further discontent. Food was rationed, people were arrested and placed in stockades for years. In one case, an American serviceman killed a driver. The death of the Nisei driver caused mass riots in the camp.[735] The military, seeing no option, gated the main area, limiting access to the military officers and servicemen. Eventually, internees from the stockades were released into the main camp after

[732] Ibid. Houston 75. Kamei. 188-196.
[733] Shirai. 95.
[734] Ibid. Houston 74-75. Kamei. 206-207.
[735] Shirai. 129-130.

many complaints from the internees. The authorities sent individuals who renounced their citizenship or were Japanese citizens back to Japan.[736]

After the dropping of the atomic bombs in 1945, Japan surrendered. The surrender brought about the end of camp life. Internees were sent to new jobs on the East Coast based on their qualifications or sent back to their old residential city. It did not end the struggles for internees. They had to find jobs, earn money, and reorient themselves back into American society. Similarly, once repatriated to Germany, the German POWs had to do the same. Spending time in an enclosure closed individuals off from the outside world. They had to learn how to rebuild.

The Japanese Americans experienced decent treatment, but it was not as good as that of the German prisoners. Some areas provided humane treatment to the Japanese Americans, when they moved into POW camps that had already built facilities or created with new tents. The authorities quickly built the internment camps from scratch and placed them in an area where the internees did not have access to easy recreational activities. Children could form teams, but swimming or other activities were not available. The internees created sports teams, with baseball being the most popular. At Tule Lake, the camp team played against other camps, or local city teams.[737] Yet, the people could only minimally maintain their identities. Jeanne Houston and Shirai both acknowledged that family ties broke, as the husbands and fathers failed to keep a firm grip on their families. Nevertheless, the children maintained their cultural heritage and identity of being of Japanese ancestry. They continued to learn Japanese, help their families,

[736] Ibid.
[737] Shirai 146-148.

and returned home when the war ended. There were psychological changes, as families separated in the camps and young people spent time together. But the family unit still taught their culture.

Imprisoned in the United States, the Japanese Americans experienced systematic removal. They experienced similar treatment to German POWs, as they had access to equipment from the War Department and the Army. But the similarities end there. The hastily built facilities did not appreciate the cultural differences between Japanese and Americans. People struggled to trust the United States government after being removed from their homes and placed behind barbed wire. Recreational activities depended upon their location and citizens questioned their loyalty to the United States. As the war progressed, opportunities arose to join the Army, based upon answers to the loyalty questionnaire, or they could work in industries where labor was lacking. Nevertheless, the idea of "us" versus "them" concerning Japanese Americans and other groups of "enemies" inside the United States remained. Americans did not accept the Japanese Americans and classified them as enemies. In contrast, the German POWs mimicked American boys in people's minds; acceptable, and friendly, despite being enemies.

There is a lack of scholarship comparing German prisoners to Japanese internees. Many publications exist on the experience of each group, but formal comparisons do not exist. The central primary texts concerning the German POWs remains the publication by Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America.* However, scholars completed smaller state and regional studies reviewing prisoner treatment at each individual camp.[738] Various publications address Japanese internment. Often quoted as the "date of infamy", scholars have discussed the narrative history regarding Japanese internment, their experiences as prisoners, and the legality

[738] For more information on the historiography, as well as literature on the German prisoners-of-war in America, see Chapter One: Understanding Prisoners-of-war.

of the internment, related to governmental oversight.[739] Ronald Takaki's *Strangers from a Different Shore* studied the tale of the Issei (immigrants to America/first-generation), who were viewed by Americans as strangers and who believed they would not remain in America. They would make their money and return to Japan. Another notable publication includes *By Order of the President*, Greg Robinson's novel that reviewed the legality of Executive Order 9066, and argued that racial motivations spurred the signing of the order deporting Japanese Americans.[740] Historians must conduct a formal study of the extent of treatment by the War Department and the United States government of those in their charge. No formal study exists; however, comparing the prisoner experiences shows that German prisoners fared better, because the United States and the Geneva Convention guaranteed prisoner rights.

American POWs in European Theater

America entered the European Theater in 1942, with the campaign in Italy and Africa. Capturing POWs, Allied forces sent the troops stateside, under the regulations of the Geneva Convention and the War Department. As the Allied forces captured troops, the Axis forces (specifically Germany) also captured troops. American servicemen were captured in the European Theater. Spread out among different areas, the American POWs experienced treatment comparable to that of the German POWs. The German captors treated Americans decently, as the German government feared reprisals from the United States and British forces. Conditions were not ideal, and there were punishments if, American POWs attempted to escape. However, Germany did try to appease the underlying premises of the Geneva Convention.

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[739] Roger Daniels. "Incarcerating Japanese Americans." *Magazine of History* 16, no. 3 (2002): https://www.proquest.com/docview/213745246?_oafollow=false&accountid=12085&pq-origsite=summon&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals. 19.
See also: Roger Daniels *Prisoners without Trial*; Sandra Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*; or Gary Okihiro *Storied Lives.*
[740] Robinson. John Rasel. "An Historiography of Racism: Japanese American Internment, 1942-1945." *Literary Law Enforcement*, Eastern Illinois University https://www.eiu.edu/historia/Rasel.pdf.

As a signor of the Geneva Convention, Germany was required to honor the agreement to ensure other countries treated their prisoners fairly. The Convention detailed proper care and treatment of prisoners to limit inhumane treatment and ensure prisoners had decent living conditions. The obligation fell on the containing power (the country holding POWs); thus, the governments needed to allocate resources to maintain prisoners' needs. The lifestyle was not easy, but necessities needed to be provided: food, shelter, clothing, medical care, etc.

This was not a simple task to accomplish. American POWs feared retaliations from their German captors as the war progressed. Overcrowding and a lack of supplies became common during the last year of the war. In addition, as the morale of their German captors fell, fears of revenge grew.[741] International Red Cross visits averaged about every three months, assisting in the care and treatment of American POWs. The additional stipulations regarding international care packages helped the servicemen endure imprisonment.

Chester Strunk was a POW in Europe, in Stalag III. Born in Benton Harbor, Michigan, he attended Western Michigan College (later Western Michigan University).[742] Recruited from college in June 1942; the government drafted him in February 1943. He was an American Airman, trained to fly the new B-17 bomber.[743] He served as a navigator with the 246th Bombardment Squadron, 99th Bombardment Group, 15th Air Force. Captured in 1944. After a bombing run in Ploiești, Romania, his plane crashed after losing its engines.[744] Upon being captured, his captors separated him from the enlisted men and searched him. He could keep his

[741] Arieh Kochavi. *Confronting Captivity: Britain and the United States and Their POWs in Nazi Germany*. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).
[742] Chester Strunk. "Becoming an Airman." (2012), The Digital Collections of the National World War II Museum. New Orleans. https://www.ww2online.org/view/chester-strunk#becoming-an-airman.
[743] Ibid.
[744] Strunk. Interview.

Bible and a picture of the woman who had pinned his wings on. Transferred by boxcar to Budapest, Hungary, he was again interrogated, before being placed in a prisoner camp.[745]

Removed to Stalag Luft III (near Zagań Poland), his first encounter with the camp, involved his personal hygiene.[746] At the camp, there was a library, a theater for plays, volleyball courts, a track that circled the camp, a church, and comfortable chairs constructed from old Red Cross boxes. The barracks were like a military barrack with an attic and raised flooring off the ground. Strunk recalled seeing *Philadelphia Story,* and reading books sent from the United States. Similar to the German POWs, he experienced roll call each day at the camp. German soldiers punished missing prisoners after a search by dogs. He received small Red Cross packages, but during his last year (1945), Strunk received no letters from home.[747] The Red Cross packages were small and did not fully help the prisoners, as the Germans confiscated their packages. Only half the parcels reached the prisoners, because of American domination of the skies. The Red Cross supplemented the little food given to them by the Germans. Strunk believed the food was "adequate".[748]

Strunk had no problems with his German captors. His treatment by civilians was hasher than that by the military interrogators. One civilian hit him for waving to a girl while a prisoner.[749] Only the commandant could talk with the German officers. Escape did not happen, as Strunk recalled. But, the "Great Escape" had happened earlier, prompting the Germans to look for tunnels. Previously, a group of prisoners tunneled under the camp to escape from Stalag III.

[745] Ibid.
[746] Ibid.
[747] Ibid.
[748] Ibid.
[749] Strunk Interview.

They escaped the camp but were recaptured and subsequently executed for trying to escape.[750] Of the seventy-six men who fled, three escaped, with fifty of the escapees executed. Ironically, German prisoners also attempted this method of escape in Arizona, who tunneled underneath the camp. The military apprehended all the escaped German prisoners. After their attempted escape, authorities reassigned them to various prisoner-of-war camps throughout the United States.[751]

Strunk advised prisoners to find things to pass the time and make themselves as comfortable as possible. There were opportunities to study from books and he told them to take "advantage of whatever is available", so they could pick up where they left off upon release.[752] He focused on being active because sleeping all the time resulted in the body deteriorating. Strunk said his confinement was not too bad. He took advantage of the opportunities, attended church, and exercised.

The hardest part of Strunk's experience was evacuating the camp in January 1945, when he transferred to Moosburg in Germany. Marched with guards on both sides, he arrived at Moosburg VII. He and others used hidden radios to remain informed about the movements of Allied forces. However, Strunk mentioned it was important not to think too much about the possibility of liberation. He stated the guards were "as good as they could be" and they did not understand "why we [United States] were in the war in the first place".[753] Moosburg limited food rations, and his treatment was harsher because German forces removed prisoners there as they evacuated from Allied forces. Liberated by Patton's forces, the meager food rations mainly

[750] Famously portrayed in the film *The Great Escape* (1963). See also Tim Carroll's *The Great Escape from Stalag Luft III: The Full Story of How 76 Allied Officers Carried Out World War II's Most Remarkable Mass Escape* (2005).
[751] See the publication by John Hammond Moore for more information. John Hammond Moore. *The Faustball Tunnel*. New York, NY: Random House, 1978.
[752] Strunk
[753] Strunk.

consisted of soup and bread. Ordered to remain, they were repatriated home via France after the war.[754]

Although the German POWs in Michigan shrinking food rations, there was never a complete loss of food. Strunk remembered Patton's corps trying to feed the men. Still being at the head of their supply lines, there was not enough food for everyone in Patton's unit and the 100,000 men (according to Strunk's recollection), whom they liberated from the Moosburg camp. Otherwise, Strunk's treatment was comparable to the German POWs in Michigan. Both had access to books, plays, activities, and sports. As an officer, Strunk was not required to work, so he filled his time painting and exercising.

Each prisoner's story is different. Each experience is unique. Generalities among prisoner treatment show that American POWs in Europe were treated as fellow soldiers. Americans experienced treatment similar to how American citizens treated German prisoners in their country. It did not limit their hardships, but they survived their imprisonment. Rothacker Smith, an Army medic, was born in New York City, though his family moved to Detroit, Michigan. After graduating high school, he attended Emmanuel Missionary College in Berrien Springs, Michigan.[755] Drafted in February 1943, the Army stationed him at Camp Custer (Fort Custer), before being transferred to basic training in Georgia.

Smith's experience was different because he was an African American service member during segregation. The United States military distinguished between men based on skin color, a distinction that directly affected Smith's military experience. Smith recalled that he and other

[754] Ibid.
[755] Rothacker Smith. "Rothacker Interview." (2015), The Digital Collections of the National World War II Museum. New Orleans, Louisiana. https://www.ww2online.org/view/rothacker-smith#getting-hit.

men from the northern states were "better behaved" than others who were from the southern states. He would salute officers; and did not possess the "fatalism" seen by others.[756] Smith recalled that his faith in Jesus Christ guided his prisoner experience.

Wounded in December 1944, German forces captured him during an assault on the Italian village of Sommocolonia.[757] At first, he believed only death awaited him, rather than being captured and interrogated. Because Smith had learned Italian, he could converse with a German corporal who marched the men into the town square. He said that the corporal was "very nice", and he was "treated okay".[758] His Germans captors gave him some wine. Although wounded, American bomb raids interrupted his medical care. As the German corralled the prisoners and marched them to a new location, Smith had a hard time keeping up because of his untreated foot injury. Prisoners attempted to help him, only to be told that he would need to walk unaided or die.[759]

Smith and ten other prisoners marched together as a group. Smith lost energy during the march, as his injuries continued. Had he stopped walking, he would have died. He remembered being struck by the barrel of carbines held by the German soldiers. He believed God was with him and helped him make the march: "God was with me. But I couldn't feel it. All I could do was count five steps."[760] As a prisoner-of-war, Smith felt gradual acceptance. He spent much of his time believing the German soldiers would simply shoot them. However, at the hospital, he received a radiogram, and he could write a letter to his family. He wrote that "he was a guest of

[756] Smith interview.
[757] Ibid.
[758] Ibid.
[759] Ibid.
[760] Ibid.

the Germans", about five months after he had left.[761] His writing was subject to censorship, as Smith found that his letters were read and edited by the Germans.

Food from his German captors was irregular. He recalled finding moldy bread and something edible, by opening up the inside of the bread. His first night, he shared the food in his pockets, allowing the men a chance to have half of a hardtack and a piece of a chocolate bar. He had to deal with thirty-six hours of no food. He remembered starving while being a prisoner. The rations were so meager, Smith stated it took him a month after being released to finally "feel full".[762] Through a horse-drawn carriage, under German guard, the prisoners received bread in the camps. Prisoners stole bread many times because the food was so irregularly given.[763] Only three to five men received a loaf of bread to share, coffee for breakfast, and Red Cross parcels, that minimally supplemented the soup given for lunch.[764] Rations were very meager. Ground-bean porridge was a staple that filled up Smith, as he recalled. He remembered getting ½ pound of Sun-Maid raisins. The prisoners rationed the raisins to ensure each person received some. Hershey bars were also divided.

His captors stole his watch, as the Germans were fearful of watches being used to escape. Soldiers were told to sell them rather than accept a certificate when one turned in their watch. German prisoners received similar certificates and there was better luck of having items returned than American POWs experienced. In 1951, after Smith lost his watch, the German government sent him $35 to replace it. He received a Purple Heart and Bronze Star for his service in the military.[765]

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[761] Smith. Interview.
[762] Ibid.
[763] Ibid.
[764] Ibid.
[765] Smith Interview.

Smith's interrogation was light, as his interrogator spoke English. An additional interrogation happened in a schoolhouse with another English-speaking German. A lieutenant, Smith decided not to answer questions except providing name, rank, and serial number. His interrogators threatened Smith with a lack of medical care to persuade him to talk. But Smith did not talk; "I would not answer and so he sent me back".[766] He was transferred to another POW camp in Italy, with bunks and received a cold shower. The bunk had straw, made from pieces of wood, with three blankets. "I hate cold showers.", Smith recalled, as he undressed for his shower. Thankfully, he did not have to take the shower, as his captors moved him to the hospital when they saw the bandages on his injuries.[767]

Living in the camp was difficult. Food was a constant thought. As Smith attempted to live on meager rations and Red Cross parcels, he recalled how important it was to eat all the Red Cross parcels. If people left rationed items out, it was widespread for the German soldiers to call for an inspection. When this happened, the soldiers would take the rations they would find. Smith recalled one inspection where he lost his raisins. Smith said, it only took one time, as he did not like his raisins going missing and other products. Taking food violated the Geneva Convention, something the German prisoners in the United States did not have to contend with. The Germans searched the packages for contraband, such as uncensored materials, but they allowed prisoners to keep the foodstuffs and other items that were sent.

Strunk's and Smith's treatment as prisoners was not ideal, but it was not completely inhumane. The Axis governments subjected the men to interrogations, but not beatings. They supplied food, although the rations were limited. The only supplement was the parcels sent from

[766] Ibid.
[767] Ibid.

families or the International Red Cross. In comparison, Americans fed German POWs well, and they had access to chocolate bars, cigarettes, butter, and other meats and vegetables. Interrogations of both groups did not involve torture. Despite the segregation and discrimination Smith experienced as an American, he did not experience the same treatment under German hands. Germans separated him from the "white" Americans and officers but treated him similarly. In contrast, German POWs experienced the same treatment as American serviceman. Nationality had no bearing on treatment and experience.

Overall, being an American POW in Europe was not ideal. The German military did not sufficiently meet the needs of the prisoners they had captured. They fed the prisoners, but their treatment was not as good, compared to the treatment their enemy experienced on American soil. The countries complied with the Geneva Convention although perhaps, minimally, given the inability of the German government to feed, provide medical care, or transport troops to prison barracks effectively. Unfortunately, much of the American POWs' treatment worsened because of the supremacy of Allied forces. Because the Allies helped change the tide of war, the German government had fewer resources for its own people and to fully adhere to the Geneva Convention.

Bob Moore's recent book, *Prisoners of War: Europe* encapsulated prisoner treatment in the various theaters. The book has multiple sections, outlining Axis prisoners in the Soviet Union, or Italians in Germany Moore's premise was to present a rounded picture of the hardships faced by prisoners in the European theater. By creating a comparative history of the POWs in Europe, Moore places prisoner-of-war into the specific historiographical narratives of their countries and demonstrates the similarities of the prisoner experience. Incorporating the context behind prisoner treatment, Moore contented that the past influenced the present. All the previous

treaties, order, and practices influenced each country's decisions regarding their foreign prisoners. As nations were "confronted with the reality of a new conflict, every belligerent nation looked to its earlier experiences. For the countries involved in the Great War, it was a case of revisiting what had been done before and sometimes even employing the same personnel."[768] Their experiences shaped political and military decisions, even those that impact resource allocation and prisoner treatment.

In contrast, the German troops held in America saw a loss of resource allocation during repatriation. Aware of their rights, many prisoners complained about ration changes once American troops began returning home. However, this allocation reduction did not limit the prisoners' food or general health. Items were still available in the commissary/canteen, American citizens still gave them food, despite provisional orders against this. The POWs were well-fed in America. Once the prisoners returned home, the food situation was dire. Military officials rationed all food. Food parcels sent from American benefactors were of the "highest quality", a former prisoner wrote.[769] Yet, not all prisoners were satisfied. Karl Jung recalled always being hungry as a prisoner, the Americans fed him the minimum allotment until he was a prisoner in Michigan. Once there, his complaints of hunger dissipated, because a local farmer fed him while he worked.[770]

The relationships between German prisoners and American citizens did not develop on the case of American prisoners in Europe. They were enemies and treated with minimal care; just

[768] Bob Moore. *Prisoners-of-war: Europe: 1939-1956*. (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2022). 23.
[769] Gerolf von Schoenborn. *Correspondence between Gerolf Von Schoenborn and Otto Herzog*. 2004. Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan.
[770] Karl Jung. *Correspondence between Karl Jung Family and Otto Herzog.* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. July 21, 1947.

enough to avoid reprisals and to be used for potential exchanges. Prisoner-of-war treatment varied with each camp, and even for each soldier, as Smith and Strunk narrated. Being African American, Smith expected to be killed immediately, rather than be a prisoner. Strunk, experienced decent treatment and received food. In contrast, German prisoners experienced relatively similar treatment throughout their stay in the United States, as most camps were standardized and the rations and procedures from the War Department determined prisoner treatment.

As American troops neared the end of the war, the hope of liberation from the German camps faltered, as common practice dictated that prisoners retreat further from the front. These evacuations "usually took place at short notice and often with no fixed destination."[771] Food was a constant struggle, with reports of frozen beets, scraps, and even animal hides being bartered for American and Allied servicemen to live on while they marched. These difficulties were not experienced by German prisoners held on American shores. Food rations dwindled as the war ended, but they did not have to rely on rotting food for sustenance.

American POWs in the Japanese Theater

American servicemen also experienced captivity in the Pacific Theater, named for the conflict between the United States and Japan. With the United States" declaration of war on December 8th, 1941, this theater was the first the Americans engaged in. Getting involved in the European Theater took longer. American troops began arriving in Europe and Italy in fall 1942. Experiences varied, but Americans in the hands of the Japanese shared horror stories of their treatment. The cultural and linguistic differences played a part in the treatment of Japanese-held POWs.

[771] Moore. (2022). 397.

Erwin Johnson, born in 1921, lived in Louisiana before the war. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps and served for two weeks of basic training before transferring to Georgia. Trained as an air force mechanic, he shipped out to Manila in November 1941. As he traveled on a troop transport ship, he noticed that the ship carrying the planes were diverted to Australia instead of the Philippines. [772] He served in Manila when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Transferred to Bataan, the Japanese captured him in April 1942. Although he was part of the Air Corps, Johnson served on the front lines to help defend Bataan. He believed that the Japanese would kill all prisoners. He remembers being told to march sixty-five miles, but he, and his compatriots" rations had dwindled by half for the duration of the march. Divided into groups, the men were dispersed with a few guards.[773] The Japanese bayoneted or shot men seated while another group passed by. One horrifying memory was a guard killing a local woman and her baby, after she gave food (rice wrapped in a banana leaf) to the American soldiers.[774] On the Bataan Death March, Johnson experienced beatings and saw prisoners shot. The Japanese troops were unkind as they "shoved" them. He attributed how the Japanese treated American soldiers to an attitude of those "who win and those who lose."[775] Johnson stayed rather than attempt escape. He followed the instructions of his captors. The main part was trying to stay in the group because falling out resulted in being beaten or shot.

Placed into 40 and 8 boxcars, they were squeezed together as they moved to Camp O'Donnell. The Japanese separated the Americans from the Filipino prisoners. Escapes

[772] Erwin Johnson. Interview by the National World War II Museum. (2012). https://WWw.WW2online.org/view/erwin-johnson#prewar-life-enlistment-training-and-deployment-to-the-philippines.
[773] Ibid.
[774] Ibid.
[775] Johnson Interview.

guaranteed punishment by shooting. Placed in groups of ten, should one try to escape, the captors shot all the remaining members.[776] His guards were "brutal", and many men expected to die.[777]

Johnson agreed to join a work detail because he got more food. He saw that the men who worked experienced better care from their Japanese captors. He recalled being part of a work cutting detail, similar to work by German POWs in America. Johnson believed that working on a detail helped him remain healthy enough to survive. On October 8th, 1942, Johnson transferred to a hell ship (Tottori Maru) in Manila. A total of 1500 men lived on the ship, along with Japanese soldiers. Bathroom facilities consisted of a bucket that was lowered down. There was no recreation on the deck for prisoners and they spent much of their time below decks.

After his hell ship encounter, Johnson was transferred to Korea. It was much colder than the Philippines. Because of the temperatures, the Japanese government issued six blankets per person and a Japanese soldier's uniform so the men could work in Manchuria. Placed in barracks, Johnson and his compatriots became slave labor. The men needed to be kept alive. Hence additional blankets were given. The blankets surprised Johnson, and he believed that these blankets saved lives. Working in a machine tool factory, he woke each morning to walk four-and-half miles to the factory, in all weather.[778]

August 17th, 1945, brought news of liberation to Johnson and his fellow prisoners. They were told the war was over. Johnson still showed emotion, telling this story, although it was long ago. His emotional reaction showed the importance of the news. He was free from his captors

[776] Johnson, Interview.
[777] Ibid.
[778] Johnson Interview.

and the war was over. He was free to return home. Johnson left Manila and returned to Seattle. From there, he returned home to Louisiana, where he remained after the war.[779]

The harrowing experiences of American servicemen in Japan juxtaposed the treatment of German prisoners in Michigan. Researchers at the Truman Library as the country celebrated the 75th anniversary of World War II, noted that the Japanese "used some POWs for bayonet practice, tortured and starved others, and forced many to perform hard labor."[780] The Japanese subjected prisoners to work in coal mines and used them as slave labor, similar to Jewish prisoners under the German government.[781] The beatings described by many other POWs depended upon each prisoner's experiences. Erwin Johnson was not beaten too badly. In contrast, other prisoners describe this as a daily occurrence. Elizabeth Collins, writing for the U.S. Army, narrates the inhumane treatment for United States servicemen captured in Japan. She argued that soldiers captured in Japan learned that the Geneva Convention was simply a piece of paper, as if.it did not exist. Soldiers suffered malnutrition, and some Japanese soldiers murdered them outright.[782] German prisoners did not experience that. They received food, clothing and were treated with respect.

Erwin Johnson was not the only surviving Airman to complete the Battan Death March; other Airmen also shared these experiences. Ben Steele was part of the Air Corps as well, raised in Montana. Growing up on a cattle ranch, he joined the Air Force in 1940, and experienced the

[779] Ibid.
[780] "Marching to Victory: Prisoners-of-war." *Truman Library Institute*. (September 4, 2020). https://www.trumanlibraryinstitute.org/wwii-75-marching-victory-23/#:~:text=Japanese%20troops%20used%20some%20POWs,the%20Japanese%20died%20in%20captivity.
[781] Ibid.
[782] Elizabeth M. Collins. "Under the enemy's yoke: The POW experience in Japan." *U.S. Army.* (December 9, 2016). https://www.army.mil/article/179395/under_the_enemys_yoke_the_pow_experience_in_japan

Battle of Bataan, similar to Erwin Johnson.[783] After joining the army and training in New Mexico, Steele transferred to Hawaii and was escorted to his first assignment in the Philippines during October 1941. Trained as an air control operator, he worked with the B-17 bombers. "We were so unorganized", Steele recalled, as he landed in Manila as a "naïve" young man who knew things were tense but did not fully understand that his country was teetering towards war in the East.[784]

On Christmas, 1941, Steele and the other members of this company moved to Bataan. They did not have enough food- "that was MacArthur's fault"- and his rations depleted by half.[785] He blamed the loss of Bataan on "starvation" as food was rationed. He butchered caribou late in the evening, as the people were starving and still needed to fight on Bataan. He reckoned that the troops would have lasted longer had the military issued adequate food rations, or the abandoned food from Manila had been sent to them.[786]

Captured on April 9th, 1942, Steele expected to be shot. His captors stripped him of his valuables, including cameras and rings. Forced to carry Japanese packs as a prisoner, Steele said, "that was torture" as he carried the pack for over five miles while being tired and hungry.[787] He experienced beatings and threats of shooting, while walking in the Bataan Death March. After spending six months in a makeshift hospital, he transferred to Cabanatuan Camp in 1944.

His experience as a POW under Japanese control differed from Johnson's. After passing out on the side of the road, he begged Japanese officers for water. He received none. Within the

[783] Ben Steele. "Oral History Interview." Interview by National World War II Museum, (2015). https://www.ww2online.org/view/ben-steele#early-life-and-becoming-an-airman.
[784] Ibid.
[785] Steele Interview.
[786] Ibid.
[787] Stelle, Interview.

camp, only one water line existed, making it difficult for prisoners to stay hydrated.[788] Steele waited all day and part of the night to get water. Burial details were rough, and he passed out frequently while working under the Japanese. Once he regained consciousness, he returned to work, without rest.[789] A clergy gave him Last Rites three times, as he was constantly ill. After his transfer to Cabanatuan, he believed it was one "of the better places" he stayed.[790] Working in fields, he ate from the cornstalks and tried to sneak food into the camps. His guards were okay, but he tried to stay away from them. He did not suffer the beatings as others did.[791] Liberation came, and the commanders ordered him not to harm the Japanese. Candy bars were the first thing he ate after liberation. He ate an entire box, twenty-four of them.[792] Then, he got sick, because of how much he had eaten. He returned to San Francisco and called his family. They were unaware of his liberation; hearing from him after the war was a surprise. He was thankful to survive and appreciated his freedom and what he can do in the United States.[793]

As the war continued, Axis forces captured more Americans. Glenn Frazier and Charles Balaza were both captured by the Japanese off Bataan. Frazier spent his time at Camp O" Donnell, while Balaza spent his imprisonment at Cabanatuan.[794] Both camps had limited water. This luxury was hard to obtain. Guards beat both men, assigned them to work details, and fed them limited rations. Their experiences mirrored those of Erwin Johnson and Ben Steele. Frazier suffered heavily, as he was without water. Conditions deteriorated rapidly, as men nearly died in

[788] Ibid.
[789] Ibid.
[790] Ibid.
[791] Steele Interview.
[792] Ibid.
[793] Ibid.
[794] Glenn Frazier. Oral History Interview by National World War II Museum. (2015). https://www.ww2online.org/view/glenn-frazier#early-life.

the water line. Toilets did not exist, only trenches.[795] It was not uncommon to witness piles of money. The black market grew inside the camp as low rations continued. Frazier paid 500 dollars for a can of corned beef. Working on the grave details, Frazier would help bury his comrades.[796] He believed that he would leave Camp O'Donnell and escape the "stench of death" that enveloped the entire camp.[797] The food had run out. The rice was full of worms and water.

Prisoners in Japanese camps experienced poor care. Historians agree that the treatment of American prisoners in Japan was brutal. Many prisoners were beaten and received poor food rations, and the high mortality rate was high. Historian David M. Kennedy, author of *Freedom From Fear*, a comprehensive book on American during the Great Depression and World War II, acknowledged the high death rates and problems experienced by prisoners.[798] The cultural differences, where the Japanese saw surrender as dishonorable, determined the treatment of American prisoners.[799] Cultural differences and language barriers were hard to remove. As prisoners came to America, many spoke some English, allowing for an easier transition of instructions.

While a prisoner, Balaza witnessed beatings by the Japanese guards, as he experienced similar conditions to Frazier. Both men realized that humor, despite being morbid by today's standards, helped keep hope alive. Faith was another element that helped them get through, as Smith acknowledged during this captivity in the European theater. Cabanatuan had poisoned

[795] Frazier, Interview.
[796] Ibid.
[797] Ibid.
[798] David. M. Kennedy. *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 810-815.
[799] "POWs in Japan". *Library of Congress.* (2024). https://www.loc.gov/collections/veterans-history-project-collection/serving-our-voices/diverse-experiences-in-service/prisoners-of-war/pows-in-japan/

water.[800] Only chorine tablets would help purify the water. Balaza had tablets to help his compatriots have safe drinking water. “Hunger will do something to man that is unbelievable that you never think you would do,” Balaza recalled.[801] He ate dog meat to survive, which he would never have considered in the United States. The food was so meager that eating any meat was necessary to survive. Sickness was rampant in the camp. Men died each day and dysentery was a common ailment. Both Balaza and Frazier suffered from dysentery and were fixed up by doctors in a makeshift hospital in the camps.

Working on farms, Balaza recalled using fertilizer from human feces. The smell from this duty was horrendous. On constant watch for Japanese guards, Balaza stole and ate the vegetables from the fields he was working in. “Hunger gets to man”, they would eat something they would have considered inedible.[802] Hunger was so rampant; prisoners would eat anything. He received very little from the Red Cross parcels. These items went to the Japanese which was a direct violation of the ICRC and the Geneva Convention. Soldiers received food a few days after the bombings of Nagasaki, Balaza recalled.[803] The government sent all crops to the Japanese Army, rather than the prisoners. The Japanese beat men who tried to escape.[804] Escapees received no food; and the Japanese used additional beatings with hands, feet, and weapons to make examples of them. In one instance, the prisoners kneeled, with ropes tied from their hands to their feet and around their necks. The men suffered abuse from the guards, every chance the guards had. The guards shot prisoners with no provocation.[805] Balaza witnessed this first-hand, as they executed

[800] Charles Balaza. Interview. (2015). National World War II Museum. https://www.ww2online.org/view/charles-balaza#enlisting-in-the-army-and-deploying-to-the-philippines.
[801] Ibid.
[802] Ibid.
[803] Ibid.
[804] Balaza, Interview.
[805] Ibid.

American prisoners near his barracks. Each prisoner received a puff of a cigarette, before tying their hands, blindfolding them, and executing them by a firing squad. The Japanese executed each man individually, rather than en masse.[806]

Oral histories from survivors continue to be told, as more former prisoners-of-war tell their stories. Additional accounts such as Laura Hillenbrand's *Unbroken*, and *Sorties into Hell* by Chester Hearn document prisoner treatment under the Japanese. Louis Zamperini's story details that difficulty of prisoner treatment. Rations were low. Beatings were common.[807] Food rations commonly were hardtack biscuits with weak tea. Zamperini recalled asking guards, who recognized the track star, what had happened to other marines held captive on the island. They were all executed. The soldiers received no water, and the men remained silent. The prison guards would rage, resulting in prisoners being "bombarded with stones and lit cigarettes, spat upon, and poked with sticks".[808] Humiliation was another tactic used by the Japanese against Americans to break them down. Forcing them to dance, sing, or pick up rice, American prisoners experienced psychological torture besides just the physical discomforts of imprisonment.[809] Interrogated frequently, he attempted to resist. He admitted that he broke and his captors rewarded him for speaking with a cola, biscuit, and pastry.[810] Resistance from Americans came through silence, gestures and whispers as they endured treatment from the Japanese, whose militaristic and honored society, led some guards to be on power-trips, as they deprived men of

[806] Ibid.
[807] Laura Hillenbrand. *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*. (New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2014). 187.
[808] Hillenbrand. 181.
[809] Hillenbrand. 181.
[810] Ibid.

necessities.[811] After being rescued, Zamperini returned to the United States, opened a camp for troubled boys and even lit the Olympic torch at the games at Nagano in 1998.

Similar to Zamperini's story at the hands of the Japanese military, *Sorties into Hell* dives into the story of Chichi Jima, an area under Japanese control, where American servicemen starved, and as accounts detailed, eaten.[812] Chester Hearn's access to oral testimonies and government investigations dictates a story where war make normal people do abnormal things.[813] As the Japanese shot down United States" airmen on the island, the Japanese captured the men. Japanese soldiers captured few Marines, as they fought to the death; this was not always an option for fighter pilots, who flew in dogfights.

As the war began, the Japanese conditioned the soldiers on Chichi Jima and trained them to listen to propaganda from the Imperial General Headquarters. They were taught that the "most painful blow to Americans is the loss of personnel," and the soldiers determined to "kill as many of the enemy as possible". [814] This led to strategies involving killing captured prisoners, and the creation of different ways to achieve this goal. Convinced the American soldiers and airmen were "beasts", the soldiers considered them unworthy of humane treatment.[815] Chichi Jima stands out as a recent publication, reviewing a cover-up by the Japanese military concerning the beatings, killings, and cannibalization of servicemen. Military investigations after the war detailed the treatment of soldiers, as Colonel Presley Rixey attempted to find answers. There were few records kept concerning the men who landed and were imprisoned at Chichi. One

[811] Hillenbrand.199-201.
[812] Chester Hearn. *Sorties into Hell: The Hidden War on Chichi Jima*. (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003).
[813] Hearn, 198.
[814] Hearn, 15.
[815] Hearn, 41.

notable airman who escaped this fate was former President George Herbert Walker Bush, who bailed out of his plane and rescued by a U.S. ship rather than landing on the island.[816]

Both Zamperini's story and the narrative surrounding Chichi Jima add complexities to the narratives of atrocities being committed by Japanese troops. Yet, the primary focus is the comparable treatment of American servicemen and German POWs in the United States. They experienced drastically different circumstances. Honor was important, but it was acceptable to be a prisoner, according to Americans. German prisoners experienced no beatings or executions; nor did they experience the humiliation of being marched naked or forced to dance for a small portion of food. The German troops reported that they gained weight during their prison experience. This may have assisted prisoners who returned to Germany after the war, as the small rations caused prisoners, and their families to lose weight. Karl Jung, a former prisoner in Michigan, called it a minor miracle that his family gained a small amount of weight in 1948. He credits much of this to the packages his family received from the Herzog family.[817]

German prisoners were not subject to humiliations or death marches, as experienced by Frazier and others. Instead, they had access to reading materials, published a newsletter; and as with an Ottawa county camp, built a swimming area. The German prisoners experienced better treatment than their American compatriots and better than their German peers fighting along the Eastern Front.

German POWs in Europe

Along the Eastern Front, the name of the battlefield between German Wehrmacht and Russian Soviet troops, atrocities and the dead mounted on both sides. The captors subjected the

[816] Hearn. 11-12.
[817] Jung, Karl. February 24, 1948.

Germans captured in this arena to terrifying and inhumane treatment. German prisoners captured by the USSR (Soviet Union) faced execution, starvation, and death marches. In some ways, the Germans on the Eastern Front were like American troops captured in the Pacific Theater.

Of the estimated thirty-five million prisoners captured through the entirety of World War II, approximately five million perished, most on the Eastern Front.[818] As Germany waged a war of attrition, the dead piled up on both sides, along with a staggering number of captives. Many of the German POWs traveled to Soviet Gulags. Others traveled to camps that were atypical of a Gulag setup. Camp Pakhta-Aral No. 29 at the Kazakhstan border was such a camp. The prisoners worked more in agriculture than mining, like German POWs in America, working on farms and in food processing factories.[819] Soviet forces captured roughly 49,000 prisoners and sent them to Pakhta. Although the men arrived in terrible shape, many suffered from dysentery, they found the resident barracks "had more room for inmates, with scant but still existing comforts like bedding and a bath within close walking range".[820] This contrasts with other camps, where prisoners squeezed into tight quarters, as prisoner Adelbert Holl experienced as he marched out of Stalingrad under Russian guard.[821]

Prisoners at Pakhta experienced a constant struggle, reminiscent of other camps in Europe: finding food. Food was scarce within the camp area, and food transports were small, given the location and number of prisoners at the camp. To combat this problem, the Soviets

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[818] Daniel Hutchinson. ""We...Are the Most Fortunate of Prisoners': The Axis Pow Experience at Camp Opelika During World War II." *The Alabama Review* 64, no. 4 (October 2011). The University of Alabama Press. https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&u=vic_liberty&id=GALE%7CA277601772&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon&aty=sso%3A+shibboleth.

[819] Aimar Ventsel & Baurzhan Zhanguttin. "Prison Camp No. 29 for Prisoners-of-war from the Second World War on the Territory of Kazakhstan between 1943-1949." *Folklore* 63 (2016) : 9-10. https://dx.doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.7592/FRJF2016.63.camp29.

[820] Ibid.

[821] Adelbert Holl. *After Stalingrad: Seven Years as a Soviet Prisoner-of-war*. Translated by Tony Le Tissier. (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword, 2016). 14-15.

established a supplemental farm near the camp. Prisoners also gathered wild plants and vegetables to combat hunger, as rations sent from the Soviet government matched standard gulag rations.[822] Suitable for "growing watermelons, melons, and other suitable agricultural crops", the farm's importance to sustaining the prisoners grew over time, as the farm increased from twenty to one hundred fifty three hectares.[823] Prisoners experienced more liberal surroundings as the Soviets attempted to lower the cost of housing and feeding prisoners. "Prisoners began to make footwear in the camp, wearing light boots and sandals instead of factory produced footwear in the summer", which reduced prison costs.[824] One advantage of cutting costs was utilizing local resources, rather than relying on the Soviet government to contribute funds and resources. This independent reliance on local resources created a system of liberal rules, different from those experienced in typical Soviet camps.

Like other prisoners, those sequestered at Pakhta became cheap labor. Working in the agriculture sector, rather than the mines, these prisoners had a lower mortality rate than their counterparts. However, it did not limit the number of deaths, as prisoners arriving in the beginning perished at higher rates because of the lack of food and medical supplies. Prisoners continued to be subjected to the ills of captivity – boredom, working, and poor food. Yet, Pakhta was a rare exception to the rule for prisoners under Soviet captivity.

Nevertheless, German prisoners could expect harsh conditions under the Soviets. As Americans experienced harsh treatment, Germans fared little better under Russian control. Like Japan, the Soviet Union had not signed the Geneva Convention. This resulted in German

[822] Ventsel. 12.
[823] Ibid.
[824] Ibid.

prisoners' basic rights as POWs being unprotected.[825] Used for economic slave labor, prisoners worked in industrial areas, such as mining and construction. These camps continued after the war's end due to economic necessity and the war's destruction.[826]

The rations were depleted. Hunger was a constant struggle for Soviet-held troops. This directly contrasted with their American-held counterparts. Adelbert Holl remembered exchanging boots for a loaf of bread, while marching into Russian territory from Stalingrad.[827] But, it did not fully appease his hunger. Those held prisoner in Russian encampments faced high mortality rates, as starvation and excessive work filled their days.[828] The treatment of German prisoners under Soviet control was like that experienced by American prisoners in Japan. Beatings, poor rations, slave labor and high death rates awaited prisoners who fell into Soviet hands. Susan Grunewald, a historian, recently published a book on the returning Soviet-held German prisoners. Her book discussed repatriation and how these prisoners adjusted once they returned home. As a new chapter in the historiography of German prisoners-of-war and the Soviet Union, Grunewald's publication combined both areas of study, arguing the prisoners lived near industrial sites for economic reasons and they experienced poor treatment.[829]

Historians classified conditions in the Soviet camps as inhumane, according to former prisoners and historians. However, the servicemen experienced these conditions differently than those servicemen captured in the western theater. The Americans also dealt with these conditions in Japan. The camps were too small for the number of people. Sickness was common, medicine

[825] World Peace Foundation. "Soviet Union: German Prisoners-of-war Following World War II." (2015). Accessed April 4, 2024. https://sites.tufts.edu/atrocityendings/2015/08/07/german-pows-deaths-under-allied-control/.
[826] Susan Grunewald. "What GIS Mapping Reveals About German POWs in Soviet Russia." 20192024. https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/february-2019/beyond-the-archive-what-gis-mapping-reveals-about-german-pows-in-soviet-russia.
[827] Holl. 8.
[828] World Peace Foundation. (2015).
[829] Susan Grunewald. *From Incarceration to Repatriation.* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2024). 2-3.

was in short supply, and doctors were infrequent. Holl's experience as a POW after surrendering at Stalingrad encapsulates the typical prisoner experience of those held under the Soviets.

After his capture in the wintery mix of snow and ice at Stalingrad, he marched away from the city. This was his first death march. Marched from the city in groups, his body ached, as he walked.[830] Two weeks of marching, limited food, and bitter cold weakened Holbert's body. Arriving in Barbukin, the men received food, but it was frozen.[831] Other food was a mixture of venison, oats and cereals, a horrid attempt at a stew. Filled with rotted potatoes, the men had to throw most of the food out, as they would have been sicker rather than just hungry. Leaving the city and heading towards a transit camp, bodies littered the road. Those unable to keep up the marching pace were shot by the soldiers and left naked in the snow. [832]

After transportation, Holl arrived at a work camp. Both Soviet and German prisoners used captured enemy soldiers as laborers to support each country's war efforts. Holl worked for camps in the Russian forests, felling trees and hauling logs. Despite similar work as his colleagues in Michigan, his working conditions varied. Food was in short supply and the taskmasters were not friendly.[833] German prisoners in the United States, specifically in Michigan, recalled getting extra food and access to water, and had recreational time available to them. One resident recalled the men being glad to work and could not stop them, when they attempted to explain that no picking was necessary for a particular day.[834]

Atrocities on both sides took place between Soviet prisoners and German prisoners held in their respective enemy territories. Both sides used prisoners as part of the labor force. There

[830] Holl. 7.
[831] Holl. 8
[832] Holl, 9-13.
[833] Holl, 9-13.
[834] Esther M. and Marge P. Interview by Abigail Runk. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan 2018.

was a constant lack of resources, concerning food, clothing, shelter, and other necessities promised under the Geneva Convention. Yet, the underlying anger resulting from a war of attrition on the Eastern Front also precipitated a high death rate, as captors shot prisoners for being slow, not working, or other reasons, simply because they were the enemy. A common complaint among employers of POWs was the physical state of the prisoners. Prisoners arrived emaciated and yet were expected to work. More prisoners ended up in sick bay because of the conditions they worked in.[835] For Soviet prisoners in Germany, conditions slightly improved with better food. German prisoners under Soviet control were not as lucky, as Holl recalled. The end of the war did not bring changes for Soviet-held prisoners.

Their captivity would last long after the war ended, as Soviet leaders claimed the prisoners were needed to assist in rebuilding.[836] Grunewald's publication, along with Christiane Wienand's book *Returning Memories* further represents the prisoner experience and their hardships upon returning home. Wienand focused on repatriation. As German prisoners returned from the Soviet Union, they had spent years in Soviet custody. The last German POWs released from the Soviet Union returned during the winter of 1955-1956.[837] Held for economic labor, as Grunewald maintained, the prisoners collectively remembered their experience, which differed from that of prisoners who spent time in America.

The experiences of German prisoners on the Eastern Front, under Soviet control varied between the different camps. Some saw minimal guard involvement and self-sufficient, as at camp Pakhta. Others were forced into death marches and work camps. Meager food rations and

[835] Bob Moore. *Prisoners-of-war: Europe: 1939-1956*. (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2022). 244-245.
[836] Holl 211.
[837] Christiane Wienand. *Returning Memories: Former Prisoners-of-war in Divided and Reunited Germany.* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2015.) 1.

sickness abounded for these prisoners spent time, even after the war, in continued captivity. These various experiences differed from those of their compatriots in America. American-held troops experienced humane treatment and with respect, albeit still being considered an enemy. Ernst Floeter wanted to be captured by American troops, rather than Soviet troops. Once the Soviets compromised his position, he retreated towards American lines to achieve this goal. He had heard of prisoner treatment under the Soviets, and decided he would take his chances with the American government. He succeeded, being captured by United States soldiers and his treatment was humane.[838] This would not be the case for millions of other German troops, such as those captured by the Soviet Union.

Despite each prisoner's unique experience, similarities existed. It is possible to compare treatment between the groups of prisoners to fully encapsulate their story in the narrative of World War II POWs. Comparing the differences in the treatment of both German and American prisoners, historians can expand the narrative by further prisoner-of-war studies. Additional studies of the actions of the United States government during World War, specific to prisoner treatment, make it possible to determine adherence to the Geneva Convention. Placing German prisoners into the narrative of America's home front reveals the connectedness of peoples throughout a war. It blurs the lines of a perceived enemy, as American citizens discovered the "human" behind the enemy through daily interactions.

How comparable is the treatment of POWs?

Overall, German prisoners in the United States fared better than their compatriots (and captured Allied troops) concerning food, clothing, and general well-being. The German prisoners

[838] Ernst Floeter. "Oral History Of: Ernst Floeter." interview by Robert Garrett. Grand Ledge, Michigan. *Seeking Michigan*. October 7, 2008, 2008. Grand Ledge, Michigan. https://seekingmichigan.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p4006coll17/id/8.

experienced excellent care, could read, write letters, work, and see areas of the United States as they interacted with American citizens. German prisoners under Soviet control faced humiliation and starvation. American servicemen in Japan faced starvation, executions, and cannibalism. Each prisoner had a particular reaction towards the treatment. Yet, some commonalities exist.

Within the United States, there was a firm desire by the War Department and the United States" government to adhere to the Geneva Convention and all its stipulations. Government officials wanted to ensure safe and humane treatment to prisoners, as this would assist in the fight between ideologies, as well as limit potential reprisals against captured American servicemen. Despite some accusations from individual prisoners of limited food rations and a loss of mail privileges, the consensus was that the United States followed the Convention and provided prisoners with the best possible treatment. The Convention entitled German prisoners to barracks and facilities matching those of U.S. servicemen. As the military built camps, there was a strong wish in the War Department and the Provost Marshal General's Office to ensure this entitlement.

As Michigan prepared to accept their first shipments of troops, the importance of ensuring the German prisoners' rights under the Convention grew. Fort Custer, the major thoroughfare between the sub-camps in the state, built with exact specifications, attempted to meet these guidelines. Fence lines had to be far from roads and barrack locations. Mess halls, classrooms, and the theater needed to be built far enough from the fence line to discourage escapes and prisoner-civilian interactions. The military gave guards very specific orders to ensure prisoners adhered to the rules and that all prisoners were present and accounted for. Should a prisoner approach within twenty-five feet of the stockade fence, a soldier fired a warning shot. If a prisoner worked in the Motor Pool with the vehicles, they were to be kept

twenty-five feet from the outer perimeter fence.[839] Within the stockade, prisoners had access to all the necessities of life. They built it with exacting standards. As government officials determined the fort needed to be expanded due to an influx of prisoners, objections were raised because the camp was too close to Highway 12, did not contain enough space for the recreational buildings and barracks, and could not properly function as a camp because the "Bldgs. primarily occupied by colored troops and are adjacent to other existing facilities for colored troops. Site to near other facilities and would proper security measures."[840]

These exacting standards were further adhered to, as the government followed specific principles to create a model prison system designed by the United States government and the War Department. These principles held that:

> A genuine belief by the great majority that the prisoners were entitled to humanitarian treatment; (2) a concern about how America would be viewed if it did not live up the letter and spirit of the Geneva Convention; (3) a conviction that well-treated prisoners would be more productive workers; (4) likelihood that American prisoners in Germany would be treated better; and (5) a calculation that news of how well prisoners were treated by Americans would find its way back to the ranks of fighting German soldiers and that as a consequence morale would decline... and German soldiers would surrender more quickly.[841]

German prisoners were aware of their rights under the Geneva Convention.[842] They understood they were to hang on to their personal items after interrogation and receive food, water, and sleeping arrangements.[843] Recently debunked arguments insinuated German POWs under General Eisenhower received poor treatment. Despite arguments about the systematic

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[839] N.W. Eveleth. *Guard Orders: Post #2.* National Archives College Park. Subject Files, 1942-1946. Record Group 389. A1 461. Box 2659. 290/34/28/03.
[840] *Objections to Site No. 3 at Fort Custer, Michigan.* National Archives College Park. A1 457. Record Group 389. Subject Correspondence File Relating to the Construction/Conditions of POW Camps. 290/34/15/03.
[841] Edward John Pluth, "The Administration and Operation of German Prisoners-of-war Camps in the United States during World War II," (Ph.D. diss., Ball State University, 1970). As quoted in Allan Kent Powell. *Splinters of a Nation: German Prisoners-of-war in Utah.* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1989).76.
[842] Krammer (1996) 27.
[843] Ibid.

execution of prisoners by American soldiers, there is irrefutable evidence to the contrary.[844] Rather, prisoners under their American captors experienced humane respect, even though the soldiers recognized them as enemies. Upon arrival in the United States, efforts continued to provide a basic standard of care, to allow prisoners the ability to contact their families and ensure their safety. Deaths happened, such as the case where the sixteen prisoners died in Blissfield, or work-related injuries and illness.[845] The military documented all instances with the International Red Cross to ensure further compliance regarding prisoner treatment.

Within the camps, German prisoners accessed a mini town, as the stockades included buildings such as an Exchange (or Commissary), barber shops, infirmary, classrooms, guest houses (in some camps), a church, and a theater.[846] The prisoners had access to a guesthouse in the Michigan camp stockade for those visiting. Visitors were required to arrange everything in advance, be vetted, and were usually members of a prisoner's family who were American citizens.[847] Sub-camps did not provide as many recreational options as prisoners lived in tents close to the fields and factories where they worked. A small canteen and library were usually accessible, so prisoners continued to have access to activities and items for purchase. Church services at the sub-camps were available through visiting pastors/chaplains.

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[844] See arguments and evidence in: Gunter Bischof and Stephen E. Ambrose. *Eisenhower and the German POWs: Facts against Falsehood*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1992). James Bacque. *Other Losses: An Investigation into the Mass Deaths of German Prisoners at the Hands of the French and Americans after World War II.* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Talon Books, 2011).

[845] See Chapters Two: Experiences Behind Barbed Wire & Four: Letters Beyond the Wire- American help during World War II. "16 PWs, Soldier Killed by Train*." Battle Creek Enquirer,* November 1, 1945.

[846] Eugene F. Richter. *Use of Buildings within Prisoner-of-war Stockade.* (January 19, 1944). National Archives College Park. Subject Correspondence Files Relating to Construction/Conditions of POW Camps. Record Group 389. A1 457. Box 1421. 290/34/15/02.

[847] *Prisoner-of-war Visitation Record.* (1944). National Archives College Park. Record Group 389. Subject Files, 1942-1946. A1 461. Box 2659. 290/34/28/03.

The War Department highly discouraged fraternization. They believed it inappropriate for German prisoners to interact with American females, and they should have limited interactions with other citizens. Michigan citizens disregarded this as male and female civilians interacted with troops, gave prisoners additional food, and allowed them to help with different chores. One prisoner assisted with repairing a telephone, whereas another drove a tractor.[848]

In contrast, European German prisoners did not have the same "privileges". Upon capture, soldiers expected to be killed. Those who survived marched into camps that held limited rations. As Holl experienced death marches, American prisoners in some fields would also experience treatment similar to their German enemy. U.S.-based German prisoners did not experience the humiliation, nakedness, and limited rations prevalent in other POW camps. The guiding principles of the Geneva Convention took precedent over the psychological need to inflict pain on an enemy. However, this was not the situation for other troops.

This part of the story concerning America's involvement in World War II contains gaps. The secondary literature contains one complete book on German prisoners in America, with various state-sponsored studies. The narrative of the Japanese American internment overshadows the story of German prisoners-of-war in the United States. This part of the story needs to be told. Both internees and prisoners could face imprisonment at the same facility. Tule Lake, for example, held a few POWs, but they lived completely separated from internees. The government perceived both as enemies, but the underlying ethnic prejudices helped determine treatment.

[848] Walter Hessig. "German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1947". Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. January 15, 1947. Harry Baer. Collection of Letters from Harry Baer to Bill Bishop. (1948), Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan.

Incorporating the study of POWs in America as part of the historical narrative of World War II furthers the humane and democratic treatment Americans aspire to. Furthermore, it reveals the blurring lines of an enemy. An enemy is "a person who is actively opposed or hostile to someone or something". The men of the Wehrmacht were enemies of the United States. But the boys who arrived on Michigan farms proved to be people. The government waged ideological battles between democracy and national socialism in the minds of the prisoners. Still, they were not fully immersed in the ideological loyalty to Adolf Hitler and the Nazis while they fought for their country.

Considered hostile to the United States, individuals subjected to internment under Executive Order 9066, faced similar hardships as American-held POWs. Soldiers relocated them to remote areas, separated them from society and enclosed them behind barbed wire. Some were American citizens, but their classification as an "enemy", required military relocation for protection, according to the government. German prisoners lived in remote areas, or areas thought to be necessary to assist with labor shortages. In Michigan, the camps were located close to farms, even within German American communities. This assisted with the ideological war but offers a stark contrast to how prisoners were imprisoned outside the United States. Internees still had access to necessities, as did German POWs. But the POWs could interact with the citizenry, despite the dangers of espionage. Locating camps in local communities helped the government deal with the language barriers, as well as support the reeducation program.[849]

Comparatively, prisoner studies focus on the conditions of the prisoners. Many relate to the conditions experienced by Americans in the Pacific Theater, Soviet prisoners in German

[849] See Chapter Four: Letters Beyond the Wire- American help during World War II.

territory, or German prisoners in Soviet territory. Few comprehensive comparisons exist of experiences of German POWs in America and their counterparts, or the experiences of internees. Scholars must conduct research to support comparative histories of prisoner treatment. Studies should encompass more details concerning the German population. Studying German POWs in America from an American perspective leaves on the other side. What is the German perspective of German prisoners in America? Additional research is necessary to provide further evidence of the United States's treatment of their prisoners.

Surviving prisoner letters showed their support and gratitude for the care they received under the Americans. They spent the war working in fields, factories, and farms, in relative comfort, despite lacking freedom. They wrote home, conversed with American troops, and learned additional skills in college-created classes. Upon repatriation, letters written back to the United States showed the former prisoners' desperation, but also the willingness of Americans to support them. Without relationships having been established, there would have been less of a desire to support and sponsor German citizens. Yet, as the Herzog family revealed through their many collection books and surviving letters, the men who worked on the farm may have been ideological enemies, who fought against the United States, but they were still human. Additionally, the workers accepted education and learned about democracy. They no longer existed just as enemies. Some people considered the prisoners friends. One POW named his son after Otto Herzog to honor the man who showed care for him.[850]

All World War II prisoners faced hardships. Their varied experiences exhibit the perseverance each man needed to survive. Some relied on God and others on the good nature of

[850] Rudi Jirka. *Correspondence between Rudi Jirka and Otto Herzog.* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan.

citizens who helped them. American troops in the Pacific and German troops in Soviet territory shared many of the same experiences. The outliers of prisoner treatment were those who spent their time on American soil. Although the internees were not war prisoners, in the traditional sense of being captured in war, they experienced the same treatment as German and Italian prisoners sent to the United States. Although only a few spent their time in Michigan, this small piece of the overall puzzle must be placed into the narrative of American history. America in World War II did not exist in a vacuum. This narrative is rarely spoken of, although some Michigan schools do attempt to give small lectures on the topic.[851] Enemies come in many sizes. As the German prisoners in the United States demonstrated, humane treatment can break down barriers better than bullets. By incorporating their story, the study of American history expands, and the German prisoners' stories lives.

[851] Within Oceana County, the local historical society tries to give a small speech about the local camps every few years, according to a volunteer in 2018.

Chapter Six: Leaving Barbed Wire Behind

Otto Ruf returned to Germany in 1946 after spending time in an English camp. “Home, such a great word”, he wrote, thankful to have returned home to his family.[852] As World War II drew to a close, German prisoners in the United States returned home. Their experiences of humane treatment traveled with them, as they returned to a land devastated by war and the grim reminder of the atrocities committed under the Nazi regime. Yet, their story remains mostly unknown. The overarching treatment of POWs in the United States is just a footnote in the narrative of World War II. Despite housing approximately 500,000 German individuals, as well as many Italian prisoners, there is little knowledge of this event in American history. There is a need to inform the public of the German prisoners, but no push to incorporate the event into American history. Incorporating this information, enhances the narrative of American history, allows the further study of prisoners-of-war, and challenges the underlying idea of Germans as Nazis during World War II. Rather, the soldiers who fought for Germany were regular men (mostly boys) who followed orders and believed in their country. Many were open to new ideas, as viewed through the reeducation program. Some returned to the United States after the war because of their treatment. Citizens befriended prisoners and blurred the enemy line. As one resident recalled, “they did not feel like an enemy”.[853]

Renewed interest in the subject is shown by a recent 2018 publication by Dr. Gregory Sumner titled *Michigan POW Camps in World War II*. However, this account of the prisoners lacks a full description of all the camps, and prisoners’ personal stories. Expanding on recent publications, the story of American-held prisoners-of-war needs to be added into the historical

[852] “Heimat, welch ein schönes Wort!” Otto Ruf. "German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1946." Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. December 15, 1947.
[853] Esther M. and Marge P. Interview by Abigail Runk. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan 2018.

lessons on World War II. This subset needs to be told to fully understand the impact American farmers had on returning prisoners who attempted to rebuild a democratic Germany. Seeing the benefits of democracy played out while in captivity left an impression on the prisoners and furthered the world's political interconnectedness. Incorporating prisoner-of-war studies into American history expands United States history in World War II and challenges the underlying idea of Germans as "Nazis". Instead, they were all men whose story deserves to be told within the context of the overall story.

Ending the War

On May 7th, 1945, General Alfred Johl, accompanied by two officers, signed the unconditional surrender of all German forces. Located in Rehms, France, representatives of the Allied Forces -- Britain, America, France, and the Soviet Union -- all participated. Surrendering "all forces on land, sea and in the air who are at this date under German control", the war ended, as Germany agreed that those who failed "to act in accordance with this Act of Surrender, the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force and the Soviet High Command will take such punitive or other action as they deem appropriate".[854] With the signing of this document, the Second World War ended. Now, rebuilding could begin.

The war devastated much of Europe. Dresden was in ruins. Berlin was burning, with children and the elderly defending its streets as Wehrmacht forces were captured in the final days. News of the surrender was told to the prisoners in the United States. Some found this unbelievable. Others were relieved as it meant an end to hostilities and a chance to return home and find family.

[854] *Act of Military Surrender*; (5/7/1945); Instruments of German Surrender, 5/4/1945 - 5/10/1945; Records of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Record Group 218; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/surrender-of-

Under the Geneva Convention, prisoners held by a foreign country were to be returned to their hometown. For many German prisoners in Michigan, this meant a return to areas now controlled by the Soviet Union. The Convention dictated that "the repatriation of prisoners shall be effected as soon as possible after the conclusion of peace", thus ensuring that prisoners returned home promptly.[855] It was possible for prisoners to be returned prior to the end of hostilities, if they were ill, but this was rare.[856] Prisoners were told of the surrender of Germany by their American captors. Many did not wish to leave. But it was not a quick process.

As Allied representatives continue to deal with the political ramifications of Germany's surrender, prisoners confined to Fort Custer, Michigan, learned about the international situation through *Die Brücke,* the prisoner-led publications. Focused on international politics in some sections, it informed the prisoners of the Potsdam Conference. The July 21st issue described the ruins of Germany and the principles needed to create a self-governing, democratic Germany. Based on the American principles, it was imperative to "create a new government based on principles and organized to ensure happiness and prosperity".[857] The Big Three— the United States, Russia, and Britain—at the Potsdam Conference used the meritorious ideas of Jefferson and Washington to create a self-sustaining government. A prisoner noted that "We cannot step away from the past, if we do not want to go as dreamers into the future."[858] Prisoners admonished one another not to be oblivious to the changes coming to their country. Having

[855] International Committee of the Red Cross, "Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners-of-war. Geneva, 27 July 1929.," (1929), accessed June 8, 2022, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/305. International Committee of the Red Cross, "Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners-of-war. Geneva, 27 July 1929.," (1929), https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/305.
[856] Ibid.
[857]"…eine neue Regierung einzuesetzen, deren Grundlagen auf solchen Prinzipien beruhen und ihre Macht derart organisiert, als es ihmen am shesten moeglich scheint, ihr Glueck und Wohlergehen erreichen." "Potsdam 1945"(July 21, 1945). *Die Brücke.* 1945-1946. Newspaper. Fort Custer, Michigan. Obtained through the Center for Research Libraries.
[858] "Wir können nicht auf die Vergangenheit versichten, wenn wir nicht mit dem Schritten eines Traumwandlers in die Zukunft gehen wollen" Ibid.

experienced captivity in America, these prisoners learned of the premises of a democratic-republican government.

However, there was still much uncertainty for these prisoners. As prisoners waited for news of repatriation and to return home, local publications continued to educate them on the importance of a democratic government. The Allied powers determined Germany's fate, so the prisoners could only wait for news. They learned Germany did not have a seat at the table to decide on their own fate. Newspapers noted that as representatives met in Berlin, "Here our fate will be decided".[859] This was a reflection of the Versailles Treaty, as all countries had equal rights, but Adolf Hitler did not support this idea. Finding the Third Reich a romantic belief, an evil world, according to the writer, Hitler had envisioned a country and governmental system resulted in Germany's ruin. *Die Brücke* countered this romantic notion with truths about American self-government and the horrors of the atrocities committed under German rule. Later that month, prisoners learned that the Potsdam Conference granted the independence to Poland, Czechoslovakia (today the Czech Republic and Slovakia), Austria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, and Greece.

This continued immersion in democratic government assisted the United States government with its reeducation program.[860] It furthered democratic ideas and helped with the end goal of a group of soldiers returning to Germany, who would help rebuild the country under democratic principles. But it was not without problems and hardships. The Germany, the prisoners returned to was not the land they had left.

[859] "Macht Und Recht," *Die Brücke* (Fort Custer, Michigan)July 14, 1945. „Macht und Recht". (July 14, 1945). *Die Brücke.* 1945-1946. Newspaper. Fort Custer, Michigan. Obtained through the Center for Research Libraries.
[860] See Chapter Three: Challenging the Nazi ideology.

Closing the Camps

With the end of the war in 1945, the Michigan prisoner-of-war camps started closing. The last shipment of prisoners left in 1946, as the process took time. Many prisoners wished to remain in the United States, seeing the country as a land of freedom. “They like it here and many have expressed the wish that they might remain here after the war”, reported an Army official in Michigan as the camps closed.[861] The camp in Sparta, Michigan closed in 1944, as its prisoners transferred to another camp prior to the war’s end. The farming season had ended and there was no longer a need for prisoner labor. According to the liaison, C.A. Van Coevering, the “farmers were well satisfied with work... [the prisoners] harvested crops which would have been damaged”.[862] As camps closed, it was imperative that the remaining prisoner labor dispersed in a way that did not violate the Geneva Convention and was not dangerous. German prisoners were very aware of their rights under the Convention.[863] Van Coevering ordered that local camps ensure prisoner labor was “not to be used on any kind of construction work”, as prisoners were to be protected and unharmed before their return to Germany under the repatriation process.[864]

With the camps closing, the prisoners saw the tragedies of war, as well as the damages caused by the Nazi government. They viewed films detailing the concentration camps. These films displayed the horrors of the Holocaust and films such as *Why We Fight* gave the prisoners insight into the human loss.[865] This information changed prisoners’ outlook. They no longer believed German propaganda about Germany winning the war. Reality had set in. No longer did prisoners believe “the country [the United States] has been bombed and show an amazing

[861] “German Prisoners are Generally Submissive, Says Local Soldier.” *Alean Times Herald Newspaper.* 1944.
[862] “Sparta Prison Camp to Close.” *The Holland City News.* (October 27, 1944).
[863] "Nazis Arrive at U.P. Camps to Cut Wood," *Marquette Daily Mining Journal* (Marquette Michigan)February 14, 1944. “Nazis Arrive at U.P. Camps to Cut Wood.” *The Daily Mining Journal.* (February 14, 1944).
[864] C.A. Van Coervering. *Tri County Farm Labor Association*. 1945. Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan.
[865] Cummins Speakman. "The Prisoner-of-war Reeducation Program in the Years 1943-1946." (University of Virginia, 1948).

familiarity with historic spots, such as the Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, and many other notable landmarks in and around the Eastern Seaboard".[866] The beliefs held at the beginning of their imprisonment were being challenged. Many prisoners wished to make amends. Writing a letter to the German people, prisoners begged citizens to stop fighting and lay their arms down.

> The German people, you, and we, are. And all of us want to live, we want to live with our families. The dead have no future. There is only hope and a future for those who live. Therefore, immediately put down your weapons! Cut the war short, surrender.[867]

Prisoners also came together to raise money to help those remaining in Germany who had suffered during the war. Presented by Fritz Blume, 1800 prisoners presented checks to the International Red Cross to send money back to those suffering in Germany.[868] These prisoners in Fort Custer, Michigan, determined to

> provide assistance for inmates of German concentration camps... hope to decrease somewhat the misery and anguish of those peoples who have suffered innocently under cruelties of the National Socialistic government. It is our desire to alleviate the abuses they have endured in the gruesome horror camps which were found by advancing Allied troops, and to help make amends for what unscrupulous despots have done to them.[869]

The prisoners contributed over $10,000 to help those suffering from National Socialism and Nazi policy. Shown the extent of the damages from the Holocaust, these prisoners felt compelled to make amends. This guilt assisted in the ideological battle between democracy and National Socialism; a battle waged through the reeducation program. The more the prisoners saw, the more apt they would be to change and become more democratic in their thinking: at least that

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[866] "German Prisoners Are Generally Submissive, Says Local Soldier.
[867] *Peace Appeal by German Prisoners-of-war in the U.S.A. To the German People.* (March 12, 1945). National Archives College Park. Record Group 389. A1 467. Box 1522.
[868] "'To Help Make Amends': PWs at Custer Give $10,147 to Aid Nazi Horror Victims." *Battle Creek Enquirer.* (November 21, 1945).
[869] Ibid.

was the idea of the War Department and the United States government. It is unclear how successful this line of thinking and reeducation were.[870]

Closing the camps was a multi-faceted process. Prisoners needed to be processed and transferred before being shipped back overseas. Returning American soldiers became guards of the prisoner-of-war camps. This caused some resentment, as prisoners in America did not suffer as those held in Germany.[871] However, some American citizens recalled feeling sad at seeing the prisoners go, because their time in Michigan was good; and the citizens credited the prisoners with helping save the local crops. There was fraternization with the citizens, which allowed the prisoners to maintain relationships. Parents taught their children to "respect the prisoners as human beings".[872] Labeled enemies of the United States, the prisoners were still humans and treated as such. Their stay in America, in Michigan specifically, demonstrated the resolve to adhere to the Geneva Convention, but also the standards of fair and humane treatment. These were prisoners, but not animals. They deserved proper care and food.

The need to treat prisoners humanely was not without complaints, as some citizens complained to the War Department of coddling. Newspapers reported that German prisoners obtained extra food or rations in the camps.[873] There were negative attitudes towards prisoners, as Americans had to fight in a war overseas and the prisoners remained safe from harm. Yet, despite the negatives, relationships and friendships blossomed. Prisoners who began as enemies came to be seen as human beings. After the war and camp closures, these human beings became

[870] See Chapter Three: Challenging the Nazi ideology for more information on the United States Reeducation Program.
[871] Don F. Cochrane. "War Captives on Our Farms! Army Seeks Base Camp at Hartford; Growers Forsee Bumper Fruit Crop!" *The Coloma Courier.* (March 31, 1944).
[872] Dixie Franklin. "German POWs Enjoyed Camp Sidnaw." *The Daily Mining Gazette.* September 12, 1981.
[873] See Don Cochrane's articles.

friends, even though they did so out of desperation. Letters continued after the camps closed and the evidence became lost. Little remains of the camps today. It is possible to see the remains of an old guard tower in Sidnaw, Michigan and local communities remember areas where prison camps were located. Nevertheless, the story of German prisoners in Michigan remains a small piece of World War II history.

Returning Home

At the end of the war, the process of repatriation began immediately. But this process took about two years to complete, with the last prisoners leaving the United States in 1946. The process of Michigan's prisoners leaving the United States started with a transfer to Fort Custer, the main prisoner camp, now turned into a depot area. The military processed the prisoners out, returned goods, distributed any money (as they earned eighty cents a day) and placed them on trains headed to the ports on the East Coast. It would be like their journey to the United States, just in reverse.

Orders came through the War Department to send the sick and wounded home first. Individuals confirmed by the military to be ardent Nazi supporters left on the last transports.[874] But, there was no standard timetable to the repatriation process. It was further agreed that prisoners transported back to the European continent could become laborers because of the devastation of the war. This resulted in some prisoners from Michigan, rather than returning home, finding themselves back behind barbed wire, working in either French or English prisoner camps. The formal declaration of release was in 1947. However, as the United States released its prisoners, American citizens learned that prisoners held in England or France would be subject to

[874] Arnold Krammer. *Nazi Prisoners-of-war in America*. (Scarbourgh, New York, 1996). 236-239.

those countries" repatriation ordinances.[875] This order eased the demands on prisoner camps in the United States and sparked public outrage about the atrocities committed by the Nazi government. Americans believed the prisoners should help rebuild after the devastation. The prisoners held in the United States needed to see the effects of the war; sending them back to Europe would achieve these ends and address the accusation of "coddling" accusations by the American public.[876] This controversial decision by the Allies resulted in German prisoners with nowhere to go. "The War Department resolved the dilemma by turning over all German POWs in its control, some 2,200,000 men, to the British and French as postwar laborers and miners".[877]

Prisoners sent to English or French prisoner camps were originally kept from being told where they were going. They believed they were returning home. Walter Hessig unexpectedly arrived in France in August 1946, after leaving the United States.[878] The Allied plan involved shipping German prisoners from the United States to Britain, France, Holland, Belgium. Luxembourg, Yugoslavia, and Greece. As these prisoners transferred, politicians began demanding prisoner labor. Government reports note that France demanded 1.75 million prisoners, information which was not disseminated to the prisoners themselves, who found themselves conscripted to work in mines or construction as they assisted in the rebuilding of Europe.[879]

One prisoner who did not return to Germany immediately at repatriation was Richard Blessing, a former prisoner held in Oceana County, Michigan. He moved to a French camp in

[875] "U.S. Frees All of Its German War Captives." *The Sun.* 1947. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun.
[876] Krammer (1996). 239.
[877] Arnold P. Krammer. "German Prisoners-of-war in the United States ", *Military Affairs* 40, no. 2 (April 1976): 43. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1987148.
[878] Walter Hessig. "German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1947". Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. January 15, 1947.
[879] Krammer (1996). 238-240.

1946. He would eventually return to Germany in 1948.[880] Horst Baumann and Harry Baer spent time in a French prison camp after they left the United States. Both men remembered hunger in those camps, as the government severely rationed food.[881] Baumann's home was in the Russian Zone. He did not look forward to returning to Germany, as he had heard from family that conditions were bad, the food was rationed, and people were starving.[882] Gerolf von Schoenborn also traveled to a French camp. After inquiring about his comrades, as many had worked with him in Michigan, he complained of the insufficient food rations. By August 1947, rations had improved but were still low. He was very grateful and joyful to receive something from "over there" [i.e. America].[883]

Letters from prisoners to Americans support claims of rationed food and problems with the care of the prisoners after the war. Reports indicated that camps, particularly in France were not complying with the terms of the Geneva Convention. According to the International Red Cross, rations were so dismal that there was starvation in some camps; prisoners survived through the donations and food packages sent by friends and families.[884]Prisoners who wrote back to American farmers supported these reports. Describing their experiences in French camps, they had little to eat, despite working on farms and in factories. Kurt Schulz, who worked in Berrien Springs as a prisoner, traveled to England following his release from American custody. English authorities assigned him to work on a local farm bringing in produce. This work was

[880] Richard Blessing. Collection of Letters from Richard Blessing to Mr. Royal. (1949). Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan. November 27, 1949.
[881] Horst Baumann. Collection of Letters from Horst Baumann to Bill Bishop. (1947-1950). Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan. March 5, 1948. Harry Baer. Collection of Letters from Harry Baer to Bill Bishop. (1948), Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan. August 23, 1948.
[882] Ibid.
[883] Gerolf von Schoenborn. *Correspondence between Gerolf Von Schoenborn and Otto Herzog*. 2004. Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. August 17, 1947.
[884] Krammer (1996). 239.

better than the conditions he would face in Germany.[885] His wife had told him they had lost everything, as she had become a refugee when the Soviet Union invaded. “I think often of the good times since I have returned, when I worked for you in August 1944 in the fall,” he wrote, hoping to return to his family for Christmas.[886] He fared better than prisoners sent to France but also pointed out that the destruction from the “pointless war” affected all people, including his family who lost everything.[887] They had fled to the British Zone and were trying to rebuild their lives.

The experiences of prisoners after they left the United States varied. Those who found themselves again in the custody of a foreign nation spent their time behind barbed wire, working to rebuild and help with production as the war ended. Willi Gude moved to England, where he remained after his imprisonment finished. He believed was nothing left for him in Germany.[888] Keeping prisoners after the war was partially due to labor shortages and a need to retain field workers. Because Germany could not handle an influx of citizens, the orders were to keep prisoners in foreign camps. Industry, farming, and cities lay in ruins. The government could not provide for the citizens remaining in the country. Adding an increase of prisoners to the mix would have taxed already stretched resources.

Prisoners who could return to Germany expressed great sadness at the conditions they saw. Ernst Kiefer arrived home in 1947 but only received a food ration for eight hundred calories a day. This meager living increased his wish to return to America.[889] The German government

[885] Kurt Schulz. "German Prisoner-of-war Letters to the William Teichman Family, 1946." Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. November 24, 1946.
[886] Schulz November 24, 1946.
[887] Ibid.
[888] Willi Gude. “World War II Prisoner-of-war Letters to Henry and Edwin Bartz, 1946-1949”. Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. February 10, 1948.
[889] Ernst Kiefer, "Letter from Ernst Kiefer to Mr. Royal," 1948. January 23, 1948.

heavily rationed food. Clothes were challenging to purchase, and money held little value.[890] This led to currency reform in 1948, which the citizens were suspicious of given that it was difficult to purchase goods in 1947, how could the currency change improve things?[891] Inflation priced items twenty to one hundred times higher than the pre-war limits. Butter, at 500 grams, normally priced at 1.80DM, would cost 250-350DM in Berlin. Beef and bread stayed highly priced, amid a booming black market after the war.[892] Robert Forster lost everything after the war, as did many other prisoners and their families. He returned to the Russia Zone to live in the countryside. As he reminisced of his former home, living in a "lonely" countryside, he acknowledged living mouth to mouth, unable to provide enough food for himself and his family.[893]

Sent to the French Zone, Willy Buck, another Michigan-based prisoner also struggled with finding food, clothing, and other necessities. He lived among ruins all because of a "war started by the Nazis".[894] Returning prisoners came face to face with their ruined homeland. Many products were expensive or in short supply. It was difficult to find necessities, prompting desperation from German families. Items such as butter, lard, canned goods, meats, and clothing were out of reach for many, other than the rations books given to each family. Despite being under rationing and price controls prior to the end of the war, the division of Germany into

[890] Josef Knorr. "Letter from Josef Knorr to Oceana Canning Company." German Prisoners WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan. September 16, 1947. Gabriella Barber and Emily T. Carlstrom. "The Impact of American Economic Aid on Post-World War II Germany." University of South Carolina, (2020):4. https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1324&context=senior_theses.
[891] Jürgen Kracht. *Correspondence between Jürgen Kracht and Otto Herzog*. (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. July 21, 1947. Else Jung. *Correspondence between Karl Jung Family and Otto Herzog.* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. July 22, 1948.
[892] Barber (2020). 6.
[893] Robert Forster. "Letter from Robert Forster to Mr. Royal." (1948). German Prisoners in WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan. November 17, 1948.
[894] Willy Buck. Letters from Wily Buck to Mr. Royal. (1948). German Prisoners in WWII. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan. March 7, 1948.

different economic zones, resulted in further issues concerning prices and shortages.[895] The shortages prompted people to go into the countryside to search for food, grow individual gardens to stop starvation, or create a barter system, in addition to relying on additional foreign aid.[896] The barter system did not solve all the problems, nor did the labor market and foreign imports fully get Germany back to its pre-war levels. It helped restart the economy, but German prisoners and their families still needed assistance. Liesel whose brother was a POW on a Michigan farm, reached out to ask for assistance from an American family. She believed that the farmer would want to assist her brother, so she requested an additional address to help her care for her family.[897] She asked if they would send packages filled with goods for their "general well-being." She was ashamed to ask for help, but she had growing children and was a refugee living in Bodenweder, who only saw her husband on weekends.[898]

This desperation mitigated by the horrid conditions in Germany, forced prisoners to reach out and contact their captors. They were starving and naked. The value of money had diminished due to inflation, and they did not believe the currency reform would assist them. It was not the first time prisoners had experienced hardship, as they dealt with limited rations in 1945, but it was harder to survive when no resources were available.[899] The relationships built between Michigan farmers and prisoners helped ease some of the burden of survival in the initial years after the war. Farmers cared enough for their "prisoner employees"; they were willing to send large packages of food to prisoners and their families to help them through the war. Some

[895] David R. Henderson. "German Economic Miracle." *Econlib.* (2024). https://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/GermanEconomicMiracle.html.
[896] Ibid.
[897] Liesel Schlitt. "World War II Prisoner-of-war Letters to Henry and Edwin Bartz, 1946-1949." Box 77. Berrien County Historical Association. Berrien Springs, Michigan. February 23, 1948.
[898] Ibid.
[899] Cummins Speakman. "The Prisoner-of-war Reeducation Program in the Years 1943-1946." (University of Virginia, 1948). 149.

records of packages survive in Frankenmuth Michigan.[900] These package books dictate the amount of shipping (much cheaper than today) and how much the Herzog family sent to Germany. Many items were one-pound cans of food, but also included things such as soaps, raisins, and other necessities. One shipment from Frankenmuth including Velveeta cheese.[901] The package cost $2.18 to ship to Germany and included other canned soups and caramels.[902] These items would help supplement the families' rations while waiting for better days and economic recovery.

No Longer an Enemy: Changing the Narrative

In studying World War II, an underlying narrative was conclusion most German citizens and soldiers were Nazis. Party membership was a requirement, tied to citizenship under the Third Reich. However, further scholarship has rendered this premise moot. Historians argue the collective memory of Nazism and the Holocaust was one that German citizens experienced, but did not fully believe in within one's family. Harald Welzer asserted that "the awareness that it was possible, in a civilized twentieth-century society, with the active participation of the overwhelming majority of a well-educated population, to exclude a part of this same population.... to see them as harmful and worthless, to look on at their deportation and to accept their extermination" has been lost.[903] The generational divide between those who participated in the Nazi regime and their children and grandchildren, shows a belief that they could not have been ardent supporters of Nazism and Adolf Hitler.[904] But this does not stop people from

[900] Books from the Otto Herzog family detail packages sent to families. These are retained by the Frankenmuth Historical Association in Frankenmuth, Michigan.
[901] Otto Herzog. *Collection Books.* (February 24, 1947). Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan.
[902] Ibid.
[903] Harald Welzer. "Collateral damage of history education: national socialism and the holocaust in German family memory." *Social Research*. Vol. 75, no. 1. (Spring 2008). https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=GBIB&u=vic_liberty&id=GALE%7CA179977461&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon&aty=sso%3A+shibboleth.
[904] Welzer. (2008).

believing this narrative. A study of the extermination of the Poles by the Nazi government claimed that the underlying fear and propaganda led the people to legitimatize the violence against communities.[905] Adherence to Nazi party policy did not make citizens Nazis. In addition, the different nationalities of the German Wehrmacht furthered the evidence that not all Germans being Nazis.[906] By reviewing the study of German prisoners-of-war in Michigan, it is possible to address additional challenges to that narrative.

The prisoners were men. Few were Nazis. They believed in their country and the information they were being told. When told the Eastern Coast of the United States lay in ruins and was bombed, the soldiers had no reason to question this information until they arrived in the United States as prisoners.[907] Their behavior was one of marked self-interest. According to Ian Kershaw, in his publication, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution,* as the German government created policies segregating the Jewish community and other "undesirables", the behavior of the average person was the most shocking. "The behavior of friends, neighbors, and colleagues who were not gripped by devotion to Nazism. Most Germans fell into this category," as they submitted to the new regime's policies.[908]

Most of the soldiers were young men, as the youngest prisoner in Michigan was twenty-three.[909] They had grown up in the Hitler Youth (*Hitler-Jugend*) organization and were taught Nazi propaganda from an early age. This propaganda also motivated German soldiers to continue

[905] Daniel Brewing. "Murderers Are Other People. 'Polish Atrocities' and the Legitimization of Nazi Violence." *The Polish Review* 62, no. 3 (2017): 40. https://doi.org/10.5406/polishreview.62.3.0037.
[906] Antonio S. Thompson. *German Jackboots on Kentucky Bluegrass: Housing German Prisoners-of-war in Kentucky, 1942-1946*. (Clarksville, TN: Diversion Press, Inc., 2008). xii-xiii.
[907] John Mewha. The Prisoner-of-war Reeducation Program in the Years 1943-1946. Manuscript. (February 1953), Record Group 391, Entry p. 10, Reeducation Monograph-Copy 2. National Archives, College Park, Maryland.4-5.
[908] Ian Kershaw. *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). 11.
[909] Kevin Hall. "The Befriended Enemy: German Prisoners-of-war in Michigan." *Michigan Historical Review* 41, no. 1 (2015): http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5342/michhistrevi.41.1.0057. 70.

fighting. As soldiers listened through the radio, the propaganda "[worked] to change people's self-conception such that they identify more closely with the state's ideology, which in turn will inform the goals of the war."[910] Listening to radio broadcasts informed the soldiers of what was happening on the war front.

As the war progressed, knowledge of the Holocaust and other prisoner experiences leaked out. The soldiers may not have been fully aware of the Holocaust, nor did they hear of this information on German radio. Still, it did not mean that they ardently believed and followed Nazi ideology. Information on American and British radio reported on the deaths and atrocities uncovered as Allied forces moved through Europe, liberating concentration camps and cities. At Fort Custer, prisoners learned of international news (censored) through public announcement broadcasts in the camp or on the radio, which also directly challenged the Nazi ideology and informed the prisoners of Allied discoveries.[911] Robert Gellately argued that the German public and soldiers knew of the concentration camps, mass shootings and gas chambers, though they may have been reluctant to believe it. First informed that the concentration camps were for educational purposes, German citizens and soldiers learned otherwise, as the Soviet Union invaded German occupied territory.[912] With the concentration camps in public view, German citizens and soldiers were aware of the prison camp. The procedures and day-to-day operations were shielded from the public's eye; however, information still reached beyond the confines of the concentration camps. People were aware that the German government executed prisoners and

[910] Benjamin Barber VI & Charles Miller. "Propaganda and Combat Motivation: Radio Broadcasts and German Soldiers' Performance in World War II." *World* Politics. Vol 71, no. 3. (July 2019): 466. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/728931.
[911] "Bowersock Describes Life of German PWs in Hartford." *Day Spring*, June 22, 1944.
[912] Robert Gellately. *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany*. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2001). 52, 208.

the Jewish populations, especially as the courts and the Gestapo ordered interrogations and executions of individuals who denounced the Nazi Party.[913]

The reeducation program used by the United States had limited success, as these young men appeared receptive to democratic ideology. Offering courses in American democracy, English, and technical skills, the prisoners passed the time and became friends with American soldiers. They challenged the idea of an enemy, through their personal interactions with people and each other. One American soldier, called the prisoners submissive and respectful of other Americans.[914] Both sides showed respect as citizens and soldiers treated the prisoners fairly. It was not uncommon to see soldiers sleeping while prisoners picked or to see a prisoner holding a guard's weapon (though rules frowned on behavior).[915] Eating with the prisoners was common, the prisoners even drank beer when the guards were not looking.[916] Each of these minor violations involving fraternization with prisoners displayed the respect and humanness of American citizens. The country may have been at war, but these prisoners still experienced humane treatment.

This determination to treat the prisoners humanely directly challenged the narrative of Nazism driving German behavior. Each prisoner received care as a human being. Had the people believed the prisoners were Nazis, they may have been less inclined to assist with meals and clothing while they remained in captivity. After the war, had no relationship existed, there may have been less willingness to send supplies to families, when Michigan residents lived in rural conditions themselves.

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[913] Gellately (2001). 233-236.
[914] "German Prisoners Are Generally Submissive, Says Local Soldier".
[915] Stories from local families remain unsubstantiated concerning guards sleeping on duty. Franklin.
[916] Anita Boldt. "Prisoners of World War II Oral History & Research." 1991. Frankenmuth Historical Society. Frankenmuth, Michigan.

Enhancing the narrative on the establishment of relationships between German prisoners and American citizens also includes incorporating the study of German prisoners in the United States back into the overall narrative of World War II and American history. Lesson plans focused on prisoners-of-war could encompass recent developments and include previously published state studies. Tailored for a high school history class, it would also allow instructors to incorporate research skills as students research prisoner stories with local historical societies.

By adding prisoner stories to American history, the interconnectedness of World War II is enhanced. Adding primary research and narrative details into the study of the American home front reveals areas where American civilians interacted with individuals from other countries and did not simply work in the war effort. German prisoners in America worked as a part of the American home front. Additionally, the prisoner-of-war stories studied in a World War II survey course can support their efforts.

The United States has a long history of interconnectedness, interacting with many countries worldwide. Foreign prisoners opened the eyes of American citizens. They viewed them as regular people, not just "enemy Nazis".[917] The people spent time near the prison camps and observed the prisoners, which turned them into a spectacle- "When trains with German POWs reached their destinations near the future camps, the local population of nearby towns and villages turned out in great numbers to watch".[918] The War Department wanted to avoid this, as they did not want the people to be captivated by the foreigners. These new people created quite a stir. American citizens watched prisoner concerts and games.[919] As they arrived on trains, people

[917] Matthias Reiss. "Bronzed Bodies Behind Barbed Wire: Masculinity and the Treatment of German Prisoners-of-war in the United States During World War II." *The Journal of Military History* 69, no. 2 (April 2005): 475-504. https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.2005.0122. 475.
[918] Ibid. 477-478.
[919] "Site #2 George Rohrbuck Farm Pow Camp." 2020. Blissfield Depot Museum. Blissfield, Michigan.

gathered to see their arrival or remained at the gates hoping to see these prisoners.[920] It was not uncommon to see prisoners eating with American families or walking down the street unsupervised.[921] This created a relationship between civilians and citizens, where they could ask each other questions. This was tied to the reeducation program, as prisoners broke down foreign barriers. Jurgen Kracht recalled speaking with his American employer about food and the government in America, as they discussed various topics while he worked on the farm.[922] This brings the prisoner experience to a person. This individualizes history, increasing interest in the local and state studies on prisoners-of-war.

Concluding the Story

The story of German prisoners-of-war in Michigan has been rarely told. Little writing exists on this topic in Michigan's state history. It is even missing in America's prisoner-of-war stories. Housing 425,000–500,000 prisoners in the United States created relationships between civilians and enemies. About 5,000 German men served time in Michigan. Some relationships spanned decades, as demonstrated through the continual correspondence of Otto Herzog and Juergen Kracht, among others. Maintaining these personal relationships created a bond between these men and their families.

Did the United States standards the confines of the Geneva Convention? As the prisoners returned home and wrote letters back to their American "employers", the tales of food, clothing, and relationship showed that the terms of the Convention had been stretched. By allowing prisoners to eat at the tables, help fix machinery, receive extra food portions, or beer, American

[920] "P.O.W. Camp Recalled in "Historical Sketches of Berrien Co." *Tri-City Record*. North Berrien Historical Museum. Hartford, Michigan. Duane Ernest Miller. "Barbed-Wire Farm Laborers." *Michigan History*, September/October (1989). "Nazis Arrive at U.P. Camps to Cut Wood." *The Daily Mining Journal.* (February 14, 1944).
[921] Boldt. "Site # 2"
[922] Kracht. July 21, 1947.

citizens in Michigan exceeded and/or violated the Geneva Convention and War Department stipulations concerning the prisoner-of-war program.[923]

The consensus in the secondary literature is that the Geneva Convention was adhered to. Prisoners experienced exceptional treatment under American captivity. All prisoners were repatriated home except one who turned himself in, in 1989.[924] Prisoners attempted to escape, but the authorities captured most men within twenty-four hours. Michigan newspaper chronicled the escapes and captures of these prisoners. The longest hunt lasted three days, as prisoners escaped with the help of two teenage girls.[925] Citing teenage love and indiscretion, the young male prisoners had befriended the females at their place of employment. Determined to run away for a joyride, the two couples spent time by a lake before their capture. Because of escaping, the prisoners transferred to other camps in the southern United States. The government tried the girls and convicted them of aiding fugitives and committing treason against the United States.[926] Prisoners kept regalia and could earn money.[927] The War Department erected barracks according to existing stipulations, despite protests in some regions against camp structures.[928]

Along with the camp structures and prisoner processing, German prisoners worked as laborers according to the Geneva Convention. Under the Convention, countries could use prisoners for war material and weapons creation.[929] However, agricultural labor was acceptable, although food could classify as a war material. In America, specifically in Michigan, prisoners

[923] See Chapter Four: Letters Beyond the Wire- American help during World War II.
[924] See *Nazi Prisoners-of-war in America* by Arnold Krammer.
[925] "4 Nazis Flee Guards, Two Are Captured." *The Owosso Argus-Press*, August 16, 1944.
[926] "Jury Convicts Owosso Girls of Conspiracy." *The Owosso Argus-Press*. January 13, 1945.
[927] Lowe. 5.
[928] *Objections to Site No. 3 at Fort Custer, Michigan.* National Archives College Park. A1 457. Record Group 389. Subject Correspondence File Relating to the Construction/Conditions of POW Camps. 290/34/15/03.
[929] International Committee of the Red Cross, "Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners-of-war. Geneva, 27 July 1929.," (1929), https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/305.

were used to support farmers and help with food production. Michigan residents praised the prisoners' labor. They credited them with saving the harvest and helping feed the local community.[930] Due to a severe labor shortage in Michigan countries, the approximately 4,000-5,000 prisoners, picked crops, worked at local factories (including the Heinz and Gerber factories), and processed food into canned goods. This "severe labor shortage during the war years and while demand for food products was at a peak, fruit and vegetables were literally rotting in the fields. Workers had enlisted or been drafted, and migrant workers were unable to obtain gasoline to travel".[931] It was no longer possible to use Mexican and other migrant workers in the community. Gasoline rations prevented some workers coming into the United States.[932]. It did not prevent the creation and use of the *Bracero* program, using foreign labor to assist in other areas of agricultural shortage.[933] The government used prisoners according to the stipulations, but citizens violated the FELP guidelines, set by the State and War Departments. Guidelines included only giving the prisoners fresh water. It forbade giving additional items to prisoners, such as clothing, newspapers, and food. Females were not to fraternize or engage in conversations with prisoners. Citizens violated both sets of rules routinely, as prisoners received food. One prisoner remembered being fed with the other twenty-three members of his company. They obtained the standard sandwich for food and were still starving. Some farming families were generous enough to share their table each day the prisoners ate.[934] Citizens violated the fraternization rule with the Ottawa girls escaping with prisoners.[935] But it was not uncommon for

[930] "Sparta Prison Camp to Close"
[931] "P.O.W. Camp Recalled in "Historical Sketches of Berrien Co.""
[932] "Gasoline Rations; Mexican Situation; Mexican Nationals" 1944. Oceana County Historical Society. Hart, Michigan.
[933] Barbara Schmitter Heisler. "The "Other Braceros": Temporary Labor and German Prisoners-of-war in the United States, 1943-1946." *Social Science History* 31, no. 2 (2007): 240. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40267939.
[934] Karl Jung. *Correspondence between Karl Jung Family and Otto Herzog.* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. August 31, 1947
[935] "Captured Nazis Are Still Enemies." *The Owosso Argus-Press.* (July 22, 1944).

women to work in the fields alongside men, nor for prisoners to talk with their female co-workers in the factories, or with the wives of farmers. When writing back to American farmers, many prisoners noted their wives and how pleasant they were.[936]

This humane treatment and building of relationships, along with full bellies and strict adherence to the Convention, led to frequent accusations of coddling. American citizens expressed outrage at the rations given to German, enemy soldiers. Reports of extra rations, cigarettes, chocolates and other amenities reached citizens' ears through newspapers and other "grapevines". One reporter stated that butter, a highly rationed food during the war, was "...in pound cartons stacked high, with German prisoners unwrapping and cutting it into generous squares-generous indeed compared to the wafer-like slices Americans receive".[937] The coddling charges came due to the extra food and clothing given to prisoners.

> These German prisoners have fared as well or better than the average American family. They are not annoyed by rationing. The army has first call on food and the prisoners have shared it. Officers in charge of the camp will tell you that America is abiding by Geneva conference rules. These rules require that prisoners-of-war shall receive the same food served to the captor army.[938]

The American perception, printed in the newspapers, asserted that prisoners were treated better than citizens. Yet, American prisoners overseas were starving and receiving little rations to live on. The American government treated their prisoners better than other foreign powers.[939] It was such a prevalent idea, that the War Department on multiple occasions, had to release statements indicating that prisoners were not receiving more than the prescribed rations established by the Geneva Convention. According to the War Department, there was no coddling. Prisoners could

[936] Jung. July 21, 1947.
[937] Don F. Cochrane. "Yanks Hungry; Nazis Well Fed! Captured Airman Tells Story! Contrast to Local Prison Camp!" *The Coloma Courier.* (October 13,1944). North Berrien Historical Museum. Coloma, Michigan.
[938] Ibid.
[939] See Chapter Five: Comparable Treatment.

make substitutions and request more vegetables, but there was no mandate to give the prisoners special food.[940] Individual citizens gave items to the prisoners, as documented through their letters and surviving family stories. But the government did not order this. They forbade it, but the citizens saw young men who needed food and wanted to help them. As one author argues, they saw themselves in the German prisoners, which prompted civilians to treat them as they would their own sons.[941] The similarities between the two cultures and a German American community in Michigan resulted in building relationships between prisoners and citizens. They saw the prisoners as regular people.

It is not to discredit that these prisoners were enemies of the United States. Because of the war, all citizens of Germany were classified as enemies. Some prisoners were adamant National Socialists and followed Nazi doctrines. The State and War Departments attempted to keep these individuals from the general population. There was limited success, as some of these individuals influenced other prisoners as the United States attempted its reeducation program.[942] Nevertheless, a psychological and social relationship was established between prisoners and Michigan citizens. Why else would prisoners, after returning home, write to specific Michigan farmers thanking, or asking for assistance after the war? The prisoners returned to a devastated area. Desperation led prisoners to ask for assistance, but it did not require continued correspondence. Nor did it require reciprocal behavior, as prisoners sent items back to the

[940] Mary Spargo. "Prisoner Coddling Denied; U.S. To Stick to War Rules." *The Washington Post*. (April 27, 1945).
[941] Reiss. “Bronzed Bodies Behind Barbed Wire”. 480.
[942] Mewha (1953)

farmers as further thanks.[943] One prisoner named his son after a Michigan farmer, affectionately calling the man "uncle".[944]

Some correspondence lasted into the 1950s, as prisoners continued to update Michigan farmers about their lives.[945] Horst Baumann wished to return to the United States and was very thankful for his friendship with an American farmer. Fritz Kaehne updated the family on his homelessness in September 1950, but he remained hopeful. Despite things still being bad when they returned home after the war, it was possible to make a small living. But the memories remained. Kaehne's wife had a rough experience as a refugee and she was ill from the stress. He said, "People here [referring to residents of his new city] did not experience the bad things we did as refugees, and they could keep everything they had".[946] Each person experienced war and repatriation differently. Each prisoner changed from his experience.

Many prisoners wished to return to the United States after the war. Scholars estimate that about 5,000 German prisoners returned to the United States to obtain citizenship. However, there is no confirmation of this number, as few records remain to about this information.[947] This desire to return was based upon their experiences as prisoners. Horst Baumann wished for a time, "where things will go allrigh [*alright*] again and all men can live in freedom".[948] Karl Kleff also wished to leave and return to the United States. He returned to Soviet-controlled territory and believed the Soviet government was an enemy to all Christian people, and they had no

[943] Jung, November 26, 1947.
[944] Herma Jirka. *Correspondence between Herma Jirka and Otto Herzog.* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. June 19, 1949.
[945] Baumann. April 12, 1950. Fritz Kaehne. *Correspondence between Fritz Kaehne and Otto Herzog.* (2004). Translated by Rosemary Ott & Mary Nuechterlein. Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Frankenmuth, Michigan. September 6, 1950.
[946] Kaehne. September 6, 1950.
[947] Barbara Schmitter Heisler. *From German Prisoner-of-war to American Citizen: A Social History with 35 Interviews*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2013). 5-6.
[948] Baumann. May 3, 1948.

freedoms.[949] Desiring to return to enemy territory illustrated the relationships and treatment received by the prisoners. Had they received treatment with disdain and been starved during their imprisonment, the prisoners would not have expressed a desire to return.

This story is not told very often. Seventy-five years separate the end of World War II and the present. Stories disappear, people's memories fail, and interest wanes. Bringing the tale of German prisoners-of-war in America back to the narrative of prisoner-of-war studies or American World War II history will enhance knowledge and experiences of the war. The stories recognize the United States' attempt to give acceptable care to foreign prisoners. It marks the foundation of relationships and blurs the lines of enemies. Soldiers become human again, and it challenges the direct narrative spin, that all Germans during World War II were Nazis. Lessons could involve introducing prisoner letters or stories from local families who had prisoners on their farms to encourage students in local history. This would also bring history closer and humanize historical events, rather than leave them as two-dimensional acts in dusty books. Reincorporating the story expands the story of prisoner treatment and presents a different perspective on the importance of American involvement in World War II. It reveals that American history did not happen in a vacuum. The United States was, and is, part of a bigger world. Historical study of the United States should attempt to incorporate this idea, particularly concerning the study of prisoner-of-war and their stay on American soil.

Reading material could center on Arnold Krammer's *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, as scholars consider this the only book to fully document and encapsulate the general experiences of German prisoners in the United States. Further material would be from local

[949] Karl Kleff. Collection of letters from Karl Kleff to Melvin Kraft. (1947-1948). Lakeshore Museum. Muskegon, Michigan. October 17, 1948.

historical societies, as well as state led publications, such as *The Enemy Among Us* (Missouri); *Michigan POW Camps in World War II* (Michigan); *Guests Behind Barbed Wire* (Alabama); and *Hitler's Prisoners in the Sunshine State* (Florida). Including this material in the narrative of prisoner studies would open opportunities for comparative history. Students would be able to gain skills in reviewing and discussing the historiography of the subject, as well as comparing prisoner experiences and internee experiences. Through the comparisons, students could ascertain the building of relationships between prisoners and citizens and determine adherence to the Geneva Convention.

Incorporating the historiography and comparative nature of prisoner-of-war studies into the overall picture of American history expands the study of World War II. Students rarely learn about this aspect of American history and few students have exposure to prisoners-of-war in the United States. This needs to be introduced as part of the narrative of the United States' actions in World War II. The American government adhered to the Geneva Convention and in some ways superseded the Convention and treated the prisoners better than expected.[950] Given access to showers, plentiful food, and relative safety from the war, the prisoners in America fared well as prisoners. Yet, scholars and teachers rarely discuss this story, partially because of the War Department's desire for the program to remain quiet.[951] This was impossible, however, as each state was responsible for adhering to the Geneva Convention and residents talked. They formed friendships with the prisoners. Those prisoners in Frankenmuth, Michigan, could converse with residents as they spoke the same language. Some prisoners spoke English and took advantage of

[950] Krammer. (1996). 2-3.
[951] Robert D. Billinger, Jr. *Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State: German POWs in Florida*. (Tallahassee, FL: University of Florida Press, 2000). 1-3.

opportunities to improve their language skills. Citizens regularly violated guidelines regarding prisoner care, as they received food, newspapers, and friendly care from American citizens.

The story of prisoners-of-war in the United States largely remains forgotten. The primary text last updated its materials in 1989.[952] Only in the last ten years have scholars and researchers published articles concerning the German prisoners in Michigan.[953] Historians completed earlier studies in 1949 through Proud's study on reeducation in Michigan and the master's thesis of William Lowe in 1995.[954] Both discussed the narrative story of prisoners-of-war, but neither published books, giving the public access to this information. Few Michigan schools teach the subject of prisoners-of-war. The Oceana Historical Society previously visited two local county schools to share prisoner stories, but this has slowed due to volunteers and the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Few Michigan residents are aware of the nearly 5,000 prisoners who temporarily called Michigan home, albeit behind barbed wire. Their stories deserve to be told and placed back into the narrative history of World War II and American history. The War Department's strict adherence to the Convention and the citizens' willingness to treat prisoners with respect do not justify forgetting this portion of history.

Scholars should complete further study through additional state-wide studies to find those prisoners' untold stories. Further enhancing the study of prisoners-of-war internationally expands the human and personal stories of those experienced imprisonment. Recent stories are still being told, such as the story of Louis Zamperini, in *Unbroken*, which was also made into a film. As this

[952] Krammer (1996). 1.
[953] Dr. Gregory D. Sumner. *Michigan Pow Camps in World War II*. (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2018). Ethan Reardon. *WWII German POWs in Michigan: Planned Reeducation Vs. Fair Treatment*: (Mission Point Press, 2019). Hall
[954] Phillip Proud. "A Study of the Reeducation of German Prisoners-of-war at Fort Custer, Michigan, 1945-1946." (University of Michigan, July 1949). William R. Lowe. "Working for Eighty Cents a Day: German Prisoners-of-war in Michigan, 1943-1945." (Eastern Michigan University, 1995).

study is U.S.-based, further study of the German archives and throughout the country to locate prisoner stories could be conducted. Historians interviewed foreign prisoners, such as Arnold Krammer and Barbara Heisler. However, further research could be conducted by interviewing family members to see if more stories exist or if other families will come forward. Discovering documents in German archives and historical societies will increase the German perspective on the American treatment of prisoners. This would expand the narrative to include the perspectives of the individuals, not just the victors.

Using technology can also assist with further studies. As artificial intelligence (AI) helps people learn foreign languages, it can also be used to decipher language and handwriting through algorithms, enabling scholars to read previously untranslated letters. In Michigan, letters remain untranslated, as there is an inability to decipher the script. Technology could assist in additional perspectives as scholars translate letters from prisoners. It could help with finding artifacts from the camp. Knowledge of many campsites in Michigan exist, though none have been involved in excavation projects to see what artifacts remain. One camp, in Coloma, Michigan, has recovered an old dog tag. However, its owner is unidentified.[955] By utilizing international sources, additional interviews, and technology, more research can expand and conclude the history of German prisoners-of-war in Michigan during World War II.

When World War II began, the United States was not actively involved. Upon entering the war in 1941, the War Department needed to establish a prisoner-of-war program, suitable to meet the standards laid out by the Geneva Convention. This program oversaw the creation of camps, work opportunities, education, and repatriation back home. Approximately 500,000

[955] Seen on a visit to Coloma Historical Society in 2023. At the time, no testing had been done to determine the prisoner's name on the dog tag.

German soldiers were prisoners from 1942 to 1946. These men had varied experiences, but they built relationships with American citizens. Some felt compelled to return after the war, as Ernst Floeter did.[956] Others would remember their time fondly and write back to American families. Yet, those prisoners who spent time in Michigan interacting with the citizenry challenged the idea of an enemy. They changed from enemies to friends as they worked alongside farmers, interacted with their families, and reminisced about their times in America after the war. They showed the humanity behind soldiers in war, and their story deserves to be told, to increase knowledge of those who become prisoners-of-war and their hardships while waiting for conflict to end.

[956] Ernst Floeter. "Oral History Of: Ernst Floeter." interview by Robert Garrett. Grand Ledge, Michigan. *Seeking Michigan*. October 7, 2008, 2008. Grand Ledge, Michigan. https://seekingmichigan.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p4006coll17/id/8.

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