

CARROLL COLLEGE

A HISTORY OF CAMP RUPERT:
REMOVING THE NATIONALITY STEREOTYPES DURING WORLD WAR II

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CHAPTER 1

A HISTORY OF PRISONERS OF WAR AS AN INSTITUTION: DETERMINING THE STATUS OF POWS

On 21 October 1943, a headline in the weekly Minidoka County News announced the following: "October 27 Set for the Official Opening of Prisoner Camp: Public Invited to Flag Raising Event and to Inspect Camp Near Rupert."¹ During World War II, this announcement publicized the government's plans to keep foreign prisoners of war near Rupert, Idaho. The local community, made up predominantly of farmers, anxiously anticipated the arrival of these prisoners. The majority of Americans were united in their support for the war and, as was the case near Rupert, in their need for labor. When Camp Rupert prisoners went to work on nearby farms, they met with American citizens, and the interaction caused many negative stereotypes to fade away. This positive interaction occurred because American workers and camp officials treated the prisoners fairly and humanely, removing the prisoners' initial apprehensions and making them less skeptical of all U. S. citizens.

The prison, officially known as Camp Rupert, held Italian, Russian, and German prisoners of war--the Russians were those soldiers captured by the Germans and forced into the German army. The treatment of these prisoners was governed by the guidelines of the Geneva Convention of 1929, which called for American military and civilian personnel to humanely care for the captured troops.² In

order to appreciate the extent of this care, one must be aware of the history of POWs as an institution. The history given in this paper will be a brief account of war and its prisoners, beginning with the Romans, touching on the Late Middle Ages, the American Civil War, World War I, and focusing on World War II.

In 72 A.D., the Roman ruler Vespasian commenced the construction of the famed Coliseum. Approximately thirty to fifty thousand enslaved Jews built the Coliseum, and as author Father A. J. O'Reilly states, "the walls of that mighty emblem of everything gloomy and horrible were cemented with the tears of a fallen people." This type of use of foreign prisoners for domestic labor has continued throughout history.³

The Jews were not the only prisoners at the Coliseum. Groups of Christian martyrs according to tradition suffered humiliation and death for several centuries in the monument. The Romans tortured and killed the Christian prisoners by burning them, boiling them in hot oil, beheading them, feeding them to ferocious animals, and by many other inhumane methods.⁴ Looking back at these seemingly barbaric practices, one might assume that these were isolated instances. Christians at this time must have believed that with the passage of time conditions for prisoners would improve and mankind would become more civilized. Yet, it was not until the Late Middle Ages, centuries later, that life in captivity showed some improvement.⁵

In the Late Middle Ages, fighting among men and among countries mitigated some Christian ethics. Those at war tried to fight fairly, as boxers or football teams do. Chivalrous behavior in all

aspects of a man's life was important. A knight knew the proper nuances involved in courtly love and he knew the specifics of war. Some of these specifics involved prisoners of war.⁶

Unlike the earlier Romans, the Christians classified prisoners of war not as slaves but as people; by doing so, they made themselves responsible for caring for their human captives. Slaves have often been considered less than human by their owners. Slave owners rationalized the poor treatment of their slaves, for example, denying them such things as proper clothing, adequate food, and even life, by saying their slaves were not human. As prisoners of war gained status from slave to human, caring for them became a more involved job for the captor.⁷

The prisoner in the Late Middle Ages had a lord-and-vassal type of relationship with his captor. Paris of Pozzo, a lawyer in the Middle Ages, explains the prisoner-captor relationship as follows: "When a man surrenders, and his victor accepts him as a prisoner, then he makes a contract with him, that he shall be captive and shall not be killed."⁸ The prisoner had to work for his captor or pay a ransom. The captor could not "threaten him [the prisoner] with death, or demand that he do anything contrary to law or his honour." Prisoners could even take their captors to court in certain circumstances.⁹

One can be fairly certain that some captors during the Late Middle Ages did punish, humiliate, and even kill some of their prisoners. But it was the laws governing the POWs and their captors that were important. People were attempting to justify and regulate war. In doing so, the lawmakers and trendsetters positioned POWs somewhere between an enemy soldier worthy of death and a human

deserving life, proper treatment, and freedom. Author Robert W. Tucker expresses this idea as he attempts to explain the purpose of combat: "The intention of combat and the result of action is the incapacitation of a combatant, not the killing of a man."¹⁰ Therefore, the main distinction one must make in war is between a combatant and a prisoner, and a noncombatant.

The question of how to treat prisoners of war seemed to have been answered in chivalrous terms during the Late Middle Ages. However, when looking at the wars following the Middle Ages, it seems as though people did not like the answers offered by the courteous knights and kings. Likewise, America has on certain occasions been one of the countries which rejected the code of the fair knight.

America has been a warring nation since its birth. The United States began fighting when it went to war with Britain in the American Revolution. Again America fought with Britain in 1812 and then with Mexico from 1846 to 1848.¹¹ America's most tragic example of its propensity to fight and its inability to care for the resulting POWs is the Civil War.¹²

The Civil War was the first war in America that involved a large number of POWs.¹³ In the years before the war, a precedent for the care of POWs had been set through a series of treaties and agreements. Among the agreements were, 1) the 1805 U.S. treaty with Tripoli, 2) the 1814 U.S. treaty with Britain, and 3) the 1848 U.S. treaty with Mexico. All of these treaties dealt at some length with the issue of POWs. Despite the rules laid down prior to the Civil War, conditions in POW camps were unsanitary and uncivilized.¹⁴ The

issue of soldier or slave, human or nonhuman, played a major role in the Civil War. The Southern prison officials did not consider their black POWs to be humans. Consequently, blacks suffered and died in untold numbers in prisons throughout the South. A North Carolina soldier's comment about a skirmish involving a black regiment summarizes the situation of the black POWs: "Several [blacks were] taken prisoner and afterwards either bayoneted or burnt." The white officers of black regiments also experienced similar deaths at the hands of the southern soldiers.¹⁵

The brutal treatment occurred in Southern camps containing white POWs as well. Perhaps, the precedent for treating blacks influenced the way in which the whites were treated. The Southern camp which epitomized this cruelty and lack of care for POWs was the camp at Andersonville in Southwest Georgia. There were at Andersonville at one time 33,000 starving and sick men cramped into a twenty-six acre prison. The camp administrators did not provide any shelter for the prisoners in either summer or winter, and of the total 45,000 men imprisoned there, 13,000 died.¹⁶

The Union army in the North was not angelic in its care for POWs either. A combination of malnourishment and overcrowding often resulted in suffering, sickness, and death for Southern POWs.¹⁷

Spurred on by the events of the Civil War, industrialization quickly tied all of America together through economic markets controlled by powerful corporations. Just as the railroad tracks crisscrossed all of America, tying places like Southern Idaho into markets in Chicago and Oregon, so, too, did shipping and the economy tie America into the world's markets, as well as the world's wars.¹⁸

America had only small confrontations with other nations between the time of the Civil War and its entrance into the European conflict on 6 April 1917. During that predominantly peaceful time, several countries met to discuss the laws and customs of war. On 18 May 1899, the Hague Convention brought together twenty-six countries to define the laws of warfare. Within their definition of warfare were several clauses pertaining to POWs. In 1907 the Hague convention reconvened and, as far as POW matters were concerned, the members confirmed their previous agreements of 1899.¹⁹

The United States during World War I interned only 1,346 enemy prisoners of war. The number was so small, in fact, that the United States government spent more hours preparing to utilize POW labor than the prisoners actually spent working. Although its experience with POWs was limited by its late entrance into the war, the United States had improved since the Civil War. The U. S. had complied completely with the rules laid down in the Hague Convention of 1907.²⁰

The Geneva Convention of 1929 was another international gathering whose goal was the regulation of war activities, including the rights and obligations of POWs. Most likely the convention built upon the prior meetings of nations. It is also likely that the shortcomings of the previous conventions, which were made manifest during World War I, served as a basis for the laws settled upon at the Convention.

On 27 July 1929, representatives of the world's most powerful nations signed the Geneva Prisoner of War Convention and the Geneva Red Cross Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of

the Wounded and Sick of Armies in the Field. "The 97 articles and 1 annex of the Prisoner of War Convention were an attempt to diminish the rigors of war and to mitigate the fate of prisoners."²¹ World War I was not the war to end all wars, and as the Geneva Convention came to a close, Hitler was preparing for another war.

Just as many people and countries had rejected the regulations proposed by the chivalrous men of the Late Middle ages, so, too, did many countries reject the 1929 Geneva Convention during World War II. Germany and the Soviet Union, for example, often declined to adhere to POW laws.²² America, in particular Camp Rupert, did take good care of its European POWs. But before looking into America's successes, it helps to see the conditions of POWs on the international level in order to draw comparisons.

It is difficult to comprehend the extent of the crimes committed in various prisons during World War II. Two years before Camp Rupert began using POWs for labor projects, the Germans were utilizing millions of Russian civilian and soldier prisoners for work.²³ There were 5,700,000 Russian POWs held by the Germans during World War II. Of that number, 3,300,000 died in captivity. Numbers this large make understanding the immensity of the tragedy very difficult.²⁴

German soldiers forced Russian POWs into service. Known as *Hilfswilliges*, the German name for Russian "volunteers," the prisoners did many uninviting tasks. For example, the Germans selected some POWs to be members of a mine-clearing unit. Some prisoners died from work-related accidents like mine explosions while many others suffered and died from the cold and starvation.²⁵

Another more publicized aspect of camp life on the Eastern Front involved German concentration camps. Auschwitz and Treblinka were just two of many German concentration camps during World War II. At these camps millions of people--Polish, Greek, Jewish, male, female, old and young--were put to death.²⁶

In 1940 and 1941, for example, at the Auschwitz Concentration Camp, the Germans killed prisoners who could not work. Various groups marched to the gas chambers where they died, sometimes as many as 10,000 prisoners in a single day.²⁷ Included among those groups who could not work were the handicapped people of Poland.²⁸

Germany was not the only country during World War II to establish concentration camps. The United States held 120,000 Japanese Americans in concentration camps during the war. Even though these were not POW camps, they shed light on one of the reasons why Camp Rupert took special care of its prisoners.²⁹

The American concentration camps held Japanese Americans who had a distinct appearance and often a distinct culture. Political cartoons in newspapers during the years from 1941 to 1946 depict the Japanese people as inferior. They were categorized as all looking alike. A member of such a stereotype loses his own personality. Just as many Americans had tried to lower the human status of Blacks by labeling them "niggers," so, too, did Americans try to use the pejorative and inclusive classification of "Japs" to relegate Japanese Americans to a position not deserving the care due to a human being.³⁰

The proximity of races in America has not always been sufficient in bringing about better racial relations. During the Civil War, Southerners brutalized black POWs. In World War II, innocent Japanese Americans went to concentration camps. But the bringing together of German, Russian, and Italian POWs with American soldiers and civilians seems to have removed some of the nationality barriers during the Second World War.

ENDNOTES

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³A. J. O'Reilly, The Martyrs of the Coliseum (South Bend, Indiana: Marian Publications, 1976), 287-289.

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⁵Encyclopedia Americana, vol. 22 (Danbury, Connecticut: Grolier Incorporated, 1985) s.v. "Prisoners of War," by Robert P. Cundick, U.S. Army, 624.

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⁷Ibid., 158.

⁸Ibid., 157.

⁹Ibid., 163.

¹⁰Paul Ramsey, The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), 415.

¹¹Robert A. Divine, et al., America: Past and Present, Brief Edition, 2 vols. (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1986), 2: 134-136, 210-216.

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- ²⁴Ibid., 107.
- ²⁵Ibid., 111-114.
- ²⁶Pawelcynska, Values and Violence, 54.
- ²⁷Ibid., 30.
- ²⁸Ibid., 30-32.

²⁹Roger Daniels, Concentration Camps: North America--Japanese in the United States and Canada During World War II (Malabar, Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1981), 91.

³⁰Minidoka County News, 1941-1946; The Burley Herald, 1941-1946.

CHAPTER 2
POW CAMPS DURING WORLD WAR II: A NETWORK REACHING
NEARLY ALL OF AMERICA

Prior to World War II, America had had little experience with POWs from other countries. Preparing for the transportation, incarceration, and utilization of large numbers of foreign prisoners was a large undertaking for many Americans. Likewise, it was a difficult task for the soldiers to quit fighting and assume an idle role on the other country's terms in the other country's land.

The highest number of POWs in the U.S. at one time was 425,806 POWs.¹ Each prisoner underwent a major adjustment. One American POW held by the Germans described the initial experience as follows: "Being taken prisoner is a terrific nervous shock, in the first place because it involves extreme personal danger during the minutes before the enemy decides to take you instead of shooting you, and in the second place because you suddenly realize that by passing from the right side of the front to the wrong you have become a non-entity in the huge business of war."² American POW administrators were faced with the difficult task of organizing and utilizing groups of men totally disoriented by their geographic settings and their changing roles.

Even though there were only small numbers of POWs in America during World War I, the war did act as an impetus for preparing the

U.S. for later POWs. The job of maintaining POWs went at first to three government branches after 20 July 1917. Those three were the General Staff, the Adjutant General, and the Provost Marshal General (PMG). Each division's responsibilities changed somewhat during and after World War I. By the time America began interning POWs in W.W. II, the division with the powers most closely associated with POW camp life was the PMG.³

The Provost Marshal General in 1926 wrote the Army Regulations and Training Regulations concerning POW camp administration. It also controlled the labor companies which used the POW labor. As of December 1937, the "provost marshal was charged with the reception, care, disposition, and security of all PW's [POWs] in the theater." Despite this large range of authority, the PMG was not active during times of peace in America. In the summer of 1941, while the war was infringing on America's trading routes, and while the fear of civilian enemies grew, the President appointed Maj. Gen. Allen W. Gullion to the position of head of The Provost Marshal General.⁴

Members of the PMG established camp sites and regulated camps. On a semi-monthly basis, a member of either the PMG, the Red Cross, or the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) would visit and inspect the individual camps. The inspectors based their criteria for inspection on the guidelines laid down in the Geneva Convention.⁵

The Geneva Convention of 1929 had several laws which centered on one simple idea: captors should treat their prisoners as well as they treat themselves. Prisoners deserved by law the same food, the

same quality of clothing, and the same living conditions as did the soldiers of the enemy army.⁶

On another level of needs, the Convention insisted that prisoners have academic facilities, which included education courses and libraries; religious services; and extracurricular activities, for example, art, music, and sports. In the area of work, the Geneva Convention stated that POWs could be put to work, excepting unhealthy prisoners, for a wage equal to that paid to the enemy soldiers for their work. Furthermore, the Convention insisted each camp have a canteen where POWs could spend their money on certain luxury items like cigarettes.⁷ There were many such regulations laid down at the Geneva Convention; each acted as a reminder to both captor and POW that a prisoner was human and should be treated correspondingly.

Prisoners began arriving in the United States almost immediately after America entered World War II. Following Germany's declaration of war on the United States on 11 December 1941, America, along with Britain, began fighting German troops in North Africa.⁸ Because of the Anglo-American successes, the Allied troops captured many German soldiers. Between 1942 and 1943, the Allied forces imprisoned 140,000 soldiers.⁹

According to an agreement made between Britain and America prior to the North African movement, the German prisoners captured in North Africa were sent to America. Other successful campaigns resulted in additional prisoners being sent to America. America received another 50,000 men who were captured in Italy and a total of 182,000 taken in France, Belgium, and Germany. This rate of

incoming prisoners continued to grow almost steadily throughout the war.¹⁰

As of 15 September 1942, there were, either under construction or completed, only thirty-three camps with a total POW capacity of 78,218.¹¹ Obviously, more camps had to be constructed.

When selecting a camp site, officers of the PMG checked for security factors and for the proximity of available work. POW camps needed to be safely distanced from any possible escape routes, meaning rivers, ports, or foreign countries. The Geneva Convention's stringent laws about the type and amount of work POW workers could do also affected camp locations. POWs could not work on any war-related projects. And even though some POWs were qualified, certain camps distrusted the prisoners and did not allow them to work with intricate, expensive machinery. The number of hours allowed by the Convention was a maximum of ten hours per day.¹² Consequently, one type of labor suitable for POWs was agricultural work. The work in the field did not relate directly to war operations, it did not jeopardize expensive machinery, it was easy to teach, and the ten-hour work day suited the needs of the farm.

One could easily discover where a POW camp was needed in the U.S. in 1943. The call for help from the small farming communities of Southern Idaho, Montana, Eastern Oregon, and Eastern Washington was loud and clear.

Of the initial camps constructed, the PMG erected none in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, or Washington.¹³ In many parts of those states, hired hands and sons went off to fight in the war, leaving a relatively

small number of people to run the farms. The anxiety those farmers felt was evident in the headlines of local newspapers.

On 18 March 1943, the Burley Herald in Idaho proudly announced the following: "Full Crop Year is Planned By Local Farmers: Important Task of Growing Food for Victory Well Outlined by Various Agencies; Water Will be Plentiful." The article was as positive as its title and professed, "With spring planting season approaching, a united and completed effort is being made by agencies in the county to secure the most full and profitable planting in the history of Cassia County."¹⁴ This was written in the moist spring when hopes were high.

Eight months later, in a town near Burley, another newspaper reported in a headline on 4 November 1943 that there were "Over 300 Acres Potatoes Still in Ground in County: Many Acres of Sugar Beets Remain to be Harvested--Temperatures Low."¹⁵

Farmers in the surrounding areas received news of incoming farm help in an article in the Minidoka County News. It proclaimed on 21 October 1943, "Oct. 27 Set for Official Opening of Prisoner Camp: Public Invited to Flag Raising Event and to Inspect Camp Near Rupert."¹⁶ Finally, the desert plot with its various inhabitants had to make room for American and European visitors.

Prisoners in America arrived at either Boston, New York City, or Norfolk, Virginia. From one of those three cities, they went by train to one of the numerous base camps.¹⁷ Similarly, Camp Rupert received POWs and then sent many to its own smaller camps known as branch camps.¹⁸ The three embarkation centers, the base camps such as Camp Rupert, and the various branch camps combined to

spin a web of POW labor across much of America. (See figure 1, page 18 and figure 2, page 19.)

Chart 4. Distribution of Base and Branch Prisoner of War Camps as of 1 August 1943



Chart 5. Distribution of Base and Branch Prisoner of War Camps as of 1 June 1944



Figure 1. A map illustrating the distribution of base and branch prisoner of war camps. (Lewis and Mewha, History of Prisoner of War Utilization, 112.)

PRISONER OF WAR CAMP
Rupert, Idaho

B R A N C H C A M P S

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>No. of Officers</u>	<u>No. of EM</u>	<u>No. of POWs</u>	<u>Miles from Base Camp</u>
Vale Branch Camp***	Vale, Oregon	2	40	250	248
Nyssa Branch Camp**	Nyssa, Oregon	2	51	500	228
Deer Flat Branch Camp**	Deer Flat, Idaho	2	32	225	206
Wilder Branch Camp**	Wilder, Idaho	3	52	490	206
Marsing Branch Camp**	Marsing, Idaho	2	32	225	204
Franklin Branch Camp**	Franklin Comm., Idaho	2	31	235	196
Filer Branch Camp*	Filer, Idaho	2	45	350	45
Blackfoot Branch Camp*	Blackfoot, Idaho	2	35	250	104
Preston Branch Camp***	Preston, Idaho	2	30	150	146
Idaho Falls Branch Camp***	Idaho Falls, Idaho	2	40	250	131
Bridger Branch Camp***	Bridger, Montana	2	35	200	406
Laurel Branch Camp**	Laurel, Montana	2	45	200	450
Billings Branch Camp***	Billings, Montana	2	45	300	466
Ballentine Branch Camp***	Ballentine, Montana	2	45	250	492
Hardin #1 Branch Camp***	Hardin, Montana	2	32	250	516
Hardin #2 Branch Camp*	Hardin, Montana	2	32	200	516
Forsyth Branch Camp*	Forsyth, Montana	2	45	350	574
Miles City Branch Camp*	Miles City, Montana	2	40	300	619
Sidney Branch Camp*	Sidney, Montana	3	50	450	752
Glasgow Branch Camp*	Glasgow, Montana	3	45	300	895
					812
Malta Branch Camp**	Malta, Montana	2	40	250	966
					741
Harlem Branch Camp**	Harlem, Montana	2	30	225	1013
					694
Chinook Branch Camp**	Chinook, Montana	3	50	500	1034
					673
Fort Shaw Branch Camp**	Fort Shaw, Montana	2	32	234	1175
					562

* Permanent
** Semi-Permanent
*** Mobile

Figure 2. A list of the branch camps under the jurisdiction of Camp Rupert. (From the Records of the Provost Marshal General, World War II, Prisoner of War Camps, Idaho, 1942-1946, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives, Boise, Idaho.)

ENDNOTES

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²Powell, Splinters of a Nation, 41.

³Lewis and Mewha, History of Prisoner of War Utilization, 58-59.

⁴Ibid., 68-70.

⁵Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

⁶Busco and Alder, "German and Italian Prisoners of War," 65-68.

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⁸Charles Cruickshank, Deception: In World War II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 34-35.

⁹Lewis and Mewha, History of Prisoner of War Utilization, 58-59.

¹⁰Ibid., 90-91.

¹¹Ibid., 84-85.

¹²Busco and Alder, "German and Italian Prisoners of War," 56-57.

¹³Lewis and Mewha, History of Prisoner of War Utilization, 84-85.

¹⁴The Burley Herald, 18 March 1943, 1.

¹⁵Minidoka County News, 4 November 1943, 1.

¹⁶Ibid., 21 October 1943, 1.

¹⁷Powell, Splinters of a Nation, 50.

¹⁸Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

CHAPTER 3
THE LOCATION AND CONSTRUCTION
OF CAMP RUPERT

The United States government and the local citizens of Idaho combined to build Camp Rupert. The camp cost approximately \$2,500,000 to construct¹ and had a standard capacity of 3,000 prisoners.² Construction began in the spring of 1943.³

Several local construction companies profited from building contracts made with the government. The two men who made the most lucrative deals were J.W. Brennan and W.R. Cahoon of Pocatello, Idaho. The government agreed to pay the men a single sum of \$1,160,000 for their work in the building effort.⁴ A headline in the Burley Herald mentions Brennan and Cahoon and refers to the many other companies that helped build the camp: "Prison Camp Work Now Under Way: Brennan and Cahoon Open Offices Here; Union Establishes Offices; People Come." The article that followed delineated which local outfits received contracts. For example, Hoops Construction of Twin Falls, Idaho, was hired for grading and graveling; the Intermountain Plumbing; and Heating Company of Boise, Idaho, obtained a sub-contract for plumbing, and C-L Electric Company of Pocatello procured a contract for the electrical work.⁵

The Burley Herald monitored the progress of the camp's construction. On 19 August 1943, for instance, one article informed the readers: "Prisoner of War Camp Work Reported Right on

Schedule: On Tuesday only 475 men were employed by the construction outfit, including all subcontracts, and the total men at work was not expected to go over the 500 mark, although 1500 men were anticipated."⁶ Considering the fact that the two closest towns, Burley and Rupert, had populations of 5,329 and 3,167 people, 475 was a relatively large number of workers.⁷

When completed, the camp contained 172 buildings and was "a little longer than the Burley country club," about one half mile.⁸ Of the buildings, a majority were 20' x 50' fifty-man barracks for the prisoners. Each building was raised slightly off the ground to ensure its inhabitants' "hygiene and healthfulness."⁹ There were housing facilities for the 700 to 800 American soldiers located at the camp,¹⁰ and a large hospital consisting of several buildings and 150 beds sat on the outskirts of the camp.¹¹

For security purposes, eight guard towers outfitted with searchlights and sirens strategically outlined the edges of the camp, which was enclosed by a high fence. Along the top of the fence were rolls of cyclone wire, and at the bottom was a six-inch base board. Because the camp sat on level ground, there was a good line of fire for the guards in the towers. One potential problem posed by the camp formation was the hospital administration building which was located in the line of fire for guards in certain towers. To safeguard against any incidental gunfire near the hospital building, guards in the two closest towers did not have machine guns.¹² Eventually, guards used guard dogs to help patrol the grounds of the camp.¹³

Despite these precautions, escape was common at the camp. According to Mrs. Joe Bradish, a clerk/typist at Camp Rupert, the

German POWs had a habit of digging holes under the fence to escape during nighttime hours. They did not go very far because the camp was in the desert, and, as Mrs. Bradish explained, "there's no place they could go. . . ." So, they would return stealthily to the camp. To prove they could and did escape, the POWs told people like Mrs. Bradish the address of their house, its color, and how many people lived there.¹⁴

Outside the camp, security was also a concern. There were no large industrialized centers, the closest defense installation was 150 miles away from the camp, and the only large airport close by was the United States Army Air Base in Pocatello, Idaho. One potential problem caused by location was the Union Pacific Railroad, which ran a quarter of a mile north of the camp.¹⁵ No official records report any escape attempts of any kind, including the usage of the nearby railroad system.¹⁶

Following its completion, the opening of the camp on 27 October 1943 was remarkably similar to a sneak preview of a play. Both the Burley Herald and the Minidoka County News announced the opening, as in the following headline: "October 27 Set for Official Opening of Prisoner Camp: Public Invited to Flag Raising Event and to Inspect Camp Near Rupert."¹⁷ The Burley Herald noted that "Special Invitations to ceremonies will be sent this week to mayors of nearby towns. . . ."¹⁸ The apparent merriment that seems to have enveloped the camp may be attributable to some extent to the situation of the local, farm-based economy.

Camp Rupert was located twelve miles west of Rupert and six miles north of Burley.¹⁹ The area was surrounded by many farms in

need of labor. The camp's location near these farmers in need of labor was the setting for the opening and the duration of Camp Rupert. The reason for the need stemmed from several factors. While the demand for food had risen, and the crops had correspondently been abundant, farm workers had left to fight in the war or to work in industrial centers.

One other characteristic of the camp's setting was the attitude of Americans toward the enemy troops. Several Gallup Pole Surveys illustrate the fact that stereotypes based on race were much stronger in America than those based on nationality. One from 5-10 February 1943 asked people a question about who they thought was America's chief war enemy, Japan or Germany. Of the people interviewed in the mountain states, 55% said Japan was while 34% pointed at Germany as the main enemy.²⁰

Another indication that race made Germany seem like less of a threat was in a survey from 4 December 1942. The survey asked who was the larger object of America's fear in Germany--German people or German leaders. Of those questioned, 6% thought German people in general were the chief enemy while a lopsided 74% thought German leadership posed the biggest threat.²¹

From these statistics, one can infer that those who physically resembled Americans were more likely to be accepted, or at least tolerated, by Americans. Moreover, Americans expected to get along better with the Germans than with the Japanese after the war. In

fact, 70% compared to 1% thought America would relate better with Germany in the post-war era than with Japan.²²

ENDNOTES

¹"Prison Camp News is Scarce Here: Little Authentic Information Available; Part of Contract Let to Pocatello," Burley Herald, 1 July 1943, 1.

²DeKoven L. Schwieger, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

³"Prison Camp Work Now Under Way: Brennan and Cahoon Open Offices Here; Union Establishes Offices; People Come," Burley Herald, 8 July 1943, 1.

⁴Burley Herald, 1 July 1943, 1.

⁵Burley Herald, 8 July 1943, 1.

⁶Burley Herald, 22 July 1943, 1.

⁷Records of the Provost Marshal General, "Memorandum on Engineering Features of Proposed Site for 300-Man Prisoner-of-War Camp Near Rupert, Idaho: 3 June 1943," Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

⁸Burley Herald, 22 July 1943, 1.

⁹Powell, Splinters of a Nation, 40-41.

¹⁰Records of the Provost Marshal General, "December 9, 1943-January 3, 1946," Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

¹¹Schwieger, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Maj. E.G. Shannahan and Capt. W.J. Bridges, Jr., Records of the Provost Marshal General, "Report of Inspection of Prisoner of War Camp, Rupert, Idaho and Branch Camps: June 19, 1945," Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

¹⁴Mrs. Joe Bradish of Boise, Idaho, interviewed by author, 13 March 1991, Boise, Idaho, tape recording.

¹⁵Schwieger, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

¹⁶Records of the Provost Marshal General, "December 9, 1943-January 3, 1946," Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

¹⁷Minidoka County News, 21 October 1943, 1.

¹⁸"Flag to be Raised at Prison Camp Wednesday, Oct. 27," Burley Herald, 21 October 1943, 1.

¹⁹Schwieger, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

²⁰George H. Gallup, The Gallup Pole: Public Opinion, 1935-1971, 3 vols., (New York: Random House, 1972), 1:338.

²¹*Ibid.*, 356.

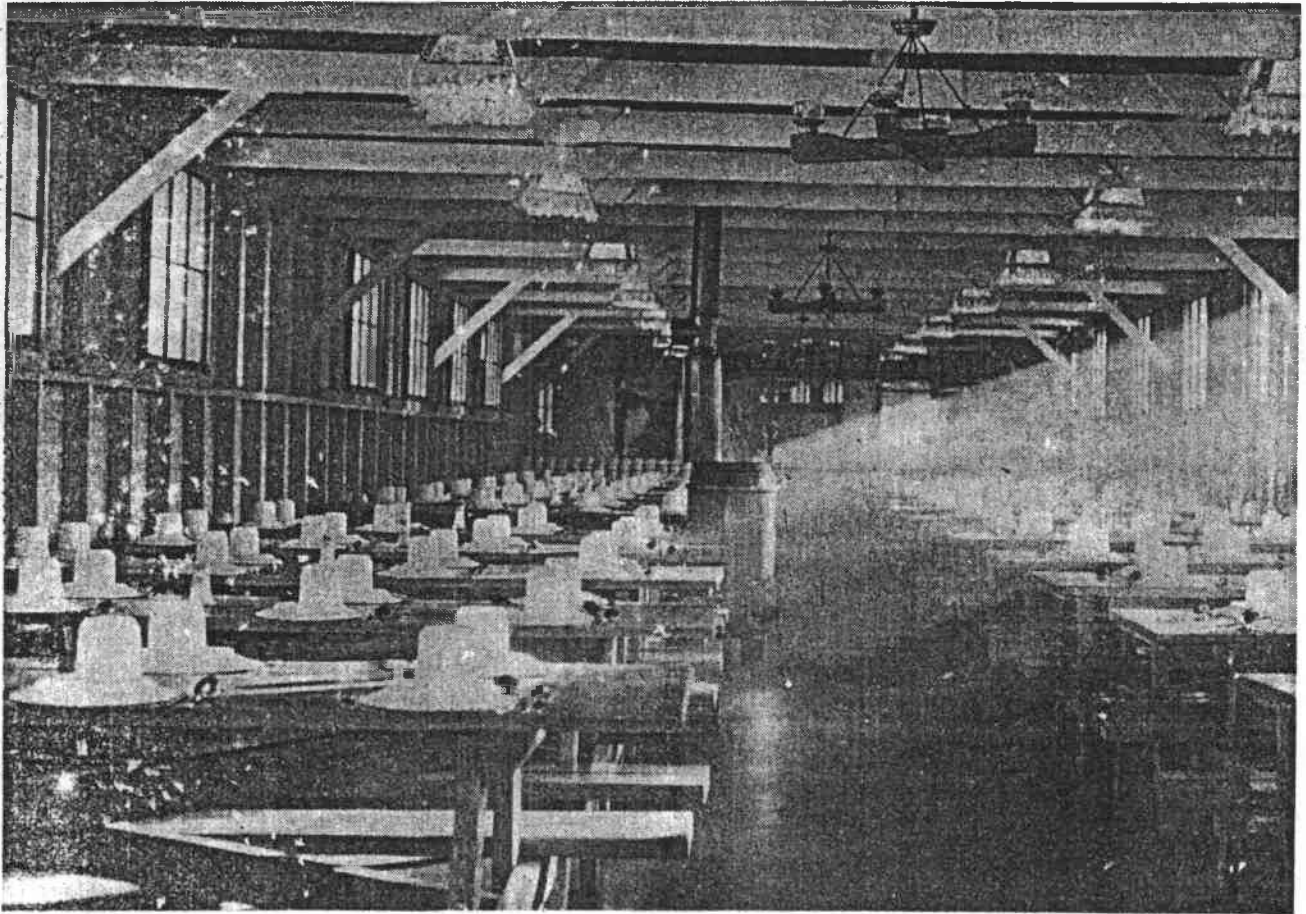
²²*Ibid.*, 385.

CHAPTER 4
CAMP CONDITIONS:
PRISON LIFE INSIDE THE FENCES

This chapter will cover the life of the various prisoners as it took place within the confines of the camp. The camp life was positive, and this fact may have attributed to the successful interaction of POWs and citizens which followed.

For the prisoners, adapting to camp life was sometimes confusing due to the pleasantness of the situation.¹ (See figure 3, page 31.) As mentioned previously, the food served to the prisoners was the same in quantity and quality as that received by American soldiers. At first, this fact overwhelmed many of the arriving prisoners who were skeptical about how they were going to be treated. The Minidoka County News captured the reactions of the prisoners in an article dated 28 September 1944: "It is understood that the Germans, tired and hungry after their long boat and train journey, were greatly surprised at the amount of food offered them, expressing the belief that they were being given a week's ration instead of for one day."² The prisoners eventually adjusted to America's abundant food supply.

The POWs did the cooking for the entire camp, including American personnel. The cooks received an allotment of food for the



**Ready for
dinner bell**

Sunlight streams through the windows of this tidy mess hall at Camp Rupert.
(Photo from the collection of Mrs. John R. Clark, Rupert)

Figure 3.

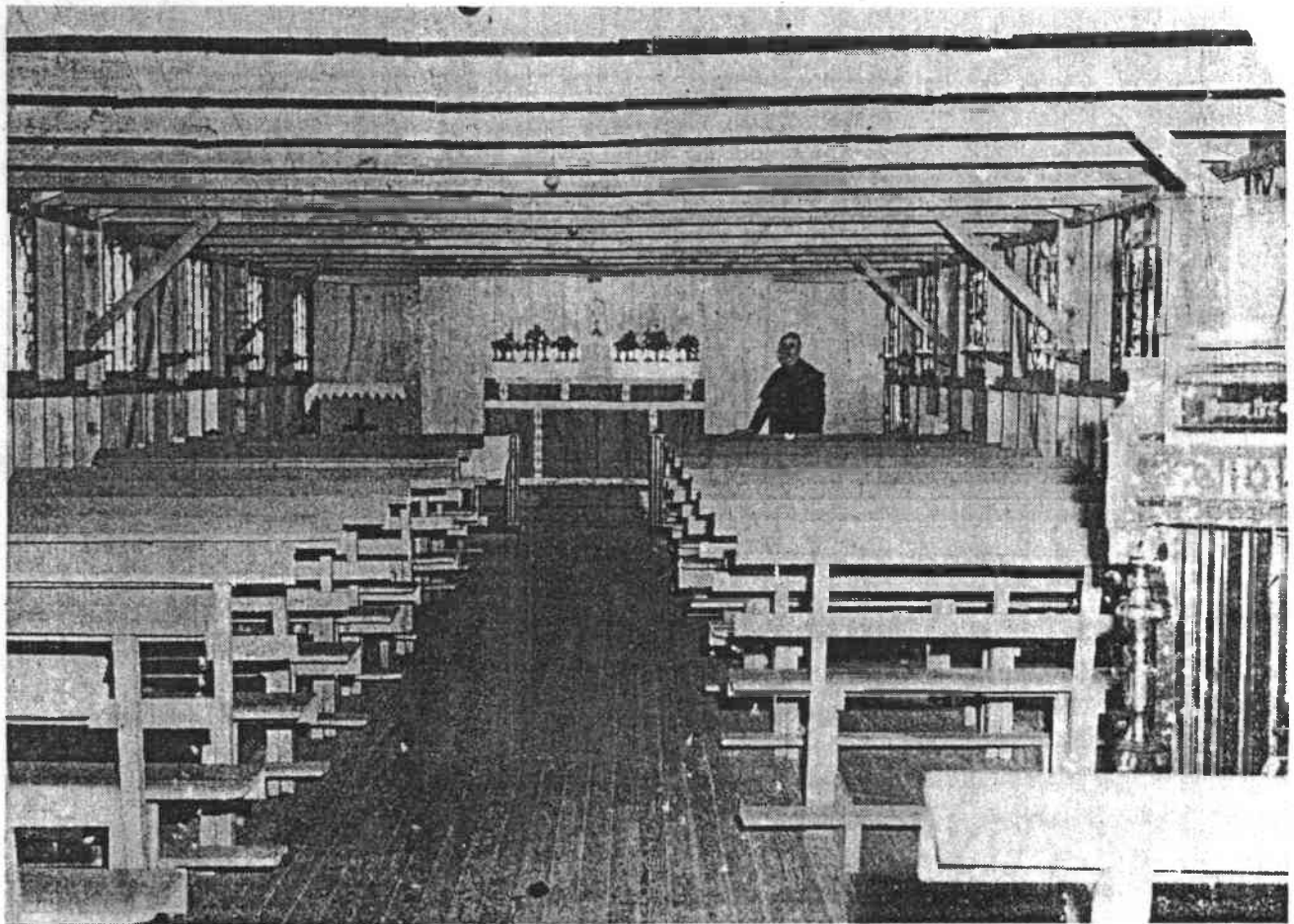
month. They often saved a large portion of the butter and at the end of the month made baked goods. Mrs. Bradish fondly recalls that ". . . they could really bake."³ As an example of their adapting to the food supply, when the camp closed, a guard found oven racks full of fresh bread which the prisoners had casually left behind.⁴

The Rupert newspaper article pointed out another fact about the initial apprehensions of the prisoners: "They were also afraid to burn the coal provided for them, fearing that using it now might deprive them of heat later in the winter when it is more needed."⁵ In most aspects of camp life, these suspicions were not justified, and the camp administrators insured the prisoners' comfort in every detail.

Camp personnel issued each prisoner a wardrobe which included, among other items, the following: two pairs of shoes, four pairs of socks, two pairs of cotton trousers, two woolen or cotton shirts, two khaki or blue cotton work jackets, and one cap or hat.⁶

Just as the clothes were issued to insure the warmth and health of the prisoners, the 150-bed hospital at Camp Rupert stood fully equipped to care for both prisoners and American personnel. Lt. Col. Olshansky was the post surgeon at the hospital; Capt. Brown acted as the dental officer; and captains Ripp and Smith were the medical officers.⁷

The image of starving and sick POWs huddled together in tattered clothing praying to their God for help did not apply to the POWs at Camp Rupert. Not only did they have adequate food, clothing, shelter, and medical care, but they also had a church building set aside for their use. (See figure 4, page 33.) A report on 13-14 March



Camp Rupert chapel

Clergyman stands near the pulpit of a chapel at Camp Rupert, the prisoner-of-war camp west of Paul that housed Italian and German POWs during World War II. (Photo from the collection of Mrs. John R. Clark, Rupert)

Figure 4.

1946 by camp inspector Sture Persson stressed the quality of the religious facilities. He said of the building that ". . . the decoration, especially of the windows, was admirably done." Services in the church catered to both Protestants and Catholics. A Lutheran minister from the town of Burley made a weekly appearance, and there was a resident German Catholic priest.⁸

Another area for finding a respite from the daily, work-oriented schedule was the canteen. Prisoners could, with the money they had earned from working, purchase such necessities as toilet articles, needles, and thread. They could also buy two ounces of tobacco a week, notebooks, and letter paper.⁹

The letters prisoners sent and received had to pass inspection. Letters could be no longer than twenty four lines, they had to be addressed only to family members or close friends, and "quotes from books, codes, musical notes, signs, and shorthand were prohibited." Moreover, "the letters could not disclose any information about military affairs, the guard strength at the camps, or anything critical of conditions in the camp or of other prisoners."¹⁰

The education system was an example of the open-minded attitude of the camp. (See figure 5, page 35.) Both the prisoners themselves and the War Department set up education programs. Camp authorities allowed POWs to subscribe to newspapers and periodicals, with the stipulation that they be printed in the U.S. And, as it was with the mail, the administrators censored the incoming information. American history, English courses, geography, and mathematics constituted the gist of the programs offered.¹¹



Figure 5, a picture of German POWs in a classroom in a Utah prison. This classroom would have been very similar to those at Camp Rupert.

The two most popular courses were American history and English. Other classes included French, shorthand, Spanish, and civics.¹² Inspector Metraux in August 1945 said the "base camp has a fine library,"¹³ and inspector Persson pointed out in the report from 13-14 March 1946 that an American Lutheran minister brought magazines for some of the POWs.¹⁴

In keeping with the instructions of the Geneva Convention, Camp Rupert provided many opportunities for the prisoners to take part in recreational activities. The POWs could play an instrument or perform a play. And while inspector Persson was at the camp the "theater group was, in spite of the shortage of men, preparing a new play, and they had an excellent building for the purpose." Speaking about the talent of the prisoners, Persson judged that the "artistic talent had been very high. . . ." ¹⁵

Among the most common recreational activities were sports, including fistball, boxing, ping pong, and the most popular, soccer.¹⁶ When one includes the facilities of the numerous branch camps, there was also chess, checkers, baseball, gymnastics, and horseshoes. Even though the branch camps, because of their temporary status, often had fewer facilities, some did provide excellent recreational opportunities. POWs at the Miles City, Montana, Branch Camp, for instance, had access to the local fairgrounds stadium.¹⁷

Of all the comments on the life of POWs in Camp Rupert, the one that might best illustrate the benevolence of the administrators concerned sports. In a semi-monthly report, one of the inspectors complained that the prisoners were having to fashion their own

ping-pong balls because the genuine balls were lost.¹⁸ Considering the war-time atrocities that were being committed in other parts of the world, the ping-pong problem seems somewhat humorous.

ENDNOTES

¹"Large Group of Germans Now at Prisoner Camp: Special Train Brings Large Number Here from East Coast--Taken in Normandy," Minidoka County News, 28 December 1944, 1.

²Ibid.

³Mrs. Joe Bradish, interview.

⁴Jay Gummow, interview.

⁵Minidoka County News, 28 December 1944, 1.

⁶Guy S. Metraux, Records of the Provost Marshal General, "Work Detachments, Camp Rupert, Idaho: August 1945," Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

⁷Shannahan and Bridges, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

⁸Sture Persson, Records of the Provost Marshal General, "Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Rupert, Idaho: August 6-10, 1945," Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

⁹Metraux, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

¹⁰Powell, Splinters of a Nation, 87.

¹¹Busco and Alder, "German and Italian Prisoners of War in Utah and Idaho," 61, 63.

¹²Persson, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

¹³Metraux, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

¹⁴Persson, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Metraux, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

¹⁸Persson, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

CHAPTER 5
ITALIAN, RUSSIAN, AND GERMAN POWS--
THE DISTINCT STORIES OF THEIR INTERNMENTS

It is difficult to say which group of POWs first lived in Camp Rupert and used its facilities. The remaining government documents have little apparent order. But, by looking at the various semi-monthly reports and local newspapers, one can infer that the Italians inhabited the camp first, followed by a mixture of German and Russian POWs, and after the majority of Russians were repatriated, the Germans inhabited the camp until it closed.

The first POWS received at the camp was on 10 May 1944,¹ and the Burley Herald mentions on 25 May 1944 that ". . . 100 Italians from the Prisoners of War camp will be available this week."² In the semi-monthly report dated 15 September 1944, the inspector listed the POWs as Italian,³ but in the following report from 30 September, the inspector listed the nationality as both Italian and German.⁴ Shortly after this date, there were just Germans and Russians. As early as 1 February 1944, the U.S. State Department was discussing the repatriation of Russian POWs;⁵ throughout June, July, and August of 1944, Camp Rupert repatriated the Russians. Finally, the camp held Germans, including those who came with the Russians, until 3 January 1946.⁶

The Italians came to Camp Rupert, oddly enough, by choice, refusing what many considered a more inviting option. On 14 December 1943, Italian leader Pietro Bagdolio joined the Allied forces in the battle against Germany.⁷ His decision forced the Italian prisoners in America to choose sides. Those Italians who showed allegiance to the Allied powers could join an Italian service unit. These units were less restrictive than regular camps. Those men who refused to join an Italian service unit went, in a majority of instances, to either Tulare Lake, California, or Camp Rupert, Idaho.⁸

The Italians in Idaho were there because they did not agree with the pro-Allied government. As a result, the overall feeling in the camp was often negative. Inspector Hortal stated in a report from July 1944 that "The morale of the camp as a whole is perhaps the lowest I have found anywhere to now."⁹ One possible reason for the low morale may have been the nascent quality of the camp while the Italians were there.

When the Italians moved into Camp Rupert, Commanding Officer Lt. Col. Smith and his staff had not completed preparations for the arriving POWs. The camp was new, and some facilities were underdeveloped. For example, there was no organized education or recreation. Even though there was a soccer field and volleyball courts, there were no balls. The problems were not the fault of camp administrators, however. The problems stemmed from a lack of cooperation among Italian POWs.¹⁰

The POWs had a spokesman whose job it was to voice their concerns to the camp commanders and to the various inspectors. If the group of POWs showed a unified interest in obtaining a particular

item, then the inspectors aided them in getting what they requested. The problem was that the Italians reflected, to some extent, the splintered opinions of Italians in Italy.¹¹ One inspector explained the situation this way: "The disunity and lack of cooperation among themselves is also one of the greatest difficulties in doing anything." Consequently, the POWs returned home to the camp from work and had "nothing to occupy their minds and to help them forget about their troubles." These problems did not reflect on the camp administrators or the PMG. Instead, they indicated how divided and often unmotivated the Italian POWs were.¹²

Given the traditional animosity between German and Italian soldiers, the arrival of the German soldiers intensified the Italians' dislike for camp life.¹³ By September 1944, there was a large number of German prisoners with the Italians. Jay Gummow, one of the prison guards at Camp Rupert, recalled, "the Italians . . . didn't get along with the Germans. The Germans considered the Italians cowards, as far as military [matters] . . . and when the Germans criticized them, they were quick to fight." The Italians seemed to have problems working with the Germans because of their different cultures. While the Germans maintained a work-oriented outlook, ". . . the Italians were happy-go-lucky. They liked to sing, and they like to sit down and rest, and they didn't work as the Germans did."¹⁴

An example of how the Italians' behaved was when the prison guards took them to the fields to work. In route to the fields, the guards sometimes drove through Burley or Rupert. This route was pleasing to the Italians who, as Jay Gummow states, had "their mind .

. . . on the girls." As the prisoners rode through town, they whistled and yelled at the girls they passed.¹⁵

Of course, the Italians' behavior--taking naps, fighting, and yelling at girls--was not acceptable to camp personnel who were trying to use the POWs for labor. Eventually, conflicts between the two nationalities and overcrowding forced the government to transfer the Italians to branch camps in various parts of Idaho,¹⁶ and to camps in Utah.¹⁷

Many Russians accompanied the Germans to America. During battle, Germans captured Russian soldiers on the eastern front and forced them into compliance. Fearing execution or starvation, the Russian soldiers obliged the aggressor's demands by joining German work battalions; some Russians willingly joined German forces.¹⁸ When the Germans with their subservient Russians lost to allied forces, the Germans, along with the Russians, went to British and American prisoners-of-war camps. After Allied government officials sorted the two groups of prisoners, they sent many of the Russians back to the Soviet Union. The Soviet government often treated the returning soldiers as traitors and imprisoned them.¹⁹

The British government sent all soldiers suspected of being Russian back to their homeland, regardless of whether they wanted to go. America, on the other hand, set up screening teams of Russian-speaking Americans who tried to determine the citizenship of the prisoners. Camp Rupert was one of the repatriation centers where the screening took place.²⁰

The Commanding General at Camp Rupert received specific government orders concerning how the camp would handle Russian prisoners of war. Ulio's orders consisted of three main points.

1. No German prisoner of war of Russian origin who disclaims Soviet citizenship will be repatriated to Russia.
2. All German prisoners of war who claim to be citizens of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics will be repatriated to Russia except those who claim the protection of the Geneva Convention by indicating a desire to remain in the United States as German prisoners of war.
3. Prisoner of war camp commanders will be instructed to that any statement by a German prisoner of war of Soviet Origin indicating a desire on his part to remain in the United States will be construed as a claim for protection under the provisions of the Geneva Convention.²¹

Despite the explicitness of the above guidelines, the process of repatriation did not run smoothly on all occasions.

On 5 June 1945, Camp Rupert received twenty POWs from Branch Camp Fletcherfield, Clarksdale, Mississippi, of Main Camp McCain, Mississippi. The administrators at Fletcherfield had interrogated the POWs and determined that all twenty were to be returned to Russia.²²

Of the twenty POWs, sixteen were German citizens who were born in Germany and served in the German Army. One other was a German citizen who was born in Austria and became a German only after his homeland had been occupied by the Germans. Likewise, the remaining three were born in Czechoslovakia and became German citizens on 10 October 1938 following the German take over.²³ Given the situation awaiting the POWs who were going to the Soviet Union, why would any one of them have elected repatriation as a

Soviet citizen? Why did the men not seek refuge in America by claiming German citizenship? Furthermore, why did they not claim protection under the 1929 Geneva Convention?

Several prisoners chose to accept the passage back to the Soviet Union, while others outwardly refused to return. Of the twenty from Camp Fletcherfield, eight elected to be Soviet citizens because they assumed that their home town had become part of the expanded Soviet territory. Four others agreed that their home town was part of the Soviet Union, but expressed the opinion that they did not want to return. Three men were undecided about their home towns' nationality, but were stalwart in their desire to remain in America. Two others were also firm in their objection to returning to Russia. Regardless of these various opinions, camp Fletcherfield sent all twenty POWs to Camp Rupert for repatriation.²⁴

Camp Rupert not only received the interrogated POWs, but it also screened the prisoners. On 9 June 1945, M. J. Baze, Executive of Security and Intelligence, sent a letter to Camp Rupert instructing administrators as to how they should interview the POWs. The basic goal of the interrogations was to find out who was German and who was Russian.²⁵

There seems to have been no specific method involved in searching for the truth of each man's origin. The prisoner's uniforms offered little clue as to their origin, and it seems as though an alibi was their only hope. An alibi was the supporting words of an acquaintance who could vouch for the prisoner's origin. The following document serves as an example of this type of alibi:

Mr Igor Sikorski
 Bridgport, Connecticut.
 Dearest Igor Konstanovitsch,

I am sorry if I don't remember your father's name but my thoughts are in doubt as I spent nine months in nine different POW camps in the United States. I am a colonel in the Russian Imperial Air Force, my name is Wadim Mikhailovitch Nadeshdin. I was granted a St. George Cross, Golden Arms and all decorations. I am 57 years old my health permits me to work. I was captured near Cherbourg, France by mistake, I was a civilian truck driver and I was in civilian clothers (my residence was in Paris 34 Rue Viola since 1925). May I ask you for a favor, recently I was worried because the entire meaning of the Nansen Passport which was granted to me tin [sic]1924 at Belgrade, Yugoslavia wasn't [sic] always understood and as I was considered for a while as Russian citizen. My only wish is to remain un [sic] the United States as I do not have any relatives and there is nothing that woul [sic] entice me to go to any other country. Here in the United States I have many friends among the Knights of the St. George Cross, I am also well acquainted with the engineer and designer Prokofiev Severski with whom I was stationed at the Oesel in a group of fighters.

Sincerely

Wadim Nadeshdin²⁶

The above letter by Wadim Nadeshdin to Igor Konstanovitsh was an example of a man trying to avoid repatriation by claiming citizenship of another country. There were two key elements to Nadeshdin's letter: one, the fact that its meaning was difficult to assess; and, two, the human urgency that permeated the language.

The plea in the letter for help progressively grew stronger throughout. The lines which read "My only wish is to remain un [sic] the United States as I do not have any relatives and there is nothing that woul [sic] entice me to go to any country. Here I have many friends . . . "27 were an indication of desperation. The last lines of

the letter indicated a foreigner's positive experience in America's POW camps.

Out of approximately 1,106 pages of assorted documents that make up the Records of the Provost Marshal from World War II for the years 1942-1946 concerning Camp Rupert, only one is hand-written. The document was written 12 June 1945 concerning the repatriation of a POW to Russia.²⁸ (See figure 6, page 48.)

The hand-written style of the note hinted at an aspect of emotion not common to most of the PMG documents. The lines were short and definite, and after reading it, the pejorative ring of frustration lingered. This idea was exemplified by the lines "It appears we have no alternative and must consider him a German," and "He has no right to send this letter."²⁹ Unlike this particular POW who wanted to remain in America, many did not want to stay and obtain German citizenship or, for some reason, had to return against their will.

Before some Russians left Camp Rupert, rumors circulated the camp about the fate of Russian prisoners who ". . . had jumped from the ships rather than face retribution by the Communists."³⁰ On the day of their scheduled departure, many Russians strongly resisted going home. Some of them tried to hide under the barracks and, when found, had to be physically dragged out from under the buildings by the guards.³¹

Eventually, Camp Rupert sent most of the Russians to the Sub-Port of Embarkation in Portland, Oregon, where they departed for Russia. As of 1 February 1945, there were only twenty Russian prisoners remaining at Rupert. These men occupied a small building

1. The Russians have refused to acknowledge his citizenship.
2. He must be repatriated.
3. It appears that we have no alternative and must consider him a German.

Bm B. 6/12/45

He has no right to send this letter. Return it to him.

Give G.S.C. proper instructions.

Figure 6, hand-written document concerning the repatriation of a Russian/German soldier.

outside the camp enclosure, separated from the German prisoners.³²

The German prisoners who arrived with the intermingling Russians in late summer and early fall of 1944³³ stayed until the camp closed in the winter of 1946.³⁴ Like the Italians and the Russians, the Germans had distinct qualities stemming from their cultural background. The Germans were artistic people who believed in the value of hard work. They were also a group divided over Nazi ideologies.

Some of the German prisoners at Camp Rupert and at its various branch camps found outlets for their artistic skills. At Camp Rupert, some of the POWs killed rattlesnakes and then made such things as hat bands and belt-buckle covers. They also made hunting knives using old saw blades and doll houses out of match sticks. The Germans sold these items to the guards for packs of cigarettes or cigars.³⁵ German prisoners at Branch Camp Farragut in Northern Idaho fashioned bracelets from stainless steel bowls discarded by American soldiers.³⁶

Some Germans used their artistic skills to mitigate their homesickness. Using water and dirt, the POWs created miniature models of their hometowns. (See figures 7, 8, and 9, pages 50, 51, and 52.) Photos of the models show the detail to scale of the towns which appear to cover about ten square feet.³⁷ The Americans like Mrs. Bradish admired the Germans' skills. She stated simply that "no matter what they did, they did very well."³⁸

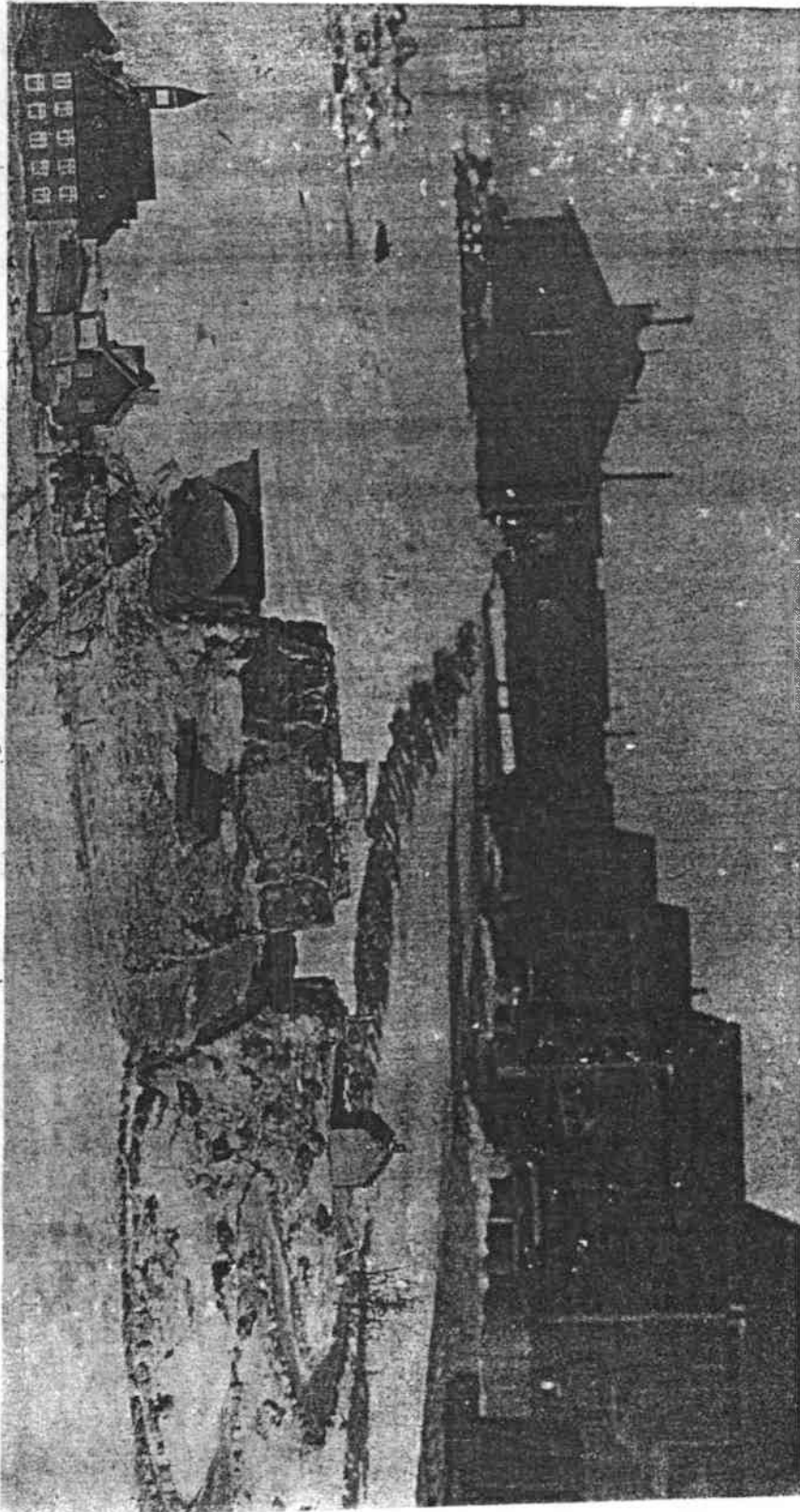
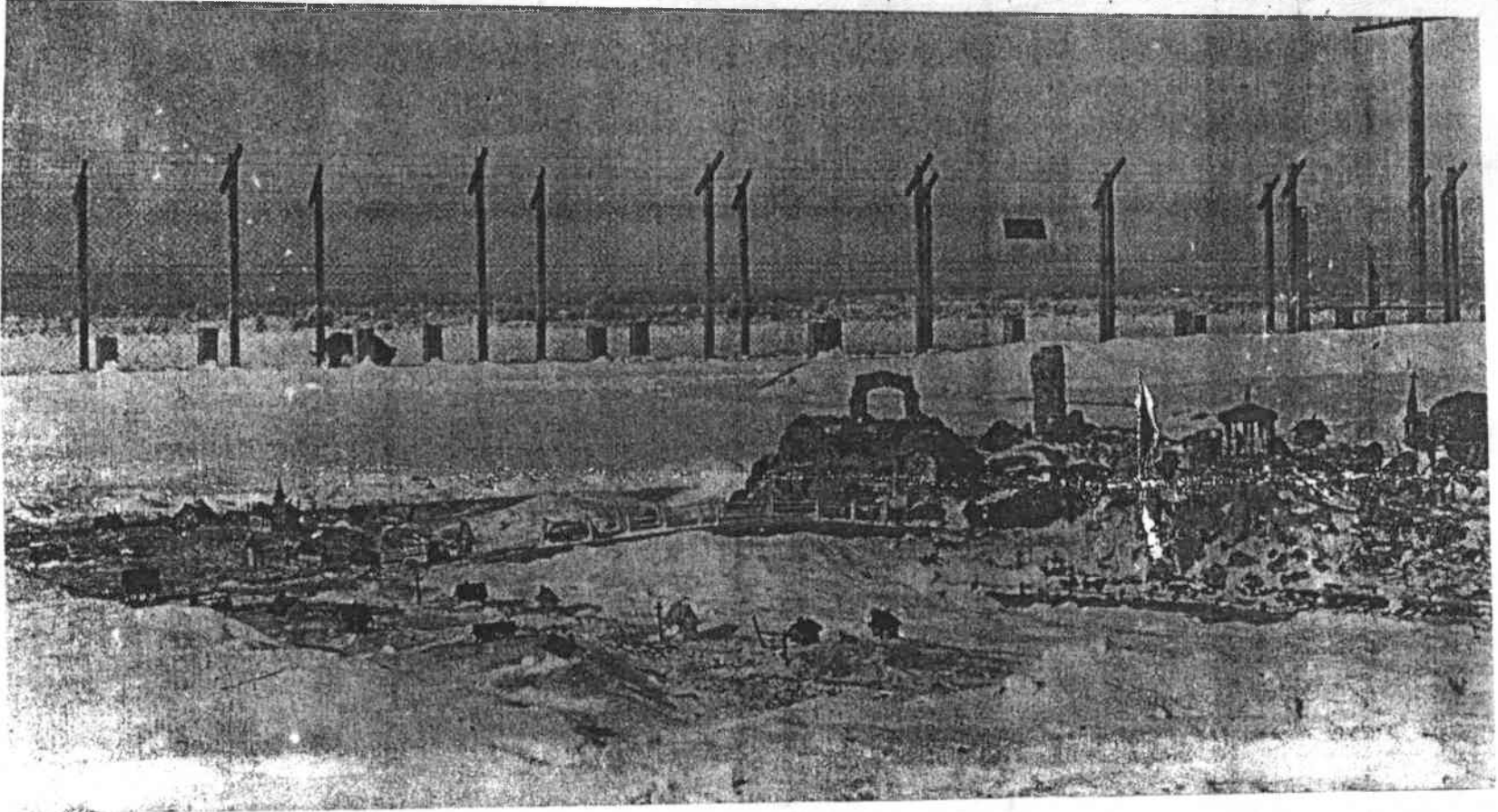


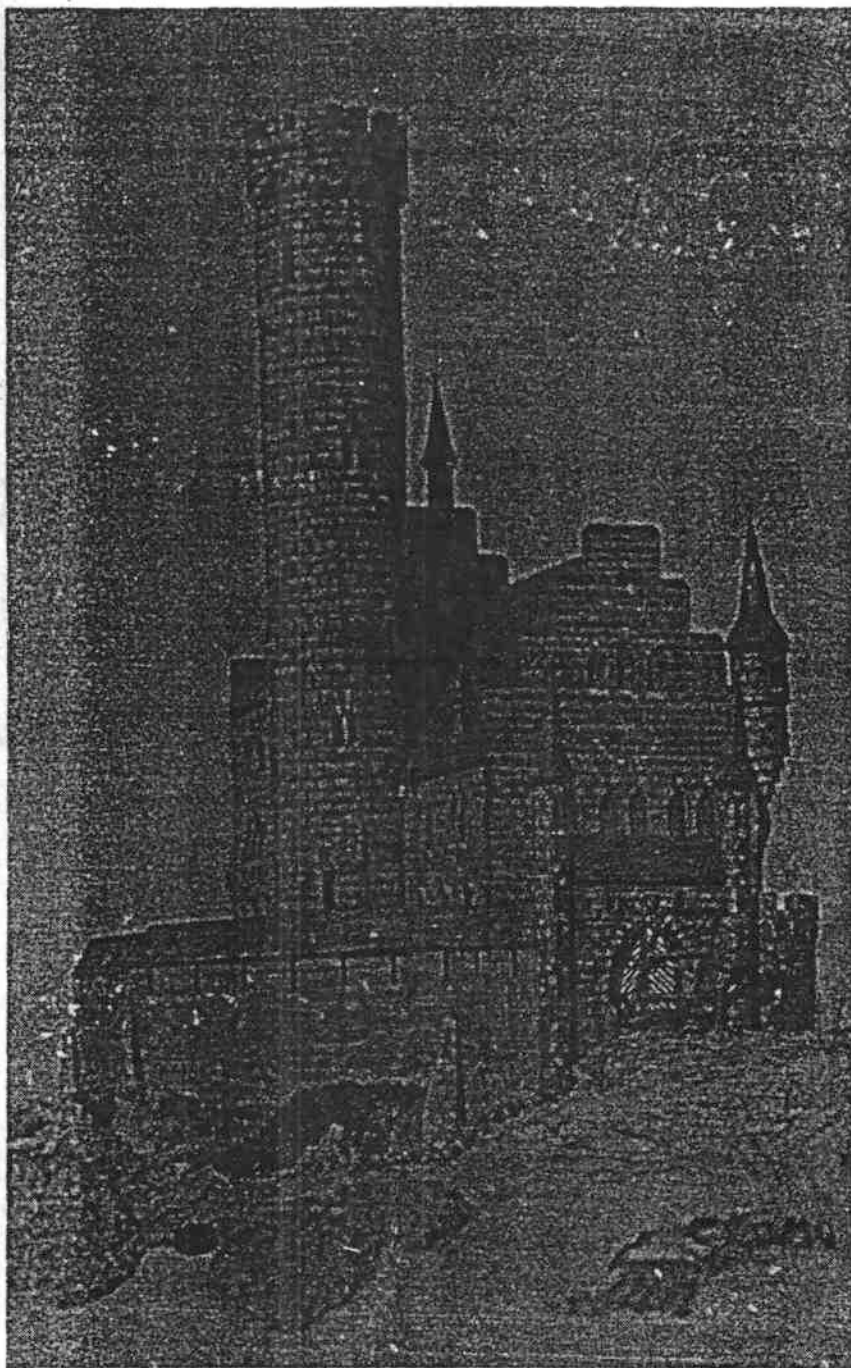
Figure 7, a German model of a town on Camp Rupert's grounds.

POW handiwork

An elaborate, miniaturized scene from Germany was sculptured by POWs from mud and stone outside their Camp Rupert barracks. (Photo from the collection of Mrs. John R. Clark, Rupert)

Figure 8, German-made model of a German town.





Mud castle

German POWs at Camp Rupert sculpted this amazingly intricate medieval castle from mud. A tiny drawbridge built from sticks was the final touch. (Photo from the collection of Mrs. John R. Clark, Rupert)

Figure 9.

The German prisoners did not have the same level of unanimity in politics as they did in art. Thus, the PMG tried to segregate the Germans based on their inclinations toward Nazi philosophies. Segregations often failed, and many pro-Nazi and non-Nazi Germans often lived in close proximity to one another within American prison camps.³⁹

Inspector Guy S. Metraux's report from September 1945 on Branch Camp Farragut Naval Station demonstrated the problems related to housing non-Nazi and Nazi prisoners together. Metraux stated in a section of his report entitled "Discipline" that no disciplinary punishments had been dealt out since the camp opened. He continued by saying that "whether this unusual record can for long be continued is, however, very doubtful." The reason he made this negative prediction was related to incoming Nazi POWs. The camp, prior to the arrival of the Nazi POWs, was inhabited solely by non-Nazi Germans.⁴⁰

Later in the report, Metraux praised the non-Nazi POWs by saying that the branch camp was "far superior to any [camp] previously visited by this representative." After giving several examples to show the high quality of the camp, Metraux reluctantly stated that "It is unfortunate therefore that . . . a group of Nazi NCOs should have been sent up from Camp Rupert and introduced into the previous group. . . ." "It is difficult to understand why," continued Metraux in frustration "Nazi NCOs are not sent where life is uncomfortable in the extreme. . . ." ⁴¹ Metraux's comment points out two trends in the various camps. One, the two groups of Germans often did not get

along with each other. And, two, the American guards and inspectors seemed to have found the non-Nazi Germans somewhat agreeable.

The PMG was aware of the difficulties that might arise as a result of the presence of pro-Nazi soldiers along side the non-Nazis. In addition to trying to segregate the Germans on the basis of how loyal they were to the Nazi party, the government used the education program to undermine Nazi ideologies. Education focused on destroying Naziism, or at least lessening the power Naziism had over the Germans. It also tried to improve America's overall image. However, the Nazis who managed to get through the segregation processes gave little or no credence to the education indoctrinations they received in American prisons.⁴²

Hitler's power over people was hard to understand or explain. The power of this one man over his followers was evident at Rupert. Specifically, it was apparent on 20 April 1944, Hitler's birthday.⁴³ Against the will of the Rupert Camp commanders, many Nazi prisoners celebrated this day. Over 250 men secretly prepared flags bearing the symbol of Naziism, the Swastika, which they displayed on April 20. In addition to their unwillingness to follow camp regulations, these prisoners refused to go to work.⁴⁴

The way in which the guards ended the Nazi revolt, according to Gummow, was more typical of wartime attitudes than the previously mentioned ping-pong ball problem. The guards placed thirty five members of the Nazi group in either the guard house or solitary confinement. They herded the remaining 250 rebellious prisoners into an outdoor pen on the camp's confines. The camp staff issued

each German a blanket for warmth and gave the prisoners bread and water instead of their normal meals.⁴⁵

One cold night during the strike, the prisoners set dry sagebrush and weeds on fire. When the guards sprayed water on the field to put out the fire, the prisoners got wet and became cold. Due to the discomforting cold and their hunger, the pro-Nazis called an end to their strike of eight days.⁴⁶

In the aftermath of the riot, camp authorities punished those involved. Guards who had fought in battle against Germans in Europe and North Africa were in charge of intimidating the prisoners. One guard had been a French soldier and a prisoner of the Germans. He escaped from the German camp and made it to America where he joined the American forces. The French-American soldier lined the leaders of the rebellion up against a warehouse. Speaking German, he walked down the line questioning the Germans. If the guard was not satisfied with a German's answer, the guard punched him. This use of forceful interrogation, along with the food rationing, was enough to dissuade the Nazi Germans from revolting outwardly again.⁴⁷

Mr. Gummow's depiction of the uprising differs from one given by Mrs. Bradish, the typist/clerk. She stated that the POWs, using the tunnels they had dug under the fences, had gone out into the desert and brought back sagebrush. They fermented the sagebrush in order to make beer. Then, on Hitler's birthday, many of the German POWs drank the beer, and, according to Mrs. Bradish, "The compound was locked down for a couple of days because they were in bad shape."⁴⁸

This version of the "revolt" on Hitler's birthday describes something that sounds more like a party.

ENDNOTES

¹Shannahan and Bridges, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

²"Prisoners of War to Work for Local Farmers: George Cleveland, Local Labor Official and County Agent, Reports to Rotarians on Labor Situation," Burley Herald, 25 May 1944, 1.

³W.D. Ginniven, Records of the Provost Marshal General, "Prisoner of War Camp Labor Report: 15 December 1944," Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

⁴W.D. Ginniven, Records of the Provost Marshal General, "Prisoner of War Camp Labor Report: 30 September 1944," Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

⁵John J. McCloy, Records of the Provost Marshal General, "Memorandum for the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1: 1 February 1945," Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

⁶Records of the Provost Marshal General, "December 9, 1943-January 3, 1946," Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

⁷Henri Michel, The Second World War, trans. Douglas Parmee (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1975), 528-529.

⁸Powell, Splinters of a Nation, 119-125.

⁹Luis Hortal, Records of the Provost Marshal General, "Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Rupert, Idaho: July 4, 5, 1944," Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Michel, The Second World War, 117-126.

¹²Hortal, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Jay Gummow, interview.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Minidoka County News, 28 September 1944, 1.

¹⁷Jay Gummow, interview.

¹⁸Georg Von Rauch, A History of Soviet Russia, trans. Peter and Annette Jacobsohn (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc. 1957), 343, 347.

¹⁹Powell, Splinters of a Nation, 70-73.

²⁰Ibid., 71.

²¹J.A. Ulio, Records of the Provost Marshal General, "German Prisoners of War of Soviet Origin," Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

²²George B. Gobers and Kenneth A. Benson, Records of the Provost Marshal, "German Russian Protected Personnel, 5 June 1945," Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵M.J. Baze and Kenneth A. Benson, Records of the Provost Marshal General, "Repatriation of USSR Citizens: 9 June 1945," Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

²⁶Wadim Nadeshdin, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

²⁷Ibid.

28Records of the Provost Marshal General, 1942-1946, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

29Ibid.

30Powell, Splinters of a Nation, 134-136.

31Jay Gummow, interview.

32Louis S.N. Phillipp, Records of the Provost Marshal General, "Report of Visit to the Camp," n.d., Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

33"3,000 German Prisoners to be Here May 1: Major Nichols Says Present Plans Call for Rupert Camp to be Reactivated Soon," Minidoka County News, 17 February 1944, 1.

34Records of the Provost Marshal General, 1942-1946, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

35Jay Gummow, interview.

36Cara Lee Foley of Helena, Montana, interviewed by author, 1 March 1991, Helena, Montana, tape recording.

37Minidoka County News, 29 March 1979.

38Mrs. Joe Bradish, interview.

39Powell, Splinters of a Nation, 134-136.

40Guy S. Metraux, Records of the Provost Marshal General, "Prisoner of War Camp Farragut Naval Station, Idaho: 1-4 September 1945," Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.

41Ibid.

42Powell, Splinters of a Nation, 134-146.

43James M. Rhodes, The Hitler Movement: A Modern Millenarian Revolution (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1980), 1-15.

44Jay Gummow, interview.

45"German Prisoners Strike; Soon are Ready to Work: Bread and Water Diet Makes Men Change their Minds and Seek Conference," Minidoka County News, 26 April 1945, 1.

46Ibid.

47Jay Gummow, interview.

48Mrs. Joe Bradish, interview.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: BEYOND THE BARBED WIRED--

THE POSITIVE INTERACTION BETWEEN POWS AND CIVILIANS

Both before and after the so-called revolt, some personnel at Camp Rupert had come to know, and in some cases, like German POWs. Jay Gummow stated that he and a couple of friends were initially skeptical of the Germans. But, as he pointed out, "while we [the guards] were there we came to know them, and our response to them warmed up."¹ Similarly, Mrs. Bradish said that ". . . after you work with them a couple of years or so . . . you become quite friendly with them."²

Many of the local citizens did not have the same opportunities as the camp personnel to get to know the German POWs. Some citizens told Mrs. Bradish it was not appropriate for her to converse with enemy prisoners.³ An article in the Minidoka County News following the revolt expressed this skeptical opinion: "Striking German prisoners of war at the Rupert Camp were given a little of their own medicine. . . ." The remark may have been rooted in the fact that Americans, as the article later indicates, were aware of the atrocities their soldiers in German prisons were being subjected to.⁴ However, as Mrs. Bradish explained, "they were just as much a victim of their circumstance as ours would've been over there."⁵

Some Americans thought life for POWs in America was too good. A Gallup Pole Survey from 22-27 March 1945 asked, "Do you think the treatment of prisoners of war is too strict or not strict enough? A mere 1% said it was too strict enough while 71% expressed that it was not strict enough.⁶

Some argued that conditions in U.S. prison camps were very good in hopes that the German prisons might hear of the treatment and imitate it, thus making life for U.S. POWs more bearable.⁷ One result of this proper treatment of the foreign prisoners was the fine health and state of mind the POWs were in when they began to meet with American civilians.

The negative attitude expressed in the newspaper article about the camp revolt contributed to negative suppositions about POWs. There needed to be some way for the American citizens outside the camp to meet and get to know the POWs. The direct interaction on farms and in nearby towns provided that opportunity. It often reversed the hold that the tenuous rumors and stereotypes had on the people. In the case of the Germans, by demonstrating their ability to work hard, a value America had rallied behind for generations, the Germans lived up to American standards. Consequently, many individual Americans changed their preconceived notions and accepted the Germans as decent people.

In May 1945, there were 425,781 prisoners of war in the United States.⁸ With each of these men working a ten-hour day six days a week, America potentially had 25,546,869 man hours per week. There was no way in which the government could possibly have used this force to its fullest potential. But the American people could. In

November 1942, faced with the beginnings of the labor shortage, "The Provost Marshal General and The Judge Advocate General jointly issued a new standard contract form to assist POW camp commanders in their negotiations with private employers of prisoner of war labor."⁹ This was, perhaps, the first step in bringing the prisoners and the American people together.

In Idaho, farmers made many contracts with the War Department to get prisoner-of-war labor. The demands came from all areas of the state and from Montana and Oregon as well. In order to assist all the farmers, the Provost Marshal General established the temporary branch camps. There were as many as twenty-four of these smaller camps, and they were as far away as Miles City, Montana, and Preston, Idaho.¹⁰

A typical contract from one of Camp Rupert's branch camps illustrates the type and amount of work the POWs did, the number of work days a job required, the amount of acreage to be worked, and the price paid per acre. An Idaho Falls company, for example, made a contract for May 20 1945, through June 20 1945, which called for such work as "beets-thinning, beets-hoeing, and onion-weeding." For this one company, a group of assigned prisoners spent 8,100 work days in just one month to do these jobs. In eight similar contracts averaging a month each, the prisoners put in 22,500 work days.¹¹ Each day represented for the prisoner another chance at positive interaction with rural American people.

One Idaho farmer who hired German prisoners was Wayne Harper. Although the prisoners would not talk to Wayne personally because they considered him "landed gentry," they did talk to his

hired man. In fact, they even wrote the hired man letters when they returned to Germany.¹² Obviously, the supervisors and hired men had sympathized with the prisoners.

Another example of this care was in Harlem, Montana, where the prison supervisors neglected regulations by giving the prisoners ten-minute breaks every hour. Inspectors at Harlem also believed that the committee for determining work loads was "too lenient" and were "underestimating the capabilities of the prisoners." As a result, POWs finished their assigned tasks in eight or nine hours, leaving an hour or two to rest. Furthermore, to the frustration of the inspectors, no "disciplinary action [has] been taken to force compliance. . . ." ¹³ The POWs did, however, work hard, and their cheap labor did make improvements in the lives of local farmers.

A blunt headline from the Burley Herald in March 1945 voiced aptly the contribution of the POWs in the fields: "Prisoner Help Nets Big Sum." POW labor in Idaho alone returned a \$235,716 profit. This amount was only a fraction of the "\$2,416,510 paid the treasury department . . . for work performed by prisoners in western states' agricultural fields and orchards."¹⁴ The profit was due, in part, to the eighty-cents-per-day wage paid to POW workers--a wage lower than what civilian laborers made at the time.

The prisoners came in contact with more than just the farmers. Paul Zillner was a carpenter in Burley, Idaho, who on several occasions met some German prisoners. His wife Catherine recalled how Paul and his brother talked with Germans at the lumber yard and on another occasion at the Catholic church. One afternoon when the prisoners were returning some borrowed items to the church,

one of them asked Mr. Zillner for permission to play the organ. Mr. Zillner agreed to let the prisoner play. While the German played, his fellow prisoners sang. According to Mrs. Zillner, they were talented and friendly.¹⁵

At about age eight, Cara Lee Foley lived near branch camp Farragut Naval Station. The prison was close enough to a main road to allow Foley and her family to see the German POWs from their car. She does not "remember hearing people talk in negative terms" about the POWs that the government had placed near to her community.¹⁶

Veria Swartz is another woman who remembers the proximity of the POWs. She owned a farm that had a branch camp on its premises. As a girl in her early twenties who was unsure about the prisoners, she said she was "scared to death of them." Veria, recalled, however, that she never had any problems with the prisoners.¹⁷

The day-to-day interaction between the prisoners and the American civilians and guards helped to dispel myths about how different and how evil the foreigners were. It is true that World War II created long-lasting feelings of hatred between Americans and Germans. But in Idaho, and in many other states which held enemy prisoners, the ill feelings subsided occasionally as a result of the positive interaction between the warring peoples.

It is safe to say that most of the Idaho and Montana communities like Rupert and Burley consisted predominantly of white people. Placing a similar white POW within such a community did not cause a large reaction among the general public--at least not along racial

lines. The POWs, by befriending the guards and pleasing the farmers with their work, blended into the white society--and the nationality stereotypes subsided. Proof is in the fact that most of the prisoners wanted to stay in America or return after the war,¹⁸ and ". . . many Germans not only took back with them names and addresses of Americans they had met but also maintained some level of contact. . . ."19

One final example that demonstrates the effects of the prisoners on America involved children. Earnest Allen lived on Mrs. Swarts's farm with his family, and his children came in contact with the nearby prisoners. On several nights Mr. Allen's elementary-age children went near the prison camp. The prisoners in the camp shone a flashlight out at the children, and the youngsters, excited about the communication, reflected the light with a mirror they had brought.²⁰ This scene involving innocent children and light symbolically foreshadowed the improved relations and communications that eventually followed World War II.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Jay Gummow, interview.
- 2 Mrs. Joe Bradish, interview.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Albert H. Lee, "German Prisoners of War Made Docile," Minidoka County News, 26 April 1945, 2.
- 5 Mrs. Joe Bradish, interview.
- 6 Gallup, The Gallup Pole: Public Opinion, 1935-1971, 497.
- 7 Powell, Splinters of a Nation, 76.
- 8 Lewis and Mewha, History of Prisoner of War Utilization, 91.
- 9 Ibid., 102.
- 10 Phillipp, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.
- 11 Shannahan and Bridges, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.
- 12 Wayne Harper, interviewed by Amy McBryde, 23 January 1988 and 30 January 1988, Idaho Oral History Center, Idaho Historical Society, Boise, Idaho.
- 13 Shannahan and Bridges, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Call RG 389, Idaho Archives.
- 14 Burley Herald, 22 March 1945, 1.

¹⁵Catherine Zillner of Idaho, interview by author, 25 October 1990, Boise, Idaho, tape recording.

¹⁶Cara Lee Foley, interview.

¹⁷Veria Schwartz of Idaho, interview by author, 22 October 1990, Boise, Idaho.

¹⁸Mrs. Joe Bradish, interview.

¹⁹Powell, Splinters of a Nation, 263.

²⁰Earnest Allen of Idaho, interview by author, 22 October 1990, Boise, Idaho.

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