

Baldwin County History Files

POW Camps in Baldwin County

On Mar 16, 1944, Baldwin County newspaper *The Onlooker* front page headlines stated "**Loxley Gets Prison Camp.**" Five new prisoner-of-war camps in the southeast were under construction, sites to be occupied by Germany prisoners as soon as construction was completed. By March 30, 1944, there were 250 prisoners to arrive within the week.

In the "History Naval Air Training Bases" Pensacola, FL, Vo II page 2 Section 1-2 states under *Construction and Maintenance Costs*: no 4. "*Commencing on 14 May 1945, the labor of approximately 150 Germans prisoners of war per day are used to hasten completion of the runway repair project. After this project was completed from 50 to 60 prisoners were used each day for general maintenance and repair jobs about the field. These prisoners came from a **prisoner of war camp located near Foley, Alabama***"

Miscellanea that may include periodical and newspaper abstracts, clippings, biographical sketches, reminiscences, personal profiles, local history, family histories, facsimile of documents, etc. pertaining to Baldwin County, Alabama.

2017

Alabama, Local History & Genealogy Collections
Foley Public Library
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Foley, Alabama 36535

THE ONLOOKER

PUBLICITY
PROGRESS
PATRIOTISM

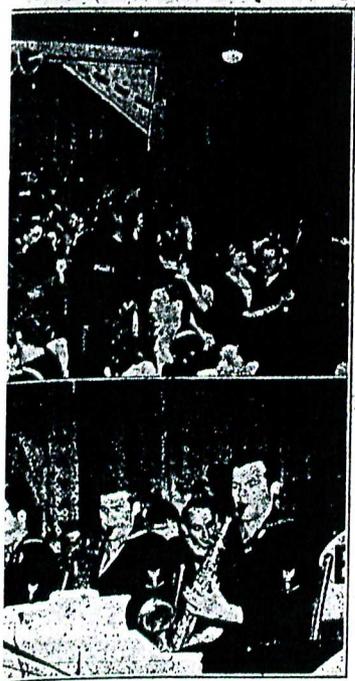
COVERS BALDWIN COUNTY LIKE THE SUNSHINE

A Fair Constructive Newspaper.

FOLEY, ALABAMA, THURSDAY MORNING MARCH 16, 1944.

SINGLE COPY FIVE CENTS

FOLEY'S POPULAR U. S. O.



shows the popularity of Foley's United Service Club pictures a group at the weekly Friday evening entertainment, as well as by the music of the "Barin Bombers," below under the direction of Bandmaster W. M. Hich is given a service man each Friday night J. S. O. entertainment. awards were five theatre tickets which were room Fairhope, Daphne and Robertsdale form U. S. Navy, of Robertsdale, Ala., who called Cincinnati, March 17th from 8:30 p.m. until 12 midnight appropriately for the event and the will wear their prettiest frocks, honoring this

BOND SALES OF DISTRICT 12 GO ABOVE QUOTA

Baldwin's "E" Bond Sales Are \$38,976 Over Quota In 4th War Loan

War Bond District Twelve, composed of Baldwin, Choctaw, Clarke, Mobile and Washington counties, rolled up E Bond sales of \$6,825,991 during the Fourth War Loan campaign against a quota of \$5,909,000 to make a record of 16.52 per cent of sales above E Bond quota, according to the announcement of Ed Leigh McMillan, chairman of the War Finance Committee for Alabama.

Albert J. Tully, of Mobile, is manager for this district. He was assisted by T. M. Taul, of Mobile, chairman of the district Banking and Investment committee, and Mrs. Marguerite Hayes, of Bay Minette, chairman of the Educational committee for the district.

Final tabulations of figures show the counties in the district had the following E Bond quotas and sales during the Fourth War Loan: Baldwin, \$363,000 and \$401,976; Choctaw, \$131,000 and \$191,762; Clarke, \$171,000 and \$219,900; Mobile, \$6,168,000 and \$5,899,207; and Washington, \$80,000 and \$113,160.

Total quotas and sales of all Fourth War Loan securities in the counties were: Baldwin, \$801,000 and \$942,129; Choctaw, \$190,000 and \$262,625; Clarke, \$404,000 and \$516,538; Mobile, \$13,103,000 and \$15,438,788; and Washington, \$120,000 and \$216,000.

County chairmen, under whose leadership these records were achieved, are: Baldwin, J. R. Wilson, of Bay Minette; Choctaw, Judge Hunter Phillips, of Butler; Clarke, John E. Adams, of Grove Hill; Mobile, J. Austill Pharr, of Mobile; and Washington, Ralph R. Jones, of Chaton.

PARATROOPER



PFC. ALVIN BOONE

Serving with the paratroopers of the U. S. Army, Pfc. Alvin Boone, age 19, son of Mr. and Mrs. Roy Boone is stationed at Camp Polk, La.

Pfc. Boone enlisted in the Army February 3rd, 1943 and received his training at Fort Benning, Ga., and Camp McKall, N. C. He is a graduate of Foley High School and recently spent a short furlough in Foley with his parents and friends.

Ceiling Prices On Spuds By April 1

LOXLEY GETS PRISON CAMP

Five new prison-of-war camps in the South-east are now under construction, it was announced in Atlanta, Georgia Friday by the Fourth Service Command headquarters.

The sites approved will be occupied by German prisoners as soon as construction is completed. The camps will accommodate 250 prisoners, except the one at Leesburg, Fla., where 125 will be sent.

Prisoners at the Loxley, Ala. camp will harvest potatoes and wood pulp, and stack and haul lumber. Those at Leesburg will relieve a shortage of civilian labor in harvesting the citrus crops, of which the Army estimated 80 per cent had not been touched.

The camps at Brookhaven, Miss., and White Springs and Telogia, Fla., will house prisoners doing pulpwood industry work.

It now appears unlikely that the Office of Price Administration will release ceiling prices on the new Irish potato crop before April 1st.

In the meantime the limited quantity of new crop potatoes on the market are being sold on a basis of "supply and demand".

Geo. Grant states, "I am told that bad weather conditions some time ago in Florida has reduced the Florida production quite considerably. Of course the potatoes carried over from last season are under the price control set up last year.

The price schedule for the new season has been approved by the Office of Price Administration, War Foods Administration and the Office of Economic Stabilization, he continued. I have been assured he said, that these prices will not be changed but will be made official about April 1st. These prices with one exception are the same as I noted in my letter of December 18, and are as follows:

Ceiling prices outside of California for the period of:

April 16-30 will be \$3.95 per hundred, f. o. b.

May 1-15 will be \$3.30 per hundred, f. o. b.

May 16-31 will be 3.00 per hundred, f. o. b.

June 1 through balance of season will be \$2.80.

The California price will range from 2.90 downward to \$2.60.

You will note the only change is for the period of April 16 to 30, which was increased from 3.00 to 3.95 per hundred, f. o. b. It was decided that new potatoes available at that time should be given a "novelty" price and therefore it was increased.

The Office of War Foods Administration is busy working on a support price. I have just checked with them and the final decision as to the price has not yet been made, but every reason was given to believe that it will be better than 2.35 per hundred, f. o. b. As soon as the support price is established, I shall advise.

Grading on this year's pack will be much sharper than it was last year. The Victory grade which was used in 1943 is being eliminated entirely. There will be the usual grades of:

U. S. No. 1, 85 per cent of U. S. No. 1 quality, U. S. Commercial, No. 1 Size B; U. S. No. 2.

Grant continued, I have endeavored to get the latest available information concerning the possibility of war-prisoners to help produce the crop. This latest information is from Major General F. E. Uhl, Commanding Officer of the 4th Service Command, Atlanta.

He has just advised me that the matter of using prisoners of war in Baldwin County, Alabama is under consideration. A Board of Officers representing his Command is to visit Baldwin County (if they have not already done so) and investigate the situation. The site and housing facilities which will be made available for a prison camp must meet military requirements. If these and other details are satisfactorily complied with, General Uhl has stated to me that "a camp will be established during the next thirty days."

I am sure that County Agent Frank Turner, like Mr. Hale before him, is keeping informed and is doing everything possible to help secure these prisoners as a source of labor for the purpose of harvesting and shipping the potatoes.

Please be assured that I shall continue to do what I can here in my effort to be helpful to the growers in that section who are doing so much to help supply an adequate quantity of foodstuff

TO UGAR CHARLES HURD GIVEN CITATION

Charles William Hurd, coxswain U. S. Navy, of Robertsdale, Ala., has received a letter of commendation from Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, according to the Navy Public Relations Office at Mobile.

The 20-year-old bluejacket was cited "for conspicuous bravery and alertness while serving as a member of the Armed Guard Unit aboard a merchantman in the Mediterranean area during August, 1943."

The letter of commendation was presented to Coxswain Hurd recently by the commanding officer of the Naval Training Station at Norfolk, Va. Hurd is the son of Mrs. Gertrude Bell Hurd, now of New Orleans, and enlisted in the Navy at Birmingham on July 29, 1941.

"A report of the experience revealed that while anchored in the harbor of Palermo, Sicily, your ship and the areas about her were subjected to vicious attacks by enemy bombers," the commendation said.

"For four days the Navy gun crew repeatedly went to battle stations and drove off the hostile aircraft with an accurate barrage of shellfire.

"Later, enroute to Gibraltar in convoy, you were set upon by approximately 25 German torpedo planes. In the brief but violent action which followed, the guns of your ship sent four of the enemy crashing into the sea; and the other

BAPTISTS WILL HOLD REVIVAL

Pastor E. M. Causey of the local First Baptist Church announces to the people of Foley and South Baldwin, the coming of Dr. Thomas D. Brown, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Hattiesburg, Miss. Dr. Brown is one of Southern Baptists strongest preachers and ablest pastors, he having held pastorates in Eldorado, Arkansas, New Orleans, La. and Louisville, Ky.

Morning and evening, except on Saturday, from March 20 to March 31, Dr. Brown will preach at the First Baptist Church. Morning services will be held at 9:30 and evening meetings at 8 o'clock.

Music during the revival will be under the direction of J. N. McFadden, Jr. of Barin Field. Mrs. Glen Haddox of Foley will be the pianist.

As in the case of all the worship and evangelistic services of the church, the entire community is invited to attend and have part. In extending this invitation to the people of all religious opinions, Pastor Causey says, "we endeavor always to help as much as possible and to hurt as little as possible, always to be your friend in Christ."

Navy In Need Of Many Men With Radio Experience

WAC TO VISIT IN FOLEY FRIDAY

Corporal Mary N. Edwards of the Army Recruiting Station of Mobile will be in Foley each Friday at the Foley Hotel lobby for the purpose of accepting applications for enlistment in the W. A. C. and for aviation cadets.

Girls interested in joining the WACs may get full particulars of this organization at that time.

News About Our Boys IN THE SERVICE

GIVEN PROMOTION



FRANK T. ANDERSON
Frank T. Anderson, son of Mr. and Mrs. Trygve Anderson, of Silverhill, Ala., has recently been promoted to corporal after completing a course in Weather Observation. He is in training at the advanced flying school in Victorville, California Air Field.

Word received from Frank Lockwood, bombardier, reports his squad

SERVING OVERSEAS



LT. JAMES A. COWDEN.
James A. Cowden, age 20, of Foley is now serving overseas following his graduation at Norfolk, Va. in the U. S. Army Air Corps.
James attended the University of Alabama for three years, where he studied medicine. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. O. W. Cowden of Birmingham, Ala., and

Raw Camps - Part 17

GIVE TO CRIPPLED CHILDREN'S FUND



The Baldwin County Crippled Children's Drive, for funds for treatment of these children will open on April 1. It is realized that we have drives practically all the year, but in times like these it is necessary for every person to give of their time, talent and money unreservedly to all of these causes. During the past year at least 100 crippled children have been receiving treatment from funds collected the previous year.

S. M. Tharp, Bay Minette, is chairman of the fund for Baldwin County and chairmen for each town in the county are being made this week.

RESTRICTIONS ON LUMBER TO BE ENFORCED

Recent Amendments Will Effect 5,000 Board Foot Capacity Sawmills

All sawmills producing 5,000 board feet per day of lumber of any species now come under War Production Board control orders, through recent amendments to M-361 and M-364, D. Leon Williams, regional WPB priorities manager, stated this week. Concentration yards that process 25 per cent of the lumber they receive by drying are also now included in the order.

Previously the orders affected only those mills producing 10,000 board feet per day of one kind of lumber, and only yards that processed lumber by sawing, edging planing or other comparable method.

"Great quantities of lumber are needed by the Army and the Navy for boxing crating supplies and equipment to ship overseas," Mr. Williams said. "We need more Southern yellow pine, hickory, ash, oak and pecan. If our boys in Italy and in the Pacific are to get enough food and ammunition and planes to fight with, we must see that the lumber goes to the Armed Forces, and is not used to build garages or new homes or restaurants or movie houses. These things can wait."

Up to the present time sawmills located where there are no retail lumber yards have been allowed to sell lumber at retail wherever they wished, the WPB official explained, but now they cannot sell it at retail unless they have WPB authorization. It will be necessary for them to fill out a form, WPB-2720, applying for authorization. If they can estimate their quarterly sales, authority may be given for the quarter, otherwise for a shorter time. Forms can be obtained from any WPB district office.

Williams further explained that if a mill owner produces lumber for a project he himself is working on, he must get WPB authorization before he can transfer stocks from his own mill for that purpose.

Off-fall or trim, considered a by-product that can be used to good advantage for fuel and for making small articles, and used lumber, are not covered by the order.

Regional WPB Compliance Department officials said that field men have just completed a check survey of the larger mills and yards in the Southeast, and will begin immediately to check the smaller mills and yards which now come under the amended WP orders.

PRISONER OF WAR



SGT. E. HOWARD DUGGER

In a telegram last week, from the War Department, Mrs. Howard Dugger was notified that her husband was missing in action over Germany.

The telegram read as follows: "The secretary of war desires to express his deep regret that your husband, Sergeant Elbert Howard Dugger has been reported missing in action, February 25, over Germany," signed Ulic the Adj. Gen.

Sgt. Dugger is a graduate of Foley High School, the class of 1935. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps on Sept. 1, 1942 and received his final training as an aerial gunner in Amorillo, Texas. He left the States for overseas duty January 2. His last letter was dated Feb. 23, stating that he had arrived safe. The War Department reported him as missing in action February 25th, later reporting him as a prisoner of war with the German Government on March 25th.

67 COUNTIES ORGANIZED TO RE-ELECT HILL

Campaign Booklets Sent To Every Rural Person In State

MONTGOMERY, March 29.—The people of Alabama "know that the selfish profiteers and forces of reaction are on the one side and Senator Lister Hill and the rank and file of the people of Alabama are on the other," Gordon Madison, State Hill campaign manager in announcing that the entire state has been organized to see that Senator Hill is returned to the Senate for a second full term.

In a statement in which he stated that letters from thousands of people indicate that they "know and understand that the winning of the war and a just peace come first," Madison said:

"All of the 67 counties have now been organized for Senator Hill. Campaign chairmen have been selected in the majority of them. In those counties where chairmen have not been selected, local committees are actively working and by local preferences will either select a chairman themselves or continue their work as committees.

"It is with deep gratitude that Senator Hill expresses his appreciation and thanks to the many fine men and women who are supporting him for election to a second full term in the Senate.

"A Lister Hill campaign booklet has been sent to every one of our rural people and will be sent to the managers and committees for distribution.

"From reports throughout Alabama and the thousands of letters received, the people know and understand that the winning of the war and a just peace come first.

"They also know that the selfish profiteers and forces of reaction

250 PRISONERS WILL BE PUT IN LOXLEY CAMP

German War Prisoners To Arrive Within Week As Camp Completed

By TAYLOR WILKINS
Emergency Farm Labor Assistant
Within a week it is expected that a camp of 250 German war prisoners will be established at Loxley. The camp is about completed and all arrangements have been made.

This project was started last fall by the Extension Service and the War Manpower Commission to relieve the labor shortage in Baldwin County. The Army does not put out camps of less than 250 men and an individual hiring these prisoners must use at least \$10. Due to this limitation, it is hard for farmers to use many of these men the year around as they do not have enough work. Considerable difficulty was encountered in securing orders for the 250 prisoners on this basis.

If it had not been for turpentine and paper wood work, the camp could not have been established.

The Army requires that the employers of this labor build a camp, furnish the site, and many other facilities. This runs into a large amount of money and the cost to each employer is from ten to twenty dollars per man.

It is not expected that we will receive a great deal of help from this camp in harvesting potatoes as the people who are paying for this camp will be reluctant to let them do other work after investing such large amounts of money.

News About ... Our Boys IN THE SERVICE

EARN'S WINGS



2ND. LIEUT. GEO. LENIZ
George G. Leniz received his silver wings as a Second Lieutenant from the Pecos, Texas, AAF Advanced Two-Engine Pilot School, it was announced by Col. Orin J. Bushey, commanding officer.

The new pilot, a former resident of Foley, but recently of Chicago, completed a course in training in twin-engine aircraft. He was assigned to Pecos from Twenty-nine Palms, California.

Aviation Cadet Edward G. Caldwell, Jr., 19, of Foley, Ala., is now receiving his basic pilot training at the Coffeyville, Kans., Army Air Field. After ten weeks of basic training he will move on to an advanced flying school of the AAF Training Command. At Coffeyville he is flying 450-horsepower Vultee Valiant trainers.

Cadet Caldwell is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Edward G. Caldwell of Foley.

HOME ON LEAVE



FORREST J. ROGERS
Forrest J. Rogers, of Summerdale, son of Mr. and Mrs. W. F. Rogers was recently home on leave after completing his boot training in the Great Lakes Naval Training Station.

Word has been received from Raymond Fell that while being transferred he met old friends, Wayne Long and Hurley Melton.

Word has been received from Robert Steigerwald that he arrived in New Guinea and finds it plenty hot. He is in the Airborne Engineers.

Word was received this week from the Navy Department informing his parents that Julius A. Hermec of Elberta was wounded in the left-clavical, serving in the Pacific. However a letter was received the same day from Julius saying he has been in the hospital since February 9th and has the

DR. ALVIE SMITH BURIED TUESDAY

Dr. Alvie Orlanda Smith of Loxley, Ala., died at the Jordan Clinic in Fairhope on Monday, March 27 at 1:20 a. m.

He was a native of Fall, Ala., but was a resident of Loxley for the past twenty years where he owned and operated a drug store. His passing is a distinct loss to the community where his civic service as well as his droll humor and jolly disposition will be greatly missed.

Funeral services were held from the Loxley Methodist Church on Tuesday, March 28 with interment in the Escatawapa Cemetery.

He is survived by his mother, Mrs. Leonora Smith of Millry, Ala., three brothers and three sisters.

HILL WILL SPEAK TO ALABAMIANS

MONTGOMERY, March 29.—Two radio speeches described as "important to the people of Alabama" by Gordon Madison, State Director of Senator Lister Hill's campaign, will be delivered by Senator Hill in a few days as a part of the Senator's campaign for election to a second full term in the United States Senate.

The first is scheduled for Saturday, April 1, from 6:15 to 6:30 p. m. and the second on Monday, April 3, from 11:15 to 11:30 a. m.

Senator Madison said that both will be delivered over a statewide radio hookup.

The Alabama Senator is scheduled to appear before the annual meeting of the Alabama Education Association in Birmingham, Thursday morning, on March 30.

are on the one side and Senator Hill and the rank and file of the people of Alabama on the other. "They are convinced that Senator Hill's experience will better serve them in this critical hour in the life of our State and Nation and that the same experience will continue to be used for the benefit of all the people."

Senator Hill Votes To Kill FEPC

WASHINGTON, March 29.—A declaration that the Fair Employment Practices Committee has "aggravated situations and irritated people," was made in Washington by Senator Lister Hill of Ala.

Construction and Maintenance Costs³⁹

1. From 1 April 1945 to 30 June 1945, there was no new construction completed at Barin Field.
2. The normal maintenance costs at Barin Field have continued to be approximately \$40,000.00 per month.
3. In addition to normal maintenance costs, a runway repair project was completed for use on 21 May 1945 at a cost of \$5,910.68.
4. Commencing on 14 May 1945, the labor of approximately 150 German prisoners of war per day was used to hasten completion of the runway repair project. After this project was completed from 50 to 60 prisoners were used each day for general maintenance and repair jobs about the field. These prisoners came from a prisoner of war camp located near Foley, Alabama.

Enlisted Personnel⁴⁰

1. The estimated complement of enlisted personnel for Barin Field is 1,989; of which number 655 or 33% are seamen and 1,314 or 67% are other enlisted personnel.
2. On 1 April 1945, the total number of enlisted personnel on board at Barin Field was 1,886 or 96% of the complement. There were 1,059 seamen and 827 other enlisted personnel. Thus there was a wide discrepancy between the proportion of seamen to other enlisted personnel in the estimated complement

39. Statistics from records in the office of the Public Works Officer, NAAS, Barin Field.

40. Statistics from records in the office of the Personnel Officer, NAAS, Barin Field.

Pow Camps

A047306



Prisoners' hands replaced local manpower

Baldwin Press Register June 13, 1994

BC#7 - POW File

► For a while in World War II, the government operated two German POW camps in Baldwin County

By VALERIE WEAVER
Correspondent

FOLEY — For more than one year during the latter days of World War II, German prisoners of war were encamped at two sites in Baldwin County, one north of Interstate 10 at Loxley and the other south of I-10 near Foley.

They were used as farm laborers.

According to Scott Hayes of Loxley, who helped supervise the more than 200 prisoners in the camps, most were enlisted men. A crew of the men who were captured on battlefields in Tunisia and Algeria were brought to Loxley in Army trucks, where they worked at local farms and potato sheds, including his family's.

"There weren't many officers, but they didn't like working thinning corn and picking up potatoes," said Hayes, referring to the manual labor the prisoners did each week day under the watchful eyes of camp guards who accompanied them to the



VALERIE WEAVER/Correspondent

Located in a cornfield across the road from Glenlakes' southernmost border is what was the mess hall of a U.S. government-operated POW camp in Baldwin County. It is now a barn used for storage.

work sites.

One or two of the prisoners spoke English and acted as translators between their compatriots and captors, Hayes remembered.

"They spoke better English than I did," he said.

The prisoners' able hands pro-

vided a solution to the labor shortage created by the area's men who were overseas and not home to harvest the crops.

"We were glad for the help," Hayes said.

Not everyone was pleased about the POWs' presence, however. Baldwin County proved to

be no exception to the fear and anti-German sentiments felt by Americans whose family members were fighting on foreign soil.

Gus Schultz was a bank teller and bookkeeper at Farmers and

Please see PRISONERS' on Page 2 ►

BALDWIN PRESS REGISTER

MONDAY, JUNE 13, 1994

Prisoners'

► Continued from Page 1

Merchants Bank in Foley who vividly recalls those times. When Schultz was 6 years old, he and his siblings had come with their parents from Germany, their homeland, to live in America.

"It was very real," said Schultz, recalling the attitudes of his friends and neighbors during World War II.

He worked at the bank more than 16 hours each day, Schultz said, but always longed to visit the camp which was located outside Foley.

"I always wanted to go see those men," he said. "Just to talk with them."

Blondine Barnwell was a 10-year-old grammar school student when the U.S. government notified her father, Daniel James, that it was taking his land to be used as a POW camp, she said.

"The government paid him for it," she said of the land located one quarter-mile south of County Road 12 on the present-day James Road.

A watch tower, barracks, guards quarters and mess hall were erected and enclosed by a high fence topped with rows of barbed wire, she said.

Then came the prisoners.

"They marched them right down the middle of Highway 59 from Foley, where they got off the train," Mrs. Barnwell remembered. "We were asked as kids not to say things to upset them and to be real quiet when we walked by."

The anxiety they felt upon hearing that the prisoners were coming dissipated, Mrs. Barnwell said. There was no cause to feel afraid, she said, but the men were closely guarded because it was suspected that if given the chance to escape, they would.

"Our dad and mom assured us that we were not in danger," she said.

The James family lived across Highway 59 on Flowers Road, but often visited the camp site.

"That was where we caught the school bus," Mrs. Barnwell said. "Sometimes the Germans looked at us hard, but they never said a word."

The James family became close friends with two of the camp guards who supervised the prisoners and manned the watch tower.

"And on weekends my daddy and brothers and I would come and watch a movie with the guards and prisoners."

Off-days were also the time for prisoner recreation, Mrs. Barnwell said.

"On Sunday afternoons my

brother, Lowell, and I would watch them play ball," she said, describing the weekly soccer skirmishes. "They were lively when they were playing ball."

Prisoners had shorn hair and wore Army-issued olive drab clothing, according to Mrs. Barnwell. Their diet consisted of mostly rice, beans and locally-grown potatoes.

"They ate fried potatoes for breakfast, and maybe biscuits," she said.

After breakfast the prisoners were loaded onto trucks and taken to one of the local farms to work. F.I. "Doc" Irwin had 200 acres of potatoes in the field and an additional 300 acres of produce he had bought from other farmers.

"They were real good help," Irwin said. "We never had a bit of trouble with them. And they made nice, orderly piles of potatoes. Most everybody else just slung them."

Ignoring warnings not to give the prisoners cigarettes and cold soft drinks, Irwin said the Germans seemed to appreciate the kindness.

"They were people, too," he said.

Once, Irwin's wife, Dorothy, and one of their young sons visited the potato shed.

Seeing the mother and son, one of the prisoners commented to Irwin, "I have a child just that age," Irwin recalled.

Except for a short lunch break and an occasional pause to get a sip of water, they worked from 7:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. According to Irwin, who paid the government the same wages for the prisoners as he did for other workers, they worked hard until the end of the war.

John Krupinski was a young boy when the prisoners worked in the farm fields belong to his father, Rudolph Krupinski.

"The day Germany surrendered, somehow or other they found out and they totally quit," he said, referring to the fact that the Germans immediately stopped working and refused to work again until they were released.

"I think the majority of them wanted to stay on in the United States," he said. "Some of the older prisoners knew that everything in Germany would be destroyed when they returned, that their families were probably dead."

Some of the prisoners stayed with family members who had migrated to the United States, but most left the way they came.

"At the end, they marched those babies right back up Highway 59," Mrs. Barnwell said.

Info for POW Camps in Baldwin County
From Prisoners of War by Ronald H. Bailey,

In June 1944 the United States had nearly 300 camps/ by 1945 there were 666, 12 listed for Alabama To conserve heating fuel, the Army located many camps in southern states, where the climate was uncomfortable for most Europeans.

At camp in Aliceville, prisoners maintained a garden of topiary or sculptured shrubs.
Opelika, AL soccer teams

Source The Alabama Review, April 1967 page 94:

In addition to four "base camps" at Aliceville, Opelika, McClellan, and Rucker, there were twenty so-called side camps, branch camps or labor camps, within Alabama. Obviously these side camps were created for immediate, particular purposes and were often short-lived.

As for other prisoner of war Camps (my comment: other than Aliceville) only scantiest records seem to have been preserved.

Listed as PW Side Camps in Alabama is Foley with Base Camp of Rucker Dates of 4-22-45 to 12-8-45 and no. Prisoners on June 1, 1945 listed as 298
Loxley with Base Camp of Shelby date begin ? To 10-22-45 with no of prisoners at 410

Housed in temporary wooden buildings, enclosed within barbed-wire fences

It was legal and customary for prisoners of war to be assigned under contract to private employers for certain types of non-military work, provided they were paid the prescribed wage rates, kept under strict surveillance, properly fed and clothed, and transported to and from camps to their jobs.

Source: Barin Field Declassified information: "Statistics from records in office of Personnel Officer, NAAS, Barin Field, page 19:

commencing on 14 May 1945, the labor of approximately 150 German prisoners of war per day was used to hasten completion of the runway repair project. After this project was completed from 50 to 60 prisoners were used each day for general maintenance and repair jobs about the field. These prisoners came from a prisoner of war camp located near Foley, AL

POW Camps

Mr. Harvey Jones
253 Walker Lane
Mobile, AL 36608
205-342-6291

Gentleman above was a guard at Camp Foley (prisoner of war camp) located south of city of Foley. On 3/21/94, he consented to an interview about what his memories were of the camp. He is willing to share the information.

A copy of his interview is enclosed in Baldwin County History Files in P.O.W Camp

CAMP FOLEY
FOLEY, ALABAMA

Following is transcribed from taped interview on March 21, 1994, with Mr. Harvey Jones, 253 Waeker Lane, Mobile, Alabama, 36608, (334-342-6291). It concerns what he remembers as a guard of the prisoner of war camp that was known as Camp Foley, located south of city of Foley, Alabama. The camp housed German prisoners of war during World War II.

Mr. Harvey:

I don't remember when they first set it up. I got there, probably, let's see, probably, August of '45 and I stayed there until November, til the end of November. I stayed there about three months.

I don't have any idea that it (the camp) had a name. It's been so long ago. There, possibly, would have been more than one. (We're) talking about the road from Foley to Gulf Shores, that's where it was, on the left as you face the Gulf. You see, you'd go down (highway) 59 and there was potato sheds and they even had a whiskey store there, too. It was closer to Foley than it would have been to Gulf Shores.

There were two narrow dirt roads, I don't think two cars could've gotten by each other and the roads were like two blocks apart and they went way back up into the woods. You know, I don't remember of any houses or anything. Might've been a few little ones. They went up there and stopped. You went the furthest road, seems like to me, to go in and then come around and come back out the other to (highway) 59. I don't know of anything beyond that, I didn't even know where Barin Field was, then.

They use to haul those guys (prisoners) in big old cattle trucks to Whiting Field and there was some more fields but I don't know where.

Housing as far as I remember was like barracks. It was typical camp like they had in Germany. They had the towers up there and you was up there with a rifle. They had towers on each corner, barbed wire just like a regular camp, but they weren't going anywhere, anyhow. I mean, you had to lock them up and count them every day.

Animosity? They were always real nice, but they lived good, much better than I did (when I was pw). They ate what we ate. We'd have to take them to Brookley Field (Mobile, Alabama) on sick call in ambulance. You've seen these old army ambulances with big red cross. We'd drive them over there when anyone was sick, take them to the hospital at Brookley. That was closest place. There wasn't any place here.

I don't really know (how many were housed), probably two or three hundred, I imagine. You could get thirty or forty of them in one of those big old cattle cars. Seems like to me there were four or five of those cars. There could have been 200 and, as far as I remember, they were from Rommel's Afrika Korps. They were officers and privates, actually, fighting men. I have no idea how they got them (prisoners) here.

Some of them learn to speak English pretty good. They liked to work.

When I left, the camp was still going on. Anyone who had been a pow (as I was) six months, they came up with this new law that you could get out of the army. I didn't have enough points to get out when I came (to the camp) but then I was sure tickled to get out (in November). I took off up there to Camp Rucker and I was discharged. I never did know what happen to that place (pow camp) or when they sent them back to Germany.

Prisoners weren't too anxious to go back cause they knew they were going to starve to death. Germany was in terrible shape. People were starving to death.

They made air drops, food, supplies, cause the Russians weren't going to feed them. No telling what the Russians did to those people.

Pow's (here) were probably interrogated when they first brought them there. (Clothing) was issued, they all had the same kind of clothes, seems like a blue denim pants and shirt with PW on the back. My wife use to wave to prisoners as they passed by their place. They would go out (to fields) and come back the same time every day.

(Being a prisoner of war himself, Mr. Jones was ask to compare German pow camp and American pow camp): I've learned a lot about German point of prisoner of camp that you'd never suspect. It wasn't any comparison. I would like to get a roster of the two camps. The camps we were in, we had only 170 people. We lived in...like a dance hall. It had a stage and an organ and everything. All the floor space was used for double bunks otherwise. All over Germany, they would have bunch little camps. That way they wouldn't have to go to expense to build. They used whatever, bar up the windows, put up barbed wire. Improvised. They had five American camps from information I found in Washington, and eleven British, and when I was looking for one (on recent trip overseas) I couldn't find any of them.

Every once in while, a medic would visit us (guards at Foley camp). I don't know if (the medics) ever checked on pows.

I never knew any of the prisoners' names here. Only one. I do remember one guy, name of Max. He wasn't too friendly to us. He was actually a civilian but he was a guard. He'd wore a pistol. But he was real nice to one (our) guy named "Swizek". Swizek was a German, anyway, from Pennsylvania Dutch country and he spoke fluent German so he got along good with Max.

I remember one time we all got a Red Cross package and we give, we didn't give him much, but we give him a little. Course, everybody together giving, it amounted to a lot. But he never thank us or anything. So I didn't give anything anymore. Said the hell with it.

'Course, you know our planes were bombing their cities, killing their people, In fact, I didn't think about it at time, we could have been in danger by some enraged person.

I could speak (German) to get back and make them understand.

I'm sure a lot (pows) were Christians. Catholic, Protestant, Lutheran. They had all been prisoners for pretty good while. It would be real hard to find these little camps. You were sent from four big stalags. These little places weren't call stalags, so it would be hard to find. This camp was listed as Z133, probably a working group number, attached to Stalag 4B. Prisoners were sent out to work from these little camps but still attached to big camp. They didn't go back but were still part of big stalag.

They had a POW number and dog tag and everything. Only American soldiers guarded. Sedlacks was a guard from around here. He was kinda rough, made them to the line. We never did that.

There were 10 or 12 guards, twenty-four (hours) on, 24 off. Henry was a guard. I knew Henry from pool room in Mobile near Brookley Field. Then I met him overseas again and we both bunked in tent together overseas. He was in prisoner of war camp over there, too.

Henry was bold. He really was something. He'd hitch-hiked back and forth to Mobile and back then, you know, being in the army then, you didn't have any trouble getting a ride and you'd meet a lot of people.

You'd get out of there (camp duty), stop by whiskey store, get you a pint, you know, and drink on the way home. I was only 22 years old. I could do it then.

We depended on getting back and forth by hitch-hiking. I served from August to November here. I can't remember much about the weather during that time. Hot.

The whole thing (camp) looked like farmland to me. There wasn't any trees, wasn't very bushy. We rode down earlier today and it looks about same landscape, few old homes.

I wonder if any of those Germans ever come over here looking for that camp today. They were treated well here. I never went to any other German POW camp in United States.

I'll be 77 years old, born in 1922. I was 20 when I went in service, 1945, almost 3 years (in service) til 27th of November.

I was a prisoner of war for nine months. I was in 13th Army Division, the 83rd Infantry Division in Europe. You see, they split us in Texas and sent us to England as replacements. I wound up with 83rd.

I spent nine months in PW (over there) from July until April. American fighter planes, 9th or 10th of April, started bombing raids. Next morning, they (Germans) pulled us out and took us back toward the Russians. Russians were coming one way, Americans another. They just took us on down road and went through bunch of little towns. They were so close together and every time they'd have a bombing raid we'd get away from the Germans. There were too many people, all different POW camps and Germans couldn't keep up with us. Not enough guards. There were 16 POW camps in "ZIKES". No telling how many POWs.

It was all disorganized. But you see, German people would tell on you. You'd be hiding in cellar and those guys would come down with guns and "Rouse! Rouse!"

They weren't going to kill anybody or hurt anybody. The American lines were just, maybe, just 20 miles away. They were scared. They knew they were going to have to die or surrender. Hitler taught the people weren't suppose to surrender, cause we'd kill them anyway....which wasn't right.

Then we'd go to some other little town and we'd be bombed and even the guards would run for cover. We'd take off again. Every time I did it, (escape) it was always with different people. Problem was, too many guys would follow you. You'd start with two or three (escaping), then twenty-five would follow. We did that five or six times in different places.

(Mr. Jones was asked how he was chosen for guard at Camp Foley)

We were up to Camp Rucker and he said we have two things you can do, be a MP in Washington, DC, or guard a prison. And I said I didn't want to be a MP. He said, "Now before we let you go there, do you think you'd have, show any revenge against these Germans?" I said no, that's not going to bother me. He said okay then. These guys had been captured for pretty good while, way back in north Africa.

In fact when I first went in, one English guy, he was a sergeant, I believe, He had a child he had never seen. He'd been there five years when I got there (prison camp). Captured at Dunkirk when they had pulled those raids in 1940, 1939, I guess, off the coast of France.

I never went with any of prisoners (Camp Foley) to local fields, I don't remember who exactly did take them (to the fields).

(The prisoners) made a soccer field at the camp. They ate the food we ate. They never complained. We (guards) stayed in one long barrack and we had kitchen area. We ate in our own building.

They found little information about these camps except little information on (what) Geneva Convention man would come and check these prisons to see if they were living up to standards and he was the one who gave all this information. He said facilities were okay and food was adequate. He said there was a room to house Red Cross packages and boxes and only had one key but said there wasn't any in there. Well, there shouldn't be if they were given out.

(In Germany) I probably didn't get more than three the whole nine months and then they would split one between two men.

The camp was listed as Z133, probably working group number. Attached to Stalag 4B.

*Janelle Powell
Library*

About: Loxley, Alabama

County: [Baldwin \(/baldwin-county.html\)](/baldwin-county.html)

Founded: March, 1957.

Town website (<http://www.townofloxley.org/community/index.html>)

The first settlement on the site was a village named Bennet (spelling varies depending on the source), but it came to be known as Loxley around 1900, when Michigan native John Loxley established a lumber camp among the virgin pine forests of southern Alabama. The camp included a sawmill and a small-gauge railroad to haul the timber. Many of the workers who were drawn to the camp remained as citizens of the town. When the lumber in the area was depleted, Loxley and his family left, possibly moving to Louisiana. In 1906, the Louisville and Nashville Railroad ran a line through Loxley, originally to end at Fort Morgan, but it was never finished.

The first schoolhouse in Loxley was built in 1908, followed by a three-room building in 1911. High school-age students in Loxley had to travel by train to Bay Minette for their education in the Loxley Public Library early part of the century. The train came to be known as the Pine Knot Special because it would stop every few miles and passengers would disembark to gather pine knots to fire the engine. The abundantly available wood along the line was the product of a 1906 hurricane that blew down many of the nearby pine groves. The Louisville and Nashville Railroad switched to wood-burning engines to take advantage of the free fuel.

By 1920, a number of businesses had been established in Loxley, ranging from an egg shop to a cement block plant. During WWII, Loxley was home one of several prisoner of war (POW) camps housing German and sometimes Italian soldiers. Prisoners in Loxley were used for labor in nearby sawmills. Loxley was incorporated in 1957. In 1965, a fire destroyed the old train depot and surrounding storage sheds, marking an end to the railroad era in Loxley.

- [See more at Encyclopedia of Alabama \(http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3306#sthash.jYimbC8S.dpuf\)](http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3306#sthash.jYimbC8S.dpuf)

Alabama

Mobilian recalls when WWII prisoners of war came to Alabama

AL By [AL.com and Press-Register Correspondent](#)
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By Hope Northington, Press-Register Correspondent

It's about the size of a shoe box, a handmade item designed by a German soldier 64 years ago. Used to store jewelry, it came to be a treasure in the home of a Mobile family who had a brief encounter with history during World War II.

Today, Mobilian Shirley Mosley recalls a time when enemy soldiers came to be on Alabama soil and the story of how the small wooden box ended up at her home.

While the Second World War was being fought on far-flung battlefields, many Alabamians were unaware of the presence of the enemy within their state, the men arriving not as conquerors, but as prisoners of war. In 1943, following defeat of German and Italian armies in North Africa, Allied forces took 275,000 prisoners. Since it became a logistical problem to secure so many captives, thousands were taken to the United States.

Camps were hastily constructed by the Corps of Engineers, hundreds throughout the nation, twenty-four in Alabama. Four were major base camps. Twenty satellite camps were established (one of them at Loxley in Baldwin County) to provide needed workers for agriculture and industry. With many American men away at war, labor was in short supply.

Shirley Mosley, 74, remembers how the war came to Mobile. Her father's labor force changed, as he began supervising a work detail transported from Loxley. A yard superintendent for Hallett Lumber Company, he had direct contact with the P.O.W.s, she explains.

"As a 10-year old child, I learned Dad was authorized to carry a gun and was made a deputy sheriff for that position," says Mosley. "I feel sure an armed guard came with the prisoners, but Dad was deputized to carry a weapon, also." Getting to know the men, he learned something about them and sometimes gave them scraps of lumber, she adds. One of the Germans expressed to his supervisor that back home he was a college professor and that he was not a Nazi. Toward the end of his confinement the man fashioned a dark stained wooden jewelry box that he presented to Mosley's father, a gift for her teen-aged sister.

"My dad volunteered as an air-raid warden in the war years," says the Mobile native. "During 'blackouts', he checked the neighborhood to be sure there wasn't an inch of light coming from the windows."

As the war dragged on, more P.O.W.s came to the U.S. Locating many camps in the South and Southwest lowered heating costs in those milder climates. In addition, prisoners provided labor needed in rural areas.

When the men weren't working, they used leisure time in a variety of ways in the various camps. Music, art, pottery, soccer, and theatrical performances relieved the boredom. Newspapers were published by P.O.W.s. Barracks and grounds were beautified. Classes were taught by Germans in confinement.

Early on, problems arose when different political factions among the detainees fought each other, devoted Nazis pitted against those who were not extremists. At times, American authorities got wind of trouble brewing and took steps to house the groups in separate quarters. Certainly, it was an unusual situation with thousands of enemy soldiers in Alabama.

At war's end, camps were deactivated and, eventually, dismantled. Prisoners were transferred to repatriation centers, and returned to their home land. One of them left a handmade box for an Alabama child. An inscription burned on the lid's inside cover identifies the prisoner as: German soldier - Wilhelm Lisicky, Berliner. It adds: P.W. Camp Loxley - 1945, along with the notation: War 1939-1945.

You can't help wondering what ever happened to Wilhelm after the war years.

(Hope Northington is a columnist for the Press-Register. Write to her at P.O. Box 2488, Mobile, AL 36652.)

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The Barbed-Wire College

REEDUCATING GERMAN POWS
IN THE UNITED STATES DURING
WORLD WAR II

Ron Robin

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AGV5536

Der Ruf:
Inner Emigration, Collective Guilt,
and the POW

The German Prisoners in the United States now have their OWN NEWSPAPER. . . . "Der Ruf" will be way above any party or small group quarrel. It will not serve the personal ambitions of the few. It will foster real German Culture. It will serve us all and through us, our country. It will denounce in the strongest terms any idle chatter and gossip. It will demonstrate clearly the seriousness of our position and will not hide the hard and cold facts of world events behind high sounding words. It is the reputation of the German people we have to serve, believing in a sense of goodness and decency. We must give it our full approval and cooperation. When "Der Ruf" reaches you, answer with a military "Present." Make sure that not one of us who still has a spark of feeling left for home and family is absent.

—Editorial, *Der Ruf* (March 1, 1945), 1–2

CAPTAIN Walter Schoenstedt, chief of the programs branch in the Provost Marshal General's Special Projects Division (SPD) and godfather of the newspaper "written for and by prisoners of war in the United States," waited anxiously for the field reports following the distribution of the first edition of *Der Ruf*. "You have hit the nail on the head" a regional commander notified a relieved Schoenstedt and his commanding officer Lt. Colonel Edward Davison, as he sifted through the reports from a number of camps. The paper had sold extremely well. Major Kreze of the First Service Command reported that a measure of the publication's success was the displeasure it aroused among both radical anti-Nazis and die-hard National Socialists; "but the middle of the line . . . they are only in accord with what you are doing." Schoenstedt was elated. He had planned for a negative response from pro-Nazi elements. The bonus of an unfavorable response from radical anti-Nazis—in particular those suspected of Communist leanings—would, according to Schoenstedt, raise the paper's credibility in the eyes of middle-of-the-roaders.¹

Edward Davison did not share this enthusiasm. Apart from a few

laconic remarks he had nothing to say in this conversation. But a few days earlier Davison had advised Schoenstedt that the newspaper's text was dense to the point of being incomprehensible. Davison apparently felt that the negative comments from both extremes of the political spectrum were signs of confusion rather than actual dissent. The difficulties involved in deciphering the ideological content of this newspaper encouraged the politically active POWs of both the left and right to "discover" treasonable, cryptic messages embedded in the text.²

Typically, the lead article of the paper's very first edition, entitled "The Inner Powers," was shrouded in obscure analogies and an ambivalent tortured syntax. This centerpiece of the first edition of *Der Ruf* condemned the "massification" of man, the tendency toward group behavior at the expense of an inner creative urge, which had been weakened by the "noisy slogans" of modern industrialized societies. The nebulous tone of the article could be interpreted as a critique of popular support for National Socialism, or, conversely, a vaguely worded disaffection with mass culture, American-style or, possibly, a combination of both sentiments.³

Not surprisingly, prisoners at the anti-Nazi Camp Devens discovered "hidden Nazi Propaganda" in this article because it failed to deliver any "aim or positive thought."⁴ By contrast, inmates at the "strong Nazi" Aliceville camp complained that the "Inner Powers" was blatantly anti-Nazi because "it was diametrically opposed to the basic Nazi philosophy that the state, rather than the individual spirit, is all-important."⁵ Lt. Colonel Davison interpreted these conflicting opinions as a fundamental weakness rather than a strength, observing that the article "seems to me rather ponderous, overworded, and even a little stilted."

Don't you think a lighter touch is needed if "Der Ruf" is to be written on a level that will be read by the many instead of the few? Shorter words and as little of the abstract as possible—concrete all the way, pungency as well as pith. . . . Above all, we shouldn't let "Der Ruf" be too literary or philosophic, even though Germans may be more literary and philosophical than we are.⁶

Davison was not alone in his lack of enthusiasm. More critical reports filtered in, belying the optimism of the initial appraisal. The Assistant Executive Officer (AEO) at Camp Aliceville, Alabama, enumerated a long list of reasons why most prisoners refused even to believe that the paper was written by prisoners of war. The expensive chrome paper of *Der Ruf* contrasted dramatically with the spartan stenciled camp newspapers printed on poor quality, recycled paper; photographs and wide margins suggested that *Der Ruf* had no budgetary constraints. But perhaps the most obvious blunder was the newspaper's mailing address. "The use of

a GPO box, rather than a POW camp address caused doubt as to whether the editors were in fact prisoners of war or, if they were, whether they really 'leben wie ihr' [living like you] as they state to the prisoners on page one."⁷

Der Ruf did indeed seem to be nothing more than a piece of misconceived propaganda written by outsiders. Its contents puzzled the majority of POWs. The articles addressed the concerns of typical inmates in passing only. *Der Ruf* disregarded the thirst for information on Germany and the POWs' craving for light entertainment to ease the oppressive routine of life behind barbed wire. Front pages were devoted to esoteric literary and philosophical debates. The inner pages on Germany were agonizingly short on substance. The so-called lighter parts of the paper—those items devoted to leisure—featured ponderous reports on theater and poetry readings. The soccer craze, perhaps the most riveting aspect of daily life in the camps, was virtually ignored. Instead, a typical edition of *Der Ruf* contained snippets—Flashes/*Zwischenrufe*—on a wide range of irrelevant issues such as a ten-year-plan for the improvement of highways in England, the establishment of the "first helicopter line in the world" between Caracas and other parts of Venezuela, as well as an item on the marriage ceremony of octogenarians in Racine, Wisconsin. The lack of humor, German human interest stories, or other forms of light reading only compounded the irrelevance of the paper for the vast majority of prisoners. In a typical complaint, the SPD's representative at Camp Carson protested that among the two thousand inmates at his camp "there are perhaps 5 or 6 who are intellectuals" able to understand the paper.⁸

Ironically, *Der Ruf* was indeed the creation of German POWs who enjoyed a great degree of autonomy in deciding upon the content of their paper. The convoluted articles that characterized *Der Ruf* were, curiously enough, the product of writers who espoused terse, expository prose. Editor-in-chief Gustav René Hocke dismissed the German tradition of elaborate and complex syntax as "calligraphy." He implied that such a florid style served a decadent role by beclouding the issues at hand. Hocke rejected the tangled and detached poetic approach to writing because it failed to address contemporary problems and was removed "from the basic contents of life."⁹ Still, he chose to edit a newspaper in a style that contradicted these professional convictions.

Moreover, the densely written texts of *Der Ruf* clashed openly with the literary creed of its chief mentor, Captain Walter Schoenstedt, whose own novels were exercises in terse prose. In his original proposal for *Der Ruf* Schoenstedt had envisioned a newspaper of "sober journalism" aimed at "the broadest audience possible" based upon "exact news of all important military and political events," as well as "news from the homeland." None of these features characterized *Der Ruf*.¹⁰ From its inception, then,

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Alabama's World War II Prisoner of War Camps

By W. STANLEY HOOLE

IN EARLY 1942 the United States War Department published a manual, *Civilian Enemy Aliens and Prisoners of War*, setting forth its basic policies for handling enemy personnel captured in World War II. The document largely paraphrased the permissive provisions which had been adopted jointly by the Geneva Prisoner of War Convention and the International Red Cross Convention in 1929. Included were regulations governing types and hours of work, rates of pay, rest periods, and other pertinent factors concerning the utilization and welfare of prisoners. Shortly after the publication of the manual, and following a reorganization of the United States Army, all prisoner of war operations were placed under the Office of Provost Marshal General (OPMG) which reported to the Chief of Staff of the Army Service Forces. An Assistant Provost Marshal was directly responsible for the administrative supervision of the Prisoner of War Division.

Meantime, as plans were formed for the immediate transfer to the United States of the first contingent of an estimated fifty thousand German prisoners from over-crowded camps in Great Britain, a nation-wide "Authorized Internment Camp Construction Program" was hastily inaugurated. The majority of these earlier camps were located in the Southwest (Eighth Service Command) in facilities which had earlier been built to house enemy aliens, but as the number of incoming prisoners slowly increased, all sorts of sites on military installations and emergency housing were temporarily used as

construction of new PW camps were rushed to completion. By the end of 1942 thirty-three camps (ten of which were described as "temporary") with a capacity of 72,218 prisoners, were either completed or nearly completed. Of these, eleven were in the Southeast (Fourth Service Command): two each in Tennessee (Forrest and Crossville), Mississippi (Como and Shelby), and Louisiana (Livingston and Rushton), and one each in Georgia (Oglethorpe), Arkansas (Monticello), Florida (Blanding), North Carolina (Braggs), and Alabama.¹

Alabama's first prisoner of war camp was built two miles west of the center of the town of Aliceville (Pickens County) on land purchased by the United States Government from Dr. S. R. and Nannie S. Parker for an estimated sum of \$29,295.² Although rumors of the possible establishment of an "alien concentration camp" in the vicinity had been prevalent for several weeks, not until September 24, 1942 was the weekly *Pickens County Herald and West Alabamian*, published in Carrollton, the county seat, able to release the news:

For more than six weeks several groups of engineers have been busy in or near Aliceville in surveying a large acreage of farm land, but no information was given out from any source till the last few days. It is definitely understood now that the project will be an alien concentration camp. . . . No idea as to the number to be located has been advanced, but the survey covers practically four hundred acres of the best farm land in the county.

Such institutions are made to be self supporting, and all the land will be drained, stumps removed, and put in the best possible condition for intensive cultivation. Most of the land located in the project belongs to Dr. Parker and his wife and son, and includes the dairy farm operated by young Thomas Parker. The dairy has just been completed with new barns, tenant houses, pastures, and other improvement, and will upset Mr. Parker's plans for a big dairy farm.

¹ Lt. Col. George C. Lewis and Capt. John Mewha, *History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army, 1776-1945*, Department of the Army Pamphlet No. 20-213 (Washington, 1955), 66, 75-112.

² Pickens County Deed Record Book 35 (Pickens County Courthouse, Carrollton, Ala.), 163-166 (Aug. 11, 1943).

At first it was widely reported that the Aliceville compound would imprison "six thousand or more Japanese" and there was some concern in the vicinity as to the safety of the local citizens who "would be sitting on a powder keg,"⁴ but fears vanished as week after week passed and no prisoners of any nationality arrived to occupy the new installations. Indeed, the expected large and immediate influx of enemy prisoners of war into the United States did not anywhere materialize, as had been expected,⁵ and it was not until June 2, 1943 that the first contingent—"three train loads of about one thousand Germans" arrived in Aliceville via the Frisco Railway which paralleled the camp along Highway 17. Virtually everybody in the vicinity lined the tracks to see the remarkable sight.⁶ The editor of the *Pickens County Herald*, on hand to describe the occasion, wrote the next day:

The majority of the prisoners are very young, many look to be not over 16 years of age. They were tired but not sullen. There was a homesick look on the faces of many; but the majority were smiling and singing. There was a wave of sympathy that swept over the local citizens when they saw the age of the prisoners. . . . [But] they probably sat down to the best meal last night they have had in years.

Emmy Peebles Hildreth, special correspondent of the *Birmingham Age-Herald*, described the arrival of the "3,000

PW File, University of Alabama Library. It will be noted that Shriver's statement of the size of the camp (700 acres) differs from that of "practically four hundred" reported in the *Pickens County Herald*, Sept. 24, 1942. However, in a conversation with the author, Jan. 22, 1967, Shriver stated that 400 acres was probably the more nearly correct figure. See below, n. 36.

⁴ Interview with Mrs. Wallace S. Kirksey, Aliceville, Ala., Jan. 21, 1967.

⁵ Lewis and Mewha, 90-91. By mid-August, 1943 the number of prisoners in the country was only 130,000, but by June, 1945 the total had grown to 425,806 (371,505 Germans, 50,052 Italians, and 4,249 Japanese).

⁶ Interview with Judge of Probate Robert H. Kirksey, Pickens County Courthouse, Carrollton, Ala., Jan. 21, 1967. Judge Kirksey, a young infantryman home on furlough at this time, stated that, when he saw these hundreds of Germans, some of them wearing heavy overcoats, marching and singing their way to the prison camp, he said to himself, "So this is what we have to fight!"

Much of the land has produced from one to one and a half bales of cotton each year for several years.

The engineer to be in charge of construction will arrive soon and work will begin at an early date.

Within a month the contracting firm of Algernon Blair of Montgomery, under the supervision of Major Karl H. Shriver, Corps of Engineers, United States Army, had the Aliceville PW Camp well in progress. To the people of the town and surrounding area the impact of the construction was tremendous. According to the *Pickens County Herald*, October 22, 29, \$75,000 a week was being "turned loose" in the community, "giving complete employment to all skilled labor . . . and unskilled labor has shared much of the work at good wages." Farmers were selling their products at the highest prices and boarding and rooming houses in Aliceville and Carrollton (ten miles distant) were filled to overflowing.

Farmers with fat calves and pigs are getting Western prices for native beef and pork, and eggs have jumped to 45¢ a dozen, and not half enough of them. . . . Every citizen of the county will prosper directly or indirectly by the construction of the camp. . . . After the camp has been completed, there will be eight or nine hundred guards, and most of them will spend their money in Aliceville. The people of Aliceville are fortunate to have such a large pay roll. Business is bound to thrive, and Aliceville will double its population before the next Federal census.

Construction of the Aliceville camp was completed ahead of schedule and activated on December 12, 1942. According to Major Shriver, it consisted of "400 frame, one story buildings, capable of housing 6,000 prisoners and 900 soldier guards." Also provided were several large mess halls, recreation areas, a hospital, a theatre, and many other miscellaneous buildings. Ample heat, water and toilet facilities were installed.³

³ Letter, Col. Karl H. Shriver (Ret.), Pleasant Ridge, Ala., to the author, Feb. 15, 1966. This letter and all other manuscripts cited (see below, n. 25) are in WWII

members of the famous Africa Corps" in these words, on June 10:

After months of waiting, the splendidly built and equipped internment camp in Aliceville is at last occupied. . . . Suspense and excitement seethed through the town when the rumor spread that two train loads of the German Africa Corps would arrive at 4:45 p.m. on the Frisco. . . .

I was disappointed with the appearance of the super-race. . . . About six looked above the average and not very 'super' at that. . . . They were mostly very young about 22, but some looked 17. A few older ones, officers maybe, looked hardened and serious. . . . All carried bundles of some kind. . . . One had what looked like golf sticks in a case, but it might have been a musical instrument. A jolly-looking one had a checker board in his hand, another carried a leather brief case. Their shoes were heavy. One was barefoot. . . .

The spectators were quiet, watching and respectful. One lady said she didn't see how the prisoners could be so well behaved. She was reminded that they were looking down too many gun barrels to misbehave. . . . The Red Cross ambulance was there also. The barefoot prisoner was marched back to the ambulance and given a ride to the camp. Two of the prisoners had bandages on their heads. . . .

Soon the Red Cross will notify the mothers where their boys are—safe in America—the land of the free and the land of plenty. Journey's end for them—in a clean, well-built, well-managed camp, away from all danger. Lucky, lucky prisoners, I think.

Another reporter for the *Age-Herald*, also in Aliceville for the momentous occasion, stated in the same paper, that the Germans gazed "in open-mouthed surprise" as they learned that the United States had not been "practically devastated by German bombs." The prisoners, "mostly boys in their 'teens," had been told that "this country had been blown to bits. They said they were surprised to see the Statue of Liberty still standing."

Restrictions prevent a newspaper man from interviewing the prisoners [he continued], but from the smiles on the faces of these conquered soldiers, their expressions are self-explanatory. Words could add little to the comfort they are now enjoying, 4,000 miles from

where the armed forces are striking at the Axis back door. . . . As it is, though, these men will enjoy comparatively comfortable living conditions amongst peaceful surroundings for the duration. They will be joined by some of their comrades later. The cantonment here is prepared to handle two or three times the present number of 'guests'.

Three days later, on June 13, Jack House, a staff writer from the same paper, devoted column after column, including several hand drawings, to life in the Aliceville PW Camp. The Nazis, he wrote, "are obedient and happy . . . and, soberly subdued by a superior foe," and are "now willing and anxious to help make this a better world in which to live." The Nazis received "fair and just treatment, better than one might expect, considering they are prisoners of war," the reporter continued.

For instance, they still are permitted to carry on with many of their own customs. They still use the Nazi salute when addressing American officers. They are given the same privileges inside the compound (the fenced area) they could expect to have in one of their own camps. Many of them continue to wear the same battered and tattered clothes they wore when Tunisia fell little more than a month ago. . . . They have their work shops. They cook their own meals, getting the same kind and amount of food that the Americans get. They are allowed to write two letters and one card a week. . . . [Even though] all of the men are listed as Germans, actually they are a combination of nationalities—Germans, Rumanians, Bulgars, Hungarians, and a few, not many, Italians. . . . The German soldier is a perfect example of condition, despite the fact that he definitely isn't the superman his masters would have him be.

Later in June hundreds more Germans arrived at Aliceville, many seriously wounded. One man, it was reported, died the day after his arrival and was buried in a little cemetery adjoining the camp. By August the camp had taken on a "homelike" look, according to Henry C. Flynn, a syndicated columnist, whose description appeared in the *Birmingham Catholic Week*, August 20, 1943:

of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, were still at large. At other prison camps throughout the state the story was the same—but attempts always failed.⁹

Incidentally, all accounts agree that the prisoners could be easily identified by their uniforms which consisted of blue denim trousers and shirt, with a large yellow PW stenciled across the back, and brown shoes.

Following the establishment of the Aliceville camp in the fall of 1942, the United States Government rapidly acquired land for the second basic prison site within the State of Alabama. It was situated near the southern limits of the City of Opelika (Lee County) on Highway 37, in the center of a 50-mile triangle formed by West Point and Columbus, Georgia and Tuskegee, Alabama. The scantily populated area of 840 acres (only fifty-five persons in seven families lived there) was acquired from A. M. Williamson, H. L. Hall, W. S. Collins, and F. J. Whatley, all of Opelika.¹⁰ The contracting firm of Smith, Yetter & Company of West Palm Beach, Florida began work in September, 1942 and in approximately six months—that is, by February 1, 1943—had virtually completed the job, despite annoying delays caused by labor shortages and a litigation over the removal of electric power lines owned by the Alabama Power Company and the City of Opelika.¹¹ Designed to accommodate 3,000 or more men, Opelika PW Camp was activated on December 12 at a cost of \$58,600, plus \$18,000

⁹ See *Birmingham Post*, Oct. 20, 1944 and *Birmingham News*, March 26, 1945 for accounts of other escapes from Aliceville and from Camp Opelika.

¹⁰ *Opelika Daily News*, Jan. 27, 1943.

¹¹ From Nov. 6, 1942, when William A. Liddell, acting administrator, Federal Power Commission, wrote Acting Director George H. Buck, War Power Staff, Federal Power Commission, about the possible objections to the location of an internment camp at Opelika because of the power lines, until the Corps of Engineers, backed by the Commanding General of the Fourth Service Command, Atlanta, Ga., said that he saw "no sound reason for the relocation of these lines," the problem loomed large in the decision regarding the establishment of the PW camp at Opelika (for details see miscellaneous letters, Nov. 14-Dec. 9, 1942).

There are men here who fought throughout the North African campaign, at Stalingrad, in the Balkans, in Norway and Dunkerque. Theirs are young faces, mostly, but they are tired young faces. . . .

They work regularly, at assigned tasks for which they are paid . . . and in their free time they work voluntarily within their compounds. They have their own organizations and their own non-commissioned officers direct their work, such as land-scaping, policing their streets, extending sanitary facilities, repairs.

They have formed song groups; they are exceptionally proficient at gymnastics, and they seem to take high interest in amateur theatricals. . . . A mild description of their games on the athletic field would employ the word strenuous. They really play for keeps and the one aim is to win, and little matter how.

Throughout the remainder of 1943 and into 1944 and 1945 prisoners continued to pour into the Aliceville compound in increasing numbers. On June 29, 1944, for example, 450 arrived from the battlefields of Europe, via Boston, "most of them very young men, some as young as 15 years," and many wounded.⁷ As of June 1, 1945 there were 3,485 prisoners, almost all Germans, within the military compound. The Aliceville camp was deactivated on September 30, 1945.⁸

Generally speaking, the Nazis accepted imprisonment stoically. Many tried to escape. For instance, according to the *Birmingham Age-Herald*, August 27, 1943, two Nazi privates who tried to flee the Aliceville camp were killed instantly by the guards. On March 28, 1945 the same paper reported that two others had escaped from Aliceville and, in spite of efforts

⁷ *Pickens County Herald*, June 29, July 1, 1944. William H. McGraw and his wife (nee Mary Alice Walker), who now live at 1507 9th St., Tuscaloosa, Ala., were a guard and a nurse at Aliceville in 1943-1945. In an interview with the writer, Jan. 16, 1967, she recalled the miserable condition of some of the wounded and their gratitude for the medical care they received at the prison hospital.

⁸ *Ibid.*, June 3, July 1, 1943; letter, Brig. Gen. Hal C. Pattison, chief, Military History Branch, Headquarters, Department of the Army, Washington, D. C., to the author, Apr. 20, 1965; and letter, Frank Lilly, chief, Reference Service Branch, Federal Records Center, General Services Administration, Kansas City, Mo., to the author, July 30, 1965.

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for razing and clearing, and \$5,000 annual property lease.¹² The first contingent of "hundreds of Germans" arrived from North Africa via Boston during the first week of June, 1943, as Opelikans filled the streets to watch the excitement. Reporters from the *Opelika Daily News* talked to several of the prisoners who told them that their Nazi leaders had told them that the Japanese Navy had long ago destroyed New York City and the United States Navy. Most of all, the writers added, the Germans asked for cigarettes and chocolates.¹³ By June 1, 1945 2,772 men were imprisoned at Camp Opelika.¹⁴ Of these the majority were Germans, although there were a few Arab deserters from the French Foreign Legion who had, perhaps under pressure, joined the German Army.¹⁵ The Opelika PW Camp was officially closed on December 8, 1945.

The third camp established in Alabama was in conjunction with Fort McClellan, near Anniston (Calhoun County), a United States Army infantry post which had been in operation since 1917. It was activated on May 1, 1943 and closed three years later, on April 10, 1946. According to the *Anniston Star*, July 6, 1943, the first 2,000 "Axis prisoners" arrived in late June—"but no information about them could be released" to the news media. When questioned, the camp commander denied any knowledge of "just what the prisoners will do." By June, 1945 2,758 Germans were confined there, more than half of whom were non-commissioned officers. In October of the same year the total was 3,058—six officers,

¹² Letter, Col. John J. O'Brien, chief, Real Estate Division, Corps of Engineers, U. S. Army, Opelika Alien Internment Camp, Ala., to OPMG, Washington, D. C., Apr. 14, 1944.

¹³ June 5, 1943. For biographical accounts of the first officers in charge of Camp Opelika see the *Opelika Daily News*, Feb. 6, 10, June 23, 24, 1943.

¹⁴ Letter, Brig. Gen. Hal C. Pattison to the author, Apr. 20, 1965.

¹⁵ Letter, M. Peter, Special War Problems Division, Department of State, to OPMG, Nov. 9, 1944.

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1,672 non-commissioned officers, and 1,380 enlisted men.¹⁶ A *Washington Post* correspondent, after visiting McClellan PW Camp, wrote on April 15, 1944 that it was "our largest and best," but that he and other newsmen could "feel the sneers of the prisoners as they passed through the place."

They seemed cocky [he continued], even about their capture. Their attitude is reflected in the German legend which they put around a huge sun-dial they have built. It says, 'For us the sun never goes under. . . .' For the most part they are service troops, Nazi officers [having] evacuated their front line fighters first when they retreated, leaving the more easily replaced service force behind. They are good-looking soldiers, but most of them are rather short. Nearly all carry that Aryan superiority look, which they were taught by the Hitlerites. . . .¹⁷

The *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 11, 1945, described the McClellan prisoners as greatly depressed by the turn of the war, but still persisting that Germany was superior to all the world. Some of the prisoners, the older ones, had been "occupation troops" in France. "They were in excellent health, well-fed, and had bright, shiny uniforms." By contrast, the younger men, those who had been through the "bitter campaign" in France, Belgium, and inside Germany, were "be-draggled and worn"—and there was "some contention between the two groups, with the men who had seen action suspecting that those from Southern France had been rather agreeable to capture." On one occasion, however, in 1944 the "agreeable" McClellan prisoners refused to work, when their request for certain special concessions was denied. "After two

¹⁶ Memo, Maj. Paul A. Neuland, chief, Field Service Branch, Quartermasters Corps, OPMG, New York City, to the Director, SPD, March 9, 1945, reporting on Capt. Walter H. Rapp's "Field Service Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Fort McClellan, Alabama, 26-27, February, 1945."
¹⁷ *Birmingham Post*, Apr. 16, 1944.

days of bread and water diet" for thus striking, however, all of them quietly returned to their respective tasks.¹⁸

The fourth basic prisoner of war camp in Alabama was incorporated into the 65,000-acre Camp Rucker, in Dale and Coffee counties, midway between the towns of Ozark and Enterprise, which had itself been newly-created in April, 1942. The first contingent of "several hundred prisoners of war and a company of military police" arrived February 28, 1944, "bringing to life a small prison camp erected with all possible speed during the past two weeks."¹⁹ As of June 1, 1945 Camp Rucker held 1,718 prisoners. They were widely used in Southeast Alabama as farm and lumber labor until the camp was deactivated on March 31, 1946.²⁰

In addition to the four "base camps" at Aliceville, Opelika, McClellan, and Rucker, there were twenty so-called side camps, branch camps or labor camps, within Alabama. Obviously, these side camps were created for immediate, particular purposes and were often short-lived. In several instances they were merely tent-towns, hastily thrown up to meet an emergency need, such as harvesting peanuts or cotton, cutting timber, or preparing ground for sowing and planting. For example, 500 Germans from Camp Opelika were sent more than two hundred miles into the vicinity of Albany and Valdosta, Georgia in the fall of 1944 to pick cotton, gather peanuts, and drain resin. They were quartered in barracks of an old Civilian Conservation Corps and in "standard American army tents."²¹ Prisoners from Aliceville, stationed in a side camp at nearby Tuscaloosa were put to work in the kitchens and laundries of Northington General Hospital.

¹⁸ *Birmingham News*, Sept. 26, 1944.

¹⁹ *Enterprise (Ala.) Ledger*, Apr. 29, 1943 and March 3, 1944; *Birmingham News*, Feb. 22, 1944.

²⁰ *Elba (Ala.) Clipper*, Sept. 14, 1944 and Feb. 1, 1946.

²¹ Letter, M. Peters to OPMG, Nov. 9, 1944.

PW SIDE CAMPS IN ALABAMA

Place	Base Camp	Dates	No. Prisoners June 1, 1945
Abbeville	Rucker	8-30-45 to 10-2-45	
Andalusia	Shelby	8-30-45 to 10-22-45	
Chatom	Shelby	? to 12-15-45	247
Clanton	McClellan	? to 9-10-45	224
Clio		9-10-45 to 10-22-45	
Dothan		8-27-45 to 10-29-45	
Dublin		5-24-44 to 6-22-44	
Elba		8-30-45 to 10-2-45	
Evergreen		11-8-44 to 5-10-45	
Foley	Rucker	4-22-45 to 12-8-45	298
Geneva		8-30-45 to 11-17-45	
Greenville	Rucker	2-23-44 to 11-30-45	230
Huntsville	Forrest	11-1-44 to 3-7-46	655
Jackson	Shelby	4-6-45 to 3-12-46	253
Loxley	Shelby	? to 10-22-45	410
Luverne		8-25-45 to 2-10-46	
Montgomery	Rucker	8-15-44 to 12-8-45	248
Sibert (near Gadsden)	McClellan	? to 12-8-45(?)	379
Troy		9-10-45 to 11-5-45	
Tuscaloosa (Northington Hospital)	Aliceville	6-1-45 to 3-20-46 ²²	

²² Compiled from obviously incomplete data supplied by Brig. Gen. Hal C. Pattison and Frank Lilly (see above, n. 5, 8, 14). In the first communication Camp Sibert is listed as Alabama's fifth "base camp." However, because of its size (only 502 prisoners, including forty-nine non-commissioned officers on Jan. 22, 1945), its proximity to Fort McClellan (Calhoun and Etowah counties are contiguous), and other available evidence, the author is convinced that Camp Sibert was a "side camp" of Camp McClellan, not a base camp.

They were housed in temporary wooden buildings, enclosed within barbed-wire fences, bordering on Fifteenth Street near the property now occupied by Shelton State Technical Institute.²³ Aliceville prisoners were also transported to Dothan, Alabama (under a heavy guard of Japanese and Hawaiian volunteers from Camp Shelby, Mississippi) to gather peanuts.

It was also legal and customary for prisoners of war to be assigned under contract to private employers for certain types of non-military work, provided they were paid the prescribed wage rates, kept under strict surveillance, properly fed and clothed, and transported to and from the camps to their jobs.²⁴ As a rule, however, PW labor proved only fairly satisfactory. For instance, according to the *Pickens County Herald*, September 9, 1943, fifty-three truck loads of Germans from Aliceville were transferred to peanut harvesting because they had proved to be so incompetent at picking cotton.

[The] farmers say they are very poor help, and not worth the trouble to provide for their transportation [stated the paper]. But few could pick a hundred pounds in a day, and many not more than 50 pounds, where an ordinary negro could pick 200 pounds and not half try. . . .

On the contrary, according to the *Birmingham News*, November 21, 1943, farmers in Oneonta, Alabama once petitioned the authorities for prisoner of war labor to replace the 3,500 men who had left the county for military service or defense work.

Personal welfare and morale of the prisoners of war were of great concern to the responsible authorities and countless efforts were made by both military and civilian agencies, particularly the American Red Cross, the Young Men's Christian

²³ The author remembers seeing these German prisoners standing behind fences, sullenly staring at passersby, but to his recollection there was never any jollity between them and either the military or civilian populations.

²⁴ Lewis and Mewha, 101-143.

Association, and the Salvation Army, in agreement with the Geneva Convention, to assure the desired esprit de corps. Frequent inspections by officers of the Special Projects Division (SPD) of the Personnel Security Division (PSD) of OPMG were routine, each of which was followed up by a detailed written report on virtually every phase of camp life: clothing, physical plant, educational facilities (libraries, lectures, formal instruction), indoor recreation (motion pictures, workshops, chess, music, cards, pingpong, theatrical performances, etc.), outdoor recreation (badminton, soccer, football, gardening, sign painting, etc.), religious activities (Protestant and Roman Catholic), and many miscellaneous projects described as "Intellectual Diversion Programs." Special civilian agents, often religious, were also assigned the responsibility of visiting the camps regularly and advising SPD of needed improvements, as for example, did Rev. Otto Kothbacker on his visit to Camp Opelika, May 21-23, 1945:

Immediately on my arrival at Camp Opelika, I was introduced to the Commanding Officer. . . . He received us most hospitably and arranged that same evening I might visit for an hour with the pastor in the camp.

In the camp is an evangelical chaplain, Altpreussische [?] Union, Breslauer Kendestorius. A Catholic prisoner of war chaplain also serves the camp. No theological students are registered.

Spiritual Camp Survey. The spokesman is an intelligent and approachable man but without sympathy for religious life. The pastor himself is a young man, without wide experience, and his position is correspondingly difficult. Half of the prisoners of war are Catholic, half Protestant.

Church services are held every Sunday at 9 o'clock, the participants numbering about 80 to 100; Sunday afternoon, Bible studies, dealing with the Epistle to the Hebrews; Monday evenings, lectures on questions concerning the Christian religion; Thursday evenings, Bible class. A barrack has been furnished for the church services and is used by both confessions.

Equipment needed. A communion set. (Until now the Post Chaplain had kindly put his own set at the disposal of the prisoners of war.) 30

biology, shorthand, and law, taught either by selected prisoners or by instructors from Alabama Polytechnic Institute.²⁷ Similar teaching programs were operated at Camp McClellan and at Camp Aliceville, sponsored by the University of Alabama.²⁸ At McClellan instruction in English, history, and other subjects was well received and the attendance at classes "extraordinarily high." In December, 1945 Colonel George C. Neilson, the commanding officer, conducted "graduation exercises" for "a large group of prisoners of war" who had excelled in "English for advanced students."²⁹

Captain Myrvin G. Clark's report on the "educational classes" conducted at Camp Opelika "as a part of the Intellectual Diversion Program of the Special Projects Division for the time period of 15 January 1945 to 15 April 1945" states that 1,407 German prisoner-students received "graduation certificates" there. The classes in architecture, auto-mechanics, biology, bookkeeping, chemistry, commercial science, English, French, geography, geometry, German (both language and literature), history, Latin, mathematics, physics, and shorthand met a total of 1,885 times, all taught by the prisoners themselves, mostly by sergeants, technical sergeants, and master sergeants. According to the reporter, these instructors were "carefully selected" and as a result the program was "progressing with enthusiasm amongst the Prisoners of War."³⁰

²⁷ Letter, Paul A. Neuland, chief, Field Services Branch, Opelika PW Camp, to OPMG, Apr. 5, 1945.

²⁸ Interviews with Dean Emeritus Robert E. Tidwell and Dean John R. Morton, Extension Division, University of Alabama, Feb. 8-9, 1967. There are no records remaining to prove that formal courses were offered; however, it is believed that some prisoners may have enrolled in correspondence courses or that a few professors may have taught the prisoners in unofficial non-credit courses. Certainly, none of the credits were earned toward a degree.

²⁹ Patte's "Report on Visit of Prisoner of War Camp McClellan, Alabama, December 11, 1944," and Karl Gustof Almquist's "Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Fort McClellan, Alabama, December 21-25, 1945."

³⁰ Clark's report, Apr. 23, 1945, was addressed "Thru Commanding Officer . . . to

Bibles in German; Bible concordance; Greek dictionary for the New Testament; 'Einleitung in de bibl. Schriften,' 'Ethik,' 'Seelsorge' (Brunner, Asmussen); history of the YMCA. For the church choir, music paper and composition books; good church music. 50 copies of the 'Kirchesboten.' Service order. There is no definite service order. The congregation has a church choir of fifteen members. No students of theology are registered. The United States Army Chaplain who had previously served the camp was recently transferred to Camp Benning. He still pays weekly visits to the camp, however.²⁵

Edouard J. Patte, another civilian agent, visited Camp Rucker in January, 1945 and again in the following May. His reports indicated that the camp chaplain was a Roman Catholic priest who was a "scholar and an excellent preacher," well qualified to conduct Bible study classes and prayer meetings.

I was impressed by the work of the Pastor [Patte wrote] and the response he is getting from the POW's. At an evening of old German music in the chapel I thought I was at the 'Salzburg Mozart Annual Festival.' The chapel was lit by thirty-six candles surrounding the string quartet; Mozart, Haydn, Bach were played in the finest style, while hundreds of men in uniform, in a complete silence, eyes half closed, were literally breathing the beautiful music, in a setting which was utterly devoid of camp life reminiscences.²⁶

Of particular interest in the United States Armed Forces was the education of prisoners of war. Great effort was devoted to the establishment of camp libraries, study groups, and formal instruction. Classes were offered at Camp Opelika and at Camp Rucker in English, Latin, French, German, Spanish, science, mathematics, physics, chemistry, geography,

²⁵ This report of a visit and those of other inspectors similarly cited, as well as all other official U. S. Government documents used, are in the World War II Records Division, National Archives and Records Service, Alexandria, Va. Microtext copies are in the University of Alabama Library.

²⁶ Patte's report is attached to other correspondence to the "Commanding General, Fourth Service Command," Atlanta, Ga. Otherwise it is unidentified (see above, n. 25).

At Camp McClellan a similar program met with less success, in the estimation of Inspector Edouard J. Patte. On February 23, 1945 less than one hundred students were enrolled in eight subject-classes. "The school is not prospering," he wrote on May 1-4 of the same year, but sports were "exceedingly popular":

. . . a championship tournament has been organized, with 300 contestants, in handball, 120 in faustball, 66 in ping pong, 70 in tennis, 45 in boxing and 42 in light athletics. The uniforms for the teams were made out of onion sacks, dyed in various colors, and tailored in camp.

Church activities are well attended, with Sunday and weekday services, which I attended. I was much impressed by the sense of devotion.

The camp is one of the most attractive bases in the U.S.A. The new German set-up seems to be eager to cooperate, and the Assistant Executive Officer has won confidence.³¹

However, eight months later, on October 4-5, 1945, Captain Alexander Lake of OPMG, after a tour of inspection, found the situation at McClellan quite different and urged immediate action to "correct the deficiencies" there. He recommended that classes be commenced as soon as possible in American history, civics, and commercial geography, that 16-mm. educational and visual aid films for prisoners of war "be shown at regular intervals," that "more musical recordings by American composers . . . be obtained," and that "loud-speaking equipment for the public address system be obtained so that daily news broadcasts, lecturers in American history, civics, and allied subjects can be presented daily to all prisoners of war in the compound." Immediately, the command-

the Commanding General, Fourth Service Command, Attention Secretary & Intelligence Division, Special Projects Officer, Atlanta 3, Georgia." It includes the names of the German teachers, their subjects, and the number of students enrolled.

³¹ Patte's report is in two parts, May 1-4 and May 2, 1945. The latter deals with the side camp at Clanton, Ala., where the prisoners were living in old CCC buildings and working in local lumberyards.

ing officer of Camp McClellan notified SPD (OPMG) that the "recommendations set forth . . . will be complied with as limited facilities and funds will permit."³²

Closely allied with the formal educational program in all the PW camps were libraries and reading rooms. At Camp Sibert, a side camp of McClellan, eight miles southeast of the City of Gadsden, there were 500 volumes in the library on February 5, 1945—approximately 60 percent of which were in "constant circulation." Newspapers and magazines were in adequate supply. As a further move, the inspector, Captain William F. Raugust, recommended that "some of the better books in the Modern Library, Pocketbook Editions, and Infantry Journal-Penguin Series be placed in the canteen."³³ At Camp Rucker, which in March, 1945 held approximately two thousand prisoners, the library contained only "850 volumes, mainly purchased from prisoner of war funds" and was in need of chairs and tables. There was a small collection of phonograph records and plans were made for establishing a "book repair project." By May of the same year the library had grown to 2,000 books.³⁴ Opelika's library in April, 1944 numbered 45,000 volumes and was "completely equipped," according to M. Peter, an inspector for Red Cross International, who was obviously in error (perhaps he meant 450) because Edouard J. Patte reported in January, 1945 that there were only 600 books at Opelika, "divided between the three compounds" of the camp. In April, 1945 a list of books in that library was prepared and an "organized method of censoring inaugurated." All incoming books were examined

³² Lake's report, addressed to the commanding officer of McClellan, together with an attached memo from Capt. Charles E. Sturm, was sent "thru channels" to OPMG, both dated Oct. 8, 1945.

³³ Raugust's report, Jan. 22-24, 1945, was addressed "thru Major Paul A. Neuland to OPMG."

³⁴ Capt. Walter H. Rapp, "Field Service Report . . . 9-10 March 1945" and Edouard J. Patte, "Report #2 of Visit to PW Camp, Rucker, Alabama, May 14-16, 1945."

("without attracting the attention of the Prisoners of War") and, at one time, forty-seven were removed from the library as being on "the disapproved list of 'Authors and Books'"; (again "without attracting the attention of the Prisoners of War to the action taken").³⁵

Creative work of various sorts was encouraged among prisoners of war in all American camps and indications are that the overall program was eminently successful. Amateur theatrical performances were popular, as were musicales, orchestras, painting, wood-carving, writing, publishing, and sculpture.³⁶ Among the most interesting activities was the publication of camp newspapers, only a few copies of which are known to have survived. At Camp McClellan *Die Oase*, an 18-page, 8½" x 11" sheet was issued every two weeks, edited by PW Paul Metzner. It contained articles, stories, poetry, and "camp reports." On April 1, 1945 the military authorities described the paper as "poor" in make-up and content, "militantly Nazi" in political attitude and "very dangerous." No copy of *Oase* is known to have been preserved, but an idea of its contents may be gleaned from the remainder of the (unsigned) official report:

The camp newspaper *Oase* consists of average articles of average quality: (Sports, recreation, novels, cartoons). The articles of general contents touch PW-care, the daily life of the prisoners and criticisms of performances within the camp. —A very active sporting life in the camp is revealed by abundant information concerning sports. A page with mixed contents and cartoons as well as short novels and humorous articles. The section 'Novels and Science' has scientific articles and

³⁵ Peter's report, Apr. 3, 1944, was sent through SPD to OPMG; Patte's was addressed to the commanding officer of Opelika; and report on censorship was prepared for SPD-OPMG by Capt. Myrvin G. Clark, Apr. 25, 1945.

³⁶ Col. Karl H. Shriver (Ret.) now owns "several pieces of beautiful concrete statuary" made by prisoners of war at Aliceville (see above, n. 3). On a pole in the yard of H. M. Stapp, just outside of Aliceville on Highway 14, now stands a large hand-carved eagle made by the Aliceville prisoners. Other residents of the community informed the author that they owned several other souvenirs, such as trays, left behind by the Germans.

answers to correspondents. The novels are taken from German authors, being well known in Germany, and approved by Nazi authorities. Very dangerous paper!³⁷

A weekly newspaper, *Der Zaungast*, was begun in early 1945 by the prisoners in Camp Aliceville. Two issues of this paper are extant, Numbers 22 and 26 (May 20, June 17). The masthead states: "Zeitschrift des Kriegsgefangenenlagers Aliceville, Ala." Neatly printed on 8½" x 11" sheets, *Der Zaungast* contains poetry, essays, humor, sports, several cartoons and other drawings, and a calendar of "Die Kulturellen Veranstaltungen der Woche." The issue of May 20 carries a lead article entitled "Ewige Mutterschaft" and a poem, "Mutter" (Mother's Day was May 13 in 1945). The front page of the June 17 issue is devoted to a reproduction of a wood-carving and an article called "Begegnung im Dschebel Aures." *Die Bruecke* was the name of one PW paper issued at Camp Opelika, followed by a second called *Der Querschnitt*, a 24-page news magazine, of which four issues in 1945 have survived. Fourteen issues of *Das PW Echo*, published at Camp Rucker in 1945-1946, are now available.³⁸

As has been indicated, strict surveillance of PW newspapers was of necessity maintained in all camps. This censorship often led to segregation of prisoners. For example, in February, 1945 at Camp Sibert the prison inspector recommended "that complete files be kept on those prisoners of war who are likely to interfere with the Intellectual Diversion Program." Notes were filed on individuals observed to be "organizers" or advocates of political trend.³⁹ At Camp McClellan the

³⁷ "Report on Camp Newspapers in German Prisoner of War Camps," unsigned document labelled SPD-68, Fort McClellan, Ala., Apr. 1, 1945.

³⁸ Scattered issues of these Alabama PW papers are on file in the Library of Congress. In nearby Camp Shelby the *Mississippi Post* and *Shelby Sport* were issued, and at Camp Forrest (Tennessee) the *Echo* and the *Scheinwerfer* (1945-1946). Microtext copies of all these papers are in the University of Alabama Library.

³⁹ Maj. Paul A. Neuland, Camp Sibert, Ala., to SPD-OPMG, Feb. 5, 1945, relaying a field service report of Capt. William F. Raugust, Jan. 22-24, 1945.

commanding officer in February, 1945 requested Captain Walter H. Rapp, the military inspector from OPMG, to interrogate six Austrian prisoners who claimed to be anti-Nazi.

As a result of this interrogation [the inspector's report continues] Captain Rapp recommended to the camp commander that these six prisoners of war be immediately segregated from the rest of the prisoners of war population and that service command headquarters be requested to transfer these prisoners without delay to an anti-Nazi camp. Their personal safety seems to be in constant jeopardy because of the presence of three S. S. and Gestapo prisoners and it is recommended to the camp commander to request the service command headquarters to immediately transfer these prisoners of war to Alva, Oklahoma.

Moreover, the commander was reprimanded for lack of knowledge "about the latest segregation directives and policies" and ordered to "study them and comply with their contents."⁴⁰

Inspection of mail received by individual prisoners also gave the military an insight into their attitudes. For instance, 44-year-old Obersoldat Paul Metzner, the aforementioned editor of McClellan's *Oase*, was carefully eyed. A former high school teacher in Berlin, he apparently wielded considerable influence among his fellow prisoners. In February, 1945 he received mail, including a money order, from Ernest Metzner of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—a fact duly noted in the local and national records.⁴¹ Indeed, in many instances recalcitrant German prisoners evidencing strong Nazi influences on their colleagues were transferred to Camp Alva (Oklahoma) or to

⁴⁰ Memo [Secret], Maj. Paul A. Neuland, Camp McClellan, to SPD-OPMG, March 9, 1945, relaying a field service report of Capt. William F. Raugust, Feb. 26-27, 1945. At the time McClellan held "about 3,000 prisoners of war," of which 1,700 were nonworking noncommissioned officers.

⁴¹ Report [Confidential], Capt. Rapp, Camp McClellan, to SPD-OPMG, Feb. 26-27, 1945. This lengthy summary of conditions at McClellan is most revealing. He reports among other things that 100 Nazi Germans, guilty of "disturbing the other prisoners," were being immediately transferred to Alva, Aliceville, or Opelika (see below, n. 42).

Camp Aliceville. Carefully screened, these prisoners were classified as "segregated." On May 16, 1945 the Birmingham *Age-Herald* emphasized the "toughness" of the Germans at Aliceville, adding, however, that the commanding officers had boasted that they could "take them as tough as they come."

When they go inside the wire at Aliceville, they say goodbye to privileges earned by prisoners who work at Army camps or on private contract for 80 cents a day in canteen coupons. . . . [They] get only 10 cents a day. . . . Many of the non-commissioned prisoners have been 'busted back' to privates because they could not furnish satisfactory credentials showing they were noncoms. Only a few score are permitted outside the [compound] were to bring supplies into the camp or work for the engineers.

As has been suggested, perhaps the best remaining accounts of World War II prisoner of war camps in Alabama (as elsewhere) are those written on the spot by the official Y.M.C.A., Salvation Army, International Red Cross, or church-affiliated inspectors. Few, indeed, of these reports have been preserved. In Alabama those of Edouard J. Patte, Otto Kothbackeberger, and Karl Gustof Almquist are most fruitful. Patte was a Y.M.C.A. agent and, as can best be determined by internal evidence, Kothbackeberger represented the Lutheran Church. Almquist was an inspector for both the Y.M.C.A. and the Ecumenical Commission. All were most probably ministers or, certainly, churchmen of one kind or another.

Patte apparently roamed from one camp to another, recording as he went. On December 11, 1944, following a snow-storm, he appeared at Camp McClellan. He inspected the barracks which had been set aside as PW art studios "with self-made benches, old canvas frames, tin cans full of red, blue, yellow, black and white [paint]." Around the walls hung "paintings of European landscapes, of marines, of winter-scenes, of still nature,—cheese, sausages and beer, or glorious bouquets of geraniums." There were also in abundance "portraits of soldiers, of Arabs, of nude women or of a child." But

seem to have been greatly affected by the new situation in Germany. There is as much indifference as in the past, and a little bitterness; however, the influence of the Church is not negligible. . . . The students in theology have the possibility, at night, to study under the ministers in charge and have access at all times, to the Catholic and Protestant library, in the Sacristy of the chapel.

At the end of 1945 McClellan was being deactivated and, according to Patte, "all activities had been stopped." Several of the prisoner-musicians who had belonged to the camp orchestra were still clinging to their instruments, hoping the American authorities would allow them to keep them. As Christmas neared, a prisoner decorated the church altar and the two remaining pastors philosophized for the reporter:

Seriously they discussed the problem of whether the Church had failed in Germany during the last twelve years under the Nazi regime. Both pastors had suffered greatly during that time. The Lutheran pastor could not obtain any position and was obliged to move from one place to another. The Catholic priest was nearly taken to a concentration camp. It was a rather sad story about inhuman suffering and persecution for the reason only that they were steadfast in their faith. Systematically, the Nazi leaders tried in all ways to break down their courage. However, it always is impossible to fight against the true Christian spirit.

Now, concluded Patte, the men "hoped to found and build a new church at home, to help children, women and men in their great need." But most of all they wanted "the understanding and help from the Christians in America and other countries in this most difficult task." Added Patte: "I was glad to bring them greetings from the Church outside the barbed wire."

Three reports on Camp Rucker in 1945 have survived—one each by Reverend Kothbackeberger (May 14-17), Edouard J. Patte (September 19-21), and Karl Gustof Almquist (December 18-19). Kothbackeberger recorded that the official PW spokesman was "indifferent to the Church," add-

Patte overlooked the quality of the work, believing that in it, however doubtful, the "artists have found . . . the best outlet for their inner force." At McClellan, continued Patte, the University of Alabama "with twenty-five teachers has a one thousand two hundred student enrolment who are taught every conceivable subject." The camp newspaper, *Oase*, which had been issued weekly, was now issued monthly because of a shortage of paper—but, he wisely added, "I do not believe that the *Oase* is of such paramount importance for the camp morale to justify the expense as well as the contribution of a special contingent of paper."⁴²

One of the Germans at McClellan, a former circus attendant, had built a little zoo where he housed birds, snakes, alligators, turtles, squirrels, 'possums, and 'coons.

The POW [wrote Patte] entered a small enclosure, moved a few stones, awoke a beautiful fox and tried with much skill, poise and persuasion, to teach him to obey his voice. It lasted ten minutes, all of them packed with tense interest. First frightened, then sneaky, then calmed, then obedient, at last the captive animal tamed by a captive man learned the lesson; but as soon as the POW had disappeared it certainly forgot it! The circus-man had a smile—or was it a grin—when he said to me: 'Sir, neither man nor animal can ever learn anything when being a captive!'

A year or so later, September 16, December 21-23, 1945, Patte was again at McClellan. This time his interest seems to have been especially directed toward the religious welfare of the prisoners. He attended the Lutheran services and later held conferences with the Roman Catholic priests. The sum of his visits revealed little change in the attitudes of prisoners:

My meetings with the German pastor, with the Catholic German priest, with a young Dominican and two Lutheran students, was most illuminating [Patte wrote]. The religious life in the camp does not

⁴² *Oase* had been described as a "very dangerous paper" and its editor transferred to a "segregation camp" (see above, n. 37, 41).

ing, however, that "65 per cent of the prisoners of war are protestant, the rest Catholic." The former were served by only one pastor, an Evangelical, the latter by one priest, a man from the Bishopric of Meissen, Saxony, Prussia. Both worked under the aegis of the post chaplain, Captain Edward Mueller, and the camp military authorities. Kothbackeberger related, as did Patte at Camp McClellan, that several prisoners of war at Camp Rucker were busily studying theology in preparation for the ministry. Inspector Patte, agreeing in general with Kothbackeberger's summary of the conditions in Rucker, added that he was pleased with the new educational program in progress "with classes in English, Democracy and History, and the bi-weekly lectures on democratic ways of living, with the broadcasting of news and good music, and with the sports championship." Almquist, whose report was longer and more detailed than those of Kothbackeberger or Patte, was much impressed with the Nazi prisoners' eager preparations for Christmas:

The spokesman was hurriedly completing arrangements for Christmas in order to make all as nice as possible for his comrades. An important place on the program was given to a gramophone concert over the loudspeaker, the records to consist only of carols. . . . The pastors showed me the church program and I recognized all the loved hymns which the choirs (the Evangelical and the Catholic) were going to sing. Already the preparation of the programs means a great deal to the prisoners of war. It is strange to observe what power the Advent and the Yuletide have over men. You can see it in the external preparations of the Christmas tree, the Advent-wreaths and other decorations. Nobody could mistake the Christian character of the festival. But neither can anyone judge how far the inner influence will reach. No doubt there will be a great and wide-spread influence upon all in the camp. May that influence last long into the New Year!⁴³

⁴³ Patte's, Kothbackeberger's, and Almquist's reports (May-Dec., 1945) were made to the commanding officer at Camp Rucker. Each indicated that he was "received graciously." Kothbackeberger also visited the branch camp at Montgomery.

Both Patte and Kothbackeberger inspected the Opelika PW Camp in May, 1945, their visits overlapping. The former (May 19-21), besides mentioning the prisoners' sports programs in progress, the 32-piece symphony orchestra, the theatrical club and other recreational activities, was most impressed with "the unique" plan of formal education employed in the camp. "The school," he wrote, "is managed by an 'advisory council' of German prisoners of war, who organize the examinations and keep the records of 1,200 students. Our [Y.M.C.A.?] publications are widely used by the camp, especially for foreign languages." (A bold marginal note added "Camp Operations did not like!") Kothbackeberger's report (May 21-23) praised the prisoners' "splendid orchestra" and the theatrical performances which were "of the highest quality," but it consisted largely of an appeal for equipment for the prisoners, half of whom were Protestant, half Roman Catholic:

. . . a communion set. 30 Bibles in German; Bible concordance; Greek dictionary for the New Testament; 'Einleitung in de bibl. Schriften,' 'Ethik,' 'Seelsorge' (Brunner, Asmussen); history of the YMCA. For the church choir—music paper and composition books; good church music. Copies of the 'Kirchesboten'. Service Order.

The ubiquitous Patte paid a short visit to Camp Sibert, a small labor-camp branch of Camp McClellan, on September 15-16, 1945. There he renewed his acquaintance with an unidentified pastor whom he had known at Aliceville the year before. This man's transfer to Sibert with its "extremely limited possibilities for religious life" required of him a "thorough adjustment." At Sibert, in contrast to Aliceville, for instance, "the chapel is outside of the barbed wire, and consequently not accessible to the POWs without special requests." As a result, "the camp population is not vitally interested in religious matters, with the exception of a small group." Patte, greatly disturbed, appealed for an immediate correction of

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of the pastor can bear fruit. The Evangelical student will contact the World Council of Churches, Geneva, when he is back home someday.

Satisfied, Almquist concluded his report with these hopeful words: "It was a visit to a camp which was closing and probably would move that same night; but it was a visit among men showing a good will to do their best in life."⁴⁴

In general, the accounts concerning the religious attitudes of the prisoners of war vary widely. The Birmingham *Catholic Week*, October 22, 1943, for instance, stated that a survey made at McClellan by a Catholic-Protestant committee revealed "42 per cent as Catholics, 57 per cent as Lutheran or Evangelical." Almost all of the prisoners were described as "definitely religious." A few said they believed in God but had no definite religious affiliation. Not more than ten out of the entire group gave National Socialism as their religion, and about three said they had no religion. On August 15, the Feast of the Assumption, the survey continued, according to Chaplain Robert J. Sherry, 675 men attended Mass and ninety-seven received Holy Communion.

At Camp Opelika the Germans were said to be "religious despite the Nazi culture. The efforts of Adolf Hitler to drive religion from his army were in vain. . . ." Many of the prisoners "not only came into camp with their prayer book and rosaries, but use them in the most conscientious manner."⁴⁵ On the contrary, the Germans clung doggedly to their faith in Hitler and the Nazi philosophy. Many were unhappy because they could not return to the battlefields to fight for the Fuehrer. At Opelika, as elsewhere, according to the Birmingham *News*, June 22, 1944, the Germans persisted in greeting American officers with the Nazi salute, shouting "Heil Hit-

⁴⁴ These reports, both of which expressed concern over the religious life of the prisoners, were made directly to the camp commander.

⁴⁵ Birmingham *News*, June 18, 1943.

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this situation and was assured that "we will try to remedy it, if at all possible." With other activities (the educational program, the "very well furnished library," the phonograph-records service, and the "well taken care of" sports routines) Patte was highly pleased.

Three months later, December 17, Almquist also inspected the operations at Sibert, arriving just as "all were very busy moving the camp." Cordially received, he was introduced to the PW spokesman, a highly regarded German school teacher, who escorted him about and answered his questions. Among other things Almquist learned that Sibert, composed mostly of young German boys, had already made a "large donation" to the International Red Cross and had been collecting funds for the Y.M.C.A.

The Church attendance at Sibert [Almquist recorded] was quite small. The pastor gave as an explanation that the inmates were rather young and were seeking their way in life. Many among them were not more than eighteen years old and had been captured only a few days after they had been inducted into the German Army. [They] were not accustomed to going to church and attending services. All were glad to have a pastor among them, which they demonstrated by looking him up for talks and advice on different matters. To the service came a faithful congregation which seemed to have good influence in the camp.

But Almquist was skeptical. Could the influence of a mere handful of Christians reach far among the larger group of youthful Nazis, heavily indoctrinated since their birth?

To this an [Evangelical] theological student, gave me an answer. Once after a Bible class which only a few had attended he went through barracks and there his comrades were discussing the subject from the Bible class in a serious way and trying to grasp the meaning and trend of the pastor's teaching. This shows that the influence might be greater than we think or realize. That the Church is there, with its message, and looking for men ready to receive the message, is important and of great value. Faithful and hard work from the side

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ler." And, although in captivity for two years, most of them continued to "bow before the shrine of German militarism." Stated another reporter, Jack House, early in 1945:

German militarism is buried so deep in the minds of 15,830 German prisoners of war being in Alabama that two years of imprisonment has not faded them, and this militarism may never wear off, at least not in this generation.

Visiting the Aliceville cantonment, the writer was amazed to find so trivial a change in the mental attitude of the German prisoners. From all appearances, [they] are as militarily-minded today as they were the day they were interned. . . .

Commenting on the camp itself, the reporter declared that it had changed "greatly . . . in scenery." The "one-time mud-hole . . . surrounded by swamplands" was now a "well-irrigated and handsomely groomed village of green-painted barracks with green lawns."

But the change is confined solely to the scenery. The prisoner himself hasn't changed a bit . . . [He] is polite in 1945—but he was also polite in 1943. He behaves well, as a rule, but he also behaved well, as a rule, in 1943. He is just as conservative on food now, two years later, as he was in 1943, when he scraped every bone and spared as much peeling from every potato as he possibly could. . . .

The prisoners still use the German Army (not Nazi) salute. . . . They still click their heels with the gusto of a Prussian general, and still talk their native tongue, although a considerably larger number now speak English. . . .

Despite good treatment . . . the prisoners are as much German soldiers now as they were when firing on British and American troops. They have no more love for Americans today than they did when they first came to this strange land.⁴⁶

After World War II and in accordance with the Surplus Property Act (1944), the War Assets Administration disposed of virtually all prisoner of war camp material in Alabama (and elsewhere) on a bid basis, in order of four priorities:

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, March 25, 1945.

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United States Government agencies, Reconstruction Finance Corporation (for resale to small businesses), state and local governments, and non-profit institutions. In Alabama, for example, on February 20, 1947 the Birmingham *Age-Herald* contained a large advertisement describing the sale of thousands of feet of water pipe, electrical equipment, and a telephone communications system which were no longer needed at the deactivated Aliceville PW Camp. Subsequently, the camp lands there were also sold, some to private citizens and others to the City of Aliceville. The Camp Opelika property was in the 1950's converted to industrial development and, of course, the lands once used for holding prisoners at Camp Rucker and Camp McClellan were soon diverted to other military uses by the United States Forces.

Today, less than twenty-five years after the closing of the prisoner of war camps in Alabama, precious little remains to suggest that they ever existed. At Aliceville, for example, where an estimated five thousand men and women—prisoners, administrative officers, enlisted men, guards, nurses, and other personnel—spent the better part of three war-weary years, nothing is left but several crumbling old wooden houses now eerily empty or in use as a chicken hatchery, a rusting, leaning water-tower, the potholed and weed-grown paved streets running crazily to nowhere, and the fairly-well-preserved Post Engineers Headquarters building which houses the offices of a commercial firm. Everywhere weeds have grown head high and plum thickets and briar patches abound. Even the recollections of the local citizens are somewhat hazy and fading—the older generation forgetting the details but remembering the whole as a sort of nightmarish dream, the younger largely unaware of and/or oblivious to the history that was so short a while ago quickly made and quickly unmade at their very doorstep. Now and then, it is said in Aliceville, a German who was a prisoner there has returned to see

where he once was incarcerated—but he, too, goes on, sadly keeping his bitter memories to himself.

Luckily, however, Aliceville PW Camp will doubtless be remembered better and longer than almost any other camp in the United States. For there in 1944 two German prisoners, Unteroffiziers Hermann Kalbe and Hans Fanselow, both accomplished artists, were given permission to draw fifty pen-and-ink sketches of the commanding officers, panoramas of the camp, close-ups of the buildings, the interiors of the barracks, the chapel, the hospital and many other structures, all beautifully and skillfully completed.⁴⁷ This rare book, plus the accounts which appeared in local newspapers—and generously cited in this essay—make up the bulk of extant data on the Aliceville prison.⁴⁸

As for the other prisoner of war camps in Alabama (as well as those in other states) only the scantiest records seem to have been preserved. Nothing apparently remains in the office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, except a short list of the camps by locations and types of work performed by the prisoners (quoted above). A similar list is on file in the Federal Records Center, General Services Administration, Kansas City, Missouri.⁴⁹ The Office of the Provost Marshal General has categorically declared that "all records of individual prisoner of war camps during the WWII period have been destroyed. In addition, all WWII records

⁴⁷ The only known copy of this book, preserved by the Aliceville Public Library, was duplicated and placed in the University of Alabama Library by the author in January, 1967.

⁴⁸ The author owes a debt of gratitude to Fant H. Thornley, director of the Birmingham (Ala.) Public Library, and to Miss Jessie Ham, curator of its Southern Collection, first, for having preserved a miscellaneous file on "World War II Prison Camps in Alabama" and, second, for granting the author unrestricted use of it.

⁴⁹ Letters, Brig. Gen. Hal C. Pattison and Frank Lilly to the author, Apr. 20, July 30, 1965 (see above, n. 8).

of the OPMG have long since been retired."⁵⁰ The Library of Congress, as has been stated, contains a few scattered issues of prisoner of war newspapers published in the camps throughout the United States, including those in Alabama, nothing more.⁵¹ The Alabama State Department of Archives and History has no material whatsoever on the several prison establishments within the state,⁵² although its collection of state newspapers is an invaluable aid to local historical research.

⁵⁰ Letter, Maj. Richard O. Rowland, MPC, Mob & Cntgcy Branch, OPMG, Washington, D. C., to the author, Nov. 16, 1966.

⁵¹ See above, n. 38.

⁵² Interview with Milo B. Howard, Jr., director, Montgomery, Ala., Jan. 27, 1967.

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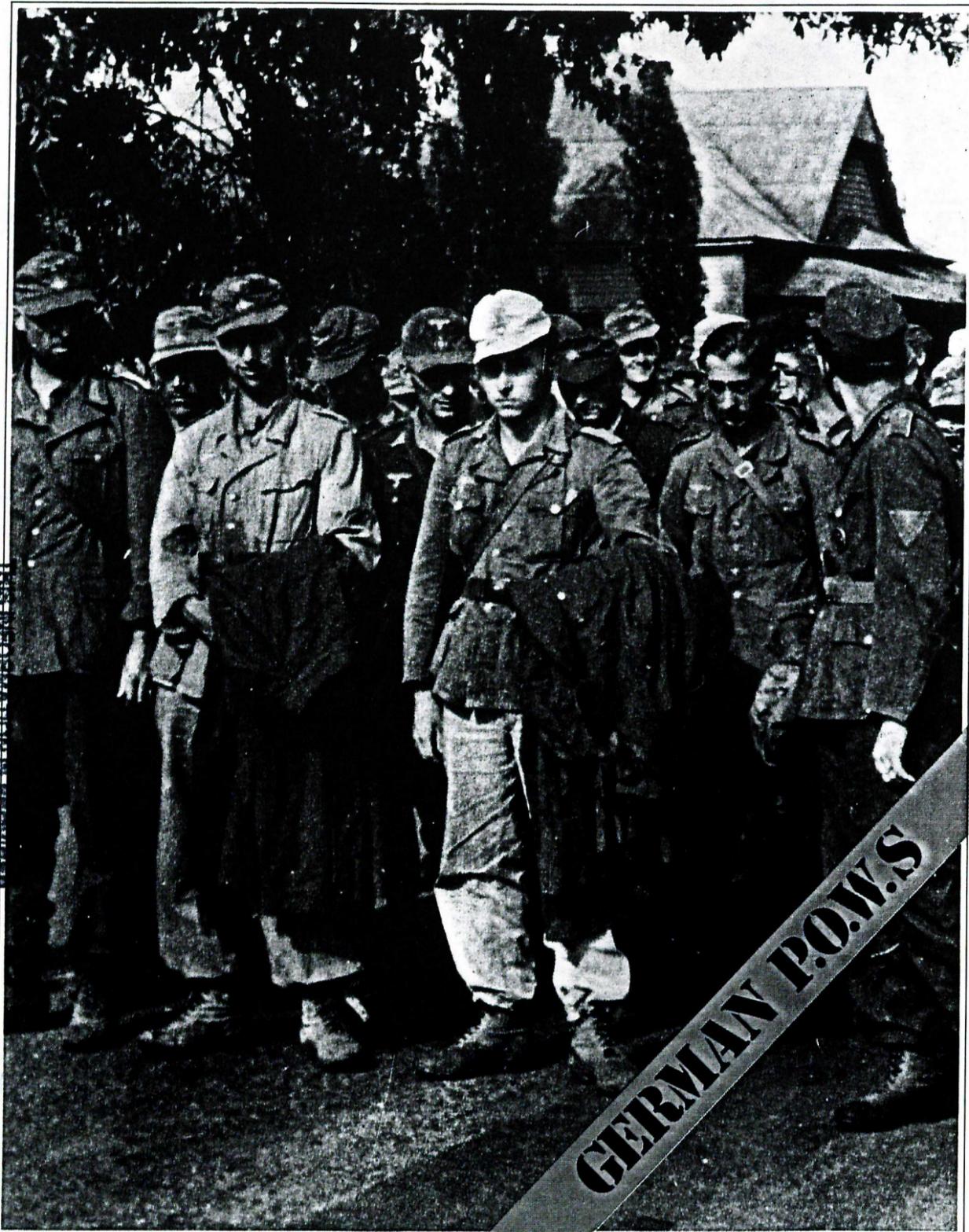
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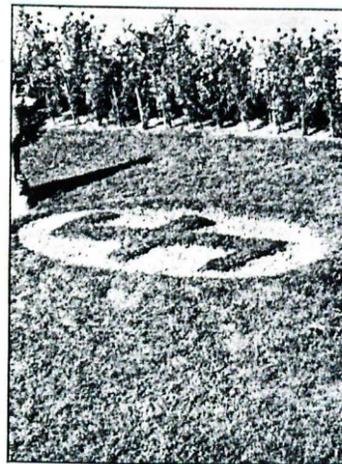


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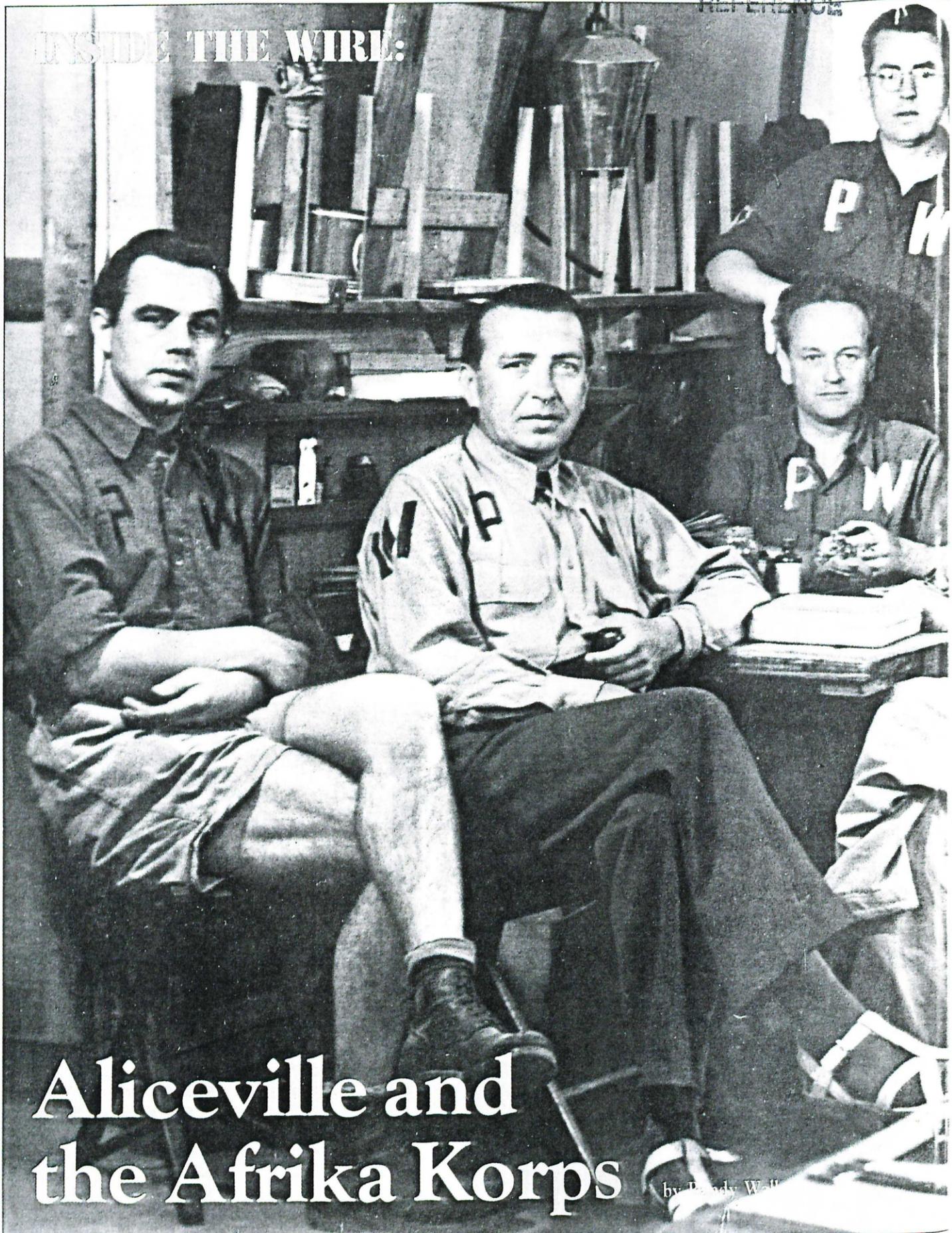
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INSIDE THE WIRE:

REFERENCE



Aliceville and the Afrika Korps

by Randy Wall

The slow-turning fans above the soda fountain at Jones' Drugstore in Aliceville brought scant relief from the sultry heat. It was August of 1942 and the Corps had arrived—the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. *Everyone* had seen them, with their tripods and transits, squinting down imaginary lines over on Doc Parker's land, near the dairy now operated by the doctor's son, Tom. The crowd at the drugstore argued endlessly about the significance of the Corps' presence. Perhaps a military base would be built. There was even the wild rumor that the land would be used to house captured Japanese soldiers. Finally, on September 24, the local paper released the news. Although details were sketchy, the paper confirmed the conjecture that had monopolized Aliceville gossip for six weeks: "The project will be an alien concentration camp."

It was then that the rumors began in earnest. The Japanese were definitely coming to Aliceville. Employees of the Algernon Blair construction firm, from Montgomery, knew nothing of the camp's future occupants and were unable to dispel the rumor. They were simply there to do a job.

Under the supervision of Major Karl H. Shriver, Corps of Engineers, the Aliceville camp was rapidly erected that fall, and the impact of the construction payroll on the community was immense. Up to \$75,000 per week was pumped into the Aliceville economy, area rooming houses were filled to capacity, and in the weeks before

German prisoners of war at Camp Aliceville c. 1944.
(Courtesy Aliceville Public Library)

Christmas the town experienced nearly total employment.

The camp, with its 400 frame barracks, capable of housing 6,000 prisoners and nearly a thousand civilian and American military personnel, was activated on December 12, 1942. Yet no prisoners arrived, and the new barracks remained empty throughout the wet spring of 1943.

The normally tranquil Aliceville community (population 4,800) was anything but tranquil during the final weeks of May 1943, as the sprawling camp buzzed with activity and the town, once again, was inundated with rumors of new prisoners. The excitement reached a peak when word spread that the Aliceville camp was to become the home for members of German Field Marshall Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps. At last the town had an answer.

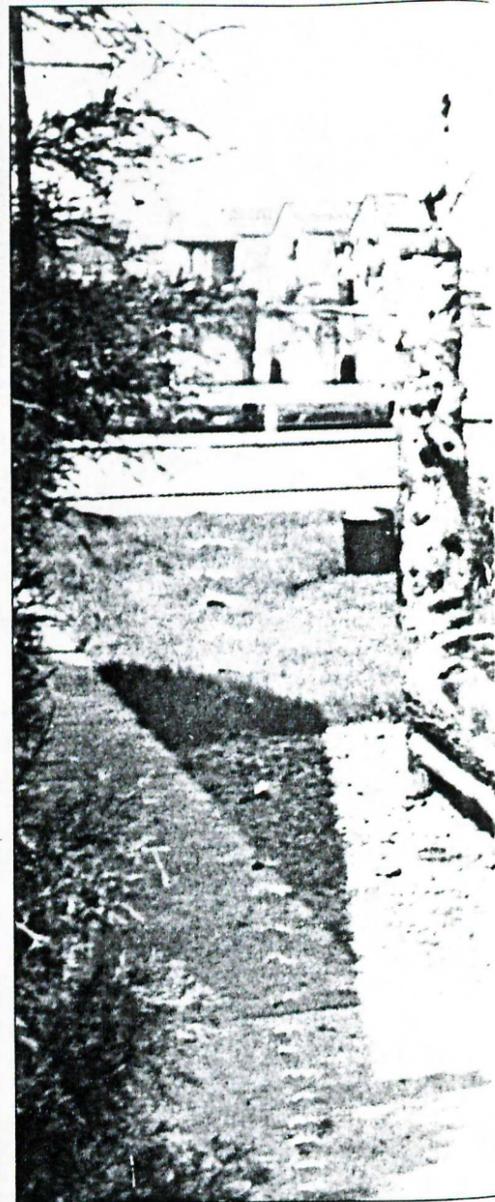
For British and Commonwealth forces, their crushing defeat of the Germans at El Alamein, Egypt, in October 1942, was a long-awaited turning point in the war in North Africa. That same victory, however, had exacerbated prisoner-of-war problems for the British. They were already holding over 130,000 Italian prisoners. At El Alamein alone they picked up an additional 30,000 Germans, and new prisoners were being captured daily, among them large numbers of Hitler's Afrika Korps [see box, pages 6-7]. The space-pressed British needed help, and the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff responded to urgent pleas, agreeing to accept prisoners on American soil. Thus was set in motion a series of events that would bring the Afrika Korps to the countryside of Alabama.

For the first contingent of German

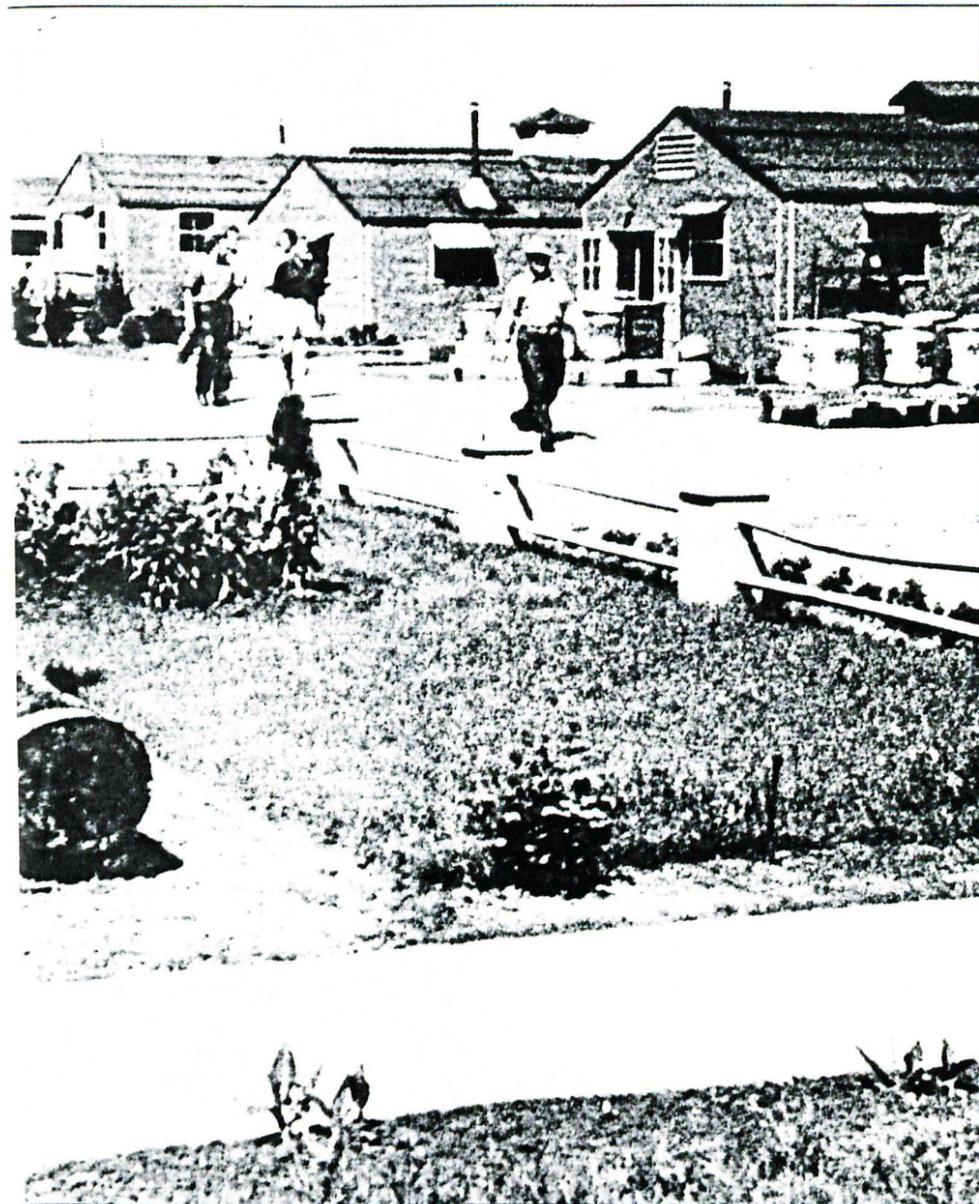
prisoners destined for this state, the rumors had begun even before they left North Africa: Capture by the Americans meant certain starvation. New York City had been leveled by German bombs. The Statue of Liberty was now a heap of twisted scrap metal. When the prisoner transports steamed into New York harbor and other eastern ports, the captives had stood at the railings and gawked at the towering skylines, at the thousands of cars, at the overwhelming bustle and vitality of the cities. Then there had been the train ride. Accustomed to the boxcars used to transport troops in Europe, the Germans had climbed warily onto passenger trains and stared out the windows, silently awed by the rich, unscathed farmland. Finally, they reached their destination, a place few, if any, had heard of before—Aliceville, Alabama.

"Germans comin' in on the Frisco!" was the cry that passed through the throngs of Aliceville residents who lined the railroad tracks along Highway 17 on June 2, 1943. It was late afternoon, almost a quarter to five, and some of the curious onlookers had spent the greater part of the day jockeying for positions from which to view the spectacle. They all wanted to look at the "Nazi supermen" who were rumored to be on the special 4:45 train.

No breakdowns in security would occur. Companies of soldiers were positioned along the entire length of highway that stretched from the railroad station to the camp. They were armed with rifles, machine guns, shotguns, and pistols. Many were equipped with bayonets. It was unquestionably the greatest show of armed force most of the onlookers had ever seen, an "event," wrote one correspondent, "that rivaled the cyclone that hit Aliceville six years ago." The



P.O.W. CAMPS IN ALABAMA



At the end of World War II, more than 400,000 Axis prisoners were in detention in nearly 700 camps on American soil. To take advantage of reduced heating costs, and to provide replacement workers for the many rural laborers who were serving in the military, the U.S. government had placed most of these camps in the South and the Southwest. Alabama alone was the wartime home to over 15,000 prisoners, who were spread

across the state in four base camps.

Almost immediately after the establishment of the Aliceville camp—the largest of the Alabama POW facilities, with over 5,000 prisoners—construction had begun on a second camp near Opelika, which opened only days after Camp Aliceville. Built to accommodate 3,000 prisoners, the facility received its first trainload of POWs in early June 1943. Like the prisoners at Aliceville, most of the Opelika POWs were

A row of barracks at Camp Aliceville.

(Courtesy Alabama State Department of Archives and History)

members of the Afrika Korps, although a few proved to be Arab deserters from the French Foreign Legion.

In late June 1943, 2,000 German POWs arrived at a third Alabama camp,

constructed near Fort McClellan, just outside Anniston; a final base camp was opened almost nine months later, in February 1944. This internment facility—at Camp Rucker, near Enterprise—was hastily constructed in direct response to the area's desperate need for farm laborers. It was the smallest of the four camps, with a prisoner population under 2,000, most of whom were enlisted men.

Following the German surrender to the Allies on May 7, 1945, Alabama's POW camps began to close. The Aliceville facility was deactivated in September 1945, and the Opelika camp closed in December. The Camp Rucker internment facility, however, stayed open until March 31, 1946, permitting camp authorities to continue POW work details that were vitally important to that labor-short region. The POW compound at Camp McClellan, which served as a processing center for many of the prisoners at the Alabama camps, was the final internment facility deactivated, April 10, 1946.

The buildings, materials, and even some of the land on which the camps stood were disposed of through a bid system operated by the War Assets Administration. The neat green buildings, the miles of plumbing, electrical cable, and barbed wire were removed in a piecemeal manner that took years to complete. Some of the land at Camp Opelika was sold to individuals who wanted to use it for industrial development; the city of Aliceville bought most of that camp's land with plans to build an industrial park on the site; and the POW grounds at camps Rucker and McClellan were reclaimed by the military.

THE DESERT FOX & THE AFRIKA KORPS

Even before his stunning military exploits in North Africa, Erwin Rommel had become a German national hero. Rommel, the son of a schoolmaster, had joined the army at eighteen and had served with distinction in World War I, when his keen understanding of battlefield tactics became apparent to his superiors. An infantry regimental officer in the years between the wars, Rommel, in 1940, was given command of Germany's Seventh Panzer Division, which played a decisive role in the defeat of France. Called the "Ghost Division" because its rapid movements and unexpected appearances terrified French military and civilians alike, the Seventh Panzers entered France from Belgium, raced on to the English Channel, and then darted along the western coast to capture Cherbourg. Because of Rommel's daring, brilliantly orchestrated performance as a tank commander in France, Hitler chose him to rescue the much-beleaguered Italian forces in North Africa.

Certainly the Italians needed help. Hoping to demonstrate Italy's military prowess and to carve out an empire equal to the one that Hitler was wresting out of Western Europe, Benito Mussolini had ordered his troops to invade British-occupied Egypt in June 1940. But the poorly trained Italians, despite their superior numbers, were no match for the British. Within six months they had lost nine divisions and more than 400 tanks; over 130,000 Italian soldiers were in British hands.

Embarrassed by Italy's North African debacle, Hitler dispatched German forces to bolster the remaining—and seriously demoralized—Italians. New divisions, including a powerful force of panzers and a light, mobile mechanized division, soon arrived in Tripoli. The troops that Hitler sent—soon the world would know them as the elite Afrika Korps—were among Germany's finest. At their helm was General Erwin Rommel.

Combining his own unorthodox military strategy with the Korps' uncanny ability to live and fight in the harsh North African desert, Rommel quickly demonstrated to the British and the world that the war in Africa was far from over. He took the offensive in the desert with the same "blitzkrieg" attacks that he had perfected on the battlefields of France, relentlessly shoving the British eastward and gaining a reputation as the "Desert Fox." "We have a very daring and skillful opponent against us," Prime Minister Winston Churchill told the House of Commons, "and, may I say across the havoc of war, a great general."

With the fall of the British fortress at Tobruk in June

1942, the desert war turned into a nightmare for the Allied forces. There appeared to be no stopping the brilliant German general; his Afrika Korps appeared equally invincible as it pursued the British forces across North Africa—to El Alamein.

There, the stiffened British resistance, led by the fiery Lieutenant General Bernard Montgomery, stopped the German onslaught at the El Alamein Line, in Egypt. The Germans suffered overwhelming defeat: 59,000 killed, wounded, or captured; hundreds of tanks and guns destroyed. The often cantankerous Montgomery, whose tactics in battle were as unorthodox as Rommel's, proved to be the Desert Fox's match. It was soon evident that unless the Germans received supplies and reinforcement, the Afrika Korps would be hammered back across the continent.

The retreat by Rommel and his Korps began in earnest in November of 1942. By the time the German withdrawal ended, the British had wrested virtually all of Libya from Rommel. The exhausted Afrika Korps attempted to

Field Marshal
Erwin Rommel

(Courtesy National Archives)



Right: Prisoner-of-war compound in Tunisia where more than a quarter million German and Italian soldiers were held following the Allied victory in North Africa. Many of these prisoners were sent to the United States.

(Courtesy U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.)

minimize losses in the months that followed El Alamein, but in March 1943, British antitank gunners struck a devastating blow, surprising one of Rommel's units and destroying fifty-two tanks. Three days later, Rommel flew to Germany in an attempt to dissuade Hitler from continuing the desert war, but his pleas went unheeded and Rommel was relieved of his command.

"Africa will be held and you must go on sick leave," declared the Führer. That decision sealed the fate of a quarter million Germans and Italians in North Africa. In early May 1943, the American First Army and the British Eighth joined forces, encircling the Axis troops at Tunis. As German defenses collapsed, the combined Allied army surged forward. The end for the Afrika Korps came quickly. By mid-May, a quarter million Axis soldiers in North Africa had laid down their weapons. Rommel's replacement, General Hans Cramer, dispatched one final message to the German High Command: "Munitions expended, weapons and war equipment destroyed. The

Afrika Korps has fought to a standstill as ordered. The German Afrika Korps must ride again."

But it was an empty message that reached Berlin. As throngs of cheering French and Tunisians celebrated the Allied victory, members of the Afrika Korps poured into hastily constructed prisoner-of-war compounds west of Tunis. Many of them appeared at the detainment center driving their own vehicles, with white flags prominently displayed. But most came on foot. For some of them, it was the beginning of a journey that would lead from one of the harshest deserts on earth to the tranquil countryside of Alabama.

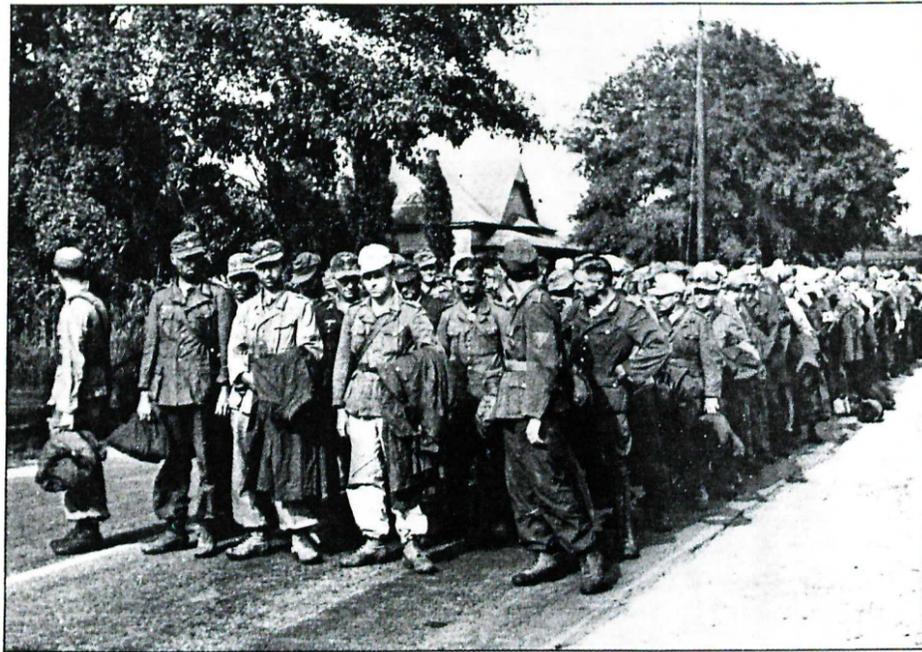
Rommel himself would suffer a much harsher fate. Increasingly disillusioned with Hitler's conduct of the war and sickened by the atrocities ordered by the Nazis, Rommel joined the July 1944 conspiracy against Hitler. When the assassination attempt failed, Rommel was taken from his home by SS troops on October 14, 1944, and forced to swallow poison.



crowd became unusually still as the 4:45 Frisco pulled into the depot. Everyone gazed at the closed doors of the train: farmers straight from the fields, merchants who had long since locked up their stores for the afternoon, mothers who had sent sons of their own off to the war, children who found the enormous crowds a diversion from the monotony of another summer day. All eyes focused on the single set of doors as they opened and the first prisoner emerged into the late afternoon sunlight.

Five hundred members of the once invincible Afrika Korps poured off the train and stood blinking in the glare. Some still wore bandages; others limped visibly. Almost all had been baked a deep brown by the North African sun; most were plagued with a variety of skin diseases and nagging injuries. Yet some of the proud veneer of the Afrika Korps remained: the feathered slouch hat of a jaunty Bavarian, the hobnailed boots that made a crunching sound on the rough gravel, an occasional arrogant glance, an outright defiant stare. But in general, they were simply a tired, shocked group of prisoners wearing an assortment of tattered uniforms, all standing quietly, clutching meagre stores of possessions in their hands: tattered duffle bags, an occasional musical instrument, a checkerboard.

As the last prisoner of war climbed from the train and fell into the five-abreast formation, a guard moved down the lines and asked in German if any prisoner spoke English. A slim, bespectacled man in a torn, blue coat slowly raised his hand. He was led to the front of the formation, and with a resounding first step, the group began the last forced march any of them would make during World War II. For them, the war was over.



In the distance, a second train could barely be heard above the heavy boots of the departing prisoners. As the train entered the crossing and slowed to a stop, the same scene was played out again by five hundred new faces. For an instant, the wary eyes of both captors and captives were diverted when a dog fight broke out in the street. Several small boys began to shout and throw stones at the animals, who quickly separated, still snarling. For one brief moment, a touch of normalcy returned. The episode could have occurred in Berlin or Tripoli just as easily. Now, a few of the weathered Germans laughed out loud; most of them smiled, as did many of the onlookers.

The remainder of the prisoners fell swiftly into formation, and the second group of prisoners, some still smiling, began their march. The steady, heart-beat sound of moving feet again filled the air. It was a sound that would be heard frequently in the next week, not only during the day, but occasionally even at night. Within a week, the prisoner-of-war camp held over 3,000 men—fliers, tank drivers, gunners, cooks, mechanics. Before the war ended, thousands more would arrive, and the sound of soldiers marching

German prisoners prepare to march from the Aliceville train depot to the POW camp, c. 1943.

(Courtesy Alabama Department of Archives and History)

from the tiny depot would become permanently fixed in the minds of many Aliceville residents.

For Colonel F. A. Prince, commander of the Aliceville camp, the night the first prisoners arrived was a long one. The tough, hawk-faced West Point graduate had been mildly shocked by the condition of the prisoners he had seen at the depot. The physical effects of their North African defeat had been apparent; many would require immediate medical attention. The processing alone would last until dawn. This night would be the first real test of the Aliceville personnel.

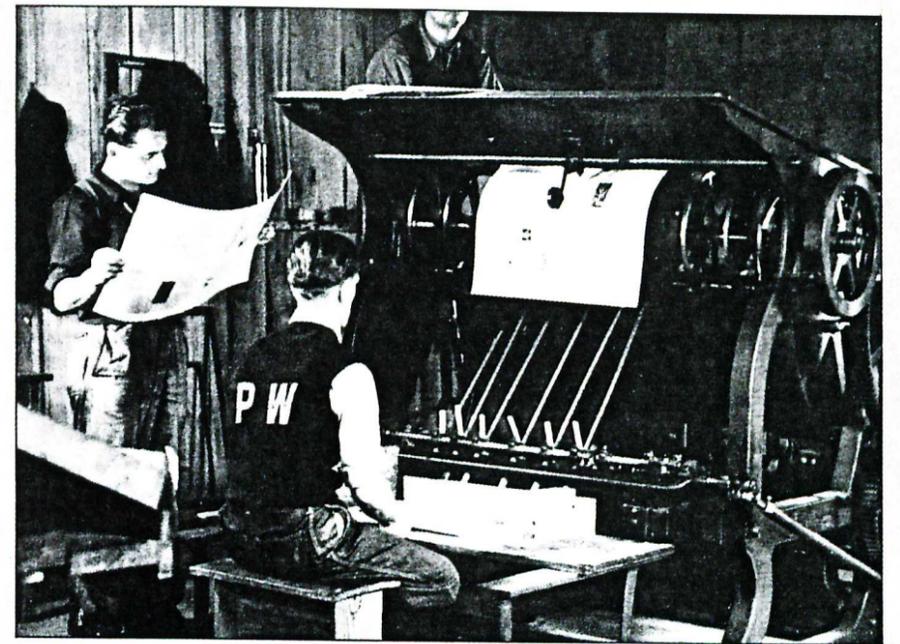
The facilities and procedures for processing the incoming prisoners were efficient, but the sheer number of arrivals made the task laborious. Prisoners filled out identification slips and were given receipts for any money

they possessed. Their belongings were searched for both weapons and papers. As the men emptied their bags, spreading the contents out on the floor for inspection by the guards, a revealing assortment of personal items appeared—possessions that had survived blinding sandstorms, bursting artillery shells, and the terrible destruction in North Africa: religious medallions, dry, cracked photographs of nervous, smiling wives and saucer-eyed children, tiny hoards of salt and tea and toilet paper, harmonicas, even violins.

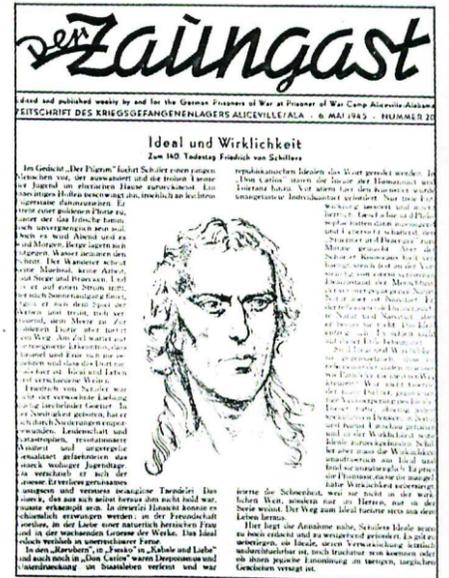
In an adjoining area, a small group of medical officers and technicians began the next phase, a preliminary examination designed to spot urgent medical problems and to gauge the overall condition of the prisoners. For most of the new arrivals, food had been limited throughout their duty in North Africa, and conditions had grown worse after their capture. There had never been enough food at the mass internment camps, and the situation had improved only slightly on the crowded ocean voyage to the United States. Most of the men were severely malnourished, a fact reported to Colonel Prince, who quickly made the decision to open the mess halls that night.

That was no simple task, yet by 2 A.M. the initial group of prisoners sat down to their first substantial meal in months. If the last nine hours had bewildered the German POWs, this they understood—food. Food in abundance—meat, eggs, vegetables, coffee—even a strange, sticky concoction that appeared to be made from mashed peanuts. After months in the desert living on military rations, the sights and smells in the mess halls that morning were almost beyond comprehension for the new arrivals. Some thought it was a trick, an edible form

CAMP NEWSPAPERS



No base camp in Alabama was without a newspaper written and printed by the prisoners. Camp Rucker had its *Das PW Echo*, Camp Opelika its *Der Querschnitt* (The Cross Section), Camp McClellan, *Die Oase* (The Oasis), and Aliceville, *Der Zaungast* (The Guest Inside the Wire), a copy of which is pictured (right). Also pictured is the printing press which the Aliceville prisoners purchased with their canteen funds. Prevented from printing any political discussions, the papers generally featured articles about camp activities, essays, poetry, short stories, cartoons, and puzzles. Few copies of any of these newspapers remain, and no copies survive of the Alabama POW paper that was criticized severely by U.S. military authorities—Camp McClellan's *Die Oase*. After the military Special Projects Division labeled the newspaper "militantly Nazi" and "very dangerous," the paper began to appear monthly rather than weekly (due to a "paper shortage"), and its



editor, POW Paul Metzner, was transferred to a camp for uncooperative prisoners.

(Photographs courtesy Aliceville Public Library)

CAMP ALICEVILLE GARDENS

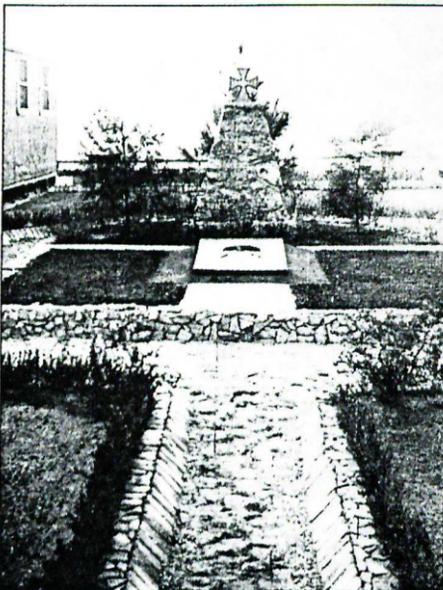
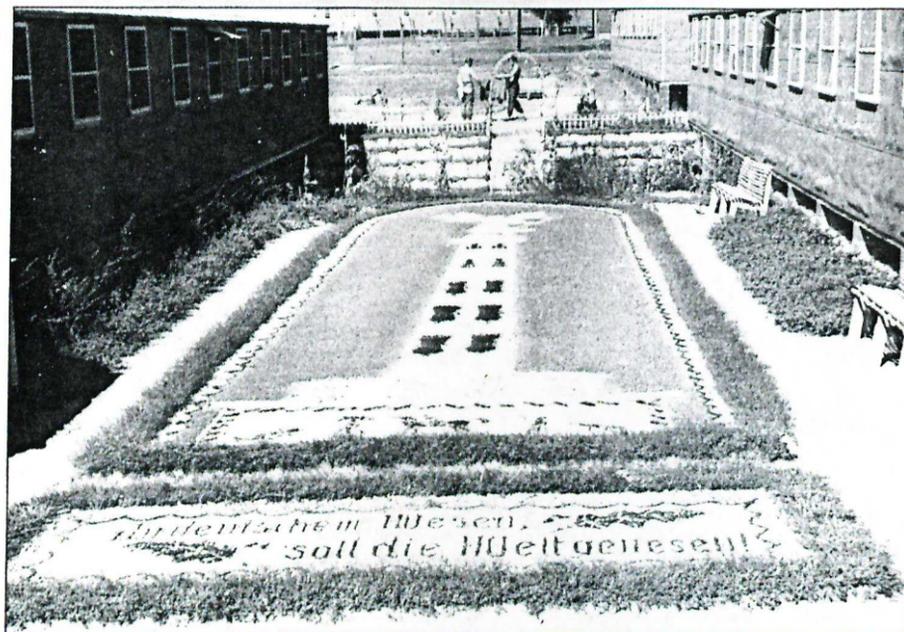
of propaganda that would soon end. Just the same, they cleaned their plates, ate even the condiments on the tables, and had refills of coffee.

The morning of June 3 brought the beginning of a new way of life for the veterans of the Afrika Korps. The sky threatened rain as the prisoners filed from their new quarters. They had been assigned to compounds that held a thousand men each, then to barracks quartering fifty prisoners. Arrayed around the barracks were mess halls, a hospital, several small indoor theatres, recreation areas, and storage facilities—a small city. Some of the barracks had radios, and several prisoners whistled the melody to a song they had only recently heard, "Pistol Packin' Mama." It was a catchy tune, even though few of them understood the lyrics.

Within a week, the prisoner population had ballooned to over 3000, and the workforce of captives had begun to transform the camp. Wearing blue denim uniforms with the letters "PW" stenciled across the back, they toiled diligently in their spare time, improving their quarters and the grounds. They also took charge of their own cooking, and the smells of German pastries, of baking ham and boiling cabbage, soon permeated the air.

"Give them two weeks and you won't recognize the place," predicted Colonel Prince to a visiting reporter. "They are damn good soldiers." And at least on the surface that June morning, both the "good" soldiers and the situation at the Aliceville prisoner-of-war camp did indeed seem well in hand. Yet, beneath the surface, problems were simmering that neither the colonel nor the reporter could have predicted.

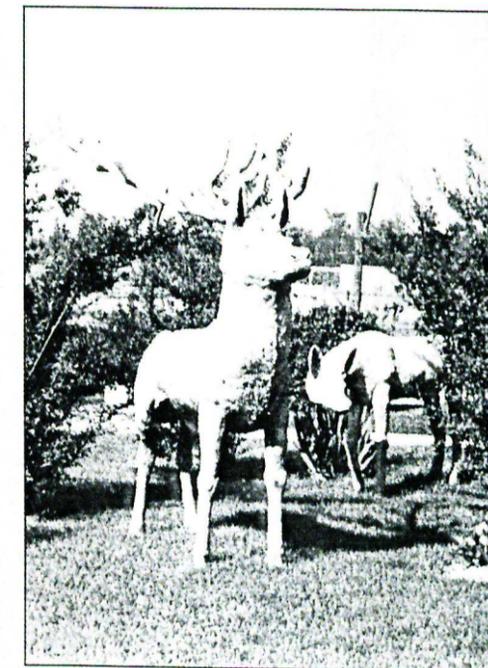
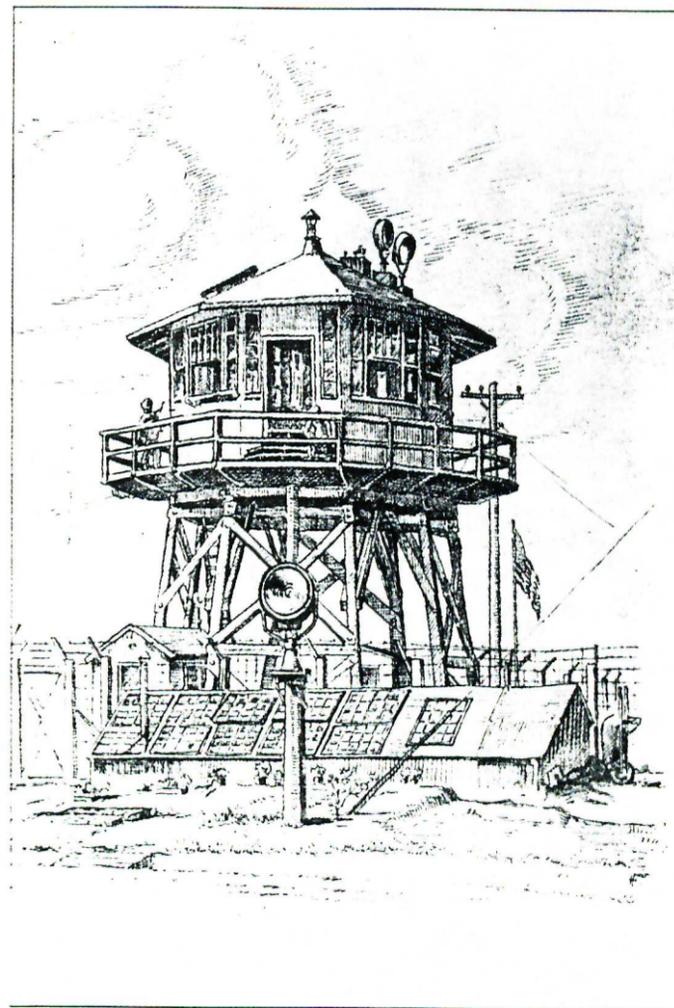
Despite the best efforts of the small medical staff, several prisoners died from a mysterious respiratory disease in



Above: "Through German character the world will be healed!" was emblazoned in German in one garden. *Top center:* Drawing by POW Hans Fanselow.

(Photographs on p. 10 and bottom left, p. 11, courtesy Alabama Department of Archives and History; drawing and other photographs courtesy Aliceville Public Library)

Transforming the bare prison compound into a semblance of home, the Germans planted Bermuda grass in front of the barracks, cultivated flower gardens throughout the camp, and built an elaborate greenhouse under the watchtower at the camp entrance gate. Many lawns contained mosaics created from flowers and pebbles; others contained elaborate topiary or cement statues designed and built by the prisoners. Shrubs and a few trees were also planted, all purchased with profits from the prisoners' canteens. Landscaping was directed by a POW master-gardener (possibly the man in the foreground in the picture at right). Each company competed monthly in a beautification contest, the winners receiving prizes or privileges.



REFERENCE

the first months the camp was open. The hospital, now overflowing with more than fifty patients, was in need of physicians who spoke German. Although the prisoners' diet had improved substantially since their arrival, the physical condition of most remained only fair, at best. To further complicate matters, the health of some prisoners was being threatened by more than just an undiagnosed respiratory problem. Injuries and "accidents" had occurred recently that appeared to be more than accidental.

While Aliceville's medical staff and officials attempted to deal with the increasing health problems of the prisoners, a handsome young captain in the U.S. Army Medical Corps was completing his instruction at the Camp Ritchie Intelligence Training Center in Mississippi. Captain Stephen Fleck (page 26) was no newcomer to the horrors of war, nor to the atrocities committed by the Germans. As a young student in 1933, he had fled his native Germany, returning warily in 1935 to arrange his immigration to the United States, where he completed medical school. The slender Jewish doctor had become a U.S. citizen in 1941, and soon thereafter he had enlisted in the military. In a matter of months, he was rattling along the backroads of Alabama en route to his new assignment at the Aliceville internment camp. Once there, Fleck would be required to treat some of Adolph Hitler's most devoted soldiers, and although he did not know it yet, he would play an important role in helping to identify two of the camp's most serious health problems.

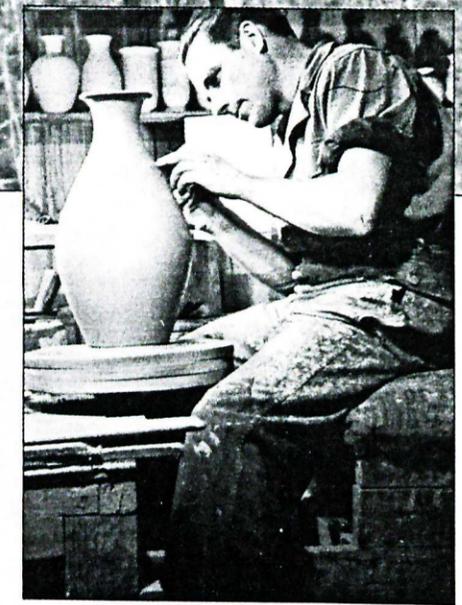
In early July 1943, Captain Fleck reported for duty at the Aliceville camp hospital. Fleck had made the decision

to keep his fluency in German a secret from the prisoners, and for the next four months he did so. His tiny office, less than five by eight feet with scarcely enough room for his desk and a chair, adjoined the camp's only examining room. Next door was the infirmary with enough beds for thirty patients. But now that the daily patient census hovered around fifty, the doctors were forced to utilize a nearby "cabin" for the overflow.

Throughout the steamy month of July, Stephen Fleck, whose arrival had increased the camp's medical personnel by 50 percent, labored with Captain John Kellam and Major Arthur Klippen to solve the respiratory mystery that was rapidly approaching epidemic proportions. The deaths that had occurred prior to Fleck's arrival had shared a common pattern—follicular tonsillitis followed by bronchopneumonia. Despite "intensive therapy including tracheotomy," some of the patients had died—a choking, gasping, tortuous death. Although autopsy results indicated a form of diphtheria, the doctors were unable to confirm the diagnosis bacteriologically. July edged into August, and the hospital beds remained full.

Three more weeks passed before the trio of American doctors would find an answer. Bacteriological tests finally confirmed that they were dealing with pharyngeal diphtheria, a form of the disease virtually unknown in the United States.

On August 23, the first accurate diagnosis was made. Other similar diagnoses followed, and on September 5, Schick tests to determine immunity were begun on more than 6,000 people in the camp, both Germans and Americans. Nine days later the testing job was complete, and the results were



Painters and potters were given ample opportunities to display their talents. One POW painted his home in Bavaria (left) on the wall of the prisoners' mess hall.

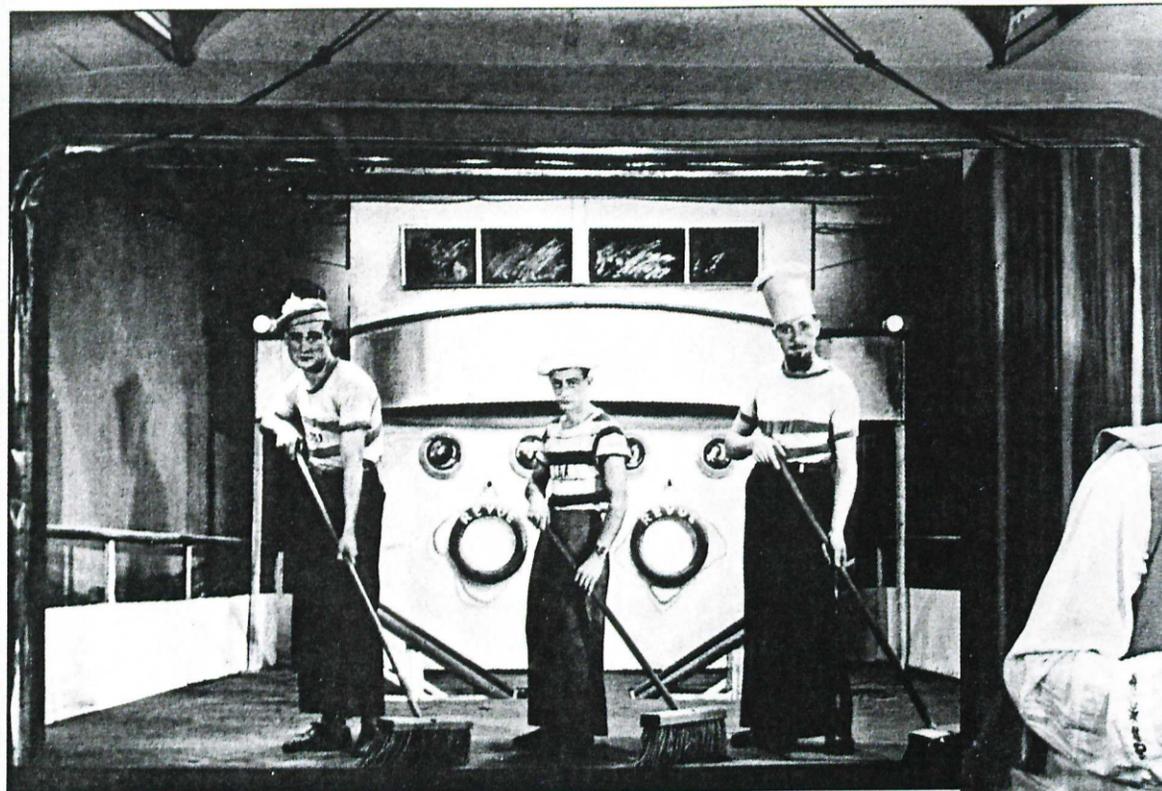
(Painting courtesy Bobbie Coleman; photographs courtesy Aliceville Public Library)

staggering to the three men: over 1,200 people had tested positive. Immunization with diphtheria toxoid would have to begin immediately. Many adults, however, had adverse reactions to the toxoid; there would never be enough beds. To compound this problem, diphtheria immunizations had not been routine in the German army, yet many of the prisoners steadfastly claimed that they had already been immunized.

In the early fall of 1943, the tiny group of American doctors, with the aid of several German physicians, began administering the toxoid to all persons testing positive on the Schick test. A complex immunization schedule was devised, with a lower dosage than had ever been used before. Within days, the results were encouraging. The lower dosage appeared to be successful. But as the deaths from diphtheria came to a halt, the deaths by other means began to increase.

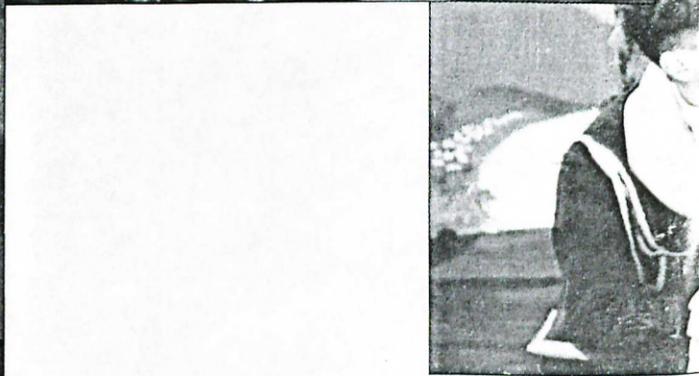
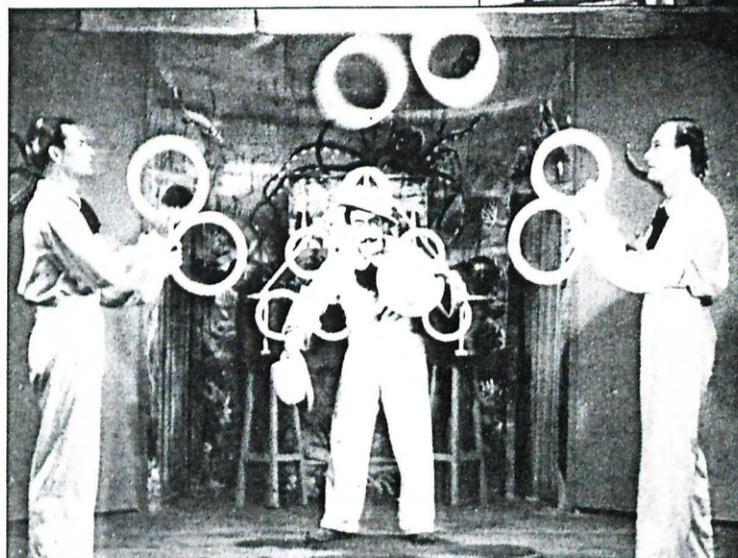
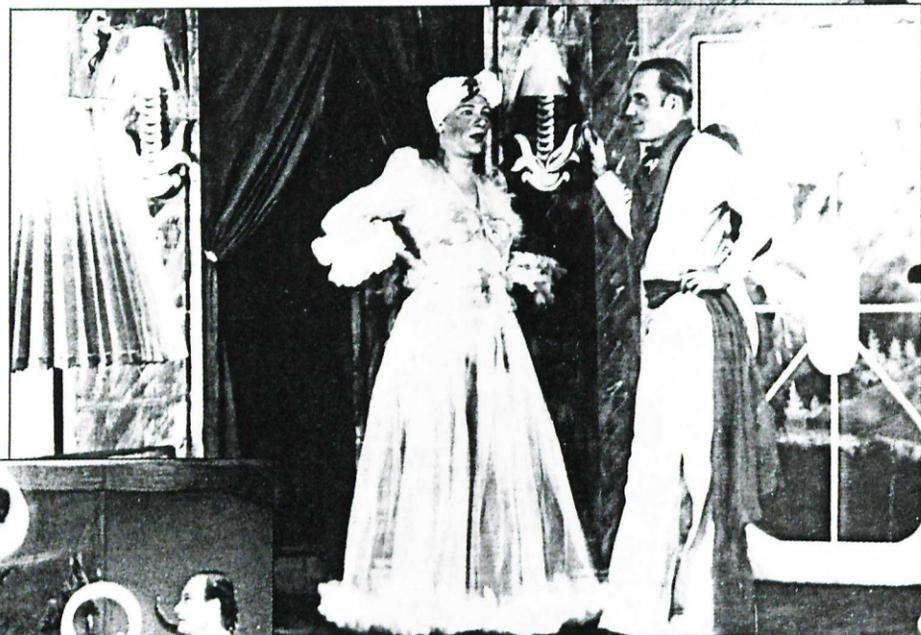
By mid-September, the Aliceville camp was nearly filled to capacity with Afrika Korps members. The internment center, designed to accommodate 6,000 prisoners of war, had ballooned to almost 5,300 in only three months. American personnel totaled 1,029, including civilians. The camp had become in every way a city complete with everything any city has—including violence.

According to various informal surveys, fewer than 10 percent of all German POWs were devoted Nazis. Another 30 percent were considered party faithfuls. During the first half of 1943 at least, little effort was made by U.S. military authorities to identify hardened Nazis when they arrived at the camps. The prisoners themselves, however, quickly learned the political sentiments of the new arrivals, and in many camps, a *Lagergestapo*—a secret



The POW acting company performed a variety of plays to approving audiences at Camp Aliceville.

(Courtesy Aliceville Public Library)



police unit that operated from within—kept those POWs suspected of being less than faithful to Hitler in a state of constant terror.

Not surprisingly, in the early months, the camp at Aliceville, with its concentration of devoted Afrika Korps members, had more than its share of prisoner violence.

It did not take an autopsy for Dr. Stephen Fleck to determine the cause of death for the slender German on the examining table. The bruises around the man's face and chest had already begun to form. It was clearly murder.

According to Fleck, "Most of [the murders] were accomplished with bare hands or some cooking utensil. . . . They cold-bloodedly killed either with knives or strangling during the night. We probably had two or three such deaths a month . . . anybody whom they suspected of wavering in his Nazi enthusiasm. Nobody would squeal," says Fleck, "because the squealer likely would face a similar fate."

Similar stories reached the ears of Jack Sisty, the camp chaplain's assistant. "We heard that the camp's Nazi leaders would fill socks with gravel and use them as weapons to keep the others in line."

The accounts by Fleck and Sisty of the violence at Aliceville illustrate a problem in internment camps nationwide. At Tonkawa, Oklahoma, five Afrika Korps sergeants beat a German corporal to death using clubs and milk bottles. The attackers were tried by their American captors and hanged on a gallows in an elevator shaft. The prosecutor in the case was a young trial lawyer named Leon Jaworski, who would later become the U.S. special prosecutor in the Watergate investiga-

tions. According to government reports, between September 1943 and April 1944, at least seven Nazi-inspired murders and seventy-two suicides occurred in various U.S. internment camps—figures which suggest that a significant number of the "cold-blooded" murders described by Stephen Fleck and others were ultimately classified by the U.S. military as suicides.

But Dr. Fleck knew otherwise. Never revealing that he understood German, Fleck forced the prisoners to speak to him through an interpreter:

[I was] thereby able to prevent a few murders, I believe. I overheard some of their talk, probably when they thought I was not within hearing distance. For instance, "so-and-so" has said he was glad to be out of Africa, something of this sort, although often it was next to impossible to trace "so-and-so" since they only used first names. Only by knowing where a particular person was housed and likely to have contact with such a man could we arrange some shift in quartering which may or may not have prevented some murders. . . . It was likely the murders were not committed by any one individual against another, but rather by a small group of fanatics who might not have known themselves who delivered the fatal blow.

For two Aliceville POWs, the fatal blow came abruptly on August 26, 1943. In separate escape attempts, they were shot and killed as they crossed into the no-man's zone between the two barbed-wire fences that surrounded the camp. "Our men simply were doing their duty," said a weary camp commander, Colonel Prince. According to

THE SPORTING SCENE



For many prisoners, sports provided a much-needed outlet from daily camp life. Although track events (like the one above at Aliceville) were popular, soccer matches consistently had the highest number of participants and spectators. On weekends and evenings, many of the Americans employed at the camps brought their families to watch the matches, which reportedly were so exciting that even the guards in their watchtowers couldn't resist cheering for their favorite teams. Other sports also had considerable followings—tennis, boxing, bowling (on outdoor alleys), and handball (on one occasion at Camp McClellan, over 300 prisoners played in a single tournament).

The leisure time of one Camp McClellan prisoner, a former circus worker, took a decidedly different direction. He built a small zoo and filled it with various local creatures captured by men on work details. His collection of alligators, birds, possums, snakes, foxes, and other local wildlife was housed in an enclosure built inside the compound. The Germans domesticated many of the animals, even training some of them to perform tricks, much to the amusement of everyone.

(Courtesy Aliceville Public Library)

other Aliceville escapees got as far as the bustling streets of Memphis. According to Jack Sisty, "They got out of the range of our ability to chase them . . . stole a car, and were driving down some street in Memphis—on the wrong side—when the FBI caught them."

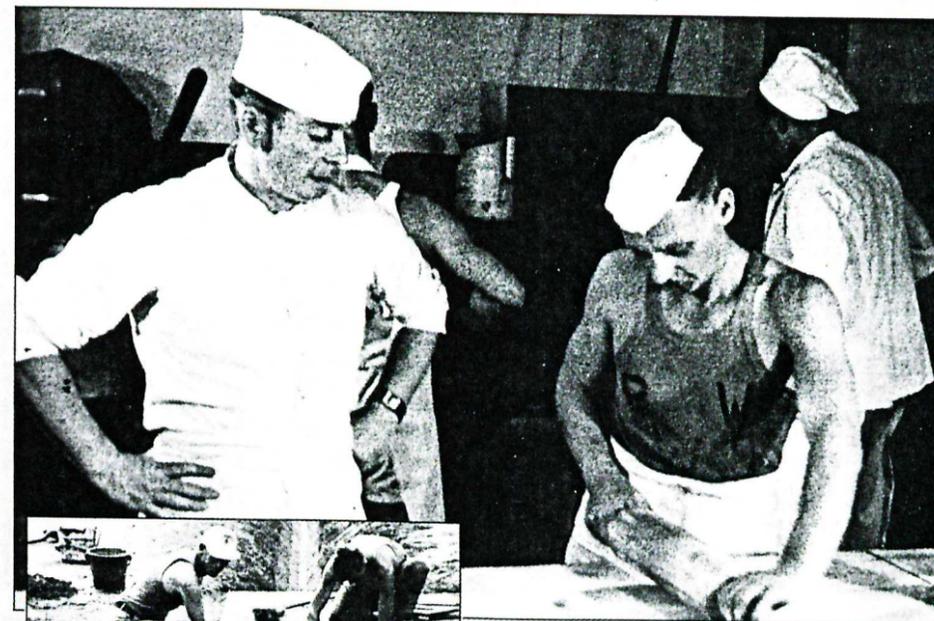
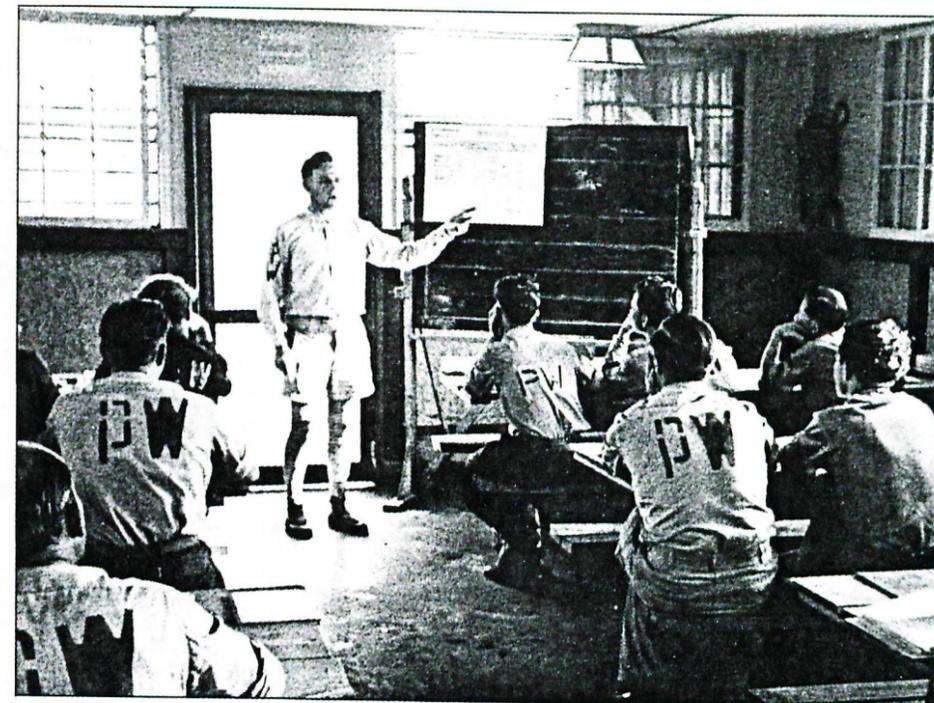
As the first days of spring transformed the Alabama countryside, an equally spectacular transformation occurred inside the camp. The long hours of captivity were seldom wasted by the Germans, who sought to change the bare prison

compound into a semblance of home. Grass was sodded in front of the green, newly painted barracks, and the grounds were decorated with mosaics made from flowers and pebbles. Shrubs, even some trees, were planted, purchased with profits from the prisoners' canteens—profits that would eventually pay for virtually all improvements in the camp and all recreational activities of the prisoners.

Construction of a brick amphitheatre also began in the spring of 1944. Chairs, benches, and tables—all made by the prisoners—appeared in the various compounds, and the camp came to assume an almost park-like appearance inside the wire.

In accordance with the articles of the 1929 Geneva Convention, enlisted men among the prisoners received an allowance of ten cents a day. (Officers of the grade of major or above received \$40 a month; captains, \$30 a month; and lieutenants, \$20 a month. Aliceville, however, had few commissioned officers.) For work outside the camp, prisoners received an additional eighty cents per day. All wages were paid in the form of canteen coupons. Although the Convention decreed that only privates might be compelled to work outside the camp, many of the noncommissioned officers volunteered for outside work in order to earn the additional wages that such employment paid and to combat the boredom inherent in captivity.

Tension was high in the first work details that ventured from the camp. Small groups of three to six prisoners were escorted to their work site by a heavy complement of guards with automatic rifles, followed by a truck with machine guns. Few chances were taken by the guards, who often feared, yet respected, the Afrika Korps veterans. If a POW on a work detail



Top: POWs organized their own classes on topics ranging from classical languages to blacksmithing to anatomy. Center: Prisoners dined on German dishes prepared by POW cooks. Left: Dissatisfied with the wooden trenches the Americans had provided, the POWs rebuilt the trenches with bricks they molded and baked themselves.

(Courtesy Aliceville Public Library)

Sergeant Jack Sisty, however, only one of the Germans was actually attempting to escape. Sisty recalls:

There was one that was really a murder. He [the prisoner] was on a detail, and there was a guard . . . whose brother was killed in the war, and he vowed he'd "get a German." He was in charge of the detail. In this part of the state, you can't find a stone larger than a pebble. He claimed that this German was picking up a stone to throw at him—and he shot him. That was real murder. He wasn't brought on trial or anything; he was kicked out of the army with a dishonorable discharge.

Although Sisty's recollection of the incident contradicts official reports ("shot in attempted escape"), his story is tragically similar to an occurrence at a temporary camp in Utah, in which a guard, who explained afterward that he hated Germans, opened fire with a .30 calibre machine gun into a row of tents. Eight sleeping prisoners were killed and twenty more were wounded.

Both at Aliceville and at the hundreds of other internment camps across the country, the "breaks" for freedom by POWs continued. During the five years of enemy captivity in the United States, German POWs made 2222 escape attempts. Only one ever made it all the way back to Germany, and he was captured within a mile of the front lines. Most escapees were recaptured within a matter of hours or days. Hans Becker and Claus Hoyer, two POWs from Aliceville, were captured at sundown on October 18, 1944, when they surrendered peacefully to military police. They had eluded capture for almost sixty hours by hiding in the swamps of the Tombigbee River. Six



wanted to light a cigarette, a standard ritual ensued: The prisoner requested a match, usually through the use of hand signals, since few of them spoke English, and even fewer of the guards spoke German. The guard then dropped a matchbox and walked backward with his rifle trained on the prisoner. Only then was the prisoner permitted to pick up the matches and light his cigarette. To return the matches, the procedure was performed in reverse. Strict protocol between captor and captive was maintained during the first months that the camp was open. By the spring of 1944, however, tensions between guards and prisoners had waned, as each group settled into its role.

One young German prisoner, Hans Kopera (page 24), who occasionally worked on outside details, later described the change in prisoner-guard relationships: "Things were completely different [after the first few months]. We arrived in the woods; the soldiers put their rifles together. We started playing cards, chatted, laughed, and eventually worked, but nobody was afraid of the other. We were rather good friends. Of course, there were individual differences."

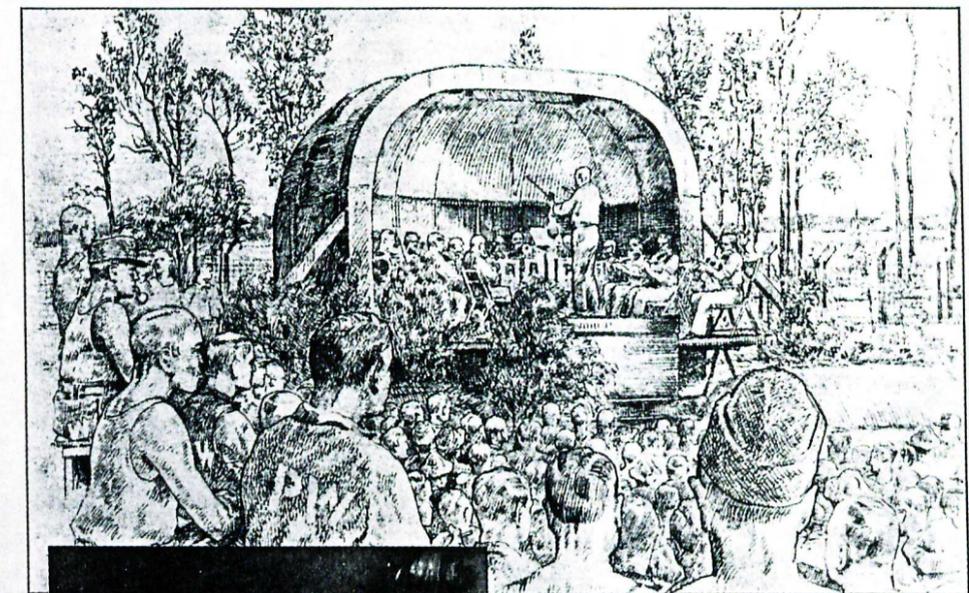
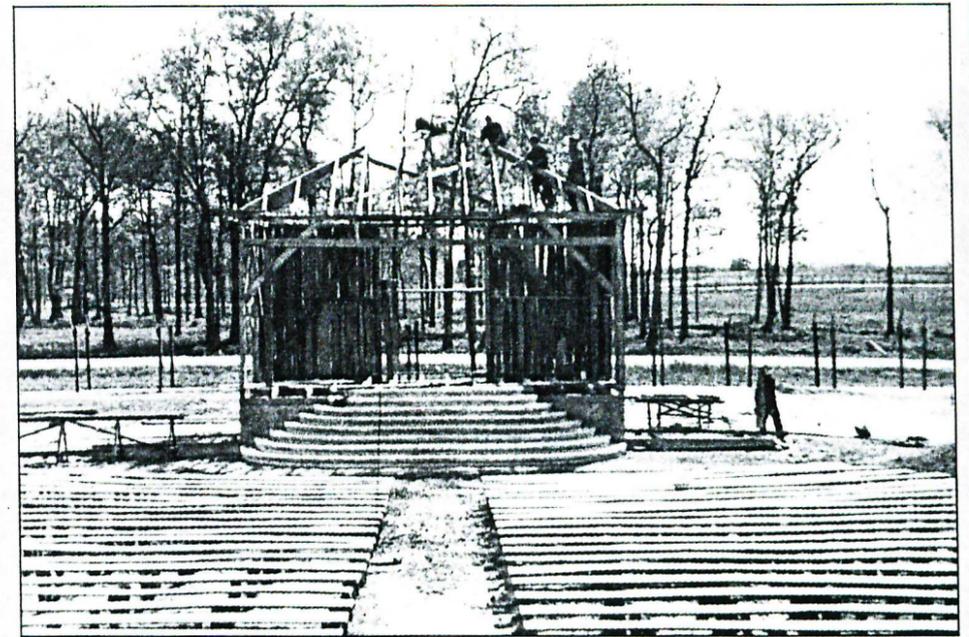
Because of the local manpower shortages created by the war, prison laborers were in demand around Aliceville and neighboring towns, and large groups of POWs were transported to outside labor details, usually on day trips. They worked at a variety of tasks ranging from timber cutting to peanut harvesting, and it was not uncommon for groups of POWs to be sent to other areas of the state, where they set up side camps, or "tent towns," housing both prisoners and guards. Most of these facilities lasted only as long as the job—a crop to harvest, acreage to clear,

pine resin to drain. Although the Germans, on the whole, were exceptionally capable workers, on one job at least, their skills proved minimal—picking cotton. Whether their ineptitude was contrived or legitimate, the result was the same. Few farmers were willing to pay for a laborer who could not pick his weight in cotton, and the German POWs seldom managed even half of that. Because of their incompetence with cotton, fifty-three truckloads of Aliceville prisoners were shifted to the peanut harvest on September 9, 1943.

One of the larger side camps was established at Tuscaloosa. For nearly a year, most of the laborers in the kitchens and laundries at the U.S. Army's Northington General Hospital were Aliceville POWs. They lived in wooden barracks, surrounded by barbed-wire fences, on a parcel of land bordering Fifteenth Street, and they soon became an accepted sight to all who regularly passed the tiny camp.

Thousands of miles from family and friends, the Germans diligently sought diversions to relieve the loneliness and boredom. To the prisoners, this sport called "football" that the guards talked about endlessly, and even tried to teach them, was certainly strange. The ball, pointed on both ends, was almost impossible to kick smoothly across the ground. Moreover, when someone made the mistake of picking this odd-looking ball up, many of the players would converge on him.

The POWs much preferred soccer, and teams were soon organized. But their uniforms, made from onion sacks, were all the same color, making quick identification of teammates difficult. The POWs solved the problem by repeatedly washing one set of uniforms with their denim workclothes, thereby tinting them a distinct shade of baby



Page 18: POWs made their own marionettes and wrote many of the plays in which they performed. Page 19, top and center: They also constructed a 1000-seat amphitheatre with handmade bricks. Bottom: One prisoner made a working violin out of matchsticks.

(Drawing by POW Herman Kalbe; drawing and photographs courtesy Aliceville Public Library)

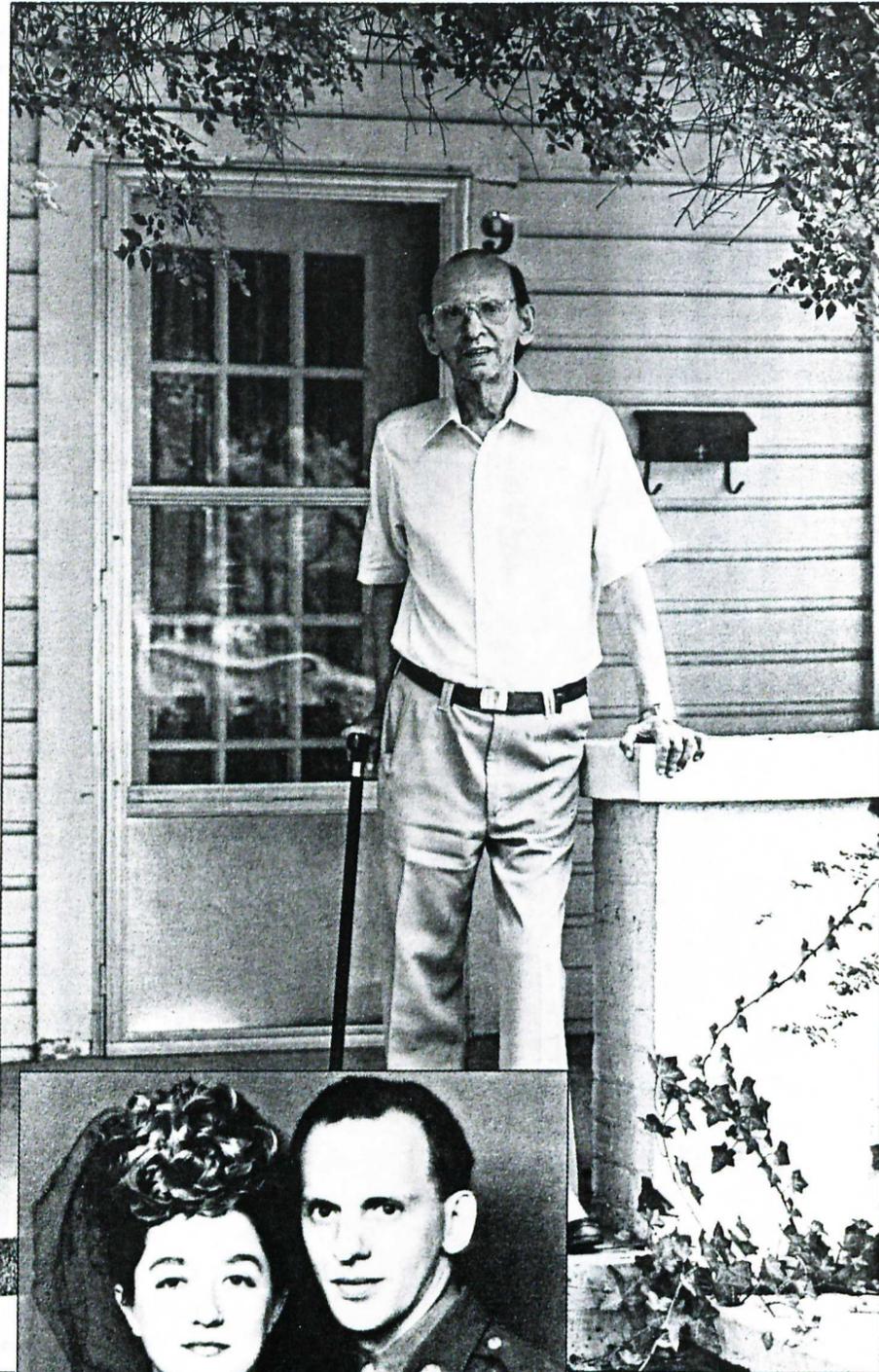
JACK SISTY

Standing in the freezing cold of Grand Central Station awaiting his army physical, Jack Sisty had little hope of being accepted into the military. He had been the victim of polio some years earlier, and one of his legs was shorter and smaller than the other. But he was determined to try anyway, and much to his surprise, he was accepted. His decision to enlist eventually led the New York City native to the newly constructed POW camp at Aliceville.

At the camp, Sisty found himself assigned to the post of chaplain's assistant, a position he held through a succession of camp chaplains. Because he had a fine voice (Sisty had sung professionally in New York), he also sang solos each Sunday at the morning service. His job at the camp involved frequent travel from one end of the facility to the other, and Sisty became the only soldier at Aliceville to ride a government-issue bicycle on his rounds.

In the spring of 1944, the young sergeant noticed a quiet, attractive secretary working at the camp headquarters. The wise-cracking Sisty was quickly hooked by her Southern charm, and the two were married that August. They moved into an apartment building for married soldiers, built across the highway from the camp, where they lived for the rest of Sisty's stay in Aliceville. (Although in considerable disrepair, that apartment building remains today, one of the few camp structures still standing.)

Following the end of World War II, Jack Sisty and his wife, Ettie, moved to New York City for a brief period, but eventually they returned to Aliceville. For ten years, the "transplanted Yankee" served as the director of the Aliceville Chamber of



Jack Sisty today on the front porch of his home in Aliceville; inset: Sisty and his wife, Ettie, on their wedding day in 1944.

(Photograph by Chip Cooper)

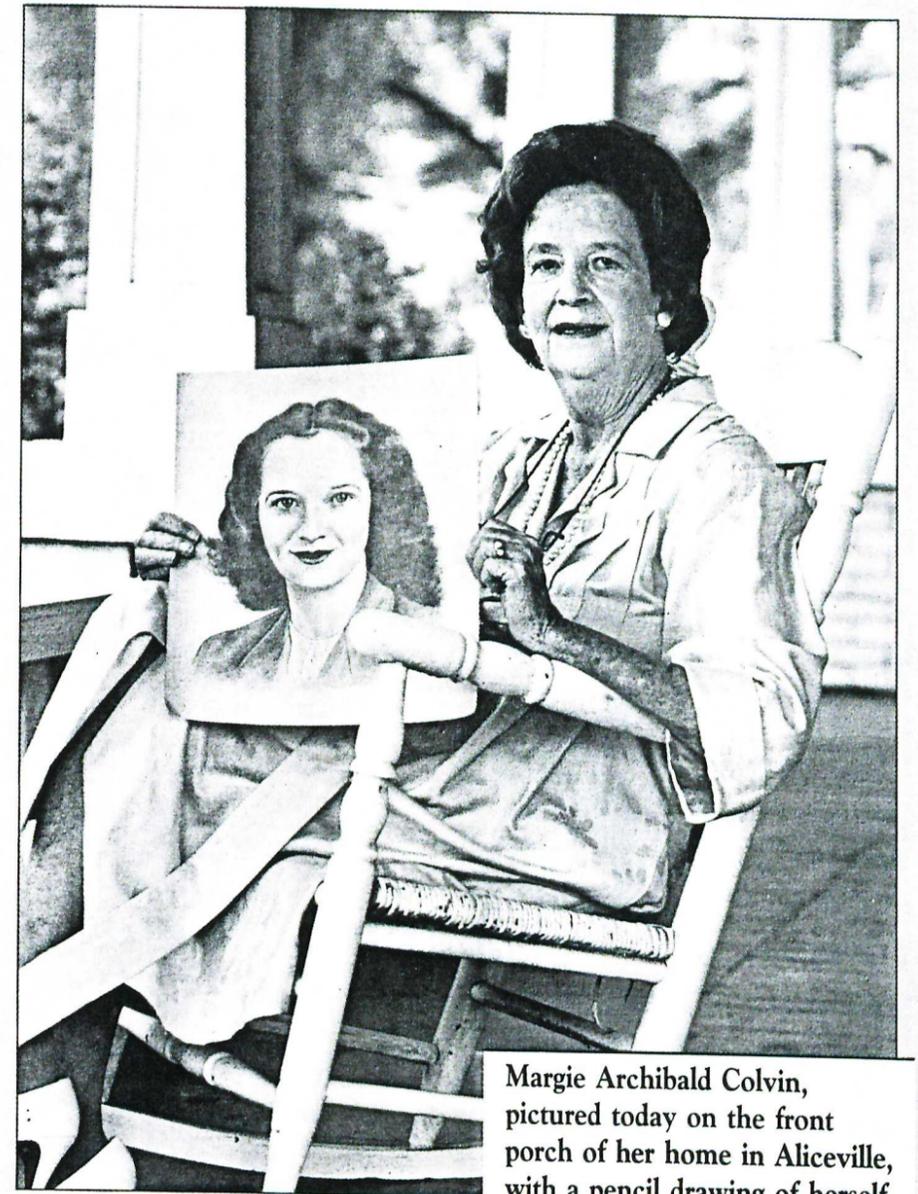
Commerce. Later, after completing his degree at the University of Alabama, Sisty worked for many years in rehabilitation of the handicapped.

MARGIE COLVIN

Margie Archibald was certain that she would hate Aliceville. The slender, nineteen-year-old brunette with the wide smile had never wanted to leave her friends in Union Springs, Alabama. But her father's poor health prompted him to retire to his hometown of Aliceville, and she reluctantly followed in March 1943. Shortly after her arrival, she found work at the Aliceville Bank and Trust—and more. She found men. Hundreds of men. American personnel at the camp often topped 1,000, and for the attractive bank teller—and other single young women in Aliceville—the supply of eligible soldiers seemed unbelievable.

"We had our choice," she says. "We could go out every night with who we wanted. It was sort of like a dream. They had the officers' club, the noncommissioned officers' club, and the enlisted men's club. We dated [them all] . . . some of the best-looking Yankee boys you ever saw."

In late 1944, Margie Archibald left the Aliceville Bank and went to work as a secretary at the internment camp hospital. Following the closing of the facility, she was hired by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers who were to oversee the dismantling of the camp. This job led to her first and last foray into entrepreneurship: She purchased all the camp's shrubbery for \$85 and sold it piece by piece to individuals



Margie Archibald Colvin, pictured today on the front porch of her home in Aliceville, with a pencil drawing of herself at nineteen made by a German prisoner of war.

(Photograph by Chip Cooper)

over a two-year period. "I may have made \$400. I thought I was quite the businesswoman," she remembers.

blue. The other set of uniforms they dyed a bright pink with dye made from red berries which they discovered while on work details outside the camp. Large crowds of prisoners, and some Americans, flocked to watch the heated contests between the pink and blue teams. The action was often rough, and leg and knee injuries became a common

problem at the prison hospital. Much of the frustration and suppressed emotion that captivity created in the prisoners found an outlet on the athletic fields of the Aliceville camp that summer.

In October of 1944, a new commander arrived at the Aliceville camp to replace Colonel Prince. Colonel R. S. Grier was no newcomer to the business

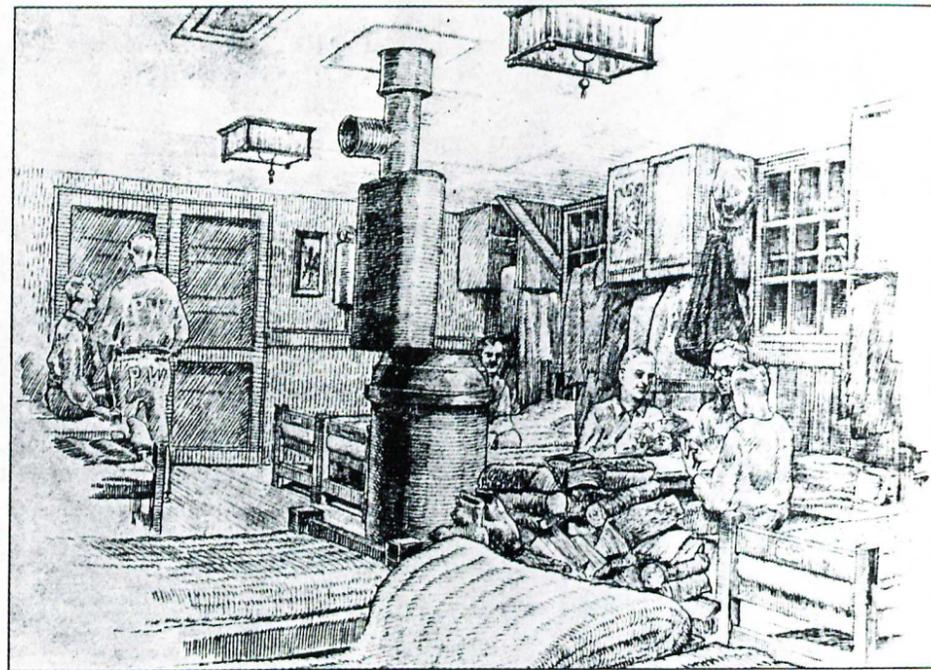
of handling prisoners of war. He had previously been the commanding officer in a similar facility at Camp McCain, Mississippi, and he had a reputation for being fair yet demanding. Grier took charge swiftly, setting the tone for his command when he placed several German prisoners on bread-and-water rations for "ar-

rogance." Grier's decisive manner was particularly important in light of the gradual changes that had occurred in the prison population in recent months.

The previous spring, Aliceville had been designated a "segregation camp," or a facility to which uncooperative prisoners—in this case, uncooperative noncommissioned officers—were transferred. Many of those sent to Aliceville were quite open in their Nazi fervor, and Grier's job of running a smooth, trouble-free camp was tested often that fall.

Most of these new, special-category prisoners, whose numbers probably never exceeded 300, were older men whose range of experience and interest was diverse. Many chose not to work outside the camp, leaving themselves a great deal of free time. As Grier quickly learned, inventive and industrious prisoners without enough to do can be quite a nuisance. The wooden guard stick, or billy club, found one morning in the main compound was only one example. All of the guard sticks had been accounted for; all of the guards, too. Yet here was this extra stick. Although the Americans were puzzled by the stick, few of the POWs were. It had been made by the prisoners in the carpentry shop and tossed into the compound at night. Many a sly glance and wry smile had passed among the Germans as they watched the "desperate search for this seemingly missing guard" the next day. For the still-proud men of the Afrika Korps, it was one small victory over their captors, carved from a block of wood.

A far more impressive accomplishment floated high above the camp early one morning in March of 1944. It appeared to be an airplane, but no engine sounds could be heard. And it was small. The plane seemed to follow a regular pattern, rising high above the



Pencil sketch of barracks by
POW Herman Kalbe

(Courtesy Aliceville Public Library)

empty cottonfield outside the barbed-wire fence before falling in a gentle, looping arc over the compounds, then repeating the action. The guards in the towers were poised, rifles and machine guns trained on the intruder. Prisoners and American personnel alike were fascinated by the graceful flight, which came to an abrupt conclusion when the plane banked above the camp, failed to rise again, and crashed in the field outside the fence.

The wreckage revealed a pilotless glider over five feet long, with a wingspan approaching ten feet. It had been constructed in sections from fruit crate slats, then covered with fabric and shellac. A search of the camp revealed the method of launch—a short ramp and a complex series of inner tubes tied together, creating an enormous sling-shot that would have required the effort of "at least a dozen men to launch."

Less frivolous activities, both creative and educational, also increased at the camp during its final year of operation. Classes were taught daily in dozens of areas, ranging from classical languages to blacksmithing to anatomy. Most of the instructors were older, non-commissioned German officers who had

been transferred to Aliceville the previous year. Before the war, many had been professors at European universities and high schools, while others were skilled artists and craftsmen.

Overall, the number and kind of activities engaged in by the POWs reached astounding proportions. The landscaping (*page 10*) was now directed by a professional master-gardener, and the weed-free Bermuda lawns, the lush gardens, the greenhouse, and the elaborate topiary that adorned the grounds were all a tribute to his guidance and expertise. The appearance of the camp changed almost daily, as prisoners worked to improve the grounds, hoping to win the prizes or privileges awarded to winners of the monthly beautification contest.

Equally impressive were the prisoners' artistic efforts. Classes in sculpting, painting, carving, statuary,

(continued on page 27)

JOHN RICHEY

The lure of better wages and new surroundings at the POW camp changed the lives of many Aliceville residents, among them John Richey, who had been the cook at the Aliceville Hotel for twenty-eight years. When a colonel eating at the hotel offered him a job as bartender at the camp officers' club, Richey, delighted at the new opportunity, accepted quickly.

By day, Richey labored on the house that he was building for himself and his family in town, and in the evenings he reported to "the best job" he had ever had. It was hard work, but Richey enjoyed his job at the club and the stories and camaraderie that he shared with the officers, whose numbers seemed to grow almost daily. The arrival of eighteen slot machines increased both the club's noise level and Richey's responsibility. On a good night, he would empty over five hundred dollars from the machines—for the week, as much as two thousand—and deposit it in the Aliceville Bank. The officers' club, he says, was "a regular little Las Vegas."

In his second year at the camp, Richey found himself undone by his reputation as a cook. Camp commander Colonel Prince needed a new cook for the camp hospital, and he remembered the slow-baked hams and the delicious pastries that Richey had doted over at the Aliceville Hotel. Because the hospital mess was also the officers' mess, Prince wanted a cook capable of producing something special. He wanted, and got, John Richey.

With regret, Richey wiped down his bar one last time and reported to his new job, where for the remainder of his time at the camp he applied his culinary skills in the hospital kitchen. Cooking in mass quantities became a



John Richey on his front porch
in Aliceville.

(Photograph by Chip Cooper)

way of life for him (for breakfast each morning he scrambled thirty-nine dozen eggs and fried thirty-two slabs of bacon). Working side-by-side with a staff of German POWs, he quickly learned that language differences, at least in the kitchen, posed little, if any, barrier.

By the time the Aliceville camp closed, John Richey had decided that he had had enough of kitchens to last a lifetime, so when a friend offered him a job selling life insurance, Richey

turned in his chef's hat for an actuarial table, and for the next twenty-one years he sold policies for United Service and Mutual Savings Insurance. Today, John Richey is retired and lives in the Aliceville house that he built while working at the POW camp.



Above: Hans Kopera, member of the Afrika Korps, c. 1942.
Below: Dr. Hans Kopera, c. 1981.

(Courtesy Aliceville Public Library)



P.O.W. HANS KOPERA

Austrian native Hans Kopera had long dreamed of becoming a medical doctor, but World War II shattered those hopes. Instead, he, along with most of his high school classmates, enlisted in the German army after graduation. Kopera, only seventeen at the time, was assigned to the Second Kradschutzen Battalion of the Tenth Panzer Division. In the summer of 1942, he saw his initial combat, in northern France, and by the time of his arrival with the first German troops in Tunisia that autumn, the blond-haired youth had become a veteran fighter.

Kopera fought in the battles at Kassarine Pass, Tebourba, Toebessa and Medine; he rose to the rank of sergeant and was awarded the Iron Cross. Then, on Good Friday 1943, he was captured by a regiment of Scottish Highlanders, thus beginning a long, circuitous journey in captivity that would lead him from the desert outside Medjes el Bab, across the Atlantic Ocean, and eventually behind the barbed-wire fences of the Aliceville internment camp in the late summer of 1943.

Kopera had studied English in school, and although his command of the language was limited, he became an interpreter at the camp. It was a difficult job, especially in the early days when tensions between guards and prisoners were high. But as the days in captivity passed, tensions waned, and Kopera's proficiency in his new language increased dramatically. When his fellow prisoners kidded him that he sounded more Alabamian than German at times, the good-natured Kopera accepted their kidding, but he found his own way to counter their jibes—with caricatures. Sketching quickly with a pencil, the young soldier made hundreds of humorous sketches of other POWs, and even of American personnel. His

sketches amused everyone, and his work was in frequent demand on birthdays and other special occasions.

As a noncommissioned officer, Kopera was not required to work outside the camp, and he soon found himself with an excess of free time. To fill his days, he helped to landscape the barracks grounds, engaged in endless gab sessions, wrote weekly letters home, and, once again, dreamed of becoming a physician.

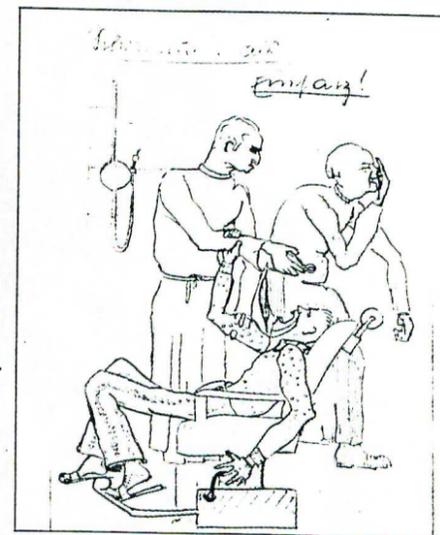
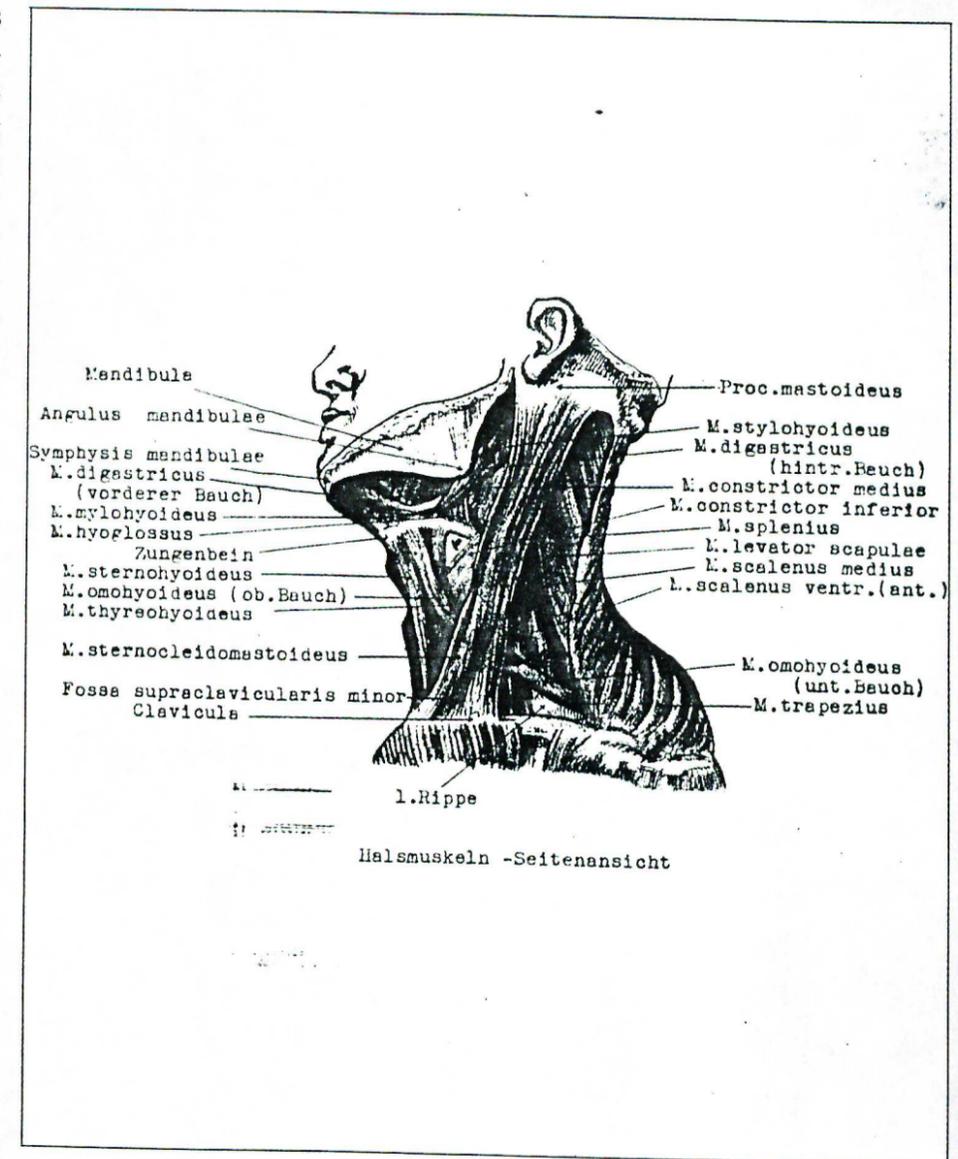
When Kopera heard that the camp hospital needed a "ward master" for the surgical wing—someone who could serve as an interpreter between the German patients and the staff of American and German doctors—he volunteered quickly. It was not the job that he wanted, but at least it was a step closer to hospital work and to his dreams of becoming a doctor.

In the early months of 1944, that dream came even closer to reality when Kopera and several other interested POWs persuaded the German doctors in the hospital to start medical classes as part of the camp education curriculum. Sitting on "little self-made chairs" that they brought to class each morning, the beginning medical students studied a variety of subjects from basic chemistry to histology. Kopera also found a new focus for his artistic talents—human anatomy. He became a nightly visitor to the X-ray lab, where he spent hundreds of hours making sketches for the lectures. By the time the camp closed, he had completed nearly 2,000 drawings and had completed three semesters of study.

But difficult times lay ahead for the would-be doctor. When the war ended, Kopera and many other prisoners were shuttled from one temporary camp to another; their food rations were cut drastically and their exemptions from

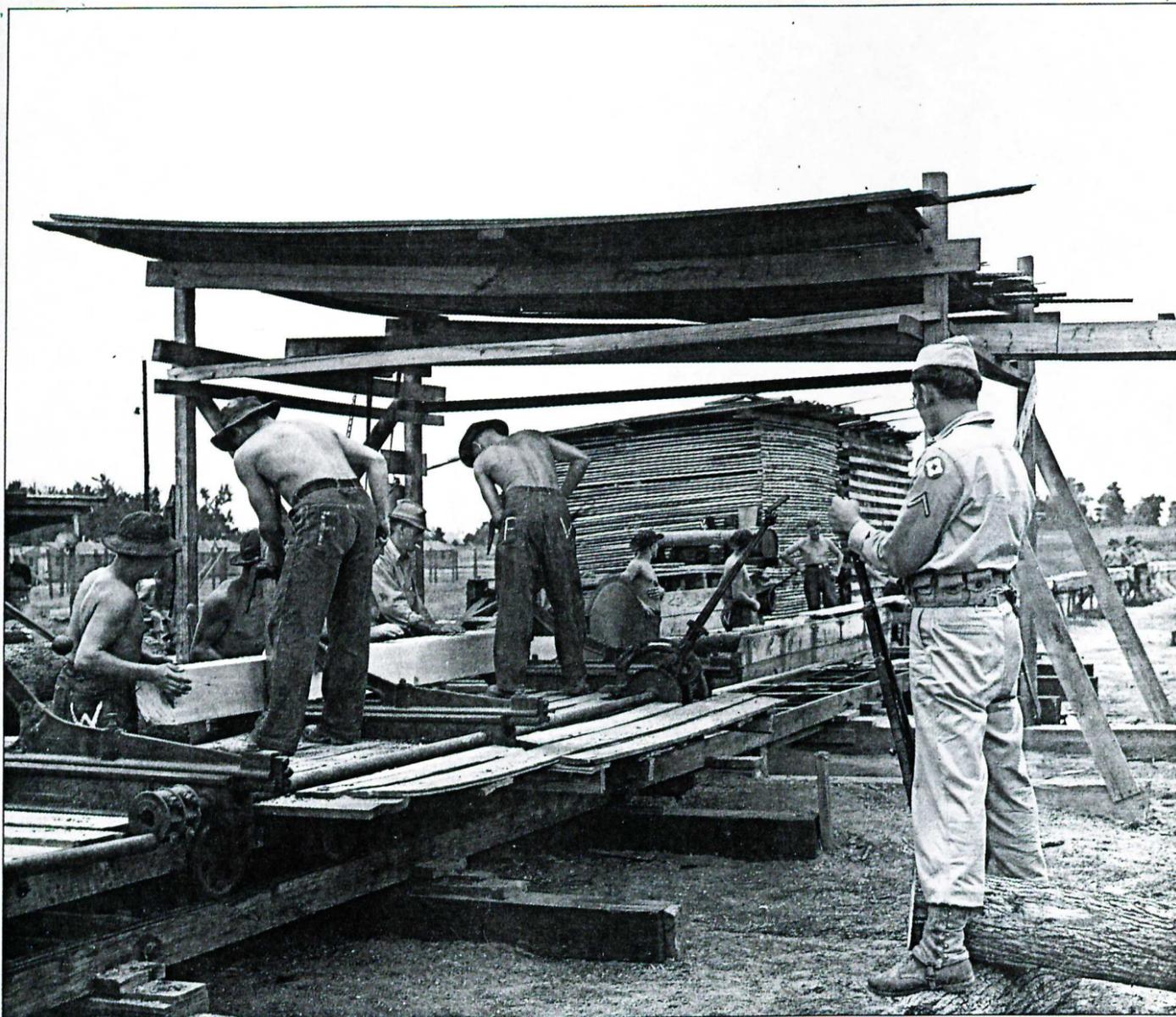
work details revoked. U.S. authorities officially blamed the change in treatment on food and labor shortages throughout the country, but according to Kopera, most German POWs thought differently. Many saw the new treatment as a form of retribution for the atrocities uncovered in the Nazi concentration camps and for the often poor treatment that American prisoners had received from the Germans. Whatever the reason, the change in treatment had a powerful effect on the attitudes of many prisoners. Kopera recalls: "If they changed our thinking in the course of the years in America, they spoiled a lot by the bitter end [when] . . . treatment was not only less human, but to an appreciable extent, absolutely inhuman (600–800 calories per day)."

Finally back in Austria, Kopera was accepted for medical school at the University of Graz, where his requirements were reduced by a full year because of his military service and his training at Aliceville. Hans Kopera graduated as a medical doctor in the summer of 1951. In 1973, he was named head of the Clinical Pharmacology Unit at the University of Graz, a position that he still holds today.



Medical illustration and cartoon by POW Kopera, c. 1943–45.

(Courtesy Aliceville Public Library)



POWs work in a sawmill outside the Aliceville camp.

(U.S. Signal Corps photo courtesy Bobbie Coleman)

a dance orchestra, a string quartet, and a twenty-five member choir for the Protestant services.

For those more inclined to the theatre, the 1944-45 season promised to be a good one at the Aliceville camp. The POW acting company, comprised of over fifty members, many of whom were professional actors, undertook an impressive list of plays that included Goethe's *Faust*, Shakespeare's *As You*

Like It, and a one-act German comedy, *The Broken Jug*, by Heinrich von Kleist. These performances invariably played to full houses, and each production was performed at least six times to permit the entire camp to attend.

Most aspects of camp life, including reviews of the camp theatre and orchestra performances, were covered by the prisoners' weekly newspaper, *Der Zaungast* (The Guest Inside the Wire), which was widely read and discussed by the prisoners. Printed on a used press purchased by the POWs (page 9), the paper was prohibited by U.S. military censors from printing political discussions. Most of the two surviving

issues are filled with articles about camp activities, philosophical and general essays, poetry, short stories, cartoons, and puzzles.

While the year 1945 marked an educational and creative high point for the Aliceville POWs, it also witnessed the beginning of the end for the German military forces. As the prisoners read and heard of the faltering Nazi effort, some of them came to accept the inevitable Allied victory. Most, however, refused to believe the newspaper reports, labeling them as propaganda.

Only after Germany surrendered to the Allies on May 7, 1945, were most prisoners at the camp convinced that they had lost the war.

As camp deactivation plans were put into effect, many prisoners were shifted to other camps, and by June 1, the number of POWs at Aliceville had declined to 3,485. When the camp was officially deactivated on September 30, 1945, the remaining prisoners were transferred to various repatriation centers around the country in preparation for the long-awaited journey home.

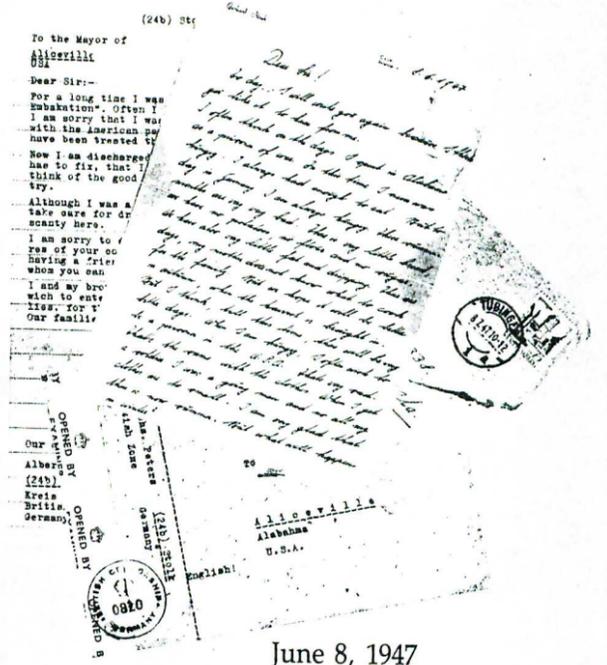
Two months after the last prisoner had departed, Aliceville's American military personnel began to move on to new bases and different assignments. For a few civilian and military personnel, employment at the camp lasted well into 1947, as dismantling of the facility continued. Those who remained watched as the Aliceville prisoner-of-war camp disappeared in the ensuing months. The amphitheatre, once filled with such creativity and vitality, was demolished and sold for scrap. Weeds quickly covered the sloping sites.

During the final months of dismantling, the camp consisted of only a few scattered buildings and a solitary tennis court in bad repair. On days when there was no work to do, the camp's lone secretary played tennis with the only remaining janitor. The soft, rhythmic sound of their volleys provided a quiet, final counterpoint to the day, almost four years earlier, when members of the German Afrika Korps marched into the lives of the Aliceville community.



AFTER THE WAR

Many former POWs retained fond memories of their days at Aliceville. The contrast between life as a POW in the United States and life in postwar Germany was a point stressed by most of the former POWs who wrote to Aliceville mayor Gerald Stabler after the war. A sample:



I often think on the days I spent in Alabama as a prisoner of war. In this time I never was hungry. But today in Germany I am always hungry. . . . There is very little bread, we have no potatoes, no flour and no sugar. We have also very little fat and dripping. There are days, my mother does not know what to cook for the family. But we hope it will be better in autumn, when the harvest is brought in. But I think till this time, there will be very bitter days. When I am hungry, I often wish to be a prisoner in the U.S.A. That's very sad. That's the same with the clothes. When [I became] a soldier I was a young man and no[w] all my clothes are to[o] small. I am very glad that there is now summer. But what will happen in winter?

Gerhard Stroh
Tubingen am Neckar
French Zone
Germany

September 15, 1947

For a long time I was PW in the camp [at Aliceville]. Often I have gone through your town. I am sorry that I was not able to speak often with the American people, but I can say, that I have been treated there very well. Now I am discharged. When I came to Germany, [I discovered] that I have lost all and often I must think of the good lif[f]e, we have had in your country. Although I was a PW at that time, I have not to take care for [clothing] and food. Both are very scanty here.

Johannes Peters
Kreis Schleswig
British Zone
Germany

(Letters courtesy Mrs. Gerald Stabler)

STEPHEN FLECK



Above: Dr. Stephen Fleck today. **Inset:** Captain Stephen Fleck and his wife Louise Harlan Fleck on their wedding day, October 13, 1945. **Right:** Stephen Fleck (*in uniform*) in Heemstede, Holland, 1945, with his first cousin Arthur Van Cleef (*left*), Van Cleef's wife, Lily (*center*), and their children Dori and Joost (*back row*).

(Photographs of Dr. and Mrs. Fleck and the Van Cleefs courtesy Anna Fleck Jacobs; photograph of Dr. Fleck today by Chip Cooper)

The journey that led to the Aliceville internment camp was a long and, at times, a dangerous one for Captain Stephen Fleck of the U.S. Army Medical Corps. Less than a decade earlier, in 1933, Fleck, a student and a Jew, had fled his native Germany to escape the increasing anti-Semitism. In 1941, following his completion of medical school in the United States, Fleck became a U.S. citizen, and soon thereafter he enlisted in the military. The shortage of doctors at the new POW camps led to his temporary assignment to the Aliceville camp. During his stay at the facility, Fleck's work in helping diagnose a diphtheria epidemic and, possibly, in preventing several murders [see page 15] was of critical importance in the

camp's early months.

For Fleck, the work with prisoners of war in Aliceville was merely a beginning of such duty. Following assignments at Camp Rucker, Alabama, and Camp Cullman, New Jersey, the young physician was transferred overseas. The next time Fleck encountered German POWs was shortly before VE Day near the Czech border, when he was assigned to a detention camp for 80,000 German prisoners. Detaining the prisoners was not a difficult task, according to Fleck, "as the Germans were only interested in not being caught by the Russians." But many of the prisoners had been exposed to typhus, and Fleck's central concern was to keep the captives "reasonably healthy so there wouldn't

be any epidemics." Later, Fleck participated in the evacuation of several concentration camps, and the final months of his duty were spent working with medical teams shuttling released concentration camp victims across "Czechoslovakia—then kind of a no-man's land—back to their home countries, mostly France and the Low Countries."

In the weeks following the war's end, Fleck searched the concentration camps for his relatives, primarily his first cousin Arthur Van Cleef and his family. Finding no trace of them, the worried Fleck finally located the Van Cleefs in their own house in Holland.

Arthur and his wife Lily had escaped death and the camps by spending the war years hiding in various attics in Amsterdam; their children, Dori and Joost, had lived on separate Dutch farms.

For the past thirty-five years, Dr. Fleck has lived in New Haven, Connecticut. Recently he retired from Yale University as Professor of Psychiatry and Public Health and director of the Yale Psychiatric Institute.

pottery-making, embroidery, and ceramics were taught regularly, and a subsequent outpouring of visual art resulted. Exhibits were held often and occasionally shown to visitors, who were impressed by the quality of the work.

In early 1944, two of the camp's finest artists, Herman Kalbe and Hans Fanselow, were granted permission to draw fifty pen-and-ink sketches of the camp (*pages 11, 19, 22*), and they spent the remainder of the year sketching scenes of the daily lives of both captives and captors.

Many of the art classes required special equipment that the U.S. military authorities would not supply. In the face of such impediments, the prisoners often responded ingeniously. In the pottery shop, for example, a wood-fired kiln was constructed from salvaged materials. The same shop also contained a homemade grinder capable of preparing fine clays for firing.

Although most musical instruments were purchased from canteen profits, at least two were homemade. Using local wood, animal bones, scrap wire and metal, the POWs built a piano. No less inventive was a working violin which the prisoners built from matchsticks (*page 19*).

The evenings in the Aliceville camp were also filled with activity. The symphony orchestra that had been formed in the first months that the camp was open had now grown to over forty members, and concerts featuring the music of Beethoven, Haydn, Wagner, Verdi and other composers played to large, appreciative audiences. Performances were given in the 1000-seat amphitheatre (*page 19*), which the prisoners had built from bricks they had molded and baked themselves. In addition to the symphony, the POWs formed six small bands, six glee clubs,

WORLD WAR II - TIME-LIFE BOOKS - ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

**BY RONALD H. BAILEY
AND THE EDITORS OF TIME-LIFE BOOKS**

PRISONERS OF WAR

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dy in June 1944, he was captured while on a recon-
naissance patrol. Following a stint of 10 months in
various German prison camps—he once spent five
days in solitary confinement—Kleber was liberated
by troops of General George S. Patton's Third Army in
April of 1945.

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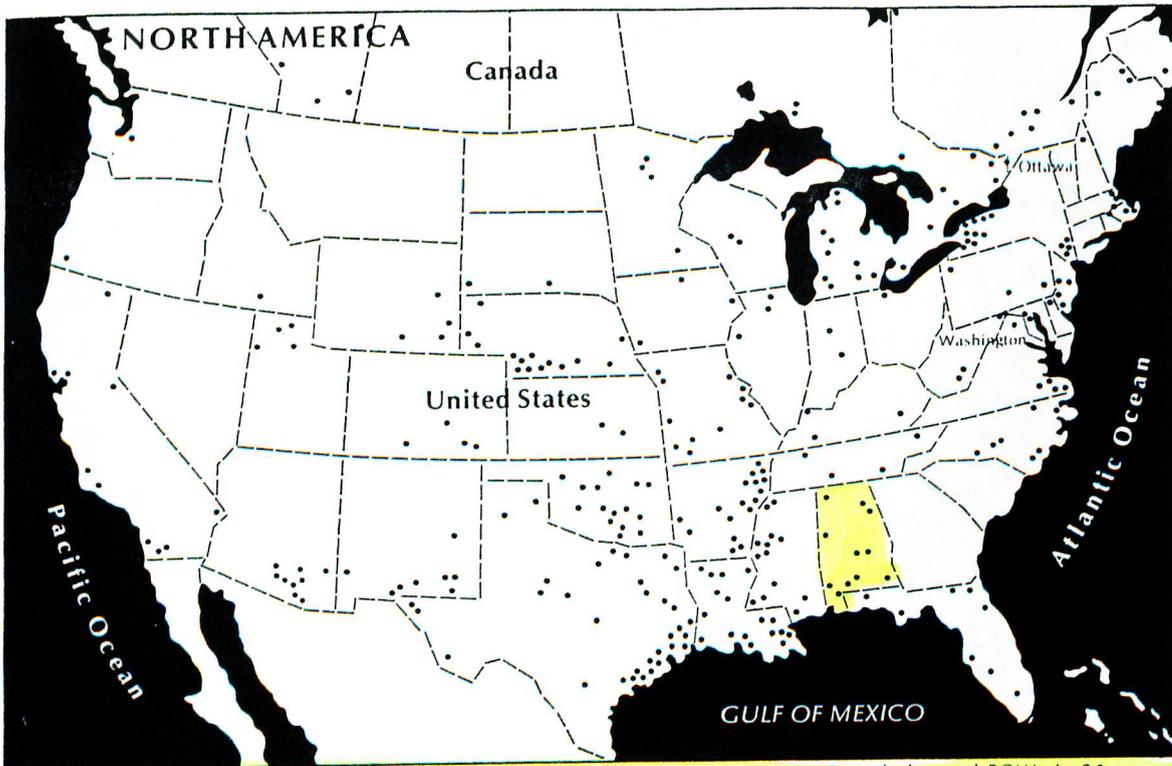
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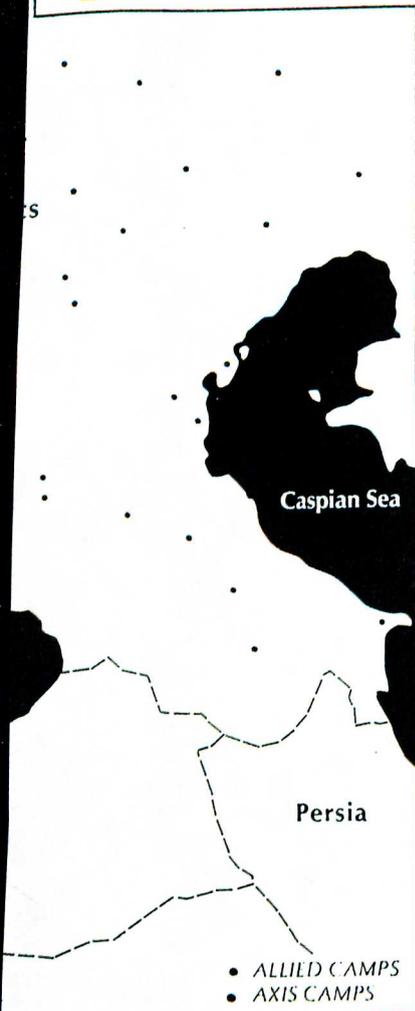
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In June 1944 the United States had nearly 300 camps; by 1945 there were 666. Canada housed POWs in 21 camps.



Germany had 90 installations, Italy 21.



Japan's home islands contained 176 camps; its Asian possessions held 500 others.

A WORLD OF MILITARY PRISONS

The global sweep of World War II was reflected in the way most of the 15 million prisoners of war were distributed. As shown in these maps, camps were established on three continents, on the islands of the United Kingdom and Japan, and in Japan's overseas possessions. Allied installations are indicated by blue dots, Axis camps by red dots. Each dot stands for one camp, except in the Far East, where each dot represents about three camps.

Japan held most of its POWs on the Asian mainland and in such wartime island acquisitions as the Dutch East Indies. The majority of German camps were in the Reich and in German-ruled western Poland. After 1943, Germans took over

Italy's camps, including those in Greece.

The distribution of the U.S.S.R.'s camps roughly followed that of the existing prison network, augmented by new camps in Soviet-controlled eastern Poland. Relatively few POW installations are shown on the map below; although the Soviet Union ran some 3,000 camps, only about 5 per cent of them can be documented accurately. Partly to take advantage of the prisoners' labor potential, the United States and Canada built many camps in agricultural areas. Most British camps were in England, with a scattering in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Everywhere, the number of camps and prisoners changed monthly with the progress of the War.



Between 1940 and 1945 Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States in-Rome Axis maintained the camps shown above. British camps numbered 86; the U.S.S.R. ran at least 1

ACCOMMODATIONS ON THE GI PLAN

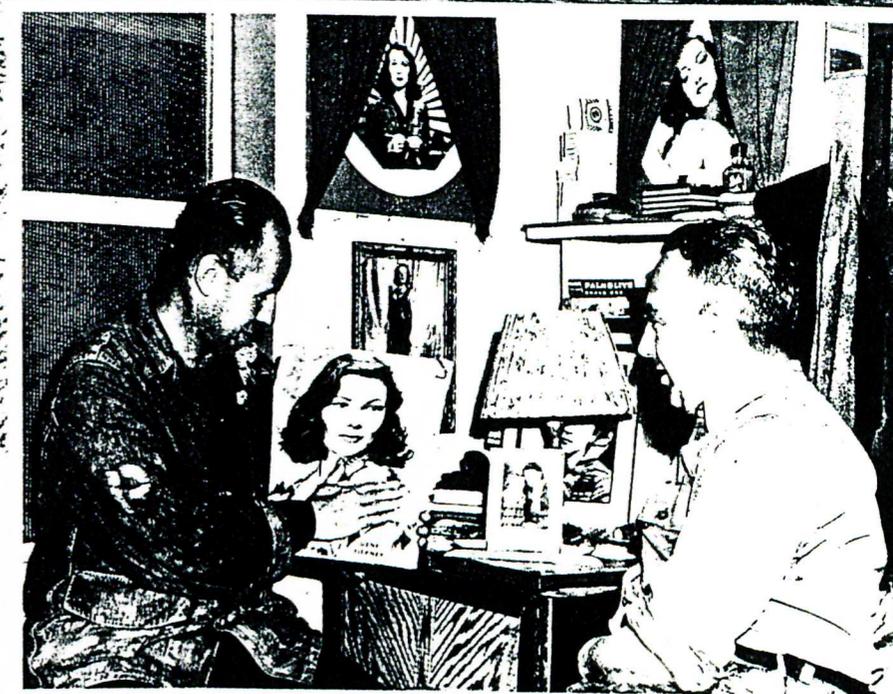
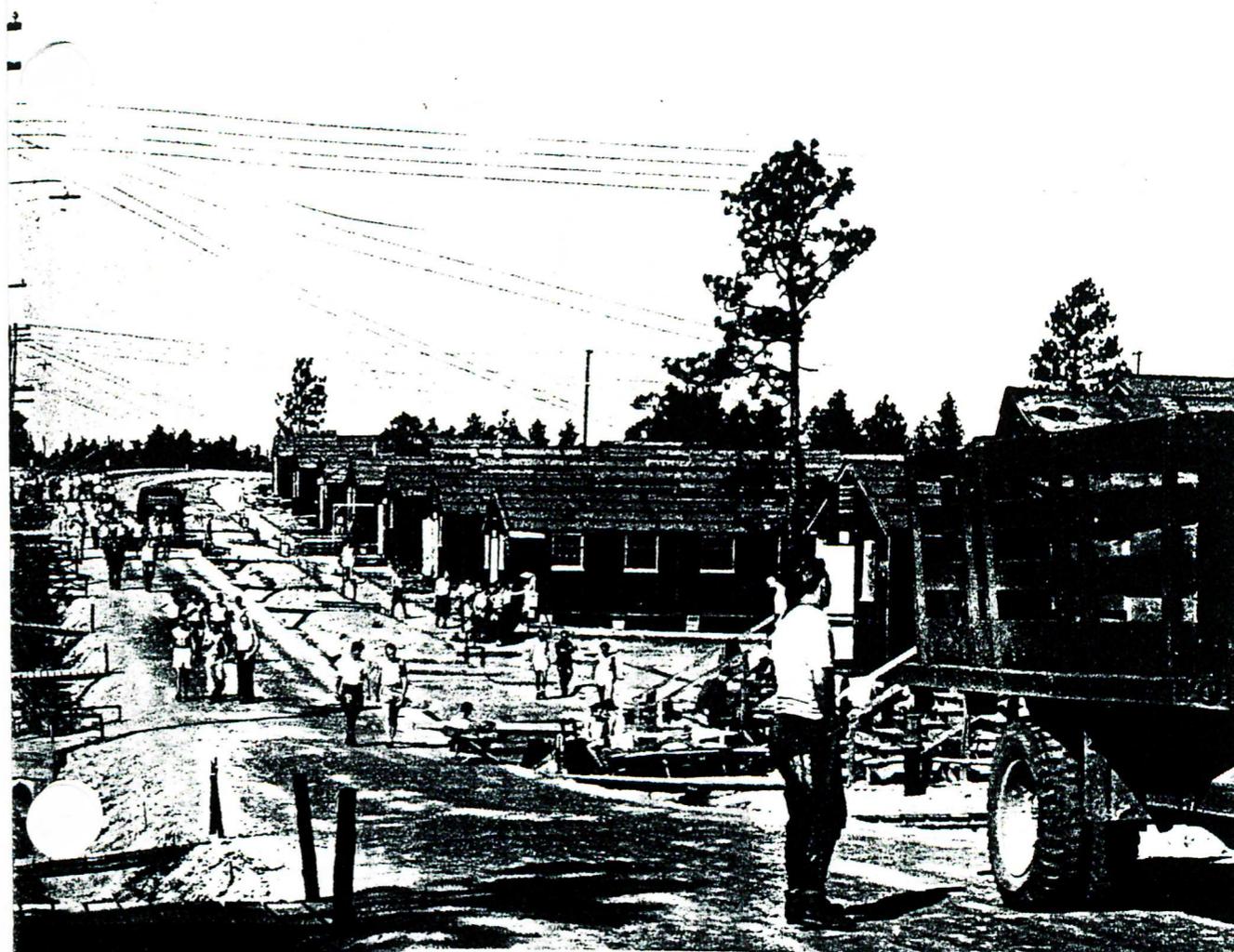
While keeping a careful eye on Geneva Convention rules, the Army built prison camps in the United States as economical-ly as possible. Materials were utilitarian: pine lumber, tar paper and concrete. To conserve heating fuel, the Army located many camps in southern states, where the climate was uncomfortable for most Europeans. A new arrival in the Southwest wrote home: "The heat is so intense one dares not venture outside."

For all their drabness and despite their location, the camps impressed most prisoners. Amenities that were considered luxurious in the camps of their own armed forces—among them modern plumbing and well-stocked canteens—were commonplace in American POW compounds. A comment by a prisoner in Camp Trinidad, Colorado, was typical: "I have never as a soldier been as well off as I am here; we are being treated much better than we were by our own officers." An Afrika Korps veteran struck an arrogant note in comments about the good treatment, telling an interpreter, "When Germany wins the War, this will make at least one good point in your favor."

A wide, unpaved street separates rows of tar-paper prison barracks at Camp Polk, near Leesville, Louisiana—a camp that housed American GIs as well as prisoners of war.



Prisoners in an enlisted men's compound at Camp Blanding, Florida, relax in GI comfort: Army cots, magazines and a wall that is covered with pinups of American movie stars.



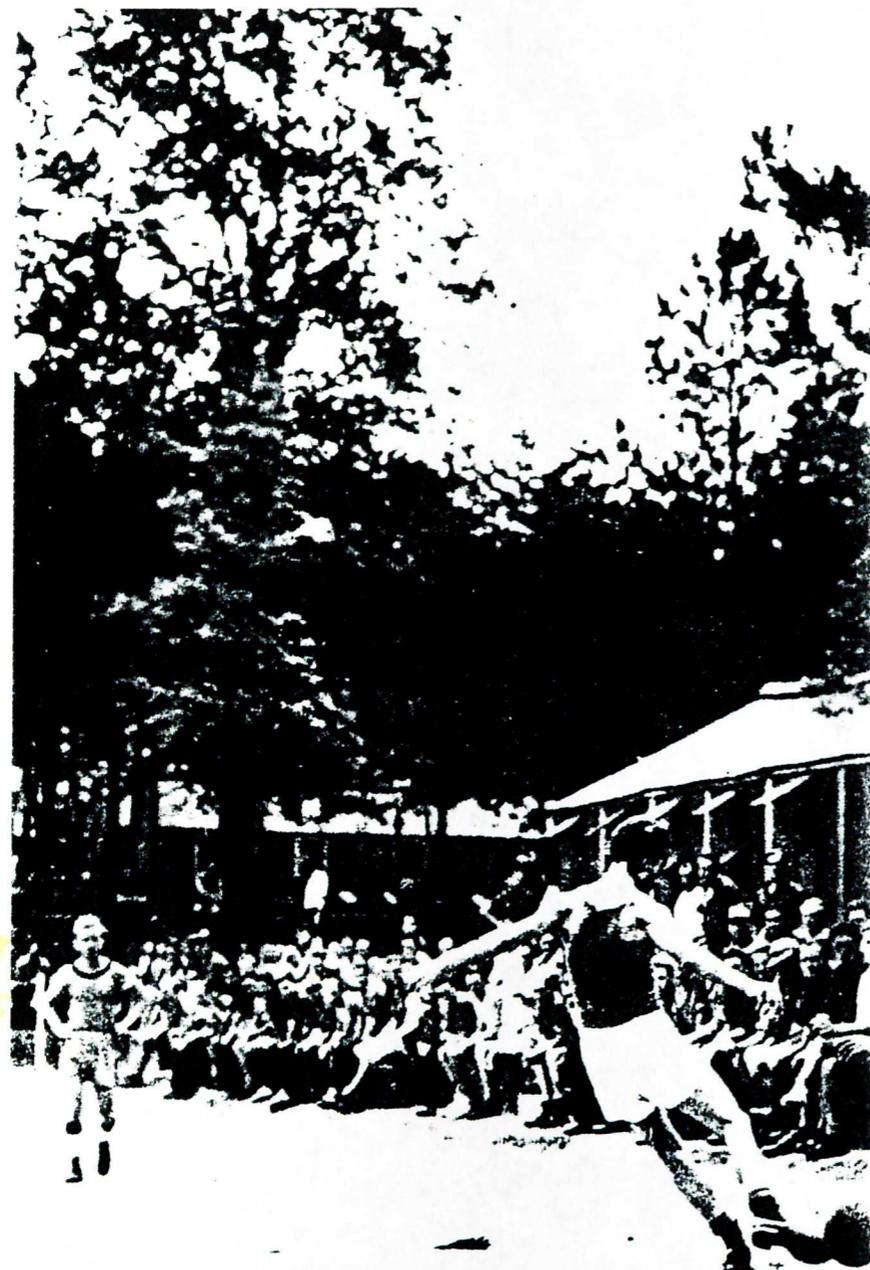
Two officer-prisoners admire the same pinups as those available to the enlisted men, but enjoy them in more comfortable quarters—rank's privilege, even in captivity.

IN PURSUIT OF PLEASURE

In the evening and on days off from work, POWs in American camps were free to engage in a wide range of activities. Prisoner orchestras performed at concerts and dances, where men danced together. At the camp in Aliceville, Alabama, prisoners maintained a garden of topiary, or sculpted shrubs. Prisoners at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, caught water moccasins and used the snakeskins to make souvenirs, which they sold to the guards. Artists painted landscapes, still lifes and, from memory, battlefield scenes for exhibitions that were community events in Fort Du Pont, Delaware, and Camp Como, Mississippi.

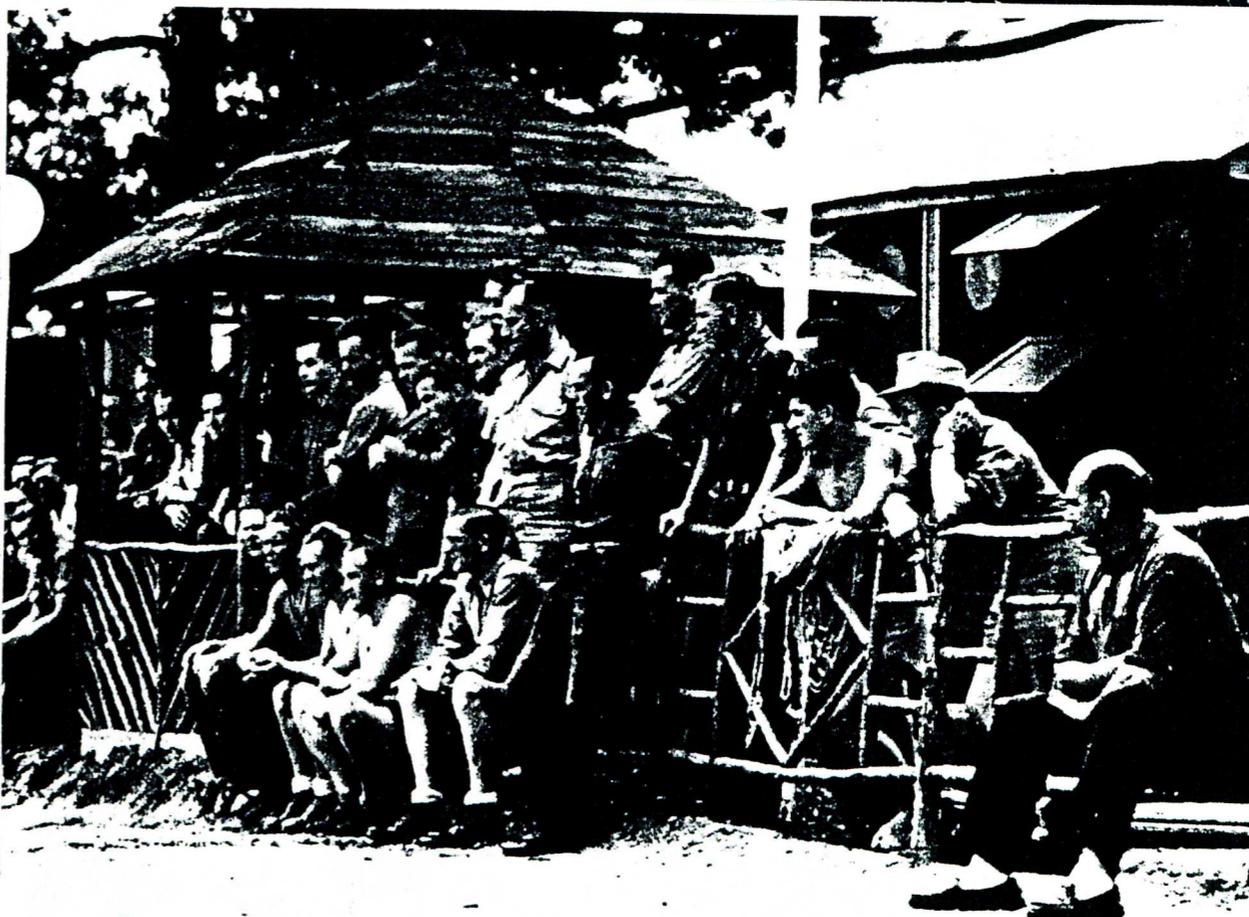
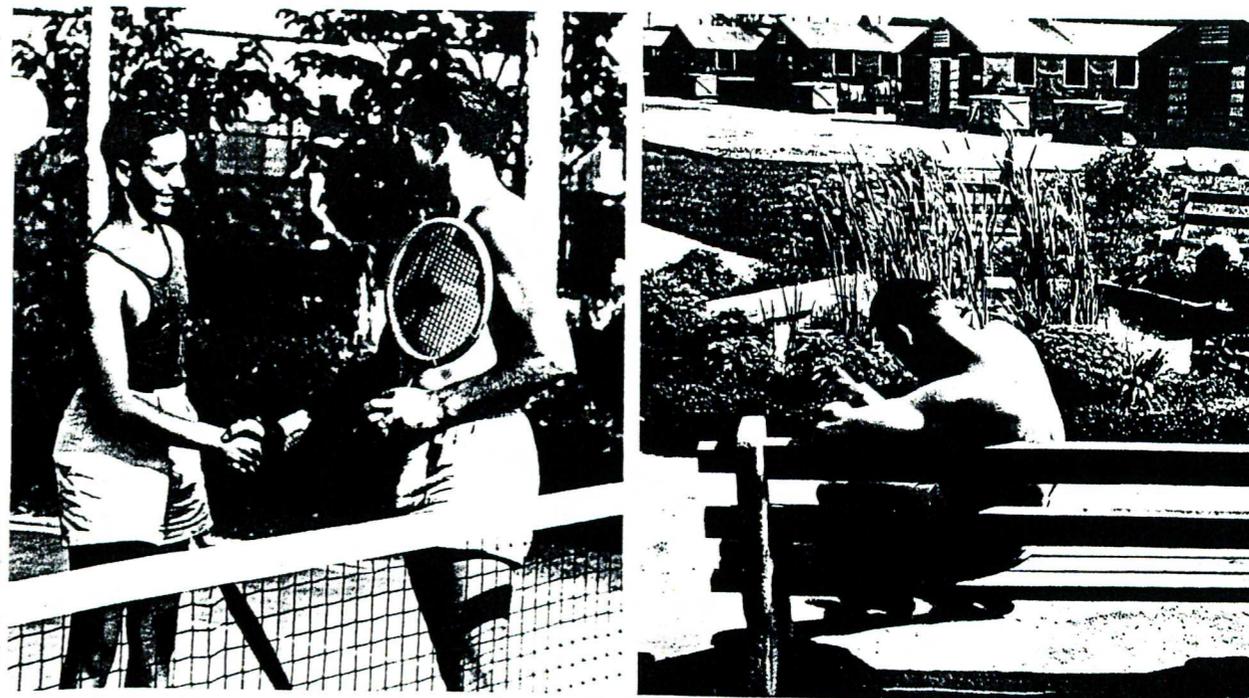
Resourceful prisoners at Camp Crowder, Missouri, established a zoo, complete with an aviary containing parrots, lovebirds and quail. The animals included alligators, monkeys, white mice and a pig.

Sports were the most popular pastime, but the American football that guards attempted to teach the prisoners was not a success—when the ball was snapped, both teams converged on the ball-carrier. Soccer teams drew ardent fans in every compound and attracted some American supporters. Civilians from Atlanta, Nebraska, pulled off U.S. Route 6 to look at matches through the wire at the nearby camp. At Opelika, Alabama, guards applauded their favorite soccer teams from the watchtowers, and when off duty, they brought their families to the games.



Two POWs shake hands after a tennis match at a prisoner-built court at Camp Breckinridge. Other recreational projects that were completed by camp inmates included bowling alleys, bocce courts—even beer gardens.

A prisoner (opposite) relaxes with a beer beside a garden in a small park—plants planted and tended by POW gardeners.



Spectators watch intently as two of their soccer teams do battle; injured knees were a frequent complaint in the hospitals at prisoner-of-war camps.



Prisoners mend uniforms at Fort Meade, Maryland; a sign above them lists the English and German words for parts of garments.



led by a guard, two prisoners use a mule-drawn plow and a rake to cultivate a Tennessee farmer's cornfield, near the POW camp at Crossville.

Three Afrika Korps veterans belly up to a camp canteen bar in Aliceville, Alabama, to sample an American staple: Coca-Cola. At some camps POWs could also buy beer and wine at the commandant's discretion.



PRISONER OF WAR
 — CANTEEN —
 — CAMP RUCKER, ALA. —
 NOT GOOD IF DETACHED
 16460A
 2 CENTS

Coupons redeemable at the canteen served as POWs' wages under terms of the Geneva Convention.



A prisoner stocks canteen shelves with American toiletries, candy and cigarettes. Goods ranging from cameras to cigarette lighters were also available.