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American Reeducation of German POWs, 1943-1946

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of History  
East Tennessee State University

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In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Pam Croley  
August, 2006

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Committee Chair, Dr. Stephen Fritz  
Dr. Colin Baxter  
Dr. William Douglas Burgess

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Keywords: Reeducation, German Prisoners of War, Intellectual Diversion

## ABSTRACT

American Reeducation of German POWs, 1943-1946

by

Pam Croley

The United States held almost 500,000 enemy combatants within her borders during World War II. Out of those 500,000 men, 380,000 were from Nazi Germany. Nazi POWs were confined to camps built near small rural towns in almost every state. It was not something that was well known to the American public. Even less known was the American Military's effort, through reeducation, to introduce Hitler's soldiers to a new political ideology—democracy. This thesis will explore how the reeducation program was formed; examine the people, both German and American, who participated in it; and make a determination on whether or not it was successful. While Special Projects did not completely win over the majority of the German POWs, it was my finding that for the Americans to have done nothing when faced with such a situation would have been foolish.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated in memory of my father, Robert L. Croley, whose love and support is greatly missed. His absence on such events is always felt.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank Dr. Stephen Fritz for his continued guidance, support, and patience during this entire project. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Colin Baxter and Dr. Doug Burgess who were always willing to answer questions and offer support.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Great Britain declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939. Soon after, large numbers of German and Italian prisoners began arriving on the small island country. Great Britain did not have room or the resources to care for them. The United States did not enter the war until December 8, 1941, when it declared war on Japan. Hitler declared war on the United States three days later. By 1941, Great Britain was overwhelmed trying to care for thousands of axis prisoners of war. The problem had become critical and Great Britain turned to the U.S. for help.

The United States had the room that Great Britain lacked but American authorities were reluctant to become closely involved with the British. Both countries had experienced problems trying to work with each other when it came to matters of the war. The United States had its ideas about the direction the war was headed. Relations were strained and American authorities wanted to preserve their ability to make independent decisions as much as possible. Sharing the problem of the POWs would mean working with the British. However, an agreement was finally reached and the United States agreed to accept 50,000 prisoners from the British in August of 1942. Those numbers would increase dramatically in the months to come.<sup>1</sup>

The defeat of Field Marshall Erwin Rommel in North Africa in Spring of 1943 meant that thousands of his elite Afrika Korps were among the first enemy combatants sent to the States. Those men and other enemy soldiers were sent to the United States at a rate

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<sup>1</sup>Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in the United States* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), xiii.

of 22,000 per month. Arrangements for their care and containment were made quickly by the American authorities and without any past body of experience to guide them. The POW program had not been planned since America military authorities assumed prisoners would be handled the same way as during WWI—that is, kept overseas in Europe. Problems of housing, feeding, security, and obtaining qualified personnel to operate the camps were not planned out ahead. It was a massive operation undertaken while battles were fought on two fronts. By the end of the war in 1945, more than 425,000 Axis POWs (approximately 371,000 Germans, 50,000 Italians, and 4,000 Japanese) were held in 650 camps. There were 125 base camps and another 425 branches or "satellite" camps located in the interior of the United States.<sup>2</sup>

When enemy combatants were first captured, they were disarmed and moved away from the combat areas. Temporary camps for processing were set up in Oran, Casablanca, and Marrakech where prisoners were processed. The POWs were relieved of all their personal belongings, such as watches, family pictures, and wedding rings. Most of the time those items were just placed in a pile and their captors helped themselves to what they wanted. Even the buttons on their shirts were sometimes removed as souvenirs. Medical exams were given and the wounded were transferred to hospitals where they received the same care as wounded American soldiers. Captives were assigned a serial number they kept for the duration of their imprisonment. The serial number consisted of three components. The first number indicated where they had been captured. The next

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<sup>2</sup>Michael R. Waters, *Lone Star Stalag: German Prisoners of War at Camp Hearne* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 3.



component indicated their native country, G for Germany, I for Italian, A for Austria. The final component was the prisoner's individual consecutively assigned serial number.<sup>3</sup>

Some prisoners were not processed until they reached the United States because of time constraints. The processing in the States differed slightly. Instead of the country they were captured in being the first component, the service command the POW was assigned to was represented. Fingerprints, a three-page medical and personal history completed by the POW, and picture were also part of the processing. Copies were made in triplicate, with one copy kept for American files. The other two copies were sent onto the International Red Cross, which was responsible for making sure the Geneva Convention was followed, and the Swiss authorities, who were responsible for notifying the prisoners' family of their capture. Once prisoners were processed, they were sent overseas to the United States. One problem involved the transporting of thousands of POWs across the Atlantic. That was solved when it was decided to use "Liberty Ships." The ships brought supplies and troops to combat zones in Africa and Europe. Instead of those ships returning empty, they were loaded with POWs for the six-week journey to the States. Once reached, the sheer size and isolation of the U.S. made any attempt at escape virtually impossible.<sup>4</sup>

The United States was unprepared for the influx of enemy prisoners who arrived on its shores the summer of 1943. After the ratification of the Geneva Convention of 1929, the United States did not make any provisions for a peacetime organization to deal with the future internment and care of enemy combatants. The Geneva Convention of 1929 called

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<sup>3</sup>Krammer, 4.

<sup>4</sup>Krammer, 16-17.

for the humane treatment of prisoners of war and established standards for internment conditions, food and clothing, discipline, labor, finance, protection, and repatriation. The conditions were defined in two treaties, collectively referred to by the general public as the "Geneva Convention." It was signed on July 27, 1929, by forty-seven nations. The two treaties were intended "to diminish the rigors of war and mitigate the fate of the prisoners."<sup>5</sup>

The United States had never been responsible for more than a few thousand foreign prisoners of war within its borders. The number of wars during the late nineteenth century finally convinced world leaders that some type of program must be developed to deal with the treatment of prisoners of war. Twenty-six nations, in response to that problem, came together and agreed to the Hague Convention of 1899. It was the first agreement of its kind to be approved by so many countries. A section on prisoners of war dealt with the duties and responsibilities of both the captor and the prisoners. It was revised in 1907 to correct a few problems. The main problem, however, was never resolved. It had to do with the stipulation that bound signers only if all the belligerents had signed. That caused problems during World War I. Serbia and Montenegro had never signed the 1907 treaty. That meant the only treaty binding the United States and Germany during the Great War was the antiquated Treaty of Prussia. It was signed in 1785 as a result of the problems Hessian soldiers encountered during the American Revolution.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>George Lewis and John Mewha, *History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army: 1776-1945*. Department of the Army. Pamphlet No. 20-213 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1955), 66.

<sup>6</sup>Arthur L. Smith, *The War for the German Mind: Reeducating Hitler's Soldiers* (Providence, R.I.: Berghan, 1996), 2-3.

During World War I, the number of POWs was minimal. There were only 1,346 German naval personnel and 4,541 alien civilians held within the borders of the United States. The majority of POWs captured during the Great War were kept overseas. At the beginning of WWII, assumptions were made that responsibility for POWs would fall on the shoulders of America's allies again. Twenty years later the War Department's lack of foresight led to a host of problems in the POW camps.<sup>7</sup>

The War Department did not have an agency that was responsible for planning for the care and containment of POWs. Instead the Provost Marshall General's Office (PMGO) that had previously been in charge of that program was dissolved in 1919. Senior officials had warned the department to utilize the experience gained during WWI and maintain the organization during peacetime. Their warnings were ignored. Now that war seemed imminent in the late 1930s, there was no agency in place to deal with POWs. In December of 1937, the War Department finally published a Military Police field manual that called for the organization of a Provost Marshall General Department "with responsibilities similar to those of the PMG (Provost Marshall General) and AEF (American Expeditionary Forces) in 1918 and with a provost Marshall in the theater of operations . . . charged with the reception, care, disposition, and security of all POWs in the theater." Although the manual was published in 1937, the Military Personnel Division was still in charge of the "policy, planning, administration, and the supervision of prisoner of

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<sup>7</sup>Smith, 3.

war affairs."<sup>8</sup> The War Department was not prepared to transfer those responsibilities to the Provost Marshall General until war was declared by the United States.

The lack of foresight on the part of the War Department meant the responsibility for POWs initially fell to the local military corps and departmental commanders. Authorization was granted by the Department of Justice and the War Department for the construction of three permanent internment camps, which were capable of holding only three thousand prisoners per camp. Considering the hundreds of thousands of prisoners who were turned over to the care of the United States, the arrangements proved woefully insufficient.<sup>9</sup>

President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Major General Allen Gullion as Provost Marshall General in July 1941. The War Department ignored Guillion's recommendation to build more camp sites. Lack of funds was the excuse. The money was not found until after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941. After that, ten temporary camps were authorized, as well as a few permanent camps capable of housing three-thousand men each. American authorities still vastly underestimated the number of prisoners they eventually received.<sup>10</sup>

By early 1942, the War Department wanted all POWs captured by American units to be removed from combat areas and interned in the United States. Overseas forces had neither the time nor the manpower to fight both a war and guard enemy combatants. The War Department still anticipated more enemy aliens than POWs, even after estimated

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<sup>8</sup>Lewis and Mewha, 70.

<sup>9</sup>Lewis and Mewha, 69.

<sup>10</sup>Ron Robin, *The Barbed-Wire College: Re-educating German POWs in the United States During World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 18-19.

figures for both groups of 100,000 surfaced in March 1942. They continued to plan for the care of enemy aliens instead of planning a program for prisoners of war. That attitude changed when Great Britain requested help with Axis POWs. American authorities anticipated 50,000 POWs from Great Britain with one month's notice and another 150,000 with three months notice. They thought the remaining POWs would be sent to Canada. They were wrong.<sup>11</sup>

Communication with prisoners was difficult and something that would haunt the reeducation program and hinder efforts to reeducate German POWs. There was a severe shortage of qualified interpreters. The majority of soldiers with linguistic experience had been snapped up quickly by Military Intelligence and other branches of the military. The PMGO (Provost Marshall General's Office) was forced to use English-speaking German prisoners as interpreters. Unfortunately, most of them were hard-core Nazis. Allowing them to be the spokesmen for the camps was one of the reasons the Nazi element managed to gain control of most of the prisoners. American military authorities had little experience with German politics or culture. The segregation of the Nazis from the more apolitical and anti-Nazi prisoners in the camps was not a priority. American camp commanders were short staffed and the personnel they had was under qualified. It was much easier to allow the Germans to control their own men. It led to a Nazi reign of terror in the camps that made the plans to reeducate the German prisoners politically much more difficult. It took

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<sup>11</sup>Lewis and Mewha, 83.

the anger of the American public and the intervention of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to stop the Nazi control of the camps and force the start of a reeducation program.<sup>12</sup>

Another mistake the U.S. Army made was not taking advantage of the initial period of disorientation experienced by the German POW. During that time, the German prisoner was more or less in a state of shock that resulted from their being out of their comfort zone—the strict, rigidly controlled environment of the German Army.

As an organization, the German Army went to great lengths to instill a sense of family; recruitment, training, and replacement policies, as well as relations between officers and men, aimed at creating and maintaining in the *Landser* [foot soldier or infantryman] the sense of belonging to a purposeful and powerful community of men who were enduring the same hardships and sharing the same fate.<sup>13</sup>

German soldiers were trained to follow all orders without question. Because of the close relationships formed in the German Army, “the German soldier had an enormous faith and confidence in his noncoms and junior officers, a confidence that led to his fierce resilience even under the most severe strain.”<sup>14</sup> Their days were highly structured and each minute was planned out for them. After a period of time, it even became painful for them to think for themselves. The German soldier lost any sense of an individuality he might have once possessed. Once captured, and out of their comfort zone, they were at a loss regarding their next move. It was a perfect time to interrogate them for

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<sup>12</sup>Robert Billinger, *Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2000), 13-14.

<sup>13</sup>Stephen G. Fritz, *Frontsoldaten* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1995), 235.

<sup>14</sup>Fritz, 235.

military information. According to Ron Robin, the British took advantage of that time to collect valuable military information. The American authorities did not.<sup>15</sup>

Because of the severe lack of housing, prisoners were held in unused sections of military bases, abandoned Civilian Conservation Corps Camps, fairgrounds, and auditoriums. The Army Corps of Engineers was responsible for building POW camps as rapidly as possible. Camps were located in rural areas primarily in the South and Southwest. A more isolated location far from the coast and vital war industries was important for security reasons; it cut down on escape and sabotage attempts. It was also less expensive to maintain in the winter. The Geneva Convention of 1929 required that POW camps be equal to the base camps of the country holding the prisoners. The same food, clothing, medical care, exercise, and recreation offered to American troops must be offered to the prisoners of war. Camps, according to the Geneva Convention, must be located at least 170 miles from the coast and 150 miles from the Mexican and Canadian borders. The camps could not be located near munitions factories, shipyards, or too near war related industries. The ideal base, according to the Army Corps of Engineers, should be 350 acres, five miles from a railroad, and 500 feet from a public roadway. The perimeter of the camp was clearly defined with guard towers and surrounded with barbed wire. Each camp was divided into four compounds that held 500-700 men per compound. That allowed for 2,000 to 4,000 prisoners in each base camp. Each compound contained four barracks, a mess hall, and an infirmary. There were also an administration building, a recreation hall, a processing center, and a soccer field. The entire base camp shared

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<sup>15</sup>Robin, 31-32.

numerous facilities such as a hospital, a chapel, showers, laundry tubs, a post office, a warehouse, and a utility area. By the end of the war, 155 base camps had been constructed. Smaller branch or "satellite" camps were built so the prisoners could be located closer to areas that required their labor. The approximate number of base and branch camps was 511. Depending of the source, there is some discrepancy about the actual number of camps.<sup>16</sup>

One of the base camps was located at Hearne, Texas, a rural community of thirty-five hundred residents. The residents of the town knew they did not have the population to attract any of the large war-related industries, but they did meet the requirements for a POW camp. In 1942, Colonel B.M. Bryan of the PMGO sent engineers to perform a preliminary survey of the area. The survey determined that an area one-half mile northwest of Hearne was suitable for a camp. The government purchased 720 acres from five landowners for a price of \$27,500. Construction began soon after and proceeded quickly. Temporary construction workers rented motel rooms and spent money at local eating establishments. Some of the men rented rooms in private homes. The labor shortage on local farms created by the war was also alleviated by having POW labor in the area.<sup>17</sup>

Concordia, Kansas was the location of another camp. Not everyone was happy about having a POW camp near their town. Many had family members overseas fighting and did not want the enemy in their very backyard, but most welcomed the extra income.

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<sup>16</sup>Krammer, 28.

<sup>17</sup>Waters, 4.



Charles Everett operated a small hardware store in Concordia with his father. He described the town's reaction:

There was a mixed attitude [about the camp being built]. Some people welcomed it, and other people didn't like it. Some were afraid the German soldiers would get out and harm people. Others thought it was great to have something here that would bring people into town—soldiers and so forth. It was the end of the Depression and it made a difference that way.<sup>18</sup>

POWs were taken to their assigned camps aboard trains. Train travel was determined to be the most efficient means of transportation of large groups of prisoners. Accommodations were comfortable and prisoners traveled in coaches, not boxcars. Many of the prisoners had to travel thousands of miles into the interior of the United States to reach their camps. For most it was their first glimpse of the size and beauty of America. Most were in awe of what they observed through the windows of the train. The country seemed endless and what is more important, there was no sign of the war that raged overseas. One POW commented, "En route through Kentucky and Virginia we pressed our noses against the window panes to take in the sights, The first impression we had was the abundance of automobiles everywhere."<sup>19</sup>

The Nazi propaganda machine had led German soldiers to believe that the *Luftwaffe* had bombed major American cities. Some of the more cynical prisoners claimed the trains were being detoured through areas not devastated by German bombers in order to fool them. Most prisoners were impressed with their first glimpse of the United States and pleasantly surprised by the treatment they received. Rheinhold Pabel recalled his trip to the

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<sup>18</sup>Lowell A. May, *Camp Concordia: German POWs in the Midwest* (Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>19</sup>Krammer, 9.

POW camp as a reassuring experience. Pabel wrote that the upholstered coaches his group was transported in were a vast improvement over the box cars the German Army used to transport their own troops. Another POW, Fritz Haus, questioned a friendly American Chaplain named Gustave Zoch about why they were being treated so well, and received the following response:

Firstly, well-fed prisoners were content and happy, and easier to control than hungry ones; they caused little trouble. The prison authorities were not keen to have constant riots and strikes on their hands . . . Secondly, they wanted to demonstrate that the American democratic way of life was superior to the dictatorships of Hitler and Mussolini; Americans were proud of their liberties and freedom of speech, thought, and religion, without having to fear arrest or punishment . . . But thirdly, and most important, they were deeply afraid that many thousands of American prisoners in German hands might suffer retaliation and reprisals if America does violate the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war. Atrocities and irregularities must not occur lest the Germans have an excuse to rough-handle American captives, as they do Russian and Polish POWs.<sup>20</sup>

There were a few prisoners who managed to find something to complain about. One POW's description of his train ride was less than enthusiastic. He claimed it was a "brutalizing experience that lasted about one hundred hours . . . the consequences were indigestion and blood pressure of the severest type." A "death march" was another prisoner's description:

We were put into box cars . . . 60 to 100 men per car. It was a long and terrible ride. All we had to eat was orange jam, which they [the Americans] deliberately gave to us to make us sick . . . They had previous experience with this. Everybody had diarrhea. A few of the old men died—how many I don't know. I just saw them throw the dead bodies off the train.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Waters, 19-20.

<sup>21</sup>Krammer, 28.

Once the prisoners reached their assigned camps they walked back into a familiar world. Gone was the fear, instability, and the confusion over America not being bombed or affected to any great degree from the war. German military traditions and command structures had been continued in the camps. The German military hierarchy was firmly in place. One prisoner wrote that it was like coming home. Erving Goffman described the type of controlled and sealed environment soldiers were used to existing in as a "Total Institution." Goffman wrote that the "individual's previous experiences were forcibly erased." The soldier had no other frame of reference but the military. Once captured, that was lost. Once back in a military setting, such as a POW camp, the soldier was much stronger. He regained his sense of belonging.<sup>22</sup>

Prisoners were placed under the guard of American soldiers not qualified for the positions they held. Most had been rejected from serving overseas; the German POWs were the closest they would ever get to the war. The prisoners were seen as a source for Nazi souvenirs such as medals, decorations, daggers, or even shirt buttons. POW camps were "dumping grounds" for American soldiers unfit for any other type of service. In addition, the guards were poorly trained and unskilled. The position they had been assigned was one of low priority and they knew it. Few could speak German. Maxwell McKnight described the situation: "We were pretty much dredging the bottom of the barrel. We had all sorts of kooks and wacky people."<sup>23</sup> Men were assigned to the camps who had no experience *and* also a great hate for the German POWs they guarded. The commanding

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<sup>22</sup>Robin, 30-31.

<sup>23</sup>Krammer, 40.

officers of most POW camps did not know or care what the requirements were for a guard. No one felt screening procedures were necessary. American soldiers rejected for other military assignments and classified as mentally ill were put in the camps. It took a few tragedies to change the minds of the people in charge.<sup>24</sup>

One such incident occurred at Fort Douglas, Utah on July 9, 1945. A private who had been court-martialed twice and never served in combat had been assigned to the camp. The guard had a few beers and came back to the camp. German POWs, who had been working on the beet harvest, were asleep in their tents. The guard loaded a .30 caliber machine gun, turned it toward the forty-three tents filled with sleeping prisoners and opened fire. Eight POWs were killed during the attack and twenty wounded. During the investigation that followed, the guard confessed to feeling a deep hatred of Germans and wanted them dead. No one thought to ask his opinion of the people he guarded until that point. A similar incident happened at Camp Ashby, Virginia. A guard fired seven rounds into the camp compound. There were no injuries that time. The guard admitted he did not like Germans and wanted to "get" one. These were situations that might have been avoided if the guards had been screened and trained for their positions.<sup>25</sup>

Intellectually unarmed, the guards were not prepared for the growing ideological battle within the camps. Guard-prisoner arguments often turned to politics. One popular example put forth by the German POWs was the charge that America discriminated against "Negroes," which was true. The American guards knew little, if anything, about countering

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<sup>24</sup>Judith Gansberg, *Stalag, USA: The Remarkable Story of German POWs in America* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1977), 42.

<sup>25</sup>Gansberg, 43-44.

such arguments. The War Department realized the position of the guards and published a 13-page pamphlet entitled *Fact vs. Fantasy*. The book listed several standard Nazi fantasies: Germany did not lose the last war; she was stabbed in the back; America should appreciate Germany's problem with the Jews, for the United States has its own minority problems; there is no persecution of the Church in Germany.<sup>26</sup> The War Department supplied (at most) a two-paragraph response to each question—not much ammunition for a prolonged verbal battle. The American guards, who could have stopped a great deal of the Nazi activity in the camp, were of little help to the prisoners who tried to stand up to the Nazi hierarchy—and the prisoners knew that.<sup>27</sup> Prisoners arrived in the camps by large numbers every day. As the number of prisoners increased, so did the number of battles for control of the compound.

The commanding officer put as much distance as possible between captors and prisoners. Some of the commanding officers were so ineffectual it led to the Nazi oppression of all the prisoners. The POW camps were understaffed, and, as stated above, what men they had were not trained for their sensitive positions. The best solution, according to the Office of the Provost Marshall General, for guarding the camps was a "perimeter system." Vehicle patrols and guard towers covered the most ground and meant the least amount of contact with the POW. It virtually guaranteed the Nazi element free run behind the barbed wire.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Gansberg, 42-43.

<sup>27</sup>Krammer, 151.

<sup>28</sup>Krammer, 36.

Because the guards could not speak German, it was dangerous for anti-Nazis or apolitical prisoners to complain about being threatened or beaten. The camp spokesman, usually a Nazi, served as interpreter. In addition to it causing problems for anti-Nazis, the lack of German-speaking Americans also led to some embarrassing incidents. One such incident occurred at Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky. In late January 1944, the camp commander, Colonel Payton Winlock, led a line of one hundred German POWs to church one Sunday morning, while they all sang in strong, loud voices the Nazi Horst Wessel song. Unfortunately for the commanding officer at the head of the parade, the news of the embarrassing incident was smuggled out of camp by anti-Nazi prisoners and eventually fell into the hands of the prominent newspaper columnist, Walter Winchell. Winchell, of course, made it the topic of one of his popular broadcasts. Colonel Winlock, who was very distressed over the whole thing, admitted that "he did not either recognize the Horst Wessel tune or understand the words of hate the prisoners sang, since he does not speak German."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Krammer, 150.

## CHAPTER 2

### DAILY LIFE IN THE CAMPS

The daily running of the camp was left to the prisoners, specifically the *Unteroffiziere*—the NCOs. The Geneva Convention called for officers and enlisted men to be held in separate camps. The NCOs, who were not required to work, spent most of their time enforcing military discipline and keeping the flame of National Socialism burning brightly. There were no combat duties to keep them occupied so military regimens were based on ceremony, such as the inspection of living quarters by officers. The NCOs encouraged the prisoners to take part in camp activities, especially sports. It helped relieve a great deal of their pent up energy.<sup>30</sup>

Camp activities included a variety of sports. Soccer was a favorite and matches were held at almost all the camps. The prisoners were extremely competitive and the games were highly charged events. Alfred Klein, a POW at Camp Opelika, Alabama, recalled:

Sports started right after breakfast, and our camp had a whole slate of outstanding teams in soccer, handball, volleyball, etc. Athletic activities were taken very, very seriously. The Camp Championships, especially in soccer and handball, were so exciting that even out guards participated as cheerleaders from their towers and attended the games on weekends with their families shouting from the sidelines. Many of our athletes, as a matter of fact, went on to sports careers in Germany after our release.<sup>31</sup>

Soccer was also a favorite at Camp Concordia, Kansas, until October 16, 1943. Corporal Adolf Huebner was one of many POWs playing the game that day at Concordia.

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<sup>30</sup>Krammer, 51.

<sup>31</sup>Krammer, 51.

The ball went out of bounds and Corporal Huebner chased it, but unfortunately, he ran too close to the security fence. One of the guards shot him through the head and killed him. His fellow POWs were so angry they held a two-hour demonstration and threw rocks at the tower. The guard involved was relieved of duty. It was the first recorded death of a POW in the United States.<sup>32</sup>

Decisions in the camps that were located on military bases were made in disorganized fashion—when made at all. The commanding officer of the POW camp reported to the post commanding officer. The two men were usually not comfortable with the situation. There was a tremendous amount of buck-passing and jealousy over territory. No one took responsibility for decisions and too many tasks were delegated to subordinates. The Office of the Provost Marshal General's Office finally took control of the situation in 1945 and arranged training seminars for camp personnel. The tension eased up as the war progressed, but administrative friction was always a potential problem for any POW programs.<sup>33</sup>

The German POWs realized quickly that the Americans would follow the Geneva Convention and provide more than adequate care for the prisoners. Strict interpretation of the Geneva Convention was done in order to insure the safety of American soldiers held in German camps. It was also done in order for word to get back to the German Army about the excellent care they could expect to receive once they surrendered.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>May, 29-30.

<sup>33</sup>Krammer, 37.

<sup>34</sup>Robert W. Tissing, Jr., "Utilization of Prisoners of War in the United States during World War II; Texas: A Case Study." (m.a. thesis: Baylor University, 1973), 17-18.



The food provided to the prisoners was far beyond what they were used to receiving in the German Army. Most had not eaten so well since long before the war. The Geneva Convention required that POWs receive the same type of diet as American troops. Prisoners received food items not available to the American public, which caused quite a bit of resentment from the public. That stipulation of the Geneva Convention later led to newspaper articles complaining about the "coddling" of German POWs, with the camps termed a "Fritz Ritz." One prisoner, Helmut W., who kept a journal wrote, "Here we eat more in a single day than during a whole week at home. At supper you find most certainly chunks up to a pound in weight. We have almost every day, apricots, apples, plums, or pears." Helmut W. described a typical Sunday menu: Breakfast: milk, cornflakes (Wheaties), sugar, bread, coffee, marmalade. Lunch: tomato soup, ribs, potatoes, vegetables, pudding, pastry, tea. Supper: cold cuts and a vegetable dish, bread, cocoa, one apple.<sup>35</sup>

The German prisoners had their own mess hall and cook. Nothing was ever wasted by the German mess sergeants who prepared meals for the prisoners. Bones were picked clean of meat, boiled and the marrow was used in soups and stews. The food in the German and Italian mess halls was so good that the American guards often preferred to eat there rather than at their own mess halls. One corporal commented: "It looks like these foreigners take their cooking more seriously than we do." There was so little garbage left over that the civilian garbage-removal contractor at Camp Shelby, Mississippi canceled his

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<sup>35</sup>Gansberg, 22-23).

contract. He was not picking up enough trash to pay for the transportation.<sup>36</sup>

The majority of POWs gained quite a bit of weight on their new and improved diets, so much so that many could not button the pants of their German uniforms. (The prisoners were allowed to wear their uniforms in the evening if they wished.) They wrote their families in Germany instructing them not to send food items in care packages. Food was much more scarce back home in Germany. Article 12 of the Geneva Convention also allowed the prisoners to have a canteen, a great luxury, where they could purchase additional food and sundry items, many of which had not been available in Germany. Some of the items sold in the canteen included candy, soft drinks, local produce, cigarettes, toiletries, and sometimes alcoholic beverages. Prices ranged from five cents for candy bars and soft drinks to thirty-five cents for shaving cream or a cigar. Many of the canteens sold beer. Prisoners who wanted to buy a pipe had to come up with eighty cents. The average pay per day for an enlisted POW was forty cents. Some hesitated to write home about the canteen and all the things available to them. They feared their letters would be copied and dropped behind German lines to encourage other German soldiers to surrender.<sup>37</sup>

The War Department was required to furnish prisoners with a nonnegotiable camp script with which to purchase such items. Enlisted men received ten cents per day—more was given to those involved in the POW labor program. Officers, who were not required to work under the Geneva Convention, received a substantial allowance: lieutenants received twenty dollars a month, captains thirty dollars, ranks of major or higher forty dollars a

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<sup>36</sup>Gansberg, 23.

<sup>37</sup>Gansberg, 32.

month. An enlisted man's daily pay, if he worked, was approximately forty cents.

Each POW received, upon arrival in camp, clothing that consisted of a raincoat, overcoat, belt, gloves, underwear, and summer and winter pants and shirts. All items were dark blue and marked on the front and back with the letters "PW." Shoes were a bit of a problem. Most of the earlier arrivals refused to wear United States Army-issue shoes. It was not possible to click the rubber heels together on the American boots when they came to attention. It was a matter of pride to the German prisoners to be able to snap to attention as they had been trained. At Fort Sam Houston, the POWs were allowed to maintain their own shoe repair unit which kept sharp wooden heels on their shoes.<sup>38</sup>

News of how well the POWs were being treated *did* reach behind the German lines. Brigadier General Blackshear M. Bryan, assistant provost Marshall general, testified at the House Committee on Military Affairs defending charges that the POWs were being pampered or "coddled." Bryan stated that "interrogations of German prisoners of war who surrendered voluntarily indicate that an overwhelming majority of them expected good treatment." Safe conduct passes that promised the soldiers they would be treated well were signed by General Dwight D. Eisenhower and dropped from the air behind enemy lines. Bryan testified that many of the German soldiers who surrendered carried those passes: "Eighty-eight percent of those captured shortly after D-day, eighty-two percent of those captured during August 1944 and more than ninety percent of those captured in October 1944 had accepted the fact that the United States treated prisoners in accordance with the Geneva Convention, despite German efforts to make them believe otherwise" Hitler was

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<sup>38</sup>Gansberg, 26.

said to have been so furious over the mass surrenders of his soldiers that he ordered the murder of all captured Allied airmen in February 1945. He wanted to make the German soldiers fear reprisals from the Americans if they surrendered. Hitler was eventually talked out of doing that by Admiral Carl Donitz.<sup>39</sup>

At one point, stories regarding the mistreatment of American POWs reached the War Department. Congress launched a full-scale investigation of comparative treatment. Twenty-five German POW camps were compared to twenty-five American camps by the Swiss. The Swiss investigation discovered that most of the problems with the camps resulted from the lack of food, especially meat, in Germany. There were also a few German camp commanders who, being particularly anti-American, had a less generous interpretation of the convention. The German government tried to meet the requirements of the Geneva Convention. Judith Gansberg wrote: "Occupation officers would be surprised to discover how many SS officers suffered from malnutrition. In 1944 the Wehrmacht and the German public were not much better off than the POWs. The food was simply not there to give them."<sup>40</sup>

The American Army hid the fact that Nazi POWs were being kept in such large numbers in the United States as much as possible from the American public. However, the Americans who lived in close proximity to the 500 camps sprinkled across the United States did get an opportunity to meet the soldiers of Hitler's Army. Many came away with a much different picture of the young Germans in their midst. Not all were rabid Nazis bent

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<sup>39</sup>Gansberg, 37-38.

<sup>40</sup>Gansberg, 38.

on ruling the world. None had horns as some cartoons had shown, nor were they all blonde and blue-eyed. The POWs were all shapes and sizes. There were blondes, brunettes, and even redheads. Many of the locals were reminded of their own sons, brothers, and husbands fighting in some distant battlefield—afraid, lonely, and thinking of home. The Germans could not be all bad, after all, they were so much like the locals themselves. So, they wondered, what had caused them to follow a fanatical ideology like National Socialism and a man like Hitler?<sup>41</sup> Some of the reasons became evident after the media discovered just who *was* running the camps. The terms "good" German and "Nazi" were soon defined for the American public.

It took a long time before the American authorities realized that German and Nazi were not synonymous. Members of the Afrika Korps were the veteran group of prisoners. They were also the most dedicated supporters of National Socialism—young men who had been raised in the Hitler Youth groups and indoctrinated by the Nazi regime. They had never known any other type of life. By the time older, less politically indoctrinated prisoners arrived, the men of the Afrika Korps were already in control of many POW camps. Members of the Gestapo and SS wanted for specific war crimes also hid among the POWs posing as soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* (German army). It was dangerous to be seen as anything but a follower of Hitler. Outside the barbed wire was America, inside was Nazi Germany.<sup>42</sup>

Once the POWs settled in at the camps, the Nazi element moved to take control.

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<sup>41</sup>Krammer, 45.

<sup>42</sup>Billinger, 60.

The violence perpetrated by the pro-Nazi prisoners against the rest of the prisoners in the camps went on under the noses of the Americans. Ludwig W., an anti-Nazi POW at Camp Mexia, Texas, wrote that few prisoners were brave enough to challenge the Nazis. He described some of the maneuvers the Nazis used to take over:

The first camp spokesman was designated by General von Varst. He also regulated the form of camp organization and the conduct of the officers....

A short time after the generals had been moved to a special camp the underground struggle for the political leadership of the camp began....

I would guess the Nazis and the anti-Nazis were about even in number. The Nazis organized themselves very quickly, and first tried to shake the position of the camp spokesman, who was not completely in favor of their efforts, by parading placards with inscriptions hostile to America, such as "who are you fighting for" and "Jewish hirelings."

The camp spokesman at that time, Major S., hereupon took over the responsibility of keeping this schism from coming to the notice of the camp commandant, that is that demonstrations be carried on in the *common* interest only.<sup>43</sup>

Judith Gansberg explained that after years of dealing with that type of aggressive, intimidating behavior in Germany, few prisoners wanted to challenge the Nazis for fear of their lives. The camp spokesman finally quit after placards were put up warning, "He who is not against the Americans will be punished." Four or five more camp spokesmen came and went until the Nazis won the struggle for political leadership. Lieutenant K. was a Nazi party official and the leader of the Nazis at Camp Mexia, Texas. Demands were made to allow the German hierarchy (the Nazis) the right to oversee the following areas of camp life: "the right to censor the newspaper, the right to control use of the radio, the right to control political indoctrination, the right to control use of free time, the right to control criticism of the motion pictures, the right to hold a 'court of honor' and a party court and the

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<sup>43</sup>Gansberg, 49.

right to censor mail." If a Nazi leader was transferred out of the camp, he appointed his successor so there was no interruption in the party organization.<sup>44</sup>

If things were quiet and orderly, then the American authorities allowed the German hierarchy to discipline their own men for minor infractions. Because of the lack of qualified interpreters, the American camp commanders allowed English-speaking prisoners, regardless of their political beliefs, to translate. It was more important to have order than worry about individual rights being violated. Because of the naivety of American military personnel regarding German politics, the Nazi element in the camp was able to take over and terrorize anyone who disagreed with them.<sup>45</sup>

The Nazis used fear and intimidation to control the camp and did more than punish minor infractions. If a prisoner did not go along with the program or was suspected of disloyalty to the *Fuhrer*, then he risked being killed. Kangaroo courts existed to pass judgments and arranged "suicides" were a popular way of getting rid of troublemakers. Groups of Nazi vigilantes (who were, for the most part, formerly of the Africa Korps) prowled the camps at night inflicting "Holy Ghosts," a German military term for severe beatings, on anyone who opposed them. Anti-Nazis were afraid to go to the Americans, since they had no assurance they would be protected. The Americans did not guard the prisoners' barracks at night and many of the prisoners were well aware of the fact that they had more to fear from their fellow Germans than their American captors.<sup>46</sup> It was best to

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<sup>44</sup>Gansberg, 49-50.

<sup>45</sup>Allen V. Koop, *Stark Decency: German Prisoners of War in a New England Village* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), 30.

<sup>46</sup>Waters, 123.

keep a club by the bed at night and use a bucket rather than risk a trip to the latrine in the dark. Harvard Historian Sidney Fay described what life was like under the control of the Afrika Korps:

They were a tough lot—the toughest of any group of German prisoners—partly since they had waged a remarkably heroic though unsuccessful campaign...and partly since they were captured at a time when Hitler's fortunes had not sunk so low as the present.... When captured probably 80-90 percent of them were still fanatical Nazis. These men were the ones who were reported to be incredulous when they saw the skyscrapers of New York still standing, and who assumed that the accounts in the American press of Allied successes were only propaganda lies.... They made life a hell for the anti-Nazis and the political moderates.<sup>47</sup>

Complaints to the American authorities by anti-Nazis or apolitical prisoners usually went unheeded. Anyone who bucked the system was labeled a troublemaker. One former German POW, Heino Erichsen, described the atmosphere:

Top military brass in Washington, D.C., were pleased to find that they were not faced with the chaos of hundreds of thousands of uncontrolled individuals, but rather a tight obedient military unit in which each rank was responsible to its direct superior for its actions. This disciplinary tactic seemed sound to the captors, but it led to a disastrous strengthening of German militarism and Nazism in the camps.<sup>48</sup>

The German hierarchy in the camp was responsible for the peace and quiet. Camps dominated by Nazis ran smoothly and caused American authorities few problems (something that was not lost on the camp commanders). Anti-Nazis were punished for trying to stand up to the Nazi element. It was a long time before American officials realized the Nazis were the minority in the camps and retained control of the majority

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<sup>47</sup>Krammer, 161.

<sup>48</sup>Waters, 111.



through brute force. Until then, concessions were made to keep the camp quiet.<sup>49</sup>

The United States government was determined to follow the Geneva Convention in order to protect American soldiers in Europe. The Nazis in the camps were extremely vocal and demanding. The War Department granted concessions that actually helped solidify the Nazis' hold over the remainder of the prisoners. One concession involved the requirement that prisoners salute in the manner accepted by their army. In the case of the German military, if a soldier's head is covered, he lifts his hand in an ordinary military salute. If the head is uncovered, he stands with his elbows back at attention. There *was* no Hitler salute in the German Army until after the July 20, 1944-assassination attempt on Hitler's life. The War Department, from the moment the first prisoner arrived, accepted what was an obvious political gesture as the official salute of the German Army. Another unnecessary concession involved taking the Geneva Convention's allowance for the celebration of traditional national holidays a step further to include "camp-wide festivities" every April 20th—Hitler's birthday.<sup>50</sup>

Nazis controlled the camps' educational curriculum in addition to almost every other aspect of camp life. They, according to Judith Gansberg, "monopolized camp media, censored reading and film material, quashed any signs of anti-Hitlerism, and threatened violence to anyone who protested. German medics refused to render assistance to prisoners who declined to return a Hitler salute. Anti-Nazis who died under strange circumstances (alleged accidents or suicides) were refused services by German chaplains

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<sup>49</sup>Krammer, 153.

<sup>50</sup>Krammer, 154.

and no German mourners were at their graves. One POW was not allowed to be buried among his 'purer Hitlerian ex-comrades' for fear he would contaminate them."<sup>51</sup>

Gottfried S., a POW at Camp Breckenridge, Ky. was an example of how the Nazi element in camp dealt with nonbelievers in National Socialism. His father, a college professor, died in Dachau after the SS crushed both his legs for his lack of support. Gottfried's mother had been declared insane and gassed to death in an asylum. In Germany, Gottfried had been a member of the Social Democratic Party, Hitler's chief opposition. Once the Nazis at Breckenridge had this information, they made Gottfried's life a living hell. His letters from home were intercepted before he could read them and burned. The pro-Nazis tore up his wife's picture, spit on him, and put ground glass in his food, then forced him to eat it. If Gottfried tried to take a shower, they beat him. He showered at 4:00 a.m. in an effort to avoid them. He was harassed for weeks and lost twenty pounds but was afraid to go to the Americans for fear they would do nothing to help him. Finally, the Nazis told him his wife was taken to Dachau and in order to save her he would have to kill himself. Gottfried was given a broken beer bottle which he used to slash his wrists during the night.<sup>52</sup>

There were at least five murders and countless suicides, real and staged, that could be traced to the Nazi leadership in the camps. Fanatical Nazis organized suicide clubs. They vowed that once Germany was close to collapse, they would escape and kill as many Americans as possible. The American authorities did not want the Nazis in charge, but it

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<sup>51</sup>Gansberg, 48.

<sup>52</sup>Gansberg, 52.

certainly made their lives easier, at least for a time. One POW who feared the Nazis would kill his non-Nazi friend went to the camp commander for help but the CO could not understand what the big deal was in having two groups with opposing political views share the same camp. He dismissed the danger the prisoner was in by reasoning that America had Democrats and Republicans and "we don't go around killing each other." His friend was found murdered the next morning.<sup>53</sup>

In most camps, the pressure to conform was more subtle. Nazi POWs who were assigned jobs in libraries hid books that had been banned by the Third Reich. A Nazi prisoner in an administrative job might hide forms or change the information on them. It was not even possible for the prisoners to attend church in peace. Every Sunday morning, for example, a self-appointed camp monitor at Fort Dupont, Delaware tried a more direct approach to dissuade church attendance:

The Nazi, posted himself, pencil and paper in hand, outside the compound church, which has a congregation of some two hundred, and warned would-be churchgoers that if they entered he'd note their names and they would discover the consequences when they got back to Germany.<sup>54</sup>

Once word leaked to the American public about the deaths occurring in the camps, complaints poured into local papers and finally reached the brass in Washington, D.C. American citizens were outraged that Nazis were being allowed to commit and get away with such acts inside the borders of the United States. Many were concerned about the future. What happened once the war had ended and hundreds of thousands of unrepentant

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<sup>53</sup>Krammer 167-168.

<sup>54</sup>Krammer, 163.

Nazi soldiers were returned to Germany?<sup>55</sup>

To the average American, National Socialism seemed a "malignant political philosophy which expressed itself in militarism, persecution, oppression, conquest, and sadistic cruelty."<sup>56</sup> It seemed logical to most Americans to equate all Germans with National Socialism, therefore, all Germans were Nazis. Few in the American public were aware of any differences in the political beliefs of the German people and thus tended to view all Germans in a negative light. Dr. Nicholas Butler, the President of Columbia University, wrote "It will take another generation—at least 25 years—before the German mind can be completely purged of the evil effects of the Nazi spirit."<sup>57</sup> One of the American captains in a POW camp, Joseph Lane, stated "My private suggestion is that you just kill them all and save the world a lot of headaches for the next couple of generations. Most of them are just hopeless."<sup>58</sup> However, the war would eventually end, and the decimation of Germany would benefit neither Europe nor America. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt was instrumental in convincing the President to change his mind about democratic reeducation.<sup>59</sup>

President Roosevelt had not been enthusiastic about teaching democratic values to German POWs. In 1981, at the age of nine, Franklin Delano Roosevelt had been enrolled in school in Germany. He found it very militaristic and nationalistic and it left him with a

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<sup>55</sup>Waters, 111-112.

<sup>56</sup>Koop, 30.

<sup>57</sup>Krammer, 189.

<sup>58</sup>Krammer, 190.

<sup>59</sup>Robin, 24.

negative attitude toward the German people. Roosevelt and his Secretary of Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, agreed that the Germans were incapable of peaceful change. The only solution, in their minds and others, was the total eradication of modern industrial German society and a return to "their primeval agrarian origins to start all over again."<sup>60</sup> Anything else was a waste of wartime resources. That mind set was reflected in other aspects of Allied policy, such as the British carpet bombing of Germany and Roosevelt's initial lack of interest in the reeducation of German POWs.<sup>61</sup>

Opinion began to change though, as word began to filter out to the American public regarding the Nazi abuse of other POWs. Journalists and educators concerned over the political struggle within in the camps often wrote articles in a similar vein:

What is important is that as many Germans as possible should be won away from Nazi ideas and converted to those of democracy. The psychological and ideological battle which totalitarianism has long waged against democracy is still going on, in the prison camps on American soil. Unfortunately, for the moment only one side is fighting it.<sup>62</sup>

As a result of articles such as this, the American public became more vocal in favor of a reeducation program for German prisoners of war. There was great concern about sending German POWs back to postwar Germany with an intact view of National Socialism.

Dorothy Thompson, a popular syndicated columnist, wrote:

Men who put up provocative signs on the walls, bragging that they will win the war, and go around giving the Nazi salute are Nazis....They will go home in excellent health, having been well fed and cared for. And meanwhile, on American

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<sup>60</sup>Robin, 19.

<sup>61</sup>Smith, 10-11.

<sup>62</sup>Waters, 81.

soil, we shall have kept alive all the symbols of their party.<sup>63</sup>

Journalists offered their viewpoints on how to proceed with the problem of unrepentant Nazis and the reeducation of the rest of the POWs. James Powers of the *Boston Globe* offered the following suggestions: "Nazi fanatics should be segregated from anti-Nazis swiftly and completely," and "German noncom abuse should be eradicated root and branch." Powers also argued in favor of a social plan and reeducation program that presented positive views of American culture and government.<sup>64</sup>

Harvard professor, Sidney Fay, maintained that "they [German POWs] ought to be swayed by Americans in an attempt to reeducate them and make them safe and fit to return to Germany."<sup>65</sup> A sociologist at The College of William and Mary, Curt Bondy, asserted that "lasting peace depends to a large extent on the success of the reeducation of the German people," while claiming that the "observation of prisoners of war and the efforts to reeducate them provide opportunities to discover more about the possibility of reeducation of the German people after the war."<sup>66</sup>

As the war continued and Allied victory became more certain, the American public grew increasingly concerned over what type of government would replace Nazism. If the Germans were not offered an alternative political ideology, then it might be possible for another dictatorship to take control as it had after World War I. The German people could

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<sup>63</sup>Krammer, 164.

<sup>64</sup>James H. Powers, "What to Do With German Prisoners." *Atlantic Monthly* (November 1944): 50.

<sup>65</sup>Sidney B. Fay, "German Prisoners of War," *Current History* 8 (May 1945): 199.

<sup>66</sup>Curt Bondy, "Observation and Reeducation of German Prisoners of War," *Harvard Educational Review* 14 (January 1944): 12.

not be expected to exist in what amounted to an enforced political vacuum. Steps must be taken to prevent another Hitler from taking over. It was important for the American government to take advantage of the Germans now under their control in the POW camps and instill a respect and appreciation of democratic principles. It was difficult for the public and the press to understand the government's reluctance to intervene. Letters were sent by thousands of American citizens to the War Department, the Department of State, and also to the president insisting on a reeducation program.<sup>67</sup>

Several committees of concerned private citizens were formed to put pressure on the American Government. The Seger Committee maintained it was in the world's best interest to instill democratic principles in place of Nazi ideology. The committee was headed by Gerhart Seger, a former member of the German Reichstag who now edited a New York magazine. The committee was composed of notable church members, teachers, and writers who were anxious that nothing was being done to offer an alternative to National Socialism. Why, the members of the Seger Committee asked, was the U.S. Government sitting on its hands and allowing the Nazi reign of terror to continue unabated in the POW camps? Research done by the committee indicated that twenty-five percent of German POWs were Nazis. By separating the Nazi element, approximately fifteen percent of the remaining POWs, according to the research, would respond favorably to reeducation efforts. The Seger Committee argued that it made little sense to ignore the POWs who might be open to learning about democracy.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Billinger, 140-141.

<sup>68</sup>Smith, 19.

The Harvard Branch of the American Defense Organization was another group advocating the reeducation of German POWs. Material supporting their position was submitted to Secretary of War Henry Stimson by Vice Chairman Warren Seavey, a former law professor. The information supplied to Stimson showed that the Nazis in the camps were being allowed to use threats and intimidation to keep the other POWs in line. The Harvard Committee also wanted prisoners interested in learning about democracy to be given that opportunity. Secretary of War Henry Stimson publicly rejected any pleas to reeducate the German prisoners by stating: “The War Department believes that any procedure such as you suggest would be met with suspicion, hostility and resistance, and instead of being persuaded by the unwelcome teaching, the prisoners would only turn against it....I cannot agree with you, therefore, that such a course of action would serve the best interests of the United States.”<sup>69</sup>

Unknown to the American public, pressure from inside the government in the form of the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, had already been applied. A reeducation program aimed at counteracting the activities of Nazi POWs was already underway by the end of 1944. Mrs. Roosevelt was made aware of what was going on in the camps in early 1944 by a group of female columnists headed by Dorothy Thompson. The First Lady was outraged and determined to find out everything she could about what had been going on. She invited Major Maxwell McKnight, the newly promoted chief of the Administrative Section of the POW Camp Operations, to dinner at the White House. Mrs. Roosevelt wanted Major McKnight to confirm the veracity of the stories but realized she had placed him in an

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<sup>69</sup>Smith, 20.



awkward situation since he did not have clearance from his superior officer, Assistant Provost Marshall B.M. Bryan. Bryan advised McKnight to "hold nothing back" when he next spoke with Mrs. Roosevelt a few nights later. Following McKnight's meeting with her, Mrs. Roosevelt spoke with the president. Shortly after that, President Roosevelt, in turn, spoke with Secretary of War Henry Stimson and Secretary of State Edward Stettinius. Those conversations led to revival of a reeducation plan developed by General S.L.A. Marshall in March of 1943.<sup>70</sup>

General S.L.A. Marshall (with the assistance of Maj. Edward Davison and Col. Dave Paige) had written a reeducation plan in 1943. It was shelved by Provost Marshall General Allen Guillon in June 1943. In Guillon's opinion, it was a waste of time to try to reeducate grown men. Guillon argued: "Enemy prisoners of war are, for the most part, not children. Those who have sufficient intellectual capacity to be of value to a postwar world have already built the philosophical frameworks of their respective lives. Those whose minds are sufficiently plastic to be affected by the program, are probably not worth the effort."<sup>71</sup>

In March 1943, some within the government realized that, in order to break the Nazi control of the camp, the non-Nazi and apolitical POWs had to be segregated from the pro-Nazi element. Instead of removing non-Nazis, the Nazi POWs were now removed with the worst ones being sent to a Nazi-only POW camp in Alva, Oklahoma. There were reports of Nazi ordered murders and suicides among the anti-Nazi POWs. The pro-Nazi

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<sup>70</sup>Smith, 20.

<sup>71</sup>Robin, 22.

POWs had to be separated from the remainder of the prisoners. A proposal was sent to General Frederick Osborn of the War Department to draft a plan "by which prisoners of war might be exposed to the facts of American history, the workings of democracy and the contributions made to America by peoples of all national origins."<sup>72</sup> General Osborn assigned the job to General S.L.A. Marshall. Marshall recalled the events:

I was distant from Washington on a very critical operation, so I knew nothing about it until, returning to the Pentagon on a Saturday night, I was told that the plan had to be on [George C.] Marshall's desk by 0800 Monday morning. At that point, I blew my top, went to Washington to take on a snootful, just to clear my head. I knew [the hasty job I submitted] was good enough to bank the fires until I could determine what the problem was all about. Then I got Edward Davison into uniform and also called Col. Dave Paige,...at the time a Military Government Officer. Paige was sent to England and Maj. Davison and I went to Canada to see what was happening to the German PWs. We found the top Nazis and Fascists playing top dog and virtually running the camps....

Then I wrote the real plan and substituted it for the dummied-up job. It called for screening the prisoners at once, separating the bad eggs from the amenable ones, ignoring the former and starting education courses for the latter with emphasis on democratic theory and practice.... That plan became pigeonholed in the PMG's office for about one year.<sup>73</sup>

Marshall's plan was considered "inadvisable" by Provost Marshall General Allen Guillon, who listed his objections to the plan point by point. He started with the long-standing argument that any attempt at reeducating POWs put American soldiers held prisoner in Germany in danger. The Germans might retaliate if they found out about it. Guillon listed other concerns such as cost, loss of badly needed manpower, classes held in overcrowded army installations, and trying to teach Germans who were not willing to learn and could barely speak English. Guillon was against the attempt to indoctrinate prisoners

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<sup>72</sup>Krammer, 194.

<sup>73</sup>Gansberg, 59-60.

and denationalization was a violation of the Geneva Convention. He wanted the reeducation supporters to turn to organizations such as the Red Cross, or the International Y.M.C.A. to teach Germans about how well Americans lived and the benefits of democracy. Guillon maintained that tactic would succeed much better "than a teacher in a classroom, or a lecturer from a platform."<sup>74</sup>

By March of 1944, almost a year had passed since General S.L.A. Marshall's reeducation proposal had been rejected by Guillon. Archer L. Lerch had replaced Guillon as Provost Marshall General. The situation in the camps had grown dramatically worse in the past few months. The failure of the American authorities to act more quickly probably led to the deaths or serious injuries of many anti-Nazi POWs. Some of Marshall's ideas were already being used as a stopgap measure. The most ardent Nazis were culled from the camps and sent to Alva, Oklahoma, a camp for hard-core Nazis only. If not sent to Alva, then pro-Nazi Pows were held in a separate compound within the camps, jokingly referred to as "Little Siberia." Lerch, unlike Guillon, supported a reeducation program. In order for a program to be successful, the pro-Nazi POWs were identified and removed from the camps.<sup>75</sup> Maxwell McKnight recounted the reaction to the segregation of Nazis from anti-Nazis and apolitical prisoners: "We had never had a theory of segregating Nazis from anti-Nazis. We could do it on the basis of color, but on the basis of ideology? This never occurred to us."<sup>76</sup>

The Special Projects Division had to take the camps back from the Nazis and

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<sup>74</sup>Smith, 19.

<sup>75</sup>Smith, 10.

<sup>76</sup>Gansberg, 60.

implement a reeducation program based on Article 17 of the Geneva Convention. It was imperative that the program remain top-secret to protect American soldiers from retaliation. The American public was kept in the dark until V-E Day. The American Army took a great deal of criticism for not taking advantage of the chance to reeducate the German POWs in their midst, while all the time doing exactly that. Public rejections by Secretary Hull and Secretary Stimson of a reeducation program infuriated members of Congress in addition to the public, but the American military was able to keep it secret.

## CHAPTER 3

### SPECIAL PROJECTS DIVISION

Major Edward Davison was selected by the Provost Marshall General to head the Prisoner of War Special Projects Division. Captain Dave Paige, a Military Government Officer, and Major Davison, an officer in the Morale Service Division, had assisted General S.L.A. Marshall in formulating the plan for reeducation. Marshall, by March of 1944, was working with the Historical Division in the Central Pacific and Captain Dave Paige was Chief of Psychological Warfare Operations, "So," Marshall wrote, "the duty fell to Ted Davison who was third down the line, the best man for it in any case."<sup>77</sup>

Davison was born in Great Britain and was well known for his abilities as a poet, educator, and writer. Davison had been on staff at the Universities of Colorado and Miami, in addition to being a Guggenheim Fellow in the 1930s. Not everyone considered Davison the best man for the job. Ron Robin, author of *The Barbed-Wire College*, dismissed Davison as not qualified for the position. Davison was, according to Ron Robin, "an obscure officer" from the Morale Division who could not even speak German. Robin used two of Davison's poems to illustrate why Davison was not the right person to teach democracy to German POWs. The following poem was written by Davison in 1937. In it, Davison, according to Robin, seemed to blame western capitalism for most of the catastrophes of the twentieth century:

England Farewell: And you, America, you  
Who might have saved the spark that was divine,  
Go down! Morgan and Ford and Hearst and all  
The dollar gods you trusted, they are through,

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<sup>77</sup>Gansberg, 62.

And what you signed upon the dotted line  
Has now become the Writing on the Wall<sup>78</sup>

Davison's poem "Kill or Get Killed" (ca. 1943), was also cited by Robin as indicative of Davison's skepticism regarding the ideological divisions of World War II:

A soldier lay dead in the Kasserine Pass  
His eyes to the stars and his back to the grass,  
They buried him later amid prayers for grace  
And noted the look that he wore on his face  
It was, they reported, a look of amaze,  
He fought unbelieving and died in a daze  
Till death rode him down and the grasses ran red,  
He doubted that anyone wanted him dead.

This soldier, they tell me, was more than a fool,  
Why, he had been trained in a very tough school!  
His generals had warned him, his captain had shrilled:  
"It's your choice hereafter: you'll kill or be killed!"

At home there were strikes as men struggled for gain,  
Some people went hungry; the hogs got the grain.  
But this stuff was never his business at all,  
His duty was clear: Keep your eye on the ball.

And so he met Death in the Passerine Pass,  
They gave him a cross and they mutter "Alas,"  
"He might have survived: he was certainly warned,"  
Dear soldiers, your lessons should never be scorned."  
But on my face, too, there's a look of amaze  
That peace-loving nations have such deadly ways.<sup>79</sup>

Robin used the poems to question Davison's suitability for his position as director of the Special Projects Division, although he allowed that Davison must have been able to differentiate more clearly between fascism and western capitalism. Davison's belief in the

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<sup>78</sup>Robin, 44.

<sup>79</sup>Robin, 44-45.

power of words and ideas, Robin asserted, was the reason the reeducation program became an exercise in rational persuasion rather than a "campaign in psychological warfare."<sup>80</sup>

The staff selected by Davison, according to Robin, was "mostly second-rate." Robin pointed out that most of the best people had already been snapped up by Military Intelligence. Contrary to Robin's opinion, Arnold Krammer wrote in his book, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, that Davison, along with Maxwell McKnight, "had selected the most remarkable staffs of the war."<sup>81</sup> Judith Gansberg was also impressed with the men Davison had on his staff. When reading the background information on the SPD staff members, it is difficult to understand how anyone could classify them as second-rate.<sup>82</sup>

Walter Schoenstedt, a German novelist who had fled Nazi Germany, was selected by Davison to be an interpreter and advisor. He was a native of Berlin and was once a member of the German Communist Party. Schoenstedt left Germany in 1933 and arrived in America a few years later. He became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1941 and joined the U.S. Army. By this time Schoenstedt had already published several books and his writing talents had landed him a job in the Morale Division. He was enthusiastic about his new position on Davison's staff since it allowed him to promote his strong anti-Nazi position and influence German POWs.<sup>83</sup>

Other members of Davison's staff included Howard Mumford Jones, a prominent Harvard dean and President of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 1938,

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<sup>80</sup>Robin, 45.

<sup>81</sup>Krammer, 197.

<sup>82</sup>Gansberg, 66.

<sup>83</sup>Smith, 41-42.

Jones wrote an article for the *Atlantic Monthly*, in which he noted the psychological roots of the pervasive hold of totalitarian regimes on their subjects. Jones argued that the success of fascism lay not in the ruthless use of repressive political tools but in "the efficient creation by the dictators of a glamorous mythology."<sup>84</sup> The "downtrodden subjects" of a regime were presented with attractive images of a collective past and "a communal sense of self-worth which no longer existed in democratic societies." Jones maintained that America used to have "glamour," but "progressive educators, the debunking biographer, and social historians" had destroyed it. He proposed mobilizing the liberal arts in order to create attractive democratic myths. Professor Jones maintained there was little use in proving that the mythological figures of totalitarian regimes were fake heroes. It was important for the humanist and cultural historians to understand the lure of myths and why people chose to believe certain ones. Jones was also a great believer in redemption and rejected the idea of the incorrigible nature of German society. Howard Mumford Jones and Edward Davison were friends and had known each other for many years. Davison selected Jones to be the American studies specialist of the Special Projects Division.<sup>85</sup>

The second civilian selected for the SPD was Henry Ehrmann. He was born in Berlin in 1908 and eventually ended up in a concentration camp after the rise of Hitler. Ehrmann escaped the camp and made his way to France where he worked as a freelance journalist. He came to America in 1940 where he accepted his first academic position at

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<sup>84</sup>Robin, 42.

<sup>85</sup>Robin, 42-43.



the New School for Social Research, which was a New York based "University in Exile." It provided a haven for German academic exiles due to its liberal democratic political persuasion.<sup>86</sup>

Dr. Ehrmann's title with the Special Projects Division was "education advisor." He was a trained political scientist and realized how difficult it would be to teach a class in democracy to German POWs in a way that did not appear to be indoctrination. Dr. Ehrmann developed the German history survey taught during the intensive crash courses in democracy given just before repatriation. He wrote:

It was decided that the instruction should be divided into two courses, dealing respectively with German and American history.... Thus there developed three main goals for the teaching at all POW schools: to awaken or sharpen the feeling for the political responsibility of the citizen; to arouse a capacity for spontaneity on the part of men whose training and education had placed special value on obedience and a respect for hierarchy; and to provide sorely needed encouragement to men who were asked to welcome the ruin of their individual and collective existence as the precondition of a new "good life."<sup>87</sup>

Ehrmann and the other instructors responsible for teaching German history recognized early on that they had to avoid identifying the individual POW with the atrocities that Hitler had committed. That was a difficult task since many Americans were, rather ironically, strong believers in the idea of collective guilt. Ehrmann decided to approach the problem by emphasizing the factors in German history that prevented Germany from fully reaching its potential for democracy. Dr. Ehrmann's dissertation had been on the French labor movement and he believed in a structural interpretation of German history. He was not a fan of the Morgenthau Plan for the pastoralization of

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<sup>86</sup>Smith, 80-81.

<sup>87</sup>Smith, 81.

Germany because it assumed pathological defects in German culture. Ehrmann argued, "If the country could rid itself of the military-industrial oligarchy—which should have been removed after the Great War—and if Germany would accept an American-style diffusion of political power, then Germany would no longer furnish a threat."<sup>88</sup>

Ehrmann maintained that the reason totalitarian governments developed was because of the lack of a culture of cooperation and a false sense of class confrontation. Labor organizations, because of the strict class consciousness, often expedited political crisis. Dr. Ehrmann accused labor of being indifferent to anything outside of its immediate interests. The business classes of such societies were equally to blame for promoting class conflict, and myopic governments failed to recognize or acknowledge the potential danger of such social and political divisions. He wrote: "The strength of a state depends upon the organized representatives of employers and workers, and their collaboration with each other and with the institution of government."<sup>89</sup> That principle proved to be the basis for how Ehrmann organized his course on German history in the final stages of the reeducation program. Ehrmann focused on how German history *might* have gone. He maintained that it was important for the POWs to focus on positive aspects or they would lose hope in Germany's future and emigrate to other countries.<sup>90</sup>

The remaining members of Davison's staff included Robert Richard who had been an instructor at the University of Colorado and an Army Air Corps officer. Dr. William G. Moulton was a famous linguist who had previously worked with military training programs

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<sup>88</sup>Robin, 52.

<sup>89</sup>Robin, 51.

<sup>90</sup>Gansberg, 123.

and spoke German fluently. Henry Lee Smith, Jr. was a language and dialect expert. Robert Kunzig, a young Pennsylvania lawyer, was recommended to Davison because of his experience working with German POWs. He had been part of a successful voluntary training program for POWs and, although he could not speak German fluently, managed to strike up an excellent rapport with them. Kunzig had also lectured on military government. He would later become a judge with the Federal Court of Claims.<sup>91</sup> Colonel T. V. Smith, a former congressman from Illinois and professor at the University of Chicago, acted as an instructor and writer. He was described by Kunzig as being "a prolific writer, a fascinating speaker. The students worshiped the guy."<sup>92</sup>

Davison had selected an impressive group of leaders and teachers who would make any university proud. The men were chosen by Davison for a variety of reasons other than their intellectual backgrounds. Some were personal friends, and others came highly recommended. Dr. Henry Lee Smith, Jr., the language and dialect expert, and Dr. Howard Mumford Jones handpicked many of the teachers for the Special Projects Division.<sup>93</sup> Davison moved his staff from Washington to New York. That was done, for the most part, to put some distance between Washington bureaucrats and his new program. The objective of the Special Projects Program was as follows:

The prisoners would be given facts, objectively presented but so selected and assembled as to correct misinformation and prejudices surviving Nazi conditioning. The facts, rather than being forced upon them, would be made available through such media as literature, motion pictures, newspapers, music, art, and educational courses. Two types of facts were needed; those which would convince them of the

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<sup>91</sup>Smith, 42.

<sup>92</sup>Krammer, 197.

<sup>93</sup>Smith, 44.

impracticality and viciousness of the Nazi position. If a large variety of facts could be presented convincingly, perhaps the German prisoners of war might understand and believe historical and ethical truth as generally conceived by Western civilization, might come to respect the American people and their ideological values, and upon repatriation to Germany might form the nucleus of a new German ideology which will reject militarism and totalitarian controls and will advocate a democratic system of government.<sup>94</sup>

The plan was to create enough interest in the American way of life to make the POWs want to know more. Literature, films, newspapers, music, art, and education courses would be used to introduce the POWs to the power and resources of the Allies, in particular America and its democracy. Hopefully, the POWs would be convinced of the impracticality and viciousness of Nazism. The long range aim was to form a nucleus of adherents to a new German ideology and the advocacy of a democratic system in Germany.<sup>95</sup>

The curriculum was based on a course that might have been taught to any new arrival in America who wished to become a citizen. It was, in short, taught as a class in citizenship. History, civics, geography, and the English language were the subjects that received the most attention. Ron Robin, author of *The Barbed-Wire College*, alleged that the particular subjects chosen for the POWs to focus on were a calculated move on the part of professors involved in the project since they represented the liberal arts. Robin argued the social sciences were ignored intentionally in order to increase the importance of the liberal arts in America. He continued by accusing Davison and his staff of failing to keep an eye to the future by downplaying the importance of the behavioral sciences. Robin

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<sup>94</sup>Krammer, 197.

<sup>95</sup>Gansberg, 63.

maintained the reeducation program would have been more successful if the psychological aspect of Nazi ideology had been addressed. Picking apart the German mind, according to him, would reveal what was behind the viciousness of the Nazi mind set. Robin failed, however, to even demonstrate that there was such a thing as a Nazi mind set that could easily be dissected and then constructed.<sup>96</sup>

World War II was a war of ideologies—democracy and fascism but also fascism versus communism. Davison and his staff realized it would not be easy to change the views and values of men who had grown up with Nazism. In 1941 the United States had only 431 enemy prisoners within its borders. By the end of 1946, 427,000 POWs had been interned on American soil. Some of Hitler's most devoted soldiers were held captive in the rural towns and farmlands of America. Not all German POWs were hard-core followers of National Socialism. Some of them were simply soldiers who happened to be German. Men who fought for their homeland out of a sense of duty, pride, or fear. A great deal of the fear was generated by the Nazi officers and devoted National Socialist soldiers they served with and, subsequently, were interned within America.<sup>97</sup>

While every German POW was classified as a Nazi, not all of them deserved the label. Many were not that different from American soldiers. Stephen Fritz, in his book, *Frontsoldaten*, wrote the following about the self-image of a German soldier:

He saw himself as a decent person caught up in a vast, impersonal enterprise that threatened both his physical and spiritual well-being. He worried about his wife or sweetheart and his family back home, especially that his marriage might deteriorate or that his wife or girlfriend might be unfaithful. He was appre-

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<sup>96</sup>Robin, 47.

<sup>97</sup>Krammer, 44-45.

hensive that his farm or business would suffer in his absence, or that he would not have a job when he returned. He fretted over his spiritual and psychological well-being and puzzled about how the war, with all its killing and violence, might alter him and the folks at home.... As a soldier he fought for many things: for survival, for his home and family, for his comrades, for the exhilaration of combat.<sup>98</sup>

What made German soldiers follow a man like Hitler? Would it be possible to take advantage of their time in American POW camps to construct programs aimed at the reeducation and denazification of those Germans deemed salvageable from Hitler's ideology? If it *was* possible, how would it benefit the successful implementation of a democratic government in postwar Germany?

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<sup>98</sup>Fritz, 241.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE FACTORY

The Special Projects Division worked out of an office at 50 Broadway in New York City until the move to a Civilian Conservation Camp in Van Etten, New York. One of the most important arms of the Special Projects Division became known as the "Idea Factory" or just the "Factory." The eighty-five German POWs who worked in the Factory were chosen for their special skills. They, like their American keepers, were well-educated, cultured men who were strongly anti-Nazi. It was a unique group. The inmate staff and their supervisors became fast friends, all with a common goal. Once they became involved with the project, the prisoners renounced their Wehrmacht military ranks to make it clear that everyone was on equal footing and would do their fair share of work. The Factory's last move, five months later, was to Fort Philip Kearney, Rhode Island. It remained there for the duration of the project. Operations at Kearney began October 1944 with Robert Kunzig, the young lawyer from Pennsylvania, as the commanding officer.<sup>99</sup>

Steps were taken to protect the prisoners at Kearney from retaliation from pro-Nazis. There was a real fear of Nazi reprisals against any prisoner who cooperated with the Americans. Pro-Nazi POWs threatened harm to "traitors" and their families. The names of anti-Nazis or "rats," were, according to the Nazis, being smuggled back to Germany where the family members would suffer the consequence. One way the pro-Nazi faction had of finding information about anti-Nazis were the camp post offices. All mail was handled by

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<sup>99</sup>Smith, 70-71.

prisoners under the supervision of American officers. Judith Gansberg wrote: "Directory service was offered along with the mail. This meant that the postal workers, a significant number of whom wore skull-design rings indicating SS membership, had access to the names of other prisoners and their camp assignments."<sup>100</sup> The address of the men who worked at the Factory was listed as Fort Niagra, New York, a normal anti-Nazi camp; this was done to keep pro-Nazi postal workers in the dark. The editorial address of *Der Ruf*, the newspaper the Factory produced, was listed as a post office box in New York City.<sup>101</sup>

All of the planning for the Special Projects Division took place at the Factory. The inmate staff at Kearney had not been given any details about the project before arriving. The POWs and the American staff selected the subject matter and the materials to be used and outlined the courses for the reeducation program to take place in the camps. In order to handle these assignments the eighty-five men were divided into six sections: translation of POW newspapers into English and reeducation material into German; review of POW camp newspapers; review of plays, music, and books to determine whether they should be made available to POWs; find films culturally and politically appropriate to be persuasive to German POWs; publication of *Der Ruf*; and administration of the Factory.<sup>102</sup>

The Factory did not operate like other POW camps. It was a special assignment and carefully verified background checks had been done on all the prisoners selected to work at the Factory. Because of that fact, the inmate staff enjoyed an unusual amount of freedom. There were no guards or guard towers. The prison staff at Kearney traveled by ferry to

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<sup>100</sup>Smith, 55.

<sup>101</sup>Smith, 67.

<sup>102</sup>Gansberg 70-71.



Jamestown, R.I. in army trucks to pick up supplies. None of the ferry passengers realized they were carrying on discussions with actual German prisoners of war. Kunzig described the camp as follows: "We had almost no problems at Kearney. Once in a while we'd have to sort of jack them up and make sure they kept their beds neat—try to keep it very military and correct. We had inspections, but at the same time there were no real pressures. They could write, work. They had no other duties—shoe shining, garbage collecting—but their main work was writing *Der Ruf*." Gansberg wrote: "It was a relaxed atmosphere conducive to the creation of a newspaper with antifascist views."<sup>103</sup>

As previously stated, the most important mission of the Factory was the production of *Der Ruf*, a camp newspaper, "written by POWs for POWs." The first issue of *Der Ruf* (*The Call*) was published March 1, 1945. The paper was "written by POWs for POWs." It was written by POWs who were professionals and encouraged German POWs to abandon the ideas of National Socialism. It was "the call" to fellow German POWs to focus on the future rebuilding of their country. There was some disagreement regarding the claim that the paper was written by POWs for other POWs. The P.M.G.'s office theoretically supervised the paper, but the contents of *Der Ruf* were the responsibility of the German POWs at the Factory.<sup>104</sup>

Dr. Gustav Rene Hocke was a prizewinning German author and novelist who was the editor-in-chief of *Der Ruf* at Fort Kearney. Hocke had been forced to serve as a civilian interpreter for the German Army in Sicily. Hocke, an antifascist, fled to Rome from Nazi

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<sup>103</sup>Smith, 68.

<sup>104</sup>Smith, 42..

Germany. After being captured by the Allies, he explained his position, and helped write antifascist leaflets. Following a general internment order, he was sent to the States. Dr. Hocke refused to be placed in a pro-Nazi camp; he was finally sent to Fort Kearney where he worked in the reeducation program. Hocke's wife was British. She and their son had been in England since 1939. Hocke was eventually transferred to the British reeducation program at Wilton Park in England to be near his wife. He also became the editor of *Die Wochenpost*, the British equivalent of *Der Ruf*. Hocke was granted favors based on his history of resistance against National Socialism. It was likely that he was the only POW to be returned to a country he was not originally from, nor had he served in that country's army.<sup>105</sup>

Judith Gansberg, author of *Stalag, U.S.A.*, viewed the influence of *Der Ruf* and Special Projects more favorably than author Ron Robin in his book *The Barbed-Wire College*. Gansberg referred to the men Davison chose to put in charge of the newspaper and Special Projects as "one of the most remarkable staffs ever assembled." She wrote that Davison had selected "a group of leaders and educators who would make any university proud." She described them as "cultured, educated men with the same purpose." She wrote "the men immediately hit it off as friends and co-workers. The "Kearney Spirit" referred to the "comradeship, mutual respect and cooperation at the Factory." According to Robin, *Der Ruf* was another effort on the part of SPD to put things in the hands of intellectuals while ignoring the rank and file.<sup>106</sup> Judith Gansberg listed the reasons *Der Ruf* was so

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<sup>105</sup>Krammer, 202.

<sup>106</sup>Robin, 81.

important to the reeducation program:

It provided an easy way for the SPD officers placed in each camp to gauge Nazi strength and pick out its advocates, since the true Nazis boycotted the publication. It also influenced the eighty local camp papers; a study showed that after *Der Ruf* began, the camp papers became less Nazi and more nonpolitical. (The original count of thirty-three clearly Nazi and three anti-Nazi papers became twenty-four democratic, eighteen anti-Nazi, and only one openly Nazi.) Nazi symbols disappeared from the pages of most camp papers<sup>107</sup>

*Der Ruf* was a bimonthly newspaper of about eight pages. It was printed on expensive paper, in contrast to the cheap paper used for other camp newspapers. The inmate staff of the Factory was responsible for writing the articles and organizing the remainder of the paper. The staff also monitored other camp newspapers in order to determine which were pro-Nazi and which were anti-Nazi. After the first publication of *Der Ruf*, the staff monitored editorials in other camp papers to determine POW response to *Der Ruf*. The reviews for the paper were mixed. The Nazis labeled it propaganda, burned thousands of copies, and threatened the rest of the POWs if they read it. Anti-Nazis also had misgivings about the contents of the paper. The articles, they maintained, were written by intellectuals for intellectuals. The ordinary POW had trouble understanding much of what was written in *Der Ruf*. Robin claimed:

The POWs' poor assessment of *Der Ruf* was little to do with Nazi intimidation and/or the hopeless passivism of the German people . . . in actual fact, it failed to accomplish its goals because its editors and mentors maintained their studious detachment from the concerns of ordinary POWs. As such, *Der Ruf* introduced nothing new into the lives of the cross-section of the German nation incarcerated in the camps.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>Gansberg, 76.

<sup>108</sup>Robin, 87.

Robin claimed the Americans who supervised the inmate staff turned deaf ears to most of the criticisms of *Der Ruf*. The intended target of the paper was the prisoner of superior intellect since they were more likely to be in leadership roles in postwar Germany. Appealing to a mass audience was not their goal.<sup>109</sup> The American supervisors thought the more intelligent POWs would read the articles and be able to influence the less literate prisoners. It made more sense to do that than waste time trying to change the minds of fanatical Nazis. Prisoners who retained their Nazi views after the war were, the Americans surmised, less likely to hold influential positions in the new German Government.<sup>110</sup> .

Response to *Der Ruf* offered the American authorities a way to determine the reaction of the POWs to the reeducation program. Many POWs wrote letters home to Germany expressing their views on the paper. All of their letters were censored and that allowed the Americans to identify POWs who were Nazis. One prisoner wrote:

Do the Americans believe they can force upon us a newspaper of traitors and deserters? All of you know by now of *Der Ruf*! Shall we allow the pictures of Cologne and Trier to mock us? Do they want to tell us that we must regain our lost honor? Boycott! This shameful newspaper! Washington wants to make an experiment of us! (*New York Times*). But our honor means faith, our belief Germany! NOW MORE THAN EVER!<sup>111</sup>

Judith Gansberg agreed that the articles were geared toward the more intellectual rather than the rank and file. One of the SPD members wrote that it was "a newspaper which even Thomas Mann would find difficult to understand. This was a great success

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<sup>109</sup>Robin, 89.

<sup>110</sup>Smith, 202.

<sup>111</sup>Gansberg, 72.

among the prisoners, since it seems the Germans believe that anything they can't understand must be pretty hot stuff.” Robert Kunzig explained why *Der Ruf* was of such high-caliber:

One reason for its caliber was to make it appear to be a regular German newspaper. German newspapers are very specialized things. Though nowadays they have more of that sexy scare stuff like we have, a lot of them are very high-level, with an intellectual-article column, one which may contain a long analysis of something. German writers do a lot of what we would call editorializing. *Der Ruf* was a very high-level thing. It didn't look interesting, but it was what they were used to reading. We carried some war news, because eventually they believed this thing. My general memory is that it became very much believed. The people felt they had been lied to, and they believed this—it looked like home.<sup>112</sup>

*Der Ruf* was an "enormously sophisticated German-language publication," but it was not the only POW published newspaper.<sup>113</sup> Individual camps were also encouraged to produce their POW newspapers. A guide, produced by the Factory residents, offered suggestions regarding the ideal content of a camp newspaper:

It recommended that the papers be used as a medium for self-education and a source for factual information, that the editors be impartial and objective, that reprints of German and Allied communications be balanced, that quotations from works of certain German authors be encouraged, and that the papers include forums to provide for the voice of the majority (presumably non-Nazi) which could be coordinated with educational activities.<sup>114</sup>

*Der Spiegel* (The Mirror) was the name of the newspaper at Camp Hearne. Its stated goal was to promote free speech and democratic ideals. There were many more, some pro-Nazi and some anti-Nazi. As the war progressed, many pro-Nazi papers became more anti-Nazi.

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<sup>112</sup>Gansberg, 73.

<sup>113</sup>Waters, 141.

<sup>114</sup>Gansberg, 76.

*Der Ruf*, though, was the most famous POW journal and the only one to make the transition back to Germany after the war.<sup>115</sup>

Hans Warner Richter and Alfred Andersch were two of the most well-known writers on the Factory staff. Both were responsible for articles in *Der Ruf*. After the war, Richter and Andersch wrote books about their time in the Factory. Richter's book, *Die Geschlagenen/Beyond Defeat*, presented the author, in the character of "Guhler," as the spirit of *Der Ruf*. Guhler was a loyal and patriotic German soldier, but at the same time he was also anti-Nazi and an ardent socialist. After his captivity and arrival in an American POW camp, Guhler and his group of anti-Nazis were the ones who stood up against the Nazi hierarchy in control of the camp. In *Beyond Defeat*, the American captors were oblivious to what was going on in the camps. The Nazis were allowed free reign to run the daily life of the camp and any signs of dissent among the prisoners were dealt with harshly. Guhler's love of German culture and heritage was proven when American intelligence officers were unable to force him to turn informer. Despite all this, Guhler and his friends were perceived as traitors and remained somewhat isolated from the rest of the POWs. Throughout the book, Richter's character was haunted by the insults that portrayed him as a traitor to his country. Guhler's "reception committee" when he arrived at the American POW camp was not a friendly one:

Prisoners from the camp, packed shoulder to shoulder, lined the side of the road. They all wore the same blue coats and blue caps....They stood in silence, like a wall. Not a word of welcome, not a sign of greeting, not a shout escaped their ranks. "Deserters!" Guhler heard someone whisper beside him. He looked at the faces in astonishment but said nothing. He sensed the threat that emanated from the silent wall. They marched faster

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<sup>115</sup>Waters, 141.

and faster down the long road. "Traitors!" came the whisper from the dark ranks all around them. "Deserters! Cowards."<sup>116</sup>

According to Ron Robin, Richter wanted to explain how he cooperated with the enemy yet maintained his loyalty to the German cause. Richter, after the war was over, also claimed to have cooperated with the Americans in order to garner some control over the material in *Der Ruf*. None of the prisoners at the Factory, including Richter and Andersch, believed in the idea of collective guilt. They favored the idea of collective responsibility. Both men later claimed to have worked in the Factory in order to tone down such views. Richter and Andersch continued to be a part of *Der Ruf* after it made the trip to postwar Germany. Both men were also involved with *Group 47*, a literary circle in postwar Germany.<sup>117</sup>

"The Inner Power" was the lead article in the first edition of *Der Ruf*. The article discussed the human soul and why the shape of the world was not the fault of the average man.<sup>118</sup> "The Inner Power"condemned the massification of man and the "tendency toward group behavior at the expense of the inner creature."<sup>119</sup> Ron Robin in his book *The Barbed Wire College* maintained the article was confusing due to "obscure analogies" that could be taken several ways or in combination. Ironically, the anti-Nazi prisoners at Camp Devens discovered "hidden Nazi propaganda" in the article because it did not offer any positive aim or thought, while the pro-Nazi POWs at Camp Aliceville felt it was anti-Nazi because

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<sup>116</sup>Robin, 64.

<sup>117</sup>Waters, 133.

<sup>118</sup>Gansberg, 73.

<sup>119</sup>Waters, 141.

"it was diametrically opposed to the basic Nazi philosophy that the state, rather than the individual spirit, is all important."<sup>120</sup> It was not, in Ron Robin's opinion, an article written for a mass audience. The POWs were suspicious of the contents of *Der Ruf*, even the anti-Nazis. The POWs in the camps, according to Robin, did not believe the articles were written by other prisoners (*leben wie ihr*).<sup>121</sup>

The inside pages of *Der Ruf* included sections on the economy of the southern states (the cotton and fruit industries of that region), and the roots of slavery. The final section included letters to the editor—written, the paper claimed, by actual German POWs. The American authorities discovered the following in a letter written by one prisoner:

We receive here a prisoner paper. It is called *Der Ruf* and they claim it is German. I would like to call it a paper printed with German words. This paper is clever and very subtle. One has to read it a few times until one finds it is supposed to be political reeducation for us. But we are all Nazis and we will remain Nazis and only laugh about it.

The influence of *Der Ruf* was gradual, even Robert Kunzig admitted that:

In the early days of *Der Ruf*, it was a mortal sin to be caught reading it. Later on, everybody read it, and it was a very, very successful high level indoctrination. Really, it was indoctrination by correct facts. They weren't use to correct facts and didn't believe what they saw in *Der Ruf* until time showed how right the magazines were and how very wrong their communiques were.<sup>122</sup>

After all the initial resistance, *Der Ruf* began to win over large numbers of POWs.

Arthur Smith wrote: "In spite of the Nazi hard-core resistance...the high quality of the

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<sup>120</sup>Gansberg, 76.

<sup>121</sup>Robin, 76.

<sup>122</sup>Gansberg, 75.



newspaper's articles and literary presentations won over large numbers of PW readers." Circulation climbed from the first printing of eleven thousand copies in March of 1945 to seventy-five thousand within the same year. Arthur Smith maintained *Der Ruf* was popular with the POWs *because* of the high quality of its articles.<sup>123</sup> Curt Vinz, a German publisher who acted as an editor of *Der Ruf*, argued that the paper actually rekindled the POWs' interest in literature and raised morale. It was expected that the Germans would be depressed over their defeat. *Der Ruf* was meant to give them moral and cultural support.<sup>124</sup>

By the seventeenth edition, November 15, 1945, articles began to appear that argued the "true patriotism" of the German involved making plans to rebuild Germany after the war. *Der Ruf* also influenced the local camp newspapers. Judith Gansberg listed reasons why *Der Ruf* was important to the reeducation program. It provided an easy way for the assistant executive officers placed in each camp to determine Nazi strength and pick out its advocates, since the true Nazis boycotted the publication. It also influenced the eighty local camp papers; a study showed that after *Der Ruf* began, the camp papers became less Nazi and even more nonpolitical. (The original count of thirty-three clearly Nazi and three anti-Nazi, became twenty-four democratic, eighteen anti-Nazi, and only one openly Nazi).<sup>125</sup>

*Der Spiegel*, at Camp Hearne, Texas, was one of the eighty POW newspapers monitored by the Factory. The paper was nine pages long and written entirely in German. An English translation of the paper was provided which made monitoring the content of the

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<sup>123</sup>Smith, 46.

<sup>124</sup>Gansberg, 74.

<sup>125</sup>Gansberg, 76.

paper easier for the Americans. It included news from Germany, camp sports, and film reviews. There were other items included in the paper, such as crossword puzzles and a section on music theory. *Der Spiegel* also printed letters to the editor in order to allow the prisoners an outlet to voice their opinions.

Prisoners who objected to the paper once voiced their opposition at Camp Hearne by walking out of a meeting in the mess hall. The spokesman for the camp, Max Weiss, wrote about the walk out in an article for *Der Spiegel*. In his opinion, the incident allowed everyone to identify the Nazi element in the camp. By walking out "the black sheep of our camp who up too now had only moved behind the scenery separated themselves from the rest." It was not clear from what Weiss wrote exactly what the meeting was about, but the important part was the proof that the pro-Nazis had been instigating trouble behind the scenes. Now they were forced out into the open by their opposition. Weiss asked his readers to form their own opinions instead of waiting for someone higher up to tell them what to do in every aspect of their lives. Hans Backmayer, another prisoner, wrote an open letter to the editor of *Der Spiegel*. In it he discussed the underground newspaper, *Die Mahnung*, (The Exhortation/Reminder), written by the Nazi element in the camp. In his letter, Backmayer expressed his relief about the end of the pro-Nazi newspaper.

Who does not, with a cold shuddering, remember the former secret newspaper of the obscure[sic] men *Die Mahnung*, the supreme task of which was the despotic political and personal tutelage. Created for the political instigation and for keeping the PWs under control by awakening fright and terror, this slovenly paper had been created out of nothing with the fanatical zeal of the small anonymous clique. This paper had bereft many comrades of the last bit of reasoning faculty. They became mental slaves, weak-minded instruments doing slave labor for those obscure me.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>Waters, 141-142.

Slowly the Nazi element in the camps was eclipsed by the German POWs who supported and promoted free thinking as a democratic ideology. The Nazi supporters were forced to back down from their promotion of National Socialism. The reign of terror came to an end. New German prisoners began to arrive in the camps. They had seen the devastation and the hopelessness of Germany's position. The Americans made sure that information reached all of the POWs. What was the point of being a Nazi and a supporter of National Socialism now that they were on the losing side? Nazis were supposed to be powerful and members of the master race. Only the most hard-core Nazis interned in the camps continued to hold out any hope of victory. *Der Ruf* had promoted the change. *Der Spiegel*, along with most of the other camp newspapers, began to reflect that change and encouraged the POWs to start planning on rebuilding their devastated homeland. Postwar Germany needed Germans who moved toward that goal.<sup>127</sup>

The Factory monitored all of the camp newspapers for evidence of Nazi influence. A guide was prepared by the Kearney staff that listed the ideal contents for a camp newspaper. It recommended that the papers be "used as a medium for self-education and a source for factual information. The editors of the papers should be impartial and objective. A voice for the POW majority, hopefully anti-Nazi, should be available through forums and coordinated with educational activities."<sup>128</sup>

The SPD wanted to allow intercamp communication. In June 1945, a biweekly clip-sheet, "Die Auslese" (The Selection), was published as a supplementary to *Der Ruf*.

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<sup>127</sup>Waters, 142-143.

<sup>128</sup>Gansberg, 77.

Articles from different camp newspapers were selected for publication in "Die Auslise" by Fort Kearney POWs. Translation of Office of War Information (OWI) releases were also available through the supplement. "Die Auslise" was never as popular as *Der Ruf* since the articles were too recognizable as propaganda.<sup>129</sup>

*Der Ruf*, in combination with the reeducation courses taking place in the camps, had an effect on the POW population by the fall of 1945. Nazi symbols and articles slowly disappeared from the papers. Efforts were made to eliminate classes of no value to the reeducation programs had taken place after V-E Day. Anti-Nazis gained more ground and eventually took control of the camps from the Nazis. Arthur L. Smith wrote in *War for the German Mind*: "Davison brought together an extraordinary collection of German prisoners to help in the preparations and course work. Writers, newspaper editors, professors, and journalists by profession, they would have a profound impact upon postwar Germany."<sup>130</sup>

The War Department accepted the PMGO recommendation for an experimental pilot program. The goal was to prepare Germans for repatriation. The experimental schools operated from the Factory and were taught by a staff of civilian and military instructors selected by the SPD. The pilot schools (known as Special Projects II and III) would train carefully screened German POWs for administrative positions and for positions as military police in postwar Germany. Project I was the official name given to the first phase of the reeducation program at Kearney involving course preparations and the creation of *Der Ruf*. The inmate staff also attended an eight-week reeducation program at

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<sup>129</sup>Gansberg, 77.

<sup>130</sup>Smith, 46.

the Factory. A commencement exercise was held at Fort Kearney on July 6, 1945. Each man who had participated in Project I was given a certificate of achievement for completing the "training course for prisoners of war." Most of the POWs at the Factory participated in an eight-week program, in addition to their other duties, to prepare them to work for the postwar military government in Germany and introduce democracy to their fellow-Germans. According to the Provost Marshall General, the pilot school at Kearney was important for two reasons. First, it "produced a preliminary group of trained graduates who exhibited a satisfactory level of enthusiasm and progress." Second, it "revealed the problems that existed in the development of such a project."<sup>131</sup>

The POWs selected for the experimental schools had varied educational backgrounds that forced the SPD to conduct only general training and reeducation. The prisoners could not speak English at the same level. The Factory, in order to prepare the students for service with the postwar military government, had to organize a program that allowed them to learn about the possibility of democratic growth in Germany by teaching the POWs how democracy developed in the United States. The officials at Kearney decided the best course of action would be to teach a program that dealt with an examination of German and American history and study of the English language.<sup>132</sup>

The primary goal of Special Projects was teaching the POWs the meaning of democracy and respect for American institutions. The definition of democracy was not an easy thing to pin down. Germans and Americans had different ideas about what it meant

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<sup>131</sup>Gansberg, 76.

<sup>132</sup>Smith, 86-87.

based on their past experiences with it. The Germans who had been recruited for Major Davison's staff had fled Germany and "social democracy." The Weimar Republic was seen as a failed attempt at establishing a democratic government. The Americans had a history to draw upon that made it easier for them to trust the process. It took the Americans and Germans working together to come to an acceptable way of teaching it to the POWs.<sup>133</sup>

The success of the pilot school at Kearney encouraged the War Department to establish the "United States Army School Center," which consisted of two training installations located at Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island: the administrative school at Fort Getty (authorized May 19, 1945 as "Special Project II."), and the police training school at Fort Wetherill (authorized June 2, 1945 as "Special Project III"). The SPD located and trained "reliable, English-speaking Germans to serve as administrators, technicians, and policemen in occupied Germany." Plans for the experimental schools were underway by February 1945. The Special Projects Division members and 13 of the Kearney staff met at the Factory with other military agencies to develop a specialized POW training school. A summary sheet was submitted by the Civil Affairs Division to the War Department outlining the objectives for the projects.<sup>134</sup>

Screening teams were organized to clear prisoners for Fort Getty and Wetherill. The teams consisted of six POWs from the Factory and American personnel. There were two series of tests given to perspective students. The first test was given in their camps, then the second test was given in groups at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. There were 17,883 men

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<sup>133</sup>Billinger, 145-146.

<sup>134</sup>Kirk Gregory, "The German World War Two Prisoner and His Experience in the United States" (M.A. thesis, California State University Dominguez Hill, 2001), 100.

screened but only 816 passed the tests for the administrative school, and 2,895 for the police school.<sup>135</sup>

All of the tests were given under the supervision of Dr. Henry W. Ehrmann. Dr. Ehrmann was a German who had fled Nazi Germany and ultimately became one of the two civilian experts for the Special Projects Division. He was an instructor at Getty, Wetherill, and Fort Eustis. The tests given to the men had a threefold purpose, which included providing general information, intelligence level, and political affiliation. Judith Gansberg explained, "They were a check on the prisoners' own statements about their education and political beliefs, they helped to determine whether the man really was a suitable candidate for the schools and for which school he was best qualified, and, lastly, the answers given in the written test could later be used in conversations to help judge the honesty and intelligence of the man."<sup>136</sup>

The Provost Marshal General with the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force in France requested that the prisoners selected should live in the American zone of occupation in Germany. That was never done. Where the candidates lived in Germany was less important than their background, politics, and understanding of English. Robert Kunzig was fairly certain that the extensive background checks done on the prisoners prevented any Nazis from slipping through. Of the men who passed the tests and entered the program, forty-three percent were university graduates: engineers, teachers, or others; twenty-five percent were businessmen or other kinds of white-collar workers; and ten

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<sup>135</sup>Gansberg, 121.

<sup>136</sup>Gansberg, 122.

percent had been German civil servants.<sup>137</sup>

Howard Mumford Jones, the senior civilian on the SPD, was selected to be the director of the Experimental School. In addition to his duties as director, Jones taught survey classes in American institutions and government. Henry Ehrmann, the other civilian expert on the SPD, and Dr. Jones developed the intellectual content of the program. Ehrmann also taught a survey class on German history. Dr. Henry Lee Smith, the Brown University linguistics expert, and Captain William Moulton, from Cornell University, headed the English department. Major Burnham N. Dell was new to the program and assigned to teach military government. Dell was the only member of the faculty not associated with a major university.<sup>138</sup>

Along with the fifty-eight American officer faculty members and 115 enlisted men, were Germans from the inmate staff at Kearney. Many of the graduates from Getty, who later taught fellow-German prisoners, returned to the United States after the war to work at the Foreign Service Institutes School of Language and Linguistics with Henry Lee Smith. Some of the Americans who were at Kearney came across the bay to teach at Getty and Wetherill. It was a close group, dedicated to the goals of the program, and genuinely interested in their students. They were enthusiastic about the project and it was reflected in their work. The core of the group consisted of the Smiths (all three of them), Jones, Moulton, and Commander Edwin Casady, from the United States Navy. Robert Kunzig recalled the atmosphere: "I've been trying to figure out why this was so thrilling to us. Part

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<sup>137</sup>Gansberg, 122.

<sup>138</sup>Robin, 128-129.



of it was that we were getting wonderful responses from each other and from a lot of the prisoners. And again and again that's the picture. It wasn't so much what they'd learned, what we'd taught them, but the general spirit of the place.<sup>139</sup>"

Ron Robin was much more skeptical and critical of the "college archetype" used by the faculty at the Experimental School. He charged that Jones and his colleagues used that system because it was the one most familiar to them. Robin went on to write that the Germans were used to an entirely different type of educational model. The German educational system produced a "rigid, socially stratified student body with no interdisciplinary exposure and very little social rapport among its graduates." The Americans, in addition to academic goals, wanted to demonstrate the social benefits of the American system.<sup>140</sup>

The Kearney staff sought to eliminate all Nazi views and symbols from the camps. In anticipation of the beginning of the reeducation program, the assistant executive officers (AEOs) began to review all books in the camp libraries. Unsuitable books started to disappear from the shelves to be replaced by ones approved by the Factory. By May 1945, the Special Projects Division was successful in eliminating those books that reflected favorably on Nazi viewpoints and replacing them with books that favored democratic ideals. Censorship and translation were two important areas that received a great deal of attention from the Factory. As part of the reeducation program, the American government published and circulated classic literary works banned by the Nazis. Translations of

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<sup>139</sup>Gansberg, 123.

<sup>140</sup>Robin, 129.

popular American books (approved by the Factory) were also made available. For example, one book entitled *Children in the USA* was deemed appropriate for all prisoners.

One of the Kearney reviewers wrote:

The small book would be extremely valuable in the reeducation of German POWs. It gives in very good pictures and in short articles a general idea of how the American child grows up. The majority of POWs are eager to learn about the 'American way of life.'<sup>141</sup>

Another book that proved to be popular with the POWs, *Kleiner Fuhrer durch Amerika* (*Small Guide through America*), was also sold in the canteens.<sup>142</sup>

A series of books entitled *Buche Reihe NeueWelt* (*New World Books*) was also a product of the Factory. The series consisted of 24 volumes written primarily by exiles from Nazi Germany such as Leonard Frank, Franz Werfel, Arnold Zweig, and Carl Zuckmayer. Four of the volumes were the works of Thomas Mann, with a two-volume edition from *The Magic Mountain*, *Lotte in Weimar*, and essays entitled *Attention Europe*. Translated into German for this series were works by exiles from the Third Reich like Carl Zuckmayer, Joseph Conrad, and William Sarozan. Ernest Hemingway's novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, was also translated into German. It was very popular with the prisoners not because of the war theme but because of the new writing style Hemingway used which was short, direct dialogue, understatement, and realism.<sup>143</sup>

Books were not the only items censored. Magazines and newspapers (foreign and domestic) were also part of the SPD's efforts to control what the prisoners had access to.

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<sup>141</sup>Gansberg, 77-78.

<sup>142</sup>Waters, 142.

<sup>143</sup>Gansberg, 77-78.

The AEOs swept through the camps removing any material deemed offensive by the SPD. Guidelines were given to each AEO to follow regarding which books would be banned: "All books which misinterpret...the significance of the contributions of all races to the formation of American culture and civilization must be rejected." That rule was in effect due to the anti-Semitic undertones present in German appraisals of the strengths and weaknesses of America.<sup>144</sup>

The Special Projects Division also rejected books filled with "contempt for America as a country without its own culture, without a soul, a country which is only interested in making money." The AEOs were instructed to use books "which show the contribution to civilization of countries which have none of the Nazi complexes such as '*lebensraum*' or '*Volk ohne Raum*,' as well as books which stress the contributions of German culture in the early part of the nineteenth century."<sup>145</sup>

Robin maintained that the SPD was not satisfied with merely removing offensive books. He argued that the reeducation staff wanted much more control over the reading material available to the prisoners. A memorandum to the Provost Marshal General, Lt. Col. Edward Davison, advocated for the first time that the distribution of technical books be discouraged, since "they are of no value to the program." One of the reasons given for the increased control of literary materials was:

German prisoners of war are intellectually and ideologically adolescent. They will need intellectual protection and guidance before they will be qualified to form judgments actually representative of their native intelligence. This protection and guidance just carefully establish a sound balance of emphasis. Nazi

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<sup>144</sup>Smith, 85-86.

<sup>145</sup>Robin, 92-93.

propaganda has emphasized and distorted such subjects as Anglo-American imperialism , capitalistic decadence, race supremacy, and the glory of military conquest. To establish a balance... they must be shielded from any emphasis of these subjects which in any way parallels Nazi propaganda.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup>Robin, 93.

## CHAPTER 5

### INTELLECTUAL DIVERSION

In November of 1944, the Adjutant General of the U.S. sent the following "secret" letter to the camp commanders:

The detention in the United States of ever increasing numbers of German prisoners of war creates an unprecedented opportunity. These men will some day be repatriated and as a group, will have a powerful voice in future German affairs. Their opinions and feelings concerning America may determine, in a large measure, future relations between Germany and the United States.... Accordingly, the Secretary of War directed the Commanding General, Army Services Forces, to establish a program of reorientation for prisoners of war.... The purpose of the program is to create and foster spontaneous responses on the part of German prisoners of war towards activities and contacts which will encourage an attitude of respect on their part for American institutions, traditions, and ways of life and thought. Thereby they may be brought to realize the industrial might and indomitable spirit of the American people.... The program is, therefore designed to encourage self-indoctrination on the part of the prisoner.... It does not contemplate an attempt to Americanize them.... [The program] also provides for a company grade officer at each base camp who is to be known as the Assistant Executive Officer of the camp. His sole duties are to foster the program....<sup>147</sup>

Maxwell McKnight wrote to Colonel Davison: "No one visits Kearney without coming away with the feeling that they had an exciting experience.". The Factory was the center of the reeducation program, "a vital, active place." To make sure the Factory's material was properly used and that the goals of the Special Projects Division were achieved, an assistant executive officer (AEO) had to be placed in each camp to monitor the program for "intellectual diversion."<sup>148</sup> The army was concerned about the camp schools run by POW leaders, the majority of whom were Nazis. If the program succeeded,

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<sup>147</sup>May, 65.

<sup>148</sup>Gansberg, 84-85.

control of the camp schools was of major importance. The Army job description for the position of AEO stipulated the men "were supposed to speak German fluently, have a college education preferably in liberal arts, and should possess imagination and good judgment."<sup>149</sup>

The SPD needed nine officers to serve in each of the nine service commands. A field officer was placed in each camp to assist the company grade officers. The assistant executive officers (AEOs) were expected to be experts on journalism and movies, in addition to having a deep appreciation of American and German culture. It was not an easy task to find one-hundred fifty men who met those requirements. Most of the best people had already been picked for the future by the planned American Military Government. To fill the quota the ability to speak German fluently was dropped; it was considered to be the least important aspect of the job description. Each service command was required to send a certain quota of men to train as AEOs. Davison and his administrative staff reviewed hundreds of files to find the right men to fill the AEO position.<sup>150</sup>

Davison, who was in the middle of finding an administrative staff of twenty-six officers, was then confronted with several hundred men sent to train as AEOs. He soon discovered that many of the men had been sent because their superiors wanted to get rid of them. The qualifications for the positions had been, for the most part, ignored. The men's attitudes were another problem. Arthur Smith wrote: "A good many of the officers had been assigned against their will. A good many others were officers of the type that says

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<sup>149</sup>Robin, 92.

<sup>150</sup>Smith, 42-43.

they would rather 'kill' prisoners of war than try to reorientate them.”<sup>151</sup>

In November and December of 1945, training for the AEOs began at Fort Slocum, N.Y. Cumins Speakman was one of the men picked to become an AEO. After the war, Speakman wrote about his experiences for his master's thesis. "There was a great deal of excitement among the officers at Fort Slocum," he wrote, "as the full scope of the program was revealed to them." All of the men attended a week long conference that consisted of lectures, discussions, seminars, and a tour of a POW camp.<sup>152</sup>

Lt. Col. Davison had his hands full. He attempted to handle many assignments at once: organizing his own staff; selecting qualified men for the AEO positions; and dealing with accusations that he had communists on his SPD staff. One of the officers sent to the training site at Slocum wrote a letter to the War Department stating that Davison had communists on his SPD staff. Although the charges were false, Davison was still required to appear before the House Military Affairs Committee to explain and defend the reeducation program. Communism quickly came to the forefront of despised political systems seemingly taking over the position held by fascism.<sup>153</sup>

There were 262 officers and 111 enlisted men sent to the service commands. The AEOs were assigned to individual camps. The enlisted men worked as aids to the AEOs. The success each AEO had depended largely on the camp commander's attitude toward the reeducation program. Some commanders maintained the German POWs were beyond help and should only be used to reduce labor shortages in America. A reeducation program, in

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<sup>151</sup>Smith, 43.

<sup>152</sup>Gansberg, 86.

<sup>153</sup>Smith, 48-49.

their opinion, was a waste of time and manpower. It was not unusual for the AEOs to run up against a commanding officer who would not let them do their job. One CO threatened to have the AEO in his camp reassigned as a troublemaker. The CO wanted to use him for secretarial duties. Ultimately, the CO was the one transferred out of the camp.<sup>154</sup>

The true role of the AEOs was kept secret in order to allow them more access to the POWs. If the truth was known, they would not have been able to move as freely among the prisoners. Maxwell McKnight explained how it worked: "We put them there since the AEO spoke German and the CO didn't. The Germans accepted this in terms of translating for the CO. It seemed to be natural. No one suspected they were there to carry out a so-called reeducation program to open the camp to free information." Some AEOs even posed as assistants to the camp chaplain.<sup>155</sup>

POWs had several reasons for taking classes, reasons that ranged from a way to combat boredom to a genuine desire to learn. Before the AEOs were instilled into the camps, the Nazi element ruled the camp schools and decided what was taught. The POWs taking English classes hoped it might lead to better jobs while they were interned. For example, one prisoner hoped to become a camp interpreter. Learning new skills might help them find work after returning to Germany. Credits were also transferred to Germany after the war. Fritz Haus, a prisoner at Camp Hearne, Texas, earned his seminary degree by taking courses offered through Corcordia Theological Seminary of St. Louis, Missouri.<sup>156</sup>

Approximately three-hundred courses were offered in the camps ranging from

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<sup>154</sup>Gansberg, 90.

<sup>155</sup>Krammer, 198-199.

<sup>156</sup>Waters, 40-41.



beginners English to Engineering. Correspondence courses were offered through many universities. At Camp Concordia in Kansas, classes included Theology, History, Geography, Government, and Physics. Vocational courses were offered to the POWs. Educational programs were organized and taught by POWs with professional backgrounds. Prisoners who had been university professors, public school teachers, accountants, or engineers prior to being conscripted taught the POW classes. All of the POW instructors were paid for their work.<sup>157</sup>

Some higher ranking officers in the American army feared the camp schools would become breeding grounds for Nazism. After V-E Day, the courses were altered to focus on material supplied by the Factory. German civil service classes were canceled and courses in English, History, Geography, and other classes stressing the democratic ideal were offered instead. The Nazi instructors were replaced with men selected by the Special Projects Division.

Movies, books, newspapers, and magazines were also provided for the "intellectual diversion" of the prisoners. Motion pictures were extremely popular and most camps were provided with a sixteen-millimeter projector and screen. Not all of the films selected for the prisoners were chosen simply for amusement. There were newsreels about the American defeat of the Japanese at Midway and the allied bombing raids of Germany. Since the films were in English, a synopsis in German was provided for the prisoners. Not all of the prisoners, of course, were pleased with having to watch footage of their country being destroyed. Some critics, such as Ron Robin, claimed that films were a form of mass

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<sup>157</sup>Waters, 40.

media that was overlooked to a large extent by the SPD staff. Robin argued that the intellectuals in control of the POW reeducation program simply looked down on films and focused on books, magazines, and newspapers. In Robin's opinion, it was a missed opportunity to reach the rank and file POWs.

Provost Marshall General Archer L. Lerch considered films to be the most effective medium for indoctrination. Films for indoctrination were an educational aid probably picked up from the Nazis. POWs were starving for entertainment and American movies were available in all the camps. Prior to the reeducation program, films were selected by the camp spokesmen, who was most likely controlled by the Nazi leadership. That person usually selected movies that depicted America in a poor light. The Special Projects Division set up an extensive film program in May and June of 1945 that "reflected our American scene without distortion and which fostered respect for our democratic institutions."<sup>158</sup>

Hundreds of films were screened by the men at the Factory—features, short subjects, travelogues—in order to weed out the inappropriate ones, such as films that depicted taboo subjects such as prison life or gangsters that presented America in the worst light possible were rejected. The Factory tried to keep those movies out of the camp, but some did get through. The Factory's control over the film section was not as firm as it was with other sections of the program. Films that included such topics such as gangsterism, political corruption, and the debilitating effects of democracy included *Lady Scarface*,

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<sup>158</sup>Robin, 107.

*Seven Miles from Alcatraz, and Legions of the Lawless.*<sup>159</sup>

Ron Robin accused Davison of looking down on films in favor of books or other reading material. Robin maintained that Davison distrusted popular culture and was more committed to reeducation through rational or logical persuasion. Because of this attitude Robin claimed the SPD allowed the camp AEOs more control over which movies were shown.<sup>160</sup> Judith Gansberg, however, maintained that the SPD was very involved in the selection of films and devoted a great deal of attention to that aspect of the program. Gansberg wrote: "To the credit of everyone in the SPD, the program ran well once it started. Studies showed that 130 base camps and 243 branch camps had achieved significant prisoner interest, access to good equipment, funds, and projectionists in sufficient quantity to make the film program successful."<sup>161</sup>

American films were favorites with the prisoners. Since the movies were in English with no subtitles, they were first screened and a synopsis in German was provided at the beginning of the movie to each prisoner. Documentaries on American history and government were also shown.<sup>162</sup> Popular themes depicted family life and common human experiences. The Factory approved certain dramas, wholesome comedies, good musicals, and films about contemporary or historical topics. Some examples approved by the SPD for viewing by the prisoners were *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, *The Adventures of Mark Twain*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Back to Bataan*, *Courageous Mr. Penn*, *Captain Eddie*,

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<sup>159</sup>Gansberg, 80.

<sup>160</sup>Robin, 107.

<sup>161</sup>Gansberg, 82.

<sup>162</sup>Waters, 142.

*King of Kings, Guadalcanal Diary, Land of Liberty, Madame Curie, Sign of the Cross, Song of Bernadette, The Story of Alexander Graham Bell, The Human Comedy, How Green Was My Valley, Lost Horizon, The Aldrich Family, Christmas in July, Young Mr. Lincoln,* and all the *Andy Hardy* films.<sup>163</sup>

A few propaganda films were deemed too "mushy" even by the Factory's standards. *Tomorrow the World* was one of those movies. It depicted a young boy who was supposedly a product of Hitler's Youth Groups. The boy was so diabolical that Hitler's worst critic would not have accepted him as realistic or representative of the children of the Third Reich. Frederick March, who played the American who had taken the boy in, was deemed "too soft-hearted and too easily duped to reflect credit on the American System among the prisoner corps."<sup>164</sup>

The Office of War Information (OWI) had a series of documentaries called "This is America" and "Why we Fight" that were shown to the POWs. Oskar W., a Factory screener, claimed "the documentary film serves the prisoners as finger-pointing to a future which will be hard but nevertheless worth living for, and it will educate them to become valid members in the community of nations."<sup>165</sup>

In order to show the films, permission of the studios was required. The Factory was not allowed to participate in that process. Two experts were brought in by Special Projects in order to facilitate the process, Captain Otto Englander and Lieutenant James E. Stewart. The War Department allowed the army bureaucracy to become involved in selecting films

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<sup>163</sup>Gansberg, 80-81.

<sup>164</sup>Gansberg, 80.

<sup>165</sup>Gansberg, 81.

instead of allowing individual camps or the SPD to make arrangements. The film section of the project did not start until March 1945, almost six months after the rest of the program because the army officials could not decide how to handle the financial arrangements.<sup>166</sup>

The Hollywood movie executives who owned the pictures were not anxious to release them for viewing by German POWs. The problem was that the most influential men in Hollywood were Jewish and did not want to participate in "coddling" Germans. Harry Warner of Warner Brothers was one of the most vocal critics of the reeducation efforts. In a letter to Lt. General W.D. Styer, Chief of Staff of the Army Service Forces and mediator between civilians and the Special Projects Division, Warner expressed his outrage:

I say this not out of a lack of humanity, but because of a strong conviction that our good intentions will almost certainly be misunderstood by these Nazis. The character of their tradition and indoctrination is well known and has brought them so far from the ordinary mental processes of civilized human beings, that they can interpret kindness only as weakness.... These men have been trained to believe that we are soft, muddle-headed idiots. They have been taught to believe that their cruelty and brutality is a virtue. and that our humanity is a fault.<sup>167</sup>

Harry Warner's anger was not easily dismissed. He had supported the current administration's policies through his movies. The SPD did not want Warner as an enemy so it decided to reveal the true nature of the reeducation program to him. Ron Robin maintained that even after Maxwell McKnight met with Warner and explained the program to him it did not change his attitude to any great degree. Judith Gansberg, however, wrote that Warner and the other Jewish Hollywood executives were happy to assist Davison after

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<sup>166</sup>Krammer, 209-210.

<sup>167</sup>Robin, 111.

the exact nature of the program was revealed to them. Robin grudgingly admitted that Warner did eventually switch from criticizing the program to criticizing the movies selected for the POWs.<sup>168</sup>

Harry Warner was annoyed over the SPD's choice of films, such as *The Oklahoma Kid* (Warner, 1939) and *The Frisco Kid* (Warner, 1935). Both had been specifically requested for the SPD's movie program, but Warner claimed they glorified gratuitous violence. Westerns and gangster movies, McKnight knew and, of course, Warner knew, were variations on the myth of Horatio Alger. Gangsters and outlaws were able to succeed through their self-reliance and enterprise. Their success was fleeting because "they denied pivotal moral values that the true Alger characters espoused. Their punishment for the rejection of traditional ethics was violent destruction and imminent demise." The recurring moral was important and McKnight's justification for wanting to show them to the prisoners:

*Frisco Kid*...doesn't whitewash conditions in parts of the country opened up by our expansion to the West. But it does stress that lawlessness was overcome by the efforts of the people themselves and that justice finally prevails. In the end the 'Kid' says, when he is taken away by the strong arm of the law, 'Some day I'll return and then I'll help to *build* instead of *destroy*,' an attitude we should very much like the Germans to develop.<sup>169</sup>

Davison decided in the end not to use the offending movies, and their absence had little effect on the program. The objectives of the film branch were more complex than merely teaching that justice will prevail or crime does not pay. Davison was not dependent on only one genre or movie studio. The film branch of the SPD selected a wide variety of

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<sup>168</sup>Robin, 112.

<sup>169</sup>Robin, 112.

movies to show the prisoners, such as musicals, situational comedies, melodramas, and war films. Even Ron Robin conceded in a retreat from his early criticism, "The film branch was efficient, professional, and quite successful in compiling a well-honed and visually attractive interpretation of contemporary American culture through film."<sup>170</sup> .

Once the AEOs reached their assigned camps they discovered the extent of the Nazi control. There had been several "Holy Ghost" incidents, American newspapers and magazines were rarely read, and the Nazis had control of the schools. The instructors were Nazis and not open to other views. *Mein Kampf* was used in the classroom and open political discussions were out of the question. The AEO's job was to gain the trust and confidence of the non-Nazi prisoners, but it was difficult to win over men who had been threatened if they cooperated in any way with the Americans.<sup>171</sup>

The censorship of books and other reading material was the first job taken on by the AEOs. The German Red Cross (GRC) was one of the first organizations the AEOs faced when they attempted to censor Nazi propaganda. The GRC sent reading material to the POWs in the form of books, pamphlets, calendars, and "religious" journals. All of the items were full of Nazi ideology, slogans, and warnings. Judith Gansberg, author of *Stalag, USA*, described one incident that involved a shipment of Christmas packages sent to the POWs by the GRC. Among the gifts the prisoners received were walnuts stuffed with propaganda messages. The letter of Nazi law was conveyed by double meaning in poetic form. The AEO summarized the messages sent as: "You prisoners over there keep your

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<sup>170</sup>Robin, 113.

<sup>171</sup>Gansberg, 92.

chins up; keep your mouths shut and stay in line politically or else." Needless to say, the walnuts and their messages were not included in the gifts the POWs received that Christmas.

AEOs scoured the camp libraries and gradually removed "offensive" books. It was done in such a way as not to arouse suspicion and appeared to be a normal rotation of books. Some of the books removed included works by Alfred Rosenberg, Dr. Joseph Goebbels, and Erich Von Ludendorff. Anything that was pro-Nazi or by "chauvinistic" German writers quietly disappeared from the shelves.<sup>172</sup> In their place, the AEOs stocked the shelves with German classics, pre-Nazi fiction, books banned by the Nazis, and translations of approved English language works. Maxwell McKnight noted the gradual changes in the camp afterwards:

We got all the books banned in Germany and distributed them in the camps. And in the camps where they weren't burned by the Nazis, they were a real breakthrough, since all the years of the Nazis and their thought control were over. It was like opening a floodgate to nurse a Sahara.<sup>173</sup>

In addition to the libraries, "approved" books were available for a few pennies or a few dollars in the canteens. The *New World Series*, which was a product of the Factory, and the *Encyclopedia Britannica World Atlas* were very popular with the prisoners. The AEO at Camp Butner, North Carolina added photographic books to the ones he received from the SPD. The officer put a sign up in the canteen advertising the books for sale as "Souvenir Books of America." Charging for the books seemed to lessen the suspicion of

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<sup>172</sup>Gansberg, 90.

<sup>173</sup>Gansberg, 91.



the prisoners.<sup>174</sup>

The assistant executive officers waited until the time was right to become more assertive in the camps. June 6, 1944 (D-day) brought thousands of new German POWs into the camps. It was important for those men to talk to the veteran POWs. The prisoners who had experienced Normandy and knew the Allies' strength were the best men to give the news to those who had not experienced such defeat before capture. The new prisoners were divided up and scattered among the ones who had been there for a long time. It made a great impression on them. Any prisoners who still held out hope for a German victory were disappointed by the news brought by the most recent captives. It was very likely that Germany would be defeated. There was no longer an attitude of superiority and the Nazis lost most of their grips on the camps. The devastating news from Europe combined with the efforts of the reeducation program were instrumental in breaking the Nazi hold.<sup>175</sup>

The AEOs were more assertive after VE-Day. The old curriculum and the Nazi instructors were replaced with schools that taught English, American, and German history, geography, and civics. The classes were taught (with the assistance of the AEOs) by anti-Nazis or apolitical POWs who could speak English. School attendance was on a voluntary basis and eighty-eight percent of the POWs attended. Subjects deemed suitable by the Special Projects Division at the Factory replaced *Mein Kampf* in the classrooms.

The AEOs were there to guide, but the Germans did most of the work. By the end of the war, more than five thousand certificates of completion had been handed out.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup>Gansberg, 91-92.

<sup>175</sup>Gansberg, 92-93.

<sup>176</sup>Krammer, 80.

Toward the end of the war, the Americans required all POWs to view films of the Nazi atrocities in the concentration camps. The footage was so shocking that, at first, the prisoners, anti-Nazis included, refused to believe it was true. American authorities provided the POWs with a blank piece of paper to record their opinions anonymously. Most of the POWs claimed they had no knowledge of what had happened in the concentration camps and expressed horror at what they were forced to watch. Many Nazi supporters turned away from the party after viewing the atrocity films. Will Nellesen, a prisoner at Camp Hearne in Texas wrote:

We could not believe that our own people, the Germans, would do something like that, since during and after the First World War it was pointed out that supposedly the German soldiers cut off the hands of the children of Belgium, which turned out to be total propaganda.<sup>177</sup>

Many, like Nellesen, were in a state of denial and wanted to believe it was only American propaganda, but the evidence proved to be overwhelming. Most were devastated and ashamed. Efforts to replace Nazi ideology with democracy were assisted by the mandatory viewing of the atrocity films.

In June 1945, one month after VE Day, the Office of the Provost Marshall General declassified the reeducation program for POWs. Oddly enough, the media gave the news very little attention after months of complaints about the government's waste of a perfect opportunity to rehabilitate the Nazis under their control. The American public was finally aware of the attempted reeducation of POWs in camps across the United States. The government tried to prepare many enemy combatants for the postwar world by exposing

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<sup>177</sup>Waters, 143.

them to American values and ideals. Most of the POWs were aware of the program; it was common knowledge in the camps. The suspicion about *Der Ruf* being under the control of the American authorities was merely confirmed. The SPD was freed of any need to protect the secrecy of the program.<sup>178</sup>

The importance of the assistant executive officers in the reeducation program cannot be exaggerated. The success of the program in the camps was directly related to the drive and imagination of that particular camp's AEO. Some were very good while others put very little effort into their assignments, or were prevented from doing so by the camp commander.

#### Reeducation in Russia and Great Britain

In the early part of the war, the Allies were battling fascism and determined to turn the German people toward more peaceful pursuits. A new political ideology would have to take the place of National Socialism. Once it was certain that Germany would fall, the question of which political ideology would replace fascism—democracy or communism—came to the forefront. Each country wanted its political system to replace Germany's old one.

Time, location and circumstances under which capture took place played a significant part in determining the individuals vulnerability to indoctrination attempts. The year of capture would materially affect the prisoner's assessment of Germany's chances of victory, and consequently his fighting morale, as well as his willingness to accept the risks of collaboration, the season and climate of the region would have a direct influence upon his chances to survive the physical hardships of captivity and his will to resist the temptations of collaboration,...whether he had belonged to a rested, well-supplied unit that was advancing, or whether capture had come after weeks of hard defensive battles, or whether it coincided with the collapse of Germany and the

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<sup>178</sup>Waters, 141-142.

end of the war, as was the case with the largest contingent of prisoners.<sup>179</sup>

German soldiers taken prisoner in North Africa during World War II had different experiences than the ones captured by the Russians on the Eastern Front. Rommel's Afrika Korps was overconfident and even arrogant toward the Americans who held them. It was still early in the war and they were sure that Germany would be the victor. Some even taunted their American guards by saying they would be in America to welcome the German army when they liberated them. The German soldiers captured by the Russians could not afford to be so arrogant and, following the defeat at Stalingrad, most realized Germany was not going to win the war. Hitler ordered the German lines at Stalingrad held at all costs and refused any requests to retreat. The Germans saw their fellow soldiers dying by the thousands. By the time the Sixth Army surrendered, most of them were starving and freezing to death. The harsh conditions continued under the Russians. Age also played an important role in how receptive a prisoner might be to reeducation. Men who were less than thirty had more confidence in Hitler and National Socialism than older men. The older man had known life before Hitler, but the younger one had grown up in Nazi Germany and knew nothing else. Another factor in whether the prisoners were receptive to reeducation was whether or not they had witnessed the destruction of their homeland. If they had, then it was easier to accept that Germany had lost the war.<sup>180</sup>

After the German defeat at Stalingrad, Joseph Stalin wasted little time in taking advantage of the opportunity to indoctrinate hundreds of thousands of German prisoners

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<sup>179</sup>Smith, 59.

<sup>180</sup>Smith, 59.

of war to communism. The German soldiers were weak and malnourished and had suffered extreme hardships in the weeks before surrender. The POWs in Russian control were held under conditions vastly different from prisoners captured by the British and Americans. They were guaranteed protection under the Geneva Convention and their living conditions were usually superior to the German Army. It was a relief after a period of instability. A U.S. Army psychological report on the capture of Germans described it as "a considerable relief after a period of instability. It is a return to normalcy and to a social structure not too dissimilar to the one he has left...privileges of military rank are restored; he receives or perhaps gives orders. He has become a cog in a wheel; he is a member of a closely organized, supervised and regimented group."<sup>181</sup> Arthur Smith wrote: "The powerful sense of group embodied much that was rooted in Nazism, and was a strong barrier to reeducation."<sup>182</sup>

German POWs captured by Russia were in almost as much danger as in battle. Food was used to lure many German soldiers into the Soviet reeducation program. POWs who survived long enough to make it to a Russian camp were not guaranteed anything. They were cold, hungry, and worked by the Russians to the point of collapse. The willingness to participate in the communist program might mean the difference in life and death. The POWs held in America and British POW camps were protected by the Geneva Convention. The Russians did not sign the Geneva Convention and were under no obligations to follow it.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup>Smith, 57.

<sup>182</sup>Smith, 59.

<sup>183</sup>Smith, 59.

The Antifa Schools were established by the communists to influence the government of postwar Germany. Stalin's reeducation plan differed from the American Special Projects Division and the British program at Wilton Park more than the teaching of a political belief. The Antifa Schools did not focus as much on academics, nor were they conducted by professional educators as was America's Special Projects and Great Britain's Wilton Park. German POWs played an active role in Hitler's defeat by participating in the Soviet propaganda machine.

POWs who broke with the group by participating in the reeducation programs offered by the Allies did so for various reasons: genuine hate for the Nazi regime; a lost battle; bad news from home; or, possibly, a genuine interest to learn about democracy or communism. Arthur L. Smith in his book, *War for the German Mind*, maintained the decision was easier for Germans captured by the Russians. Most of them had experienced serious deprivation and a deep sense of resignation about their fate. Even after capture, German soldiers were forced to march for miles in treacherous weather wearing nothing but rags. Russian camps were devoid of the relative comfort found in camps located in England and America.<sup>184</sup>

Many German soldiers captured by the Russians were disheartened and disillusioned with Hitler and his politics. They blamed Hitler and the Nazis for putting them in the position they were in. Some had begun to doubt Hitler even before they were captured and blamed him and his Nazi followers for the mess they were in. It was not something that happened all at once but had built up over the months watching their

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<sup>184</sup>Smith, 60.

comrades suffer and die. What exactly were they fighting for? Fear had kept them silent, but now they were free to express their true feelings. Becoming a prisoner of the Russians was, for many, a chance to discard a political ideology they had lost faith in and embrace a new one—communism.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

One of the Special Projects Division directors wrote the following in jest about whether the reeducation program had been successful:

Many people will ask, of course, whether the prisoners have actually changed. The easiest answer to this is photographs taken before and after their captivity. Obviously, they have gained considerable weight. But it is our firm conviction that they have also become aware of the spiritual powers of the great country. Go into any camp and you will find them jitterbugging to the latest recording of America's great jazz, or perhaps with an ear cocked attentively to the radio from which the humanitarian and courageous career of Ma Perkins is being expounded. And certainly most of them know that there is only one superman and that he is an American reporter on the *Daily Planet*.<sup>185</sup>

Judith Gansberg suggested there was a lot of truth in that sarcastic statement—a touch of the best and worst of the program. The reeducation program had no shortage of critics. Among sociologists and psychologists who studied the program and the possibility of reeducating Germans, few agreed that the program would work. Judith Gansberg noted that, "The primary danger was that of leaning too much on the American, British, and French experience rather than on German sources. There was also a danger of force-feeding instead of winning them to democracy by teaching them to discriminate between fact and propaganda."<sup>186</sup>

One of the best examples of the success of the camp reeducation programs was a Special Projects Conference held for the AEOs at Fort Benning, Georgia in October 1945. Two prisoners from the base camps and each of the thirteen branch camps presented a three-day event that included classes, plays, and lectures by democratized prisoners. The

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<sup>185</sup>Gansberg, 124.

<sup>186</sup>Gansberg, 124-125.



POWs were anxious to show the results of the wonderful program in which they had participated.<sup>187</sup>

In a special edition of the camp newspaper *Wille und Weg* ("Will and Way") entitled "Nevertheless, We Will Carry On," the prisoners published the pledge they had signed on October 25:

We accept the reeducation program "American Government and Democracy" to develop a new basis for the spiritual reformation of the Germans and the reconstruction of the German Nation. Since the inner collapse of our people was at last due to a systematic seclusion from the word and ideas of Western Democracy, we saw our first task...to create for ourselves...a glance into the construction and life of a state, which from the beginning of its history had one desire, the freedom of its citizens, the welfare of their life, and the peace of all those who lived within its borders.<sup>188</sup>

Ron Robin claimed the Special Projects Division, when it was established by the office of the Provost Marshall General, decided to use "humanists, poets, and professors of the liberal arts" instead of social scientists in the reeducation program. In his opinion, the intended students were unsuited for "highly intellectualized college courses."<sup>189</sup> Hard-core Nazis and battle hardened soldiers would never learn about America and democracy in such an environment. They were too ingrained in the Nazi ideology. The SPD, however, did not target hard-core Nazis. That was the reason for the extensive screening. It was accepted that the fanatical Nazi element would not be converted by the reeducation program. The SPD wanted the Nazis out of the way so they could focus on the anti-Nazis and apolitical prisoners. Robin refused to let go of that argument. Robin ridiculed the

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<sup>187</sup>Smith, 118.

<sup>188</sup>Smith, 118.

<sup>189</sup>Robin, 4-5.

"university atmosphere" employed by the SPD, but it was hard to understand why. Robin maintained it was all a conspiracy—liberal arts professors were attempting to regain their former glory in the universities by minimizing the importance of the social scientists by not using them in the reeducation program. The SPD used "logical persuasion" to turn the POWs around. Robin never believed that was enough.<sup>190</sup>

One problem with Robin's theory was a lack of regard to the screening and selection process implemented by the SPD. The target audience of the reeducation program was not the Nazi element. Efforts were made to pick those prisoners who were, or claimed to be, anti-Nazi or even apolitical. Davison and his staff recognized that rabid Nazis were not going to be receptive to lessons in democracy and the "American way" of life. Robin refused to credit the effort at reeducation with anything positive. By taking that stand, he lost credibility. Robin came off as one-sided by his obvious lack of objectivity. The best argument for democracy among most German POWs was more practical than ideological. It was the visible affluence of America. Democracy translated to the POW as the ability to live a comfortable life.

Germany was the enemy and Russia the ally during WWII, both pro-Nazi and pro-Communists POWs were considered unsuitable for reeducation. Even the American officers involved in the Special Projects Division were not safe from certain members of Congress if their politics were deemed too liberal. By the end of the war, the American government was more concerned with countering communism than eradicating Nazism.

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<sup>190</sup>Robin, 17.

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