

ternments and the people who became their friends. It is present in the face of a woman who spends part of each Memorial Day at the grave of a German uncle who died in Utah and is buried at Ft. Douglas with forty other German soldiers. And it is part of the life of a man who wrote poetry about his prisoner of war experiences in Wyoming.

### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS IN WYOMING

In January, 1943, plans were announced for the construction of a prisoner of war camp near Douglas, Wyoming. Specifications called for the erection of 180 buildings, including a 150-bed hospital, to provide complete, self-contained accommodations for approximately 3500 men.

Construction was completed in June, 1943, at a cost of more than \$1,000,000, and the first group of prisoners, 412 Italians, arrived in Douglas on August 17. By early October, the Italian prisoner population had increased to more than 1900 men.

During the autumn of 1943, Italian prisoners from Douglas were used extensively as laborers in several side camps. Two hundred of them helped with the beet harvest in Worland. Other side camps were established at Pine Bluffs, Veteran and Wheatland, as well as at Greeley and Ft. Lupton, Colorado. Italians from the Douglas camp were also used in the Wyoming timber industry, at Ryan Park near Saratoga.

Employment of prisoners for farm labor rapidly became a viable part of the wartime economic pattern in Wyoming. In the fall of 1943, Douglas prisoners harvested 3,685 acres of sugar beets, 141,400 bushels of potatoes, 15,000 bushels of small grain, 310,000 pounds of beans, and 2,000 tons of hay.

When Italy surrendered, the status of the Italian prisoners changed, and they were moved out of the Douglas camp. It appeared then that the camp would be closed, a fact that distressed local farmers, who had begun to count on the prisoners for labor.

The first German prisoners of war were brought to the Douglas camp in April, 1944. Most members of that initial group, however, were moved to other camps during the spring. By late June, less than 100 German prisoners remained at Douglas, and in July the camp was deactivated.

Only six weeks after its deactivation, the camp reopened, but the first new prisoners did not arrive until mid-September. The 471 Germans who arrived on September 19 were soon followed by others. By the first week in October there were again nearly 2,000 captives at Douglas.

Like the Italians, the German prisoners played an important role in the Wyoming economy. In the summer of 1944, Douglas prisoners worked on farms near Wheatland, and others were sent to a lumber camp Southwest of Douglas. The following year the operation was expanded to include side camps at Basin, Clearmont, Deaver, Esterbrook, Lovell, Riverton, Wheatland and Worland.

Not all of the side camps in Wyoming, however, received their laborers from Douglas. Many German prisoners came to Wyoming from large centers outside the state. Prisoners from most eastern Wyoming camps came from a major facility at Scottsbluff, Nebraska. During 1944, almost all side camps in Wyoming operated under Scottsbluff. These included Basin, Deaver, Dubois, Pine Bluffs, Torrington, Veteran, Wheatland and Worland. The following year, Scottsbluff provided the prisoner labor for camps at Clearmont, Dubois, Huntley, Lingle, Veteran and Torrington. All of these camps except Dubois supplied labor for the beet and potato fields and for miscellaneous farm work. Prisoners at Dubois worked in the timber industry.

Like its Douglas counterpart, the Scottsbluff internment camp was built in 1943 and first housed Italian prisoners of war. German prisoners arrived there in May, 1944. From then until June, 1946, they worked on farms near Scottsbluff and in many side camps in Nebraska, Wyoming and Colorado. The peak population of the Scottsbluff camp was approximately 4,700 German prisoners.

The Scottsbluff prisoners were apparently good workers and got along well with their American "hosts." In

an account of her final encounter with German prisoners of war on a Nebraska farm, Mrs. E. B. Fairfield gives some interesting insight into the unique relationship that existed between the prisoners and the farmers. She says:

The last day the Germans worked on our farm, my husband took his tractor to help another neighbor some distance from our home. So it left me alone, knowing that twenty or more of these men would be in our yard at noon. Their speech was low and guttural, which made them sound more harsh and frightening, but all went well, even when I had to let two or three come into the kitchen to get drinking water. I enjoyed making jelly and jam, yet had learned that others in the family didn't care for it as I did, and had a lot of the jars on the table, thinking to throw it out. Some were several years old and rather sugary. One P.O.W. noticed them, called it marmalade, made motions in asking for it. I was glad to get rid of it, and every jar was returned, completely cleaned out, even if I hadn't spoons enough. They then gathered in formation with one acting as leader and marched back to work as they had come.<sup>6</sup>

A Camp at Greeley, Colorado also became important for Wyoming. After the Italian prisoners were moved out of Douglas, German timber labor for camps in the Medicine Bow National Forest was supplied from Greeley. During 1944 and 1945, the Greeley camp provided several hundred workers for lumber camps at Ryan Park and Mullen Creek.

The real impact of German prisoners of war upon the Wyoming economy is perhaps revealed in statistics concerning their employment. In July, 1945, the *Wyoming Eagle* gave the following report concerning the use of prisoners in the state during 1944:

The record shows that prisoners worked 79,815 days in agriculture and 7,117 days in the timber industry, or a total of 86,932 days at all types of work.

Accomplishments in agriculture accounted for the following record: 1,604.59 acres of beets thinned, 1,455.02 acres of beets hoed, 416.90 acres of beets weeded, 78,380.2 tons of beets topped, 2,106.75 acres of beet tops piled, 1,861.45 acres of beans and corn hoed, 642 acres of beans piled, 132,464 hours of miscellaneous labor, 6,745 turkeys picked, 14,486 bushels of potato seed cut, 669,515 bushels of potatoes picked, 1,041 acres of grain shocked, 19,877 bushels of potatoes sorted, 59.6 acres of beet tops siloed, 5,769 bushels of corn picked, 171,219 pounds of green beans picked, and 1,605 bushels of apples and plums picked.

Lumbering and forestry activities accounted for the following record: 5,003,815 board feet of timber felled, 5,367 snags cut and disposed of, 14,712 hours of mill work and skidding, 400 slabs edged in mill, 695,625 board feet of lumber offbearing, and 45,776 railroad ties offbearing.<sup>7</sup>

Almost all of this work was done by Germans. The Italian prisoners' status changed before they could be used during the 1944 farm season. Only in the timber industry was significant work done by Italians early in the year. Complete figures will not be given here, but a similar production record was made by German prisoners during 1945.

The first German prisoners to be brought to Wyoming—and the last to leave—were interned in none of the aforementioned camps, and had contact with few Americans other than military personnel. These men were placed in a camp at Fort Francis E. Warren, near Cheyenne. The first of them arrived at Ft. Warren on November 13, 1943. From then until late in 1946, several hundred prisoners were housed at the fort. Unlike prisoners in the agricultural camps, this group and its activities were hidden behind the cloak of army censorship. The Germans at Ft. Warren neither left the post, nor were they employed by civilians, either in agricultural or otherwise.

Most Germans interned in Wyoming camps were captured during the African campaign. The story of Julius Algermissen is typical, in that it reflects both the myriad of circumstances which took these men to many battlefronts, and the long road leading eventually to Africa, and finally to Wyoming.<sup>8</sup>

A ship carrying Julius Algermissen and other prisoners landed in Boston in the fall of 1943. From Boston, Mr. Algermissen was sent by train to Colorado Springs, Colorado. There, at what is now Ft. Carson, he cleaned barracks, built facilities for the prisoners, and transplanted trees. Later he worked in the sugar beet fields near Ovid.

In 1944, Mr. Algermissen was transferred to a camp in Michigan, where he remained for a month before being moved to Wisconsin. From a camp near Madison he and other prisoners were sent to work in a canning factory, processing peas, tomatoes and corn.

From Wisconsin, Mr. Algermissen was sent to Scottsbluff, Nebraska. For a few weeks he worked in nearby potato fields. Then he traveled to Wheatland, Wyoming, where he harvested sugar beets. In November, 1944, when the beet harvest ended, he was assigned to the camp at Douglas. He spent the rest of his internment there.

While at the Douglas camp, Algermissen worked on local farms and ranches. For two seasons he harvested potatoes and performed other labor on the Alexander Cross ranch. A positive relationship developed between him and Mr. Cross. Because of their friendship, Mr. Cross sponsored Julius Algermissen's return to the United States after the war. Mr. Algermissen immigrated with his wife and children and settled in Wyoming.

Although this last portion of Julius Algermissen's story is not especially typical,—only a small percentage of the former prisoners returned permanently to the United States—it does reflect the positive nature of the Wyoming prisoner of war experience. Other former prisoners have returned from time to time to visit. Still others have longed to do so. That in itself is a tribute to those Wyoming people who, during difficult times, treated their "enemies" with humanity.

## LIFE IN THE MAJOR CAMPS

### *Cheyenne*

The internment center at Ft. Warren recorded the longest continuous service as a detention camp for German prisoners of war in Wyoming. Some captured German soldiers lived in the Cheyenne camp for three full years. The prisoner population during that period varied from an initial 350 to as high as nearly 600 men.

The prisoners' compound was separated from the main post facilities by Crow Creek. Their barracks were surrounded by a high fence topped with barbed wire and guarded by military police. Eventually, dogs from the K-9 Corps training facility at Ft. Robinson, Nebraska were also used to guard them.