

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.

In April, 1945, a stable was remodeled to give the prisoners more comfortable living quarters. A steam heating system was installed, along with showers and toilet facilities to accommodate approximately 485 prisoners. Additional windows were also constructed to comply with Geneva Convention regulations concerning light and ventilation.

Like most of Wyoming's captured Germans, Ft. Warren prisoners were members of the famous African Corps. Because of the severity of the African campaign, many were ill or in otherwise poor physical condition. For that reason, a War Patient Detachment was organized at Ft. Warren, a fact that was not made public until 1945.

According to Mr. James Fitzpatrick, who was in charge of the medical laboratory at the post hospital, one common ailment was tapeworms.⁹ Many German soldiers had acquired the worms from improperly cooked meat while fighting in Africa. On May 29, 1945, doctors removed from one German prisoner a tapeworm twenty-four feet long.

Able prisoners were employed by the army in various kinds of manual labor. In the hospital laboratory they scrubbed floors, cared for test animals, and did other non-technical work. Others were assigned to the base laundry, set pins in the bowling alley, worked in kitchens and as gardeners. The post engineers used many of the German prisoners in all phases of their building, repair and maintenance responsibilities, including painting, carpentry and metal work.

The German prisoners were also provided with facilities and opportunities for various leisure time activities. They pursued hobbies, participated in a number of sports, attended regular church services, and enjoyed other cultural and educational experiences.

Soon after their arrival at Ft. Warren, the German prisoners set up a camp school. During its first year, the school served only a few of the captives, because of a lack of available space, texts and teachers. In February, 1945, however, the leader of the prisoners issued a proclamation calling on all of them to participate in the school. As a result, 241 men enrolled in formal classes. In November, 1945, more than 150 men were still participating regularly.

With American cooperation, space was made available for the classes and textbooks were obtained. Additional educational materials were provided by the International Red Cross. Under the circumstances, the scope of the camp school program was extraordinary. The curriculum announced in February, 1945, provided for courses in the following areas: German, history, geography, botany, zoology, physics, chemistry, mathematics, English, Latin, general business, political science, drafting, carpentry, masonry, cabinet work, electronics, heavy equipment operation, taxes, credit, economics, commerce, industrial management, construction management, insurance, accounting and statistics.

As part of a formal army re-education program, the German internees were given equipment to publish a camp newspaper. Although the paper was subject to censor approval, the prisoners actually were not greatly restricted in what they could write. It was intended that the newspaper provide news of the outside world, a forum for the discussion of prisoner problems, opportunity for literary expression, information on camp activities, entertainment and educational material.

At Ft. Warren, two periodicals were created. The first, *Der Zaungast*, was a mimeographed newspaper that appeared approximately weekly from April, 1944, until May, 1945. In August, 1945, the prisoners started a mimeographed magazine, *Lagermagazin*, which came out twice a month through January, 1946.

Der Zaungast was primarily a news medium. A typical issue contained articles translated from the *New York Times* and elsewhere, as well as commentary on specific events. Special attention was given to the happenings within Germany.

Input from within the camp itself, however, was usually quite minimal and limited to mention of prisoner birthdays, an occasional poem or essay, and announcements of coming events. Eventually, reports on sports and cultural events were also printed, along with crossword and other puzzles, jokes and anecdotes.

Lagermagazin was somewhat different. It was obvi-

ously oriented more toward realization of army re-education and denazification goals. In addition to news, it featured summaries and treatments of important political documents, literary contributions from prisoners, and open discussion of current political and social problems. The prisoners often examined the challenges facing them upon their return home, and sometimes provided interesting solutions for anticipated difficulties.

A most unique suggestion came from a prisoner who was concerned with the inevitable German housing shortage. Influenced by Wyoming history, the man wrote a lengthy essay, complete with plans and building instructions, dealing with the erection of log cabins. He argued that cabins might well provide easily erected shelter to meet the needs of the homeless masses.

Other magazine features included general educational materials, especially in the sciences. English literary works were also translated and printed along with those of German authors. In addition to sports reports, the magazine also presented instructions and detailed regulations for new sports like softball and basketball.

Sports were an especially important recreational outlet for the men. Regular competitions were held in traditional European team sports, and later in American sports as well. Sports for pairs and singles, like handball and table tennis, were also popular.

Entertainment, in the form of variety shows, plays and concerts, was a common element of prisoner experience in the Cheyenne camp. Musical instruments were provided, and a camp orchestra was formed. A typical live concert featured as many as eighteen musical selections, varying from marches to dance music. The orchestra also provided accompaniment and solo numbers for the variety shows and dramas.

Despite the positive aspects of their internment, German prisoners at Ft. Warren did not live a totally tranquil life. For some, the confinement was a severe personal ordeal. Occasionally, escapes were attempted, although none completely succeeded. On August 10, 1944, an escapee from the Ft. Warren camp was arrested in a Denver theater lobby. In another

instance, three prisoners boarded a freight train as it passed near the compound. They were later found, hungry and cold, returning from the Pole Mountain section of the Medicine Bow Forest.

Three fires in the prisoner compound also interrupted the normal camp routine. One broke out in the prisoners' kitchen, and another in a furnace room. A third fire occurred in a room used to store the prisoners' belongings. Despite the excitement that they caused, all of the fires were quickly controlled without serious damage or injury.

As a result of accidents and from other causes, several prisoners died at Ft. Warren and were buried there. Others from smaller camps in Colorado and Wyoming were also brought there for burial. Included among the deaths were several suicides that occurred after Germany's fall.

Several tensions between German prisoners and post military personnel occurred within the few days surrounding V-E Day. Authorities feared that the German prisoners would riot in the wake of Germany's surrender. Therefore, on May 8, 1945, all army personnel were restricted to base. Leaves and passes were cancelled, and security precautions at all levels were strengthened. Guards were posted at officers' quarters, while machine gun emplacements were set up at key points. And all of this in spite of the fact that the prisoners themselves had been confined to quarters since the first hints of German capitulation.

For the most part, the prisoner reaction was quite different from what had been expected. A newspaper article of May 10, 1945, reported that the Ft. Warren prisoners "were resigned to the defeat of the fatherland and jubilant, for the most part, when informed of the unconditional surrender of Germany."¹⁰ For these men, Germany's defeat meant only that they would soon go home. For some, it was nevertheless another year before that earnest desire could be realized.

Douglas

When German prisoners of war first replaced the Italians at Douglas, in April, 1944, they went relatively un-

noticed for a time. Aside from a brief newspaper article praising their work, there was no immediate mention of their presence in the area. The following month, however, local citizens became vividly aware of the Germans, when activities at the camp were made a matter of public controversy.

On May 19, 1944, the *Wyoming State Tribune* published an editorial claiming that \$6,000 worth of meat and gasoline had been wasted at the Douglas camp. The article alleged that seventy-eight quarters of beef and 150 hams had been burned with gasoline because the meat was mouldy.¹¹

Camp authorities denied the claims, and an investigation revealed that the accusations were unfounded. Purchase records showed that since the arrival of German prisoners only \$748 had been spent on beef and \$288 on ham. Furthermore, the entire camp expenditure for gasoline and kerosene since 1943 had been only \$3,412. Finally, in an official written response, the camp supply director stated: "Not one ounce of meat received on this post at the cold storage plant of the Quartermaster has been condemned as unfit for human consumption."¹² That was the end of the matter, but Douglas residents were now very much aware of the camp's new tenants.

Arrival of the first new German prisoners in September, after the summer deactivation of the camp, was made known in large front page headlines. During a ten-day period, more than 1600 prisoners were brought to Douglas, ranging in age from fourteen to eighty years. Eventually, that early population nearly doubled, reaching a peak of 3,011 officers and enlisted men in the summer of 1945.

While the prisoners by no means enjoyed "country club" treatment, their situation was not especially negative. Housed in four large compounds, they operated their own tailor shop, barber shop, shoe shop, bakery and carpenter shop. With the nominal amounts that they were paid for their work (\$.89/day in most instances) they could purchase luxury items including candy, cigarettes and hobby materials. They could also have earnings credited to an account redeemable in cash at the end of their internment.

Although prisoners were not forced to work, most of them did. The labor assignments outside the camp were

mainly agricultural, but a few prisoners worked in lumber operations and some were assigned other tasks.

The educational program at Douglas appears to have been more limited in scope than the one at Ft. Warren. For one thing, the Douglas school lacked the heavy vocational orientation of the one at Cheyenne. It was limited primarily to the standard army re-education plan, including, among other things, courses in English and democratic government.

An amusing illustration of the program's relative success is found in a local historian's account of a camp experiment in practical democracy. Peg Layton Leonard wrote:

In this democracy-in-action program, each barrack represented a county, each compound a state, and the entire camp represented a country—all fictional in name. All went well until the election of the first prisoner to the camp presidency. He missed the point completely. He considered his elevation to the office as a mandate for dictatorship of the community. He was promptly impeached. At this stage the majority of the internees wanted no part of a dictatorship—either here or over there.¹³

Sometimes prisoners simply rejected formal attempts to re-educate them, especially when those attempts berated conditions in Germany under the Nazi dictatorship. At the end of the war, for example, all German prisoners were required to view films of the concentration camp horrors. Julius Algermissen recalls that internees from areas where concentration camps were located claimed that what was shown in the films was untrue. Prisoners who refused to accept the films at face value were required to view them again and again.

Re-education endeavors were hampered not only by the Germans' lack of trust of American propaganda, but also by the very composition of the camp population. One of the four compounds contained hard-core SS troops, who refused cooperation and had considerable influence on the other prisoners. Their resistance activities even led to physical violence. Mr. Clinton Baker, who was assistant post engineer, recalls that SS men repeatedly attacked prisoners from other compounds.¹⁴ The fanatics frequently left their own compound at night, cut their way into other compounds and assaulted Africa Corps prisoners. They blamed the Africa Corps for

Rommel's defeat, insisting that his troops had not fought valiantly enough.

As a result of these forays, some prisoners feared for their lives. One young man hid from the SS in a barrack attic for nearly a week. In order to control such problems, a group of guard dogs was brought to Douglas in November, 1944. Double fences were erected around the compounds, and the dogs were placed in runs between them.

The strength of dogmatic Nazi influence in the camp was also visible in the first camp newspaper. On February 17, 1945, the first number of *Ekkehard* appeared. It lasted through one more issue before the censors halted its publication. The content was rabid Nazi in tone, and left little to the imagination in point of intent. Six months passed before publication of a camp periodical was attempted again.

The second newspaper, *Douglas' offene Worte*, was more successful. Twenty issues were published from August, 1945, until Christmas, when the camp was finally closed. Its format was similar to that of the Cheyenne camp's *Lagermagazin*, except for length. A typical issue contained news, prisoner literary efforts, sports, educational materials and other items.

Like the prisoners at Ft. Warren, the Germans at Douglas enjoyed various leisure time activities. Many participated in sports or spent time in the camp library. Others were gifted artisans who practiced their crafts with the materials at hand.

Clinton Baker tells of one prisoner who was a violin maker. In his spare time, he cured native cedar and used it to make beautiful violins which were finished with a special homemade varnish. One of his violins was sold during those years for \$275.

According to Julius Algermissen, the performing artists also used their skills to augment their income. When they staged plays and concerts, fellow prisoners, who welcomed the diversion, gladly paid for tickets to the performances. The actors and musicians then used the proceeds to purchase supplies for other productions.

American officials usually cooperated with the

prisoners in such endeavors. When specific items were needed to make scenery or backdrops for stage productions, for example, unofficial efforts were made to get materials that were not readily available. This fact contributed to many positive relationships between prisoners and post personnel.

In one context cooperation was perhaps greater than it should have been. Some of the prisoners earned extra money by setting up and running several stills. Potato peelings and other materials suitable for a mash never went into the garbage, but found their way into the prisoner compounds. The portable stills were never confiscated, even though parts of them were discovered during inspections. American military personnel even supported the project by purchasing some of the product. Informed sources maintain that the liquor was very good, and that it served to boost the morale of the camp.

Unfortunately, relations between the prisoners and camp officials were not always relaxed. Prisoners occasionally attempted to escape, and although most attempts were harmless, one incident did involve the shooting of a young prisoner as he attempted to get away.

The more interesting escapes were extremely embarrassing for camp authorities. On April 9, 1945, for example, two prisoners escaped and were not recaptured until three days later. When discovered in a haystack near Wendover, Wyoming, they were each clad in six pairs of long-handled GI underwear.

Three weeks later, three more prisoners escaped. Because of the cleverness of their preparations, their escapade made headlines in many Wyoming newspapers.

According to Julius Algermissen, who was there at the time, the men got away with the help of prisoners assigned to garbage duty. They were smuggled out on horseback in large garbage cans and set free near the Platte River.

The prisoners' absence was not discovered until the next roll call. Even then, the escape almost got by the Americans in charge. The Germans had made dummies of paper mache to cover the flight of the missing men. During the roll call, other prisoners held the dummies up and answered for the escapees. Although the officer of the day noticed that some of

the men looked peculiar, he did not realize immediately what was wrong. Only when he asked about the health of one of the dummies and grabbed hold of it did he recognize the constructs for what they were. A search was organized at once, but the escapees had a good start and were not found until three days later.

Other situations occurred in which prisoners were away from camp without authorization, but these were not really attempts to escape. Clinton Baker remembers that some prisoners set up clandestine meetings with young ladies whom they had met on local farms. In other instances, prisoners were left working in the fields through the carelessness of guards who had been sent to pick them up. On at least three such occasions, missing prisoners walked back to the camp and were let in during the night.

When the time came for the German prisoners to leave Douglas, some were reluctant to give up new friends and relationships. For most, the experience had left a positive imprint on their lives. As one of them put it, in an essay written for the camp newspaper, encounters between the Americans and Germans at Douglas "brought us significantly closer with respect to our understanding of one another, so that the artificial gap between us, which was created by the war, was recognized as nonsense, and the first steps were taken toward its elimination."¹⁵

THE SIDE CAMPS

Basin

In April, 1944, plans were made to employ German prisoners in the beet fields near Basin. It was suggested that the local CCC camp be used to house the prisoners, and personnel from the Douglas camp visited Basin to inspect the facilities.

Necessary modifications of the camp were not finished in time for prisoners to participate in the early summer beet work, and the first group of Germans, 160 men, were finally brought to Basin from Scottsbluff for the sugar beet harvest.

They worked until November, then returned to the Nebraska camp.

The following summer, 246 prisoners were moved to Basin from Douglas. They thinned beets until the middle of July, and were then sent elsewhere. The camp was reactivated in September, at the beginning of the beet harvest, and prisoners worked in Basin until shortly before their return to Germany.

Centennial

About 200 German prisoners were sent to a lumber camp at Mullen Creek, above Centennial, in July, 1945. The men worked through the fall for the Wyoming Timber Company near Keystone. On one occasion, some of them were called upon to help transport an injured timber worker to an ambulance which met them near Albany, but otherwise they had little contact with the public. By mid-November, they had cut approximately 2,000,000 feet of timber.

Clearmont

No German prisoners were used in the Sheridan area until 1945, when 350 men were requested for camps to be established at Clearmont and on the Sheridan Heights. Plans called for moving CCC camp barracks from Gillette to Clearmont, to house more than 200 of the prisoners, while about 120 men would occupy Sheridan Heights laborer homes owned by the sugar company.

When the requested number of prisoners was not available, plans for the Sheridan Heights camp were abandoned. The CCC camp barracks were moved to Clearmont in the hope that 275 prisoners could be housed there.

That summer, 250 German prisoners came from Scottsbluff to thin beets in the area. They were followed in the fall by 200 prisoners from Douglas, who harvested sugar beets through October and into November.

Deaver

Early in 1944, local workers renovated the CCC camp at Deaver, to make it suitable for the housing of German prisoner labor. During the beet thinning season beginning in June, 120 men from the Scottsbluff camp worked in Deaver area fields.

In the fall, when German prisoners returned to Deaver for the harvest, an unusual situation developed. Some prisoners were assigned to work in fields owned by Carl Hessenthaler. To his surprise, the farmer found that one of the German workers was his own nephew. The boy's family was in Germany, and Hessenthaler had not heard from them recently.

Prisoners also worked in Deaver during 1945. In June, more than 100 Germans were sent there as part of a group of 676 men assigned to camps in the Big Horn Basin. After thinning beets until mid-July, they were sent elsewhere, but returned in late September for the harvest.

Dubois

On June 1, 1944, it was announced that 138 German prisoners of war would be employed by the Wyoming Tie and Timber Company in a lumber camp above Dubois. A fenced tent colony was to be established at Du Noir, and the prisoners were expected to arrive near the middle of June to serve under a six-month labor contract.

Construction of the camp was delayed by heavy rains in the area, and the advance group of twenty-five prisoners did not arrive until July. Others continued to trickle in from Scottsbluff during the next few weeks, and a final group of 74 men arrived in the middle of August.

Public sentiment in the area soon turned against the prisoners. A newspaper article, revealing that the army was supplying the Germans with beer and Coca-Cola especially aroused the ire of local citizens.

Although official records do not show the reopening of the camp in 1945, it was activated again that summer. An

article in the *Riverton Review* reported that fifty German prisoners participated in the annual tie drive from Du Noir down the Wind River canyon to Riverton.¹⁶

Esterbrook

The first German prisoners from Douglas to work in a Wyoming lumber camp replaced Italian prisoners at Esterbrook in the spring of 1944. At first, only about twenty-five Germans were provided for the Laramie Peak operation, but after the reactivation of the Douglas camp, the work force there was increased to seventy-five men.

Huntley

In the fall of 1945, a mobile camp for prisoner of war labor was set up briefly near Huntley. Established in late September, the camp housed 150 German prisoners from Scottsbluff, who worked on Huntley area beet and potato farms through November.

Lingle

When the Goshen County Labor Board made plans to establish a prisoner of war labor camp at Lingle for the 1945 farm season, there were no facilities available to house the prisoners. Local farmers were therefore recruited to assist with the construction of a camp.

The first German prisoners moved to Lingle in late April or early May. Apparently, they were well received by local farmers, because on May 24, an editorial appeared in the *Guide-Review*, denouncing farmers for their soft treatment of the prisoners.¹⁷ During the 1945 season, 300 German prisoners were assigned to the Lingle camp.

Lovell

One hundred German prisoners housed at Deaver were used in Lovell during the first half of May, 1945, to remodel

the armory building and the cavalry barn, which were used for prisoner housing during 1945.

The first agricultural workers arrived at the Lovell camp in early June. During the thinning period, and again during the harvest, 200 German prisoners worked in Lovell beet fields. The last prisoners did not leave there until the first week in November.

Pine Bluffs

German prisoners in a camp at Pine Bluffs were employed in the potato and beet harvests during the fall of 1944. The 160 men, who were brought from Scottsbluff, worked in the Pine Bluffs area from September until the first week of November.

Riverton

The state armory was remodeled for housing, and temporary buildings were erected to accommodate approximately 110 German prisoners during the 1945 farm season in Riverton. The prisoners were originally expected to arrive during the last week of May and remain until the beet crop had been thinned. Plans also called for their return to Riverton that fall.

About 100 German prisoners arrived at the camp in early June, but instead of returning to Douglas a few weeks later, they remained in Riverton all summer, doing miscellaneous farm work. After finishing the beet harvest, they were returned to Douglas in early November.

Ryan Park

In the spring of 1944, when Italian prisoners were no longer available, the R. R. Crow Lumber Company of Saratoga made arrangements to employ 300 German prisoners from a camp at Greeley, Colorado. The prisoners came to Saratoga in the early summer and remained in a camp at Ryan Park until the end of 1945. During 1945, together with

prisoners from the Centennial camp, they cut 21,000,000 board feet of lumber in the Medicine Bow National Forest.

Citizens of Saratoga were kept aware of the prisoners' presence through news of unusual events at the camp. In July, 1944, for example, four prisoners escaped. They were eventually found, well supplied with provisions, camped in the Saratoga rodeo grounds. In another incident, one of the prisoners was killed by a falling tree in November, 1944.

Near the end of the prisoners' stay at Ryan Park, the camp became a focus of controversy when R. R. Crow submitted to the state bills in excess of \$2,000 for educating the prisoners in lumbering skills. State Auditor John J. McIntyre refused to pay the vouchers, arguing that the state had no responsibility to train German prisoners.

Torrington

German prisoners of war were employed at Torrington during both the 1944 and 1945 farm seasons. Prisoners from Scottsbluff came to Torrington in June, 1944, and worked for about six weeks in the beet fields. Later, 200 prisoners helped with potato and beet harvests.

On October 2, 1944, two prisoners escaped from the camp. Their brief adventure revealed a certain naivete concerning local geography. When captured only a few miles from the camp, the two men thought that they were already crossing the Mexican border.

The following summer, prisoners returned to Torrington, and 287 of them worked there from June until November. One prisoner drowned on August 15, when a truck that he was driving plunged into a canal. His body was found and returned to Scottsbluff two days later.

Veteran

Unlike other side camps in Wyoming, the small camp at Veteran housed German prisoners continuously from April, 1944, until it was vacated in November, 1945. At its

peak, in the fall of 1945, the population of the Veteran camp was 300 prisoners.

Veteran farmers were enthusiastic about the prisoners' work, and they incurred the wrath of patriotic groups that spoke out against the positive treatment that prisoners were receiving. In September, 1945, the Veteran American Legion post joined a Torrington post in passing a resolution against the "coddling" of war prisoners used in harvesting.

Prisoners at Veteran were unusually vocal in their opposition to the war itself. On April 16, 1945, they issued a statement against continuation of the war. All but two of the 153 German prisoners then interned at Veteran signed the following written proclamation:

For a long time now and with growing apprehension, we German and Austrian prisoners of war in the United States of America have been following the course of the war in Europe. The battle has become a hopeless one, greater and greater parts of Germany and Austria are being occupied by the armies of the United Nations and cleaned of Hitler's helpers. Everyone—even Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels and their helpers and stooges, know that the war is lost. And yet, the battle continues, one town after the other is falling in ashes, factories and railroads are being destroyed, fields remain untilled, while farmers, workers, students, and doctors senselessly and uselessly are sacrificing their lives.

Can you in the homeland imagine our anxiety, our fear, that all suffering and all waiting was in vain, since this homeland is a smoking heap of rubble, since you, our fathers, mothers, wives, and children are no longer among the living, having been sacrificed in criminal madness? Has not enough blood been spilled? And what for? That the length of life of a few mad criminals will be stretched by a few months, yes, only a few weeks!

This not even is enough, we hear that within Hitler's sphere of power are being formed gangs of snipers and assassins, the so-called "were-wolves" and that in the mountains SS-troops and other fanatical units are to continue the fight, even if Hitler's despotism has been broken everywhere else.

Will you put up with that? Will you be accessory to the crime on your people, that Hitler's slave-drivers intend to commit?

You ask what you could do? How to withstand the terror of SS and Gestapo? Believe us, we know that it is difficult, we too were living in the Nazi-Reich. But now, in the hour of the collapse of the Nazi organizations, something *must* now be down! It is the last, the very last opportunity to save our peoples, and our countries, and also us, from sinking into chaos, into Nothing.

And it can be done! Germans and Austrians have shown it, have saved their towns and their villages, their factories and their homes and thus have preserved their future.

You Austrians, keep in mind that men and women of Vienna and Wiener Neustadt saved their cities from complete destruction.

You Germans, keep in mind that the resolute action of some forced the hangmen of the SS and Gestapo to preserve towns like Heidelberg and Weimar for the German future.

Do not believe the lying vows of Goebbels, that the Soviet Union, that England, that America wants the destruction and slavery of Europe. We, as prisoners of war, live in spiritual freedom, are not being persecuted by hatred and revenge and know, that only war-criminals are punished. Austrians in Vienna and many other places have greeted the Red Army as a friend, and are being regarded by the Red Army as friends. The first free elections since 1933 were held in West-German cities. Does that look like slavery?

Certainly, the first years will be difficult, many wounds must be mended, wounds which we inflicted on others, which we—and that is a matter of course—must also help to mend, as well as the injuries of the fatherland. See to it, that you at home will be able to do this job, that these sufferings will not be more yet and not be heavier! Help the destroyer of Nazism! Refuse the execution of orders of officers of the SS and the army, follow the directions of the allied military commanders! They do not come to enslave you! Hitler and accomplices are the enemies of our future! They only want to send you into death, because they themselves have to die! Make an end to this Nazi war! Fight the snipers, the “were-wolves” as you can and where you can! They only want to avoid their just punishment, they want to make accomplices in crime out of you, they want that you and we shall not live, because *they* cannot! Refuse any help to the SS and other units, who want to continue the fight in pathless and remote regions! Commit sabotage against them and betray them! With this you will not betray your people, your honor, you will betray your hangmen and murderers. Assist the representatives of the American, English, and Red armies. With this you help your people, you help yourselves and us. With this you will bring closer the day of our return and a free future.¹⁸

Wheatland

The first German prisoners to be sent from Douglas to Wheatland arrived in June, 1944. Although 250 men had been requested for the camp, only 100 were provided. They re-

mained in Wheatland for about six weeks, and were then sent to Scottsbluff, when the Douglas camp was deactivated.

During their initial stay in Wheatland, eighty-three of the men regularly attended special Sunday services conducted in German by a local clergyman, the Reverend J. Schoenberger. The services were held at the Evangelical Bethlehem Church.

A week after the first prisoner church services were held, two of the Germans escaped from the camp. Within half an hour after they had crawled through the fence of the compound, however, they were captured by the night marshal as they attempted to hitch a ride out of town.

For the harvest, 134 Germans were brought to Wheatland early in October. An additional twenty-five men came later in the month. All were returned to Scottsbluff in November.

Prisoner labor for 1945 was supplied from the Douglas camp. The side camp was kept open from June until the beet harvest had been ended. During the summer, the men worked in hay, beans and corn. The camp reached its maximum population in 1945, when 250 men were employed in the beet harvest.

Worland

Worland's first experience with German prisoners was frustrating. In April, 1944, Worland growers requested 200 men for early summer beet work, and plans were made to house them in the abandoned CCC camp. When the prisoners arrived from Scottsbluff, however, only half of the requested number had been sent.

Less than two weeks after they arrived, ninety-four of the 100 prisoners went on strike. They complained of leaky barracks, that there were no benches to sit on in their truck, and that they had no athletic field. In response to the strike, military authorities placed the rebels on bread and water rations.

The strike took on a note of humor on the second day. The strikers prepared a letter addressed to Hitler, asking him

to intervene in their behalf. Whether or not the communique was ever sent was not revealed. In any case, the prisoners did not wait for an answer, but eventually returned to work after four days on bread and water.

Other periods when prisoners were assigned to Worland passed without incident. Two hundred men from Scottsbluff helped with the beet harvest in 1944, and 300 prisoners from the Douglas camp thinned, blocked and harvested beets near Worland during the 1945 season.

* * *

WRITINGS OF GERMAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN WYOMING

(Translator's note: All materials in this section were translated from the original German by *Lowell A. Bangerter*. Excepting the writings of Rudolf Ritschel, they are presented without commentary.)

POEMS AND ESSAYS BY RUDOLF RITSCHHEL

Introduction

Mr. Rudolf Ritschel, who spent the summer of 1944 working in a lumber camp near Dubois, Wyoming, has this to say about experience as a prisoner of war in Wyoming: "For decades I have carried memories of the land of Wyoming in my heart. Again and again I pictured in my mind the days that I was able to spend in your beautiful country. Although I was a prisoner of war, during the time I spent in the Rocky Mountains I felt free and was happy every day to be able to work in that magnificent countryside."¹⁹ All of the essays and poems included here were written while Mr. Ritschel was a prisoner of war in this country. He has provided the following brief overview of his earlier life and his prisoner of war experiences, as an introduction to his writings.

When I look back today, in the autumn of my life, I know that it is not only knowledge, courage and strength that conquer the abysses in human life. An important factor is and