

FORT LEONARD WOOD'S WWII POW CAMP — HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

by Stephanie L. Nutt

Note: This article is an excerpt from a report entitled National Register Eligibility Assessment of Four Historic Sites (23PU322, 23PU424, 23PU465, and 23PU1869 [The World War II Prisoner-of-War Site] and Expanded Archaeological Investigations of Two Historic Sites (23PU278 and 23PU757) On Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri by Dennis Naglich, Stephanie L. Nutt, Steven R. Ahler, Terrance J. Martin, and Michael L. Hargrave, 2011.

CAMP HISTORY

WWII POW Camps in the United States

With the United States' entry into World War II in December, 1941, Fort Leonard Wood became a major training site. Within a few months American soldiers had invaded North Africa, fighting alongside British troops, the campaign yielding thousands of prisoners of war, most captured by the British. Its facilities already taxed, Great Britain asked that some of its prisoners be transferred to American control. The Provost Marshal General's Office, the government department charged with handling POWs, decided to bring them to the United States to preserve resources at the front and to more easily comply with the terms of the Geneva Conventions. Military posts were favored locations for POW camps, considering their security, isolation from the civilian population, and ready supply of unused construction space. Fort Leonard Wood was among the first posts selected, and McCarthy Brothers Construction Company won the contract to build the camp there in October, 1942. Four major POW camps were established in Missouri during WWII – the Fort Leonard Wood camp and Camp

Clark in 1942, and Camp Crowder and Camp Weingarten in 1943. Additionally, a number of satellite and branch camps were created in the state.

Fort Leonard Wood POW Camp Layout

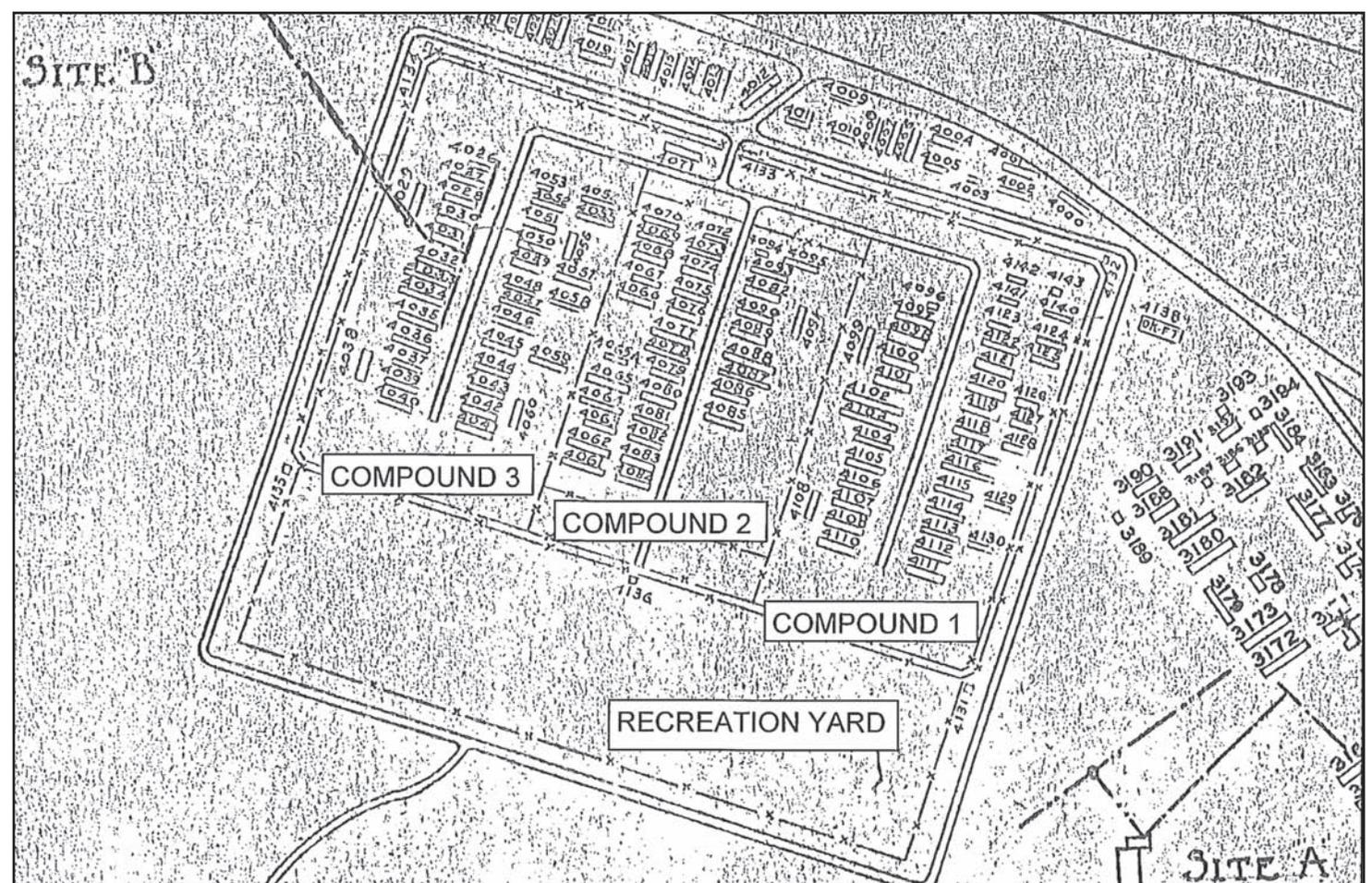
The layout of the Fort Leonard Wood POW camp matched in general outline a standard plan for Army POW camps used during World War II, featuring three rectangular compounds of equal size, each designed to accommodate 1000 prisoners. The Fort Leonard Wood camp, however, deviated from the template in both the number and arrangement of buildings within its compounds, primarily due to the constraints of local topography, although this deviation was perhaps in part the result of a sudden explosion in prisoner population several months after initial construction was completed.

The POW camp contained 161 buildings. The buildings were constructed based on standard War Department Theater of Operations (temporary) 700-Series plans. The plans allowed for a wide variety of wall treatments and most at Fort Leonard Wood were sided with Celotex, a black composition board made with sugar cane residue and resembling tarpaper. Most buildings were frame with wooden floors set on concrete block piers spaced six or eight feet apart. Kitchens, shop buildings, and lavatories had concrete floors. To house prisoners, there were 70 barracks, 12 mess halls, 16 lavatories, 14 company administration and storehouse buildings spread throughout the three compounds, and a main administration building, Post Exchange (PX), and shop building for each of the three compounds. One chapel was constructed to serve the entire camp. An enclosed

recreation area was located in the southeastern portion of the camp. The camp was enclosed by a double row of wire fencing with six guard towers. An American guard quarters and staff headquarters for the 500 plus who managed the camp was situated northwest of the prisoner compounds, on either side of the main gate entrance road. Buildings in this complex included barracks, mess halls, administrative buildings, a hospital, a stockade office, a chapel, and a tool house (see Figure 1 below).

Camp Activation

The Fort Leonard Wood POW camp was officially activated Dec 18, 1942, with 662 Italian prisoners arriving that day. These Italians were shipped to Camp Weingarten near St. Genevieve June 22, 1943, to make way for the German POWs who arrived June 29. The War Department had quickly learned that



Italian and German POWs did not get along, therefore they were not housed at the same POW camps if it could be avoided. The first group of Germans to arrive numbered 800, but this number would top out at closer to 5,000 during peak use in 1945, with some prisoners located at branch camps across the state. The German POWs were members of General Field Marshal Rommel's Afrika Korps and had been captured by British forces in North Africa.

Camp Life

POWs were provided with grass, flower, and vegetable seeds and given the freedom to construct rock gardens and beautify their camp compounds and barracks. The camp commander worked hard to maintain prisoner morale, as a method of maintaining order

and keeping unrest and escape attempts to a minimum. A "beverage garden," boxing rings, volley ball courts, and a baseball diamond were built. The prisoners organized soccer teams and held games and tournaments among the different compounds. The prisoners also formed theater and dance groups and routinely performed for their fellow prisoners and the American officers.

Educational classes in language, mathematics, and art were organized, taught by instructors drawn from the prisoner population. The classes were not well-attended, with the exception of the art classes. These classes were taught by a professional artist. In 1945, one camp inspector noted the painting school was a prize development and that the instructor had created his own instruction manual for the

students.

Other free-time activities available were carpentry, woodworking, sculpting, painting, and other hand-crafts performed in the shops and workrooms located in each

camp compound. Some prisoners made purses out of snake skins for sale to the wives of officers stationed at Fort Leonard Wood, while others were melting empty toothpaste tubes to make copies of



Figure 2. Fort Leonard Wood German POW Soccer Team, 1945.



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German medals and other decorations out of the lead, for sale as souvenirs to the Americans.

The prisoners were provided regular US Army rations and could supplement these rations with vegetables they grew in the camp and items purchased in the PX. The POW camp mess halls were staffed with prisoner cooks and the menus reflected German preferences. The German prisoners were especially happy when there was plenty of bread and potatoes. They prepared sauerkraut and other German dishes. They seemed to dislike carrots and corn, but enjoyed bananas. On more than one occasion, American soldiers working guard duty commented that the POWs ate better than they did because the POW cooks were much more skilled than their US Army counterparts.

Prisoners were issued American

military uniforms, dyed blue with "PW" stenciled in white on the back, knees, and seat of the pants. Prisoners were allowed to wear their original uniforms during free time, but were required to wear their PW-marked uniforms while on work details. A military hierarchy was maintained among the POWs, with a prisoner spokesman occupying the highest office. The spokesman was a liaison between prisoners and American camp administrators, ensured camp directives were enforced, and presented prisoner requests and complaints. He also met with the representatives of the International Red Cross, YMCA, and Swiss Legation, organizations overseeing prison conditions and otherwise providing assistance to POWs. Ranking beneath the spokesman were the elected heads of each prison com-

pound to whom POW company leaders reported; each compound was divided into four companies.

Radical Nazi Activity

While it would appear that the POW population was content, in reality the atmosphere in the camp during the first year after the German prisoners arrived was one of tension, intimidation, and fear. POW leadership demanded loyalty to Hitler and the Nazi regime. The first wave of German prisoners, captured early in the war in North Africa, included elite troops who had engaged in hard fighting, many fanatically devoted to the Nazi cause.

The noncommissioned officers of the Afrika Korps set the tone for prison leadership within the camps. At the FLW POW camp they held weekly indoctrination sessions that

all the POWs were required to attend. Those prisoners found guilty of disloyalty to the Nazi regime or of collaboration were beaten and, in at least one case, apparently murdered. Former Fort Leonard Wood POW Anton Kuehmoser recalled a fellow prisoner being stabbed to death after twice failing to attend the indoctrination meetings. He described the "Holy Ghost" or "Heilige Geist" punishment where a group of attackers come in the night and beat the victim in his bunk. This punishment was typically employed by the German military during boot camp, to punish a new soldier who made repeated mistakes. In the case of the Fort Leonard Wood POW camp incident, in addition to a beating the victim was also stabbed to death. Because it was a group of people, it was difficult to

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identify the culprit.

Kuehmoser did not name the POW killed in this fashion, but it may have been Wendelin Schiller, who was murdered at the camp on September 25, 1943. Another POW was tried for the crime, but was found not guilty. Other camp violence followed, including a major fight among POWs in November 1943, where one participant was hospitalized and later died of his injuries. A January 1944 inspection report on the Fort Leonard Wood camp noted prisoner spirit was low due to the friction between various factions within the camp. The inspector believed tensions would continue to rise as Allied victories turned the tide of the war and a growing number of POWs came to oppose the militant control by the Nazi faction in the camp.

Similar incidents were occurring

at POW camps across the United States. Generally, however, camp administrators were reluctant to take action. While they objected to the pro-Nazi POW leadership, camp commanders appreciated the discipline they exercised, providing at least the appearance of a smoothly running camp. Continued violence and increasing unrest among POWs eventually forced action. In April 1944, the situation in the POW camps was brought to the attention of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt who pressed the Provost Marshal General to address the problem. A nation-wide program to segregate Nazi extremists from the rest of the prison population was devised and this was the strategy employed at Fort Leonard Wood.

In May 1944, an effort was made at the Fort Leonard Wood camp to

separate the militant Nazi non-commissioned officers from the rest of the prisoners. A portion of Compound 3 was fenced off and 380 noncommissioned officers, agitators who refused to work, were placed there. This special detention area was likely only a temporary arrangement. Ultimately, the situation was dealt with by transferring the men to other camps. In early June 1944, the men were divided and sent to four different camps. According to camp records, the transfers significantly lessened the violent incidents between prisoners.

POW Labor

Under the terms of a directive issued by the Provost Marshal General's office in January, 1943, captured enlisted men could work outside combat zones on any job not directly related to war opera-

tions or involving the manufacture and transport of arms and munitions intended for the armed forces. Unhealthy, dangerous, and degrading work was forbidden. Enlisted POWs could be employed on military posts, doing laundry, clearing brush, working on soil conservation projects, roads, and ditches, etc. Noncommissioned officers could not be required to do manual work, and commissioned officers were exempted from all work. POWs typically worked six days a week and wages were set at 80 cents per day, with the wages credited to a US Treasury trust fund. All prisoners, whether working or not, were entitled to 10 cents per day to be used for purchase of necessities from the PX, including toiletries and beer, which was rationed to two bottles per day.

In May, 1943, War Department

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plans to use POW labor on American farms were made public. Officials in Washington had decided the vastly increased prisoner population could work the fields on privately owned farms in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, although the details, including the housing of POWs working away from the main camps, had yet to be worked out. Ultimately, the government delayed deployment of prisoners on private property, fearing local residents would object to the presence of captured enemy soldiers in their midst. Over the following months, most POW work details were restricted to jobs on military reservations.

Work details on Fort Leonard Wood centered primarily on services and infrastructure. Shortly after their arrival, the German POWs were asked to work within the Fort Leonard Wood reservation. After some hesitation, 10 volunteered to work at the post laundry. They came back that night with the news that at least 100 women were employed at the facility, and the following day 60 POWs volunteered for the task. According to one former prisoner, Fritz Ensslin, the American women and engineers respected and treated the POWs well, at least until later in the war when newsreels of war atrocities caused many to change their opinion of the German soldiers.

POWs labored in groups of 10-30 men in the laundry, warehouses, unloading railcars, working in the coal and wood yards, in the quartermaster department, the Post Engineer office, mess halls, and repairing shoes. According to Ensslin, POWs served as pin boys in the bowling alleys, fired the furnaces in the officers' quarters, performed garbage removal and incinerator work, served as cleaning crews for office buildings and clubs, and were employed in painting, carpentry, and cabinet making. They also helped improve the post airport, built roads, maintained the

prison grounds, cleared brush, dug ditches, quarried stone, and performed stone masonry work laying walkways, culverts, check dams, and the like (Figure 3). By October 1943, Fort Leonard Wood had the highest percentage of working prisoners among any of the US camps that were filled to capacity.

POW Stonework

A select group of POWs, including engineers and master stone masons, were employed building stonework features and infrastructure at various locations across Fort Leonard Wood. They constructed sidewalks, steps, walls, foundations, chimneys, patios, bridges, check dams, culverts, weirs, and fire hydrant plinths. The stone was quarried on post. Eventually, 10 master stone masons were employed full-time, supervising a staff of assistants and laborers. Within the POW camp they laid drainage ditches and were involved in the creation of rock gardens around the POW barracks. A 1944 camp inspection report boasted about the orderly appearance of the stonework features and how they had improved the camp and Fort Leonard Wood.

The legacy of these POW stone

masons survives in the over 400 remaining examples of their work on Fort Leonard Wood. A number of these features are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and are visible at prominent buildings and other locations on the installation. Notable features are found at the Garlington House, the WWII-era Black Officers' Club, the Water Intake Plant on the Big Piney River, the Nebraska and Minnesota Avenue culverts, and Veteran's Park (Figure 4). It appears the POWs were afforded some freedom and "artistic license" because a variety of German words, symbols, initials, and names are found carved in to the stonework features. For example, a palm tree, emblem of the Afrika Korps, can be found in a culvert in Gammon Field (Figure 5). The surviving stonework enhances the architectural character of Fort Leonard Wood and contributes to its historic significance.

Expanded POW Labor Program

By the spring of 1944, the United States had established procedures for the use of POW labor outside military posts, and hundreds of prisoners from Fort Leonard Wood were distributed to various locations across Missouri, many work-



Figure 4. Portion of chimney constructed of stone by German POWs at Fort Leonard Wood's WWII-era Black Officers' Club, 1945.

ing at agricultural or horticultural tasks. Branch camps were established at Chesterfield, Louisiana, Jefferson Barracks, Rosati, Marston, Independence, and Marshall. Typically, the POWs were transported from the branch camps to local farms in military vehicles, often with just one security guard assigned to them. Most were well-received and, according to those farmers who employed them, were treated just like any other hired farm laborer. They ate the noon meal with the family and worked alongside them in the fields.

By May 1944, so many POWs from Fort Leonard Wood were dispersed to the branch camps that the camp commander requested more prisoners to be sent to Fort Leonard Wood, where only 500 POWs were currently available for labor on post. By this time, the POWs



Figure 3. German POWs on work detail at Fort Leonard Wood, showing stonework walkway, circa 1945.



Figure 5. Afrika Corps palm tree emblem located in stonework drainage ditch in Gammon Field, constructed by German POWs, circa 1945.

were assigned an even wider variety of tasks, which now included working at the bakery, motor pools, photo laboratory, maintenance garage, dry cleaning, salvage, blacksmith shop, as well as cutting meat, in addition to the tasks mentioned above. Following the commander's request, an additional 1,500 POWs were sent to Fort Leonard Wood.

While generally effective, the prison labor program at Fort Leonard Wood was not without problems. Refusals to work, slowdowns, inferior productivity, and theft were common. Over a five month period in 1944, nearly 130 prisoners were cited for work infractions, primarily unsatisfactory work. Punishments included removal from detail, forfeiture of pay, denial of canteen privileges, and confinement to the guardhouse. A War Department directive helped to increase work productivity by linking pay to output, although it was initially met with a negative reaction from prisoners.

Security and Escapes

Across the nation, as prisoner numbers rose during 1944 and 1945, the guard ratio steadily reduced, to as little as 1:15 in some camps. At Fort Leonard Wood, a reduction in the guard staff in July 1944 meant that only two of the six guard towers were actively manned and as few as four men were on duty at any particular time. Even-

tually, towards the end of the war, guard ranks were supplemented by wounded or disabled soldiers who could not return to combat.

On any given work day, prisoners were scattered across Fort Leonard Wood working at a variety of jobs and inevitably escapes were attempted. On March 29, 1944, two POWs escaped from a brush-clearing detail, only to be recaptured a week later by farmers in nearby Laclede County. They were punished with 30 days at the camp guardhouse, the maximum allowed under the Geneva Conventions for escapes. Two more escaped from quarry detail at the end of April. After hiding for several days they made their way to a diner in Rolla. Unable to speak English, they pretended to be deaf mutes. Others in the diner found their behavior suspicious and notified the police who later arrested the escapees in a rail yard where they were attempting to catch a freight train.

War's End and Prisoner Release

American administrators feared the reaction among German prisoners when the end of the war in Europe came, worrying that there might be riots, disturbances, or mass suicides by German POWs. In fact, when Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945, the POW camps remained, for the most part, peaceful. Following the surrender, POWs were required

to watch documentary footage of the German death camps. Some prisoners maintained that the films were faked, others that the bodies filmed were those of people killed by the Russian army. According to one poll, only one-third of German prisoners believed the scenes were real, but at a POW camp in North Carolina one thousand reportedly burned their uniforms and others collected money for the relief of Holocaust victims. Education programs were implemented to prepare German POWs for service in the United States military occupation government in Germany.

The prisoner population at Fort Leonard Wood and its branch camps peaked at 5,187 in June 1945. The war came to a close with the Japanese surrender two months later, but prisoners remained in the United States well into the following year, and their anxieties grew as they learned of the hardships suffered by family and friends in post-war Germany. Further contributing to low spirits within the camp were stories that the POWs might not be allowed to return directly to Germany, but could instead be detoured for labor in France. The Fort Leonard Wood camp commander reported the news had caused camp morale to be very low, and he feared a rash of escape attempts as a result. At least one prisoner did escape during this period. He left a trash detail

in September and remained on the run for three months, until ultimately being recaptured by the FBI in Orlando, Florida.

On March 6, 1946, the first POWs were released from Fort Leonard Wood, with 1,281 sent to San Francisco for embarkation. Another 1,660 departed on April 25 and May 2, headed for Europe via New York. Many were, in fact, detoured to France or Great Britain where they worked for months on rebuilding efforts. The Fort Leonard Wood POW camp was closed on May 20, 1946, after which most of its buildings were removed or demolished during the following months.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeological Investigations

Archaeological investigations were conducted at the Fort Leonard Wood POW camp site (23PU1869) in 2008. The investigations consisted of multiple stages of field work and subsequent analyses and interpretations of recovered artifacts and architectural information. The tasks included architectural mapping, nondestructive geophysical survey, surface collection, metal detector testing, systematic shovel testing, mechanical trench excavation, and test unit excavation. The field work was followed by artifact analysis and site interpretations.




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Architectural Remains

Above ground architectural remains of the POW camp site are limited. One feature consists of a dry-laid stonework wall of a man-made drainage channel in Compound 1. The product of POW labor, the construction resembled other extant stonework features on Fort Leonard Wood. Concrete ruins on the western boundary of the site represent the remains of POW camp Building 4070. The main portion of the ruins consists of contiguous slabs of poured concrete that measure 23 feet, 9 inches east-west by 100 feet north-south. The function of Building 4070 is unknown, however its flooring material and dimensions suggest that it may have been employed as a shop. Four POW camp-era fire hydrants remained extant at the time of initial fieldwork, one in each of Compounds 1 and 2, and two in Compound 3. The hydrants were marked in cast lettering "AMERICAN FOUNDRY I & /MFG CO. I ST LOUIS MO" with a manufacture date of 1942. Identified as "Old Style" in company literature, the type of hydrant used at the POW camp was produced during the 1940s and through February 1954. Finally, a comparison of the site plan with period maps shows that most of the POW camp compound roads remain intact, though some have been overlaid by modern asphalt.

Surface Collection

Artifacts recovered and collected from the surface of site 23PU1869 were found within or near a drainage ditch on the dividing line between Compounds 1 and 2. The assemblage was small, and consisted of ceramics, container glass fragments, and one piece of architectural debris. Ceramics were all semivitreous and included one plate rim and two bowl rims. Among the container glass was a fragment of a white glass mug with a base mark identifying it as Pyrex manufactured by the Corning Company. Known as a "military watch hand warmer" mug, the vessel was produced for military use by Corning during World War II and probably was issued to prisoner mess halls. The large, extremely heavy-duty mug was among the thickest that Pyrex produced. Also found was a bottle base embossed with the mark used by manufacturer Hazel-Atlas between 1923 and 1964 and a milk glass plate fragment.

Metal Detector Survey

Metal detector testing was employed over the open areas within the southwest portion of Compound 2, as well as the northwest and southeast portions of Compound 3. All metal detector hits were flagged, with verification shovel tests excavated at every fifth metal detector hit and at the

locations of all nonferrous metal detector hits. A total of 487 metal detector hits were recorded. Most concentrated at the locations of former POW lavatories and barracks. Over half of the metal artifacts recovered were architectural in nature and consisted of nails, screws, staples, brads, brackets, nuts and bolts, hinges, and the like. Non-architectural metal artifacts included food can fragments, a knife blade, and a bottle cap. Of particular note were several artifacts that could be directly connected to the POWs. These consisted of a German two-pfennig piece, a metal friction buckle used on great coat utility straps used by German soldiers in the North Africa campaign, and a



Figure 6. WWII German army match box cover excavated from site 23PU1869, Fort Leonard Wood's WWII POW camp.

fragment of a metal alloy matchbox cover issued to German soldiers during World War II with a depiction of a helmeted soldier in profile, set inside a raised circle three centimeters in diameter (Figure 6).

Shovel Testing

WWII-period maps of the POW camp were used to guide the placement of shovel tests. Shovel tests, typically about 30 centimeters wide, were excavated in a grid pattern at various locations throughout all three camp compounds, guided by the supposed locations of barracks, lavatories, and other camp buildings. For the most part, the shovel tests revealed disturbed soils and few artifacts. The disturbed soils are in keeping with the demolition of the POW camp buildings in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Of the artifacts recovered, most were glass, nails, and other architectural debris, again hinting at the demolition of the camp following WWII. Unlike the others, one shovel test in Compound 1, at the location of a POW barracks, yielded 50 artifacts and revealed an ashy burned layer. It is likely this represents the remains of a refuse pit created during demolition of the camp buildings, where debris was pushed and burned after the building was torn down. Artifacts from this shovel test included nails, container glass, and wood fragments, nearly all of them coming

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Mechanical Trenching

Heavy machinery was used to excavate 28 trenches in Compounds 1, 2, and 3, as well as in the POW camp recreation area, to test for the presence of intact subsurface remains of the camp. As with the shovel tests, placement of trenches was guided by period maps of the POW camp, putting them in locations most likely to reveal building remains. Trench excavation revealed that demolition and subsequent earthmoving had impacted all three compounds, but not to sufficient depth to eliminate all subsurface POW-era cultural deposits. The trenches revealed foundation remnants and architectural elements from camp buildings, as well as POW-era utility trenches and ditches. Narrow concrete wall lines, stone edging for sidewalks or gardens, building entrances or landings, and concrete block piers were exposed in a number of the trenches (Figure 7). As with other excavations at the site, the majority of the artifacts recovered from the trenches were nails and other structural related items, window glass, and ceramic sewer tile fragments. Also recovered were numerous fragments of container glass and ceramic kitchen items such as dishes, typically used in mess halls. Few personal items were unearthed.

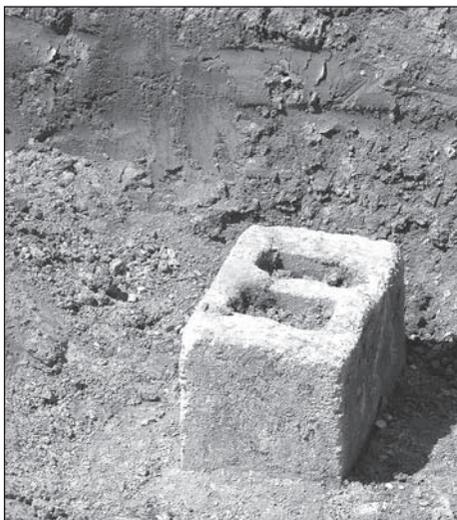


Figure 7. Concrete block POW camp barracks foundation pier from site 23PU1869.

Test Unit Excavation

Ten 1 x 2-meter test units were excavated in areas where mechanical trenching had indicated intact building foundations, where metal detector testing had indicated artifact concentrations, or where shovel testing had revealed a possible subsurface feature. Test units 1 through 6 were situated within Compound 2, within the north rank of buildings in the south half of the compound. Test units 7 through 9 were placed in the north half of Compound 3, in the vicinity of the artifact concentration that had included the metal fragment showing a German soldier in profile. Test Unit 10 was placed in the south half of Compound 1, at the location of a shovel test that had revealed the ashy burned layer containing an abundance of POW era artifacts.

Test Unit 1 revealed edging stones and a trench or ditch feature, most likely used for disposal of remaining POW items and architectural debris during demolition of the camp. The artifact assemblage contained items similar to those discovered in other excavations at the site (metal hardware, structural fragments, container glass, etc.), but there were some unique items as well. A metal O ring, possibly from a German field equipment strap, was found in the trench fill. Also unearthed were window screen fragments, insulation, panel board fragments, furniture springs, and grains of pigment, possibly paint. Finally, an entire machine-made bottle made by the Hazel Atlas Glass Company sometime between 1923 and the late 1940s was found.

Test Unit 2 exposed foundation remains of a barracks. Artifacts consisted of mainly architectural items and container glass, along with a can key like the type used to open a can of sardines and a four-hole metal alloy button issued to prisoners upon their

arrival at the camp. The button was embossed with the letters “U.S.A.” flanked by stars. Test Unit 3 was placed near the edge of a line of stonework, probably the remains of the edging of a flower bed or walkway near barracks Building 4075. Artifacts from this test unit consisted almost entirely of nails.

Test Unit 4 revealed more building foundation remains and another utility trench or ditch. Of the 127 artifacts recovered from the unit, nearly all were architectural in nature, mostly nails and nail fragments. However, one of the most interesting artifacts from site 23PU1869 was also recovered from this unit — a Tunisian coin minted in 1941 (Figure 8). The coin was made of zinc due to war-time metal shortages and was cast with a hole in its center. On one side the coin is embossed in French, “TUNISIE / 10 CENTIMES/ 1941 / PROTECTORATE FRANCAIS.” The obverse is embossed in Arabic with the Muslim era date, 1360, and the name “AHMAD,” indicating that the coin was struck in the name of Ahmad Pasha Bey, the Tunisian bey [*chieftain or governor*] at that time. Tunisia, a French protectorate from 1881 to 1956, was the scene of intense fighting in 1942, ending with the surrender of German forces, some of whom were eventually housed as POWs in Compounds 2 and 3 at the Fort Leonard Wood camp. The coin represents one of the few personal items found that can be directly associated with a POW.



Figure 8. 1941 Tunisian coin excavated from site 23PU1869.

Test Unit 5 revealed no building remains and few artifacts compared to the other units. Architectural artifacts, primarily nails, again dominated the assemblage. Of note was a small steel disk with a rivet attachment which may have been a portion of a double button part from a German army Ystrap used to carry equipment on field. Test 6 exposed two stone concentrations. The stone concentrations could mark a building front entry, with the stone serving as an approach walkway or ground cover under the entry stairs. The artifacts, once again, consisted primarily of nails, along with a hacksaw blade and a plastic ruler fragment.

Test Unit 7 was placed in the northern portion of Compound 3, near the location of a POW lavatory where a high concentration of metal detector hits had occurred. A large concrete block fragment was unearthed, perhaps a remnant of the lavatory foundation. The artifact assemblage contained an unusually high amount of container glass, many pieces consisting of bases with identifiable maker's marks. The marks dated the bottles and containers to the late 1930s through the 1940s and included marks identifying the Owens Illinois Glass Company and the Armstrong Cork Company. Test Units 8 and 9 were excavated near Test Unit 7, to further investigate the high concentration of metal detector hits. Neither unit revealed structural remains and both contained relatively low artifact counts.

Again, most were architectural items. Of note was a shoe sole, a horse shoe (likely pre-dating the POW camp), and a bottle glass fragment embossed “FED,” probably the start of the legend, “Federal Law Forbids Sale or Re-Use of This Bottle,” used on liquor bottles between 1935 and the mid-1960s.

Test Unit 10 was located in the south half of Compound 1, near the shovel test which had revealed

an ashy burned layer containing an abundance of artifacts, including remnants of demolished POW camp buildings. Nearby were the locations of POW barracks Buildings 4106 and 4107. The burned layer was encountered at a depth of approximately 28 centimeters below the surface, and extended across the entire 1 x 2 meter unit. This layer consisted of burned black clay with numerous burned wood inclusions and burned artifacts, and terminated at about 45 centimeters below the surface. Test Unit 10 produced more artifacts than all the other POW camp test units combined, yielding 1,002 artifacts, the majority coming from the burned layer. Nearly 750 artifacts were architectural metal items, predominantly nails, some fused together under the intense heat of a fire. The burned layer also contained a relatively high number of container glass fragments, including milk bottle fragments, canning jar fragments, and an entire cosmetic or ointment jar.

Eight ceramic sherds were recovered from the burned layer, consisting of sturdy plate and bowl rims. Two refitting plate base fragments bore a back mark used prior to 1950 by the Shenango China Company, the mark including the image of a Native American painting a ceramic jar (Figure 9). In business from 1901 to 1979, the Shenango China Company of New Castle, Pennsylvania was listed in 1902 as a maker of "semi-porcelain dinner sets, toilet sets and short sets of odd dishes, some decorated." Beginning in 1909 and continuing through the years of the Great Depression, the company manufactured a durable type of "hotel ware." During World War II, Shenango turned to the production of ceramics for government use, with federal contracts eventually accounting for over half its business. With little or no decoration,

the government ceramics included many manufactured for military use, sometimes marked with the insignia of an armed services branch or department. The ceramics present in the burned layer were undoubtedly used in the POW camp.

The artifact assemblage from Test Unit 10 most closely resembled that collected from test units elsewhere within site 23PU1869 that can be exclusively associated with the POW camp. The burned layer within the unit was probably created during POW camp demolition, its artifacts including architectural remains such as Celotex used on POW camp buildings, as well as possible electrical wiring. Most likely, the unit was located where debris from adjacent Compound 1 buildings was piled, burned, and buried.

Archaeological Summary

The POW camp at site 23PU1869 was built in the fall of 1942, receiving its first prisoners in December of that year. Most POW camp buildings were constructed according to Theater of Operations standards as modified in 1942. The Fort Leonard Wood POW camp matched in general plan the standard design for a camp of 3000 prisoners, involving three prisoner compounds of roughly equal area. Yet, the exact number and

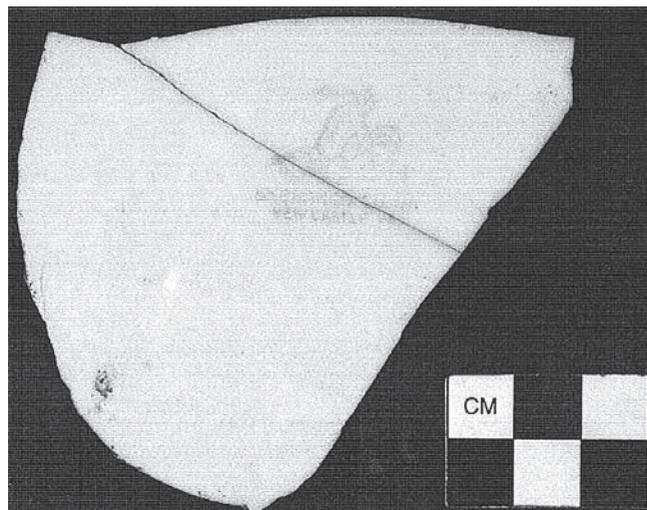


Figure 9. Refitting Shenango China Company plate base fragments, used prior to 1950, from site 23PU1869.

arrangement of buildings within each compound varied considerably from the standard plan due to the rapid expansion of the prisoner population and the constraints of local topography, most notably a deep ravine passing through Compounds 1 and 2. Numerous artifacts were recovered that are associated with the POW camp. However, few could be directly associated with the prisoners themselves. These few included the German two-pfennig piece, the Tunisian coin, several items of German army field equipment, and a German army matchbox cover.

Site 23PU1869 is eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. As one of four main POW camps in Missouri during World War II, the site is important for its connection with events of national significance. Archaeological investigations further indicated the site is noteworthy for its potential to yield important information regarding significant research questions, given the presence of intact subsurface remains including building foundations. The presence of a quantity of in situ barracks foundation piers just below the present ground surface indicates that portions of the original camp ground surface were buried rather than stripped by heavy machinery after camp abandonment. Information from the POW camp site could be used to address research questions regarding the treatment and conduct of POWs within the United States during World War II, as well as their interaction with the local military and civilian populations. The site is currently protected on Fort Leonard Wood. If a military mission need should arise that requires the use of the land on which the POW camp site is located, further archaeological excavations and archival and oral history research will be undertaken to mitigate the loss of the site. s



The gravestone of POW Wendlin (Wendlin) Schiller, believed to have been murdered by another POW(s), in a cemetery adjacent to Pick Educational & Volunteer Facility on Pulaski Avenue. Schiller's first name is misspelled and the death month should be September. Two other Germans and one Italian POW are also there.

Author **Stephanie L. Nutt's** full title is Cultural Resources Coordinator, Texas State University, US Army Garrison Fort Leonard Wood.

Stephanie has published two previous articles in the *Gazette* about the history and archaeology of Fort Leonard Wood. "Unearthing Early Pulaski County," written with Dennis Naglich, appeared in the 2007 *Old Settlers Gazette*. It recounted the excavations, methodology, and history of the Robinson/Musgrave site and the Wilson Tilley homestead. The 2009 issue of the *Gazette* featured "Bloodland: A Community Lost But Not Forgotten." By means of archaeology, document research, and interviews, Stephanie explored the history of that community which disappeared with the building of Fort Leonard Wood.

Stephanie is currently on the Board of Directors and is a Past President of the Old Stagecoach Stop Foundation.

A German soldier tells what it was like to visit Fort Leonard Wood in 1943 as a

POW

When America went to war on December 7, 1941, few could have imagined the profound changes which the next four years would bring. Battles great and small produced heroes and cowards; savage brutality with an occasional glimpse of human dignity; the development of awesome weapons; and millions of prisoners of war. For such prisoners, the war was an entirely different experience from that shared by their comrades at the front.

After capture they were processed and shipped thousands of miles to prisoner communities where they carved out new, if temporary, lives for themselves in the midst of their enemies.

Some prisoners of war, such as Americans in Japanese hands or Germans captured by the Russians, fared badly and were often fortunate simply to survive. German prisoners in America had a much better time in captivity.

Fritz Ensslin was a tanker in an armored regiment who, after capture in North Africa, arrived at the Fort Leonard Wood Prisoner of War Camp in June 1943.

In 1982, Mr. Ensslin wrote a letter recounting his experience as a prisoner of war in America. That letter, printed in its entirety, follows. (Reprinted from Essayons, June 27, 1991, Fort Leonard Wood.)

First of all I would like to express my gratitude toward those individuals who would like to include a story of us former POWs in the history book of Fort Leonard Wood.

We were all soldiers of General Field Marshal Rommel's Afrika Corps, who just a few months earlier, had the chance to view the towers of Moscow on 5 December 1941, during a temperature of minus 54 degrees Centigrade.

I was a tank gunner in an armored regiment and I am familiar with the war only from that perspective. If someone wants to come to a conclusion about communism with all of its brutality, I believe he should leave the judgment up to us.

Those from my regiment who survived the war in the Soviet Union were withdrawn and sent to Africa. As far as Africa is concerned, I have the following saying: "The more dogs that chase a rabbit, the quicker he'll be caught."

We boarded an American transport ship in Morocco, and after 30 days of voyage we landed at Norfolk, Virginia. On a daily basis during the trip we were followed and attacked by German submarines. We arrived at Fort Leonard Wood at midnight after a two-day trip by train in well secured rail cars.

I believe that this short introduction is necessary in order to understand our conduct and attitude as I progress to write my memoirs.

We were combat experienced troops, realistic and without illusions. You can discard the above memoirs since you actually want information concerning Fort Leonard Wood.

Well, then, Fort Leonard Wood at midnight, June 1943. We were received by a large force of security guards, armed with submachine guns, with their fingers on the triggers ready to fire at us at all times. We were escorted by the guards to Camp 1.

The camp looked like a cage for wild animals. I was illuminated by dozens of spotlights to an extent that it made you think it was daylight at midnight. We had never seen so much barbed wire at one place. Between the barbed wire fences there were numerous observation towers manned by guards

with submachine guns. Thousands of fist-sized moths could be seen in the light screens in front of the spotlights. It was an unforgettable first impression.

Beyond the locked gate, we could see dark barracks with no sign of life in them. They were made to house 50 men. The inside of those barracks was a pleasant surprise for us. Namely, each of us had a bed which one could call his own, a mattress, two blankets, and a pillow. We had the feeling of being in a Hilton Hotel. For years we had been sleeping either inside or on top of our tanks, sometimes just on the ground in the desert.

Someone called out in broken German, "Hurry up, Germans, you will get something to eat!" About one o'clock in the morning we were served a "dream meal" that a reputable hotel could not have cooked better. Some of us were kidding and made such remarks as: "If we had only known, we would have sneaked across earlier instead of fighting until we ran out of ammunition." They let us sleep until noon, since we were exhausted by our journey.

Through an interpreter, the camp commander, who was a major, made the following announcement to our formation: "If you behave yourselves, you will be treated well. Those who approach the fence will be shot." It was understood and was clear to us.

We received clothing which consisted of used GI uniforms dyed blue. A large POW was printed on the back, knees, and rear-end of our uniforms.

We had the opportunity to set up general housekeeping within the barracks during the following few days. However, during the day our camp looked somewhat depressing. It looked almost like the Sahara Desert since there were no trees, grass, bushes or flowers within our camp. We did our best to improve the appearance of our camp with the help of our camp commander who brought us grass and flow-

er seeds. Our camp looked like a virtual paradise within a few weeks. To our major's great satisfaction, the occupants of the barracks competed against each other in which barracks had the nicest garden.

For the use of 100 POWs, there was barracks equipped with a bathroom and toilets. We were surprised to find that it was possible for us to use the bathing facility where there was hot and cold running water at any time of the day.

We were required to do our own laundry. For that purpose we were given an ample number of wash basins and washboards dating back to grandma's time, and again, to our surprise, we had access to almost unlimited quantities of real curd soap.

We did not have the chance to enjoy smoking for six weeks. Every smoker knows what a punishment that is.

The voluntary work began approximately 10 days after our arrival. Thirty men were needed for the laundry but only 10 volunteered of the 1000 POWs. We were all curious to find out from the volunteers at the end of the day about their experience in the laundry. The magic words from the volunteers was that there were "at least 100 girls there in all shades and colors;" the same day another 60 men volunteered. From then on, the laundry was operational 24 hours a day, with 30 POWs on all shifts. I was working on a three-meter-wide steam press, pressing the GI's bedding and hospital laundry. I was working with a black girl named Laura who was my boss. She was a real beauty; a mixture of black and white with a touch of Asiatic in it.

The regulations prohibited conversation during work. Only matters pertaining to work were allowed to be discussed. Love matters, particularly, were strictly forbidden, and if someone was caught, both would be severely punished. There was one guard assigned to every 10 prisoners during work. They tried

to make themselves look important in the eyes of the girls. To show off, the guards would sometimes use the stocks of their weapons on us. It was also a laughing matter to us that the guards habitually had their fingers on the triggers of their weapons, ready for use on us if needed.

The American women and the engineers respected and treated us as their co-workers and there were never any problems between us. The guards, however, were always looking for trouble. They were ridiculed even by their fellow Americans on occasion when they used their power to subdue a helpless POW.

The boss of the laundry, who was as strong as a bear, was impartial and fair. He detested discipline and often closed his eyes to matters that otherwise could have harmed us POWs. My co-worker, Laura, was very shy and reserved at first. She sang almost the whole day. I can still remember and probably repeat the songs she sang then. Here are a few I remember: Good Night, Wherever You Are; Somewhere Over the Rainbow; Spring Fever; How Many Hearts Have You Broken; Sweetheart Rosemary; and Won't Be Satisfied Until You Break My Heart. Despite the strict regulations she managed to smuggle me a 20-pack of Chesterfield cigarettes every day.

Meanwhile, the POW camp was filled to a total number of 3000 men. It was divided into three parts by a barbed wire fence.

All enlisted men were required to work. NCOs and officers were not required to work but even they worked. We were assigned to the following work details in groups of 10 to 30 men and worked at quartermaster, post engineers, mess hall, shoe repair, road construction, police of the exercise areas, lawn mowing, and garden maintenance around the barracks, sowing grass seeds around the post, and removal of trees where road had to be widened.

Except military duties we were assigned to all imaginable work details

like pin boys in the bowling alleys, firing of furnaces in the officers' quarters, garbage removal, incinerator workers, cleaning crews for office buildings and clubs, painting, carpentry, cabinet making and the like.

We worked eight hours per day and were paid ten cents per hour. To have cash in possession was strictly forbidden, therefore we were paid in five-cent and ten-cent money certificates. Stores were established in each 1000-man camp where we were able to purchase all our necessities and many luxuries like chocolate, mineral water, toilet articles like the finest soaps, after shave lotions, safety razors, peanuts, etc. At the end of each working day we also received a ration for two bottles of beer at ten cents each. The beer was brewed in St. Louis and was called Alpenbrau.

To make the long story short, the Americans adhered to the Geneva Convention as far as the handling and treatment of POWs was concerned.

The Americans didn't do much for us within the camp as far as free time activities were concerned. We received permission to build a soccer field. Within a few hours the field was measured by a group of planners, but it was impossible to play on the rocky bare ground.

Among the 1000 POWs in our camp, there were many intelligent men with many capabilities such as professors, high school teachers, and foreign language instructors who offered tutoring in almost every language. Unfortunately, very few people took advantage of this golden opportunity and I am sure that they were sorry afterwards. I made up my mind to study English and Russian. Why Russian? I'll come back to that subject later.

Occasionally we had trouble with the Polish guards who hated us passionately. When one of us had been mistreated by the guards, the entire camp went on a strike. For us this meant living on bread and water for

one to three days and the kitchen and the store were placed off limits. There was total silence in the camp during these times.

Meanwhile, we were integrated into the Fort Leonard Wood labor camp force to such an extent that if for some reason, the POWs missed one day of work due to a strike it would have a very negative effect on the camp's operation. Our camp commander always ironed out these problems by re-establishing normal operations of the kitchen and store, then everything would be back to normal until the next incident.

Meanwhile, artistic groups were formed within the camp such as cabaret theater and even a dance group consisting of 12 "girls" trained by a ballet master. Among the spectators of this dance group were many American officers who attended the performances on a regular basis. They were awed by

the dancing girls who were actually boys, by their genuine looks and performance. Girlish-looking boys were picked for that role. They were well drilled and with the perfect makeup, they looked almost real.

Each barracks in the camp received one copy of the St. Louis Post Daily[*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*] free of charge. We often found articles written about us in this newspaper. At first, these articles were fair and pertinent, while later they became more negative. If you consider how many people read this paper, the purpose was obvious. Besides the information portion of the newspaper, we were amused by the day-to-day cartoon series called "Sad Sack." The story portrayed a GI who had to suffer a lot in the Army because everything he did was wrong. The men who were assigned to the incinerator and garbage removal brought us large quantities of other magazines and newspapers so that we had a

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good inside view of the American press. Here are just a few that I can remember: *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, *Life*, *Esquire*, *Stars and Stripes*, *Reader's Digest*, and a number of comics. We were convinced after a while that the intention of the entire US press was to create a negative atmosphere toward Germany. We knew what to expect from all this and from time to time our expectations came true.

I stated in the beginning that we had no trouble with the American civilians—this quickly changed later. We found out in a hurry why. It was required from everyone who was employed by the Army to watch a movie during duty hours every second week. Afterwards these people behaved as if they were brainwashed. They would not speak to us anymore and you could see the hatred sparking from their eyes. It took days until they simmered down, but by then it was time for the next movie made in Hollywood. Some of us managed to see some segments of these movies—they were hair-raising.

We had no contact with the American soldiers who received their training on the base. To us they were friendly and looked somewhat shy, like all recruits of all armies do during basic training.

Every morning before we went to work we had to stand in the formation by the gate for a head-count. After the head-count we had to sing

and march to a cadence to work. Each group of workers had to carry his own food ration in boxes which had a secret double bottom. These double bottomed boxes were used by us to bring forbidden items into the camp.

The smuggling went on unnoticed for a good while until one day we had a big shakedown inspection. We had a short-wave receiver in the camp and were able to listen to Radio Germany. On one occasion we even had a chance to listen to one of Hitler's speeches.

Sundays were the worst days for us, but everyone of us had some kind of hobby. Woodcarving was in at the time. We also had some specialists who were making ladies' purses out of snake hides. The snakes were caught locally and the purses were sold to the American officers to have them as presents for their wives. Some POWs were melting empty toothpaste tubes to make copies of German medals and decorations out of the lead. The medals looked genuine and no American could resist buying a few for souvenirs.

Many of us were occupied by sports activities. Sports equipment was not available, however, we were able to fabricate some out of available materials. Acrobatics and circus artistry were among the most popular sports within the camp. Professional circus artists were the coaches. We also had a group that

performed on trampolines with such accuracy and professionalism that they could have well performed in a circus.

There were large farewell ceremonies conducted on Friday on a large exercise field for the units up to battalion-size who were leaving for overseas. For us it was a very touching experience because the soldiers received goodbye kisses from pretty girls. Such things were entirely new to us.

We were very much impressed by the WACs and their smart-looking uniforms. Also, by the hospital nurses who were all officers. We all agreed that their uniforms looked much more impressive comparison-wise than the clothing worn by German Red Cross sisters.

A new morale booster appeared for the GIs one day. They were called the "Victory Girls." Watching those girls left our mouths and eyes wide open. They pulled up their skirts and fumbled around with their garters for the GIs. All this happened in public, otherwise we would not have had the opportunity to view such spectacles. Scenes such as these were painted by American artists and are sold today for from \$10,000 to \$20,000.

In the meantime, it was spring of 1944 and the situation greatly changed. Hatred against anything German developed into a domineering role. I was fortunate enough to be transferred, along

with 30 POWs, to work on a farm in Missouri. There the people were uncomplicated; good work was rewarded with good treatment. Many such groups of POW workers were assigned from Fort Leonard Wood in all possible directions to help harvest cotton, sugarbeets, peanuts, corn, spinach, melons, potatoes, etc.

I experienced the "Day of Victory" in Jefferson Barracks. There the routine was about the same as in Fort Leonard Wood with the only difference being that the general circumstances were rougher. The camp itself was located only a few yards away from the Missouri River. I will never forget the day of the victory. We had the chance to view the world's largest fireworks show over St. Louis, and could hear President Truman's speech over KWK Radio from St. Louis. The following sentence in his speech I will never forget: "Liberty and peace is coming to all the nations big and small—except to Germany." Look around today and see what is left of it.

My last job was in the mess hall which served meals to soldiers returning from overseas. They were discharged from the Army from here. The mess hall served three meals a day to 3000 soldiers. Many of the GIs spoke to us by saying, "Deutschland Kaputt, Hitler Kaputt," and similar statements.

Meanwhile we learned how to shun rather than provoke unnecessary arguments, but some insist-




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ed on an answer. "We conquered Germany, what do you have to say about that?" We almost all had the same answer. "It's OK, but the worst is yet to come, namely the Soviet Union." "Oh, that's typical Nazi propaganda, conquered and still arrogant. We are going to beat the militarism out of your bones, you Nazi bastards." The press commented the same way. There's still a lot to say on this subject, but let's forget it.

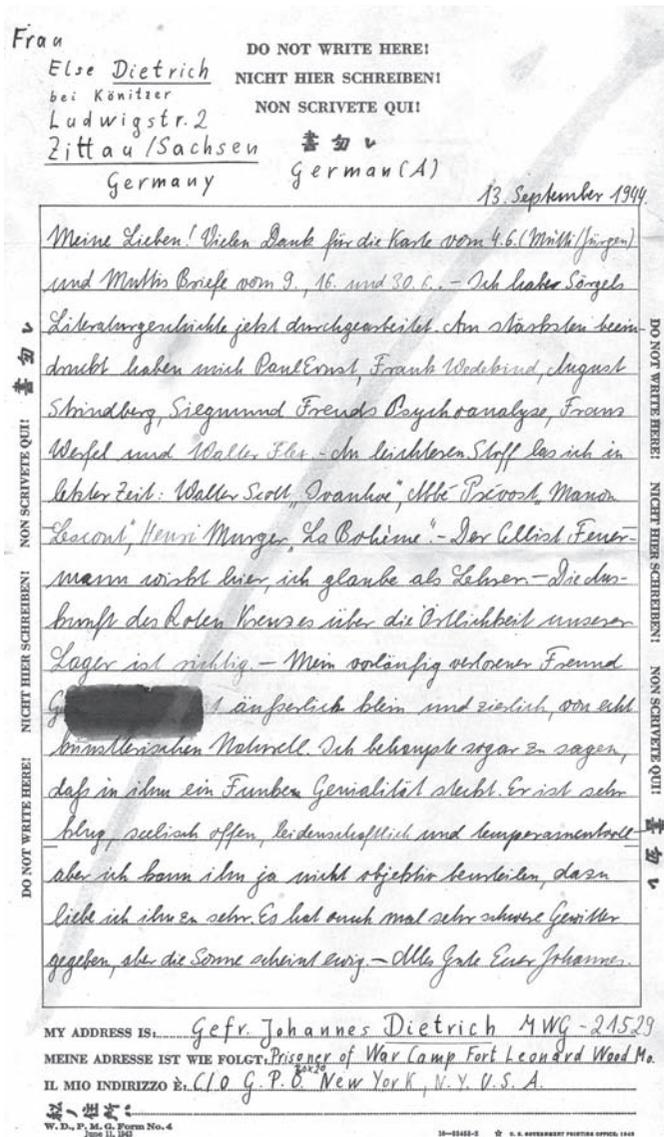
The first POWs were brought back to Europe in the spring of 1946, not to Germany, but to France. There they were released by the Americans and turned over to the French to perform forced labor. They were required to work that job. Many POWs died performing that kind of job. All this after three years of US imprisonment; three to four years of forced labor. This report may appear extensive, however, I have said very little.

Last but not least, I would like to bring back some memories of the widow of President Roosevelt. She suggested that German POWs be allowed to stay in the US if they desired. President Truman, however, said, "No Nazi can remain on this continent." Mrs. Roosevelt will remain in our memories as an honorable person. I would ask you kindly not to take out those memories that are pertinent to Fort Leonard Wood.

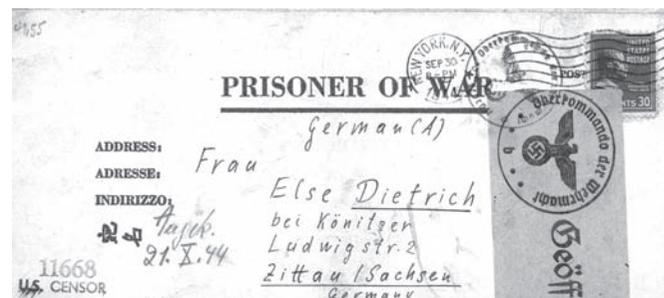
I am giving you my word of honor that all this is the absolute truth.

Sincerely,

/s/Herr Fritz Ensslin



Top The inside message portion of the POW letter.
Bottom The outside address panel. Both images are scaled at 45% of their original size.



The POWs at Fort Leonard Wood were allowed to write letters, though they were censored by the Americans and the Germans. We have three such letters, two from German prisoners and one Italian letter. We had the one at left translated by a native-born duo, father/daughter Klaus Littwin and Gabriela Gallagher. Klaus is a WWII survivor.

Frau
Else Dietrich
C/O Konitzer
Ludwigstr.2
Zittau/Sachsen
Germany

Do Not Write Here!
Nicht hier Schreiben!
Non Scrivete Qui!

13 September 1944

Dear loved ones! Many thanks for the postcard from June 4th (mother/Jürgen) and mother's letter from June 9th, 16th, and 30th. - I have now worked through Sörgel's history of literature. I have been greatly impressed by Paul Ernst, Frank Wedekind, August Strindberg, Siegmund Freud's Psychoanalysis, Franz Werfel, and Walter Flex. Recently, I have turned to less heavy reading material: Walter Scott "Ivanhoe", Abbé Prévot "Manon Lescaut", Henri Murger "La Bohème". - The cellist, Feuermann, lives here, I believe, as a teacher. - The Red Cross information about the location of our camp is correct. My friend G [redacted], who I have lost temporarily, is of small and delicate stature, of real artistic disposition. I believe I can say there is a spark of genius in him. He is very smart, highly emotional, passionate, and vivacious - but I cannot assess him objectively since I love him too much. Sometimes we have also had heavy thunderstorms but there is unending sunshine. - All the best, your Johannes.

My Address: Gefr. Johannes Dietrich MWG - 21529
Meine Adresse ist wie folgt: Prisoner of War Camp FLW

In an attached note, translators Klaus and Gabriela characterize this letter as "might not be what it seems... Johannes mentioned throughout the letter that he read books that were banned by the Nazi regime and mentioned a Jewish cellist who had to flee Germany to escape persecution... Overall, it is definitely an interesting letter but a mysterious one for sure."

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