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## Article Title: Nazi Influence at the Fort Robinson Prisoner of War Camp during World War II

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Article Summary: Most prisoners of war held at Fort Robinson considered their treatment satisfactory. There was some harassment of non-Nazi prisoners of war by Nazi prisoners. A Special Projects reeducation program successfully modified the political stance of many PWs while they were in the Nebraska camp.

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Photographs / Images: Wolfgang Dorschel's pencil and ink rendering of the Fort Robinson Prisoner of War camp, October 1945; sign for PW camp on Highway 20 west of Crawford; PW camp compound that housed the original Afrika Korps contingent throughout World War II; Hans Waecker and other members of a variety entertainment group in front of their hall; German PW Wolfgang Dorschel on work detail; PW reunion August 21, 1987

# NAZI INFLUENCE AT THE FORT ROBINSON PRISONER OF WAR CAMP DURING WORLD WAR II

*By Thomas R. Buecker*

During World War II some 375,000 German and 50,000 Italian prisoners of war were brought to internment camps in the United States, chiefly at the request of our European allies. In 1942 alone large numbers of German soldiers were captured by the British in North Africa. The thousands of prisoners of war strained their supplies and manpower, and the British government pressured the United States to take charge of the captured men. Prisoners were shipped on empty troop transports returning from Europe to the United States. The American army was ill prepared to receive and hold large numbers of prisoners of war (P.W.s). Numerous prisoner of war camps were quickly built on military installations, including Fort Robinson, Nebraska.

Although Fort Robinson was located in the northwestern corner of the state, it had excellent railroad connections. After several weeks of rumors, word was received in late December 1942

that construction of a P.W. camp on the post military reservation was to begin. In January 1943 a site one and one-half miles east of the post was prepared, and construction started. Initially the camp was planned as a single-compound, 1,000-man camp, with additional facilities for guard and administrative echelons. The buildings were all temporary frame structures, covered with battened tarpaper. Almost before construction was completed, the army decided to expand the camp to hold 3,000 prisoners. With the addition of two compounds, the camp contained 160 buildings for prisoners and American personnel.

Later that spring, American soldiers arrived to garrison the camp. Two military police escort guard companies, numbering 275 men, arrived to provide security. The 1765 Service Unit was activated for administrative purposes. Composed of seventy-five men, this unit provided the headquarters staff, chauffeurs, mess personnel, clerks, and four interpreters. By the summer of 1943 the camp was ready for operation.

On November 19, 1943, the first prisoners arrived at the Fort Robinson camp. They were 680 members of

General Erwin Rommel's famed Afrika Korps. These troops were well-disciplined, regular soldiers, many of whom were fanatical Nazis. They were more thoroughly indoctrinated in Nazi ideology than most later arriving P.W.s<sup>1</sup> The Afrika Korps soldiers were usually the first prisoners to arrive in American P.W. camps, and they became the camp cadre for the later arrivals.

Throughout World War II the American government strictly complied with the Geneva Convention's rules for prisoner of war treatment. Because of that compliance, the German P.W.s were able to maintain continual contact with their government. Swiss representatives regularly visited the camps. The German government sent directives, books, and canteen funds through those representatives.

Initially, Americans had no interest in the politics of the German P.W.s. Camp personnel were unprepared to deal with the ideological distinctions found in the camps. Most Americans were politically ignorant or naive about Nazism. This naivete is illustrated by a conversation between the Fort Robinson commander, Colonel Arthur Blaine, and his interpreter, John

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The pencil and ink rendering of the Fort Robinson Prisoner of War camp was made in October 1945 and donated to the Nebraska State Historical Society by former P.W. spokesman Wolfgang Dorschel. The caption reads "View to east on the sand hills (spur of the Rocky Mountains)." (NSHS-11044-3)



Sign for P.W. camp on Highway 20 west of Crawford. (NSHS-T467-1)

Neumaier:

"Corporal, I tell you these Bolsheviks in that camp, they really have discipline."

"Colonel, sir, these are not Bolsheviks. These are Nazis."

"Bolsheviks, Nazis. All the same."<sup>2</sup>

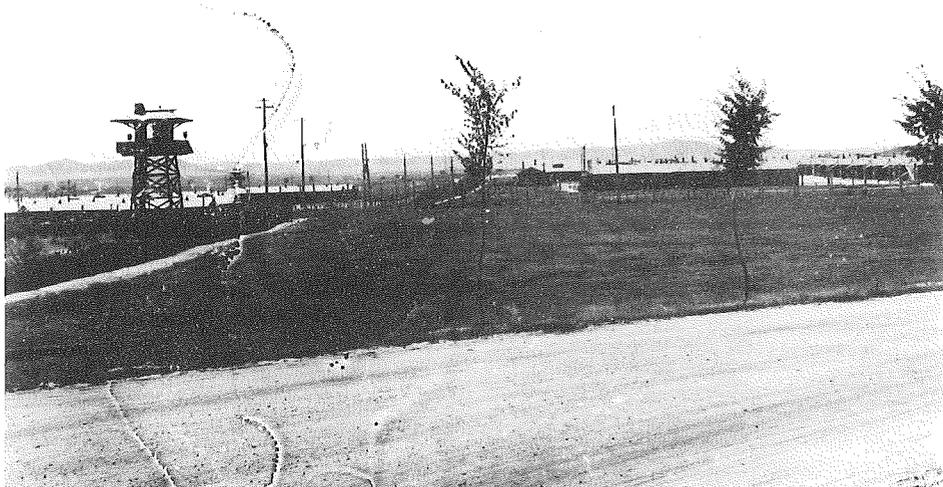
The stage was set for internal strife that the American command at first chose to ignore.

There were several factors that led to American difficulties with German prisoners. The first was Nazi political influence. Approximately eight to ten percent of the German P.W.s were considered fanatical Nazis, and thirty percent were felt to be sympathetic to Nazism. It can be assumed that these figures, compiled at the end of the war, applied to the Germans in the Fort Robinson camp. Although ardent Nazis were a minority, they controlled the camps, intimidating others by threats and violence.<sup>3</sup>

A second factor was the failure to segregate anti-Nazis and Nazi prisoners during the initial processing. It was assumed that every German soldier was a Nazi. Those considered rabid Nazis were sent to a special camp at Alva, Oklahoma. But a quota system imposed on each Service Command Area prevented all of the hard-core Nazi P.W.s from being sent there.

Third, the average German soldier had strong patriotic and nationalistic feelings. He was doing his duty as a soldier serving his country. A P.W. display of anti-American expression was not necessarily pro-fascist. The blind obedience characteristic of German soldiers did not indicate Nazi sympathy. The American command confused nationalism with Nazism.<sup>4</sup>

Along with ignorance of German political beliefs, American guards generally had no understanding of the German language. Some qualified men were selected as interpreters but never in sufficient numbers. At times the Fort Robinson camp was short as many as sixteen interpreters. As former interpreter John Neumaier explained, the



*The P.W. camp at Fort Robinson housed in the compound on the right the original Afrika Korps contingent throughout World War II. [NSHS-T467-2] . . . (bottom) Varista (variety entertainment) group in front of their hall. Hans Waecker is at right. (NSHS-T467-16)*



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German Army was “not just a national army but a political army.”<sup>5</sup> The Americans’ lack of understanding of political ideology, nationalistic attitudes, language, and rules of compliance with the Geneva Convention led to the drastic increase in Nazi influence inside the compound.

Nazi influence on the German P.W.s actually began before they arrived in the camp. Many expected to see New York in ruins after being bombed by the Luftwaffe:

Sometimes in conversation, they had the impression New York City was completely demolished, it was destroyed, it was wiped out. We said ‘That’s not true. Here’s a news picture of New York City,’ Propaganda! Propaganda! It was destroyed, that was their attitude.<sup>6</sup>

Others were amazed to see the large ship convoys coming from America. They had been led to believe that German U-boats had eliminated all trans-Atlantic shipping.<sup>7</sup>

In prisoner of war camps the office of camp spokesman was the most important P.W. position. This man was the key intermediary between the American command and the prisoner community. His position was guaranteed by Article 43 of the Geneva Convention. In camps across the United States, Nazis quickly managed to get their candidates appointed to this important position. Fort Robinson proved no exception.<sup>8</sup>

At Fort Robinson, the senior ranking P.W. noncommissioned officer was selected as spokesman. His appointment was approved by the American command for several reasons. First, he had a good command of English. Second, some felt his character was beyond question. However, he was also pro-Nazi.<sup>9</sup>

Nazi-dominated camps were models of efficiency. The Nazis soon realized that a well-run camp earned them the backing of the American command. The Americans seemed to have an unwritten policy of making any concession which helped keep the compounds running smoothly. As a result, camp inspection reports filed by the Swiss representatives praised the efficiency

of the camp. Typically a June 1944 report remarked that the camp was well-administered, “not to say worthy of commendation.”<sup>10</sup>

The general aim of the American command was to maintain tranquility. As long as the P.W.s behaved correctly, they were treated accordingly. Unfortunately some American personnel, especially camp guards, were not qualified for their assignments. The camps had to operate with an unprepared skeleton staff.

Several months after the P.W.s arrived at Fort Robinson, conflict between Nazis and anti-Nazi prisoners began to surface. To maintain camp harmony, the groups had to be separated. February of 1944 saw the first documented cases of Nazi harassment, which served to bring recalcitrant prisoners into line or drive them to other camps. In addition there was fear among prisoners that harsher methods would be used. Because the Americans believed that most of the P.W.s were Nazis, anti-Nazis requesting segregation were transferred elsewhere. Other prisoners quickly learned to keep their opinions to themselves.

Harassment included monitoring personal conversations to detect dissenters, beating of prisoners for “unpatriotic behavior,” and control of camp media by censoring printed and film materials. Some P.W.s believed that threats against their families by Nazis in the camps could actually be carried out in Germany.<sup>11</sup>

Specific instances of Nazi harassment at the Fort Robinson Camp can be identified. On March 14, 1944, a transfer was requested for Soldat (Private) Gerhard B. Braune. This prisoner was threatened with death inside the compound because of anti-Nazi sympathy. He was transferred to Camp Campbell March 29, 1944, two weeks later.

On February 26, the U.S. camp commander requested transfer for Unteroffizier (Sergeant) Albrecht Lederer from the camp for his own

safety. He had exhibited decided anti-Nazi sentiment. His transfer to Fort Devins, Mass., was also made to preserve “the efficient operation of the prisoners interned here.”

On July 12 Unteroffizier Ernst Ummack was placed in protective custody because his life had been threatened. He was accused of being a traitor because he translated war news to other P.W.s, which they did not believe. Three days later he was transferred to Camp Veteran, Wyoming.<sup>12</sup>

On February 18 Camp Spokesman Harry Huenmoerder recommended transfer for Gefreiter (Corporal) Otto Ludwig. He had boldly threatened Nazis in the camp in front of a number of his fellow prisoners. He was subsequently beaten:

I got very bad treatment from my comrades. That’s the reason why [the Americans] sent me later to Camp McCain, in Mississippi. They took me out, and maybe wanted to kill me, you see, because [I] had some information, you see, the American officers leading the camp they heard about it. And they took me out and asked me and I told them the comrades put some water, in the night time, on me, you see, they beatened me and I think in solution they sent me to Camp McCain in Mississippi.<sup>13</sup>

Spokesman Huenmoerder believed it would be useful to transfer Otto Ludwig, and that it would be “in interest to good order and discipline among the German Soldiers in this camp.”<sup>14</sup>

There were other examples of harassment by the Nazis inside and outside the compounds. Prisoners taking English language classes were threatened with punishment for giving in to “foreign indoctrination.” Nazi spies were also in the classes for the purpose of controlling discussion and prohibiting expressions of opinion.<sup>15</sup> Some anti-Nazi prisoners were threatened en route to the camp, necessitating their transfer immediately upon arrival.<sup>16</sup>

Nazis in the camp also tried to intimidate P.W.s of other nationalities serving in the German Army. After the Afrika Korps, other Axis prisoners began to arrive at the camp. Many were Czechs, Belgians, and Austrians. Upon

arrival in America they protested against their German conquerors. Once an American officer could not understand why the German P.W.s were throwing stones at another barracks. He was informed by an enlisted interpreter that they were Belgian soldiers stoning a German barracks.<sup>17</sup> The Belgians quickly requested segregation from the Nazi Germans.

Another fault of the American P.W. program was its failure to segregate Germans from Austrian P.W.s. Immediately after they arrived at American camps, the Austrians launched a flood of protest petitions attesting to their hatred of the Nazis. A group of Austrian P.W.s at Fort Robin-

son wrote a letter to the War Department in which they identified camp spokesman Huenmoerder as the "head Nazi" and charged the American camp commander with antipathy toward the Austrians and anti-Nazis. They requested transfer to an "Austrian camp."<sup>18</sup>

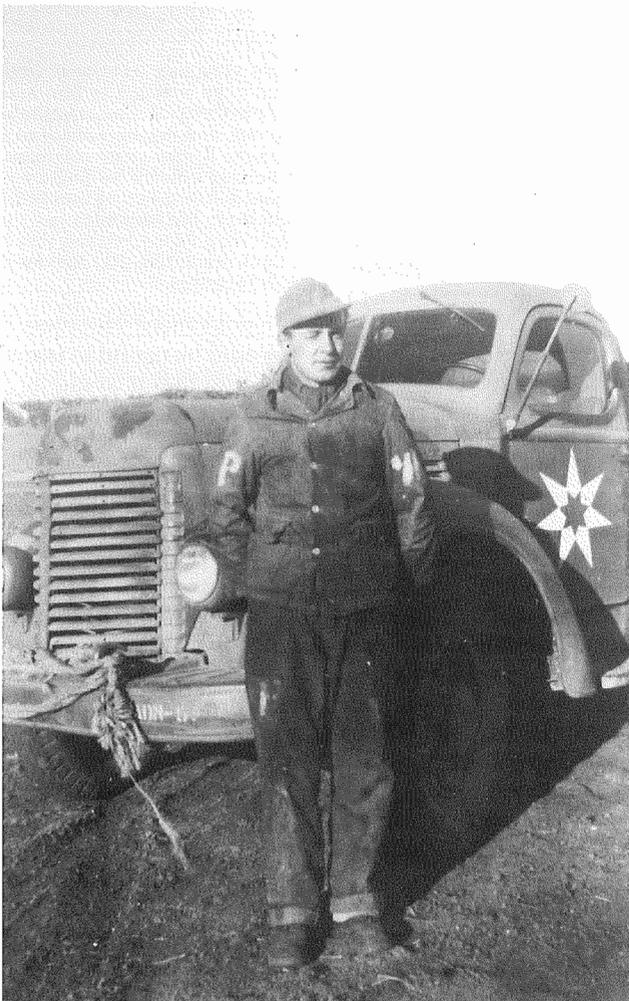
Austrian soldiers worked on the main post, the same as German P.W.s. The Veterinary Corps officers at the K-9 Hospital became acquainted with an Austrian working there. One day he came to work, evidently having been beaten the night before. He did not know who beat him. In another instance the Austrian did not want to take his hat off. The Americans discovered that half his head had been shaved by his

Nazi tormentors.<sup>19</sup>

Nazi influence was not limited to terrorizing P.W.s inside the compound. Nazi influence was felt in the entire camp, on both sides of the wire. In American camps the most visible sign of Nazism was use of the Nazi salute. After the attempt on Hitler's life on July 20, 1944, the entire German Army was Nazified. The traditional army salute was replaced by the outstretched arm. The use of the Nazi salute in the camps had to be permitted because of the Geneva Convention. The German P.W.s received orders through the Swiss representatives to use the salute.<sup>20</sup> According to military protocol, the Nazi salute was properly used to acknowledge United States officers. A German sergeant regretted the necessity of giving the Nazi salute to an American officer whom he knew was Jewish. The officer told the sergeant he should not feel badly, because it was his duty to use the proper salute.<sup>21</sup>

Other signs of Nazi influence became evident. Nazi flags were used to drape the coffins of P.W. burials. At least eleven burials of German P.W.s occurred at Fort Robinson, with the Nazi flag displayed during wartime funeral ceremonies. The American government decided to allow the Germans to use the national flag desired by fellow prisoners. There was no objection to P.W.s displaying in the barracks national flags, emblems, or pictures of political leaders. The use of the Nazi salute and the display of Nazi flags, emblems, and pictures, were concessions to the hard-core Nazis. One reason the prisoners received the concessions was to prevent retaliation against German-held American prisoners of war in Europe.

There was a degree of arrogance on the part of the German P.W.s toward the American staff at the camp. They



*German P.W. on work detail. (NSHS-R659-2423)*

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refused to believe any American war news. When the invasion of Normandy was announced, most P.W.s believed it mere propaganda.<sup>22</sup> Prisoners on post work details had the opportunity to interact with Fort Robinson soldiers. Discussions on the war were often held:

They really believed they were going to win. You couldn't talk to them and tell them they had no chance of winning the war. They had it in their minds they were going to win it. And you couldn't change it. Boy, them people was bull-headed. Damn. Talk till you were blue in the face.<sup>23</sup>

Along with several Jewish officers, John Neumaier, the interpreter for the camp commander, was Jewish. Neumaier had more contact with the Nazi P.W.s than many American personnel and recalled the following exchange with one of them:

"Now John, you're a nice kind of Jew. When Hitler comes here I'll have a good word for [you with] him." I said, "Gee, thanks."<sup>24</sup>

In addition to such behavior, some Germans on work details were uncooperative. At times, the American supervisors felt German P.W.s were argumentative and ready to sabotage work projects. Prisoners were removed from work details for such covert operations. In March 1945 fencing foreman Roscoe Craig requested that P.W. laborer Fleischfresser Rudolf be removed from his work detail because Rudolf was

argumentative when assigned to duties, and attempts sabotage in the manner of throwing nails in the path of vehicles, turns on the switch of the vehicles and at one time grabbed the gear shift when I [Craig] was trying to drive.<sup>25</sup>

The Nazis devised ways to harass anti-Nazis, even after some had left the camp. One P.W. never was able to work because of a double hernia. He was an anti-Nazi and cooperated with the Americans. In 1945 he was transferred to the Scottsbluff P.W. Camp. Shortly after arrival he was thrown into the guard house because he would not perform heavy labor even though his medical record carried recommendations for only light work. Nazi administrators at Scottsbluff remembered him from



*Unteroffizier (sergeant) Wolfgang Dorschel, appointed camp spokesman in mid-1945, taken shortly after the first group of P.W.s arrived at Fort Robinson. (NSHS-D717-7)*

Fort Robinson and found this way of punishing him for his anti-Nazi sentiments.<sup>26</sup>

Several months after the Afrikaners arrived, movies became a part of camp entertainment. Rented with funds provided by the German government and selected by the camp spokesman, films were often chosen that showed American life in the worst possible light. A Red Cross representative described film content as "nothing but whiskey, drinking, gangsters, wild women, and horse thieves." Many P.W.s complained, declaring that the selected movies were seventy-five percent trash.<sup>27</sup>

As part of the process of exposing P.W.s to American life, national magazines and newspapers were brought into compound dayrooms.

Camp spokesman Huenmoerder flatly told the Americans the presence of those publications would cause trouble and dissension among the P.W.s. Shortly thereafter he discouraged the circulation of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Life* magazines as "they contained undesirable propaganda."<sup>28</sup>

German influence inside the compound left some on the outside wondering who was in command. At the same time there were charges on the national level that the United States was encouraging Nazism rather than eliminating it. At nearby Fort Robinson rumors spread among the soldiers. There was talk about the "German prisoners running their own jail and compound." Others heard talk of murders in the camp and bodies of murdered P.W.s being thrown out of the gate.<sup>29</sup> But nobody on post actually saw evidence to substantiate these rumors.

Nationwide, the prison camp problem was more apparent. More and more Americans believed the Nazis had full control over the camps.<sup>30</sup> In some P.W. camps, Nazi influence became particularly evident between September 1943 and April 1944. During that period at least seven political murders, numerous assaults, and a disturbing number of P.W. suicides occurred.<sup>31</sup> As the tide of battle turned in favor of the Allies in Europe, something had to be done to subdue and remove the Nazi influence in stateside camps.

By 1944 the War Department had realized the viciousness of the Nazi philosophy in the P.W. camps. A year earlier General George Marshall requested a plan by which "PWs might be exposed to the facts of American history, workings of a democracy, and the contributions made to America by peoples of all national origins." Thus the idea for the intellectual diversion program was born.<sup>32</sup>

That fall efforts began to influence prisoners through books, films, newspapers, lectures, and music. The Americans hoped to introduce P.W.s to



*P.W. reunion August 21, 1987: Alfred Thompson (left), U.S. military, Bismarck, North Dakota; Wolfgang Dorschel, P.W., Bad Griesbach, Germany; Karl Deyhle, P.W., Stuttgart, Germany; Dr. Hans Waecker, P.W., Cliff Island, Maine; John Neumaier, U.S. military, Poughkeepsie, New York; Wolfgang Loesche, P.W., Limberg, Germany. Courtesy of author.*

the resources of the Allies and particularly to America and democracy. This reorientation or reeducation program was directed by the Special Projects Division of the Office of the Provost Marshal General. About all most personnel knew about the organization was its address: 50 Broadway, New York. The inner workings of Special Projects was kept secret. Because part of the project was to gather information from P.W.s, it fell outside the Geneva Convention's rules. On the other hand, if information was volunteered, there was no violation of the convention.<sup>33</sup>

The loophole in the Geneva Convention was in Article 17, dealing with "intellectual diversion" and sports. The object of the program was not to Americanize the P.W.s, but to instill respect for the quality and potency of American institutions. This was done through a program of education and recreation designed to reeducate the P.W. to think democratically. Simul-

taneously, the P.W.s received information to combat misinformation or prejudices instilled in them by Nazi propaganda.<sup>34</sup>

Measures for Nazi reeducation began at the Fort Robinson camp in late 1944. The American guards were encouraged to represent America to the P.W.s. One officer and enlisted man from the intelligence section were sent to special training seminars at 50 Broadway.

For reeducation in the camp to work, the American command had to gain the confidence of the non-Nazi P.W.s. The first breakthrough came from an Austrian soldier. He identified Nazi troublemakers in the compound and pointed out the camp spokesman as the main source of internal trouble. For this he was threatened by the Nazis for talking too much with the Americans. With much courage the man stood up to them, rebuffing their threats.<sup>35</sup>

After this breakthrough, the Americans did more to gain P.W. con-

fidence. Two G.I. intelligence men walked the compounds all night on several occasions. Before this, American personnel did not generally enter the German area after dark. As a result of this surveillance, charges were brought against suspected Nazi ringleaders and a number were thrown in the guardhouse. Warning notices against threats or bodily harm were posted in the compounds. Prisoners that mistreated other P.W.s were to be severely punished.

According to a Special Projects directive no pro-Nazis were to be retained as camp spokesmen. Harry Huenmoerder was immediately removed from that position and transferred to another camp. A progressive non-Nazi N.C.O., Wolfgang Dorschel, was selected to be the spokesman. The pro-Nazi spokesman's dismissal proved a significant accomplishment by the Special Projects staff.<sup>36</sup>

Prisoner transfer policies were also corrected. The policy of transferring anti-Nazis and Nazis out of the camp ceased. What was needed was to convert unreliable P.W.s to democratic ways. Nazis were removed from positions of authority, such as that of camp spokesman. This broke down the existing camp hierarchy. The prisoners' fear of speaking out and cooperating with the Americans diminished.

As the pressure that had been exerted by Nazi leaders lessened, non-Nazi leaders gained influence over the compounds. The founding of "Arbeitsgemeinschaft Zur Politischen Aufklaerung" (Working Association for Political Enlightenment) in 1945 proved a milestone. This organization was established and managed by a select group of P.W.s, entirely on their own. The goal of the group was the "reeducation and stabilization of all misguided persons." By June 30, 1945, ninety-three percent of the camp population signed sworn statements that they had forever broken with National Socialism.<sup>37</sup>

Political lectures by P.W. educators were held in packed activity rooms.

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Topics of discussion included reconstruction in Germany, banking and money in postwar Germany, and the relationship between the United States and Germany. The American command provided a mimeograph machine and copies of lectures were made and distributed to those unable to attend.<sup>38</sup>

Educational activities had been organized by the prisoners in the camp from the earliest days. With the creation of the reeducation program, the American command made careful plans to assume control over the classroom. Classes in American history and government were eased into curriculums that included engineering, physics, and languages.

As part of the national reeducation program, a bimonthly newspaper-magazine *Der Ruf* (*The Call*) was initiated in early 1945 for the P.W.s in camps across the United States. It was an illustrated publication, designed to present realistic war news, entertainment, and views of American life. Nazis in the Fort Robinson compound objected to the magazine. They purchased the entire first issue and destroyed it. At the time *Der Ruf* was published, the pro-Nazi spokesman suggested that the P.W.s not buy it. Orders quickly limited purchases of the magazine to one copy per prisoner. Additional orders provided punishment for any who interfered with its distribution or reading.<sup>39</sup>

A large number of books and other publications had been sent to the camp by the German government. Directives received from 50 Broadway outlined the removal of disapproved books from compound libraries. Lists of disapproved and approved books were received by the American command. Book selectors were told to avoid cheap, sensational, pulp-type publications for the P.W.s.<sup>40</sup>

Freedom of expression in the compounds slowly developed. The camp Special Projects staff secured a blue-print machine for use by the P.W.s. Anti-Nazi and democratic posters were

printed by the progressive P.W.s and openly displayed throughout the compounds.

Control over P.W. movie selection improved. Potential movies were screened by the Special Projects staff. Guidelines directed those screening movies to "be critical of P.W. tastes in getting low-type feature comedies or third rate pictures." While in New York City to attend an orientation, Fort Robinson camp staff members purchased "The Defeat of Germany" and "Why We Fight" at Macy's Department Store for viewing at the camp.<sup>41</sup>

On the morning of May 8, 1945, the memorandum from the War Department announcing the surrender of Germany was read to all P.W. companies. Immediate prisoner reaction was mixed. The Nazi die-hards were sad; other prisoners were glad and relieved. One P.W. recalled, "A few stupid people were not happy." One Nazi wanted to commit suicide and attempted to get poison from a medical assistant. He felt "no Fuhrer, no Fatherland." Fortunately he was talked out of the attempt.<sup>42</sup>

The end of the war in Europe brought other changes. With the surrender, all rank in the German army was abolished. In addition the use of the hated Nazi salute was strictly prohibited. Several weeks later Nazi atrocity films were shown. All P.W.s were required to view the horror of European death camps. Progressive P.W.s had awaited the films to further prove to their counterparts the evils of Nazism. Reaction to the films was also mixed. Some die-hard Nazis believed the bodies of Jews killed by the Nazis were really natives massacred by the British in India.<sup>43</sup>

Freedom of speech in the compounds was encouraged by the introduction of a camp newspaper on July 12, 1945. The paper, aptly named *Neuer Horizont* (*New Horizon*), was produced and edited by a talented staff of educated P.W.s. Political essays were the usual fare, with additional articles on social, cultural, and histori-

cal topics. The Special Projects staff was extremely proud of this effort and considered it the best P.W. camp newspaper in the country.<sup>44</sup>

As the reeducation process began, several signs of progress became evident. The camp assistant executive officer, Captain Jason Silverman, who also directed the Intellectual Diversion program, was credited with creating good will and cooperation with the P.W.s. An inspecting officer commented, "Prisoners constantly come to him for advice and requests, the fact that he is Jewish notwithstanding."<sup>45</sup>

The stockade library grew to over 1,300 volumes. Most of the titles were in German, which encouraged more reading. All books were checked for undesirable literature and against approved and disapproved book lists. P.W.s were also allowed to subscribe to American newspapers and magazines.

Additional recreational activities were organized to occupy the prisoners' time. An entertainment club provided theatrical and musical performances. Under reeducation, music was not censored. The American command wanted to impress on the Germans that music was international. Athletic competitions were popular and attracted many participants. As a result, the Americans found it beneficial to provide and encourage outside activities for the P.W.s.

The process of repatriating German P.W.s did not begin until months after the war ended. However, during the spring and summer of 1945 hundreds of P.W.s were transferred from Fort Robinson to other camps. In September, Fort Robinson became a branch camp of Scottsbluff and later Camp Carson, Colorado. Between February 1945 and February 1946, camp population dropped from 3,044 to 305. In May 1946 the last few German P.W.s departed and the camp was closed.

By the end of the war the mission of the American P.W. camp had changed. During 1943 and most of 1944 the philosophy was mainly to hold prisoners of war until repatriation.

However, the internal struggle with Nazi ideology led to redefinition of the camp's mission. The War Department issued orders and guidelines for policy changes. It was up to the American command in each camp to properly implement those changes.

Although today it is difficult to accurately measure the success of their efforts, some conclusions can be drawn. One measure of the successful operation of the Fort Robinson camp can be seen in the attitudes of the American personnel, especially those involved with Special Projects. They were proud of the reeducation program. They believed worthwhile work had been accomplished and that aspects of the Fort Robinson camp program were superior to those implemented at other camps. In their opinion the camp was one of the best run P.W. camps in the country.

Another measure might be how the Germans felt about their period of internment. Most P.W.s made the best of a difficult situation.<sup>46</sup> They had the opportunity to learn new ideas and beliefs when not under the restraints of Nazi ideology. New freedoms, even behind the wire of the compounds, prepared them for repatriation. Most P.W.s were satisfied with their treatment, and hold pleasant memories of their forced stay in America.<sup>47</sup>

A third measure of success at the camp came in the spring of 1946. As part of the repatriation process, an advanced program of democracy training was organized at Fort Eustis, Virginia. This school was for reliable P.W.s, selected from camps across the United States. About five percent of the total P.W. population was sent to this school to prepare for possible leadership roles in postwar Germany.

The Fort Robinson camp had a larger percentage of men selected per capita than any other camp in America. At the time the camp was closed, most of the prisoners remaining were the original Afrika Korps contingent. About twenty-five percent of the Fort Robinson P.W.s were sent for further democratic training. Many of the Afrikan P.W.s had changed their political sentiment. The camp was successful in the reeducation of those prisoners.<sup>48</sup>

The campaign against Nazi influence at the Fort Robinson camp was highly successful. The camp did not experience the severe violence associated with Nazi harassment as happened at other sites. Although the specter of Nazism did exist at the camp, with American support, non-Nazi P.W.s successfully endured its threats.

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### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Sidney Fay, "German P.W.s," *Current History* 8:43 (March 1, 1943), 193-94.

<sup>2</sup>John Neumaier, camp staff interview, Aug. 20, 1987, Fort Robinson Museum (hereafter referred to as FRM).

<sup>3</sup>Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (New York: Stein & Day, 1979), 149; Fay, "German P.W.s," 196.

<sup>4</sup>Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War*, 149.

<sup>5</sup>Neumaier interview, FRM.

<sup>6</sup>Joseph Meranda (Fort Robinson veteran) interview, Oct. 10, 1989, FRM.

<sup>7</sup>Karl Deyhle (former German P.W.) interview, Aug. 20, 1987, FRM.

<sup>8</sup>Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War*, 161; Fay, "German P.W.s," 195.

<sup>9</sup>"Field Service Camp Survey, 15 February 1945 - Report on Camp Spokesman," National Archives & Records Service Record Group 389, Records of the Provost Marshal General (hereafter referred to as NARS RG 389). Copies of all Fort Robinson reports from this record group are on file at FRM.

<sup>10</sup>Inspection report of Charles Eberhardt, Special War Problems Division, June 21, 1944, NARS RG 389.

<sup>11</sup>Judith Gansberg, *Stalag: U.S.A.* (New York: Thomas Crowell Co., 1977), 47; Fay, "German P.W.s," 196.

<sup>12</sup>"Prisoner Transfer Requests," Enemy Information Bureau, Sub-Post File, Fort Robinson, NARS RG 389.

<sup>13</sup>Otto Ludwig (former German P.W.) interview, Sept. 17, 1987, FRM.

<sup>14</sup>"Prisoner Transfer Requests," NARS RG 389.

<sup>15</sup>Alfred A. Thompson U.S. Army interpreter letter dated Febr. 19, 1946, "Special Projects & Camp Education" file, FRM.

<sup>16</sup>The problem of Nazi P.W.s threatening others began long before German prisoners landed in America. One former P.W. recalled that he and a friend were removed from a compound in North Africa for protection. Both were musicians and were threatened because they played American tunes in the compound. Dr. Hans Waecker, personal correspondence, Oct. 5, 1991.

<sup>17</sup>Neumaier interview, FRM.

<sup>18</sup>Evidently this letter was never sent. It was found with miscellaneous camp papers donated by Alfred Thompson in 1987. A translated copy of the letter is on file at FRM.

<sup>19</sup>Meranda interview, FRM.

<sup>20</sup>Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War*, 148.

<sup>21</sup>Wolfgang Dorschel (former German P.W. and camp spokesman) interview, Aug. 20, 1987, FRM.

<sup>22</sup>Samuel Mitchell (U.S. Army camp first sergeant) narrative, copy on file at FRM.

<sup>23</sup>Carl Still (Fort Robinson veteran) interview, July 11, 1978, FRM.

<sup>24</sup>Neumaier interview, FRM.

<sup>25</sup>Report of Roscoe Craig to the post engineer, dated March 30, 1945, copy on file at FRM.

<sup>26</sup>Alfred Thompson letter dated Mar. 5, 1946, from "Special Projects & Camp Education" file, FRM.

<sup>27</sup>Report of Howard Hong, Red Cross representative, July 31, 1944, NARS RG 389.

<sup>28</sup>"Report on Intellectual Diversion Program," dated Jan. 27, 1945, NARS RG 389.

<sup>29</sup>Ralph Knepper (Fort Robinson veteran) interview, n.d., and Thomas McMahon (Fort Robinson veteran) veteran questionnaire, FRM. On the other side of the wire, former P.W. Hans Waecker had heard of anti-Nazis being murdered and their bodies thrown into the latrines in the North Africa camps. Dr. Hans Waecker, personal correspondence, Oct. 5, 1991.

<sup>30</sup>There are a number of contemporary articles on Nazi P.W. camp control. For example, see "Nazis in the U.S.," *Time*, May 1, 1944, and Vicki

Baum, "Land of the Free," *Collier's*, August 19, 1944.

<sup>31</sup>Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War*, 169-73; Fay, "German P.W.s," 196-97.

<sup>32</sup>Gansberg, *Stalag: U.S.A.*, 59.

<sup>33</sup>Alfred Thompson interview, Aug. 20, 1987, FRM.

<sup>34</sup>Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War*, 195.

<sup>35</sup>Alfred Thompson and Wolfgang Dorschel joint interview, July 7, 1989, FRM.

<sup>36</sup>"P.W. Special Projects Letter No. 16," July 28, 1945, FRM; Alfred Thompson letter dated June 30, 1945, copy on file at FRM.

<sup>37</sup>Alfred Thompson letter dated July 27, 1945, copy on file at FRM.

<sup>38</sup>Copies of political lectures are on file at FRM.

<sup>39</sup>Inspection report by Rudolph Fischer, Legation of Switzerland, dated March 31, 1945, NARS RG 389; "Special Projects Letter No. 16," FRM.

<sup>40</sup>Special Projects directives dated May 15 and July 25, 1945, copies on file at FRM.

<sup>41</sup>"Checklist for Special Projects Officers," dated May 15, 1945, copy on file at FRM; Alfred Thompson letter, June 30, 1945, FRM.

<sup>42</sup>Dorschel interview, FRM.

<sup>43</sup>Neumaier interview, FRM.

<sup>44</sup>Copies of all issues of *Neuer Horizont* are at FRM.

<sup>45</sup>"Report on Intellectual Diversion Program," copy on file at FRM.

<sup>46</sup>"The most difficult part of being a P.W. (as compared to a prisoner in a jail) was the uncertainty about the length of internment (no reduction in time for good behavior)." Dr. Hans Waecker, personal correspondence, Oct. 5, 1991.

<sup>47</sup>On his time at Fort Robinson, Dr. Waecker remarked, "We had good food, hot showers, decent clothes, work, entertainment - the only thing missing was the lack of opportunity to deal with the male hormones." Dr. Hans Waecker, personal correspondence, Oct. 5, 1991.

<sup>48</sup>Alfred Thompson letter dated Febr. 9, 1946, "Special Projects & Camp Education" file, FRM.