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Libraries in American German prisoner of war camps during World War II

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LIBRARIES IN AMERICAN GERMAN PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS DURING
WORLD WAR II

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Library and Information Science

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Library and Information Science

by

Trista Stephanie Raezer

December 2008

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SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

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LIBRARIES IN AMERICAN GERMAN PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS DURING
WORLD WAR II

by
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ABSTRACT

LIBRARIES IN AMERICAN GERMAN PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS DURING WORLD WAR II

by Trista Stephanie Raezer

This thesis addresses the topic of libraries in American prisoner of war camps for German soldiers during World War II. It examines the role of the prison library in the prisoners' lives, as well as the camp libraries' use for recreational and re-educational purposes. The overall treatment of the prisoners and how this treatment affected their use of the camp libraries is explored. Research in the subject of libraries for German prisoners of war in America is nonexistent. Research on the treatment of the German prisoners reveals that they were treated so well that many wanted to become American citizens afterwards. Research on other prisoner of war camps reveals that prisoners used the libraries to gain a sense of hope and to escape the reality of their prisoner status.

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I would have never come to the point of writing a thesis if it were not for my parents. They instilled in me a strong love for reading and constantly supported me through my educational endeavors. I would especially like to thank my dad for flying all the way out to Washington, D. C. to keep me company while I spent a week doing research at the National Archives.

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Introduction

During World War II nearly a half million German soldiers were interned on American soil as prisoners of war (POWs). Between 1941 and 1946, they lived in almost every state in nearly six hundred different camps and contributed to the American economy by working in various trades, such as farming and lumber work.¹ Despite their prisoner status, they were not treated harshly. The United States strictly followed the rules for the treatment of POWs set by the Geneva Convention² of 1929 and provided the soldiers with comfortable shelter, food, religious services, education, and leisure activities.³ One such accommodation was camp libraries. According to historian Glynn Sytko, "Every POW camp had a library [They] ranged in size from a few dozen dog-eared books at Angel Island POW Camp in San Francisco Bay to the substantial collection of more than 9,000 volumes at Camp Dermott, Arkansas."⁴ However, the literature on this topic is mostly nonexistent at worst and mentioned in passing at best.

The camp libraries provided recreation and re-education. The Geneva Convention demanded fair treatment of POWs. Recreation and intellectual pursuits were required by Article 17, which was partially fulfilled by libraries.⁵ However, the United States deliberately disregarded the spirit of the convention that forbade denationalization,

¹ Fiedler, *Enemy Among Us*, 1.

² The singular use of "Convention" in this thesis refers to the Geneva Convention of 1929. Plural usage refers to all Geneva Conventions that convened between 1864 and 1929.

³ Mason, "German Prisoners of War in the United States," 198.

⁴ Sytko, "German U-boat men in Captivity," http://www.uboa.net/men/pow/pow_in_america.htm.

⁵ Diplomatic Conference of Geneva of 1929. Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Article 17.
<http://www.icrc.org/IHL.nsf/52d68d14de6160e0c12563da005fdb1b/eb1571b00daec90ec125641e00402aa6?OpenDocument>. Hereafter referred to Geneva Convention.

which the United States slyly did through an extensive re-education program directed by the Special Projects Division (SPD) of the Provost Marshal General Marshal's Office (PMGO).⁶ A large part of this endeavor included reading material.

These German POW camp libraries were not unique. Japanese internment camps, Jewish ghettos, and American POW camps in Germany all had libraries. The literature on these libraries is more prevalent and produces themes of humanity, hope, and escape from reality.

The topic of libraries for German POWs resonates in contemporary American issues. As of 2008, America is engaged in a war and holds prisoners abroad and on American land. The Geneva Convention followed during World War II is still applicable today, though slightly revised in 1949. The current treatment of POWs has come under severe question and controversy.⁷ During World War II camp libraries were provided in order to comply with the Geneva Conventions and for re-educational purposes. Providing camp libraries for re-educational purposes was against the Geneva Conventions. The current treatment of POWs by the United States is following a similar theme, certain amenities are being provided, yet there are glaring examples of breaking the rules of conduct towards the POWs.⁸

This thesis will fill a glaring gap in World War II era historical research. There has not been any research covering this subject. While the subject of re-education has

⁶ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 8.

⁷ "U.S. Abuse of Iraqi Detainees at Abu Ghraib Prison," 592.

⁸ Ibid.

been explored extensively by such authors as Ron Robin and Judith Ginsberg, neither expressed specific thoughts on the libraries.⁹

Literature Review

The subject of German POWs in America is an afterthought in American memory and scholarly research. Allen V. Koop contends that “prisoners of war do not figure as largely in the scholarly or popular history of World War II as their numbers might warrant. Usually, such neglect is due to other things having seemed more important at the time.”¹⁰ Jake W. Spidle, Jr., lamented in 1975, “It is especially regrettable that this topic has thus far escaped extended consideration by serious historians, as some of the most useful source material for its study is ephemeral and will not be available to historians of the future.”¹¹ Therefore, if time was running out in 1975, then now is definitely the time to explore the topic of camp libraries.

Locating primary sources is of the utmost importance for the camp library historian. As suggested by Spidle in 1975, primary sources are disappearing. The physical camps are gone, deteriorating, or rebuilt for other purposes; the guards and POWs are either dead or too elderly for oral history interviews.¹² Many German POW historians use interviews as their primary sources. Because some of their books were published ten or more years ago, many of the men interviewed may be dead, making any more interview opportunities impossible. Spidle found many primary sources in 1975 by

⁹ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*; Ginsberg, *Stalag: U.S.A.*

¹⁰ Koop, *Stark Decency*, 4.

¹¹ Spidle, “Axis Prisoners of War in the United States, 1942-1946,” 61.

¹² Ibid.

asking local citizens near a former POW camp. Most citizens now would not remember the camps like they did in 1975.

According to Spidle an important primary source is an article by John Brown Mason, who was a staff member of the State Department's Special War Problem Division, Internees Section.¹³ Mason's article from the *American Journal of International Law* describes the conditions of the German POWs in relation to the Geneva Convention and includes a descriptive paragraph of the camp libraries.¹⁴ Books were sent to soldiers by their families. The camp libraries were stocked by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the War Prisoner's Aid of the International Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). POWs were also allowed to purchase their own books, or purchase books for the libraries.

In the study of available secondary research, four themes dominate. First, the history of libraries during World War II gives context to the camp libraries. Second, the history of the German POWs gives information on the lives of the men who used the libraries. Third, these libraries were a part of the re-education programs for the German POWs and this re-education effort has its own body of scholarship. Fourth, the history of libraries in other concentration and prisoner camps can be used for comparative purposes and show how POWs in general reacted to camp libraries.

Scholarly works on libraries during World War II are limited, but present an interesting aspect to the ideological and patriotic struggles of the period. Three major themes present themselves in these writings: censorship, destruction of books, and the

¹³ Spidle, "Axis Prisoners of War in the United States, 1942-1946," 62.

¹⁴ Mason, "German Prisoners of War in the United States," 204.

role of the library in the community. Both the United States and Germany struggled with these issues. Patti Clayton Becker offers a compelling look at the role of American libraries and the American Library Association during World War II in her doctoral thesis and an article for *American Libraries*. In her article, Becker examines the affects the war had on libraries in the United States. "Tight budgets would not increase much, if at all, during wartime while the nation poured its resources into fighting the war. To make matters worse, some libraries bore additional expenses to meet war needs."¹⁵ Libraries struggled with new demands from patrons for military publications and books about the new jobs available for women. The Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson ordered libraries to remove books about "explosives, secret inks, and ciphers."¹⁶ Due to the fact that intellectual freedom was not yet a "professional commitment" most librarians followed this order. In the end the war discouraged most librarians. Circulation was at an all time low as was library school enrollment.

Becker's doctoral thesis addresses the American Library Association's attempt to put libraries into war service by handing out propaganda. However, "ALA met significant resistance and indifference from legislators and government agencies that did not share the association's view of public libraries as essential community institutions. Furthermore, many librarians and library users rejected ALA's attempt to expand the jurisdiction and purpose of the American public library."¹⁷ Thus American libraries were neglected and given no significant role in society during World War II.

¹⁵ Becker, "In Time of War," 56.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Becker, "Up That Hill of Opportunity," iv.

The topic of libraries in Europe during World War II has thoughtful secondary literature as well. Margaret Stieg's article from the *Journal of Contemporary History* addresses the question of what influence the Nazis had on German public libraries. "The Nazi regime attempted to transform German public libraries from quiet, out-of-the-way places into active participants in the stirring new era. Most important, of course, was the principle that the library was now a Nazi public library."¹⁸ This article presents a succinct overview of the library background of the German POWs and what their attitude towards libraries may have been.

An excellent contribution to the themes of censorship, destruction and affects on the community is an intriguing article by Nikola von Merveldt. His article uses the topic of libraries to explore cultural memory in "times of radical change."¹⁹ The story of two libraries is explored. These libraries, the German Freedom Library in Paris and the American Library of Nazi-Banned Books in New York, were created in direct reaction to Nazi book burning. Von Merveldt concludes that "created on different continents and in different social, cultural, and political contexts, they reflect the dynamics of cultural memory from 1933 through World War II and the Cold War Era to the present day."²⁰ Von Merveldt his thesis by presenting the stories of these libraries, their missions, and how they affected their patrons. The article poetically concludes, "In times of war . . . books and libraries gain symbolic dimensions precisely because their physical existence is threatened. . . . They can act as a powerful force to shape identity and create

¹⁸ Steig, "Second World War and the Public Libraries of Nazi Germany," 23.

¹⁹ Von Merveldt, "Books Cannot be Killed by Fire," 523.

²⁰ Ibid., 532.

community even under adverse circumstances. Once library collections lose their symbolic function. . . . They are doomed to be forgotten.”²¹ Thus, von Merveldt concisely shows why the libraries of POWs camps have been mostly forgotten and overlooked in most historical research. The POW libraries lost their “symbolic function” and now few remember their existence.

Kenneth R. Shaffer’s work gives a broader view of library destruction and concentrates on how the war affected the libraries of all participating parties, including Germany, France, Italy, China, the Philippines, Japan, and other small countries. His article argues that “World War II differed from preceding wars in that it was very precisely tailored for the destruction of books and libraries.”²² Shaffer was compelled to write his article due to the fact that the international sharing of scientific knowledge was greatly hindered by the destruction of libraries during the war. He blames both sides of the conflict for this destruction and calls on America to share their printed resources with the world. This article is brief and mostly narrates how libraries were pathetically destroyed.

A more concise look at library destruction is explored in Marek Sroka’s article about the destruction of Jewish libraries and archives in Krakow during World War II.²³ After giving a brief overview of the many Jewish libraries and archives in the city and the early persecution of the Jews after the war broke out, he narrates the destruction of the libraries. Books were confiscated, removed and destroyed from almost all Jewish

²¹ Von Merveldt, “Books Cannot be Killed by Fire,” 532.

²² Shaffer, “Books-Agents of War and Peace,” 428.

²³ Sroka, “Destruction of Jewish Libraries,” 147-65.

libraries and archives during the length of the war. Books by Jewish authors were removed from all Polish libraries and bookstores. The last part of the article details the heroic efforts of librarians to save these collections. Unfortunately, only a very small number of books were saved. This article however, does not add much to the historical analysis of how this destruction affected Jews, Poles or the rest of the world, but simply narrates what happened. Yet, it gives good insight into the enormity of the collections destroyed and the huge effort the Nazis put into destroying them.

In order to understand the role of libraries in the German POW camps and why they were made available, the literature about the camps must be explored. While the literature is limited in comparison to what is written about most World War II topics, it is much more extensive than scholarly works on libraries during World War II. Three themes dominate in these writings: the Geneva Convention, the relationship between the POWs and their guards, and the struggle to deal with POWs from many different political backgrounds and views.

Recent POW research focuses on the social history of the POW experience and seeks to discover the human factor of the war. Allen V. Koop gives excellent reasoning for this development. "Three phases marked the history of the World War II era. First came the . . . accounts trumpeting the triumph of the Allies. Second came a period of sobering investigation, which emphasized the . . . evil on all sides. Recently, a third view has emerged, revealing small sparks of light within the darkness, private moments of goodness."²⁴ Along with Koop's work on a camp in Vermont, David Fieldler, Antonio

²⁴ Koop, *Stark Decency*, xi.

Scott Thompson, Jeffrey E. Geiger, and Arnold P. Krammer present works that explore the humanity and decency of the guards and POWs.²⁵

David Fielder sums up the theme of most scholarly POW literature. "They came as our enemy, but in many cases they left as friends, or, at the least, with a more positive view of the United States."²⁶ The treatment of the German POWs was exemplary, as the Geneva Convention required that food and sanitary and health services had to be the same as that provided for American armed forces.²⁷ This literature also reiterates the fact that, ironically, there is little literature on the subject. Thompson claims, "Most writers assume that no great historical answers to the major questions of the war can be found in POW barracks."²⁸ Thus each writer tries to make their mark on the subject and usually ends up repeating what everyone else had written. The most important aspect of this literature is that it shows how well the POWs were treated and how much recreation was allowed. Perhaps the POWs did not need the escape and humanity that books provided for POWs in Germany. At the same time, maybe the POWs were anxious to use their frequent leisure time to expand their knowledge in books, or relax with their favorite novel.

The libraries in POW camps were used for leisure and re-education. While the leisure aspect is void of scholarly work, important works on the re-education aspect have been written. Re-education brings the first signs of controversy into the available literature. Denationalization and indoctrination was strictly against the Geneva

²⁵ Fielder, *Enemies Among Us*; Thompson, "Men in German Uniform"; Geiger, *German Prisoners of War at Camp Cooke*; and Krammer, "German Prisoners of War in the United States."

²⁶ Fielder, *Enemies Among Us*, 1.

²⁷ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 68.

²⁸ Thompson, "Men in German Uniform," v.

Convention, so the United States government carried out this ambitious re-education plan in secret.²⁹ Ron Robin argues that “the program’s ultimate objective was to provide ideological alternatives to National Socialism for the cross section of the German nation represented in the prison camps.”³⁰ Therefore, careful and meticulous research is needed to explore this topic.

Ron Robin is the most prominent writer on this subject. His entire book is devoted to German POW re-education along with an entire chapter on the literature used in the re-education programs. He notes that “the management of the POW literature was based on the assumption that controlling the POWs’ intellectual diet would diminish the need for a harsh penitentiary regime.”³¹ Therefore POWs were sometimes not allowed to read books written strictly for entertainment. However, “Much of the approved material soared way above the comprehension capabilities of the average inmate.”³² The fact that the re-education program mostly failed is backed up by William M. Tuttle, Jr.’s review of Robin’s book. Tuttle exclaims, “[Historian] Gansberg . . . claimed that the SPD was ‘one of the most remarkable and successful training programs ever implemented under the auspices of the military.’ Robin’s conclusion is starkly different. Who is correct? Clearly, it is Robin.”³³ Judith Gansberg was the first historian to write about the re-education program and concluded that the program was a resounding success.³⁴ However, Tuttle does acknowledge that Robin does not show any of the positive sides to

²⁹ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

³² *Ibid.*, 7.

³³ Tuttle, “Professors into Propagandists,” 122.

³⁴ Gansberg, *Stalag: U.S.A.*

re-education, such as schools set up and taught by German POWs. Reviewer Edward J. Pluth, who was less convinced of Robin's thesis, does proclaim that Robin's work is "well-written and researched. It's an important contribution to the literature and is highly recommended."³⁵ Therefore Robin's work is an excellent source to discover the re-education uses of books in the camps and how influential they were on the POWs' lives.

A. Rettig wrote a short article on re-education in American and Canadian camps and discovered similar conclusions as Robin. He argues, "In short, POWs accepted a portion of Allied history that criticized Nazism. But they did not reject Nazism in its entirety. Apparently, they attempted to balance new information with the old."³⁶ Rettig mentions that re-education was deemed a waste of time and effort until Soviet Russia started a successful re-education program for their POWs. While the POWs were encouraged to form their own "anti-Nazi" opinions and were encouraged to read articles about democracy by such authors as columnist Dorothy Thompson, the program essentially did not work.³⁷ The role of books in the re-education program in the camps is a subject that is in great need of more scholarly work, especially in light of the intriguing research conducted by Robin.

There were many other types of prison camps during World War II and they all had libraries as well. These include Jewish concentration camps in Europe, American POW camps in Germany, and Japanese American concentration camps in America. The main themes in this literature emphasize how the libraries brought escape and a sense of

³⁵ Pluth, "Review of *The Barbed-Wire College*," 573.

³⁶ Rettig, "De-programming Curriculum," 593.

³⁷ Ibid.

humanity and hope to the POWs and internees. David Shavit's article on libraries provided for the American and British POWs held in Germany is worth a serious look. He explains that, like the German POWs, American and British POWs received books from the Red Cross and YMCA. There was on average 1,050 books per 200 POWs and the books were used more to stave off boredom than for re-education.³⁸ This excellent article is a gold nugget in an empty mine of camp library literature. It explains the process that books went through to get to the POWs, who sent them, and how the POWs felt about the books.

A peer reviewed article from *Library Trends* by Miriam Intrator shows how a library in a Jewish concentration camp "represented an organized system of life, all the more inspirational and strengthening as it thrived, providing links to the past as well as room to hope for a future within the much larger system of death."³⁹ The library at Theresienstadt ghetto consisted of 100,000 volumes, because many of the incoming internees packed up books to bring with them instead of other necessities. This library helped these internees to feel more human and escape their dreadful reality. This article gives a wonderful explanation of how the library was compiled and operated. Different branches were established throughout the ghetto and there was even a children's branch. Even after the war ended and the ghetto was liberated, the last remaining librarian and assistant librarian stayed for three extra months to organize and catalog the collection before it was moved to a Jewish museum in Prague. Thus this article clearly shows how important books were to camp internees.

³⁸ Shavit, "Greatest Morale Factor Next to the Red Army," 113-23.

³⁹ Intrator, "People were Literally Starving for any Kind of Reading," 513.

Axis soldiers were not the only war-related prisoners held on American soil. Thousands of American citizens of Japanese descent were held in concentration camps. These camps also contained libraries, which were also used in leisure and education efforts. The literature, as in the case of POW camp libraries, is limited. Exile Within: the Schooling of Japanese Americans, by Thomas James, argues that “for educators, the connection between democracy and education was an article of faith.”⁴⁰ The effort to use books to teach democracy to internees who were not allowed to exercise their democratic rights was quite a paradox.

The history of libraries for internees on American soil attracted important and much needed attention from Andrew B. Wertheimer and his doctoral dissertation on Japanese-American internment camp libraries.⁴¹ Wertheimer shows that these libraries were similar to camp libraries for Germans and to libraries in Axis-controlled camps. The Japanese POWs were desperate for reading materials to relieve boredom and to keep up with the outside world. Self-education was also prevalent. All books were subject to censorship. Only books in English were allowed, which isolated internees with poor or no English skills. One large difference, however, was that these libraries mostly existed due to the grassroots efforts of the internees and not because of any policies or standards. These libraries received little outside support. The American Library Association was initially interested in supporting them, but withdrew support when it became apparent

⁴⁰ James, *Exile Within*, 1.

⁴¹ Wertheimer, “Japanese American Community Libraries in America’s Concentration Camps, 1942-1946.”

that no one else was interested in helping. Many of the books donated were duplicates, and thus had to be given away or destroyed.

Wertheimer also faced the hurdle of writing about libraries that no one has written about before. He explains, "This dissertation is the first study of libraries in America's concentration camps. It joins the literature on 'libraries in hell,' which includes the legal, semi-legal and clandestine libraries operated in Soviet Gulags, and the Jewish ghettos of Nazi Europe."⁴² He continues with the profound conclusion that "'libraries in hell' and local public libraries serve as agents of social control; they also can affect personal liberation."⁴³ Thus he shows that these kinds of libraries are a double-edged sword; on the one hand the belligerents control what is in the library, yet on the other hand, the library gives the POWs and internees' freedom and hope.

New Directions

Secondary sources addressing the history of German POWs in America present compelling questions that historians must address before the available primary sources deteriorate and are lost. The German POWs lived comfortable lives and the camp library was a part of that comfort and contentment during a time of war. However, these books were censored and chosen with ulterior motives in mind and may have had a lasting influence on the POWs. Available literature on the German POWs emphasized the good treatment they received and how they interacted with their captors. Their re-education

⁴² Wertheimer, "Japanese American Community Libraries in America's Concentration Camps, 1942-1946," 197.

⁴³ Ibid.

was a secret plan to instill the importance of democracy in them, but through poor planning it was mostly ineffectual and had no lasting influence.

Libraries during World War II struggled from poor funding, destruction, and censorship. Libraries in prison camps during the era helped to bring escape and a bit of humanity into the lives of the POWs. Unfortunately, the literature on all of these subjects is limited and scattered. No one has brought these subjects together to explore the history of libraries in camps for the German POWs on American soil. The current research emphasizes the social history and a sense of hope, so future research should look into the hope that books and libraries gave German POWs during a trying time in their lives.

Organization of Thesis

This thesis has been broken down into six chapters. These chapters range from historical background, evaluation of the daily life of POWs, the conditions of the libraries, to censorship and re-education. Chapter 1 gives the necessary background that supplies context to the camp libraries. This chapter narrates the process a German soldier experienced while transforming from a captured soldier on the battlefield to a camp library user. The complex camp system and Provost Marshal General's Office is explained.

Chapter 2 explores the treatment of the German POWs and how international war laws affected this treatment and the creation of camp libraries. The history of the Geneva Conventions, Hague Conferences, Lieber Code and Red Cross explains the influence that these entities had on the eventual treatment of POWs during World War II. The

treatment, both positive and negative, is explored using first-person accounts and secondary materials.

Chapter 3 describes and analyzes the libraries that were in each of the POW camps. This chapter covers the physical conditions of the libraries and how materials were selected. Chapter 4 continues exploring the camp libraries. The major contributors of camp library books, such as the YMCA, Red Cross and private donors are covered, along with the camp canteens where POWs could buy books. The reactions the POWs had to the camp libraries are explored through first-person accounts and observations.

One of the major reasons the military obtained books for the POWs was not merely due to the Geneva Convention but also for the re-education endeavor. Chapter 5 describes the re-education attempt and how and why books were chosen for this effort. Censorship had a hand in re-education as well. Chapter 6 states the conclusions and analysis of the author, and ties together all of the previous chapters.

Findings of Thesis

This thesis concludes that the Provost Marshal General and the Special Projects Division provided camp libraries for the POWs not only to fulfill the obligations of the Geneva Convention, but also to re-educate and influence the minds of the POWs. The SPD, created by the PMGO to re-educate POWs, carefully censored camp library books and created approved and unapproved book lists in order to subtly influence the POWs into accepting democratic ideals and American ways of life. The POWs in turn appreciated the access they had to books and used the libraries for entertainment and self-education. Books helped to distract the POWs from the psychological trauma of being

prisoners far from home. Books also provided the POWs with much needed intellectual diversion and stimulation. Most POWs left America with a positive attitude and brought books home with them as souvenirs and to replenish the lack of books in Germany.

Chapter 1

Wave a White Flag: Building a Prisoner of War Complex from Scratch

Introduction

A casual viewer who obtains a map of the POW camp system in the United States will be quite surprised. The map is completely scattered with over a hundred dots, showing the main camps in nearly all of the forty-eight states. If one is to include all of the branch camps as well, the map will have 511 dots.¹ Many of the names will be familiar to anyone vaguely aware of current military bases. From Fort Bragg in North Carolina, to Fort Lewis in Washington, from Fort Hood in Texas to Fort Ord in California, German soldiers once lived in these camps over sixty years ago.²

The tale of these POWs has mostly been forgotten.³ Americans are either not aware of the camps, or the drama and horror of World War II overshadowed everything that happened on American soil at the time. When the last escaped German POW surrendered in 1985, the resounding response from the American public was, “Were there really German war prisoners in the United States?!”⁴ However, nearly a half million German men were captured, transported via ship, and travelled by train to every corner of the United States to live as POWs until hostilities ended. These men lived in a prison system that was built from scratch, by a country that had little experience with POWs let alone a vast multitude of them. With only the Geneva Convention Relative to the

¹ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 1.

² Carlson, *We Were Each Other's Prisoners*, xxix.

³ Koop, *Stark Decency*, xi.

⁴ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, xiv.

Treatment of Prisoners of War signed on July 27, 1929 to guide them, the United States military built up a vast system of prison camps that housed, fed, and educated Germans in preparation for their eventual return to a war-ravaged continent. Despite the needed manpower, hours, and money that went in to this endeavor, arrangements were made to provide these enemy POWs with reading material and libraries.

The first third of this chapter will discuss the transfer of POWs from capture to arrival at camp. The trip from battlefield to camp was long and arduous. The POWs had reason to feel nervous as they suddenly found themselves in enemy hands and realized they would be moved half way across the world to a large and mysterious foreign country. The second third of this chapter will explore the PMGO and the three Provost Marshal Generals who served during the United States involvement in World War II. The last third of this chapter describes the camp administration and how the individual camps were run. The camps were run by camp commanders and guards on the outside and by German military rank on the inside. This system helped to maintain discipline and control over the POWs.

World War II and the Capture of German Soldiers

World War II, which lasted from 1939 to 1945, was a terrifying global war involving fifty countries, one hundred million soldiers, and fifty to sixty-five million deaths.⁵ The war began when Adolf Hitler, Führer of Germany, invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. This prompted Great Britain and France to declare war on Germany. Over the course of the war various nations joined either the Allies or Axis powers. The

⁵ Wagner et al, *Library of Congress World War II Companion*, 35.

Allies were Great Britain, the Soviet Union, the United States, France, Canada, and many others, totaling twenty-six nations. The Axis powers, which were led by Germany, included Italy, Japan, and a few others. However, the United States did not enter the war until December 7, 1941, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. This led to a two-front war. Hostilities in the European theater ended on May 7, 1945 (VE day) and ended in the Pacific theater on September 2, 1945 (VJ day).⁶

Shortly after hostilities broke out, men on both sides were captured and became POWs. However, there was the question of what to do with German soldiers after they were captured. Many of the Germans were captured in North Africa or France and there were few resources to keep these men there, let alone they were being held so near to enemy lines. This latter fact encouraged escape attempts. The most obvious solution was to transport these men to America. Firstly, ships transporting supplies to Europe returned empty, so they could easily be filled with POWs. Secondly, separated by an ocean, the men were not likely to escape. Thirdly, these men could be used as labor on farms to fill in for the American men who left to fight in the war.⁷

A year after Pearl Harbor there were only 431 POWs on American soil.⁸ In August of 1942, the United States accepted 50,000 POWs from Great Britain and the flow of POWs could hardly be stopped.⁹ However, there were between three and five million POWs that were never shipped to the United States.¹⁰ The American camps were

⁶ Wagner et al, *Library of Congress World War II Companion*, 35.

⁷ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 6.

⁸ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰ Springer, "American Prisoners of War Policy and Practice from the Revolutionary War to the War on Terror," 177.

merely a finger in the dike. The process of bringing German POWs from the European theater to American soil was a long four-step process. The POWs were captured, processed at the location of capture, transported across the ocean, and finally brought to their final destination by train. Once at camp, the POWs began their life behind barbed wire, unsure of when they would return to their homes.

Getting POWs from battlefield to the United States was a long and chaotic process. There were the problems of few interpreters, roads and trucks for transportation, unsanitary and full temporary camps, medical examinations, the filling out of forms, and souvenir hungry American soldiers who stole the POWs' belongings.¹¹ One of the forms that had to be filled out was a card provided by the International Red Cross to let the POWs' families know where they were and their condition. However, the rabid souvenir hunters often caused trouble by stealing the Germans' identity booklets.¹² One POW remembers, "The guards took everything away from us. I had a picture of my father in uniform. . . . They took that as a souvenir."¹³ On top of all of this, the POWs felt dejected to have been captured and were frightened and uncertain of what was going to happen next. As Robin puts it, the POWs had lost their frame of reference which had been drilled into them by a rigid and rabid military framework that completely enveloped their identity.¹⁴ Now they were set adrift into a sea of uncertainty.

The crossing of the Atlantic was much more relaxing. POWs were sometimes allowed to sleep in cabins instead of the cargo hold, and a plethora of food, often cruise

¹¹ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 2-5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 13.

¹³ Carlson, *We Were Each Other's Prisoners*, 21.

¹⁴ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 30.

ship quality, was available. POW Helmut Hörner spent the first part of his trip eating until nearly catatonic, then the rest lying in his bunk seasick. However, he and his fellow POWs and American guards did enjoy a glorious viewing of an iceberg which prompted a heated discussion about the *Titanic*.¹⁵

Upon arrival to the United States POWs were given a shower, clothing was deloused, fingerprints taken, and paperwork finalized.¹⁶ The train ride to the camps was mostly comfortable as well. Reinhold Pabel wrote about how thrilling the train ride was in his memoir.

There were immediate shouts of “Man, oh, man!” and “How about that?” when we followed orders to board the coaches of a waiting train. Most of us had always been transported in boxcars during the military service. These modern upholstered coaches were a pleasant surprise to everybody. And when the colored porter came through with coffee and sandwiches and politely offered them to us as though we were human beings, most of us forgot a great deal of their anti-American feelings.¹⁷

After arrival at the camps, the prisoners were given their POW uniforms to replace their battle uniforms. Their shirts and jackets had the letters PW in large white paint on the back.¹⁸ They were searched, given a medical examination, filled out the proper forms, introduced to the camp authorities and had camp rules explained. Thus the POWs settled into their uncertain life as a prisoner.¹⁹

¹⁵ Hörner, *German Odyssey*, 241-59.

¹⁶ Powell, *Splinters of a Nation*, 51.

¹⁷ Pabel, *Enemies are Human*, 146.

¹⁸ Powell, *Splinters of a Nation*, 54.

¹⁹ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 47.

The Camp System

The POW camps were located in almost every state. Locations were determined mostly by where space could be found for the POWs, such as military bases and Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps, which were located mostly in the Southwest. After these spaces were filled up the Provost Marshal General initiated a fifty million dollar construction program. Locations for new POW camps were based on the security of the site and could be no closer than 150 miles from Canada and Mexico. Each camp was created to house about 2,000 to 4,000 POWs, which were divided into compounds of about 500 to 750 men each, which were further divided down to barracks of about 150 POWs. Each barrack was a large square room consisting of rows of beds and footlockers. Each camp contained a mess hall, workshop, canteen, infirmary, administrative building, post office, warehouse, chapel, showers, and a recreation field. Enlisted men and officers were usually separated into their own camps. One camp at Clinton, Mississippi, was set aside for the forty generals and three admirals who were captured. Branch camps were created to house POWs close to work sites so that transportation back and forth to work would be minimized. These branch camps contained about 250 to 750 POWs each.²⁰

With so many German POWs on American soil, someone had to be responsible for them. On July 18, 1941, the War Department and the Department of Justice agreed that the PMGO would be responsible for the POWs.²¹ The PMGO and Corps of Military Police were created by Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and the army's chief of staff

²⁰ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 26-35.

²¹ Billinger, *Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State*, 11.

General George C. Marshall, with Major General Allen W. Gullion acting as the first provost marshal general.²² This was the first time in American history that a military police corps was instituted, though there has been a history of “military police” tracing back to the Revolutionary War and General George Washington’s creation of the Marechausee Corps.²³ There were also Provost Marshal General’s during the Civil War and World War I, though their roles were different.²⁴

The need for a Provost Marshal General was anticipated in 1937 with the writing of “Basic Field Manual IX,” which spelled out how to organize a Provost Marshal General Department when needed.²⁵ This need arose in 1941 after the United States entered World War II. The main duty of the new PMGO was to oversee the Military Police Corps. The new PMGO was also initially responsible for the civilian internee camps, which included Japanese American internees.²⁶ However, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and State Department would eventually take over caring for internees.²⁷

In November of 1941 the PMGO created the Investigations Division to oversee the investigation of military employment applicants, such as for the Women’s Army Corps and American Red Cross. This division would employ 954 people.²⁸ In March of 1942 the PMGO was placed under the Chief of Administrative Services, which was

²² Billinger, *Hitler’s Soldiers in the Sunshine State*, 10.

²³ GlobalSecurity.org, “Military Police Corps,” Military, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/army/mp.htm>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Craig, “Evolution of the Office of the Provost Marshal General,” BNET Business Network, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0IBW/is_1_4/ai_n6124024/pg_2?tag=artBody;coll.

²⁶ Billinger, *Hitler’s Soldiers in the Sunshine State*, 11.

²⁷ Fox, *America’s Invisible Gulag*, 109.

²⁸ Craig, “Evolution of the Office of the Provost Marshal General,” BNET Business Network, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0IBW/is_1_4/ai_n6124024/pg_2?tag=artBody;coll.

partially responsible for the Manhattan Project, and then in November 1945, the PMGO was placed under the Deputy Chief of Staff for Service Commands in the Army Service Forces.²⁹ Finally, in June of 1946, as the POWs were being sent home to Europe, the PMGO was placed under the direction of the Chief of Staff for Service Commands in the Army Service Forces. Besides overseeing the Military Police Corps and the POW and alien internees, the PMGO investigated military crimes and deserters, which culminated in nearly two million investigations.³⁰ The PMGO remained a permanent department until 1974, with duties evolving with the needs of the times.

The PMGO worked on running the POW camps and taking care of the POWs from beginning to end. Under an agreement created during World War I, POWs fell under the jurisdiction of the army and under the command of the provost marshal general.³¹ In 1942 the PMGO created a plan for creating a camp system for the first 50,000 POWs ready to be shipped from England.³² Even more important was adhering to the Geneva Convention. The PMGO was responsible for acting as liaison between the Swiss Legation, German Foreign Office, Red Cross, YMCA, individual camps, POWs, and the State Department. In order to make things easier the PMGO divided up the camps into different geographical Service Commands. Historian Robert Billinger, Jr. notes that this system and hierarchy is "as complicated as it sounds."³³ The man who had to keep track of this complicated hierarchy, the international delegates who visited the

²⁹ Craig, "Evolution of the Office of the Provost Marshal General," BNET Business Network, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0IBW/is_1_4/ai_n6124024/pg_2?tag=artBody;col1.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Gansberg, *Stalag: U.S.A.*, 4.

³² Powell, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 26.

³³ Billinger, *Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State*, 12.

POWs, and maintain the POW's living condition was the provost marshal general himself.

In July of 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt assigned Major General Allen W. Gullion as Provost Marshal General to "superintend the internment of POW and enemy aliens."³⁴ His other duties would include creating the military police force and protecting military and industrial installations from sabotage.³⁵ Gullion was born in 1880 and died shortly after his tenure as Provost Marshal General in 1946. His previous assignments included Assistant Judge Advocate General for the U.S. Army and Judge Advocate General (JAG) from 1937 to 1941.³⁶

The initial existence of libraries in the camps is due to the work of Gullion. On March 31, 1942, before the large waves of German POWs arrived, Gullion wrote to the YMCA's War Prisoner's Aid accepting their offer of recreational and welfare aid. This included "the furnishing of libraries and special books."³⁷ This letter established the start to a long and rewarding relationship between the YMCA and the PMGO. Gullion required that all representatives of the War Prisoners Aid must be "of neutral origin" and receive approval before they could work with an individual camp. Any religious activities were to be forwarded to the Chief of Chaplains in the War Department. Due to Gullion's attitudes against re-education and his desire to adhere strongly to the Geneva

³⁴ Koop, *Stark Decency*, 17.

³⁵ Billinger, *Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State*, 11.

³⁶ *Generals.dk*, "Gullion," The Generals of WWII, http://www.generals.dk/general/Gullion/Allen_W./USA.html.

³⁷ Major General Allen W. Gullion to John R. Mott and Tracy Strong, 31 March 1942. Records of the Office of the Provost Marshal General. Decimal Files, 1943-1946. National Archives. Box No. 1606. Hereafter referred to National Archives.

Convention the books going to the POWs during this time were not under the heavy-handed censorship that would happen later in the war.

Gullion was opposed to the suggestion of a re-education program. He emphatically proclaimed, "Enemy prisoners of war are, for the most part not children. . . . Those whose minds are sufficiently plastic to be affected by the program, are probably not worth the effort."³⁸ He was a man with a strong sense of duty and the importance of obedience and hierarchy. Gullion also strongly sensed that war had its time and place and the military should be used wisely and sparingly.³⁹ This sentiment included the objection to prolonged military governments and military presence in foreign countries. He declared that "despite the inevitable obligation of the Army to establish and maintain military government in an occupied area, it is sometimes said that military government and imperialism are practically undistinguishable. This is an error-provided that military government is discontinued, as it should be, when military necessity no longer requires it."⁴⁰ Thus his opposition to re-education is understandable. He was nervous of an invasive military that overstepped its bounds set out by law. His code of honor forced him to look down on the idea of re-education, which was anathema to the Geneva Convention.

After Gullion's tenure as Provost Marshal General, the honors went to Archer L. Lerch, who was born in 1894 and died shortly after the war in 1947.⁴¹ He took his

³⁸ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 22.

³⁹ Davidonis, "Some Problems of Military Government," 469.

⁴⁰ Vagts, "Military Command and Military Government," 261.

⁴¹ *Current Biography*, "Lerch, Archer L.,"

<http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790e4741fae46b91d0b755b0ce90b1ed48a945ed3439f189bfdbdef22da3b1b0f578c3d1da3801c0b61d&fmt=C> (accessed June 18, 2008).

position in April 1944 and served as Provost General Marshal until July 1945.⁴² Lerch had previously served as a Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) instructor at the University of California, Berkeley and University of Florida.⁴³ In 1945 Lerch's hard work led to his promotion to American military governor of Korea, where he died of a heart attack.⁴⁴

On the surface, Lerch appears to be a man honor bound like his predecessor Gullion. After all, he is quoted as saying, "The Geneva Convention, I might emphasize is law. Until that law is changed by competent authority, the War Department is bound to follow it."⁴⁵ He also emphasized that "I do not think that any of us are now emotionally fitted to tackle the job of re-evaluating one of the few international laws that has withstood, with a considerable measure of success, the hatred and lawlessness that war breeds."⁴⁶ However, it was under Lerch that the re-education program was started.⁴⁷ The controversy that surrounds this is explored in more detail in chapter 5, but it must be understood that creating a re-education program went against the spirit of the Geneva Convention. Lerch was enthusiastic about the re-education program and hoped it would help promote his career and add some glamour to his position.⁴⁸

⁴² Craig, "Evolution of the Office of the Provost Marshal General," BNET Business Network, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0IBW/is_1_4/ai_n6124024/pg_2?tag=artBody;coll.

⁴³ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 24.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 141.

⁴⁵ Van Bergen, "If Sabotage & Assassination are Okay . . . What's Wrong with Torture?" <http://www.counterpunch.org/bergen09142004.html>.

⁴⁶ Lerch, "Army Reports on POWS," 536.

⁴⁷ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 195.

⁴⁸ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 25.

Brigadier General Blackshear Morrison Bryan served as Provost Marshal General at the end of the war from July 1945 to April 1948.⁴⁹ During Lerch's tenure he acted as Assistant Provost Marshal General. Born in Louisiana in 1900, Bryan graduated from West Point in 1922, where he also worked as a football coach.⁵⁰ From 1940 to 1942 he served with the War Department General Staff and then moved to the PMGO where he was promoted to Brigadier General in December 1942. After serving as Provost Marshal General, he became Commanding General of the XVI Corps, joined the United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission in 1953, became superintendent of West Point from 1954 to 1956, Commanding General of the U.S. Army Pacific from 1956 to 1957, and Commanding General of the First Army from 1957 to 1960. He died on March 2, 1977.⁵¹ Bryan's long and illustrious career included the laying down of the armistice line between North and South Korea after the end of the Korean War.⁵² He also acquired the Distinguished Service Medal, the Order of the British Empire and the Air Medal for meritorious service in the Korean War.⁵³

While assisting Lerch as Assistant Provost Marshal General, Bryan was closely involved with the POW camp libraries. His duties included acting as liaison between Lerch and book donors, such as the Victory Committee of German-American Trade

⁴⁹ Craig, Ronald, "Evolution of the Office of the Provost Marshal General," BNET Business Network, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0IBW/is_1_4/ai_n6124024/pg_2?tag=artBody;coll.

⁵⁰ Billinger, *Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State*, 120.

⁵¹ *Biographical Dictionary of World War II Generals and Flag Officers*, s.v. "Bryan, Blackshear Morrison," <http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790e4741fae46b91d0b70e7c59074daecf20b9b8624face6050957652c7e848e0af61f2dfac8bb56deeb0a027d662a79318e&fmt=C>.

⁵² "Armistice Line in Korea," *The Hindu*, June 19, 1953, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2003/06/19/stories/2003061900860901.htm> (accessed July 7, 2008).

⁵³ United States Army, Pacific, "Lieutenant General Blackshear M. Bryan, Jr.," http://www.usarpac.army.mil/history/cgbios/cg_bryan.asp.

Unionists and the Columbia Broadcasting System.⁵⁴ In the last few months of 1944, he accepted the help of the reference librarians of Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts, to create a list of acceptable periodicals for the camp libraries' subscriptions. Bryan eagerly accepted this list and used it as the basis for a list used by the military. He also arranged for Dr. Charles H. Kimberley, the man who obtained the list, to meet with Lt. Colonel Edward Davison, the head of the SPD.⁵⁵ This activity was in connection to the re-education effort, which Bryan embraced, especially after serving as Lerch's assistant.

The task of making public to the nation that a secret re-education program was taking place fell to Bryan twenty days after V-E Day.⁵⁶ However, considering that the war was almost over, the public was uninterested in this news despite earlier protests. Gansberg argues that the American press was completely blind to the significance of the announcement and very few articles at the time mentioned it.⁵⁷

Individual Camp Administration

At the micro level the camps had two administration systems, an American camp commander and the German hierarchy headed by a camp spokesman. Thus, there were the American guards and their commanders and the POW's military hierarchy. The German hierarchy administration had a much more intimate effect on the day-to-day lives

⁵⁴ William L. Shirer to Assistant Provost Marshal General Blackshear Bryan, 17 September 1945. Box No. 1597. National Archives; and Brigadier General B.M. Bryan to Victory Committee of German-American Trade Unionists, 21 January 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

⁵⁵ Memorandum for Lt. Schoenstedt from Henry Ehrmann, 13 December 1944. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

⁵⁶ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 212.

⁵⁷ Gansberg, *Stalag: U.S.A.*, 117.

of the POWs. The POWs were allowed to use their German military hierarchy due to the Geneva Convention and it helped to maintain order among them. A camp spokesman, usually the highest ranking POW, was elected to act as liaison with the camp commander and representatives from the Red Cross and YMCA. The spokesmen also forwarded the book requests from the POWs.⁵⁸ The spokesman was able to garner respect from the POWs due to instilled German military discipline and was always able to hold his access to American authorities over the POWs' heads. The spokesman also gained the respect of the American authorities because he maintained discipline in the camps and was able to forward information about camp conditions and treatment to German authorities through the Red Cross. This information could be used against American POWs in Germany if the conditions for German POWs in America were unsatisfactory.⁵⁹

As the war progressed and American men were needed for overseas battle, the number and quality of the guards at the camps was reduced.⁶⁰ These guards were considered unfit for overseas duties and were often retired officers or combat veterans. This sometimes led to difficulties between the guards and POWs because the POWs could sense how unprepared the guards were. The POWs taunted them and generally made relations difficult.⁶¹ However, friendships and tenuous bonds were sometimes struck between the guards and their charges. Some bonds were so strong that many decades after the war was over guards and ex-POWs arranged reunions.⁶² Like most

⁵⁸ Billinger, *Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State*, 13.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁰ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 116.

⁶¹ Billinger, *Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State*, 13.

⁶² Koop, *Stark Decency*, 118.

human interactions, the relations between the guards and POWs relied on individual personalities and attitudes.

Conclusion

During World War II nearly a half million German POWs found themselves transferred from their strict and orderly life as Nazi soldiers to prisoners in an American camp system recently thrown together. Their trip from battle front in Europe to isolated areas of the United States was long, hard, and psychologically disheartening. To make matters more complicated, the camp system had just been created by a country that had not dealt with such a magnitude of prisoners. The PMGO was quickly created and low quality guards were scrounged up to take care of these foreigners. However, a workable system that maintained discipline and order arose and the POWs began a life on American soil.

Chapter 2

Life behind the Wires: The Geneva Convention and the Daily Life of POWs

Introduction

A German man who fought against Napoleon moves to America and becomes friends with Abraham Lincoln. A Swiss man returning to Europe from a sojourn in Africa witnesses a horrifying battle in Italy. A young man in London wonders how he can improve the lives of young single men flocking to London for work. The Queen of the Netherlands and the Tsar of Russia have an idea to promote world peace. A young and dashing president named Theodore Roosevelt encourages world leaders to meet and renew the ideas put forth by the Queen and Tsar. After the “war to end all wars,” world leaders gather together to prevent a repetition of the bloody days of World War I. One may be hard pressed to figure out what these people had in common. Yet their actions did come together. They all contributed to the eventual welfare and reading materials of a half million German POWs housed in a large foreign country an ocean away from their homes.

The first half of this chapter will cover international war laws, the development of the Geneva Convention of 1929, and the rules of the Convention. The Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War protected the German POWs and ensured that they had access to books. The creation of the Geneva Convention stemmed from a long history of humanitarian international movements and laws that culminated into treaties that steer the conduct of modern warfare to this day. The Geneva Convention of 1929 was influenced by the Lieber Code used by the Union Army in the

American Civil War, Jean Henri Dunant who created the International Red Cross and the first Geneva Convention, and the two Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907.

The second half of this chapter will concentrate on how these different conventions, conferences and codes eventually funneled down to the lives of these German POWs. How they were treated will be examined in both a positive and negative light, to give the context for the men who were reading the camp library books. Their daily life and experiences behind barbed wire will be explained and given voice from excerpts from POW memoirs. The POWs were fortunate to have the Geneva Convention and long history of international humanitarian aid and laws to give them a tolerable and sometimes enjoyable experience on American soil.

International War Laws and Humanitarian Aid

The Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, signed on July 27, 1929 in Geneva, Switzerland, by thirty-seven countries, spelled out how POWs were to be treated by their captors. This Convention, the third since 1864, was the result of the concerns of the international community resulting from modern warfare. This was the world's first attempt at applying international laws to ameliorate the devastating effects that modern warfare had on civilians and soldiers alike. The first Geneva Convention was the brainchild of humanitarian Jean Henri Dunant, who also founded the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1863. Both of these institutions had profound effects on the German POWs during World War II and their access to and use of books and camp libraries.

The first historical document to effect the eventual treatment of the German POWs was called the Instructions for the Government of Armies of the United States in the Field. Better known as the Lieber Code of 1863, it was a general order to the Union Armies signed by Abraham Lincoln that established an ethical guideline for the conduct of soldiers. This included how POWs were to be treated. This document has striking similarities with the Geneva Convention of 1929.

The Lieber Code was created by Dr. Francis Lieber. He was born in Germany in 1800, fought against Napoleon's army, immigrated to the United States in 1827, and eventually became a professor of history and political economy at South Carolina College and Columbia Law School. Besides writing the Lieber Code, he also created the Encyclopedia Americana.¹ Lieber was inspired to give a series of lectures on laws of war after visiting his wounded son who fought for the North in the Civil War. General H.W. Halleck attended his lecture and asked Lieber to write a summary of the lectures. Afterwards Lieber was asked to help write amendments to the few laws of war in place.²

The influence of the Code went beyond the Civil War. Both Russia and Germany would adopt and adapt the Code for their own purposes and this influence eventually trickled down into the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907.³ Other nations, such as the Netherlands, France, Serbia, Spain, Portugal, and Italy wrote their own Codes based on the Lieber Code.⁴ The Code itself tries to alleviate the terror and suffering that would

¹ *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*, s.v. "Lieber, Francis,"
<http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790e4741fae46b91d0b7e47876628ac7c324e8cdb275044a55464e0197cc670697fb1d5fa81105fee5e7&fmt=C>.

² Moorehead, *Dunant's Dream*, 37-38.

³ Carnahan, "Lincoln, Lieber and the Laws of War," 213-31.

⁴ Roberts and Guelff, *Documents on the Laws of War*, 7.

have gone along with being a POW in the nineteenth century and bring a little bit of humanity into the picture. The Code states:

Prisoners of war are subject to confinement or imprisonment such as may be deemed necessary on account of safety, but they are to be subjected to no other intentional suffering or indignity. The confinement and mode of treating a prisoner may be varied during his captivity according to the demands of safety. Prisoners of war shall be fed upon plain and wholesome food, whenever practicable, and treated with humanity. . . . A prisoner of war who escapes may be shot, or otherwise killed, in his flight; but neither death nor any other punishment shall be inflicted upon him simply for his attempt to escape, which the law of war does not consider a crime. Stricter means of security shall be used after an unsuccessful attempt at escape. . . . Every captured wounded enemy shall be medically treated, according to the ability of the medical staff. Honorable men, when captured, will abstain from giving to the enemy information concerning their own army, and the modern law of war permits no longer the use of any violence against prisoners in order to extort the desired information, or to punish them for having given false information.⁵

Many of these same conditions for the treatment of POWs would be spelled out in the Geneva Convention. Thus, a German escaping the revolutionary upheavals of early nineteenth century Europe would influence the treatment of future Germans a century later.

Jean Henri Dunant, also known as Henry Dunant, was the founder of the Red Cross and helped to initiate the first Geneva Convention. Born in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1828, his humanitarian work earned him the first Nobel Peace Prize, shared with Frederic Passy, in 1901. His humanitarian interests stemmed from witnessing the tragic battle of Solferino, Italy, in 1859. Dunant was seeking aid from the French Emperor Napoleon III for his mission in Africa and had arrived in Solferino to meet him. There Dunant witnessed the prolonged and horrific death of almost 40,000 soldiers, who lay on

⁵ "The Lieber Code of 1863," <http://www.civilwarhome.com/liebercode.htm>.

the battlefield dying without aid. Dunant tried to save some of these dying soldiers along with only two doctors. His efforts scrounged up a few more doctors and Dunant prevented injured Austrian soldiers from being killed by the French. This tragic experience propelled Dunant to figure out a way for soldiers to receive better aid in future battles. In 1862 he wrote A Memory of Solferino, which was translated into twelve languages.⁶

On October 26, 1863, Dunant organized thirty-nine international delegates to come to Geneva to draft a treaty, “guaranteeing the neutrality of relief workers and adopting an emblem, a red cross on white-the Swiss flag with colors reversed. . . . [T]he treaty, commonly known as the Geneva Convention, was signed in Paris the following year by representatives from twelve nations.”⁷ Thus, through the efforts of one brave man, the International Red Cross and humanitarian war laws were founded in neutral Switzerland. While the first Geneva Convention did not address the treatment of prisoners of war, it was a ground-breaking event that began a strong and growing movement towards humanitarian ideals and efforts.

The first Hague Peace Conference was originally proposed by Tsar Nicholas II in 1898. This seemingly humanitarian and noble idea was born out of fear. Weapons across Europe were improving dramatically, except for in Russia. The thought of trying to improve their weapons at a cost of fifty million dollars compelled the Tsar’s government to find a way around it. What better way than to ask the world to reduce

⁶ *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, s.v. “Jean Henri Dunant,” <http://0-galenet.galegroup.com/mill1.sjlibrary.org:80/servlet/BioRC> (access June 12, 2008).

⁷ *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*, s.v. “Dunant, Jean Henri,” <http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790e4741fae46b91d0b7291f29f6d150ecd9969010908fda31ade6ffbe8f1ba7345763e9e8c313931f03&fmt=C> (accessed June 29, 2008).

armament and stall armament competition?⁸ Wrapped up in language of peace and humanitarianism, governments and peace workers from across Europe, North America, South America and Asia gathered at The Hague, Netherlands, to attend the conference hosted by the Queen of the Netherlands. Chapter II of the conference was on prisoners of war and was influenced by the Lieber Code. Chapter II demanded that POWs be treated humanely, be able to retain their personal possessions, receive the same quality of food and shelter as regular soldiers, exercise their religion, write wills, and be repatriated swiftly at the end of hostilities.⁹

The second Hague Peace Conference of 1907 was the idea of Theodore Roosevelt. The 1899 conference had a provision calling for a future conference to clarify issues where agreement had not been reached; Roosevelt started the process that led to the second conference in 1904. Few changes were made to the laws and customs of war on land, but the 1907 laws did replace the 1899 laws.¹⁰ These 1907 laws regarding the treatment of POWs were in use during World War I, which started in 1914. No conference since has ratified so many war laws at once, which totaled thirteen conventions and one declaration.¹¹ Even though this conference made few changes in how POWs were to be treated, the 1907 Conference was the law protecting POWs until the Geneva Convention was created in 1929.

After the long and terrifying “war to end all wars” ended in 1918, the international stage was set to reevaluate the Geneva Convention and Hague Conferences

⁸ Davis, *United States and the First Hague Peace Conference*, 42-45.

⁹ Holls, *Peace Conference at The Hague*, 145-50.

¹⁰ Roberts, *Documents on the Laws of War*, 43.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

in light of the treatment of POWs. The 1921 International Red Cross Conference proposed convening a special convention to evaluate the treatment of war prisoners and drew up a draft for such a convention. The convention was eventually held and ratified in 1929, completing but not replacing the Hague Conventions.

The Geneva Convention of 1929 consists of ninety-seven articles divided into eight parts. The eight parts are: general provisions, capture, captivity, end of captivity, deaths of prisoners of war, Bureau of Relief and Information concerning prisoners of war, application of the Convention to certain categories of civilians, and execution of the Convention. Some of the parts are further divided into sections or chapters. An annex attached at the end addresses the treatment of ill or injured POWs. First and foremost, the preamble of the treaty calls for all participating nations to “mitigate as far as possible, the inevitable rigors thereof and to alleviate the condition of prisoners of war.”¹² The humanity and integrity of each prisoner had to be maintained. “Prisoners of war are entitled to respect for their persons and honor. . . . Prisoners retain their full civil capacity.”¹³ This idea set the tone and purpose of the Convention.

The Convention covered the basic needs of everyday life for POWs. Food, shelter, clothing, hygiene and medical care had to be adequate and equal to the levels provided for the army of the country holding POWs. The United States had to inform Germany and the Red Cross of the names and camp addresses of the POWs. The men were required to give their name and rank, but nothing else. The prisoners were allowed

¹² Geneva Convention, Preamble.

¹³ Ibid., Article 3.

to send a card to family members to notify them of their health and address for packages and letters.¹⁴

The Convention made sure that POWs had more amenities than regular prisoners. Besides intellectual pursuits discussed later, the men were allowed to have a canteen where they could purchase toiletries, food, and magazines; have access to regular religious services of their own denomination; and receive their pay for being a soldier. The Convention emphasized that besides providing basic needs and intellectual comforts, captors should keep POWs safe and not inflict severe punishment. "All forms of corporal punishment, confinement in premises not lighted by daylight and, in general, all forms of cruelty whatsoever are prohibited."¹⁵ POWs could not be punished for escaping if they were recaptured. In fact, a POW was allowed to escape if he found the opportunity.

The creators of the Convention realized that POWs were excellent resources for labor to take the place of the local men who left to fight the war. The United States was allowed to use any POW it wanted for labor purposes, except for non-commissioned officers. Of course, this labor had to be humane, not unduly dangerous, and the POWs were paid for their efforts in canteen coupons. Even on-the-job injuries were covered by the Convention. Lastly, the POWs were required to have at least one day off a week, preferably Sunday.¹⁶

A POW's autonomy was protected, often resulting in bizarre outcomes. Article 19 states, "The wearing of badges of rank and decorations shall be permitted."¹⁷ Thus there

¹⁴ Geneva Convention, Article 36.

¹⁵ Ibid., Article 46.

¹⁶ Ibid., Article 30.

¹⁷ Ibid., Article 19.

were cases where men had pictures of Hitler, gave Nazi salutes to each other, and, in regards to Article 76, held Nazi military funerals with complete pomp and circumstance for their comrades who died in the camps.

Most importantly, a POW had to be made aware of his rights and know who to go to with complaints. Article 84 states, “The text of the present Convention . . . shall be posted, whenever possible, in the native language of the prisoners of war, in places where it may be consulted by all the prisoners. The text of these conventions shall be communicated, on their request, to prisoners who are unable to inform themselves of the text posted.”¹⁸ The Red Cross sent representatives to all of the camps to interview POWs, inspect camps, and hear complaints.

The camp libraries would probably not have existed if it was not for Article 17 of the Geneva Convention. “Belligerents shall encourage as much as possible the organization of intellectual and sporting pursuits by the prisoners of war.”¹⁹ Article 39 clarifies the status of books for POWs. “Prisoners of war shall be permitted to receive individually consignments of books which may be subject to censorship. Representatives of the protecting Powers and of duly recognized and authorized relief societies may send works and collections of books to the libraries of prisoners’ camps. The transmission of such consignments to libraries may not be delayed under pretext of difficulties of censorship.”²⁰ Further, as stated in Article 57, the withdrawal of books cannot be used as punishment. “Prisoners of war undergoing disciplinary punishment shall be permitted to

¹⁸ Geneva Convention, Article 84.

¹⁹ Ibid., Article 17.

²⁰ Ibid., Article 39.

read and write and to send and receive letters.”²¹ The Geneva Convention thus protected the rights of the readers and ensured the existence of the camp libraries.

Treatment of the German Prisoners of War by the United States

According to POW historian Arnold Krammer, the daily life of the POWs was mostly the same across the country.²² They woke up at 5:30 am, breakfasted at 6:00 am and left for work by 7:30 am. Physical labor made up the majority of a POW’s day. Because so many American men had left for war, the POWs made perfect substitutes. The War Manpower Commission believed that without the POWs labor, many crops would have been lost. In the South POWs picked cotton, citrus, sugar cane, peanuts, rice, and tobacco. In the West POWs harvested sugar beets, corn and grain, and packed vegetables and fruit. In the North and East POWs cut pulp and harvested vegetables and fruits. POWs were also employed to work for the army in laundries, warehouses, supply shops, and mess halls. They also performed maintenance, grounds keeping, road work, and auto repair. The army estimated that this labor saved \$80,000,000.²³ POWs were transported to work by their guards and worked side by side with civilian farmers. Work usually ended around 4:30 pm and dinner was at 6:00 pm. The remaining hours before bedtime was for recreation and relaxation.²⁴

Most camps offered a plethora of recreational opportunities for the POWs. In addition to the libraries, there were educational classes ranging from elementary school level to university level, sports, amateur theater performances, music performances,

²¹ Geneva Convention, Article 57.

²² Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 47.

²³ Prisoner of War Fact Sheet, 10 February 1945. Box No. 1596. National Archives.

²⁴ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 48.

films, camp newspapers, arts and crafts, and gathering together in the recreation hall with a beer for conversation. On Sundays there were religious services and a well-needed day off from work. The men also used their recreation hours to write letters home, peruse the newspaper, or decorate their bunk area with photos of popular pin-up models. These recreational activities were made available not only because the Geneva Convention demanded it, but because it kept the men from becoming psychologically despondent and dwelling too much on their current state of affairs. A distracted prisoner was less likely to ponder escape or grow angry and vengeful.²⁵

With the Convention spelling out how the POWs were to be treated, the United States had to put it to the test after receiving its first POWs in 1942. Memoirs and accounts by the POWs, guards, and visiting delegates portray an inspiring picture of a country dealing the best it could with the resources it had to make 300,000 men comfortable and healthy.

The first order of survival and comfort for a POW were the basic essentials: food and medical attention. Food was an ever present comfort. Wrote one POW, "When I was captured I weighed 128 pounds. After two years as an American POW I weighed 185. I had gotten so fat you could no longer see my eyes."²⁶ This was easily explained by Article 11 of the Geneva Convention which demands that POWs be given food of the same quantity and quality as the depot troops.²⁷ The POWs ended up being better fed they had been as soldiers in Germany. Food rationing for Nazi troops was much stricter.

²⁵ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 51.

²⁶ Carlson, *We Were Each Other's Prisoners*, 59.

²⁷ Geneva Convention, Article 11.

Article 37 of the Convention also allowed POWs to receive packages of food from family and organizations such as the Red Cross, and there was plenty of snack food to buy at the camp canteen.²⁸

An excellent example of the POW's food comes from the memoirs of Josef Krumbachner, who copied the menu for day of July 24, 1944. This was a meal served on the ship from Europe to America. The scrumptious breakfast consisted of "Stewed Fruit, Rolled Oats with Milk, Assorted Dry Cereals, Smoked Haddock, Butter Sauce, Eggs – Boiled, Fried or Scrambled, Broiled Breakfast Bacon, Sliced Minced Beef on Toast, Hashed Brown Potatoes, Tea or Coffee."²⁹ The tantalizing dinner was even more decadent. "Pickled Lamb's Tongue, Vinaigrette, Green Olives, Potage Jackson aux Croutons, Broiled Fresh Fish with Lemon Butter, Potted Round Steak, Esterhazy, Buttered Spaghetti, Parmesan, Buttered Kernel Corn, Baked Potatoes, Mixed Green Salad with Thousand Island Dressing, Mocha Layer Cake and Fruit Jello Macedoine, Cheese and Crackers, Fresh Fruit, Bread and Butter, Coffee."³⁰ Some of his peers thought that this was a tease, that there would be hardly any food in the camps, but they were happily wrong. POW Reinhold Pabel remembered, "When we gathered in the mess halls for our first dinner at camp, we at first suspected that the Yanks wanted to make fun of us. Such a menu: soup, vegetables, meat, milk, fish, grapes, coffee and ice cream!"³¹ Food was a pleasure that the POWs heartily welcomed.

²⁸ Geneva Convention, Article 37.

²⁹ Carlson, *We Were Each Other's Prisoners*, 70.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Pabel, *Enemies are Human*, 148.

The POWs received the necessary medical attention that they needed. The POWs were cared for by doctors and dentists that were POWs themselves, from the army, or civilian. Each camp usually had an infirmary and the sickest went to camp hospitals set up for the very purpose of caring for sick POWs. Basic needs, such as glasses and instruction on the care of teeth, were provided. POWs who were doctors concluded that the care was better than what was available in Germany during the war.³² Throughout the war the sickest POWs were sent back to Germany in exchange for ill American POWs. In all 1,166 men were sent home.³³

The United States needed to strictly adhere to the Geneva Convention if they expected Hitler's Germany to do the same. The Red Cross held interviews with POWs and inspected camps to make sure the United States was following the Convention. Everything the Red Cross representatives witnessed was reported back to Switzerland and Germany. Thus, if the United States did something wrong, the Nazi's could retaliate and do the same thing to the American POWs.

Yet, some good treatment did come because the guards truly respected the POWs and grew to consider them friends over time. POW Pabel writes, "In a certain POW camp which was noted for its particular toughness in dealing with prisoners, some inmates were even used as babysitters in an officer's home. Surly, if all prisoners had been considered to be wicked Nazis no officer's wife would have dared to entrust her babies with them!"³⁴ Pabel continues, "The people in the country respected us as human

³² Powell, *Splinters of a Nation*, 68.

³³ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 229.

³⁴ Pabel, *Enemies are Human*, 154.

beings, disregarding our status of enemy soldiers in captivity.”³⁵ Allen V. Koop’s book about the friendships and kindness that the POWs, guards, and townspeople of Stark, Vermont, experienced with each other reinforces this point.³⁶

Some POWs enjoyed their treatment so much that they did not want to go back to Germany, or came back to America as soon as they could after the war was over. POW Karl-Heinz Hackbarth even married a young American woman that he met while a POW near Detroit.³⁷ A farmer named William Teichmann in Michigan received over fifty letters from the nine POWs who worked for him on his farm. They appreciated working for him and the gifts of clothing he gave them for good service. In fact, some wrote from Germany about their need for food and asked if Teichmann could possibly send some packages.³⁸ One former POW asked for a picture of Teichmann’s farm so he could “recall the happy days there.”³⁹ Some even brought their families to the sites of their former camps in order to show them where they spent the war and introduce them to some of the Americans they met.⁴⁰

Relatively few POWs were overtly mistreated and acute hunger, cold, and a lack of sanitary facilities were seldom problems in the camps. Nevertheless, they were prisoners and being incarcerated is an unnatural experience for any human being. Carlson writes, “They too had to deal with enervating boredom. They also missed and worried about their loved ones back home who live in constant peril. Finally, because so many of

³⁵ Pabel, *Enemies are Human*, 153.

³⁶ Koop, *Stark Decency*.

³⁷ Carlson, *We Were Each Other's Prisoners*, 17.

³⁸ Hahn, “Germans in the Orchards,” 170.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 175-76.

⁴⁰ Koop, *Stark Decency*, 117.

them faced additional years of internment in France, England, and Belgium, the cessation of hostilities did not end their agony.”⁴¹ Pabel, one of the few POWs to escape, hated his imprisonment for this very reason. “We settled down to the routine of our drab POW existence. I say ‘existence’ on purpose, because it was no life. There can be no real life worthy of the name for a human being without freedom. . . . The best food and relative security are no substitute for freedom.”⁴² Intellectual activities could only substitute so much for a life of freedom with family.

Ultimately, the Geneva Convention was not always followed to the letter. Caroline Moorehead argues, “It is unrealistic to imagine that so many countries would go to war and abide by the Geneva Convention. As it was, the Conventions were violated by all sides, daily, casually, contemptuously, even if the violations committed by the Allies over prisoners-of-war . . . were minor compared to those of the Axis powers.”⁴³ For example, Article 6 forbade guards from taking possessions away from POWs, except for “arms, horses, military equipment and military papers.”⁴⁴ However, the POWs’ possessions were often stolen by their guards for souvenirs.

Another problem was the political leanings of the POWs. Having enthusiastic Nazis and non-Nazis in the same barracks caused some tragic deaths. While the most notoriously ardent Nazi sympathizers were put into a maximum security camp in Oklahoma, Nazis and anti-Nazis were otherwise housed together.⁴⁵ The Nazis would put

⁴¹ Carlson, *We Were Each Other's Prisoners*, 62.

⁴² Pabel, *Enemies are Human*, 151.

⁴³ Moorehead, *Dunant's Dream*, 400.

⁴⁴ Geneva Convention, Article 6.

⁴⁵ Springer, “American Prisoners of War Policy and Practice from the Revolutionary War to the War on Terror,” 188.

their non-Nazi compatriots on trial for perceived treason or for being too friendly with the American guards. The fortunate ones were merely beaten, some were put to death. POW Helmut Hörner experienced this tension. When he arrived at camp, it already contained many ardent Nazis from the Afrika Corps, who displayed pictures of Hitler and Nazi flags around their bunks. In his memoirs he mentions a conversation he had about this topic. “‘Do you know that the idiots here think we are all traitors and deserters?’ he says bitterly. ‘That’s not possible,’ I insist. ‘Listen to me, keep your mouth shut and don’t talk about the lost war here,’ Siegfried advises. ‘They will throw you into the barbed wire. . . . By the way, supposedly someone was tried for high treason and hanged.’”⁴⁶ This tension brought added difficulties and stress to some of the POWs.

While one may be tempted to attribute the easy lives of the POWs to indulgent and benevolent guards full of kindness and charity, it must be remembered that the Geneva Convention demanded such treatment. As POW Pabel reminds his readers, “The fact that we prisoners received regular U.S. Army food irritated a lot of patriotic Americans. . . . Army authorities were accused of coddling the Nazis. Actually, the Army didn’t do nothing of the sort, it merely adhered to the provision of the Geneva Convention which requires that a country in custody of prisoners of war must supply food according to its own army standards.”⁴⁷ Also, as historian Lewis H. Carlson points out, “after all, they looked like the majority of Americans, and they shared a common heritage

⁴⁶ Hörner, *German Odyssey*, 274.

⁴⁷ Pabel, *Enemies are Human*, 148.

with many of their captors.”⁴⁸ Many Americans were of German ancestry and even had family members in Germany.

POW escape attempts were minimal during the war. Carlson notes, “In spite of the 1929 Geneva Convention’s provision that prisoners had the right to escape, few actually attempted to do so. . . . Less than one percent of the German prisoners attempted to escape.”⁴⁹ While this can be attributed to the fact that if a prisoner escaped it would be nearly impossible to find his way back to Germany, it is still remarkable that there were so few escape attempts. Out of the 378,898 German soldiers that were held in the United States during the war, there were only 2,222 escape attempts.⁵⁰ One reason why this did not happen very often became obvious according to one POW. “Some of us thought it was foolish to escape from a place where we were enjoying relative freedom and good care to return to a Germany where death, hunger, and other dangers were still the rule of the day.”⁵¹ The men seemed to be happy to stay put where they were until the war ended. The treatment the POWs received also eliminated the despondency, despair and fear that the POWs may have felt. Astonishingly, out of the over 300,000 German POWs, only seventy-two committed suicide.⁵² This is only about 0.00024 percent of the POWs.

Conclusion

The German POWs lived in relative comfort and ease during their stay in the United States. While there were problems, such as Nazis, boredom, and the

⁴⁸ Carlson, *We Were Each Other's Prisoners*, viii-ix.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁵⁰ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 7.

⁵¹ Carlson, *We Were Each Other's Prisoners*, 128.

⁵² Powell, *Splinters of a Nation*, 69.

psychological trauma of being a prisoner, their lives were made as comfortable as possible by a series of revolutionary international laws and treaties. The overall treatment was fair and as far as prison life goes, enjoyable. The men had access to intellectual activities, arts, plays, music, religious services, a canteen for purchases, paid (though not voluntary) labor, and somewhat sympathetic guards. Medical care, letters from home, school credits, and visits from the Red Cross were a large reassurance to these men. The humanitarian aid and laws enacted by men and women from the mid nineteenth century up to the decades previous to World War II helped to ensure that this lifestyle was a reality for the German POWs so far from home.

Chapter 3

A Library Book Called Mein Kampf: The Prisoner of War Camp Libraries

Introduction

In central Pennsylvania eleven men leisurely sit around a large and comfortable room. The seats are leather bound, grouped around a row of wooden tables and facing the windows for better light. There is a lamp on every table and taller lamps next to the chairs around the room. Two men chat around a board game, another man smokes while gazing out of the window with a newspaper on his knee. Two men lean studiously over books with pencils in hand to take notes, while others read magazines, books, and newspapers, while sitting comfortably in their leather seats. Each man seems deep in thought, ruminating over the literature spread before his eyes. They all share one similarity though: the giant letters PW on the back of their shirts.

This scene comes from a photograph of the recreation room situated at Indiantown Gap Military Reserve in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, taken on March 15, 1945.¹ These men are enjoying books, magazines and newspapers provided by the camp libraries and canteens. Such a genteel scene seems almost unimaginable, but it was played out across the United States in the many POW camps. These German men, far from home and in the hands of the enemy, had no shortage of reading materials to fill times of boredom and stimulate the intellect.

¹ Recreation Hall, Prisoner of War Base Camp Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, 15 March 1945. Box No. 1604. National Archives.

Camp Library Administration

The camp libraries, created in accordance with the Geneva Convention, were organized under the direct control of the AEOs, who were under the command of Major Paul A. Neuland, Chief of the Field Service Branch, who was himself under direct command of Lt. Colonel Edward Davison, Director of the SPD.² Lastly, Davison answered to the Provost Marshal General himself. However, the libraries were not under the complete control of the Assistant Executive Officers (AEO).³ The organization of the libraries was directed by the Book Section, which was under the Recreation Section, headed by 1st Lt. Siegmund Betz, who was one of two officers in charge of the Education Branch. These divisions and branches were all a part of the SPD, under the direction of the PMGO. The Education Branch, like the Field Service Branch, was also under command of Lt. Colonel Davison.⁴ The men under Betz, such as Henry Ehrmann, made most of the policies for book acquisition and censorship.

Once the PMGO, SPD and AEOs began to figure out how they wanted to run the libraries, they needed to know about the conditions of the existing libraries. Meticulous surveys were taken to determine the status of extracurricular activities at each of the camps. Part C of the field service camp survey contained thirteen questions and statements about the "Library and Reading Rooms." The questions and statements are as follows:

² Office Memorandum from Lt. Colonel Edward Davison, 21 December 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

³ Memorandum for Executive Officer from Henry Ehrmann, 29 November 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

⁴ Office Memorandum from Lt. Colonel Edward Davison, 21 December 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

1. Are library and reading room facilities adequate for the use of all prisoners of war?
2. How many volumes are contained in the library?
3. What percentage of the books are in constant circulation?
4. Attach a list of all books in the library, exclusive of textbooks, by title, author, and language.
5. If the present supply of books is inadequate, how many additional books and what type are needed?
6. What percentage of the prisoners of war use the library and reading rooms?
7. What is the chief source of supply for books?
8. Has a system of rotation of books between base and branch camps been arranged?
9. Have the prisoners of war specifically requested that certain books be placed on sale in the canteen?
10. Are sufficient German-English and English-German dictionaries available?
11. Attach a list of the newspapers and magazines in English and German now in the camp and also those requested by the prisoners.
12. Are the prisoners of war informed about such sources of books as the Modern Library, Pocketbook Editions, and *Infantry Journal*-Penguin Series?
13. What action is recommended as necessary in the field?⁵

Unfortunately, these surveys were filled out haphazardly and with little care. Some questions were answered simply yes or no and some were not answered at all. Yet these surveys, along with reports compiled by the Red Cross and YMCA, provide a view of library conditions and POW reading habits.

Twenty-two of these surveys were examined for this thesis. In answer to the first question, whether the library and reading room were adequate for all POWs, thirteen answered no, eight answered yes and one did not answer. The second question, about the number of books, was answered in all reports but one. Between these twenty-one libraries, there were 64,985 books in all, with an average of 3,095 books per library. The

⁵ Field Service Camp Survey, February 1945. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

largest library had 9,000 and the smallest housed only 70 books. Most likely due to the small number of books per camp, the percentage of books in constant circulation was high, with an average of 63 percent among eighteen camps. Five of the camp reports did not include a circulation percentage, or answered in words, such as “most” or “quite a few.” Twelve of the camps had a circulation of 50 percent or higher, six were 80 percent or higher. Only six were 25 percent or less. The percentage of POWs using the books was high as well. Among eighteen camps, 60 percent of the POWs used the library. At seven of the camps the rate was 90 percent or higher. Only seven of the camps had a rate under 50 percent. The remaining survey questions were either not answered, or the answers were not substantive enough for evaluation. These reports, while poorly filled out, clearly show that the libraries were mostly inadequate, had few books, but were highly used by the POWs.

Library Conditions

The size and condition of POW camp libraries varied widely from camp to camp. They ranged from fifteen religious books provided by a chaplain at Camp Colona, Michigan,⁶ to the 9,000 book collection at Camp Dermott, Arkansas.⁷ The conditions of the reading rooms also varied widely. At one camp Captain Herman Greupner found a reading room that discouraged its own use. “Although a library room is set up in a company day room building, it did not appear to be properly run. Books were lying about here and there in a haphazard manner. The average prisoner of war reads ‘on his

⁶ Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Branch Camp, Coloma, Michigan, 1 August 1945. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

⁷ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 53.

bunk', there is no 'reading room set up,' although sufficient space is available."⁸ Yet, at Camp Concordia, Kansas, the reading room rivaled that of the best public libraries. Major Neuland wrote: "There are two libraries at Concordia, one a resplendent Wissenschaft or technical library containing 2,593 books and an incompletely constructed fiction library of 3,663 books. The enlisted men have 1,026 books in their library. The library building is one of the finest seen by Captain Lakes. It has an excellent color scheme, fine paintings on the wall, a superb division of subject matter on various shelves and study alcoves with tables and chairs."⁹

A typical camp library is described by historian Allan Kent Powell, whose book concentrates on the POW camps in Utah.

Shortly after the Ogden camp was established, it boasted a library of nearly 400 titles consisting of German novels and history books, textbooks, religious works, classics and poetry collections, and a few English books. Less than a year later the number of books had increased six fold to about 2,500 volumes. During May 1945, 75 percent of the books were in constant circulation and 60 percent of the POWs used the library and reading room. Specific requests were for German classics by Goethe and Schiller and for local history books. The library was open daily except Sundays from 9:00 to 11:00 A.M., 2:00 to 4:00 P.M., and 7:00 to 9:00 P.M. Books could be checked out for a week, magazines for two days. Some of the available magazines were *Life*, *Times*, *Look*, *Newsweek*, and *Coronet*. Used magazines were sent over from the officers' club at the Ogden depot, and the men could subscribe to magazines and newspapers as well as purchase them in the compound canteen.¹⁰

Despite the inconsistencies found in the camp libraries, the SPD did attempt to create standards to be followed at all camps. On April 23, 1945, Colonel A. J. Lamoureaux wrote a memo for all POW camp commanders. His goal was to establish

⁸ Camp Report from Herman W. Greupner, n.d. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

⁹ Report on Camp Concordia, Kansas, 18 April 1945. Box No. 1611. National Archives.

¹⁰ Powell, *Splinters of a Nation*, 179.

what exactly was expected of the camp libraries. He opened his letter with a stirring tribute to the importance of books.

People have become increasingly accustomed to a plentiful supply of books and magazines in civilian life. They provide friendship when a man is lonely; stimulate his mind when he is bored; serve as a release for his tensions; broaden his horizons; fortify his spirit; and deepen his understanding. The easy availability of books has become one of the fundamentals of our democracy.¹¹

After this appeal, Lamoureaux established a protocol stunningly similar to what any professional librarian would desire in a well-established library. “[Books] fulfill their functions only when properly arranged, displayed and made available. A library is not a room full of books; a library is a service.”¹² Lamoureaux continued to outline the ideal camp library. Each camp was authorized to have a POW librarian. This librarian needed to have “patience, pleasing personality, liking for books, intelligence, and a sympathy for democratic ideals.”¹³ An academic background was not needed, but being a social worker, teacher, publisher or bookstore worker in civilian life was ideal. Lamoureaux wanted each camp library to have tables and chairs and books arranged by subject and alphabetically by author. It cannot be determined if Lamoureaux was aware of the Dewey Decimal System, or if he did not think it would be suitable for POWs. He determined that the library should be open when the POWs had free time and that each book should be cataloged in a card file system. A separate accession list was also

¹¹ Memorandum to Camp Commanders, Prisoner of War Camps from Colonel A. J. Lamoureaux, 23 April 1945. Box No. 1652. National Archives.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

recommended to help keep track of books. If time allowed, the camp librarian was encouraged to create a card catalog for the POWs' use.¹⁴

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of Lamoureaux's ideas was that he devoted a third of his memo on how to promote the camp libraries. The desire for outreach and marketing shows that the SPD did not just provide books for the POWs, it also had a strong desire to get the POWs reading. Lamoureaux's ideas included articles about the libraries in the camp newspapers, displays, posters created by the art class, book reviews, discussion groups, and visible shelf arrangement. Mostly, he wanted books to be tied in as much as possible to other areas of the POWs' lives. For example, he suggested including book displays at music programs and featuring books by authors or subjects studied in courses in the education program. Lamoureaux was also confident that the camp commanders would come up with other good ideas.¹⁵

According to the library surveys filled out by the SPD and the Red Cross, camp libraries were either adequate and warranted few suggestions for improvement, or they were deemed inadequate with suggestions from the reviewer. Adequacy was a word used officially in most of the reports to denote if a library passed the camp library standards. The adequate libraries were considered to be so for two reasons: number of books and quality of the reading room. Adequate libraries received such praise as: "the library and reading room are ample," "the library is fairly good," "the library and dayroom are comfortable," "library and reading room facilities are adequate for the use of all," and

¹⁴ Memorandum to Camp Commanders, Prisoner of War Camps from Colonel A. J. Lamoureaux, 23 April 1945. Box No. 1652. National Archives.

¹⁵ Staff Study on the Intellectual Diversion Program for PW Camp, Camp Ashby, Virginia, 24 November 1944. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

“the library room is one of the largest I have seen in a camp.”¹⁶ The other factor that demonstrated a good library in the eyes of the reviewers was a large number of books. However, some libraries are praised for only having 1,000 books, while others did truly have a substantial number, such as 6,000 books, with an order for more books worth \$25,000 on its way.¹⁷ These reports reveal that the SPD was mostly concerned with the POWs feeling comfortable enough to relax and read a wide range of titles. While this idea is not very ambitious or creative, it still shows a concern for the comfort of the POWs and a commitment to providing enough intellectual distractions for them.

The largest issue with inadequate libraries was not enough books. Some camps had dismally small collections. One had only fifteen books, another thirty-five, and another sixty-five.¹⁸ Camp Clearfield, Utah, was a bit better off with 200 books, but about 150 of them were religious in nature, leaving those not interested in reading that subject out of luck.¹⁹ Camp Eldora, Iowa, had a group of POWs with voracious reading habits, but they had to share 125 books. The reviewer noted that all of the books were checked out except for “only about twenty very old German books and text books on

¹⁶ Camp Report from Major Paul A. Neuland, 1945. Box No. 1608. National Archives; Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Branch Camp (Algona) Owatonna, Minnesota, 21 November 1944. Box No. 1608. National Archives; Prisoner of War Camp West Point, New York, 20 March 1946, Box No. 1608. National Archives; Memorandum for the Director, Prisoner of War Special Projects Division from Major Paul A. Neuland, 26 March 1945. Box No. 1611. National Archives; and Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Fort Devens, Massachusetts, 23 November 1945. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

¹⁷ Memorandum for Director, Prisoner of War Special Projects Division from Major Paul A. Neuland, 15 March 1945. Box No. 1612. National Archives; and Camp Report, March 1945. Box No. 1611. National Archives.

¹⁸ Prisoner of War Camp, Fort Hamilton, Brooklyn, New York, 15 March 1946. Box No. 1608. National Archives; Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Yankton, South Dakota, 26 April 1945. Box No. 1608. National Archives; and Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Branch Camp, Coloma, Michigan, 1 August 1945. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

¹⁹ Camp Clearfield, Utah, Visited by Mr. P. Schnyder, 31 May 1945. Box No. 1611. National Archives.

American social problems and public relief.”²⁰ Yet another camp had a library of fifty books, which were all personally owned by the POWs. Only the kindness in making their books available to the other POWs allowed the camp to have this pathetically small library.²¹ Three other libraries were considered inadequate due to the reading rooms or the quality of the books. One camp’s reading room was unorganized and uncomfortable.²² Camp Ashby, Virginia, had a library with no table or chairs and was only accessible through the spokesman’s office.²³ Lastly, one unfortunate camp had a large collection of 5,500 books, but they were in such bad condition that they needed to be destroyed.²⁴ These reports reinforce the fact that the SPD wanted POWs to have a comfortable reading experience with access to enough titles to go around.

Circulating libraries were surprisingly common in the camp system. A circulating library was analogous to a traveling library, meaning that a set of books was moved periodically from a base camp to branch camps so that a wider array of POWs could use the same set of books. In the camp system there were 155 base camps and 308 smaller branch camps. Thus books from a base camp could be circulated among the smaller branch camps at no added cost. For example, 400 books were circulated between the base camps and branch camps at Parvan and Bridgeton, New Jersey.²⁵ The branch camps usually had their own small libraries. However, they were supplemented with monthly

²⁰ Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp Edora, Iowa, 5 December 1944. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

²¹ Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Fort Bliss, Texas, 29 January-2 February 1945. Box No. 1609. National Archives.

²² Camp Report from Herman W. Geupner, n.d. Box No. 1611. National Archives.

²³ Staff Study on Intellectual Diversion Program for PW Camp, Camp Ashby, Virginia, 24 November 1944. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

²⁴ Prisoner of War Camp, Camp Atterbury, Indiana, 10 April 1946. Box No. 1609. National Archives.

²⁵ Field Service Section Survey, 11 October 1944. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

shipments of books from the base camp. For example, a branch camp of Camp Dermott, Arkansas, had its own small collection of 150 books.²⁶ While the reason for creating circulating libraries is never explicitly explained, it is obvious that this method saved money. By circulating these books, fewer books needed to be bought and the books received more use. Base Camp Crossville, Tennessee, had a library of 6,000 books, which were circulated among six branch camps.²⁷ Thus, instead of creating six adequate libraries, the branch camp libraries could remain small and be supplemented by the adequate library at the base camp. Also, it would keep the reading rates high because the POWs were constantly getting new books to look at and not growing bored with a static library. At camp Alma, Nebraska, the library catalog for the base camp was provided to the POWs.²⁸ Therefore they could see all of the books available and perhaps put in requests for books they wanted circulated to them.

The camp libraries contained books mostly in German, some in English, and, on rare occasions, in other languages such as French or Italian. The languages of the books were a concern to the SPD because most of the POWs were learning English and it was hard for some of the camps to find enough books in German. The SPD was also anxious for the POWs to learn English so they could read books in English during the re-education programs mentioned in chapter 5.²⁹ According to the reports that mention what

²⁶ Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Grider Field, Arkansas, 18 October 1945. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

²⁷ Memorandum for Director, Prisoner of War Special Projects Division, 31 January 1945. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

²⁸ Memorandum for Director, Prisoner of War Special Projects Division, 3 March 1945. Box No. 1609. National Archives.

²⁹ An Address Delivered by Major Samuel Pace, Prisoner of War Branch Security and Intelligence Division, Eighth Service Command, 31 January 1945. Box No. 1634. National Archives.

languages the books were in, about three-fourths were in German, a fourth in English, and a smattering in other languages. For example, at Camp Crossville, Tennessee, 3,175 of the books were in German, 1,137 were in English, and 71 were in other unnamed languages.³⁰ Of the other languages present, one camp had some French and Italian books; another had a handful of Spanish books.³¹ Some camps had very few books in English. One camp only had 12 percent of their books in English, another 7 percent, yet another only 5 percent.³² On the other hand, some camps had a substantial number of books in English. Camp Devens, Massachusetts, has 20 percent of the books in English, which amounted to 1,145 books.³³ Another camp was fortunate to have 44 percent of their books in English.³⁴

While Lamoureaux authorized the use of POWs for librarians, they are rarely mentioned in the reports. However, the few mentions are quite significant in showing how seriously the camp commanders took the librarians' work. Finding the right librarian for a camp was an important undertaking. One camp explained a change in librarians. "It is recommended that Walter Ressel be replaced as librarian by Wolfgang Poesngen, Unteroffizier [sergeant], who holds a PhD degree in bibliography, was a

³⁰ POW Camp Crossville Report, n.d. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

³¹ Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, 24 May 1945. Box No. 1611. National Archives; and Staff Study on the Intellectual Diversion Program for PW Camp, Camp Ashby, Virginia, 24 November 1944. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

³² Staff Study on the Intellectual Diversion Program for PW Camp, Camp Ashby, Virginia, 24 November 1944. Box No. 1608. National Archives; and Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Camp Fort Crockett, Texas, 21 July 1945. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

³³ Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Fort Devens, Massachusetts, 23 November 1945. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

³⁴ Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Dermott, Arkansas, 18 October 1945. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

librarian in civilian life.³⁵ While it is not explained why Ressel was not a fit librarian, the new librarian was not only a librarian in civilian life and extremely well educated, but his political leanings were anti-Nazi.³⁶ Thus this camp had the ideal librarian on their hands; experienced and politically compliant.

While the work of the POW librarians was appreciated and needed, sometimes red tape got in the way. At another camp the librarian was working hard on cataloging the collection, but was pulled away from his work. The reviewer for this library explained, "The delay in cataloging has been due to the fact that the librarian has been taken off of that job and put on manual labor since, there is no provision made for classifying such an activity as constituting [POW labor]."³⁷ Even though this librarian was doing important work that the SPD needed to have done, being a librarian did not fulfill the requirement that POWs work. Fortunately the camp was working on getting the librarian off of manual labor and back to cataloging. So, while the POW librarians were important, they were in the end still prisoners who had to submit to authority and needed to be seen as politically neutral and compliant.

Selection of Materials

The Book Department was a subsidiary of the Recreation Section of the SPD. Its mission statement was "to make available to all prisoners of war a liberal and varied assortment of books in English and in their native language as intellectual and moral stimuli, providing relaxation and contentment and a more tolerant understanding of the

³⁵ Staff Study on the Intellectual Diversion Program for PW Camp, Camp Ashby, Virginia, 24 November 1944. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Camp Report, n.d. Box No. 1611. National Archives.

world and its people.”³⁸ The fulfillment of this mission relied on the selection of books.

“The success of the mission depends greatly on the style of books selected. Books which further the mission are recommended; books contrary to this aid are not approved.”³⁹

This was achieved by the creation of lists approved and unapproved books to guide the selection of books.

The goal of the SPD in developing its selections policy was to present to the POWs a completely different world view that would be compatible with American goals and values. The key to this new world view were books promoting ideas of democracy and America as a unified nation untouched by the cultural and ethnic unrest of the “Old World.” Robin explains, “The approved reading material effectively rewrote the history of Germany by emphasizing disproportionately the presence of consistent humanist and democratic trends in Germany’s recent political past.”⁴⁰ Thus any books emphasizing any form of democracy in Germany’s past was enthusiastically put onto the list.

Secondly, any book that mentioned the problems of race, class, materialism, isolationism and loss of culture in America was swiftly banned.⁴¹ Major Davison, head of the SPD, reminded all reviewers of this in a memo. He reiterated the need to block books that criticized American culture or emphasized materialism. German books that mentioned the Versailles treaty as a “stab in the back,” emphasized a “Nordic” race, had negative

³⁸ Memorandum for Chief, Special Projects Branch, from Major George Krys, 7 November 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 94.

⁴¹ Ibid.

views on allied nations, mentioned “Jewish Bolshevism” or “Jewish Imperialism,” or included any mention of the Nazi need for “living space” were to be swiftly banned.⁴²

Educational consultant Henry Ehrmann made most of the decisions on what books would or would not be provided for POWs. Ehrmann was one of two civilians working in the higher echelon of the SPD. Hired to be the educational advisor, he reviewed German language books, developed a German history survey course and “crash courses” on democracy.⁴³ Born in Berlin in 1908, he studied law and earned a doctorate in jurisprudence in 1932. After his arrest by the Gestapo due to his connections with the German Social Democratic Party he was sent to a concentration camp. After a daring escape from Germany to Czechoslovakia, he made his way to France and worked there as a journalist until 1940. He was involved in an anti-fascist group and later escaped to America with his wife via another daring escape over the Pyrenees Mountains to Spain.

Ehrmann’s obituaries reduce his role in the SPD to a single sentence, “[He] lectured at re-education courses for selected German prisoners-of-war held at Forts Kearney, Getty and Wetherill, R.I. and Fort Eustis, VA.”⁴⁴ However, his wartime work may be overlooked due to the activity in his life after the war. His work ranged from being a professor, to an editor of the *American Political Science Review* to a member of the Fulbright Awards Selection Committee. He served as a professor at several top-notch universities, was highly involved in several civil liberty cases, and was a member of the

⁴² Criteria for the Selection of Books, 20 October 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

⁴³ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 51.

⁴⁴ Szurek and Hawrylchak, “Henry W. Ehrmann Papers,” M. E. Grenader Department of Special Collections and Archives, <http://library.albany.edu/speccoll/findaids/ger013.htm>.

American Civil Liberties Union. He died in La Jolla, California, in 1994 at the age of 86.⁴⁵

Ehrmann, a Jew persecuted by the Nazis, was highly motivated to leave his stamp on the German POWs. Along with a few assistants, he reviewed and censored the books that made it into the hands of the POWs, established lists of approved and banned books for the libraries, and determined how camp libraries would be organized. Ehrmann's team created the "basic library" list, which consisted of 300 books that Ehrmann felt should be in every camp library. Ehrmann's goal was to have this list published so that libraries of approved books could be swiftly set up and make the work easier for camp commanders and AEOs. Ehrmann enthusiastically said in a memorandum, "Books which are on the 'Basic Book List' of 300 titles should be procured with the shortest possible delay for all prisoner of war camps."⁴⁶ A second "basic library" list, which contained 500 titles, was created for AEOs who wanted to expand on their camp libraries. Therefore there were 800 titles in all that established "once and for all that books on the list are approved," meaning that camp commanders did not have to seek approval for books on these lists.⁴⁷ This not only made the work of creating a camp library easier for the AEOs, but it ensured that the books that Ehrmann felt were essential for the POWs were making it into their hands. Ehrmann also created a list of books that were deemed acceptable, but were not necessarily recommended. However, Ehrmann concentrated on his "basic library" lists.

⁴⁵ Saxon, "Henry W. Ehrmann, 86, Author Who Taught Law at Dartmouth," 1.

⁴⁶ Memorandum for Chief, Special Projects Division from Henry Ehrmann, 27 November 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

⁴⁷ Memorandum for Chief, Special Projects Branch, from Henry Ehrmann, 6 December 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

Criteria for the creation of the “basic library” 300 title list included:

- a. Best samples of works in different fields of literature by representatives of various nations.
- b. Will give prisoners composite picture of free human thought.
- c. Types varied to reach prisoners of all educational backgrounds.
- d. Will serve as guide in establishment of new libraries.
- e. contains a few specially selected works for this program.
- f. No text books on this list.
- g. Procurement source stated whenever possible.⁴⁸

This list was broken down into eight categories by Ehrmann. They were: fiction and drama (General) one hundred and thirty books, Fiction and Drama (U.S.A.) forty books, anthologies thirteen books, history of art, literature and music, nineteen books, history, biography, politics (general) twenty-seven books, history, biography, politics (U.S.A.) twenty-seven books, travel twenty-two books, and philosophy and psychology twenty-three books.⁴⁹

Ehrmann also worked on lists of banned books and banned authors.⁵⁰ These were books that were under no circumstances to be included in the camp libraries. This list was created so that the AEOs could quickly go through their lists of camp library books, requested books or books in consideration, and immediately know what to not get.

Ehrmann created his lists by reviewing lists of books already in POW camp libraries. When POWs began to arrive in America the German Red Cross and Nazi government began to send POWs books, but it soon became obvious that many of these books, including educational books, were filled with Nazi propaganda.⁵¹ The studying of these camp library book lists was imperative in order to discover what was already

⁴⁸ Book Plan Outline, n.d. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

⁴⁹ Comment on Book Plan Outline, n.d. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

⁵⁰ Memorandum for Executive Officers from Henry Ehrmann, n.d. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

⁵¹ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 206.

available, what POWs liked to read and what kind of books were missing.⁵² In late 1944, the approved book list (separate from the “basic book list”) contained 5,500 titles and the unapproved book list contained 150 titles.⁵³ To find more books for “basic library” lists and banned book lists, members of the SPD, such as Ehrmann, Captain Michael Ginsburg and Ginsburg’s secretary Mrs. Acton, personally visited book warehouses to inspect books for possible inclusion on the book lists. These book warehouses belonged to publishers that sold books to the SPD. This proved to be time consuming and often took days at a time.⁵⁴

Ehrmann created rules for the selection of books of different genres. German books could be especially troublesome. Extra care had to be taken if a book was published after 1933, was dedicated to a known Nazi, or contained a quote from a known Nazi. Fiction could not exalt military deeds in German history, cover World War I experiences, talk about the Versailles Treaty, criticize the Weimar Republic, praise the Nazi Movement, cover the “blood and soil” theory, talk about the superiority of the Nordic race, talk about American materialism, or contain erotica. History books had to be reviewed for how they treated the rise of Prussia, Frederick the Great, Bismarck, Pan-Germanism, German colonial policy, World War I, the treaty of Versailles, the Weimar Republic, Nazism, the United Nations, American materialism, American imperialism, race questions, Woodrow Wilson, and labor conflicts.⁵⁵

⁵² Memorandum for Commanding General, Army Service Forces from Major Paul A. Neuland, 7 April 1945. Box No. 1628. National Archives.

⁵³ Memorandum for Director, Prisoner of War Division, 3 November 1944. Box No. 1628. National Archives.

⁵⁴ Stoffels, Scarsdale Lists, 10 December 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

⁵⁵ Supplementary Memorandum No. 15, n.d. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

Henry Ehrmann and his dedicated assistants painstakingly wrote reviews of each book they examined. These reviews give insight into how Ehrmann and the SPD made their book selection decisions. The book review form asked the reviewer to list the title, author, publisher, subject, a detailed review, suitability, usefulness, and whether it should be translated into German or not. Some appraisals seemed obvious. The review for The Prince by Machiavelli, for example, simply had “not recommended” written on the form; it did not warrant even a cursory abstract of its contents.⁵⁶ A spy novel called Cause for Alarm easily made the grade since it “does not rate above the average of entertainment novels.”⁵⁷ Thus, it did not cover anything controversial and it would easily entertain.

Serious thought and time were put into these reviews. While Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels might have been automatically approved, its reviewer, Dr. Doerr, carefully considered why Gulliver’s Travels was an appropriate choice for the POWs. “To many prisoners, who in their childhood were captivated by the expurgated translation, a second reading might be a help in deflating their unrealistic Weltanschauung (world view), besides giving them a more accurate idea about that eminent author.”⁵⁸ This obviously shows that Dr. Doerr used an intellectual interpretation of a popular novel to grant its acceptance and not just because it was a popular classic that was doubtful to cause a Nazi uprising in the camps.

Two other classic books on the approved lists were The Travels of Marco Polo and The Moon is Down by John Steinbeck. The choice of Marco Polo was made,

⁵⁶ Report on Niccolo Machiavelli’s *The Prince and other Discourses*, 26 December 1944. Box No. 1596. National Archives.

⁵⁷ Report on Eric Ambler’s *Cause for Alarm*, 1 January 1945. Box No. 1596. National Archives.

⁵⁸ Report on Jonathon Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, 26 December 1944. Box No. 1596. National Archives.

according to its review, because it was a classic novel that most POWs probably never had time to read.⁵⁹ As for John Steinbeck's novel, "[it] gives a very good psychological picture of a conquered people as well as of the conquerors without making the conquerors members of a master race."⁶⁰ Steinbeck's novel is about an invading force that tries to control a small European town's coal mines. The town's people resist this invading force and are successful in their resistance against the repressive regime of the invading force. Obviously, this book would clearly represent not only the current state of the war in Europe, but show that those who did not belong to a "master race" could succeed quite well in the world.

Some books were deemed acceptable, but only for anti-Nazi POWs. For example, America, by Stephen Vincent Benet, contained two chapters, "America and the World" and "And after the War," which reviewers feared would anger passionate Nazi POWs. However, the reviewers felt this book might prove interesting to anti-Nazi's educating themselves on the American way of life. The Next Germany, by a group of Anti-Nazis, would be "reject[ed] as a propaganda of German emigrants," by Nazi POWs, but anti-Nazi POWs "are really interested in these kind of problems, concerning their personal future in the reconstruction task of a new country."⁶¹ Thus these books were conditionally approved for the anti-Nazis. Yet, not every anti-Nazi-themed book was automatically added to the approved list. According to the review for We Cannot Escape History, a book criticizing Nazism "gives more propaganda about Nazism than real facts

⁵⁹ Report on John Steinbeck's *The Moon is Down*, 1 January 1944. Box No. 1596. National Archives.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Report on *The Next Germany* by a group of Anti-Nazi Germans, 1 January 1945. Box No. 1596. National Archives.

and reflections.”⁶² Thus a book was not approved just because it could be; the book had to be well written.

These book lists were sent to the individual AEOs and camp commanders. The AEOs were also provided with information as to where they could locate copies of the books. Ehrmann encouraged the AEOs to obtain catalogs from local booksellers and contact local universities to see if these institutions would donate library books to the camps.⁶³ However, Ehrmann made it clear that the YMCA War Prisoners Aid, Red Cross, and War Relief Services of the National Catholic Welfare Conference would be the first place to get books. Only after these sources were exhausted would the AEOs look for books locally.⁶⁴

While the library book lists were a form of censorship and control over the POWs’ reading, they also served an essential purpose. The “basic book” lists ensured that the camp commanders gathered together a library that covered a wide array of subjects and reading levels. Left to their own devices, these commanders, who had many pressing duties on their minds, might have just gathered up every book in German they could find. With the “basic book” lists, all of the POWs were bound to find something of interest to read. The approved book lists also helped the camp commanders collect and forward books to the POWs quickly. Thus the commanders did not have to waste time censoring every book they acquired. While it is easy to bemoan the existence of unapproved book lists and bewail the lack of intellectual freedom among the POWs,

⁶² Book Review on *We Cannot Escape History*, 19 December 1944. Box No. 1596. National Archives.

⁶³ Memorandum for Chief, Special Projects Division from Henry Ehrmann, 27 November 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

⁶⁴ Memorandum for Executive Officers from Henry Ehrmann, n.d. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

keeping out Nazi literature most likely reduced any political conflicts that might arise among the POWs. With both ardent Nazis and anti-Nazis living together in the camps, a copy of Mein Kampf could lead to strained relations between the POWs. Censorship was allowed by the Geneva Convention, though it did not state to what extent was acceptable before it became propaganda.⁶⁵ However, these lists were detrimental in one way. The POWs were only allowed to read books that painted America in a perfect light and books that carefully edited German history. The POWs gained a deceptive view of American and German history and culture. Most importantly, censoring books to the extent to which the SPD did could be considered propagandizing the POWs, which was strictly against the Geneva Convention. The Convention was created to protect the POWs and ensure their best interest.

Conclusion

The conditions of the camp libraries varied widely but they usually faced the same issues. Adequacy of the libraries, circulating libraries, the language of the books and camp librarians were topics that were raised many times. It was important that the POWs had access to many books and felt comfortable enough to read during their leisure time. Circulating libraries and comfortable reading rooms were solutions emphasized by the SPD. Overall the rates of reading seemed to be high and the libraries were popular.

The selection of materials for the libraries was a complex and imperfect process. While a basic book list was created to help start up the camp libraries, not all of the reviewers were in agreement as to which books should be included. Many issues were

⁶⁵ Geneva Convention, Article 39.

present when it came to what kind of subject matter needed to be emphasized or avoided. Many aspects of German and American history were sensitive and camp officials wanted library books to depict America in a positive light. Henry Ehrmann worked hard to ensure that these issues were taken into account and that the perfect set of books was distributed to the camp libraries. His goal was to present to the POWs democratic ideals, respect for the American way of life, and a proper interpretation of German history. Ehrmann was a unique individual to be in charge of the POWs reading materials. A Jew who had to daringly escape Europe because of Nazi persecution, he could have easily felt bitter and vengeful. Instead, he eagerly used his intellect to try to subtly change the minds of a group of young, scared Nazi prisoners. His book lists were meant to gently mold the minds of the POWs to accept and cooperate with America after the war.

Chapter 4

Intellectual Diversion: Providing Books for the POWs

Introduction

The camp library books came from two major sources, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) War Prisoners Aid and the International Red Cross. Nearly all books donated or sold by publishers and individuals went to these two contributors for distribution. While some camp commanders bought books directly from local publishers, they were encouraged first to go to the YMCA or Red Cross. Due to the provisions of the Geneva Convention, Red Cross representatives were allowed to visit POW camps in America and inspect the libraries for themselves. Swiss and American representatives from the YMCA were allowed to do this as well. The YMCA and Red Cross also received book requests directly from the POWs, though they did have to notify the SPD of these requests.¹

The bulk of this chapter describes where the camp library books came from and the entities that donated or sold these books. The YMCA and Red Cross already had a long history of serving POWs in many different capacities when World War II began. Their core values extended to helping to provide intellectual materials to the POWs along with their other regular services. Many Americans felt compelled to donate books, magazines and newspapers to individual POWs and camp libraries. The POWs also had the chance to purchase reading materials from the camp canteens with camp coupons they earned from working. The last portion of this chapter examines the POWs'

¹ Memorandum for Executive Officers from Henry Ehrmann, n.d. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

responses to the camp library books. POWs were extremely thankful to have reading materials and the learning opportunities these books provided. Their reading rates were high in most of the camps and many POWs used books for self-education.

The Young Men's Christian Association War Prisoners Aid

The Young Men's Christian Association, better known as the YMCA, was founded in London, by George Williams on June 6, 1844. Started much in the same spirit as the Red Cross, George Williams, like Jean Henri Dunant, saw a need and created a society to fulfill that need. England was becoming transformed during the Industrial Revolution and single men were flocking to London for work. They were surrounded by the mean streets of vice-filled London and Williams wanted to convert these young men to evangelical Christianity in order to improve their lives and deter the degradation of their morals. The YMCA grew proportionately and made it to American soil in 1851.²

The earliest YMCAs in England and the United States organized tent revivals, sponsored prayer meetings and Bible readings, had reading rooms, listed job openings, had coffee shops, and had boarding rooms for single men. As the nineteenth century progressed, an emphasis on sports emerged to help develop the "whole man."³ The religious focus of the YMCA decreased during the early twentieth century as the public attended fewer religious programs. Women were allowed to join starting in 1934 and the thirties also saw the admission of Catholics and Jews into the fold.⁴

² YMCA, "History of the YMCA Movement,"
http://www.ymca.net/about_the_ymca/history_of_the_ymca.html.

³ Zald and Denton, "From Evangelism to General Service," 218.

⁴ Ibid., 219.

The YMCA had a long track record of working with military men and POWs. During the American Civil War, Abraham Lincoln endorsed the YMCA's newly created U.S. Christian Commission to aid troops and POWs. Their work included supplying hospitals and contributing a million bibles to the soldiers. In 1902 Congress authorized that YMCAs could be permanent fixtures on military bases. The YMCA's war work came into its own during World War I, the largest test yet. The American YMCA sent 26,000 volunteers to Europe to help the four million POWs, performing 90 percent of the aid work.⁵

During World War II the YMCA, along with other charitable organizations, created the United Service Organization (USO) to entertain and serve the troops in America. However, the most important service during this time was the YMCA's War Prisoners Aid Program, which provided humanitarian aid to both Axis and Ally POWs. The program lasted seven years, served in thirty-three countries and cost fifteen million dollars.⁶ The German POWs received most of their books from this program and the Red Cross.

The YMCA War Prisoners Aid, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, was one of the largest contributors of books to POWs in the world. It had the money, international support and infrastructure to provide books to every camp in the United States, not to mention camps in Europe as well. Twenty-eight world governments recognized the neutrality of the YMCA and its function to provide recreational,

⁵ YMCA, "History of the YMCA Movement," http://www.ymca.net/about_the_ymca/history_of_the_ymca.html.

⁶ Armed Services YMCA, Camp Pendleton, "History," <http://www.camppendletonsymca.org/whoweare.html>.

intellectual and spiritual welfare for the POWs.⁷ The YMCA War Prisoners Aid's mission statement proclaimed, "Its basic purposes [are] to serve all prisoners of war irrespective of their nationality, race, or creed and to bear witness to its faith in the deeper spiritual values expressed in the commandment 'to love God and our neighbor.'"⁸ This the YMCA fulfilled by providing books for German POWs in America.

The relationship between the YMCA War Prisoners Aid and the PMGO and SPD began in March of 1942 under the direction of Provost Marshal General Allen W. Gullion.⁹ The YMCA set up an office in New York to oversee the distribution of books and other recreational materials to the German, Italian and Japanese POWs in America. Tracy Strong acted as General Secretary of the American YMCA, E. T. Colton as Executive of the American YMCA, and Richard M. Honig as Chief of the Book Section of the American YMCA. Seven field assistants visited and reported on camp libraries and recreation centers.¹⁰

The YMCA also acted as a liaison for World Student Relief. Other organizations that worked with the YMCA included the Lutheran Commission for Prisoners of War and the American Bible Society.¹¹ The World Student Relief helped the YMCA donate free books to POWs. In early 1945 Dr. Honig, Chief of the Book section of the YMCA, had a

⁷ Memorandum on Services to Prisoners of War Held in the United States by E. T. Colton, n.d. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

⁸ Tracy Strong to Provost Marshal General Archer L. Lerch, 1 August 1945. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

⁹ Allen W. Gullion to Mr. John R. Mott and Mr. Tracy Strong, 31 March 1942. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

¹⁰ YMCA War Prisoners Aid Staff for Services in the United States, 1 August 1945. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

¹¹ Memorandum on Services to Prisoners of War Held in the United States by E. T. Colton, n.d. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

budget of \$50,000 to purchase books for a two-month period. He planned to procure 7,000 books, all to be given to the POWs.¹²

The work of the YMCA did not go unnoticed by the German POWs. "In the last months I and numerous German prisoners . . . received . . . many very important and valuable books," wrote POW Werner Kloos, doctor of philosophy. "For me it was one of the happiest and most surprising events in this first year of my prisoner-life. . . . You could not have done a thing of greater practical and spiritual importance. . . . I hope to be able, after the wartime, to prove this feeling to the Y.M.C.A."¹³

The work of the YMCA War Prisoners Aid, hailed by POWs and appreciated by the SPD, did experience some conflict and rivalry with the SPD. Major William Gemmill of the PMGO Executive Division wrote to General Blackshear Bryan on May 4, 1945:

I recommend that steps be taken to curtail the activities of War Prisoners' Aid. At the present stage of events, the representatives of the War Prisoners' Aid are actually acting in competition with assistant executive officers. Some of their field agents have gone so far as to tell prisoners that what ever the assistant executive officers cannot do for them the Y.M.C.A. can and will do. This destroys the confidence of the prisoners in the assistant executive officer. Now that the prisoners have their own funds, there is no need for War Prisoners' Aid . . . I, therefore, recommend that we take appropriate steps to cancel the privileges of the War Prisoners' Aid of the Y.M.C.A. to visit prisoner of war camps. They should be permitted to continue to furnish books or to procure articles desired by prisoners which are approved by the camp commander. This activity does not to require them to visit camps. . . .¹⁴

Fortunately his advice was not acted upon.

¹² Memorandum for Colonel Davison from 1st Lt. S. A. E. Betz, 13 January 1945. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

¹³ Werner Kloos to the YMCA Headquarters, 9 May 1945. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

¹⁴ Memorandum for General Bryan from Major William B. Gemmill, 4 May 1945. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

The International Red Cross

The International Committee of the Red Cross was the second major provider of books to the camp libraries. They had offices in neutral Geneva, Switzerland, where they operated as international watch dogs to ensure that the Geneva Convention was being followed. Red Cross officials and representatives visited the POW camps around the world to investigate conditions and speak with POWs. They oversaw every aspect of life governed by the Geneva Convention and expected strict adherence. For example, when POWs in Ogden, Utah, wanted to double their rations of potatoes and half their rations of meat, the camp commander needed permission from the Red Cross to do so, in order to comply with Article 2 of the Geneva Convention.¹⁵

Much like the YMCA War Prisoners Aid, the Red Cross provided not only books for study and pleasure, but musical instruments, recreational equipment, and even skeletons, microscopes and frogs to scientist POWs setting up makeshift laboratories.¹⁶ The Red Cross also concentrated on providing relief packages full of clothing, personal hygiene items, food, and medicines.¹⁷ Other essential services were provided as well. For example, under the Geneva Conventions, non-commissioned officers were not required to work, but they had to prove first that they were an officer. This proof was found in their "Soldbuch," their personal identification booklet. Unfortunately, many POWs lost their Soldbuchs in the bustle and confusion of capture and transfer to America as a prisoner. However, all they needed to do was write a letter to the Red Cross and the

¹⁵ Powell, *Splinters of a Nation*, 83.

¹⁶ Moorehead, *Dunant's Dream*, 385-86.

¹⁷ Ibid., 383-85.

Red Cross would notify the camp of the officer's status.¹⁸ After the war ended the Red Cross continued to serve the POWs by setting up a tracing service to find missing POWs and reconnect POWs with their families.¹⁹

The Red Cross provided over a million and a half books to POWs around the world by the end of the war.²⁰ In America, the International Red Cross and American Red Cross worked closely with the State Department and YMCA War Prisoners Aid. The Red Cross often took the YMCA War Prisoners Aid and National Catholic War Council under its wings to act as transmitting agency or to provide overall organization of efforts.²¹ However, cooperation with the German Red Cross became another matter. Even though the camps had received 45,000 educational books and 110,000 fiction books by March 30, 1944, the German Red Cross had technically severed its ties with the International Committee in Geneva.²² Red Cross historian Moorehead notes that "on 29 November 1933, new statutes were passed in Germany decreeing that the German Red Cross and all its activities were to be made directly responsible to the German government. . . . The society became, overnight, just another part of the German state machinery, effectively violating all the principles of the Red Cross independence."²³ The SPD had to deal carefully with anything from the German Red Cross. These books were

¹⁸ Hörner, *German Odyssey*, 277-78.

¹⁹ Moorehead, *Dunant's Dream*, 516.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 385.

²¹ Memorandum for the Record from Major Stephen M. Farrand, 14 August 1945. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

²² The Geneva Convention, Intellectual Relief for American POWs, and Intellectual Activities of German POWs in this Country, 30 March 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

²³ Moorehead, *Dunant's Dream*, 345.

carefully censored and compared to lists of approved books.²⁴ Even walnuts sent by the German Red Cross to POWs during Christmas were stuffed with small slips of paper covered in Nazi propaganda.²⁵

Book Publishers and Donors

While the Red Cross and YMCA War Prisoners Aid provided the bulk of books to the POWs, book publishers and donors helped to supplement the camp libraries. While publishers, especially publishers of books in German, sold books to the camp libraries to make profit, individuals donated books for four main reasons: religious evangelism, re-education, common German heritage, or because they had relatives in the camps.

The PMGO was in charge of dealing with the book publishers, donors, approving donations, and enforcing regulations. The PMGO was inundated with requests from individuals and organizations that wanted to donate books and periodicals. The PMGO managed to streamline these requests by creating strict rules. Individual book donors could not donate books to individual POWs, only to the camp libraries. If the donor wanted a specific POW to receive a book, it had to be purchased from a publisher and sent to the camp directly from that publisher. If the donor wanted to donate books to the camp libraries, the PMGO directed them to contact the YMCA or Red Cross in New York City. All used books had to be unmarked.²⁶ Publishers, on the other hand, could

²⁴ PW Circular Letter No. 9, April 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

²⁵ Gansberg, *Stalag: U.S.A.*, 90.

²⁶ Lt. Colonel Earl L. Edwards to Mrs. H. A. Pyhrr, 7 December 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives; Colonel I. B. Summers to Commanding General, Fourth Service Command, 11 November 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives; and Colonel I. B. Summers to Harry P. Jeffrey, 15 October 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

send books to individual POWs and camp libraries directly, but first the books had to be sent to the Office of Censorship.²⁷

Publishers were thrilled to have a new market to sell their books, especially their German language books. They were anxious to provide their catalogs and pricing to the PMGO and to obtain lists of the camps to send more catalogs to.²⁸ The camp commanders were anxious to learn about these publishers as well, since the stock of the German language books at local booksellers was picked over and running low.²⁹ Wilcox & Follett Co. was one such publisher and had provided hundreds of thousands of books to POW camps by May of 1944.³⁰ Prentice-Hall, Inc. tried to entice business with the PMGO by providing a 40 percent discount and Didier Publishers sent a free book to Provost Marshal General Lerch and an ad for the top sellers.³¹

Many Americans and German-Americans who fled Nazi Germany were highly motivated to take advantage of the opportunity presented by German POWs being held in America. Here was a chance to re-educate, de-Nazify, and humanize Nazi POWs, and maybe this could be achieved through proper reading material. Of course, this was exactly what the SPD was already trying to do, explained further in chapter 5. The public was not made aware of the SPD's re-education efforts until after VE Day, so some believed that this effort was falling on their shoulders. These included publishers of

²⁷ Colonel A. M. Tollefson to Rev. Severin Lamping, 12 April 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

²⁸ Allen S. Wilber to Provost Marshal General, 15 March 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

²⁹ Colonel Joseph I. Greene to Commanding Officer, Prisoner of War Camp, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, 2 April 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

³⁰ Wilcox & Follett Co. to Col. A. M. Tollefson, 9 May 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

³¹ Harry Berke, Didier Publishers to Provost Marshal General Lerch, 30 April 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives; and H. Carter, Trade Book Dept. to Lt. Frederic W. Handschy, 28 March 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

German periodicals, groups of German-Americans and some individuals who had access to German language books, or wanted to pay for some periodical subscriptions for some of the camps.³²

These donors were eager to spread the values of democracy to the POWs, within the bounds of the Geneva Convention as they understood it. Joseph Kaskel, representative of the *Deutsche Blaetter* periodical, wrote to the PMGO:

Refraining from propagating the political persuasion of the editors in an obtrusive form [*Deutsche Blaetter*] offer[s] to these prisoners writings of literary value which should convey to them the ideas governing the democratic world in a dignified form. The desirability of the *Deutsche Blaetter*, from the American viewpoint and with regard to the Convention of Geneva, is increased by the fact that the magazine does not serve the ends of any single political party, confession or group.³³

Paul Merker of the *Latino American de Alemanes Libres* wrote, "*Freies Deutschland* is the only democratic literary, cultural and political periodical in German which at present exists on this Continent."³⁴ J. H. Biden of the *New Jersey Freie Zeitung* explained, "We . . . are pro-American in every detail. . . . There are a number of people who would like to subscribe for additional copies of our paper in order to Americanize . . . the German prisoners."³⁵ Spreading democracy to the POWs seemed like the best route to these newspaper men.

German-American and German refugee societies were eager to share democratic reading materials to the POWs in order to re-educate and perhaps convert these POWs to American ideals. The Victory Committee of German-American Trade Unionists went so

³² E. H. Starkel to Prisoners of War Department, 1 May 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

³³ Letter from Joseph Kaskel, n.d. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

³⁴ Paul Merker to War Department, Office of Propaganda and Information, 30 September 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

³⁵ J. H. Biden to General B. M. Bryan, 22 May 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

far as to adopt a resolution entitled, "Making Democratic Literature Accessible to German War Prisoners."³⁶ This resolution was adopted at the Special Conference of German-American Trade Unionists held in New York City on November 20, 1943. The committee felt strongly about this cause. "We feel that only through the re-education of the future citizens of the New Germany to be constituted after the defeat of Hitlerism, will a firm foundation be established for a Democratic Germany."³⁷ Their resolution resolved that "it is not only our duty to make it available to them but it is equally our opportunity to win them over as staunch fighters for the complete eradication of the fascists and Nazi ideologies."³⁸ Thus the committee contacted the PMGO and wished to meet with them to discover how they could follow through on their firm resolution to make a difference for the POWs who held a common heritage.

Other German groups collectively gathered together their German language books to send to the POWs. These groups—the Federation of German-American Societies, Inc., the German Club of Wausau, Wisconsin, and a group of German refugees from Cambridge, Massachusetts—all clamored in their letters to the PMGO to send their book donations to the camp libraries. As Dr. E. R. Meyer, owner of The Book Collection, put it, "The younger Nazis have practically no education in modern thinking outside of their Nazi indoctrination and that it would be very desirable to furnish them with works in German."³⁹

³⁶ Making Democratic Literature Accessible to German War Prisoners, 20 November 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

³⁷ Michael J. Obermeier to Office of the Provost Marshal General, 14 January 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Dr. E. R. Meyer to Prisoner of War Division, 17 May 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

An entirely separate group of people wanted to share literature with the POWs not so much because they believed that re-education and de-Nazification needed to be done, but because they were called by a higher power. Numerous Christians and Christian societies wanted to give reading materials to the POWs because they felt it was their Christian duty to bring comfort to the POWs and also because it presented a unique opportunity to evangelize them. Churches interested in contributing to this effort ranged a wide gamut of Catholic groups and many different Protestant denominations, which including the First Church of Christ-Scientist, Seventh Day Adventist, Zion Evangelical, Lutheran, and many other non-denominational Christian groups.

In a sense this evangelism was also a form of re-education. These Christians declared that once the POWs had been indoctrinated with Christian ideals, they would also obtain a love for America and democracy. Reverend Harry A. McGimsey of the American Desert Mission wrote to the PMGO, "We believe if we could reach these men now with Christian Literature that when the war is over that they will go back to their nation with a love for our land instead of hatred for America."⁴⁰ Congressman William A. Pittenger of Minnesota connected Christian literature with the goals of the United States government. "I can't think of anything more in keeping with the policies of the government than a little Christian education of the Axis powers."⁴¹ Others were less political in their message; they simply wanted to spread the Christian message, without any other ulterior motives. Frank F. Bunker, manager of the *Herald of Christian Science*,

⁴⁰ Rev. Harry H. McGimsey to Provost Marshal General, 28 February 1944. Box No. 1944. National Archives.

⁴¹ William A. Pittenger to General James A. Ulio, 3 September 1943. Box No. 1944. National Archives.

reassured the PMGO that his newspapers “are written solely for the purpose of affording spiritual and religious comfort and uplift to the reader.”⁴² Mr. and Mrs. Emil Wollschlaeger, a Christian couple from Texas, simply wanted to save souls. “If their education has been as godless as reports would lead us to believe, surely they need to become acquainted with the Prince of Peace.”⁴³ These letters from Christian book donors suggest that animosity and hatred towards the POWs was not common among Christians, or at least these Christians attempted to cure what they hated about them. The generous gifts of reading material was one of the only things these groups of Christians could do to relieve the discomfort of prison for POWs and to spread their message to a group they would otherwise never be able to reach in Germany. A feeling of doing their patriotic duty was also a motivator and tied in neatly with their Christian beliefs.

Due to the United States being a land of recent immigrants, many Americans still had relatives in Germany and some of these relatives became POWs. These Americans knew POWs not as Nazis or the enemy, but as their beloved family members. A nun in Kansas wished to send a religious German language newspaper to her cousin, a priest held at Camp Alva, Oklahoma.⁴⁴ Another man, a veteran from World War I, wished to send a monthly German language newspaper published in Milwaukee to his German cousin.⁴⁵ A woman wished to send some German magazines to the brother of her parish

⁴² Frank F. Bunker to Colonel I. B. Summers, 14 October 1943. Box No. 1944. National Archives.

⁴³ Mr. and Mrs. Emil Wollschlaeger to Official Censor, 14 January 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

⁴⁴ Sr. M. Callista to Office of the Provost Marshal General, 27 March 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

⁴⁵ Carl Zeisberg to Provost Marshal General, 9 March 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

priest.⁴⁶ Donating books and periodicals to these loved ones was really the only way these Americans could make a difference for their relatives in the camps. These donors saw the POWs in the most personal way possible, as family, as friends, and mostly as human beings caught up in realities of war and imprisoned in a foreign land.

Camp Canteens

Another provider of reading materials was the camp canteen, where POWs could buy books and magazines, along with other personal materials, such as cigarettes and toilet articles.⁴⁷ These purchases were made with canteen coupons, which represented the amount of money held by the POWs in credit. POWs were not allowed to personally keep money tender, so the government held onto the money for them, to be credited after their repatriation.

The AEOs were in charge of materials sold in the canteens. From the PMGO they received lists of approved books and magazines to sell and what sort of materials they should strive for. It was important to keep sales high and carry popular materials. Otherwise POW morale suffered and the canteen made little profit to use for camp improvements.⁴⁸ Gansberg writes about an AEO who,

Pored over catalogues and selected publications for his canteen. . . . He particularly liked photographic books that offered alluring pictures of the best the United States had to offer. He placed them for sale in the canteens noting: "We experimented in one . . . camp where there was some talk about 'propaganda.' A sign 'Souvenir Books of America' fixed that and sales boomed."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Mrs. S. Arnold to Office of the Provost Marshal General, 20 February 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

⁴⁷ Hörner, *German Odyssey*, 273.

⁴⁸ The Offence II-Books and Publications, n.d. Box No. 1628. National Archives.

⁴⁹ Gansberg, *Stalag: U.S.A.*, 91.

However, not all AEOs made wise decisions about the kinds of materials they chose.

Andre Vulliet of the YMCA was of the opinion that

Too many books . . . have been put on display and on sale in PW canteens, obviously meant for Americans only or for advanced student of philosophy or literature. . . . Shakespeare, Confucius, Longfellow, Henry Adams, Emerson, Plato, Dostoiensky, Santayana, Bergson, Jefferson, and the like—all in English—cannot find much response among the common run of German soldiers. I wonder if they could even sell well in an American canteen. . . .⁵⁰

One camp report noted that canteen book sales were 75 percent “serious reading” and 25 percent was fiction.⁵¹

Materials sold in the canteens came from many different sources. Popular American magazines and newspapers, such as *Collier's*, *Esquire*, *Life*, *Newsweek*, *Reader's Digest*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Time* were sold, along with a selection of foreign magazines.⁵² Publishers from around the country could apply to be put onto the approved booksellers list and send their catalogues to AEOs. Publishers had to prove that they were a “bona fide” publisher and send their catalogue and other “pertinent information” to the PMGO.⁵³ These publishers included Oxford University Press and *Infantry Journal*, along with many others that specialized in German language books or sold locally in an area near a camp.⁵⁴ Other popular sources of books for the canteen included books from the Modern Library series and the Pocket Book Editions series.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Memorandum to Dr. Tracy Strong from Andre Vulliet, June 1945. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

⁵¹ Special Projects Activities in First Service Command, 1945. Box No. 1628. National Archives.

⁵² Prisoner of War Circular, 9 January 1945. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

⁵³ Lt. Col. A. M. Tollefson to Provost Marshal General's Office, 17 December 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

⁵⁴ Major Maxwell S. McKnight to Commanding General Army Service Forces, 18 December 1944. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

⁵⁵ Status Report, Review Branch, Prisoner of War Special Project Division, 22 June 1945. Box No. 1628. National Archives.

Other series of reprinted books were sold as well, such as Pocket Book Editions, Penguin Series and Modern Library. These reprints included classics such as Brothers Karamazov, Crime and Punishment, David Copperfield, Don Quixote, Gulliver's Travels, Madame Bovary, The Three Musketeers, Walden, Wuthering Heights, Moby Dick, and War and Peace.⁵⁶

The canteen was the perfect place for the PMGO to sell its own materials. The *Buecherreihe Neue Welt* (New World Bookshelf) was a series of reprinted books exclusively for POWs. Sold for twenty-five cents a piece, these books were not allowed into the camp libraries until their sale had been promoted in the canteen.⁵⁷ These novels were mostly written by refugee Germans escaping Nazi Germany and were a small attempt on the part of the PMGO to re-educate and influence the POWs, discussed further in chapter 5.⁵⁸ These authors included Thomas Mann, Franz Werfel, and Carl Zuckmayer.⁵⁹ Other titles included in this series were works by Willa Cather, Mark Twain and Jack London

Buecherreihe Neue Welt proved to be popular among the POWs. One camp sold 45,000 books from the series alone in one year. The total number of POWs that bought these books was just under 5,000.⁶⁰ *Buecherreihe Neue Welt* books usually sold out. The Status Report of the Review Branch for June, 1945, announced that the initial 7,500

⁵⁶ Infantry Journal Book List, n.d. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

⁵⁷ J. A. Ulio to Commanding Generals, 23 January 1945. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

⁵⁸ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 96.

⁵⁹ Memorandum for Chief, Review Branch from Henry Ehrmann, 3 April 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

⁶⁰ Special Projects Activities in First Service Command, 1945. Box No. 1628. National Archives.

copies of each book in the series initially distributed had to be raised to 10,000 to keep up with demand.⁶¹

Krammer confirms that book sales in the canteens were high and that many camps had to make many orders to keep up with demands.⁶² However, Robin notes that some of these sales may have been due to POWs wanting souvenirs to bring home, or ardent Nazis buying up the stock to keep it out of the hands of the other POWs.⁶³ Major Neuland demonstrates how popular these books were with POWs. He mentioned that during a visit to Camp Robinson, Arkansas, "books purchased by the prisoners in the canteen, were being carefully kept in their possession. . . . There is no doubt that most of the prisoners of war will be taking the literature we want them to upon their repatriation."⁶⁴

Reactions from the POWs

On March 20, 1946, a delegation from the Red Cross visited the Eastern Branch of the United States Disciplinary Barracks, where criminal POWs were held serving five-year terms for crimes done in camp. These hardened criminals only had three questions of dire importance to ask the Red Cross delegates. They were desperate to know about the status of mail, their personal funds, and getting more books.⁶⁵ Reading was not only a popular distraction from prison life; it also allowed POWs to keep abreast with their

⁶¹ Status Report, Review Branch, Prisoner of War Special Project Division, 22 June 1945. Box No. 1628. National Archives.

⁶² Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 207.

⁶³ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 105-6.

⁶⁴ Memorandum for the Director, Prisoner of War Special Projects Division from Major Paul A. Neuland, 7 September 1945. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

⁶⁵ United States Disciplinary Barracks, Eastern Branch, Greenhaven, New York, 20 March 1946. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

interests, world news, and their education goals. Many POWs had been students before they were drafted or volunteered for the military and fortunately were allowed to finish their studies at most of the camps. POWs were able to request literature through the camp spokesman. The spokesmen represented all of the men at the camp and often contacted groups like the War Prisoners Aid of the YMCA, the Red Cross and other national groups that offered aid to POWs. The requests were for musical instruments, games, theater gear, art materials, sports equipment, phonograph records, and above all else, books. The books requested varied dramatically, from Sophocles' Oedipus to medical books.⁶⁶

The reading habits of the POWs reflect a desire to escape their current condition. A survey of the 13,996 prisoners held in the First Service Command, which covered New England from Maine to Massachusetts, revealed that "light reading" accounted for 79 percent of the books checked out from the camp libraries. This percentage accounts for 18,368 of the 23,250 book loans. These New England camp libraries contained 2,559 books in all. About 10 percent of the reading was instructional books, 5 percent was inspirational books, 5 percent was political books, and 1 percent was history books.⁶⁷

POW reading habits may also have been influenced by their education levels. According to Major George Kryss, 90 percent of the POWs only had a grammar school education. Only 8 percent were high school graduates and a mere 2 percent could boast of

⁶⁶ Spokesman Johannes Certel to World Student Services Fund, 20 November 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives; and R. V. Bartsch-Salgast to War Prisoners Aid World Committee of the YMCA, 23 October 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

⁶⁷ Special Projects Activities in First Service Command, 1945. Box No. 1628. National Archives.

a technical school or university education.⁶⁸ Yet, despite education level, reading was a popular activity. Howard Hong of the YMCA observed, “Apparently the main activity outside work is reading. For twenty minutes I stood in the library-canteen watching the sanitary corpsman-librarian receiving and issuing books. At least forty men came during that time.”⁶⁹ Another camp reviewer observed that newspapers and periodicals were “seen on tables and beds throughout the barracks.”⁷⁰ At Fort Devens, Major Krys noted that the POWs read on average seven hours a week.⁷¹ Reinhold Pabel, a POW who daringly escaped from his camp and was not found until 1953, recalled in his memoirs his strong desire for reading materials while he was a POW. “I was always on the lookout for reading material of any kind. My sources of supply were pretty limited; I had to rely, on the whole, on whatever the guards disposed of, and I soon got tired of the girlie magazines. Once I tried to persuade a GI I had made friends with to subscribe to a book club for me.”⁷² Unfortunately, it seems that he was at a camp that did not have a library, or had not yet formed one before he escaped.

Many letters from camp spokesmen were sent to the YMCA and Red Cross requesting books for their campmates. These letters are invariably polite and extremely thankful. These men were thrilled to have received books and know exactly what else they and their fellow campmates wanted. Spokesman F. J. Schmidt wrote to the War

⁶⁸ Memorandum for Chief, Special Projects Branch from Major George Krys, 7 November 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

⁶⁹ Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp Eldora, Iowa, 5 December 1944. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

⁷⁰ Memorandum for Director, Prisoner of War Special Projects Division from Captain Alexander Lakes, 15 May 1945. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

⁷¹ Report on Camp Devens, Massachusetts, 8 December 1944. Box No. 1216. National Archives.

⁷² Pabel, *Enemies are Human*, 155.

Prisoners Aid that “first of all I want to thank you, also in the name of all men of our camp, for the many things you supplied us with. . . . I personally have to thank you too for those theological books by Kirkegaard, Brunner, and Niehbur, and I am sure that all P.W.s who are chaplains or theological students will find them of great value.”⁷³

Spokesman Johannes Oertel appeals to the World Student Services Fund’s sense of contribution and success by stating, “We are glad that you are willing to ameliorate the hard lot of the prisoner of war. . . . you especially render aid to those, who after termination from their studies, shall and will work for the benefit of all human kind.”⁷⁴

Another POW spills his heart with emotion. “In your eyes perhaps these things you are doing for us are details, but for us inside the barbed wire your work is of the greatest importance. Always in all our remaining life we will remember what you have done for us during this difficult time.”⁷⁵ It is apparent that reading was an important diversion for these POWs. They were not only thankful, but hopeful that they will receive more materials for their studies and enjoyment.

Many of the requests were for educational purposes. Spokesman Willi Jungel explained to the YMCA that “during wintertime we intend to intensify our lessons. . . . We are very short of instructive books.”⁷⁶ F. J. Schmidt, who reminds the YMCA that the men will pay for their books, requested lesson books for “mathematics, algebra and

⁷³ Uffz. F. J. Schmidt to War Prisoners Aid of the Young Men’s Christian Associations, 18 October 1944. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

⁷⁴ Johannes Certel to World Student Services Fund, 20 November 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

⁷⁵ Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp Clinton, Mississippi, 14 May 1945. Box No. 1611. National Archives.

⁷⁶ Spokesman Willi Jungel to War Prisoners Aid of the YMCA, 29 September 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

geometry for beginners in German, and a manual for playing chess, also in German. . . . I need some textbooks of economic geography, chemistry, and physics.”⁷⁷ He also needed forty German/English dictionaries, sixty copies of the Junior Classic German Dictionary by J. E. Wessely, twenty copies of Kleine Englische Sprachlehren by Dr. Emil Otto, and ten copies of Goode’s School Atlas, Physical, Political and Economic. Lastly, the men were in need of 100 ruled exercise books for shorthand. The desire for learning materials was strong among these men, and they were willing to use their hard-earned money to gain them.

The spokesman for Camp Opelika, Alabama, was desperate for materials. The camp was recently reoccupied after being temporarily shut down and lacked any sort of recreation or diversion. The spokesman addressed his request to the War Relief Services of the National Catholic Welfare Conference and asked for “books, especially instruction books such as mathematics, technical books, and general fiction.”⁷⁸ Spokesman Johannes Oertel from Camp Clinton, Mississippi, demonstrated the need for materials, “The books cited under 1) are urgently needed. This camp has one copy of each only.”⁷⁹ He wanted the Red Cross to know how important books were to a POW’s life. “The desires for books among the comrades are great particularly for trade-manuals, and we are very glad to be allowed to submit our requests.”⁸⁰ The camp spokesman for Camp Swift, Texas,

⁷⁷ Uffz. F. J. Schmidt to War Prisoners Aid of the Young Men’s Christian Associations, 18 October 1944. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

⁷⁸ Camp Spokesman, Camp Opelika, Alabama to War Relief Services, 15 November 1944. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

⁷⁹ Spokesman Johannes Oertel to the German Red Cross, 23 September 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

wrote the YMCA in thanks for not only the books recently received, but for eight bookbinding sets as well.⁸¹

In one camp, a POW created a small booklet to teach English. Each page described a camp activity, with an accompanying poem in English and German. Each activity has a sketch illustration. The booklet shows that the library and education were a part of daily life. The poem about the library goes:

A well assorted library
is taken care of.

You will be honestly
surprised about the large
number of books.

Learn by continuous
reading.

We hear interesting
lessons on civics,
history, and geography.

At what time are the
lessons?

Mostly all go to the
evening lessons.

I have to be excused if
I miss a lecture.

Go and tell the others
that it is time to go.

Time is money.⁸²

⁸¹ Camp Spokesman, Camp Swift, Texas to Young Men's Christian Associations War Prisoners Aid, 31 October 1945. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

⁸² Better Understanding Guide to a Working Knowledge of POW's Everyday English, n.d. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

This little ditty confirms that the library was a daily part of the POW's lives and that they tied it closely to education.

When the war ended, there was concern over how many personal belongings the repatriated POWs could bring home with them. In August of 1945, Major Stephen M. Farrand, Deputy Director of the POW Operations Division, was under the assumption that soldiers could only bring four pounds worth of possessions home with them.⁸³ This was of grave concern for the POWs. Farrand asked his colleagues, "How about books which certain POWs who are students or professionals may have acquired during their internment, as, for example, legal, medical, or other scientific books which are usually large and heavy?"⁸⁴ For out of the several sources of property that a POW could legally acquire, one was books.⁸⁵ Thus, Captain Robert L. Kunzig, a staff member of the SPD, made the request that extra bags and suitcases be allowed so that POWs could bring home extra "books, papers, and manuscripts." The Provost Marshal General asked for unlimited packages to be mailed to family members so that they could hold onto these books and manuscripts for the POWs until the war was over.⁸⁶ It would be unlikely that the Provost Marshal General and various officers in the program would bother to ask for these exceptions if the POWs were not anxious to bring their books back home.

The end of the war also confirmed to the POWs that books were more important than ever. Books were one of the few constants in their uncertain lives and distracted

⁸³ Memorandum for the Record from Major Stephen M. Farrand, 14 August 1945. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Exceptions to War Department Memorandum Number 580-45 from Captain Robert L. Kunzig, 26 June 1945. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

them from the reality they would face after repatriation. Tracy Strong of the Red Cross wrote to Provost Marshal General Lerch in August 1945, "Recent reports indicate an even greater appreciation of our work by both the prisoners and many of the commandants at a time when the prisoners are confronted with the deadly affects of the loss of freedom, disillusionment, and defeat."⁸⁷ Olle Axberg of the YMCA explained in a library report that "they have been anxious to bring good books with them to Germany, where books are scarce, they understand."⁸⁸ Books were among the few contributions these defeated POWs could bring with them when they went home to their broken country and their broken families.

Conclusion

While books were not a vital need for the POWs held in America, a combination of the Geneva Convention and caring individuals provided these men with an abundance of reading materials to give them company during their trying time in prison. Humanitarian societies, most notably the Red Cross and YMCA, and Americans across the land made sure that these men had the intellectual stimulation that any confined person needs. While the Red Cross and YMCA provided books for purely humanitarian reasons, Americans donated books to provide the POWs with re-education, entertainment, consolation and religious inspiration. The POWs were also free to purchase books they desired from the camp canteens.

⁸⁷ Tracy Strong to Provost Marshal General Archer L. Lerch, 1 August 1945. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

⁸⁸ Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp Fort Devens, Massachusetts, 2 April 1946. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

The POWs were thankful for the books provided to them. Many were eager to let the YMCA and Red Cross know how thankful they were. Their reading rates were high and they looked forward to bringing their new books home to Germany. The camp libraries appeared to be a success among the POWs and gave them a glimmer of normalcy that they so desperately needed.

Chapter 5

De-Nazified: Censorship and Re-education

Introduction

A stunning visual example of the use of books to reform a Nazi can be found in a creative art project created by POW Karl Schmidt. Through the use of eight posters, he tells the story of how films, education, religion, books, periodicals, and recreation provided by Americans reformed Karl from an ideological Nazi to a new man.¹ These entertaining illustrations begin with Karl's life story. The narrative explains, "Karl Schmidt was 7 years old when Hitler came to power. Poor Karl . . . Poor Karl . . . Poor Karl . . . After 10 years Karl was just like the others." Here an illustration shows Karl being crushed by a giant swastika. "WAR—Karl was a good soldier, he bombed occupied countries, he tortured prisoners of war, he raped and murdered women . . . But—Normandy 6 June 1944. Karl was on a boat, arrived in the United States, was placed in a PW Camp, like thousands of others." The next poster shows Karl being pulled in two directions by two men, with the words "Karl's ideological conflict" underneath. The following two posters are entitled "Karl and the work program" and "Karl in the camp." The last poster is the most compelling. On the top is a map of the United States made out of a montage of patriotic photographs. On the bottom is Karl standing in a triumphant pose. In between are the words films, education, religion, books, periodicals and recreation, with lines connecting these words from Karl to the

¹ Photographs, n.d. Box No. 1604. National Archives.

United States. Below this poster, on the table on which it is propped, is a pile of books for sale.

The first half of this chapter covers the censorship of the camp library books under the Office of Censorship and the SPD. The Office of Censorship was created by President Franklin Roosevelt to censor materials shipped to America from overseas. The office also monitored other information media, such as newspapers and radio broadcasts. The PMGO created the SPD to re-educate the POWs. They had strict guidelines on what they did or did not want the POWs to read. Education consultant Henry Ehrmann worked hard to create lists of approved and unapproved books for the camp libraries based on book reviews and studying already existing camp library book lists.

The second half of this chapter covers the re-education of the POWs. After the PMGO established camp libraries for the POWs in accordance with the Geneva Convention, the PMGO and SPD realized that this was perfect opportunity to try to re-educate and de-Nazify the POWs, even if this was against the spirit of the Geneva Convention. This re-education effort was kept top secret from not only the public, but from the YMCA, Red Cross, and of course Germany.

Office of Censorship

The Office of Censorship was created a few days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and ceased operations shortly after Japan surrendered.² This office, headed by Associated Press editor Byron Price, encouraged the voluntary censorship of American radio, newspapers, magazines and the mandatory censorship of information that crossed

² Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 6.

American borders. Franklin D. Roosevelt's executive order number 8985 issued on December 19, 1941, gave Price the power to create censorship rules and censor international communications "in his absolute discretion."³ The Office of Censorship was divided into six divisions, one of which was postal censorship.⁴ The Office of Censorship District Postal Censor, headquartered in New York City, was also responsible for censoring American publications that were bound for POW camps, mainly newspapers and magazines. The goal of this department was to keep out "subversive propaganda."⁵

The only foreign books sent into America that did not have to be censored by the Office of Censorship were books published before 1930 or shipped into the country before December 7, 1941.⁶ After November 1944, domestic camp library books only needed to be censored by local camp commanders. However, the camp commanders could forward books to the District Postal Office if they needed help with censorship, such as with books in foreign languages.⁷ The reason commanders were allowed to make some of their own censorship choices was because, "a newspaper or magazine which may be harmless or even beneficial for prisoners at one installation sometimes has an entirely

³ Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 36.

⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁵ Memorandum for Colonel Davison from 1st Lt. Siegmund Betz and 1st Lt. Richard N. Meyer, 1 January 1945. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

⁶ Major Edward Davison to E. T. Colton, 27 July 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

⁷ Colonel Alexander Adair to the Provost Marshal General, 30 December 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

opposite effect on prisoners of war at another installation.”⁸ Local camp commanders were the ones who knew their POWs best.

Special Projects Division

The PMGO created the Special Projects Division to de-Nazify and indoctrinate POWs with democratic ideals. The SPD started operations on October 31, 1944, at Van Etten, New York, and a few months later moved to Fort Philip Kearney, Rhode Island.⁹ Major Edward Davison, head of the SPD, was born on July 28, 1898, in Scotland, became a naturalized American citizen, and died on February 8, 1970. He became a poet and professor, teaching at Vassar, the University of Miami, and the University of Colorado, Boulder. After joining the Army in 1943, he became an officer in the Morale Division of the Army Service Corps.¹⁰ From there he was put in charge of the SPD and would have a large hand in the procurement and censorship of books. His name graces dozens of documents recommending and disapproving camp library books coming from the YMCA, Red Cross and private donors. After the war he received the Legion of Merit for his work in the SPD and became the Dean of Hunter College’s School of General Studies.¹¹

Davison, who was assisted by Major Maxwell McKnight, was put in charge of POW newspaper *Der Ruf*. Davison was also responsible for the Film Section,

⁸ Brigadier General B. M. Bryan to Mr. William L. Shirer, 17 September 1945. Box No. 1597. National Archives.

⁹ Gansberg, *Stalag: U.S.A.*, 67.

¹⁰ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 43-45.

¹¹ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 303.

Translation Section, Administration Section and the Review Section.¹² Along with all of these onerous tasks, he was in charge of filling the ranks of the SPD. With his assistant McKnight, a diverse group of civilians and military men were gathered to form “the Factory.”¹³ “The Factory” included: Major Maxwell S. McKnight, Deputy Director; Captain Robert L. Kunzig, Executive; Captain Michael Ginsburg, Chief of the Education Branch; First Lieutenant Walter Schoenstedt, Chief of the Programs Branch; and Major Paul A. Neuland, Chief of the Field Service Branch.¹⁴ Two important civilians who worked with the Education Branch were Harvard Dean Howard Mumford Jones and Henry Ehrmann. Along with this American group, eighty-five highly trusted anti-Nazi POWs were brought into Fort Kearney to help run the education program.¹⁵ Below this group of men that made up Davison’s cadre were the officers in charge of re-education at the camp level, the AEOs. There were about 150 AEOs altogether.¹⁶

The censorship of American books bound for POW camps was a huge undertaking for the SPD’s review branch. With thousands upon thousands of books being sent, it was hard for the SPD to get their hands on copies of the books they were supposed to censor. Some of the censors, such as Captain T. L. Sullivan, only received lists of book titles, making it nearly impossible to properly censor the material. Sullivan complained, “I am no authority on Nazi literature. I mean by that that it is perfectly possible that judging from title alone—all I have to go by,—I might allow some to pass

¹² Springer, “American Prisoners of War Policy and Practice from the Revolutionary War to the War on Terror,” 189-90.

¹³ Ibid., 188.

¹⁴ Office Memorandum No. 1, 21 December 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

¹⁵ Gansberg, *Stalag: U.S.A.*, 67.

¹⁶ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 198.

that may for all I know be worse than 'Mein Kampf', and possibly, also, condemn some that may have been utterly harmless."¹⁷

The alternative was to visit warehouses full of the books bound for the camps. While on the surface this seemed like an odious and expensive task, it was the most useful for mass censorship. On December 29, 1944, 1st Lt. Siegmund Betz and his secretary Mrs. Acton visited the Stoffel Seals Company in Scarsdale, New York, to physically examine hundreds of books. Captain Michael Ginsburg, approving of the visit, reminded his superiors why this was an efficient process. "It is estimated that the accomplishment of the equivalent amount of work through checking in libraries would have required approximately four days. The accomplishment of an equivalent amount of work would have entailed the writing of several pieces of correspondence with a normal drain upon the supply of time and stenographic help."¹⁸ Censorship continued to proceed using both methods, of reviewing lists of titles and reviewing the actual books. It is not inconceivable to think that this caused inconsistencies in censorship.

Specific examples of censorship give a clearer picture of the inner workings of the SPD, what was censored and how the censorship process worked. A book would be censored for many various reasons, based on the author, subject matter, or political leanings of the publisher. A book that topped all unapproved book lists was Hitler's Mein Kampf. Yet controversy was raised when Dr. Lohmann of *Time Magazine* insisted that he saw copies of Mein Kampf all over the camps. Lt. Colonel Davison was certain

¹⁷ Captain T. L. Sullivan to Major Hemans, 1 November 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

¹⁸ Memorandum for Director, POW Special Project Division from Captain Michael Ginsburg and 1st Lt. Siegmund Betz, 30 December 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

that there were no copies of Mein Kampf in the camp libraries and if there were any copies in the camps they were hidden.¹⁹ There is no certainty if this book was at any of the camps.

No matter how innocuous a book may have seemed, if it was of a subject matter banned for POWs, it was not passed along to them. For example, books about radios were banned across the board when POWs at Camp Alva, Oklahoma, tried to change radios into short wave receivers.²⁰ The YMCA was notified to stop sending radio books and these books were returned.²¹ Books on chemistry were also banned. However, this ban came directly from the Office of Censorship and not the SPD.²² Certain contents of a book and not just its overall subject could condemn a book as well. One sentence out of the textbook Soldat und Beruf put it on the list of objectionable Nazi propaganda. "We are still in the midst of the war. The German people's power is gathered and united in order to defeat the foe and to fight for our victory and in order to form a new Europe and a new world."²³ On a much lighter note, an issue of an otherwise perfectly acceptable evangelical church newspaper had to be censored because it mentioned the death notice of an American soldier. While this seems harmless, it was still considered to be military information, which could not be shared with the POWs.²⁴

¹⁹ Memorandum for Major Gemill from Lt. Colonel Edward Davison, 23 March 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

²⁰ Lt. Colonel Horatio R. Rogers to International Red Cross Committee, 4 March 1944. Box No. 1614. National Archives.

²¹ Lt. Colonel Edward Davison to Mr. Alfred L. Cardinaux, 19 December 1944. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

²² Lt. Col. A. M. Tollefson to Office of Censorship, 25 October 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

²³ E. H. Starkel to Prisoners of War Department, 1 May 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

²⁴ Major T. L. Sullivan to Colonel Tollefson, 24 February 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

German textbooks that contained some Nazi propaganda were acceptable for POWs as long as the offending passages were cut out. These passages mention a superior race, Hitler's success with turning around the German economy, and the enemies' inability to block the progress of Germany.²⁵ It is not explained how cutting out pages in these textbooks would not raise the POWs suspicions that their reading material was censored.

Three newspapers censored for the political leanings of the publisher were the *Baltimore Correspondent*, the *German American* and the *Deutsche Wochenschrift*. Captain Ginsburg wrote a memorandum about Bernard G. Peter, publisher of the *Baltimore Correspondent*. Apparently Bernard Peter was the son of Val Peter, a man who had been investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for running extremely pro-German newspapers.²⁶ While the *Correspondent* seemed innocuous, Peter's past condemned it. For similar reasons the *Deutsche Wochenschrift* was denounced. This paper's co-owner, editor, and publisher, Eugene Geissler, had diverted funds to Germany's veterans' association and published very pro-German articles before America's entry into war.²⁷ The *German American* was too communist for the SPD's taste. The newspaper "eulogizes" the Soviet government and army, refers to "Russia and her Allies" and never "America and her Allies."²⁸ Communist ideals were not something that the SPD wanted the POWs to absorb.

²⁵ Textbooks from German Red Cross, 17 April 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

²⁶ Colonel I. B. Summers to Miss Hute, 26 November 1943. Box No. 569. National Archives.

²⁷ Memorandum Re: *Deutsche Wochenschrift*, 18 July 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

²⁸ William L. Shirer to Brigadier General B. M. Bryan, 4 September 1945. Box No. 1597. National Archives.

Censorship in the Camps

Gansberg gives an excellent overview of the censorship process that the AEOs undertook in the individual camps.

One of the . . . things the AEOs could do immediately was make a survey of the libraries, and gradually, so that it would appear to be regular rotation and avoid arousing suspicion, replace many of the books. They discarded “injurious” material, filled gaps, and estimated the popularity of given texts. Books by such authors as Alfred Rodenberg, Dr. Joseph Goebbels, Erich von Ludendorff, and dozens of other pro-Nazi or chauvinistic German writers began disappearing from the shelves. The AEOs saw to it that the “proper” books were added in exchange. German classics, pre-Nazi fiction, books proscribed by the Nazis, and translations of English-language works found their way on the shelves. Maxwell McKnight describes what slowly began to happen after that: “We got all the books banned in Germany and distributed them in the camps. And in the camps where they weren’t burned by the Nazis, they were a real breakthrough, because all the years of the Nazis and their thought control was over. It was like opening a floodgate to nurse a Sahara.”²⁹

The SPD did not want the POWs and the general public to know about the censorship of books, or the existence of approved and unapproved book lists.³⁰ This secrecy protected the goals of the re-education program and prevented the POWs from realizing that their reading was orchestrated. In a speech delivered to camp commanders of the Eighth Service Command, Major Samuel Pace outlined how secrecy was to be maintained.

The assistant executive officer must avoid being secretive and mysterious. . . . When friends ask him what kind of work he is doing, the stock answer is that his job is primarily education and recreation of prisoners of war for two reasons: first, to get reciprocal treatment for Americans imprisoned in Germany; second, to get more contentment, order and security, and more work, out of the Germans. . . . Any attempt to hedge or evade the question will jeopardize the secret phases of

²⁹ Gansberg, *Stalag: U.S.A.*, 90-91.

³⁰ Lt. General Styer to Commanding Generals, First through Ninth Service Commands, n.d. Box No. 1652. National Archives.

the program . . . [if he] tries to be coy about it he can not fail to arouse suspicion.³¹

He explained that the entire program needed to be kept secret. This included the use of the term "Intellectual Diversion" and the segregation of Nazis and anti-Nazis in the re-education program.³² When an outsider did learn that there was some sort of list coming out of the SPD, its purpose could still be kept secret. Captain Ginsburg reminded his superior, "It is apparent that this basic list will shortly be known to the book trade generally as having official approval, although the classified *intent* with which the list was published is not necessarily being compromised."³³ Thus it was hoped nothing could be gleaned by someone coming across the basic book lists.

In order to keep censorship secret from the POWs, removal of unapproved books from the camp libraries had to be handled with the utmost care. Memorandum after memorandum reminded the camp commanders that "these books will not be withdrawn from the libraries by means that might cause prisoners of war to suspect a design to control their reading material. It is suggested that the withdrawal of the undesirable books be given the appearance of a routine library rotation."³⁴ For added emphasis these memorandums note, "This list will not be disclosed to prisoners. The fact that the books listed have been disapproved will not be publicized."³⁵ This low-key effort not only kept

³¹ An Address Delivered by Major Samuel Pace, Prisoner of War Branch Security and Intelligence Division, Eighth Service Command, 31 January 1945. Box No. 1635. National Archives.

³² Ibid.

³³ Memorandum for Director, POW Special Projects Division from Captain Ginsburg and 1st Lt. Siegmund Betz, 30 December 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

³⁴ Major General J. A. Ulio to the Commanding Generals, 17 February 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

³⁵ Major General J. A. Ulio to the Commanding Generals, First through Ninth Service Commands, 17 February 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives; Edward F. Witsell to Commanding Officers, Prisoner

the lists and censorship secret, but avoided problems that had already occurred on a few occasions. Lt. Colonel Davison reminded Major Gemmill that “In one or two cases [removal of books] has been too violently attempted and some trouble has resulted.”³⁶ Worried that panic over unapproved books in camp libraries might have AEOs getting carried away, W. S. wrote to Lt. Colonel Davison and Major McKnight, “Unless we keep our shirts on about undesirable books in prisoner of war libraries, we will all be nervous wrecks in a very short time. . . . We hate to think in terms of raids into prisoner of war libraries. We must, therefore, avoid creating suspicion on the part of the prisoners, and we should not apply any high pressure methods.”³⁷

Re-education

The re-education program for POWs did not start until the war was nearly over. Initially, the President of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt, did not believe that the POWs could be won over. He had spent a part of his childhood in Germany and believed that the German people were far too militarily indoctrinated.³⁸ Secondly, re-education went against the Geneva Convention. Powerful military figures, including the first Provost Marshal General Allen W. Gullion, opposed the idea of re-education for this reason.³⁹ Other concerns included retributions from Germany, dissent from the POWs,

of War Camps, 26 November 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives; and Lt. General Styer to Commanding Generals, First through Ninth Service Commands, n.d. Box No. 1652. National Archives.

³⁶ Memorandum for Major Gemmill from Lt. Colonel Edward Davison, 23 March 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

³⁷ Memorandum for Lt. Colonel Davison and Major McKnight, 25 November 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

³⁸ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 19.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

taking the POWs away from their labor just to put them in a classroom, the cost, and that the effort might not work.

As the war progressed feelings against re-education began to soften and were re-proposed by the Departments of State and War. There seemed to be few alternatives in de-Nazifying Germany and that could not be started until the war was over. Re-educating the POWs gave the government a head start. News that the Russians were successfully re-educating German POWs into model communists also gave the U.S. government pause.⁴⁰ The new Provost Marshal General, Archer Lerch, supported the idea whole heartedly.⁴¹ Thus a program of re-education through “logical persuasion” instead of “rehabilitation-through-annihilation” originally proposed by the president was commenced with the creation of the SPD.

The program itself would remain a secret. The public would not learn about it until General Blackshear Bryan made a public announcement on May 28, 1945.⁴² Even though the program would become public knowledge, it still was shrouded in secrecy and disappeared quickly from the public conscience. In 1977, over thirty years after the program ended, Judith Gansberg wrote, “I had no idea that upon investigation I would discover a top-secret program unknown to the American public to this day.”⁴³ The reasons for all of this mystery and controversy were quite simple; re-educating POWs was, plain and simple, against the laws of war spelled out by the Geneva Convention of 1929 and the SPD was anxious to tip-toe around this fact.

⁴⁰ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 28.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 212.

⁴³ Gansberg, *Stalag: U.S.A.*, ii.

Article 17 became the basis for the justification of the re-education program.⁴⁴ “Belligerents shall encourage as much as possible the organization of intellectual and sporting pursuits by the prisoners of war.”⁴⁵ Accordingly, the PMGO defined its re-education program in this way: “The prisoners would be given facts . . . to correct misinformation and the prejudices surviving Nazi condition. The facts, rather than being forced upon them, would be made available through such media as literature, motion pictures, newspapers, music, art, and educational courses.”⁴⁶ Thus, Article 17 was used illogically to justify and lambast re-education.

The SPD realized that the very nature of books made them much more than mere recreational tools, as compared to the music and theater equipment provided for the POWs. Major Davison said,

Books must be selected with greater care than films. While the impression a film might make wears off after a certain period of time, the impression of a book does not. The book actually remains in the possession of the prisoners. It can be re-read and made the basis for subversive Nazi activities. Passages of the book might be shown around or pointed out to others, or might even appear as reprints in prisoner of war camp newspapers. It is also possible that such passages be made the basis for subversive speeches by Nazi leaders.⁴⁷

Thus, flurries of memos and opinions were exchanged among members of the SPD and PMGO as to what books needed to be read by the POWs and which needed to be kept far away.

The SPD also had outside pressure placed on them to ensure that the correct books got into the hands of the POWs. Colonel Robert Cutler noted after a meeting with

⁴⁴ Billinger, *Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State*, 141.

⁴⁵ Geneva Convention, Article 17.

⁴⁶ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 197.

⁴⁷ Office Memo #15, 20 October 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

some senators, "It is apparent from the questions asked by Senator Revercomb . . . that considerable attention will be focused by the Congress on the type of books which German POWs are permitted to read, that the Army should use particular care in this regard. . . . No aspect of the handling of German POWs is more sensitive than this with the Congress."⁴⁸ The senators were concerned that communist books might get into the hands of the POWs and were also concerned about public opinion.

A general education program was set up towards the end of 1944. A Prisoner of War Circular from the War Department explained what was expected of this program in all the camps. "Prisoners will be aided in developing among themselves classes, lectures, studies, and discussion groups. . . . Prisoners may select from their number a director of studies to organize and promote their educational and recreational activities. . . . Prisoners may select from their number qualified teachers and instructors subject to the approval of the camp commanders."⁴⁹ The education programs were successful in the fact that most of the POWs were interested in taking classes and were pleased that the Reich Ministry of Education in Germany allowed POWs to complete their high school degrees and gain university credit in the POW camps. About 103 universities set up correspondence classes for more advanced POWs.⁵⁰ Classes were held in English, mathematics, the sciences, history, the humanities, and music. Classes ranged from elementary school level to university level. The plethora of classes made available through universities,

⁴⁸ Memo for the Record from Colonel Robert Cutler, 9 May 1945. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

⁴⁹ Prisoner of War Circular No. 46, 13 October 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

⁵⁰ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 63.

guest teachers, and classes taught by POWs themselves meant that every POW could find a class to take that interested them.

POWs were enthusiastic about classes for the most part. A memorandum mentioned that the POWs “seem to be imbued with the desire to learn and to use their time as prudently as possible.”⁵¹ The classes were yet another distraction from prison life and gave the POWs a sense of usefulness and hope that they could use their new knowledge to gain jobs in their postwar lives. As noted in chapter 3, most POWs were extremely grateful for the books that they received for the classroom and self-education. Many of them were extremely motivated to use their prison time to learn as much as possible.

Official re-education programs were also set up outside of the regular education courses. When World War II drew to a close in 1945, the SPD realized that this was the last chance to re-educate POWs before they were repatriated. A last ditch effort, The Eustis Project, was thrown together in the last months of 1945 and commenced on January 4, 1946, at Camp Eustis in Virginia. In all, 23,142 POWs were transferred to take one of twelve six-day “democracy seminars.”⁵² Most of the POWs were chosen because they were cooperative, or were “economically marginal, undereducated, or socially detached.”⁵³

The program had two goals: training the POWs to support American occupation forces in a post-war Germany and instilling and glorifying principles of democracy and a

⁵¹ Memorandum: Report on Intellectual Diversion Program, Prisoner of War Camp, Concordia, Kansas, 27 December 1944. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

⁵² Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 149-50.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 150.

love for America. The program consisted of college-like classes that involved writing papers and examinations. The classes took an extremely academic approach, promoting the historical aspects of democracy, American civilization and institutions.⁵⁴

The main connection between re-education and the libraries is that the SPD saw books as the best way to achieve re-education. Thus the selection of books for the library was tainted by the re-education program. The men involved in selection, such as Ehrmann, Mumford Jones and Edwards, worked in the re-education program as well. In fact, their academic backgrounds led them to believe that books were the way to re-educate.⁵⁵ This belief was held by most involved in providing books for the POWs, such as some of the book donors mentioned in chapter 4. E. T. Colton of the YMCA mentioned in a statement, "Increasingly, if slowly, German prisoners on their own initiative are asking for literature to implement reading and courses that present aspects of our American life, system and institutions. Hundreds of them are asking for working relations with our Universities that will facilitate such constructive and legitimate studies."⁵⁶ When the re-education program became public knowledge after VE Day, an article by Peter Edson published in the *NEA Staff Correspondent* explained that re-education was achieved mainly through reading. "To re-orient Nazi thinking of German prisoners of war brought to the United States, books, newspapers, magazines, camp papers, schools, lecture courses, correspondence courses, pamphlets, guidebooks, radio,

⁵⁴ Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 127-30.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁶ Not for Publication: Concerning Educational Activities in U.S. POW Camps, n.d. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

phonograph records and movies are employed.”⁵⁷ The SPD greatly believed in the power of books to mold the minds of the POWs.

Conclusion

While the Geneva Convention forbade re-education, the PMGO and SPD saw a golden opportunity to indoctrinate the POWs in the ideals of democracy and American values. Through the use of censorship and re-education programs the German POWs were constrained on what they could read. Books sent to POWs went through two levels of censorship, first at the Office of Censorship in New York, then through the camp commanders at the individual camps. Secondly, the POWs were allowed to take classes or were entered into the Eustis Program, where the reading materials were meticulously picked out. These materials presented the POWs with a view of an idealized America and democracy. It cannot be determined if these programs and censorship were successful in their intent, but it did limit what the POWs could read.

⁵⁷ German Prisoners of War De-Nazified by Army's Unique Re-orientation Plan, n.d. Box No. 1597. National Archives.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: There Were Prisoners Here?

The German POWs who spent their war years on American soil are fading into a forgotten past. Many have either died or live obscure lives in Germany. The camps they lived at are either gone or have long been put to other uses. The guards who knew them are also dead or retired. As Krammer notes, "As time passes, they are getting older and more frail. . . . Still, they come in small groups with their families and grandchildren to poke around the old overgrown campsite and embrace their equally frail former guards. Someday soon they will stop coming. Nothing will remain but the yellowing records and the history of their recollections."¹ Yet, the memory of these men does not have to fade into obscurity. Academic research on these men has increased and an awareness of POWs has increased in the American imagination because of the publicity of places like Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay. The exemplary treatment of the German POWs during World War II, especially the existence of camp libraries, presents a model for the current American government.

The POWs experienced mental and sometimes physical hardship in their transfer from battlefield to America. Being captured and held in uncertain circumstances were psychological blows to the POWs. To make matters worse, the trip to America was long, and most of the POWs had never been there before. First the POWs were processed at the point of capture and then put into a temporary camp until a ship was ready to take them across the ocean. The boat trip was the first point where the POWs began to feel

¹ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, xiv.

the effect of the Geneva Convention, for they found themselves confronted with delicious food, a bunk to sleep on and the company of their comrades. Things were even better once they landed on America's shore and boarded a train for their final destination. Once they reached the camps they were processed for a final time and then introduced to their new life as a prisoner. Provided with new clothes, a bunk and a locker, the POWs were given jobs and introduced to the camp routine. This usually meant regular working hours at a farm, then leisure hours for taking classes, doing crafts, reading or playing sports. Sundays were off and there were religious services for those who wanted to attend. A camp canteen allowed the POWs to buy books, magazines, snacks, and hygiene products.

The camp system that housed the half million POWs was created almost from scratch. The PMGO was in charge of these men and quickly built a sufficient and efficient system of almost 500 camps. Camps were created from military bases, CCC camps, and even race tracks. The POWs lived in barracks and compounds with access to a mess hall, camp canteen, sports field, classrooms, and a library. The camp administration allowed the POWs to retain and function within their former military ranks, which helped keep stability and maintain discipline in the camps.

Over the course of the war three men served as Provost Marshal General: Allen Gullion, Archer Lerch, and Blackshear Bryan. Gullion adhered strictly to the Geneva Convention. He was strongly opposed to re-education, censorship, and military occupation in a postwar world. His greatest contribution to the POW program was working with the YMCA to establish camp libraries. Lerch, on the other hand, embraced re-education and hoped to use it to boost his career. He helped to create the SPD which

established re-education and strong censorship. Bryan, who assisted Lerch, involved himself closely with the camp libraries and re-education program. His tenure as provost marshal general was the shortest, and he was the one who had to break the news of re-education to the public.

The comforts that the POWs enjoyed were the product of nearly a hundred years of humanitarian efforts. From Jean Henri Dunant to Theodore Roosevelt, men and women worked hard to create humanitarian institutions and write international humanitarian laws. The POWs owed their comfort to the Lieber Code, the Geneva Convention, the Hague Conferences, the YMCA, the Red Cross, and charitable Americans.

The Lieber Code was created during the American Civil War by a German professor. This code guided how POWs captured by the Northern Army were treated and some of its language and ideas can be found in the Geneva Convention directly affecting the German POWs. In the early 1860s Jean Henri Dunant of Geneva created the Red Cross and promoted the first Geneva Convention after witnessing first hand the horrors of war. After seeing how wounded soldiers were left to die on the battlefield, he determined that a neutral body was needed to tend to these wounded men and promote humanitarian aid around the world. These ideas of humanitarianism filtered down to The Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907, which established international laws to mitigate the horrors of war and promote humanitarian treatment of soldiers. The Geneva Convention of 1929 created the first succinct international law that covered the treatment of POWs

and was in effect during World War II. Article 17 of this convention proclaimed that POWs deserved intellectual stimulation, which led to camp libraries.

The German POWs enjoyed the treatment they received due to the Geneva Convention. Their daily lives were comfortable, they earned money from their labor, and there were plenty of intellectual distractions. This did not make up for the fact that they were prisoners, but it did ease the burden. Many POWs missed America when the war was over and many had fond memories of their time spent in the United States.

Each camp had a library. According to reviews of the camps, these libraries usually consisted of a few thousand books and a reading room. Some camps had exemplary libraries that rivaled public libraries, while some only contained a few books with no reading rooms. Circulating libraries increased the number of books POWs had access to by bringing new books to the camp library every month. The books were mostly in German, but were also in English and a smattering of other languages. POWs served as librarians and some had been librarians in civilian life.

The selection of books for the libraries was complex. Education consultant Henry Ehrmann and his assistants scoured lists of books to pick out the right ones for POWs, created approved and unapproved lists, and wrote extensive reviews on many different books. Based on these reviews Ehrmann eventually created the “basic library list” which consisted of 300 books. The approved book list contained both fiction and non-fiction that covered a wide array of topics, but never controversial topics. These controversial topics included the Versailles Treaty, the Nazi movement, the “stab in the back” theory, the “blood and soil” theory, American materialism, and erotica. German history books

were also carefully reviewed. These books painted America in a good light and did not contain any material on controversial historical topics. However, this process was imperfect and some reviewers were not in agreement on what the POWs should read.

Overall the list covered a broad range of materials and seemed to be satisfactory to the POWs for the most part. The impact of these lists was that the POW's reading was regulated and skewed in a pro-American light. However, the POWs were pleased with having access to books at all and were eager to use educational books for their own self-education and advancement.

The Red Cross and YMCA eagerly provided books for the camp libraries. The humanitarian mission of these two organizations presented unbiased help to POWs from both sides of the war and supplied over a million books. POWs also had the luxury of buying books, newspapers, and magazines from the camp canteens. Many American citizens donated books to the POWs for many reasons. Some wanted to help re-educate them, some felt it was their Christian duty, while others had relatives who were POWs. Lastly, some German-American's just wanted to help their fellow Germans during the war and had no other way to do so but to provide books.

The POWs themselves were grateful for the opportunity to read. Many letters were written from the camp spokesmen to the YMCA and Red Cross thanking them for books and asking for more. Many of the POWs were eager to use books for self-education and to keep up on their civilian professions. The reading rates were high and the libraries were well used. Many POWs were also hopeful that they could bring books

home. Some saw them simply as souvenirs of their time in America, while others realized it was the only contribution they might be able to make to a war-torn Germany.

While the POWs had access to a great number of books and could even buy their own books, these books were censored. The Office of Censorship in New York was responsible for censoring all materials that were shipped in from overseas, such as books coming from the German Red Cross. Books that were not censored by the Office of Censorship were censored by the SPD and local camp commanders. Ehrmann had created an extensive list of unapproved books.

The unapproved book lists included works by Nazis, works dedicated to Nazis, communist literature, and anything that put America and its allies in a negative light. The unapproved books demonstrate what was most important to America at the time: promoting democracy. The ultimate goal was to turn out democracy loving Germans who would embrace and promote democracy across Germany after the war.

The censorship of books also played into the covert re-education program started by the SPD. This program went against the Geneva Convention, so it was kept top secret. The SPD censored books so that the POWs were never exposed to anything that went against democracy or praised the Nazi system. Education classes were set up and POWs were exposed to SPD ideals. The Eustis Project, an intense re-education program, was set up at the end of the war and directed toward the most malleable POWs. Thus the POWs did not have true intellectual freedom. However the re-education program was not so heavy-handed that it became obvious or the POWs were brainwashed. The educators in the program hoped that the POWs natural curiosity would lead them to the proper way

of thinking. Thus the POWs could enjoy their library books and not feel coerced into repudiating all things German.

The libraries provided for the German POWs in America during World War II was an astounding concept. Even though America was in the throes of a global war on two fronts, money, effort and time were still put into providing a pleasing reading atmosphere for Nazis. These POWs, who probably feared retribution, were presented with an opportunity to make the most of a forced imprisonment and expand their knowledge and feed their intellectual hunger. The POWs grew to appreciate the workings of the Red Cross and YMCA and went home to Germany thankful for what the United States did for them. While returning to a war-torn Germany and war-torn families was a great burden for the POWs, at least they could pull out a book they bought at a camp canteen and escape into the words of a thrilling novel or intriguing academic treatise.

The history of the camp libraries during World War II has relevancy to current events. The United States currently holds POWs from the Middle East and these POWs fall under the revised Geneva Convention of 1949. The PMGO, which was disbanded in 1974, was reestablished in 2003 in response to the War on Terror and conflicts in Iraq.² The Red Cross and YMCA are still active in humanitarian aid and the Red Cross continues to work closely with POWs around the world.³ However, there are questions about how POWs held by the U.S. are treated today, with accusations of torture and

² Craig, "Evolution of the Office of the Provost Marshal General," BNET Business Network, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0IBW/is_1_4/ai_n6124024/pg_2?tag=artBody;coll.

³ International Committee of the Red Cross, "Strengthening protection and respect for prisoners and detainees," <http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/detention?OpenDocument#<!--%20b1%20-->Visiting%20people%20deprived%20of%20their%20freedom>.

breaking the Geneva Convention. This thesis presents how POWs can be treated humanly, especially with the provision of intellectual diversion. The psychological need for books for entertainment and self-education have been demonstrated by the German POWs of World War II and hopefully the treatment that these men received can be a legacy for the future.

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