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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Gregory J. Kupsy entitled "Making the Most of a Bad Situation: Coddling, Fraternization, and Total War in Camp Crossville, Tennessee." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

G. Kurt Piehler, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

George White, Vejas Liulevicius

Accepted for the Council:


Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

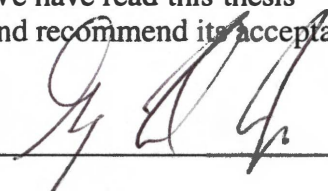
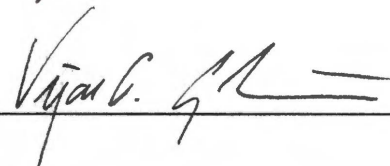
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and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:


Vice Chancellor and Dean of Graduate Studies

Thesis
2004
.K87

**Making the Most of a Bad Situation: Coddling, Fraternization, and Total War in
Camp Crossville, Tennessee**

**A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts Degree**

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

**Gregory J. Kupsky
May 2004**

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I want to express my appreciation to those who shared their memories about Camp Crossville. Hans Albertson, Earlene Aytes, Evelyn Coulter, Gerhard Hennes, Hugo Hohnecker, Howard Newton, and Hilde Welch have been of immense help in my work, and their recollections have formed the backbone of my study.

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Abstract

This study examines the significance of interactions between German prisoners of war and their American captors during World War II. It uses government documents, personal accounts, and newspaper articles to reconstruct various aspects of life in Camp Crossville, Tennessee, as a representative of the national camp system. It also examines the recollections of former prisoners, guards, and Crossville residents to assess the impressions created by prisoner-captor interactions.

These sources demonstrate that camp life created a generally positive impression among both the Germans and the Americans at Camp Crossville. The POWs attempted to use their time in captivity constructively, and their interactions with Americans were usually amiable. While an official “reeducation” policy yielded questionable results, these social contacts triggered a process of reconciliation similar to that taking place in occupied Germany.

If American policy fell short of its goals for “reeducation,” it did provide an admirable example of captivity within modern, total war. In contrast to the de-individualization and de-humanization taking place in other camp systems, U.S officials maintained a commendable degree of humanity. American standards of treatment, combined with one-on-one interactions, constitute a positive element to a generally gruesome war.

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Introduction

The train arrived at 7:30 in the evening on November 28, 1942. Sixty-eight German officers, who had left the deserts of Africa only seventeen days earlier, stepped onto the station platform in Crossville, Tennessee and breathed the autumn air. They beheld a ring of armed guards, positioned at regular intervals, who hastily directed them toward a line of Army trucks. After a short ride, they caught their first glimpse of Camp Crossville, which was to be their home for the next three years.¹

These prisoners were the first of over 1,500 German POWs who would spend the balance of the war in Crossville. They, along with some 372,000 fellow soldiers distributed throughout the United States, would gain a unique firsthand look at the homeland of their purported enemy. For most of them, the time behind barbed wire would profoundly alter their views of the war, their nation, and their future.

The Focus of This Study²

This is an examination of the effect that internment in America had on the German prisoners. It begins with the story of Camp Crossville, Tennessee, but becomes progressively broader as it answers questions about the implications of American captivity. For instance, what was the nature of everyday life in the U.S. camp system? How did the camp environment change the German POWs' perspectives? Finally, in what ways was imprisonment in America unique?

Most existing writings on the German prisoners in America have given a basic

¹ Crossville *Chronicle* (December 3, 1942), 1; "Camp History," 4-H Camp guide, Private Collection of Conrad Welch, Crossville, Tennessee.

² For full bibliographical information for these sources, see the List of References.

overview, with little interpretation. The goal of this study will be to expand upon the findings of these earlier works by analyzing the greater impact of the German POW experience. Before providing a detailed explanation of this goal, it is necessary to summarize the existing historiography.

The Army's own analysis of the camps is available in Pamphlet 20-213, *History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army, 1776-1945*, published in 1955 by George Lewis and John Mewha. The authors study decision making at the national level, focusing largely on the Second World War. Written for the War Department as a policy assessment, it concludes that the military has entered each war "without adequate preparation for [prisoners'] employment."³ It recommends that the Army develop uniform plans for POW labor, to maximize labor productivity in the event of a future large-scale war. While not an academic study of the national system, Pamphlet 20-213 is a valuable source of information on the POW employment program.

The first nationwide study of the American camps came in 1970, with Edward Pluth's dissertation on the evolution of the camp system's administrative structure. The author emphasizes that the War Department was unprepared for the challenges which World War II would present, and that its administration was largely improvised. While he focuses on the arguments and considerations behind policy decisions, Pluth also incorporates public opinion, international law, and other relevant aspects. The earliest book on the nationwide system is Judith Gansberg's *Stalag USA* (1977). Gansberg focuses on the Special Projects Division (SPD), to show how fears of Nazi influence led

³ George Lewis and John Mewha, *History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army, 1776-*

to a reeducation program. She says that German POWs, like many of their fellow citizens, adopted democracy, but makes no clear argument about how camp life influenced their decisions. Finally, Arnold Krammer's *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (1979) presents the most comprehensive and informative description of the U.S. camps. Despite the suggestion in the title, he recognizes the diverse array of political attitudes among the prisoners. Krammer demonstrates the comfortable standard living in the camps and the generally positive memories that resonate decades later, but offers no greater conclusion.

More recent book-length studies have focused on individual states or base camps, and they usually center on the favorable relationship between prisoners and guards. Perhaps the best is *Splinters of a Nation* (1989), in which Allan Kent Powell conducts a case study of the camp system in Utah. He offers comparisons to camps in Germany and in the First World War, but makes no greater statement about the implications of captivity. Another representative study is Allen Koop's *Stark Decency* (1988). Koop treats the story of Camp Stark, New Hampshire in isolation, to convey the sense of "an island of decency in a world at war." Like most local studies, he embraces the theme of friendly interactions without a broader argument.⁴

In terms of argumentation, two of the most profound works have dealt with reeducation. In 1995 came the publication of Ron Robin's *The Barbed Wire College* (1995), a detailed analysis of the reeducation program. According to Robin, the

1945 (Washington, D.C., 1955), 262.

⁴ Allen Koop, *Stark Decency: German Prisoners of War in a New England Village* (Hanover, 1988), 121. Additional case studies are provided in the List of References.

reeducation plan failed to capture the interest of the general POW population, but its leaders painted the results in a positive light for reasons of self-promotion.⁵ Arthur Smith's *The War for the German Mind*, published a year later, views the American, British, and Russian reeducation programs. Taking advantage of recently declassified sources, Smith provides the first real comparison of POW policy on both sides of the Iron Curtain, and concludes that, of the three countries, the U.S.S.R. had the most advanced and consistent plan.

A growing number of studies have also used the POW camps as a prism through which to view American race relations. A 1995 article by Matthew Schott, entitled "Prisoners Like Us," compares whites' favorable attitudes toward German prisoners in Louisiana to their less friendly treatment of African-Americans. In a German-language study, *Die Schwarzen waren unsere Freunde* (2002),⁶ Matthias Reiß argues that POWs and African-Americans enjoyed a degree of empathy, because both groups found themselves in a type of "confinement" within the United States.

A few writers have provided narrative histories of Camp Crossville. W. Calvin Dickinson's article, "Camp Crossville, 1942-1945," provides a basic overview of the camp. "Barbed Wire in the Scrub Oaks," a feature in *Tennessean Magazine* in 1968, contains a collection of anecdotes about life in the camp for both guards and prisoners. Finally, Major Herston Cooper, a former stockade commander at the camp, published *Crossville: How Did We Treat Our POWs?* More of a quasi-memoir than a history of the

⁵ Ron Robin, *The Barbed Wire College: Reeducating German POWs in the United States During World War II* (Princeton, 1995). A more in-depth treatment of Robin's argument can be found in Chapter 3.

⁶ "The Germans Were Our Friends."

camp, Cooper's manuscript recounts army regulations and magazine articles, with intervening collections of personal recollections. Like other local studies, these works have provided information about the camps and insights into the public's memory of them, but have not offered any interpretation of the POW experience.

Several themes emerge from a survey of the above materials. First, it is clear that American policymaking was problematic. Lewis and Mewha point out that the Army consistently failed to plan ahead, and Pluth shows that policy remained inconsistent well into the war. According to Smith, the same inconsistency plagued American reeducation, even after the war. From a variety of perspectives, then, planning with regard to POWs appears flawed.

Second, Americans and Germans enjoyed an amiable relationship in the POW camps. Most studies, especially the local histories, simply present this fact as their conclusion, while writers like Reiß and Schott use prisoners' comforts as a backdrop for unjust treatment of African-Americans. There is clearly a consensus that German and Italian POWs enjoyed comfortable standards in the U.S. camp system.

Third, the Germans embraced Western democracy after the war. Gansberg ends her book by saying that a democratic Germany emerged, despite adversity. Similarly, Robin says that denazification took place in spite of the abysmally flawed reeducation policy. A consensus thus exists that, for whatever reason, democracy triumphed in Germany.

This study will connect these three themes, to make a stronger statement about the nature of captivity in the U.S. It will show that, in spite of the clearly flawed reeducation

policy, one-on-one interactions between Germans and Americans significantly contributed to reconciliation between the two countries. Rather than completely dismissing American planning, however, it will also demonstrate that official policy helped to preserve a sense of humanity within modern warfare.

The first two chapters paint a picture of Camp Crossville as a representative of the national camp system. While relying heavily on evidence from the Crossville experience, they use data from other camps to show the universality of certain aspects of camp life. Chapter 1 describes the vast freedoms that prisoners enjoyed, as well as the degree to which they attempted to make the most of their imprisonment. The second chapter examines the interplay between the German POWs and American citizens, and confirms that a generally friendly relationship existed. After defending the government's assertion that kind treatment benefited the U.S. war effort, it argues that this benevolence extended well beyond official policy.

Chapter 3 places the effort to reeducate the German prisoners within the larger "denazification" policy. After providing a description of the program, it suggests that official reeducation was ineffective. Drawing on examples from the previous chapter, it argues that bottom-up interactions compensated for this flawed program. Alongside Cold War tensions, these one-on-one contacts allowed both Germans and Americans to move beyond a stance of hostility. If the official effort failed to "denazify" Germany, these factors rescued that objective.

The final chapter compares the American reeducation plan to those of Britain and the Soviet Union. Drawing on larger historiographical themes, it analyzes the impact of

total and ideological war on modern captivity, including POW camps, gulags, and concentration camps. It argues that the assignment of a radical/liberal dichotomy to modern captivity is an oversimplification, because modern total war imposed similar changes on both Soviet and Western notions of internment. However, it shows that U.S. policy continued to uphold the liberal *spirit*, and thus set an important example for twentieth century societies at war.

Sources

An examination of the American camp system requires an understanding of government policy, public opinion, and everyday life within the camps. As mentioned earlier, this study relies heavily on firsthand accounts from Tennessee to establish the nature of camp life. Any work that draws on such anecdotal evidence is necessarily inductive, but connecting these local accounts to national trends will reinforce the conclusions drawn from the Crossville experience.

Government Records

Federal and military records provide a glimpse at decision-making on the national level, as well as some camp-specific information. The records of the Army Fourth Service Command and the Provost Marshal General's Office (PMGO) are available in Record Groups 338 and 389, respectively, in the National Archives. Among these records are correspondence among camp officials, camp inspection reports, civilian complaints about the location of Axis prisoners in the United States, and the "Poll of German Prisoner of War Opinion."

The U.S. House Committee on Military Affairs conducted two "Investigations of

the National War Effort,” to determine whether civilian complaints about the “coddling” of POWs were warranted. Their official reports contain testimony from the Provost Marshal General, provide detailed descriptions of several camps throughout the country, and evaluate the validity of civilian complaints.

Media

National newspapers and magazines are indispensable in understanding the American public’s views, as well as their knowledge, of the camps. Media sources provide official press releases, civilian opinions on “coddling” and race issues, and speculations about postwar policy toward Germany. In addition, they occasionally contain government officials’ perspectives, like J. Edgar Hoover’s article, “Enemies at Large,” in *American Magazine*.

Tennessee newspapers give similar perspectives on national and regional issues. They record announcements on camp planning and construction, contain notices of prisoner escapes, and carry public statements from camp officials. The Crossville *Chronicle* and the Nashville *Tennessean* have been extremely helpful in reconstructing a time line of major events at Camp Crossville.

Other important media sources are the German-language newspapers produced by the German prisoners of war themselves: *Die Brücke* (The Bridge) and *Die Kolibri* (The Hummingbird). A survey of the articles gives the reader a sense of POWs’ interests and activities, and features on American history and politics reflect the strategies of the reeducation program.

Individual Voices

It would be impossible to reconstruct life in Camp Crossville without the memories of former prisoners, guards, and workers. Those who experienced the camp firsthand not only fill in minute details about everyday events, but also provide their own opinions. Hans Albert Smolinski Albertson and Gerhard Hennes, both of whom were second lieutenants in the Afrikakorps, have written summaries of their experiences in Camp Crossville. Their memoirs can be found in the Tennessee Technological University Archives, along with an oral history interview with Hennes, conducted by TTU faculty. Conrad Welch, the former director of the 4-H camp in Crossville, has saved letters from Hermann Treis, a former POW, and Howard Newton, who had been a guard. My own correspondence and conversations with Albertson, Hennes, Newton, and other subjects have supplemented these written accounts.

The physical remnants of Camp Crossville have long since deteriorated. However, the memories and emotions of those who experienced the camp have survived through the resources mentioned above. By weaving these perspectives together, the hope is to reconstruct a vision of a community that has long since vanished.

Chapter 1 **Camp Crossville: Life Inside the Barbed Wire**

In December 1944, Edouard Patte, an inspector for the YMCA, arrived in Camp Crossville. He had accepted the prisoners' invitation to attend a Fine Arts Exhibition, and on the morning of December 9, twelve German officers escorted him through the exhibit hall. Patte was amazed by the collection, which comprised over 400 pieces. He beheld a series of landscapes, still-life paintings, and "impressive Africa war scenes." His report described "two hilarious masks of terracotta," a series of busts and engravings, and a "Tyrolian accordion player made in wood." A wall clock, made from scrap wood, kept perfect time on the wall. Reflecting on the collections of model airplanes, insect collections, and replica military medals, Patte reported that the Exhibition was "a tribute to the workmanship, the artistic achievements and the imagination of the POW's."⁷

The Exhibition's diverse collection of artwork serves as a metaphor for everyday life within the stockade. In Crossville, as in other camps, German prisoners enjoyed a high level of freedom and comfort, which they devoted to constructive pursuits. In providing the basic history of Camp Crossville, this chapter will demonstrate the various ways in which the POWs sought to create a meaningful existence out of captivity.

The Creation of the Camp System

In the First World War, captured German soldiers had remained in Europe, and authorities in the United States had been responsible for only 1,346 naval prisoners. In August 1942, however, the transfer of 50,000 German prisoners from Great Britain

⁷ Edouard Patte, "Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp Crossville, Tennessee," December 8-9, 1944, RG 389, Entry 459A, Box 1612, National Archives.

demonstrated that the Second World War would present a much greater logistical challenge to the U.S. Provost Marshal General's Office (PMGO).⁸ The division quickly established new sites for camps throughout the country, and later expanded the system as enemy soldiers surrendered *en masse*, first in Africa, and later in Europe. At its peak, the American camps held 371,683 prisoners, whom they distributed among 155 base camps in every state but North Dakota, Nevada, and Vermont.⁹ Four of the camps were located in Tennessee: Camp Crossville, Camp Forrest (Tullahoma), Camp Campbell, and the Memphis Armed Service Forces Depot.¹⁰

Officials generally tried to place the camps in thinly-populated agricultural areas, and Camp Crossville was no exception. The proposed site lay in Cumberland County, Tennessee, which held a population of 15,592 in 1942. It lay five miles southwest of Crossville, population 1,511, and the largest town within thirty miles was Cookeville, a town of 4,364. The Crossville site also had the benefit of lying near a railway line and several highways, which would allow easy access for construction, supply, and the transportation of the prisoners. In a preliminary report about the site and its surroundings, the inspector noted that the "local supply of common labor" could be supplemented, if necessary, by workers from Nashville, Chattanooga, and Knoxville. The site met the approval of the Provost Marshal General, who approved the construction of a 200-acre

⁸ Lewis and Mewha, 57; Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (Lanham, MD., 1979), 2.

⁹ There were also many smaller "branch camps" tied to these larger camps, whose purpose was to disperse POW labor in agricultural areas. House Military Affairs Committee, "House Report 728: Investigations of the National War Effort," prepared by Andrew May, 79th Cong., 1st Sess., 1945, 7; Edward Pluth, "The Administration and Operation of German Prisoner of War Camps in the United States During World War II," Ph.D. diss., Ball State University, 1970, 128.

¹⁰ Camp Campbell was in Kentucky, but it extended into Montgomery County, Tennessee. House Military Affairs Committee, "House Report 1992: Investigations of the National War Effort," prepared by Andrew

installation on June 29, 1942.¹¹ Designated an officers' camp, Crossville would remain relatively small. Its official capacity was 1,700, and at its peak in early 1945 it probably held at least 1,500 inmates.¹²

The people of Cumberland County were actually more than willing to host the facility. Local residents enlisted the aid of their congressman, Albert Gore, Sr., in acquiring more information about the plan, and the Crossville *Chronicle* reported that "no effort [was] being spared ... to aid in the location of the camp in this county." At least one resident, Mrs. J.L. Wyatt of Cumberland County, wrote to the War Department to offer private land for the project. Upon official approval, the *Chronicle* reported "excitement and jubilation" at the news, and quoted a local businessman who called the project "the most wonderful thing that has ever happened to Cumberland County."¹³

According to Herston Cooper, the stockade commander, this enthusiasm was a testament to their sense of "civic obligation in the war effort." He also emphasized the selflessness of the act, since the installation would not provide an overwhelming number of jobs.¹⁴ Indeed, a patriotic spirit did exist in Cumberland County, as indicated by

May, 79th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1944, 18; Krammer 28; W. Calvin Dickinson, "Camp Crossville, 1942-1945," *Journal of East Tennessee History* 68 (1996), 31.

¹¹ Krammer, 26; Office of the Chief of Engineers, "Memorandum on Engineering Features of Site for Alien Enemy Internment Camp Near Crossville, Tennessee," May 14, 1942, RG 389, Entry 457, Box 1420, National Archives; War Department Memorandum to the Chief of Engineers, June 29, 1942, RG 389, Entry 457, Box 1420, National Archives.

¹² Records from May 1944, before the Normandy invasion, show that Crossville held 1,442 prisoners. The population presumably peaked near the end of the war, and by July 1945, after consolidation of the camp system had begun, the population had fallen to 1,363. Army Service Forces Lists, May 1, 1944; July 1, 1945, RG 389, Entry 435, Box 8, National Archives.

¹³ Letter from Albert Gore to the Provost Marshal General, July 7, 1942, RG 389, Entry 457, Box 1420, National Archives; Letter from Mrs. J.L. Wyatt to the War Department, April 24, 1942, RG 389, Entry 434, Box 407, National Archives; Crossville *Chronicle* (April 23, 1942); (July 2, 1942).

¹⁴ Herston Cooper, *Crossville: How Did We Treat Our POWs?* Special Collections Library, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1981, 28.

residents' active participation in the War Bond effort.¹⁵ But regardless of the actual number of potential jobs, residents certainly foresaw economic benefits in the proposition, as well. Reports in the *Crossville Chronicle* in the spring and summer of 1942 frequently mentioned the \$3,000,000 price tag on the proposed camp, often adding that construction would rely heavily on local labor and resources. Cumberland County residents anticipated "great and lasting benefit" for the area, because the new facility meant "increased business, citizenship and prosperity," and they petitioned Congressman Gore for information regarding "positions, concessions, etc." at the installation. Combined with a sense of patriotic duty, this anticipation of greater prosperity made the camp a popular addition to the county.¹⁶

At first, residents had only vague notions about what the new installation's function would be. Many presumed that it would be an internment area for civilians with ethnic ties to Axis countries, presumably Japan, and so the facility became known as "the Jap Camp." The *Chronicle*, assuming that whole families would be interned, explained to residents that the aliens were not "necessarily bad people." Finally, in mid-July of 1942, the Provost Marshal General's Office dispelled the rumor about civilian internees, explaining that the installation would be an "Officer Prisoner of War Camp," and the newspaper relayed the news. Soon after, local residents learned that the inmates would be German and Italian soldiers, but the nickname had already stuck. Sixty years after the

¹⁵ Cumberland County ranked fourth in the state in the 4th Bond Drive, raising over \$481,000. *Crossville Chronicle* (March 9, 1944), 1.

¹⁶ *Crossville Chronicle* (April 9, 1942); (June 29, 1942); (July 2, 1942); (August 6, 1942); Letter from Albert Gore, July 7, 1942; RG 389, Entry 457, Box 1420, National Archives.

war, the road leading to the camp would be known as “The Jap Camp Road.”¹⁷

The Camp

The stockade at Camp Crossville consisted of two twelve-foot barbed wire fences, with guard houses along the outside perimeter. Within the stockade sat the Stockade Commander’s Office, the camp hospital, the barracks, latrines, mess halls, and the prisoner canteen. The individually fenced-in compounds separated the quarters of German officers, German enlisted men, Italian officers, and Italian enlisted men. Outside the stockade stood the Camp Commander’s Office, staff quarters, administrative buildings, the auditorium-gymnasium, the camp fire house, and the guard house.¹⁸ It is important to remember that little interaction took place between the two areas, which were, for the most part, different worlds. American personnel generally only entered the camps during inspections or on other such formal business, and guards were, at least officially, forbidden to casually converse with prisoners.¹⁹ Major incidents aside, the German POWs themselves were in charge of affairs within their camp.

It did not take long for the incoming POWs to make the camp their home. Hans Albertson, a German Second Lieutenant who arrived on April 28, 1943, observed that the new camp “looked rather barren and sterile--no trees within, no bushes, just gravel roads and barracks!” But within a few months, the “green thumbs” among the prisoners went to work, and the grounds became adorned with flowers, plants, and bushes.²⁰ As officers,

¹⁷ Crossville *Chronicle* (April 9, 1942); (April 23, 1942); Dickinson, 32.

¹⁸ “Behind the Wire.” *Time* (June 21, 1943), 64; Cooper, 33-4.

¹⁹ Congressional Report 1992, 10.

²⁰ Hans Albert Smolinski Albertson, “My Memories of the Prisoner of War Camp in Crossville, Tennessee,” Unpublished Manuscript, March 8, 1993, Special Collections Library, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, 2.

the majority of Crossville's prisoners enjoyed relatively comfortable living space. Two prisoners shared a ten-foot-by-ten-foot bedroom, and two bedrooms shared a common area furnished with a stove, closets, a table, and chairs. Some prisoners used scrap lumber pile to build additional furniture, and wall decorations included photos of scantily-clad women from the pages of *Esquire Magazine*.²¹

As in other POW camps, prisoners in Crossville followed a daily routine. Shortly before 8 a.m., they would be awakened for breakfast.²² A roll call immediately followed breakfast, and work or leisure time then commenced until lunch at noon. The 6 p.m. roll call, which often consisted of several head counts, was described by Albertson as "the main event of the day." Dinner followed at 6:30, followed by more free time. The compound gates closed around 10 p.m., but there was no curfew within the individual compounds.²³

Judging from oral histories and memoirs, one of the most memorable facets of camp life was mealtime. Albertson remembers that he "received excellent food, well prepared, and more than enough." Prisoners enjoyed delicacies which they hadn't had in years, such as eggs, bacon, and coffee. Hennes says that he "learned to eat, and appreciate," items like corn, squash, sweet potatoes, and melons. The cafeteria employed German cooks, who whipped up pies, cream puffs, tortes, and other desserts. At the end

²¹ Gerhard Hennes, "The Barbed Wire: POW in the USA," Unpublished Manuscript, 1985, Tennessee Technological University Archives, Cookeville, Tennessee, 37; Albertson, 2; Telephone Interview with Gerhard Hennes [Hereafter, "Hennes Phone"], December 7, 2003, 17.

²² Hennes remembers being awakened by a bell outside the dining hall, while Albertson remembers a German officer blowing a whistle. Gerhard Hennes, interview by Todd Jarrell, et al. [Hereafter, "Hennes TTU"], Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, Tennessee, 19; Albertson 3.

²³ Albertson, 3; Hennes, 40. Hans Albert Smolinski Albertson, Letter to Gregory Kupsky [Hereafter, "Albertson Letter"], January 18, 2004, 6.

of meals, Albertson says, kitchen staff distributed leftover food for prisoners to take with them.²⁴

Using their canteen coupons, prisoners could also purchase a vast variety of merchandise, including clothing, personal items, candy, and tobacco. The Provost Marshal General's office stipulated that special orders for prisoners were prohibited, but at Camp Crossville, POWs could order from a Sears-Roebuck catalogue supplied by one of the guards. In addition to the official inventory, Crossville's prisoners used the catalogue to procure items such as window curtains, tablecloths, tennis shoes, and lingerie for their girlfriends in Germany.²⁵ This purchasing power, along with the abundant food allotments, would eventually come under fire from the American public, as will be described in Chapter 2.

Labor

Early in the war, American authorities saw the prisoners of war as an inconvenience and as a security threat. According to Archer Lerch, the Provost Marshal General for most of the war, the POWs presented an "economic and administrative burden," and were "a drain on the manpower of our army." By early 1943, however, the prisoners seemed relatively cooperative, and authorities began to view them as an "untouched pool of available manpower ... at a time when manpower was a desperately needed commodity."²⁶ By putting the prisoners to work inside and outside the camps, the

²⁴ Albertson, 3; 12-13; Hennes, 38; Hermann Treis, Unpublished Manuscript, March 1995, Private Collection of Conrad Welch, Crossville, Tennessee, 3.

²⁵ Prisoner of War Circular No. 33, "Canteens," June 12, 1944, RG 383, Box 57, National Archives; Albertson, 5.

²⁶ Press Conference with Major General Archer Lerch, February 13, 1945, RG 389, Entry 461, Box 2570, National Archives, 2.

government would turn their perceived burden into a blessing.

In accordance with the Geneva Convention, the U.S. could require enlisted prisoners to work, provided that the work was not dangerous and did not directly benefit the war effort, such as producing munitions. Officer POWs could not be required to work, but could work if they chose, and NCOs could only be employed in supervisory roles.²⁷ Enlisted workers initially received eighty cents per day, in addition to the ten cents given daily to all enlisted men. After April 1944, an incentive system allowed them to make as much as \$1.20 for a day's work. Throughout the war, officers received between \$20 and \$40 per month, depending on rank. All pay was in the form of canteen coupons, and outstanding balances at the time of release would be paid in German currency.²⁸

Nearly half of Crossville's inmates were enlisted men, despite the camp's designation as an officers' camp. In accordance with Army Regulations, they were to serve as orderlies for the officers, although Cooper recalls that most of them "possessed an excellent skill at being busy at something else." Many of them found the work program to be a perfect escape. But for those who refused to do work of any kind, officials found the nationwide "no work, no eat" policy to be instrumental in changing their minds.²⁹

A priority system governed the types of work for the prisoners. "Essential Post

²⁷ "Convention of July 27, 1929, Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War" [Hereafter, "Geneva Convention"], in Charles Bevin, ed., *Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America, 1776-1949*, Vol. 2 (Washington, D.C., 1960), 944-5.

²⁸ Lewis and Mewha, 77-8; 120; Cooper, 56.

²⁹ Cooper, 54-5; Authorities did not literally cut off stubborn prisoners' food, but placed them on a diet of bread and water. Press Conference with Major General Archer Lerch, 29.

and Army Work” was the first priority, which included in-camp maintenance and construction, as well as services for other prisoners, such as barbers, cooks, and janitors. The second priority was the filling of work requests from government agencies and private employers, which were screened and approved by the War Manpower Commission (WMC). Once prisoners filled these roles, camp officials could apply manpower to “useful but not necessarily essential work” in camps.³⁰

The main benefit of POW labor was its use by private employers. To gain a contract to use prisoners of war, an employer submitted a “Certification of Need for Employment” form, in which he or she described the type of work, the number of workers and man-hours needed, and the rate of pay. To prevent a conflict with American workers, the WMC also required proof that local employees could not fill the contractor’s need, and that the rate of pay did not undercut that of free labor. If the government approved the project, the local camp agreed to transport, guard, and feed the workers, while the employer was responsible for training, equipment, and supervision. The employer directly paid the War Department, which paid the worker in canteen coupons. The prisoners received the rates described above, and the War Department kept the difference.³¹

For prisoners at Crossville, work outside the camp was usually on private farms, but according to one report, some also worked for the Tennessee Valley Authority and the

³⁰ Lewis, 146-7; Army Service Forces, Fourth Service Command, to Commanding Officers, “Prisoner of War Labor Priorities,” March 22, 1945, RG 383, Box 57, National Archives.

³¹ Lewis, 70. War Department, “Policies and Responsibilities in Connection with the Hiring and Use of Prisoner of War Labor; “Certification of Need for Employment of Prisoners of War,” RG 389, Entry 435, Box 8, National Archives.

University of Tennessee.³² An article in the Crossville *Chronicle* in late 1944 praised the success of the program, and advised local farmers who were “unable to find local labor” to contact the WMC office in Rockwood, Tennessee.³³ The program did meet some success in Cumberland County: as of August 1945, 160, or about 20% of the German officers, had volunteered to work alongside 202, some 30%, of the enlisted men.³⁴

The proportion of officer volunteers does demonstrate, however, that they were of two minds on the issue of voluntary labor. Hans Albertson welcomed the opportunity to work, despite his exemption as an officer. He had struck up a friendship with Colonel Harry Dudley, the camp commander, who allowed him and a friend to grow crops on a nearby farm. Enjoying the opportunity to walk to the farm and spend the day outside the stockade, Albertson and his friend eventually allowed “applicants” to join in the project. For Gerhard Hennes, on the other hand, work was not an option. He joined the majority of officers who refused to be seen “currying favors with our captors.”³⁵

Nationwide, the labor program was a success. By 1945, an estimated 95.6 percent of employable prisoners were working. By war’s end, the PMGO estimated that these prisoners contributed approximately 34,219,185 man-days of labor to the nation’s economy, of which Crossville provided 29,834.³⁶ The Provost Marshal General estimated that, in 1944, private contracts netted the government \$22,000,000 dollars, while POW labor on Army installations saved an additional \$80,000,000. Furthermore,

³² “Barbed Wire in the Scrub Oaks,” *Tennessean Magazine* (April 14, 1968), 7.

³³ Crossville *Chronicle* (October 12, 1944), 4; War Manpower Commission, “Directory of Field Offices,” RG 389, Entry 435, Box 8, National Archives.

³⁴ Crossville *Chronicle* (August 30, 1945), 1.

³⁵ Albertson, 22-3; Hennes, 91.

³⁶ Lewis, 171; 264; Semimonthly reports of labor, Camp Crossville, RG 389, Entry 361, Box 2493,

prisoners reportedly saved countless acres of crops that would otherwise have been lost due to manpower shortages.³⁷ As these numbers show, authorities managed to turn a perceived burden into a handsome profit.

Free Time

Because most of the officer prisoners at Crossville did not have to work, they were free to find other pastimes during the day, and athletic competitions became a favorite. Using sports equipment supplied by the Red Cross and the YMCA, prisoners created handball, soccer, tennis, and volleyball leagues, of which tennis and soccer seem to have been the most popular. Prisoners constructed four tennis courts throughout the camp, and match highlights appeared regularly in *Die Brücke*, the POW newspaper. The paper also provided weekly soccer scores, and frequently commented on the excitement of the crowd at the games.³⁸ For prisoners like Hennes, who was active in both sports, the weekly matches were among the most memorable aspects of camp life.³⁹

In terms of organization and participation, the only program that exceeded athletics was the educational system. Prisoners taught and attended courses on dozens of subjects, from foreign languages to sciences to woodworking. The program developed very quickly, and a “cultural inventory” conducted by the YMCA in May 1943 found that 20% of Crossville’s prisoners attended classes in the summer, and 35% enrolled in the winter semester. By 1945, several American universities had even agreed to recognize

National Archives.

³⁷ Press Conference with Major General Archer Lerch, 3-4.

³⁸ “Es wurde auch diesmal ein vortreffliches Spiel, das die Zuschauer in seinen Bann schlug.” [It became once again a splendid match, which cast a spell on the spectators.] In “Auswahlspiel abermals Sieg von II/III,” [All-Star Game Another Victory for II/III], *Die Brücke* (April 7, 1945), 6.

³⁹ Hennes, 62-3. Hennes TTU, 13.

college-level courses taken in the camps, and both Hennes and Albertson received a year of credit from the University of Minnesota.⁴⁰

A number of inmates also participated in the arts. A group of actors formed a theater troupe, and among their productions was a rendition of *Julius Caesar*, complete with armor made from tin cans. Hennes, who attended the production, remembers that it

was competitive with ... the city theater in Coblenz.... You saw these Roman soldiers running across the scene, and their armor was tinkling, and their swords were rattling, and I tell you, it was some production! And the American camp leaders and some soldiers had front seats!⁴¹

The musicians in the camp assembled both a choral group and a forty-piece orchestra, using instruments donated by the YMCA. Smaller musical groups formed within each compound, and would play for their respective companies during the day. Painters, sculptors, and other artists participated in exhibitions like the one described above.⁴²

Crossville's inmates also spent their leisure time in less formal pursuits. An inspection by the Special Projects Division in January 1945 found that prisoners at Crossville had access to 6,000 library books, and that 75% of the volumes were in constant circulation. In addition, the library provided periodicals like *Time*, *Collier's*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and the *New York Times*, as well as *Die Brücke* and *Die Kolibri*, which the prisoners themselves published. German soldiers also listened to records, boxed, played darts, gambled in makeshift casinos, and engaged in a myriad of

⁴⁰ Young Men's Christian Association, "Cultural Inventory," May 6, 1943, RG 389, Entry 461, Box 2576, National Archives; Prisoner of War Circular No. 1, "Correspondence Courses for Prisoners," January 1, 1945, RG 383, Box 57, National Archives; Albertson, 17; Hennes TTU, 6.

⁴¹ Hennes TTU, 15.

⁴² Hennes TTU, 14; "Cultural Inventory," 3; "Field Service Camp Survey," 9, RG 389, Entry 459A, Box 1612, National Archives.

other activities to pass the time.⁴³

Despite the comfortable living conditions and the wide range of activities, many German prisoners recall a dark side to camp life. Towards the end of the war, even the most active men in the camp could not remove their fears about the war's outcome or their concern for relatives in Germany. Hans Albertson remembers pacing the grounds at night, unable to sleep for fear that his family might be harmed. While interned in Memphis, Edwin Pelz felt guilty about receiving packages from the Red Cross. He remembers that

these packages made us sad rather than happy. In our prisoner-of-war camp ... we had enough to eat and enough of everything else. We knew how bad things were in Germany. The intentions of the German Red Cross were good, of course, but they shouldn't have sent us anything.

For Gerhard Hennes, the inability to aid in the war effort meant a certain loss of self-worth. It was upsetting to know that he had been "shoved aside, lived in the shadows, and had no more use to the Fatherland."⁴⁴ Despite their own relative safety and comfort, prisoners could not escape thoughts of the ongoing destruction overseas.

In April 1945, camp administrators initiated one of the most controversial aspects of the American camp system. Within a few weeks, camps throughout the U.S. drastically cut prisoners' rations, citing a worldwide food shortage. The results were felt immediately among the prisoners, who quickly began losing weight. At Crossville, Hennes remembers a prisoner passing out a roll call. Throughout the country, employers

⁴³ Memorandum from William Raugust to Director, Special Projects Division, "Field Service Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Crossville, Tennessee," January 31, 1945; Bernard Gufler, "Camp Crossville," RG 389, Entry 459A, Box 1612, National Archives; Cooper, 93-4.

⁴⁴ Albertson, 28; Edwin Pelz, "A German Prisoner of War in the South: The Memoir of Edwin Pelz," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 44:1 (1985), 48; Hennes Phone, 8.

complained that their workers were unable to do a full day's work. The War Department publicly denied that rations were substandard, but the testimony of prisoners and employers suggests otherwise.⁴⁵

A few different factors help to explain the food cuts. First, now that German defeat was imminent, the U.S. no longer had to fear that mistreatment would bring retaliation against American POWs. As for the motivation behind the policy, there are two possible explanations. One is the PMGO's assertion that the change was a response to a general shortage of foodstuffs. After all, the War Department pointed out, it had also cut G.I.s' rations.⁴⁶ But many wondered whether the change had to do with returning American POWs, who told tales of harsh treatment and inadequate food. The PMGO had indeed come under fire for German prisoners' comfort levels, and on April 18 it admonished commands to stem the "public relations problem" by making sure "that POW regulations are rigidly enforced ... regarding food conservation."⁴⁷ Whether or not this was the true motivation, it is significant that many German POWs believed it was. According to Pelz, he and his fellow inmates "understood that the food shortage in the camp was primarily punitive." Hennes saw the ration cuts as a "new policy of treating the Germans a little rougher." Albertson, who denies that the cuts were a "starvation diet," does see the policy as a direct result of the inevitable German defeat.⁴⁸ In general, prisoners saw the food cuts as a break with what was otherwise a pleasant experience.

⁴⁵ *New York Times* (April 25, 1945), 1; (July 3, 1945), 15; Hennes TTU, 4.

⁴⁶ *New York Times* (April 25, 1945), 5.

⁴⁷ PMGO Telegram to Service Commands, April 18, 1945, RG 389, Entry 435, Box 3, National Archives. For more on the public criticism of prisoners' comfortable living conditions, see Chapter 2.

⁴⁸ Pelz, 52; Hennes Phone, 33.

Release and Repatriation

The Geneva Convention requires that “repatriation of prisoners shall be effected with the least possible delay after the conclusion of peace.”⁴⁹ However, there were several delays in the departure of the German POWs from the United States. Because many American soldiers were still overseas, the Secretary of Agriculture requested an extension of POW labor contracts to fill the persistent labor shortage. More extensions followed, until President Harry Truman finally set a deadline of June 1946 for the removal of all prisoners from the United States.⁵⁰

Unfortunately for most prisoners, Germany was not their first destination. The U.S. turned over thousands of POWs to West European countries, especially France, for use in labor battalions. Exempt from the transfer were selected groups of non-Germans, as well as those “with sincere democratic convictions and special skills.” According to Krammer, those turned over to France spent an average of four to six months performing mandatory labor before being sent home. Other prisoners, including Gerhard Hennes and Hans Albertson, spent several weeks in holding camps with hundreds of thousands of Displaced Persons (DPs) and recently-surrendered German soldiers. Due to overcrowding and food shortages, conditions in these camps were horrendous, and survivors report scenes of widespread starvation. Hennes, who spent time in the camp at Attichy, estimates daily rations to have been about 1,000 calories. He recalls that his father, a fellow prisoner, never fully recovered from his six-week stay in Attichy.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Geneva Convention, 954.

⁵⁰ Lewis and Mewha, 173.

⁵¹ State Department, “Transfer of German Prisoners of War to the French,” December 19, 1945, RG 389, Entry 461, Box 2576, National Archives; Hennes Phone, 30-1; Albertson, 35; Krammer, 247-50.

The idea of retaining prisoners in Europe did not sit well with the American public. *Christian Century*, for instance, launched a series of tirades against the policy, which it equated with slavery. Holding prisoners indefinitely, the *Century* argued, was in “cynical disregard of the laws of morality and in contempt for future consequences to international peace.” The articles assured readers that continued use of POW labor would only undermine the Germans’ positive impression of their captors. Taking such criticisms to heart, the Army washed its hands of the labor battalions in France, and relinquished custody of its last prisoners on June 30, 1947.⁵²

Taken together, the ration cuts in April and the controversial use of prisoners in Europe constitute the darkest chapter of the American camp experience. However, as prisoners’ writings show, these events did not detract from the genuinely positive impression created by everyday life in the camps. Hans Albertson, who faced starvation in Attichy, still became an American citizen. He writes that “Crossville remained a respectable, fair and memorable experience in my life.” Hermann Treis feels that his time in Crossville “laid the basis for my love for the USA.” Reflecting on his departure from Tennessee, Edwin Pelz remembers that he had “felt at home there--I had never felt that we were enemies. It was all like a dream and that is how it remains in my memory. I was not ashamed of the tears which were running down my face that day as we all said our goodbyes.”⁵³

On balance, camp life was obviously a positive episode in the lives of these

⁵² “Set These Slaves Free,” *Christian Century* (July 31, 1946), 933-4; “Uncle Sam in the Slave Trade,” *Christian Century* (June 12, 1946), 741; Krammer, 249.

⁵³ Albertson, 35; Treis, 3; Pelz, 54.

German soldiers. They enjoyed enormous freedoms, and, in the words of Evelyn Coulter, they decided to “make the most of a bad situation” by teaching, learning, competing, and composing. Their active lifestyles, however, constituted only a portion of their fond memories. As prisoners’ recollections reveal, interactions with their captors were an equally important feature of the POW experience. Those exchanges, and their greater significance, are the focus of the next two chapters.

Chapter 2

Through the Barbed Wire

Howard Newton of the 316th Military Police Battalion sat alone, manning his guard tower. The sounds of laughter and revelry down below, typical of the evening hours, seemed especially loud on this particular night. From his tower, Newton watched as a barrack door flew open. A prisoner ran from the building, laughing, as several shoes flew past him. Having decided it was time to settle the prisoners, Newton turned on the tower's floodlight, moving it back and forth across the barrack. Several minutes of silence passed. Finally, the door opened again, and Newton caught sight of an arm, outstretched, waving a white handkerchief. He promptly turned off the floodlight.⁵⁴

By and large, the Americans and Germans remained on their respective sides of the barbed wire. The prisoners were free to manage their own affairs, while the guards usually spent uneventful shifts along the fences and in the towers. While camps like Crossville thus contained two virtually distinct worlds, the contacts that did take place would have an important effect on the two groups' perceptions of each other. This chapter will show that these interactions left most prisoners, guards, and local residents with favorable views of each other. It is first necessary, however, to survey the unfriendly episodes that did take place.

Arrogance and Nazism

Even after they arrived in American camps, a number of the Germans remained confident of victory. Thanking his guards for the excellent food and living space, one

⁵⁴ Howard Newton, Interview by Gregory Kupsy, Chattanooga, Tennessee, October 28, 2003, 9.

German officer remarked, "When Germany wins the war, that will be at least one good mark on your record." In a similar vein, some POWs would question the practicality of studying English: "After the war's over, everybody is going to speak German here."⁵⁵ In Crossville, some collective acts of defiance took place, but they were generally mild.

Howard Newton, a guard, remembers that in 1943 the Germans

thought they were going to win the war.... All day long, they'd march backwards and forwards in them steel boots. See each other, "Heil Hitler!" All day long. That went on for a couple of months. They finally got tired of it, and began to ease up.... They got lazy.

One year, refusing to celebrate Thanksgiving, some prisoners decided to save their turkey until the following Sunday. The end result was an overfilled camp hospital on Monday morning, thanks to the ample servings of four-day-old thawed turkey.⁵⁶

In addition to such lighthearted episodes, some of Crossville's prisoners harbored a more sincere hostility towards the United States. The best example is the leadership of one of the most infamous German POWs, Captain Jurgen Wattenberg. Previously the navigation officer of the battleship *Graf Spee* and the commander of the submarine U-162, Wattenberg was one of the first officers to arrive at Camp Crossville in late 1942. He became the prisoners' official spokesmen, despite the legal claim of a German colonel to the position, and Major Cooper quickly came to view him as a dyed-in-the-wool Nazi. This assumption was not unfounded, considering the naval officer's belief that "the Fuehrer expects us to make trouble."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ James Powers, "The German Prisoner Muddle," *Reader's Digest* (November 1944), 42; Frederick Doyle, "German Prisoners of War in the Southwest United States During World War II: An Oral History," Ph.D. diss., University of Denver, 1978, 68.

⁵⁶ Newton, 9; "Barbed Wire in the Scrub Oaks," 6.

⁵⁷ John Hammond Moore, *The Faustball Tunnel: German POWs in America and Their Great Escape* (New

As spokesman, Wattenberg considered any acts of cooperation by his subordinates to be treason. According to camp authorities' reports, he demanded that prisoners let him censor their letters, and he threatened collaborators with capital punishment. He also encouraged fellow prisoners to "pester" their guards by taunting them and running laps around the stockade perimeter to confuse them. Such behavior eventually exhausted the patience of Crossville's authorities, who began to request for his transfer as early as July 1943. Finally, in January 1944, he departed Crossville for Camp Papago Park, Arizona, where he displayed similar behavior, and even organized the famous, if unsuccessful, "Faustball Tunnel" escape.⁵⁸

Another such character was Major Friedrich Johannes Werner. A protestant minister, Werner quickly annoyed camp officials with his fiery sermons. The following excerpt, reported to the Camp Commander by William Kanning, the German chaplain, demonstrates the hostile nature of the Major's message:

Today we hold the Fortress of Europe against all the World. God did not give Germany great riches in natural resources, but he did give her men who could work and fight and make a rightful place for us in the sun. Germany is struggling for her rightful amount of room in the world in which to live. She will never be defeated, if she does not lose faith in her historical mission in the world.

It was not unusual for camp authorities to equate such nationalistic sentiments with Nazism. Following a transfer request in October 1943 which accused him of doing "more promoting for the State religion of Hitler than ... for the Christian religion," Major

York, 1978), 4; 44; Crossville *Chronicle* (December 3, 1942), 1; Cooper, 43-4; Letter from Harry Dudley to the Provost Marshal General, January 11, 1944. RG 389, Entry 451, Box 1293, National Archives.

⁵⁸ For an in-depth study of the Arizona tunnel escape, see John Hammond Moore. Moore, 62; "Barbed Wire in the Scrub Oaks," 7; Requests for Transfer of Prisoner of War, RG 389, Entry 461, Box 2478, National Archives.

Werner moved to Camp Alva, Oklahoma, a camp for the most ardent Nazis.⁵⁹

For a time, Crossville's strain of prisoner hostility extended beyond the acts of a few individuals. Because the American personnel generally stayed outside the stockade, internal discipline was the responsibility of German noncommissioned officers, whom American authorities permitted to dole out punishments for minor offenses within the camp. But in the winter of 1944-45, the guards received several reports that the system fostered a Nazi undercurrent.

The first indicator came in December, when a group of officer prisoners submitted an anonymous letter to the Camp Commander, to protest the internal organization of their camp. They reported that the camp spokesman, who was supposed to act as an intermediary between prisoners and guards, actually assumed the role of a military commander. The spokesman at the time, Rudolf Buhse, placed pro-Nazi officers in charge of the press, the library, the curriculum, and in other roles. In some ways, they said, this authoritarian system "even surpass[e] conditions within Germany itself." By socially isolating anti-Nazis and using death threats against them and their families, the Nazi elements allegedly maintained control over the inmates.⁶⁰

Other reports emerged to corroborate these claims. Following an official inspection of the camp in January 1945, which included interviews with prisoners, Captain William F. Raugust concluded that the camp spokesman ruled in a "dictatorial manner," using "courts of honor" to try anti-Nazis. Worse yet, he reported that POWs

⁵⁹ "Gist of the Address on Sept. 1, 1943 by F. Werner" and "Transfer of German PW." RG 389, Entry 461, Box 2478, National Archives.

⁶⁰ Anonymous letter to "Commanding Officer, Camp Crossville," December 1944. RG 389, Entry 459A, Box 1612, National Archives.

were “forced to remain in the mess halls after each evening meal while a distorted news communiqué [was] read.” A month later, a State Department inspection made the same observations, and recommended action on the part of the Crossville officials. The camp commander replied that he had solved the problem by sending Rudolf Buhse to Camp Alva and appointing a new spokesman.⁶¹

Firsthand accounts by prisoners also suggest the presence of individual insurgents within the POW population. Hermann Treis ordered a number of books by writers who had been exiled from Germany, only to find that a superior officer had cancelled his request. As Albertson remembers, when a German doctor in Camp Crossville learned that his son was killed in action, he angrily condemned Hitler. A ranking German officer summarily court-martialed him and forbade other officers to associate with him.⁶² Worse yet, a few even feared for their lives. In a letter to the camp commander, Eberhard van Nuis, a known anti-Nazi, reported receiving a note on his doorstep “with the message that my death was a matter of decision and that I had forfeited my life.” Death threats continued even after he had himself placed in protective custody, and he ultimately received a transfer to another camp.⁶³

In some camps, Nazi “discipline” turned violent. At night, collaborators might receive visits by the “Holy Ghost,” meaning that they would be held to their beds and

⁶¹ “Field Service Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Crossville, Tennessee;” “Extract” from a State Department report; Memo from Camp Crossville to Fourth Service Command, March 12, 1945, RG 389, Entry 459A, Box 1612, National Archives.

⁶² Albertson, 11; Treis, 2.

⁶³ Statement to the Commander of Camp Crossville, January 3, 1945. RG 389, Entry 452, Box 1394, National Archives.

beaten.⁶⁴ In Camp Aliceville, Alabama, guards intervened to prevent the lynching of a German communist. Worse still was the lot of Werner Drechsler, an informant for the camp officials who was beaten to death in Papago Park, Arizona, or a prisoner in Hearne, Texas who met the same fate. As of May 1944, the PMGO officially recorded seven politically-motivated murders in the camp system.⁶⁵ None of these murders took place in Crossville, although one lucky prisoner allegedly received a transfer just as “the knife was sharpened.”⁶⁶

Each facility also had its share of avowed anti-Nazis. Among this group were a number of communists and socialists, some of whom seemed to be as mistrustful of the Americans as they were of the Nazis. Others were non-Germans, whom the Reich conscripted from occupied territories. Several of these prisoners, whose ranks included French, Austrian, Polish, Czech, and Russian citizens, asked not only to be paroled, but to fight for the Allies. A letter from Otto Wunsch, an Austrian interned in Crossville, to the Provost Marshal General is representative of these requests:

I am an Austrian, my father has been at a Nazi concentration camp for half a year. Therefore, you will understand that I have nothing [in] common with these people. On the contrary, I want to have a share for the liberation of my homeland.... I hope a similar institution as the Austrian Legion [which] the British now have in Italy will be created in this country. Many Austrian prisoners would be glad to see an end of their idleness in the camp and to be able to do something for their country.

⁶⁴ The “Holy Ghost” is mentioned in Pluth, 319 and in Matthew Schott, “Prisoners Like Us: German POWs Encounter Louisiana’s African-Americans,” *Louisiana History* 36:3 (Summer 1995), 282. Gerhard Hennes refers to nighttime beatings as visits from “Santa Claus.” Hennes Phone, 15. Press Conference with Major General Archer Lerch, 31.

⁶⁵ Moore, 95-96; Pelz, 46; “Violent Deaths of, and Injuries to, Prisoners of War.” RG 389, Entry 451, Box 1338, National Archives. Werner Drechsler’s death led to the controversial execution of his murderers. See Richard Whittingham, *Martial Justice: The Last Mass Execution in the United States* (Chicago, 1971).

⁶⁶ Anonymous letter. RG 389, Entry 459A, Box 1612, National Archives; Press Conference with Lerch, 31.

In its response to Wunsch and others, the Provost Marshal General's Office explained that the best way to help the Allies was "to cooperate wholeheartedly with the present prisoner of war work program." If such prisoners felt endangered, they could request a transfer to another camp, as with Eberhard van Nuis, described above.⁶⁷

The standard means of combating political intimidation was to create separate facilities for anti-Nazis, and to send hostile prisoners to Camp Alva, Oklahoma. This procedure was deceptively simple, however. For one thing, removing German spokesmen automatically brought protests through the Swiss legation, the ultimate effect of which was additional paperwork for camp commanders. There was also the problem of distinguishing between hardened Nazis and merely uncooperative prisoners, not to mention the inability to determine which prisoners were causing the problems. For these reasons, the removal of agitators remained, in the words of Edward Pluth, "the War Department's albatross."⁶⁸

Open Hostility and the "Battle of Crossville"

Within the nationwide system, some violence did occur between Germans and Americans. The worst incident took place on the night of 8-9 July, 1945, in Camp Salina, Utah. During the night, Clarence Bertucci, a guard at the camp, suddenly began to fire his tower's machine gun into the group of tents that housed the German POWs, killing nine and wounding nineteen. The shooter explained that he disliked Germans, and that he had acted on a long-standing temptation. Camp authorities advocated a court-martial, but

⁶⁷ Letter from Otto Wunsch to the Provost Marshal General, January 18, 1945; Memo, Army Service Forces to Fourth Service Command, February 3, 1945, NA RG 389, Entry 461, Box 2478, National Archives. Similar letters and complaints are located in NA RG 389, Entry 461, Box 2479, National Archives.

⁶⁸ Pluth, 140; 296.

Bertucci was ultimately ruled insane and confined to a mental institution.⁶⁹ It is worth emphasizing that this incident, by far the worst that took place in the American camps, was the result of individual derangement, not official policy.

While no event at Crossville rivals the violence at Salina, there was one instance of violence, which Herston Cooper refers to as the “Battle of Crossville.” In February 1943, during a routine “property check” in which guards searched prisoners’ quarters for contraband and signs of escape plots, a group of officers refused to move to the recreation field, as was the normal procedure. According to Cooper, Captain Wattenberg, the acting spokesman at that time, refused to relay the guards’ orders because he hoped to provoke an uprising to embarrass his captors. Eventually an armed guard advanced, bayonets fixed, and compelled the prisoners to vacate.

Later in the day, several prisoners rushed Cooper, and one prisoner, Major Erich Gräf, placed him in a “painful ‘hammer lock.’” Cooper remembers kicking at Gräf with his steel-rimmed boots, as other guards came to his aid. At some point in the scuffle, Gräf received a bayonet wound, and was sent to the hospital. According to both Major Cooper and Howard Newton, Gräf resisted treatment in the hospital, telling the American doctor that “he wanted to die for his Führer in the battle of Crossville.” Frustrated by the prisoner’s struggling, the doctor elected to “let him die, then, if he wants to die.”⁷⁰ Within a few hours, Gräf’s wish became a reality.

The incident’s aftermath caused a confrontation of a different sort. According to

⁶⁹ Allan Kent Powell, *Splinters of a Nation: German Prisoners of War in Utah* (Salt Lake City, 1989), 223-5.

⁷⁰ Cooper, 132-136; Powell, 67. “Violent Deaths,” RG 389, Entry 451, Box 1338, File 3, National Archives.

Army regulations, POWs who died while interned were entitled to an honorable burial. Gräf's funeral, which all of the German officers attended, featured a large Iron Cross and a Nazi flag. After the ceremony, officials arranged for Gräf to be buried in the local cemetery, a fact that did not sit well with the community. Crossville Mayor Charles Smith led a group of angry citizens to the camp to protest the burial in their cemetery. If the camp commander did not remove Gräf, the group warned, they would "dig him up and hang him on Main Street." With little delay, the commander had Gräf's remains disinterred, reburied inside the camp, and eventually transferred to a site at Camp Forrest in Tullahoma.⁷¹

While unfortunate, the events surrounding the "Battle of Crossville" were unrepresentative of life at the camp. Citizens' indignation over Gräf's burial stands in sharp relief to their general acceptance of the camp's presence, as well as their benign relationships with prisoners, as will be seen later. More importantly, the scene of mass hostility remains an isolated incident in the story of a generally uneventful day-to-day camp life. The following section will demonstrate that, even in cases of disobedience, the prisoners were generally harmless.

Escapes and Minor Offenses

Some of the most interesting interactions between civilians and prisoners were the result of escapes. Writing in the April 1944 issue of *American Magazine*, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover admonished Americans to remain on the lookout for escapees. The frustrated director presented several true stories in which unobservant citizens aided

⁷¹ Cooper, 140; Earlene Aytes, Interview with Charles Johnson, Crossville, Tennessee, September 7, 1993,

German fugitives, such as an unknowing G.I. who bought drinks for a German fugitive in Nashville, or an elderly couple who gave an escapee a free night's lodging. Prisoners' slip-ups usually brought them back into the hands of authorities, but Hoover warned civilians to be vigilant for clever disguises and tactics.⁷²

The public's help was crucial, Hoover stressed, because escapees were obviously rabid Nazis. Although none had committed acts of sabotage, he argued, "they *might* have." The FBI director believed that "every one of these ... prisoners at one time or another broods upon his confinement and tries to figure out some means of escaping." After all, since "every prisoner of war has taken an oath to uphold the forces of Nazism and Fascism," they would seek to continue the war at all costs.⁷³

Despite the director's assurances, an examination of escape stories shows that fugitive prisoners were completely harmless. As even Hoover conceded, none of the escapees actually committed acts of violence or sabotage. Nor, in most cases, did they travel very far. The Provost Marshal General himself referred to them as "absentees," rather than "escapees," because they generally spent a few days dawdling in the surrounding area, before surrendering or being captured. In the most famous escape, the digging of the "Faustball Tunnel" at Papago Park, Arizona, all of the prisoners were back in the camp almost immediately, after a brief taste of freedom. Captain Jurgen Wattenberg was the last to be captured: he turned himself in to a police officer in downtown Phoenix after less than a month.⁷⁴

Special Collections Library, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, 10-11.

⁷² J. Edgar Hoover, "Enemies at Large," *American Magazine* (April 1944), 17; 97-100.

⁷³ Hoover, "Enemies at Large," 97; 100.

⁷⁴ Hoover, 97; Press Conference with Archer Lerch, 9; Moore, 206.

The escape stories reflect a simple desire to relieve the monotony of camp life. Four prisoners who escaped from a train in Kansas stole several cars in making their escape, leading police on a high speed chase through the eastern part of the state. When police finally caught them and returned them to camp, a photographer who snapped a picture of them remarked that their actions served as proof of the Germans' "unsubdued belligerence." However, the four smiling faces in the picture imply that the real motivation behind the escape was the excitement of the adventure itself.⁷⁵

Camp Crossville's sole escapee was equally innocuous. On Saturday, October 23, 1943, camp authorities first became aware of the absence of Captain Wolfgang Hellfritsch. After hiding in a garbage truck as it left the camp, Hellfritsch began hitchhiking, and allegedly even rode with a highway patrolman who had his photograph on the dashboard.⁷⁶ By the end of the following week his picture appeared on the front page of the Nashville *Tennessean*, with a report that he had been seen jumping from a train bound for Ohio. Other papers across the state also gave his description and warned residents to be on the lookout. After four months, on February 18, 1944, the FBI finally caught up to Hellfritsch, who had been working for some time on a farm near Lexington, Kentucky.⁷⁷ As with the other escape cases, Hellfritsch does not seem to have had any persistent desire to wage war on the United States. Escapes were an inconvenience for camp personnel, but they did not pose a security threat.

As with escapes, most forms of misbehavior lacked any political or military

⁷⁵ "Prisoners of War," *Life* (January 31, 1944), 5-6.

⁷⁶ Aytes, 4.

⁷⁷ *Crossville Chronicle* (October 28, 1943), 1; (February 24, 1944), 1; *Knoxville News-Sentinel* (October 29, 1943), 12; *Nashville Tennessean* (October 29, 1943), 1; (October 30, 1943), 1.

motive. American officials even viewed some displays of Nazi symbols as pranks, rather than as serious statements. In Crossville, a few German gardeners planted seeds in such a pattern that, after a period of rainy weather, a swastika became clearly visible in the grass. Colonel Harry Dudley, the camp commander, dismissed the incident as a simple prank and imposed no punishments on the amused prisoners. In a similar case in Arizona, a group of German workers on their way to a work site unfurled a Nazi flag and hung it on the back of a truck, out of view of the driver. While authorities did punish the offenders, they viewed the act as a practical joke.⁷⁸

When observing the prisoners' rebelliousness, one must remember that most of them were in their late teens or early twenties. As the Provost Marshal General explained to the press, "any group of young men ... will try to raise all the Hell they can with somebody who is over them, to keep them in a dither all the time." Reflecting on his own rambunctious behavior and "heavy drinking" as a POW, Gerhard Hennes compares his actions to those of the average college student. After all, he "was the same age [as an undergraduate]. I was twenty-one when I came to Crossville, and so we had plenty of beer, and ... there was no curfew."⁷⁹ In such an atmosphere, one could reasonably expect a certain degree of unruly behavior.

Young, lighthearted, and curious, the majority of the prisoners did not harbor any great malice toward their captors. They focused on their daily work and activities and paid little attention to the American soldiers. The fact that a single guard, armed only

⁷⁸ Treis, 2; Press Conference with Lerch, 21.

⁷⁹ Press Conference with Lerch, 22; Hennes TTU, 19.

with a pistol, could enter the compound and not even attract the attention of the prisoners is a testament to the Germans' docility.⁸⁰ American authorities not only recognized this docility, but in fact cultivated it, and turned it to their advantage.

American Policy and "Coddling"

The Provost Marshal General's Office made sure that the POWs were by no means "roughing it." For example, most prisoners fondly recall the large and diverse camp menus, as described in Chapter 1. Even despite prisoners' appetites, Hennes recalls that meals could produce several garbage cans of uneaten food.⁸¹ Especially interesting was the fact that Crossville prisoners had access to beer, which even local residents could not buy. Many Afrikakorps soldiers, who had become accustomed to meager rations, actually became sick from their abundant and rich diet in camp. It is no wonder that American civilians, on learning of the prisoners' heavy diets and access to consumer items, began to see them as spoiled.⁸²

After a while, the German and Italian prisoners in Crossville even began to *act* spoiled, as shown by their demands and complaints to camp authorities. Officers complained about the unattentiveness of their enlisted valets. Demands for pets--which were sometimes approved--included requests for a dog, a monkey, and a canary. The Italian officers asked for partitions in the showers and the right to take baths, but the stockade commander drew the line when they requested individual nameplates on the partitions. An increase in the beer allowance, phonographs, short-wave radios, a

⁸⁰ Newton, 15.

⁸¹ Hennes, 38.

⁸² Albertson 7; During the war, Cumberland County was a dry county. Dickinson, 36.

swimming pool, and interactions with women were also among the prisoners' denied requests.⁸³

This level of comfort and laxity was not unique to Crossville. Throughout the country, prisoners enjoyed traveling in passenger trains, and a few even ordered from waiters in Pullman cars. One Italian prisoner recalls receiving three meals a day on his train journey, while his guards only had two. Later, after Mussolini's fall, Italian POWs received even more privileges, because technically they were no longer enemies. Italians in camps near large cities sometimes received permission to go sightseeing, and often attended dances and dinners in local Italian-American communities.⁸⁴

As these conditions became public knowledge, and as news of harsh treatment of American POWs in Germany reached the U.S., the public lashed out at the Army for "coddling" enemy prisoners. A *Newsweek* article in May 1945 juxtaposed accounts from German and American POW camps to show that the average American POW in Germany lost an unhealthy amount of weight, while the average German POW in America often *gained* weight after capture. The article also noted that, as American POWs were telling their liberators about thousand-mile forced marches, the German prisoners were openly celebrating Hitler's birthday. Around the same time, journalist Walter Winchell launched a series of attacks on camp authorities. In his radio broadcasts, Winchell relayed various reports of "coddling," including off-site dentist visits, hearing aids, pajamas, and other luxuries. "The way we coddle Nazi prisoners," he remarked, "explains why the Germans

⁸³ Cooper, 78-80; "Behind the Wire," *Time* (June 21, 1943), 67.

⁸⁴ Pelz, 45; Louis Keefer, *Italian Prisoners of War in America, 1942-1946* (New York, 1992), 45; 104-5.

laugh and call ours ... Democracy.” Over time, these protests would only increase.⁸⁵

The loudest objections often came when prisoners received better treatment than Americans. In Crossville, during a beer shortage, guards became frustrated to learn that because the officer prisoners “outrank our soldiers, ... they get the beer.” At a camp in New Jersey, the commander summarily cut butter supplies for prisoners when his wife complained about a shortage of the commodity. An irritated *Newsweek* reporter listed off foods on prisoners’ menus, such as veal and pork chops, which many civilians could not have afforded. In the face of such reports, it was difficult for Americans to accept their own sacrifices.⁸⁶

Especially offended were African-Americans, who contrasted their own treatment with that of the POWs. The most famous incident came in January 1945, when singer Lena Horne walked out of a USO show in Little Rock, Arkansas. Horne had become outraged when the “rude and definitely unfriendly” commander admitted German prisoners, but not black troops, to the theater. Countless similar instances took place throughout the war, such as the removal of blacks from train cars to make way for German and Italian prisoners. In one case, German POWs at MacDill Field, Florida actually *requested*, and received, segregation of the hospital cafeteria. “Nothing so lowers Negro morale,” observed the editor of *The Crisis*, “as the frequent preferential treatment of Axis prisoners of war.”⁸⁷

Eventually, this frustration escalated to the point of violence. On August 14,

⁸⁵ “German Atrocities Raise Question: Are Nazi POW’s ‘Coddled’ Here?” *Newsweek* (May 7, 1945), 58; Walter Winchell broadcast, March 11, 1945. RG 389, Entry 435, Box 7, National Archives.

⁸⁶ Newton, 9-10; “German Atrocities,” 58.

⁸⁷ *Chicago Defender* (January 6, 1945), 1; (January 27, 1945), 2; *Pittsburgh Courier* (February 10, 1944), 2;

1944, a group of black soldiers in Fort Lawton, Washington rioted and attacked a company of Italian prisoners, killing a private. In November, as the Army began court-martial proceedings for forty-three of the soldiers, a writer for *The Crisis* suggested that the attack was “the only way to focus American public opinion upon [the soldiers’] unhappy plight.” While this was not “justification for mob action,” the writer argued, it demonstrated that black Americans “had reached the breaking point. They could no longer endure seeing prisoners of war ... enjoy in this country the very facilities which they were denied.” The *Courier* noted that white soldiers, also annoyed with the “coddling,” had conducted a similar attack the night before the riot, and that the black soldiers had simply “picked up the ball.”⁸⁸ Like a growing number of civilians, these soldiers demanded an explanation for POWs’ comfortable lifestyles.

An important element of camp authorities’ defense was the clarification of misunderstandings. For example, citizens of Cumberland County raised questions about the Maidens United For Fun Service (MUFFS), an organization that provided entertainment for the guards and personnel at Camp Crossville. The camp’s public relations office released a statement to dispel the rumor that the MUFFS were actually dancing with the German internees.⁸⁹ Officials also repeatedly explained that the Italians, whose government had surrendered, had been reclassified as “co-belligerents,” and enjoyed additional privileges. Colonel Francis Howard of the Army POW Division wrote

“War Prisoners Again,” *The Crisis* (March 1945), 85.

⁸⁸ “Pampered Italians?” *Newsweek* (August 28, 1944), 40; *The Crisis* (November 11, 1944), 353.

Needless to say, the fact that white soldiers had committed a similar offense was a source of resentment for the *Courier* writer, although the paper does not mention whether they were also charged. *Pittsburgh Courier* (September 9, 1944), 5; (November 11, 1944), 17.

⁸⁹ “Barbed Wire in the Scrub Oaks,” 7.

to a complainant that these Italians, who were “in sympathy with the Allied cause,” had joined Italian Service Units to aid the American war effort, and subsequently they were “afforded minor privileges.”⁹⁰

Eventually, the public outcry led to an investigation by the House Military Affairs Committee, to determine whether prisoners were truly being “coddled.” In the proceedings, covered extensively by the *New York Times*, the Committee found that many civilian complaints about extravagant privileges, such as “parties, picnics, dances ... [and] sightseeing tours,” were based on rumors.⁹¹ In terms of the food levels, the Committee stressed that the Provost Marshal General merely adhered to the standards of the Geneva Convention. Article 11 of the agreement dictated that POWs’ food levels must be the same as those of the captor nation’s soldiers. Consequently, the Germans received an estimated 3,560 calories, as compared to 3,800 for American G.I.s.⁹²

After defending the PMGO on these grounds, the Committee went on to question the credibility of the protesters: “The conclusion is inescapable that any complaints of laxity in our control and treatment of war prisoners come from persons who have never heard of that state document [the Geneva Convention] and are therefore unaware of its definite provisions.” It found the remainder of the complaints to be from “persons in more obscure walks of life; people who were prejudiced because they were generally bitter to begin with and who would form opinions and perpetuate stories without

⁹⁰ “Are We Coddling,” 18; Correspondence between Congressman Lindley Beckworth and Colonel Francis Howard. RG 389, Entry 451, Box 1299, National Archives.

⁹¹ House Report 1992, 13; *New York Times* (April 27, 1945), 7; (May 1, 1945), 9.

⁹² Geneva Convention, 940; *New York Times* (April 25, 1945), 5.

bothering to ascertain the facts.”⁹³

Officials at other levels also gave practical reasons for comfortable treatment. At Camp Crossville, Herston Cooper believed that Nazism was best met with responses fitting a “civilized and honorable” country. By treating the prisoners respectfully, Cooper believed, the Nazis among them might “be convinced of the pseudo properties of their persuasion.” The Provost Marshal General, Major General Archer Lerch, emphasized that “any non-adherence by this government probably would result in instant retaliation against American prisoners held in Germany.” He said that camps in Germany generally operated within the confines of international law. Recent hardships for American POWs were the result of the “internal crackup” of Germany, not a renunciation of the Geneva Convention, and therefore the document’s provisions were still in effect.⁹⁴

The most effective practical arguments for American treatment of POWs are clearly outlined in a speech by Lieutenant Newton Margulies, the Assistant Judge Advocate, at Jefferson Barracks in Missouri. Addressing an audience in April 1945, Margulies listed the three primary reasons for POWs’ treatment. First, he explained that news of POWs’ treatment reached the German lines, where more prisoners might be enticed to surrender. In his words, it was thus “eminently more sensible, and really more clever, to win our war with butter and beefsteaks instead of bullets and bombs.” This argument seems valid, especially considering the fact that an estimated eighty to ninety percent of German POWs interrogated in Europe revealed that they anticipated good

⁹³ House Report 1992, 20; 29.

⁹⁴ Cooper, 29; *New York Times* (February 14, 1945), 4; “Anger at Nazi Atrocities is Rising but U.S. Treats Prisoners Fairly,” *Newsweek* (May 7, 1945), 58.

treatment in the hands of the U.S.⁹⁵

Second, Margulies said that humane treatment kept the Germans docile and cut down on security needs. He attributed the low number of escapes, and the complete absence of sabotage, to “the fact that the prisoners are relatively happy in the camps.” Indeed, despite the use of prisoners outside camps and the laxness of guards, the POW escape rate was .45%, as compared to .44% in the federal prison system. The prisoners, occupied with beer, sports, and classes, generally thought little about harassment or escape.⁹⁶

Finally, the speaker explained that allowing the prisoners jobs outside the camps filled the manpower shortage, and controlled them through monetary incentives. By offering payment for work, camp authorities fostered the abandonment of Nazi ideals, and watched as “the Nazi sniper became the American farmer!”⁹⁷ Prisoners focused their time and energy on working for canteen credit, while actually aiding the American economy. Indeed, as explained in Chapter 1, one year’s POW labor brought \$80 million in improvements to military installations, and contract work contributed \$20 million toward the maintenance cost of the camp system.⁹⁸

While it provoked some resentment among American citizens, in practical terms the policy of good treatment was a sensible one. In addition to fulfilling the requirements of the Geneva Convention, this so-called “coddling” helped to pacify prisoners.

⁹⁵ Newton Margulies, “Proper Treatment of War Prisoners,” *Vital Speeches of the Day* 11 (May 15, 1945), 478; House Committee Report 728, 13.

⁹⁶ Margulies, 479; Press Conference with Major General Archer Lerch, 9.

⁹⁷ Margulies, 478-9.

⁹⁸ House Committee Report 728, 8.

Moreover, in a time of insatiable demands on labor, it reduced the number of guards needed, while adding cooperative workers to the labor pool. Just as important as this official effort, however, were the interactions between Americans and Germans in everyday life. The positive impressions created through the barbed wire would last well beyond repatriation.

Benevolence and Fraternization

Initially, there was an air of tension in contacts between Americans and Germans. In 1942, authorities usually arranged for incoming prisoners to arrive at Crossville in the evening, to avoid drawing a crowd and a potential confrontation. When civilians did see the prisoners, however, they seemed nervous, but far from hostile. Occasionally, residents of Cumberland County would gather near groups of German laborers, displaying a guarded curiosity. Evelyn Coulter, a clerical worker in the camp hospital, remembers that townspeople “really didn’t know what to say” when prisoners came through downtown Crossville, but that they “did a lot of staring.” According to Edward Pluth, this interest in the prisoners was quite common nationwide: Americans, he says, were typically “more inquisitive than antagonistic when actually confronted with the German soldier.”⁹⁹

Over time, civilians’ caution abated, and they became increasingly friendly toward the prisoners. One prisoner in Colorado recalls that civilian employers brought him food, and even invited him to their homes, although his guards prevented such visits. Evelyn

⁹⁹ Crossville *Chronicle* (December 13, 1942), 1; Aytes, 10; Hilde Welch, Telephone Interview with Gregory Kupsky, November 21, 2003, 10; Evelyn Coulter, Interview with Gregory Kupsky, Crossville, Tennessee, October 26, 2003, 11.

Coulter recalls having pleasant conversations with German doctors and with Heinz Muller, the German interpreter in the hospital. These interactions, Coulter says, directly influenced her lifelong admiration for the German people. Even despite the state of war and the news of German atrocities, some Americans were able to cultivate friendships with their purported enemies.¹⁰⁰

This amiable relationship sometimes troubled American authorities, especially in terms of fraternization between women and the German prisoners. The Provost Marshal General publicly acknowledged only one instance of women cavorting with prisoners, but studies of the camps suggest otherwise. Allan Kent Powell has recorded several cases of “illicit sexual relations” in Utah, and Judith Gansberg tells the story of an escapee who lived with a California woman for a month before being recaptured. Similar events apparently occurred in the Southeast, too, as suggested by a number of exhortations from the Fourth Service Command. In November 1944, the Armed Service Forces headquarters in Atlanta ordered the use of “partitions, rails, fences, or similar means [in work areas] so that fraternization between prisoners of war and female personnel will be prevented.” A month later, presumably because of continued violations, the command headquarters reiterated the order, asking camp authorities to take “positive means” to stamp out fraternization, and to directly report all transgressions. Yet again in March 1945, the command responded to reports of such interactions, ordering the cancellation of contracts with any employers who failed to prevent socialization with civilians.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Doyle, 33-4; Coulter, 5-6.

¹⁰¹ Press conference with Lerch, 28; Powell, 207-8; Judith Gansberg, *Stalag USA* (Toronto, 1977), 45; Army Service Forces, Headquarters Fourth Service Command, “Instructions and Information,” November 22, 1944; December 6, 1944; “Prisoner of War Instructions and Information Letter No. 1,” March 20, 1945,

Guards, too, developed friendships with their charges. Allen Koop, writing on a camp in New Hampshire, describes how American soldiers sometimes helped prisoners to finish their work, so that both could return to the barracks more quickly. Koop says that many such friendships formed because Americans and Germans found common ground in “shirking, as well as working.” In Crossville and elsewhere, prisoners sometimes covered for sleeping guards. Hans Albertson, for example, often promised to wake his napping supervisor if an inspection party approached. In another instance, American firemen and German prisoners worked out a small moneymaking scheme. As Herman Treis recalls,

A fireman sat down with us and developed the following plan. I was to make sure that the stove in my barrack was stoked excessively so that a small flame would be visible above the roof. Then the guard from the watch tower would call the fire alarm and they, the firemen, would receive a so-called action bonus. That winter we were the cause of several fire alarms.

For their part, guards overlooked prisoners’ idleness, allowing them to work halfheartedly, or gave them small gifts.¹⁰²

Like civilians, guards received reprimands from their superiors for excessive socialization with the prisoners. As early as December 1943, the commander at Camp Forrest, Tennessee responded to reports of fraternization and trading between guards and POWs. The headquarters issued a memo to remind personnel that “these men are Prisoners of War, and will be treated as such.” The memo forbade the giving of cigarettes, candy, gum, and “unauthorized articles” to the Germans, and prohibited the

RG 383, Box 57, National Archives.

¹⁰² Koop, 76; 78; Albertson, 23; Treis, 2; 3.

acceptance of gifts from them.¹⁰³ Even without an official policy of good treatment--indeed, well beyond the provisions of the policy--the American soldiers befriended the Germans.

At Crossville, another positive influence was the benevolence of Colonel Harry Dudley, who served as the camp commander after August 1943. According to Hans Albertson, prisoners respected the Colonel, because he “reacted favorably to many German requests and suggestions,” and allowed the prisoners a degree of self-governance. He frequently supported prisoners’ initiatives, such as the prisoner-run garden and the fine arts exhibition described in Chapter 1. The commander even befriended a few prisoners, including Albertson, who “had some quite interesting dialog with him every week and smoked his offered cigars with enjoyment.” Hermann Treis, who served the American officers breakfast, also engaged in countless conversations with the Colonel, whom he describes as a “fatherly figure.” Dudley even secured a transfer for Treis, so that he could see more of the U.S. while in transit.¹⁰⁴

Even camp inspectors were aware of Dudley’s positive influence on guard-prisoner relations. After attending the fine arts exhibition, inspector Edouard Patte saw the event as a testament to the commander’s “understanding leadership.” After viewing the camp in April 1944, State Department representative Bernard Gufler reported that Crossville displayed “an outstandingly good feeling and spirit of cooperation between the prisoners and the camp administration.” He noted that this atmosphere only developed

¹⁰³ Memorandum, Camp Forrest Tennessee, December 29, 1943, RG 389, Entry 461, Box 2479, National Archives.

¹⁰⁴ Albertson, 5; 22; Treis, 3;

after Dudley's appointment as commander the previous August.¹⁰⁵ Like the prisoners, American officials appreciated the Colonel's contribution to camp harmony.

Combined with the ample food and relative freedom, the numerous instances of positive interactions with their captors gave the German prisoners a positive impression of American citizens and their society. Prisoners' memories were so favorable that many of them, including Hennes and Albertson, moved to America after the war, and countless others returned to visit the camp in later years. If the policy of good treatment aided the war effort, this sense of American benevolence would also help to mend postwar German-American relations, as the next chapter will demonstrate.

¹⁰⁵ "Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp Crossville," 40; Bernard Gufler, "Camp Crossville," RG 389, Entry 459A, Box 1612, National Archives.

Chapter 3

Denazification and the German POW

After visiting the Papago Park camp in April 1945, Democratic Congressman Richard F. Harless of Arizona was outraged. He simply could not countenance the fact that his state housed “pampered, well-fed German prisoners as fat as hogs.” Not only did they live in luxury, he said, but the prisoners were under the control of “old guard German sergeants” who continued to uphold National Socialism. Harless charged that “the United States has not done a single thing to educate German prisoners in the American way of life,” and demanded immediate action.¹⁰⁶ Unbeknownst to the congressman, however, the government had already begun such a program.

During the war, American authorities had discussed possible methods of “denazification,” to root out all facets of National Socialism in postwar Germany. Officially, the term referred to an effort to remove and punish Nazi civil servants in occupied Germany. But in 1944, the PMGO launched a new program, the “reeducation” of POWs in the U.S., to assist in reforming the German ideology. As such, the Special Projects Division (SPD) program fits within the greater denazification effort.

The term “denazification” is problematic, because it assumes, as did many Americans at the time, that all nationalistic Germans were Nazis. Indeed, one of the Swiss legation’s common complaints to the State Department was that camp staff labeled all uncooperative Germans as Nazis, regardless of their political views.¹⁰⁷ For the purpose of this study, the term will denote the effort to prevent a resurgence of

¹⁰⁶ *New York Times* (April 23, 1945), 3.

¹⁰⁷ Pluth, 345.

totalitarianism and aggression in Germany. This chapter will assess America's contribution to that effort.

Denazification as Punishment

The most prominent form of denazification was the effort to root out and punish Nazi officials after 1945. This effort, in the eyes of many, was a failure. In *Denazification* (1969), Constantine Fitzgibbon charges that America and Britain initially “rubbed [Germans’ noses] in the Nazi filth,” but ultimately failed to follow through with meaningful policies.¹⁰⁸ He defines three clear goals within American denazification: punishment of war criminals, a “cleansing” of Germany’s administrative ranks, and ideological reeducation. After evaluating the American pursuit of these goals, he contends that the plan’s only real effect was resentment among the Germans.

The main problem with prosecuting Nazis was the question of whom to charge. Fitzgibbon argues that American policy was initially overzealous, as it attempted to “sift the entire adult population into Nazis and non-Nazis.” Authorities distributed thirteen million *Fragebogen*, or questionnaires, to the population, to determine which citizens actively supported the Nazism and war crimes. The result was a logistical nightmare, as thousands of staffers attempted to make sense of varied answers and attitudes. When the trials began, amnesties, inconsistent sentences, and painfully slow hearings undermined the credibility of the process, leaving Germans skeptical of what they saw as a “quasi-legal, bureaucratic apparatus.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Constantine Fitzgibbon, *Denazification* (New York, 1969), 12.

¹⁰⁹ Fitzgibbon, 165; 167.

According to Fitzgibbon, the administrative cleansing policy also met strong criticism. Drawing on the experiences of their Union Army counterparts in 1865, American officials decided that a stable government and economy would not be possible if they removed wartime civic and business leaders. But by leaving these leaders in power and banning minor officials from holding civic office, the Military Government lent its policy an air of injustice. Germans could not take seriously an authority that pardoned major leaders while prosecuting those it considered “lesser offenders.”¹¹⁰

Ultimately, Fitzgibbon explains, contradictions in denazification policy only fostered cynicism among the German people. Critics pointed to the irony of a “democratic” authority that governed by decree and through a military presence. Others questioned the prosecution of individuals, when the victors professed to believe in “collective responsibility.” Combined with controversial legal procedures, these contradictions further depleted the credibility of denazification. In the end, Fitzgibbon concludes, the effort failed to punish the guilty, to evoke feelings of guilt in the public, or to instill Germans with an appreciation of democracy.¹¹¹

At best, the punitive strategy was incomplete. On the other side of the Atlantic, however, a growing number of officials saw the potential for reform among the 372,000 German prisoners of war. It seemed only logical to bring the ideological battle to the camp system, and, in the SPD’s words, pursue a policy of “reeducation.”

¹¹⁰ Fitzgibbon 29; 167.

¹¹¹ Fitzgibbon 99; 171; 177.

The Special Projects Division

As early as the summer of 1943, the Provost Marshal General's Office had drafted plans for a plan to combat Nazi indoctrination among the German prisoners. The plan remained inactive, however, until the idea of a reeducation program caught the attention of Eleanor Roosevelt in March 1944. The First Lady appealed to both Secretary of State Cordell Hull and War Secretary Henry Stimson, who agreed on the need for a secret "reorientation" program, with the goal of "imbuing [German prisoners] with respect for the quality of American institutions." The program was to be conducted both subtly and quietly, for two reasons. First, officials knew that "an obvious campaign ... to turn the prisoners against their own country" would only cause "dissension in the camps and ... lead the prisoners to react directly against this country." Second, as Ron Robin explains, the U.S. would have to avoid "blatant defiance" of international law, which prohibited the indoctrination of prisoners. The appearance of an indoctrination program might compel the Germans to retaliate by "reorienting" American prisoners in Germany. To avoid any such interpretation, officials classified the effort as an "Intellectual Diversion" program. The details of the plan would remain confidential until the end of the war, and the Provost Marshal General would refuse to answer reporters' questions about the program.¹¹²

The reeducation program became the task of the Special Projects Division (SPD), under the Provost Marshal General. Led by Colonel Edward Davison, the program comprised three major tasks: Project I, the distribution of pro-democracy reading material

¹¹² Gansberg, 60; 62; Arthur L. Smith, *The War for the German Mind: Re-Educating Hitler's Soldiers* (Providence, 1996), 48-9; Special War Problems Division, Department of State, "Indoctrination of German Prisoners of War," March 2, 1944. RG 389, Entry 459A, Box 1603, National Archives, 2; Robin, 9; Press Conference with Major General Archer Lerch.

to POWs; Project II, the training of civil administrators for postwar Germany; and Project III, the formation of a school for German police officers. After the war, Davison added the “Six-Day Bicycle Race,” a crash course in American democracy, in a last-ditch effort to educate as many cooperative German prisoners as possible before repatriation. Conducted in early 1946 at Fort Eustis, Virginia, the program graduated 23,142 POWs before its closing in April.¹¹³ Unfortunately, as a review of these ambitious plans demonstrates, the SPD’s projects seem to have suffered from a number of problems.

Project I, known as the “Idea Factory,” began in Camp Van Etten, New York, in October 1944. The Factory’s staff included a mix of American intellectuals, German refugees, and volunteers from within the POW population. Their primary goal was the publication of *Der Ruf* (“The Call”), a pro-democracy magazine to be distributed throughout the nation’s camps. In addition, Factory members screened and reviewed films, books, and reading material for distribution throughout the camp system. The SPD also placed Assistant Executive Officers at each camp, to aid camp commanders in carrying out reeducation programs and to introduce pro-democracy educational material into camp curricula.¹¹⁴

Unfortunately, educational efforts ran into several problems. First, many camp commanders remained unconvinced of the efficacy of a reeducation program, and saw the Assistant Executive Officers as “a threat to camp harmony.” Likewise, many reeducation officials resented the uncooperativeness of local commanders. Even at Camp Van Etten,

¹¹³ Quoted in Smith, 20-21; Krammer, 221-2.

¹¹⁴ Smith, 45; Robin, 55.

the heart of the program, Factory members complained that the commander treated the German staff as if they were “prisoners in a strictly Nazi [POW] camp.” Furthermore, a continued emphasis on the labor program limited the time and resources for the education programs.¹¹⁵

A second problem with Project I was the nature of *Der Ruf*. From January 1945 to April 1946, the prisoner-run magazine reached a readership of 75,000, but it had its share of opponents. Despite administrative assurances, some prisoners saw the publication as a propagandistic mouthpiece, and doubted whether German prisoners actually served on the staff. In extreme cases, hostile prisoners burned copies of *Der Ruf*, charging its editors with collaboration. The most common problem, however, was a perception of the German writers as an “alienated intelligentsia,” who had little in common with the average prisoner. As Robin explains, *Der Ruf*’s content, which dealt largely with literature, seemed centered around “private intellectual controversies,” rather than on issues pertinent to the average German soldier. To support this assertion, one can simply examine accounts of ex-POWs. In an oral history of German prisoners in the Southwest, Frederick Doyle failed to locate a single prisoner who remembered—or admitted—reading *Der Ruf*. At Crossville, neither Hans Albertson, Gerhard Hennes, nor Hugo Hohnacker recalls the publication.¹¹⁶ Either because of contempt or genuine unawareness, it seems that *Der Ruf* did not have the intended impact on these prisoners.

Projects II and III had similar obstacles in their efforts to install trained democratic

¹¹⁵ Pluth, 65; 135-6; Robin, 59-60.

¹¹⁶ Smith, 46; Robin, 68; Doyle; Albertson Letter; Hennes Phone; Hugo Hohnacker, Letter to Gregory Kupsky, March 3, 2004, 4.

officials in the new Germany. According to Arthur Smith, only about 600 of the 1,600 Project II graduates became civil officials after being repatriated. One reason for this low proportion was the attitude of the American Military Government in Germany, especially its head, General Lucius Clay. Opposed to the idea of creating a “privileged class” out of the reeducated prisoners, Clay and other officials refused to give the Project II graduates any special consideration in administrative positions, leaving them to join regular applicant pools. Another impediment was the nature of German society after the war. Smith points out that not all of the German soldiers wanted jobs in the Military Government, for fear of being seen as collaborators with the occupiers. Others became disillusioned by the American authorities in Germany, citing the irony of democratizing a country through martial decrees. Even *Der Ruf*, which began publication in Germany in August 1946, became critical of the Military Government.¹¹⁷ As with resistance in the United States, administrative obstacles in Germany clearly hamstrung the SPD’s efforts.

To what extent, despite these obstacles, was the Special Projects Division successful in reeducating the general POW population? In the view of the SPD, the reeducation program met “greater success ... than the officers who administered the program had dared to hope.” In an effort to measure the program’s success, authorities conducted an opinion poll among approximately 25,000 departing German prisoners. The study relied mainly on a pool of 22, 153 prisoners at the Camp Shanks, New York port of embarkation. Because this pool represented Germans from within all service commands, and camps with both cooperative and obstinate commanders, it was

¹¹⁷ Smith, 147; 152; 154-7; Robin, 168.

considered to be a population of “average” prisoners. The SPD also polled a sampling of graduates from the “Bicycle Race” reeducation program at Fort Eustis, Virginia, and a group of prisoners in Atlanta, Nebraska, at a “normal, good prisoner of war camp.”¹¹⁸

In its report on the results, the SPD found prisoners’ attitudes in general to be “very favorable.”¹¹⁹ Asked whether the state exists to serve the people, or vice versa, 96% at Fort Eustis, 80% at Camp Atlanta, and 78% at Camp Shanks chose the former. As for their preferred type of government, democracy was the choice of 96% at Fort Eustis, and 62% at Camp Shanks.¹²⁰ Asked if they would fight the same war over again if victory were assured, 98% at Fort Eustis, 89% at Camp Atlanta, and 76% at Camp Shanks answered “No.”

The report did find some responses to be “disappointing,” however. Asked whether the concentration camp films they had seen were real or propaganda, 94% at Fort Eustis considered them to be real, but “average” prisoners at Camp Shanks were split evenly among the answers “True,” “Propaganda,” and “No Answer.” The study concedes that the films could be both factual and propagandistic, but it attributes the results to a “guilt complex” among prisoners. More disturbing was the fact that 57% of those at Camp Shanks believed that, in whole or in part, “the Jews were the cause of Germany’s troubles.” This suggests a racism which, the study says, “runs parallel to the experience of our own nation.”¹²¹ Despite these disheartening answers, however, the report still

¹¹⁸ Poll of German Prisoner of War Opinion, RG 389, Entry 459A, Box 1603.

¹¹⁹ Poll of German Prisoner of War Opinion.

¹²⁰ Of those at Camp Shanks, 19% did not answer this question, which the report interprets as an unfavorable response. Only 0.5% of those at Eustis, and 5% of those at Camp Shanks, chose National Socialism. Poll of German Prisoner of War Opinion.

¹²¹ Poll of German Prisoner of War Opinion.

claims overall victory in instilling the prisoners with democracy.

Unfortunately, several factors obscure the poll's results. Ron Robin asserts that many prisoners probably gave what they knew would be "favorable" answers. He cites a 1946 survey of German youth, which argues that the youth were still ingrained with totalitarianism. As a result, they simply tried to regurgitate the answers they believed to be "correct," or desired. This, Robin says, explains the ambivalent answers about the Jews. Prisoners were unsure which response their captors wanted, whereas questions pertaining to government type were more clear-cut. He also suggests that, even if prisoners were not "brainwashed," some probably saw "correct" answers as an express ticket home. Either way, he says, the poll is unreliable.¹²²

The SPD, on the other hand, was confident in the accuracy of the results. It expressed confidence that the answers were genuine, pointing out that even the most favorable write-ins often had "unfavorable qualifications." Because some of the write-in answers "could be extremely damaging to the writer if his identity were known," the report said, POWs clearly took advantage of anonymity to express their true opinions.¹²³ In reality, the results of the survey are probably a mix of genuine and calculated answers whose exact proportion is impossible to quantify.

The SPD poll probably did provide an approximation of prisoners' sentiments, but it remains unclear whether the favorable answers were the result of reeducation.

Authorities had only admitted "cooperative" prisoners to the Eustis program, many of

¹²² The study cited by Robin is Donald McGranahan and Morris Janowitz, "Studies of German Youth," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 41 (January, 1946), and is summarized in Robin, 163-4.

¹²³ "Poll of German Prisoner of War Opinion."

whom were probably partial to democracy at the outset. In the absence of pre-captivity polling data, the percentages from Fort Eustis say little about the success of the “Bicycle Race.” Furthermore, if one assumes that an ideological shift did take place among the POWs, the survey does not prove that the conversions were the result of the deliberate educational effort. In fact, several other aspects of their time in captivity probably swayed the prisoners from Nazism, as will be seen later in this chapter.

Despite the SPD’s own assertions of victory, its program obviously had several flaws, and its ideological effect on the POWs is uncertain. But one must account for the fact that, after 1945, Nazism was, for all intents and purposes, a dead ideology, and that Germany did rejoin the Western democratic world. To understand the role of captivity in this process, one must examine the other forces acting on the prisoners.

De-education

In the January 13, 1945 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*, reporter Ernest Hauser presented an account of his experiences with German prisoners in Europe.¹²⁴ Having emigrated from Germany to the United States before the war, Hauser won the trust of countless POWs, who shared with him their views of Nazism, America, and the war. According to Hauser, the average German soldier tended to be well-educated, and intelligent enough to realize that Germany was losing. The frequent scenes of marching and singing were only a façade, and most prisoners tended to be rather sullen in individual conversations. After all, he quipped, they were experiencing a “morning-after

¹²⁴ Ernest Hauser, “German Prisoners Talk Your Ears Off.” *The Saturday Evening Post*, (January 13, 1945). The article was the beginning of a two-part report, whose second installment appeared on January 20.

mood, rubbing their temples after the biggest binge in history.”¹²⁵

The most striking part of the report is Hauser’s discussion of the prisoners’ general disavowal of Nazism. As one prisoner told him, “They are all shedding their Nazi ideas while things are going bad.... What’s the use of being a Nazi when you are defeated?” Adopting this point of view himself, Hauser concluded that “there is no such thing as a defeated Nazi. Perhaps the Nazi philosophy is a state of mind which has to be kept up with strong daily doses of victory.” Were the war to shift in the Germans’ favor, “most of [the prisoners] would again be supermen with wings.”¹²⁶

If one interprets Hauser’s definition of “Nazism” as any display of nationalism, there is quite a bit of evidence in the Crossville experience to support his view. Prisoners rushed to the front gates to receive the latest reports from arriving prisoners, as if their lives depended on the frantic search for a victory.¹²⁷ Indeed, Hans Albertson remembers how word of Allied advances slowly convinced him that defeat was imminent, until he learned of the Battle of the Bulge. At that moment, prisoners’ morale “turned around 100%,” and “many wise guys said, that they had told us so--all the time!”¹²⁸ Even beneath a gradual acceptance of defeat lay an ember of hope for victory.

Another example is Gerhard Hennes’s description of officers’ attitudes in early 1945. For Hennes, when the war situation was at its worst, “the unspoken order of the day for us was solidarity one with another [*sic*].” The prisoners banded together “as if

¹²⁵ Hauser (January 13, 1945), 61.

¹²⁶ Hauser (January 13, 1945), 64; (January 20, 1945), 105.

¹²⁷ Albertson, 20-1.

¹²⁸ Albertson Letter, 10; Albertson, 30.

integrity among ourselves assured survival and still made life worthwhile.”¹²⁹ Even though he was becoming disheartened himself, Hennes expressed disdain for Gilner, an officer who became openly pessimistic about the war effort and who was suspected of collaboration with the guards. Shocked and disgusted by this behavior, “most of [the officers] saw--and avoided--Gilner as a traitor.”¹³⁰ To begin to nurse doubts about the German war effort was understandable, as long as one held on to the remote possibility of victory. To abandon the war effort and embrace the enemy, however, was intolerable. In this case, as with Albertson, Hauser’s assertion about “doses of victory” holds true.

Even for those who were not ardent Nazis, their resilient morale was linked directly to Adolf Hitler. As Gansberg explains, Germans who were disinclined toward Nazism still celebrated the rise in living standards under the Führer. Ian Kershaw has argued that, once diplomatic and military victories earned Hitler the Germans’ faith, he became the embodiment of German success. Thus, even when Germans criticized the Nazi party or the war, they adhered to what Kershaw calls the “Hitler myth,” the symbol of German glory. In other words, it was the Führer who administered the nation’s “doses of victory.”¹³¹

This reliance on Hitler is manifest in Crossville accounts, and it explains why prisoners’ resilient morale dissipated at the news of their leader’s death. According to Hennes, throughout both good and bad news, soldiers had “clung to faith in the Führer.” With their leader’s demise, reality itself seemed to have been overturned. Hennes

¹²⁹ Hennes, 85-6.

¹³⁰ Hennes, 56.

¹³¹ Gansberg, 166; Ian Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford, 1987), 71; 167; 200.

remembers being “numb for days,” and Albertson describes his state of mind as “depressed, confused, and somewhat mentally deranged.”¹³² As long as Hitler remained, hope remained; when he died, so did the nationalistic fervor that he had generated.

The implication for reeducation is clear. If support for the German war effort could not outlive Hitler, then the Führer’s death would automatically begin, in effect, a “de-education” of nationalism and totalitarianism. Albertson remembers how “[the] world seemed to fall apart” at the devastating news. He and his fellow soldiers were left in a daze, trying “to understand the troubled world, the dark unknown future.”¹³³ Combined with the reality of surrender, the destruction of the “myth” exploded any faith in fascism as a means to national glory.

For some, exposure to the horrors of the concentration camps would reinforce this “de-education.”¹³⁴ At the end of the war, the PMGO decided to present German prisoners with firsthand evidence of the concentration camps. One method was the distribution of a pamphlet, “German Concentration and Prison Camps,” to POWs while in transit from entry ports to their camps. One Military Police Battalion reported “subdued and stoical” reactions among the train’s passengers, and the fact that “most of the P/W’s professed complete ignorance of the existance [*sic*] of deplorable conditions as portrayed in the pamphlet.” Some prisoners saw the pamphlets as propaganda and summarily discarded

¹³² Hennes, 85; 87; Albertson Letter, 10.

¹³³ Albertson, 31; Albertson Letter, 10.

¹³⁴ I make this point with the assumption that a number of prisoners, especially within the Afrikakorps, did not know of the “Final Solution.” Many of them, including Albertson and Hennes, disavowed all knowledge of the death camps. It is not the purpose of this study to speculate as to the validity of those claims, beyond the assertion that some prisoners were, in fact, unaware of the camps.

them, but the information had a definite impact on many others.¹³⁵

Most POWs, including Albertson and Hennes, learned of the war crimes through film. After the war had ended, guards across the United States herded POWs into movie houses, where images of starvation, abuse, and industrialized killing flashed before their eyes. Hennes, who professes to have known only that the concentration camps were for “enemies of the people,” says that he “had no idea of the extent and ferocity of murdering innocent people.” Upon watching the films, he says, his self-image changed “from being a hero to being a villain.”¹³⁶ Similarly, Albertson claims to have known only of camps for “criminals, social misfits, communists, homosexuals and political enemies,” adding that “we never had heard anything about bad or inhumane treatment in those institutions.”

After watching the films, he

will never forget those inhumane cruel and unbelievably horrible pictures.... Only with disgusted repugnance did I have to admit that the film was real! I never ever heard of these unimaginably gruesome actions before. [For] the first time in my life I felt that Hitler and his helpers had betrayed us soldiers--I felt ashamed and angry. Up to this day.¹³⁷

Admittedly, prisoners who knew about the camps were unlikely to admit as much after the war. Still, for those who did not know, the shock of the crimes could only discredit the now-fallen government.

Defeat, destruction, the death of their leader, and confrontation with Germany’s war crimes were far more effective “denazifiers” than were the SPD programs. After all, as Edward Pluth points out, many German prisoners did not even begin to embrace

¹³⁵ “Report on Atrocity Pamphlets.” May 18, 1945; May 22, 1945. RG 389, Entry 459A, Box 1603, National Archives.

¹³⁶ Hennes, 88.

¹³⁷ Albertson, 34; Albertson Letter, 10.

Special Projects programs and literature until after May 1945, when these forces came into play.¹³⁸ In the end, National Socialism invalidated itself, leaving the prisoners, and all Germans, to rebuild their collective psyche.

Incentives for Reconciliation

If the above factors undermined fascist and nationalistic attitudes, what allowed pro-democracy sentiments to replace them? In truth, life in the POW camps did sway many prisoners toward the West, but not through calculated programs. Rather, the mere observation of everyday life in the United States presented the Germans with a favorable view. For Edwin Pelz, a prisoner in Arkansas, courses on democracy were not necessary, because “even from inside a prisoner-of-war camp we could see the difference between Germany and America.” Gerhard Hennes remembers laughing at the guards’ informal behavior, but adds that he “was impressed by a more civilian society, and not the sort of snap-to-attention business that they had in the German army.” Similarly, prisoners who read the *New York Times* were shocked to find that the paper printed both American and German news communiqués, since they were “used to a press that presented only one line.”¹³⁹

The SPD poll results quantify these sentiments. Asked what impressed them most about America, 41% of the “average” prisoners at Camp Shanks gave answers classified as “favorable,” while only 18% gave “unfavorable” responses. Of the favorable comments, the most common were freedom of speech and the press (13%), individual

¹³⁸ Pluth, 419-20.

¹³⁹ Pelz, 52; Hennes TTU, 14; Gansberg, 105.

freedom (8%), and “the fact that democracy works” (5%).¹⁴⁰ It seems that democracy by example made an impression on these prisoners.

In addition to the ideological battle, two important factors helped to mend relations between the U.S. and West Germany. One-on-one contacts between Americans and Germans, combined with Cold War expediency, allowed the two peoples to cast off wartime images and embrace each other. While the POW camp experience directly affected only about 372,000 Germans, it contributed to this bottom-up reconciliation.

Within the camp system, most American personnel and German prisoners looked beyond wartime stereotypes. While interned, Edwin Pelz realized that “the [American] uniforms, the weapons, and the languages were different, but their faces were the same as ours.” In spending time together on work assignments, guards and soldiers developed a degree of empathy, because they endured the same hours and the same weather conditions. American civilians also found that prisoners held similar concerns about their loved ones overseas.¹⁴¹ In the setting of the POW camps, both Germans and Americans were able to look beyond the images created by propaganda.

The individual interactions in the U.S. resembled those taking place in the American Occupation Zone, as described by Petra Goedde. In *GIs and Germans*, Goedde examines contacts between American soldiers and German civilians, and their impact on postwar relations. Her study shows that in Germany, as in the U.S., civilians and enemy

¹⁴⁰ Poll of Prisoner of War Opinion.

¹⁴¹ Pelz, 43; Koop, 76-77; Coulter, 6.

soldiers found that they had much in common, leading to “a sense of cultural affinity rather than alienation.” Just as in the camps, informal interactions reached such a level that officials sought, unsuccessfully, to curtail them. In the end, however, they saw the value of fraternization in fostering cooperation between Americans and Germans, and actually encouraged it through social programs.¹⁴² In both the Occupation Zone and in the camp system, everyday contacts removed wartime barriers.

The primary difference in the two contexts is that, in Germany, fraternization was much more sexually charged than in U.S. camps. Goedde explains that war casualties had driven the female-male ratio in Germany to 160/100, and so most of the GIs’ interactions were with women. Through everyday contacts, dating, and sometimes marriage, the American soldiers dealt with a “feminized” nation, whose subordination and dependence contradicted the image of a bitter enemy. No such feminization occurred in the camps, but captivity had a similar effect. Disarmed, confined, and thousands of miles from home, the German prisoners experienced an emasculation of their own, and elicited the same empathy as did civilians in Europe. Hervil McKelvey, a farmer who employed prisoners in Tennessee, denied the need for guards because “[the Germans] were all very nice boys, just like ours.” While working at the hospital in Camp Crossville, Evelyn Coulter felt compassion for the German interpreter, who often expressed his concern for his family in Stuttgart.¹⁴³ Even without gender divisions, the harmlessness of the German-as-prisoner had the same effect.

¹⁴² Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945-1949* (New Haven, 2003), xix; 43; 137.

¹⁴³ Goedde, 44; 81-2; Michael Bradley, “Revelie to Taps: Camp Forrest, TN, 1940-1946,” Unpublished Manuscript, Motlow State Community College Library, Tullahoma, Tennessee, 158; Coulter, 6.

Goedde contends that, for GIs, feminization undermined the notion of collective responsibility, paving the way for forgiveness of the German nation. In their encounters with destitute families, genial women, and smiling children, American troops questioned the wartime perception of “a monolithic people unified by their support for the war.” In the same way, the lack of hostility among German prisoners impressed the American guards and civilians. A guard at Camp Forrest, for instance, found that the majority of prisoners “were, like himself, draftees who were told--not asked--what to do.” Howard Newton’s encounters with the Germans left him with the view that they were “good soldiers,” who simply “had to do what they were told to do.” These impressions, like the camaraderie described in Chapter 2, suggest that Americans drew a distinction between the German prisoners and the war criminals overseas.¹⁴⁴ In both the camp system and the Occupation Zone, this separation played a role in the foundation of favorable postwar relations.

The second component in a speedy reconciliation was the necessity created by the Cold War. Logically, in the emerging bipolar international system, many Germans saw the U.S. as the lesser of two evils. Cornelius Fitzgibbon, whose indictment of American policy in Germany is described above, credits the Cold War with holding together the flawed occupation authority. Regardless of the controversial political trials, the disagreements over collective guilt, and the flaws in the Military Government’s policies, Germans readily adhered to the U.S., needing no reminder of “Russian frightfulness.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Goedde, 44; 203; Bradley, 164; Newton, 14.

¹⁴⁵ Fitzgibbon, 170.

Furthermore, as Goedde says, images of American prosperity provided a strong incentive to remain in the American sphere, and consumerism was “the essence of [Germany’s] postwar democratic experience.”¹⁴⁶ Thanks to their fears of Russia and the desire for a rejuvenated economy, Germans in the U.S. Zone became willing partners with the West.

For their part, the Americans sought to expedite reconciliation, because they needed another Cold War ally. In *The Pledge Betrayed*, Tom Bower explains that the American Military Government reneged on its commitment to punish Nazi collaborators, because many of them would help to make West Germany a bulwark against communism. He points out that the Allies devoted more resources to “Project Paperclip,” a program to locate and employ German scientists, than to finding war criminals, a mission which “did not even boast a code-name.”¹⁴⁷ For the U.S., the focus was on emerging enemies, not defeated ones.

Bower sees this willingness to pardon Nazi technocrats as a moral failure. Whatever the moral implications, however, the end result of America’s Cold War pragmatism was the completion of denazification. As explained above, containment of communism required a strong Germany, and rebuilding the German economy required the help of men who had worked for Hitler. In exchange for their assistance, German industrialists earned an implicit pardon. Similarly, politicians like Chancellor Konrad Adenauer knew that cooperation with the West would allow them to bury Germany’s “brown past.”¹⁴⁸ This final step in denazification, then, involved not the removal of the

¹⁴⁶ Goedde, 196-7.

¹⁴⁷ Tom Bower, *The Pledge Betrayed: American and Britain and the Denazification of Post-War Germany* (Garden City, 1982), 4; 98; 325.

¹⁴⁸ Bower, 343; 355.

men themselves, but rather the removal of a stigma. By allowing former Nazis to fade into the population, the Americans received a new ally, and the Nazi technocrats rejoined the civilized world.

In the end, the problems with U.S. reeducation and denazification policy seem to have been irrelevant. Through both cultural contacts and Cold War pragmatism, Americans abandoned the perception of the Germans as Nazis. West Germans, who had witnessed the bankruptcy of totalitarian ideology, saw the U.S. as a source of prosperity and as an appealing alternative to the Soviets. In providing a forum for these interactions, the American POW camp system thus contributed to German-American reconciliation.

An examination of the American impact on postwar Germany provides only a partial explanation of denazification. Indeed, only half of the reeducated German people were in the West, and fewer still were in the American sphere. To better understand the impact of bottom-up cultural contacts on postwar Germany, one must also consider occupation and POW policies in other Allied countries.

Chapter 4

World War II and Modern Captivity

Hilde Welch was six years old in the summer of 1944. She lived with her mother and brother in Frankfurt, Germany, where intense Allied bombings frequently sent them scrambling for the basement. There had been no word from her father, a German Army medic, for some time, when suddenly the family received word that he had been captured. Hilde's mother was relieved that her husband was alive, but she remained concerned. "I hope the Americans have him, and not the Russians," she said. "If the Russians got him, he ain't got much of a chance." A few months later, her fears were allayed by a postcard from Crossville, Tennessee.¹⁴⁹

It is important to remember that a very small percentage of German prisoners of war actually resided on American soil. At the end of the war, the U.K. held approximately the same number as the U.S., and the Soviets had captured 3,100,000.¹⁵⁰ To truly understand the significance of America's treatment of prisoners, therefore, one must discuss it in relation to other Allies' camp systems. Although official U.S. policy was ineffective in advancing denazification, this comparison will show that its value was in combining humanity with modernity.

The British Camp System and Reeducation

In many ways, the British system was similar to that of the U.S. The majority of German prisoners came to the U.K. after the Normandy invasion, and by December 1945 the island housed nearly 400,000 POWs. Britain distributed approximately half of its

¹⁴⁹ Welch, 7-8.

¹⁵⁰ Henry Faulk, *Group Captives: The Re-Education of German Prisoners of War in Britain, 1945-1948* (London, 1977), 32; S.P. MacKenzie, "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in World War II," *The Journal*

prisoner population among 1,500 small work camps to fill labor needs throughout the country. These prisoners, like their comrades in America, had access to books and media through international organizations, and were generally left alone within the stockade. As in the U.S. system, this system sometimes led to Nazi domination.¹⁵¹

Officials in Britain resembled their American counterparts in their adherence to the Geneva Convention, and they provided comfortable treatment for their German charges. Prisoners' rations amounted to 3,300 calories, a level above that of civilians, but beneath the British soldier's daily intake. After V-E Day, public outcry convinced authorities to reduce the rations to 2,800 for working prisoners, and 2,000 for non-workers. Colonel Henry Faulk, a British reeducation official, recalls that many sympathetic employers continued to give prisoners extra food, as had been the case on American work sites.¹⁵²

The end of the war brought several changes to camp life in Great Britain. British authorities screened the same concentration camp footage that the Office of War Information had distributed to American camps, and prisoners generally displayed the same mixture of disbelief and shock as did prisoners across the Atlantic. The British, no longer fearing reprisals against their own POWs after May 1945, put a number of prisoners to work clearing mines along the English Channel.¹⁵³

In terms of reeducation, the British and Americans generally pursued the same goals. Officials set up the Wilton Park facility to expose prisoners to liberal education

of Military History 66:3 (September 1994), 511.

¹⁵¹ Faulk, 32; 55; 114.

¹⁵² Faulk, 17; 36.

¹⁵³ Faulk, 121; 43.

techniques and open discussion groups. The Foreign Office's Prisoner of War Division (POWD), like the SPD, hoped to give the prisoners an appreciation for democracy through firsthand exposure. They also relied on simple statements of fact, rather than persuasion, with the hope that prisoners would come to democratic conclusions on their own. These similarities between the two programs are unsurprising, considering the political and cultural similarities between the two nations.¹⁵⁴

Some important differences did exist, however. Colonel Faulk explains that the POWD's goal was to create a more altruistic reeducation plan than the American and Soviet programs, "both of which were essentially political." Wilton Park officials rejected the idea of training civilian administrators, instead focusing on "general reeducation." In his description of the reeducation program, Faulk presents his belief that the key to denazification was the formation of a new "group identity" to replace the one created by National Socialism. The goal, he says, was to engage students in free discussions. What mattered was not the actual content of the discussions, but "the tone of the groups as a means of cultivating ... a spirit of tolerance and respect for human dignity." Dispersing the school's 4,800 graduates would spread these democratic perspectives throughout the POW population, which would in turn carry them into Germany.¹⁵⁵

One of the most notable features of the British reeducation program is the fact that, unlike the American SPD, the POWD embraced fraternization. Officials and

¹⁵⁴ Smith, 31-2; 69; Faulk, 120.

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in Smith, 22; 70; Faulk, 149; 199.

politicians, including several members of Parliament, felt that firsthand views of British civilians and everyday life would be an excellent way to counteract Nazi propaganda. To that end, in December 1946 the government lifted the restriction on interactions between prisoners and British citizens. In 1947, cooperative German POWs received permission for limited travel, to handle British money, and eventually to marry. Colonel Faulk hoped that individual friendships would change individual views, which would then carry over into “barracks-room discussions” and introduce pro-democracy sentiments into prisoners’ group identity.¹⁵⁶

Unfortunately, British denazification shared some of the same flaws as the American program. For instance, extending captivity into 1948 became a source of resentment for prisoners. Smith says that, for prisoners anxious to return home, the delay in repatriation “overshadowed what would otherwise have lingered on ... as a pleasant time full of good will.” He points out that, in most of his interviews, POWs vividly recall their frustration with ongoing captivity. Another bone of contention, as with the U.S. program, was denazification in the occupation zone. Like the Americans, British officials gathered up German scientists and technocrats, and acquitted many high-profile officials, including the industrialist Hermann Abs, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, and Armaments Minister Albert Speer. As Tom Bower explains, the result was a loss of faith in British intentions.¹⁵⁷ It seemed that practical needs like labor concerns and Cold War politics worked their way into the allegedly apolitical British system.

¹⁵⁶ Faulk notes that 769 British women married German prisoners of war. Faulk 40; 53; 168; 173.

¹⁵⁷ Smith, 139. See Tom Bower’s criticism of American and British occupation policy in Chapter 3.

In its flaws, as well as in its goals, it is clear that the British system had much in common with its American counterpart. Undoubtedly, the social interactions between prisoners and civilians aided reeducation in Britain just as they had in the United States. After the war, and especially after the creation of Bizonia in January 1947, the U.K. also found itself on the side of prosperity in the emerging Cold War. The Western countries and zones thus provided similar camp environments, but their prisoners' experiences were far removed from those of their counterparts in the East.

The Soviet Camp System and Reeducation

On the Eastern front, mutual hatred reached such a pitch as to make humane treatment of prisoners unlikely, if not impossible. As part of the plan to physically exterminate the carriers of Bolshevism, German pens held hundreds of thousands of Red Army prisoners, providing no shelter and inadequate food. Hitler approved their use in exploitative labor, although their poor health made the program rather ineffective. In the end, some 3.3 million, or 57.5%, of the Russian prisoners in German hands would perish.

On the other side of the lines, propaganda leaflets assured Red Army soldiers that the Germans were "not human beings but wild animals," and that death was the only proper treatment for the Wehrmacht soldier. As a result, many of the would-be prisoners were shot immediately upon capture, and those taken into custody fared hardly better. In addition to generally difficult living standards in Russia, the Red Army employed the POWs in the dangerous mining and timber industries, as a way to alleviate labor shortages. While slightly lower, the figures on the Soviet side are also staggering: at least 1 million, or 32%, of the Wehrmacht prisoners died in captivity. Like their German

counterparts, the Soviet camps were characterized by excessive brutality.¹⁵⁸

As with the Americans and British, the Russians formed a plan to reeducate the prisoners in their custody. Arthur Smith explains that the Soviets' *Freies Deutschland* (FD) Movement developed much more quickly than did similar programs conducted by the Western Allies. As early as May 1942, a full year before the U.S. drafted Special Projects plans, the first Antifa (Antifascist) school for German POWs opened in the Soviet Union, offering markedly better treatment for cooperative prisoners. The goal was to instruct the enrollees--many of whom had signed up in exchange for food--in the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism.¹⁵⁹

The Soviets distributed Antifa graduates throughout the camp system, to spread antifascist sentiments. In 1943, these prisoners formed the Union of German Officers (BDO) and the National Committee for a Free Germany (NKFD) for enlisted men. Among the POWs, these groups' credibility benefited greatly from the leadership of Field Marshal Friedrich von Paulus and General Walther von Seydlitz, both of whom seethed over their abandonment by Hitler at Stalingrad. These and other leaders aided the Soviet war effort by sending radio messages to their German comrades, appealing to them to surrender. In the event of a separate peace, the Soviets also prepared BDO and NKFD members to sweep into Germany and assume control.¹⁶⁰

Smith explains that, in some ways, the Antifa strategy was superior to the American and British counterparts. First, he describes as "brilliant" the plan to have

¹⁵⁸ MacKenzie, 509-511; Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, 1995), 43.

¹⁵⁹ Smith, 65-6; 108-9.

¹⁶⁰ Naimark, 10; 17; Smith, 36.

German officers, such as Paulus and Seydlitz, set an example for the enlisted men. He says that the Soviets gave reeducation a “German face” by conducting courses in German and by defining the program as anti-Nazi, rather than as pro-Allied. The Red Army also managed to send over 85,000 prisoners to the Antifa schools, as compared to about 23,100 at Fort Eustis, Virginia, and 4,800 at Wilton Park. Even during the war, the program seemed so well-conducted that it evoked the envy of American officials.¹⁶¹

Like the Americans, the Soviets planned to install reeducated prisoners in postwar government positions. Unlike the U.S. Military Government, however, the Russian authority directly aided the Antifas. They began by repatriating 300 German prisoners in the summer of 1945, to organize antifascist groups and set up local administrations. Later, the new Justice administration would hire as many judges and lawyers from among the returning POWs as possible. A large number of former captives also ended up as members of the Alert Police, a paramilitary force created in 1948 as a non-Russian means of maintaining order.¹⁶² In appearance, the use of reeducated prisoners in the Soviet Occupation Zone was clearly more organized than were similar attempts in the West.

Unfortunately, even an effective occupation policy could not compensate for the quality of the overall POW experience. While many prisoners in America returned home with positive memories of their experiences, Russian captivity left a much more negative impression on both prisoners and East Germans. First, the problem of delayed repatriation in the West pales in comparison to the fact that nearly a third of the Soviet-

¹⁶¹ Smith, 13; 37; 193.

¹⁶² Naimark, 19; 43; 374.

held POWs remained imprisoned until their deaths. Naimark explains that the retention of, and lack of contact with, these POWs after the war became a serious publicity problem for officials in the Soviet Zone. Of those who did return home, many became disillusioned with the East German administration. Some felt that they had been misled as to the nature of the Soviet occupation, and those who joined the Alert Police resented the force's political indoctrination sessions. According to one estimate, as many as 30% of the returning POWs fled to the West.¹⁶³

The U.S.S.R. had little more success in winning over the East German population in general. One of the primary reasons for this failure was persistent hatred between the Germans and the Russians. At best, according to Mary Fulbrook, East Germans tried to make the most of the Soviet occupation, hoping that reunification with the West would come quickly. At worst, they despised their conquerors. Racist propaganda images could not disappear overnight, and most Germans found it difficult to submit to a nation of *Untermenschen*. Worse still, the degree of physical assaults, looting, and deportations of political prisoners did little to dispel the barbaric image propagated by the Nazis.¹⁶⁴

Finally, while bottom-up interactions became an asset in the American Zone, the opposite occurred in the East. In the aftermath of the Soviet invasion, the vast number of rapes committed by Soviet troops constituted a dark counterpart to the sexually-charged fraternization of the West. According to Norman Naimark, the “ubiquitous threat and the reality of rape” in the East, whose victims probably numbered in the hundreds of

¹⁶³ Krammer, 266; Naimark, 43; 287; Smith, 175; Lothar Kettenacker, *Germany Since 1945* (Oxford, 1997), 35.

¹⁶⁴ Mary Fulbrook, *Interpretations of the Two Germanies, 1945-1990* (New York, 2000), 16-7; Naimark, 134; 254.

thousands, was an experience entirely unknown to other zones. He suggests that the frustrations of the war, desires for revenge, and mutual racial hatred probably lay at the root of this violence. In the end, Red Army soldiers' behavior played into the hands of the noncommunist political parties, who linked the barbarism to the nature of a communist regime. The fact that female voters flocked to support the Christian Democrats and Liberal Democrats is, for Naimark, a clear indicator of the rapes' impact on the Soviet image. If Western fraternization compensated for an ineffective denazification policy, the inhumane character of this "fraternization" in the East undermined a more organized attempt at reeducation.¹⁶⁵

Whereas American authorities ultimately embraced fraternization, in the end Soviet officials had to enforce cultural separation. First, Stalin's "anti-cosmopolitan campaign" to protect the Red Army troops from bourgeois influence kept interactions to a minimum. After July 1947, officials completely isolated soldiers from the Germans, to curb the problems of rape and venereal disease. The policy did advance these goals, but it also precluded any remaining chance of allowing meaningful interactions at the individual level.¹⁶⁶ The indelible hostility between troops and civilians left administrators in a no-win situation and eliminated an important tool for reconciliation.

At the end of the war, before these problems became visible, the Soviet reeducation program appeared to be superior in its employment of former prisoners. In

¹⁶⁵ Naimark, 107; 121; 133.

¹⁶⁶ Naimark, 37; 94.

1943, U.S. Army Intelligence advised the Provost Marshal General to “take a page from the Russian book” in denazifying POWs. Meanwhile, the Soviets observed the inconsistent denazification policies of the West, and declared a public relations victory. Over time, however, factors such as Western prosperity and racial hostility contributed to the defeat of Soviet ambitions in their zone. In both Germanies, the effects of cultural attitudes, as described by Petra Goedde and Norman Naimark, trumped those of official policies.¹⁶⁷

Liberalism and Radicalism: The Nature of Modern Captivity

The above examination of the major Allies’ captivity and reeducation policies shows that success and defeat were divided along East-West lines. It is thus tempting to view the camp systems through a Cold War lens, and to see the divergence as a triumph of democracy over communism. However, if one begins with the First World War and traces common developments in both Soviet and Western camp systems, the Cold War image seems inaccurate.

In *Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War*, Richard Speed compares World War I camp systems in terms of international standards and multilateral agreements. At the beginning of the war, he explains, all major belligerents, including Tsarist Russia, tried to adhere to the 1907 Hague Convention and respect the rights of prisoners, in accordance with a “liberal tradition” of captivity. By war’s end, however, the Bolsheviks fully embraced a darker “radical tradition,” which has since served as a rival to the standards of the West.

¹⁶⁷ Smith, 18; Naimark, 466.

As with the later Geneva Convention, the Hague agreement stipulated that prisoners' labor should "have no connection with the operations of the war," and that POWs should receive the "board, lodging, and clothing on the same footing as the troops of the Government who captured them." Third, the convention forbade the forcible use of prisoners in arms against their home government. In embracing the Hague spirit and agreeing to a prisoner's inherent right to life, the belligerents embraced what Speed calls the "liberal tradition."¹⁶⁸

Admittedly, some instances of poor treatment did occur in the Great War. For instance, the British blockade and the infamous "turnip winter" caused general shortages in Germany, which carried over into the level of treatment of prisoners. Speed notes that Tsarist Russia, which displayed the least humane conditions, initially made an effort to comply, but that "circumstance and ineptitude" made for inadequate distribution of supplies. What is important is that the major belligerents both intended and attempted to adhere to the Hague standards. Some rule-bending took place, but generally speaking, "the liberal tradition remained intact."¹⁶⁹

In the author's view, the year 1915 saw the beginning of a break with the liberal norm, as Russians' treatment of prisoners marked the new "radical tradition." The first hint of this radicalization was the use of ethnic favoritism among prisoners. Speed describes how the Soviets gave Slavic POWs preferential treatment, because the

¹⁶⁸ Richard Speed, *Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity* (New York, 1990), 3. The text of the 1907 Hague Convention and the 1929 Geneva Convention on prisoners of war are available in Charles Bevins, *Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America, 1776-1949* (Washington, D.C., 1969).

¹⁶⁹ Speed, 6; 73; 109.

government saw them as “potential recruits in an ethno-political struggle” with Austria-Hungary. By violating the rights of another nation’s citizens and by attempting to create a fifth column after the cessation of hostilities, this tactic violated the liberal spirit.¹⁷⁰

Speed argues that the final break came with the Bolshevik takeover in 1917, as the communists added indoctrination and recruitment of agents to the camp program. First, they directly violated the Hague Convention by admitting Germans and Austrians into the Red Army, using food as an incentive. More importantly, the Russians inundated prisoners with Red propaganda, and repatriated only their “ideological converts” at the end of the war, to foment class warfare in enemy countries. This transformation of the POW into an ideological warrior formed the core of the new radical tradition.¹⁷¹

To Speed, this liberal-radical split has been present since 1917. “Prisoners were no longer merely men, whom none could exploit,” but were now “potential recruits” in a greater conflict. This form of captivity has lived on in communist regimes, he argues, and events such as the reading of propaganda statements by American prisoners in Korea and Vietnam are part of the radical legacy. He suggests that the tension between the two captivities will persist “as long as the ideological confrontation between liberal democracy and communism continues.”¹⁷²

An examination of the Soviet camp system reveals that many of these “radical” tenets were still in play in the Second World War. Taken alone, the fact that the Soviets renounced the Geneva Convention indicates a rejection of liberal standards, but

¹⁷⁰ Speed 109, 120.

¹⁷¹ Speed, 170-1.

¹⁷² Speed, 8; 186-7.

individual actions and policies add to the radical image of Russian captivity. First, political indoctrination was central to the German POW experience in Russia. As explained above, the Antifa schools and agents systematically worked to convey Marxist-Leninist teachings to the prisoners. In the words of Arthur Smith, Russian reeducation was again “simply another weapon in the war to expand communist domination.” The Russians also gave preferential treatment to those who joined the Antifa programs, and former prisoners were sometimes given the choice between working in mines or joining the Alert Police. In offering enlistment as an escape from starvation and hard labor, the Red Army thus copied its tactics from World War I.¹⁷³ This exploitation of prisoners suggests that Speed’s radical tradition was alive and well in the U.S.S.R. in the 1940s.

But if one takes into account similar trends in Allied behavior, the liberal-radical lines begin to blur. As noted in Chapter 3, American officials realized that reeducation could be construed as a violation of international law, and as a result they cast their reeducation effort as an “Intellectual Diversion” program. As they well understood, their utilization of the prisoners as tools of democratization represented, like the Soviet program, an intervention into the neutrality of the prisoners of war as “protected persons.” It is also significant that the Americans saw reeducation as a means of combating not only its current enemies, the Nazis, but also nascent communist elements in Germany. Thus, the U.S. planned to utilize the POWs beyond the termination of the war, in the “ideological confrontation” described by Speed.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Smith, 37; Naimark, 371.

¹⁷⁴ Gansberg, 63-4; Speed, 7-8, 187; American officials, especially T.V. Smith, spoke of the need to isolate communist POWs and prevent both the far left and far right from taking power in Germany. Robin, 135-6.

The use of certain tactics by both “liberal” and “radical” countries suggests that Speed’s model requires revision. In truth, the “radical” view of prisoners as “potential recruits” applied not only to the Bolsheviks’ intended class struggle, but to all sides in the ideological conflicts of the twentieth century. In conflicts between capitalism and communism, democracy and totalitarianism, each nation sought to rescue enemy prisoners from what it considered illegitimate political values. The difference was not one of intentions, but rather of methods, as seen below.

A more useful method of examining the changing status of the POW is to place captivity within the context of modernized warfare. Omer Bartov has explained that the rise of industrialization and mass organization transformed not only the physical nature of war, but also the morality behind it. The focus on sheer numbers in the First World War diminished the agency—and value—of the individual combatant.¹⁷⁵ This depersonalization of combat is equally applicable to the treatment of POWs. In the twentieth century, the growing size and mobility of armies inevitably led to an increase in the scale of captivity. Just as modernized war devalued the individual soldier, large-scale imprisonment diminished the integrity of the individual prisoner as a “protected person.”

An example of this de-individualization is the commodification of prisoners of war. Admittedly, camp labor systems had existed for some time, but with total war came an increase in the scale of POW employment.¹⁷⁶ In 1917, and again in the 1940s, whole economies strove to meet wartime demands, and large pools of prisoners provided a ready

¹⁷⁵ Omer Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation* (New York, 1996), 26; Omer Bartov, *Mirrors of Destruction: War, Genocide, and Modern Identity* (Oxford, 2000), 16.

¹⁷⁶ In the U.S., POW labor had been used on both sides in both the Revolution and the Civil War, but on a far smaller scale than in World War II. Lewis and Mewha, 38-40.

solution to labor needs. In America, appraisals of POW's work potential made sense during a manpower shortage, and profitability became a plausible explanation for comfortable treatment.¹⁷⁷ This commodification, if less extreme, is not entirely unrelated to perceptions in Germany and Russia, where labor value became the sole reason for feeding prisoners adequately.¹⁷⁸ In terms of the prisoner-as-resource, the evolution came not from communism, but from mass organization.

If radical traits extended to all modern countries, is there a strictly “radical tradition?” In reality, the difference between Speed's traditions is one of degree. The U.S. saw prisoners as resources, and sought to utilize them in a greater ideological battle, but it is notable that the Americans did so *humanely*. As Edwin Pluth points out, even beyond their obligations under the Geneva Convention, the Americans were simply “willing to adhere to certain principles.” Despite sharp ideological differences with the Germans, the U.S. stopped short of physically dehumanizing them, and provided all prisoners the same food and supplies. In the Soviet Union, on the other hand, the same modern warfare caused commodification and depersonalization, but Stalin's disregard for human life carried the radicalization to a greater level of brutality. Perceiving their prisoners as “the unfinished business of the battlefield,” the Russians regarded them as expendable, and made ideological conversion a condition of survival. More importantly, as with the German concentration camps, the Gulag system internalized captivity by making POWs of Russia's own citizens. The extremity of de-individualization in Soviet

¹⁷⁷ See Lerch's comments on the POW labor program in Chapter 1, and Margulies's defense of “coddling” in Chapter 2.

¹⁷⁸ MacKenzie, 509; 511.

Russia affirms Bartov's view that "totalitarianism is modern utopia brought to its ultimate concrete conclusion."¹⁷⁹

In the final analysis, then, what does a comparison of camp systems say about captivity in modern, total war? The scale of the world wars led to an increased focus on numbers and resources, in which the integrity of the individual POW became lost. In this sense, the United States was just as "radicalized" as the Soviets in its view of the prisoner as a resource and as an ideological convert. However, it is to the credit of the Americans, as well as the British, that they held this "radicalization" within limits, and lent an air of decency to a program whose horrific potential is all too clear. It is their respect for a prisoner's *physical*, rather than *ideological*, integrity that is the true difference between the twentieth-century traditions.

U.S. policy thus retains its historical significance. If bottom-up interactions played a greater role in postwar political concerns, one cannot deny that American camp policy set a humane example in the context of modern warfare. Prisoners at Crossville, along with 372,000 other German soldiers nationwide, enjoyed a standard of treatment that can no longer be taken for granted.

¹⁷⁹ Pluth, 236; MacKenzie, 519; Bartov, *Mirrors*, 158.

Conclusion

On October 1, 1945, Camp Crossville was to become a branch of Camp Forrest, in a consolidation of the national camp system. Colonel Dudley would assume a new post at Fort Benning, Georgia, and his executive officer, Major Robert Brendel, would take command of the branch camp. Two days before Dudley's departure, the camp staff held a farewell party. With Mayor Charles Smith and other prominent Crossville residents in attendance, Dudley thanked the local citizens for their cooperation, and expressed his gratitude to the camp's civilian and military personnel. Over the next few months, the camp continued to shrink in size. The last prisoners departed on December 5, 1945, and authorities transferred control of the grounds to the Army Engineers.¹⁸⁰ Cumberland County's "civic obligation" had been fulfilled.

In the end, what is the significance of the story of Camp Crossville? First, the memories of both captors and captives reveal that the positive aspects of camp life are what impacted their lives. Prisoners' stories center not around political leanings, but rather around sports, classes, festivities, and artistic pursuits. Guards, civilians, and German soldiers alike describe the friendly encounters that took place through the barbed wire, and they emphasize commonalities, rather than differences. These pleasant memories have survived for decades, indicating that captivity in Crossville, as in other American camps, had a lasting, benign effect.

Second, these memories prove that "bottom-up" interactions, rather than official

¹⁸⁰ Crossville *Chronicle* (October 11, 1945), 2; (December 13, 1945), 1; Program, "Farewell Party, POW Camp, HQ Det. 1478 SCU, Crossville, Tenn.," September 29, 1945, Private Collection of Conrad Welch, Crossville, Tennessee.

policies, formed the POWs' views of the U.S. In spite of flawed reeducation policies, food cuts, and delayed repatriation, the German prisoners still returned home with an appreciation for American society. Along with cultural contacts in the Occupation Zone and the expediencies of the Cold War, the POWs' memories of their captors' benevolence contributed to a smooth transition into friendly German-American relations.

Finally, as a representation of the national camp system, Crossville shows that the United States rose above the problems caused by the evolution of modern warfare. The integrity of the individual prisoner, on which democratic nations based their standards of captivity, deteriorated in the face of total war and mass resource utilization. But the standard of living at Crossville and other American camps shows that the U.S. held fast to the *spirit* of the Geneva Convention, even after German abuses could have justified its renunciation. By respecting the physical integrity of its prisoners, the United States contained de-individualization within the limits of human decency.

Sixty years later, the Crossville facility is the site of a 4-H camp. At bonfires every summer, counselors regale the campers with stories of the Axis prisoners who once walked the same grounds, and who enjoyed playing sports and attending classes. They also tell the tale of Herman the German, a POW who, legend has it, lost his leg in a futile escape attempt. The children should not venture away at night, the counselors say, lest they run across Herman's ghost, which is said to roam the grounds in search of his missing leg.

Whether or not Herman still lingers in the camp, what does remain is the memory of friendships forged despite the realities of war. Local residents, like the former

prisoners who visit from time to time, remember the camp as a bright chapter in an otherwise dark time. Perhaps Hans Albertson's reflection on Camp Crossville provides the best summation: "We were treated very well and fair. We could do what we wanted. We were free to think and talk and discuss. The food was excellent. What more do you want—especially during a gruesome war?"¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Albertson letter, 11.

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Vita

Gregory J. Kupsy was born in St. Louis, Missouri on June 19, 1980. He attended grade school at St. Peter's School in Kirkwood, Missouri, graduated from Chaminade College Preparatory in 1998, and enrolled at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois the following fall. He received his B.A. in History in June 2002, after completing his Honors thesis, "Wartime America: A Case Study in Oral History."

While in the graduate program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, he served as Assistant to the Director at the Center for the Study of War and Society. He completed his M.A. in History in May 2004. Kupsy plans to pursue a doctorate in History at The Ohio State University, beginning in the fall of 2004, and to become a college professor.

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