



THE OREGON
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY
FOUNDED 1898

Reminiscence: John Fahey on "Reeducating" German Prisoners during World War II
Source: *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 93, No. 4, Oregon during the Second World War
(Winter, 1992/1993), pp. 368-393
Published by: [Oregon Historical Society](#)
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20614486>
Accessed: 25/08/2011 16:39

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Oregon Historical Society is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Oregon Historical Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Reminiscence

JOHN FAHEY ON
“REEDUCATING” GERMAN PRISONERS
DURING WORLD WAR II

STEERING MY 1939 Ford 60 down from the Cascade Mountain forests of wintry southern Oregon toward Ashland and Medford, I was about to meet the enemy, the celebrated German Wehrmacht, four days before Christmas 1944. I had been assigned, as an officer in the U.S. Army, to a secret mission among German prisoners of war interned at Camp White, six miles north of Medford.

In various parts of the United States that December, approximately six dozen other American officers arrived at German prisoner-of-war camps on a similar mission: to inculcate in their prisoners a realistic understanding of—and, if possible, an appreciation for—the United States. Although countenanced by Article 17 of the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war, this reeducation project was classified as secret to preclude reprisals against Americans held prisoner in Europe and to prevent sabotage of the mission by Nazis in the United States. As T. V. Smith, one of the designers of the project, wrote in the *Saturday Review of Literature*: “Ours was the fearful opportunity of helping to create some of the creators of whatever new German state there would be.”¹

Article 17 reads, in full: “So far as possible, belligerents shall encourage intellectual diversions and sports organized by prisoners of war.” Roughly 340,400 Germans were held in about 150 main (base) camps in the United States. German prisoners had begun arriving in America in 1942. At first they were held in rural areas; but, beginning in August 1943, they were put to work (under Articles 27–34 of the convention) where they would not compete with American civilians. War Department policy was “that every employable prisoner of war in the United States will be worked on essential work . . . which would have to be done whether or not there were any prisoners of war.”²

At Camp White prisoners worked at dismantling obsolete army gas

masks, to save components, and also did farm labor under War Manpower Commission contracts with orchardists and farmers. For their work prisoners were paid eighty cents a day, which they could collect in canteen coupons or place in a trust fund available to them upon repatriation. Most contributed some of their wages to POW funds to rent motion pictures, buy magazines, and so on.

Officers assigned to the reeducation project were chosen for their backgrounds in teaching, journalism, or law (I was a journalist). (We were told that military intelligence had refused to release German-speaking officers for the project.) Assigned to the provost marshal general by telegraphic orders from Washington, D.C., some seventy of us gathered at Fort Slocum, New York, for indoctrination and training between November 17 and 28, 1944. The training consisted largely of lectures and discussions of German history, culture, and propaganda techniques; conventions governing prisoners of war; and operation of POW camps.

We were told that we would find German prisoners, for the most part, disciplined and respectful of authority; we were also warned that politicized noncommissioned officers among the POWs continued to influence the men strongly. (Since German officers were not held in the same camps as enlisted men, internal leadership fell to "noncoms.")

We were advised not to argue politics with prisoners or to express our own ideas about a future German political system. We were also introduced to a motivating legend of prisoner democratization: the tale of the one-eyed general. A German general interned in the United States, the story ran, lost his glass eye. He had to be taken a long distance through rural country and small towns to a large city for another eye, and his journey impressed him with the ways of Americans. If a glimpse of America excited one German prisoner in this way, his escorts thought, why not make a conscious attempt to show the thousands of men interned in the United States what our country really was like? Why not become, in effect, an army *waging peace*? We would hear this phrase, "waging peace," repeatedly during our preparation.³

On the first day of our training we were cautioned to maintain the secrecy of the project, and that warning was underscored by the quick dismissal of two men who gossiped about the mission in the officers' club. We were also given an opportunity to withdraw without prejudice, and several men did so. Those of us who stayed began to hear from our families that FBI agents had inquired about us among our neighbors. Once training was completed, we were launched to the POW camps with a steak-and-beer dinner, attended by Maj. Gen. Archer L. Lerch, the provost marshal general himself, who gave us a pep talk and joined in singing college songs.

Looking back over nearly fifty years, I remember Camp White as an abandoned city of wartime buildings. It stretched for several miles on either side of the principal highway between Medford and Crater Lake, and was also intersected by secondary roads. Civilian vehicles were limited to speeds no faster than thirty-five and no slower than twenty-five through the cantonment.

Earlier in the war Camp White had been the training site for the Ninety-first Infantry Division—the “Wild West” division—and later for the Ninety-sixth. There had been more than 30,000 men in each division, but by December 1944 they had moved on. At the end of 1944 the installation lay dormant; typewriters, desks, chairs, and bunks stood ready in deserted buildings. Gates were unguarded, but military police roved the paved streets (the Seven Hundred Fifty-second Military Police Battalion trained there briefly). A few days after reaching the camp, I drove to the vacated company areas and peered into buildings. The whole place exuded an eerie quality: It seemed that, if a voice called “Action!” everything might spring to life.⁴

The prisoner-of-war section lay on a flat overlooking the swift Rogue River, on the western boundary of this silent city. On a clear day one could see mountains in the distance, and on the near horizon loomed Table Rock, sheared flat by glacier eons earlier. Trees and meadows lined the river.

The main compound, surrounded by two parallel wire fences topped with barbed wire, with an elevated guard tower at each corner, consisted of perhaps thirty buildings—barracks, mess hall, storage, offices, and the inevitable football field. (Fierce guard dogs prowled between the two fences until the Germans cut holes in the inner wire and made pets of them.) The prisoners were organized into companies, each with its headquarters, supply room, and company area.

Perhaps half a mile from this main prison a smaller compound of about a dozen buildings held “anti-Nazi” POWs (classified as “protected personnel”), those deemed in jeopardy in the main compound. At Camp White most of the men in the anti-Nazi stockade were either political dissidents or citizens of countries other than Germany who had been dumped into the Afrika Korps. From time to time a prisoner would ask to be moved from one compound to the other.

Each compound had a single gate with a guardhouse, always manned by armed American sentries. The American barracks and offices stood outside the fences beside the main compound. Two German medical officers and their German orderly lived in a barracks set off by a wire fence in the American area; they worked with an American physician in a first-aid clinic. The gate to their barracks was locked nightly at ten. Each day

one of the American officers walked the German medics for exercise, usually down a road along the river. Both spoke passable English, and one, with a smashed nose, claimed to have been a sparring partner for German heavyweight champion Max Schmeling. The medical officers had a jeep and driver to take them to the anti-Nazi compound. Rare was the week that a perturbed resident of Medford did not call to ask, "Do you know there are Germans driving around that place?"

On my arrival at Camp White, I had been ushered immediately to see Lt. Col. Lou J. Farber, the commanding officer, who looked me up and down like a museum piece. "We don't get many officers who've been preceded by a classified personal letter from the provost marshal general," Farber remarked tartly. I was to find Farber a reasonable and practical man, but on that first encounter he did not seem pleased to see me. I suppose he expected his reeducation officer to be some sort of an idealistic ass with a direct line to the provost marshal general. (We reeducation officers were soon placed under the Service Commands, in my case, the Ninth, headquartered at Fort Logan, near Salt Lake City.)

Although Farber knew what I was to do, none of the other American personnel had been told. Therefore, part of my work was to redirect attitudes among the American personnel, to persuade them to be "representative Americans" rather than bored jailers. Farber, as I wrote my parents, "stated frankly that he didn't think the program would work," but he supported me nonetheless. And he heeded the provost marshal's direction—no other duties for the reeducation officer—until the staff protested that I was not taking my turn as officer of the day, whereupon I joined the rotation.

In order to introduce me as inconspicuously as possible to camp routine, the colonel assigned me to be commanding officer of one of the POW companies. To the Germans I likely appeared, at first, as just another stray second lieutenant handed over for whatever use might be made of him. As I walked into the orderly room, I reflected that if conversation went beyond *Guten Morgen* ("Good Morning"), I would be at a loss. But the German first sergeant spoke excellent English; he had been educated, compliments of a fond aunt and uncle, at Oxford in England. Others also spoke English. And so I stood reveille, counted noses, inspected barracks, signed forms, and learned something of prisoner life.

As soon as they realized how little I knew of camp routine, the German and American first sergeants each tried to turn me to his view, suggesting how I should think and act. Obviously, their opinions differed. This was my introduction to the competing networks of power inside the compound. With the cautious counsel of the German sergeant, I learned to ignore dust under cots and shoes out of line, kicked there by other prison-

ers in the hope the inspecting officer would reprimand the messy one. Sometimes hostilities among the prisoners were brutal. To keep someone in line, for example, several other prisoners would roll the man in a comforter (so the attackers could not be seen or identified), kicking and punching him nearly unconscious.

I was touched by the pathetic assortment of family pictures, letters, and mementos from home that, next to their bunks, decorated the unpainted shelves of prisoners. Each prisoner had a bunk, a small shelf, and a box for personal items such as towel, razor, and whatever else he might own. Occasionally the colonel ordered a shakedown inspection. I described one for my parents: "It comes without warning—usually we blow the siren for a fire drill and after they [the POWs] come out of the buildings, [we] herd them into the center of the football field and seat a couple of guards in the bleachers with carbines. . . . Men like these . . . collect the most pitiful trinkets you can imagine; they prize a thread of cloth or scrap of paper for the memory it brings them."

We found few pictures of Hitler or other German leaders. We did confiscate a skillful wood carving of an eagle and swastika, since prisoners were allowed no Nazi emblems other than their uniforms. One prisoner had a cartoon of Hitler in a bombed-out radio studio saying, "And as a Christmas present from the fuhrer to all German soldiers—advance!" Quite a few prisoners had cut concentration-camp atrocity pictures from magazines and slipped them under mattresses. We left those where they were. When two prisoners cut army sheets into underwear, handkerchiefs, and shirts, they were put on bread and water for a few days for destroying government property. The universally prized possessions were soap and tobacco; each POW had a small hoard.

"Most of the prisoners have all their letters from home carefully stacked in order and tied with string or in a special box," the letter to my parents continued. "From the tattered envelopes, I imagine they know every letter by heart. . . . You ask yourself how we can interest these men in political affairs when they can think only of family and children."⁵

Since the prisoners worked either at the dismantling warehouse or on one of the farms in the intermountain basin near Medford, my obligations toward them during the day were minimal. We company commanders counted our men in the morning and counted them again in the evening; the guards at the gate counted them as they departed for work and counted them again when they returned. During my twelve months at Camp White, no men tried seriously to escape, although one pair—wearing their German uniform caps and American army fatigues with "PW" painted on them—sat on the Southern Pacific tracks waiting for a train on

a sunny afternoon. At least a dozen Medford citizens telephoned to tell us the men were there, and the colonel sent a guard to march them back.

The prisoners then at Camp White were largely from the Afrika Corps, captured as the British rolled back Gen. Erwin Rommel in Tunisia. An Arab who understood little English or German—a sort of mascot—belonged to the company in my charge. The German sergeant explained to me that the Arab had first been impressed into some army or another; when he discovered Italian food was better than what he had been eating, he deserted to the Italians, then followed his stomach to the Germans, and now ate heartily in America.

Our prisoners at Camp White had been interned at an isolated compound in Arizona before being transferred to Oregon. In Arizona a knot of “noncoms” kept other prisoners under control by claiming a clandestine radio, hidden in a barracks attic, was receiving instructions from submarines in the Gulf of Mexico. One of the POWs later admitted that they were simply picking up the signal from a nearby airport landing system and passing it off as code.

As in other POW units, the Americans serving at Camp White were limited-duty personnel. We had not yet begun to receive the U.S. combat veterans waiting out the last few months of their service. With two or three exceptions, our officers were career “noncoms” with reserve commissions, stubbornly tied to the ways of the army as they knew it. These were the men who, it was planned, would show by example the superiority of American culture. Unfortunately, though, they looked on me as a wet-nosed college kid, not as the master of ceremonies for a pageant of American life. Thus we would have to stage a first-rate show with a pickup cast.

Before reaching Camp White, I had expected to find overt antagonism between Americans and Germans; I imagined an atmosphere charged with tension, danger, perhaps even deadly cat-and-mouse games. Certainly the 1,662 prisoners outnumbered guards by twenty to one. But my introduction to prison life was hardly confrontational: For two days before the Christmas when I arrived, prisoner artists exhibited ninety-seven paintings and several hundred sketches, in a show open to the public. One of the POWs, the Berlin scene painter Georg Sorg, had served in his government’s art ministry; now he taught others. Consequently, many of the pictures were well executed—mostly scenes remembered from Germany, a few of prison life, and some of women. (In the barracks the prisoners hung pin-up photos of American motion picture actresses.)

Some visitors from Medford were unimpressed. One lady said as she left, “Well, anyhow, I’m glad we came,” as if she had done a civic duty.



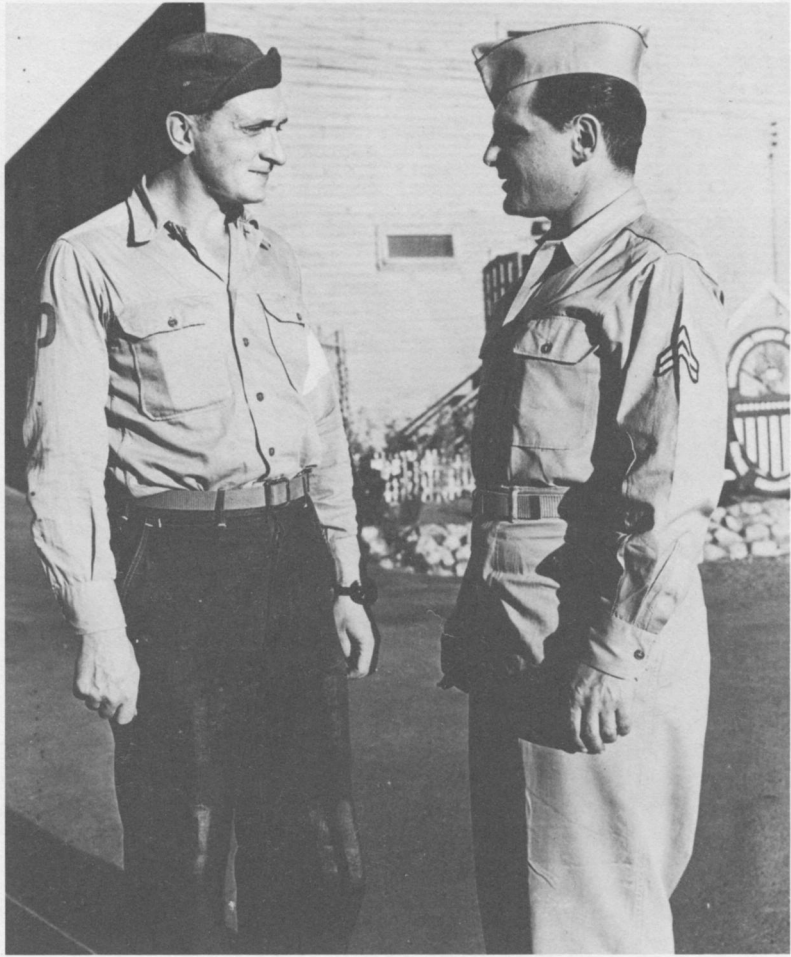
Before Camp White housed German prisoners of war, it served as training ground for the famous “Wild West Division.” Here, in the summer of 1942, soldiers of the 362d Infantry shout the division’s historic battle cry: “Powder River; Let ‘er Buck!” (OHS neg. OrHi 88293; courtesy *Oregonian*)





Aerial photo of Medford, just after the war. Outlying cultivated areas were among the work sites of German POWs. A group of well-to-do Medford citizens ran a social club for American officers and occasionally invited them to dinner and other outings. (OHS neg. OrHi 38201; H. Alden, photog.)

Photoreproduction of a woodcut done by German prisoner Otto Reinking (opposite pg.), showing Camp White's security fence, watchtower, water tower, and barracks. The German POW portion of the camp lay at the edge of the larger camp, some 500 yards from the Rogue River. (OHS neg. OrHi 88299; author's coll.)



German prisoners at Camp White elected a “spokesman”—Walter Enscanodas (left), a noncommissioned officer in the Afrika Korps—to represent them. Enscanodas maintained an office inside the compound, met with American officers to discuss prisoner business, and was always escorted outside the compound fence by an American guard, in this case Cpl. Mark Walton. (OHS neg. OrHi 88300; courtesy *Oregonian*)



Two covers of *Heimat*, the periodical publication of German prisoners at Camp White. One illustration is a general depiction of the ravages of war for the “common man”; the other is a likeness of the German poet and Enlightenment figure Johann von Schiller, and a quotation from him. The statement—a distinctly anti-Nazi sentiment—proclaims that the realm of spirit, not the realm of the sword, is the true locus of German greatness. (OHS neg. OrHi 88305, 88306; author’s coll.)



And another declared: "Oh, they'd probably as soon kill you as paint." The artist, standing by to translate titles, overheard. I saw him shrug and shake his head.

The art show had brought some sort of sampling of Americans to the camp, at any rate, and prisoners were learning more about the United States from radios, magazines, and newspapers. The prisoners tended to look on war news as government propaganda; several followed soap operas loyally. English-speaking newspaper readers favored the *New York Times* or the *Oregonian*, published in Portland.

For me this was a time to discover what other contacts the prisoners had with American life and ideas. I snooped in their library and talked with the German POW director of education. Almost half the prisoners were enrolled in some kind of evening class, such as English or other languages, mathematics, or accounting. Since these classes were organized and taught by prisoners, I hoped they were not merely disguised exercises in Nazi ideology. A much smaller number of prisoners, perhaps two dozen, had signed up for correspondence courses from the University of Oregon, one of approximately seventy-five universities participating in the POW program. Their lessons and correspondence passed through me, and I gradually became acquainted with both students and teachers.

The POW library, consisting of about 1,350 volumes in German and perhaps 150 in English, was a disaster. Housed on the second floor of a barracks building, it was run by two prisoners. Nearly all of the German books, most of them old, had been donated by the YMCA. Looking through these, I found a lexicon dated 1895; there was not one up-to-date reference book in German or English. The English-language books were mainly castoffs, out of date, and of no interest to American readers—such items as *The Big League*, a boy's book published about 1905, and one very old history of the United States. The collection was not likely to impress the prisoners with the quality of American literature.

Col. Farber, however, agreed that six prisoners who read English well could borrow books from the Camp White post library. These half dozen men, whom I drove to the library once a week, became an information conduit for other German prisoners. On our first library visit I was tested to discover whether I proposed to "censor" their selections: One wanted *Mein Kampf* in English, claiming he had never read it in German. That was fine with me. Once they learned that every book was available, their preferences ran to recent novels and a range of nonfiction. One prisoner spent an afternoon reading about the Masonic order, which he said his father had told him secretly controlled European politics and which he remembered as an ominous presence in his hometown.

Of course, as a mere company commander I could not pry into the li-

brary or question the POW schoolmaster (tasks essential to my reeducation assignment) without arousing suspicion. Therefore, Farber relieved me of my company after a week or two and named me, as the provost marshal general required, assistant executive officer. The title conferred a semblance of authority and some apparent responsibility for the stockade. (The change also relieved me of standing reveille and counting prisoners.)

My new eminence also introduced me to Walter Enscanodas, the camp spokesman, elected by the prisoners as their representative in all official matters, and to his interpreter, Karl-Heinz Klein. The latter was a tall, wiry, blond man with blue eyes, an exemplar of the Aryan ideal. As interpreter for spokesman Enscanodas, Klein was also an informal arbiter between prisoners and Americans, useful to both (he was a member of my six-man library group).

Enscanodas felt somewhat encumbered by his Greek name and heritage; consequently, he was defensive among the POWs and staunchly Nazi, but at the same time deferential to the Americans. Perhaps the only conversation we had, other than exchanging official views, was when he asked me whether I thought that after the war he would get the Volkswagen on which he had been paying installments.

I am sure that Klein suspected my mission in the camp before any of the Americans or the other Germans, but he never let on to me. He noticed my meddling in too many aspects of camp life, my asking too many questions, and my making too many suggestions to conclude anything other than that I was pursuing some special assignment. He was one of a handful of intellectuals who spoke English—few as well as he—and who read copiously, and by observing him I was able to identify other cerebral prisoners.

I tested Klein early by bringing into spokesman Enscanodas's office a newly assigned GI who spoke fluent German; he reported that Klein translated accurately, without bias. Sometime later I joked with Klein about this testing. "Oh, I knew he spoke German," he replied. "I watched his eyes." He also added that Enscanodas "understands more English than he lets on." I accepted this as a warning not to chatter within the spokesman's hearing.

As Klein and I got to know each other better, we compared upbringing and schooling. From him and others I got a picture of a structured, hierarchical German society, and of an apprentice and school system that limited work and educational opportunities. But economic life, the prisoners maintained, had been better under Hitler than under the inflation of the republic. Klein's father had sent him, as a boy, to live briefly with a French family with whom the father billeted in World War I. The young, blond German recalled marching in a Bastille Day parade while French

spectators called out “Dirty Boche!” As he neared the age at which I joined the Boy Scouts and learned to tie knots, Klein had followed his friends into the Hitler Jugend (Hitler Youth).

Looking back, I suppose that we American reeducators went about our work in a somewhat heavy-handed way, responding to the sense of urgency emanating from the provost marshal general’s office. Poking into the prisoner library and school, suggesting stronger doses of English language and American history, and assessing the cloaked hierarchy among the prisoners were transparent overtures. Those of us who did not speak German fluently relied on interpreters; this virtually ruled out subtlety, for the interpreter would pick away at my remarks until he was sure he understood what I wanted to say. Klein resorted rather early in our acquaintance to telling Enscanodas what I had said, and then adding what I *meant*. Then he would turn to me with a literal translation of the spokesman’s response, adding, for my benefit, what Enscanodas meant. We engaged in a sort of three-way verbal ping-pong match, with Klein touching the ball on each exchange.

The trickle of German-speaking American soldiers passing through Camp White presented another problem. Many were descended from Jewish families who had fled Germany; in some cases these men had received terrifying appeals from their families remaining in Europe or learned that relatives had been murdered. The act of interpreting offered these German-Americans a tiny wedge for vengeance, and their translations often were delivered with evident loathing of the prisoners of war and were distorted by word choices intended to derogate the Germans. Eventually, I was assigned an American interpreter, Fred Hecht, who had not been with me long when he received news that his parents had been gassed in a Nazi death camp.

Like water wearing away stone, drop by drop, we washed the library and school relatively clean of pro-Nazi propaganda. The separation of Nazi fanaticism from true German nationalism could never be fine-tuned—since the two were hopelessly mixed in the minds of prisoners—but we tried.

The Red Cross occasionally delivered German books—paperbound reprints of classics and grammar and rhetorical texts—to replace the antiquated castoffs. We also bought English-German dictionaries and a few modern German books in college bookstores, and obtained some from German families located for us by the Lutheran pastor in Medford. The War Department also began to deliver paperbound reprints of German works for sale in prisoner canteens at twenty-five cents each. For English works we relied on the six users of the Camp White library to direct material to the others, and we increased the prisoner library subscriptions to

U.S. newspapers and periodicals. The hands-down favorite among the prisoners was *Life* magazine.⁶

Changing the camp's school curriculum proved difficult because the German director was convinced that any changes would compromise his integrity. In a way he was right. A carpenter by trade and a part-time technical-school instructor before the war, the director's political convictions were suspect to us. I remember him as a nervous, obsequious, arbitrary man with a gift for forgetting agreements. He clung to a post that was cushy by comparison to the predominant farm labor. Klein regarded him as inadequate, and this I took to reflect the views of the other educated prisoners.

Taking away books and suspending selected classes were negative steps I sometimes had to take. As a positive step we negotiated with a distributor to rent (with money from the prisoner fund) motion pictures that represented American skill in moviemaking, if not American views; we rejected war propaganda outright. These new pictures—*Top Hat*, *Stand Up and Cheer*, and *Going My Way*, to name a few—were an improvement over the B westerns and detective films that had been the regular prisoner fare, although I am not sure the POWs agreed. Bing Crosby—"der Bingle"—was a favorite. We also recruited instructors, denied positions earlier because they were not friends of the schoolmaster, to teach business courses and English.

One of our most significant steps was to establish a weekly journal edited by a prisoner, Werner Baecker, who was assisted by a few of the other POWs. The publication was called *Heimat* (*Homeland*). We provided mimeographing equipment and colored inks for the staff, and they produced, in multiple runs, two- and three-color sketches to illustrate the journal. The contents ranged from news summaries based on U.S. newspapers to commentary, fiction, and poetry by prisoner writers. Baecker, who had ambitions as a journalist, was rightfully proud of his journal. He also maintained a bulletin board for posting late news. Baecker and I held long discussions about the reliability of various news accounts and generally agreed that official war bulletins of the German high command, which he took from the *New York Times*, were trustworthy. When big stories broke, I occasionally passed on to him United Press International reports from the local radio station, KMED.

Baecker provided an English translation of the publication's editorial commentary for the camp administration. We never asked for publication of our own items, preferring to use the bulletin boards to announce changes in schedules and other information. In this way we kept *Heimat* as free from American pressure as practical. The journal and Baecker's bulletin board were undoubtedly our best means of communicating with



This work gang of German prisoners from Camp White stand by their haul in apples. The outdoor farm and orchard labor kept most of the Germans tan and healthy looking. (OHS neg. OrHi 88302; author's coll.)



German prisoners Georg Eppel (left), a furniture maker, and Georg Hartmann, an organ maker, worked in a camp carpentry repair shop. In their spare time they made such items as this inlaid table, which were generally sold or given to American guards. (OHS neg. OrHi 88301; courtesy *Oregonian*)



Camp White, standing largely empty in 1947 (opposite pg.). Except for the German prisoner-of-war compound, most of the camp's structures were vacant during the last years of the war. In the last months of active service the camp was occupied by navy medical personnel, who used a few buildings as living quarters, mess, and clinics. (OHS neg. OrHi 87391; courtesy *Oregonian*)

the prisoners; both were read universally in the main compound. Oddly enough, the spokesman for the anti-Nazi stockade, Georg Skibbee, banned *Heimat* in a show of authority during election of a new spokesman for that compound.

Skibbee, who had a skewed notion of democracy, once called for a vote to choose between the Catholic and Lutheran pastors from Medford for the church services to be conducted in the compound. When the Lutheran won, he ordered all the men to attend Lutheran services. We tried to explain to Skibbee that this was unacceptable, but he insisted he had conducted a fair election and the majority ruled. Eventually, the prisoners ignored him; they attended a Catholic mass on Sunday morning and a Lutheran service the same evening.

A national biweekly tabloid for prisoners, *Der Ruf* (the *Call*), which was ostensibly edited by prisoners, appeared in March 1945; it was sold in POW canteens for five cents a copy and contained literary reprints and philosophical articles by noted Germans as well as news of current events. The general opinion among prisoners at Camp White was that *Der Ruf* was an example of "not very skilled" propaganda. The first edition was bought up and destroyed by Enscanodas, but a few copies of the second slipped past him, stimulating guarded discussion. We told canteen workers to sell one copy per customer, but the prisoner clerk in the canteen ignored requests from men who wanted to buy the paper. Meanwhile, Enscanodas proclaimed that buyers were "expected to destroy their copies."

Several of the POWs inquired about what we Americans thought of *Der Ruf*, giving their own view that it "aimed too high intellectually." (According to reports from other camps, that was a general opinion.) My own reaction, as I passed it on to the provost marshal general's office, was that "the magazine's obvious sponsorship by the United States government has provided some astute prisoners . . . with an insight into the [reeducation] program . . . not only its purpose, which they can deduce from *Der Ruf*'s tone, but its scope, which is clearly national."⁷

Both *Der Ruf* and *Heimat* became considerably more outspoken after the collapse of the German government in 1945. In its issue of June 15, 1945, *Der Ruf* carried an article headed "*Das Leben Geht Weiter*" ("Life Goes On"), which quoted an American journalist on the resumption of peacetime living in Germany; and another, entitled "*Die Leichtgläubigen*" ("The Gullibles"), which concluded: "The future is open to everyone who was innocent of culpable deeds and is willing to learn anew. We should be conscious of entering an era of human morals which repudiates political crimes and dictatorships."⁸

Baecker published a special four-page edition of *Heimat* on May 8 with the news of Germany's surrender, sublimating in work his emotions of

sorrow and defeat. He quoted German dispatches from newspapers and UPI reports given to us by KMED. One did not need to understand the German language well to catch such phrases as “*diesem tragischen Moment unserer Geschichte an die Deutsche Nation*” (“this tragic moment in the history of the German nation”); or “*Kapitulation allen deutschen Truppen*” (“capitulation of all German troops”); or “*die letzten Tage des Krieges in Europa*” (“the last days of the war in Europe”).

We Americans at Camp White had not known what to expect with the news of surrender of the German armies. We were prepared even for a riot of wrath and despair, but the compound remained orderly and quiet. Only after a few days did we realize that the rank and file of prisoners did not believe the reports. Those who did believe them went about with long faces, listening to radios, reading news accounts, and making frequent trips to Baecker’s bulletin board for the latest items of news.

On VE night a squad of us inspected the main compound after “lights out,” beaming our flashlights into roadside ditches and under barracks, half expecting to find suicides. As we walked through the darkened barracks, it seemed as though the Germans had gone to bed as usual. If some cried themselves to sleep, they did not show us their misery.

The War Department stilled the doubts of any remaining skeptics by sending contingents of German soldiers captured in France and Germany to the POW camps. Their personal testimony ended any doubt that the reports of German capitulation were true. As the first group of new captives arrived, I heard a commotion at the gate while standing inside the compound. After falling in with prisoners converging to see the newcomers, I was able to see the reason for the uproar: One of our prisoners had recognized his son in the new group, called his name, and rushed to embrace him. The son, in very un-German fashion, broke ranks and ran to his father. The POWs cheered their reunion.

From that time on, of course, Americans and Germans both speculated on a timetable for going home. But the war in the Pacific was not yet over. Several prisoners volunteered to enlist in the U.S. forces to fight the Japanese but were, of course, turned down. When the inevitable day of Japanese surrender came (along with the disclosure that the United States had dropped an atomic bomb), POWs going to work in trucks through towns cheered and honked horns, giving the Churchillian “v” sign for victory. When the Germans requested the same two days’ leave granted American personnel at the time, they got it—but only because a lapsed work contract had not been renewed.

For the prisoners U.S. victory over Japan brought repatriation nearer, but for the time being farm labor continued to be scarce and the POWs were still needed. In addition to Camp White, we operated a branch camp

just south of the Oregon border, at Tulelake, California (111 miles by highway from Camp White). Here prisoners were housed in a former Civilian Conservation Corps camp not far from the austere black-tar-paper barracks that imprisoned Japanese civilians.

The population of Tulelake was seasonal—crowded at harvest, quiet otherwise. The town consisted then of a main street with a general store, a motion picture theater, and a generous choice of saloons, where players used silver dollars as chips in incessant card games. The farmers occupied plain houses or trailers during planting and harvesting; only a few farmed year-around.

Our POW employers in the Tulelake vicinity were mostly potato and onion growers who farmed the fertile, drained lakebed. They relied on seasonal itinerant laborers, Mexicans and Indians, and refused to hire anyone who filled fewer than 125 bags a day. This was backbreaking work: In stooped position, laborers passed along the rows, pulling onions or turning spuds, with fifty-pound sacks hooked to their belts and dragging between their legs. (Growers claimed some itinerants could pull 300 bags a day at five cents a sack.) Some of the Germans filled 150 bags a day; hardly any fell below the standard requirement of the itinerants of 125.

Only a few growers needed so many prisoners as to warrant sending a guard. We ran a route similar to that of a school bus, dropping one prisoner here and three or four there in the morning and picking them up in the evening. The POWs ate lunch with their employers, and some became friends. A prisoner would sometimes wear a new jacket or pants that the farmer bought for him, or carry home a pie given to him by the farm wife. Occasionally a prisoner missed the bus—actually a canvas-backed GI truck—and we wondered if he had tried to escape, but invariably the patrol sent to look found him trudging along the roadway toward camp. From Tulelake, as from Medford, there was really nowhere to escape *to*, although from time to time a prisoner would fantasize about reaching San Francisco to board a neutral steamship bound for Europe.

In accompanying several convoys from our base camp to Tulelake, I noticed that the American guards, in every instance, passed their rifles to prisoners to hold while the Americans climbed into the trucks, whereupon the POWs docilely handed the weapons back. One convoy lost several trucks at night on the winding mountain road outside Klamath Falls, and we had momentary visions of Germans dead under their vehicles or scattered across southern Oregon; but the scout car sent to find them came across the POWs in a ravine below the highway picking up pieces of smashed machinery by flashlight. No one was seriously hurt. Despite the general atmosphere of trust, though, I did experience occasional moments of paranoia. Once, while I rode with a German driver and a half

dozen prisoners into the hills above Camp White to cut Christmas trees, I had the sudden thought: They've got the axe; they could chop me up and leave the pieces under a snowbank.

Not long after VE day, the War Department lifted the secret and confidential classifications on the reeducation program, and I was then able to work in the open, doing what the brighter prisoners had all along suspected I was doing. The *Oregonian* sent its staff military writer to do a three-part report on Camp White. His report concluded that "the German prisoners are unrepentant. . . . They will agree that nazism's leaders were wrong, but argue that because the people had no voice in determining the nation's course that the people should not be punished."⁹

Of Werner Baecker and *Heimat* the *Oregonian* reporter wrote: "Heimat's editor appears a convincing example of the anti-nazi trend of thought. . . . His editorials undoubtedly have a marked effect on the readers of Heimat . . . said to be read universally." The *Oregonian's* assessment was far more favorable than those of other newspapers and magazines reaching Camp White, although in truth the press did not show much interest in the reeducation program. When Col. Farber asked me to describe the program for our American personnel, I found they were not very interested.¹⁰

Tulelake represented, in a sense, the penultimate chapter in the story of prisoners at Camp White, for by the middle of summer transfers of American personnel without replacement, as well as publication of limits on prisoner baggage for repatriation, clearly signaled the last days. In preparation for departure the War Department directed that we weed out potential troublemakers. We culled 135 hard-core Nazis from the compound (including the spokesman) and shipped them to Oklahoma; as a result 21 men in the anti-Nazi compound felt safe enough to return to the main camp.

By midyear the War Department ordered "every practicable step" to teach prisoners to speak, read, and understand English, and mandated classes in U.S. history, civics, and commercial geography with textbooks "of the type used by grade schools." Prisoners would no longer be "encouraged" to take other subjects, and correspondence studies with universities were to be "discouraged." This was one of an increasing flow of directives, some contradictory, that undermined the cooperative spirit of reeducation so painstakingly nurtured over months. Another War Department provision dictated the form of news bulletins posted on compound boards; they would be "in German with the English translation immediately below each line." Obviously we complied with these directives, and soon every man, willing or not, was enrolled in an English class, most taught by prisoners using army technical manuals issued for the

purpose. For historical instruction (preferably given by the assistant executive officer), the provost marshal general's office furnished a seventy-five-page guide, bound in bright blue and entitled *Kurze Geschichte der Vereinigten Staaten* (*Short History of the United States*), by the historian Howard Mumford Jones. It included English and German versions on facing pages, and an appendix listed parallel historical events in Germany and the United States.¹¹

In order to demonstrate further the American point of view, we showed the prisoners six "Why We Fight" films, with German narrative prepared, under Baecker's editorial hand, largely from the original sound tracks. These were documentary films, using newsreels and some captured film, shown initially to American soldiers to persuade them of the justice of the Allied cause. When German infantry appeared on the screen, a few of the prisoners cheered. "The other Germans considered that these men showed their ignorance by their behavior," I wrote home, "an interesting reaction since it came from them and not from us. . . . The Germans get in little groups in the streets after the pictures and in every group there are several gesticulating figures, arguing and shaking their heads, so we know they watch the screen." For many of the prisoners these films were the first exposition of what other countries thought of Germany's pretensions. Here and there a prisoner spotted a genuine misstatement and mentioned it to us. We corrected the script and noticed that snickers were then absent among the next company of viewers.¹²

We showed newsreels of German extermination camps, but the POWs, almost to a man, declared these to be Russian atrocities. The arrival of *Life* magazine with the first pictures of starving inmates, bodies piled like cordwood, and gas chambers sobered the Germans. They believed the magazine. Some were outraged: "That's what our government was doing while we were fighting!" one cried, throwing the pictures across the barracks. Such outbursts, other frank comments about the movies, and the prisoners' gradual acceptance of American magazines as truthful indicated changing perspectives. The prisoners were shedding their pose as an invincible unit and beginning to react as individuals.

Although they observed Christmas, few of the prisoners in the main camp openly practiced religion. (The *Oregonian*, based on a talk with chaplains, estimated perhaps 130 Catholics and 80 Protestants, out of more than 1,600 total prisoners, attended services conducted by pastors from Medford.) A Catholic priest among the prisoners maintained a chapel in a barracks. He had been serving as a sanitary (first-aid) corpsman in the war, he told me, because the German army assigned only one chaplain to a division. Rare was the week he did not complain that someone was nipping his altar wine. When I guessed who the culprit might be and

offered to lock his wine outside the compound, he declined.

Even though we gradually eliminated identifiable troublemakers, some bullying continued among prisoners. One man in the anti-Nazi compound, overcome by threats against his family, committed suicide. As he jumped from a chair to hang himself in an unused corner of the mess hall, he also tried to cut his throat with a butcher knife taken from the kitchen. The prisoner cook, coming on duty in the morning, found the poor man, removed the knife from his cold hand, and went about preparing breakfast. The prisoners seemed sympathetic, but they had seen death often. Anyhow, this man, they remarked, had acted a little “crazy.”

While Camp White was gradually being closed and contingents of prisoners sent by train for repatriation, I was transferred to the prisoner-of-war camp at the Stockton Ordnance Depot, Port of Stockton, California. I left behind me a typewritten sheet of instructions for whomever might carry on. As with most assistant executive officers, I had become something of a special services administrator for the prisoners, and my instructions reflected that role: an inventory of sports equipment (forty-three soccer balls included), a suggestion that my successor continue paying Medford shops to repair prisoners’ radios (“because there are so few radios inside that fixing one is performing a welfare service for the entire barracks”), notes on our handling of the school and the POW paper, and so on.¹³

At Stockton I found a well-established reeducation program, and the prisoners working in it let me know—not very subtly—that they preferred that I not tinker with it. A contingent of English-speaking POWs made weekly visits to what was then the College of the Pacific library, spending half a day selecting books; they were also permitted shopping tours in town for office supplies. I went along—tagged along, actually, for they knew the streets better than I. In clean GI fatigues with “PW” painted on them, and wearing their Afrika Korps cloth caps, they strode through Stockton without stirring much notice.

A running debate between prisoners and guards revolved around the merits of football, American or German (which we persisted in calling soccer). The commanding officer, Col. Kenneth M. Barager, enthusiastically backed the training of two twenty-two-man prisoner teams, one from the base camp and the other from the largest branch at the county fairgrounds, to play an American-style football game. I signed on as an assistant coach. (I don’t think the head coach appreciated my services, but, since he was a sergeant and I a captain, what could he say?) Wearing uniforms borrowed from service teams, the German teams split the two games. Among the POWs we found some excellent athletes, but none who could pass effectively. Throwing an oval ball was wholly foreign to them.

I wrote my parents: "With them everything is think it out, then do it, and the expressions of concentration as they go through simple maneuvers is sometimes marvelous to see." Our backs learned quickly, however, to complain about missed blocks. The competence of play, I would judge, compared with rural high school teams in the United States, but some of the Germans were probably big and quick enough to have played at the American college level.

The port newspaper saw the first game—the "Barbed Wire Bowl"—as a lesson in politics: "Football is a democratic sport. There is no dictator on a football field. . . . There was no dictator at the Barbed Wire Bowl on Sunday. There were no robots. Instead there were 44 players thinking as individuals."¹⁴

Each game drew about 5,000 spectators (civilians by invitation only), and the prisoner band played American university fight songs. "It was a real football game," opined the port news writer: "It was not a comedy. American and German spectators were cheering with the players, not laughing at them." The Germans insisted on playing an abbreviated soccer game at halftime, to show their kind of football, and they performed with zest and skill.

Our fairgrounds fullback played both halves of American football *and* the soccer game. The second game witnessed a halftime show unparalleled: A fairgrounds exhibition building used as a POW barracks caught fire and burned, filling the sky with smoke and flames. The second half was delayed by twenty minutes as belongings were rescued and the building hosed until firefighters arrived. As we left the stands I overheard an American say: "That was a good ballgame in anyone's league."¹⁵

The prisoners at Stockton were as relaxed as those at Camp White had become after the news of Japan's defeat. On my first night as officer of the day, the sergeant of the guard showed me the bicycle used to ride around the perimeter of the stockade; he counseled me to whistle or sing loudly as I approached the guard towers so the guards would be awake when I arrived.

Stockton was a prison camp in the process of dismantling. Ships to carry prisoners home docked in the port, a few blocks from the compound and barracks, and Americans habitually strolled down to see the Germans off. To prepare selected prisoners to act as civil administrators when they returned to Germany, we chose some (among them former Hitler Youth) for training at Fort Eustis, Virginia, before embarking. At this the Stockton POW spokesman protested: "Those who help the enemy administer their occupational government will become outcasts among their own people—spies and traitors."¹⁶

Among my last services as an assistant executive officer was preparation

of a mandated twelve lectures, translated into German and delivered to the remaining prisoners by volunteer lecturers, on such topics as the principles of democratic government, the U.S. Constitution, political parties and elections in America, the American economy, American military government in Germany, among others. A question-and-answer session followed each lecture. The questions, such as "How much does the average American household pay for electrical service?" often seemed wide of the point. The lecture topics were the same as those offered in the training at Fort Eustis.

By now I knew I would soon be heading back to civilian life. I watched another batch of prisoners board ship, each hauling a barracks bag on his left shoulder. As his name was called by the identification team at the gangplank, each man stepped forward to have his face matched with a picture. The team then handed him a mess card, and up he went while the band played "On Wisconsin." As the ship turned and started down the channel out of the port, the prisoner dockworkers waved dolefully to the grinning men lining the ship's rails.

The experiment in "waging peace" was ending. In his first announcement of the reeducation program to commanding generals of the service commands, the adjutant general remarked on the "unprecedented opportunity" the German prisoners offered us to send home men with "a powerful voice in future German affairs." The purpose of the program, he declared, was "to create and foster spontaneous responses on the part of German prisoners of war toward activities and contacts which will encourage an attitude of respect on their part for American institutions, traditions, and ways of life and thought."¹⁷

Although the army itself stifled much of the spontaneity of the program by creeping centralization, I believe we achieved in large part the purposes set out in our original orders. For those prisoners willing to listen, we instilled an understanding and respect for American ways of life and thought. They witnessed, in President Roosevelt's death, the peaceful transfer of government; they heard Americans, even soldiers, openly criticize their government without reprisal; they read American newspapers of divergent opinion; and they were reintroduced to German authors, artists, and composers banned under National Socialism.

No objective assessment of the reeducation project can be made, of course, for no one followed the subsequent careers of men who had been prisoners. And these nearly 350,000 men of varying capacities and interests, constituted a minute fraction of the German nation. T. V. Smith, writing in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, judged that "the success of the program . . . was widely reflected in changed political and social attitudes" among prisoners. And a New York psychiatrist who interviewed prison-

ers concluded that they “learned to have more warmth in personal relationships. . . . They came to a more human and less literal idea of public affairs.”¹⁸

Capt. Robert L. Kunzig, an executive officer of the special projects program who went to Germany to evaluate the reactions of selected prisoners, observed that “by no means [is it] correct . . . that all these especially trained men are flag-waving enthusiasts for democracy.” Quentin Reynolds, writing in *Collier's* magazine, quoted an American colonel on reeducation: “Maybe this is doing some good. . . . Certainly it isn’t doing any harm and isn’t costing the taxpayers a nickel.” By this he meant that contract payments from employers exceeded the costs of maintaining the camps and paying POWs for their labor.¹⁹

When I reread the old *Heimat* issues, their cheap mimeograph paper now yellowing, I find such prisoner declarations as: “Let us strive for one goal: a Germany in which freedom and justice are not empty ideas and that in the union of the European family of peoples, is the guarantor of a permanent peace.” And I conclude that we conveyed a spirit of America better than we guessed at the time.

NOTES

1. T. V. Smith, “Behind Barbed Wire,” *Saturday Review of Literature* 29 (May 4, 1946), 44. For a discussion of the laws governing treatment of prisoners, see John Brown Mason, “German Prisoners of War in the United States,” *American Journal of International Law* 39, 2 (Apr. 1945), 198-215.
2. The number of prisoners, statements of policy, and other information in the narrative are based on a transcript of the remarks of Brig. Gen. B. M. Bryan, Jr., assistant provost marshal general, made to the House Military Affairs Committee, April 26, 1945. Bryan estimated that 91 percent of the prisoners consented to work.
3. Recollections of the author have been augmented by letters from that time to his family, by conference notes, and by mimeographed and printed materials in his possession. The prisoner reeducation program was directed by the Special Projects Division, Provost Marshal General’s Office (hereafter PMGO).
4. Based in part on newspaper clippings supplied by Frank A. Drake, director, Domiciliary, White City, Oregon. See especially items from the *Medford Mail-Tribune* (Nov. 24, 1941; July 8, 1942; Jan. 3 and Apr. 17, 1944).
5. Author’s letter (June 10, 1945).

6. The Adjutant General to Commanding Generals, Service Commands (Jan. 23, 1945). The books available for sale in the canteen bore the publisher's imprint: Buecherreiche Neue Welt.
7. The inaugural issue of *Der Ruf* was dated March 6, 1945, and was accompanied by a mimeographed translation of its major articles for American personnel. Judith M. Gansberg, in *Stalag U.S.A.: The Remarkable Story of German Prisoners of War in America* (New York 1977), 65-67, comments on "The Factory" at Fort Kearney, New Jersey, where the paper was produced, and on page 171, on disagreements within the Special Projects Division over the number of copies to be printed and changes in editorial direction. Paper shortages limited the number of copies feasible to produce. Prisoner reactions were described in a report I wrote to PMGO (Apr. 14, 1945).
8. *Der Ruf*, no. 7 (June 15, 1945), 1.
9. This story, by Herman Edwards, appeared in the *Oregonian* on September 30, 1945; it was the first of three articles.
10. Ibid.
11. POW Special Projects letter No. 12, Adjutant General to Service Commands (June 28, 1945); technical manuals TM 30-1506 through 30-1506E; Special Projects letter No. 13, Adjutant General to Service Commands, July 8, 1945.
12. Author's letter (June 29, 1945); and author's report of film booking (June 28, 1945). Prisoners laughed, for example, at a statement that German men and women were placed in camps for the purpose of producing "pure German" children.
13. Author's instructions (Dec. 5, 1945).
14. *Port Scope*, Stockton Ordnance Depot (Jan. 17, 1946).
15. *Stockton Record* (Jan. 14, 1946).
16. Author's letter (Feb. 23, 1946).
17. Adjutant General to Service Commands (Nov. 9, 1944).
18. Smith, "Barbed Wire," 5; *Science Newsletter*, "Democratizing Germans," 50, 293 (Nov. 9, 1946).
19. R. L. Kunzig, "Prisoners of War: The Hope of Germany," *American* 142, 5 (Nov. 1946), 135; Q. Reynolds, "Experiment in Democracy," *Collier's* 117, 12 (May 25, 1946), 13.