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WITH THE WEHRMACHT IN FLORIDA: THE GERMAN POW FACILITY AT CAMP BLANDING, 1942-1946

by ROBERT D. BILLINGER, JR. *

AN IMPORTANT ASPECT of the impact of World War II on the American homefront that has not been widely examined is how the government handled the nearly 378,000 German prisoners of war who were incarcerated in this country. Their odyssey took them from the deserts of North Africa, the mountains of central Italy, and the hedgerows of Normandy to Florida—one of forty-five states in which POWs were lodged during the war and immediately afterwards.¹ The story of the German prisoners remained until relatively recently a virtual *terre incognita* because of the low profile of POW operations during the war and because documents and papers relating to the issue are only now being declassified at the National Archives.² There has been a recent spate of books and articles on the POW issue, but more regional and state-level studies are needed.³

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1. Edward J. Pluth, "The Administration and Operation of German Prisoner of War Camps in the United States During World War II" (Ph.D. dissertation, Ball State University, 1970), 128.
2. Since Pluth completed his research in 1968, most records have been declassified. Pluth to Robert Billinger, September 28, 1976. However, as recently as the summer of 1977, most records of the POW camps which the Modern Military Archives Division of the National Archives has acquired were not indexed, thus being difficult to use. See Judith M. Gansberg, *Stalag U. S. A.: The Remarkable Story of German POWs in America* (New York, 1977). Other general studies of the POW camps are Jake W. Spindle, "Axis Prisoners of War in the United States, 1942-1946: A Bibliographical Essay," *Military Affairs*, XXXIX (April 1975), 61-66; Arnold P. Krammer, "German Prisoners of War in the United States," *Military Affairs*, XL (April 1976), 68-73; Herman Jung, *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in amerikanischer Hand, USA* (Munich, 1972).
3. See Terry Paul Wilson, "The Afrika Korps in Oklahoma: Fort Reno's Prisoner of War Compound," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, LII (Fall 1974), 360-69; John Hammond Moore, "Hitler's Afrika Korps in New England," *Yankee* (June 1976), 82-89, 116; John Hammond Moore, "Hitler's Wehrmacht in Virginia, 1943-1946," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXXV (July 1977), 259-73; John Hammond Moore, *The*

An examination of Florida's experience with German prisoners is essentially the study of the evolution of the POW facility at Camp Blanding, the main POW base in Florida. It administered more than 4,000 prisoners. Camp Blanding was constructed on the edge of an inland lake near Starke, in north-central Florida about forty miles south of Jacksonville. It served as a major training depot for American troops during World War II. Its rural, isolated location, and immense size—handling up to 75,000 trainees at one time—made it an admirable place in which prisoners of war could be held relatively easily and inconspicuously. Blanding contained both a naval and an army compound which could hold up to 1,200 prisoners. There were also nearly 3,000 men incarcerated in eleven, later fifteen, branch camps, each holding about 250 to 300 men. They provided Florida's agriculture, lumbering, and canning industries with inexpensive labor. The story of Blanding and its internees is a microcosmic example of the American POW experience. It illustrates the type of prisoners that the government had to deal with and the problems Americans faced in guarding them, using their labor, and accepting their presence on our shores. The military personnel at Camp Blanding were forced to handle different types of prisoners, many of whom were difficult to control. At first there were a number of enemy aliens, who were confined in Blanding only for a short while. Then there were sailors taken off U-Boats in the Atlantic and Caribbean, General Rommel's battle-hardened veterans who had been captured in North Africa, and the soldiers taken in the fighting in Italy and during the invasion of France. Many were lodged at Blanding at one time or another during the war years.

Soon after Pearl Harbor and the German declaration of war on the United States, Camp Blanding became the home of a troubled mass of humanity: a number of German civilians who had been living in various Latin American countries. Interned as enemy aliens, they were transported by allies of the United States to this country. During the summer of 1942, they were housed temporarily in a special compound at Blanding until more permanent internment quarters could be arranged in Texas, Oklahoma, and North Carolina.⁴ Under the surveillance of a thirty-man mil-

Faustball Tunnel: German POWs in America and Their Great Escape (New York, 1978).

4. Copy, report of visit to Camp Blanding, March 26, 1942, by Willy C.

itary police detachment, the internees-men, women, and children -were confined in a stockade, 110 by 150 yards in area, which was enclosed by inner and outer cyclone fences topped with barbed wire. They slept in pyramidal tents, only large enough for four persons. According to a Swiss inspector, the whole facility looked barren. It was located about 100 yards from a coal dumping place, and the area was usually covered with black dust. The scene was brightened only by little gardens that some of the internees endeavored to start in front of their tents.

This original German population at Blanding consisted of confused and embittered former residents of Costa Rica, Guatemala, and the Panama Canal Zone. At Blanding they were separated by sex. Interned without trial, they had been transported to Florida against their will, forced to wear army fatigues marked with the letters "EA" (enemy alien), and left to camp out in the sand hills of northern Florida with little assurance of what the future held for them. They were guarded by inexperienced American soldiers who had little understanding of what should be done with or for their new charges. Among the sad immigrants was a particularly pitiful group of sixteen German Jews from Panama who, interned along with Nazi sympathizers, were treated as prisoners in the "land of the free."⁵

With the departure of the civilian aliens by the summer of 1942, Camp Blanding was ready for other foreign guests. On a new site about a mile from the unhealthy habitat of the original civilian internees were confined Blanding's first German naval prisoners. The group of fourteen men who arrived on September 24, 1942, were the first contingent of U-Boat prisoners.⁶ Eventually the number would increase to 216. The first German army personnel began arriving in November 1943. The two groups were

Bruppacher, Department of German Interests, Swiss Legation, record group 389, Camp Blanding, file 254, box 405, Modern Military Branch, National Archives, Washington. Ultimate transfer of the aliens to camps in Texas, Oklahoma, and North Carolina can be deduced from requests made by Blanding officials to the provost marshal's office for forwarding the mail of former Blanding prisoners to the new camps. See RG 389, files 311.7, 383.7, and 254, box 405, MMB, NA.

5. Internee to Enemy Alien Information Bureau, May 31, 1942, RG 389, file 014.311, box 405, MMB, NA.
6. Roster of prisoners at Camp Blanding, January 31, 1942, RG 389, file 383.6, box 405, MMB, NA. For date of arrival, see record of visit to Camp Blanding, December 26-29, 1943, Enemy POW Information Bureau, Reporting Branch, RG 389, box 2656, MMB, NA.

confined in separate compounds about one-half mile from each other. Unlike some of the army captives who arrived later, these original U-Boat prisoners were some of Hitler's finest personnel, and as such they were respected by many Blanding army officers. The American military hoped to take advantage of whatever expertise and knowledge of technology and planning the prisoners might have; they constantly quizzed the German officers.⁷

The resistance of the early German naval prisoners to defeatism was very high. In fact, the determination of a few of these officers to remain loyal to their fatherland in the face of the defeatist attitude of prisoners brought in later led to several nasty incidents, including death threats and beatings of the less patriotic newcomers.⁸ The steadily-growing pessimism over the final outcome of the war, which the later arrivals held, increasingly put even moderates on the defensive. As early as February 1944, twenty-four naval officers asked to be transferred to Camp McCain, Mississippi, because their fellow officers were giving Blanding a distinctly anti-Nazi character. They feared for their own reputations and the safety of their families in Germany because of possible charges of guilt by association.⁹ Their transfers were not approved, however, and, in fact, seventy-eight anti-Nazis from McCain were transported to Blanding, thereby confirming the increasingly anti-Nazi character of the camp.¹⁰ The result was that loyal German seamen feared for their lives and sought protection in self-inflicted isolation from their comrades.¹¹

Camp Blanding had one of the four naval internment facilities in the United States. The others were at Camp McCain, Mississippi, Camp Beale, California, and Papago Park, Arizona.¹² But Blanding became better known for its army prison compound. At one time, it held over 1,000 members of the Wehrmacht and administered some 3,000 other internees at eleven branch camps throughout the state of Florida. The first army prisoners arrived

7. Interview of Harry A. Johnston, former executive officer at Camp Blanding, West Palm Beach, June 22, 1977.

8. Major Henry R. Totten, post adjutant, to commanding general of the Fourth Service Command, July 3, 1944, Enemy POW Information Bureau, Reporting Branch, RG 389, box 2476, MMB, NA.

9. Memorandum from Camp Blanding staff to provost marshal general, February 13, 1944, RG 389, box 2476, MMB, NA.

10. Memorandum from Camp Blanding staff to provost marshal general, July 3, 1944, RG 389, box 2476, MMB, NA.

11. Moore, *Faustball Tunnel*, 109.

12. *Ibid.*, 68.

on November 5, 1943. There were two contingents each with 250 men, transferred from camps in Aliceville and Opelika, Alabama.¹³ These POWs had been captured when the Germans were ousted from Tunisia in May 1943. At first they had been incarcerated in camps located in the interior of the country to deter any threat of escape or sabotage. Then, in late 1943, they began to be dispersed to camps like Blanding because of the growing demand for POW labor outside military reservations and the feeling that the POWs should be distributed among the various service commands.¹⁴ Additional contingents of 250 men each arrived in Blanding from Aliceville and Opelika on November 12, 1943, bringing the total up to 1,000 men.¹⁵

The new arrivals were placed in an army compound about one-half mile from the navy area. The compound for army POWs was located on sandy soil amid a number of second-growth white oak trees. Sodding and seeding made both stockades fairly attractive. Housing consisted of sixteen-by-sixteen victory-type hutments and mess halls similar to those that had been used by Civilian Conservation Corps personnel during the 1930s. Each compound was surrounded by two fences of seven and ten feet respectively, and the area between the fences was of rolled sand so that guards in the six-by-six guard towers on the perimeters could detect any illegal activity occurring in the area.¹⁶

The first residents of the army compound were veterans of Rommel's tank corps captured in Tunisia. The animosity of these men, filled with esprit and arrogance, toward the relatively inexperienced American camp personnel led to violence that was not atypical of the early American POW camps. The Afrika Korps, at least its most loyal Nazis, wanted to sabotage American efforts to control and pacify it. Testing the camp commander's newly announced policy of "no work, no eat," German ring-leaders staged a strike on November 15. Later, on December 22, despite the transfer of the main leader, dissidents staged a riot that sent anti-Nazi elements fleeing to the protective custody of

13. Record of visit to Camp Blanding, December 26-29, 1943, RG 389, box 2656, MMB, NA.

14. Pluth, "Administration and Operation of German Prisoner of War Camps in the United States During World War II," 123-24.

15. Record of visit to Camp Blanding, December 26-29, 1943, RG 389, box 2656, MMB, NA.

16. *Ibid.*; International Red Cross inspection report of Camp Blanding, April 6-7, 1944, RG 389, box 2656, MMB, NA.

prison guards.¹⁷ Ultimately many of these anti-Nazi Germans were transferred to Camp McCain for their own safety. The Nazi troublemakers were sent to a special camp at Alva, Oklahoma.¹⁸

An investigation into the riot in the Blanding army compound concluded that it was caused by the proximity of ardent Nazi and strong anti-Nazi elements. The anti-Nazis were members of the 962 Regiment, a well-known "Communist" unit, and of the 361 Regiment, a former French Foreign Legion unit containing Austrians, Poles, and Czechs, some of whom had served prison terms in Europe for their anti-Nazi leanings before being drafted into the German army.¹⁹ Nazi elements were particularly bitter when they discovered a letter from a Foreign Legion captain, requesting that he be released so that he might fight against the Germans.²⁰

The presence of large numbers of young POWs who had little or nothing to do with their time led the War Department and the War Manpower Commission to consider how they might be put to work. The Geneva Convention of 1929 prohibited use of prisoners in either war-related or unusually dangerous occupations, and this restriction was carefully observed by the War Department to prevent retaliation by the Germans against our own captured personnel. POWs could not be left idle, however, if jobs were available.²¹

The POWs at Blanding were used, as at other base camps, in maintaining their own housing and facilities. In 1944 several branch camps were also established to provide labor for private industries whose own work forces had been depleted by the draft. On January 6, 1944, Paul V. McNutt, chairman of the War Manpower Commission, announced that he had certified to the War Department the need for seven auxiliary camps in Florida "in order to supply muchly [*sic*] needed labor in pulp wood cutting

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17. Record of visit to Camp Blanding, December 26-29, 1943, RG 389, box 2656, MMB, NA.
 18. *Ibid.*: International Red Cross inspection report of Camp Blanding, April 6-7, 1944, RG 389, box 2656, MMB, NA.
 19. Major Woodruff H. Lowman, Camp Blanding commander, to assistant chief of staff, G-2, January 4, 1944, RG 389, box 2476, MMB, NA.
 20. Record of visit to Camp Blanding, December 26-29, 1943, RG 389, box 2656, MMB, NA.
 21. For a good presentation of the military's views on POW labor and the Geneva Convention, see Major General Archer L. Lerch, "The Army Reports on Prisoners of War," *American Mercury*, LX (May 1945), 536-47.

and gathering of naval stores.” The announcement came in the form of a note to Florida Senator Claude Pepper, who had initiated a request for POW labor to aid the state’s lumber industry. A news story also indicated that the War Manpower Commission’s regional office in Atlanta had asked for 2,000 prisoners to be sent to Clewiston to aid in sugarcane harvesting.²²

Announcements of requests for large contingents of POW workers to be sent to Florida exaggerated the numbers involved while overlooking the strict regulations under which such laborers could be used. The Geneva Convention allowed only privates to do such work, and they had to be supervised by their own non-commissioned officers. The government paid each man eighty cents a day, while demanding the going rate from private employers. The POWs received coupons for use in the post exchange to purchase cigarettes, toiletries, food, and other commodities. Private employers had to show a need for POW labor by making application through their local county farm agents. These requests were then forwarded to regional military commanders, who referred them to base camp commanders.²³ In the case of Camp Blanding, requests came from the Fourth Regional Command in Atlanta.

In early 1944, 126 men were shipped from Blanding to Leesburg to help in fruit picking. Supplementary labor was also transported to Florida from other states to set up branch camps under Blanding’s direction. The camp at Clewiston was established in February 1944, with POWs coming in from Aliceville, Alabama.²⁴ Shortly afterward, more POWs were processed through Blanding and sent to branch camps in Winter Haven, Dade City, and White Springs.²⁵ These 250-man contingents had arrived from Fort McClellan, Alabama, and Camp Gordon, Georgia. By February 1945, with branch camps also at McDill and Drew Fields, South Miami, Orlando, Homestead, and Venice,

22. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, January 6, 1944.

23. Lerch, “Army Reports on Prisoners of War,” 544; John Brown Mason, “German Prisoners of War in the United States,” *American Journal of International Law*, XXXIX (April 1945), 213.

24. International Red Cross inspection report, Clewiston POW camp, March 16, 1945, RG 59, 711.62114 IR/9-545, Civil Archives Division, Diplomatic Branch, NA; interview with David Forshay, former company clerk at Clewiston POW camp, West Palm Beach, May 28, 1978.

25. International Red Cross inspection report of Camp Blanding, April 6-7, 1944, RG 389, box 2656, MMB, NA.

Camp Blanding was administering a total of 4,686 members of the Wehrmacht. Of these, 1,064 were at Blanding and the rest in the eleven branch camps.²⁶

By July 1945, there were a total of twenty POW camps in Florida. These included Blanding with, by then, fifteen branch camps, and Camp Gordon Johnston with three branch camps at Eglin Field, Dale Mabry Field, and Telogia.²⁷

The presence of such large numbers of German prisoners in Florida increased apprehension about escapes. The army left all problems of detection and apprehension of escapees to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. At Blanding, the policy was to remind all new arrivals that if they escaped they would find themselves at the "tender mercies" of the FBI. Working on the reputation of "Hoover's finest," and on the dreaded reputation of Germany's national police agency, the Gestapo, officers hoped to thwart possible escape attempts.²⁸ A combination of such threats, combined with a realistic appraisal of the distances to neutral or friendly countries, seemed to help discourage potential escapees in Florida, as it did throughout the United States. Despite early fears of mass escapes, it was later noted that the percentage of escapes from POW camps averaged about the same as from federal penitentiaries.²⁹

There were some attempts, however. One POW nearly froze to death as he tried to hide in a refrigerator car en route to Jacksonville. In another instance, two Blanding escapees wandered in the woods for two days before turning themselves in, lost, hungry, and bloodied by brambles. To discourage others who might be making similar plans to run away, the Blanding administration had these two paraded before the assembled POW contingent in the clothes and condition in which they were returned to camp.³⁰ Other escapes occurred nonetheless. One POW escaped temporarily from Winter Haven in July 1944, two from Kendall in September 1944, one from near Orlando in January 1945, four in January 1945 from Clewiston, and four from Blanding in June 1945.³¹ Of

26. Army report, Camp Blanding, February 11-12, 1945, POW Special Projects Division, Administrative Branch, RG 389, box 1609, MMB, NA.

27. Monthly state list of POW camps, July 1945, RG 389, general file, MMB, NA.

28. Johnston interview, June 22, 1977.

29. Lerch, "Army Reports on Prisoners of War," 546.

30. Johnston interview, June 22, 1977.

31. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, July 11, 1944; *Miami Herald*, Sep-

all of these incidents, the most pathetic was the escape by Karl Behrens from the Clewiston camp in late December 1944. Behrens, a young man of eighteen, had been captured in Cherbourg after D-Day, and was thus a relatively recent arrival at the sugarcane harvesting camp in Florida. Probably because of his recent capture he did not receive any mail for a long time, and he was no doubt frustrated by the fact that others often received six to twelve letters at a time.³² When Behrens was discovered missing from the camp on the afternoon of December 30, a general search with the help of local FBI agents was initiated. On January 1, 1945, Behrens's body was found hanging from a tree two miles from the camp near Lake Okeechobee. He had been strangled by the rope from his own duffle bag. Despite the usual rumors of foul play-rumors that still persist today-FBI and camp personnel concluded that Behrens's death was a suicide, the result of depression.³³ His suicide was one of seventy-two totaled for the POW population in the United States, an average lower than that among the population of prewar Germany.³⁴

Escapes and suicides brought publicity to the Florida POW program. The involvement of the FBI and publication of descriptions and "mug shots" of escaped POWs generated a degree of publicity that might otherwise have been avoided. In fact, newspaper coverage of escapes and recaptures provided information about the German POWs that the army might otherwise have limited.³⁵ The less the press depended on the military for news, the more likely it was for the media to ferret out information about the Germans which would otherwise have been controlled. Thus, while Camp Blanding was the largest POW base camp in Florida, the *Bradford County Telegraph*, the weekly published in the nearby community of Starke, was so close to the military

tember 3, 1944, January 5, 1945; *Clewiston News*, January 5, February 2, 1945; *Belle Glade Herald*, January 26, 1945.

32. Interview with David Forshay, May 17, 1979.
33. *Clewiston News*, January 5, 1945; interview with Judge Hugh MacMillan, former FBI agent, West Palm Beach, February 26, 1979; Forshay interview, May 17, 1979.
34. Lerch, "Army Reports on Prisoners of War," 547; Provost Marshal General's Office, Prisoner of War Division, "Prisoner of War Operations," 4 vols. (unpublished monograph, historical mss. file, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington, 1945), 212. "Prisoner of War Operations" is available 'on microfilm through the Library of Congress.
35. Pluth, "Administration and Operation of German Prisoner of War Camps in the United States During World War II," 237-44.

establishment that it carried nothing about the Blanding POW camp until after V-E Day. An article about escaped prisoners appeared in June 1945. On the other hand, when Wilhelm Stuetzgen and Gerhard Anklam escaped briefly from the Clewiston camp in January 1945, the article on their recapture in the *Clewiston News* included personal facts about the men: that their home towns were Dusseldorf and Berlin and that they had been captured in Tunis in April 1943, and in Italy in September 1944, respectively.³⁶

While recaptured escapees were transferred to other camps and given bread and water diets as punishment, the Florida public-like the rest of the country-became increasingly aware of the POW program. Despite efforts by the government to keep the POW program in a low profile, public contact with POWs, either through their private employment in American industry or through newspaper articles covering escapes, led to stories and complaints of coddling the Germans. In February 1945, Florida Congressman Robert Sikes, a member of the House Committee on Military Affairs, became particularly vocal regarding complaints from Floridians.³⁷ The editor of the *Bradford County Telegraph* took up such general criticism of the POW program-with no reference to Camp Blanding-in an editorial on February 16, 1945, captioned, "The Germans Shoot Their Prisoners; We Feed Ours Shortcake." In his editorial he included menus for meals fed to German prisoners at McDill Field and juxtaposed these with recent stories of the Malmedy massacre.³⁸

The response from Camp Blanding took the form of a talk by public relations officer Captain Leon S. Theil to the local Rotary Club, in which he stressed that treatment of German POWs was based on the "twin policies of protecting Americans in German hands and easing our own manpower shortage under the Geneva Convention."³⁹ He explained that the government had realized \$25,000,000 from the labor of German prisoners through its policy of paying them only eighty cents a day in canteen checks. In return, the government was paid prevailing labor wage scales

36. Starke *Bradford County Telegraph*, June 22, 1945; *Clewiston News*, January 26, 1945.

37. Pluth, "Administration and Operation of German Prisoner of War Camps in the United States During World War II," 267-68.

38. Starke *Bradford County Telegraph*, February 16, 1945.

39. *Ibid.*, March 9, 1945.

for their work. Theil stressed further that in Florida alone the government received \$777,058.81 for POW contract labor over the four-month period ending December 31, 1944.

Meanwhile, Congressman Sikes and his colleagues on the House Committee on Military Affairs continued their official investigation of the “coddling” charges. Sikes was particularly adamant about confronting the military with letters from his constituents that seemed to substantiate these charges. He claimed that POWs had been “cat-calling” at American girls near Miami, that they worked side by side with American women in a laundry in Orlando, and that they received special hot lunches at a canning plant in Lake Wales.⁴⁰ Despite the army’s rebuttal of such charges, the Sikes committee continued hearings, and then announced that it was satisfied that the army’s close adherence to the Geneva Convention was a rationally-calculated policy to protect our own servicemen in German hands.⁴¹

The charges did bring about some changes in the way that POWs were handled in Florida and elsewhere. Newspaper commentary on fancy POW menus at Camp Blanding—in this case, the product of the literary imagination of a German chef rather than the serving of special delicacies—led to a prohibition of exotic phrases on POW menus.⁴² Then, as the spring of 1945 brought American victories on German soil and the opening of the concentration camps, newspapers contrasted German cruelty overseas with a two-day strike of German POWs at the Belle Glade branch camp over a cut in cigarette rations.⁴³ These accounts of German atrocities probably helped spur the War Department’s decision to increase work loads, cut calories, and limit post exchange supplies for German POWs. These actions immediately drew complaints from the International Red Cross, and more adequate menus were restored by the fall of 1945.⁴⁴

40. Transcript, “Questioning of Brigadier General Blackshear M. Bryan by Congressman Robert Sikes,” Hearing of the Special Committee of the House Committee on Military Affairs Regarding POW Treatment, April 30, 1945, 454, 461, 464, in RG 59, files 740.00114 EW/4-145 through 740.00114 EW/7-3145, box 3623, Civil Affairs Division, Diplomatic Branch, NA.

41. Pluth, “Administration and Operation of German Prisoner of War Camps in the United States During World War II,” 286-87.

42. Johnston interview, June 22, 1977.

43. *Palm Beach Post*, April 13, 1945; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 13, 1945.

44. Jung, *Deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in amerikanischer Hand, USA*, 60-62.

In addition to the charges of coddling, Congressman Sikes and others complained that little effort was being made to try to re-educate German POWs in the ways of democracy. Sikes criticized the army's "voluntary indoctrination" program as ineffective. He argued that "German war prisoners should be thoroughly indoctrinated into the workings of democracy. . . . Although forcible indoctrination is prohibited by the Geneva Convention, force should be used, if necessary, because the United States is the only country to observe the convention."⁴⁵

What Sikes did not realize was that, since the spring of 1944, the army had been secretly developing and introducing a subtle, if technically illegal, system of reeducation for the POWs that was not revealed until after V-E Day. This program included adding an assistant executive officer (AEO) to all POW base-camp staffs. In each camp, this officer's job was to gain the confidence of prisoners through his work as an interpreter and assistant to the chaplain. He helped organize recreational programs, secured books and magazines, selected movies, and set up special interest courses. The AEO was to order fewer gangster and "wild West" films, and more highlighting heroism and the achievements of democratic peoples (film versions of the lives of Alexander Graham Bell, Mark Twain, and Louis Pasteur, for example) or those showing the capacity for goodness of the German people, such as "The Seventh Cross." Newsreels of the German concentration camps as American and British armies found them were also shown. Several German-language newspapers were banned from camps because of their chauvinism or National Socialist leanings. The post exchanges did stock the *New York Staats-Zeitung*, along with *Time*, *Life*, *Newsweek*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and the *New York Times*.⁴⁶

How effective such efforts were is difficult to ascertain, but after one of the concentration camp newsreels, the prisoners at Camp Blanding took up a collection for the survivors. The POW spokesman added the note: "The whole company had the occasion on 10 June 1945 to convince itself through a moving picture how the German government, during the past years, has mistreated and tortured to death citizens, foreigners and prisoners of war in the concentration camps and POW camps. Voluntarily,

45. *New York Times*, April 23, 1945.

46. Gansberg, *Stalag U. S. A.*, 89-119.

the company decided to forward the amount of \$411.00 to the German Red Cross, to be used for women, children and men, regardless of religion, who have suffered the most during the years of the German [Nazi] government. . . . We hope that all those criminals, regardless of class, religion, party, organization or military unit, will suffer just punishment."⁴⁷

In contrast, it must be noted that a former German POW reported that at one of the Blanding branch camps an American army chaplain held lectures extolling democracy, and on at least, one occasion he stomped off angrily when pro-Nazi prisoners began asking him questions about American racist policies toward blacks.⁴⁸

The end of the war in Europe in May 1945 forced planning for POW repatriation as well as overdue publication of indoctrination policies. Despite requests by Florida farmers and businessmen-like their counterparts throughout the United States-to continue the use of cheap German labor, the War Department determined to begin closing the camps later that year.⁴⁹ Gradually, throughout the fall, as harvests were taken in, Blanding's branch camps were shut down. Their occupants were transferred to military installations like those at Green Cove Springs and Jacksonville.⁵⁰ Requests for permission for POWs to be released early in order to fight against the Japanese were also denied.⁵¹ Similarly, requests for repatriation to non-German territory or for continued residence in the United States were refused. All German Wehrmacht personnel, regardless of nationality, were to be returned to Germany.⁵² Exceptions were made for prisoners of Russian background. Through a special agreement with the

47. Ibid., 103-04.

48. Jung, *Deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in amerikanischer Hand, USA*, 220.

49. Pluth, "Administration and Operation of German Prisoner of War Camps in the United States During World War II," 388. For an example of requests for Florida for further POW labor, see memorandum to regional manpower director, region VII, "Use of Prisoners of War in Florida Canning Plants," RG 211, series 175, region VII file, War Manpower Commission, Civil Archives Division, Industrial and Social Branch, NA.

50. Report, War Prisoners' Aid, World Committee of the YMCA, POW camps visited, December 19, 1945, RG 59, 711.62114 IR/12-1945, Civil Archives Division, Diplomatic Branch, NA. The group visited Camp Blanding and its branch camps October 14-23, 1945.

51. Johnston interview, June 22, 1977.

52. Pluth, "Administration and Operation of German Prisoner of War Camps in the United States During World War II," 385-413.

Soviet Union, the United States returned these men to Russian hands. The sad fate of these men, considered traitors by their own government, seems not to have been played out in Florida as it was at Fort Dix, New Jersey, where several prisoners committed suicide and others had to be overpowered by tear gas and shots when they learned that they were to be repatriated to the Soviet Union.⁵³

In April 1946, there remained only 243 POWs at Camp Blanding. As of May 1, all had been transferred or repatriated.⁵⁴ For some of the Blanding POWs, the odyssey was not yet over. About 178,000 of the 378,000 POWs in the United States were turned over to Britain, France, and Belgium to be used to help rebuild these war-torn countries. They would not be released for a year or more after their departure from American shores during the spring of 1946. Most prisoners, however, were more fortunate; embarking from Camp Shanks, New York, they arrived in Germany by way of French transit camps.⁵⁵ One of the naval officers who had feared for his life at Camp Blanding because of the extreme anti-Nazi elements in the compound was transferred to Fort Eustis, Virginia, soon after V-E Day and helped other POWs translate Werner von Braun's rocketry notes. With special commendations from the United States government, he returned to Germany in July 1946.⁵⁶

Wartime Florida, with its more than 4,000 German POWs, saw only a small fraction of the total Wehrmacht contingent in America. Its experiences, however, were representative of those that America had with the larger group. With strikes, riots, escapes, and public uproar, Florida's Camp Blanding and its branch camps experienced the unusual problems America faced as it held large numbers of foreign prisoners on its soil for the first time. This experience remains a unique, though frequently overlooked, aspect of life on the homefront in the United States, during World War II.

53. See Nicholas Bethell, *The Last Secret: The Delivery to Stalin of Over Two Million Russians by Britain and the United States* (New York, 1974), 166-69. The incident at Fort Dix was not a secret to the American press; see *Palm Beach Post*, June 30, 1945.

54. Weekly report, prisoners of war, April 15, May 1, 1945, RG 389, general file, MMB, NA.

55. Jung, *Deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in amerikanischer Hand, USA*, 248-57.

56. Moore, *Faustball Tunnel*, 109.