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THE OTHER SIDE NOW: WHAT BLANDING PRISONERS OF WAR TOLD THE WEHRMACHT

by ROBERT D. BILLINGER, JR.

FIFTY years after the arrival of German prisoners of war in Florida their story is still little known.¹ Admittedly their presence was minimal since only about 4,000 out of the 378,000 German prisoners who spent time in America were detained in the state. Florida was one of forty-five states with POWs, and the base camp

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1. The Florida POW story was the focus of Robert D. Billinger, Jr., "With the Wehrmacht in Florida: The German POW Facility at Camp Blanding, 1942-1946," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 58 (October 1979), 160-73, recently republished in *Florida at War*, ed. Lewis N. Wynne (St. Leo, FL, 1993), and the subject of several reminiscences appearing in Florida newspapers: Bill Bond, "Residents Recall Days of POWs in Camp Near Leesburg," *Orlando Sentinel*, October 15, 1986, and Jerard Thornton, "WWII POW Returns to See Campsite," *Clewiston News*, December 31, 1986. As a result of the massive publication of studies supported by the German government in the 1970s and the declassification of American documents at about the same time, the story of German POWs in America has only been told in detail in the last twenty years. See particularly Herman Jung, *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in amerikanischer Hand, USA* [German Prisoners of War in American Hands, USA] (Munich, 1972). This is volume X/1 of a massive twenty-two-volume series, Erich Maschke, ed., *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Kriegsgefangenen des Zweiten Weltkrieges* prepared by the Wissenschaftliche Kommission für deutsche Kriegsgefangenengeschichte established in 1957 with the assistance of the Federal Republic of Germany. For an evaluation of this series see Jake W. Spidle, "Axis Prisoners of War in the United States, 1942-1946: A Bibliographical Essay," *Military Affairs* 39 (April 1975), 62-63. Excellent studies in English include Edward J. Pluth, "The Administration and Operation of German Prisoner of War Camps in the United States during World War II" (Ph.D. diss., Ball State University, 1970); Judith M. Gansberg, *Stalag, U.S.A.: The Remarkable Story of German POWs in America* (New York, 1977); and Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (New York, 1979). Some recent studies of individual camps, regional POW employment, and German memoir literature include Allen V. Koop, *Stark Decency: German Prisoners of War in a New England Village* (Hanover, NH, 1988); James E. Fickle and Donald W. Ellis, "POWs in the Piney Woods: German Prisoners of War in the Southern Lumber Industry, 1943-1945," *Journal of Southern History* 56 (November 1990), 695-724, and Helmut Homer, *A German Odyssey: The Journal of a German Prisoner of War*, trans. and ed. Allan Kent Powell (Golden, CO, 1991).

at Camp Blanding, with its fifteen side camps, was only one of 155 base camps in the continental United States.²

Yet the experiences of German prisoners of war in Florida provide insight into the American handling of these Germans during World War II. Equally important, this story illuminates how prisoners coped with the hard realities of incarceration. This essay explores these dimensions, with special attention to how the ideological and political perspectives of internees influenced their stay in Florida.

What has been missing in scholarly works to date has been information about the views of German POWs. The most important reason for this lacuna has been the problem of access to relevant documents. Without written permission from former prisoners, the German military archives will release no materials regarding specific prisoners from its vast stock of oral and written interviews with former POWs.³

But German public records are generally declassified thirty years after the events that generated them.⁴ Thus materials taken in wartime judicial proceedings are now becoming available to researchers. One such set of proceedings are the inquiries of the Armed Forces Research Office for Injuries to International Law. This legal research branch of the German Supreme Command was set up in September 1939 to investigate war crimes by enemy military and civilians against members of the German armed forces and to investigate allegations from abroad regarding the German military.⁵

2. Billinger, "Wehrmacht in Florida," 160-61; Jung, *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen*, 24; Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War*, 28. There were 551 branch camps in the United States.

3. This was the author's experience based on visits to the National Archives, Modern Military Branch, Washington, DC, and with the staff of the German Federal Military Archives (Bundesarchiv, Militärarchiv, Freiburg) The latter explained that the numerous oral and written interviews conducted by the Scientific Commission for the History of the German Prisoners of War (Wissenschaftliche Kommission für deutsche Kriegsgefangenengeschichte)— excerpts of which have been published in the multivolume work published by the Commission as noted in footnote 1— can normally only be used thirty years after the death of the source. See *Hinweise für Benutzer des Bundesarchives-Militärarchiv in Freiburg* [Information for Users of the Federal Archives-Military Archive in Freiburg].

4. See *Hinweise für Benutzer*, as cited above.

5. Alfred M. de Zayas, *Die Wehrmacht-Untersuchungsstelle: Deutsche Ermittlungen über alliierte Völkerrechtsverletzungen im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich, 1980).

Repatriated prisoners of war gave information to this office. Former prisoners released from American hands responded briefly in writing to questions on a form entitled "Report regarding the treatment experienced in British or American prisoner of war camps."⁶ In some cases repatriated prisoners were asked to provide notarized testimony to supplement the cursory information supplied on these forms. These elaborations are particularly helpful in illuminating the German perspective on America's POW program.

Four German POWs housed at the army prisoner of war compound at Camp Blanding between November 1943 and February 1944 filled out comprehensive reports on their experiences. They were repatriated to Germany in an exchange of wounded prisoners in March 1944.⁷ Their observations about Camp Blanding are available because the Wehrmacht found enough useful information in the answers given on the summary questionnaires to seek additional testimony from them.

Information they gave to the German military provides a German perspective on some of the violent conflicts within the camps that occurred early in the German POW experience in America. Such conflicts erupted at Camp Blanding in November and December 1943. These developments revealed both the fragility of American military control in the early years of stateside camps and the factions existing among Germans in some of the camps that made the segregation of various sorts of German prisoners absolutely necessary. This separation, more importantly, disclosed the diversity of opinion within Germany during the Nazi era. Hitler's totalitarian society, the Wehrmacht testimonies prove, worked hard but unsuccessfully to induce complete conformity within its own ranks.

Many American military officers were either ignorant of or cared too little about this reality. Despite warnings from the Provost Marshal General's office, camp commanders focused on the successful use of prisoners in work projects related to camp and civilian contracts and often let internal discipline within the camps

6. These materials are in the Bundesarchiv, Militärarchiv, Bestand: RW2/v. 109, Freiburg, Germany. They are entitled Oberkommando der Wehrmacht Wehrmachtuntersuchungsstelle für Verletzungen des Völkerrechts, USA, Kriegsverstöße gegen Kriegsgefangenen in den Lagern. Lager: Blanding.

7. Ibid.

take care of itself. As the experience of Camp Blanding demonstrated, the dangers facing German soldiers did not cease when they entered American camps.

The Wehrmacht's interrogation of repatriated Blanding prisoners disclosed the story of an odyssey only possible in an age of world wars. This journey took four wounded men from capture by the British in Tunisia in May 1943 to American custody in Oran, Algeria, and then by boat from Casablanca, Morocco, to Boston, Massachusetts. They traveled by train to Aliceville, Alabama, and later to Camp Blanding in Starke, Florida. Finally, repatriation came by way of Hallaron General Hospital in New York, passage to Barcelona, Spain, then transfer to Marseilles, France, and home to Germany in March 1944.⁸ The experiences these soldiers encountered along the way have remained part of German memories over the last fifty years.

Documents stemming from an inspection of Camp Blanding in the fall of 1943 by a representative of the Provost Marshal's office provide a portrait of this newly created German army detention center in Florida. When Captain Edward C. Shannahan of the Provost Marshal General's office arrived on December 26, 1943, to inspect the army compound at the German POW installation, the duty officer expressed great relief.⁹ Shannahan soon realized that he had stumbled into a very tense situation. Major Woodruff Lowman, the former prison officer at the post, had just taken over command of the POW compound. His predecessor had been relieved of duty on December 24 because of problems with the prisoners. Lowman had no familiarity with the rules of the Geneva Convention or with handling prisoners of war, and he was forced to take over the new army POW compound at a time of great unrest.

A riot had occurred on December 22 resulting in the removal of thirty prisoners for their own protection. Agitators within the compound had instituted a "reign of terror." "Flying squads roamed about the compound armed with clubs, threatening the lives of any other men who were so-called traitors." Over the next

8. *Ibid.*

9. Captain Edward C. Shannahan, Report of Incidents Occurring at Camp Blanding, December 22-30, 1943, filed with Record of Visit to Camp Blanding, December 26-29, 1943, RG 389, box 2656, Modern Military Branch, National Archives (hereinafter, MMB).

several days clusters of two or three prisoners requested that they be removed from the stockade. Removal of two more during the daily count at 6:00 P.M. on Christmas Day caused such a disturbance that guards were forced to use tear gas. The gas grenades were not accurately placed, and POWs were able to bury them while shouting "Sieg." At 10:30 P.M. Major Lowman instructed the officer of the day to remove the German spokesman and eight other leaders and to place them in several cells in the garrison prison.¹⁰ Finally, guards segregated about sixty-five Germans from the rest.

Such problems were not unique to Camp Blanding; the first years of the German POW experience in America saw numerous disturbances of a similar nature.¹¹ Problems proliferated with the creation of new German army compounds in late 1943. These new camps were designed to disperse the increasingly large number of German prisoners arriving in the United States and to provide labor on American military reservations where the draft had depleted civilian work staffs.¹² The number of German prisoners escalated from 990 in January 1943 to 12,300 by December because of the capture of the Afrika Korps in Tunisia in May 1943.¹³

Of the 378,000 German POWs in the United States during World War II, 135,000 were captured in North Africa.¹⁴ These men— as was seen at Camp Blanding— were among the toughest, most nationalistic, and ultimately most troublesome for American authorities. They viewed later arrivals suspiciously, calling them "punks" and "cowards."¹⁵ Yet even the Afrika Korps had dissenters in its midst, and this was the cause of violence in the opening days of the Camp Blanding experience.

The German army compound at Camp Blanding, eight miles east of Starke, opened on November 5, 1943, to hold 1,000 Afrika

10. Ibid. The soldiers were later removed to a hut outside the garrison prison. Shannahan ordered this because placing prisoners in cells for criminals contravened the Geneva Convention.

11. Gansberg, *Stalag, U.S.A.*, 47-63.

12. Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War*, 79.

13. Pluth, "Administration and Occupation," 123-24; Major General Archer L. Lerch, "The Army Reports on Prisoners of War," *American Mercury* 60 (May 1945), 546.

14. Jung, *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen*, 8.

15. Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War*, 162-63, 169; Interview with David Forshay, former American guard at Aliceville and the Camp Blanding branch camp at Clewiston, West Palm Beach, FL, May 29, 1978, notes in author's possession.

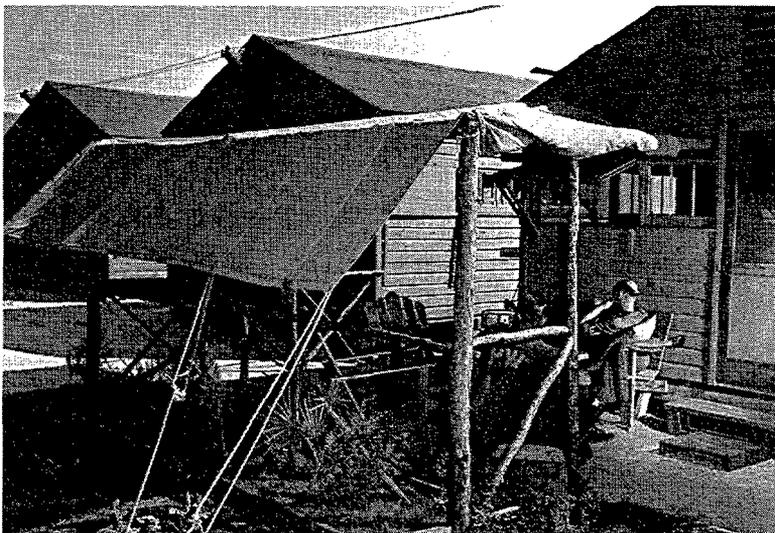
Korps men.¹⁶ On that day the compound received 250 prisoners from Aliceville, Alabama, and 250 prisoners from Opelika, Alabama. By August 1945 it held 1,472 prisoners and was the base camp for about 5,000 more men held in fifteen branch camps throughout Florida. Each camp held 250 to 300 men.¹⁷ Shortly thereafter, one of the prisoners, Alfred Paschke, called the men together and told them that he was going to run the camp. He insisted that POWs do as little work as possible, try to destroy U.S. government property without getting caught, and “ride” the sick report.¹⁸

Real trouble at the compound started after an additional 500 men (again 250 from Aliceville and 250 from Opelika) arrived on

16. There had been a naval prisoner of war compound located at Blanding since September 24, 1942. It held the first contingent of captured German sailors—fourteen U-Boat prisoners rescued when their submarine was sunk off the U.S. coast. The Blanding naval compound was the first of four naval internment facilities in the United States. See John Hammond Moore, *The Faustball Tunnel: German POWs in America and Their Great Escape* (New York, 1978), 109. Even before the naval compound, there had been a temporary camp during the summer of 1942 for German civilians in various Latin American countries. Later, these civilians—some of them German-Jews—were moved to more permanent internment quarters in Texas, Oklahoma, and North Carolina. See Willy C. Bruppacher, Report of Visit to Camp Blanding, March 26, 1942, Department of German Interests, Swiss Legation, file 254, box 405, RG 389, MMB. See file 254, 311.7, 383.7, box 405, RG 389, MMB for requests made by Blanding officials to the Provost Marshal’s office for forwarding mail to former Blanding internees at the new camps.

17. In August 1945 Blanding’s branch camps included facilities at Leesburg, Winter Haven, Dade City, White Springs, Clewiston, Kendall (Miami), Drew Field (near Tampa), MacDill Field (Tampa), Orlando, Venice, Page Field (Fort Myers), Belle Haven, Belle Glade, Jacksonville, and Daytona Beach. See Semi-Monthly Report on Prisoners of War, August 1945, tab 116, in Provost Marshal General’s office, Prisoner of War Division, “Prisoner of War Operations,” unpublished monograph, historical mss. file, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington 1945, now available on microfilm through the Library of Congress. Later facilities were located briefly at Green Cove Springs and Banana River Naval Air Station (near Melbourne), and Melbourne. See War Prisoners’ Aid of the World Committee of YMCA to Department of State, December 19, 1945, file 711.62114 IR/12-1945, RG 59, Department of State, National Archives, Washington. In the western part of the state a separate base camp was established at Camp Gordon Johnston (near Carrabelle), with three branch camps at Eglin Field (near Crestview), Dale Mabry Field (on the outskirts of Tallahassee), and Telogia. See monthly state list of POW camps, July 1945, general file, RG 389, MMB.

18. Report of Captain Jadie H. Brown, December 30, 1943, enclosed with Shannah, Report of Visit to Camp Blanding.



German prisoners listening to the radio, Camp Blanding, 1943. *Photograph courtesy National Archives, Washington.*

November 12. According to one American officer, “It seemed that all of the 250 from Aliceville were either wounded or trouble makers.”¹⁹ On November 15 a strike of all but about fifty men occurred. Its leaders, including Paschke, claimed that their work around the Camp Blanding military reservation was contrary to the Geneva Convention because it assisted the war effort. Despite explanations from the camp’s commanding general that the required work was not contrary to the Convention, difficulties continued.

On December 7 Paschke, identified as a trouble maker by American authorities, was transferred to another prisoner of war camp. His followers, however, continued work slowdowns and threatened prisoners who did their work well. Tensions finally led to the riot on December 22, the removal of threatened prisoners, and the segregation of the most troublesome of the German leaders on December 25.²⁰

19. *Ibid.*

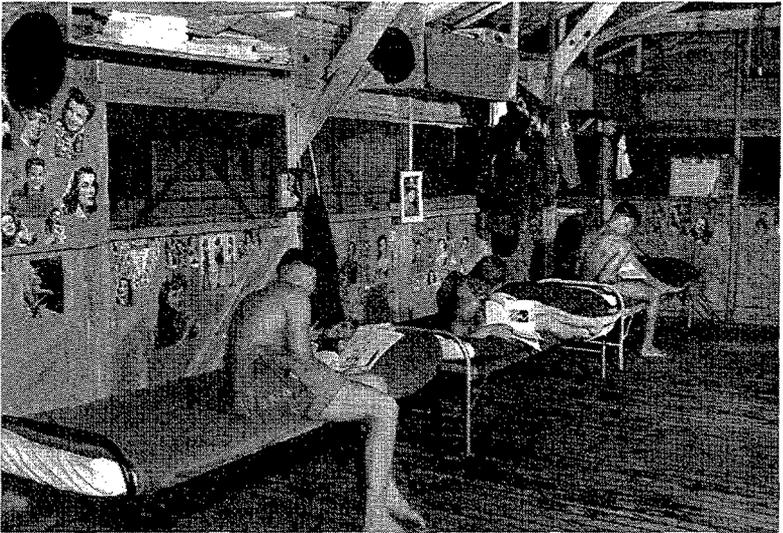
20. *Ibid.*

Captain Shannahan confronted this situation when he arrived at Camp Blanding on the evening of December 26, 1943. In interviews with German prisoners, Shannahan learned the essence of their complaints. They centered on a Camp Blanding “no work, no eat” policy and the claim that the sixty-five Germans segregated from their comrades by the Americans were traitors. This latter assertion stemmed from a letter the POWs had found from one of their fellow inmates to a captain in the French Foreign Legion. In the letter the “traitor” requested his release so that he might once again fight for France against the Nazis. The writer explained that he had been forced to leave Germany early in Hitler’s reign and had fought in the French Foreign Legion until the fall of France. Placed in a concentration camp by the Germans, he was later inducted into the German army in lieu of staying in the camp. He escaped to the Allied side shortly thereafter.²¹

Shannahan concluded that German suspicions were exaggerated and that probably only one or two real anti-Nazis were to be found in the camp. The balance of the sixty-five soldiers who had asked to be segregated for their own protection probably had rebelled only against the actions of their leaders. Shannahan therefore suggested to Blanding’s commanding officer that the 4th Service Command in Atlanta issue orders transferring Nazi agitators to a special camp in Alva, Oklahoma. Anti-Nazis were to be transferred to Camp McCain in Mississippi.²²

21. Shannahan, Report of Visit to Camp Blanding.

22. *Ibid.* A letter of January 4, 1944, from the Blanding POW commander requested that the War Department transfer thirty-seven men because their lives were threatened in the December 22 riot. See W. H. Lowman to assistant chief of staff, G-2, War Department General Staff, January 4, 1944, subject file, 1942-46, box 2476, Enemy POW Information Branch, RG 389, MMB. A note enclosed with this document indicated that the prisoners were delivered to Camp McCain, Mississippi on January 26, 1944. See A. R. Tiedgen, WOJG, U.S.A., Adjutant to Provost Marshal General, Washington, DC, January 27, 1944. A Department of State official, visiting the camp in early April with representatives from the International Red Cross Committee and the Swiss Legation confirmed that thirty-nine Germans were sent to Alva, while the sixty-five prisoners in protective custody were only slowly being sent elsewhere. At the time of his visit, thirty-seven men had been sent recently to Camp McCain, and he was sure that most or all of the rest would soon follow. See Charles C. Eberhardt, Report Regarding Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Camp Blanding, Starke, Florida, April 6-7, 1944, Other Inspection Reports, Camp Blanding, FL, RG 389, MMB.



Interior view of German prisoners' barracks, Camp Blanding, 1943. *Photograph courtesy National Archives, Washington.*

The situation at Camp Blanding in December 1943 was caused, the camp commandant concluded, by the proximity of ardent Nazis and strong anti-Nazi elements. The anti-Nazis were members of the 962nd Regiment— which he described as a well known “communist” unit— and the 361st Regiment, a former French Foreign Legion unit containing Austrians, Czechs, and Poles, some of whom had served time in concentration camps before being drafted into the German army.²³

Testimony from the repatriated Germans adds detail to these findings. The four soldiers were among those individuals transferred from Aliceville, Alabama, who were “either wounded or trouble makers.”²⁴ Information that each gave to the Wehrmacht reveals both why the Americans had to deal with trouble makers and why German officials requested more complete, notarized testimony from the returnees. Each described incidents of maltreat-

23. Billinger, “Wehrmacht in Florida,” 165; and Lowman to assistant chief of staff, G-2, January 4, 1944.

24. Report of Captain Jadie H. Brown, December 30, 1943, with Shannahan, Record of Visit to Camp Blanding.

ment by Americans, especially by Jewish-Americans, and they all mentioned the presence of traitors in the camps, especially at Camp Blanding.²⁵

The stories they told initially had only two things in common: the soldiers were in Tunisia when the Afrika Korps was defeated in May 1943, and they were each already wounded when captured. One was a twenty-two-year-old private first class in the Tank Corps of the Herman Göring Division, another a soldier of the 962nd Infantry Regiment, a third was a forty-year-old private in the 665th Pioneers, and the fourth was a twenty-year-old signal operator on a patrol boat. They were all captured by the British between May 7 and 11, 1943.

Shortly thereafter, the four men and their fellow captives were turned over to the Americans in Oran, Algeria, transferred to Casablanca, Morocco, and then shipped to Boston. Once in the United States authorities transferred them by train to the POW facility in Aliceville, which held 6,000 prisoners. After making trouble there, they were sent to Camp Blanding.²⁶

Their first experience as a prisoner was at the hands of the British. They described their treatment as “good,” and more “fair” than the treatment later meted out by the Americans.²⁷ They had no complaints about the British, though they noted efforts to obtain military secrets.²⁸ One returnee also commented on the attentive English personnel at the British military hospital in North Africa.²⁹

Treatment by the Americans suffered in comparison. Each of the four prisoners mentioned the early theft of personal articles along with insignia from their uniforms.³⁰ They complained also of verbal abuse and inconsistent behavior by the Americans. One returnee reported that while waiting on the dock in Casablanca to depart for Boston, an American doctor asked a wounded German if he were in pain. Then, without troubling to help the wounded

25. See materials in the Bundesarchiv, Militärarchiv, Bestand: RW2/v. 109, Freiburg, Germany. Henceforth, the four repatriated, wounded Germans and their testimony to the German military jurists will be noted by the initials of the soldiers involved: WJ, BK, WK, and MM. All of these materials are found in the same archival packet in the Federal Military Archives, Freiburg.

26. WJ, WK, MM, BK

27. WK, WJ.

28. MM.

29. BK.

30. WJ, WK, MM, BK

man, he remarked, "Ask Hitler why you are in pain."³¹ Another stated that just before embarkation an American chaplain handed out cigarettes and matches but that these were confiscated before they boarded the ship. Then, when one German soldier smoked, the whole group— perhaps 500 men— were denied food for twenty-four hours.³²

After arriving in Boston the wounded prisoners were placed on a Red Cross train and sent to the facility in Aliceville.³³ Because some prisoners required special handling unavailable at the POW camp, two were sent to a Memphis, hospital. The indignity of traveling from Aliceville to Memphis and back again in slippers and pajamas in a train filled with civilian travelers was memorable.³⁴ Equally notable was the presence at the Memphis hospital of a pharmacist in the American army— a Jewish emigrant from Germany— who accosted the German POWs. He accused the Germans of burning "Marxist" literature, blamed Germany for starting the war, and declared that the Russians would win. Fortunately, a prisoner reported, an American military doctor sharply rebuked the pharmacist and ordered him to cease annoying the POWs.³⁵

In Aliceville the POWs were introduced to the American work program, a source of misunderstanding in the early days in the camps, both at Aliceville and later at Blanding.³⁶ When officials asked the Germans to pick cotton, Sergeant Warnstedt, the prisoners' spokesman and a camp leader, encouraged his comrades not to assist the American war effort. As a result, the approximately 150 resisters were first segregated in a branch camp and then transferred to Camp Blanding.³⁷

31. BK.

32. MM.

33. WJ, BK.

34. WJ.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Parker W. Buhrman, Report of Inspection of the Prisoner of War Camp, Aliceville, Alabama, November 26, 1943, Aliceville, AL, Inspection and Field Reports, entry 461, box 2653, RG 389, MMB. The Swiss representative observed that the prisoners did not believe they were required to work, except on a voluntary basis. Thus there were cases of noncooperation and insubordination on the part of prisoners who refused to work. The American State Department representative recommended that general discipline in the camp would improve if the camp commander clearly stated that prisoners were required to work and that those who refused would be subject to discipline.

37. WJ.

Before leaving Aliceville, however, the Germans heard of escape attempts by their comrades and of the deaths or woundings of others at the hands of American soldiers, some of whom they described as Jewish Americans. At the end of July or the beginning of August two prisoners tried to escape. They were discovered, and, according to the story told to the patrol boat radio man, one was shot despite the fact that both men had raised their hands to surrender.³⁸

A soldier from the Pioneer regiment claimed that while in the prison hospital in Aliceville he saw a German admitted who had received a shotgun blast to the chest and face. Reportedly, the wounded man, who died several days later, had been shot twice by a Jewish guard who had bragged that he would kill a Nazi. As a result, POWs at Aliceville refused to work for a month and demanded that Jewish guards be removed. They were still there, however, when the Pioneer's whole company, in retaliation for the special problems that they caused the Americans, were transferred—some to a disciplinary camp in Oklahoma and the wounded to Camp Blanding.³⁹

Several of the new arrivals described Camp Blanding as a place of unbearable heat and infested with snakes and deadly scorpions.⁴⁰ The camp, one of them reported, was a troop training area for white and black troops, but the Americans were rotated every three months while the Germans were not. Able-bodied Germans were forced to do rough work such as loading coal and ashes, street cleaning, and tree cutting. He did note, however, that the food at Blanding was no worse than at Aliceville. Nor were rations cut when the Germans resisted American attempts to propagandize them for democracy. Their camp leader successfully rejected American offers to send a German speaker among them to talk about democracy.⁴¹

In Blanding, too, conflicts between “communists” and “national socialist-thinking prisoners” broke out, as problems already apparent in Aliceville continued. A repatriated Panzer soldier warned the German military that in future they should be sure that probationary battalions not be used against the English

38. BK.

39. MM.

40. WJ, MM.

41. WJ.

or Americans. He observed that these troops, composed mostly of former political prisoners and criminals, too easily deserted to the enemy. In the American camps, he felt, they were given preferential treatment. In both Aliceville and Blanding conflicts occurred when members of these units separated themselves, formed soldiers' councils, and finally sought and gained protection from American authorities. According to the returnee, there were sixty "communists" at Blanding who went over to the Americans after one of them was nearly beaten to death by "loyal" Germans. Furthermore, one German had warned that there were as many as 120 more prisoners at Blanding who had secretly agreed to help the Americans.⁴²

The informant claimed further that he and his comrades attempted to find out who belonged to this group. But while loyal Germans stood outside and rejoiced that the sixty "communists" had been taken away, guards suddenly put on gas masks and threw tear gas grenades into the crowd. An American general threatened to revoke the prisoners' food and pay because of their open hostility to the others, but Sergeant Warnstedt pointed out that this action contravened the Geneva Convention. In response to these complaints, the Americans removed the prisoners' spokesman, three company leaders, and four sergeants from the camp and confined them in a barracks with negroes awaiting the death penalty.⁴³

Shortly thereafter the informant was transferred, but this time to his homeland. Along with three wounded comrades from Camp Blanding, he was transported to Halloran General Hospital in New York and medically screened for repatriation to Germany. The men were then placed on a neutral Swedish ship and included in a wounded prisoner exchange via Barcelona in March 1944.⁴⁴

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Mixed medical commissions, composed of three members (two Swiss and one American), examined all sick and wounded prisoners and certified them for repatriation. The commissions were activated in the United States in November 1943 and functioned until April 1945. During this time 7,941 German prisoners were examined, and those found eligible were returned to Germany in the course of five exchanges that occurred between October 1943 and January 1945. The Germans were shipped under Red Cross and neutral flags by way of Göteborg, Sweden, or Barcelona, Spain, and then to Marseilles as long as France was occupied by the Germans. See Pluth, "Administration and Operation," 387, fn. 3; and Jung, *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen*, 244.

When the war ended in Europe in 1945, the number of confirmed Nazis in Camp Blanding was difficult to determine. The diehards had been transferred to other camps or had learned to conceal their opinions. Later arrivals and less fanatical Germans who manifested very different attitudes from the early prisoners now dominated Blanding's POW camp. For example, in the summer of 1945, after being shown newsreels of liberated German death camps, 1,000 prisoners took up a collection for concentration camp survivors. A German POW spokesman added: "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, 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."⁴⁵ In mid September the Blanding POW newspaper announced that a total of \$5,917.73 had been collected in the camp and its various branches for the support of "survivors of the victims of the German concentration camps."⁴⁶

By May 1946 all German POWs at Camp Blanding were gone.⁴⁷ Some were shipped directly to Germany through Camp Shanks, New York; others still had a year or so to spend in British or French prisoner of war camps. America's European allies "owned" about 178,000 of the 378,000 POWs in America yet held them in the United States during the war. This was particularly true of Afrika Korps men who had been captured by the British and were thus the first Germans to come to America, the last to leave, and some of the last to return from British and French captivity.⁴⁸

45. Gansberg, *Stalag U.S.A.*, 103-04.

46. *Der POW Zeit Spiegel* (a biweekly prisoner of war camp newspaper), Camp Blanding, no. 8, September 16, 1945, Lagerzeitungen B 205/332, Federal Military Archives, Freiburg, Germany.

47. Billinger, "Wehrmacht in Florida," 173. In April 1946 there were 243 POWs at Camp Blanding, but by May 1 all were transferred for repatriation. See Weekly Report, Prisoners of War, April 15, May 1, 1945, general file, RG 389, MMB.

48. Jung, *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen*, 243-44.

What the Blanding prisoners told the Wehrmacht in 1944 reveals the early German POW experience in America in microcosm. The German government found that despite minimal thievery and verbal abuse in North Africa, American treatment of its captives largely conformed to the Geneva Convention. As one testimony concluded after a long recitation of ills, "The food with the Americans was generally good throughout and the handling was humane."⁴⁹ Stories of Jewish guards shooting prisoners came second hand and proved difficult to verify. It must be noted, however, that perceptions among German POWs that German Jews serving in the American army were "out to get" the POWs can be found in other POW stories and reminiscences.⁵⁰

Discipline within the camps was generally upheld, though sometimes ineffectually. American authorities insisted on a "no work, no eat" policy and segregated "Nazis" and overzealous "anti-Nazis" alike. Despite what "loyal" Germans reported, anti-Nazis were not usually allowed to enter American service. Often, their treatment was as harsh as that meted out to the Nazis.⁵¹

German reports from Blanding did not indicate that Americans often were as frustrated by anti-Nazi elements as by Nazi ones.⁵² Because discipline and cooperation within camps depended largely upon the German military hierarchy among prisoners, individuals who bucked the system were unwelcome. This was true whether they were Nazis resisting American efforts or anti-Nazis resisting both German and American military authorities, since disturbances caused administrative problems for American camp administrators. Often, camp commandants classified any "troublemaker" as a Nazi, thus often hopelessly mixing the segregation program.⁵³

49. WJ.

50. See for example Reinhold Pabel, *Enemies are Human* (Philadelphia, 1953), 149. Pabel was a former German POW held in America who escaped and whom the FBI discovered only in 1953.

51. WJ. Some Poles, Frenchmen, Czechs, Belgians, and Luxembourgers were eventually screened for possible use against Germany. See Pluth, "Administration and Operation," 360-61. Generally, however, being considered an "anti-Nazi" brought neither privileges nor guarantees of early repatriation after the war. See Koop, *Stark Decency*, 44, 46; and Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War*, 247.

52. Interview with David Forshay, former POW camp guard at Aliceville and Camp Blanding's branch camp at Clewiston, West Palm Beach, FL, May 29, 1978. See also Koop, *Stark Decency*, 30; and Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War*, 165.

Only later in the POW experience did American camp administrators get assistance from trained intelligence officers who helped segregate and “reeducate” POWs. These officers—interested in showing growth of anti-Nazi sentiment—used anti-Nazi elements as part of their wartime propaganda efforts and as preparation for a post-Hitlerian Germany. Small numbers of anti-Nazis were selected and sent to training schools for early postwar repatriation.⁵⁴

The Wehrmacht learned from Blanding POWs that Americans were beginning to recognize massive cleavages within German army ranks. Even the famous Afrika Korps, reputedly the most patriotic and fanatical of Hitler’s legions, suffered from disunity due to mixing of the “elite” with military units whose purpose was more penal. Probationary battalion members were also among those captured by the Western Allies. But what the Germans did not know was how slow Americans were to discover, understand, and utilize this situation. In part, perhaps, this oversight came about because Americans, great nonconformists themselves, distrusted nonconformists in the military— even in the German military.

The significance of the Blanding experience is clear. There were serious political tensions within the German army that reflected major ideological divisions existing in Germany’s totalitarian society. Both captives and captors soon realized that the German uniform concealed but did not efface differences that separated Germans. Communists, socialists, labor leaders, and democrats found themselves incarcerated with “patriotic Germans,” some of whom were Nazis. Others were just nationalistic German warriors who refused to cooperate with the “enemy” and despised those who did.

What Blanding prisoners told the Wehrmacht revealed the complexities of European nationalism, racism, and totalitarianism of the 1940s. German POWs had witnessed these tensions in their homeland, seen the horrors of war, and finally found themselves far from the front, but hardly safe. Endangered less by Americans

53. Pluth, “Administration and Operation,” 345.

54. This is the subject of Gansberg, *Stalag, U.S.A.* But such efforts, both in the camps and later in the confused political atmosphere of occupied Germany, had minimal effects. See Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War*, 224-27; and Jung, *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen*, 237-38.

than by each other, many suffered from the political hatreds, fears, and terrors instilled in them by Nazi Germany. In the relative security of the Florida interior, the devils that German POWs brought with them broke forth to disfigure and kill what could have been a peaceful paradise in the midst of a world at war.