

CATALOGUE

// ENGLISH VERSION //



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5.0. Sponsors

- 5.1. Michael Luick-Thrams - Director of TRACES-Spuren
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E. ENTRANCE HALL

E.1. WELCOME TO HAUS DER SPUREN

Each one of us has a story.

Over time, we weave a narrative to explain where we are, how we got here and to where we might be headed. After more time, our experiences, others' input and our own shifting awareness alter how we tell our own story. With deeper insight and wider perspectives, we also see others' stories differently.

This museum—literally a “place for the muses”—is about human lives during dramatic times, marked by war, fear, loss and lamentation. It mirrors experiences by some who came before us: Through letters, diaries, artwork, etc., we gather clues about their experiences and how those might have altered them.

On these panels are stories of “the Other,” of “enemies” during war, of soldiers stranded on opponents' soil; of “traitors” seen as dangerous largely because of where they had happened to be born, not because of something treacherous they had done; of men whose skin contained “too much” pigment to be “pure”.

Those who survived such trials might seem valiant, yet many later reported having felt immense fear, desperation and dejection at the time. With time's passage, many later came to see their own stories differently, with conscious or unintended revision—a means to survive memories or feelings that otherwise seemed too painful, too threatening to entertain raw or intact: Even self-contradictions are a form of storytelling, of coping that betrays deeper truths and telling nuance; self-deception is a norm.

We invite you to spend time considering biographies lived by others which directly influenced our world today—and to meditate on how their stories inspire or warn us going forward. Please tell us your stories!

E.2. WHY COMPARE GERMANS' AND AMERICANS' EXPERIENCES DURING WWII?

Since 1945, Germans have long pondered the causes and consequences of their nation's greatest collective disaster. Together, they have come up with a finite pool of explanations. By considering other nationals' experiences of not only World War II but of National Socialism itself, new perspectives arise that might not exist otherwise. But, why—of all warring nationalities—consider Americans' experiences?

Certainly, British or French perspectives (for ex.) entail insights, but might they be too burdened by their own “grande nation” dynamics to be of real use? Which countries might share more cultural ties with Germany to forge more empathetic ties with the German experience—the Russians? After all, Tsarina Catherina was a German princess who took countless ethnic Germans with her to her adopted empire; Lenin had studied in Berlin; the last Tsar was first cousin to the German Kaiser—and yet... The Russian, moreover Soviet experience of Nazism and a war between two dictatorships involves singular factors.

The history of the young United States, in contrast, includes indelible ties to Germandom, but perhaps is not “too” self-contained to be of comparative use. Over eight million Germans emigrated to the US: Today, German-Americans are still the largest ethnic group, with every fifth American having German ancestry; in the Midwest every third, in some communities more. Globally, a third of all ethnic Germans live in the US. Deep and lasting cultural transference between the two countries continues to tie not only their historical development but also future fates to each other.

E.3. GERMAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS 1607-1990

1990

The US government supports German reunification

1987-89

In 1987, Ronald Reagan calls for Mikhail Gorbachev to open the Berlin Wall, which had separated West and East Berlin since 1961; two years later, Gorbachev visits East Berlin but resists showing enthusiastic and much-sought support for the GDR—a month later, the Wall falls

1961

J. F. Kennedy's "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech shows solidarity with West Berlin, in response to the building of the Berlin Wall

1949

23 May: founding of the Federal Republic of Germany; the USA supports the FRG, military bases in West Germany, and transatlantic partnership

7 October: founding of the German Democratic Republic, supported by the Soviet Union

1948

The Marshall Plan helps the western German zones to rise economically; the Berlin Blockade and Airlift strengthen western German ties to the USA

1947

The Truman Doctrine marks the beginning of the Cold War

1946

Fraternization ban, Nuremberg trials and de-Nazification implemented by the American occupation forces

1945

US Army liberates German cities and concentration camps and occupies the southwestern part of Germany after the war; Thuringia is transferred to the Soviets 3 months later

1943

First mutual prisoners of war taken: 14-24 February: at the Battle of Kasserine Pass in Tunisia, the Germans capture about 4000 American soldiers 13 May: the surrender of nearly 250,000 German and Italian soldiers at Tunis leads them into Allied captivity; the British government requests FDR to take many of those captured to the USA, to decrease the threat they might pose if held in the UK

1941

After the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December, the US government immediately begins to intern what would become some 15,000 German-Americans living in the US and kidnapped from Latin America; Germany declares war on the USA on the 11th

1939

20,000 people attend at New York's Madison Square Garden a rally of the German American Bund, a US-based Nazi body with roots dating to May 1933: only US citizens could be members

1938

Prominent Americans are awarded the "Order of Merit of the German Eagle" medal in acknowledgement of their sympathy for Nazism, e.g. Henry Ford and Charles Lindbergh following the November pogroms in Germany and in annexed Austria, America's Ambassador leaves Berlin; Jewish emigration to America accelerates

1939 - 1936

German and American volunteers fight together in the Spanish Civil War, largely in the pro-Communist "International Brigades," which Ernest Hemingway called the "true Germany"

1936

Olympic Games, with American athletes in Berlin; AfricanAmerican Jesse Owens becomes the most successful athlete

1941 -1933

Some important American companies maintain close ties with Nazi Germany—even including deliveries suitable for military use: e.g., Kodak, Standard Oil, Ford, General Motors, IBM, ITT, Chase National Bank

1933

Hitler becomes Chancellor, sparking emigration of Jews and intellectuals to the USA

1929

The world economic crisis, originating in the US, cripples Germany's economy

1918

The USA emerges from World War I as one of the victorious powers

1917

US joins the war on the German Kaiserreich and Austria-Hungary; over a quarter-million German-Americans required to register with authorities and carry ID cards at all times, with more than 2,000 interned in Utah, Georgia and North Carolina

1915

Sinking of "Lusitania" by a German submarine, with 128 American deaths

1914

Beginning of World War I; US government spies on US civilians with German roots

1871

Founding of the German Empire; emigration to the "New World" decreases sharply

1849 - 1848

"Forty-Eighters"—political refugees from the failed German revolution of 1848-49—flee to the USA, especially to the Midwest; they alter American politics

1783 - 1775

Hessian soldiers fight in the American Revolutionary War for the British Army; many stay to grow with the new republic

1683

1st German settlement in America, in Germantown [Pennsylvania], site of first petition against slavery (1688)

1607

1st German immigrant to America, botanist Dr. Johannes Fleischer; followed in 1608 by 5 glassmakers and 3 carpenters

E.4. GERT SCHRAMM

Gert Schramm was born in Erfurt on November 25, 1928. His mother Marianne worked in her father's workshop on Nettelbeckufer in Erfurt after completing her apprenticeship as a seamstress. Little is known about Gert's father. He was probably an African-American engineer who lived temporarily in Germany while working for an American company on the construction of a railroad bridge in Jena. The only thing that is certain is that Gert, as the illegitimate child of a "white mother" and a "black father" who was officially considered "unknown", grew up firstly in the household of his Erfurt grandparents (Kurt Schramm with his second wife and his daughter Marianne), then in Langensalza, where his mother Marianne had moved to when she had managed to find a job as a seamstress. When Marianne realized that she could not cope with the dual task of working and raising her child alone, she gave up her son into the care of his "other grandparents" (Marianne's mother Johanna with her second husband) in the village of Witterda. Gert was now four years old. From then on, he spent his childhood in Witterda, which he himself described as carefree and sheltered. Despite Nazi rule and Catholic-conservative village culture there was apparently no racially motivated discrimination. Until 1939, when everything changed.

Shortly after the war began, Gert's class teacher, whom he remembers as fair, level-headed and patient, was drafted into the Wehrmacht. The new class teacher was also the local group leader of the NSDAP and from the outset made clear to Gert that he regarded him as inferior. This treatment ranged from ostracism in class to the insults "Saustück" or "Dreckschwein" ["female swine", "filthy pig"] up to corporal punishment for alleged misdemeanors. Gert reacted with more and more frequent truancy, which led to further punishments and school truancy reports, as a result of which fines were imposed on his grandmother. The teacher called in the Youth Welfare Office, which had guardianship over Gert because of his illegitimate birth. Then, finally, the teacher obtained the court-approved order to commit Gert to a welfare home. This ultimately failed only because no home wanted to accept the "negro mongrel" described as highly troublesome. Grandmother Johanna now (1941) considered it urgently necessary to get Gert out of the line of fire, and convinced his mother Marianne to bring him back to Langensalza, where in 1938 she had meanwhile married and had three children with her husband Willi Löcher.

Gert completed his last year of compulsory schooling in Langensalza. Afterwards he wanted to begin an apprenticeship as a car mechanic. This was denied him as a "non-Aryan", but he could at least (1943) start as an unskilled "young worker" in the Greiner car workshop in Langensalza. One day, two Gestapo members showed up at the workshop to arrest him. There began an odyssey of several months through the police detention center in Langensalza, the police prison on Erfurt's Petersberg, the Gestapo prison in the Weimar Marstall and a forced labor camp at the Weimar train station. He was never charged with any concrete crime. Finally, he was presented with a so-called "protective custody order," in which he was designated "a danger to the people and the State". Referring to his "race", he was now to be placed indefinitely in a concentration camp. Thus, on July 20, 1944, he was sent to Buchenwald. There, just fifteen years old, he was marked as a political prisoner with the red triangle and given the prisoner number 49489.

Gert would hardly have survived the nine months in the Buchenwald concentration camp if he had worked permanently in the quarry - the work he was initially assigned. Communist fellow prisoners, who created a kind of subversive shadow-administration in the camp, saved him from this and ensured that he was transferred to the construction commando and then to the camp's carpentry shop. On April 11, 1945, Buchenwald concentration camp was liberated by the U.S. Army. Gert remained for two months in the camp to help in the orderly room during the process of the liquidation of the camp. In June he returned to his family in Langensalza. When the American Military Administration sought an administrator for its food depot in the town center, its choice fell on Gert, who, though only sixteen years old, was a former Buchenwald prisoner and so above any Nazi suspicion. In July 1945, the American occupation was replaced by the Soviet occupation. With that Gert was out of a job again. But now he benefited from the fact that he had learned a few scraps of Russian in Buchenwald and that in Langensalza, a local antifa committee was headed by a former Buchenwald prisoner who had the trust of the Soviet military administration: through his intercession, Gert was hired as an interpreter.

His career subsequently led Gert Schramm to the Wismut uranium mine and to a colliery in Essen in West Germany. He later returned to the GDR to work as a car mechanic and head of the civil engineering combine in Eberswalde, until he finally (still in GDR times) started a taxi-driving and haulage business. As a member of the board of the Buchenwald Committee he engaged in battling right-wing extremism and was honored for this with the Federal Cross of Merit in 2014. He died on 18 April 2016 in Eberswalde.

E.5. HAN JÜRGEN MASSAQUOI

Hans-Jürgen was born in 1926, the son of the nurse Bertha Baetz and the black African student Al-Haj Massaquoi. Bertha (born 1903) had grown up in Nordhausen, Thuringia, and in 1922 moved to Hamburg, where Al-Haj's father was Consul General of Liberia. Hans-Jürgen spent the first years of his life in his grandfather's luxurious diplomatic villa. When his grandfather returned to Africa in 1929 and Bertha decided to stay in Hamburg, a hard time began for the now single mother (who had to work as a nurse again) and her three-year-old son. They lived in a small attic flat in a working-class district of Hamburg.

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, the mother and son had to endure a period of harassment and humiliations. The mother lost her job at the hospital. Because she had a child with an African, she was declared 'politically unreliable'. She could then only work as a cleaning lady. Hans-Jürgen, who really only ever wanted to belong, was made painfully aware that as a non-Aryan he would never be entitled to that. First in the playground, which he was not allowed to enter, then the Hitler Youth, who refused to let him join, his mistreatment continued at school with derogatory remarks and the denial of access to higher education. Life became dangerous during a bombing raid on Hamburg, when he was not allowed into a protective bunker because of the color of his skin. Racial discrimination was mainly carried out by private individuals, while the Nazi authorities showed some restraint, as they envisaged giving German Africans a role in future African colonies.

In July 1943, the house where Hans-Jürgen lived with his mother was destroyed in a bombing raid. Both then sought refuge with Bertha's family in Nordhausen-Salza, where they stayed until the spring of 1944. Hans-Jürgen, who in the meantime had completed an apprenticeship as a building fitter, found work at the Schmidt, Kranz & Co. firm in Nordhausen. Mother and son then returned to Hamburg at the end of the war. In the black-market period that followed, Hans-Jürgen's dark skin came in handy because people thought he was an American, a role he gladly accepted himself because he had become a fan of America since the days of Joe Louis and Jesse Owens, the world-famous top black athletes.

After a two-year interlude with his father in Liberia, Hans-Jürgen actually went to the USA in 1950 on a student visa. Further important stages in his life: factory work, service in the US Army, study of newspaper science, American naturalisation in 1960. Later Hans-Jürgen was editor-in-chief of the influential African-American magazine *Ebony* for many years. He published his autobiography *Destined to Witness* in 1999. It was translated into German and made into a film with the title "Neger, Neger, Schornsteinfeger". In 2009, Hans-Jürgen was awarded the Federal Cross of Merit. He died in Florida on 19 January 2013.

E.6. JEAN MARCEL NICOLAS

Jean Marcel Nicolas was born on October 20, 1918, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, the son of Hilderic Nicolas and his wife Lucie Dalicy. Both parents were from the French overseas department of Guadeloupe and therefore had French citizenship, as did their son. In Haiti, they belonged to the social upper class. Hilderic worked as a secretary for the British Embassy. After some difficulties at school in Haiti, Jean Marcel's parents sent him to a prestigious French boarding school, where he was something of a trouble-maker and was sent back to Haiti three years later. After finishing school in Haiti, Jean Marcel joined the French navy as a soldier in Martinique in 1938. He suffered a head injury in an accident which led to his discharge from the navy in March 1939. Jean Marcel returned to France and began studying medicine at the University of Paris, but did not finish.

After the start of the Second World War, Jean Marcel fled to Marseille together with many Frenchmen, but later returned to German-occupied Paris. Despite the occupation, Nicolas moved freely among artists and writers and continued to be friends with his former fellow students. Jean Marcel presented himself differently to those he felt he had to deceive. He spoke fluent French, was also proficient in German and spoke English with an American accent, which he had learned from the American Marines stationed temporarily in Haiti. His knowledge of English was a necessary deception that made it easier for him to pass himself off with fake papers as 'Johnny Nicholas', a U.S. Army Air Force fighter pilot from Boston, Massachusetts, who had parachuted into France on a secret mission. He also posed as a doctor, complete with white smock and a fake diploma from the University of Heidelberg in gynecology hanging on an office wall.

But when a French woman denounced him to the German Gestapo as an American spy, "Johnny" was arrested in the fall of 1943, interrogated, and transferred to Buchenwald concentration camp in January 1944, where he was registered as an American pilot under prisoner number 44451 and was forced to work in the quarry. Later, he was sent to the Buchenwald-Dora subcamp, where the Nazis' V-1 and V-2 rockets were built. Here he posed as a doctor and was employed in the infirmary. As "Dr. Johnny Nicholas," as "the black American doctor" or as "St. Nicholas the American," he became famous because he saved many prisoners' lives and encouraged them to keep the belief that the Allies would eventually liberate them and return them to their families.

When the Buchenwald Dora camp was liquidated in April 1945 and the prisoners sent on a death march, Johnny managed to escape despite being severely wounded. He was finally captured in early May by American soldiers near Lübz and evacuated to an American military hospital in Paris. His brother Vildebart, living in Paris, was able to convince the Americans that their patient was a French citizen. As a result, he was – now once again Jean Marcel Nicolas – admitted to a French hospital, where a few months later, on September 4, he died, aged 26, of tuberculosis.

1. HELD IN THE HEARTLAND: GERMAN POWS IN THE MIDWEST, 1943-46

1.1. INTRODUCTION

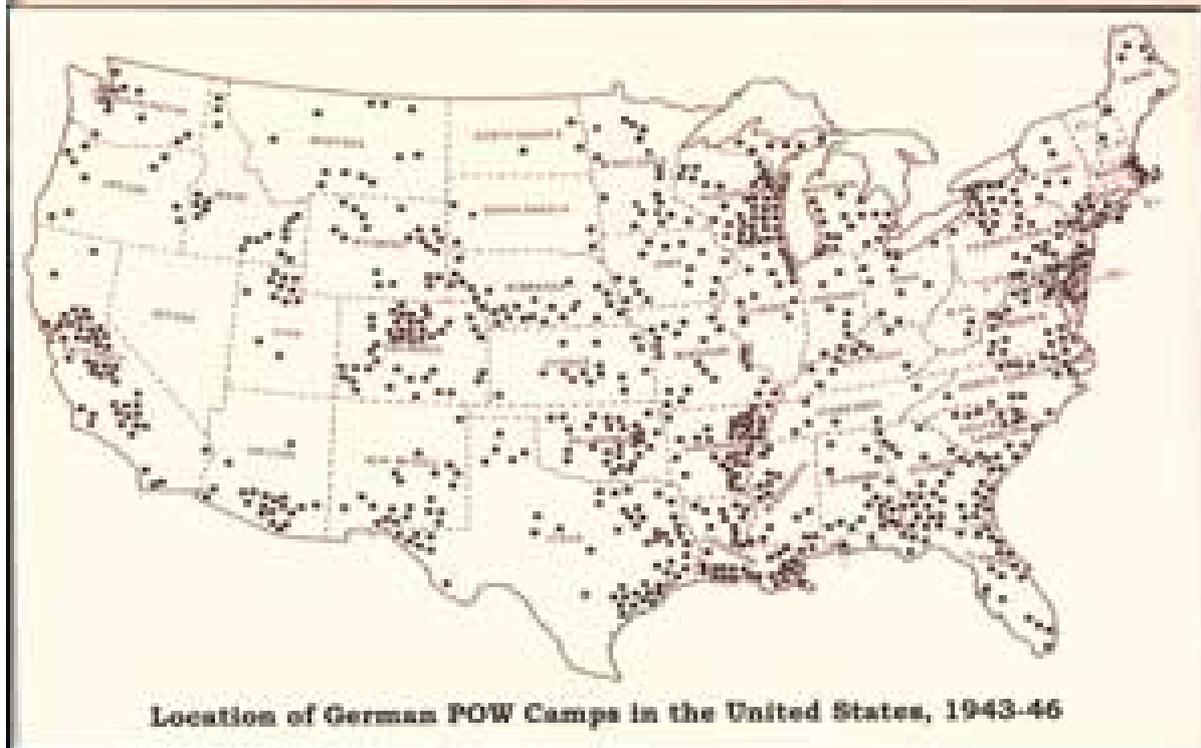
By the end of World War II some 425,000 German, Italian and Japanese prisoners of war (POWs) found themselves imprisoned in over 660 base and branch POW camps in almost all of the then-48 United States and the territory of Alaska. Millions more Axis and Allied POWs were held in other camps in Europe, the Soviet Union, Canada, Australia and Africa. While Axis and Soviet POWs were both perpetrators and victims of dictatorial governments and state-sponsored violence, POW experiences on all sides embody ageless and timely themes of war and peace, justice under arms, and issues regarding human rights, international reconciliation and future conflict avoidance.

The roughly 372,000 German POWs held in U.S. Army-operated camps across the United States were sent out to harvest or process crops, build roads and waterways, fell trees, roof barns, erect silos, work in light non-military industry, lay city sewers and construct tract housing, wash U.S. Army laundry and do other practical wartime tasks. With the high rate of 19th-century German immigration to the Midwest, many of those who worked with POWs spoke to them in their native tongue; some even had relatives or former neighbors among them. In the process, POWs formed significant, often decades-long friendships with “the enemy” and underwent considerable changes as individuals and as a group—thus fundamentally influencing postwar German values and institutions, as well as American-German relations. A number of POWs even chose to immigrate to the United States after the war.

While Midwest soldiers and airmen were in Europe, blasting German cities to rubble, some German soldiers sat out the rest of the war after being captured—behind barbed wire, in the American Heartland. While there, some secretly dated local girls, sneaked into corner bars and darkened movie theatres, and some even took correspondence courses for which they would earn college credit back in postwar Germany. All this occurred while a vicious global war raged on beyond the peaceful Midwest, claiming over 55 million lives and laying entire countries to waste. This exhibit documents the contradictions and ironies of both war and imprisonment—above all to stimulate reflection, discussion and insight.

For more information, visit www.TRACES.org.

1.2. POW CAMPS IN THE MIDWEST (MAP)



1.3.1. BEFORE THE STORM: PRE-CAPTIVITY LIFE

The National Socialist Party took control of Germany's democratic Weimar Republic in 1933 through legal means—not by a majority vote but by building a grand coalition with smaller political factions. Once Adolf Hitler's "Nazi" party seized power, it swiftly passed legislation that made its control over Germany absolute. The fates of the men who would become German soldiers in the later war for global conquest were determined by larger political events. While family and private life remained the focus of most Germans' daily lives, public life became increasingly marked by the demands of the party. Schools, religious bodies, social organizations and other non-familial groups parroted Nazi ideals of patriotism, racial superiority, history, art and culture—even in sports and nature clubs! Former opponents of Nazism retreated into an uneasy realm of "inner migration"—a tense, dangerous co-existence with a deadly regime. Eventually, though, most Germans came to accept Nazi rule: for them, so-called "Greater Germany" offered a source of restored national pride and hope for the future. Few foresaw the many regions that the Nazi war machine would come to occupy, let alone the destruction of much of Germany.

1.3.2. INTO ENEMY HANDS: CAPTURE

A string of German military victories across Europe from fall 1939 to spring 1941 convinced Hitler and his enemies of apparent Nazi invincibility. When Erwin Rommel's troops surrendered to British and American forces in Tunisia in May 1943, more than 100,000 captured Afrika Korps members overwhelmed hastily built British and U.S. camps for detained German POWs, scattered across North Africa. The British had entered the war much earlier than the U.S. and by August 1942 that tiny island's ability to house increasing numbers of enemy captives was reaching a breaking point. They also feared that should German forces land at Dover and push north, German POWs held in the Midlands might rise up and head south—squeezing the capital in a vise that would force British surrender. For that reason, London implored Washington to take as many captured Axis prisoners as it could. Little did the Roosevelt administration realize, that after later Allied victories in Italy, Northern France, the western Rhineland and the heart of Germany itself, the number of German POWs would reach the millions—more than a third of a million of whom would be shipped to the United States for the war's duration.

1.3.3. REMOVED FROM HELL: TRANSPORT

To move such vast numbers of men and material, the U.S. Government appropriated ocean liners such as the Queen Mary; they were painted Army gray and converted to carry some 15,000 POWs at a time, stacked in hammocks hung in former luxury cabins. "Liberty Ships" and other quickly recruited vessels formed convoys that zigzagged across the Atlantic Ocean to dodge U-boats; many of the ships were equipped with torpedo nets, lest the German navy inadvertently try to sink its own men. Mostly landing at Newport News, New York City or Boston, a large number of the German POWs were transferred to Pullman train cars bound for the Midwest. It was there that many saw black people for the first time—some as Army guards. They also witnessed another first: paper plates. Often, after eating their first meal on such strange tableware, when they asked the guards about cleaning up, they were told to open the windows and simply throw the trash out the moving trains. Apparently, POW transports passed those routes at the same time every day, as the Germans were amazed to see what looked like banks of snow covering the railway bed: whole embankments of accumulated paper plates and napkins!

1.3.4. AWAY FROM THE BULLETS: CAMP LIFE

Base camps for Axis POWs (usually named after the nearest civilian settlement) generally resembled camps the U.S. Army built for its own soldiers, but with much more elaborate security features: guard towers, no-man's zones between inner and outer enclosures, taller fences with barbed wire, search lights, machine guns and the like. Most had an Army administrative area and maintenance facilities, separate from secured compounds containing POW barracks, washhouses, perhaps a sick room or library, etc. Often Nazi cliques dominated the daily lives of POWs inside the compounds, at least until the defeat of Hitler's regime in May 1945. Branch camps, however, physically differed greatly from the set-ups of base camps. Typically housed in former Civilian Conservation Corps camps, fairground buildings or grandstands, sports halls, vacant schools or other public buildings, branch camps tended to operate seasonally and with significantly less security. As the POWs were not allowed to use telephones, most base-camp systems published an official, Red-Cross-supported camp newspaper, through which the German POW upper echelon communicated with men at the branch camps.

1.3.5. ENDLESS TOIL: WORK

As was the case with U.S. POW officers held in the Third Reich, imprisoned German officers were not required to work outside the camps—although after Nazi capitulation, many volunteered to work, to earn money to take with them on their inevitable return to Europe. Non-officers, however, had no choice but to do farm or forestry work, or to labor in non-military industries. Midwest farmers and loggers paid the U.S. Government 50 to 60 cents an hour for POW labor, of which 10 cents was paid to the POWs in special camp scrip, up to 80 cents a day, even during peak seasons when the men might toil longer than eight hours. Guards accompanied work units of more than three POWs, but smaller bands worked on farms without a guard. Especially on small work details, German POWs forged friendships with Midwest farmers and their families—in the 1940s, many of them still spoke at least some German, being of German-immigrant stock. Some farmers sent CARE packages to POWs' families after the men returned to war-torn Germany. Many former POWs and their "employers" exchanged letters or cards long after the war. Some farmers even invited individual POWs to return after the war to marry a daughter and take over the farm.

1.3.6. A CAPTIVE EYE: POW ART

As it did for Midwest POWs imprisoned in camps in Nazi-occupied Europe, art provided German POWs held in the American Heartland both an escape from their immediate environment and a way to process their recent experiences and their current emotions. Already upon capture in North Africa, some German Afrika Korps soldiers sketched scenes of Arab traders or desert POW camps. Other subjects of later POW art included the ships that transported them to "Amerika", camp sports events, other prisoners, or scenes from work assignments beyond the barbed wire. Later, as homesickness settled upon the men, many created nostalgic images of the German countryside or of beautiful Teutonic women. The men filled Red-Cross or YMCA-supplied blank books used as journals, and special, handcrafted comic books with depictions of camp-life. Besides one-dimensional art, POWs also captured German motherhood or even likenesses of Native American chiefs in woodcarvings, or on the sides of elaborate jewelry boxes. Many Midwest farm families and guards happily received gifts of art from the German POWs—or even traded extra cigarettes for "commissioned" portraits or other works.

1.3.7. MUCH-WELCOME RESPITE: FREETIME

Free time activities afforded welcome distractions not just from a war the POWs well knew was devastating their homeland, but from the crushing boredom of indefinite detainment. Sports kept athletes and spectators alike focused on endless rounds of soccer, table-tennis tournaments, chess championships, boxing matches and much more. Handicrafts, gardening or grounds work, night classes and newspaper production tended to busy smaller numbers of POWs. Many more participated in often-elaborate theatrical or musical productions, with women's parts being playfully acted by men. Camp staff or guards—and, at times, even their families—were invited to join live-performance or concert audiences. In December 1945 (by then armed hostilities had ceased between Germany and the United States), a POW team of artisans at Camp Algona, Iowa, crafted a two-thirds-life-sized nativity scene to be enjoyed by POWs as well as people from the surrounding area. More private, “therapeutic” free-time activities included ever-popular journaling and writing endless series of letters or postcards—on prescribed, and censored, U.S. Army stationery—to family and friends back in Germany.

1.3.8. ONE WITH ANOTHER: RELATIONSHIPS

Among the German POWs were many anti-Nazis, apolitical types or simply individuals critical of the war. At times this caused tension between the men, even to the point of fanatical Nazis murdering other German POWs in their beds at night. The Camp Algona system, for one, had an anti-Nazi branch camp at Howard Lake/Minnesota. Other camp systems also identified men in danger because of dissident views of Nazism or the war—a state of affairs that changed radically after the defeat of Nazi Germany. Still, regardless of their political persuasions, most of German POWs enjoyed harmonious relationships with each other, and even with the guards, with whom they often traded favors with or gave gifts—including birthday cakes or presents. The U.S. Army allowed POW brothers to reunite, providing the train ticket and guard needed to transport one brother from one camp, cross-country, to another. Some of the men established contact with relatives who had emigrated to the United States before the war, while others formed friendships with fellow POWs that lasted decades, often till death.

1.3.9. ESCAPE, RESISTANCE, CAPITULATION: RETURN TO EUROPE

Escape attempts occurred, but relatively seldom, given German POWs knew they stood no chance of reaching Europe and most felt grateful to be far removed from flying bullets and the savagery of war. Some of those who did escape wanted little more than to wander into town to buy a beer, or to embarrass the often lax guards. Serious escapees, once apprehended, endured disciplinary actions that—especially for repeat offenders—included bread-and-water diets or solitary confinement (in at least one case, naked). After May 1945 the U.S. Army selected 25,000 thousand German POWs for “re-education” efforts, in violation of the Geneva Convention, and in November 1945 the U.S. Government surrendered several thousand “Volga Deutsche” —Soviet citizens of German descent who had been forced to fight in the Wehrmacht—to waiting Soviet officials: the men were shot immediately. Of the remaining 370,000 German POWs in the U.S. at the war's end, only about 50,000 were returned directly to Germany in summer 1946: the U.S. handed the other third of a million to our British and French allies to use as slave laborers on farms or in mines, some of them until as late as September 1948.

1.3.10. RECONCILING THE PAST: HOME AGAIN

Despite the near-total indoctrination that they had received as Hitler Youth, in the United States German POWs saw, in tangible and undeniable ways, that it was possible to have a decent, prosperous society without the heavy hand of dictatorship. Especially after Nazi Germany's collapse in May 1945, the men learned lifelong lessons about democracy in action—and those selected for "re-education" largely returned to their broken homeland to rebuild it as teachers, mayors, newspaper editors or journalists, or other roles as social leaders. Like most Germans, it took years for them to examine and unlearn Nazi propaganda—although contrary to postwar U.S. stereotypes, that process for the POWs already began in spring 1945, more than a year before they returned to Europe. Also, in the process of witnessing "American" values such as democracy, individual freedom, etc., most POWs came to admire the United States and its people. Even during the most disillusioning years of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, former German POWs remained loyal friends and staunch defenders of the United States. Many happily revisited the U.S. in later years, with an estimated 5% even emigrating to the U.S.

1.4. WERNER DEUBNER

1.4.1. LIFE STORY

Karl Werner Deubner was born in Thamsbrück on 7 March 1911, the son of a senior postmaster. Typical of imperial "Prussia", his father - a Protestant and staunch supporter of the Hohenzollern dynasty - was the patriarch of the Deubner family, which belonged to the up-and-coming middle class. The classic values of the time included diligence and thrift, deference to hierarchy and a sense of duty. The already 40-year-old empire boomed, but soon became embroiled in a global war, then in cascading crises.

After World War I, Germany reeled under waves of hyperinflation and political instability, hardship and hunger, punctuated by waves of booms and busts. As a young man seeking his own fortune, Werner left his home village and moved to nearby Langensalza. There he opened an optician's shop in 1933 - intentionally doing so one day before the Nazi order which stipulated that only party comrades were allowed to set up their own businesses. With his wife Johanna [née Rebene], he had two sons: Dieter (*1938) and Helmut (*1941). Although his optical business thrived, Werner increasingly felt the tightening presence of the Nazi dictatorship as well as the threat of approaching war. Friends got him a minor job at the air base between Langensalza and Thamsbrück, where he mainly provided optometry services to pilots. Nevertheless, in 1942 the young father of two children was drafted into military service. He was 31 years old when, with a heavy heart, the reluctant soldier left not only his loved ones, but also the business he was building.

In September 1943, Werner's unit was transferred to Italy, where it was to fight against Allied troops near Salerno. On September 22, a four-year period of captivity began for him: he had been deliberately hiding in a forest with others when he was caught, was taken among other places, first to Tunisia, then the USA. After his arrival on the East Coast - along with 372,000 other German POWs - his involuntary "odyssey" through the USA began. The German Red Cross informed his family in Langensalza of his imprisonment, but it was to be months before his letters sporadically made it home.

Werner was sent to work in the American heartland, first to Ohio, then to Wisconsin and via Iowa to Camp Indianola in Nebraska. Here he enjoyed working as a projectionist and optician. Irony of history: also for a former customer from his shop in Langensalza. After the end of the war, he landed in California, where - still a prisoner of war - he was put on a ship that was to sail through the Panama Canal. The prisoners of war released from America did not know that they would not be coming home so soon: in March 1946 Werner landed in Britain, where he would spend the next year and a half making lasting friends as a farm labourer.

Johanna Deubner had meanwhile leased the store to an optician from the Thuringian Forest, whose own store had been bombed some time before. On March 24, 1944, her family narrowly escaped death when, during a bombing raid by an Allied bomber on Langensalza's old town, the house and store were badly damaged. The business equipment was completely destroyed. When, at the beginning of April 1945, the US forces took Thuringia, Johanna and her sons saw tanks of the U.S. Army rolling by their house.

In October 1947, after an absence of four and a half years, Werner returned as a free man to Langensalza. There he found his family worn out by the years of war; now they were living under another dictatorship. Initially a stranger to his own sons, he soon resumed the life of a busy optician and valued father. The years spent as an involuntary soldier and as a "much-traveled" prisoner of war had changed him. Werner spent the rest of his life dealing with dissonances between a quiet provincial life and his experiences of the wider world.

1.4.2. TIMELINE

7.3.1911

Born in Thamsbrück, 5km/3 miles from Langensalza

circa 1917-20

1917 began elementary school; as of circa 1920 attended middle school in Langensalza

circa 1924-27

Apprenticeship at Ranke optical shop in Gotha; journeyman in Posen and Offenbach

14.6.1933

Acquisition of an optician store in Langensalza

24.12.1934

Married Johanna, née Rebene; born 1908, died 2004

1935

Passed master craftsman's examination in front of an opticians' guild

1.9.1938

Birth of son Dieter Deubner, in Langensalza

1.9.1939

Beginning of 2nd World War: began optical care of pilots at the air base just outside Langensalza

25.7.1941

Birth of son Helmut Deubner, in Langensalza; died 2019

8.10.1941

Emergency service prevented conscription to the Wehrmacht

Early 1942

Conscripted into a motorized rifle battalion; sent to Sondershausen

Spring 1942

Returned to Langensalza after short training course; optical care of the pilots

Late summer 1942

Served in campaign in France, then transferred through Italy towards Salerno

22.9.1943

Captured by US soldiers in a forest near Acerno outside of Salerno

bis/before 10.10.1943

In Paestum, Italy

ab/after 10.10.1943

Shipped to Biserta, Tunisia, Africa; accommodated in tent camps

13.10.1943

Shipped to the US aboard the "Mühlenberg"

6.11.1943

Landed at 10:00 a. m. with the "Mühlenberg" in Norfolk, USA; from there by train via St. Louis and Lincoln to Indianola [Nebraska].

9.11.1943

Landed in POW camp, worked as a "Zementboy" and then optician

3.6.1944

14.10.1945

Transferred to camps in Illinois (Sheridan, Ellis, Hampshire, Grant) and Wisconsin (Janesville); worked on farms and gardens, and in factories

15.-19.10.1945

From Janesville to side camp #10 of Fort Ord, California; worked in cotton fields near Fresno

10.2.1946

From San Francisco, by boat "Sea Patrice" through the Panama Canal to Europe

5.3.1946

Arrival in Liverpool, continue by train to Dunham Park, near Manchester

7.3.1946

On his 35th birthday Werner became English prisoner No. D. 927 352

11.3-15.11.1946

Transferred to camps at King's Cliffe, Shipdham and Pembrey Burry Port; worked as a cook, among other assignments

10.4.1947

Transferred via Birmingham to Happendon Camp 19, Glasgow and Laurencekirk, Labour Camp 75

18.6.1947

Transferred via Glasgow to Doonfoot, Ayr, labour camp 112, side camp Mauchline; farm work with Miller-Wilson families

6.9.1947

By car to Doonfoot and Happendon camp 19 for the journey home ten days later

30.9.1947

By ship from Harwich to Hoek van Holland

1.10.1947

By train via Utrecht, Bentheim, Osnabrück, Minden, Hanover to Münster, then Camp Friedland

2.10.1947

Werner Deubner became a civilian again

5.10.1947

Glimpsed the family as train passed through Langensalza, enroute to Hermsfeld to Quarantine Camp 29

18.10.1947

End of quarantine: return home after 4 years, 5 months and 28 days

ab/after 1948

Werner Deubner returns to the optician business

1962

Son Dieter Deubner became co-owner of the optics business

1973

40th anniversary of Werner's status as "master craftsman"

4.1.1997

Werner Deubner died in Bad Langensalza

1.5 Geneva Convention

Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, as ratified 27 July 1929

General Provisions: Articles 1-4 designate those who are covered and define "prisoner of war," specifically stating "POWs have the right to honor and respect"

Capture: Articles 6-7 cover what may/may not be done to a prisoner upon capture; require prisoners to give name and rank; prohibit coercion of other information; give prisoners the right to retain personal possessions

Captivity: Articles 8-67 require prisoners be evacuated from combat zones and that opposing sides be notified of capture; set standards for camps:

- call for separate locations for different races and nationalities
- require adequate food, clothing as well as medical, sanitary services
- require provision for religious, intellectual and physical activity needs of POWs
- establish rules for camp discipline and leadership
- call for treatment of officers appropriate to rank
- set rate of pay for POWs
- require safe transfer of POWs from one location to another, notification of transfer, and retention of personal possessions upon transfer
- detail work that may be done by prisoners and remuneration for it
- allow POWs to correspond with families, and receive mail, parcels, food, clothing
- put POWs under the same rules applying to the detaining power's own code of military regulations
- prevent reduction of rank, and regulate treatment of escapees

Termination of Captivity: Articles 68-74 require repatriation of sick and seriously injured prisoners; cite conditions of repatriation upon end of hostilities; require honorable burial and marking of graves of those dying in captivity

Application to Certain Civilians: Article 81 entitles individuals who are non-military but linked (support contractors, war correspondents, etc.) to be treated as POWs

Execution of the Convention: Articles 82-97 set the conditions and time for the implementation of the articles and require that if one combatant force is a party to the convention, the opponent of that force is covered under the articles even though not a party to the convention.

2. BEHIND BARBED WIRE: MIDWEST POWS IN NAZI GERMANY, 1943-45

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The prisoner of war experience is one few undergo directly. Being taken prisoner is, in itself, neither dishonorable nor heroic. Capture is largely an accident. It usually comes as a complete surprise and is often accompanied by injury. The results of confinement may be painful and sometimes fatal. This exhibit explores the experiences of prisoners of war (POWs) from the American Midwest who were imprisoned in Nazi Germany, and the human context in which those experiences took place. Implicitly, it poses five primary questions:

- why did some Midwest POWs survive certain conditions or experiences, while others did not,
- what roles did art, free time and religion play in helping those men who did survive imprisonment by the Nazi regime,
- why did some Germans or Austrians assist U.S. POWs, while others did not,
- how did the liberated POWs later come to terms with their own experiences, and
- how do countries once in armed conflict reconcile with each other: how do nations and the individuals from those nations get beyond war?

The Midwestern United States has unique connections to the World War II European-theater POW experience. The first U.S. troops sent to Europe came in largest part from Iowa, both Dakotas and Minnesota; the Iowa-based 34th “Red Bull” Division served the longest uninterrupted duty of any U.S. unit—more than 600 days. As about two thousand soldiers from the 34th Division were captured by German Afrikakorps Field Marshall Rommel’s troops in North Africa in February 1943, until the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 a disproportionate share of the U.S. POWs in the Third Reich came, per capita, from the Upper Midwest. Because of the high rate of German ancestry across the entire Midwest and the then-recent immigration, numerous POWs from the American Heartland spoke German or had kin behind “enemy lines”; for such men, World War II represented a kind of fratricide.

There were three main waves of Midwest POWs: those captured in North Africa in 1943, those Midwest pilots shot out of the sky during the air war over Europe, and those Midwest soldiers captured at the Battle of the Bulge (a mere six months before the Second World War ended). Each wave of U.S. POWs in Nazi Germany had its own experiences. All of the men who survived them, however, left a provocative legacy for those alive today—one involving the very nature of war itself: how does armed conflict between groups of people play out, face-to-face, when the guns are lowered; how “should” humans treat each other and, ultimately, live together?

2.2.1. PRE-CAPTIVITY MILITARY LIFE

As the Great Depression ended, Thearl Mesecher clerked in a department store. Charlie Lloyd Jones manned a county road crew. Keith Haight worked as a migrant farmhand, while Dan Bied was a soda jerk in his father's drugstore. These Midwest men truly were "citizen soldiers"—individuals who never aspired to military adventures but during World War II found themselves drawn into armed conflict in faraway lands by forces larger than their own lives.

Once they either had enlisted or been drafted, each of them underwent radical changes: assignment to unfamiliar surroundings, followed by rigorous training either as soldiers or pilots, and then deployment to foreign countries, where they would be confronted by strange cultures. In addition, the men had to obey the hierarchical commands and myriad regulations of everyday life in the military—even if, as would be true as POWs, too, the experiences of an officer were markedly different from those of an enlistee or draftee. Most daunting of all, as they left the relative safety of the American Heartland and ventured out in the world as U.S. soldiers or pilots, each of the men had to be prepared to die in combat—to surrender life itself on behalf of an ideal. Theirs was a world of drama and danger.

First Christmas Away

On the day before Christmas [1943], I bid my family farewell and boarded a bus for Camp Dodge, Des Moines, Iowa. My first stop was the first step of a journey that would affect me for the rest of my life. It was not a happy Christmas for me. Before I left, I put my Christmas gifts from my family on a shelf in my closet and there the packages remained unopened on Christmas Day. I tried to push the day out of my mind, but Christmas memories were with me. Little did I know—my next Christmas was to be even worse than the one I was experiencing.

—from *My Freedom* by Delbert Berninghaus of West Bend, Iowa

2.2.2. AIRMEN

Flying over enemy territory posed a dangerous assignment. The fatality rate was high, and being captured constituted a prolonged endurance test that not everyone subjected to it could withstand. Some Midwest airmen flew on dozens of bombing raids on targets in Germany or Nazi-occupied countries before being downed by Luftwaffe (air force) or Wehrmacht (army) fire, while other bomber crewmembers were shot down on their maiden run. Usually, civilians or German officials apprehended those who survived—although a small number of downed U.S. airmen managed to escape and go underground, either temporarily or for the duration of the war.

German civilians typically loathed the bombers and called them "Luftgangsters" ("air gangsters"). Certainly, the bombing of military and later civilian targets in Europe by both sides far outmatched the airborne damage inflicted in any war, previous to World War II or since. Germans felt the bombing of their cities incommensurate and indefensible—and the psychological strain of repetitive bombing raids pushed many into a state of protracted hysteria, a frenzy that compromised their ability to treat captured enemy airmen decently and according to the established conventions of war.

2.2.3. CAPTURE

Some Midwest POWs later complained that the U.S. Army under-prepared them for imprisonment. Other than being told to give only name, rank and serial number if interrogated, until the last year of the war U.S. soldiers and pilots were not trained in what to do in the event of being taken alive by the enemy. This usually meant an initial period of disorientation and a gradual, painful adjustment.

Some POWs were captured during battles, while others were shot down during bombing runs. Of the former, soldiers taken alive just as easily could have been killed in the process—as many comrades were. Of the latter, pilots who escaped their damaged planes soon learned it was more desirable to surrender to German authorities than to be apprehended by civilians, who often beat or killed downed pilots as "Luftterroristen" ("air terrorists")—especially after severe raids.

Usually, by the time of their capture, U.S. servicemen had lost most of their equipment and supplies. Many of them had only the clothes on their back and some—like those captured in North Africa—had to wear summer-weight clothing during two of Northern Europe’s damp, frigid winters. The few items Midwest POWs were able to retain became precious possessions.

Chicago’s George Rosie later related his capture to a biographer, who wrote

Surrounded by Germans, they were quickly captured. George was able to get a look at [his fellow soldier] Ronzoni: he had been hit in the chest [and] never knew what hit him. After they had been disarmed, George and three other men were lying in a shallow ditch with their hands over their heads, a guard with a rifle on either side. With bullets flying in all directions, [one of the men] remarked ‘God, these guys are lousy shots.’ George lost so much that morning--his freedom.

2.2.4. INTERROGATION

German interrogators often spoke fluent English: many had visited or even lived in the U.S. before war broke out; some had returned to Germany to see relatives, had their passports confiscated and had been forced into the German army. Sometimes interrogators offered individual Midwest POWs cigarettes or other favors, trying to help them feel at ease and thus win their cooperation. Most POWs, however, later reported having given only their name, rank and serial number. Such minimal information at times led German interrogators to scream and threaten abuse, or resulted in the POWs being forced to stand for long hours in the cold or rain to “soften them up”; some were beaten, while others were told they’d be shot if information was not shared. Some POWs endured stints of solitary confinement.

Normally, the German military already knew much about the men and their units: the history and positions of their companies, lists of unit members, bombers’ destinations, etc. The Nazi regime hoped for useful information, but interrogation generally brought little of value. The interrogation process itself was the POWs’ first significant contact with Germans inside the Third Reich—and it served to harden them against their captors and strengthen their resolve.

2.2.5. TRANSPORT

The transportation of POWs inside Nazi Germany was brutal and claimed many lives. After first marching, the men were loaded into “40 and 8” boxcars designed for transporting 40 soldiers or 8 horses—often without changing bedding: many more than 40 POWs would be crammed into the windowless wagons. Space was tight: some men stood, while others squatted between their legs. They were supposed to change positions periodically, but sometimes those crouching would be too sick—or in the meantime had died of battle wounds, dysentery or freezing. The Germans provided no heat or food. Any water was served in pails that, once emptied, doubled as toilets: if refilled at the infrequent stops, they were not cleaned first. A particularly cruel fate was strafing by U.S. planes, whose pilots assumed the trains were moving German soldiers. During such attacks the guards would take shelter in nearby ditches and leave the POWs to survive the strafing by sheer luck, if at all. Such transports across the Third Reich could last for days or even a week. The dead were thrown out alongside the tracks. The trains’ destinations changed repeatedly, as the trains moved in spurts and zigzag patterns.

Tales from Transport

Many Midwest POWs captured during the Battle of the Bulge were marched over the Eifel region and along the Rhine into Germany, then loaded onto trains at Limburg. Dan Bied, a 17-year-old soda jerk from Muscatine, Iowa had lied about his age in order to join the Army, as he didn’t want to “miss all the action” as the war clearly was drawing to a conclusion: he was captured at his first battle, at the Bulge. Bied later wrote that he and the other U.S. POWs

...left Limburg, our bellies warmed [after their first meal since being captured several days earlier] but only half-full, in 30-foot wooden railcars that each carried 65 or 70 men—depending upon how many the guards wanted to stuff into each of the rail-borne “Wagens.” There was absolutely no illumination, natural or artificial, in the cars. Our body heat, with so many of us crammed together like pigs in a sty, was all that kept us from freezing as the train lurched and rattled its way east across the beaten-up roadbed. Each time the train screeched to a halt, I felt as though my lower intestines were being yanked from their moorings. The train was strafed several times by Allied fighters but our car was never hit by any of the slugs, to my knowledge. There was no food. Occasionally, a bucket of water ... was poked through the door by a guard or railroad worker, then left with us for use as a toilet... and to be filled with drinking water at the next station. The stench, from vomit and excrement, was nearly unbearable from the outset of the trip... then got worse as dead bodies accumulated in our midst. After odors of this sort multiply so long, they become indistinguishable... but no less nauseating.

2.2.6. CAMP

Each POW camp in the Third Reich housed either officers or enlisted men, and was organized according to service branch. Barracks were hastily built, under-heated, dark and—as the global war dragged on—deathly over-crowded. While the Nazi regime generally honored Geneva-Convention stipulations that officers not work and thus mostly left such prisoners in regular barracks, lower-ranked POWs were sent on Arbeitskommandos (“work units”), where they might be housed in barns, mines, power plants, slaughterhouses, brick factories or the like. Although such makeshift accommodations proved taxing, at least such “lucky” POWs might encounter civilians—and thereby receive food or favors, which often meant the difference between life and death.

During the forced marches conducted at the war’s end, more than 500 POWs might be housed in a barn overnight—or simply forced to rest by the side of the road, in all weather. The inadequate shelter that the German government provided Allied POWs claimed tens of thousands of lives—especially of Soviet soldiers. While national groupings did not often mix, Nazi POW camps held Brits, French, Dutch, Poles, Serbs, Canadians, Indians, Malaysians, Africans, etc.

2.2.7. FOOD

Immediately after capture, Midwest POWs went days before receiving a piece of dried bread or a cup of thin soup. Once they had been interrogated and processed, they hardly fared better: POWs received food irregularly, in meager quantities and of poor quality. If Red Cross packages finally arrived, they did so unexpectedly and irregularly. While each package was intended for a single man, more likely than not they were divided among two to 12 men. Under such conditions, men took to dreaming about food, talking about it incessantly, fighting over it and even paying other POWs with cigarettes or other rations to draw pictures of food. They recorded recipes in their journals, even if they could not cook and they had no food on hand.

Such conditions claimed many victims. Those who survived lost a large portion of their body weight. Malnutrition retarded the men’s abilities to heal, or grow hair and nails; their teeth fell out. As they starved on an unsteady diet of rotten vegetables, German Brot stretched 20% with sawdust, or diluted grass soup, POWs turned to eating bugs, cats, birds or mice they trapped, edibles stolen or bartered from civilians, or horses lying alongside the road, killed by strafing. POWs even murdered for or over food.

Recipe for Black Bread in German POW Camps:

50% Bruised Rye Grain

20% Sliced Sugar Beets

20% Tree Flour (saw dust)

10% Minced Leaves and Straw

Mix all ingredients, form into a 3” x 3” x 8” loaf and bake until black.

2.2.8. WORK

The Geneva Convention proscribes officers being forced to labor for the captors, and non-officer POWs working in war-related industries, but it does not bar the latter from other work. While the hierarchy-minded Nazi regime honored the clause that officers not work outside their camps, it set the other ranks of POWs to heavy labor—literally working Soviet POWs to death. Allied POWs often worked seven days a week—or, conversely, not at all, for days at a time. The irregularity of work assignments proved an additional source of stress for already taxed prisoners.

Work assignments varied from exhausting physical labor to repetitive “busy work”. POWs were leased to individual farmers, in both small and large numbers, and to factories or power plants, by the score. A major source of labor replacement for German men fighting on either front, POWs harvested crops, mined coal, cleaned floors, built roads and rail beds, cleaned debris or removed corpses after bombing raids, felled timber and shod horses. Sometimes POWs sabotaged German equipment, both to hinder the war effort and to impede their own ability to work. They were, after all, short of food and physically weak. Work beyond the fence did provide some outside contact—or an escape.

2.2.9. ART

Midwest POW officers in Nazi Germany mostly did not have to work outside the camps. To pass time, POWs in one of the Third Reich’s various Oflags (“officer camps”) turned to art. They acted in plays and performed cabarets, sang in choruses and played in orchestras, wrote poetry and short stories. They painted, sketched, whittled, sculpted, wove Spam-can coils into metal art, knitted, embroidered, sewed and so on. Officers and enlistees traded cigarettes or other items of value with POWs of Allied nations for woodcarvings, drawings or other works of art. Journal drawings provided an outlet for pent-up ruminations and vivid, post-war documentation.

The International Committee of the Red Cross and the War Prisoners Aid of the World Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) provided supplies for art or theatrical projects, and instruments for music making—but the creative talent came from the POWs themselves. Some of the men spent countless hours writing plays or composing scores, preparing elaborate stages and costumes, practicing lines or notes until the performances—which sometimes were attended by German staff, even though some theatrical works included implied political commentary or satire. Germans also attended sports events.

2.2.10. FREETIME

The existence of officers—and to a lesser extent of non-officers—among POWs inside the Third Reich alternated between physical exhaustion and spiritual emptiness. In between those two extremes, POWs created freetime activities that lightened the crushing weight of their plight.

The Red Cross, YMCA and German Quakers provided Allied POWs with blank books for journals, and used books to read; a few camps had well-appointed libraries. POWs in some camps offered fellow prisoners instruction, in various subjects. In a few camps, POWs learned to trade cigarettes with the German guards as a bloc (as individual trading proved “inflationary”). Despite great risk, guards sneaked radio parts, typewriters and even cameras into the camps. In turn, the POWs listened to the BBC and, using scrap paper, produced “camp papers” with war news; new “editions” were passed between barracks at roll call. More overtly, sports competitions between POWs attracted enthusiastic audiences consisting of both prisoners and their keepers. In good weather, the men savored a few moments of rare sunshine, or washed their dirty clothes in cloudy water. The occasional film or visit by official delegations or celebrities provided welcome distraction.

2.2.11. LOSS

Midwest POWs experienced loss from the moment of their capture—upon which they lost their freedom, to the point of becoming a number and being treated inhumanely. A loss that lasted longer than that of freedom, however, was the loss of the Midwest POWs' innocence. They witnessed the brutal, bestial treatment of Soviet POWs and of "Ostarbeiter" (slave laborers imported from occupied Eastern Europe). Some marched through concentration camps, and more looked on as political prisoners or Jews were abused or murdered by their captors. The trauma that POWs experienced in Nazi Germany marked their personalities for as long as they would live. What they saw lingered in them.

The men lost tangible things, too. German and Austrian soldiers pilfered POWs' watches or other valuables upon capture or in the course of the men's imprisonment. POWs captured in North Africa literally lost the shirts off their backs. The men fled by night after the American front had collapsed; during the day Arab peasants traded food or water for their clothing—piece by piece, until some men traversed the desert wearing only socks and underwear! The greatest loss of all, however, was the loss of fellow POWs—through hunger, disease or murder.

The POWs endured severe emotional strain—to the point that some of them lost their emotional control. Dan Bied wrote about one of his barrack mates: "Jack O'Donnell was slumped at the table one afternoon, saying something inconsequential about our collective woes, when Ernie Krasuski, without any prolonged thought, repeated the remark, imitating Jack's accent. "Don't mock me!" Jack screamed, nearly up-ending the heavy table as he bolted from his stool. "Never mock me... don't you ever mock me again!" After pushing Ernie with his palms, but not actually striking a blow, Jack fell back onto his stool and buried his head in his hands, his elbows on the table. He trembled with a mixture of anger and remorse, but not uttering a word. We were all silent a half-hour or more, hoping something would happen to change the mood of hostility and tension. Finally, a few remarks were made about such innocuous topics as the weather (abundant with wind-driven snow), food (the steak we assumed Herr Engel would be eating that night), music (what number Ginny Simms might be singing with Kay Kyser's band on the Lucky Strike Hit Parade show) and wartime shortages (the lack of toilet paper in the outdoor crapper)."

2.2.12. RELIGION

Some Midwest POWs were agnostics, others atheists. Some were Protestants or Catholics and others Jews. Some were pious upon being captured; others became so during imprisonment—whether or not they remained devout after liberation. Generally, their religious faith helped those POWs to endure Nazi imprisonment; it was not, though, a precondition for survival.

Some Christian POWs had access to Protestant or Catholic chaplains; in the absence of clergy, one man or a core band of men served as religious counselors to other POWs. Groups of POWs formed to read the Bible or discuss current topics. The Red Cross and YMCA distributed Bibles as well as other inspirational materials to POWs. Religious altars or adorned nooks were established in the permanent camps, and volunteer choruses sang at religious services. Burials of POWs who died or who were killed by German guards usually included a religious component.

Jewish POWs sometimes were separated from the rest of their nationals—in gross violation of the Geneva Convention—but it is not documented that such segregation necessarily resulted in murder at the hands of the Germans.

"A chaplain's assistant is customarily a figure of fun in the American Army... He was powerless to harm the enemy or to help his friends. In fact, he had no friends. He was a valet to a preacher, expected no promotions or medals, bore no arms and had a meek faith in a loving Jesus which most soldiers found putrid."

—from Kurt Vonnegut

2.2.13. HOMESICKNESS

With family and friends far away, and contact with them rare, Midwest POWs felt far from home. Letters from POWs might take months to reach home—if ever. Often, POWs' letters arrived after they already had been liberated or even had returned to the U.S. Letters to POWs first had to catch up with the men; countless letters, having reached the Third Reich, spent the rest of the war bundled in piles, sitting in boxcars or on warehouse floors, never to be delivered.

In an age when personal travel—inside one's own country, let alone abroad—was quite difficult and costly, few Midwest POWs had been far from home before joining the military. To be wholly stranded in a foreign country—moreover imprisoned by a hostile regime—made being in wartime Germany or Austria more taxing and lonely than might have been the case otherwise. While some POWs spoke basic German, most spoke none. Moreover, Germans or Austrians the POWs came into contact with either were under command not to fraternize or too afraid for their own safety to be approachable by enemy soldiers. In the camps, the mental strain of imprisonment, coupled with tense interpersonal dynamics, made the POW experience ultimately an exceptionally lonely one.

2.2.14. HEALTH

The physical health of the POWs suffered severely. Many had been wounded when captured; soon thereafter most contracted dysentery. Various other opportunistic diseases joined the list of maladies afflicting the men from the onset of imprisonment. The POWs also lost considerable weight—some of them to the point of collapsing. In the process, they lost hair, teeth, musculature and even patches of skin. Most suffered from infected feet; some lost toes or even heels. Many would suffer from bone or other bodily degeneration for the rest of their lives—lives which often were prematurely shortened by the harsh living conditions the men had experienced as POWs.

The men's mental health also took a deadly beating. Some men couldn't bear the strain of imprisonment: at least one POW stormed a guard so he'd be shot; more ran into the barbed wire —suicide by electrocution. Some became despondent; one man would only sit and rock, with his face buried in his hands. At night a chorus of murmuring, screaming and crying filled the narrow boxcars, barracks, barns or other places POWs found uneasy sleep. Nightmares in which POWs relived their horrific experiences would plague them for the rest of their lives.

2.2.15. HUMOR

Midwest POWs trapped in Nazi Germany coped with their miserable situation, in part, by somehow sustaining a sense of humor, even if at times it was coarse or a base sign of resistance. Making light of their serious plight helped many of the men move beyond feeling totally helpless or alone. Also, humor provided

an uplifting vent for deeply troubling ruminations. Jokes, for example, involved “someone’s” girlfriend or wife back home, with cynical story lines describing her seeing another man—often another soldier! Or, they focused on the “Goons” who guarded them; “Jerry” was another common nickname for the Germans. Anecdotes often foretold of post-liberation life, or of “typical” scenes and struggles awaiting the men after returning to the civilian world. Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, Winston Churchill or Franklin Delano Roosevelt featured in comic POW-camp tales, as did army heads and unit leaders. Some camps even printed their own cartoons in self-published booklets. Humorous or risqué sketches adorned many a POW bunk area or journal. The showing of comedy films, the reading of farcical literature and absurd burlesque shows provided the POWs welcome distraction from the anguish that filled their everyday world.

2.2.16. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN POWS

Midwest POWs in Nazi Germany had no safety, few tangible resources and no freedom. The only thing they consistently had—besides their personal abilities and convictions—was each other. Relationships between POWs were of utmost importance, even if a source of conflict.

Generally, the men helped each other. Still, there were quarrels—over personal behavior or group actions—and betrayals, such as when men stole food from each other or when a hapless individual was caught collaborating with the Germans. And, as a society in microcosm, each given circle of POWs—the men in a certain barrack, a group assigned to an individual work Kommando, a line of POWs being marched together—reflected the usual interpersonal dynamics: natural leaders and followers; some men interested in power for power’s sake and some willing to serve others selflessly; the popular guys and social outcasts; “brains” and “dopes” and heroes and fiends.

Lacking adequate clothing, the POWs literally slept together—often in groups of up to a half dozen; when one turned, they all turned. They ate (and starved), worked, bled, played, joked, fought, tried to escape, were liberated (or died) together. Often, the men sustained each other emotionally, not to mention in practical ways: relationships proved as vital as life itself.

2.2.17. MINORITIES

Although most Upper Midwesterners in 1940 had Northern-European, Christian ancestry, determined minorities lived among them: Native Americans, African Americans and Jews also served their country. Ironically, while fighting the racist Nazi regime across the Atlantic, on the homefront and in the armed services themselves, minorities in the pre-Civil Rights United States typically lived under marginalized, disadvantaged conditions. Even “white” Jews endured exclusion from many residential areas or civic organizations, “Jew quotas” and the disdain of their non-Jewish compatriots.

As prisoners of war, Midwest POWs came into contact with Asian Americans from either coast, and rural “WASP” POWs lived closely with fellow American citizens from urban Slavic, Mediterranean, Hispanic or other ethnic backgrounds largely absent in the rural Midwest. Also, the German government usually quartered U.S. POWs in common barracks—a mixture of “races” unthinkable in the still-segregated U.S. Army. For their part, the Germans taunted their U.S. captives about discrepancies between “democracy” and the blatant segregation institutionalized in the American South.

In Hell on Earth, Dan Bied wrote about the minorities he encountered while a POW:

"Stalag IV-B was a bleak place. The barracks were jammed almost to the rafters with internees from all the nations fighting Germany. There were British, American, French, Dutch, Canadian, Russian and Serbian troops—among others—scattered throughout the camp. There were tall, silent Gurkhas from India who, one of the Englishmen told me, were treated as "privileged characters" by the Nazis. "They never know," he said with a half-hearted chuckle, "when one of those sinister chaps might pull a stiletto out from his turban and slash someone's throat." The Gurkhas actually did look as though they knew something the rest of us didn't . . . as though they could slice an adversary ear to ear if provoked to that degree of malevolence."

2.2.17.1. MESKWAKI CODE TALKERS

In January 1941, eleven months before Pearl Harbor, 27 Meskwaki men enlisted together in the 34th Division of the 168th Infantry of the United States Army. Twenty-two-year-old Frank Sanache was one of them. As the eldest of the group, per tribal tradition the other men looked to him for leadership. At the time, the men made up sixteen percent of Tama, Iowa's Meskwaki population—an unusual community of Native Americans in that they lived not on a reservation, but on a "settlement" of self-owned land. Of the 27 Meskwaki enlistees, Sanache, his brother Willard and six others were sent to Scotland and England for code-talking training after general training in Marshalltown, Iowa and jungle-warfare training in Louisiana. Meskwaki Native Americans, along with eighteen other tribes around the United States, were trained in talking in codes that were based on their native language—codes that were never broken by the Germans.

Sanache and the other seven code talkers served as scouts in Northern Africa, using walkie-talkies to radio the coordinates of artillery batteries. "Frank used to tell me about how he would be sent out as a scout," Alex Walker, a Meskwaki tribal council chair, later reported. "They used to send him about two miles ahead of the troops in dangerous conditions. There were only eight of them so they worked 24-hour shifts." Sanache called such work "the worst place this side of hell."

In mid-February 1943 Sanache was performing his duties at Faid Pass in Tunisia when German soldiers captured him, then flew him with about two thousand other Midwest POWs to Naples, Italy, where they were shipped by train to Nazi Germany. For 29 months, Sanache unloaded bags of lime, and other materials, from rail cars in a POW camp in Hammerstein—dusty work that would leave him with scarred lungs and a variety of chronic illnesses for the rest of his life. He survived on a daily ration of a cup of soup, two boiled potatoes, a glass of water and a slice of bread. He was finally liberated at the end of the war when Allied Troops liberated the POW camp where he had been imprisoned.

2.2.17.2. THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

Luther Smith grew up in the streets of Des Moines dreaming of flying through the clouds. At age 13 he flew his first airplane, perched on the lap of a Ford Trimotor pilot. Smith later said that experience instilled in him "a lifelong love of flying." As a kid, he hitched rides from his home on School Street to the Des Moines airport, where he worked on airplanes. The white military pilots there became his role models. In 1938 Smith graduated from Roosevelt High School and in 1942 joined the U.S. Army Air Corps, becoming one of twelve African-American Iowans who completed Negro Pilot Training. In May 1943 Smith was commissioned at Tuskegee Airfield in Alabama.

The Tuskegee Airfield and the Selective Service Act of 1940 were created in response to the shortage of white pilots and soldiers. Numerous members of congress and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt urged President Roosevelt to ask congress to pass the Act, which allowed all armed services to enlist African-Americans. On October 1st 1941 the 99th Pursuit Squadron was created, followed by the opening of the 66th Army Air Force Training detachment on December 1st 1941. The task of designing the Tuskegee Airfield was given to a nationally known architect, Archie A. Alexander of Des Moines. 276 African-American pilots trained in a 30-week program while stationed in Tuskegee, leading to one of the most decorated and successful Army Air Force divisions during WWII. The first death in military combat of a Tuskegee Airman was Maurice "Smokey" Easters of Webster City, Iowa.

Lieutenant Luther Smith escorted B-24 Liberators and B-17 Flying Fortresses in 133 combat missions over Yugoslavia, Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and southwest Germany. On October 13th 1944, after escorting a group of bombers over Hungary, Smith and his flight team were ordered on a search and destroy mission. Smith's element leader spotted loaded railway oil tankers, which exploded in a massive fireball after being hit with machine gun fire. Smith's airplane was close to the ground and he was forced to fly his Mustang through the ball of fire. Smith's airplane immediately caught on fire, making the airplane doomed to crash. He evacuated his airplane and soon became tangled in his parachute, making a hard landing in a nearby forest. Smith was captured and spent seven months in a German POW camp. He was segregated from white POWs and for two years was hospitalized for injuries he sustained in that crash landing.

Despite all of the racism, segregation and personal struggles that Smith faced while in the Army and POW camp, Smith still felt that his home was worth fighting for: "I felt the better I did my job, the better the possibility things would improve at home. It was also a labor of love," he said. "I was doing exactly what I wanted to do. You know, in 1941 nobody wanted the Tuskegee Airmen. In 1945 only the Nazis didn't want us."

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2.2.18. ENCOUNTERS WITH GERMANS

Midwest POWs' encounters with Germans or Austrians varied yet were a central part of their experience as prisoners. Some "hosts" were sadists, while others kept individual POWs alive by smuggling them food. Some beat or even shot POWs on pretexts, while others ignored actions that could have resulted in execution. Some provided POWs with equipment or supplies (usually, but not always, in exchange for cigarettes or other valuables). One doctor, who had studied at Johns Hopkins, used the last anesthesia on hand on the American POW in the field hospital, while wounded German soldiers went without. A German woman fed a POW a generous meal—despite the risk of being shot for doing so—because her husband was a POW in the U.S. and she wished he, too, be shown human kindness

While some of the POWs left ruined Germany hating Germans, others assigned much of their poor treatment to Nazis leaders and the war these had sought and fought. Of those POWs who left war-torn Europe filled with enormous hate, some were able to overcome that hatred with time's passage. Others never were—and passed their hatred to the next generation. Some POWs returned to Germany decades later and confronted a haunting past head-on; others never could.

2.2.18.1. THE VOSS FAMILY

While imprisoned near Jaskow, a village on the Baltic coast near Danzig, POW Thearl Mesecher of Knoxville, Iowa was sent to work in the village blacksmith shop. The smithy, Rudolf Voss, originally was the pastor of the local church. When he refused to give the Hitler salute from the pulpit after the Nazis came to power (explaining "This is God's house, not Adolf Hitler's"), however, the regime sent him to a concentration camp for three months. When he returned to Jaskow, he worked as a blacksmith because he was barred from the ministry. As his and Frau Voss' three sons were sent to the Eastern front (where they all were killed, fighting the Soviet Red Army), they turned to POW labor to assist in the smithy. Taking a liking to Thearl, the family "adopted" him and helped keep him alive by smuggling food to him and his "buddy" from Iowa, DuWayne Bulman. Billa, the oldest of the Voss' two daughters, was caught one day by a guard and shot on the spot for trying to hand Thearl a fish from under her jacket. Meanwhile, Dora, the youngest Voss daughter, fell in love with Thearl and dreamt of emigrating to Iowa after the war. On Sundays the Vosses gave Dora bribery money for the guards and sent her to retrieve Thearl from the POW camp. Thearl spent Sunday afternoons in the family's garden and in their parlor, snuggling with Dora or listening to forbidden BBC broadcasts with the family. After the war, both Dora and her desperate father sent him letters, implicitly begging for food or other help. Thearl sent the Vosses packages, but never brought Dora to be with him in the Midwest. Two of the Vosses' letters are reprinted, below:

1. Dear Thearl:

I have so often wished that I could hear from you. Mail service is not too good and you are silent. Did you get the letter that I wrote you Feb. 6? I sent it through the Polish Post Office.

Thearl, is there any way on earth that you can help me? You well know that I would not ask you for any aid or assistance, if I could go through this horrible thing alone. Lately it has been even worse, as many are at the end of their strength. My parents are old, full of worry and hungry. They do not have any desire to live. Already there are 38 dead in Jaskow and there were only 90 in the beginning.

My parents are so changed that you would never recognize them. They are fast becoming victims of these terrible times, and I cannot do anything to help them.

As a prisoner of war, Thearl, you had it very bad, in spite of the little we were able to do for you. But, you could do it alone. You knew that your parents and loved ones were all right, in far-away America. In am watching my parents starve to death.

You know how we all felt about Hitler and the war. We couldn't help it. Could you?

Billa [Dora's older sister, shot by German guards for smuggling Thearl and DuWayne Bulman a fish under her coat] is dead. It was by a chance she took of her own free will. We are not asking you to help to the extent of endangering your life or violating the laws of your country or conscience.

Many here have typhus. Malnutrition is a dreaded enemy. Did Bulman deliver the full we sent to Lauenburg [where the two Iowa POWs were sent after Jaskow]?

My father's apprentice [in the blacksmith shop, where Thearl had worked], Herbert, is still alive. He risked his life many times in caring for us as he promised you he would do. I send greetings from him and mom and dad.

And now, farewell:

Dora.

2. Mr. Mesecher, our good friend:

I, my wife and youngest daughter, Dorchen, are still here in Jaskow, the place where you were a prisoner of war. A year after you left, when the Poles took over, most of the Germans were forced to leave and were moved westward over the Oder. The greater portion left willingly, under pressure of hunger. As a blacksmith, I did not have a permit to leave and will probably remain here the rest of my life and let them make a Pole out of me. We have no newspaper to read, no radios, are cut off from the whole world. Conditions are enough to drive us mad. Our Dorchen is very down-hearted and blue, says that if only you could come from America, you could do something to help us out here and, knowing you as I do, I believe it, too. It is not easy for a young girl to live here, see all this, and no future. Our beloved Billa's life was sacrificed.

Times have changed. Now we are the Gefangenen (prisoners). We have no rights; the Russians and Poles do with us as they please. Our greatest need, a package came, and the sender's name was Mesecher. It was a wonderful help and a treat, something we are not able to get here now. We send our hearty thanks. All the comfort and aid we received here come from our earnest prayers to God. Such true friendship and trust as we have in you, means much to us.

The Russians made short process of everything and as far was we can see there is no Germany (in the future). As far as our future is concerned, you folks in America know more about that than we do. We are cut off entirely from the whole world and I would be very grateful if you would give me the American slant on things. What about the Russian and Polish Rule? Please let me know what you think?

Wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. May God grant you good health and hearty greetings from our grateful family.

Rudolf Voss

2.2.19. DRESDEN

Midwest POWs witnessed one of the most infamous subchapters of World War II—the firestorm bombing of Dresden. Part of the controversial Strategic Air Offensive, the attacks between the 13th and 15th of February 1945—less than three months before the war’s end—claimed up to 130,000 lives. As Dresden posed no military target, most of the dead were civilians; many were refugees fleeing the advancing Soviet army. (In comparison, the U.S. nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki killed an estimated 60,000 and 75,000 people, respectively.) An Allied press briefing explained that “Operation Thunderclap” deliberately targeted population centers to create chaos and disrupt relief. News of the unmatched destruction spurred widespread condemnation—including from Winston Churchill, who called it “a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing”. The raids’ rationale and effectiveness were questioned, as in spite of incinerating the city—in theory thereby causing dislocation—trains again ran through Dresden just two days after the first attack. An estimated 500,000 people were killed in air raids on Germany between 1939 and 1945. Especially in Dresden, U.S. POWs were put to work, removing the remains of what once had been human beings.

2.2.19.1. THE BOMBING OF DRESDEN

Indiana-born POW Kurt Vonnegut was in the meat locker on the night that Dresden was destroyed.

There were sounds like giant footsteps above. Those were sticks of high explosive bombs. The giants walked and walked. The meat locker was a very safe shelter. All that happened down there was an occasional shower of calimine. The Americans and four guards and a few dressed carcasses were down there, and nobody else. The rest of the guards had, before the raid began, gone to the comforts of their own homes in Dresden. They were all being killed with their families.

So it goes.

The girls that Billy had seen naked were all being killed, too, in a much shallower shelter in another part of the stockyards.

So it goes.

A guard would go to the head of the stairs every so often to see what it was like outside, then he would come down and whisper to the others. There was a firestorm out there. Dresden was one big flame. The one flame ate everything organic, everything that would burn. It wasn’t safe to come out of the shelter until noon the next day. When the Americans and their guards did come out, the sky was black with smoke. The sun was an angry little pinhead. Dresden was like the moon now, nothing but minerals. The stones were hot. Everybody else in the neighborhood was dead.

So it goes.

The guards drew together instinctively, and rolled their eyes. They experimented with one expression and then the other, said nothing, though their mouths were often open. They looked like a silent film of a barbershop quartet.

The guards told the Americans to form in ranks of four [and] march back to the hog barn which had been their home. Its walls still stood, but its windows and roof were gone, and there was nothing inside but ashes and dollops of melted glass. It was realized then that there was no food or water, and that the survivors, if they were going to continue to survive, were going to have to climb over curve after curve on the face of the moon, which they did. Nobody talked much as the expedition crossed the moon. There was nothing appropriate to say. One thing was clear: Absolutely everybody in the city was supposed to be dead, regardless of what they were, and that anybody that moved in it represented a flaw in the design.

2.2.20. ASSISTANCE

Assistance from international organizations kept the POWs alive during the worst of their imprisonment. The War Prisoners Aid of the World Young Men's Christian Association and the International Committee of the Red Cross delivered vital aid to POWs on all sides in WWII. The Red Cross grew out of the vision of Henry Dunant, who while traveling across Italy after the Battle of Solferino in 1859 personally witnessed war's carnage. Convinced that something could and should be done for those suffering war's effects—especially those taken prisoner—he worked with others to establish in 1863 the Red Cross. Based in Geneva, Switzerland, the ICRC and a parallel organization in Islamic countries, the Red Crescent, are still active today, around the world, providing vital aid.

During WWII, the Red Cross not only delivered packages to POWs, but also registered prisoners and informed the men's families of their capture. It provided medical supplies as well, and sent delegations to observe camp conditions. As a neutral party, the Red Cross had access to the POWs that other non-governmental organizations did not have. Without the various efforts of the Red Cross, during WWII thousands more POWs would have perished in their captors' hands.

2.2.21. ESCAPE

Escape from Nazi-German POW camps proved almost impossible and was usually deadly. Aware that the Geneva Convention sanctions POWs' attempts to evade their captors, the Germans still did all they could to hinder escape. They built barracks on brick stilts, so that guards could crawl underneath and listen to POWs' conversations during lock up; the exposed space between the barracks' floors and ground below also made passage to tunnels easily visible. Those escape efforts that succeeded usually did not succeed for very long; many of those later recaptured were quickly executed—typically in front of their peers, to discourage future escape attempts by others.

Once liberated by the Soviet Union's Red Army or the U.S. Army, some POWs so feared falling back into German hands that they chose the uncertainty of "escape" over waiting for slow removal from the ruins of the Third Reich—but, they fled into the dangerous unknown. Some of those men later ended up back in American hands; some, though, perished or, perhaps worse, were apprehended by the Red Army, sent into the Russian hinterland and never heard from again. The compulsion to flee, while understandable, arose out of their post-imprisonment inner turmoil.

2.2.22. THE DEATH MARCHES

Horrific "death marches" took place at the end of the war—a lasting legacy of senseless human cruelty and, conversely, suffering. POWs themselves and historians disagree: did the Germans send POWs on such marches—some of which lasted almost three months and covered hundreds of kilometers—to keep them from rejoining the U.S. war effort? Or, did they do so to keep them from falling into the hands of the Red Army, to retain them as bartering stock once the conflagration reached a climax or, perhaps, to "hide" proof of German war crimes? If the latter, the German authorities simply could have liquidated the men—a desperate act that did not take place.

During the marches, the POWs received almost no food and far too little water from their captors. What nourishment they did secure was coincidental—stolen vegetables, dead horses lying by the roadside, or handouts from German Hausfrauen who took pity on them. The POWs' clothes and supplies were at an end; they literally had walked their shoes to shreds. At times they slept 500 or more men in a barn; often, they had no shelter at all. Sometimes the Germans put them in airport hangars—frequently the inadvertent targets of American bombing raids. Losses were heavy. The scars left were deep.

2.2.23. LIBERATION

Although Midwest POWs had waited seemingly an eternity to be rescued, once liberation did come, it often came suddenly and by surprise. Usually, the first clue that the war was ending was the abrupt disappearance of the German guards—who generally remained better informed than the POWs about the proximity and fortunes of the Red or U.S. Armies. The initial confusion that followed quickly turned to relief and joy once Soviet or American forces arrived in the camps (frequently literally by breaking through the fence). A common mistake in the POWs' immediate treatment was their liberators' eagerness to provide "help" in the form of generous supplies of food. Most POWs turned ill from eating too much after months of starvation diets; many died.

As soon as transport could be arranged, the POWs were trucked to collection points behind the front or flown by plane to liberated France or Belgium. Often, standing in those trucks or sitting in those planes, the men could not believe they had survived imprisonment in the Nazi hell; the emotional intensity of the moment often overwhelmed many of them. As they left, they departed changed men. They had seen the worst of human behavior; recovery would take years.

About being liberated, Dan Bied of Iowa wrote that: *"some of the more demonstrative types among us whooped and waved their arms when they realized we were actually in the midst of armed U.S. troops again. Others got down on their knees and prayed. I pinched Ed Brewer, and he returned the favor, to make certain we weren't just dreaming about our liberation, as we had so many times. "God, we're glad to see you" Reed Hart erupted as he grabbed [a soldier], hugged him and kissed one of his grimy cheeks."*

Thearl Mesecher and DuWayne Bulman of Iowa were liberated in a German village on Friday the 13th, April 1945: *"The village is about half a mile away [from heavy fighting] and in the center of the main street sits a tank the size of a battle ship with a white star on the side. We run as fast as our weakened condition will permit. If it is only a reconnaissance tank it will go back after looking around. And no more fire than it has drawn, the main front will move on up fast. Two Yanks walk up the road to meet us and to grasp the hand of our comrades, whom we had waited for over two years—something I shall never forget."*

2.2.24. RECOVERY

For many liberated Midwest POWs, recovery's first step consisted of being freed from the fleas and lice that had accompanied their entire imprisonment. Then, most received medical care, with many undergoing hospital stays while doctors attended to immediate health problems.

The men typically experienced an unshakeable edginess even after being removed from Nazi Germany. Planes flying overhead or the dropping of hospital equipment would send liberated POWs into a near-hysterical panic. Those who could endure it were sometimes sent on outings to nearby sites—on walking tours of springtime Paris, for example, or along the English Channel. Hospital staff considered such outings as practical ways to reintroduce the men to civilian life.

Food played a central role in liberated POWs' recovery—not just in terms of nutrition but psychologically. Many former POWs often abruptly would visit the refrigerator to check that it was full, and had a lingering fear of hunger. For most POWs, years passed before they could speak about their experiences; some never did. Many found relief, decades later, in seeking the company of fellow former POWs; finding specific men from their past proved very meaningful.

Iowan Thearl Mesecher wrote in his journal about his recovery at a U.S. Army hospital:

April-26-45 Am in the largest hospital in Paris. Have had X-rays taken. Am taking infra-red heat treatments, getting along OK. Receiving a good diet. I can walk and have drawn a partial payment and a few articles of clothing. The war surgeon insists that I take a pass and see Paris a bit. Actually, I don't care to see Paris but perhaps it's best if I get out a little. Maybe hanging around here I have a little too much time to think. My mind is running wild. My nervous system is as an overworked or overloaded electric system. Our planes overhead make me very nervous. Their sounds are quite different from those of German planes and for the past two years we learned to regard Allied planes as enemy and never even looked up as German fighter planes or bombers flew over us.

Everything is noisy. A dropped tin tray, a sharp whistle, a rumble of food carts in the hall, the flip of a window blind, the click of a cigarette lighter and millions of other sounds unnoticeable by nearly everyone paralyze me at times as they are sharp reminders of various things on the front or in prison life which spelled death or its equivalent.

We weren't afraid then because our nerves were never given a chance to relax. At no time were we ever completely free of nervous tension. And now it is reproduced in harmless noises. Thank God, I am here, I did survive it all. Now, if I could only relax and quit living the entire panorama over and over again. If I could quit comparing the sound of a cigarette lighter with that of an angry guard's rifle safety release. The rumble in the halls with that of distant artillery or bombing. Instead of being always on the alert to jump and move fast at the first harsh command. If only I could just relax. There will be no command and if there is it will be gentle, allowing ample time for it to be put into execution. It isn't fear of death: God knows that no man with two years of POW life behind him is afraid of death. "Many have chosen it in preference to existence in prison." It is the dread of the nauseating, weak feeling that always follows high nervous tension, excitement. In the very best conditions of prison life we were never at ease.

Pow Dan Bied wrote of:

mixed emotions about the entire string of jumbled events. "I hate the Germans one minute," I remarked, "every one of them, then I can't help feeling sorry for some of them. They'll never be able to rebuild those cities. They brought it all on themselves, but they're all hurting now, even the little kids, and all of them couldn't have caused what happened in the gas chambers." "I'd like to forget as much as I can," Bendle said as we peered down on the mosaic of villages, forests, crops, rivers, web-like roads and occasional U.S. convoys [as the recently liberated POWs were being flown out of ruined Germany] "But I never will," he sighed. "We'll all have mental scars the rest of our lives. This was too much shock treatment to be ever forgotten; too much happened to us all at once."

2.2.25. RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES

For liberated POWs, passage back to the U.S. proved intensely emotional. Those returning by ship celebrated upon first glimpsing the Statue of Liberty. The completion of their trek home, however, often proved more challenging. Thearl Mesecher, for example, disembarked in Des Moines with only the station master and a sole taxi driver on the platform. He wrote in his journal that it was the loneliest day of his life. George Rosie looked forward to returning to his family in Chicago, but resisted honoring his promise to a fallen buddy—to visit the man's parents and report how their son had died. A happy-go-lucky boy, upon returning to Burlington, Iowa Dan Bied fulfilled his POW dreams: he quickly downed a ten-scoop ice cream cone at his dad's soda fountain.

For the most part, returning POWs spoke little of their imprisonment; their families stubbornly avoided the topic, too. The men threw themselves into postwar life—finding a job or going to college, getting married, having children, joining civic groups and becoming part of their chosen communities. For them, the war should have ended—and they strove to forget it...

Fully forgetting what had happened to them, though, ultimately would prove impossible.

2.2.26. RECONCILIATION

By confronting their experiences as prisoners in the Third Reich, former Midwest POWs could heal and move beyond them. For some, a first step in that long process began in the 1950s—some Iowa POWs, for example, met one summer for a picnic, accompanied by their young families. In the late 1960s, one group of former POWs invited their one-time captors to come to the U.S. to attend a POW reunion. Not all of their American peers were pleased by the Germans' presence, but the gesture had lasting, reconciliatory effects: it showed, in tangible ways, that the war had ended and that both nations could move on. In the 1970s—on the heels of the failed Vietnam War—large numbers of WWII-era POWs joined veterans' associations; in the 1980s former POWs among them formed groups focused on the POW experience. Often, simply comparing experiences with other former POWs facilitated much healing. Some of the men, as they entered retirement and confronted their past, took to public speaking. That, too, was a form of healing. And, it was a call to keep such tragedy from ever happening again. Will future generations learn from the past century's lapse of humanity and do better? Only time will tell...

Upon being liberated in May 1945, Dan Bied was flown from defeated Germany to Belgium:

The most memorable sight on the way from Merseburg to Liege seen by me through moist eyes came when "The Roger Dodger" dipped its left wing to make a broad, lazy circle over Cologne. Cologne, a city of 750,000 on the Rhine, had been flattened by Allied bombers, except for the city's massive, twin-spired Gothic cathedral.

All of us on "The Roger Dodger" agreed that, most likely, Cologne would not be reconstructed—at least not at this location, where dozens of raids had reduced the metropolis to rubble. We were wrong on this count: in just a few years, Cologne became a thriving, handsome city smacking of Western Germany's post-war prosperity.

All of us on "The Roger Dodger" agreed that, very definitely, Germany—and the other civilized nations of the world—had learned a lesson... an unforgettable lesson about the horror and futility of war that future generations would cherish as sacred enlightenment.

3. VANISHED: GERMAN-AMERICAN INTERNMENT, 1941-48

3.1. INTRODUCTION

German-American internment is one of the least known subchapters of U.S. World War II history, yet perhaps its most disturbing. In a land where the rule of law is thought to prevail, tens of thousands of innocent men, women and children were arbitrarily detained, interned and even deported or “exchanged” by the United States government. (“Excludees”—including American citizens—were individuals banned from living in coastal communities or “high-security zones”, typically due to unproven denunciations veiled as anonymous “tips.”) U.S. citizens as well as “enemy aliens” were deprived of due process, property and their freedom. Their suffering cannot be justified, as no German-American internee was ever convicted of a war-related crime. (Those spies and saboteurs convicted by the U.S. for attempted sabotage were not interned; they were kept in prisons, and then hanged.) As of this writing, Congress has repeatedly refused to acknowledge German-American internment or to compensate those whom it affected. Unwilling to learn from this tragedy, we easily could repeat it.

During WWII the U.S. government registered some 300,000 Germans in America as “enemy aliens” and interned approximately 11,000 German resident aliens and German Americans. It forcibly brought 4,058 German Latin Americans—including German and Austrian Jews who had fled Nazi terror—to this country in the holds of ships. From 1941 to 1948 Ellis Island served as a prison for German- and Italian-American internees; their caged exercise pen overlooked the Statue of Liberty. (Today’s museum about this national landmark omits this part of its history.) During some of WWII’s fiercest fighting on the North Atlantic, the United States shipped back to Germany more than 2,000 of the 15,000 German Americans it had imprisoned, in exchange for German-held U.S. nationals; after the war President Truman deported more.

This exhibit explores the larger German-American drama as represented by the experiences of a sample of individuals or families who had lived in the Midwest prior to America’s entry into WWII, were interned in the Midwest or lived there after their release. More than answers, this exhibit aims to provoke questions—including how members of the United States’ largest ethnic group could be singled out and labeled threats to “public peace and safety.” Without being told what the charges were against them, they were refused legal counsel, denied fair trials, put behind barbed wire and, in some cases, denied their freedom until three and a half years after the war in Europe ended. It also begs the question: Why did no one demand that justice prevail and that innocent people live free?

3.2.1. THE BERG FAMILY: VICTIMS OF HAWAII'S MARTIAL RULE

Eleven-year-old Doris Berg saw the attack on Pearl Harbor and, in the days that followed, lived the horror of internment and abandonment.

Doris' father was born in Cologne/Germany in 1902 and graduated from the university there. Her mother came from German immigrants who had worked the Hawaiian sugar fields since the 1880s, when Hawaii still existed as a sovereign country. Doris and her two sisters, like their parents, were US citizens. Still, after Hawaii's governor declared martial law on the 8th of December 1941, her older sister (then 18) and parents were interned without charge or trial, and only released in 1942 and 1943, respectively. On the day that FBI agents took away their parents, the two youngest girls—eleven and eight years old—assumed their parents were dead and were left to fend for themselves in the family's nursing home. Apparently with government collusion, a local realtor assumed the Bergs' properties and coerced Doris' parents to sign over title. Strangers came into the family's house and confiscated food, clothing and other personal property.

Hawaii's government changed overnight. The press and radio underwent rigid censorship. Orders were issued without regard to the provisions of territorial or federal laws. "Citizens are not supposed to be subject to internment" Doris says today. "We were protected by the Constitution. We were entitled to its civil liberties and certain 'inalienable rights.' All of that went out the window on December 7th, 1941. Our American citizenship and our Constitution did not protect us after the attack on Pearl Harbor."

3.2.2. MATHIAS BORNIGER AND SIGFRID MUNTZ: VICTIMS OF ARBITRARY DETENTION

Mathias Borniger, a photographer who made templates of plane parts for Boeing, was arrested in Wichita/Kansas in the middle of the night, a day after Pearl Harbor was bombed—a week before he was to become an American citizen. He was held for approximately four months at Wisconsin's Camp McCoy. He later learned that confidential FBI informants accused him of photographing new planes at Boeing and sending the pictures to Hitler.

Twenty-seven-year-old Sigfrid Muntz of San Diego was born in Chile to German parents. In 1939, he emigrated from Germany to the US, where he sought American citizenship and work as an engineer. He was arrested in San Diego the day after Pearl Harbor. He was given no explanation for his arrest. Two weeks later, he was sent by train for internment at Fort Lincoln near Bismarck/North Dakota and then to Camp McCoy.

At McCoy, internees like Muntz and Borniger wore uniforms with POW stamped on them and adjusted to life in a barracks without running water. They were plagued by boredom and had little to do but read magazines that were several years old. They had no idea what was happening outside McCoy. An elderly German immigrant from nearby Sparta/Wisconsin gave the German internees an old piano, which they used to put on shows for others at the camp.

Mathias Borniger was sent from McCoy to Stringtown, an Army-run internment camp in Oklahoma. After his family's lawyer vouched for his loyalty, he was released in the fall 1943 and opened a portrait studio in Wichita. Sigfrid Muntz was released after two years of internment and returned to his job with an iron and steel company in San Diego.

3.2.3. EDDIE FRIEDE: A JEW ONCE AGAIN BEHIND BARBED WIRE

Eddie Friede was born of Jewish parents in Hamburg in 1892. "Doktor" Friede practiced law until forbidden to do so by Nazi edicts. Eddie and his wife, Liesl, were granted exit permits in 1938. Before they could emigrate, however, Eddie was arrested and imprisoned in Sachsenhausen, a concentration camp outside Berlin. Relying upon his connections to the legal community, Eddie eventually was able to secure his release from Sachsenhausen and flee to America with Liesl.

In San Francisco his English was insufficient to pursue law, so Eddie found work delivering Viennese pastries door-to-door in the German community. To FBI agents secretly monitoring the Friedes' activities, this connection to suspicious German Americans indicated that the dejected lawyer was a dangerous Nazi. During the December 8th raids following Pearl Harbor, in which hundreds were arrested, the FBI took him into custody in his San Francisco apartment. Doctor Friede—a Jew who narrowly had escaped extermination in Germany—wound up behind barbed wire at Fort Lincoln.

There, he fought *Gitterkrankheit* ("fence sickness") for six months before his protests of innocence finally were heard. He was released and returned to San Francisco, but marked for life by the internment experience. He never practiced law again, and spent thirty-nine years as a door-to-door salesman. He always fixed his deep, sad eyes on his customers and introduced himself, "I am Doctor Friede. Would you like to buy some cookies and pastries?"

Years later, the Friedes were still so terrified by their experience and the FBI's power that they would not allow their real names to be used when their story was first published.

3.2.4. THE THEBERATH FAMILY: VICTIMS OF FORCED SEPARATION

The Theberath family was arrested at their Milwaukee home at 2:30 AM by FBI agents on the night of 8 December 1941. The family of five was inexplicably split up. Peter and Marie—the parents—were shipped to Fort Oglethorpe/Georgia, and their children Gertrud (14) and Friedrich (13) were turned over to the Milwaukee County Children's Home. For several weeks no one knew what happened to the other son, John (17). Six months later, Peter—still in a state of shock—wrote to a relative in Germany from Fort Oglethorpe that...

*Marie and I were awakened and taken into custody [8 December 1941]. I was in prison for 4 months. Marie was released on Feb. 11th, but everything was gone, no children, no home. In one word everything **robbed**, the children placed in separate homes, the mother helplessly thrown into **the street** [writer's emphasis].*

We arrived here on April 9th and no news yet from our family. The last time I saw John and Marie was in the prison on April 5th and I have not seen Gertrude and Friedrich since December 8th. These are ridiculous conditions... All hope that the war will end soon.

The letter never made it past the US National Censorship Office in Washington/D.C. Undaunted, Peter wrote numerous letters to the Swiss Legation in Washington, whose Department of German Interests watched over the fate of German internees. Eventually, the exasperated assistant commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, W.F. Kelly, told Edward Ennis, head of the Alien Enemy Control Unit, to "get to the bottom of the case and really provide a solution which would be best for both parents and the children." This case, as well as some others, eventually even reached the desk of General Edwin Watson, secretary to President Roosevelt.

3.2.5. KARL VOGT: VICTIM OF DENUNCIATION AND FALSE ACCUSATION

Karl Vogt was abruptly taken from his family's farm home near Spokane/Washington on the afternoon of 9 December 1941. When his American born wife Elsie demanded to know why Karl was being taken away and where they were taking him, she was told "it's none of your business".

Karl was held in the Spokane County Jail until 21 December 1941, when he was taken by train to Fort Lincoln, and finally to the camp at Stringtown. During an internment hearing, authorities asked Karl repeatedly why he had "sent money to Hitler." It was only later that he discovered that money he and Elsie had mailed to her cousin in Germany—via the German embassy in San Francisco—had been assumed to be destined for the Nazi regime. Still, Karl was told neither the source of this suspicion, nor the name of the neighbor who had been an informant against him in hopes of buying the Vogt farm cheaply.

Elsie and Karl's brother, Bill, tried to cope as best they could and save the farm. The family's bank account, however, was soon blocked and funds had to be borrowed from relatives or friends. Elsie later hired an attorney who arranged for some funds to be released.

Finally, through a coincidental question from an interrogator, Karl realized the mistaken impression about the funds he and Elsie had sent to Germany. After six months of legal wrangling by Elsie and supporters "on the outside," Karl was told to pack his bags—he was going home.

3.2.6. THE WORNER FAMILY: VICTIMS OF MALICE AND PREJUDICE

Twenty-year-old Meta Maria Brenner of Worms-am-Rhein/Germany sailed for New York in 1926. Three months later she married her hometown beau, Peter Worner, also a German immigrant, who worked as a factory superintendent and by 1940 had obtained his citizenship. In the summer of 1940 the Federal Bureau of Investigation field office in Saint Paul/Minnesota began to receive allegations about the couple.

FBI informants said that Maria Worner was "thoroughly imbued with Nazi doctrines." Agents arrested Maria at the family's home in Winona/Minnesota in the late evening of 9 December 1941 and delivered her to the Immigration and Naturalization Service office in Saint Paul before dawn. The INS put her in the Ramsey County jail, where the presence of convicted murderers and open toilets prompted her to threaten to commit suicide. On 12 December she was moved to the Home of the Good Shepherd in Saint Paul, operated by a French order of nuns who ran cloisters throughout the country and took in female enemy aliens. She remained detained there until her hearing and parole three weeks later. Back home, Maria attempted suicide again, and she remained housebound and reclusive.

Meantime, her husband Peter's loyalty also was a subject of government interest. On the basis of complaints that were eventually described as "malicious and prejudiced," denaturalization proceedings were instituted against him, and then dropped. Finally, in April 1956, Maria became an American citizen—but she was only one of dozens of German-American women who were the subject of malicious rumors and prejudice and interned during World War II.

3.2.7. THE ECKARDT FAMILY: VICTIMS OF US-GOVERNMENT KIDNAPPING

Albert Eckardt came to the US when he was fifteen and eventually found work in Panama, where he helped to dredge the great canal. Eckardt died in 1938, a naturalized US citizen. His son Ted—also a US citizen—was only eight years old when in 1942, by direction of the US government, his mother Ruth, his sister Emilie and he were taken from their village home near the Canal by Panamanian police. Authorities auctioned off their belongings and pocketed the receipts. They also kept the family's real estate.

Young Ted Eckardt and his family were taken by ship to New Orleans. After being processed at the Federal detention center at Camp Seagoville near Dallas, they were sent to Crystal City, where they spent the next three years.

In 1944 the family once again was uprooted and sent to Ohio, where Ted and his sister lived in the Lutheran Orphans' Home Society of Toledo, under conditional guardianship of the superintendent of the orphanage. Their mother lived and worked in the Old Folks' Home on the grounds of the orphanage.

It wasn't until after the war that the family was reunited, but the Eckardts continued to live and work at the orphanage because it was the only home they had. Eventually, they rented an apartment in the city and the children graduated from Toledo High School. They never recovered their real estate or belongings in Panama, and the US government has never apologized for its illegal abduction of the Eckardts from the Canal Zone.

3.2.8. EBERHARD FUHR: VICTIM OF ABANDONMENT AFTER PARENTAL INTERNMENT

In August 1942 the US government interned seventeen-year-old Eberhard Fuhr's parents, who were German resident aliens. After his older brother left for college, "Eb" lived alone while attending high school in Cincinnati, and supported himself delivering newspapers.

On 23 March 1943 two FBI agents arrested Eb in class. Pistols drawn, the agents handcuffed him and took him to a Cincinnati police station, where his older brother also had been taken. The two were booked, fingerprinted, then taken to the county prison, where they were locked in separate cells.

Eb and his brother soon faced the same Civilian Alien Hearing Board that had interned their parents seven months earlier. "What would you say to your German cousin" they asked him, "if he came to you for sanctuary after coming up the Ohio River in his German U-boat?" "A sub couldn't come up the Ohio River" Eb answered. "It only drafts four feet."

The board did not appreciate his answer, and after further questioning the brothers again were handcuffed and driven to Chicago, where they spent three months detained in a former mansion housing in-transit internees. Meanwhile, the contents of their Cincinnati home were looted and the home was lost to foreclosure. In July 1943 the Fuhr brothers were sent to Crystal City, where they were reunited with their parents and younger brother. They remained at Crystal City until 1947, when they helped close the camp. Finally, they were shipped to Ellis Island. In September 1947—two-and-a-half years after the cessation of hostilities with Germany—the Fuhr family was finally released from internment.

3.2.9. MAX EBEL: VICTIM OF RUMOR, HEARSAY, AND GOSSIP

Max Ebel objected to Nazi Germany's militarism and resisted joining the Hitler Youth. He and his family knew he had to flee Germany after he was stabbed in a knife fight with angry Hitler Youth members. A month before his seventeenth birthday in 1937, he left Germany to join his father, a German-born naturalized US citizen in Boston.

Max savored America's promise of freedom. As required, he registered with the Selective Service. Although he agreed to fight in the Pacific, he was classified as 4C—a conscientious objector—because he did not want to fight in Germany against his brother, cousins and friends.

In September 1942—just months after filing his naturalization papers—Max was arrested by the FBI. Subsequently, at a hostile hearing, with only his father at his side, an aggressive US Attorney presented uncorroborated tips from FBI informants as fact. Although he was scolded for not wanting to fight in Germany, the hearing board recommended parole.

For three months, pacing a rooftop barbed-wire exercise cage in a Boston Immigration and Naturalization Service [INS] facility, Max awaited the US Attorney General's favorable decision. In January 1943, though, Max was ordered interned and was shipped to Ellis Island, where he lived in the Great Room that had recently welcomed immigrants seeking freedom and opportunity. In May 1943 he was transferred to North Dakota's Fort Lincoln. There, Max was one of one hundred men selected for a work detail on the railroad, thereby helping the American war effort. In the spring, acknowledging that the railroaders performed a valuable service for the US, the Department of Justice [DOJ] agreed to reconsider the railroaders' internment, and Max Ebel eventually was paroled. The terms of his parole included a prohibition against walking under or near railroads.

3.2.10. ANNA AND HORST SCHAFER: VICTIMS OF INDEFINITE DETENTION IN A CONVENT

Karl Frederick Schafer came to the United States in 1927 and completed his naturalization in 1933. He returned to Germany twice before the war and married Anna Maria Boettger, who made the return journey to the United States with her new husband. When the war broke out, Anna was not yet an American citizen, and the FBI arrested her on 9 December, taking her and her infant son Horst to the Home of the Good Shepherd in a Milwaukee suburb. Horst received food and a nightshirt and was put to bed. "Mama" he began crying, "heimgehen, heimgehen." ("Mama, I want to go home, I want to go home.") He then vomited everything he had eaten before finally falling asleep, while Anna and five other women tried to stay warm huddled together on the cold stone floor of a locked, unheated room.

Anna endured lengthy FBI interrogations and remained detained at the convent until April 1942. Meanwhile, the FBI investigated her husband Karl. In summer 1943 the Justice Department considered filing denaturalization proceedings against Karl, but decided that the facts were insufficient to do so. In subsequent FBI investigations, numerous witnesses testified regarding the Schafers' patriotism and loyalty. The embarrassment and hardships of detention, however, remained with Anna. She became an American citizen in 1952, but rarely discussed internment with her family.

3.2.11. THE GREIS FAMILY: INTERNED, WITH SONS IN THE MILITARY

In 1923 Joseph Greis—a German WWI vet and a paint chemist—left his wife Francis and newborn son in Germany and traveled to Milwaukee to open a store. The business did not succeed, but Greis’s family eventually followed him to America, where he and his wife had three more sons.

On 9 December 1941 the FBI pounded on the door in the early morning hours and took Joseph Greis away. In December 1945—after Greis had been interned for three years at Fort Lincoln and elsewhere—he was transferred to Ellis Island in preparation for repatriation to Germany. Two of his sons were serving in the US merchant marines, but his wife and two remaining sons joined him at Ellis Island to await repatriation.

After years of being her family’s strength, Francis had a nervous breakdown and was transferred from Ellis Island to a Navy hospital. In April 1945 the government transferred the Greises to the “family camp” in Crystal City/Texas, where they lived in a small house with only bedrooms and a kitchen. Despite Germany’s surrender in May 1945, at least five hundred Germans, including the Greises, remained imprisoned at Crystal City after President Harry Truman decided that those still interned at the war’s end were probably “dangerous” and should be sent back to Germany. Finally, in 1947—two years after the end of the war—the Greises were allowed to leave Crystal City and return to Milwaukee. They had little money and felt stigmatized by their internment. Francis was never the same after this ordeal. Meanwhile, Joseph was refused re-employment at his old job as a chemist. Instead, he borrowed money and opened the European Relief Store, which provided care packages for those suffering in Europe after the war.

3.2.12. THE EISERLOH FAMILY: VICTIMS OF FORCED REPATRIATION

The Eiserlohs—a family of five, including three American-born children—lived in a rural Ohio home built by Mathias, a German-born engineer. In December 1941 the FBI took him away and didn’t inform his family of his whereabouts for weeks. The young family lived in the basement of a relative’s home for two years until they were voluntarily reunited with Mathias at the so-called “family camp” in Crystal City/Texas.

In January 1945, the Eiserlohs suffered forced repatriation to Germany, in exchange for Americans held in Germany. The family crossed the Atlantic during the height of the war. After traveling to Bregenz/Austria in boxcars, they were exchanged for Americans. From Bregenz, the Eiserlohs traveled north toward Frankfurt—sometimes on foot, sometimes in boxcars that were strafed by American planes.

In late February, they were forced to live in a relative’s cramped basement again. The family was viewed with hostility and ridicule. The Gestapo suspected Mathias of being an American spy for the advancing US Army. He was questioned, beaten severely by six SS men in front of his family, and dragged away to a camp. Months later, US Army troops freed those in the camp. Mathias returned home and the family managed to survive the postwar difficulties. Mathias, however, never found a good job again in Germany or the US. A broken man, he died at age 65 in a supermarket aisle.

3.2.13. THE FRANKE FAMILY: VICTIMS OF “EXCLUSION”

A US-born citizen of German parents, Otto Franke came under suspicion in 1940 in Baltimore when the FBI got an unsigned, semi-literate letter accusing him of coordinating “German underground work.” The FBI opened a dossier on Otto and soon filled it with hearsay and rumors.

Confused about Otto’s citizenship status, the FBI finally realized that he wasn’t an alien and couldn’t be interned. It sent his case to another DOJ branch for his prosecution as a subversive. The 1940 tips were reviewed but could not be corroborated, so no prosecution resulted. Then, in February 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, authorizing the military to exclude both US citizens and aliens from coastal areas. A military review board was established in each military district. Otto Franke’s file was forwarded to a military review board and in October 1942 Otto appeared before the review board. Relying on still unconfirmed FBI information, the board ordered him out of the Eastern Defense Command along the eastern seaboard.

As he was trying to resettle in Lima/Ohio, he was ordered fired as a subversive. After another aborted hiring and months of unemployment, Otto found a job in another Ohio town and his family moved again. In July 1944 that company moved to New York, but Otto had to decline the position they offered because of his exclusion order. Isolated and discouraged, Otto Franke, his wife Roberta and their children were not able to return to Baltimore and resume a normal life until May 1945.

3.2.14. ADOLF HAMANN: VICTIM OF US-GOVERNMENT “EXCHANGES”

Adolf Hamann was born in Hamburg/Germany in 1884. At age 20 Adolf sailed for South America, settling first in Chile, then in Peru, where he ran a hardware export-import business. In 1939 his name was added to the Lista Negra, a “black list” that kept potential clients and customers from patronizing names of businesses or individuals on it.

In early 1944 Adolf Hamann quietly submitted to deportation from Peru by the US government. An American embassy official described the operation as “one of the most successful of the various deportation proceedings undertaken with very few last-minute escapes.” Adolf’s wife was among approximately fifty German wives who chose not to accompany their husbands because they feared being sent to Germany.

Twelve hours after disembarking in New Orleans, Adolph was on a train bound for the Crystal City internment camp in Texas. To secure funds still held in German banks, Adolf was required to sign a loyalty statement to the German Reich and indicate his willingness to return to Germany.

In September he and other internees left for Fort Lincoln in North Dakota. In January 1945 Adolf was sent back to Germany on the Swedish ship, the SS Gripsholm. He settled in northern Germany. In April he went to Hamburg to visit his sister, who had been wounded in a bombing raid. While at the hospital there he had a heart attack and died on 25 April. His family did not find out about his fate until a full year later, in May 1946, when mail was re-established with Germany.

3.2.15. HILDEGARD: TEENAGE VICTIM OF DETENTION IN A CONVENT

As a German-American teenager growing up in the Upper Midwest, Hildegard corresponded with German WWII-air ace Werner Moeller. She was arrested at her home in Iowa by two FBI agents on 21 October 1942. During questioning, the district attorney for northwest Iowa implied that Moeller was a German spy. Hildegard was fingerprinted and photographed as an enemy alien, given a brief hearing and taken to the Good Shepherd Convent in Omaha/Nebraska, where she remained for three months. She then was sent to the Seagoville/Texas camp for internment with other enemy aliens.

Later Hildegard was sent to Ellis Island in preparation for deportation. There, she and other enemy alien women shared dormitory rooms rank with the smell of urine from European refugees and infested with cockroaches. From their Ellis Island windows, she watched several Japanese internees jump into the Hudson River and commit suicide; days later, their bloated bodies would be recovered and returned to Ellis Island, strapped on the back of Coast Guard cutters. Hildegard was ordered deported to Germany, but in August 1946 the order was lifted and she was free to return to her home in Iowa.

3.2.16. THE JACOBS FAMILY: VICTIMS OF DEPORTATION

The Jacobs lived in Brooklyn for years. Lambert and Paula Jacobs were German-born resident aliens. Their two boys were American citizens. The FBI raided their home on three occasions, but never found contraband. Still, Lambert was arrested at his job in November 1944. He was taken to Ellis Island and interned, even though his hearing board recommended release.

Though ill, in February 1945 Paula packed up her family and joined Lambert at Ellis Island. The family arrived at Crystal City on May 1st 1945, where they lived until they agreed to be repatriated. They left the United States in January 1946 and arrived in a devastated Germany in the dead of winter. They were transported to Hohenasperg in a guarded, stench-filled unheated boxcar. Once there, a still-ailing Paula was sent elsewhere, while Lambert and his sons were sent to a military prison and placed in separate cells. Convinced that the prisoners had been dangerous spies in America, Army guards treated young Arthur and his brother like Nazis. As they marched Arthur to meals they passed what was called "the hanging tree," and they threatened the boy with death if he did not behave.

Eventually, the family was released and reunited, and lived with Lambert's parents. Arthur worked with American GIs living in Germany and eventually found sponsors in Kansas and became a US Air Force major. For the past twenty years he has researched the government's wartime treatment of German Americans, sought to include them in legislation recognizing injustices done to Japanese and Italian Americans, authored a book on his internment experiences, and created a related internment web site. He has devoted himself to public education on the events, laws and attitudes that destroyed his family life and that of tens of thousands of others.

Art dedicates his tireless work to "the memory of my loving and patriotic parents, Lambert Dietrich Jacobs and Paula Sophie nee Knissel Jacobs, and to the thousands of other innocent victims."

3.2.17. JOSEPH LEBER – GUATEMALA

On the sunny morning of 6 January 1942, Guatemalan police agents arrested Joseph “Joe” Leber at the Guatemala City Tennis Club. Joe had left Germany in 1920 for the US and lived in New York for some six years before moving to Latin America to work for US export companies. He settled in Guatemala around 1929, where he continued to represent US and British export firms. In addition, he bought into a shoe factory owned by another German—a property apparently on a list of assets to be confiscated in the event of deporting their “enemy-alien” owners. Three days after Joe’s arrest and deportation, the newspaper *Diario de Centro America* published a list of so-called “Blocked National Assets”—former German properties, ranging from properties of “Deutsche Lufthansa” to “Leber, Joseph (Leber & Cia).” As a bachelor living alone, he could only leave a message for his housekeeper. Carrying two suitcases, he joined other Germans rounded up in Guatemala. That same evening, the group was taken by train to Puerto Barrios, on Guatemala’s northwestern coast. To pick up prisoners from Central America, the US Army had diverted the troop carrier *Kent* to Puerto Barrios, from where the prisoners were deported to New Orleans. From there, they were taken to the US Army’s Camp Blanding in Stark, Florida—parts of which had been converted into a temporary internment camp. The internees of Camp Blanding were then used as a kind of exchange commodity for the US, in a deal to release US citizens to the US from German-dominated territories; the Germans, in turn, were taken—against their will—to Germany, an operation for which the International Red Cross was used [or “misused”?]. Joseph Leber’s deportation voyage to Göteborg, Sweden, then onward to war-torn Nazi Germany, started in New Orleans on 24 July 1942, when he boarded the *SS Drottningholm*, along with 116 other Germans from Guatemala.

3.2.18. WOLFGANG HARTEN AND FAMILY – ECUADOR

In 1928, Wolfgang Harten traveled to Ecuador, where he worked for a German company. In 1937, he met Gertrud Ahlers in Hamburg, married her and traveled with her back to Ecuador, where they had three children. The youngest of them, Karin, was born in November 1943 in Cuenca, where they were forcibly resettled after their assets and all possessions had already been confiscated and Wolfgang had lost his job in 1942 as an “enemy alien” after the US had entered the war against the “Axis”. On 23 December 1943, two military police officers arrested Wolfgang and took him to the local prison. On Christmas Day, he and other imprisoned German men were taken to an unknown destination; women and children were left behind in uncertainty. The times were exceptionally difficult for the women, who had to survive on the little money the Ecuadorian government made available to them. They also heard bad news about the fate of their husbands: Gertrud once read in a newspaper that Wolfgang had been shot, but she did not want to believe it. In late March 1944 letters arrived from Wolfgang with the request that the family should become reunited in the Crystal City internment camp in Texas. Gertrud decided to join Wolfgang, and in early November arrived with their children, where they were subjected to a “special cleaning” during which they had to take very hot baths and were disinfected with DDT. After almost 10 long months they were met by Wolfgang—who had been staying in Algiers, Louisiana, after first being interned at Camp Kenedy—on a Pullman train car which took them to the “family camp” Crystal City, where they received a bungalow with a kitchen. The children thought they had a true paradise in Crystal City, as there was a kindergarten and a German school. All in all, the family thought their internment was not a bad time; only the uncertainty troubled them. When the war

ended on 8 May 1945 those who could afford it financially were able to leave; everyone else, including the Hartens, had to stay behind in the camp. In late March 1946—almost a year after the end of the war—they were informed that the camp was to be dissolved and they were allowed to leave. They decided to return to Ecuador in spite of everything, where they arrived in June 1946 and started rebuilding their lives.

3.2.19. STEPHAN SCHERER – COSTA RICA

As an ally of the United States, Costa Rica declared war on Germany in December 1941. Although it did not send soldiers, it took action in its own country against the Germans who were listed by the American secret service as potential enemies. These were not only German citizens who were temporarily in the country, but also people of German descent who had emigrated to Central America permanently, some of whom had already taken on their adopted country's nationality. Especially those who were economically strong and thus were regarded as competitors to US-American economic interests were considered to be enemies of the US – a pretext to which the Costa Rican government gave its approval. The fact that they were suddenly considered "enemy aliens" by the country which they considered their home, then were expropriated, captured and – in violation of international law – extradited to the US hit those affected hard; it traumatized them for the rest of their lives. Not so, for Stephan Scherer. He had come to Costa Rica in 1936 as a commercial clerk in order to gain experience abroad for only a few years. In Puerto Limon he became the manager of the local branch of a trading company whose owner was of German descent. Stephan considered himself a loyal "patriotic German" with sympathies for the National Socialist government of the Reich. For him, the classification as an "enemy alien" was no shock; he even saw it more as an honorary title because it made him feel included in the ranks of fighters for German interests in World War II – even though he was prevented, against his will, from becoming a soldier. Stephan Scherer was arrested in March 1942 and one month later extradited to the US, where he was interned in Camps Blanding (Florida) and then in Kenedy (Texas) until February 1944. Then, he was exchanged—during wartime—for Americans civilian internees in Europe. He was able to continue to work as a merchant relatively uninterruptedly until 1945 – in Poland, the Ukraine and Belarus. After his "denazification" (after being classified as "just a follower"), his career continued, and he was able to become co-owner of the company in Bremen where he had started his professional life as an apprentice.

3.3. AMERICAN CIVILIAN INTERNMENT CAMPS

3.3.1. FORT LINCOLN

Lincoln was a small city. We had teachers of every kind: artists, musicians, cooks, carpenters - you name it. If you accepted that this was it for the present, you could survive well. We'd still have guys who would lie in their bunks, staring at the ceiling all day long and driving themselves slowly nuts, but I managed to find work of some sort all the time.

I went out on a farm for a while because it was fun to look at the camp from the other side of the fence; at least we were physically active. You could sneak a vegetable occasionally. They had a large vegetable garden and a couple of beef cattle, but the farming thing didn't last very long. We immediately told them "Listen, you can take this rake and shove it. We don't have to stand for this at ten cents an hour."

Then, I worked in the laundry for a while, which was a great winter job because it was nice and warm. I also painted for a while, then went into business for myself, making costume jewelry out of soup bones. You boil a soup bone until it's white and looks like ivory. I made jewelry for myself, eventually for sale, and for the girlfriend. Later, when we couldn't get enough bones, we went into plastic.

Occasionally, a hearing board would come out, either from Washington or from New York; I think one even came from the West Coast. You'd be lined up for hearings; some guys got very excited and dressed up. Most of us accepted this as "Well, these guys need something to do." You went through the motions, told them the same things. They wanted to know whether you had changed your mind about anything...

I made friends with many Austrians, who were nearly all ski instructors. They decided it would be terrific if we skied, so we ordered skis. When I say "we," it's always a couple of us young guys who did these things together. My brother didn't get into the skiing part, but many of my other friends did. Sears, Roebuck people came in once a month, and you could order stuff. When we got the first snow, we skied around the camp. Then somebody said "We need somewhere to maneuver a little bit, and slide." Somehow, we got permission from the authorities; they brought in a couple of loads of timber, and we built a ski "slope" by hand, no power tools at all. We put up this roughly forty-foot structure that you climbed and skied down. My kids laugh when I tell them this because, first, nobody skied at the time. Second, it's flat in North Dakota. The payoff came when we had the first snow and all were elated. In the evening, it started to snow, and in the morning we skied. I did my first downhill skiing on that damn thing...

We were active in sports. That was a major thing: soccer teams, tennis groups and skiing. I was also very much involved in swimming, which was just great. Fort Lincoln had been a cavalry base before we got in, and they had a fine pool outside the fence. We were escorted out there twice a day if we wanted, once during the day and once in the evening. I swam every day. I've never enjoyed swimming as much in my life as I did then, because it was always available. They let us know when the season was over: they stopped heating the darn thing.

—Werner John, as told to Stephen Fox, in *America's Invisible Gulag*

3.3.2. CAMP MCCOY, SPARTA/WISCONSIN

At McCoy the men wore uniforms with POW stamped on them and adjusted to life in barracks without running water....Amenities included an outhouse, beds and nails for hanging clothes.

The internees were plagued by boredom, having little to do but read magazines that were several years old... They had no idea what was happening outside Camp McCoy. "They took the papers and cut out anything that might look bad for the U.S, like a ship sunk or anything like that" (one internee later) said. "They were just like paper dolls. We got letters from our relatives and it as all cut out. Everything was censored."

An elderly German immigrant from Sparta (a nearby town in Southwest Wisconsin) gave the German internees an old piano and they used it to put on shows for others at the camp. They also could cook and made European breads and other dishes.

The internees were given a belated Christmas tree because most of them had spent the holidays in jail... "The people there were trying to be good, but they had their orders, too" (the former internee) said of the camp staff. "The war effort was going on – who was thinking about 500 little old aliens up there at Camp McCoy in the snow and ice"?

- Excerpted from "Casualties of war," and article by Sharon Theiman of the Associated Press, printed in the *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune* on 30 May 1994

While Karl was at...Camp McCoy, we at least knew where he was and could write censored letters to each other. In April of 1942 Karl wrote that he was to be transferred to a permanent camp, but didn't know where. An attempt was made to keep the new place of detention secret from the internees' families. We were given a New York address and all mail to Karl was sent to this number: ISN-23-46-G-19-CI, Postal Censor, 244 Seventh Ave., N.Y There was a terrific uproar from the families and the destination leaked out anyway, so thankfully this plan didn't work out For quite some time mail was routed over New York for censorship and letters were weeks old before they reached their destinations.

- Excerpted from the story of Karl Vogt, civilian internee of war, as recollected by members of the Vogt family; edited and compiled by Ursula Vogt Potter for her book *The Misplaced American*

3.3.3. CRYSTAL CITY, TEXAS

Crystal City: "Hell Incorporated." The way I understand it, they repatriated the braceros [Mexican contract laborers], strung a barbed wire fence around it and put up guard towers. You know the pictures that you see of concentration camps in Germany with the guard towers, machine guns and all that stuff? That's Crystal City. The first people that they moved in there, who were Germans, helped in fixing up the shacks and making them livable. When those braceros got through with them, they weren't fit to live in. Even when we came there, in May 1943, it was barely livable. We had to build boardwalks to stop struggling in mud and, back in those days, you didn't have air conditioning. Most of us were from a more moderate climate, and that place out there near Del Rio was hotter than Hades, to say nothing of how cold it could get in the winter. There was no grassy area. It was all mesquite and cacti with sandy places between.

We ripped most of the old stuff out and planted gardens and yards. We lived in a frame house, two very small bedrooms, one kitchen called a combination kitchen-dining area—all very primitive. The whole thing was covered with waterproof sheet rock on the outside and no wall covers at all on the inside, just tarpaper sheeting. The bathroom included a toilet only. If you wanted to take a shower or use the sink or something like that, you'd have to go down to the center of the area. The community swimming pool was on the other side of the camp, which was not bad. They dug everything up by hand, poured all the concrete and everything else all by themselves. All the government did was to furnish the concrete and tools.

When we kids played, everything was said in English, except for the ones who were there from South and Central America... Quite a few of my teachers in school in Crystal City were from Lima/Peru. You've probably heard of these diplomatic schools overseas? They have English ones; they have German ones, where the diplomats' kids go to school? That's where these people came from. They just arbitrarily closed those schools, took all the teachers and shipped them to Crystal City. They weren't asked. We had people... from practically every country south of the Texas border.

—Alfred Plaschke, as told to Stephen Fox in *America's Invisible Gulag*

Crystal City/Texas—my favorite place. I met my wife there. As my dad and I left North Dakota, we wore winter coats and suits. The further south we got the more apparel we shed. What a change from the military and Border Patrol establishments. Yet, there were familiar sights: barbed wire fences, guard towers and sentries... I worked first as a milk truck driver, then drove the ice truck, and lastly busied myself as an operating-room orderly, which I truly loved. Our pay in all camps amounted to ten cents an hour plus \$3 per month coupon book. Wow! But, where in heck were we going to spend this stuff? You also were given a certain number of tokens in red and green and gray pressed fiber or cardboard. Each color showed either food, clothing or canteen money. You never were allowed American money; that's the first thing they took

away from you. They put it on deposit, and you could draw from it to send to Sears, Roebuck or something like that, but you never could have it in your hand. That way nobody would have money to escape with.

—Alfred Krakau, as told to Stephen Fox in America's Invisible Gulag

3.3.4. ELLIS ISLAND, NEW YORK/NEW YORK

At some point, a class action was started by a lawyer named [George] Dix. [Senator William] Langer visited the Island a couple of times; he was always very understanding, being from North Dakota [with its large German-American population]... That January, we were sitting playing cards, and a guard came up: "Listen, Werner: you can go home, and if you hurry and pack you can catch the last ferry."

"First, let me finish my hand. Second, I'm not in a rush. I've been here four years. I'm going to worry about the last ferry now?"

So, we finished out the hand, and everybody came running over: "Hey, Werner; you're going home? You got released?" That was always the big news.

"Yeah."

"Why?"

"How do I know why?" You were in without knowing why, and you were out without knowing why. It was like somebody threw up a handful of cards, picked one out and said "Hey, this one says 'Werner.' Let's let him go!"

I packed my stuff; I didn't have too much. And, the next morning, I left. Believe me, it was one of the saddest moments of my life, because all my friends—these were the friends I had lived with close to four years—my brother and everybody, were standing there waving goodbye, and I was the only one on the ferry going the "wrong" way. It was the weirdest sensation. You wondered: "Why were you going? Why were they staying?" The guilt thing. Honest to god, for two cents I would've stayed. This sounds crazy as hell, even now.

I couldn't get myself to go down into the subway, although I had grown up in New York. I walked, and I walked, because I "knew" everybody could tell I was an enemy alien who had just been released.

I just kept walking and walking and finally got home. I didn't have the keys to the apartment but, luckily, a neighbor across the hall knew the situation, and she said "Your mother went shopping. Leave your suitcase here." So what do you think I did, the first thing? I went to the Bronx courthouse and applied for a new driver's license! I had nothing better to do, you know? When I got back Mom was just coming down the street. She dropped her shopping bags and ran and hugged me, and her first words were "Where's Heinz?" She wanted to know why I was home, and I said I didn't know. I contacted my friends, and we went out that night and met some of the old crowd for dinner.

I saw Heinz every few weeks. He was still running the canteen; after all those years he was sort of a trustee. They'd take a guard in one of the immigration cars and go into Yorkville [a heavily German section of Manhattan] and shop for the canteen. The guard loved it because it was a day off for him. I was driving a cab at nights then. I'd meet them and we'd spend the day together. He'd go to different stores and buy things, and they would either take them along or have them shipped to the Island. That happened every couple of weeks, besides my visits to the Island. Occasionally, we'd meet my mom and we'd all go out to eat for lunch. We'd also meet Heinz' ex-girlfriend for lunch; the guard was perfectly trusting. Heinz wasn't going to cause a problem; all they'd do is turn around and grab his mom and dad and his brother and bring them in again.

—Werner John, as told to Stephen Fox in America's Invisible Gulag

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—Werner John, as told to Stephen Fox in America's Invisible Gulag

3.4. AFTERWORD

During WWII the U.S. government felt compelled to act decisively to protect the country from potentially dangerous individuals in its midst. To achieve this goal, the government repeatedly violated civil liberties and disrupted tens of thousands of innocent lives: the human cost was unconscionable. Rather than protecting the vulnerable immigrant population and their American-born families, the government used security concerns to justify an oppression based not on “race” but culture. German Americans suffered greatly for their “enemy” ethnicity through various forms of wartime mistreatment by the U.S. government: unauthorized raids and searches, the ransacking of homes, detention, internment, losses of property and jobs, exclusion and relocation, and finally forcible exchange and deportation.

These actions were undertaken without formal charges against the accused, and without legal representation, jury trials or the opportunity for appeal. “Witnesses” were not live and subject to cross-examination, but written and unnamed. “New evidence” could not be gathered, since no one on the “outside” represented the interned, and all correspondence was censored. Also, the accused usually were not present during sentencing. Forced into a situation from which those affected could not free themselves, thousands landed in camps across the country, behind barbed wire and guard towers—some for as long as seven years—in detention centers and internment camps across the country. And, they were the “lucky” ones, for untold hundreds of the forced repatriates either ended up in Soviet-occupied eastern Germany, where many were imprisoned again or shot.

The law of 1798 sanctioning such injustices—enhanced by the so-called “Patriot Act”—still exists and could be used at any time, against any individual in this country, “aliens” or citizens. Indeed, internment could happen to ANYONE on American soil!

3.4.1 The Gulag Archipelago (quoted from: Scherz-Verlag 1974 München Bern)

Arrest is an instantaneous, shattering thrust, expulsion, somersault from one state to another... The gate to our past life is slammed shut once and for all... It's a blinding flash and a blow, which shifts the present instantly into the past and the impossible into the omnipotent actuality... That's all. And neither for the first hour nor for the first day will you be able to grasp anything else... The traditional image of the arrest is also trembling hands packing for the victim—a change of underwear, a piece of soap, something to eat; and no one knows what is needed, what is permitted, what clothes are best to wear; and the Security agents keep interrupting and hurrying you: 'You don't need anything. They'll feed you there. It's warm there.' (It's all lies. They keep hurrying you to frighten you.)... The traditional image of arrest is also what happens afterward, when the poor victim has been taken away. It's an alien, brutal and crushing force, totally dominating the apartment for hours on end, a breaking, ripping open, pulling from the walls, emptying things from wardrobes and desks onto the floor, shaking, dumping out and ripping apart—piling up mountains of litter on the floor—and the crunch of things being trampled beneath boots. And nothing is sacred in a search!... Nothing is so stupid as to be inadmissible during a search!

—Alexander Solzhenitzyn

4. STRANDED: AMERICAN CIVILIAN INTERNEES IN GERMANY AND OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, 1941-45

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Unlike in the United States—where thousands of immigrants lived who had not yet been naturalized but wanted to live in the US permanently—Americans in Europe generally were there only for a limited period of time. They had, for ex., professional reasons (diplomats, journalists, members of aid organizations, artists on tour, students) or religious obligations (nuns as part of their education): During the war, from December 1941 to May 1945, only a few hundred American citizens fell into those categories. In addition, there were people who (with families) had emigrated to the US years or decades before and had been naturalized there, but who later had returned to their former homeland, mostly for familial reasons (e.g., to support aged parents). It is estimated that up to 1,500 people were affected. As the German armies advanced, such Americans fell into the hands of the Third Reich, which placed them in internment camps as “enemy aliens.” From the very beginning, the Hitler regime planned to exchange them for German citizens who had fallen into Allied hands.

The hope of escaping fates that otherwise threatened people in German-occupied countries (forced labor and deportation as “foreign workers;” resettlement in ghettos; banishment to a concentration camp or death in an extermination camp) through such an exchange was attractive not only to those who could clearly prove American citizenship with a corresponding passport, but also to people who could, for example, prove a legal claim to this citizenship based on a birth in the USA. Since the German authorities were at times keenly interested in being able to offer as many Americans as possible for exchanges, they were relatively generous in reviewing corresponding applications, which were submitted primarily by Jews in occupied Eastern European countries, as they were under particular threat.

In addition to the (real or supposed) American citizens, people who were able to present (real or forged) entry documents from third countries could temporarily benefit from this. In the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, there was an entire section reserved for such “exchange Jews;” the internment camp for “enemy foreigners” in Vittel, in occupied France, contained many people to whom the same applied. This, however, was a very uncertain status. A large number of those who had been temporarily protected by this ploy on the part of the German government was transferred to death camps in the East when interest waned and the Germans, upon a reexamination of the documents, did not recognize them as valid any longer.

As late as February 1945, nonetheless, German authorities officially placed 121 Jewish prisoners from Bergen-Belsen on the exchange list because there were no longer enough Americans to match the 875 equivalents negotiated for the Germans to be exchanged.

As far as verified “genuine” American citizens were concerned, most of them were released during the war in the course of an internee exchange or freed by the Allies as their troops advanced through Europe. The internees’ ordeals, then, seemed to vanish.

4.2.1. GEORGE F. KENNAN - DIPLOMAT

When the Third Reich’s envoy in Washington presented Germany’s declaration of war on the United States on 11 December 1941 he was arrested—contrary to the usual practice for dealing with diplomats. Further members of the diplomatic mission and a number of German journalists were arrested shortly thereafter for the purpose of internment at the Greenbrier Hotel near White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. On 14 December, the same fate befell American diplomats and journalists in Berlin. They were put on a train and taken to a luxury hotel in Bad Nauheim, near Frankfurt/Main, for internment. As the acting First Secretary of the American embassy, George Kennan (then 37) took over the leadership of the American group in Bad Nauheim, which, like the Germans in the USA, was diplomatically supervised by a representative of neutral Switzerland: Both sides carefully observed what the other side was doing to ensure approximately equal conditions. On both sides of the Atlantic the internees independently developed similar measures to counteract idleness and subsequent boredom. Those included an extensive educational program with courses in all areas of knowledge in which members of the group had special skills and abilities (languages, natural and economic sciences, music, sports, etc.). The Americans in Bad Nauheim had a special interest in baseball: They carved bats for themselves and organized themselves into several teams. For internal communication, they also created a camp newspaper, which they ironically called the Bad Nauheim Pudding after the—in their view, indefinable and not very tasty—“typical” German dessert they were served daily. For diplomats and journalists on both sides, the internment ended in May 1942 with a two-sided exchange, for which authorities chartered the Swedish passenger ship SS Drottningholm. George Kennan returned to Europe shortly thereafter and continued his foreign service career—in neutral Portugal.

4.2.2. Philip Whitcomb - Journalist

Born in 1892 in Topeka, Kansas, in 1941 Philip Whitcomb was working in Paris as a correspondent for several American newspapers. When the US entered the war, he was arrested and taken to join other American internees in Bad Nauheim, where he was primarily involved in the education program—whose “presidency” he assumed. Shortly before his arrest, Philip had fallen in love with a Frenchwoman named Genevieve. In May 1942 he was allowed to return to the United States through an exchange program, as was the entire American group in Bad Nauheim, for which the SS Drottningholm was waiting in Lisbon. There, Philip succeeded in breaking away from the group and secretly returned to his beloved Genevieve in Paris, where they married. Not long after, he was arrested again. A second interment followed, which brought him together with the diplomats, journalists and members of aid organizations who were arrested in November 1942 after the German occupation of the until-then-unoccupied “Vichy France” and interned at the Brenner Hotel in Baden-Baden. Having been allowed to take his wife with him, Genevieve became pregnant during internment and gave birth to a son, Giles, in December 1943. Drawing on his experiences in Bad Nauheim, Philip also suggested the creation of an extensive educational program in Baden-Baden. Among the internees, his pragmatic optimism made him an agent of peace. For all the internees, their main torment was that they did not know if and when they would be released. Philip, however, was able to reassure them at least with the thought that matters would not become truly bad for them. He promised: “Our internment here is a minor matter in the total perspective of the war. It will occupy no space in the history of events. We are in one of the most protected situations in all Europe and it is certain we shall be fed because there are so many Germans interned in both North and South America whose treatment is dependent upon how we are treated here.”

4.2.3. GILBERT FOWLER WHITE—RELIEF WORKER

Gilbert Fowler White (born 1911) was an American geographer who worked on government projects. As a Quaker, he advocated the peaceful resolution of conflicts and was not prepared, at age 28, to become a soldier when conscription was (re-)introduced in fall 1940. Instead, he was allowed to do voluntary peace service in Europe with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Quaker aid organization. Gilbert gave up his government job in mid-1942 and went to unoccupied France, where Quakers distributed relief supplies to the suffering population and provided food for thousands of children. These supplies were intended for all French people, but the Quakers paid special attention to the people who lived in camps as refugees or internees, for whom no one else wanted to care. Among the refugees were Spaniards who had fled to France after the defeat of the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War, Germans (Jewish and Non-Jewish) who had gone into exile after the National Socialists took power in Germany and had to flee further when the German armies advanced. Other refugees who could not expect protection from the collaborating Vichy government against Gestapo extradition requests were Jews from Poland, the Netherlands and Belgium who were held in camps or in forced residences. The Quakers realized the danger to such refugees and made a special effort to help Jewish children find refuge in the US. This was only successful in a few cases because the US had long maintained a very restrictive immigration policy. The Quakers began to doubt whether their traditional neutrality and non-partisanship was still appropriate in the face of such a situation. For Gilbert Fowler White and his American comrades, this question became superfluous when, after the American landing in North Africa in November 1942, the Germans also occupied the hitherto unoccupied part of France and arrested all American citizens, then interned them in Germany until they could return to the United States via Lisbon on the MS Gripsholm in February and March 1944.

4.2.4. Freddy Johnson and family

Frederic "Freddy" Johnson, an African-American jazz pianist, was born in the US in 1904. With his wife Ida (also born in 1904) and their two daughters Marilyn (1926) and Jaqueline (1927), he emigrated to Cannes, France, in 1930, hoping for better career opportunities and a better life in Europe, in the face of racism in the United States. He was very successful as a musician, founded his own band and had joint performances and recordings with many celebrities of the time, including Louis Armstrong and Marlene Dietrich. He was considered an important representative of Swing. At the beginning of the Second World War, Freddy lived with his family in the Netherlands—and at first lived undisturbed, as an American citizen. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the entry of the US into the war in December 1941 he was arrested as an enemy alien and imprisoned in a Bavarian internment camp in Tittmoning. A year later, his wife and daughters were also arrested and transferred to the internment camp for foreign women in Liebenau, near Lake Constance. In the camp, Freddy remained active as a musician and played in a band with other internees. In February 1944 Freddy was able to leave the camp as a participant of an internee exchange and traveled to the US on the MS Gripsholm. In June 1944, his wife and daughters were able to join him in another exchange to the US. After his return to New York, Freddy played in a band in New York, but had to earn his living primarily as a piano and singing teacher. In 1959, he went on a European tour, during which he was struck with a serious cancer. Shortly after his return to the US, Freddy died in New York in March 1961.

4.2.5. Chaskel Roth and family

After the German army invaded Poland, a walled ghetto for Jewish residents arose in Bochniam, near Cracow, Poland, where the Roth family lived. When the liquidation of the ghetto began in 1942, Chaskel Roth and his family were able to hide behind a fake wall in the house of non-Jewish friends. Then, they received information that the Germans were looking for foreigners living in Poland to exchange for Germans held abroad: Chaskel saw this as an opportunity for himself and his family, since he assumed that he had been born in the US in 1903 when his parents had lived there for some time—in an ultimately aborted attempt to emigrate and settle there. Chaskel left the hiding place with his family and reported to the Gestapo as an American longing for exchange. The family was then separated and sent to two different internment camps in Germany. Chaskel's wife Rywa was sent with their two daughters to Liebenau,

Chaskel to the Tittmoning camp: A family reunion took place in August 1943 in an internment camp in German-occupied France, in a former hotel complex in the health resort of Vittel in the Vosges Mountains. This camp was intended for foreigners of different nationalities who were held ready for exchanges: Chaskel's and his family's goals seemed fulfilled. In February 1944, they traveled by train via Spain to Lisbon and from there on the MS Gripsholm to New York—but, without a happy ending: Chaskel could not prove that he was born in the US, so he and his relatives were denied entry; instead, the whole family was detained on Ellis Island. After a few months, entry was finally allowed by way of temporary toleration, but until 1950 that meant a permanent threat of possible deportation. And, unlike all the other exchange passengers on the Gripsholm, the Roth family had to pay for their own passage, which was a heavy burden for many years.

4.2.6. ANNETTA (LEAH) LEBEAU

Almost all American Catholic congregations are dependencies of religious orders with headquarters in Europe—many in France. It is therefore custom for nuns to spend a certain amount of time—usually one or two years—there to complete their religious education. Thus, at the outbreak of the Second World War, nuns of many orders were in France, at first relatively untouched by what was happening around them. One of these nuns was Sister Annetta (born 1918 in the Dakotas), whose birth name was Leah LeBeau. In July 1939, she had come to Brittany with six sisters from the order Sisters Mary of the Presentation, with plans to stay for two years. When the group wanted to return to the US in 1941, they were denied passage through the unoccupied part of France, so that they could not make an already firmly-booked ship passage. After the US entered the war, the nuns were left unmolested in their monastic refuge for several months before they were arrested on 25 September 1942 and taken to the Vittel internment camp. Vittel was a reception camp for foreigners of many nations who were waiting for an opportunity to leave the country, including—with the tacit agreement of the Nazi authorities—many Jews who had been able in one way or another to obtain entry documents to various countries. These people lived in permanent danger that these papers might be declared invalid and they would be deported to an extermination camp—a danger that did not exist for the American nuns. Nuns of different religious orders were accommodated together on the top floor of the Hotel Continental, where they could practice their religion unhindered. In the camp, they engaged in the care of the Jewish children, whom they wanted to offer as untroubled a time as possible, despite knowing that their life was in danger: A large majority of the children they cared for were eventually deported and murdered. The American nuns from Vittel were able to leave for the US in March 1944 as part of an internee exchange.

4.2.7. Jizchak Katzenelson and son

Jizchak Katzenelson was born in 1886 in Karelicz, Belarus. Soon thereafter, his family moved to Łódź, Poland. As of 1911, Jizchak—who had started writing songs at the age of 13—published plays in Hebrew and Yiddish. By 1912, he had founded a Hebrew theater, Jewish kindergartens and elementary schools in Łódź, where he continued to live as a teacher. In November 1939, two months after the German invasion of Poland, he fled with his wife and three sons to Warsaw, where they were trapped in the ghetto. There, Jizchak ran an underground school for Jewish children. He was actively involved in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in April 1943. In order to save his life, the command of the Jewish combat organization procured forged Honduran papers for him and smuggled him into the “Aryan part” of Warsaw, where he, like many others, hoped in vain to reach freedom via the Hotel Polski. Instead, Jizchak was sent to a special concentration camp in Vittel on the edge of the Vosges Mountains. There, mainly American and British citizens were interned who were to be exchanged for interned Germans in enemy countries. In Vittel he wrote his poem *Lid funm ojsgehargetn yidischen folk* (“Song of the Murdered Jewish People”). Together with his fellow prisoner Miriam Novitch—who survived—he buried the manuscript, packed in bottles, under a tree, where it was excavated after the camp was liberated by the Allies on 12 September 1944. Here it was excavated after the camp was liberated by the Allies on 12 September 1944. Some months before, in late April 1944, Jizchak and his seventeen-year-old son Zwi had been deported in “Convoy 72” to Auschwitz, where they were gassed in early May 1944. In February 1945, even before the end of the war, former fellow prisoner Nathan Eck published Jizchak's poem *Lid funm ojsgehargetn yidischen folk* in the original Yiddish version in Paris, as he had promised Jizchak in Vittel to publish the poem, in case the poet would not survive the war.

4.3. JESCKE'S GRAND HOTEL AMERICAN INTERNEES IN BAD NAUHEIM

After the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941, diplomatic relations between the United States and Germany abruptly ended. Along with journalists and a few other Americans still inside Nazi Germany, the diplomatic corps awaited a decision regarding their fate – even as embassy staff hurriedly destroyed records. After authorities in Washington decided to arrest German correspondents in the United States, American correspondents in turn were placed under house arrest in Berlin, guarded by the Gestapo.

Three days later, nearly all American diplomats who had remained in Germany- including Leland Morris and George F. Kennan- were joined by Associated Press reporter Louis Lochner. In total, about 115 people gathered at the American embassy in Berlin. Kennan took charge amid chaos and confusion, and organized events.

The American's hadn't expected they would be travelling en masse by train. It was only when Kennan saw the luncheon menu, headed "Berlin – Bad Nauheim," that they realized their destination. The group were transported and held at Jeschke's Grand Hotel, in Bad Nauheim, where they were to remain for five months.

The Grand Hotel had closed with the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939-its staff dispersed. The hotel director, Gistav Zorn, had remained in residence, but without staff, this summer hotel had burst water pipes and no heating or electricity; furniture, linens, silver, curtains, and other accoutrements had been placed in storage; The hotel was not prepared for this sudden occupancy.

The hotel was surrounded by Gestapo guards, which limited the American's freedom and access to outdoor space. Kennan worked with Captain Valentin Patzak (the German authority for operations at Bad Nauheim) to negotiate this and all other hotel related demands during the internment period. Kennan also had his hands full dealing with the Americans who were full of complaints about food, general conditions, amenities, heating, or lack thereof- in short, everything.

The Americans were very unhappy with the food, and the amount served, so Kennan and Morris met with representative groups to discuss this and to find solutions. They drafted a strong protest statement that was issued to the State Department, through neutral Swiss representatives. Before they received a response, the Germans doubled the Americans' rations to 200 percent of the regular civilian allowance. Food preparation improved to the point that it was at least edible, and Patzak made great efforts to procure eggs, fruit, fish and fresh vegetables.

Another central issue for the hotel inhabitants was the lack of heat, as the hotel lacked the plant and coal for proper heating. When temperatures in January 1942 dropped to below zero, a protest was again lodged through the Swiss. Patzak used his position to commandeer supplies supposedly meant for a neighboring town and heat was provided.

As April and warmer weather arrived, calisthenics and strength-training exercises became a popular pursuit, with baseball and other outdoors activities following. A newspaper was mimeographed, which gave the journalists an opportunity to use their skills, while also serving as an outlet for communicating, including all kinds of humor and sarcasm.

Through the efforts of Perry Laukhuf and Phillip Whitcomb, Bad Nauheim University formed to provide a gainful pastime. Fourteen instructors volunteered to share from their areas of expertise. Kennan's Russian history course proved to be the most popular. Many other courses, including the American Constitution, were offered, and enthusiastically attended.

On 25 January 1942, a group of Americans from Copenhagen arrived in Bad Nauheim, bringing news that a Portugese ship had sailed for New York to bring back the first US internees being held in Nazi Germany, but the news was full of conflicting rumors. On 29 March, Morris and Kennan received confirmation that the Swedish ship "SS Drottningholm" had sailed to New York, and would then arrive in Lisbon on 5 May with a first exchange of German Internees.

The Americans eventually left Bad Nauheim on 12 May 1942, to much celebration. They arrived in Lison on 14 May and boarded the "SS Drottningholm" on 22 May, along with many other Americans: Once aboard they were finally free from the presence of the Gestapo guards. The internment-weary Americans arrived in New York City on 30 May.

Details of this experience have been recorded in "An American Island in Hitler's Reich: The Bad Nauheim Internment" (All pictures come from this and were originally used in a TRACES exhibit in 2005, with permission.) It's author, Charles Burdick, had recounted the story as described by Kennan and Lochner in the "American experience" and then elaborated upon their record of events.

5. SPONSORS

5.1. MICHAEL LUICK-THRAMS - DIRECTOR OF TRACES-SPUREN

Having grown up on his family's Century Farm in Northcentral Iowa, Dr. Michael Luick-Thrams (Ph.D. awarded by Humboldt Universität in Berlin, 1997) used to listen rapt as his maternal grandmother told him endless stories of how their ancestors came from the Old World and slowly settled the New, from before the American Revolution into the early 20th century. It was there that he began to appreciate the contribution of ordinary people to larger world events; that he began to see "history" as the story "from the ground up, not the heavens downward"—social history rather than accounts of states. Michael divides his time between Germany and the American Heartland. He serves as executive director of a non-profit, educational organization in each country—respectively, Spuren e.V. and TRACES Center for History and Culture; both provide social-history-based programming to educational and cultural institutions. He is the author of Turkeyfoot: What is Our BIG Problem, about his 2016 campaign for the US Senate from Iowa; and a genealogically-based Midwest social-history series, Oceans of Darkness, Oceans of Light: Our Troubles and Treasures in the New World. (Find the author's works on Amazon.)

5.2. Jörg Seiler - Sponsor of Spuren e.V.

Dr. Jörg Seiler (Ph.D. awarded by Universität Würzburg, 2001) says, "History lives because people tell their stories. Because I am not indifferent to people, I studied theology, and because I am not indifferent to how we became who we are today, I studied history". On his career path, Jörg encountered many formative experiences: Spirituality, science, teaching and pedagogy, administration and a little marketing. Since his youth he has been engaged in different areas for the greater humanization of our world, especially in peace and one-world projects. Jörg was born in Swabia in 1966, into a family with many children. Coincidentally growing up in Schloss Ludwigsburg, the castle and its gardens were fantastic playgrounds, so that dealing with the past (and its relics) became commonplace. Jörg's conviction remains: "I believe that historical thinking helps to better understand social and individual life." Today, he works as a church historian at Universität Erfurt.