

From Afrika Korps to Beet Fields

German POWs in Montana Newspapers

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Cliff Notes

A Quartermaster officer watched Rommel's Afrika Korps arrive in 1943 and was disappointed to find no Supermen, though he was pleased they'd be housed better than the starving Allied prisoners he saw in 1918.

A Staff Sergeant at Camp Hale, Colorado was cleared of "trafficking commercially" with German prisoners of war. Give people a captive market and someone will try to sell to it.

Seven German POWs were hanged at Fort Leavenworth for murdering a fellow prisoner they believed was a traitor, after claiming German newspapers had told them to.

Montana's record sugar beet crop was brought in by 900 prisoners of war and Mexican nationals, with the POW count expected to hit 1,567. The public wanted its sugar, the sugar companies wanted their beets, and the labor was whoever was available.

JRL Looks Over German Prisoners

Source: The Havre Daily News (Montana), Sep 20, 1943, Page 4. <mthspub-lic.newspapers.com>

There was quite a stir around these parts this week as our camp received some contingents of German prisoners of war ... Quite a large detention camp has been constructed here and there was keen interest this week as the krauts arrived to help fill it up ... Military police kept unauthorized persons at a respectful distance from their charges, but because the men marched by my spread, I had a good look ... They are from Field Marshal Rommel's onetime Afrika Korps and most of them arrived in shorts and desert fatigue clothing not unlike some of the tropical uniforms furnished our own men ... I looked closely but failed to detect a single individual who resembled Superman ... They looked just like young men of any army, physically fit and of average age ... A few wounded and convalescents were helped into motor trucks but the others marched in the perfect cadence which is characteristic of all well disciplined troops but most especially German soldiers ... Their mission here is pretty much of an official mystery yet, but it is believed they will be used on labor operations not directly connected with the war.

These Jerries are being housed in quarters equal in quality to those occupied by our own soldiers ... I was struck by the difference between their appearance today and that of the thousands captured by our forces in France in 1918 ... These men seemed to wear clothing of fair quality and were in excellent physical condition, where as the prisoners of the dying days of the Hohenzollern era were ragged, hungry and in poor

shape generally ... Of course these men have had the advantage of good care and food since their capture, but nevertheless I'd say that if these troops are typical of those still fighting for Germany her manpower problem is still not too critical ... There were few boys in the ranks and no old men, whereas many of those I saw in France were either mere babes or else past middle age ... Hence any optimism inspired by hope that Germany is weakened seriously, yet, is not justified ... It is quite possible, of course, that these men were especially selected for their youth and vigor, with the idea of getting some constructive work out of them, but in any event these specimens looked like tough hombres, and I have no personal doubt but what Germany is still provided with plenty more like them and that our men will meet them in due time ... The final battles will be no pushover.

The sorriest sight of all in 1918 was the thousands of Allied prisoners released from German prison camps following the Armistice ... On the verge of starvation herself, Germany wasted no food or clothing on her war prisoners, so they straggled into France in all stages of emaciation and virtual nakedness ... I saw hundreds who arrived without underwear, without soles on their boots; many without shirts or trousers ... These last were clothed principally in long overcoats of wood fibre manufacture ... All were bearded and crawling with lice ... French, Russian, Italian and Rumanian—they all hiked into France and made for the nearest American outfit which would care for them ... The prisoners arriving here stepped off the train shaven and clean as to person ... They will have ample soap, shower-baths and reconditioned army clothing, in addition to proper food; so the war is nicely over for them if they behave themselves and thus avoid the undoubtedly twitchy trigger fingers of their guards ... Better contrast this with the stories we hear of Japanese treatment of our men and then buy a few more bonds for more tools for more Yanks ... U. S. soldiers returning from the European fronts seem to have no particular hatred for their German opponents—they are merely enemies to be beaten as expeditiously as possible ... Those drifting back from the Far East, however, are utterly vicious in their consuming hatred for Japs ... It's rather unlikely that we shall see many Jap prisoners ... Our boys seem inclined to the belief that the only good Jap is one who is very, very dead! ... Well, they asked for it and here is one guy who is positive they are going to get it!

In addition to my other duties here, I am now operating two filling stations and a gasoline bulk plant! ... The trade is all military but business is plenty brisk and we have no credit problems! ... The boys just sign for it and then go out and burn it up! ... Over 200,000 gallons last month and much more business in sight now that we have a new combat outfit here with all its myriad motor vehicles ... So, in my new job I find myself a combination Sears Roebuck (clothing). Safeway Stores (chow) and Standard Oil company ... Lotsa work and many problems to keep me from growing too fat and sassy, but at least I feel useful again ... Still hot here and very dry. with numerous forest fires breaking out ... My men are constantly called out to battle these blazes, so half the time I don't know whether I am a general merchant or a forest ranger! ... The trees and brush don't burn as rapidly as they do in our own mountain country, but

once started they are tough to put out because they smolder so persistently ... One, thing I can say for the Quartermaster Corps is that to work isn't monotonous ... A different kind of job pops up almost every day! ... I should be a most versatile gent before I am through with this outfit ... Well, it is bedtime, G bye! ... JRL.

People in the News

Source: The Havre Daily News (Montana), April 04, 1944, page 4. <mthspub-
lic.newspapers.com>

By United Press

Secretary of Navy Frank Knox today announced the appointment of Rear Admiral F. E. M. Whiting, 52, Watertown, N. Y., former commander of the southeast Pacific naval force, as commandant of the new 17th naval covering Alaska and the Aleutians, with headquarters at Adak.

Manpower Chief Paul V. Mc-Nutt today instructed regional WMC directors to plan the recruitment of 64,000 additional workers in the fishing industry to meet estimated 1944 requirements of 5,300,000,000 pounds of fish products.

Pan American airways, answering a 31,010,000 damage suit filed by Singer Jane Frohman following the 1943 Lisbon crash of the yankee clipper held today that the company was not liable under terms of the 1929 Warsaw convention.

Comedians Laurel and Hardy are going to be starred in a 20th Century-Fox film on bullfighting to be made in Mexico this summer.

Edward H. Shaffer, 40, editor of the Albuquerque, N. M., Tribune, died last night. He had been ill for two years.

Hugh Wilton, Los Angeles apartment house operator, was sentenced to 90 days in Jail and ordered to pay a 35,000 fine for violating OPA rent ceilings.

Brownhaired Actress Kathryn Grayson has climaxed a hectic, three-year marriage to Lt. Edward S. Price, known on the screen as John Shelton, by announcing she intends to divorce him.

S-Sgt. Guido Gundisoh of Milwaukee has been cleared of charges of "trafficking commercially" with German prisoners of war at Camp Hale, Colo.

Enough hybrid seed corn to plant 1,500,000 acres this year resulted from work of 531 boys in Indiana.

Seven German War Prisoners Hanged

Source: The Big Timber Pioneer (Montana), August 30, 1945, page A4. <mth-
spublic.newspapers.com>

FORT LEAVENWORTH, Kan., Aug. 25—The army Saturday hanged seven German prisoners-of-war in the Fort Leavenworth disciplinary barracks for the murder of a fellow prisoner whom they had accused of being a traitor to the reich.

All seven went to the gallows after receiving last rites of the Roman Catholic church. They were executed for killing Werner Dreschler at the Papago Park, Ariz., prisoner of war camp March 13, 1944.

The hangings took less than three hours.

The executions brought to 14 the total number of Nazi prisoners-of-war executed at Fort Leavenworth during the last few weeks.

The seven went to the gallows without showing any signs of emotion. They had signed statements admitting their guilt. Their defense was that they read in German newspapers that they should put to death any German who was a traitor. At their trial they said Dreschler had admitted giving information of military value to the United States.

Beet Harvest Starts in Two Districts

Source: The Havre Daily News (Montana), September 26, 1945, page 6. <mth-public.newspapers.com>

HELENA, Sept. 26. (UP) — Harvesting of Montana's record sugar beet crop was under way in two eastern districts today, despite stormy weather last week, the bureau of agricultural economics reported today.

Harvesting has started in the Kinsey region near Miles City and in the Billings district of the Great Western Sugar Co. with over 900 prisoners of war and Mexican nationals in the field, it was reported.

However, rain and snow has virtually stopped harvest operations in northern Montana and has caused damage to some crops.

But on the brighter side of the picture the stormy weather materially benefited fall seeded grains, ranges and pastures, the bureau said, by providing needed moisture.

Small grains were mostly removed from fields ahead of the storm, it was reported, but some bundled wheat in scattered irrigated localities remained to be threshed. A few late seedings of grains in Beaverhead county had failed to reach maturity and received some damage from frost.

Harvest of flaxseed, potatoes, beans, corn and late cuttings of hay was temporarily delayed by the bad weather, but maturity of potatoes and corn was hastened by the frost, the report said.

It was pointed out that moisture supplies had greatly improved in the major winter wheat area, comprising north central and central counties.

Harvesting of sugar beets was expected to get under way in all remaining districts this week.

Approximately 60 nationals were working in the fields for the Holly Sugar company of Sidney, while 900 prisoners of war were working in beet fields of the Billings district, which includes Bridger, Laurel and Forsyth regions. The number of POW's employed was expected to reach 1,567 by the end of this week.

The Ted K Archive

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