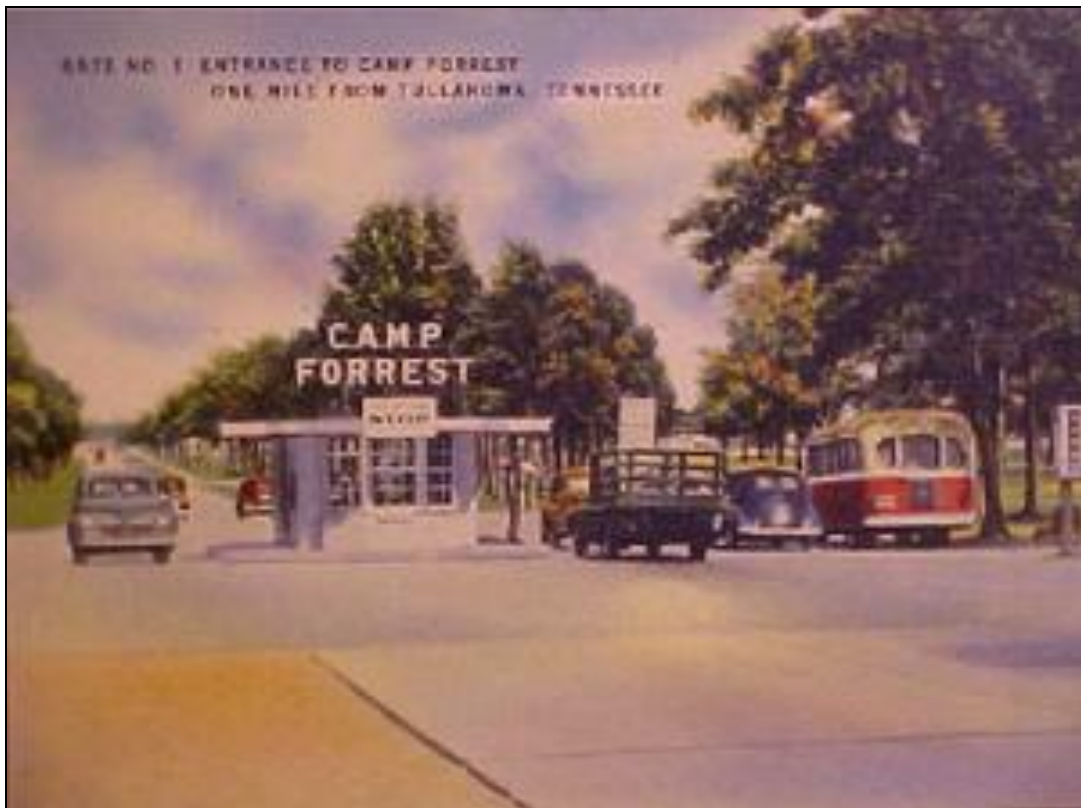


Major Semester Project

World History - Hauck



Interviews of Three People Who Worked at a World War II POW Facility, Camp Forrest, near Tullahoma, Tennessee

By

Jacob Worthington

May 1, 2008

Introduction

For my project, I interviewed three people:

- My maternal grandmother, LP, worked at a Prisoner of War (POW) camp, one of over 150 camps which the United States operated during World War II. In doing this project, I learned a lot about my grandmother, but I also learned even more about POW camps from my research.
- My grandmother's friend, DS, also worked at Camp Forrest. Mrs. S provided additional information by phone from her home in Shelbyville, Tennessee.
- Mr. Louis Buzek responded to an email sent to persons who had provided information about Camp Forrest on a website (<http://www.campforrest.com> - maintained by Mr. Steve Speers, whose father was a Korean War POW). Mr. Buzek, who worked at Camp Forrest from 1942 to 1946, agreed to be interviewed by phone from his home in Tryon, North Carolina.

Additionally, Ms. Linda Cole, daughter of an interpreter at Camp Forrest, provided a sketch of Camp Forrest made by a POW, and excerpts from a chapter in a book about Camp Forrest written by an internee.

Interview with LP

Jacob: Grandma, could you first tell me a little bit about yourself, such as when you were born and where you grew up?

Mrs. P: I was born in Liberty, Tennessee, in 1919, and lived there until the summer of 1932, when my family moved to Winchester, Tennessee. After high school, I went to business college in Nashville, Tennessee.

Jacob: Where were you when you heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941?

Mrs. P: We (my family) were listening to the radio in Winchester when we heard about it.

Jacob: What kind of work did you do after the US became involved in World War II?

Mrs. P: World War II began shortly after I graduated from business college in 1940. By this time, my family had moved to Tullahoma, Tennessee. My first job with the federal government was in 1942 for the Rent Control Office. There were about ten people working in our office. Since a lot of people were trying to find housing, our job was to make sure that rents

were fair and controlled for apartments, hotels, and any other kinds of lodging.

Jacob: How you did you come to work for the POW camp?

Mrs. P: I changed jobs in 1943 and started working as a stenographer (grade 2) at an Army Air Corps Base in Tullahoma. Camp Forrest was just outside of Tullahoma. In 1945, I went to work at the POW camp, also located at Camp Forrest, where I got a higher-grade job as a stenographer (grade 3). My younger sister, Virginia, and my friend, Mrs. S, also worked at this camp as secretaries to some of the doctors.

Jacob: What did your parents think about your working at a POW camp?

Mrs. P: They were just grateful that we had jobs.

Jacob: What about your brothers? What were they doing at this time?

Mrs. P: My older brother, John, a soldier, was shot in the face in battle when he was in Germany. The bullet went in one side of his face and came out of the other side. He was flown back to a hospital in Ohio. My parents drove up to Ohio to visit him. I think that he received a purple heart for his service. My younger brother, Tom, volunteered for the Marines (I think), but he was rejected due to being flat-footed. My baby brother, James, was only about 12 years old at the time, so he was at home in school.

Jacob: From my research, I learned that Camp Forrest originally housed German and Italian internees (aliens who were rounded up and imprisoned when the war first broke out), but that in 1942 the internees were relocated and the camp was used exclusively for German and Italian POWs. What kinds of people were housed at this camp when you were there?

Mrs. P: Just the POWs were there by the time I started working there.

Jacob: How were you able to get the job there?

Mrs. P: My previous experience with the Federal Government at the Army Air Corps base helped me to get this job since I was an experienced civilian employee.

Jacob: What did you do in your job at the POW camp?

Mrs. P: I was a clerk stenographer. I performed shorthand dictation for various military staff and interrogators. This included letters, notes, and records of interrogations. The interrogations were quite lengthy, too. After

I finished dictation, I would type everything and turn it over to whomever I was taking dictation from.

Jacob: Do you remember any of the details of the interrogation records?

Mrs. P: No, I can't remember details of the interrogations; that was so long ago.

Jacob: What was your salary for your job?

Mrs. P: I don't remember exactly how much I made, but it was paid at one of the lowest pay grades for federal employees at the time. I think that the only lower grades were for file clerks.

Jacob: I read that everything was rationed at that time (fuel, food, clothing, rubber, typewriters, refrigerators, etc.) Where did you live, and how did you make ends meet with all of the shortages?

Mrs. P: My family and other people of that period had always been frugal. One funny thing that I remember is that once when I went into a little store to buy eggs, the woman looked at me and said that I couldn't have them because I didn't trade there all of the time.

Jacob: I also read that ration stamps (coupons) were given to families based on size of family, ages, and income. Did you receive additional ration stamps because of your work at the POW camp?

Mrs. P: Leather, sugar, and gas were among many things that were rationed. I don't recall using ration stamps, although they may have been issued to my family.

Jacob: Did you wear your civilian clothes to work, or did you have a uniform?

Mrs. P: We wore civilian clothes, and back then women didn't wear slacks (trousers).

Jacob: How did you get to work? Did you have a car, or did you ride with someone?

Mrs. P: I lived at home with my family. My sister had a Chevy convertible that her husband bought her before he went into the service. We drove this car, and carpooled with others.

Jacob: In general, how was your family affected by the war?

Mrs. P: Everybody just adapted to the times, and did what we had to do. Other than the shortages of items, we were all comfortable.

Jacob: Were parts of your job classified?

Mrs. P: I don't think so. I don't recall if they were.

Jacob: Were you allowed to communicate with the prisoners?

Mrs. P: The only POWs that were allowed to be in our work area were the trusties, but I did not talk to them. One time, one of the captains came into the office and said that one of the trusties told him that I looked like his wife, since I was blonde and wore my hair up in a braid.

Jacob: In my research on Camp Forrest, I learned that the prisoners slept in barracks. Did the camp have any electricity, heat, running water, etc?

Mrs. P: Sure, it was a big installation. I didn't go into the area where the POWs were held, but I assume that the POWs had most of the amenities that were common for that period.

Jacob: Were the prisoners respectful to the people who worked at the camp?

Mrs. P: Yes, at least from what I observed based on the way that the trusties acted in the office where I worked.

Jacob: I read that by the end of the war, there were approximately 24,000 POWs under guard at Camp Forrest. How many of them worked?

Mrs. P: I think that most of them probably worked in some way, as trusties, in the kitchen, cleaning, and things like that.

Jacob: I read that the POWs were used in outside work details, such as on farms. Did you ever see them do any work outside of the camp?

Mrs. P: No, I don't recall seeing them once they were outside of the camp.

Jacob: How were the POWs treated inside the camp?

Mrs. P: They were well-treated. I never saw or heard of any maltreatment. However, I did hear about suicides by officers. I am guessing that this is because they were ashamed to be captured, but I'm not sure about this.

Jacob: From research sources, I learned that the US Government created what was called an Intellectual Diversion Program, which was for the purpose of

training the POWs about various American cultural issues and change their views about the US. Do you remember anything about whether the POWs had access to other education or recreation?

Mrs. P: The POWs were about ¼-mile away from where I worked, but I recall seeing and hearing them exercise and play in their band.

Jacob: From pictures of Camp Forrest on the internet, I could see a guard tower. Were there other ways that POWs were confined to the camp? In other words, how were they prevented from escaping?

Mrs. P: There was also fencing around the area where the POWs were held.

Jacob: Were the POWs restrained with chains or handcuffs?

Mrs. P: The trustees did not wear any sort of restraints. I am not sure if there were any of the other POWs that were restrained. I would imagine that only troublemakers would be restrained.

Jacob: Did any of the POWs stay in the United States after they were released?

Mrs. P: The POWs were sent back to Germany before being released, so I am not aware of how many may have returned to the US.

Jacob: In doing research for this project, I read that the earliest recorded escape from a German POW camp was on November 5, 1942, when two prisoners escaped from the train that was transporting them from Cincinnati, Ohio to Camp Forrest. Were there any attempted escapes at Camp Forrest while you worked there?

Mrs. P: I heard that there were some escapes, but that they were caught pretty quickly and returned.

Jacob: I read that at another POW camp in Crossville, Tennessee, the POWs had better food than the Americans because the POWs were mostly officers who were allowed to bring their own chefs to the camp to cook for them. What kinds of food did the POWs at Camp Forrest eat?

Mrs. P: I am pretty sure that they ate the same food as the staff – pretty much just meat and vegetables like we eat now.

Jacob: Where did you eat?

Mrs. P: We ate in a mess hall with the nurses and officers.

Jacob: How did POWs communicate with the Americans since they probably spoke mostly German and Italian?

Mrs. P: They used interpreters. Some of these interpreters were POW trusties.

Jacob: Grandma, how were you able to dictate the interrogations if you didn't speak or understand German or Italian?

Mrs. P: I wasn't present during the actual interrogations. The interrogators would dictate the findings of their interrogations to me in English after interrogating the POWs through interpreters, in German and Italian.

Jacob: So you really couldn't be sure if the interrogator was accurately documenting the discussion. Is this correct?

Mrs. P: Yes, I guess so.

Jacob: How did the local people react to the camp being near their town?

Mrs. P: They were happy to have the jobs and other business generated by the POW camp.

Jacob: I remember reading that the population of Tullahoma before the war was about 4,500, and during the war it grew to 75,000. What happened after the war?

Mrs. P: When the camp closed down in 1946, the local economy suffered greatly. Jobs were eliminated; we had to move to Atlanta to find jobs.

Jacob: Did you ever listen to President Roosevelt's "fireside chats" during the war, and what did you think about what he had to say?

Mrs. P: We frequently listened to the president speak on the radio. Roosevelt was very well-respected. Everyone was more respectful of people in authority back then.

Jacob: Did you ever buy any war bonds?

Mrs. P: Yes, we all bought these bonds all during the war years. They were heavily promoted since they helped fund the war. They were worth \$25 at maturity. I didn't cash them in until after I was married – until they had matured.

Jacob: I read that after the war was over in 1946, Camp Forrest was declared surplus property, and buildings were torn down. What is on the site where Camp Forrest was located?

Mrs. P: Arnold Engineering Development Center is located there now.

Jacob: Thank you for taking time to talk about your experiences at the POW camp.

Interview with Mrs. S

Jacob: Could you first tell me a little bit about yourself, such as where you grew up?

Mrs. S: I grew up in Bedford County, Tennessee.

Jacob: Where were you when you heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941?

Mrs. S: I remember it well. I was at Western Kentucky College in Bowling Green, Kentucky. I was studying in my room. One of the girls down the hall had the radio on. She came down the hall to tell us about the news, and we all gathered around and listened to it. We had a lot of ROTC boys at school, and they were the first ones to go to war.

Jacob: How did you come to work for the POW camp?

Mrs. S: One of my friends was working at Camp Forrest. She was making a lot of money there, so I quit school to go to work there.

Jacob: What did your parents think about your working at a POW camp?

Mrs. S: We made a lot more money than others who had jobs as bank clerks and schoolteachers, so my parents were pleased. They were not concerned for my safety; conditions for employees were safe at Camp Forrest.

Jacob: What did you do in your job at the POW camp?

Mrs. S: . I was secretary to the chief of surgical service.

Jacob: Where did you live, and how did you make ends meet with all of the shortages?

Mrs. S: My sister and I lived in efficiency apartment. It had a kitchen, bath, and one big room. It was very nicely furnished, and had built-in beds. It was a very nice apartment; we were lucky to find it.

Jacob: Did you receive ration stamps?

Mrs. S: We got ration stamps for sugar, gas, and shoes. They came out with some kind of shoes that were not leather, but to buy leather shoes, you had to have stamps.

Jacob: Did you wear your civilian clothes to work, or did you have a uniform?

Mrs. S: We wore civilian clothes - dresses, skirts and blouses. I remember having to iron them. My sister and I would go home on the weekends, and my mother would wash and dry our clothes since we didn't have laundry facilities.

Jacob: How did you get to work? Did you have a car, or did you ride with someone?

Mrs. S: I rode to work with a man who worked in the engineering department or carpenter shop; I paid to ride with him.

Jacob: In general, how was your family affected by the war?

Mrs. S: Mother and Daddy had a grocery store that had all kinds of things beside groceries. I remember that we had everything that we needed or wanted. Nobody had any money, but we didn't suffer.

Jacob: Were you allowed to communicate with the prisoners?

Mrs. S: No.

Jacob: I read that the POWs were used in outside work details, such as on farms. Did you ever see them do any work outside of the camp?

Mrs. S: I never saw them outside of camp.

Jacob: Do you remember anything about whether the POWs had access to recreation?

Mrs. S: One funny thing I recall was that their band used to play a Cole Porter song, "Don't Fence Me In"!

Jacob: Did any of the POWs stay in the United States after they were released?

Mrs. S: One of the German POWs who was a doctor had an aunt living in Toledo, Ohio; he planned to return to join her there after being released in Germany. One POW interpreter trusty named "Negrini" dreaded going

home because the area where he had lived had been occupied by the Russians toward the end of the war.

Jacob: Where did you eat?

Mrs. S: We ate in the mess hall with the doctors and nurses, and had good food.

Jacob: Did you ever buy any war bonds?

Mrs. S: Money was automatically taken out of our paychecks. It wasn't mandatory, but we were expected to buy them.

Jacob: Thank you for taking time to talk about your experiences at the POW camp.

Interview with Louis Buzek

Jacob: Could you first tell me a little bit about yourself, such as when you were born and where you grew up?

Mr. Buzek: I was born in Philadelphia in 1921. We lived in Southern California for a while, and then moved back to Philadelphia.

Jacob: Where were you when you heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941?

Mr. Buzek: I was living on the East Coast, where I was in school at the University of Pennsylvania. I was not aware of the bombing of Pearl Harbor until the following Monday at breakfast. I do recall that classes were suspended at around 10 a.m. so the students could go to various student lounges and listen to President Roosevelt. It was the famous *Day of Infamy* speech.

Jacob: How did you come to work for the POW camp?

Mr. Buzek: I was originally drafted in my junior year at the university, and was rejected due to a medical problem. Later, when they got desperate for soldiers, I called back and they accepted me. I was inducted on October 13, 1942 at Indian Town Gap, Pennsylvania. We were put on a troop train, and after three days, we ended up in a place called Camp Forrest near the city of Tullahoma.

By the way, some of the information that you got from the internet about Camp Forrest is wrong. It was established in 1940 as a training facility for draftees. It eventually ended up costing \$36 million and covered 78,000

acres. Over 20,000 people came from Tennessee, Alabama, etc. to be involved in the construction. This was during the Depression, and people needed jobs.

After construction was completed in 1941, it was used for training of the 33rd infantry and 75th artillery brigade. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the 80th Division (of which I was a member) and the 8th Division came to the post. During this time, Camp Forrest was used exclusively for training of American troops. The camp had a laundry, two movie theaters, coal-fired heaters, electricity, and water.

The entire area up to Nashville was dedicated to army maneuvers and war games. The headquarters for all of this was Camp Forrest. The camp provided employment for 12,000 civilian employees.

Jacob: Then what happened?

Mr. Buzek: The standard procedure included six weeks of basic training in special camps set up for that purpose.

The Japanese had overrun the Pacific. Great Britain was in great difficulties; they were almost out of the war by then. I had been put into Company L of the 317th Infantry Regiment. I was completely unsuited for my placement in the infantry regiment. After a couple of weeks, I came down with pneumonia, and was sent to the station hospital on the camp. When I recovered I went before a Medical Board and was reclassified as Limited Service and transferred to Headquarters Detachment of the Post Headquarters. Thereafter I worked in the Personnel Office.

After training was completed, all soldiers went overseas to England to prepare to invade the continent. Very few soldiers were left at Camp Forrest except for people like me.

We heard that the camp was going to be shut down. Out of concern for the local economy, Senator McKeller and others in power persuaded the War Department to use the camp for something else. Since Camp Forrest had a hospital, they decided to use the camp as a hospital for POWs. Ultimately, it turned into a complete POW camp.

Jacob: I read that the POWs were used in outside work details, such as on farms. Did you ever see them do any work outside of the camp?

Mr. Buzek: POWs were sent to work on farms, but they were treated very well.

The POWs were divided into two groups. The SS group were identified by tattoos on their inner arms. They were Hitler's elite troops. They were kept separate so as not to propagandize other POWs against Americans.

Jacob: How were the POWs treated inside the camp?

Mr. Buzek: The German POWs were treated so well that after the war they returned to visit the area and farms where they worked. Some probably stayed. By the Geneva Agreement, officers could not be made to do physical work.

Jacob: Weren't there also Italian POWs at Camp Forrest?

Mr. Buzek: There may have been a few Italian POWs, but I never heard about them.

Jacob: Do you remember anything about whether the POWs had access to education?

Mr. Buzek: Officers were given educational opportunities. I am not sure about the enlisted men.

Jacob: Where did you eat?

Mr. Buzek: We ate out a lot at local restaurants because we didn't think the food at camp was very good.

Jacob: How did the local people react to the camp being near their town?

Mr. Buzek: Camp Forrest brought employment and prosperity to Tullahoma; previously it was practically a mere railroad stop.

Jacob: Did you ever listen to President Roosevelt's "fireside chats" during the war, and what did you think about what he had to say?

Mr. Buzek: No, we preferred Glenn Miller.

Jacob: Is there anything else that you could tell me about your experiences at Camp Forrest?

Mr. Buzek: After victory in Europe, when the war was limited to Japan, discipline at Camp Forrest was relaxed a great deal. I was staff sergeant at the time. The supply sergeant, who was a wheeler-dealer, arranged for POWs to clean our rooms and make our beds daily in exchange for a couple of packs of cigarettes that we would leave on the beds.

The POWs were very clever. They made art objects and sold them as souvenirs through the supply sergeant and others. This was an open secret.

As part of daily procedures, special orders were issued. We at headquarters saw these. After a while, we noticed that two civilian employees would regularly be given gasoline and cars to go to Oak Ridge. We wondered what was going on since there was nothing in Oak Ridge except for houses, gardens, shops, etc. One time, an Episcopal priest from Tullahoma had to go to the town of Oak Ridge as part of his pastoral duties. When he and his wife returned, they said that they had been told that they weren't allowed to discuss what they had seen. But they thought this was strange since they had seen nothing. I guess you know what happened later; that's where they were working on the atomic bomb...

Jacob: Have you ever been back to Camp Forrest?

Mr. Buzek: I returned many times to visit friends. There is very little to see of Camp Forrest; however, in 1985 or 1986, a memorial was put up there.

Jacob: You remember so many things. How are you able to recall all of this?

Mr. Buzek: I have been working on my memoirs off and on for several years.

Jacob: What did you do after the war?

Mr. Buzek: After I was discharged in 1946 I returned to university and completed my education. I went to work at a large gas utility, eventually working as a computer programmer. I retired in December 1984 and the next month moved to my present home in North Carolina.

Jacob: Thank you for taking time to talk about your experiences at the POW camp.

Other Correspondence

Ms. Linda Cole provided the following information by email:

Your project sounds so interesting. I would love to see the finished report if you wouldn't mind sharing it. It was my father who was stationed at Camp Forrest. He was born in Germany and so spoke fluent German, even though he came to the USA when he was three. We really didn't know much about his work at the camp until after his death. Though, it is obvious he was there as an interpreter. My sister and I discovered a pack of sketches under his bed. These sketches were done by some of the POWs at the camp. I will try to e-mail some of these sketches. The one of the camp itself might be a nice illustration for your report. The little bit of research that I have done on Camp Forrest led me to a book Let the Chips Fall written by Eric Krannitz, a former internee at Camp Forrest. According to his story, they were not happy with the cook there, so they volunteered to do the cooking and, while learning on the job, did it very well. Eric did do work for farmers in the area (all the able-bodied Americans were in Europe, after all). Anyway, he kept in touch with the family he worked for and received Christmas presents from them, etc. After the war, he returned to the USA, as did a great number of German POWs. That speaks well for the way they were treated, in my mind.

Following are some other interesting pictures that I found when doing my research for this interview.



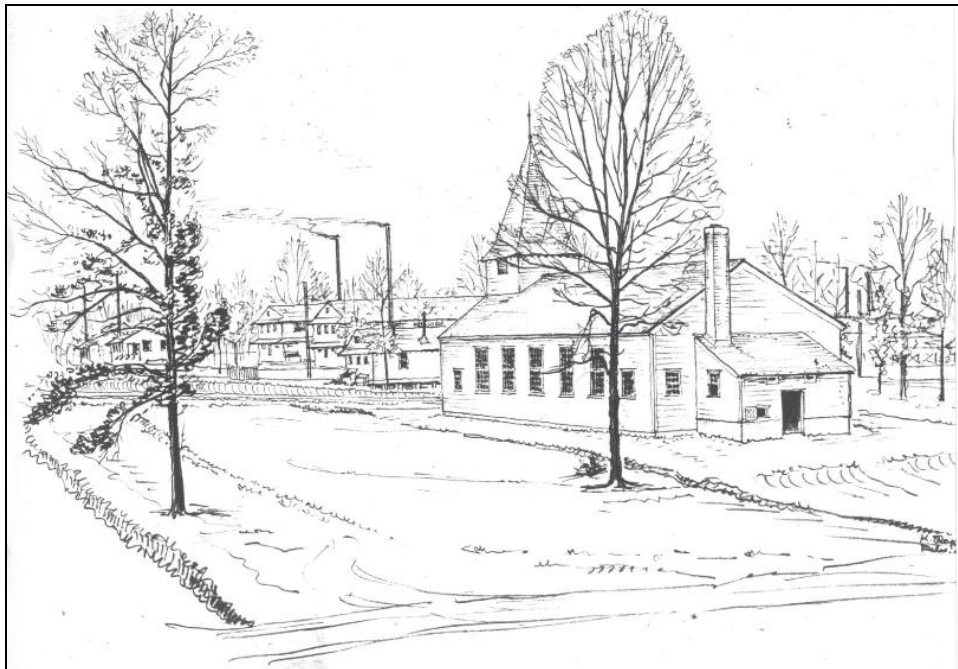
Pictures above of Camp Forrest guard tower, and buildings; and front entrance postcard illustration on cover page are from:
http://www.gaic.info/camp_usarmy.htm



The photos above are of Camp Forrest from:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camp_Forest



The photo above is of Camp Forrest mess hall from:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camp_Forest



This is a sketch of Camp Forrest made by a POW - provided by Ms. Linda Cole.
After Camp Forrest closed, the church in the foreground was sold for \$10,
relocated, and is still in use as a church in Benton, Tennessee.

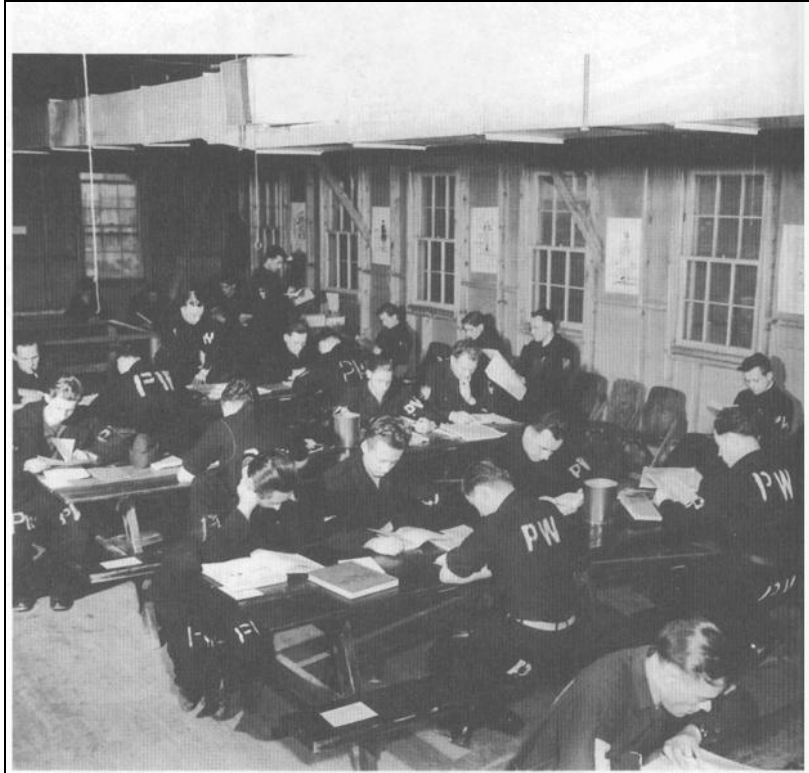


Fig. 6. German POWs cramming for an exam on “The Principles of Democracy,” at the School for Democracy, Fort Eustis, Virginia, 1946.



Fig. 2. Distribution of POW Camps in the United States (1944).

From: Ron Robin, *The Barbed-Wire College: Reeducating German POWs in the United States During World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, c1995).