



CONSULTANT: S. Cooper Malone

DATE OF BIRTH: June 18, 1920 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: September 26, 2000

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Malone farm, Lake Arthur, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER: Marcie Palmer

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM   x   OTHER           

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ABTRACTOR: Marcie Palmer

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QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Recollections of a farmer whose family employed Germans prisoners of war as farm laborers during World War II.

DATE RANGE: 1943 - 1946

## **ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):**

### **TAPE ONE, SIDE A:**

In 1925, Mr. Malone's parents began farming along the Chavez and Eddy county lines. During World War II they employed about twenty to thirty German prisoners of war from camps in Roswell and Artesia. Mr. Malone recalls that the Germans disliked picking cotton and would rather run farm machinery and learn how to farm.

Mr. Malone says the prisoners were not allotted meat so his mother would make them a thin soup of mutton to supplement the packed lunches they brought with them. The Malones also shared what rationed sugar and coffee they could spare.

The Malones raised cotton and alfalfa and the German workers loved to rake or cut hay, the consultant remembers.

The family was building its main farmhouse and employed the Germans to dig a deep basement by hand, Mr. Malone says, because there was no heavy machinery for excavation. The Germans were "good, thrifty workers," he recalls. He thinks the prisoners who worked at the Malone farm were intelligent and industrious.

The prisoners of war mainly did hand labor, Mr. Malone recalls. Without their help he thinks the crops would have gone unharvested. The army's primary concern in asking farmers and others to employ POWs was to keep discipline problems down by giving them something to do away from camp. The prisoners were "really delighted" to get out of camp and see the valley and farms, Malone says.

Just before the war ended in 1945, the Malones had probably the "most superior" prisoners helping them of any time. They were the elite of the German forces, says Mr. Malone, who knew Germany was losing the war and just wanted to go back home.

He believes there was no opposition to having POWs in the area because there was no other farm labor available.

Mr. Malone thinks escapes were not a problem because the POWs wanted food and security until the end of the war. He cannot remember any disciplinary problems on the farm although sometimes the Germans would go to sleep in the rows when they did not want to pick any more cotton. The guards would sleep then, too.

Each farmer had to furnish transportation for the prisoners and the Malones used a bobtail truck with sideboards on it. He says the camp sent one guard with the group.

The farmers paid the prisoners about forty or fifty cents an hour, as he recalls, and gave the money to a government agency. He thinks farmers gave records to the camp commander showing the number of workers and amount paid.

The German workers were always glad to go to the Malone farm because "we did treat them like human beings" and tried to see their side. Their intelligence and willingness to work were only limited by their unfamiliarity with farming by irrigation.

One or two Germans in a work detail could speak English and would translate instructions for the others, who then "went after it" with exceptional industry.

He says the POWs wanted to send a food supplement to their families in Germany, like the small amounts of coffee and sugar the Malones shared with them. He did not know if they were successful.

Many of the American soldiers assigned to guard prisoners on the farm were not as highly educated and as well trained as the prisoners but there was never any animosity.

Several former POWs wrote to the Malones after the war and asked for foodstuffs. He cannot recall if his family sent anything because of shortages here in the United States.

It was “understood” that the camp did not want the farmers to fraternize with the prisoners. The prisoners did not want to fraternize and only wanted food supplementation, he adds. He feels there was still congeniality: the prisoners would ask the Malones about their family and would tell them about their families in Germany. The POWs got along with the Mexican-Americans and undocumented Mexican nationals who worked on the farm.

After the war the Malones employed Mexican nationals as farm workers under the bracero program, which allowed Mexican nationals to live and work on farms in the United States. The family also employed migrant farm workers but not during the war when most of them would have been in the service. The extra help was needed because harvesting was not mechanized.

Mr. Malone thinks the prison camp officials did a good job in administering the work details but he says “we didn’t take any pride” in the minimal camp facilities behind barbed wire fencing. He adds, though, that his family had no electricity, refrigeration or water well when they first began to farm and the prisoners were perhaps in a similar situation. The Malones began farming during the Depression after Mr. Malone’s father lost his hardware business in Roswell. Mr. Malone feels farm workers today are better off than people who started farming during the drought and the Depression.

Because of polio, Mr. Malone says he was ineligible for service and so joined the Civil Air Patrol.

Prisoners in the United States “were controlled by the book” or the camp commanders would have been in trouble, the consultant says. Farmers who employed POWs understood there was to be no abuse and were expected to help with supplementing the prisoners’ lunches.