



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: W.A. "Bill" Phipps

DATE OF BIRTH: January 15, 1920 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: July 27, 2000

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Deaf Smith County Museum, Hereford, Texas

INTERVIEWER: Robert L. Hart

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM x OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: March 1, 2001

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Robert L. Hart

DATE ABSTRATED: March 30, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good. But Phipps, a New Englander, frequently uses agrammatical phraseology, and his sentences trail off in volume and intelligibility.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Phipps served first as the postmaster for the camp and later as the first sergeant of Compound 4 (Officer's Compound) at the Hereford, Texas, POW camp during World War II. He describes his duties and wartime treatment of Italian prisoners.

DATE RANGE: 1943 - 1945

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Phipps describes his arrival with the first fifteen soldiers at Camp Hereford (400th MPEG). When the first Italians arrived, the guards had no ammunition. Describes separation of prisoners into different compounds: one, "brown shirts"; two, workers in the fields; three, empty; four, officers.

Description of "brown shirt" hostility. Denies famine stories. Anecdote of the Italian general who didn't sign out and his punishment (as well as that of the American officer of the day). Story of discovery of the escape tunnel. Prisoner's knowledge of train schedules. Discusses camp incidents. Sick call malingering which with a change of command was solved with dosings of castor oil.

Chooses to come to Hereford after being wounded as an engineer. Had prisoner assistants: interpreter and company clerk. No rank in compound; everyone a POW. Cartoon book done by company clerk Angelo Notoli of himself (Phipps) dealing with POWs. Also a portrait painted of Phipps.

Discusses division between "brown shirts" and communists. Hands off policy with Compound One ("brown shirts"). Fire department not allowed into compound story.

Idiosyncrasies of camp commanders. Col. Hall feuding with the preachers. Prisoner religious services. Captioned movies.

Five prisoners died at Hereford. Guard passes out from heat on field detail and prisoners give him back his gun. Tunnel story, Compound Four. Field detail guard ratio: one to fifteen/twenty prisoners. Mail censoring duties. Searching prisoner packages. V-mail letters after the war to Hereford resident.

Prisoners were treated with respect and without respect to rank. One escapee made it "downstate" before being returned to camp. One hid under the hospital building. Escapees might hitchhike or possibly have help from relatives.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Relatives were allowed to come and visit POWs. Had a visitation area.

Phipps left in February and camp closed in April [1946].

Close-knit camp administration. Officers had to see NCOs to get anything. Jake Shyroch, quartermaster; mess sergeants. Camp commander's steak story. Procuring rationed items was not a problem. Sugar for girlfriends' home. Lieutenant Brown's morning hike made men miss breakfast. Technical Sergeant Jimmy Trindele, commissary and officer's club. Enjoyed Compound Four duty more than post office. Camp commander's wife's visit story [enlisted men's revenge]. Civilians would bring their own alcohol to the officers' club because the county was dry; purchased booze in Clovis. Works as a bartender. Postwar POW contact. Interpreter's wife came back to visit. Letter from Emilio Jury (in possession of interviewers). Participated in interviews by college students from Canyon, TX and has written some articles.

Had a POW-made cigarette lighter (cannot find) and has a twin-engine aluminum airplane model. POW-made ring from a dime was given to their youngest daughter. Craftsmanship.

Possible additional contact: Waylon Smith, Amarillo. The farmers are long gone. Grace Covington is at the hospital on Mondays; her husband worked at the camp.

First he held the postmaster job first; then assumed first sergeant duties. Two years at postmaster job. First sergeant duties: check food delivered, clothing needs. Digresses to tell of a prank of— molasses-in-the-shoes trick and a second prank—bed and mattress in the latrine.