



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Warren Gillie

DATE OF BIRTH: March 3, 1921. GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: August 3, 2000

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Cochise College, Sierra Vista, Arizona

INTERVIEWER: Mollie Pressler

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM OTHER

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: March 19, 2001

NUMBER OF TAPES: Two

ABTRACTOR: Sheila Klug

DATE ABSTRACTED: May 7, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Narrative covers his career in the Army, concentrating on his work with German prisoners of war in Lordsburg, Las Cruces, and Fort Bayard, New Mexico.

DATE RANGE: 1940-2000

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Mr. Gillie describes his enlistment in the army in 1940 although he had gone to sign up for flying lessons. After he broke his back swimming in Lake Michigan, he spent a year in an army hospital. Following that he was deemed fit only for administrative work and was taught to type. He was assigned to Fort Totten, New York, and did clerical work while there. From there he was transferred to Newport, Rhode Island, then to Fort Bliss, Texas, then to Lordsburg, New Mexico.

He started as a mess sergeant, but when it was discovered that he could type, he was transferred to Fort Bayard, New Mexico, near Silver City, taking with him 100 German prisoners, seventeen guards, and two officers.

One time he had to take a German prisoner to Lordsburg to the hospital. He brought another German prisoner back with him. It turned out that the new prisoner insisted he could not stay at Fort Bayard overnight because he was a Nazi and felt he would be killed by the other prisoners. So Mr. Gillie took him back to Lordsburg that night.

He describes how the prisoners would work in homeowners' yards and gardens. There was a dormant orchard there, and Mr. Gillie found a prisoner who restored it. Just as it was in full blossom there was a late frost and the crop was ruined. The POW "cried like a baby." Mr. Gillie explained the caprices of a high climate to him.

Mr. Gillie describes the compound where the prisoners stayed, then delineates the types of work the prisoners did. This included cleaning up the veterans' cemetery, painting the exteriors of the living quarters, and building rock curbs around gardens.

The consultant tells about bringing a convoy of Germans through the main streets of Silver City even though he had asked the sheriff to escort him a different way. Apparently this frightened some townspeople because Mr. Gillie would get calls that German prisoners had been seen hitchhiking. He would tell the caller that this was impossible, that he had just taken roll call, and eventually the fears and phone calls subsided.

The prisoners also helped townspeople's lawns and gardens. One woman who did not want them on her property eventually relented and was soon inviting the POWs into her house for coffee and cake.

Mr. Gillie feels that the POW's life in camp was pretty good: they were well fed, eating the same food as the American guards, and had their allotment of beer.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

The consultant describes how the Germans distilled liquor from apricot and peach peelings. When the guards investigated the source of the Germans' drunkenness, they found eighty-three gallons of liquor. Mr. Gillie cut the fruit and sugar off, but an SS prisoner went to see Colonel Lee and got the allotment reinstated. Nonetheless, Mr. Gillie does not feel the prisoners were coddled.

The only farmers and ranchers to use POWs, to his knowledge, was in the Las Cruces area. He talks about their work at Stahmann Farms and how after the Germans left Mr. Stahmann bought geese to pick the weeds and then put up a packing plant for the geese. He sold both the geese and their down.

The consultant told of an incident where a "Polish man from Pennsylvania," who got a machine-gun and was threatening a POW who had claimed not to understand him. Mr. Gillie stopped him and recommended that he be given other duties.

Mr. Gillie said the SS men in charge of each area. The prisoners wore trousers with a "P" on the back, but the SS men wore their uniforms and carried a copy of the Geneva Convention at all times, which they used at every opportunity.

The consultant relates a rumor, which he was unable to confirm, that some prisoners were allowed to escape so that we could follow them to South America to see what connections they had.

He also describes a trail, called the Burma Trail, to a small town called Central near Fort Bayard. It was unincorporated and consisted mainly of a few bars.

After the war he was offered several incentives to stay in, but he refused. He stayed in the Fort Bayard area, however, working as a meat cutter.

While he does not remember dances at the Lordsburg Camp, he does remember the POWs acting in their own shows, complete with costumes they had made. He also discusses how some of the POWs painted pictures, using bleached army mattress covers as a canvas.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

The tape begins with a discussion of cars, including Mr. Gillie's \$700 Plymouth purchased right after the war and the Mercedes he bought when he went to Europe (in 1970) as a commissary officer for the government.

There follows a discussion of various photographs the consultant brought with him, as well as a menu from a December 1944 Christmas dinner.

As an almost postscript to the interview, Mr. Gillie describes his memories of July 16, 1945, when the first atomic bomb was set off at White Sands.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B: Blank