



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Alfonso Guzmán

DATE OF BIRTH: August 29, 1926 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: February 16, 2001

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: NM Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum

INTERVIEWER: Robert L. Hart

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: March 8, 2001

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Robert L. Hart

DATE ABSTRATED: May 7, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good, but Mr. Guzmán drops his voice frequently, lapses into Spanish at times, and is frequently unintelligible.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Paperboy for Italian and German POW camp located near present day Young Park. Miscellaneous recollections beginning with Civilian Conservation Corps use of camp through post World War II.

DATE RANGE: 1933 - 1946

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Saw prisoners go by on Lohman Avenue daily on their way to the camp. The camp, when used as a CCC camp, was designated G178N. Sequence of the POWs: Germans, Italians, Germans. The German POWs were also housed at the camp- BR39N on Melendres Avenue. The designation BR was for Bureau of Reclamation.

The Civilian Conservation Corps camps were established as a result of the work of New Mexico's delegation in Washington [D.C.], Clinton B. Anderson and Joe Montoya. The CCC camps housed fifty men per camp. His uncle, José Padilla, lived in camp G178N. Other CCCers include: Mike Martinez, El Paso (married Eva Barrio); Alonzo Zanarrita (married a Medina and worked in California shipyards, fell off a pole working for El Paso Electric [Company], called a *polecat* because he climbed the poles); Catarino Quintannila; and George Ortiz, both from Gallup. Ortiz married Disaña Isabel. Quintannila married a Telles (she is still living.) Joe Peña, from Laredo, Texas, was another member of the CCC, he married Bertha Cargon.

The Montezuma Dance Hall and Grandview Hall were both located where Pep Boys is now [1203 E. Lohman Avenue]. Santiago Duran was the owner.

The consultant speculates that the CCC camps were closed in 1942. Those of the former CCCers who weren't drafted went to California to work in the shipyards. The CCCers were mostly Hispanic.

Germans and Italian POWs arrived close together. The authorities added fence with barbed wire on top and spotlights to the CCC camps to convert them to POW camps. There were guard towers and a lighted perimeter.

Italian POWs sang and played soccer. The German POWs were quiet; they were mostly troops from the Afrika Korps. They wore shorts. The German POWs were feared more. The consultant witnessed a search for an escaped Italian prisoner. He was not allowed to talk to the POWs. On work details to farms the POWs had two to three guards. They packed own lunches. Eventually the German POWs at the Lohman camp were transferred to the camp on Melendres.

Two to three hundred sailors training as machinist mates at the Melendres camp. The German POWs moved in when sailors moved out and Italian POWs were moved into the Lohman camp.

Alfonso describes pedaling his bike to the Lohman camp to deliver the *Sun-News* twice weekly. The roads were dirt and gravel. The papers cost twenty-five cents a week of that the paperboy got a dime; *Sun-News* got fifteen cents. He went through the main gate, then a second gate and handed the papers to the guards.

The barracks were wood frame buildings, unpainted with black roofing paper and chicken wire on the outside. They were not weighted down for high wind conditions. The buildings, approximately twenty yards long, housed fifteen [?] men each. (After the camps were demobilized, the Baca brothers bought the surplus buildings cheaply.) Both camps were about the same size. But the Melendres camp had fertile soil. And they also had a tennis court.

Guzmán did not get to know any regular army guards.

POWs had the POW emblem sewn on their pants and jacket; also on the back. They wore blue denim uniforms except for the German POWs who wore shorts.

Relates an anecdote about a POW in restaurant having difficulty ordering.

The German POWs were more feared than the Italian POWs, believed to be a mean people. The Italians were considered to be nice guys, who didn't want to fight.

His wife observed prisoners picking cotton and putting it in the sacks. Some Germans preferred a tub. Germans had never seen cotton before and were poor cotton pickers. (Schoolchildren were excused from school to pick cotton in August and September.)

The POWs were transported in two-ton trucks with sides on them. The guards rode in the back. Italian POWs waved; the German POWs did not.

He believes they moved the POWs out "mysteriously." The POWs got what they deserved; however, they were well treated.

Discusses again that US navy sailors were trained at the Melendres camp before the Italian POWs arrived.

The camp was fenced with hog-wire with a barbed wire string at top. The perimeter of the camp was lighted.

Prisoner escape stories probably in *Sun-News* or *Las Cruces Citizen*.

Few townspeople had cameras, as the economy was poor.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

The consultant's brother was a guard at a German POW camp in Louisiana. Brought home a POW-made suitcase constructed of orange crates. How did they get the tools to make it? Believes it might have been Camp Pontchartrain.

The POWs were transported to the camps in trucks without markings, probably government vehicles.

He describes an unusual occurrence, a CCC camper riot in Las Cruces (!), between both camps.

The POWs were not too effective, as they were not experienced in farming.