



CONSULTANT: Grant Hanna

DATE OF BIRTH: July 21, 1918 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: July 27, 2000

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

INTERVIEWER: Cameron Saffell, Robert Hart

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM x OTHER

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: January 11, 2001

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Robert Hart

DATE ABSTRATED: February 23, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good. Consultant has soft voice.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Memories of a mess sergeant at Camp Hereford (prisoner of war camp) during World War II. KP detachment. Prison riot at Hereford Reflections on reduced rations, but had already been transferred to France.

DATE RANGE: 1942 - 1988

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Mr. Hanna explains the origin of the camp located four miles outside of Hereford. He talks about the Italian prisoner of war officers on KP detail, and said the mess hall where he was a mess hall sergeant needed more or less fifteen Italian POWs at a time for KP duty.

He describes how the Italians smuggled sugar and raisins out of the mess hall kitchen and into their barracks to make wine.

When they arrived at the camp, the prisoners of war were marched from the train to the camp, guarded by men who had no bullets in their guns because the ammunition had not arrived.

New prisoners were deloused and given prison camp clothes. Guards found diamonds, Swiss watches and other jewelry at this time.

L. B. Holland was lobbyist who represented the town of Hereford in Washington, D.C., to get the prison camp placed there.

Mr. Hanna says he and his cooks were not armed when they had the POWs working with them in the mess hall. He relates anecdotes about guards who were injured while guarding prisoners; the prisoners held their guns for them until help came.

Farmers would contact the county agent to make arrangements for the prisoners to work on farms in the area.

An escape attempt is described by Mr. Hanna: American soldiers at the camp in Hereford were playing ball when the ball went into a prison compound, the soldiers retrieved the ball, found signs of digging and located a tunnel.

Fascist and communist Italians were both in the camp: the black shirts and the reds. Mr. Hanna does not know what the ratio of the division was, but said about eighty per cent of the prisoner population were officers. He said officers and enlisted men were treated alike, and relates the punishment of an Italian general.

The consultant does not remember the International Red Cross ever inspecting the camp. He says the camp commanders were changed several times but does not know why.

Mr. Hanna praises the Italian prisoners who worked in his mess hall for the high quality of work they did in keeping the place "spotless". He said they were willing to work.

He describes the loss of "four or five hundred" pieces of silverware in the time he was there. He found out the silverware was mixed in with the garbage carried off by a hog feeder; he confronted the man and got the silver back.

Prisoners of war were sent on work details to Albuquerque where they spent a "month or two" at a time at a small factory. They also would have daylong work details to Clovis farms. Mr. Hanna said the farmers considered the POWs were "the best workers they ever had." They gave their

guards no trouble, Mr. Hanna said. When one of the guards fell out of the work detail truck during loading and dropped his gun, the POWs picked it up and handed it back to the guard.

Other work details included the building of the chapel at Umbarger and a grain elevator in Hereford.

Many of the Italians were medical doctors but the camp hospital was staffed by the army's doctors and nurses. They cared for the prisoners and the American soldiers who were injured in the camp riot which broke out when the army shipped 1,000 German POWs to the Hereford camp where Italians were already housed. There was an antagonism between the Italian and German soldiers even when Italy was still allied with Germany and had not yet joined the Allies in World War II, Mr. Hanna said. The German POWs at Hereford had to be shipped out immediately.

In building the memorial chapel in Umbarger, the Italians had no tools and made much many things by hand. They caused trouble by sneaking off and chasing rabbits. One time they chased a skunk by mistake.

Mr. Hanna said five prisoners died at the camp, including one who committed suicide, one killed in a fight over a piece of candy and a prisoner who died of gangrene after breaking his leg.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Mr. Hanna said he doesn't believe the rumors about a famine toward the end of the war. (He was not at Hereford then.) As far as he knows the POWs were treated "too white" in comparison to how American POWs were treated by their captives.

Rationing hurt the farmers who came to the camp to take prisoners to work on their land. Trucks would break down and sit at the camp for several days because of a lack of parts.

The consultant lived on base.

The POWs who worked on KP in his mess hall were trustworthy and willing to work, although none was a former cook, Mr. Hanna says. They were good artisans: his wife wore a ring made out of a dime by a POW, and he carried one of their pencil sketches of her.

Mr. Hanna never saw any of his KP workers again, although several former Italian prisoners went back to Hereford in 1988 for a reunion at the chapel. At least one returned in 1989 when renovations were completed.

The consultant had no observations on a rumor that Italian officers complained of having to deal with non-commissioned American officers rather than directly with commissioned officers. He only says that as a mess sergeant he did have Italian officers working under him.

Additional contacts are Jim Mercer and Bill Phipps, who were both stationed at the Hereford camp.

His future father-in-law appreciated Mr. Hanna's ability to get gas for the car during rationing. Mr. Hanna had met his future wife when he wanted to place individual menus on the plates at a holiday dinner and had asked the USO director, Miss Olson, who could help him. She directed him to where his future wife worked.

An American soldier from New York acted as an interpreter between Mr. Hanna and the prisoners on KP duty. Mr. Hanna was on KP duty himself later in the war.

At Hereford, Mr. Hanna and the Italians on KP duty joked a lot or talked “strictly business” and avoided any detailed discussions about larger issues.

The last group of POWs who left Hereford after the war went to California and were shipped home via the Panama Canal.

The advantage of being a mess sergeant, he says, is the access to sugar, tea, butter and other rationed items, which the consultant could deliver during the time when Hereford people were learning to accept the American soldiers in their town.

Mr. Hanna has kept a scrapbook of the POW camp, including photographs of a tower and his KP unit. He was transferred from his unit at Hereford, the 426th Military Police and Escort Guard, to Europe where he served in the 7th Army and Patton’s 3rd Army.

He tells the story of one Mother’s Day in Hereford when he drove out to the Caprock with his girlfriend and his future parents-in-law. Captain Davis at the Hereford camp punished his absence by assigning him as sergeant of the guard that night. Mr. Hanna says he usually did not deal with officers except once when he had a date with one.