



**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**  
**INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANTS: Maggie Dominguez /Homer Childs

DATE OF BIRTH: April 10, 1925 / Sept. 14, 1921 GENDER: Male/Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: August 30, 2000

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Dominguez residence, Deming, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER: Jane O'Cain

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM   x   OTHER\_\_\_\_\_

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: April 25, 2001

NUMBER OF TAPES: Two

ABTRACTOR: O'Cain

DATE ABSTRATED: May 7, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Details Dominguez's duty as a prisoner of war camp guard at the Hatch branch camp during World War II. He and his two brothers were drafted into WWII. He discusses the draft board's policies in Deming, New Mexico. Childs describes hemp production and manufacture of rope near Fabens, Texas, before and during the war. Homer Child's imprisonment in Stalag 17B, and his duties while he was imprisoned.

DATE RANGE: 1935-1946

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

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

Childs was shot down over the city of Danzig on April 2, 1943. He was on "E&E," escape and evasion for six or seven months before he was forced to turn himself in due to inclement weather. While he was a prisoner of war he worked on German farms.

Maggie Dominguez was drafted into the army September 3, 1943. He was stationed on New Guinea and the Philippine Islands where he was wounded. After a period of hospitalization and convalescence in California, he returned to El Paso on January 9, 1945, and soon after began his duty as a prison camp guard in Las Cruces and Hatch. He guarded both Italian and German prisoners of war (POWs). He pulled duty at one of three guard posts at Camp Hatch, but also guarded POWs assigned to work at area farms and ranches. Usually crews were comprised of twenty to thirty POWs, although on one occasion he remembers guarding fifty POWs.

The POWs had to pick a certain amount of cotton per day, a quota. Some of the younger POWs were "pretty good pickers," and would assist the "elderly that, uh, could not get their quota."

Dominguez relates in detail the escape of three POWs from a farm when he was guarding the work detail. Of note is the fact that Dominguez was interviewed by "FBI and security people" concerning the escape. The POWs, when they were caught after three days, were put in "jail," which is described.

A dairy farmer, Mundy, trained ten or twelve POWs to work at his dairy. These POWs were not guarded and walked back and forth to the dairy farm.

Child's describes the strategies the POWs in his prison camp in Germany used to "aggravate the Germans."

Dominguez stated the POWs were "good workers." They complained of being hungry – they were given two sandwiches for lunch. Dominguez eventually shot large catfish in the Rio Grande with his carbine, and gave them to the POWs, who would put them in their water cans and take them back to camp to eat. He says, "I knew they were hungry."

Dominguez relates that the POWs "behaved." The first day he guarded the POWs at a farm he laid down a strict policy to them, because "I was angry at the Germans and the Japs [sic] . . . for putting me through all these ordeals . . ."

Mr. Childs relates an anecdote that occurred in the prisoner of war camp in Germany.

### **TAPE ONE, SIDE B:**

Mr. Childs continues discussing the anecdote. At the camp in Hatch there was very little entertainment. Dominguez believes they might have had a radio. There was concern on the part of the guards about the location of the POW camp in Deming, "the neighborhood was all around." The officers told the guards that it was their responsibility if the POWs jumped the fence and got out in the neighborhood.

Childs states that in October 1944, the Germans began to fear that the Red Army would liberate the prison camp where they were being held. Consequently, they kept the prisoners walking from October 1944

through May 1945. They had little to eat during this period, the same as the German soldiers were receiving by this time and more than the civilian population.

Dominguez describes an experience he had in Tucumcari, New Mexico, while escorting a train load of POWs to New York at the end of the war. He was forced to hit a man with his rifle butt to stop him from climbing on the train to get at the prisoners.

Childs came to El Paso with his family during the Depression. He was Canadian by birth. When Great Britain declared war on Germany in 1939, he joined the service. The consultants discuss the impact on Deming of the Bataan Death March during which many of the young men from Deming, members of the 200<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery, died. They discuss Japanese prison camps, and Dominguez tells of his wife's uncle, Moppy, who through acting "a little cuckoo" was able to gain the confidence of the Japanese and thus save other prisoner's lives.

Dominguez escorted the POWs to New York in 1946, and was discharged from the service in April of that year. In his opinion, others did not treat the farmers with hostility for using POW labor, because there was no other labor. The guards were also careful not to allow contact between the farm families and other workers and the POWs.

Dominguez feels the hardest part of his duty as a camp guard was overcoming his feelings of animosity, and the feeling that it wasn't "my job, why I was in the army."

Dominguez discusses his feelings about the fact that not only was he drafted, but his other two brothers were as well. His father did not work, and this presented a hardship for the family. None of the boys in the family were educated beyond the ninth grade. Dominguez believes that the draft board in Deming was prejudiced in their selection of young men for the draft. His research shows that Hispanics were drafted more often than European Americans.

Mr. Childs begins the description of the growing of hemp in the Fabens area and the manufacture of hemp into rope.

## **TAPE TWO, SIDE A:**

The discussion of the manufacture of hemp into rope continues. Prisoners of war were employed in this enterprise, because the navy owned the factory. He believes they just started operating this factory in the mid 1930s. The factory no longer exists.

The POW camp in Deming was located at the Deming Airfield where there was a bombardier training school. The POWs ran the mess hall.

A long discussion begins of Mr. Childs' imprisonment in a German prisoner of war camp. He occasionally worked as a farm laborer; however, this work was used as a cover for intelligence gathering. After a day on the farms the prisoners would report to the intelligence officer and describe what they had observed. By the end of his long march across Germany he weighed ninety-six or seven pounds. Childs learned a great deal through this prisoner experience.

Dominguez states that toward the end of his combat experience fifty to seventy-five Spanish – speaking soldiers from the Civilian Conservation Corps were brought in as replacements. He wrote letters in English for fourteen of them.