



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Dietrich Bennen

DATE OF BIRTH: May 15, 1921 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: 2001

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Nienburg, Germany

INTERVIEWER: Jens Grüber

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: June 13, 2002

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Rita Hartley

DATE ABSTRACTED: June 13, 2002

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Not clear in some places

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: D. Bennen was taken prisoner in North Africa in 1943. He was imprisoned in the United States until 1945. He spent one year in Camp Polk, Louisiana, and was then moved to Ft. Bliss, Texas, where he worked in agriculture sometimes in New Mexico. Describes camp life, relationships, activities

DATE RANGE: 1943-1946

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Description of capture in North Africa in May of 1943 by the English. Transfer to the United States by ship. The transatlantic trip to Norfolk, Virginia, took twenty-one days. From there the prisoners were transported to Camp Polk, Louisiana. Bennen spent one year in Camp Polk and was then moved to Ft. Bliss, Texas. Prisoners were trucked to job sites in the surrounding area. They worked mostly in agriculture.

The consultant states that most POWs were only twenty to twenty-one years old and were thoroughly indoctrinated by the Nazis.

Bennen describes a large map that was seen each morning on the way to work assignments that showed the allied advance on Berlin as an indication that Germany was losing the war.

Food rations were plentiful until the end of the war. Drastic reductions were instituted for a short time. However, this trend was reversed because the prisoners became too weak to work.

Prisoners were paid by the Red Cross (\$3/day) and for work done in agriculture (90 cents/day). They were able to earn up to \$30/month.

Bennen discusses the educational opportunities in camp depending on availability of trained personnel.

Recreational activities included sports, theatre, music, lectures, etc. Movies and news programs were added at the end of the war and prisoners were required to watch movies of liberated concentration camps.

Bennen describes POW punishment. They were confined to small 'cages' (1x1 square meters) made of roofing material for up to three days in hot weather with very little water.

According to the consultant, POWs were assigned to harvest cotton, sugar cane, fruits and vegetables. Picking cotton was the least desirable work.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

The consultant explains that farmers sometimes provided food for the POWs and that they could eat fruits and vegetables from the fields.

Fraternization between prisoners and farmers, farm families, and civilian workers was frowned upon. Bennen observed that African-Americans were also working in the fields but they were separated from the POWs.

Bennen states that his treatment in the United States during the war was generally good. It changed somewhat after the war ended but only for a short time.

Bennen left Ft. Bliss in 1945 and was transported to New York for repatriation to Europe. First, he arrived in Belgium then he spent another year in England working in agriculture and brick making before he returned to Germany.