

**NEW MEXICO  
FARM & RANCH  
HERITAGE  
MUSEUM**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM  
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: Ernesto Padilla

DATE OF BIRTH: June 20, 1930 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: April 17,2001

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Padilla residence, Mesilla, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER: Jane O'Cain

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

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: May 3, 2001

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: O'Cain

DATE ABSTRATED: May 9,2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Employment as a farm laborer at Stahmann Farms during WW II, and his observations of the prisoners of war (POWs) who were also employed there during the war

DATE RANGE: 1944 - 1945

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

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

Padilla started working at Stahmann Farms part-time while still attending school. He grew up on a small cotton farm and had done farm labor since he was a small child. He was hired by farm foreman, Dario Garcia. His work at Stahmanns entailed cantaloupe and pecan harvest as well as irrigation. He also drove tractor at Stahmann Farms, although on his parents' farm horses were still in use. On Stahmann Farms "Mexican mules" were being used.

At Stahmann Farms prisoners of war were assigned to each foreman. He worked with both Italian and German prisoners of war. Both groups were friendly to him, and he did not observe differences in their ability or willingness to work.

Some of the farmers asked to have the POWs come out and swim and have picnics on the weekends. He believes that Victor Ginther was the first farmer in the Mesilla area to do so.

His parents raised some grapes as well as cotton, alfalfa, and corn on their farm. His grandfather bought grapes from local farmers and made wine. He remembers helping his grandfather make wine in a large animal skin, and stomping the grapes.

His parents warned him to be careful around the POWs. He heard of attempted POW escapes, but not from Stahmann Farms. Initially the guards were armed with rifles, later they carried only *macanas* [clubs].

The guards warned the other workers not to ""get too close" to the POWs, however, some of the younger workers started talking to the POWs, and providing them with burritos. Padilla feels that the POWs "had plenty to eat." They'd bring "sacks and sacks of, uh, things to eat."

The prisoners of war had "P W" sewn on their uniforms, which the consultant remembers as being "khakis".

The POWs would swap rings or watches for cigarettes. Sometimes the young men would have tobacco only, and would tell the POWs to use newspapers for cigarette paper, and to "roll" their own. Padilla states that he believes the POWs were fairly treated, "to my knowledge." They were treated "like a serviceman."

He discusses the farm laborers that came from Mexico and lived and worked on Stahmann Farms. Stahmann, he says, was a "god for them."

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

Stahmann would, in the early 1950s, give large parties for his workers at his landing field, including food and live music.

Padilla mostly remembers being approached by one particular POW, Walter Schmid. However, he doesn't recall being frightened of any of the POWs. He never knew of any sabotage at Stahmann Farms by the POWs. The POW's communication with the other workers mostly revolved around trying to obtain food and cigarettes.

The consultant describes working with the geese that Stahmann kept on the farms to clear the weeds. Not a favorite work assignment!

Discusses again that Stahmann was thought of very highly by his workers. He states that when Stahmann died, "everything changed around here."

He believes the POWs worked about the same number of hours (7:00 A.M. to 4:00 or 5:00 P.M.) as the other workers with an hour off for lunch.

A medic accompanied the POWs to the farm. He doesn't remember the POWs being susceptible to sunstroke or heat exhaustion.

Padilla believes that the POW work program was beneficial, it gave the POWs something to do and they also earned some money.