



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Wilfried Grüber

DATE OF BIRTH: October 24, 1923 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: 2001

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Nienburg, Germany

INTERVIEWER: Jens Grüber

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: January 31, 2000

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Jane O'Cain

DATE ABSTRATED: February 11, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Faint in places.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Grüber, taken prisoner in North Africa in 1943, was imprisoned in the United States until the summer of 1946. He spent one year at Camp Roswell where he worked harvesting cotton.

DATE RANGE: 1943-1947

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Describes capture in North Africa in 1943. Subsequent processing and transport by the British to Glasgow, Scotland. Because he spoke English, he was selected by his fellow soldiers to be the translator. He was transported to the United States aboard the *Queen Elizabeth*, a trip of approximately five and a half days. The ship docked at Hoboken Island and from there the prisoners were entrained at Grand Central Terminal in New York City. They were transported via Chicago to El Paso, Texas. From El Paso they were taken to the Camp Roswell prisoner of war camp, arriving on June 17 or 18, 1943.

The management of Camp Roswell “was according to provisions of the Geneva Convention, it was pleasant enough.” In the beginning Grüber was the interpreter in his unit’s kitchen. The kitchen held competitions each week to determine which unit kept the cleanest kitchen. “The object was to get the flag with the emblem ‘Excellent.’”

Grüber remarks that many of the prisoners, born between 1920 and 1923, did not criticize “Nazi politics” and “believed until the end of the war in the final victory.” However, he amends this statement by saying that once German prisoners of war arrived from Normandy they realized “we were about to lose,” although a prisoner had to be “very careful about your political and ideological convictions.”

The food rations were good and sufficient until Germany’s surrender. Then “rations were reduced to 1200 calories.” This reduction went on for “several weeks” during which time “our outside units procured food, i.e., we stole.”

Grüber was paid \$.80 per day for his work as an interpreter. He spent part of his wages in the canteen; the remainder was credited to his account.

The consultant discusses educational materials – educational films and a class on German literature. Apparently, the latter was not as successful as it could have been had they had more educated people available to lead the discussions. At the end of the war the prisoners were made to look at photographs of the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp and “repeat the contents” to an interviewer.

Recreational activities included sports: the “biggest one was soccer.” They watched American movies, usually at the “weekly inspection.”

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

During the winter months the prisoners “read, played cards, and did handcrafts.”

Grüber discusses an escape attempt from Camp Roswell during which the other prisoners “covered for these people a few days and in the evening when everyone was counted.” These escapees were captured; they had been unable to reach the Mexican border.

The consultant states that Camp Roswell had “excellent’ medical care, “a well-equipped field hospital” and a dental clinic.

The consultant describes picking cotton on farms near Roswell. He states the prisoners of war “worked with a crew that employed seasonal workers from the Caribbean.” The “most difficult task was to fulfill quotas.” He states, “Well, I would say that we worked as much as was necessary in order to keep the peace in our area.” “Sometimes sand was put in the cotton sacks “ in order to achieve the required eighty-five or eighty pounds.” Grüber recalls, “Two or three [African American] families” would come to pick

cotton, “the small children also helped with the cotton picking.” They would camp “in their Tin Lizzies . . . at the edge of the cotton fields.” In regard to their treatment by the farmers, Grüber states, “I have to say they were as we were, i.e., totally without rights.”

Grüber left New Mexico in June 1944. He was moved to various camps in the United States before being transported to England [summer of 1946] where he was detained until July 1947.