



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Felipe G. Guzman

DATE OF BIRTH: May 1, 1930 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: March 22, 2001

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum

INTERVIEWER: Jane O'Cain

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM OTHER

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: April 9, 2001

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: O'Cain

DATE ABSTRATED: April 27, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Worked as a laborer at Stahmann Farms during school vacations from 1944-1946. Worked with German prisoners of war [hereafter called POWs], and discusses a reunion with one former prisoner of war in 1998.

DATE RANGE: 1944-2000

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Guzman started working for Stahmann Farms at age fourteen during his summer vacation from school. He worked at the Snow Ranch portion of Stahmann Farms. He began by picking up cantaloupe vines, and soon met the German POWs who were employed to harvest the melons. (The cantaloupes were planted between the rows of the pecan trees.) He drove a tractor and pulled a trailer on which the POWs emptied their bags of cantaloupe. (His foreman at Stahmann Farms was Dario Garcia.) While the melons were being harvested, one POW, Walter Schmid, would attempt to communicate with him. Guards were watching everyone very closely; however, Walter and Felipe found ways to communicate despite the language barrier.

Felipe would give Walter food, burritos or tortillas. Walter showed Felipe where he had been wounded during combat.

The young men employed at Stahmann Farms were afraid that the guards would see them talking to the POWs. Guzman felt sorry for the POWs, and although his father also had sympathy for them, he reminded Felipe that they were “our enemies.”

His communications with Walter Schmid were difficult due to the language barrier; he eventually understood certain phrases for hunger, thirst and being tired in the German language.

He doesn't remember any escape attempts. Guzman believes that the POWs were being well cared for at least in regard to receiving vaccinations and medical care.

One POW operated a Caterpillar at Stahmann Farms. After observing him for a while, Guzman experimented with starting the Caterpillar, and began operating it. By the age of sixteen, he was appointed an assistant foreman charged with the duty to make sure the other men were working.

He states that the POWs worked eight hours per day. The German POWs were hard workers in his opinion.

Guzman said the POWs were “well built,” but appeared “undernourished or something like that.” He states, “. . . that's why we used to give 'em a tortilla or burrito or things like that. They used to eat a lot of cantaloupes.”

The consultant recalls that schoolchildren were dismissed from school to assist with harvest. He also believes that some women may have assisted with the melon harvest, however, he doesn't remember seeing them after POW labor became available.

He wrote a letter to Walter Schmid after the war, but never received the letter Walter wrote in return.

Begins a discussion of meeting Walter Schmid fifty-four years after they worked together on Stahmann Farms.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Continues discussion of his reunion with Walter Schmid.

He believes that the employment of POWs in agricultural work was “a very good thing to do.”