



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM  
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Katy Hofacket

DATE OF BIRTH: January 28, 1930 GENDER: Female

DATE OF INTERVIEW: May 23, 2002

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum

INTERVIEWER: Jane O'Cain

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

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: July 23, 2002

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Sheila Klug

DATE ABSTRACTED: September 3, 2002

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Excellent

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Describes living on a ranch near Deming during World War II, with particular emphasis on the German POWs who worked there.

DATE RANGE: 1941-1945

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

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

The family moved to a farm approximately six miles from Deming in 1933. During World War II their principal crop was cotton. Before the war years they hired local people to help with the harvesting of cotton, but this pool of workers dried up when many of the workers went off to war. The consultant recalls her father being “a gentlemen of the old school” who believed his wife and daughters should not work in the field.

During the war, however, the consultant’s mother picked cotton, and the consultant and her sister picked some after school. Her father picked cotton when he had the time, and one local lady, Mrs. Maynes, and her children picked. The consultant does not recall anyone missing school to pick cotton, most certainly not in her family.

The consultant said they had POWs working for them only one year—1945, when the war was already officially over. There was no permanent camp in Deming, and some POWs were moved to the Deming Army Airbase late in the war. She had no personal contact with the prisoners. She does not remember how the POWs got to the farm, but she believes they were brought there by someone, rather than their being brought out by her father.

Her parents felt the POWs were doing as good a job as they could, considering it was a very new experience to them.

The consultant’s brother, ten years older than she, joined the National Guard and was sent to the Philippines before the start of the war. She recalls her brother coming home at the end of World War II. He had been through a terrible ordeal in a Japanese prison camp, where there was starvation and much brutality. He felt no one should have to suffer this. He would go hunting for rabbits in the morning, and the consultant’s mother made rabbit stew so the POWs could have a good, hot lunch. Mrs. Hofacket thought this was a very compassionate gesture coming from one who had been treated so badly in his prisoner of war experience. This was at a time when the Germans’ rations had been cut, and he might have been aware of this.

The consultant does not recall anyone feeling the POWs were overworked; in fact, they quit earlier in the day than the regular workers.

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

Mrs. Hofacket does not recall a great deal of discussion about the POWs in the schools, although there was an emphasis on current events, principally the war. She also recalls listening to the war news on the radio, which was a “sacred time” at her house. The children were expected to sit down and remain quiet while the news was on.

She recalls the family getting a card signed by her brother describing the miniature golf camp at his POW camp. They didn’t believe the message on the card, but they were relieved to see her brother’s signature.

Deming was a small town, and many of the young men were in the service. She recalls her best friend’s mother having a shop called the Teapot Dome. When anyone in town got a letter from someone in the service, it would be put in the window of the Teapot Dome for everyone to read.

The following additional information was added after the interview.

The parents: Clarence Raymond Lewis married Winnie Lee Spratt Lewis in Oklahoma and moved to Deming, Luna County, in 1933 when Katy was three years old. Their children are Jack Spratt Lewis, Mary Kathryn (Katy) Lewis Hofacket, and Becky Ruth Lewis Hornbeck.

The transcriber of the interview adds the following information:

My father, Robert S. Palmer, worked as an electrician at the air base in Deming during the war. There weren't very many (20 to 30?) German prisoners of war housed there. One prisoner of war asked my dad to bring him oil painting supplies and a canvas, which my father did, and the prisoner painted the Florida Mountains and gave it to my father. However, sometime in the seventies, my mother threw it away. In the early sixties, this same man brought his wife back to Deming, where he was treated well, from Germany and stopped by to see my father and mother, because he wanted his wife to see Deming and the Southwest and meet the people who were nice to him.

Also, Jim Lundy, an air force pilot at the Deming air base and long-time Deming resident, told me that the German prisoners of war that were kept at the Deming air base served as cooks and waiters at the officers club, which after the war became the Country Club, so they were well fed and well dressed.

It is my understanding that the German prisoners of war that worked on the farms were housed in a camp near Lordsburg. Maybe that is the reason they quit working early in the day on the farm, because they had to be driven back to Lordsburg.