

Camp Alva: Suppression by Recreation

by

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Camp Alva: Suppression by Recreation

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## ABSTRACT

Throughout the Second World War, there was a plethora of Prisoner of War (POW) camps that were run throughout Europe. The growing numbers of captured and surrendered Axis prisoners resulted in the United States to develop their own POW camp system. One of the largest constituencies of prisoners held in the U.S. was German. Nearly 400,000 German POWs were held in the U.S., and a large majority of them held some kind of Nazi affiliation. American authorities tried to develop a strict Nazi camp in Alva, OK, to protect other prisoners and citizens while in captivity. In the first year of the camp's existence, American authorities carried out extremely strict policies that still adhered to the Geneva Convention of 1929, but limited recreational privileges. The result was a failure as contemptuous prisoners carried out deeds detrimental to the administration's goal. However, in the following years changes in leadership and policies resulted in expanded recreational spaces and activities that resulted in a dramatic drop in unwanted prisoner actions. To a degree, the later policies and leaders were successfully in suppressing the Nazi enthusiasts and troublemakers that were held at Alva through recreation, while maintaining the integrity of the Geneva Convention.

## CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| ILLUSTRATIONS.....   | v  |
| Introduction.....  | 1  |
| Chapter 1 – The American POW System: Camp Alva’s Beginnings.....     | 7  |
| Chapter 2 – Geneva Convention: Guidelines for Harboring POWs.....    | 16 |
| Chapter 3 – Changes in Recreational Spaces & Activities at Alva..... | 28 |
| Conclusion.....  | 58 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY.....  | 67 |

## ILLUSTRATIONS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 1 – Alva POW Camp Mural.....                                 | 11 |
| Figure 2 – Camp Alva Physical Layout.....                           | 13 |
| Figure 3 – Johannes Banzhaf’s <i>SS-Waffen</i> Membership Card..... | 51 |
| Figure 4 – POW Trail Sign.....                                      | 70 |

## Introduction

On March 21, 1944, the camp commander at Camp Alva, Colonel Ralph Hall, posted a scathing memorandum attacking the malingering tactics of the German POWs at Camp Alva on the base.<sup>1</sup> The letter was the culmination of Col. Hall's attempts to turn his camp inmates – a group culled from the other POW camps of the most ardent Nazis and troublemakers – into an efficient workforce. He stripped away their beer privileges and threatened to change the diet in the canteen to one not suited to the German palate.<sup>2</sup> These punishment techniques were not the first he had instituted and overall they had failed to create the workforce he desired. A few days later Colonel Hall's tenure as head of Camp Alva was over and higher authorities overturned the draconian orders. A new leadership at the camp emerged which sought to keep Camp Alva prisoners in line with alternative activities rather than meting out constant punishment. Recreation facilities and activities proved to be a more effective means within the strictures of the Geneva Convention of 1929 of coercing the most ardent Nazi POWs under American control to behave as best as possible given the ardent nature of their ideological beliefs. After new leadership took over Camp Alva, specifically Colonel Murray Gibbons and Lieutenant Colonel H.H. Richardson, the draconian orders were replaced with a significantly less intimidation policy.

Under these two commanders and the new policies, morale rose significantly. Swiss legation representatives, who made monitoring visits to the camp every few months, noted the improved morale and conditions.<sup>3</sup> Their evaluation process was to take note of the different facilities, listen to comments and complaints from the prisoners, and finally make their own

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Army Provost Marshal General. *Memorandum For: All Prisoners of War, Except Office*, By Colonel Ralph Hall, (Washington, D.C.: Army Service Forces Headquarters Prisoner of War Camp, March 21, 1944).

<sup>2</sup>*Memorandum For*, March 21, 1944.

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Report on a Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, By S.E. Ievers, (Washington, D.C.: Prisoner of War Division, November 16-19 1944).

remarks or suggestions about the camp. These kinds of primary source material and others for this thesis was procured at the Northwestern Oklahoma State University (NWOSU) library, the Cherokee Strip Museum, the Alva Public Library and the National Archives. The material from the National Archives included various camp rosters, intake records, and other data from the Record of the Office of the Provost Marshall General Records of World War II Prisoners of War. In particular it utilized “Record Group 389” from the National Archives II, which contains the majority of information on POWs from Camp Alva, OK. Personal accounts were also used to provide supplemental primary source material from actual prisoners from other camps that are presently absent from any actual POW held at Camp Alva. This includes the diary from an unknown officer in the Africa Corps. Members of the Corps were some of the first prisoners of war brought into American POW camps and varied in Nazi beliefs. Additionally there is a collection of fourteen prisoner testimonies from Camp Cooke in California. In recent years, more materials have become available with the declassification of military records, which have revealed more about this camp in particular than in the past.

From the procured source material, a variety of things have been established for this study that have been spread amongst three chapters. In Chapter 1 there will be an abbreviated survey of the American POW system and intake process, along with a description of Camp Alva, Oklahoma. This is emphatically needed because of the lack of any real narration of the camp’s facilities, administration, and prisoners, even though it was dedicated for Nazi enthusiasts and troublemakers. After a picture has been created of the POW camp and system in the 1940s, Chapter 2 will delve into the major document that influenced and controlled any and all POW system – The Geneva Convention of 1929. In particular, there will be a breakdown of all the articles that were responsible for POWs that included everything from hygiene to punishment for

a belligerent prisoner. In addition to describing the various articles, there will be a discussion of examples where either a particular Geneva Convention article is displayed at Camp Alva – be it upheld, broken, etc. Finally in the third chapter, there will be a chronological analysis of recreational spaces and activities throughout Camp Alva’s existence. This chapter will prove that as recreation expanded, improved, and developed, the amount of violent or malicious acts went down. Conversely the chapter will also prove that with little recreational privileges at Alva, the amount of contempt and antagonistic actions was in excess.

This drastic change for the prisoners at Camp Alva was not strictly based upon reforming the leadership at the camp, but a large part was due to the changes in recreation that occurred after Hall. The corresponding changes in recreation provided an alternative means of occupying the prisoners who under the more draconian regime of Hall had spent their leisure time engaged in making trouble for their captors.

Under Colonel Hall’s leadership there was very limited and convoluted recreation. It was limited in the sense that the prisoners were only allotted a certain amount of time on the single sports field, there were little to no books, prisoners could not view films, and the use of the theater was limited as well.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the limitations, there was a variety of precarious situations that made recreational spaces and activities poorly kept and ran in the early years of the camp. Furthermore, there were several occasions where prisoners were shot at for going over their allotted time limit on the sports field.<sup>5</sup> The primary reason given under Hall’s leadership was a lack of funds and a punitive approach to discipline. For example, the theater was perpetually

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<sup>4</sup>These occurrences were within various reports from the Alva records. They spanned from September 1943 to April 1945. The full citations of the reports are in their singularity is held in the bibliography. (See Chapter 3 for analysis of specific events from reports).

<sup>5</sup>U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Prisoner of War Camp: Alva, Oklahoma [Visit: February 9-11 1944]*, By Mr. Rudolph Fischer, (Washington, D.C: Army Service Forces Headquarters Prisoner of War Camp, February 9-11, 1944).



“closed for repairs” even though it never seemed that anyone was really attempting to repair the problems.<sup>6</sup> The costs for the repairs were also supposed to be borne by the prisoners.<sup>7</sup> A desire to increase the number of books was thwarted under Hall’s leadership. When prisoners attempted to use their canteen funds to purchase books, the process was drawn out and it took a significant amount of time as the respective American personnel responsible would never receive the appropriated list to purchase the works.<sup>8</sup> Along with the limitations being put into place, there was also a variety of malicious and violent attempts in the camp. There were several small mutinies, German spokesmen and chaplains encouraging others to escape, and POWs hoarding various goods in their barracks.<sup>9</sup> All of these were handled extremely harshly with further punishments and restrictions then were already available.

After Hall however, there is a drastic drop in these kinds of malicious acts. There is a clear correlation between the various agitated actions and the limitations put on recreational spaces and activities. The developed sports fields, orchestras, record play symphonies, theaters, library, German-ran school, and chaplain provided the prisoners and the American personnel two very important things: for the prisoners this provided them an escape from the monotonous life that was the life in a POW camp and for the American personnel it provided a distraction that they could give to the prisoners that would keep them at bay, and not want to revolt or riot against them in some fashion. All this time all the leaders and other American authorities were responsible for upholding the Geneva Convention. While Hall and those under him walked the line between fulfilling the requirements and failing to comply, the subsequent authorities and his

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<sup>6</sup>U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Report of Visits to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, By Major Frank Brown, (Washington, D.C.: Prisoner of War Division, February 19 1944).

<sup>7</sup>U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Report on a Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*. By S.E. Ievers, (Washington, D.C.: Prisoner of War Division, November 16-19 1944).

<sup>8</sup>*Report of Visits to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, February 1944.

<sup>9</sup>Another example of incidents from multiple reports being pooled together (See Chapter 3).

subordinates, for the most part, successfully fulfilled the Geneva Convention while supplying a few other additions. Ultimately over time and the different leaders at Camp Alva, recreation began to serve as a means of controlling the most ardent Nazis and troublemakers, while still complying with the rights guaranteed by the Geneva Convention.

The precedents for this study began with several broad studies on the American POW system during the Second World War. These include Judith Gansberg's *Stalag U.S.A.: The Remarkable Story of German POWs in America* (1977), and another almost twenty years later by Arnold Krammer, titled *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (1996).<sup>10</sup> Krammer's monograph is the superior work because of the amount of detail and source material that was available to him, and it paints a picture of what the prisoner of war experience – broadly speaking - was for the Axis prisoners and the controlling Allied powers.<sup>11</sup> Krammer outlines how the United States' strategy and opinions on German POWs changed over the years – from developing a prisoner of war program to crafting a politically driven reeducation program.<sup>12</sup>

Building on these broader works, studies of specific state's POW programs have emerged such as Robert D. Billinger, Jr.'s *Nazi POWs in the Tar Heel State* (2008)<sup>13</sup> and David Fielder's *The Enemy Amongst Us: POWs in Missouri during World War II* (2010).<sup>14</sup> Also new to the field

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<sup>10</sup>As the precursor to Arnold Krammer's famous work, Gansberg does a great job presenting any and all information that was available on German POWs in 1977. The work starts with the prisoners entering the park and continues through the end of the war and the prisoners being returned home

<sup>11</sup>Krammer's monograph could be viewed as the archetype for German POW scholarship. Krammer maps out what it was like to be a German POW in America. He details how they were integrated into the system, what camp life was like, the various escape attempts, etc. This monograph provides the most information to place an individual in the middle of a German POW camp in America.

<sup>12</sup>Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*.

<sup>13</sup>Billinger's monograph was actually influenced from his previously published article, "With the Wehrmacht in Florida," which looked at a specific camp like Michael Water's work. Billinger elected to take a step back to examine the POW camps in North Carolina and create a very cohesive and complete narrative.

<sup>14</sup>This monograph is comparable to Billinger's analysis of North Carolina, but because of geographical closeness to Oklahoma this may help establish what the camps in Oklahoma most likely looked like because of similar environments. This monograph details the specific story of how 15,000 prisoners who came into the

have been specific camp studies such as Michael Waters' *Lone Star Stalag: German Prisoners of War at Camp Hearne* (2006) which analyzes Camp Hearne, in Texas.<sup>15</sup> This work makes a new contribution to the study of American based POW camps because it not only examines a specific POW camp but also looks at the role recreation played in camp life and administration.

In the end this analysis is very young and there are definite rooms for expansion. There are countless amounts of transfer records that can be researched to discover exactly who the prisoners were that were held at Alva. This could be done by breaking down various characteristics that influenced their identity and mentality. This would continue the complex image that has been debated and researched of "who" a Nazi was. In the meantime any kind of scholarly analysis of Camp Alva, coined, the "Nazilager" needs to happen. This camp has been disregarded, but its importance to German and American POW historiography is huge. This camp provides a great case study of how recreational privileges in one of the most infamous camps in the American POW system helped suppress Nazi enthusiasts and troublemakers, while still complying with the troublesome Geneva Convention.

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camp as enemies, left as friends to some of the guards and remained in America. The prisoner-guard dynamic in Fielder's work is for the most part polar opposite to Camp Alva.

<sup>15</sup>Water's work is somewhat a case study that looks to detail the facts from a specific camp. Camp Hearne was in Texas, and he discusses the entry into the camp and the problems that arose there. This is an example and model to help develop a similarly specific case study of Camp Alva, OK.

## **Chapter 1 – The American POW System: Camp Alva’s Beginnings**

Initially POWs captured by American forces were sent to Allied POW collection camps. However, as collection camps became overpopulated, the United States was pressured into developing POW camps for the Axis prisoners on domestic soil. Despite resistance to incarcerating foreign enemies on domestic soil, an American based POW camp system eventually arose. Within the first year of POWs being held in the U.S., there was “little preparation” for them, which Arnold Krammer correlates with “the nation’s primary consideration...was that of national defense, and the question of POWs was simply something that would have to take care of itself.”<sup>1</sup> However as the numbers grew, American military and political authorities had to react. They did so by submitting measures that would only take care of the first 50,000 prisoners to come to the United States.<sup>2</sup> As the numbers continued to rise the previous measures were no longer sufficient and a more organized, yet rushed, system was put into place. By the end of the war, the American POW system imprisoned nearly 400,000 Germans within the United States.

One of the most important objectives that the United States Army Provost Marshal General set was the division of Nazis from anti-Nazis – claiming it was for the protection of other prisoners and suppressing displays of Nazi ideology by these “true believers” throughout the camps. “True Believers” were individuals that were party members, ardent supporters of Nazi ideology, and often were the apprehended individuals that would cause the most problems for the capturing authorities. As a result,

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, (Chelsea: Scarborough House Publishing, 1996), 26-28.

<sup>2</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 26-28.

the military directors decided that it would be beneficial to create a single camp to harbor these men and hopefully suppress any form of Nazi expression – this camp was in Alva, OK. Some of the men that would call Camp Alva home during the war were soldiers from the Africa Corps. One Africa Corpsmen discussed his first night spent as a prisoner of war (POW) in a collection camp stating in the evening tents were built and the poles of the barbed-wire fence had to serve as tent-poles.<sup>3</sup> These collection camps were often the first sites of captivity for Axis POWs. They were haphazardly put together on or around the field of battle until the capturing authority could decide what to do with the prisoners.<sup>4</sup> Typically, captured German prisoners were transported via train, truck, or ship from an initial collection camp near the site of battle to more permanent collection camp. It was at these collection camps that captured German soldiers underwent the intake process.

First they were separated into groups of a hundred, and then they were divided by nationality (i.e. Austrian, German, etc). Second, they were subjugated to a variety of searches as they moved from site to site. Although the Geneva Convention of 1929 ensured that POWs were entitled to keep their personal possessions (other than arms) with them, this turned out to not always be followed. Karl Heinz-Barth, a German POW, explained that although he and other prisoners were assured that they would not have any personal possessions confiscated, this turned out to not be true.<sup>5</sup> Material items such as weapons which were permitted to be taken by the Geneva Convention were

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<sup>3</sup> W. Stanley Hoole, editor, *And Still We Conquer! The Diary of a Nazi Unteroffizier in the German Africa Corps who was Captured by the United States Army, May 9, 1943, and Imprisoned at Camp Shelby, Mississippi*, (Birmingham: Confederate Publishing Company, 1968), 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> Hoole, ed., *And Still We Conquer*, 8-10.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis H. Carlson, editor, *We Were Each Other's Prisoners: An Oral History of World War II American and German Prisoners of War*, (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), 19.

confiscated but so were items which should have been left with the men such as bibles.<sup>6</sup> Prisoners were interrogated as part of their intake procedure. Although the Geneva Convention of 1929 protected soldiers from having to reveal anything other than their name and rank, they were nonetheless subjected to questioning beyond these basic facts. Immediately after their initial interrogations, the prisoners were given a medical examination and usually a POW serial number. The POW number consisted of two components – the first contained a designation of the “theater in which the prisoner had been captured,” followed by a letter “indicating the country in whose army the prisoner had served.”<sup>7</sup> The second component “was an individual number, assigned consecutively, to the POW upon his capture.”<sup>8</sup> Below is an example of a POW number from a member of the *Afrika Korps*.

**81G – 5379**

Figure 1 – German soldier captured in North Africa<sup>9</sup>

After traveling to and from different collection camps and living under poor conditions, a large number of German prisoners were finally sent to the United States.

Before these prisoners could be sent to camps, some had to be immediately transported to the United States before receiving the introductory interrogation, medical examination, and POW number. As a result the United States number designation was somewhat different containing three components.

The first component contained three symbols: the number of the Army Service Command – numbered 1 to 9 – representing the military districts into which the United States was divided, ‘W’ for War Department, and

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<sup>6</sup> Carlson, ed., *We Were Each Other's Prisoners*, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 4.

the first letter of the country for which the prisoner served. Thus, an incoming POW from North Africa who found himself being processed in Oklahoma or Texas was assigned the number 8WG – 1234. These numbers were of major importance since many prisoners had similar or identical names, or their names had been misspelled or incorrectly copied. Thus, the army of POWs, like armies anywhere, moved on serial numbers and forms.<sup>10</sup>

After the soldier was designated a number from either system, they were forced to fill out a three-page form, “which requested his personal and medical history, fingerprints, serial numbers, an inventory of personal effects, and information about his capture as noted on the tag still hanging from his tunic.”<sup>11</sup> After this was filled out several copies were sent to both the International Red Cross and Swiss authorities “so that the prisoner’s family could be immediately informed about his fate.”<sup>12</sup> After this tiresome process has been completed the prisoner was taken to their respective camp, and the German POW had finally moved from capture to captivity.

After the prisoner was finally given their POW number, be it by either system, and screened, prisoners were beginning to be brought into the United States in early 1942. However, Alva’s role as a permanent POW camp did not begin until the formal announcement of its construction in November 1942 by Captain Henry C. Tremblay recorded in the *Alva Review Courier*.<sup>13</sup> Tremblay stated, “it is not revealing a military secret to say that we will get prisoners of war – not enemy aliens.”<sup>14</sup> The unknown reporter from the *Alva Review Courier* continues as “Captain Tremblay explained further that the internees would be evacuated from England and that some of them would be

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<sup>10</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> “Alva Internment Camp Will House Prisoners of War,” *Alva Review Courier* (Alva, Oklahoma), November 10 1942.

<sup>14</sup> “Alva Internment Camp Will House Prisoners of War,” November 10 1942.

captives from Marshal Rommel's forces off the Libyan front."<sup>15</sup> Tremblay clarified that small contingents of prisoners would eventually start to arrive around December 15<sup>th</sup> until a complete complement of 600 men was present.<sup>16</sup> These kinds of arrivals were the norm at Camp Alva, but the route that the POWs had to take was always changing in the first few months because of people wanting to watch these men and see who the Nazi enemy really was.

Before prisoners could even be held at Alva, the physical camp had to be developed. The camp was originally planned to house 3000 internees, who were to be segregated into three compounds according to nationality.<sup>17</sup> It was not succinctly documented, but the designation of Camp Alva as the "Nazi camp" occurred during its construction mainly because of its geographical location. The area is in the middle of the country with few other major roadways or towns surrounding. In other words, attempted escapees could be found and apprehended quicker because of isolation and flatness of the surrounding terrain. This concept would eventually change in two ways. The first is that Camp Alva and the others in Oklahoma would become strictly confined to housing German POWs. In "Barbed Wire and Nazilagers: POW Camps in Oklahoma," Richard Wagner clarifies that only German POWs were held in Oklahoma, "although some Italian POWs were sent into the state as patients at the POW hospital at Okmulgee."<sup>18</sup> The second aspect is that the camp grew to hold 4 total compounds, which were separated by rank. In other words, there was a separate officer barrack along with barracks for

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<sup>15</sup> "Alva Internment Camp Will House Prisoners of War," November 10 1942.

<sup>16</sup> "Alva Internment Camp Will House Prisoners of War," November 10 1942.

<sup>17</sup> Marianne Price, "Alva P.O.W. Camp," *Alva Review-Courier* (Alva, Oklahoma), June 1985.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Wagner, "Barbed Wire and Nazilagers: PW Camps in Oklahoma," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, No. 64 (Spring 1986): 36-67.



commissioned and non-commissioned soldiers. Along with the barracks the camp was filled with a plethora of other buildings including a recreation area, library, infirmary, canteen fill, and other administrative buildings, which were all built on a “square mile of land one mile south and west of Alva.”<sup>19</sup> Interestingly because of the angst that was growing amongst the Alva citizens after the announcement by Captain Tremblay, Alva natives were invited to come and tour the facilities that were being built for the German prisoners before they arrived, but after the group of 19 American guards arrived. This was to assure the public that the necessary security measures were being used to keep the Alva community secure.



Fig.1 – “Alva POW Camp” by the Alva Mural Society (2012)<sup>20</sup>

The first group of guards, numbering 19 total, finally arrived in Alva on July 11,

1943 by truck, and when the prisoners began to arrive a few months later they were in

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<sup>19</sup> U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Headquarters Detachment: Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, (Washington, D.C.: Army Service Forces Headquarters Prisoner of War Camp, January 29, 1944), 1-9.

<sup>20</sup> Don Prechtel & Robbie Pierce, “Alva POW Camp” (painting), *Alva Mural Society*, 2012.

larger groups.<sup>21</sup> As a result they had to come by train, and from the station a regular march route was set up where they would march in long columns of POWs in complete silence, looking neither to the right or left with each man carrying his personal belongings in a small bag.<sup>22</sup> Some of the men that arrived at the camp had to wear burlap sacks on their feet, since they did not have shoes, and others were still wearing dirty and bloody clothing after being ripped away from the battlefields (Fig. 1).<sup>23</sup> Once the prisoners were within the camp, they were faced with eight foot high fences dividing each of the compounds, while the officers' compound was surrounded by two eight foot high fences.<sup>24</sup> For security purposes 13 guard towers were arranged along the fences.<sup>25</sup> All the buildings were temporarily built of wood and they were later sold to the general public starting after the camp was deactivated in November 1945.<sup>26</sup> Figure 2 is attached to give an actual physical layout of the camp.

Throughout the total 3 years of Alva's existence, there were only five deaths of prisoners, who are all now buried at Ft. Reno in Oklahoma.<sup>27</sup> Two of the deaths were suicide, two were by illness, and one while trying to escape, Emil Minotti was shot by one of the guards and eventually died in the infirmary.<sup>28</sup> In all of the POW camps there were attempts to escape, where prisoners would hope to break from captivity. Even though escapes were prevalent throughout the United States, Alva had the most attempted

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<sup>21</sup> U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Headquarters Detachment*, 1-9.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Headquarters Detachment*, 1-9.

<sup>23</sup> Price, "Alva P.O.W. Camp," June 1985.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Headquarters Detachment*, 1-9.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Headquarters Detachment*, 1-9.

<sup>26</sup> Carolyn B Leonard, "Couple Still Without Any Clues to German Painter's Identity," *The Daily Oklahoman*, October 1984.

<sup>27</sup> Wagner, "Barbed Wire and Nazilagers," 40.

<sup>28</sup> Wagner, "Barbed Wire and Nazilagers," 40.

escapes out of any of the camps.<sup>29</sup> Newspapers were only able to record around 21 attempts, but military authorities claim that there were several others that were put down quite quickly. One of the interesting attempts was detailed after two men were presumed to have escaped for two years.

Shortly before the camp was closed it was discovered that the men had built a trap door under a bed in their barracks and had nearly completed a tunnel under the two wire fences that surrounded the compound. Guard Richard Kirkham said that as they dug the dirt from the tunnel that they would flush a little at a time down the toilet stool. The tunnel was discovered during a surprise inspection of the prison barracks. There was no time for the prisoners to get rid of the surplus dirt according to Guard Leo Meyer.<sup>30</sup>

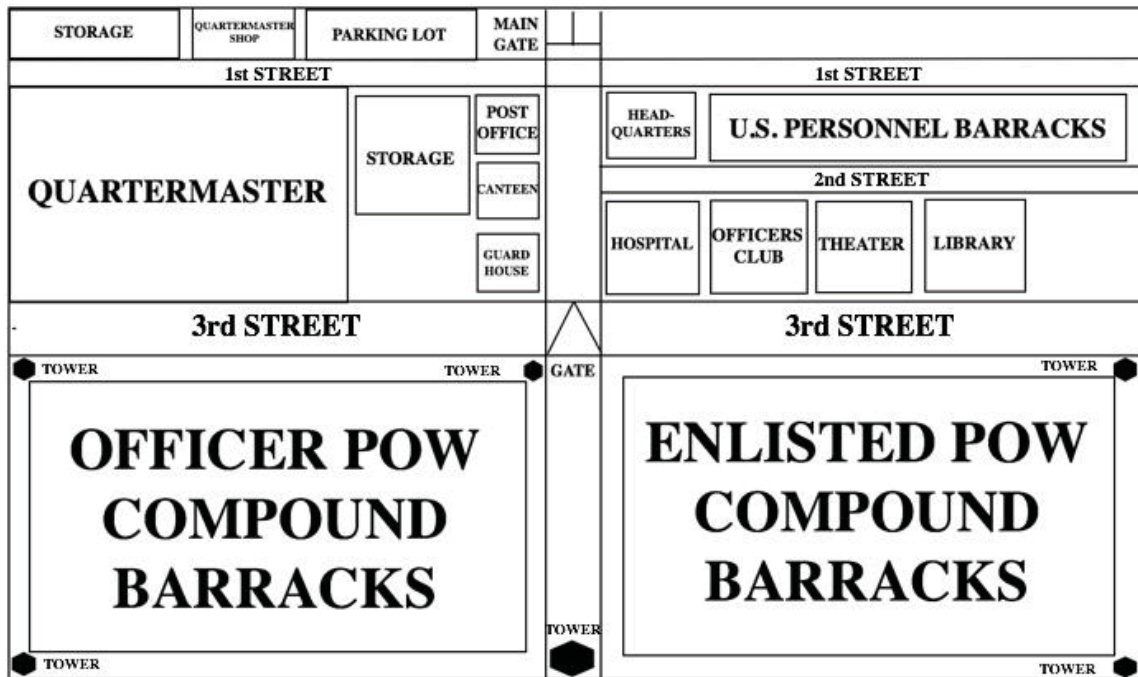


Fig. 2 – Camp Alva Layout<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Headquarters Detachment*, 1-9.

<sup>30</sup> Milt Lehr, “Alva POW Camp,” Unpublished Article, Northwestern Oklahoma State University, 6

<sup>31</sup> “Personal Collection.” This is a simplistic layout of Camp Alva. Within each of the compounds there was obviously greater detail and complexity. Was not included because a simplistic view was only needed to convey what the camp looked like.

For the men at Camp Alva, their POW and war experience ended on November 15, 1945, when the last of the soldiers were repatriated either to Germany or to British control. Throughout the history of the camp there was a flux of prisoners in and out that never reached the full capacity of 6,000 – the largest amount at one moment was 4,850.<sup>32</sup> Throughout its existence the camp established its own personality and reputation that was not only known by those in Alva, but also by the prisoners, American military, and citizens throughout the country. It is clear from this developed reputation and the subsequent analysis that this camp not only held some of the strongest Nazi enthusiasts, but that American authorities working at Alva struggled with the relationship between prisoners' rights and security.

Throughout the history of the American POW system and Camp Alva, there is nothing intensely different from other camps detailed by the likes of Waters, Fielder, and others that were discussed earlier, besides the caliber of prisoner that made Camp Alva so different and intriguing. Camp Alva was dedicated for those that the selection and screening processes categorized as Nazi enthusiasts. As a result it would appear logical to place all Nazis within the same camp to keep them isolated from other prisoners and the respective cities and towns the camps were located.

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<sup>32</sup> U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Semi-Monthly Report on Prisoners of War as of 1 July 1945*, (Washington, D.C.: Army Service Forces Headquarters Prisoner of War Camp, July 1, 1945).

## **Chapter 2 – Geneva Convention: Guidelines for Harboring POWs**

The Geneva Convention of 1929 guaranteed certain rights and protections to prisoners of war during World War II. Since both the United States and Germany were signatories on the document, these rights and protections were extended to German soldiers who were captured by the United States and forced the American authorities and guards to provide certain treatment and rights for all POWs. The Geneva Convention was signed July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1929, but was edited and added to address the deficiencies and lack of precision in the subject of prisoners of war that was brought to light after the end of the First World War. The most important changes dealt with the prohibition of reprisals and collective penalties, the organization of prisoners' work, the designation, by the prisoners, of representatives and the control exercised by protecting Powers.<sup>1</sup>

The entire document consisted of variety sections and articles, but within the “General Provisions,” it states prisoners “prisoners should be humanely treated and protected, particularly against acts of violence, from insults and from public curiosity,” and differential treatments should only be committed when based on “military rank, state of physical or mental health, the professional abilities, or the sex of those who benefit from them.”<sup>2</sup> At no point in these “General Provisions” is there any indication that differential treatment should be provided for those of differing ideologies – be them political, culturally, etc. Thus, from the very beginning of the document the American

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<sup>1</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*, 12 August 1949, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b36d2.html>.

<sup>2</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

authorities in the planning, and military personnel at Camp Alva were already dealt a bad hand when it came to differential treatment.

As the Geneva Convention continues there are significant articles to denote in “Part II – Capture,” “Part III – Captivity,” “Part IV – End of Captivity,” and “Part VIII – Execution of the Convention,” which made the treatment of Nazi POWs at Camp Alva difficult. Articles 5 and 6 within Part II deal specifically with what was supposed to happen when one was captured. These state that a prisoner must reveal their identity to the capturing authority, but will not be pressured or threatened in the situation. In congruence with revealing their identity to their captors, they will be allowed to publicly demonstrate “identity tokens, badges of rank, decorations and articles of value” that cannot be taken from prisoners.<sup>3</sup> This caused a multitude of problems for the American authorities mainly in the sense of screening prisoners and their physical experience within the camp. Even though Article 5 declares that each prisoner is supposed to reveal their true name, rank, etc., some did not do this, which resulted in problems, such as officers being denied appropriate privileges. On the other hand, more directly related to Camp Alva is the allowance of individuals to openly display their military regalia. The confiscation of personal items was not a problem in the actual POW camps, comparatively to the collection ones. As a result Nazi soldiers were allowed to continue wearing their uniforms and display any personal material objects that got past the authorities at the collection camps. Even though they were supposed to be in captivity, there were no punishing repercussions for openly displaying military uniforms and material objects that may have included Nazi insignias or propaganda.

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<sup>3</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

The previous parts and provisions dealt specifically with prisoners' rights entering captivity and the camp, but the following parts and articles dealt specifically with things that should occur in the prison camp. Article 9 discusses where prisoners could be held and how they could be held.<sup>4</sup> This article allows American authorities to suspend the Nazi prisoners behind "fenced camps" because their grade of prisoner could be deemed as a "measure indispensable for safety [and] health."<sup>5</sup> Articles 10 thru 17 detail things important for daily life like food, clothing, hygiene, etc. Article 10 involves the installation of camps being fit enough for to "afford all possible safeguards as regards to hygiene and salubrity, while articles 11 and 12 are delegated to food rations must be equivalent to "depot troops" and clothing, shoes, etc. should be provided by detaining powers.<sup>6</sup> These particular articles caused some problems at Camp Alva, and it was documented thoroughly in the early years of its existence. In a visit during January 1944, a Swiss representative took a significant amount of notes on the "hospital and infirmary" stating that there were cases of tonsillectomies and hemorrhoids, which could possibly be connected to the altered diet that they were subjected to while imprisoned.<sup>7</sup> Articles 13 through 15 involved the following spaces needed for general hygiene: physical toilet facilities, infirmary, and monthly medical inspections. Each of these was excellently discussed at Alva in the Swiss legation reports – the only eccentric mention of anything

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<sup>4</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>5</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>6</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Report of Visits to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, By Major Frank Brown, (Washington, D.C.: Prisoner of War Division, February 19 1944).

involved in this was prisoners hoarding soap in their rooms.<sup>8</sup> The final two articles in this section deal with idealistic freedoms that can be explained also as religion and the organization of intellectual, or sporting “pursuits.”<sup>9</sup> These articles developed more throughout the existence of the camp in the chaplain, which became a major area of recreational activity.

Articles 18 thru 20 details “internal discipline of camps.”<sup>10</sup> These articles continue the previously mentioned statements that detailed the prisoners’ ideological expressions in article 5. However articles 18 through 20 deals with the lack of punishment to the prisoners displaying these items. In other words, article 5 allows the prisoners to show these items, but articles 18 through 20 forbid the capturing guards of punishing POWs. The sections and articles Article(s) 5-26 of the 1929 edition concentrated upon the logistics of prisoner of war camps, which resulted in heated debate and confusion by American military personnel.<sup>11</sup> For example, the prisoners were provided with rations that were equal to, if not better, than what was given to American armed forces. This led to a large degree of jealousy from the guards, but also the people residing near the camp seeing their enemy being treated equally or better than their friends, sons, or family fighting in the war.

Even though to this point the 1929 Geneva Convention had a troubling effect for the authorities at Camp Alva, Section III of Part III titled “Work of Prisoners of War”

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<sup>8</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>9</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>10</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>11</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*



actually provided a platform for the military authorities to distract POWs from ideological expression.<sup>12</sup> Dr. Milt Lehr explained that work detail at Camp Alva was extremely limited compared to other camps, but there was still the availability to work. This kind of work detail deterred enlisted prisoners from publicly expressing Nazi ideology as much, because much of their time was taken away with work, which was motivated by a promised pay from the American government. The intensive security that surrounded Alva allowed for the prisoners to work within the camp itself for the most part, but there were some prisoners who were sent to a nearby camp sporadically to work breaking down rock and other simplistic jobs.

Work detail was a valuable tool for the American authorities in suppressing Nazi ideology, but these work details were not allowed for all German POWs. First, all officers and some NCOs were not allowed to participate whatsoever in work details. This caused for a lot of anxiety, boredom, contempt, and a variety of other negative emotions because they were left alone without any real task to take away from life behind barbed wire. Even though this was a detriment to the officers and NCOs, work became a tool to distract the enlisted men from an imprisoned life – they were working for a salary, and most did not want to lose that privilege. Second, there were technically two classifications of work detail in a POW camp. The first kind of labor, coined as “Class I Labor,” was delegated to housekeeping and maintenance work, while “Class II Labor” was jobs related to agricultural work.<sup>13</sup> These jobs were sought after more because they

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<sup>12</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Headquarters Detachment: Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, (Washington, D.C.: Army Service Forces Headquarters Prisoner of War Camp, January 29, 1944), 1-9.

paid more, and specifically for Camp Alva, this allowed prisoners to leave from the camp for a certain amount of time. This work dynamic caused some problems for the more elite soldiers, but for the enlisted men, who were the majority, it was a great deterrent from causing problems that included an incentive if done without hassle.

The following articles exclusively deal with POWs reception of mail and other items – Articles 35 through 41.<sup>14</sup> This section of articles was titled “Section IV – Relations of Prisoners of War with the Exterior.”<sup>15</sup> Articles 35 and 36 deal exclusively with how prisoners should be notified about hostilities, and how they should be communicated with about hostilities within and outside of the camp. Articles 37 through 39 explain what kinds of items prisoners were allowed to receive in the mail – they included food items, presents (money, valuable, etc.), and books.<sup>16</sup> The mail became a major issue of conflict at Camp Alva, where prisoner spokesmen complained to Swiss representatives that guards and stealing and confiscating personal items through the censorship process that was described in article 40. Article 40 stated

The censoring of correspondence shall be accomplished as quickly as possible. The examination of postal parcels shall, moreover, be effected under such conditions as will ensure the preservation of any foodstuffs they may contain, and, if possible, be done in the presence of the addressee or of a representative duly recognized by him. Any prohibition of correspondence ordered by the belligerents, for military or political reasons, shall only be of a temporary character and shall also be for as brief of time as possible.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>15</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>16</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>17</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

No Swiss representative dealt any punishments to American guards or administration, but it was mentioned in several reports.

The next selection of articles deals exclusively with the chain of events that should occur when a single prisoner or a group commits acts of insubordination. This section is titled “Penal Sanctions with Regard to Prisoners of War” and is quite extensive spanning three sub-sections and 22 articles.<sup>18</sup> The first grouping of articles titled “General Provisions” acknowledges that any and all prisoners are subject to the laws, regulations, etc. that the capturing authorities place on them.<sup>19</sup> These laws and regulations should not be overly biased in any way, and should follow the rules of where they were imprisoned. Furthermore after the respective prisoner, or prisoners, should not be treated any different than other as stated by articles 48 and 49.<sup>20</sup> Along with belligerent acts within the camps, articles 51 and 52 deal explicitly with attempted or successful escapes.<sup>21</sup> In both of these situations an escapee should be immediately taken to a court, and any accomplices should only be given minor disciplinary action.<sup>22</sup>

The second sub-section of this selection handles the actual punishments that should be given to guilty prisoners. These punishments ranged from imprisonment and food restrictions, but they were still guaranteed hygiene, being able to read and write, and

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<sup>18</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>19</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>20</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>21</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>22</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

granted medical inspections.<sup>23</sup> “Judicial Proceedings,” which was the third sub-section, dealt with the extreme cases (i.e. murder, rioting, etc.).<sup>24</sup> One of the most important articles in this section was article 60, which clarified that the holding authorities should contact the prisoners’ government with the following information: civil status and rank of prisoner, place of residence or detention, statement of the charge(s), and the legal provisions applicable.<sup>25</sup> There were several cases at Camp Alva that went to a court hearing, but there were several other situations that received significantly more attention.

One of the most documented and controversial attempts that demonstrate these articles involved two POWs: Werner Wolf (7-WG-37489) and Heins Rath (7-WG-13331).<sup>26</sup> Their case not only delved into the facts of two escaped prisoners, but also provided an example of a prisoner’s rights during captivity. These two men escaped from the Officer Compound on May 26<sup>th</sup> 1944, and were eventually captured by “civil authorities of Kansas City, Kansas, and Kansas City, Missouri, and returned to custody this station 1 June 1944. Upon their return to this station they were confined in the prisoner of war guardhouse pending questioning.”<sup>27</sup> The sheer fact that these men were able to escape for a total of six days, and multiple authorities were put to the task of finding them shows the severity of escaping.

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<sup>23</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>24</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>25</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Report of Visits to Headquarters, Eighth Service Command, Dallas, Texas, and to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, by Captain Robert Estes, (Washington, D.C.: Prisoner of War Division, July 1944), 1-10.

<sup>27</sup> *Report of Visits to Headquarters, Eighth Service Command, Dallas, Texas, and to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, 2-5.

Even though the details of the escape and the actual men involved create an amazing story, the consequences of their failed attempt are even more interesting. Under Article 42 of the Geneva Convention, each prisoners “has the right to lodge complaints by direct communication with the protecting power, and this implies the right to receive a direct reply.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, Werner and Rath approached their prisoner representative to file a complaint about the punishments that they were dealt. Colonel Marvin Stern detailed the punishments in a formal document stating that the men’s hair was clipped, which represented a degradation of a POW and seen as cruelty.<sup>29</sup> Along with a forced haircut, the letter “E” was marked with red on their clothing and questions of the severity of their confinement were raised.<sup>30</sup> After a lengthy back and forth discussion between American authorities and the Swiss legation, who was in charge of possible violations of the Geneva Convention, no one was officially punished on the American side. However the measures taken by the American authorities are another example of the fear and desire to keep the Nazi POWs under their control. In spite of all the precautions and seemingly “illegal actions,” there will always be escape attempts and successes be if for a short or lengthier amount of time. Although there were no successful escapes at Camp Alva, there were over thirty different attempts to flee the camp.

Apart from a singular governmental document providing problems and solutions in the day-to-day training, eating, or working within the grounds, there were various acts by the U.S. Army Provost Marshal General and other military leaders that provided

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<sup>28</sup> *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*, 12 August 1949.

<sup>29</sup> *Report of Visits to Headquarters, Eighth Service Command, Dallas, Texas, and to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, 2-5.

<sup>30</sup> *Report of Visits to Headquarters, Eighth Service Command, Dallas, Texas, and to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, 2-5.

additional measures to subdue the expressions of Nazism at Camp Alva. One of them involved the amount of guards watching at various posts and watchtowers, and the lengthy divisions between compounds and barracks that were seen in the camp layout. This kind of security was not the only kind that American authorities placed at the guards' disposal. One interesting government document from the Provost Marshal General displays the various alert situations and ensuing plans that must be followed. The situations sketched out tentative plans to be followed in the event of a failure of lights or power at night, escape of group of prisoners of war from compound or work project, escape of an individual from compound or work project, riot within compound at night or daylight (including attempt at mass break or escape), riot outside of compound, or a fire outside or within the compound.<sup>31</sup> Within all of these alert plans there was a step-by-step process to be followed and the following excerpt was taken from the "Emergency Plan for Riot Outside Compound," which stated that

The 455<sup>th</sup> Military Police Escort Guard Company will proceed immediately to the scene of the riot and take necessary action to subdue the prisoners of war. The 455<sup>th</sup> Military Police Escort Guard Company will be armed with the following: (1) Sub-machine guns, (2) Carbines, (3) Shotguns, (4) Grenades, hand, CN, (5) Grenade, hand, DM, (6) Gas Masks.<sup>32</sup>

These measures may seem drastic and extravagant, but at the same time it is telling of the prisoners that were held in the camp. These men were often characterized by their tenacity and brutality, and their devotion to the Nazi regime inspired fear from locals and

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<sup>31</sup> U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Alert Plan*, by Colonel M.C. Bernays & Mr. Gufler, (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Prisoner of War Camps, November 10 1943), 12.

<sup>32</sup> *Alert Plan*, November 10 1943.

authorities alike.<sup>33</sup> The American authorities wanted to make sure that the Nazis and sympathizers were held at bay as much as possible.

Along with progressively preparing for any violent attacks, riots, escapes, etc., the guards enforced a strict curfew, and committed several inspections. A memorandum from September 1943 states that “prisoners of war will go to their quarters by 2300 and remain there until First Call for Reveille daily,” “maintain silence during sleeping hours,” and “any Prisoner of War lurking inside the ‘Danger Zone’ ... will be subject to disciplinary action.”<sup>34</sup> While enforcing strict curfew hours, one of the more interesting tasks that the guards had to complete to keep the camp safe were various “shake-down inspections.” One of these inspections was reported to the Director of Security and Intelligence Division on April 4<sup>th</sup> 1944.<sup>35</sup> In Colonel Murray F. Gibbons’ corresponding report, he clarified that items like soap, cigarettes, and stored food in hollowed out bunks were found, which he categorized as a “deliberate set of passive sabotage.”<sup>36</sup> These acts of subordination were not severe, but there were several situations where the POWs were rambunctious and the MPs and guards had to handle the situation.

The construction and development of Camp Alva was a troubling process. The intent of the camp was a valiant one in the degree that it was attempting to separate the extreme individuals from the masses and place them under greater security. However several factors got in the authorities and guards working there. Part of their problems

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<sup>33</sup> Carolyn B. Leonard, “Hitler’s Men’ Held at Alva Camp,” *Enid News and Eagle* (Enid, Oklahoma), 1989.

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Memorandum [Curfew]*, by Ralph Hall, (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Prisoner of War Camps, September 1943).

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Matters Disclosed by “Shake-Down Inspection*, by Colonel Murray F. Gibbons, (Washington, D.C.: Army Service Forces Headquarters Prisoner of War Camp, April 8 1944), 1-4.

<sup>36</sup> *Matters Disclosed by “Shake-Down” Inspection*, 1-4.

arose with the preconceived notions and stereotypes that Americans had towards Germans overall. These beliefs resulted in a skewed image and problems in the screening and selection process when Nazis were often characterized by concepts of age, religion, or profession. The largest and most constricting factor that hindered Camp Alva was the various articles and demands established in the Geneva Convention of 1929. These articles went into drastic detail from how hygiene must be kept in the camp to the allowance of an overall representative for the prisoners. The Geneva Convention undermined a lot of the security measures that were established at Alva. The security measures were not at all strong enough to suppress blatant expression of Nazi ideology, which resulted in maintenance throughout the war.



### **Chapter 3 – Changes in Recreational Spaces & Activities at Alva**

*Recreation activities at this camp have not been greatly developed because there has been plenty of Class II labor. For those non-commissioned officers who have not accepted work, however, there is not much available in the way of recreation. In the officers' compounds there are about 50 books and in the enlisted men's compound there are practically none. The local Wichita newspaper is received at irregular intervals and as yet it has not been possible for the prisoners to subscribe to any newspapers of national circulation. The prisoners stated that they have been restricted in the number of magazines which they have been able to receive.<sup>1</sup>*

This was the original state of recreational spaces and activities only a few months after the opening of the camp as reported by the Swiss legation representative, Mr. Rudolph Fischer. Fischer's visit occurred on September 21-22 1943, and it revealed a lot about the original leadership's mentality and policies surrounding the prisoners at Camp Alva.<sup>2</sup> First, it explains the difference and mindset that the men at Alva, compared to other camps, were placed in because of work detail. While most prisoners, regardless of rank or status, were allowed to participate in work detail in other camps, the grade of prisoner at Alva permitted only enlisted men to participate in labor. As previously stated Camp I labor was general housekeeping and maintenance details, while Camp II labor was related to agricultural duties.<sup>3</sup> In other words the original plan to distract prisoners was to allow the majority of them to participate in work detail, while officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) were only left with a small collection of books. The only

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Prisoner of War Camp: Alva, Oklahoma [Visit: September 21-22, 1943]*, By Mr. Rudolph Fischer, (Washington, D.C: Army Service Forces Headquarters Prisoner of War Camp, October 25, 1943). There was another visit later in September for one day (See U.S. Army Provost Marshal General. *Camp Alva [Visit: September 27, 1943]*. By Mr. Paul Schnyder. Washington, D.C: Army Service Forces Headquarters Prisoner of War Camp, May 16, 1944.)

<sup>2</sup>*Prisoner of War Camp: Alva, Oklahoma*, October 25, 1943.

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Headquarters Detachment: Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, (Washington, D.C.: Army Service Forces Headquarters Prisoner of War Camp, January 29, 1944), 1-9.

other real mention of recreation rested on other reading material – newspaper and magazines. Unfortunately for the prisoners each of these media outlets were heavily censored and sporadic in their release to them.

During the time of Fischer’s visit and until March 1944, the infamous Colonel Hall was the commanding officer, but a few months after Hall was replaced another visit by a Swiss legation representative occurred between July 2 and 4 1944, with little to no changes.<sup>4</sup>The visitor, Captain Robert V. Estes, explains that there was little to no recreational distractions in place during 1943, but there was a “recreation area” that “consists of one single large field” by July 1944.<sup>5</sup> This large field was only available for a two-hour minimum for each compound that was organized into a schedule – the officers’ compound “possess[ed] a separate and fenced recreation area of their own.”<sup>6</sup> This change shows that clear differences between officers and enlisted men began to take shape under Colonel Hall. Officers had clear and different standards in the early years of the camp, and recreation began to take shape apart from work and reading material. This still adhered to the Geneva Convention theoretically, but the minimal nature of recreation hours correlates with extremely strict security on the prisoners and the camp.

Along with addressing the minimalistic nature of recreation at Camp Alva shortly after it was opened, Estes gives two very insightful plans on how to “improve” recreation. The first plan recites the plan in three stages. The first states “that the double wire fences

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<sup>4</sup>U.S. Army Provost Marshal General. *Report of Visits to Headquarters, Eighth Service Command, Dallas, Texas, and to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*. By Captain Robert Estes. Washington, D.C.: Prisoner of War Division, July 1944.

<sup>5</sup>*Report of Visits to Headquarters, Eighth Service Command, Dallas, Texas, and to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, July 1944.

<sup>6</sup>*Report of Visits to Headquarters, Eighth Service Command, Dallas, Texas, and to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, July 1944.

now existing between compounds 1 and 2, and between compounds 2 and 3, be extended to the far side of the large recreation area at the back of the camp.”<sup>7</sup> The second piece details the inclusion of a “simple guard tower” in the middle of the newly expanded far side of the area.<sup>8</sup> Finally, “single gates [should] be installed between compound 1 and the recreation area and between compound 3 and the recreation area.”<sup>9</sup> On the other hand the second plan that Estes details includes a disclaimer that this plan should only be followed if the first one is not considered cost efficient – the steps being to eliminate a “wire bull pen” in compound 2, extension of double wire fences between compounds 1 to 3, and various single gates should be rearranged.<sup>10</sup> This change in recreation at Camp Alva shows that the Swiss legation and American authorities began to realize that the policies in placemight not have been the greatest plan to control Nazi enthusiasts; thus, recreation is correlated with German POW morale.

After the recommended plans by Estes in July, a new report from Swiss representative Mr. Paul Schnyder on August 15, 1944, shows a completely new image of recreation at Alva.<sup>11</sup> Schnyder generally remarks in the sub-section, “Recreation,” that “each sector has organized and orchestra,” along with having “a sufficient number of indoor games at their disposal.”<sup>12</sup> Recreational activities and spaces were developed to

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<sup>7</sup>*Report of Visits to Headquarters, Eighth Service Command, Dallas, Texas, and to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma, July 1944.*

<sup>8</sup>*Report of Visits to Headquarters, Eighth Service Command, Dallas, Texas, and to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma, July 1944.*

<sup>9</sup>*Report of Visits to Headquarters, Eighth Service Command, Dallas, Texas, and to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma, July 1944.*

<sup>10</sup>*Report of Visits to Headquarters, Eighth Service Command, Dallas, Texas, and to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma, July 1944.*

<sup>11</sup>U.S. Army Provost Marshal General. *Camp Alva, Oklahoma [Visit: August 15, 1945]*. By Mr. Paul Schnyder. Washington, D.C: Army Service Forces Headquarters Prisoner of War Camp, August 15, 1945.

<sup>12</sup>*Camp Alva, Oklahoma, August 15, 1945.*

the point that Schnyder had to include the following sub-sections: Education, Sports, Religious Services, and Work. One of the most interesting to note is the section titled “Sports,” which stated that “each sector has its own sports field. The equipment is sufficient but the men request footballs, which are now difficult to obtain.”<sup>13</sup> The inclusion of sports fields in each “sector” makes it apparent that the leadership at Alva responded aptly to the report and suggestions by Captain Estes. Furthermore the inclusions of more recreational venues again support the transformation in mentality and leadership that occurred since Hall’s departure in March 1944.

Ruling with an iron fist had obviously failed and the following camp commanders realized that providing freedoms to the prisoners with sports, music and theater, a library, education, and religious services would distract and deter prisoners from acts that were detrimental to the camp’s purpose. The reason that these assumptions can be made about the role of recreational spaces and activities is because of incidents and responses that are explained by these reports from Swiss legation representatives. In the early years of the camp where recreation was limited, there were countless numbers of small incidents. Additionally there were many complaints to the Swiss legation about how the men were treated. One of the strongest inclinations was when prisoners held at Alva claimed that they were treated like criminals and they were being held in a “punishment camp.”<sup>14</sup> One of the instances that occurred that reflected this was when an individual was transferred to the camp they were instantly forced to “spend the night in jails established for ordinary criminals.”<sup>15</sup> This kind of tension resulted in some acts of violence. In the same report,

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<sup>13</sup>*Camp Alva, Oklahoma*, August 15, 1945.

<sup>14</sup>*Prisoner of War Camp: Alva, Oklahoma*, October 25, 1943.

<sup>15</sup>*Prisoner of War Camp: Alva, Oklahoma*, October 25, 1943.

there was a mutiny on November 9, 1943, where prisoners refused to attend their work detail.<sup>16</sup> The strict enforcement of policies while still attempting to follow the Geneva Convention resulted in punishment that only further angered the prisoners at Alva.

On the other hand once the former leadership was taken out of the equation Swiss legation representatives reported that the morale at the camp had significantly improved. This may have been in large part because of the change in leadership, but the new American personnel also brought expansions to recreation that correlate significantly more than the changes in leadership. This is the case because as the camp progressed and leadership changed under several camp commanders, recreational freedoms for the most part stayed the same after the immediate drastic changes. Thus, all of the recreational spaces and activities mentioned are exemplary examples of how Camp Alva partially succeeded to resolve the struggle between Geneva Convention and the attempt to control the grade of prisoner held there.

Although the three previously described visits had direct connections to the inclusion of a sports at the camp, there were a plethora of other visits that narrate the importance of sports at Alva. One of these reports was by Major Frank Brown, who visited on January 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> 1944.<sup>17</sup> In this report Major Brown gives a general expression of recreational activities and one of them is considered “games, sports, and recreational kits.” This section states

Kits furnished by the PMG have been received and are in use. The stockade recreation field is very muddy and generally unsuitable for use except in the driest weather during which time it is available to compounds on roster basis, because of the segregation policy in effect at

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<sup>16</sup>U.S. Army Provost Marshal General. *Report of Visits to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*. By Major Frank Brown. Washington, D.C.: Prisoner of War Division, February 19 1944

<sup>17</sup>*Report of Visits to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, February 19 1944.

this camp. Soccer and flat ball are played within compounds on fields arranged in available space. Several times recently guards have fired upon prisoner players who have approached the deadline to retrieve a ball. The field available within the compound is necessarily small and close to the fence line because of the arrangements of the buildings which allow very little space. Competition in sports is held within the compounds, but competition between compounds is forbidden because of the segregation policy.<sup>18</sup>

Within the incomplete records that have survived from Camp Alva, there is no indication of what was included in these kits, but the documentation on the field is very telling of the leadership and their mentality towards the prisoners. During this time Colonel Hall was still the leader; thus, the policy of strict security while tip-toeing the line of the Geneva Convention was still in effect. As a result the upkeep of recreational facilities was not seen as important. This is shown with the poor drainage of the field.

Furthermore, the instances where prisoners were shot at during recreation time reveals the strict mentality that the guards had at this camp to not let prisoners wander outside of what they felt was comfortable. One of these examples was explained in the prisoner complaint section of the same report stating restricted spaces in the compounds “requires the players to approach near the deadline [i.e. two hour limit] and that two players had been fired upon recently by the guards although they had raised their hands above their heads before running for the ball.”<sup>19</sup> The prisoners were told that it would be appropriate in the future for prisoners to await signals from the guards before retrieving the ball.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>*Report of Visits to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, February 19 1944.

<sup>19</sup>U.S. Army Provost Marshal General. *Prisoner of War Camp: Alva, Oklahoma [Visit: February 9-11 1944]*. By Mr. Rudolph Fischer. Washington, D.C: Army Service Forces Headquarters Prisoner of War Camp, February 9-11, 1944.

<sup>20</sup>*Prisoner of War Camp*, February 9-11, 1944.

Over a year later, Mr. Othon Goetz visited the camp on April 18-19 1945, and the situation had drastically changed under the first major change in leadership.<sup>21</sup> Each compound had its “own sports field and highly organized recreation program.”<sup>22</sup> The mentioning of a sports field for each compound was alluded to in a previous visit, but the differences between these two visits in particular show the importance of sports to the prisoners, and the resulting distractions from imprisonment. After Hall was taken out of his role as Camp Commander, it appears that there were only two other commanders – Colonel Murray F. Gibbons, and Lieutenant Colonel Harold H. Richardson. These leaders understood this importance, and used it to lighten the load of restrictions that were presented under Hall. In the final remarks from the representative, he states compared to previous visits, “there is little doubt that a marked improvement has been brought about the present commander in the morale of what was formerly an unusually troublesome camp.”<sup>23</sup> The use of a sports field for the prisoners was clearly one of the most important to them, and reading about these differences show obvious changes. However there are obvious differences in other kinds of recreation, such as the use of music and theater within Camp Alva.

In the aforementioned visit by Major Frank Brown in January 1944, there was an explanation of the music and theater at the camp. Specifically, Brown on others who visited broke down music and theater into reporting on the camp’s orchestra, symphonies, and theater. Brown began his report on the orchestra with his sub-section “Prisoner

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<sup>21</sup>U.S. Army Provost Marshal General. *Prisoner of War Camp: Alva, Oklahoma [Visit: April 18-19 1945]*. By Mr. Othon Goetz. Washington, D.C: Army Service Forces Headquarters Prisoner of War Camp, June 1, 1945.

<sup>22</sup>*Prisoner of War Camp*, June 1, 1945.

<sup>23</sup>*Prisoner of War Camp*, June 1, 1945.

Orchestras and Theatricals.”<sup>24</sup> Brown states, “each compound with the exception of the officers compound has an orchestra.”<sup>25</sup> The orchestras at Alva became very popular in the camp, but they were limited by a single theater building whose use was arranged by roster.<sup>26</sup> At first glance this appears to be a great addition to the distractions available at Camp Alva, and it was, but then Brown details that there were still complications in regards to it. For example the theater, at that time, had not been in use because the commanding officer “closed it for repairs.”<sup>27</sup> In the actual report “closed for repairs” was placed in quotations, which gives the impression that Brown did not believe that the theater was actually closed for repairs. Instead it was closed for a more controlling reason. As a result it would not be surprising that the “improper wiring arranged by the prisoners within the building,” which caused a fire hazard, was a fabricated story to deter the prisoners from having an additional freedom.<sup>28</sup> Since Hall was not blatantly taking the theater away from them, he was not violating the Geneva Convention; instead, he found a loophole.

This theater was used for the orchestras and symphonies, but one of the most interesting uses of the theater became the showing of moving pictures entertainment. Brown explains that a 16-mm projector and rented films were purchased with the POW fund, but because of the theater being “closed for repairs” it was not available to any of the prisoners to watch.<sup>29</sup> In this report there was a myriad of complaints from the prisoner spokesman about the theater and its various uses. Brown reports that some of

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<sup>24</sup>*Report of Visits to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, February 19 1944.

<sup>25</sup>*Report of Visits to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, February 19 1944.

<sup>26</sup>*Report of Visits to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, February 19 1944.

<sup>27</sup>*Report of Visits to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, February 19 1944.

<sup>28</sup>*Report of Visits to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, February 19 1944.

<sup>29</sup>*Report of Visits to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, February 19 1944.



the band members complained the majority of their instruments were old and required a drastic amount of repair.<sup>30</sup> It was also interesting to note that NCOs and other officers took the better instruments, which caused a degree of infighting amongst the German POWs. On the other side, prisoners were not allowed to see some films and they requested allowance to American and German movies.<sup>31</sup>

However in future reports, the complaints change from how the prisoners were being treated and what they were given, to concerns about the equipment used for the films. Some of the POWs were concerned that if they took the film equipment outside it would result in dust getting into it and ruining it.<sup>32</sup> In other words the petty infighting had continued, but now it did not appear that the theater was being taken away from them because of “repairs.” In addition to noticeable terminology surrounding the theater, there appeared to be a better morale in this visit as well when the camp visitor remarks that the new camp commander (Gibbons), was “just and fair” and appreciated the role of “allowing no opportunity for any of the prisoners to indulge in pastimes which might have been the reason for their being transferred to Alva.”<sup>33</sup> This was in large part thanks to the distraction of recreation.

Along with the development of the sporting grounds there was a German-ran education program that became a huge deterrent from activities seen as polar opposites to what American authorities wanted. One of the first mentions in the primary documents is from September 29, 1944, with a letter between a camp spokesman Karl Smej (1<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>*Report of Visits to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, February 19 1944.

<sup>31</sup>*Report of Visits to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, February 19 1944.

<sup>32</sup>U.S. Army Provost Marshal General. *Report on a Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*. By S.E. Ievers. Washington, D.C.: Prisoner of War Division, November 16-19 1944.

<sup>33</sup>*Report on a Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, November 16-19 1944.

sergeant) and Miss Hilde Steck.<sup>34</sup> Steck was the Secretary for the Special Book Service of the War Prisoner's Aid of the Y.M.C.A. Through the "Special Book Service," the Y.M.C.A. donated millions of books to Allied soldiers, along with enemy prisoners held in the United States.<sup>35</sup> Smej's letter, with an attached list, stated

...I have the privilege of requesting further help in supplying our school library with more material...Doubtlessly it will not be possible to supply us with all desired books, however I would beg you to ship us all the books an this list that you can get hold of within the next 3 months. I may add here that we are in a position to pay in full for all books you might be able to ship on this order.<sup>36</sup>

Smej ends his letter thanking the Y.M.C.A's for their help, and included a three-page list of books. The list is separated by the different categories: German, History, Geography, Mathematics, Physics, Engineering, Construction, Surveying, Agriculture/Horticulture, Law, Economics, English, French, Africa, Psychology, and Miscellaneous.<sup>37</sup> Based on the categories, Smej wanted the prisoners to receive books that were educational.

This is the first mentioning of the program that was detailed to have 2,000 students – there is no inclination of how the program was approved, and who it was approved by, but the date on this letter is a few months after Hall had "retired," and more freedoms were being granted.<sup>38</sup> Now this program is not to be confused with the reeducation program that was popular in all Allied POW camps. The reeducation programs attempted to teach prisoners the capturing authorities respective government. For example the Soviets educated Germans on communism, while the U.S. taught the

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<sup>34</sup>U.S. Provost Marshal General, *Books for Educational Purposes*, by Karl Smej, (Washington, D.C.: Army Service Forces Headquarters Prisoner of War Camp, September 29, 1944).

<sup>35</sup> Andrew Boyzna, "Santa Clara Library Raises Books for GIs, 1942," *Books for Victory* (blog), April 16, 2015, <http://www.booksforvictory.com>.

<sup>36</sup>*Books for Educational Purposes*, September 29, 1944.

<sup>37</sup>*Books for Educational Purposes*, September 29, 1944.

<sup>38</sup>*Books for Educational Purposes*, September 29, 1944.

democratic system. The U.S. program focused on convincing and teaching the anti-Nazis that were imprisoned because Nazi enthusiasts were often set in their ways to the degree that they would undermine the system. The education program at Alva appears to have been a program that was another way from prisoners to distract themselves and escape the monotony of prisoner life.

Two months before the letter from Smej and Steck, Howard Hong reports about the school after his visit on July 8-9 in 1944.<sup>39</sup> Hong writes “summer has slowed up the school somewhat, the non-commissioned officers continue much of their school work during both the day and evening. The enlisted men hold evening classes and the officers at any convenient time.”<sup>40</sup> Apart from the NCO’s and commissioned officers attending the classes, the format of them was usually lectures that were held from noon until four o’clock, or later in the evening.<sup>41</sup> From this small description of the classes and Hong mentioning the “educational leader’s” dedication to the program to get books through the book loan service, it is clear that the education program became important to the German NCO’s and officers. The education program not only provided another area of escape for the prisoners, but it was also another area for distraction that American authorities allowed.

Since the work detail was extremely minimal for the prisoners at Alva, Paul Schnyder on August 15, 1944, remarks, “they have all the time in the they need to organize a very complete curriculum.”<sup>42</sup> During Schnyder’s visit, one learns more about

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<sup>39</sup>U.S. Army Provost Marshal General. *Report on a Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*. By Howard Hong. Washington, D.C.: Prisoner of War Division, July 8-9 1944.

<sup>40</sup>*Report on a Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, July 8-9 1944.

<sup>41</sup>*Report on a Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, July 8-9 1944.

<sup>42</sup>*Camp Alva, Oklahoma*, August 15, 1945.

the subject matter of the coursework with the explanation that there are a variety of language courses – English, French, Russian, and Spanish.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the courses began in the fall and included “the study of many extremely varied subjects and university courses.”<sup>44</sup> These courses were divided into three groups amongst the NCOs and enlisted men.

The NCOs in Sectors 1 and 3 have quite a number of courses: German, mathematics, geography, [history], stenography, English, French, Spanish, Latin, chemistry, physics, technical courses, agriculture, accounting, correspondence, etc. The [enlisted men] in Sector 2 have a varied secondary education: as they work all day they take the courses in the evenings. The first sector of the NCOs given: 22 subjects, in 46 classes, before an audience of 1,700 prisoners; the second sector – 12 subjects, in 17 classes, before 300 auditors; the third sector: 28 subjects, in 98 courses, before 3,626 auditors.<sup>45</sup>

Apart from courses given and the division of students among all of those courses, the report reveals that there were two divisions of secondary schooling that took up 93% of the total students, while 3% were participating in “university studies.”<sup>46</sup>

In addition to Schnyder’s visit, another visit in November of the same year provides hard statistical data about the classes and how truly important they are. Amongst all of these students 94% of officers and 95% of NCOs attend the varying courses, while only 40-50% of enlisted men attend them as well.<sup>47</sup> The disparity between enlisted men and officers is not because the enlisted men do not want to attend, but it is because the enlisted men were the ones that put on work detail. Thus, there will be larger

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<sup>43</sup>*Camp Alva, Oklahoma*, August 15, 1945.

<sup>44</sup>*Camp Alva, Oklahoma*, August 15, 1945.

<sup>45</sup>*Camp Alva, Oklahoma*, August 15, 1945.

<sup>46</sup>*Camp Alva, Oklahoma*, August 15, 1945.

<sup>47</sup>*Report on a Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, November 16-19 1944.

numbers of officers and NCOs, who were not allowed to work, needed to find some means of production that would provide an escape from prison life.

The final visit that mentions the Camp Alva school occurred on April 18-19, 1945, by Mr. Othon Goetz.<sup>48</sup> His extremely abbreviated section on education at the camp writes, “school work has been organized by the prisoners of war themselves and a number of flourishing classes are in swing.”<sup>49</sup> In correlation with the previous statistics, this is exactly the case. Once the program was allotted and Karl Smej was able to get respective books from the Y.M.C.A. Special Book Service, the education program took off for prisoners and officers. In the end, the education system may have been one of the most developed places for recreation in Camp Alva. This was mainly because it was initiated after a friendlier and more open atmosphere was established under Colonel Gibbons. This allowed for a complete planning and organization process that was not deterred like the theater and library in earlier administrations – it became a continuous process.

One of the lesser-documented sources of recreational privileges that were available at Camp Alva was the chaplain and religious services. During the original administration and their policies there is actual no explanation or description of the chaplain outside of the common notes about services every so often. However once the newer administrations and policies were put into place, there is a larger discussion of religious services. In the report from July 8-9 1944 the Swiss representative states that “the only religious service in the compound since Palm Sunday was July 8, a funeral

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<sup>48</sup>*Prisoner of War Camp*, June 1, 1945.

<sup>49</sup>*Prisoner of War Camp*, June 1, 1945.

service.”<sup>50</sup> Hong continued stating that the “tone and content” of the service was “nationalistic...rather than Christian.”<sup>51</sup> In essence, a nationalistic sentiment was provided to the service probably because of the nature of where their comrade was buried – the United States, not Germany. They wanted to provide a proper burial service for this particular individual.

After this report, there is another report from a visit from December 1944, where religious services are mentioned in passing.<sup>52</sup> The report states,

Regular religious services have now been resumed under the direction of the American Chaplain. There are two officer Chaplains: one Catholic and a Protestant who conduct the religious services. These are assisted by other chaplains and captive Clergy. A chapel building is now provided for religious services. The theological study group mentioned in the last report continues.<sup>53</sup>

There is no indication of why only by late 1944 that regular services are being provided, but one can assume it was because they did not have the proper facilities, since the report states that a chapel was just erected for religious purposes. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that a theological study group is being held in addition to the German-ran education. This is proof that religion took a multi-faceted role in recreation – it distracted the men with services and study groups, but also it allowed for an upholding of individual faith for the men being held captive.

Even though religion was an obvious plus for recreational privileges in the Camp, once the policies were less severe and strict, some POWs were able to use their respective

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<sup>50</sup>*Report on a Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma, July 8-9 1944.*

<sup>51</sup>*Report on a Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma, July 8-9 1944.*

<sup>52</sup>U.S. Army Provost Marshal General. *Prisoner of Camp, Alva, Oklahoma [Visit: December 13-14 1944]*. By Mr. Emil Greuter. Washington, D.C: Army Service Forces Headquarters Prisoner of War Camp, July 29 1944.

<sup>53</sup>*Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma, July 29, 1944.*

platforms to express Nazi ideals and propaganda. In a report from a visit, one discovers that one of the German chaplains, Major Werner, was using his power to preach Nazi ideology.<sup>54</sup> In the end, these were some of the few discussions of religion and religious services at Camp Alva. Religion was obviously important for the prisoners and guards, but the reports on the prison chapel reveals that the expansion of recreation was not always a positive thing because it sometimes offered an opportunity for expression by the prisoners.

In the September visit immediately after Camp Alva was open, there is an indication that a small collection of books was present within the camp. Over time these collections became an actual library. Even though it had grown from the small collection of 50, Major Brown indicated that the library still did not contain a lot of books. The problem was being addressed as

...the commanding officer has instructed the canteen officer to prepare an order to the new York publishers for books to be paid for from the POW fund. Although these instructions had been given some time before the visit of this officer, the written order had not been prepared. The canteen officer stated he was unable to find sufficient sources of supplies for books. He was referred to neighboring camps which had excellent sources for the purchase of German and English books.<sup>55</sup>

In accordance with earlier policies, the library was hindered by his policies and mentalities towards the Nazi prisoners. Even though there was a fund available to buy things like the theater projector and other books, prisoners reported to the Swiss representative that they had been forbidden to purchase books individually unless they

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<sup>54</sup>U.S. Army Provost Marshal General. *Prisoner of War Camp: Alva, Oklahoma [Visit: July 10-12 1944]*. By Mr. Verner Tobler. Washington, D.C: Army Service Forces Headquarters Prisoner of War Camp, July 29, 1944.

<sup>55</sup>*Report of Visits to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, February 19 1944.

had enough funds in their account, and even if they did no books were ever ordered and sent to the prisoner.<sup>56</sup>

While the books had to be censored and monitored by the American authorities, things had drastically changed within the camp library system within Alva. After a visit in August 1944, one discovers that two libraries are created – one for officers, and one for non-commissioned officers along with enlisted men. Along with the surprising changes in the library, the visitor from the Swiss legation reveals that the officers' library contained 450 books, while the other had over 4,700.<sup>57</sup> Altogether the prisoners had spent over \$2,000 in books.<sup>58</sup> The clear differences that are seen in a single year, and with different leadership reveals that not only was the camp expanding and prisoners were receiving more freedoms, but the leadership understood that with more recreation and distractions for the prisoners less problems would occur.

A large reason that these kinds of numbers were even possible in the “Nazilager” was because of a specific limitation beset by the Geneva Convention. Article 39 states “prisoners of war shall be permitted to receive individually consignment of books which may be subject to censorship,” along with various organizations controlled by the capturing authorities could send books. One example of a singular prisoner asking for books comes from Gefreiter Johannes Kunze, whose letter home stated,

Dear Erna, I am well. I am getting older and slower; playing football I am not able to keep up any more. The days go by in thinking, once in a while a game of chess, some English lessons, also French. I do not bother about the sequence of the days of the week or the date. The companionship of the other prisoners is good. The report, according to the newspapers here, is that Leipzig and Dresden were bombed. I hope you will be spared any

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<sup>56</sup>*Report of Visits to Prisoner of War Camp, Alva, Oklahoma*, February 19 1944.

<sup>57</sup>*Camp Alva, Oklahoma*, August 15, 1945.

<sup>58</sup>*Camp Alva, Oklahoma*, August 15, 1945.



misfortune, also in the future, insa'Allah! You are permitted to send me books, so will you please?...<sup>59</sup>

Although Kunze was imprisoned at Camp Tonkawa, OK, this short letter shows the importance of books to a prisoners' x bland and monotonous way of life. Each prisoner would have had generally the same routine, boredom, and loneliness leading to frustration that Kunze alludes to by not keeping track of the date and time. The interesting part of this quote however, is his asking his wife for books. There was a substantially large library within the camp that held a plethora of German, French, and English literary works. The reading of books provided one major things for the German prisoners – escapism.

From the library at Camp Alva, hundreds of library cards have survived. Each library card is on a traditional four by six inch notecard. Each card is set up in portrait orientation with the title and author at the top. Below this margin, the name of the individual who checked out the book is listed along with the due date. Sadly few of the names are legible, but one can discern the variety of names of individuals that checked out the books and how often they were read. Amongst all of these cards there was a group of 20 to 40 that were completely filled out, front-and-back, and some even had a second card started. Obviously these men were reading these books, but how can the reading of books reflect Alva prisoners? The answer to this question is partially answered by Wilma Parnell, who utilized the quotation from Corporal Kunze above. Parnell wrote after the quotation, “reading lists mirror the minds of the readers.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Wilma Parnell, *The Killing of Corporal Kunze* (Secaucus: Lyle Stuart Inc., 1981), 17.

<sup>60</sup> Parnell, *The Killing of Corporal Kunze*, 17-18.

Throughout all of the books at Alva, there are two general trends that emerge that explain the popularity of some over the others. The two trends expand from a national identity and individual identities/motivations. The individual identities and motivations are broken down further by the books that provide escapism, thoughts of home and family, and nostalgic expressions. The discussion of generational differences demonstrated how individual identities were fed and strengthened until a national group identity was created. In other words a multitude of individuals were selecting these certain works to read, and in reading the same books they then shared a group identity, and shared components of their individual identity. The books being read showed individual identity because of the nature of reading – reading is personal, and primarily it is done alone; thus there is a deeper and more personal connection than reciting Nazi slogans amongst a group of people. On the other hand the popularity of some books exemplifies the monotony, boredom, and loneliness of the prisoners. Plainly, the men would read some of these works because it reminded them of home, their childhood, or something else that held significant meaning. Ultimately prisoner identity and mentality can be theorized by analyzing the most popular books' author, content, and subject matter.

While later works that will be discussed deal with direct connections to National Socialism, there are a plethora of works that feed on feelings of nostalgia and memory. The work was by Georg Hermann and was titled *Jettchen Gebert*. Hermann was a Jewish author in the early 1900s that was subjugated to some of the brutalities that other Jewish people and authors had to deal with during the Second World War. His works like *Jettchen Gebert* were put on the German “blacklist,” and before he could flee the country,

he was captured and sent to a camp in Westerbork in Holland.<sup>61</sup> He was later sent to Auschwitz where he was eventually murdered along with the countless other victims of the Holocaust.<sup>62</sup> Even though Hermann was a quintessential version of the “enemy” to Nazi Germany, why was *Jettchen Gebert* so popular in the “Nazilager?”

The answer coincides with the release date of this novel – 1908 – and Hermann’s reputation by the time the Nazi regime took power. While the men at Alva may have identified with the National Socialist tendencies of Johannes Banzhaf and Hjalmar Kutzleb described later, the popularity of Hermann’s work reveals something significantly different about the mentality of the prisoners. They missed home. They missed Germany. Since a majority of the men grew in the time period before Hitler, they probably were feeling some kind of nostalgia in the loneliness and boredom within the camp. With the blacklisting and illegal nature of Hermann’s works, the copy of *Jettchen Gebert* in the library would have been a rare commodity in the German nation. The success of this book was huge; *Jettchen Gebert* made Hermann a superstar overnight, even though one of its main characters was Jewish. *Jettchen Gebert* was a great example of a Jewish family, and the book was later adopted into a film in late 1910s after the Great War. The sheer focus of this novel and the popularity it had being transformed into a motion picture shows how popular it really was, and how enticing it most likely was to the men at Alva to read for the first time, and for some to revisit it from their past. Apart from Hermann there were other artists’ works that were included in the library that did

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<sup>61</sup>Martin, Glaubrecht, "Hermann, Georg," *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 8 (1969), p. 656, <http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/ppn118703706.html>

<sup>62</sup> Glaubrecht, "Hermann, Georg," 656.

not align with National Socialist belief, but were most likely popular for their realistic images that these literary works portrayed.

One of them was Norwegian author Sigrid Undset's book, *Frau Hjelde*. Like Gutzleb, Undset was born well before the Nazis came to power in Germany.<sup>63</sup> As the Nazi regime rose Undset fled because of her opposing views, and returned after the war. Her work is extremely interesting because of the feminine nature of a lot of her works. Her stories would contain a lot of female characters and motifs, which would not appear to be connected to male POWs. However the connection goes deeper into the nostalgia and homesickness that was shown by the popularity of Hermann's *Jettchen Gebert*. With the tagline on the cover of the book being "Menschen suchen – Ihr Glück" (People Search – Their/Her Luck), there is a promise of the reading finding what they want.<sup>64</sup> At this point in captivity men were missing their girlfriends, wives, etc., and literary characters were one way to think about their significant others and figuratively "find" them in their memories and imaginations.

The other difference in fictional pieces of literature in the camp library resided upon heroic and realistic tales. The previous works all revealed realistic images of family, landscape, etc., but both fueled the desire for escapism while in captivity. The heroic tales that were the most popular included Jules Verne's *Mathias Sandorf*, Ernst F. Löhndorff's *Khaiberpaß*, Friedrich Spielhagen's *In Reih und Glied*, and C.F. Meyer's *Gustav Adolfs Page*. From the beginning, Verne holds most likely the largest amount of popularity and success as an author. Verne was a French playwright and novelist, who

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<sup>63</sup> "Sigrid Undset," *Erik Berntsens Slektssider*, accessed March 2015, <http://vestraat.net/TNG/getperson.php?personID=I37182&tree=IEA>

<sup>64</sup> Sigrid Undset, *Frau Hjelde*, (Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Aktiengesellschaft, 1930), cover.

along with H.G. Wells and Mary Shelley, are considered the creators of science fiction stories.<sup>65</sup> Verne's *Journey to the Center of the Earth* helped create the Vernean thrill — “a congenial mixture of 19th-century moral clarity, the safety of numbers, and a sense of coming very close to, but never toppling over the edge of the known.”<sup>66</sup> The particular book that was popular in Alva was *Mathias Sandorf*, which has commonly been referred to as “Verne's Monte Cristo.”<sup>67</sup> Verne's work and others in this category tell more of the story behind POWs mentality behind barbed wire. They wanted to escape from daily routines, and the clear fact that they were apart from the war that they had fought for a few years. They were constantly placed in adrenaline-fueled situations only to be taken away from them. Thus stories like Verne's *Mathias Sandorf* that contained elements of adventure and justice provided them with an adequate escape along with a possible sensation of adrenaline by being immersed into the story.

The story itself takes place in Trieste, 1867, when two criminals named Sarcany and Zirony intercept a carrier pigeon.<sup>68</sup> The message attached to the pigeon details a plot to liberate Hungary from the Austria-Hungary crown.<sup>69</sup> The two men met up with another individual, who decided to turn in the conspirators for an award. The conspirators' names were Count Sandorf, Stephen Bathory, and Ladislas Zathmar — Bathory and Zathmar were sentenced to death while Sandorf escaped.<sup>70</sup> Fifteen years after the sentence Sandorf returns as Dr. Antekirrt, vowing to enact justice. To enact his

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<sup>65</sup> “Jules Verne, 1828-1905,” *EMP Museum*, accessed March 2015, <http://web.archive.org/web/20120722084104/http://www.empmuseum.org/exhibitions/index.asp?articleID=961>

<sup>66</sup> “Jules Verne, 1828-1905,” March 2015.

<sup>67</sup> “Mathias Sandorf,” *ROH Press*, accessed March 2015, <http://www.rohpress.com/sandorf.htm>.

<sup>68</sup> Jules Verne, *Mathias Sandorf* (London: 1889).

<sup>69</sup> Verne, *Mathias Sandorf*

<sup>70</sup> Verne, *Mathias Sandorf*

justice, Sandorf recruits Pescade and Matifou to scour the Mediterranean for the men.<sup>71</sup>

Just like any other Verne story there is a countless amount of adventure, justice, and “marvelous journeys” that would have simply taken the prisoner out of the reality that they would have been living in under captivity.<sup>72</sup>

Apart from the infamous Jules Verne, there are also several other books that would provide adventurous and thrilling storylines for prisoners. One of them was Löhndorff's *Khaiberpaß*. Löhndorff was completely different from the rest of the authors because he was mainly an adventurer and sailor, who wrote about his travels and visits. He was born at the end of 1800s and lived through the Second World War. The work that was in the library, *Khaiberpaß*, was published in 1941, and followed his travels through the Khyber Pass, which was a mountain pass that connected Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>73</sup> The relative “newness” of the publication is probably a large indication of why it was popular. In other words the prisoners most likely would not have been able to find this book on the battlefield, and the popularity of his works before the Second World War would have incited them to read it. Additionally the adventurous nature of the work would allow another route of escapism for the prisoners.

Completely disconnected from National Socialism in time, there were also several interesting works from early 19<sup>th</sup> century writers that held similar beliefs with Nazi ideals. These include K. Schönherr's *Allerhand Kreuzkopf* and Gustav Freytag's *Die Journalisten*. Schönherr was primarily a playwright and dramatist, who became known as an “early twentieth-century representative of the centuries-old tradition of regional

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<sup>71</sup> Verne, *Mathias Sandorf*

<sup>72</sup> Verne, *Mathias Sandorf*

<sup>73</sup> Ernst F. Löhndorff, *Khaiberpaß* (Bremen: Carl Schünemann Verlag, 1941).

folk drama of the Alpine Tirol.”<sup>74</sup> The Alpine Tirol was the setting for the majority of the plays at the time.

As a popular *Heimat* writer, he brought the dialect and culture of the rural areas to life on the prestigious stages of Vienna and other German-speaking theaters. His plays often portray the harshness of life and faults of the common people in blunt naturalistic fashion; some combine grim realism with sentimentality and melodrama. Frequent themes include peasants' love of the land, family tragedies, moral dilemmas, the battle of the sexes, and [others].<sup>75</sup>

Considering the concept of *Heimat* and *Lebensraum* were important to Nazi ideologues, it is not crazy to think that thematic portrayals of the land and the people would not appeal to their nationalist tendencies. On the other hand, it holds a separate connotation of being *Heimatlos* (homeless), in the sense that they are in a foreign land and not home.

The full title of Schönherr's work had the subtitle of *Geschichten und Gestalten aus den Trioler Alpen*, which means that the work will be focused upon the history and shapes of the Tyrolean Alps.<sup>76</sup> This is reflected within the chapters that Schönherr elected to include which divulge into drastically different stories and explanations of things within the Alps.<sup>77</sup> The story and detail of the Alps that Schönherr delves into would draw a picture for the prisoners within the camp and they would be able to think with positive nostalgia about their respective homes – even if they did not live relatively close to the Tyrol. Schönherr's works were influential on *Heimat* themes, but Gustav Freytag's *Die Journalisten* reveal concepts of opposition towards other Eastern European countries – specifically Poland. Freytag was a very early example of nationalist identities and

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<sup>74</sup>Pamela S. Saur, "Karl Schönherr," *The Literary Encyclopedia*, published March 01 2005, <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=5888>.

<sup>75</sup> Saur, "Karl Schönherr," March 01 2005

<sup>76</sup> Karl Schönherr, *Allerhand Kreuzkopf: Geschichten und Gestalten aus den Tiroler Alpen* (Leipzig: H.Haefel Verlag, 1911).

<sup>77</sup> Schönherr, *Allerhand Kreuzkopf*, 5.

*Lebensraum*, stating that the Polish people were facing the entirety of the German nation and that they would bring Poland into the German realm.<sup>78</sup> As a result it was another example of soldiers' maintaining and building upon the Nazi identity that they entered the camp with.

Finally there are the two most interesting books from the discovered cards that reveal a lot about the prisoners are Johannes Bahnzaf's *Lachendes Leben* and Hjalmar Kutzleb's *Zeitgenosse Linsenbarth*. The interest in these two books begins with the men attributed. Bahnzaf was born December 20<sup>th</sup> 1907 in Stuttgart, and would eventually become the *Verlagskaufmann* (bookseller, or publisher) of Bertelsmann-Verlags during the Nazi regime.<sup>79</sup> Along with working in a prominent role during Hitler's reign, Bahnzaf took an active role with National Socialism by applying and serving in the *Waffen-SS*.<sup>80</sup> In the last years of the war, Bahnzaf was detained for *korruptionsvorwürfen* (charges of corruption), when he was caught making blank paper forms for the publishing house.<sup>81</sup> He was able to get past the charges and continued to work in the publishing industry post-war. Along with his experience as an SS-soldier, as a publisher he edited one of the most successful Gemran publications during the Second World War, *Lachendes Leben: Ein Buch voll herzhaften Humors* (Laughing Life: A Book of Hearty Humors).<sup>82</sup> The book was mainly a collection of humorous stories. The fact that Bahnzaf was a Nazi officer, and edited one of the most successful books during the

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<sup>78</sup> Agnieszka B. Nance, *Literary and Cultural Images of a Nation without a State: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Poland* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2008), 45-46.

<sup>79</sup> Hans-Eugen Bühler & Olaf Simmons, "Banzhaf, Johannes," *Datenbank Schrift und Data, 1900-1960*, last modified 2003, <http://www.polunbi.de/pers/banzhaf-01.html>.

<sup>80</sup> Bühler & Simmons, "Banzhaf, Johannes," 2003.

<sup>81</sup> Bühler & Simmons, "Banzhaf, Johannes," 2003.

<sup>82</sup> Bühler & Simmons, "Banzhaf, Johannes," 2003.



Second World War makes sense that it was this popular at Camp Alva. Not only did they know that the work was coming from a fellow Nazi, but it was something that they had already been accustomed to in the German nation.



Figure 3— *Waffen-SS* Card for Johannes Banzhaf<sup>83</sup>

*Lachendes Leben* not only contained humorous stories, but it included illustrations to accompany some of the stories, and a singular poem. The poem was titled “Was soll ich machen?” written by Fritz Woike.<sup>84</sup> The poem itself is interesting in its singularity, but the content of the poem is equally intriguing. The narrator is a father who begins the poem with

Und wenn der Sonntagmorgen lacht  
 Und meine Kückenschar erwacht –  
 Dann währt es nicht lange,

<sup>83</sup> Bühler & Simmons, “Banzhaf, Johannes,” 2003.

<sup>84</sup> Johannes Banzhaf, editor, *Lachendes Leben: Ein Buch voll herzhaften Humors*, (Gütersloh: Verlag C. Bertelsmann, 1943), 145-147.

Kommt so eine Range  
Ins Bett mir hinein  
Und kuschelt sich ein.  
Was will ich machen –  
Als lachen.<sup>85</sup>

This stanza explains that after he wakes up on a Sunday morning, issues that face his family on a daily basis confront him. The issues are laughable as the narrator talks about the children and girls with “plappernde Zungen” (blabbering tongues), but each stanza is finished with the mantra – “what will I do, except laugh.”<sup>86</sup> The meaning of the poem is to never get stressed or take for granted the problems of daily life – take everything in stride. This kind of message would have been a positive one for the prisoners who probably were depressed on being imprisoned. Additionally the use of the family as the centerpiece for the poem would allow the men to reminisce about their own back in Germany. All of these light-hearted connections apply more to the individual identity and mentality of a prisoner, but the familiarity of the text with the history of the editor and Nazi Germany appeals more the national identity within the camp. As a result, there should be no question on that *Lachendes Leben* was one of the most, if not the most, popular piece of literature at Camp Alva because of its popularity in Germany, and the comedic stories that the prisoners would encounter.

While Bahnzaf’s *Lachendes Leben* was directly connected to the National Socialist regime both in publication and editor, Hjalmar Gutzleb was loosely connected to Nazi Germany. Gutzleb was born December 23, 1885, in Thüringen, and would eventually study philosophy, German language, history, and geography in Leipzig and

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<sup>85</sup> Bahnzaf, *Lachendes Leben*, 145.

<sup>86</sup> Bahnzaf, *Lachendes Leben*, 145-147.

Marburg.<sup>87</sup> After serving for a short time in the Great War, Gutzleb would finish his career and life teaching at various institutions and publishing a variety of material.<sup>88</sup> Along with being an author and academic, he was also a major proponent of the earlier mentioned *Wandervogel*. “Mit den Wanderutensilien der Bewegung und einer Laute unternahm Kutzleb Wanderungen abseits der Städte und begeisterte sich für das einfache Leben in unberührter Natur.”<sup>89</sup> In other words Kutzleb believed in the younger generations finding themselves on their own, and National Socialism took advantage of this.

Not only did the National Socialist authorities use Kutzleb’s works to instill youthful pride to join the Hitler Youth or another Nazi parallel, but his works were also filled with “eine germanisierend-nationale Tendenz” (a German-national bias) and anti-Semitic attitudes. *Zeitgenosse Linsenbarth*, in particular, was considered a *Schicksalroman* (Fate, or destiny novel). The story is quite dense to get through, but there is a multitude of issues and themes that reciprocated Kutzleb’s nationalist pride towards the German nation, and would connect closer to the nationalistic tendencies of the POWs in Alva. The inclusion of Banzhaf’s and Kutzleb’s works in Camp Alva’s library reveals a lot about the men in the camp, but also the incompetence of the American authorities within the various camps. Two of the most popular works at Alva had clear Nazi connections – Banzhaf as a *Waffen-SS* officer, and Kutzleb with his focus

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<sup>87</sup> “Hjalmar Gutzleb,” *Lexicon Wesfälischer Autorinnen und Autoren 1750 bis 1950*, accessed March 2015, [http://www.lwl.org/literaturkommission/alex/index.php?id=00000003&letter=K&layout=2&author\\_id=00000738](http://www.lwl.org/literaturkommission/alex/index.php?id=00000003&letter=K&layout=2&author_id=00000738).

<sup>88</sup> “Hjalmar Gutzleb.”

<sup>89</sup> Rudolf Müller, “Literarisches Weilburg Stadt und Lahn: Lob des Windhofs,” *Homepage zur Stadt Weilburg an der Lahn*, last modified 2008, [http://www.weilburg-lahn.info/literat/lit\\_we\\_19.htm](http://www.weilburg-lahn.info/literat/lit_we_19.htm).

on youth, national pride and anti-Semitism. It makes their popularity completely believable, since they would have been works that would have been forced or shown to them as young Nazi members.

The question may be asked how these kinds of novel, poems, etc. were even able to find their way into the most intense Nazi camp, while the most extreme works like *Mein Kampf* or Goebbel's works were stricken from anyone's reading list. The answer is quite simple. The American POW system was terribly organized and ran because of the unfamiliarity with the German mind – be it culturally, socially, etc. One of the best examples to understand their incompetency apart from the kinds of National Socialist literature in camps was the reeducation system that they developed in other camps. After the Soviets developed their own reeducation program in 1943, several American politicians and military minds vied for the creation of reeducation programs in some POW camps. The process was expedited because of the Soviet program and was initiated with Camp Van Etten.<sup>90</sup> This was not the final product, but it was a planning and organizing camp, where American authorities attempted to develop a screening process, a curriculum, and select educators.<sup>91</sup> In a few months, the process was finalized and the program began in Rhode Island with Fort Kearney.

In short the problem that the Americans faced was in large part because of the hurried nature of the program, but another larger complication arose. There were no true German-speaking instructors, academics, etc. involved in the process. The program was developed by Americans for Germans – as a result a disconnect from what a German

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<sup>90</sup> Arthur L. Smith, *The War for the German Mind: Re-Educating Hitler's Soldiers* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996), 45-46.

<sup>91</sup> Smith, *The War for the German Mind*, 45-46.

would understand and how they would comprehend information was created amongst the volunteer students and the American instructors.<sup>92</sup> Along with a lack of German scholars, there were no true German translators that the Americans utilized; instead, they decided to rely upon other German volunteers that could speak some English.<sup>93</sup> These poor decisions led to a lackluster reeducation program that would never really take hold amongst the prisoners and Americans. Poor decision-making was in abundance in the American POW system beginning with the initial screening processes that led a lot of non-deserving prisoners to be sent to Alva. Since the reeducation program did not have specific individuals focused on being German translators, it is not surprising that some of the lesser-known, yet still National Socialist works were included in the library. Just as the Nazis at Alva were allowed to demonstrate their identity in subtle ways with their Nazi uniforms, propaganda (the carved eagle, in particular), and thoughts, they were now able to include passive Nazi literature.

The theoretical approach to a comparative analysis between literature and identity is relatively absent, but it is hard to argue against some of the details arisen by the literary works in Camp Alva's library. These works clearly demonstrate the separate, and sometimes equal, components of Nazi national identity, and personal identity and mentality. For national identity, the POWs were able to read the likes of Banzhaf and Gutzleb. Although these were not extremist names in Nazi propaganda, there were still clear connections that made them popular to the group of prisoners. On the other hand the works included by Banzhaf and Gutzleb, and others like Hermann and Schönherr appealed to the personal component of the prisoner. These works reminded them of

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<sup>92</sup> Smith, 45-55.

<sup>93</sup> Smith, 45-55.

home. They reminded them of family. They reminded them of Germany. Therefore even if this comparative evaluation of the library books at Alva is fairly new and young, it is hard to argue that what isolated prisoners were reading behind barbed wire did not correlate to some degree with who they were – be in nationally or personally.

Between the library, religious services, education program, music and theater, and sports, there was a clear change in mentality towards the prisoners held at Camp Alva. After the failures, complaints, and incidents within the early years of the camp when there were little to no options for recreation, a lot more positive responses and fewer complaints were given to the Swiss legation representatives. In other words the visits from the representatives became the timeline that showed the correlation between recreation and less demonstrative actions by the POWs at the most feared camp. The grade of prisoner became irrelevant after they were given more privileges and freedoms to distract themselves from everyday captivity. In congruence with these positive changes, a stronger adherence to the Geneva Convention resulted from the newer policies and privileges.

## Conclusion

As the Axis powers were pushed and stretched thin by the Allied Powers, it was clear that the war was reaching an end in the European front. A lot of rumors explaining the failures of the German *Wehrmacht* in particular were spread throughout the POW camps, like Alva. The Nazi Unteroffizier from earlier describes these rumors in great detail. In the last two entries from the journal that Stanley Hoole put together, the prisoner explains on December 7<sup>th</sup> 1943, that a representative from the International Red Cross arrived at the camp that discussed various political discussions that were occurring amongst world powers.<sup>1</sup> In the last entry of the journal, December 8<sup>th</sup> 1943, the reader is presented with a very simplistic acknowledgement of the eventual impending defeat.

Since the Russians have made steady progress during the entire month of November, according to papers in this country, they should most certainly be at least at the Polish border by Christmas. Nevertheless they have to retreat now under pressure of presumed 1700 tanks on various places. That being so, they must be near Kiev and Korosten. Does Moscow fire yet salvoes? Hardly any.<sup>2</sup>

These kinds of rumors were not only spread my word-of-mouth from guards and other prisoners, but also from English and German POW newspapers. As the years progressed the German prisoners more and more accepted these rumors. These men just wanted to go home.

When the war had finally come to an end the only precedence for prisoner repatriation was from Article 75 from the Geneva Convention that stated “repatriation of

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<sup>1</sup> W. Stanley Hoole, editor, *And Still We Conquer! The Diary of a Nazi Unteroffizier in the German Africa Corps who was Captured by the United States Army, May 9, 1943, and Imprisoned at Camp Shelby, Mississippi*, (Birmingham: Confederate Publishing Company, 1968), 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> Hoole, ed., *And Still We Conquer*, 8-10

prisoners shall be effected with the least possible delay after the conclusion of peace.”<sup>3</sup>

Even though this was the case, the prisoners at Camp Alva, amongst others, the “unconditional surrender” agreement decided upon by the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union the repatriation of POWs should be pushed to the backburner until

The termination of the war with Japan; or until the conclusion of a treaty of peace with Germany, and as much longer as may be provided in such a treaty; or during such time as the labor of these personnel is desired for the rebuilding and restoration of devastated areas; or during such time as is required by security considerations.<sup>4</sup>

Along with the complexity of items that had to be fulfilled for repatriation, the topic became controversial among American authorities and the public. On one side of the argument, there were the individuals that did not care for everything that the prisoners had contributed to American society. South Carolina senator Burnet Maybank fell under this mindset stating that “the prisoners of war in this country should be returned to their native lands, so that our boys who made possible the great victory in Europe, our gallant soldiers, will not find them there.”<sup>5</sup> On the other hand there was the group of individuals who were focused more on the mentality of the imprisoned soldiers. A representative from the American Military Government in Germany stated that “not only would they probably be the only large group of Germans who are well fed and who are still strongly Nazi, but they would reach Germany at a time when food and supplies will be running

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<sup>3</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*, 12 August 1949, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b36d2.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, (Chelsea: Scarborough House, 1996.),

<sup>5</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*,



low,” and seeing the destruction of their *Heimat* would turn them inflamed against the Allied ruling powers in a newly created divided Germany.<sup>6</sup>

Although it took some time, Camp Alva was finally closed on November, 15, 1945, as the final men were sent to Dermott, Arkansas, and Camp Polk, Louisiana before being repatriated to Germany.<sup>7</sup> Dermott was reserved for officers, while non-commissioned officers and enlisted men were sent were sent to Camp Polk.<sup>8</sup> During Alva’s existence, a plethora of men were transferred in and out of the camp as American authorities attempted to create an environment strictly of Nazi prisoners. While in captivity, military personnel wanted to suppress and control expressions of Nazi ideology so that there would not be any extenuated problems. They were partially successful with no huge displays of violence apart from the “Battle of Alva,” but in the suppression of Nazi expression they were not successful whatsoever. This was in large part due to the Geneva Convention.

The Geneva Convention of 1929 was adopted and revised after prisoners’ rights were not upheld throughout the First World War. Within this amended version, various articles were included that gave prisoners more rights while in captivity. This included the possibility for a “camp spokesman,” consignment of books, hygiene, and maintenance of possessions and “tokens of identity.”<sup>9</sup> The tokens of identity were displayed when the men would parade around the camp participating in military drills while still wearing their uniforms. On the other hand, there were displays of Nazi symbols in the camp the

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<sup>6</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*,

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Army Provost Marshal General, *Inactivation of PW Camp*, by Director, PW Special Projects Division (Washington, D.C.: Prisoners of War Division, September 13, 1945).

<sup>8</sup> *Inactivation of PW Camp*.

<sup>9</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*

guards like Leo Meyer and Herb Barrett had to ignore, such as the large wooden eagle. Most of the expressions were public and noticeable to the guards, who installed a myriad of security measures to counterbalance the measures within the Geneva Convention.

The singular moment that has been discovered, where there was a more private and individual display of Nazi expression was in the camp library. Within the library some of the most popular books were leisure reads that prisoners were taking out to escape from the world that they were now in behind barbed wire. One of the most famous examples is Jules Verne's *Mathias Sandorf*. These tales were escapist, but others like Georg Hermann's *Jettchen Gebert* and Karl Schönherr's *Allerhand Kreuzkopf* held more of a nostalgic meaning. Most of these stories had nothing to do with National Socialism, but several works like Johannes Banzhaf's *Lachendes Leben* and Hjalmar Gutzleb's *Zeitgenosse Linsenbarth* had clear and direct connections to the Nazi regime. Thus, the popularity of these works indicates another example of expression that could not be suppressed by the American authorities.

Apart from the consequences from the Geneva Convention, the library book situation represents the problems and character of the American POW system. The POW system was not planned well, and the lack of German translators and thinkers most likely allowed for the works of Banzhaf and Gutzleb to slip past. It is true that the extreme works of Hitler and Goebbels were not in the camp, but the popularity of these works in Germany prior, or in the early years of the war would have been noticed by a German thinker. Additionally the stereotypes and characterizations of what, or who a Nazi was influenced the screening a selection process. Descriptors like age, religion, etc. often held certain meanings to Americans on which correlated with Nazis, thus some prisoners

may have been wrongly categorized. Even if they were categorized properly, the early years of the POW system reveal that they were not conscientious of the problems Nazi enthusiasts would cause until a few years after hundreds of thousands of prisoners were brought into the United States.

For all of these reasons, Camp Alva was a failure that the guards and administration there could not prevent. The aspirations for a Nazi-centered camp were valiant, but could not succeed. However as the years have gone by, what has the legacy of Camp Alva become? On a national scale, Camp Alva has remained documented within the National Archives with few historians examining these records beyond quick anecdotes or reference by scholars like Arnold Krammer or Antonio Thompson. On the other hand there has been a larger effort locally to preserve and expand the history of Camp Alva. The campus library of Northwestern Oklahoma State University and the Alva Public Library has preserved primary source material, while the Cherokee Strip Museum has substantial donations from the community to build an excellent POW room that details everything about the camp – from the various handicrafts to the mugshots of the prisoners. Additionally there have been various signs put up around the town of Alva that signify the prisoners' travel to the camp. In other words, one learns the track these men took and understand how long it truly was until reaching their forced home.

Similarly the Oklahoma Mural Society created the painting cited earlier to commemorate the camp and the men that came there – still blood stained, without shoes, and overall disheveled. Finally and most importantly there are two major local historians that have greatly contributed to the study of Camp Alva: father and son, Paul and Wayne Kinzie. The Kinzie family has dedicated a lot of information and efforts to the camp that

in the future a Camp Alva museum will be opened in the small Oklahoma town. One of the most publicized events that exemplified the legacy of Camp Alva transpired in 1988 when several prisoners returned to tour Alva and the neighboring cities where camps were located.



Figure 4 – POW Trail Sign<sup>10</sup>

After all of the extensive attempts and failure to suppress hardcore Nazis imprisoned at Camp Alva, there was a highly publicized return to Alva by nine former POWs. Local newspapers and news channels recorded and observed the entire event, which was included in “Alva’s Centennial Celebration.”<sup>11</sup> In an article in the *Alva-Review Courier* by Julie Johnson, the reader discovers that Kurt Trummer had organized POW tours in 1984, and brought more former prisoners with him in 1988 by

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<sup>10</sup> “Personal Collection.” Picture taken in Alva, OK, where there are a variety of signs up that tracks course prisoners would take to get to camp.

<sup>11</sup> “Alva’s Centennial Celebration: Salute to the Military,” Flyer, 1988.

...posting notices in newspapers inquiring as to the whereabouts of men who served as prison guards. He then contacted leaders in communities to find out if the former POWs would be welcome to return to the communities where they had been interned. Once Trummer had received letters of welcome, he contacted members of German veteran groups and informed them of his intention to form a tour group.<sup>12</sup>

Upon contacting various veteran groups, Trummer established an assembly of nine former prisoners to revisit Alva. These men were Trummer, Franz Wulf, Harry Black, Ignaz Goehm, Werner Friderichs, Emil Holtkamp, Egon Uhlmann, Manfred Vieweg, and Max Woelfel.<sup>13</sup> Trummer and Woelfel were held at neighboring Camp Tonkawa for the majority of their captivity, while the rest spent their time at Camp Alva.

Although this trip is a huge supplementation of primary source material, it is quite skewed by the passing of time. If one considers that nearly forty-five years had passed since these men were first imprisoned, there must have been obvious changes in that timeframe. In other words, how these men were treated and what they encountered once they returned must have changed their mentality. In the United States they were given nearly everything – clothes, a plethora of food, and a small degree of freedom while being behind barbed wire. On the other hand once they were expatriated back to Germany, all Germans discovered that their country was left in ruins and divided into occupational zones amongst the Allied Powers. As a result, former POWs were more willing to return to the site of their captivity over time since they realized what they were given. In the 1988 visits Erhard Erk mirrored this sentiment stating “we made the best of the situation...there was no hate among the Americans at the camp and the German

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<sup>12</sup> “POWs Leave Alva with Pleasant Memories,” *Newsgram* (Alva, OK), April 11, 1989.

<sup>13</sup> “POWs Leave Alva with Pleasant Memories,” April 11, 1989.

prisoners.”<sup>14</sup> This obviously is not the case with various guards recounting the “Battle of Alva,” a sit down strike by the prisoners, POWs refusing to work on Hitler’s birthday to celebrate, and multiple guards interrupting POWs intimidating others.

The passage of time changed the mentality of prisoners toward their captivity; so too did their political viewpoints change, sometimes in befuddling ways. For example the POWs that Corporal Jack R. Martin saw with “an SS tattoo under their arm” would seem to be those that would most likely not want to return.<sup>15</sup> These Germans would not want to return because the Nazi ideals that they held were not only frowned upon by Americans, but also in German society. One former prisoner, Karl Koenig, explained this viewpoint in a visit describing how people in Germany treated former Nazis like “scum of the earth.”<sup>16</sup> Consequently the statements from visitors in the 1980s are extremely hard to analyze and understand. On one hand the visits provide great insight into the camp and give specific names of those that were guards and prisoners. On the other hand the passing of time and the caliber of visitor befuddles any interpretation that could be made.

In the end, Camp Alva’s story is still uncharted, but it is an important one to tell. Even though it provides a brilliant case study to understanding the expansion of POWs’ rights during the Second World War, it also reveals a lot more about the men held there. In the future, the historiography of Camp Alva will be able to expand by looking at the individual men held there. Using genealogical records specifically, a clearer picture could be drawn of the character of the prisoners held there. Essentially this could answer,

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<sup>14</sup> Julie Johnson, “WWII, Camp Alva Remembered by Former POWs,” *Alva Review-Courier* (Alva, OK), 1988.

<sup>15</sup> “Martin’s Remember Prisoner of War Camp,” *Alva Review Courier* (Alva, OK), November 10, 1985.

<sup>16</sup>Helen Barrett, “He Came a Stranger, Left a Cherished Friend.”

who was a Nazi? What was a Nazi? Or, where was a Nazi from? All of these questions need and should be addressed, but in the meantime an understanding of the balancing act that the American authorities had to face between the Geneva Convention and their intentions to suppress Nazi expressionism reveals something previously not addressed.

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