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# The Round Tablette

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**Welcome to the first October session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.** Tonight's speakers are Dean Simmons, author of *Swords into Plowshares: Minnesota's POW Camps during World War II*, Tom Lalim, from Fort Snelling, and Jerry Yocom, curator of the Camp Algona POW Museum in Iowa, who are filling in for Dr. Arnold Krammer, who was unable to make the trip. They will be discussing the extent of German POW camps in the United States and the activities inside them.

Beginning with *OPERATION TORCH*, the invasion of North Africa, the United States began receiving thousands of German and Italian prisoners of war (PWs). This trickle would grow into a deluge with each Allied advance until there were over 400,000 by 1944. The prisoners were loaded onto transport ships and brought to the United States.

Overall, the US was quite generous in its treatment of enemy PWs in the States. The 1929 Geneva Convention laid out the guidelines for how prisoners were to be treated. These included the types of camps they were to be held in, standards for nutrition, medical care, religious needs, education, and even sports facilities. Also included in the convention were provisions and standards for PWs to work in the country. The War Department believed that if the US treated their prisoners well, it would be reflected in the treatment of US soldiers in enemy hands. Concern over American PWs was paramount in the War Department's treatment of enemy PWs in America. In addition to a US government commitment to provide good treatment of prisoners, the Swiss Legation and the International Red Cross also had some oversight, they inspected American PW camps, noted complaints from the Axis prisoners, and delivered letters home for them.

One major difficulty in processing PWs when they embarked to the US and when they arrived here, was the lack of language interpreters and typists. Most of the military's German and Italian speakers were active in the combat areas and unit intelligence, and few were available for PW

processing. Many times foreign PWs that could have yielded valuable intelligence were passed through the registration process without serious interrogation because of the lack of language specialists. Many times US personnel relied on English speaking prisoners to translate with fellow PWs. This led to major problems when the earliest German PWs were often still loyal to the Nazi cause had to interact with later PWs who were disenchanted. Eventually the US set up separate facilities to house the ardent Nazi PWs to keep them from disrupting the camps.

Another problem was the generally low caliber of the America soldiers who guarded the prison camps. Those soldiers, who did not qualify to make the cut to be combat troops, were given lower priority assignments, and being a POW camp guard was one of them. This did not sit well with guards who would rather have been fighting overseas. Later, as manpower became scarcer, returning frontline soldiers were used as camp guards, and morale of the camp staff improved.

Axis prisoners in the camps were generally treated respectfully. The PWs had a variety of activities open to them while incarcerated: many took the time to learn English, obtain more education, put on theatrical productions, engage in sports, and work outside the camp, for which they were paid in scrip to use at the camp PX.

A major difficulty in keeping order in the camps for Germans was the ideological split between committed Nazis and non-Nazis. The differences in attitude were dependent on when in the war a prisoner was captured. Those first German prisoners captured during the North African campaign, (known in camp parlance as "*Afrikaners*") were largely dedicated Nazis, with faith in the ultimate victory of the Reich. Later German PWs that were captured in Italy and France were called "*Franzosen*" and had few illusions about the inevitability of Germany's defeat. They were considered traitors by the older camp hands, and tensions quickly developed. If a non-Nazi spoke out against the Third Reich, or even expressed doubt about Germany's ultimate victory then he might be severely beaten or killed. Later, in 1944, there were efforts to permanently separate the two groups and engage in democratic re-education.

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**If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)**

With millions of American men in uniform overseas, the United States had a manpower shortage at home. Millions of women and minorities took jobs in defense plants, but there were few agricultural laborers. PWs were used to fill that void. In the South they were used to pick cotton and harvest rice, while in the Midwest they were used to harvest wheat, corn, and sugar beets. Minnesota was one state that employed PWs. Camp Algona in Iowa was established in 1943 as a feeder camp to branch camps in Minnesota. That fall, 100 Italian prisoners arrived in Princeton, Minnesota to harvest potatoes, with another 100 in Olivia, Minnesota to harvest corn. Eventually there would be fifteen Minnesota branch camps: in Princeton, Olivia, Morehead, Fairmont, Remer, Bena, Owatonna, Faribault, Deer River, New Ulm, Montgomery, St. Charles, Howard Lake, Bird Island, Hollandale, and Wells. Prisoners would pick crops and tend fields on farms, and were lumberjacks in northern Itasca County. PWs were housed in old Civilian Conservation Corps barracks, fair-ground buildings, and even tents. PWs were often shifted from one camp to another.

When the war ended in May 1945, PWs were expected to be repatriated as quickly as possible. For the European prisoners this was difficult. In devastated Germany and Italy, there were no easy answers for where would they live and how would they feed themselves. The continuing war with the Japanese also delayed the return of PWs. They were still needed for the harvest in the fall of 1945. However, by July of 1946 all Axis, PWs had been returned to their homelands.

US treatment of foreign prisoners of war was, while not perfect, a moderate success. Many PWs returned for camp reunions, stayed in touch with farm families where they worked, and many returned to become American citizens. The experience of Axis PWs in America is in marked contrast to how American PWs were treated as captives by the Germans and especially by the Japanese.

**FURTHER READINGS:**

- Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (Lanham, MD: Scarborough House, 1996)
- Dean B. Simmons, *Swords into Plowshares: Minnesota's POW Camps during World War II* (St. Paul, MN: Cathedral Hill Books, 2000)
- Anita Albrecht Buck, *Behind Barbed Wire* (St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press, 1998)

**Announcements:**

- Vietnam War Roundtable** - 15 Oct. 2018 - Native American Veterans - [mnvietnam.org](http://mnvietnam.org) - [rldietrich@mnmilitarymuseum.org](mailto:rldietrich@mnmilitarymuseum.org)
- Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - 16 Oct. 2018 – *Lost Gettysburg Address* - [www.tccwrt.com](http://www.tccwrt.com) - [info@tccwrt.com](mailto:info@tccwrt.com)

St. Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - 22 Oct. 2018 – *Culp's Hill* - 715-386-1268 - [rossandhaines@com-cast.net](mailto:rossandhaines@com-cast.net)

Civil War Symposium - 6 Apr. 2019 - [info@tccwrt.com](mailto:info@tccwrt.com)  
 Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>

Minnesota Air Guard Museum - [www.mnangmuseum.org](http://www.mnangmuseum.org) 612-713-2523

Friends of Ft. Snelling, [www.fortsnelling.org](http://www.fortsnelling.org)

World Without Genocide, 651-695-7621, <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>

Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644, Air show - 20 June 2020. <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.

Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie - 13-14 July 2019 - [www.wotn.org](http://www.wotn.org) 952-746-6100

Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble - 24 Oct. 2018 - Bromworth, *The Sea Wolves*- [sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com](mailto:sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com)

Winston Churchill Book Club: Info: [lin.hopkins@hotmail.com](mailto:lin.hopkins@hotmail.com)

Alliance Francaise, [www.afmsp.org](http://www.afmsp.org), 612-332-0436

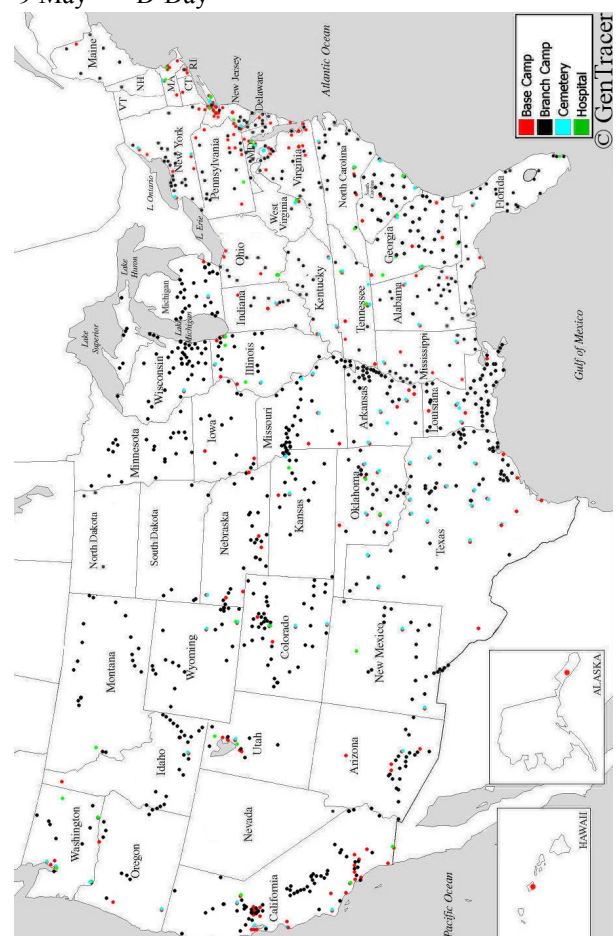
Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - [crazyjerry45@hotmail.com](mailto:crazyjerry45@hotmail.com) - 651-338-2717

CAF - Commemorative Air Force - [www.cafmn.org](http://www.cafmn.org) 651-455-6942

**We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)**

**Round Table Schedule 2018-2019**

- 2018**
- 25 Oct. WWI Relative to WWII
- 8 Nov. Conspiracies v. Hitler
- 13 Dec. Pearl Harbor
- 2019**
- 10 Jan. Inside Hitler's Headquarters
- 14 Feb. Economics of War
- 14 Mar. Aerial Reconnaissance of the Reich
- 28 Mar. WASPs
- 11 Apr. General with Six Stars: J. H. C. Lee
- 9 May D-Day



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