



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: James C. and Dorothy Mercer

DATE OF BIRTH: May 23, 1924 / January 27, 1920 GENDER: M / F

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: July 28, 2000

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Mercer's home in Hereford, TX

INTERVIEWER: Robert Hart and Cameron Saffell

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM _____ OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: February 9, 2001

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Cameron Saffell

DATE ABSTRATED: March 28, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Responses to standardized prisoner of war project questionnaire for camp workers; some questions from farm and ranch folks questionnaire for Dorothy. Regards Italian POW camp south of Hereford and their jobs at the camp.

DATE RANGE: 1943 - 1946

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Jimmy begins by discussing his duties at Camp Hereford, first as a guard at the main gate and later bringing in supplies by truck from Clovis, N.M. Stopped for coffee at shop in Clovis with POWs, which made the detail popular among the prisoners. When things “got comfortable” the Army transferred him to Germany (circa March 1945), where he served in an infantry division and an armored infantry division before being discharged in May 1946. Drafted in April 1943 in Kentucky. Came through Fort Benjamin Harrison, Ind., and sent directly to Hereford. Found out when his brother, stationed there as a cook, came and told him.

Talks about the arrangements for his work details of four Italian prisoners: one guard with rifle, brought their lunch with them. Dorothy asked about whether locals resented how the prisoners were treated (better rations and general treatment). Jimmy briefly talks about the army units assigned to Hereford. Camp was still being built when he came. More details about getting supplies at Clovis: one to four trucks a day, left at 7:30am, prisoners and guard went by car, Jimmy went with the first truck, came back with the last truck. Only went into compounds occasionally, to distribute food. Never had trouble, particularly since he was bringing what they were eating. POWs unloaded the trucks at camp, sometimes included the ones who went to Clovis if there was a lot.

Jimmy tells story he heard about Italians helping Mexican girls in the fields by helping fill their sacks, since the girls were paid by the sack (or pound). Neither recalls Germans being at camp. Motor pool supplied a driver for the car with the guard and POWs. Discussion about doctors at the camp for POWs and for base personnel. Camp had a chapel, but prisoners had their own chapels or something. Some soldiers went to church in town. Discussion of whether POWs were treated too well. Does not recall any escape stories or incidents.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

More questions about escapes, but neither recalls any escapes. Story about two soldiers drafted with Jimmy in Kentucky who went AWOL and visited Jimmy’s parents at home. Worst job was working at the gate because periodic shift rotations created an irregular schedule. Loved what he did with the quartermaster; lived in town and it was like having any job.

Dorothy asked about whether she had contact with POWs. Not that she recalled. Discussion about photographs or objects that might be used in exhibit. Paintings at Umbarger church mentioned. A couple of local families mentioned as perhaps having knowledge of POW use. Having grown up there, Dorothy discusses impact of camp on community emotionally and economically. She tells a story about a soldier who was sent to the one bank in town but who didn’t drive, had never left the camp, and didn’t know how many banks were in Hereford.

Dorothy was a secretary in the quartermaster’s office. Some discussion about use of Mexican nationals after the war. Neither recalls inspection visits from the Red Cross or other officials. Dorothy does not recall if camp closed shortly after the last prisoners left or not. Most of town turned out by the railroad when the first prisoners arrived. Dorothy remembered seeing farmers in town, but never saw any prisoners there. Neither believes the stories that the POWs were mistreated or starved. Dorothy mentions local teachers who promote study of history in the town and of the camp.