

NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: J.Q. Barnes

DATE OF BIRTH: February 7, 1927 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: August 23, 2000

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum

INTERVIEWER: Ron Nelson

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM__x__OTHER_____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: January 16, 2001

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Ron Nelson

DATE ABSTRATED: January 25, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Mr. Barnes' recollections of a German and Italian prisoner of war camp in Hatch, New Mexico, during World War II.

DATE RANGE: 1942 - 1943

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

During World War II, Mr. Barnes attended Hatch High School across the street from a prisoner of war camp housing German and Italian prisoners captured in North Africa. The prisoners worked on farms in the area and were not, according to Mr. Barnes, very efficient.

The American soldiers stationed at the prison had good relations with residents of the Hatch area. In contrast, the "CC boys" at the Civilian Conservation Corps camp near Hatch before the war "had fights all over." Soldiers at the POW camp gave free jeep rides on certain days to residents who bought a twenty-five cent war bond stamp. The camp personnel also sponsored turkey shoots before Thanksgiving and Christmas and donated the proceeds to charity.

Italian prisoners were allowed to go to the movies on Saturday afternoons, the consultant said, but not the Germans. The German prisoners were considered uncooperative, he said, and threw rocks in their cotton sacks to increase the weight when told to pick more cotton per day. One farmer said he got the rocks cleared out of his field anyway.

Mr. Barnes said the POW camp included three buildings originally built by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation when it was there in 1912-14 to construct Elephant Butte Dam. After the POW camp closed, the buildings were declared surplus property and were turned over to the Hatch public schools. Mr. Barnes describes how one of the adobe buildings finally disintegrated, or "melted," and a federal employee was sent to Hatch to investigate the missing building.

The Italians were the more artistic, said the consultant, and created a twelve-foot plaster American eagle and shield to be displayed by the camp's flagpole. They also made a chandelier for their mess hall. (The chandelier has been donated to the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum.)

One of the German POWs returned to Hatch after the war to show his family where he had been.

Asked if the area residents were afraid of the prisoners, Mr. Barnes said all the local people were deer hunters with rifles. Only an escaped prisoner, he said, would be in danger.

The consultant did not think prisoner of war labor did very much to alleviate farm labor shortages during the war.