

**NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM**

CONSULTANT: Nick Clemenza

DATE OF BIRTH: January 14, 1918 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: August 27, 2000

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Clemenza residence, Dexter, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER: Marcie Palmer

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: November 14, 2000

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Marcie Palmer

DATE ABSTRATED: December 12, 2000

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Description of World War II prisoner of war camps for Italian and German prisoners at Roswell and Dexter (Bogle farm), New Mexico.

DATE RANGE: 1942-1945

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Nick Clemenza joined the U. S. Army around 1942 and transferred from Louisiana to New Mexico in early 1943. He was at the Roswell prisoner of war camp for about a year and a half before transferring to the Bogle farm near Dexter.

The Roswell camp housed German prisoners of war, then Italians, then Germans again. Mr. Clemenza says there was not “much difference” between German and Italian prisoners, and said both groups were glad to be where they had a place to sleep and food to eat each day.

He says the Germans were shipped directly from North Africa where they had been in Rommel’s Afrika Corps. Mr. Clemenza’s first duty at the Roswell camp was to record their names and note any scars or other identifying marks. He was then assigned to the provost marshal’s office where his job was to assign the POWs into groups for farm detail and count them when they came back in the evening. He remembers them as well-disciplined men who had a “togetherness” and sang as they marched.

English-speaking German POWs acted as interpreters.

Mr. Clemenza was transferred to a POW sub-camp at the Bogle farm near Dexter and remained there about a year until his discharge in 1945. He remembers there were about fifty to sixty-five prisoners housed in a farmhouse and in tents in the yard. The POWs cooked in the farmhouse kitchen.

An officer, an interpreter, and about six enlisted men made up the camp’s American army staff.

The prisoners were good workers “when they wanted to work,” Clemenza says. He believes they were paid ten cents an hour if they went on work details to farms, and ten cents a day if they stayed at the camp. At the camp they had a soccer field and figured they had a “pretty good deal here.”

The Roswell camp was larger, he says, with three compounds of about 1,500 prisoners each. Each compound had its own housing and kitchen with prisoners as cooks. The three compounds were separated by wire. Trucks delivered supplies from town to the camp, then horses and wagons delivered supplies into each compound.

At the Bogle farm, the American soldiers would tell a prisoner needing discipline that he would have to go back to the base camp in Roswell. This worked as discipline because the prisoners preferred the freedom of the Bogle farm.

From the first, Mr. Clemenza says, he felt like the prisoners were just human beings in a strange country.

Army doctors were on duty at the Roswell camp. Religious services for the prisoners were in the gymnasium where the American servicemen enjoyed movies, dances, and basketball. Nick and Betty Clemenza met at one of the dances, he says.

Mr. Clemenza remembers several prisoners dying at the Roswell camp and being buried at a small cemetery there. He does not know if the bodies were exhumed and shipped home after the war.

He feels the prisoners were treated well and gave no trouble. They “knew their job” on work details, and did it or they stayed in the camp.

His service duty was “a good experience,” Mr. Clemenza feels. He thinks the prisoners were human beings that Americans should not hold a grudge against because they were told to fight and they fought. He says his wife’s family understood his work duty because her father helped with carpentry work in building the camp and had experience being around prisoners.

The consultant remembers hearing the POWs were afraid to escape because they knew the farmers had guns. He also heard there were regular escapes at the POW camp in Artesia; prisoners would go to town at night and return to camp before light. No prisoners were ever missing when Mr. Clemenza was checking work-detail prisoners in and out at the Roswell camp.

Prisoners at the Bogle farm worked in a [feed] mill for eight-hour shifts, twenty-four hours a day, Mr. Clemenza says.

Compared to Army infantry duty, Mr. Clemenza’s service assignment at the POW camps was “a picnic” where the servicemen got along with each other.

He has not heard from any of the POWs since that time.

The Presbyterian minister from Dexter would go out to the camp and pick up four or five POWs to work around the church. Mr. Clemenza thinks that even now the church has a stained, or painted, glass that is the work of prisoners.

Mr. Clemenza has photographs showing guards in the cotton fields; their officer is mounted on a horse. He has no copies of the Roswell camp’s newspaper or anything about its softball team which would play a civilian team in Artesia.

Mr. Clemenza was in a detail that took a group of prisoners by train from New Mexico to Dover, Delaware, before the war was over. He recalls the prisoners cooked for everyone on the train. Another time he accompanied a smaller number of prisoners in one train car to Fort Smith, Arkansas. He does not remember why the prisoners were being transferred.

Both Germans and Italians were at the Bogle farm, Mr. Clemenza says, and cooked for themselves and the American soldiers. The Germans cooked beef in different ways and the Italians wanted pasta. Vegetables came from the farm.

Mr. Clemenza says the prisoners at the Bogle place cleaned out a cement irrigation holding tank for swimming. POWs would swim on weekdays, American soldiers and their families on weekends.

The consultant reminisces at the end of the interview about his parents who emigrated here from Italy through Ellis Island. His father worked as a coal miner in Colorado and then at the steel mills at Pueblo, Colorado. Mr. Clemenza says his father left the Italian miners camp at Ludlow just before the 1914 massacre of workers there during a union-owners dispute.