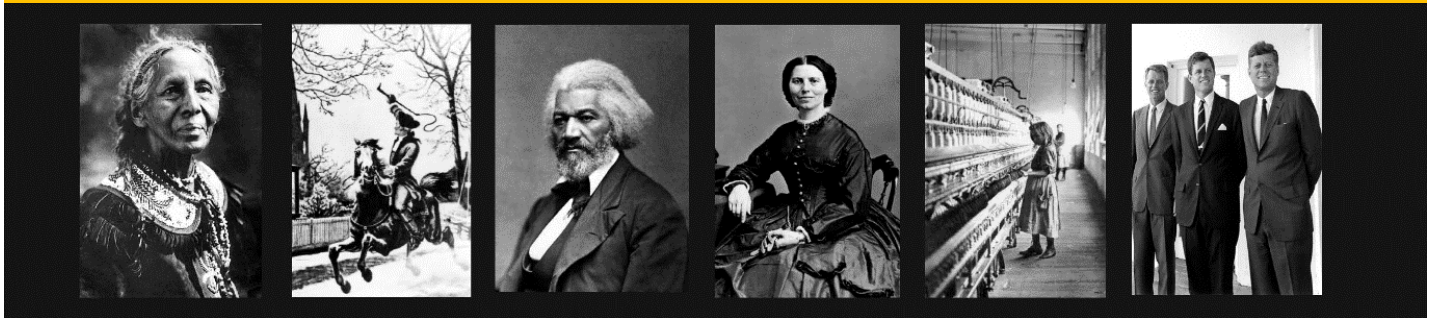


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“Hospitality Is the Best Form of Propaganda”: German Prisoners of War in Western Massachusetts, 1944-1946.”

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German POWs Arrive in Western Massachusetts

Captured German troops enter Camp Westover Field in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts. Many of the prisoners would go on to work as farmhands contracted out to farms in the Pioneer Valley. Undated photo. Courtesy of Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell Air Force Base.

“Hospitality Is the Best Form of Propaganda”: German Prisoners of War in Western Massachusetts, 1944–1946

JOHN C. BONAFILIA



Abstract: *In October 1944, the first German prisoners of war (POWs) arrived at Camp Westover Field in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts. Soon after, many of these prisoners were transported to farms throughout Hampshire, Franklin, and Hampden Counties to help local farmers with their harvest. The initial POW workforce numbered 250 Germans, but farmers quickly requested more to meet the demands of the community and to free up American soldiers for international service. At its peak, Camp Westover Field held 701 prisoners.*

The U.S. government recognized that the POWs at Westover, and across the country, would one day be repatriated in Germany and, as a group, might have a powerful voice in postwar German affairs. Their treatment and experiences in the camps would shape their opinions and

feelings concerning America and could possibly affect future relations between the nations.

From 1994 to 1997, the author conducted interviews with twenty-five former POWs and twenty local farmers to assess opinions and memories on both sides of the experience. While the federal government had implemented the Special Projects Program to positively influence German POWs' perceptions of the United States, prisoners were more significantly impacted by the kindness of local residents than by the reeducation and propaganda efforts.

A little more than a year after U.S. entry into World War II, the United States held 1,881 enemy prisoners of war within its continental boundaries. At Great Britain's urging, the United States established a prisoner of war (POW) work program under the auspices of the Provost Marshal General of the army's office. The POW workers were intended to free up U.S. soldiers for battle, as well as to augment labor shortages in a number of domestic industries, including agriculture. The program ultimately consisted of 155 base camps and 511 branch camps in forty-five of the existing forty-eight states. Typical camp leadership consisted of three primary army officers — the camp commander, his executive officer, and a special projects officer. With the approval of the Provost Marshal's Office, the commander and employer (farmer) would negotiate the amount to be paid to the United States for the use of POW labor. The arrangement is estimated to have provided nearly \$230 million in economic benefits to the United States. By the war's end, the number peaked at 425,871 prisoners, and of these, approximately 87 percent, or almost 372,000, were Germans.¹

Camp Westover Field in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, was activated as a prisoner of war branch camp on September 28, 1944, to address local agricultural manpower shortages.² The initial allocation was 250 POWs, but filling manpower shortages on- and off-base proved so successful that military personnel and local farmers requested and received another 250 workers. At its peak, Camp Westover Field housed 701 prisoners of war.³ Noncommissioned prisoners were required to work and were paid eighty cents a day for their efforts.⁴ Most POWs worked on base and filled a variety of positions such as cooks, kitchen helpers, garage mechanics, bakers, construction workers, gardeners, and general maintenance workers. In addition, a large number worked off-base on local farms picking tobacco and harvesting vegetables. And despite rules against fraternization, these POWs

interacted with local farmers in ways that would leave lasting impressions on both farmers and prisoners.

The U.S. government recognized that the POWs at Westover, and across the country, would one day be repatriated in Germany and, as a group, might have a powerful voice in postwar German affairs. Their treatment and experiences in the camps would shape their opinions and feelings concerning America and could possibly affect future relations between the nations. The following pages describe the conditions for German POWs at Camp Westover, interactions among prisoners, soldiers, and local farmers, and general impressions held by both groups during and after the war. Research suggests that while the federal government had implemented the Special Projects Program to positively influence German POWs' perceptions of the United States, prisoners were more significantly impacted by the kindness of local residents than by the reeducation and propaganda efforts.⁵

CONDITIONS AT CAMP WESTOVER FIELD

Camp Westover Field was situated approximately two miles from Chicopee Falls and about ten miles northeast of Springfield. It was located on an isolated section of Westover Army Air Force Base. The prisoner of war camp covered approximately two acres with eleven buildings and ten barracks.⁶ The camp was overseen by Captain John Shields, First Lieutenant Fred Reisner, and Second Lieutenant Daniel Pfenning. Most Westover POWs arrived on U.S. soil through Boston Harbor in the cargo holds of returning Liberty ships. Prisoners remembered being shipped from the English coastline in convoys as large as ninety ships. Upon arriving at Boston, all POWs were deloused, given prison garb, and then transported via Pullman rail cars from Boston to Springfield and then by truck to Camp Westover Field.⁷ In *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, historian Arnold Krammer stated that "each prisoner was required 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. With completion of these forms, he became an official prisoner of war."⁸

Betty O'Connell worked at base supply at Westover Field from 1942 until she retired in 1981. She vividly recalled POWs disembarking from the railroad cars. While fraternization was forbidden, Betty and her coworkers treated the POWs as they wanted their own brothers and sons to be treated by the Germans if they were captured.⁹ Priscilla Sullivan worked out of the base hospital at Westover Field during the war. She marveled at how young

they all seemed—some prisoners were as young as fifteen. According to Sullivan, some of the guards displayed animosity toward the prisoners.¹⁰ She was not sure if this was a result of the soldiers having to stay stateside or if they just did not like the prisoners because they were the enemy.¹¹

Westover operated like many other camps. German soldiers were accustomed to a disciplined regimen, which greatly benefited each command post. A typical day included:

0545	Reveille
0600	Roll call
0605	Breakfast
1200	Lunch
1750	Roll call
1755	Dinner
2100	Lights out

Additionally, prisoners were expected to work, on-base or off-base, in a carefully supervised and preapproved environment. For the prisoners' free time, Westover was provided with athletic equipment kits that included basketballs, soccer balls, table tennis equipment, playing cards, volleyballs, dominoes, horseshoes, bingo, Chinese checkers, croquet, and other games. The quality of food service in the POW camps was also above average. Prisoners were well-fed, despite resentment from many American citizens facing rationing shortages. The army feared that German POW treatment in America would have a direct impact on the treatment of American GIs in Germany.¹² Some POWs found Westover a stark and pleasant relief from the war. Lieutenant Fred Reisner's wife, Virginia, remembered how happy they were to be out of harm's way.¹³ Former German prisoner Willy Kunze declared, "Imprisonment in America was for me the best time of my life as a soldier!"¹⁴

According to the 1929 Geneva Convention, which was strictly followed by the United States, prisoners of war required certain standards pertaining to camp setups and treatment. As a result, camps such as Westover contained well-equipped buildings and services, with a wide range of amenities and offerings. Buildings or tents had to be lighted and heated sufficiently. For living space, officers received roughly 120 square feet per man, while enlisted quarters were set up at 40 square feet per man. Sanitary facilities and latrines conformed to policy, and there was a laundry tub for each of twenty-five men. Two square feet of indoor recreation space were required for each POW at permanent camps, and the same footage allocated for POW canteens. Each compound contained an infirmary



Camp Garden

German POWS (at left) pass a small garden outside their barracks at Camp Westover Field. Camp conditions strictly followed the 1929 Geneva Convention for housing and treatment of prisoners. Undated photo.

and hospital facility. If this was not feasible, medical care was made available in the immediate vicinity. Where space allowed, a separate building accommodated religious services. An outdoor recreational area was also provided on the basis of 200 square feet per man.¹⁵

From the camp's establishment, reviews and inspections were a common occurrence. Many German prisoners were familiar with the Geneva Convention rules and constantly monitored camp situations to ensure compliance.¹⁶ The camp was also visited a number of times by representatives of the army, the International Red Cross, and the International YMCA. For

example, Major Frank L. Brown visited Camp Westover Field on April 7–8, 1945. During his tour, he noted that the camp commander had prepared a large amount of space within the stockade for the planting of vegetables to supplement his mess, thereby reducing the requirements of the POW camp with the commissary. Prisoners worked in these gardens on their off-time. Brown commented on the prisoners' clothing — some clothing displayed indistinct markings or no markings at all — and he recommended that all POW outer clothing be clearly marked at the supply room before issuance. Brown also spotted books and radios in a guard tower and suggested that they be removed to keep the guards focused. He observed that a new compound had been prepared by converting existing housing to provide quarters for up to five hundred POWs who were expected at Westover. He suggested that an additional five hundred POWs could be accommodated in tents within existing areas of the stockade. (These open areas existed because the buildings were scattered on a dispersion theory used at some Army Air Force [AAF] bases as an antibombing measure.)

Brown also visited all work details and stated that none appeared to be overstaffed. Supervision seemed adequate, but he concluded that the civilian personnel were not the best choice for supervisory duties. Aside from the messes, the next biggest problem on base was dust control, which resulted in the closing of the airport at times. Brown suggested implementing a program for the seeding and sodding of the ground around the taxiways and landing strips to keep the dust down. He was impressed with the ingenuity and initiative shown by the camp commander, Captain John Shields, in improving camp area facilities and the successful efforts to maintain a high state of morale among the enlisted men. Brown concluded that the relationship between the POW camp and the base appeared excellent.¹⁷

A representative of the International Red Cross visited Camp Westover Field on June 13, 1945. He shared many positive observations. In particular, he was quite happy that he was given permission, without witnesses, to speak to the POW camp spokesman, Heinrich Plagemann, to platoon leaders, and to the pastor. The representative did not perceive any complaints and came away with the overall impression that the camp was run very well.¹⁸

Lastly, in late August 1945, Pastor Carl Erik Wenngren, representing the International YMCA, accompanied by Louis S.N. Phillipp from the Special War Problems Division of the Department of State, visited the camp. Wenngren described an array of one-story buildings scattered over a large area, much of which had been planted in vegetables. He noted that the prisoners had also planted flower gardens around the barracks. His report pointed out that prisoners were organized into two companies for

administrative purposes. He observed that the medical and sanitary facilities were standard U.S. Army type and that a medical officer from the base was responsible for conducting daily sick calls. The dispensary also contained ten beds for emergency treatments and housing the long-term sick and dental treatment was given as necessary. Wenngren noted one prisoner of war was sick in the hospital on the day of the visit and none were at the dispensary. The camp commander confirmed the overall good health of the prisoners.

During Pastor Wenngren's visit, the prisoner population numbered 522. Of this total, 364 men were working on the base and 135 were working on local farms. The remainder were on their designated rest days or unavailable for work. Wenngren observed that the canteen was extremely well-stocked and that the library contained in excess of 1,000 books. Wenngren was informed that Camp Westover Field had the fewest disciplinary problems in the First Service Command. This record did not surprise him, since during his review, he had received excellent cooperation from the prisoners and felt complete harmony inside the stockade. His overall impression was of a smoothly functioning camp where there was good discipline, a minimum of friction, and excellent morale. Wenngren credited Lieutenant Daniel Pfenning with the pleasant accord in camp. Not surprisingly, he commended Pfenning's passion for bringing religion to the prisoners. Pfenning belonged to a German Congregational church and impressed Wenngren as "being one of those young American men who not only have ideals, but are ready to work and fight for them, having at the same time profound respect for the opinions and character of others."¹⁹

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPECIAL PROJECTS PROGRAM AT WESTOVER

Quite fittingly, Lieutenant Pfenning had been selected the previous year to lead a special initiative at Camp Westover Field. The American military was acutely aware of watchful German eyes in the prisoner camps, focused on more than just conditions. The ever-increasing number of German prisoners of war detained in the United States created an unprecedented situation. These men would one day be repatriated in Germany after long periods in American camps and, as a group, might have a powerful voice in postwar German affairs. Their opinions and feelings concerning America could possibly determine future relations between Germany and the United States. To that extent, on May 22, 1944, the secretary of war approved the establishment of a secret program for the education of German prisoners of war. This program fell under the provost marshal general's office and was

known internally as the Special Projects Program. It was designed to teach the German prisoner certain “truths” which had been denied or distorted by the Nazi regime.²⁰ The overall objective was to make prisoners believe in the superiority of the American way of life and to instill respect for American institutions. Helen Peak, writing in the *Journal of Social Issues*, II, had this observation:

Healthy democracy, vigorous enough for survival, must be rooted in basic attitudes of the people of a nation. It cannot flourish on mere acquaintance with the forms of democracy in other nations. Ways must be found, therefore, to do more than expose the Germans to text books swept clean of Nazi teachings, to the ritual of going to the polls, to knowledge of civil liberties. German men and women must be produced who know how to stand up against too much bossing from their superiors and who, at the same time, can restrain their own desires to lord it over the people in their control, their employees, their families, their students.²¹

In their spare time, prisoners would be given the opportunity to learn English, American history, civics, Latin, and geography. In addition, the prisoners were to be provided access to a preapproved selection of newspapers, books, and films depicting life in America. Many of the movies were in German with English subtitles to promote language connections. Camp cultural events, such as plays and musicals, were also encouraged, and specifically highlighted the scope and diversity of American music. Government authorities hoped that POWs would develop a preference for American music and arts that would foster a lucrative “cultural tie” between the State Department and Germany after the war’s end.²²

On November 10, 1944, the Special Projects Program was introduced to Camp Westover Field. Lieutenant Daniel Pfenning was tasked with the program’s implementation and success. To ensure the POWs had quality instruction in the core courses, Pfenning contacted local colleges to obtain the services of a number of civilian lecturers. He quickly recruited a half-dozen professors to speak at the camp, pending approval from Washington. Given the expediency desired by the Department of the Army, Pfenning anticipated little delay in gaining approval. He miscalculated, however, and approval for visiting civilian lecturers/professors took almost four months. By then, many potential lecturers had made commitments to other endeavors. This proved to be one of Pfenning’s greatest disappointments. Records indicate that both the commanding officer and Pfenning took a “dim view of

the Special Projects Division tardiness clearing or banning lecturers."²³

To further educate prisoners, most camps were encouraged to establish their own camp newspaper, and Camp Westover Field was no exception. While each camp paper differed in its ideological, literary, and technical qualities, each was adapted to exploit the political and social conditions of its respective compound. Camp newspapers were regarded as a valuable educational medium. The "Annual Report of the Special Projects Program" dated February 26, 1946, claimed that camp newspapers were very popular among the prisoners and helped



Lieutenant Daniel Pfenning

stimulate appreciation for freedom of speech and thought. Camp Westover Field's first edition was issued on April 15, 1945, and was named *Die Brücke* or *The Bridge*. The lead story was heavy on symbolism with the historic Brandenburg Gate representing the "old country" and ancient memories, and New York's skyscrapers representing a small slice of life in the United States. The heading on the first edition illustrated a bridge spanning the Atlantic creating a connection between both worlds. The article solicited contributions from all for future editions. POWs were particularly interested in reporting on other prisoners' experiences.

In addition, the first edition of *The Bridge* included poems, a trivia quiz, a short story, camp news, and references to a "large system of classes" that were offered, including English, math, metalworking, history, biology, German, and Latin. To supplement structured classes, the paper mentioned that "a group of interested comrades of all professions meets once a week as a workers' group." At these supervised sessions, prisoners discussed the "themes" that most interested them, such as American movies, popular music, and sports, but the most common theme was discussing news from home and the likelihood of being shipped to England, France, or Russia to help with the rebuilding efforts.²⁴ The paper also published sports news, announcements for orchestra and choir practices and church services, and included crossword and other puzzles.²⁵ The newspaper and a vast array of educational, cultural, and recreational offerings were intended to cultivate positive impressions of the United States among German prisoners.

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN POWS AND LOCAL FARMERS

Camp activities notwithstanding, the purpose of most camps—including Westover—was to address wartime labor shortages. While mandatory work responsibilities might anger prisoners or lead to negative opinions, in reality, many German POWs developed strong bonds and positive opinions of Americans through their employment on local farms. Requests for prisoner of war labor were directed to the War Department through the War Manpower Commission (WPC) local representative. Allen S. Leland was the WPC representative for Hampshire and Franklin counties in Western Massachusetts. Although some employers complained about prisoner productivity, nationwide POW work was performed in a thorough and satisfactory manner. Farmers noted that crop values were higher than they would have been had the work been done by scarce civilian labor, some of which involved less-than-able individuals. At the very least, German prisoners were generally young and strong and were accustomed to rigid discipline and taking orders. The War Department expected them to produce as much as inexperienced civilian labor.²⁶ Prisoners were paid 80 cents per day in canteen coupons.

Once barrack construction was underway, local residents near Westover had a largely positive view of the WPC's handling of prisoner labor. In 1945 June S. Mislak (formerly Lankowski) of Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts, was married to John Lankowski of South Deerfield, who owned and operated Lankowski Farms. Lankowski Farms extended from Sunderland, Massachusetts through the Deerfield Valley and as far north and east as Hawley, Massachusetts. Their farm grew potatoes primarily for the Army and Navy during World War II and also supplied Fort Devens in Worcester County and the submarine base in Newport, Rhode Island. John Lankowski requested POW labor to help with the harvesting demands in 1944. Although farms were granted limited deferments for tractor drivers, many remaining farm employees during World War II suffered from ill health, mental disorders, chronic drinking, or other behavioral issues, otherwise they would have been drafted for military service.²⁷ POW labor was a welcome change from the shortages and problems of local workers. For example, on a tobacco farm, a civilian worker offered the POW workers, including Karl Laurenz, a dollar to slow down their pace. The farmer found out and when they got to the other side of the row, the farmer asked the German POWs to maintain their regular tempo to show the other workers (civilians) how work should be done.²⁸

To employ the prisoners, the Lankowskis had to agree to several inspections

by the War Manpower Commission. As required by the government, the Lankowskis' land had to be surveyed to determine how much could be planted per acre of land, and therefore, how many workers were needed.²⁹ To transport prisoners to and from the fields, their trucks also had to meet certain specifications. Benches had to be installed on the truck and one end of the truck had to remain open, though a tarpaulin cover hid occupants during transit.³⁰ The Lankowskis complied with all inspections and were granted fifteen POW workers for the farm.³¹ June Lankowski recalled using the POWs from late 1944 through early 1946.

The first group of prisoners assigned to Lankowski Farms was mainly composed of men with professional backgrounds, such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, scientists, and professors. June recalled these men being superb workers who beautifully repaired John's trucks and tractors. The second group consisted of former SS troopers. According to June, they were terrible workers and showed intense hatred of Polish people, which was the ethnic origin of the surname Lankowski. The workers from both groups harvested potatoes by standing on the sideboards of a mechanical picker, cleaning off each potato, and putting it into a bag. While they used POW labor, the Lankowskis had no major problems, aside from some of the machinery being sabotaged. If a particular POW was suspected of foul play, the base commander was notified, and that person was removed from the detail.³²

After the war, John Lankowski even sponsored Wolfgang Lichtenberg's visa request, which was later approved by the State Department. Lichtenberg spent the winter of 1949 working on Lankowski's farm in Homestead, Florida. By sponsoring Lichtenberg, the Lankowski family assumed responsibility for him for five years. June recalls having to fill out a tremendous amount of paperwork required by the Emigration Department to help them make a decision regarding the visa request. The Lankowskis had clearly formed a strong bond with Lichtenberg and were willing to support his permanent residency in the United States.³³

The Lankowskis were not the only residents of Western Massachusetts to develop close ties with the German prisoners. Earle Parsons transported POWs from Westover Field to his farm on a daily basis during the growing season. The farmers always got the same fifteen prisoners, along with an armed guard, which allowed for some relationships to develop. Parsons recalled that two or three prisoners were very friendly and would teach him German words.³⁴ Alan Zuchowski heard many stories about the POWs from his father while growing up. Zuchowski's uncle had employed a small group of POWs to harvest carrots on his farm during the war. Their appearance, according to Alan's father, was of a proud people, all over six feet tall, and all

very strong.³⁵ Katherine Zgrodnik remembered that her husband often chatted with the POWs during the ride to and from Westover Field and he truly enjoyed their company. The Zgrodnik farm was very large and they required two truckloads of POW labor daily, so thirty POWs worked steadily on the farm. The group working on the Zgrodniks' farm seemed happy and content. Zgrodnik recalled that one POW had a beautiful singing voice and sang constantly while he worked. They had frequent conversations with the POWs, and even invited one POW into their house for lunch. His name was Herbert Niether, and he corresponded with them for many years after the war.³⁶

Wanda Grabowski worked side by side with the POWs stripping tobacco and harvesting potatoes. According to locals, the POWs spoke Polish and many of the farm girls spoke Polish as well, so they were able to converse with them, despite restrictions on fraternization. Tobacco worker Margaret Tudryn also confirmed that the predominant languages used by the POWs were Russian and Polish. As did many others, she avoided speaking to them, but she did sneak them gum and candy while sewing tobacco in the barn.³⁷ Whenever the girls left the field for a personal break, they were required to go in pairs. The field boss did not want them taking any chances, although Grabowski says they always felt safe and never worried about being attacked. Young eighteen-year-old Grabowski thought some of them were very handsome, clearly recalling German POW Gustav Mueller. Despite her youth, Grabowski's family, friends, and neighbors felt comfortable with her working on the farms with the POWs. Overall, the POWs minded their own business and were treated just like regular workers.³⁸

POW RECOLLECTIONS OF CAMP WESTOVER FIELD

It is understandable that many farmers had positive impressions of the German POWs given their strong work ethic and low-cost labor. More interestingly, many of the German soldiers who were required to live and labor in the United States also shared these positive feelings about local farmers and military personnel on base. The following summaries were derived directly from correspondence with German POWs who had been imprisoned at Westover. On the whole, the German POWs remembered their time at Westover fondly because of the people and decent living conditions, rather than the reeducation efforts of the Special Projects Program. (For more on the research process and how these POWs were located and interviewed, see the afterword.)



Settling In

Three German POWs are shown relaxing in their bunks at Camp Westover Field. When they were not at work on farms in the Pioneer Valley, the prisoners had access to indoor and outdoor activities at the camp, including publishing their own newspaper. Undated photo. Courtesy of the Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell AFB.

Friedrich Geitel

Serial Number: 31G-721689³⁹

Date of Birth: October 29, 1925

Rank: Gefreiter (second-lowest enlisted rank in the German Army)

Organization: 11th Division

Date of Capture: September 6, 1944 by Belgian freedom fighters

As a POW, Friedrich Geitel worked on base at a warehouse and later in the hospital, both located near the airport. At the hospital he was responsible for a sick station with American soldiers and cared for cleanliness and food.

Geitel's memories of Camp Westover Field and America were positive. Although he did not participate in the reeducation programs, Geitel was fluent in English and he had frequent contact with personnel and patients in the hospital. He was well-liked and applied himself to the job willingly. He recalled that discipline ruled in the camp. Escape was not discussed, nor did he recall anyone trying to escape.⁴⁰ After the war, he returned numerous times to visit former American soldiers and their families that he befriended while a war prisoner.⁴¹

Walter Görtz

Serial Number: 31G- 725485

Date of Birth: July 22, 1925

Rank: Gefreiter

Organization: 2nd Regiment

Date of Capture: August 21, 1944 in Paris by Parisian women and children, despite German occupation of the city

Walter Görtz was taken prisoner in 1944. He recalled working in a car repair shop on-base with an American boss, but also spending some time "out in the country" on a farm. He truly enjoyed being outdoors working with the farmers and found that the contact with civilians was quite welcomed and always good. According to Görtz, some farmers said they would have preferred to keep them forever, and he thought many Germans would have stayed.⁴²

Ernst Götzl

Serial Number: 31G-721541

Date of Birth: April 16, 1924

Rank: Gefreiter

Organization: 6th Luftwaffe Field Division

Date of Capture: August 7, 1944 by Belgian freedom fighters

Ernst Götzl spent six months in a POW camp in Chartres, France, prior to being shipped to the United States on a transport ship. He spoke fluent English and was used by American personnel as a translator while in transit to the United States. Upon his arrival, he was assigned to the enlisted men's mess hall and was surprised by the quantity and quality of the food available to the prisoners.⁴³ With warmer weather, Götzl worked the local fields picking tobacco and potatoes. He found his experience with local farmers very good. When not working, Götzl played violin in the camp band,

spending much of his free time with rehearsals and occasional concerts, as well as writing music. Any remaining free time was spent attending religious services or playing cards. He also worked closely with Sergeant Edmund Spiro, teaching English to German prisoners.⁴⁴

Otto Hohns

Date of Capture: November 19, 1944, in Metz, France, by American forces

No Other Information Available

Otto Hohns found the accommodations at Camp Westover Field civilized, with washrooms, toilets, and sufficient living space. In spite of being so far from home, he was happy that one could lead a relatively normal life in captivity. Unfortunately, he was not allowed to communicate with loved ones back home, which was very upsetting to him. However, this all changed when the war came to an end. "We were very happy when we came back in the evenings and mail from home had arrived, which was fairly regularly the case," Hohns said. "As far as I remember, we were allowed to write home once a month, maybe twice."

Hohns and many others had hoped their captivity was coming to an end in early 1946, but they soon learned otherwise. According to Hohns:

We left Camp Westover Field on March 18, 1946, bound for Fort Devens and subsequent transport home. On June 18, 1946, we boarded the ship full of expectations. It was a quiet journey. After eight days at sea, there was a rumor that started to go around that said the Americans had sold us to England as work power. No one wanted to believe that; however, it was the bitter truth.

Hohns said the disappointment was great as they arrived in England on July 4, 1946, and were once again brought into a camp. "We were bitter and mad at the Americans who had deceived us since they had said in America that we were going home," Hohns said. Although the war had long ended, the men were still enemy prisoners. In England, they were mainly used to help with construction and rebuilding, but Hohns again worked at a hospital. He did concede, "Camp life in England was not as strict as in America. We could move about freely and were allowed out until ten in the evening. I finally arrived home on October 31, 1947, almost two and a half years from the war's end."⁴⁵

Wolfgang Johner

Serial Number: 31G- 716987

Date of Birth: July 26, 1926

Rank: Gefreiter

Organization: 7th Division

Date of Capture: October 5, 1945, on the Belgium border near Aachen by American forces

Johner left Camp Westover in March 1946. He did not go directly to Germany. From Westover, he went to Fort Devens in eastern Massachusetts and then in September 1946 he was sent to Camp Shanks, New York. He was put on a ship and transported to Liverpool, England. This was a great disappointment to him because he had been informed by Camp Westover personnel that he would be shipped directly home. Instead he was part of a large contingent shipped to England to help rebuild their country. He remained in England until the spring of 1948, at which time he finally returned to Germany, more than two and a half years after the war's end. He remained disappointed for a very long time, believing he had been lied to by the Americans.⁴⁶

Max Klein

Serial Number: 31G-720353

Date of Birth: November 21, 1923

Rank: Obergefreiter (Senior Lance Corporal)

Organization: 30th Flak Regiment

Date of Capture: September 4, 1944, near Verdun, France, by American forces

Max Klein was fortunate to have relatives residing nearby in the United States during the war. When he got to America, he found the address of his aunt and uncle through a German newspaper and wrote to them in New York. All letters were written on a form sheet to limit length, and prior to being forwarded to the addressee, the letters were censored. The content of his letter expresses great joy at receiving two letters from his aunt and learning of their impending visit to Westover.⁴⁷ He wrote about people they both knew and ended his letter by asking about her garden and apologizing because his space to write was limited. His aunt updated Max's mother about his well-being, and his aunt and uncle tried to visit him monthly.⁴⁸ While at Camp Westover, Max participated in the reeducation efforts. He studied English and French and took part in other course offerings. For Max, classes were well-attended until war's end, at which time the effort petered out, in

his opinion. When not studying, Max spent many hours playing soccer or watching German films.

Karl-Wilhelm Laurenz

Serial Number: 31G-716867

Date of Birth: February 8, 1926

Rank: Soldat (Lowest rank in the German Army)

Organization: 11th Division

Date of Capture: September 4, 1944 near the border of France and Belgium

Karl-Wilhelm Laurenz considered Captain John Shields quite a man. Someone once told him that Shields was one of the richest men in Massachusetts and he had paid for setting up the movie equipment out of his own pocket so the prisoners could watch films (although the prisoners were required to pay 15 cents in canteen coupons to watch a movie). Laurenz worked in the canteen in the winter and on the farms in the spring and summer. He got along wonderfully with the civilians. For recreation, when not working on- or off-base, Laurenz enjoyed playing table tennis, billiards, and going to the movies. After the war ended, he did not notice any change in the availability of goods in the canteen, and besides, they were able to get many items from the farmers.⁴⁹

Bernhard Lutz

Serial Number: 31G-700665

Date of Birth: August 21, 1922

Rank: Obergefreiter

Organization: 48th Division

Date of Capture: September 3, 1944, somewhere in France near the Atlantic coast by American forces

Bernhard Lutz arrived at Camp Westover Field in March 1945. While he was there, the medical staff replaced his glass eye. He remembered it being unbreakable and it suited him well for the next six years. Before the war, Lutz had a positive opinion of America, and his experiences as a POW only confirmed this opinion. The fellow Germans he met at Camp Westover Field had already been in the American prison system for more than a year and had not experienced the decline of the German position in Europe. Consequently, they had a much more optimistic picture of home (Germany) based on earlier ideals and did not yet oppose the Nazi military goals. Lutz

was one of the more politically astute prisoners in camp. He believed that the positive impression of Adolf Hitler among his countrymen was influenced by his political and military successes of 1933–1942 and by bitter national memories of the terms of the Versailles Treaty of 1918. Regarding America's reeducation efforts, Lutz felt this endeavor was hindered by an overwhelming black/white portrayal of the issues. The American papers were full of praise for "Uncle Joe" Stalin and the Russian Army and denigration of Nazi Germany. For example, after one delegation visited a POW camp, the local newspaper wrote, "German war prisoners are fat like pigs," in reference to the abundance of food available to the prisoners. In retrospect, Lutz believed the German people postwar owed many modern freedoms to the actions of America. He stated that America's support in East Germany helped them survive the inhumane policies of Communist Russia.⁵⁰

Gerhard Riese

Serial Number: 31G-1116339

Date of Birth: September 24, 1927

Rank: Gefreiter

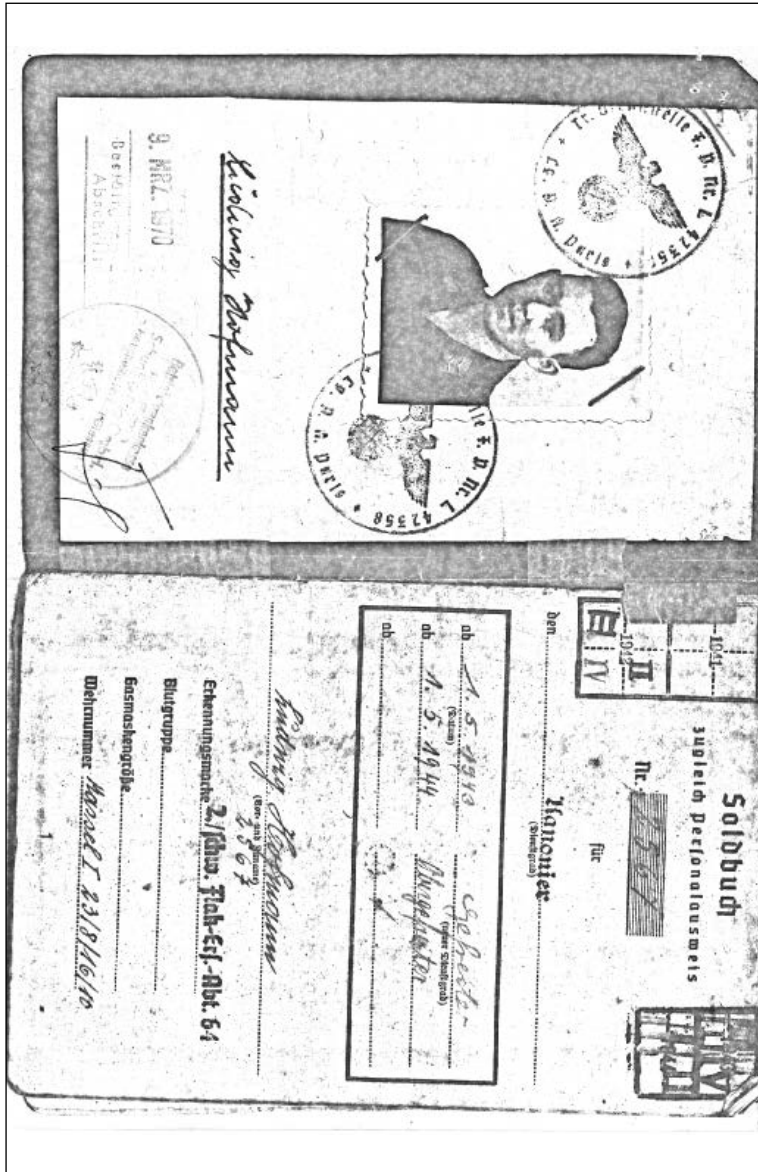
Organization: 15th Regiment

Date of Capture: January 10, 1945, in Luxembourg by American troops

When Gerhard Riese arrived at Camp Westover Field in 1945, Lieutenant Daniel Pfenning delivered a welcome speech.⁵¹ Pfenning declared:

You are now in the United States and the sun shines here exactly as in Germany. Those who behave respectfully and don't act politically can have it good here in Camp Westover Field. Those who spread Nazi slogans will not remain here; they will go to another camp and will be worse off than those here.

After the speech, dinner was served in the mess hall, and to Riese's surprise, three U.S. Army officers served them. Riese later worked at the airfield in the officers' mess, performing kitchen duties and distributing meals. Since many officers spoke German, Riese could converse with them. Riese also worked in the fields harvesting potatoes and tobacco during the warmer season. He recalled that many farmers were of Polish descent, and even though they were not always friendly with the German prisoners, they treated them properly.⁵²



A Soldbuch

This image shows the Soldbuch, which listed personal and service details, issued to every German soldier. This one belonged to Ludwig Hoffmann, a POW at Camp Westover Field. Undated image.

Manfred Ruck

Serial Number: 31G-1106935

Date of Birth: December 22, 1926

Rank: Gefreiter

Organization: 14th Regiment

Date of Capture: January 11, 1945, in Belgium by an American panzer division

Upon his arrival at Camp Westover Field, Manfred Ruck was greeted by Sergeant Edmund Spiro. Over time, Ruck regarded Spiro as a “good, fair, just man” who got along with everyone. Spiro made sure they had good clothing and food. One day, Ruck found himself and two of his fellow POWs thirty kilometers from base painting a bridge. An African American GI served as their guard. He does not remember the soldier’s name, only that he was very nice to them. They finished painting the bridge around 1 p.m., but the GI did not want to go back to camp yet, so they set up cans along the bridge for target practice. Ruck asked if he could take a shot at the cans as well, and without hesitation, the soldier handed Ruck his weapon. “I could just as easily have turned the weapon on him and shot him,” Ruck said. “Instead, we all spent the rest of the afternoon shooting cans off of the bridge we had just painted. It was just four guys having fun in the woods.”

Ruck loved when he had the opportunity to work in the country, but on one occasion he worked for a Polish American farmer who did not have a very good opinion of Germans. He thought they were all criminals. At lunchtime, the POWs often received, in addition to their food, one bottle of beer and a cigarette. On the third day, the Polish farmer refused to give them beer or cigarettes. The next day, they got off the truck and refused to work. The Polish farmer came out and wanted to shoot at them, but the Americans lifted their weapons and said, “No, we will not use violence.” This stalemate lasted until an officer informed the farmer that if he did not provide the prisoners the promised cigarette and beer, then he would no longer receive any workers from the camp. The next day, the POWs received their allotted cigarettes and beer.⁵³

According to Ruck, free-time activities in the camp were organized by the older German prisoners and by American leadership. He played cards, went to lectures, and engaged in political discussions. Ruck had lively political debates with some of the older prisoners who were not committed to the Nazi cause. The younger soldiers were mostly National Socialists because they knew little else, and there were some very hot debates among the prisoners. After Victory in Europe (V-E) Day (May 8, 1945), many young soldiers,

and former members of the Hitler Youth, began to question long-standing personal beliefs about Hitler. Ruck offered:

As a young man, I believed Hitler was our leader and we had to follow him because he would protect us from the Russians. We were in the middle of a very slow rethinking process. Through the reading of American magazines and papers, I learned that there was something in the rest of the world besides what Adolf Hitler thought. In this regard, access to newspapers under the Special Projects Program was very helpful, even though we believed half of the news to be war propaganda.⁵⁴

ASSESSING THE SPECIAL PROJECTS PROGRAM

Camp officers and POW supervisors at Westover were questioned in January 1946 about the overall effectiveness of the Special Projects Program. Captain Reisner (promoted from lieutenant) was somewhat pleased with the numbers of prisoners who participated in the English language class. He believed that their exposure to the English language had encouraged them to look deeper into our form of government and to try to understand how it operated.⁵⁵ Lieutenant Pfenning thought the program was effective, but not for the reasons for which the program was designed. Pfenning believed that the army had made more of an impression on the prisoners by satisfying their basic needs: food, shelter, and clothing.⁵⁶ The prisoners regularly experienced the generosity of the American military and the civilians they came in contact with, despite restrictions on fraternization. Reisner and Pfenning agreed that those who spoke English or participated in English classes were helped the most, and prisoners who had exposure to the civilian workforce, both on- and off-base, came away with a better understanding of America.⁵⁷

POW camp spokesman Heinrich Plagemann praised his own efforts and those of other older prisoners to produce a change of mind in the younger Nazi group. He considered these efforts to have been somewhat successful with all but the most committed Nazis who had joined the party before 1933, and particularly with the younger men. Many men's minds were opened to new ideas, despite the continued Nazi influence from prisoners who were transferred from other camps. Plagemann felt the introduction of new prisoners who maintained pro-Nazi ideals had slowed his progress considerably, but he believed that with the proper approach, good results could continue to be obtained.⁵⁸



Time for Art

Three prisoners engage in art activities at Camp Westover Field. While the chief purpose of the camp was to provide labor to neighboring farms, a secondary aim was to expose German POWs to positive experiences of American life with the hopes they would take a pro-democracy attitude back to postwar Germany. Cultural, educational, and even religious activities were seen as contributing to that aim. Undated photo. Courtesy of Lolly Pfenning.

POW Protestant chaplain and librarian Oberleutnant Werner Knauss believed the Special Projects Program might have been more effective among the younger men, although he saw this group as being divided into three schools of thought. According to Knauss, there were the “hard heads” whose minds were closed, the “presentist guys” who saw only the immediate future, and the “intelligent group” who were willing to listen and learn.⁵⁹ In the education process, Knauss felt the newspapers were helpful as was the ability to worship frequently, but other than that, he did not believe the program was overwhelmingly successful.⁶⁰ Similarly, Director of Studies Lieutenant

Pfaff believed the program had started too late in the war to have any lasting effect on the prisoners. He thought it may have helped the younger men who had never been exposed to anything but Nazi indoctrination, but he was not optimistic given the continued Nazi influence in the camp.

On a national level, in February 1946, the army commissioned a report to determine the program's success. This report noted that one of every four POWs gained a working knowledge of English, one of every five participated in the educational program by attending formal classes in at least one of the four subjects, and, on average, each POW withdrew approximately ten books from camp libraries and purchased another five from the canteen each year. Halfway through the first year of the Special Projects Program, efforts were also made to improve church attendance. These efforts succeeded, with upwards of half the camp prisoners attending church regularly. Surprisingly, attendance at films declined steadily during the last half of 1945, and by December, the majority of prisoners no longer attended the showings. A number of reasons might explain poor film attendance. The war had ended seven months earlier in Europe and four months earlier in the Pacific, and prisoners were likely eager to get home—understandably concerned for their loved ones and the condition of their country. Additionally, some felt the American films displayed propaganda on par with what their military leaders had used to indoctrinate them.⁶¹

From a national perspective, the most serious setback to the reeducation efforts, according to camp commanders, was a direct result of the Special Projects Program's adopting restrictions on diet and drink after V-E Day. In anticipation of Germany's unconditional surrender to Allied Forces in May 1945, the U.S. War Department issued specific guidelines establishing a program to be carried out in all German prisoner of war camps in the United States. The thrust of the guidelines included:

Camp Commanders cautioning all American camp personnel against fraternization or relaxation of discipline as a result of the end of active hostilities against Germany. Orders issued prohibiting any meetings of prisoners of war without special permission of the Camp Commander; demanding and receiving increased productivity from prisoner of war labor in all its phases; prohibiting the Nazi salute and greeting and establishing the recognized military salute as the only authorized form of greeting.⁶²

This directive also required each camp to read a proclamation in German informing the prisoners that Germany no longer existed, and that the United States would continue to treat them justly and in accordance with rules of war by the American Armed Forces. Correct and soldierly conduct was expected from the POWs and would be respected. The camp commander finished up by showing empathy with their concern for the health and welfare of their families back in Germany. A disruption in mail was anticipated with V-E Day, and the camp commander asked for their patience until the American authorities in Europe had succeeded in restoring communications.

Two days after V-E Day, the Army Service Forces, First Service Command, under the command of Major General Miles, issued new prisoner of war canteen restrictions and noted possible impacts on the Special Projects Program:

Recent reports indicate that the United States Fifteenth Army will take over the occupation of southern Germany. Lieutenant General Gorow's headquarters said German civilians would be allowed a maximum diet of 1,150 calories a day. It is not fitting that German prisoners of war interned in this country should enjoy luxury items such as beer, cookies and candy while their fellow countrymen are in need. The following items will no longer be sold in prisoner of war canteens after present supplies are exhausted: beer, candy, cigarettes, cookies, crackers, and Cola drinks.⁶³

This measure was generally interpreted by POWs as one of cowardly reprisal, contrary to the spirit if not the letter of the Geneva Convention. While Reisner agreed with this assessment, the other officers and prisoners at Camp Westover Field who contributed to the Special Projects Program review ascribed the biggest detriment to be the influx of "undesirables" from other camps.

Westover Field basically turned into the dumping ground for the other camps within the First Service Command.⁶⁴ The reeducation efforts at Camp Westover Field ran relatively smoothly until other camps started transferring Nazi "troublemakers" to Westover. According to Reisner, a definite slip in the program's effectiveness was noticed after the arrival of the Nazi leaders from Camp Edwards and elsewhere, despite the very stringent efforts to isolate them from the general population.⁶⁵ Unreconstructed Nazis were forbidden to occupy camp leadership roles and, although they were allowed to participate

in group activities, under no circumstances could they act individually. In regards to the screening efforts, every camp, including Westover, contained a number of prisoners who resisted attempts at reorientation and denounced them as propaganda.

The Special Projects Division was roundly criticized for numerous other reasons including a late start of implementing such a program, not establishing an agency to evaluate the success of the program, and for not conducting psychological surveys of the POWs during their incarceration. On the other hand, the program's success was demonstrated in other ways. According to a 1955 Army report:

The most important lesson of all to be remembered is that the use of prisoners of war during World War II was essential to the welfare and economy of our nation. U.S. military personnel were released for combat duty, and civilians were transferred to essential work. Crops vital to the economy of our nation were harvested that otherwise would have spoiled, and war industries were able to continue operations in the face of the civilian manpower shortage. Both civil and military authorities have stated that they could not have performed their functions except for the use of prisoner of war labor.⁶⁶

Various sources have estimated the savings derived from the employment of prisoners working on military installations and contract employment to be as high as \$230 million.

Perhaps more significantly, many German POWs at Westover shared meaningful social interactions with the local farmers for whom they worked in Western Massachusetts. Many friendships were established and remained intact long after the war. Most POWs described their American experience with kindness and warmth. This is a tribute to the character of the Western Massachusetts farmers, their families, and their employees, who, despite the horrors of war and in some instances personal loss, still found it in their hearts to treat these men as human beings. It can be surmised that German POWs across the nation encountered the same American hospitality and it colored a seemingly negative situation with fond memories. The last POWs left Camp Westover Field in March 1946. Camp facilities were dismantled and/or repurposed and absorbed into Westover Air Force Base. But many years later, the POWs have not forgotten their experience, nor have they been forgotten by all who came in contact with them.

Notes

1. Department of the Army Pamphlet, No. 20-213. *History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army 1776–1945*. George G. Lewis, Lieutenant Colonel, MPC, United States Army and John Mewha, Captain, Armor, United States Army. Department of the Army, June 1955, 91.

2. Under War Department guidelines, internal security was the primary driver of POW camp locations. As more and more state and local governments notified the War Department of their desire to employ POW labor, restrictions were eased, leaving only the military district of Washington, DC, and a ten-mile radius from the White House (except Andrews Field, MD) as prohibited from housing or employing POWs.

In 1944, farmers in Hampshire County, through their local agricultural agent, Allen S. Leland, applied for POW labor for the upcoming harvest season. Published reports at the time indicated approximately 500 German POWs would arrive in time to provide the necessary manpower for a successful harvest. However, they did not arrive in time. Farmers were forced to recruit from local colleges and prep schools and imported two crews of Jamaicans from Connecticut and New York. June Mislak, whom I interviewed for this article, explained the process for obtaining POW labor. “All acreage had to be surveyed and presented to the government for vital records to meet the qualifications for employment of German POWs. The purpose of the survey was to determine how much they could plant per acre of land.”

3. National Archives, Washington, DC. Microfilm Photoduplication Service. *Semi-Monthly Report on Prisoners of War* as of 16 October 1945.

4. Officers were governed by different rules under the 1929 Geneva Convention, but during Camp Westover Field’s time as a POW camp, only one German officer was ever imprisoned there.

5. Ronald H. Bailey remarked in his book titled *Prisoners of War — World War II*, “By putting the vast majority of the eligible POWs to work, the Allies managed to offset critical labor shortages and to release Tommies and GIs for combat duty. POW labor turned out to be remarkably docile, and in the words of an official U.S. Army historian ‘was essential to the welfare and economy of our nation.’ British historians heartily concurred. The same was true of their economy.” Ronald H. Bailey, *Prisoners of War — World War II* (Chicago: Time-Life Books, 1981), 156.

6. Comité International De La Croix-Rouge, Geneva, Switzerland, March 22, 1996. Mr. Perret’s Visit to Camp Westover Field, June 13, 1945. In his report, under General Remarks, Perret noted, “This camp is situated a few kilometers north of the city of Springfield in a region of lightly uneven terrain. Prisoners have access to the following barracks, formerly occupied by American troops: 10 sleeping quarters, 2 mess halls & kitchen, 3 latrines, 3 leisure barracks – library, auditorium, etc., 1 infirmary, 1 prison, and 1 crafts shop. The barracks are the standard American type, on one floor. The camp, with its barracks scattered among the trees and lawn, resembles a park.”

7. As a general rule, POWs were processed in Europe and then shipped to the U.S. As more and more Germans were captured, this function became an administrative nightmare and was moved stateside. Upon the POWs' entry into the country at either Norfolk, VA, Boston, or New York City, prisoner clothing and property was searched for weapons and anything that could be used as propaganda. At this stage a soldier's "Soldbuch," a 15-page booklet that was carried by every German soldier, was confiscated. The Soldbuch was basically a personnel file containing weight, height, birthplace, and date, parental information, military training records, transfers, duties, promotions, etc. After being searched, prisoners were sprayed with disinfectant and allowed to take showers while their clothing was being fumigated. They were later fingerprinted and photographed. After processing, they were put on trains and dispatched to a POW camp.

8. Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), 5.

9. Betty O'Connell, Chicopee, MA. Interview in her home, November 12, 1994.

10. Priscilla Sullivan, Chicopee, MA. Telephone interview, April 14, 1995.

11. At the end of the war, the War Department made it a habit to assign former American POWs to guard German POWs stateside. There was animosity from some, but the majority realized that conditions were much better in America than in Europe and they didn't begrudge the German POWs. In many instances they befriended the Germans who were anxious to hear of things back home. Many returning GI's knew Germany was destroyed, as was much of Europe. They empathized with their fellow combatants.

12. The German command was aware of the treatment of their soldiers imprisoned in America, and for the most part, Americans were treated relatively well. They were not fed as well as German POWs, but even the German soldier did not eat well. German farmers lacked the capacity to provide sufficient food for German soldiers and German citizens. Every able-bodied young man, as young as fifteen, was called up to fight for the Führer. This, coupled with daily Allied bombing raids, severely hampered the ability to feed the populace. German soldiers were often so hungry that when they came to realize the war was lost, they took great pains to try to find American troops to surrender to.

13. Virginia Reisner, Bradenton, FL. Telephone interview, November 29, 1995.

14. Willy Kunze, Zschaitz, Germany. Correspondence received January 17, 1997.

15. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 429A, Box 36. *Historical Monograph*, Prisoner of War Operations Division, Provost Marshal General's Office, 57.

16. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 429A, Box 36. *Historical Monograph*, Prisoner of War Operations Division, Provost Marshal General's Office, 24. "In the course of prisoner of war administration, the U.S. Provost Marshal General's office obtained translations of the Geneva Prisoners of War and Red Cross Conventions into the German and Italian languages, and caused them to be distributed for the benefit of enemy prisoners of war in War Department

custody.” Every POW camp had a camp spokesman. The camp spokesman, through a small cadre of German prisoners, monitored virtually everything within the camp to ensure the Geneva Convention was adhered to.

17. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 459A, Box 2675. Report of Visit to POW Camp, Westover Field. Major Frank L. Brown. April 7–8, 1945.

18. Comité International De La Croix-Rouge, Geneva, Switzerland. March 22, 1996. Mr. Perret’s Visit to Camp Westover Field. June 13, 1945.

19. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 459A, Box 2675. Prisoner of War Camp, Westover Field, Massachusetts. Louis S. N. Phillipp. August 22–25, 1945.

20. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 459A, Box 1628. Annual Report of the Special Projects Program. Special Projects Activities, First Service Command. February 26, 1946. Allen V. Koop noted that “The prisoner-of-war camp education program assumed such large dimensions that ... the Reich Ministry of Education published a detailed plan by which prisoners of war in American camp curricula would receive high school and university credit for their studies.” Allen V. Koop, *Stark Decency — German Prisoners of War in a New England Village*. (Hanover: University Press of New, 1988), 91.

21. Helen Peak, “Some Psychological Problems in the Re-Education of Germany,” *Journal of Social Issues* II (August 1936): 26-38.

22. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 440, Box 25. Classification of Reorientation Program. Headquarters, Army Service Forces, Office of the Adjutant General. May 31, 1945.

23. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 459A, Box 1628. Annual Report of the Special Projects Program. Special Projects Activities, First Service Command. February 26, 1946.

24. Numerous responses from the former POWs I interviewed made reference to the free time they had to play sports, participate in the band, avail themselves of numerous books and newspapers, and wonder when they’d return home. No one individual was directly involved in the development of Die Brücke.

25. Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Photoduplication Service. German P.O.W. Camp Newspapers, Volumes 50-52, Shelf 10779, Reel No. 14.

26. Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Office of the Provost Marshal General, *World War II — A Brief History* (January 15, 1948), 428.

27. June Spencer Mislak, Shelburne Falls, MA. Interview in her home, April 26, 1995. Mislak explained that each farmer was allowed only three deferments and these usually went to the equipment operators or mechanics needed to keep the farm equipment operating. The majority of farm employees not receiving deferments entered military service, unless they were medically boarded out. Mislak explained that in conversations with her fellow farmers, they all commiserated over the poor quality of farmhands remaining and were therefore extremely happy when the POWs arrived.

28. Karl-Wilhelm Laurenz, Drebbler, Germany. Telephone interview, August 25, 1996.
29. Gordon Ainsworth, later to become famous as the "Yankee Surveyor of Old Deerfield," surveyed Lankowski's acreage for the government prior to them gaining approval to grow potatoes and employ POWs.
30. June Spencer Mislak, Shelburne Falls, MA. Interview in her home, April 26, 1995.
31. In 1944, work units were restricted to ten prisoners but with experience; in 1945, the Army raised this number to fifteen.
32. June Spencer Mislak, Shelburne Falls, MA. Interview in her home, April 26, 1995.
33. June Spencer Mislak, Shelburne Falls, MA. Interview in her home, April 26, 1995.
34. Earle Parsons, Hadley, MA. Telephone interview, October 18, 1996.
35. Alan Zuchowski, Hadley, MA. Telephone interview, March 17, 1995.
36. Katherine Zgrodnik, Hadley, MA. Telephone interview, March 20, 1995.
37. Margaret Tudryn, Hadley, MA. Telephone interview, March 17, 1995.
38. Wanda Grabowski, Northampton, MA. Telephone interview, March 20, 1995.
39. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 429A, Box 36. *Historical Monograph*, Prisoner of War Operations Division, Provost Marshal General's Office, 49. Serial numbers for prisoners captured by the Army of the United States normally were assigned at the first prisoner of war enclosure or prisoner of war camp to which the prisoners were sent.
40. There is only one documented escape pertaining to Camp Westover Field. Albert Adams, 33 years old, escaped while on a detail from the Manning farm in Hadley. He was later apprehended by State Police. The most common means of escape was to simply walk away from a work detail. The Provost Marshal General's office recorded 2,827 escapes among enemy POWs held in the continental United States.
41. Friedrich Geitel, Gnarrenburg, Germany. Correspondence received, May 22, 1996.
42. Walter Görtz, Düsseldorf, Germany. Correspondence received July 31, 1996.
43. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 459A, Box 1629. 331.14 General. Prisoner of War Canteen Restrictions and the Special Projects Program, May 8, 1945.
44. Ernst Götzl, Gera, Germany. Correspondence received on July 30, 1996. Götzl vividly remembered the beginning of the retreat of the German troops from Stalingrad; he and his comrades believed Adolf Hitler had led his supporters and the country into ruin and he very much regretted that the putsch, and the attempt on Hitler's life of June 20, 1944, did not succeed.
45. Otto Hohns, Manderscheid, Germany. Correspondence received on July 31, 1996.
46. Wolfgang Johner, Rottenburg, Germany. Telephone interview, June 9, 1996.

47. Two visits per month were allowed from parents, brothers, uncles, aunts, grandparents, wives, or children of the prisoner of war.
48. Max Klein, Schweinfurt, Germany. Telephone interview, July 14, 1996.
49. Karl-Wilhelm Laurenz, Drebbler, Germany. Telephone interview, August 25, 1996.
50. Bernhard Lutz, Pforzheim. Correspondence received on May 31, 1996.
51. Gerhard Riese, Brome, Germany. Correspondence received on June 6, 1996.
52. To mistreat POW laborers was a serious offense and the farmer risked losing this help altogether without an immediate resolution. At the same time, if a prisoner misbehaved, he was restricted to work on the base.
53. Author was not able to corroborate Mr. Ruck's assertion that the farmers were responsible for providing beer and cigarettes to the POWs.
54. Manfred Ruck, Sachsenheim, Germany. Correspondence received on August 1, 1996.
55. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 459A, Box 1628. Section B, Opinions and Criticisms from the Field. Special Projects Activities, First Service Command, February 26, 1946.
56. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 459A, Box 1628. Section B, Opinions and Criticisms from the Field. Special Projects Activities. First Service Command, February 26, 1946.
57. Arnold Krammer asserts that "Approximately 74 percent of the German prisoners of war who were interned in this country left with an appreciation of the value of democracy and a friendly attitude toward their captors." Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), 224.
58. Allen Kent Powell states that "to eliminate or at least weaken the control of the German prisoners by the Fascist/Nazi leadership which prevailed in many camps and to present a positive image of having the returning prisoners act as a democratic yeast in post-war Germany and as emissaries in promoting friendship between the two countries." Allen Kent Powell, *Splinters of a Nation – German Prisoners of War in Utah* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989), 93.
59. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 459A, Box 1628. Special Projects Activities, Section B, Opinions and Criticisms from the Field. First Service Command, February 26, 1946.
60. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 459A, Box 1628. Section B, Opinions and Criticisms from the Field. Special Projects Activities. First Service Command, February 26, 1946.
61. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 459A, Box 1628. Section B, Opinions and Criticisms from the Field. Special Projects Activities. First Service Command, February 26, 1946. Former POW Heinrich Imhorst recalls being shown a propaganda film on the concentration camps. Many of the men viewing the film were shocked into silence; however, one of the men fluent in English shouted to the American officers that the film was not true and he presented three men, former concentration camp workers, as witnesses to actual events. All three men proclaimed the concentration camps to be work camps.

Dissatisfaction was expressed by various personnel at each camp with the Special Projects Division's sponsored national film circuit. "The POWs don't like our movies ... too many war pictures, too much talking." One AEO felt that a centralized compulsory film circuit was opposed by most on the grounds that each POW installation required individual educational and psychological treatment. "The discrepancy of mean camp attitudes of prisoners of war among the dozen odd installations in the First Service Command is so marked that the imposition of a compulsory circuit upon these camps alone is considered educationally unsound and most presumptive." In his book *Enemies Are Human*, former prisoner of war Reinhold Pabel wrote:

I imagine the idea was that we prisoners should be shown what we had done and thus be prevailed on to repent. The experiment was a complete failure. On our way home and in the barracks, whenever that movie was mentioned, the men either declared it a fake or said, 'Why the hell did they show that to us? We didn't do it.' I am convinced nobody in our camp had ever seen a concentration camp from the inside, except perhaps as a victim. Many Americans seemed to be of the opinion that all Germans, especially all soldiers, knew about the crimes in such concentration camps. In fact, many Germans knew only vaguely that there were camps of this type in existence, but very few of them knew exactly what was going on in them, except the victim's relatives, who always were bullied into eternal silence.

Reinhold Pabel, *Enemies are Human* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co., 1953), 160.

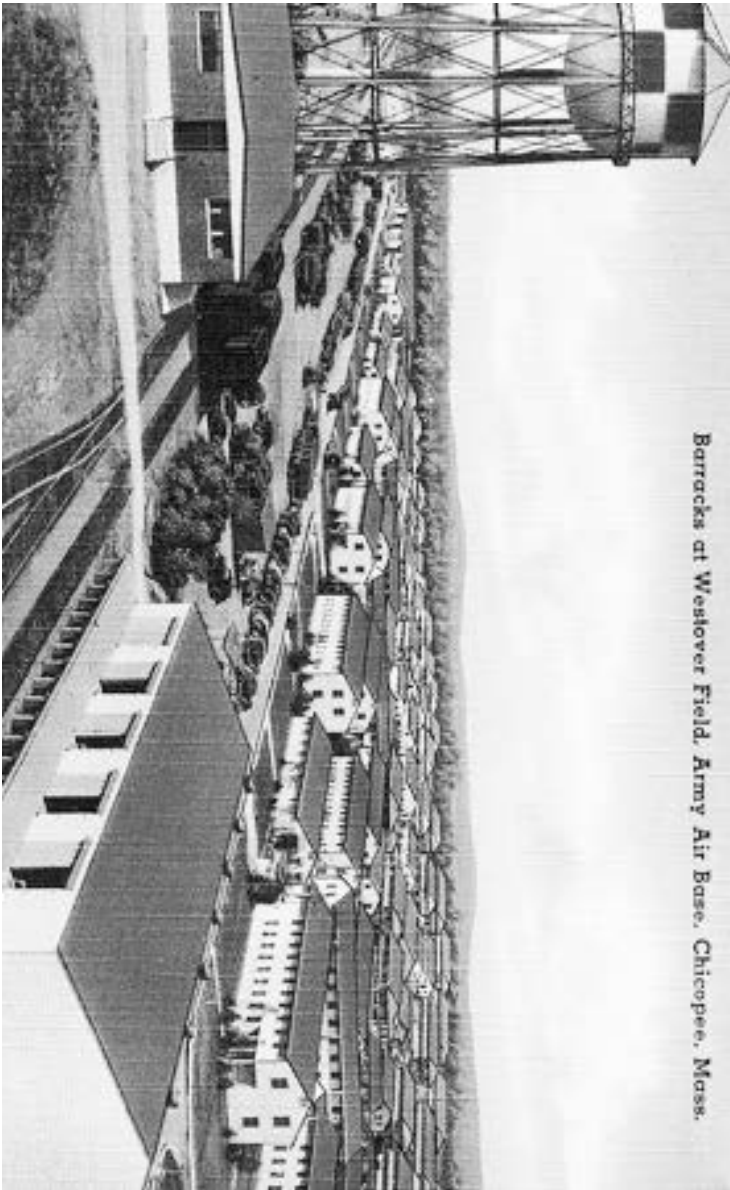
62. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 459A, Box 1637. General 383.6, VE-Day Program for German Prisoners of War, Office of the Provost Marshal General, April 25, 1945.

63. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 459A, Box 1629. General 331.14, Prisoner of War Canteen Restrictions and the Special Projects Program, First Service Command, May 8, 1945.

64. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 459A, Box 1628. Annual Report of the Special Projects Program. Special Projects Activities. First Service Command, February 26, 1946.

65. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 389, Entry 459A, Box 1628. Annual Report of the Special Projects Program. Special Projects Activities. First Service Command, February 26, 1946.

66. Department of the Army, No. 20-213. *History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army, 1776-1945*. George G. Lewis, Lieutenant Colonel, MPC, United States Army, and John Mewha, Captain, Armor, United States Army (Department of the Army, June 1955), 265.



Westover Field

This World War II postcard shows the barracks at Westover Field in Chicopee, MA, in 1944.

Afterword

Searching for German POWs: A Researcher's Personal Odyssey

JOHN C. BONAFILIA

Editor's Introduction: *I asked John Bonafilia how he had tracked down the German POWs whom he had interviewed and written about in the preceding article. His response was so captivating and intriguing that the editors decided to publish his behind-the-scenes research story as a companion piece to the article.*

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I love whodunits. I love history, and I love puzzles. That's what this entire research process entailed. I was chasing clues—every little “nugget” that I gathered from one source only led me to another source. I found myself truly obsessed. When I began, in the mid-1990s, I was working out of Washington, DC, on a work assignment for the U.S. Postal Service. This gave me easy access to the National Archives. For almost five solid months, I spent every hour away from work in the archives, usually a couple of hours every evening and all day Saturday. Imagine a solitary soul sitting in the archives going through hundreds of boxes containing thousands of onionskin documents. All documents relating to German POWs were in the same record group (collection) in the National Archives, but none of the material was sorted by camp facility. Then imagine that solitary figure suddenly stumbling upon a document mentioning Camp Westover Field and its officers and prisoner-of-war camp. I remember the elation I felt the first time I hit pay dirt. That's the feeling I had throughout this process—it's what drove me to visit Alabama, to fly to Wyoming in the middle of December, to sit in a poorly lit army building in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. It goes on and on.

The genesis of this article began in a college classroom. I was forty-one years old and a nontraditional student at Westfield State University in Western

Massachusetts. I had grown up in nearby Holyoke. I was looking for a topic for an independent study. The professor, Dr. Michael Konig, permitted me to complete an independent study because I'd be on traveling status for my job with the U.S. Postal Service for an extended period of time. One night I happened to be watching an old movie in a hotel room in some forgotten city and, while channel-surfing, came across a movie about a German prisoner of war in Texas—not a very memorable movie, but I found myself intrigued. As a history major, I was shocked that I was unaware that we had housed German prisoners of war in our country. So I started doing research and eventually presented Professor Konig with a paper on German prisoners of war in the United States.

In hindsight, it wasn't a very good paper because it dealt with POWs on a national scale, and I relied entirely on secondary sources. However, the paper intrigued Professor Konig, and he asked me lots of questions. One evening at work, I mentioned it to one of my coworkers, and he said he was aware of the POWs and that nearby Westover Field in Chicopee had, in fact, held prisoners of war interned during World War II. I had played golf many times at Westover, my absolute favorite course, but had no idea that POWs had ever been imprisoned there. That was the spark that started me down a path that eventually led me to this article.

From that brief conversation, I wrote letters to every historical society in Western Massachusetts that I could think of. From their responses came suggestions that I interview some of the farmers who had employed the POWs. The first name mentioned was Betty O'Connell. She was a minor celebrity due to her longevity at Westover Field and had also been present at Westover when POWs were brought in. Others suggested I put an ad in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, the *Holyoke Transcript Telegram*, the *Springfield Union*, and other local newspapers. This proved to be a gold mine as the responses were excellent.

I now had many farmers to initiate contact with. The cooperation level was excellent. The clock was working against me, though, as most of my subjects were in their late seventies or older. June Mislak of Shelburne Falls (an incredibly sharp woman whose husband employed POWs) also warned me to take my subjects' responses with a grain of salt. Age, the passage of time, and life in general can adversely affect memories.

GERMAN POWS

Now I had the farmers' stories, but that was only one-third of the larger story. I needed to track down some former prisoners as well as the officers

in charge of Camp Westover Field. I wrote to the Military History office in Germany. (I found their address on the Internet, but not the Internet we know today. It was the wild west in the midnineties. You never knew what the results were going to be.) All correspondence and phone calls with Germany and later with the prisoners of war were conducted and then transcribed by two students from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst who were majoring in German that I hired as my translators. I paid them \$10 an hour: Brenda Bethman was one of these translators. Unfortunately, I don't remember the second student's name, and I can't find her in my notes.

I wrote the Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Military Historical Research Office) in Germany in August 1995, along with other offices that I discovered in my research. I received a response from them in October 1995. They regrettably informed me that they did not have any films or documents about German prisoners of war in America, but that possibly Deutsche Dienststelle (WASt) or Bundesarchiv Außenstelle Berlin-Zehlendorf might be able to help me. As it turned out, I had already sent letters to both of these organizations.

The Bundesarchiv came back negative, but in September 1995, the Deutsche Dienststelle notified me that they maintained records from World War II of every German soldier who had been incarcerated by the Allied forces. They told me that they would reach out to every German soldier who had been imprisoned at Camp Westover and get back to me.

Early in March 1996, more than six months from my first letter to them, I finally struck gold. They provided me with a list of twenty-nine names of former POWs who were willing to provide their addresses so I could initiate the next step. Immediately my translators and I drafted a letter to each of the twenty-nine. It included a questionnaire with forty questions. Shortly after sending the letters, responses starting coming in. Of the twenty-nine letters, twenty-five responded and/or agreed to a telephone interview. These interviews were recorded and later transcribed by my interpreters. I also received several letters from wives stating that unfortunately their husbands had passed, although they were sure they would have loved to participate. It was sad, but again, I realized I was dealing with people in their seventies and eighties. It doesn't seem that old now.

THE OFFICERS

The final missing piece of the story centered on the officers. From my research in the archives, I came across Captain John Shields, Lieutenant Fred Reisner and Lieutenant Dan Pfenning. Again, I went to the Internet. When

I typed in John Shields's name, I got back about 33,000 hits; I didn't know where to start. I then typed in the name "Fred Reisner" in a Google search. Although the number of hits was very high, something jumped out at me. There was only one Reisner in Indiana (at the time, I thought Reisner came from Indiana). The address also listed his wife, Virginia. I noticed that a Fred and Virginia were also in Florida. Since it was winter, I guessed/hoped that they were snowbirds.

In the end, I sent out only five letters across the country, and a few days later, Virginia responded. Her opening sentence was, "Dear Sir, Fred Reisner died last year and Dan Pfenning died several years ago. We lost track of Captain Shields." Again, it was a moment of both great elation and great sadness. Sadness because my three primary sources had passed on or were in parts unknown and elation because Virginia had kept in touch with Lolly and Daniel Pfenning.

From Virginia, I discovered that Lolly Pfenning lived in Cheyenne, Wyoming. I wrote to her, and she called me a week later. She possessed a treasure trove of pictures and mentioned that Dan had written to her every day that he was stationed at Camp Westover. I can't describe how excited I became. I flew to Wyoming to interview Lolly. In addition to the interview, she allowed me to make copies of numerous pictures, along with photocopies of about three hundred very personal letters.

I flew back to Washington, DC, (still on assignment) and started reading the letters—they were full of Dan Pfenning's experiences with the prisoners. Suddenly my focus changed—I could now give my participants from Westover a more human voice, bring them to life. Unfortunately, feeling particularly tired traveling back to Hartford, Connecticut, late one afternoon, I decided to check my computer bag (with my laptop and all of Lolly's documents) rather than carry it on the plane. The laptop and Lolly's letters were stolen at some point from when I checked it. The life pretty much went out of me at that point. I called Lolly the next day and pleaded with her to have her son, Mark, make me additional copies at my expense. She said she'd do her best. Again fate stepped in. Lolly died a week after my phone call. I expressed my sympathies to Mark but didn't broach the subject of the letters for a couple of months. By then, Mark had cleaned everything out and didn't recall seeing any letters.

I had written about five hundred pages of what I hoped would be a book on Camp Westover. I was fortunate enough to get an agent, who in turn very quickly received a call from Greenwood Publishing. They were interested, but insisted on fleshing out the characters more. Daniel Pfenning's love letters to his wife, rich with daily prison camp life, would have allowed me

to do this. That's when I put all my research—notes, letters, tapes, etc.—in a black box where it sat until two years ago. Meanwhile, I had heard about the Historical Journal of Massachusetts from an article in Westfield State University's alumni magazine. I immediately became a subscriber. After my hopes for a book were dashed, I decided to try my hand at an article.

As far as the editor's question about whether these POWs were "representative," I wish I could have interviewed more "hard-liners" such as the Afrika Korps guys, the die-hard Nazis. Most of the interviewees had been ordinary German kids brought up as the war was winding down. Most had quickly thrown down their weapons and surrendered. The hard-liners, of whom I interviewed two or three, did provide a great contrast to the others. It might have been a more interesting story had I been able to find more of these guys.

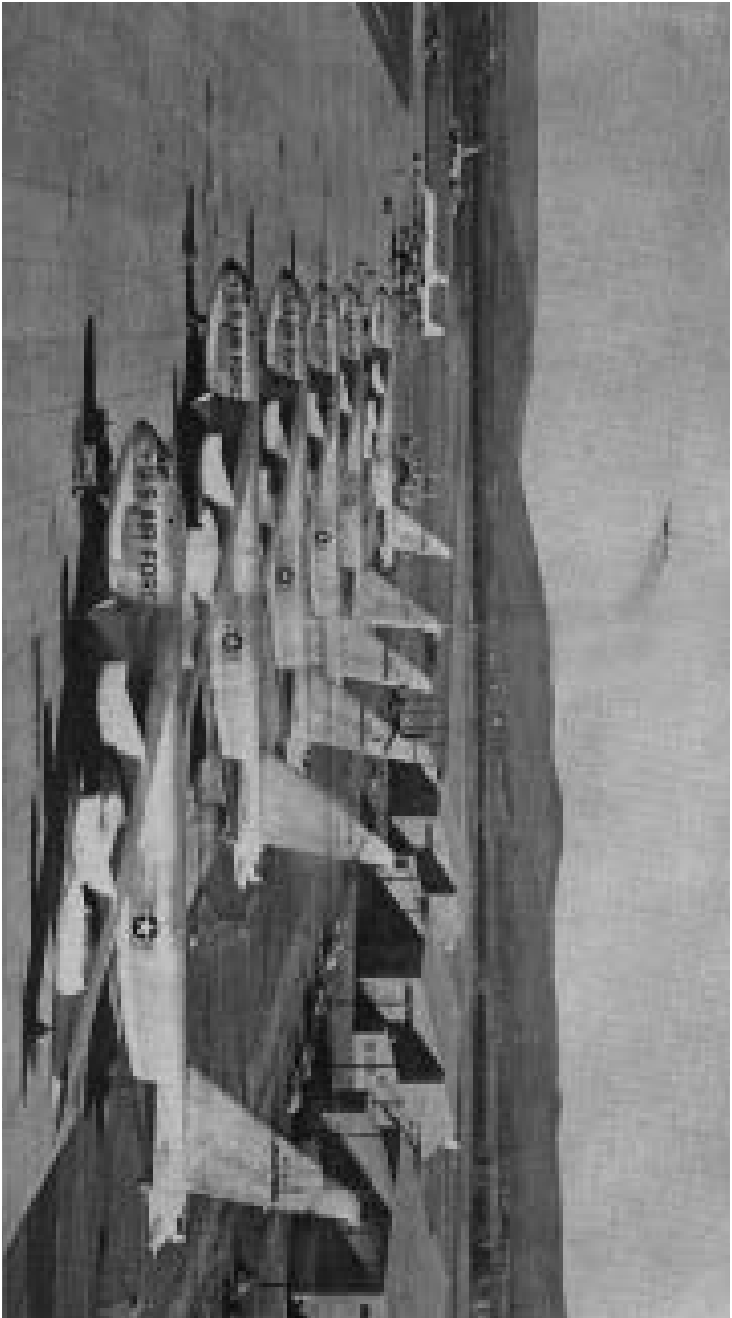
WESTOVER AIR RESERVE BASE, CHICOPEE

It's interesting that none of the main websites that include information about Westover Air Reserve Base (including the base's own website) mention that it served as a POW camp for German prisoners of war during World War II. In fact, the base's history originated with World War II.

Plans for Westover Field began in 1939 after Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939. Until then, the United States had only seventeen unimproved and ill-maintained air bases. At the direction of President Franklin D. Roosevelt the Army Air Corps had begun rapid expansion to develop an adequate air force for defense of the United States. The mayor of Chicopee, Anthony Stonina, lobbied long and hard for a new military airfield in the Northeast. He argued convincingly for the town's flat, open tobacco fields as a natural airfield. Within two weeks of Hitler's invasion of Poland, Chicopee was chosen for a new base.¹

In November 1939, President Roosevelt signed a \$750,000 Works Progress Administration (WPA) project bill for the base's construction. The land was cleared by fourteen hundred WPA and Civilian Conservation Corps. Actual construction started in February 1940. The base was named after Major General Oscar Westover, chief of the Air Corps, US Army, who had died in September 1938 in an airplane accident.

1. Frank Faulkner, *Westover: Man, Base and Mission*, 1st ed. (Springfield, MA: Hungry Hill Press, 1990), 160. See also "Westover Air Reserve Base" in Wikipedia, accessed October 20, 2015. The material in this section was added by the editors. It is based on a variety of websites that contained the same basic information.



The B-52s

This 1958 photo from a magazine shows B-52s—long-range bombers—lined up at Westover as a Stratofortress thunders off the runway into the New England sky. The photo aptly illustrates the Cold War era at Westover.

Originally, the base was planned to accommodate fourteen hundred men as an airplane overhaul facility, but by 1940 this number was increased to three thousand. At the start of 1942, there was housing for approximately 3,300 enlisted men and 500 officers, and at the close of that year there were quarters for about 8,000 officers and men. During the course of World War II, it became the largest military air facility in the Northeast. In October 1944, the first German prisoners of war arrived; 701 prisoners were held at its peak.

The base was designed to be nearly self-sufficient. It housed not only hangars but also barracks, warehouses, hospitals, dental clinics, dining halls, and maintenance shops. In addition, it had libraries, separate social clubs for officers and enlisted men, and a commissary to buy living necessities.

Westover's mission was to organize and provide initial training to new combat units. Pilots, navigators, bombardiers, flexible gunners and other aircrew would arrive and be assigned to newly organized squadrons and groups. Newly manufactured B-17 Flying Fortress, B-24 Liberator heavy bombers and P-47 Thunderbolt fighters and other aircraft were ferried to Westover and assigned to the newly formed units to begin their first phase of combat group training.

Today, Westover is the nation's largest Air Force Reserve base and is home to more than 5,500 military and civilian workers. Its mission is to provide worldwide air movement of troops, supplies, equipment, and medical patients. The 337th Airlift Squadron is the wing's flying unit and operates the C-5B Galaxy airplane. The C-5 specializes in missions involving outsized and oversized cargo that no other aircraft can carry.