

Viewer's Guide

THE ENEMY IN OUR MIDST



Nazi Prisoner of War Camps
in Michigan's Upper Peninsula



Written by John Pepin

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Meet the Filmmakers:



John Pepin is an award-winning photographer and journalist who has been a staff writer with *The Mining Journal* in Marquette, Michigan for the past decade. An Ishpeming native, Pepin spent several years in California where he received bachelor's and master's degrees from California State University, Northridge. He also worked with the NBC-Television program *Unsolved Mysteries*. Pepin is currently writing and researching materials for new projects.



Jackie Chandonnet is a television news anchorwoman at WLUC-TV6 in Marquette, Michigan. She is originally from Ft. Wayne, Indiana. Chandonnet has a broadcast journalism degree from the University of South Florida, located in Tampa. She is a member of the International Radio and Television Society Foundation and, as such, spent a summer at WNBC-TV in New York City. She has received several broadcasting awards for her reporting in Upper Michigan.

The Filmmakers Log

The story of making our film, much like the story we were trying to tell, started along the old railroad tracks in Wetmore, Michigan, where the German prisoners of war first arrived in the Upper Peninsula in February 1944.

Sitting along the railroad tracks, I took several photographs scouting the first locations for where we would film interviews or other segments of the film. It was here that I first envisioned the final sequence of the film with Jackie walking down the tracks away from the camera. Ironically, that ending to the film was one of the first segments we shot.

After months of planning our film through discussions held mainly in the upper meeting rooms of the Peter White Library, we were close to buying our Mini-DV camera. We shopped and bought a Canon GL1 on Ebay, along with a wireless microphone.

With six revisions of the film outline behind us, we started filming our first B-roll, stand-ups and interviews in fall 2002. Our interview with Evelyn Balko, on a sunny Sunday morning in September, was our first. Joan Thompson of Sidnaw was the final interview, which was filmed in November 2003.

In between, we traveled virtually every weekend and spent almost all of our free time working on some aspect of the film. This was very difficult to do. We knew at the onset that the hardest part of this project would be coming home after working our daytime news jobs and then trying to work on this additional project in the evenings. In many ways, it was almost our undoing.

But along the way, there were many great memories made.

"The greatest pleasure in making this film was the opportunity to meet the people who were a part of this interesting time, not only in Upper Michigan, but across the country and overseas," Jackie said. "It is a privilege and a joy to be in the company of former German POWs Ernst Floeter and Kurt Pechmann. I am grateful to be able to help tell their stories and preserve them."

For me, one of the best things was seeing the film come to life from the words written on countless pieces of scrap paper that were inserted into numerous revisions that ultimately produced our script. We were making changes right up to the point we stopped editing.

"One of my favorite memories is the day we hiked up Mount Kallio with Bob Godell," Jackie said. "Mr. Godell is a gem. It was a fun trip, a beautiful view and an emotional day. His interview at the top of the bluff was heartfelt and his warm character shone throughout the film."

Mount Kallio was one of the best memories for me too. The uncertainty of what we would find there, being



The railroad tracks in Wetmore, looking west toward where the old depot used to stand. It was here that the prisoners first arrived in the Upper Peninsula before being trucked a few miles east to Camp Evelyn in February 1944. (Photograph by John Pepin)



Jackie Chandonnet, Evelyn Balko and John Pepin pose for a photograph after filming an on-scene interview with Balko in Wetmore in fall 2002. Balko was the first interview filmed for the documentary. (Photograph by Mary Jo Cook)



The Enemy in Our Midst filmmakers John Pepin and Jackie Chandonnet discuss shots to film on the hike up Mount Kallio with Robert Godell in spring 2003. This outing was one of the most memorable for the pair and the footage obtained provides a key moment in the film—the beginning of the realization by interview subjects that things have changed dramatically over 60 years. (Photograph courtesy of Robert Godell).

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The Filmmakers Log, *continued*



Early on, Camp Pori became the favorite camp of the filmmakers to visit, perhaps because it was the first to be filmed and the discoveries made in the remote woodland setting were captivating. (Photograph by John Pepin)



This old boot was among the artifacts discovered on a visit to Camp Pori by the filmmakers. The crumbling footwear was discarded in the leaves near some of the camp foundations. (Photograph by John Pepin)

there when Godell would return to the spot for the first time in almost six decades, the scenery and the adventure certainly outweighed our audio problems and the more than one handful of wood ticks we encountered.

Another highlight for me was meeting Mary Lee at her home in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. We'd discovered her through Betty Cowley, a retired Wisconsin school-teacher, who has written a book about German POWs in the badger state.

Cowley had also interviewed former POW Kurt Pechmann for her book. When we talked to her about Camp Barron, she suggested we interview Mary Lee.

In her comfortable living room, Lee sat in a soft recliner and talked about her days at Camp Sidnaw. She looked through several photographs that she graciously made available to us for the film. We found pictures and stories we had not known existed previously. As Mary talked, it was very moving to see her still visibly touched by her husband Hugh Lee's passing, though it was many years ago.

Jackie remembers our day filming Gil Hart, who had volunteered to drive north about seven hours from downstate Saranac to be interviewed at Camp AuTrain and in Munising.

"He was so eager to tell us his memories of Munising, the Corktown Bar and camp life," Jackie said. "I also felt he was overwhelmed to be back at Camp AuTrain, so many years later. The saddest part of making this film was learning that Mr. Hart died and wasn't able to see the finished film. His smile and his laughter will not be forgotten."

And of course, who could forget the harmonica playing Ernst Floeter and the inimitable Kurt Pechmann, two men who have overcome numerous adversities in their lives.

Then there's the wonderful stories of Ray Maki the importance of which cannot be understated. Ray was a little surprised when we made him cover up his Green Bay Packers sweatshirt for the interview. "And they won today too," he said. But we hope he's forgiven us by now.

Everyone we talked to who is featured in the film was able to provide something very special to the finished product. We thank you all.

At the camps, Camp Pori became our favorite early on. We found and filmed some of our first real relics here in autumn 2002. A mess hall dish, an old boot and the crumbling foundations were fascinating to discover.

With 52 hours of film shot, we spent almost all of the summer of 2003 logging our tapes and transcribing quotes, which were arranged by subject matter in my computer.

Once we were finished with this monumental task, we were able to go to any subject and find out exactly

The Filmmakers Log, *continued*

what we had available to use in the film, right down to the last word of interview quotes or B-roll footage.

Next we made index cards with the roughly 75 subject headings written on them. We then took 27 hours arranging these cards, with the help of our latest version of the outline, to create the final sequence for our film.

Then it was back to the computer to rearrange the subject headings to match the line-up we had agreed upon. After that, we looked at all of the material listed under each heading and began cutting things that we didn't absolutely want to keep in the film.

With this finalized, I wrote the script by linking all the subject headings together with transitions and filling in the blanks. In some cases, we had to go out and shoot last-minute images to help the transitions work properly.

Then came the nightmare that was digital editing. It would have been some of the most fun of the entire project, had we not had a severe deadline to meet.

Both of us had taken a week's vacation in January to work on nothing but editing. We rented a high-powered laptop computer with Avid software to put our film together.

Forty-five hours into the process, the computer "hiccupped" and we thought we had lost all of our data. But after about nine hours, we were able to retrieve almost all of our lost images from the computer. But the phrase "media offline" is one that we will never forget.

During the week, we only slept when we couldn't stay awake anymore. Ultimately, we had more than 2,100 clips that had to be played into the computer and linked together.

One of our proudest achievements is that in viewing the film, you never see the same image twice, except for a couple of instances where we purposely wanted the audience to see a picture again to reinforce a previous idea.

Finally, at 5:30 on the morning of the January day we were scheduled to send our editing equipment back to Arizona, we finished our film. It took several weeks for the anxiety to subside.

On March 27, we held a private screening at Northern Michigan University in Marquette, Michigan for those who were featured in the film and their guests.

It was another highly memorable experience seeing all of these people in the same room at the same time, watching themselves and each other on-screen.

Friends, family and cast came from great distances to watch our film. Roughly 100 people attended the premier, including television and newspaper reporters. This was something very touching for us. Again, we are grateful.

Some of the best compliments we received that night included several warm hugs, handshakes and a silent pat on the left shoulder that I remember well.

Since that time, we have been readying the film for its August broadcast premier on Public Television (WNMU-TV 13, Marquette) and video release. Our dream of capturing this story on film and bringing it to the people of Upper Michigan is nearing fruition. We are very excited about this.

Then last week, having thought this was all just about said and done, somebody from the film brought me back to the Wetmore railroad crossing one more time.

Curt Bacon, a Michigan Department of Natural Resources law enforcement officer who was interviewed in the film, called and said he was in Alger County recently.

"I crossed these railroad tracks and said, 'this looks really familiar,'" Bacon said. "Isn't that the place where you filmed Jackie walking down the railroad tracks? I had never been there before, but I recognized it from the film."

To me, this is more proof that even in little ways, this story that many thought would fade forever into the woodlands with the passage of time will never end.

It keeps going and coming back again and again—like history itself.



WNMU-TV 13 Station Manager Bruce Turner and Enemy in Our Midst filmmakers Jackie Chandonnet and John Pepin pose for a publicity shot during a PBS fundraiser at the station's studios in Marquette, Michigan in 2004. (Photograph by Stuart Baker)

Keeping Contact: German POWs After the War Years



After World War II, Camp Sidnaw Commander Hugh Lee and his wife Mary received many letters in America from former German POWs held previously at the Houghton County branch camp. They had also sent packages to German families. (Photograph by John Pepin)



The Lees also visited former POWs in Germany after the war. This photograph was taken in Sarbrücken in 1949. The image shows a brother-in-law of one of the POWs, left, Capt. Hugh Lee, Mary Lee, the POW named Paul and his future wife. (Photograph courtesy of Jane Sauer)

Sixty years after the German prisoners of war were held in the Upper Peninsula branch camps, glorious memories are still stirring within the hearts and minds of people seemingly everywhere.

Mary Lee, the Wisconsin English teacher who spent most of the war years living at Camp Sidnaw with her camp commander husband Hugh, continued to visit and write to the German POWs the Lees had befriended at the camp, long after the war was over.

Around the time of a private screening of *The Enemy in Our Midst* in March 2004, for those who were featured in the film and their relatives, Mary's sister Jane Sauer sent a stack of letters that had been written to Mary.

Translated, the letters talked about simple day-to-day occurrences in the lives of those on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

"Our dear children say 'Hello' to you with warm hearts even that they don't know you," wrote Albert Weizinger. "They want to send you a little souvenir from Germany with their gratitude."

The Weizinger family was the recipient of several packages of gifts sent to them by the Lees. Some of the items sent included two pounds of lard, two bars of Ivory soap, 1 boy's leather jacket, 1 pair of boy's rayon trousers, 1 woman's wool coat, 3 pairs of woolen auklets, 2 rayon slips, 5 rayon dresses and 4 pairs of shoes.

In one letter, Weizinger wrote, "The fullness of your wonderful package made us cry with joy and happiness. The children were standing with bright, shiny eyes when they saw all these wonderful useful things."

The Lees sent their packages timed with the changing seasons.

"Just now we have a cold spell again with cold and snow and we use your good warm things permanently," Weizinger wrote. "Our boy doesn't take off your warm gloves all day long. He is so anemic that he is cold all the time. I can't find the words to thank you for your help. I can wish you only the blessing of the Lord

as a reward."

In January 2000, when the original *Mining Journal* 5-part series of articles on the POW camps was published, numerous people called or wrote to say that they had fond remembrances of the prisoners or the camps.

Four years later, when news of the film's completion was released to the public, the same thing occurred. From telephone calls and E-mail to discussions on an Internet bulletin board located at www.pasty.com, the camp stories were being told all over again.

"Remember seeing the map in Alger County when I was a kid. It was between Forest Lake and Munising and north of 94," wrote one correspondent on the bulletin board.

Another wrote, "My husband was in the Army and guarded German POWs near Baltimore, Maryland. The men who were in these camps were felt to be of no threat to U.S. security. Joe said they were just men who wanted to go home safely to their families. While on guard duty, Joe carried a pistol with one bullet in it. There were many camps here in the Lower Peninsula also. The prisoners worked on farms. One near here was at a pickle factory and they harvested cucumbers. Memories!"

Keeping Contact, *continued*

Amazingly, some of the former German POWs are still in contact with friends they've made here in the United States, all these years afterward. A woman in Indiana sent an E-mail note to *The Mining Journal* in early April 2004.

"My dad served in Germany in World War II and after he was wounded and sent back to America. He served in a POW camp in California until the end of the war. There he made friends with a German prisoner who had worked in a camp near AuTrain. His name is Kurt Holtfreter and he corresponded with my dad for years. After my dad died, I found the old letters and contacted Kurt and now we have been writing back and forth for several years ourselves."

With the public release of *The Enemy in Our Midst* in August 2004, we anticipate even more people will be heading to their closets to dust off old photographs, letters and memories. There will be more phone calls, correspondence and people just talking about one of the more offbeat chapter's in the region's local history.

In those actions we will have helped achieve one of the primary aims of our film project, that of keeping the German POW captivity story alive for future generations.

Many of those aging citizens who have first-hand knowledge of that wonderful story feared that might not be the case. Hopefully, they may now rest a bit easier knowing their legacy is intact.

Twelve Questions We're Often Asked:

Q: Where did you get the title for your film?

A: It's a quote from Robert Godell, one of our prime interview subjects in the film. He said that there was some bad feeling toward the prisoners in the beginning. "There was always some that, that's the enemy that's in our midst." The title also sums up the story we were trying to tell throughout the film.

Q: How much time did it take you to make the film?

A: Two years. It took us almost a whole summer to log the 52 hours of film we'd shot. It took 27 hours to put a set of index cards in order that would provide the order of our segments and we edited the entire film in 10 days in January 2004.

Q: Where did you get the funding for the film?

A: We put this film together on the smallest of budgets. Using our own money, we split the cost of all the expenses and we scrimped everywhere we could. We made sandwiches to take with us on long trips to do film shoots or interviews.

Q: Where do you plan to show the documentary?

A: We always had hopes of first debuting our film on public television in the Upper Peninsula. The story is from here. It should be shown here first. We also felt that a PBS setting would provide a climate for educational viewing, along with an opportunity to show the film without commercial interruptions. After the initial premier, we hope to distribute the documentary to a wider audience, likely to include more Public Television stations in other areas.

Q: Were there ever any creative differences between the filmmakers during the project?

A: Yes. But ultimately, these proved to be healthy exchanges of thought that resulted in making a better film.



A quote from Robert Godell of Watton in Houghton County led to our naming our film The Enemy in Our Midst. (Photograph courtesy of The Mining Journal).



Robert Gillstrom was interviewed in his backyard in Greenland on May 31, 2003. Gillstrom was one of the interview subjects who felt he had too little to contribute to be interviewed. However, his stories added fine touches of humor that helped the film greatly. (Photo courtesy of Ruth MacFarlane)

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Questions, *continued*



This U.S. Forest Service sign in Houghton County at Camp Pori is the most extensive marking of any of the Upper Peninsula POW camps. (Photograph by John Pepin).

Q: How did the people in the film feel about being interviewed?

A: It varied, depending on the interview subject. Some people felt at ease before the camera, while others were uncertain how their interviews would be depicted in the final version of the film. Several people felt they had too little to add to warrant being interviewed. In both of these cases, after a private screening of the film in March 2004, many of these people said they were very happy with the end result.

Q: Have you considered cutting the length of the film?

A: We decided against that option after thinking about the possibility several times and listening to the suggestions of those who have seen the complete version. One of the goals of this film was to compile the available information in one place for people to enjoy, study and contemplate. We were not trying to fit our film into any specific time slot or video format. We were trying to tell the whole story in our documentary. And to do that, you need time and context. We have, however, considered repackaging the film in a 3-volume set so that it may be played on television in shorter segments. But again, we do not plan to cut the film.

Q: Did you compile any funny outtakes from the film?

A: There were moments during the making of our documentary that would make good fodder for a bloopers reel. There were blown lines, adverse weather conditions and an uncooperative garter snake. Some of these segments may one day make their way to the public eye.

Q: Do you have another film project in mind?

A: Making another historical documentary would require finding a subject that grabs your heart and soul like this one did. Whatever your subject matter on a long project like this, it needs to be something you are willing to live, eat and breathe for the duration.

Q: Did you contact a lot of German POWs and soldiers from the Upper Peninsula camps in making your film?

A: No. The U.S. Army destroyed the records of which American military personnel was stationed where during those war years. No lists are available with the names of soldiers stationed at the camps, according to the National Archives and Records Administration. In the case of the German POWs, a list of their ranks does exist. But the roughly 375,000 men on that list are not arranged in any way that describes which prison camps they were held at. To complicate the problem, many of the Germans were held at several camps during their time in captivity.

Q: Where can I find more information about this subject?

A: There are a few books listed in this publication that would be helpful places to start. Most notable of these is Arnold Krammer's "Nazi Prisoners of War in America," which will provide a good overview of the subject nationally. For specific local information concerning the Upper Peninsula prison camps, there are several articles available that were published in newspapers including *The Mining Journal*, *The Munising News*, *The Houghton Daily Mining Gazette* and *Soo Evening News*. These articles would be available from local libraries, historical societies and archives that maintain those publications. Good places to search for articles are around the dates of February 1944, when the prisoners first arrived and April 1946, when the camps were closed down.

Q: Have any of the Upper Peninsula camps been pointed out as tourist attractions?

A: Not really. There is one sign at Camp Pori that describes the camp's history. But the other camps are without this. Camp Evelyn is not marked in any way. The U.S. Forest Service is the landholder in several of these places. We have contacted Forest Service archaeologists and rangers in hopes of trying to help develop some interpretive signs at Camp AuTrain. These signs could incorporate available photographs, descriptions and diagrams of the camp. Visitors could have a greater experience, trying to locate the crumbling and fading landmarks, while learning more about their local history.

Hitler's Pulpwood Cutters

As it had years earlier during World War I, armed conflict overseas drew thousands of men from the towns and woodlands of northern Michigan during World War II.

Several of the Upper Peninsula's 15 counties registered marked declines in population as men enlisted into military service, or were lured by higher wages to big cities. There, the production of all sorts of items for the war effort was in full swing. Detroit's massive automobile industries were converted to producing war materials in 1941.

In the wake of this exodus, north woods timbermen were confronted by a shortage of workers to cut pulpwood that was also desperately needed for the war. Paper drives and publicity campaigns in local newspapers urging increased cutting to improve supplies had failed to meet demand.

More than 1,250 newspapers in 27 pulpwood-producing states were being asked to continue their editorial and advertising efforts to boost pulpwood production.

"Pulpwood is still a vital war material made scarce by the manpower shortage," said Walter M. Deer, chairman of the Newspaper Pulpwood Committee. "Our fighting forces will need it as long as the war lasts, as long as there is an American soldier on foreign soil."

Twenty-five war plants that used waste paper to manufacture cartons and shipping cases for soldiers' food, clothing, ammunition and blood plasma had shut down. One hundred more were only operating part-time. An estimated 700,000 items used by the armed forces were either made from paper or were wrapped in it.

Lt. Gen. Brehon B. Somervell, chief of the Army Services and Supply, said that given collection levels at the close of 1943, the U.S. would meet only 6 million of its 8 million ton quota.

"You can't do a 75 percent job back here and expect us to do a 100 percent job over there," Somervell said in an editorial published in the *Daily Mining Gazette* of Houghton, Michigan.

Meanwhile, with thousands of Nazi soldiers taken prisoner, and limited space to house them, Great Britain had been urging the United States to accept German prisoners of war.

The U.S. reluctantly agreed to take a group of 50,000 prisoners from England in August 1942. In the months to follow, thousands more would flood west after Gen. Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps surrendered to the Allies in North Africa in May 1943.

By spring of the following year, more than 100,000 German and Italian prisoners of war had come to the U.S. Eventually, those numbers would swell to roughly



Posters, newspaper articles and other advertisements were used to attract workers to the pulpwood industry during World War II. This poster was used from 1941-45. The Office for Emergency Management, Office of War Information, Domestic Operations Branch, Bureau of Special Services created the poster. (National Archives and Records Administration image No. NWDNS-44-PA-1349).



This pass was given to Nazi soldiers who surrendered to the Allies. The pass includes a message from Allied Expeditionary Force Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower, written in German and English, which says, "The German soldier who carries this safe conduct is using it as a sign of his genuine wish to give himself up. He is to be disarmed, to be well looked after, to receive food and medical attention as required, and to be removed from the danger zone as soon as possible." (Document from the collection of John Pepin)

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Hitler's Pulpwood Cutters, *continued*

The Germans sent to the Upper Peninsula POW camps were largely soldiers from Gen. Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps, who were captured after surrendering in May 1943 in North Africa. These prisoners pictured cut pulpwood in the woodlands north of Camp Sidnaw, which was located in southern Houghton County, Michigan. (Photograph courtesy of Robert Godell)



After the initial opening of Camp Evelyn near Wetmore in Alger County, and Camp Sidnaw in Sidnaw in Houghton County in February 1944, the U.S. Army created three additional German POW camps in the Upper Peninsula. (Map from the collection of John Pepin).

Army officials announced that German prisoners had been used successfully to cut trees in the southern pine forests. If this north woods experiment worked, they said, more German POW camps could be expected in the Upper Peninsula. Ultimately, there would be five Upper Peninsula branch prison camps, all located at former CCC camps that had been used during the 1930s, but had now been largely abandoned.

In addition to camps Sidnaw and Evelyn, Camp AuTrain was opened in Alger County in May 1944, followed by Camp Pori in northern Houghton County in November 1944 and finally, Camp Raco in the eastern Upper Peninsula's Chippewa County in January 1945.

At Camp Evelyn, pulpwood, railroad ties and fence posts were cut for the Munising Paper Company, which had been advertising men's wages paid to women for eight hour shifts of heavy work at the mill.

Germans held at Camp Sidnaw cut pulpwood and posts for the William Bonifas Lumber Company of Neenah, Wisconsin. The Niemi & Niemi Company of AuTrain, Michigan and the Bay de Noquet Company of Nahma, Michigan used Camp AuTrain POW labor to cut pulpwood, chemical wood, ties and fence posts.

The Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company of Port Edwards, Wisconsin used the Germans to harvest pulpwood from the woodlands near Camp Pori, while Nazi war captives at Camp Raco, which was located in lands clear cut by the Richardson Avery Company decades earlier, cut chemical wood for the Newberry Lumber and Chemical Wood Company of Newberry, Michigan.

In all, roughly 1,100 German war prisoners were held at the five camps. Each camp had two officers and about 40 enlisted men who watched over their captives.

Clearly, the guards were outnumbered. But the Germans were fed and clothed well, had comfortable liv-

375,000 captured Nazis who were held at more than 500 POW camps across the country.

Under provisions of the Geneva Convention of 1929, the prisoners could be put to work. Across the country, Nazi soldiers were now harvesting peas, corn, cotton, hemp, tomatoes and other crops.

To help try to ease the paper shortage, U.S. War Manpower Commission officials in Cleveland decided to use some of the Afrika Korps prisoners as pulpwood cutters in the Upper Peninsula.

In February 1944, a special train carried about 400 Nazi prisoners north. About half of these war captives were taken to Camp Evelyn, a converted Civilian Conservation Corps camp located near Wetmore, Michigan, just east of Munising. The remainder was sent about 100 miles west to Camp Sidnaw, a similar camp situated in southern Houghton County.

Hitler's Pulpwood Cutters, *continued*

ing quarters and few prospects if they hoped to escape into the unfamiliar countryside.

Security at the camps was considered light to medium. The guards in the camp watchtowers were armed with carbine rifles and pistols.

"They'd get their tools at the little filing shack. And I remember the first time I went out I had a couple truckloads—about 35 of them, I guess," said Gilbert Hart, a former guard at Camp AuTrain, who watched the prisoners on their woods work details. "And they got out there and went in that tool shed and come out with sharp double-bladed axes and log peelers and crosscut saws and here I was with a revolver with six shots. I thought, 'Holy goll, what chance have I got here?' But they just went to work."

The prisoners were paid 80 cents per day to cut their quota of pulpwood sticks, which was estimated by some woodsmen to be about one-fifth what a regular pulpwood cutter would do. At least one former POW said he made more money as a war captive in the United States than he did in Germany as a free man after the war.

Prisoners who did not volunteer for work in the woods stayed at the camps where they did the cooking and performed other duties. They were paid 10 cents per day in coupons for canteen trade.

Timber companies hoping to use the prisoner labor contracted with the government and paid going rates. At Camp Raco, for example, chemical wood was being cut for \$3.50 a cord.

Jack Nordine of Bergland, Michigan owned a small timber company at the time. He also owned four 40-acre plots with timber to cut. Through Nekoosa-Edwards, he was able to get a band of the German prisoners to the trees off his land. Nordine said he was

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After losing an eye and suffering other shrapnel wounds while fighting in Italy, Gilbert Hart was a limited service soldier sent to Camp AuTrain in Alger County, Michigan to guard German prisoners in late 1944. This photograph was taken of Hart at the camp in 1946. After initially having reservations about guarding the POWs, Hart eventually came to consider his time at the camp the best he'd spent in the Army. (Photograph from the collection of John Pepin)



Camp Raco, was the first Civilian Conservation Corps camp created in the Upper Peninsula. Later, after the CCC was discontinued, Camp 667 was one of five in the Upper Peninsula converted to house German prisoners of war. The buildings and other structures at all of the camps looked similar, the tarpaper and lathe covering for the buildings is characteristic of the camps. (Photograph courtesy of Bernard Arbic)

Hitler's Pulpwood Cutters, *continued*



The cracked stone foundations at Camp AuTrain are typical of those found at all of the camps today. In many cases, the concrete foundations are hidden under the leaves and branches of trees, bushes and other vegetation, which has overgrown the former POW camps. This photograph was taken in autumn 2002. (Photograph by John Pepin)



A stone chimney built from local quarry stones is the most striking remnant remaining today at Camp Racó in Chippewa County. This photograph was taken in summer 2003. (Photograph by John Pepin)



This collapsing structure is one of several badly-damaged, but standing, POW camp structures remaining at Camp Sidnaw in Houghton County. This camp is located on private property and is not accessible to the public. (Photograph by John Pepin)

impressed with the results.

"I don't know if I had 30 or 40 POWs, but when you turn that many men loose on a logging job, it looks like a desert," Nordine said. "By the end of the week, holy smokes—so many hands—at 100 sticks a day, some 300 sticks. That's a pile of wood. That's a carload. Big production."

During the first three months of 1945, the Nazi war captives from the Upper Peninsula camps cut roughly 800,000 sticks of pulpwood; 45,000 railroad ties; 197,000 cedar posts and 2,250 cords of chemical wood. The main species of trees being logged during this time period were spruce, hemlock and balsam fir. The prisoners also cut cedar and poplar trees.

Initially, some labor unions, including the Timber and Sawmill Workers Union, protested against using the prisoners for woods work in place of free labor. The government promised it would only use the Germans when free labor was unavailable.

Michigan Governor Harry F. Kelly, while visiting Camp Evelyn shortly after the prisoners' arrival in 1944, said that the Army had secured the safety of the civilian population.

"I believe also," Kelly said. "that civilian labor has been protected through regulations governing employment of war prisoners. We all recognize the critical shortage of labor in the pulpwood and chemical wood industry and we also understand the necessity for safeguarding civilian labor. The problem, I feel confident, has been adequately met by the Army."

Many of the Nazi prisoners could speak or understand English and though they possessed a wide range of talents from woodcarving to engine repair to clock making or playing musical instruments, they were by no means accomplished woodsmen at the onset.

Injuries, including cuts and gashes, were not uncommon. Prisoners were taken to the camp dispensary for treatment. In the Camp AuTrain dispensary, some prisoners received a crude form of preferential treatment.

"The guy would sew 'em up there," Hart said. "If he liked him (the prisoner) he'd give him a shot of whiskey. If he didn't, he'd just have to stand there and he'd sew him up. Pretty rough."

Prisoners dressed in castoff Class X Army clothing marked with a large "PW" and sometimes, at least some part of the German uniforms they were captured in.

Local reaction toward the presence of the German war prisoners was generally favorable. Many people have treasured memories of hearing the Germans singing in harmony while they were trucked back to camp from the woods. Others remember quick glimpses of the men as they waved and smiled from the passing vehicles.

Hitler's Pulpwood Cutters, *continued*

But to ensure protection of the POWs, Army personnel kept news of the Nazi prisoner arrivals quiet and asked curiosity seekers to leave the area surrounding the camps.

Camp escapes were limited to a handful of brief incidents. Local priests and ministers would visit the camps weekly from nearby towns to hold religious services for the Nazi prisoners, many of whom held no large allegiance to Hitler or his ideals.

Those prisoners who were hardliners, or who refused to work by breaking saw blades or causing other problems, were shipped out to camps elsewhere across the country.

Some hardcore Nazis at Camp Sidnaw scowled when taunted by local children who chanted that Germany was losing the war.

Despite victory being declared in Europe in May 1945 and the surrender of the Japanese three months later, the Nazi prisoners remained in the Upper Peninsula and elsewhere in the U.S. for several more months.

But by April 8, 1946, all five of the German POW camps in northern Michigan—which had been under the control of Army officials from Fort Sheridan, Illinois since January 1945—were closed.

During those last 15 months the Upper Peninsula camps were operating, the Nazi prisoners did work valued at \$715,858. Wisconsin had 30 POW camps operating at one time or another, with camp commanders mostly using the German prisoners to harvest various crops. Private contractors there paid the U.S. Treasury a total of \$3.3 million.

With the close of the prison camps, the Germans were sent back to Fort Sheridan and then repatriated to Europe as ordered by the Geneva Convention. However, many were not taken home to Germany immediately. Instead, they were shipped to other countries, including France, to rebuild war-torn cities and towns.

Today, the former Upper Peninsula POW branch camps are a crumbling memory. They constitute an off-beat chapter in local history that few can recall. The forests the Germans once cut are now reclaiming the places where the prisoners of war were held captive.

Cracked stone foundations, walkways, stairwells and other ruins lie beneath brambles, moss and saplings. Most all of the buildings were sold off or were razed years ago. But in some cases, some amazing relics remain.

A stone fireplace from the former officer's quarters at Camp Raco stands intact, while old mess hall dishes once buried by the Army when the camps closed have resurfaced at Camp AuTrain.

Camp Pori has the rusted remains of an old water tower hidden beneath a canopy of trees. Camp Evelyn's treasures include an old stone shack with 55-gallon drum heaters still in place.

But likely the most spectacular remnant of the Nazi POW era is a guard tower that remains standing at Camp Sidnaw. The unstable watchman's post is hidden between the supporting limbs of overgrown trees.

Unfortunately, those who can tell the stories of the prison camps first hand are fading into history themselves. But nonetheless, a legacy is enduring that is absent from school history books, buried under the green leaves and grasses of the northern forests.

That legacy tells the strange tale of a brief time period during the second world war, when Hitler's pulpwood cutters came all the way from Africa to the Upper Peninsula to cut wood.



A guard tower from the former Camp Sidnaw still stands today on private property owned by Wood Development Corporation west of Sidnaw, Michigan. Of the five POW camps in the Upper Peninsula, Camp Sidnaw retains the best artifacts, including one intact barracks building and the deteriorated remains of several other structures. (Photograph by John Pepin)

Reconstructing the Past: Film Reenactments



The Enemy in Our Midst Producer John Pepin, right, discusses the script with Steve Swanberg, while Robert Hughes, Dave Latvala and Alan Hager wait to shoot a scene along the Camp AuTrain Road in June 2003. (Photograph courtesy of Robert and Patti Hughes).



Robert Hughes, left, and Dave Latvala, waiting for a cue during filming of The Enemy in Our Midst in June 2003. Latvala was playing Marquette Branch Prison officer Walter Mayworm. (Photo courtesy of Robert and Patti Hughes)

The reenactments in our film were crafted with the help of many people who gave a great deal of their time and effort to try to replicate past events. None of these people had extensive acting experience, but their performances became very special to the film.

In deciding to feature some reenactments, we were continuing a major theme of the production, which was to try to make the material interesting to viewers by providing information in a variety of formats.

Throughout *The Enemy in Our Midst* there are several small reenactments that were minor in scope. Examples of these would include the sketch artist, typing journalist or woodsman with an ax on a bucksaw blade. These features were relatively simple and were used to help move the film forward. In a similar fashion, we also recreated several sound effects.

In other instances, we showed footage of modern trains moving along railroad tracks while we discussed historic events. We also used a range of present-day images, including cars along highways, trees in the forest and the moon rising from the trees. These pictures were not intended as reenactments, where historical accuracy in the depiction would be important. Instead, they were again instances of using various images to artistically move the film forward or take the viewer's mind or mood in a particular direction.

However, there were two relatively elaborate reenactments that we took pains to try to recreate. These included the "Red Ribbon Reenactment" and the opening "Escape Reenactment."

The story of red ribbons being tied or pinned to German POWs came from the remembrances of Gil Hart, a former guard at Camp AuTrain. We worked to recreate his story, based on the details he provided. We looked at photographs to confirm types of clothing that could be used for the POWs, woods boss and American officer featured in the film.

Neil Perry, Tony Cook and Dan Schierschmidt, then students at Munising High School, played the three German POWs in the reenactment. Stuart Baker, a good friend of mine, was the U.S. camp guard and Jackie's father, Craig Chandonnet, played the woods boss. He had been in the Upper Peninsula from Florida on a hunting trip.

Filming took place at Camp AuTrain on Nov. 23, 2002 – a very cold day in Alger County. The brief film sequence took several takes to complete. We originally intended to use this footage with dialogue, but we later decided to instead use Hart's voice telling the story over the footage we had shot.

Despite the cold, which quickly diminished our camera batteries, we had a lot of fun doing this. In one outtake, Cook's bucksaw collapsed into pieces, leaving everyone laughing. In another, Baker tried to rip the red

Reenactments, *continued*



The Enemy in our Midst actors Dave Latvala, center, Steve Swanberg and Al Hager surround actors Frank Pergande, Benjamin Frederick and Shaun Hughes during a filmed reenactment of a June 30, 1944 recapture of three escaped Nazi prisoners of war near Skandia. The reenactment was filmed near Camp AuTrain in Alger County. (Photograph courtesy of Robert and Patti Hughes)

cloth into a long strip, but instead ended up with only a tiny piece of cloth and a great big grin. “Cut,” somebody yelled.

Deer hunters walking down a snow-covered dirt road, were played by my brother Jimmy and his friend, Murray Bell, who were visiting during the Thanksgiving holiday that year from Canada. That footage was shot along the Camp AuTrain Road on Nov. 29, 2002. Steve Swanberg provided shotguns of the proper time period.

The “Escape Reenactment” took a lot longer to write and plan. The 15-scene reenactment was somewhat complicated to shoot with only one camera and one remote microphone. Actors would sometimes speak toward trees where we had strategically secured the microphone with masking tape.

We again used photographs and some text to research clothing and other items we used in recreating the events. Newspaper articles describing the recapture of the three escapees from Camp AuTrain provided many valuable details.

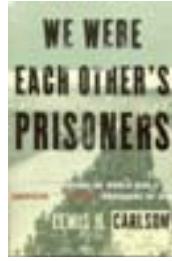
A photograph of state police and prison guards on a 1946 manhunt in the classic 1985 Ike Wood book *One Hundred Years at Hard Labor-A History of Marquette State Prison* was used to determine what law enforcement uniforms of the day would look like. Additional information was provided by several real-life lawmen, which were aptly featured in the reenactment as police officers.

These men included Steve Swanberg, who is the police chief in Munising, Michigan and Alger County Sheriff’s deputies Alan Hager, John “Jack” Linsky, Dave Latvala and Undersheriff Robert Hughes. While the uniforms are not exact replicas of those used in those days, they are as close as could be achieved given limited resources and availability of certain clothing, particularly state police trooper uniforms.

Frank Pergande, Benjamin Frederick and Shaun Hughes played the three German POWs in the sequence. Hughes and Frederick live in Alger County. Pergande was recommended to us, after we contacted professor Carol Strauss Sotiropoulos of the Modern Languages and Literature Department at Northern Michigan University. We wanted someone for the part who could speak the German phrases translated for us by Dr. Sotiropoulos.

This reenactment was filmed on June 28, 2003, almost 59 years to the day after the actual recapture, which took place in Marquette County near Skandia. Our filming was done a few miles to the east, amid clouds of mosquitoes, along the Camp AuTrain Road.

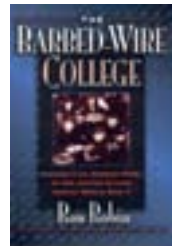
For More Information:



We Were Each Other's Prisoners: This 1997 book by Western Michigan University History Professor Lewis H. Carlson is a great text which details the experiences of American and German prisoners of war during World War II. The book includes sections on both Kurt Pechmann and Ernst Floeter, the two German POWs interviewed in *The Enemy in Our Midst*. Published by Basic Books.



Nazi Prisoners in America: Arnold Krammer's consummate resource on the subject of German POWs in the United States. Krammer is a professor of history at Texas A&M University. This wonderful text is a must for anyone interested in learning more about this still relatively unknown subject in American history. Published by Scarborough House Publishers, most recently in 1996.



The Barbed-Wire College: Ron Robin's account of reeducating German POWs in the United States during World War II provides a fascinating look at the U.S. Army's "School of Democracy." Robin is a history professor. Princeton University Press published this book in 1995.



POW Camps in the U.P.: This booklet is a compilation of five articles written by John Pepin and published in *The Mining Journal* of Marquette, Michigan in January 2000. The series was popular locally, ultimately providing the basis for *The Enemy in Our Midst*. The booklet includes several photographs not published in the newspaper.