



POW CAMPS IN THE U.P.

Since the release of our film "The Enemy in Our Midst" on August 30, 2004, several viewers of the program have inquired about how to get copies of the original articles the film was loosely based on.

In the year 2000, the Mining Journal and WNMU-TV 13 cooperatively produced a booklet called "POW Camps in the U.P.," which included these five articles. With only limited numbers of copies of that publication still available, we have since decided to make these pieces part of the materials associated with the film available here for download.

What follows here is the entire series. The opening statement below is from the booklet preface, which was written in early 2000. Thanks again everyone for your interest in the our film.

John Pepin, Producer
"The Enemy in Our Midst"

Initially intended to run as a series of articles during the week between Christmas and New Year's Eve 1999, the five-part "POW Camps in the U.P." series was published in the Marquette Mining Journal on consecutive days beginning on Jan. 4, 2000.

The idea I had was to elaborate on previous material already written on the subject by local historians and journalists. I wanted to visit some of the camps to get modern first-hand impressions of them, coupled with stories of people who were actually there during those days in the mid-1940s. This primary source information would then be combined with historical archives information. The blend worked nicely and the series was extremely popular with readers. Several calls and letters were received from across the Upper Peninsula, along with e-mail messages from both U.S. coasts.

The most common comment was that people were unaware of the German prisoners' internment here, much less escape attempts, deer hunting with Tommy guns or a camp for malcontent conscientious objectors. Since the series was published, more people with more stories of the camps or the Germans have contacted me. With talk of producing a documentary film inspired by the articles, chances are good that the story will continue to hold local interest for years to come. It was, after all, a unique chapter in the area's captivating history.



*John Pepin, Staff Writer
Marquette Mining Journal
Marquette, Michigan*

Part I

WETMORE--As a special train neared the Wetmore depot on Feb. 12, 1944, waiting Army guards readied their Tommy guns.

Civilians who gathered to witness the arrival strained to get a better look at the 262 passengers on board.

Walking off the train, the warmly-dressed German soldiers, who had been members of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps and who were now U.S. prisoners of war, laughed and joked while they were marched toward seven waiting trucks.

Bound for converted Civilian Conservation Corps Camp Evelyn two miles away, the POWs smiled and waved to locals as their caravan passed an intersection.

One hundred miles to the west, a similar scene was unfolding near Camp Sidnaw where 200 or so more German prisoners were being unloaded.

An intriguing chapter in local history had been opened.

Though it may seem hard to imagine today, more than 1,000 captured German soldiers were held at five POW camps in the Upper Peninsula during World War II.

Camp Evelyn and Camp AuTrain were in Alger County. Camp Pori was located near Mass City in Houghton County. Camp Raco was in Chippewa County and Houghton County also had Camp Sidnaw.

The prisoners were brought here to help alleviate an intense shortage of manpower caused by the war. The POWs were paid 80 cents a day by the government to cut wood from the forests near the five camps.

In turn, the private logging companies benefiting from the POW labor would pay the government the prevailing wage scale.

The cut wood was used to make crates for shipping munitions, food, clothing and parts for tanks and planes. It was also used for fence



Top: Lt James Sessions looks over handcrafts made by German POWs at Camp Evelyn in Alger county in 1944. The artwork includes a prisoner's drawing of Adolf Hitler. (photo courtesy Russell Magnaghi)

Bottom: The names of some U.S. Army personnel pressed into a concrete foundation at Camp AuTrain has survived more than 50 years of degradation. The slab is located a short distance from where a guard tower once stood at the camp. (Mining Journal photo by John Pepin)

posts, plywood and construction and to produce explosives and vital chemicals.

From 1942-1946, at least 375,000 POWs were held at more than 500 camps across the country. About 20 such camps were operated in Michigan that held about 6,000 POWs. During 1944-45, Camp Germfask in Schoolcraft County also housed about 80 conscientious objectors who opted not to fight during the war.

The POW camp buildings were built during the Depression-era CCC days of the 1930s. Between 1933 and 1942, more than 100,000 Michigan men were enrolled in the CCC work program. They planted 484 million trees, fought hundreds of forest fires and built 7,000 miles of truck trails, 504 bridges and 222 buildings, according to the CCC Museum in Grayling.



The camps included a library, bath house, kitchen and mess hall, dispensary, infirmary, recreation area and barracks. New features like guard towers, gates and a few strands of barbed wire strung between fence posts were added to the camps when their purpose shifted to housing war prisoners in early 1944.

The tar-papered barracks and wooden guard towers were heated with 55-gallon drum stoves. Watchtowers were manned by guards armed with carbine rifles and .38 caliber revolvers. Each guard would supervise up to 30 prisoners while they worked in the woods. At the U.P. POW camps, a total of 189 enlisted men and 11 non-commissioned officers guarded 1,098 POWs, by June 1945.

Many of the German prisoners were talented artisans who made handicrafts, sketched or played musical instruments. Some could speak English, others couldn't. Several made friends with their captors.



Given the language barrier, expected hostility from locals and the cold, snow, mosquitoes and isolation of the U.P., escapes from the prison camps were infrequent. But some did occur.

The condition of the camps and treatment of POWs was inspected periodically by members of the International Red Cross. All of the U.P. POW camps were sub-camps of Fort Sheridan,

Top: Guard Tower at Camp Sidnaw where about 250 German prisoners of war were interned. The grounds included an infirmary that was visited by many local residents when they needed medical attention. (Mining Journal photo by John Pepin)

Bottom: POWs were first brought to Camp Evelyn near Wetmore in Alger County & Camp Sidnaw in Houghton County in February, 1944, beginning the era of five POW camps in the Upper Peninsula during WWII. Here the prisoners enjoy a beer at Camp Evelyn. (photo courtesy of Russell Magnaghi)



Ill., which was the initial Midwest reporting center for the POWs.

To visit the camps today, most show only scarce traces of the past.

At Camp AuTrain, the names of soldiers who poured a cement foundation in 1945 are still visible, along with other historical artifacts protected by the U.S. Forest Service as an archeological site.

Dilapidated buildings and at least one guard tower can still be found at Camp Sidnaw, although private landowners plan to topple the 55-year-old structures considered a liability risk.

And at Camp Evelyn, where the first German prisoners were taken on that February afternoon in 1944, only a large clearing in the woods, some partially buried cable, discolored grass and grown-over gravel roads remain.

But even with physical evidence of the camps lacking, an enduring legacy lives on through existing photographs, a few records and remembrances of some of the people who were there.

It truly was an interesting time.

Part II

AuTRAIN--With the Alger County woods filled with deer hunters, guards huddled around the scores of war prisoners chopping pulpwood in the swamps.

The guards pulled strips of torn red cloth tight around the arms of the Germans who spoke little or no English. Some pinned the scarlet swatches on the hats of the prisoners who laughed and stared back in inquisitive glances, not understanding what was happening.

The soldiers were merely hoping to protect the prisoners as they worked.

“We’d tell them to sing in German or make a lot of noise or something out there because we didn’t want any hunters bearing down on



Top: A wooden sign in the AuTrain Township woodlands marks the location of the former CCC Camp AuTrain installation, later activated as a prisoner of war camp during WWII. (Mining Journal photo by John Pepin)

Bottom: Army guards watch POWs cut wood at a Camp Evelyn woods detail. Two groups of prisoners escaped from a Camp AuTrain pulpwood camp near Rumely in 1944. Escapes were infrequent, but several did occur from the UP prison camps. (photo courtesy of Russell Magnaghi)

those guys,” said Gilbert Hart, 75, of Saranac, a former guard at POW Camp AuTrain.

Considered a desolate place, some of the soldiers and prisoners thought they had arrived “at the end of the world,” when they got to Camp AuTrain.

End of the world or not, the POW camps were a far better place to be than the war-torn countries of Europe. The prisoners were treated well and enjoyed their internment. Many wanted to stay in the U.S. after the war.

“They had a good deal up there,” Hart said. “I mean a place to sleep, fairly good food.”

“It wasn’t a great place to work, but they were out of the war.”

Several local companies benefited from the POW labor including the Munising Paper Company (Camp Evelyn), the NeKoosa-Edwards Paper Company (Camp Pori), the Bonifas Lumber Company (Camp Sidnaw), the Newberry Chemical Company (Camp Raco) and the Bay de Noquet and Niemi and Niemi companies (Camp AuTrain).



The crews worked in three-man teams and filled daily quotas. At first, some of Camp Sidnaw’s POWs didn’t want to work. They broke saw blades and punctured tires. But after being made to walk 12 miles back to camp in a snowstorm, the prisoners reportedly became workers.

The quotas were much lower than those of a typical logger, said Glen Maki, 70, a Houghton County man who skidded logs the prisoners cut near Camp Sidnaw.

Maki remembers seeing the woods full of working Germans. He recalls feeling apprehensive, but never afraid.

“It seemed they went out of their way to be nice to me,” Maki said. “I think I reminded them of their kid brother they had back home.”

The Germans also befriended another local man whose wife was expecting a child.



Top: Former Camp AuTrain guard Gil Hart standing near the ruins of the recreation room at the POW camp in Alger County in August 1950. Hart returned to the camp for several years after his service was completed. (photo courtesy of Gil Hart and the U.S. Forest Service, Escanaba)

Bottom: The concrete foundation of a guard tower at Camp AuTrain, front. During WWII, the camp housed 228 German POWs. (Mining Journal photo by John Pepin)



When the baby was born, several of the POWs asked about the mother's condition. Some of the men had tears in their eyes, reminded of their own wives who had been pregnant when they left for war.

The prisoners also waved and threw candy to local kids while on their truck trips to and from the woods.

And the kindness showed locals was returned.

At least one farmer near Camp Sidnaw threw fresh vegetables into the POW trucks. Another man brought fishing lures and hooks to one of the Germans.

Camp Sidnaw prisoners were mostly captured draftees, but some SS soldiers were also held there. Those stern Nazis greeted each other with "Heil Hitler" and the accompanying arm gesture.

Locals didn't talk much to the SS troops. But some kids were chased away from a lumber job after they taunted and infuriated the SS soldiers, telling them Germany was losing the war.

At Camp AuTrain, German sergeants and officers were in command of the POWs under their U.S. captors.

The German officers woke the prisoners, marched them and sent them to the mess hall before ordering them to their barracks to get ready for work.

Most of the 228 prisoners at Camp AuTrain worked as pulpwood cutters, but about 20 stayed behind to perform kitchen duties.

"We were in the swamps...the worst darn place to cut pulpwood," Hart said. "It was cold and sometimes we'd have two, three foot of snow out there and those guys are out there trying (to) cut these trees down. They had a lot of accidents, a lot of injuries out there."

Back at camp, prisoners had some leisure time for handi-crafts or hobbies. Lights out was 10 p.m.

Hart, a soldier wounded overseas, was reluctant to serve his final Army days at Camp AuTrain.

"I kind of questioned going up and guarding these guys. I wasn't too happy about that. But after I was there for a while, I kind of enjoyed it," he said. "I didn't hold any-



Gil Hart and "Smoky," the Camp AuTrain dog, during Hart's service as a POW guard at the camp. In the background, the guard tower is visible and the dispensary is the building on the right hand side of the photo. (photo courtesy of Gil Hart and the U.S. Forest Service)

thing against them. I mean they were doing their job, we were doing ours. War is kind of a senseless thing. You're both in it."

Part III

RUMELY--On the morning of June 5, 1944, state police troopers, sheriff's deputies and FBI agents manned barricades pulled across roads leading out of Alger County.

Checking cars, asking questions and listening for German accents, the officers were looking for three prisoners of war who walked away from a work camp near Rumely two days earlier.

Karl Theis, 30, Adam Wagner, 25, and Erich Hoessel, 23, were among more than 200 POWs held at Camp AuTrain, a converted CCC camp in the woods about 10 miles southwest of Munising.

The incident marked one of the infrequent escape attempts from five German POW camps operating in the Upper Peninsula during World War II. The Rumely work camp was a labor station for the prisoners who were guarded pulpwood cutters for the Bay de Noquet Lumber Company.

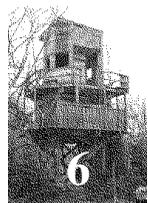
Hoessel, described as having straight, combed-back brown hair, a fair complexion, small eyes and a thin face, spoke English fluently. Wagner was 5-foot, 7-inches tall, 143 pounds with blue eyes and wavy brown hair. Theis had blonde hair, a ruddy complexion and gray eyes.

Police were also looking for a 1936 automobile with wire wheels that had been seen in the area. Investigators theorized civilians might have helped the Germans escape.

But where could they go? The surrounding landscape was primarily woods and swamps inhabited by voracious mosquitoes. The highways were blocked. And into 1945, guards feared what measures some locals might take against the Germans if they should discover them outside the camp confines.

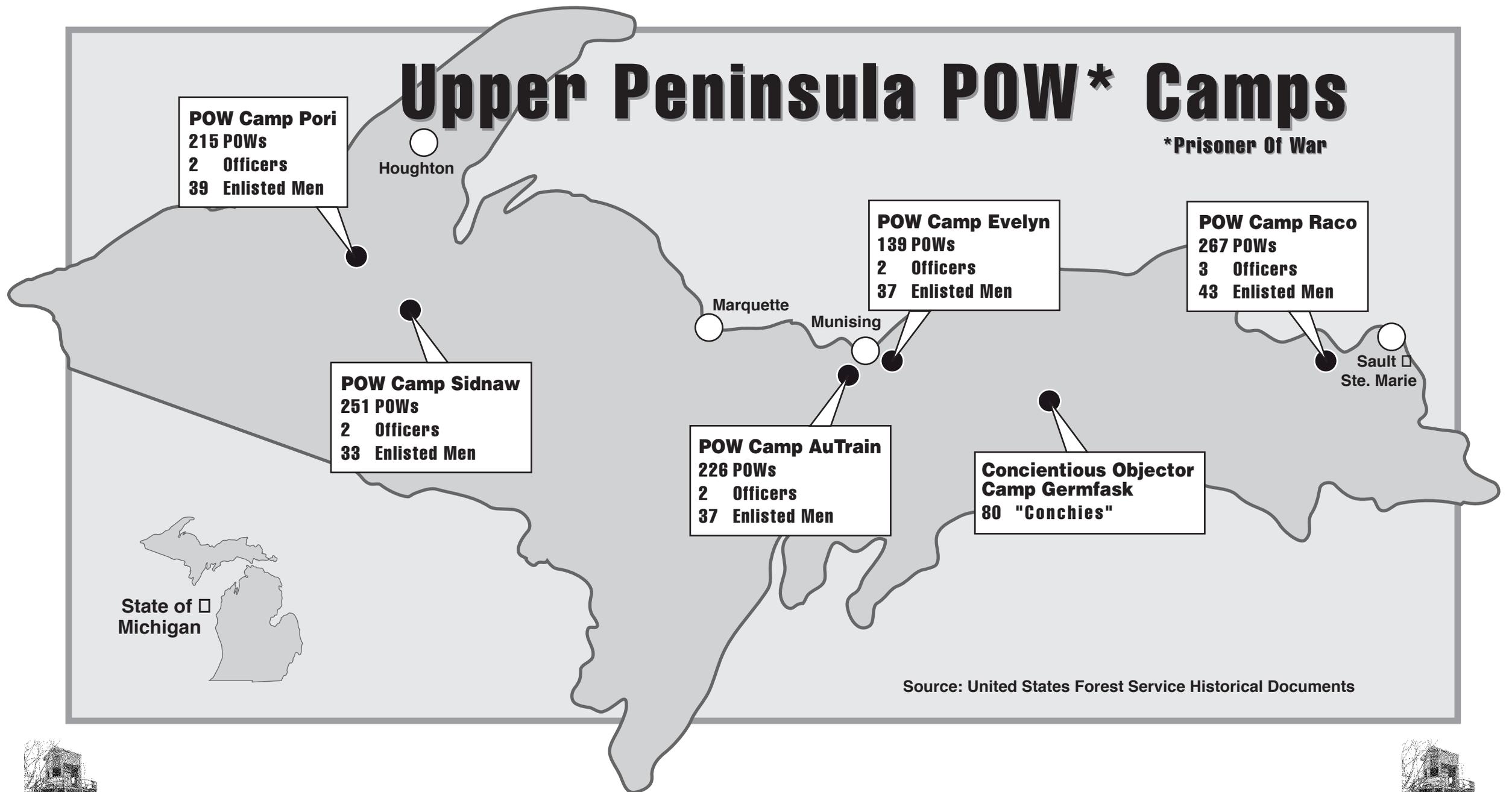
To find sympathizers, guards said the German prisoners would probably have to escape the United States through Mexico to find passage to a country like Argentina.

Wherever the three POWs had gone, police across the U.P. were now looking for them.



Upper Peninsula POW* Camps

*Prisoner Of War



The next morning, a foreman from POW Camp Evelyn, near Wetmore, spotted the escapees wearing their German uniforms outside a roadside cabin resort called "The Pines." The resort was located along M-28 between Shingleton and Seney.

The foreman stopped his car and approached the trio. After talking to the POWs and giving them cigarettes, he headed down M-28 to police waiting at a roadblock in Seney.

Meanwhile, Frank Davis, the owner of the cabins, woke up, looked out a window and spotted the Germans.

"Realizing instantly who they were, he dressed and went outside, invited them in, built a fire and told them to make themselves comfortable," the Mining Journal reported on June 7, 1944. "Not knowing the (police) officers were being tipped off, and having no telephone, Davis carried on a conversation with the Nazis and was trying to figure out how he could get word to authorities."

But state troopers and a conservation officer arrived within a few minutes and arrested the Germans.

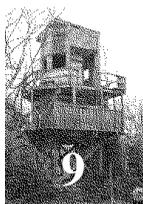
"Hoessler and Theis were dressed in khaki and Wagner in the black wool uniform of the German army and each wore German army insignia," the Journal said. "They carried prisoner of war raincoats and canteens, issued to them at Camp AuTrain where they were quartered and also had stilettos they had made from table knives used in the dining room at Camp AuTrain."

The escapees said little about their whereabouts since their escape. They said they had no plans to surrender. Theis, a soldier in the German Foreign Legion for eight years, had a U.S. map in his possession when he was recaptured.

Two weeks prior to that escape, two other Germans left a woods job near POW Camp Sidnaw on May 20, 1944. But those prisoners were located within hours after one of the Germans was spotted on a road near Kenton. Locals say the prisoners had been overlooked at a head count, and left in the woods, were actually hitchhiking back to camp.

Then on June 27, 1944, three more prisoners were reported missing from the Rumely work camp.

Ironically, one of those who fled the work camp was also named Adam Wagner, the same as one of the prior Camp AuTrain escapees. But this Wagner was six years younger than the other prisoner.



No trace of Wagner, 19, Claus Born, 20, and Franz Schrect, 20, was found by police searching the woodlands near AuTrain and Rumely as of late that Tuesday night.

On Friday morning, state police near a road block in Skandia saw the footprints of three men in the dirt and became suspicious. Troopers and a prison guard followed the footprints off the road and into the brush.

Splitting up, police began searching the woods and spotted the Germans within minutes. They surrendered without resistance.

Part IV

SIDNAW--One of Robert Godell's prized keepsakes from the World War II era is a wooden Indian head plaque that was given to him by a German war prisoner from Camp Sidnaw.

The POW fashioned the plaque from the end of an "Upland Pride" orange crate, cutting the pattern out using a template.

Godell, 78, became acquainted with the German Afrika Korps prisoners when skidding timber while living on his Dad's farm in Watton. He received the plaque in exchange for a small block plane the prisoners wanted for woodworking.

"Cigars is what they really wanted," Godell said. "They could get cigarettes and all the candy they wanted."

Captives at the five POW camps in the Upper Peninsula were given a government allowance to buy cigarettes and other items, including 3.2 beer.

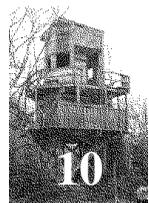


At Camp AuTrain, prisoners read German newspapers sent to them from Milwaukee and they watched American movies.

Many prisoners were accomplished artists, some sketching and drawing or playing music. A POW at Camp AuTrain made a cuckoo clock from a cigar box that he gave to the camp captain.

A widely-published 1944 photograph from Camp Evelyn showed some of the knick-knacks made by prisoners, including an ominous drawing of Adolf Hitler.

Robert Godell, left, and Glen Maki, both of Houghton county, display an Indian head plaque cut from an orange crate that Godell received as a gift from German POWs at Camp Sidnaw. (Mining Journal photo by John Pepin)



Varied recreational opportunities for prisoners were readily available.

“In addition to the usual carving and painting, the camp (AuTrain) has its own orchestral music (3 violins, 1 trumpet, 3 mandolins and 4 guitars) supplemented by recorded concerts (YMCA Concert Record Series) and Mannerchor concerts,” wrote camp inspector Howard Hong in a May 31, 1945 report. “A few variety shows were also presented during the winter months, written by a professional stage writer.”

A 24-voice choir was established at Camp Sidnaw. Prisoners formed a 16-piece orchestra at Camp Pori. The camp also had an unusually strong educational program featuring classes in English, German, French, math, economics, shorthand and music history. There were also study groups in machine construction, electricity, technical drawing and agriculture.

The camps were supplied with books by the German Red Cross. Prisoners received mail regularly and religious services were performed by visiting clergymen.

At Camp Sidnaw, chess and ping pong were the main diversions, together with soccer and fistball. Chess tournaments were held along with track contests in the summer months, featuring dashes, the broad jump, high jump and medallions for the winners. At other camps, some prisoners tried snowshoeing, skiing and boxing.

Camp Evelyn had a prisoner who was a master mechanic. He set up a mechanical workshop in one of the barracks. POWs at Camp AuTrain were also talented mechanics. They drove and repaired trucks used in the camp’s logging operations. Not speaking much English, they would point to pictures of parts they needed to fix the trucks.

At Camp Sidnaw, prisoners brewed moonshine under their barracks. A small native zoo was kept by Camp Pori POWs who imprisoned mice, snakes, chipmunks and other animals.

Prisoners at Camp AuTrain adopted and named deer that inhabited the nearby woodlands. One pair was named Hans and Gretel. Another deer came into camp each night to be fed cigarettes when a prisoner whistled.

For a while, deer were also shot by Camp AuTrain guards with various firearms, including Thompson sub-machine guns. The



The compound at Camp Sidnaw. (photo courtesy of Russell Magnaghi)



venison supplemented the camp diet of pork chops, eggs, mashed potatoes, cabbage, pickled herring and other items.

If one of the guards saw a deer during the day while on a woods detail, he'd shoot it and gut it. Then later that night, guards would go back to the woods to get the deer with a dump truck. They unloaded it in an oil shed and the POWs would dress it out.

To get enough venison for the entire camp, sometimes several deer would be shot with a Thompson gun which could "drop a whole herd out there."

But ultimately, conservation officers and sheriff's deputies found out about the illegal hunts and stopped them. The practice was reportedly also discovered at other U.P. POW camps.

Despite being prisoners of war, the range of available recreational pursuits helped the German POWs pass time and enjoy their internment, which began in 1944 and ended in 1946. It also made things easier for guards.

A May 3, 1944 International Red Cross report on Camp Evelyn and Camp Sidnaw sums up the situation.

"We conversed freely with both spokesmen and several prisoners. They like very much the life in these camps among the woods," wrote inspector A. Cardinaux. "Both camp commandants told us that the discipline and the morale of the prisoners were perfect."



Elizabeth Losey (Mining Journal photo by John Pepin)

Part V

GERMFASK--In the minds of most, it was a 388-day experiment that failed miserably.

During the time five German prisoner of war camps operated in the Upper Peninsula, the government also housed about 80 conscientious objectors deemed troublemakers at Civilian Public Service Camp 135 in Germfask.

"They were the incorrigibles from all the other CO camps across the country," said Elizabeth Losey, 88, a former wildlife biologist at the Seney National Wildlife Refuge from 1947-1952.



Beginning on May 12, 1944, “conchies” arrived at former Civilian Conservation Corps Camp Germfask from any number of the 151 camps for war objectors run by peace churches nationwide.

Government CO camps in LaPine, Ore. and Mancos, Colo. also interned “radicals” from the 11,950 individuals draft boards classified as objectors.

Of the 80 objectors at Germfask, 60 were college graduates including three lawyers, an architect and several school teachers and college professors. Most were also Jehovah’s Witness followers.

Harvey Saunders, work supervisor at the camp, wrote about some of his experiences after the camp’s closure in August 1945. He described a CO called “Partridge” who was a Princeton University graduate and a post-grad of Harvard.

“I got to know him well and, if he hadn’t been an objector, one wouldn’t want a nicer man,” Saunders wrote. “He could speak eight different languages. He told me that he was an objector and he firmly believed that the only way they would stop having wars (was) when the man that carried the gun would stand up and say he wouldn’t do it.”

Nationally, men assigned to the church-run objector camps built roads, planted trees and stopped soil erosion in national parks and forests.

“Many found the labor so hard and monotonous that they asked to be reclassified as objectors willing to enlist in the armed services for combat duty,” a Detroit newspaper article said in 1965.

But at Germfask, disruption and civil disobedience were the norm. The objectors were to perform various tasks benefitting the Seney National Wildlife Refuge.

Instead, the COs did whatever they could to cause problems including threatening supervisors, destroying property, sabotaging water and sewer systems and hindering



Top: Many detainees at the Germfask objector camp received money from wealthy family members. The CO’s used the money to buy things while on local traveling excursions and set up comfortable accommodations referred to as “Tobacco Row” at the camp. (photo courtesy of Russell Magnaghi)

Bottom: Conscientious objectors at Camp Germfask. (photo courtesy of Russell Magnaghi)

objectors who did try to work.

“Potentially, the group has the makings of a very fine community group, and excellent prospects for self-sufficiency as a work unit,” wrote C.S. Johnson, Seney Refuge manger, in 1947. “Actually, these dormant talents were to be exercised in raising hell instead of paying back to the nation the price of escaping military duty.”

The Germfask camp was run by civilian supervisors. Military officials considered the objectors civilians bound only by provisions of the Selective Service Act. The only available recourse was federal court action. Camp supervisors were never to strike COs, except in self-defense.

Some objectors took hours to chop down a single tree, sink a fence post or string barbed wire. They were paid \$5 a month for their labor.

“If you handed one a broom and said sweep a platform truck, he would sweep for four hours and the dirt would still be in the truck,” Saunders said.



Corbett Bishop was one particularly disruptive objector who wore a chain on his leg dragging a 10-inch wooden ball. He was a staunch admirer of Mahatma Gandhi and eventually deserted from the Germfask camp.

Objectors were allowed to leave camp after working hours on Sundays. Until restrictions were later applied, COs could travel to Newberry, Manistique or Grand Marais, where many attended movie theaters, bought liquor or met local girls, according to Northern Michigan Professor Russell Magnaghi.

Objectors were charged three days leave for every day they were late in returning. They faced desertion charges if they were gone for more than 10 days.

“The people of Manistique, many of whom had sons and daughters fighting and dying overseas, were angry to see these men and considered them deadbeats,” Magnaghi wrote in a 1997 publication of the Center For Upper Peninsula Studies. “...Many people had more respect for

Top: A sign on M-77 near Germfask indicates the site of the government's former CCC Camp & Civilian Public Service Camp 135 for conscientious objectors. The objector camp was created in 1944 to handle malcontents from dozens of church-run CO camps across the country. (Mining Journal photo by John Pepin)

Bottom: Seney National Wildlife Refuge Manager C.S. Johnson maintained an unfavorable opinion of the objectors in Camp Germfask for many years after their departure in 1945. (photo courtesy of Elizabeth Losey)



the German prisoners of war who had fought and were captured than they had for these fellow Americans.”

After his arrest, “Bishop staged an 86-day hunger strike during his detention at the Kalamazoo county jail and at the federal correctional institution in Milan, Mich.,” the Mining Journal reported on Feb. 3, 1945.

“...Bishop refused to walk and had to be carried from place to place while at the Milan institution. Physicians resorted to force feeding when his long fast, his second since induction for service in a civilian work camp, endangered his health.”

Bishop’s photograph ran in national magazines in early 1945. Articles described poor conditions at the camp, which were eventually investigated as an uprising by several federal agencies including the FBI.

Twenty-two Germfask objectors, including Bishop, were eventually sent to federal prison for desertion or other charges.

The Germfask COs were relocated to California in 1945 to battle forest fires, closing a historic chapter many of the officials at the Seney refuge wanted to forget.

Years later, they hadn’t.

“They were still almost in a state of shock for several years after,” Losey said.

“They just wanted to put it behind them it was such a horrible thing.”

Marquette Mining Journal
Copyright January, 2000



LIST OF SOURCES

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- John Franzen, U.S. Forest Service, Escanaba, MI
- Gil Hart, Saranac, MI
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