

**LETTERS FROM THE “FRITZ RITZ”: GERMAN POWS IN AMERICA  
DURING WORLD WAR II**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

DANIEL JOSEPH WELCH

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Dr. Michael Waters

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	1
DEDICATION.....	2
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	3
NOMENCLATURE .....	4
CHAPTER	
I.    INTRODUCTION .....	5
II.   AFRIKA KORPS AND CAPTURE.....	13
III.  LIFE IN THE AMERICAN POW CAMPS .....	25
IV.  CONCLUSION.....	43
NOTES.....	49
REFERENCES .....	52
APPENDIX A .....	53
APPENDIX B .....	54
APPENDIX C: MATERIALS AND METHODS .....	55

## **ABSTRACT**

Letters from the “Fritz Ritz”: German POWs in America during World War II

Daniel Joseph Welch  
Departments of History and Anthropology  
Texas A&M University

Research Advisor: Dr. Michael Waters  
Department of Anthropology  
Texas A&M University

The personal writings of German Prisoners of War (POWs) in the United States during World War II have the potential to generate a unique understanding of the internment experience of the average German soldier. Letters and diaries, as opposed to oral history, remove the potential for post-war reflections by the participant. Through the study of letters and diaries of two German POWs, I intend to provide depth to our understanding of life inside the average POW Camp in the United States during the Second World War. I have chosen a collection of 50 letters, three diaries, and one sketchbook from two German POWs that were in very different stages of life, but brought to similar circumstances by the fortunes of war. By examining their writings, much can be learned about the daily lives of these German soldiers that were held in captivity far from home while fighting for a government that many of them did not support. The purpose of this research is also to encourage further inquiry into the variety of primary source documents written by German POWs during the war and their potential impact on our understanding of the war itself.

## **DEDICATION**

This paper is dedicated to the memory of the men and women who fought on all fronts during the Second World War. Their stories of service, sacrifice, and loss deserve to be preserved and shared as an essential component of the human experience.

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## NOMENCLATURE

POW	Prisoner of War
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NATO	North American Treaty Organization
Gef.	Gefrieter (NATO Private First Class rank equivalent)
Unt.	Unteroffizier (NATO Sergeant rank equivalent)
BEF	British Expeditionary Forces
WWII	World War II
SS	Sicherheitsdienst
NSDAP	National Socialist German Workers (Nazi) Party
PX	Post Exchange/Canteen

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

During the Second World War, more than 400,000 Axis soldiers were held as prisoners of war in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Government had no prior experience dealing with such a concentration of foreign POWs and so it had to develop an extremely complex internment system, virtually without precedence.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Government's primary objective throughout the course of the POW Internment system was to ensure that American troops held as prisoners in Germany would be treated according to the Geneva Convention by holding themselves strictly to the Convention when dealing with the German POWs.<sup>3</sup> The success of this policy has been widely debated, but it is generally agreed that the policy was successful to an extent in keeping American soldiers safe overseas while held in German POW Camps.<sup>4</sup>

The Geneva Convention of 1929 was written to address several deficiencies from the previous Hague Regulations of 1899 and 1907 that became apparent during the course of World War I. The primary focus of the Geneva Convention of 1929 was the treatment of prisoners of war in modern conflict. Both Germany and the United States signed this convention in 1929 and used it to develop the framework for their internment systems during the Second World War. One of the major stipulations of the Geneva Convention was that enemy soldiers that were interred within the combatant nation must be treated to the same living accommodations and dietary options as the interring nation's own army.<sup>5</sup> The POWs were also required to be paid the equivalent of an American citizen for their labor in industries not directly related to the war effort.<sup>6</sup> Stipulations such as these required the hosting country to treat their POWs with respect and this was often met with hostility in the United States from the civilian population because

they were being forced to live on rations for the war effort at the time.

Many local citizens who lived near the camps felt that the POWs were being treated too well and started referring to the camps satirically as “The Fritz Ritz.”<sup>7</sup> Throughout the war, civilians protested the perceived unfair treatment of enemy soldiers within the POW camps, because they believed that their brothers, sons, and fathers fighting overseas were not receiving the same treatment from the German government. However, German POWs in the camps did not live a perfect life contrary to the opinions of many of the civilians that resented their presence. The POWs suffered years apart from their loved ones, arduous adjustments to foreign climates, the simple monotony of prison life for the duration of the war, political infighting, and the initial phases of the post-war reconstruction process.

The U.S. Government strove to ensure that the POWs had as much potential for activity as could be made possible during the war. Prisoners took classes at local universities, formed camp orchestras, purchased a variety of items more typical of civilians than prisoners at camp canteens, played sports, and worked in many different American industries not directly related to the war effort.<sup>8</sup> Another incentive for offering such a wide variety of programs to entertain and engage the large German prisoner population was to begin the process of ‘reeducation’ in which principles of American Democracy were intended to provide alternatives to the indoctrination of the National Socialist Workers Party (NSDAP) of Germany.<sup>9</sup>

Prisoners were also permitted to send and receive letters from their loved ones in the Fatherland which alleviated some, but by no means all, of the feeling of homesickness and loneliness. These letters were submitted to censorship by both the United States and German governments and so had to remain relatively devoid of sensitive or controversial information in order to avoid the censor’s knife or marker.<sup>10</sup> The letters provide a unique opportunity for a



researcher interested in the POW camps of this time period to better understand the mental state and concerns of the captive German soldiers. A more humanistic and contemporaneous point of view on camp life can be gained through the translation and analysis of German prisoner letters. Analysis of such letters is superior to oral history in that the letters have no potential for post-war biases or reflections. However, it must be noted that letters do have the potential for censorship biases from both the writer and the governments through which the letter had to pass.

Another key to understanding the life of German POWs from their own point of view can be found in the personal diaries that they kept while they were interred in the United States during the war. Diaries can contain a vast amount of information about the personal observations and experiences of individual prisoners. By combining the analysis of letters and diaries written by German POWs and their families from this time period, it is possible to gain a deeper insight into camp life than can be learned from period documents already preserved in archives.

This project focuses on 50 letters and three diaries written by two different German soldiers, George Kellermann and George Füssl, who were incarcerated as POWs in the southern United States during the war (See Tables 1-3 in Appendices A and B for more information). These two men both fought in the Afrika Korps under General Erwin Rommel and were both captured in Tunisia in May of 1943. When they arrived in the United States, they were placed in POW camps in Oklahoma and Texas where they began to write letters and diaries about their experiences. Appendix C describes the materials and methods used in the course of this project in detail.

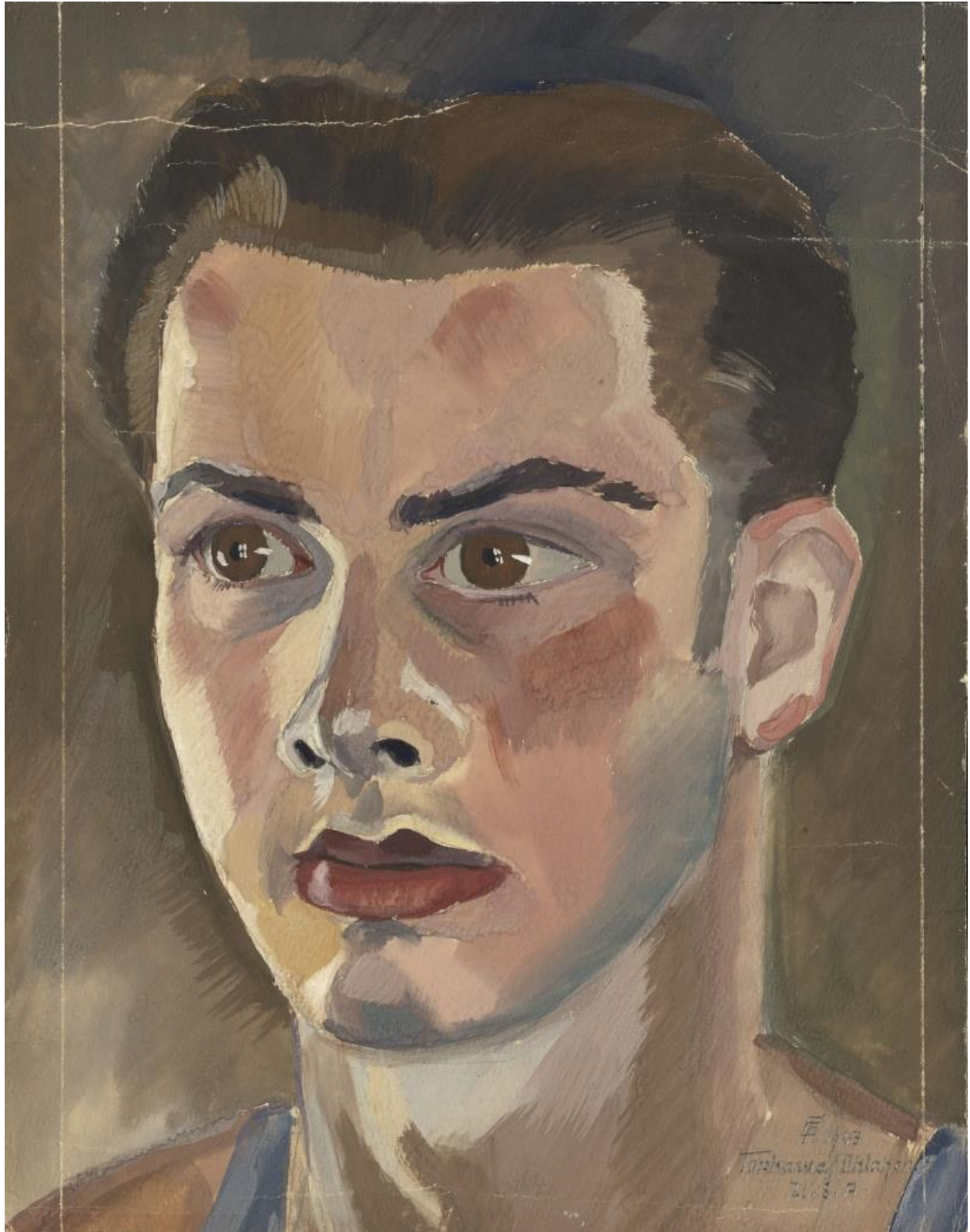


Figure 1. Self-portrait of Unteroffizier George Füssl from his sketchbook.

The primary difference between the two men being studied in this project is their age at time of capture and incarceration. George Kellermann was age 41 with a wife and child when he was captured in Tunisia. In contrast, George Füssl (Figure 1) was 21 and unmarried at the time of his capture in May 1943. George Kellermann was a Gefreiter (Private First Class rank equivalent) and George Füssl was an Unteroffizier (Sergeant rank equivalent).

An understanding of the lives of these German soldiers in the American Camps requires a rudimentary discussion of the historical background of their circumstances. The rise of the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) in Germany began in the early 1920s with the dissatisfaction of the German people with the terms of the Treaty of Versailles that ended the Great War of 1914-1919.<sup>11</sup> Adolf Hitler charmed the German people with his charismatic personality and promises of a bright future under the Third Reich that could not have been provided by the Weimar Republic. Once in power, Hitler altered the seat of Chancellor into a dictatorial position that did not require parliamentary consent for action and essentially had no limitations on its power.<sup>12</sup>

Using this power the NSDAP, or Nazi party, was able to fundamentally revolutionize the entire German way of life. This included changes in the education system which led to the indoctrination of the youth into the mindset of Nazi ideology. This indoctrination was precisely the target of the American reeducation program that was put in place during WWII in its POW camps.<sup>13</sup> The German government was able to maintain this system of dramatic change through fear. The Sicherheitsdienst (SS) and Gestapo were the organizations utilized by the Nazi government to maintain its grip of fear on Germany in the 1930s and 1940s.

Fearing reprisal from the SS and the Gestapo, the German people acquiesced to the

seizure of power by the Nazis. In the mid to late 1930s, the German Government under Adolf Hitler began to break some of the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles such as rearming the German military forces. Throughout the 1930s, the Nazis disregarded an increasing number of the provisions from this treaty until they were ready to focus on reacquisition of lost territory from the Great War. This included annexing Austria and the Sudetenland to which the other world powers did not respond effectively.<sup>14</sup> It wasn't until the Invasion of Poland in September 1939 that Britain and France finally declared war on Nazi Germany.

Initially, the war proceeded well for the Germans and by mid-1940 they had forced the surrender of France and had managed to push the British Expeditionary Forces (BEF) off of the European continent. Hitler then turned his eye on the Soviet Union led by Joseph Stalin who had been Hitler's tentative ally until this point. The campaign in North Africa had also begun in June of 1940 with the Italian declaration of war and retaliation by British Commonwealth forces in Libya. The North African Campaign turned sour for the Italians and necessitated the assistance of the Wehrmacht when the Commonwealth operation codenamed Compass was launched in December 1940.<sup>15</sup>

By February 1941, the first elements of the Afrika Korps under General Erwin Rommel arrived in North Africa to put a halt to the advances being made by the British Commonwealth forces.<sup>16</sup> The Germans regarded this front as secondary to the main offensive against the USSR and they chose to focus their efforts on the Invasion of Russia in 1941.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, viewed the North African Campaign as the critical theater of the war that could crack open the "soft underbelly" of Europe and expose the Germans to the very real threat of invasion from the Mediterranean.<sup>18</sup> However, General Rommel was extremely successful in his efforts to halt Allied efforts in North Africa. This was

in spite of being allocated a very slim proportion of the resources that were being channeled into the Invasion of Russia.

A sort of see-saw war raged in North Africa throughout 1941 and most of 1942 as the BEF under Montgomery attempted to corner and eliminate Rommel's elusive and seasoned Afrika Korps troops.<sup>19</sup> With the stall of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front, many German troops were reallocated to the North African theater. This was also in response to the introduction of the U.S. Army in December 1942 during Operation Torch on the West North African coast. Finally, the BEF with the assistance of the fresh U.S. Army troops was able to corner the Afrika Korps in Tunisia in May 1943 where they forced the Axis armies to surrender more than 275,000 able-bodied soldiers.<sup>20</sup>

This sudden influx of prisoner population would have easily overwhelmed the administrative and logistical capabilities of Great Britain had the U.S. Government not anticipated it and begun to develop its POW camp system in early 1942. The British could not handle any more German POWs as its camps were already overflowing by the time of the fall of Tunisia. These newly captured POWs were placed on transport ships and convoyed across the Atlantic to the newly established POW camps in the United States.<sup>21</sup> Many of the German soldiers were seasoned veterans of both the Russian and North African campaigns and in general they turned out to be the most ideologically indoctrinated of all the German POWs that the United States would receive over the course of the rest of the war.<sup>22</sup>

As the new POWs made their Atlantic crossing into a foreign land, the United States government was busy at work preparing to receive them within the camps. A great social experiment was beginning that would test the patience and will of a nation at war and would ultimately lead to the political 'reprogramming' of an entire generation of German soldiers

through the POW reeducation program. This process did not happen overnight, however, as many of the German soldiers were very resistant to this ideological change.

In the next few chapters, the emic perspective of German POWs will be analyzed in relation to previous scholarship on the topic. This perspective is explored through the experiences of two Afrika Korps soldiers, George Kellermann and George Füssl, which unwillingly participated in the great social experiment of the American POW camps. Their service in North Africa, circumstances of their capture, and experiences while incarcerated in the United States as recorded in their letters and diaries are explored chronologically in the course of this paper.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **AFRIKA KORPS AND CAPTURE**

“I was enlisted on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1942 and sent to Fürth in Bavaria (for the tropics) assigned to the 8.8cm Flak.” Due to the catastrophic loss of records of all types in Germany at the end of the war, it has been almost impossible to determine anything about the life of Gefrieter (Private) George Kellermann before he wrote these words in his journal. At the time of his enlistment, Kellermann was a 41 year old farmer with a wife named Maria and at least one child named Otto who was born in 1932. Pre-war information about his wife and child was obtained through government issued x-ray examination documents from 1935 that were included with the collection of Kellermann’s personal letters.

George Füssl’s diary, on the other hand, begins on the Eastern front of the war. He was 20 years old at the time of the firefight with the Soviet forces that he vaguely described in his diary in December 1942. By late February of 1943, Füssl had departed for Stendal and Salzwedel, Germany in order to be refitted for the Afrika Korps. While there, he received 14 days of furlough which he spent with his parents in his hometown of Landshut, Germany. After additional training, Fussl was transported by rail to southern Italy on his way to the North African Theater. The train happened to pass through his hometown of Landshut and in his journal he describes throwing a letter out of the window for his parents. He also met with his father when the train made a temporary stop in Munich, Germany.

George Kellermann arrived in North Africa on November 17, 1942 after spending some time in Palermo with an anti-aircraft battery that had lost several of its men due to an ammunition explosion caused by a firing malfunction with the 10.5cm Flak gun. Until mid-

February 1943, Kellermann was stationed in the vicinity of Tunis and tasked with unloading the cargo ships and with the air defense of the city. During this time, he remarks that he had expected to receive a Christmas package from home, but was disappointed when that proved impossible with the increasing intensity of the North Africa campaign. By this time, the U.S. Army had landed in North Africa during Operation Torch and they were working with the British to corner the Germans in the region of Tunis.<sup>23</sup>

By the time that George Füssl had arrived in North Africa in April of 1943, George Kellermann had already been in the midst of some of the largest tank and artillery duels of the war. As the Tunisian campaign dragged on, the U.S. Army Air Force was slowly able to establish dominance over the Luftwaffe (German Air Force) in the Mediterranean. American aerial superiority led to a decrease in Axis military shipping potential which negatively impacted the Afrika Korps' capability to continue fighting against the encroaching Allied forces.<sup>24</sup> Both George Füssl and George Kellermann commented on the effectiveness of the Allied bombing campaigns in terms of hindering the German army's capability to make war.

As the allies closed in on Tunis, the question of what to do with the German and Italian prisoners became a very real problem that the allies would have to deal with.<sup>25</sup> Much of the infrastructure for the POW system in the United States had already been laid in 1942 and the beginning of 1943, but it was about to be put to the ultimate test. Hundreds of thousands of German and Italian troops had become trapped between the approaching Allied armies and the Mediterranean Sea with very little hope of evacuation due to the state of the aerial war above North Africa.

When he arrived in Tunis, Unteroffizier Füssl immediately began to take note of various cultural features that were unique to Tunis and the surrounding landscape. In his diary, he



describes interactions that he had with the local populace of Tunis whilst preparing to defend the city. He also demonstrates that he was learning to read and write Arabic while in North Africa through several examples of Arabic phrases that he placed in his diary. These Arabic phrases also demonstrate a basic understanding of Islam by George Füssl. Inside of the sketchbook that he kept throughout the war, Füssl drew several images of cities in North Africa in order to inspire his later paintings (Figure 2). He also drew several images of the Arab people that inhabited Tunis alongside the German and Italian soldiers. Interestingly, Füssl did not make any depictions of the war itself in North Africa.



Figure 2. One of George Füssl's depictions of North Africa from his sketchbook.

Despite his apparent abundance of cultural experiences, George Füssl quickly became involved in some of the heaviest fighting of the Tunisia campaign in late April and early May of 1943. As Kellermann notes in his diary, this period was characterized by general confusion within the German military as the remnants of the Afrika Korps tried to put up a coordinated defense against the intensifying Allied attacks. It was in the midst of this confusion that George Füssl joined the defense of Tunisia in places such as Kairouan, Zaghouan, and Hammam-Lif (Figure 3). By May 7, 1943, the city of Tunis had fallen to the British and American forces.

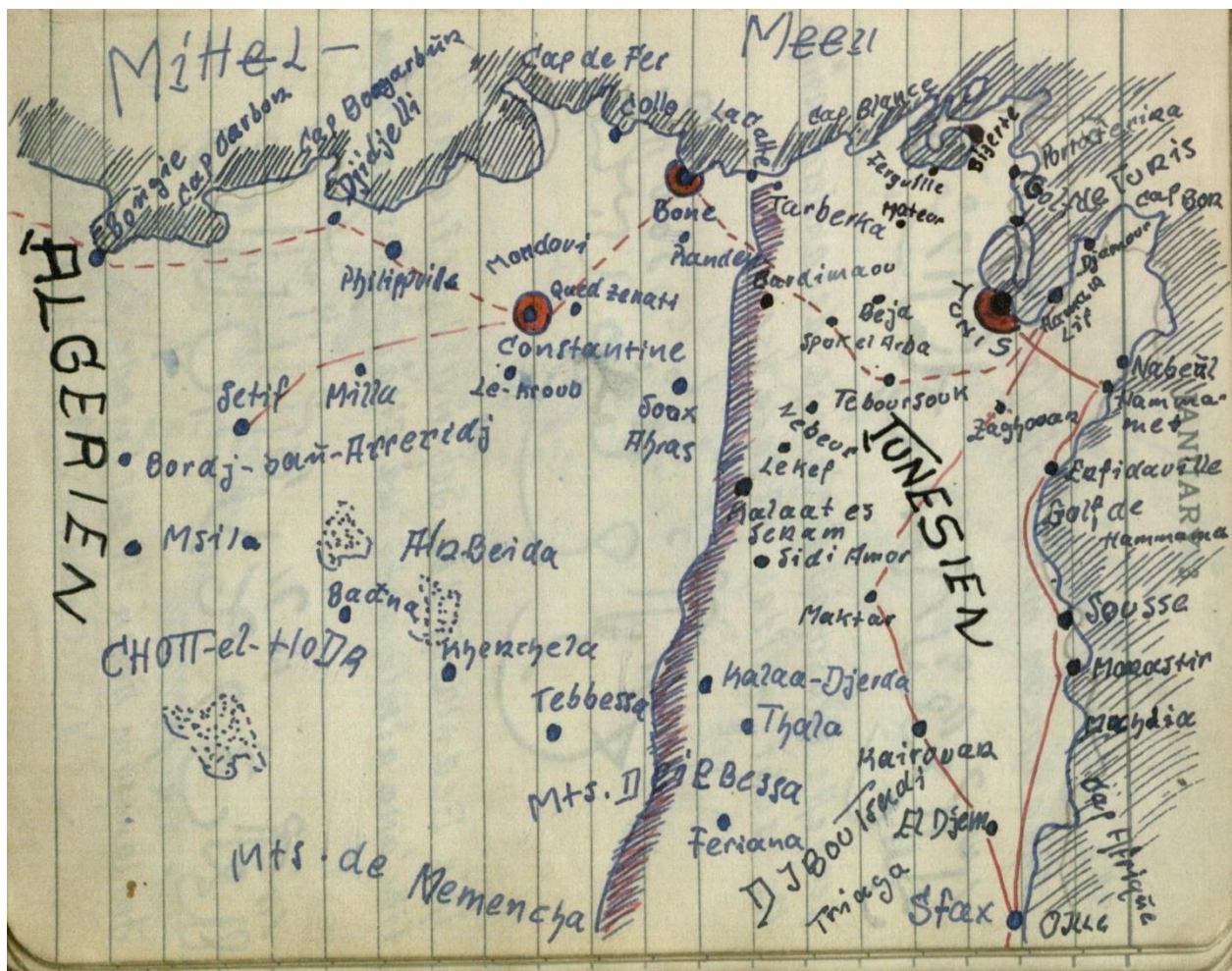


Figure 3. George Füssl's diary map shows his geographic perspective of the Tunisian campaign.

On May 10, George Füssl was captured in the vicinity of Tunis by British soldiers. After



being captured, he was transported to Algeria where he noted that there were tornadoes and colossal temperature variations between 65°C (149°F) and 14°C (57°F). He was then transported to the city of Fes, Morocco, in early June to be put to work on the construction of a railroad. On August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1943, George Füssl left what he referred to as, “damned Africa,” on board the freighter *SS Robert H. Harrison* (Figure 4) from the port of Oran.

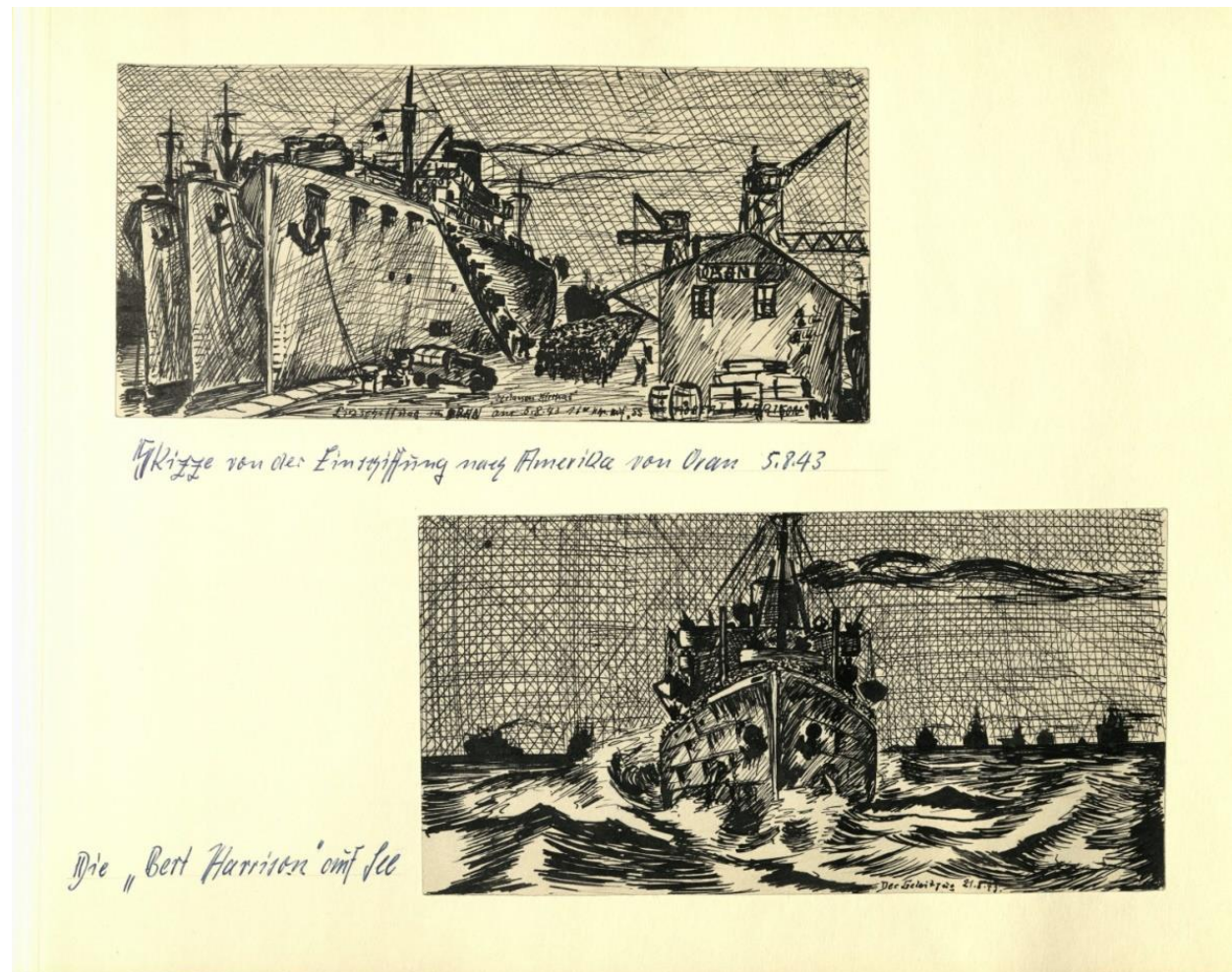


Figure 4. Pencil drawing by George Füssl depicting the transport ships at Oran in 1943.

The anti-aircraft battery to which George Kellermann belonged was tasked with the defense of Tunis from the Allied bombing raids that came almost continuously from January to April of 1943. He describes several close calls with bombs dropped by Allied aircraft and also

describes shooting down two of the Allied bombers in February 1943. Several airfields were attacked during this period by the Allied bombers and Kellermann takes note that many German transport planes were immediately destroyed on the ground that had just landed. He also notes that besides the loss of critical equipment and ammunition, many of the replacement soldiers from Italy were also killed on the airfields. On April 18, 1943, he notes that the Allied air superiority had become so well established and the Luftwaffe transport planes had been ordered to stay away from North Africa because they were experiencing many losses. Because of the advantage of this aerial superiority, Kellermann writes that that his unit, “knew so gradually, what lies ahead.”

On April 26, 1943, Easter Monday, Kellermann’s battery was repositioned to Bonifas near Tunis. While moving their equipment, they were caught in an artillery bombardment by British troops and forced to take cover in nearby cornfields as British Spitfires made strafing runs on their convoy. He notes that on April 28 and 29, 1943, the local Berber nomads came along the road bound for Tunis and he draws the conclusion that the British soldiers could not be far behind them. The Spitfires continued to strafe the German positions here until May 1, 1943 when Kellermann’s Flak battery was forced to move again to Camel Mountain in the North where they dug in until May 5. The Germans were constantly hounded by artillery and small arms fire from the British and were finally forced to move north again after May 5. Kellermann notes that the entire German military infrastructure was in disarray at this point as supply trucks and units were being confused and backed up on every road in the region of Tunis.

The Flak battery was kept on the move until May 10<sup>th</sup>, when they realized that they could no longer flee from the advancing British forces because they were completely surrounded. They received news that Tunis had fallen to the Americans and could see the city burning on the

horizon as their infantry retreated all around them in the midst of British artillery explosions and rifle fire. Kellermann's Lieutenant then called the battery together for one last short speech about how they had done their duty to the Fatherland and it was now time to destroy the guns and attempt to escape from North Africa. Many of the German soldier's personal items were also destroyed in order to avoid any form of intelligence falling into the hands of the Allies.

Along with several soldiers from his battery, George Kellermann was able to find a truck and they began to drive toward the town of Hammam Lif near the beach. He remarks that the predictions of the British propaganda leaflets were coming true, "On the right the desert, on the left the sea, German soldiers, you see your homeland no more." At Hammam Lif, they tried to modify a small boat that they found into a motor boat using their truck's engine but were discovered by the spotlights of the British Navy and were forced to abandon their effort and flee the beach. Five of the soldiers, including George Kellermann, took cover in a nearby farmhouse and were afraid of the British artillery bombardment because a direct hit on the house that they were staying in could instantly kill them. On the morning of May 12, 1943, their lieutenant told them to stay where they were because it would be better to fall into the hands of the British soldiers rather than the Moroccans. At 10 a.m. on May 12, 1943, George Kellermann surrendered to a British armored car with the rest of his comrades.

After checking the German soldiers for any weapons or scraps of intelligence, the British officer gave them something to smoke. Kellermann remarks that they were very happy that it was finally over because they had known that they could never leave and they had been very tired of running from the British soldiers whilst risking death in the artillery barrages. "But my idea was always: God has helped us until now, he will continue to help us and we will go to heaven." Despite the dire circumstance of becoming a prisoner of war, Kellermann shows a

remarkable optimism about what lies ahead for him at this point in his life.

The Germans were moved to collection points in Tunis and given blankets and plenty of food. Kellermann writes that there was never enough water for them and that the heat was unbearable during their transport. On May 14, 1943, they were loaded onto freight cars and arrived in Schanzi, Algeria on May 18. As they traveled across the countryside, Kellermann noticed that the Arabs and the Moroccans had already returned to their fields trying to reestablish their agricultural lifestyle which had been interrupted by the war. He writes that the American and Moroccan guards in the rear echelons were very afraid of the German soldiers despite the fact that they had no capacity to continue fighting. The temporary camps that the Germans had to stay in were very hot and mosquito infested so that it made it hard to sleep at night. On Ascension Day, June 3, 1943, Kellermann and his fellow POWs were loaded onto ships in Oran to be transported to the United States of America.

Both Kellermann and Füssl noted that their primary concern in the course of the Atlantic crossing were German U-boat wolfpacks. Kellermann writes that the Atlantic crossing was very hard on the German POWs as the water was pale, food was cold, and they only had a blanket with which to sleep on the cold iron decks below the main deck of the transport ship. Several times there were threats of German submarine attacks and the defensive measures deployed by the American convoy frustrated the POWs because they tended to result in loud explosions in the middle of the night as depth charges were detonated. There was a particularly frightening submarine attack that occurred on Kellermann's convoy on June 18, 1943 which caused the Americans to make life jackets and lifeboats ready for the POWs, but they ultimately were not forced to use them. On June 26, Kellermann had his first sighting of the American coast near Norfolk, Virginia. George Füssl had similar observations about his Atlantic journey and he

arrived in Norfolk on August 28, 1943.

Upon arrival, the German soldiers were subjected to medical checkups by American doctors and they were assigned POW numbers. They were again searched for contraband by the American guards before being deloused and kept in warehouses in Norfolk before they were to be dispatched to their individual camp assignments. Kellermann was placed on a train for St. Louis, Illinois and he arrived on June 29. He writes that they spent an hour in the St. Louis train station so that the American people, black and white, could view the Nazis. He and his fellow soldiers were then immediately placed on another train and they arrived at Huntsville, Texas on June 30, 1943 which was their final destination.

Kellermann notes that the trip was “terribly hot and the sweat ran into our shoes...because you could open the windows of the car just a little bit.” He contrasts this by noting that the food on the trip was “good” and they were fed three times a day. The guards were quite strict during the trip because they did not yet know how the German POWs would react to their new surroundings. Once they arrived in the Huntsville station, they were marched the last hour to Camp Huntsville. Huntsville, Texas is roughly 70 miles north of Houston, Texas.

Füssl’s diary is unfortunately brief or silent with regard to many of his experiences in the course of his journey across the Atlantic and across the United States by truck. Almost immediately after being deloused and subjected to a quick physical by U.S. Army doctors in the Norfolk port, the prisoners were placed onto trucks to be transported to various POW installations across the nation. The trucks brought Füssl and his fellow German POWs to the camp at Tonkawa, Oklahoma which is roughly 90 miles north of Oklahoma City (Figure 5). Upon arrival at the camp, Füssl volunteered to be a cook in one of the POW kitchens for a couple of days and he immediately took up leisure painting in his free time.



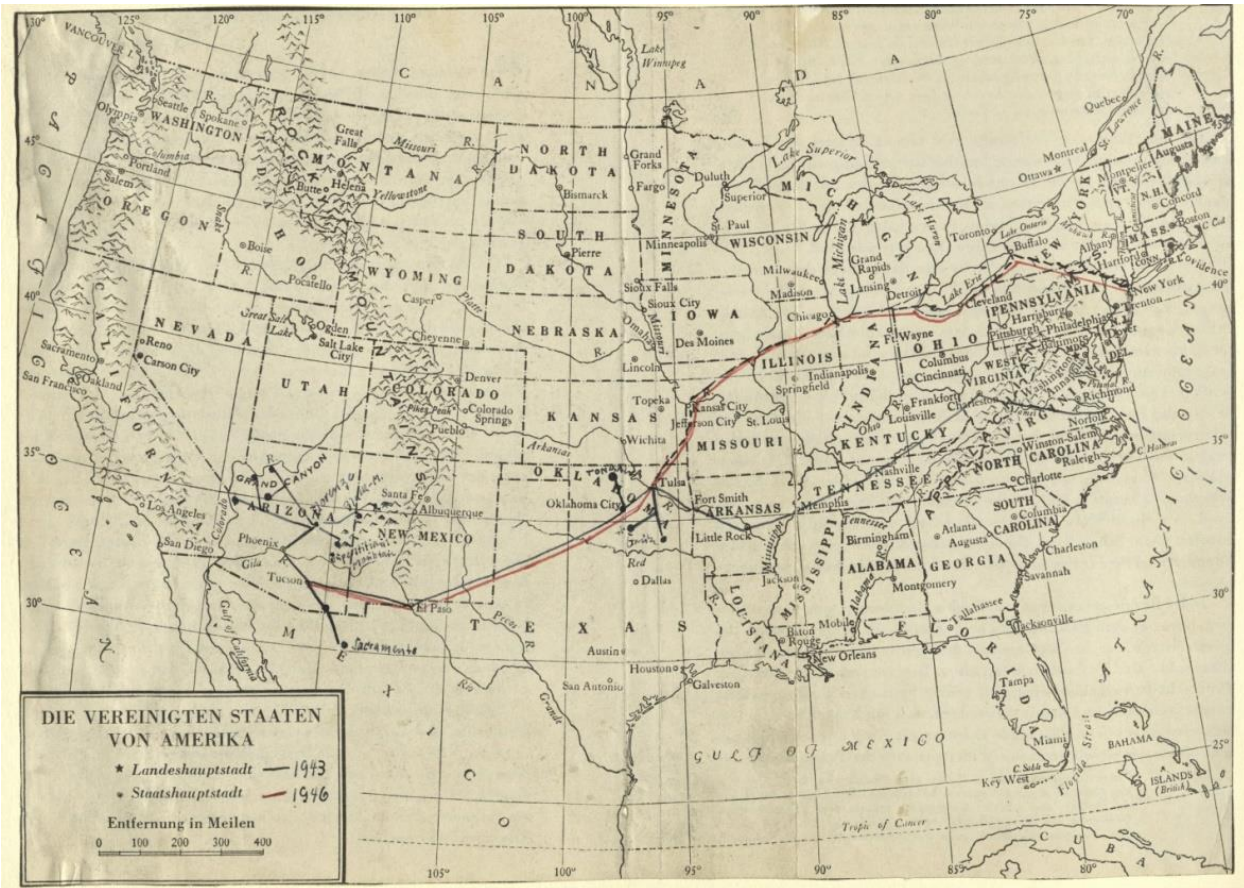


Figure 5. A map from Füssl's sketchbook that depicts his travel across the United States in black ink in 1943 and again in red ink in 1946 when the war was over.

These two men had distinctly different roles and experiences during their time in the Afrika Korps despite being within the roughly 50 miles of one another during the final Allied push towards Tunis. Füssl was younger than Kellermann, but also possessed a higher military rank and combat experience from the Russian front. Füssl arrived in North Africa later than Kellermann, but was captured sooner than Kellermann because he was placed into action in the immediate vicinity of Tunis. Kellermann on the other hand spent much of his time in North Africa working in a logistical capacity. It wasn't until the threat of Allied air power reached the Tunis area that Kellermann was finally placed into a combat role in the anti-aircraft defense of the city. Once air superiority was established by the Allies, Kellermann's story became one of



constant retreat in the face of overwhelming Allied ground forces until his inevitable capture.

Dr. Krammer, a prominent scholar in the study of POWs during World War II, notes that many problems were encountered by the U.S. Army in the initial processing of German soldiers in the North African theater.<sup>26</sup> One such problem was the distinct language barrier and the challenges it posed to developing a personnel record for each of the individual POWs as they were assigned their permanent serial numbers. The language barrier also caused U.S. Army personnel to be careless about how they grouped individual German soldiers based on ideological differences.<sup>27</sup> This led to many of the politically anti-Nazi German soldiers being placed into holding units with devout Nazi soldiers which caused tensions amongst the German POWs themselves in addition to the tensions being experienced between the German soldiers and the American personnel.

The Atlantic crossings experienced by Kellermann and Füssl seem pretty standard across German prisoner accounts. Many of them note concerns about German U-boat attacks but they were generally not subjected to such attacks. In fact, German U-boats never sunk a single American transport with German POWs on board throughout the entire war.<sup>28</sup> Krammer notes that the primary problems faced by German POWs on the transport ships included seasickness which is confirmed in the case of George Kellermann through his descriptions of the trans-Atlantic voyage.<sup>29</sup> Both Fussl and Kellermann entered the United States through the port at Norfolk, Virginia but it is worth noting that there was also a two other ports of entry for German POWs at Camp Shanks, New York and Boston, Massachusetts.<sup>30</sup>

In general, their accounts of the war in North Africa and the circumstances of their capture and processing period are in line with what is currently understood about the German POW experience in World War II. Thus, the primary source evidence provided by these men

serves to support the general trends of oral histories that have been collected from German prisoners after the war.



*Figure 6. Map showing the location of Camp Huntsville, TX (Green) and Camp Stockton, CA (Red) where George Kellermann was incarcerated.*

## **CHAPTER III**

### **LIFE IN THE AMERICAN POW CAMPS**

The housing and care of prisoners of war on American soil was among the last things to be considered by the United States Government when first thrust into World War II in December 1941. By mid-1942 U.S. Army planners had recognized the need for a comprehensive plan of action with regard to incoming POWs.<sup>31</sup> Operation Torch was scheduled for November of that year and they knew that the majority of captured German and Italian soldiers in North Africa would likely be sent to the United States for internment because Britain was already operating at maximum capacity in terms of prisoner population after more than three years of war.<sup>32</sup>

The first major obstacle for Army planners was to decide on strategic locations for camps in the United States. These camps would then have to be built to the same standards as other U.S. Army installations in order to fulfill the responsibilities outlined in the Geneva Conventions.<sup>33</sup> Special consideration was also given to make sure that camps were not too close to the coasts, major cities, or war production centers. U.S. Army planners also had to strategically place camps in order to make effective use of Enlisted German POW labor as prescribed by the Geneva Conventions. The United States was permitted to force the enlisted POWs to work, but only in non-war related industries.<sup>34</sup> Agricultural regions naturally attracted the War Department's attention due to their pressing need for manual labor and their isolation from major population centers and potential escape routes.<sup>35</sup>

George Kellermann was first brought to the camp in Huntsville, Texas in late June, 1943. The camp was built during the first half of 1942 just north of Huntsville, Texas which at the time had a resident population of 5100. The camp was designed to accommodate 4800 German

prisoners and their compliment of American guards and Army support personnel.<sup>36</sup> The camp consisted of more than 400 buildings divided into German prisoner and American sections.<sup>37</sup> The German prisoners were further subdivided into three parallel compounds separated by barbed wire fences that each operated independently from one another (Colored Blue in Figure 7).<sup>38</sup> Each individual compound had its own Post Exchange (often abbreviated to PX) for German prisoners to buy goods like cigarettes, beer, and reading material in limited quantities.<sup>39</sup> Prisoners were divided into barracks by companies of 250 men each and the barracks were grouped together on opposite ends of the compounds flanking the central cafeteria buildings.<sup>40</sup>

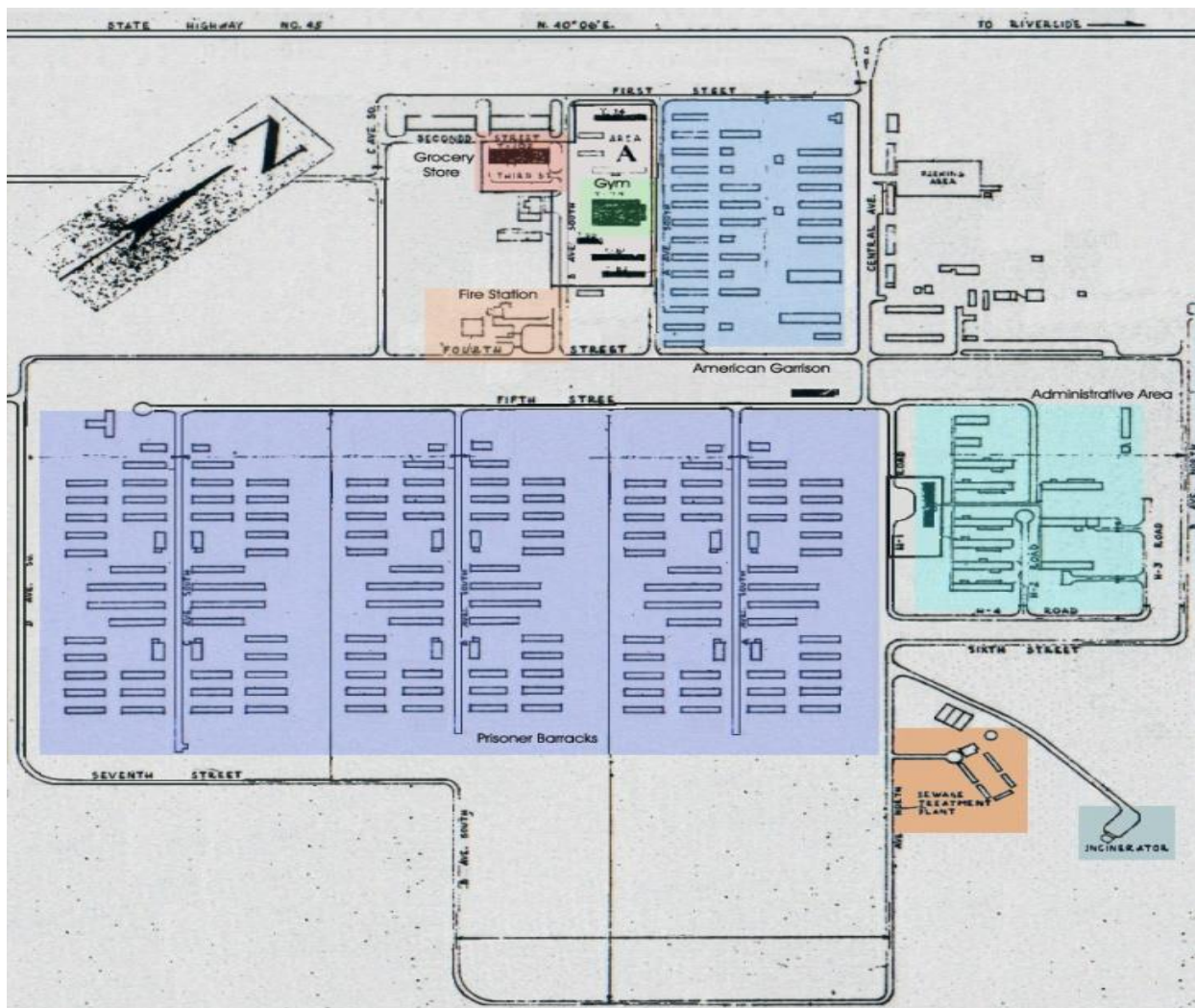


Figure 7. U.S. Army planning map depicting the layout of Camp Huntsville, Texas.

The barracks, cafeteria, PX, laundry buildings, hospitals, and gymnasiums were built to the same standards for both the American guards and the German prisoners in order to ensure the fulfillment of the conditions of the Geneva Conventions (Figure 8).<sup>41</sup> It was standard operating procedure that if the German prisoners could not all be housed in their barracks, the American guards would have to sleep outside in the same conditions as the excess prisoner population until room could be found for the prisoners in the barracks or else they would be relocated to another nearby prisoner of war camp. The prison compounds also consisted of theater buildings, shop and crafts buildings, and libraries for the prisoners to spend their free time in.<sup>42</sup> The camp hospital was located in its own sector of the camp separate from both the American guards and the German prisoners (Colored Green on Figure 7).<sup>43</sup> The fourth sector of the camp consisted of the yard where games such as soccer, American football, and baseball would be played by the prisoner population during their abundant free time.<sup>44</sup>

The prison perimeter was relatively lightly guarded. Guard towers commanded a wide field of view over the areas surrounding the camp and the barbed wire fences were only doubled on the outside perimeter of the camp system.<sup>45</sup> Between the compounds themselves only one line of fencing sufficed. American guards regularly patrolled the perimeter of the camp in pairs with rifles and dogs.<sup>46</sup> The main gate of the camp was the only means in and out of the prison. It led directly into the American Officer's section of the camp before the road divided into the Enlisted American's compound (Colored Light Blue on Figure 7), the hospital compound, and the three main prisoner compounds.<sup>47</sup>





*Figure 8. Füssl's depiction of the POW barracks at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma.*

Camp Huntsville was specifically designed to accept prisoners from the Afrika Korps beginning in the spring of 1943. By fall of 1943 it had reached its maximum operating capacity of prisoners. Huntsville, Texas lies in the agricultural heart of East Texas and this is a major reason why prison planners decided to build a major POW camp here. The surrounding farms required a great deal of manual labor to operate and many of the men that regularly worked them were being called upon to serve in the United States Armed Forces.<sup>48</sup> The enlisted German prisoner population would be used to fill the ranks of these farms and allow them to operate at maximum output potential in order to provide food for the American economy and indirectly assist in the American war effort. This type of work was allowed by the Geneva Conventions as

long as the German prisoners were paid a standard wage for their work.<sup>49</sup>

Another key aspect of camp life was the classified reeducation program initiated by the United States Government for the German prisoner population. At Huntsville specifically, this program would later come to include Japanese prisoners of war. This was the only camp in the United States to operate the re-education program for Japanese soldiers that had been captured in the Pacific theater of combat.

Excerpt from George Kellermann's diary: "The land of Texas itself is 1½ times the size of Germany and has a humid, very hot, unhealthy air and it is called the Hell of Texas."

Kellermann's first observation Texas is very similar to that of many non-native Texans upon arrival to the state. Coming from the North Africa campaign, George Kellermann would have been very used to a hot climate. The Geneva Conventions required that prisoners be placed into the most similar climate available to the conditions that they had been originally captured in.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, many Afrika Korps troops were placed in camps in the American South and in the West such as Camp Huntsville. Of course, the prisoners themselves would likely have instead preferred to be placed in a climate similar to that of their homes in Germany since they had spent much of their time in North Africa complaining about the oppressive heat.

After being checked again by American doctors and going through various administrative processes, Kellermann and his fellow POWs were assigned to their company and their specific barracks within the company complex. The barracks each held 35-40 prisoners according to Kellermann's diary. He describes the conditions as being so hot, especially during midday around lunch, that, "although we were almost naked, the sweat ran from our body as if we were doused with water." He writes in his diary that the food was very good but that he missed the black bread that he was accustomed to in Germany since in America they are fed wheat bread

instead.

After praising the foods as more than adequate he writes that, “this is all very well and good, but it is very hard to be a prisoner.” This is an important to recognize because it would be easy to point out all of the ways in which American POW camps had better living conditions than POW camps in Germany or Japan during the war.<sup>51</sup> Despite better conditions, the German POWs were still prisoners being held thousands of miles from their loved ones in unfamiliar territory that was inhabited by people that possessed negative opinions of them in general due to the effects of nationalism. The very circumstance of being a prisoner made life more difficult for the German POWs than it would have been had they still been fighting in the German Army.

Following his initial descriptions of camp life, George Kellermann transitions to write about working in the cotton fields of East Texas. Because he was an enlisted soldier, he could be required to perform agricultural work by the U.S. Government according to the Geneva Conventions. First, he describes being bused to Midway, TX which is roughly 35 miles northwest of Camp Huntsville. The prisoners, numbering about 300, were housed in the local schoolhouse each night until the farmers came to pick them up with trucks around 0600 hours for the workday. They had to drive another 5 to 10 miles to reach the cotton fields that they would be plucking. Along the way, he made observations about the state of African-American huts that he saw along the road:

On this trip you could see all sorts of interesting things. The road was bad, because it was a dirt road. Right and left of the road were the houses of the blacks; they were only simple wooden huts. On one morning as we drove past, we could see the Negroes still lying in their huts. It was a nice sight when such a black face looked so shy from their hut. They mostly had no windows. The children, usually six to ten, sat or lay mostly outside the hut under the porch. Some were also sitting in a wooden box, so-called swing, which glides back and forth. In these cabins, everything was in shambles, whether this is the fault of the woman or his



own daughter, the Negro takes it not as an affront, even with the lack of cleanliness. There are sometimes people in such states that you cannot imagine if you have not seen it. Every now and then you could see a white family who made a different impression. There were blacks who were very clean, but rarely. These blacks had to work for the farmer, they are so-called slaves.

Kellermann also states that it was common practice for the German soldiers to call out to the “blacks” on the side of the road and tease them. The first time that he saw the vast cotton fields, George Kellermann was overwhelmed by their size and the amount of potentially difficult work that lay ahead of them. He describes the work as very difficult and hot, often commenting on the extreme heat. It was much hotter in Texas that summer than the German soldiers would have been accustomed to when working in the agricultural industry in Germany. The enlisted soldier contract labor program allowed the German POWs to directly interact with American citizens and gain a better understanding of their way of life.<sup>52</sup>

From August 17 to September 5, 1943, George Kellermann reports that he picked 7.5 Zenter of cotton which is approximately 825 American pounds. For this span of work, Kellermann made \$5.00 that could be used at Camp Huntsville’s Post Exchange (PX) on items such as cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, books, postage, and candy. This was in addition to the base payment of \$3.00 in PX coupons that all prisoners received per month.<sup>53</sup>

Kellermann wrote that he was glad to leave the cotton fields. Many of his fellow prisoners stayed behind to continue picking cotton, and he notes that by the time these men had returned to Huntsville in December, the cotton harvest had still not been completed because the fields were so large. Prisoners from Huntsville were also used in gathering corn and working the nearby rice fields. George Kellermann notes in astonishment that work can be carried out through the whole winter in Texas because there is no snow unlike the typical winter in Germany which halted agricultural work.

The earliest letter written by George Kellermann after his capture in the collection is dated September 29, 1943. This letter is written to his wife, Maria Kellermann, and he informs her that he is doing very well in the camp. He also writes that he is worried about how she is getting on with the agricultural work back home in Germany. He is worried that she may have sold the two old oxen that they owned in order to buy other necessities and that this will have made the plowing she has to do even more difficult. He had not received any letter from her by this time and was not sure that the letters he was writing to her were actually being received. There is also evidence from this first letter than he is relying heavily upon his Catholic faith in order to bolster hope for both himself and for his wife that the war will end soon and he will be able to return to Germany.

On October 4, 1943, he wrote to his wife again in order to inform her that the German Harvest Festival, *Erntedankfest*, has just passed for him. During the special service held in honor of the Harvest Festival he was able to participate in the Holy Communion and received a New Testament as a momentum of the occasion. The New Testament makes him think of his wife and of the difficult work that she must be enduring at this time of the year. He writes,

Since I don't know how the harvest was this year, and how the weather was during harvest. But God the Lord will have given his rich blessing as always, and even though I could not directly personally work with you, my thoughts are with you always. Despite the big ocean, nothing can come between us. We are doing well, and I hope the same is true for you.

By November 26, 1943, he still had not received any letters from home and writes to his wife that he is worried she is putting the address wrong and that she must print in all capital letters so that the American postal system could read it. On this same day, he wrote in his diary that they had to bury one of their comrades from one of the other two compounds. He also

mentions in his diary that there was a group of communist German prisoners that got into a fight which the American guards had to break up. He does not mention these things to his wife however; probably for fear that his letter would be discarded by the censors.

Littlejohn and Ford describe a major riot that took place in Camp Huntsville on the evening of November 25, 1943. Several hard-liner Nazis carried out a coordinated assault with clubs against Anti-Nazi prisoners on one of the streets of the compound. Several of the Anti-Nazis were described as, “receiving beatings so bad that they required hospitalization and were left near dead.”<sup>54</sup> Nazi sympathizers formed a wall around the scene of the fight so that American guards could not intervene:

Fighting their way through the human blockade with clubs and fists, the guards finally broke into the area. One of the perpetrators immediately broke for the fence line. Ordered to halt three times, he refused to comply. The sole fatality of the night occurred when a guard shot and killed the Nazi perpetrator as he approached the fence.<sup>55</sup>

George Kellermann could not have participated in the riot of November 25, 1943, because it took place in another separated compound. In his diary, Kellermann recalls this riot noting that the Nazi who was killed in the course of the fighting was his comrade but he wrote that the fight was instigated by the communists when it had in fact been planned and executed by the hardline Nazi faction within the camp.

It is also interesting to note that the primary target of the attack was an Anti-Nazi Catholic priest who received a visit from *die heilige Geist* (“The Holy Ghost”) while the street fighting was going on. This was a popular tactic amongst Nazi prisoners in which a pillow would be placed over the victim’s head in order to prevent later identification of the attackers.<sup>56</sup> The victim would then be severely beaten to the point of near-death. This tactic was extremely

effective because it was difficult to identify the attackers and it caused terror in its potential targets so that it was difficult to sleep for fear of being attacked in the middle of the night.<sup>57</sup>

The Catholic priest was transferred to an Anti-Nazi camp for his own protection after spending some time in the camp hospital and he was replaced with a hardliner Nazi priest because the screening process implemented by the Americans was not very effective in discerning the political leanings of incoming prisoners. Despite keeping extremely detailed notes in a secondary diary of services and the songs that they sang in worship, George Kellermann did not mention anything about the “Holy Ghost” attack on the Anti-Nazi Priest and his replacement by an ardent Nazi priest.

George Füssl’s diary is shorter and less detailed than that of George Kellermann. He arrived in Camp Tonkawa, Oklahoma on August 30, 1943. After his short time as a volunteer cook, George Füssl immediately began painting and notes that he established an art school in the camp. He spent many of his hours painting because he was a non-commissioned officer and therefore not required to work like George Kellermann according to the Geneva Conventions. Many of his paintings were of Europe during this time such a tempera depicting a Dutch fishing fleet and another tempera depicting a Venice waterway which he notes as being complete by September 10, 1943. On December 13, 1943, he noted that he received his first mail from his mother in Germany and that letters tended to take more than four months on average to reach him from Germany.

On December 10, 1943, Kellermann wrote to Maria in a tone that is distinct from his previous letters. He despairs at their situation but at the same time tries to maintain hope that he will soon see her again. This letter shows George’s heavy reliance on his Catholic faith during his period of imprisonment in the United States. I have included an excerpt from this letter

below:

I often ask myself the question why it is us who have to be separated for so long and so far, and I am sure that you have asked yourself the same question. But I can assure you that this is just a trial period. Such times are always difficult to endure, for you too, since all responsibilities at home are now on your shoulders. But dear wife do not become discouraged. We may thank God every day for his grace that he has taken care of us thus far. When I think back how He rescued me from great danger, and also here as a prisoner of war, I am doing fine. And still, I long for the day of salvation when we are free again and together again in the homeland, reunited with my family to share happiness and sadness. I could fall in despair since I still have not received any mail, but I find comfort in the fact that I am not the only one who has not received any mail from the homeland.

On December 16, 1943, he wrote to his wife again in order to tell her about their celebrations of the Christmas season. The German prisoners received cookies, cake, chocolate, apples, nuts, a white handkerchief, and over 150 German-made cigarettes in the kitchen of the compound (Figure 9). He also mentioned that they were permitted to have a Christmas Eve service at the Chapel and a Christmas tree in each of their individual barracks. On Christmas Day they were given fruit cake and a full turkey dinner from the American guards. After describing the festive nature of the camp, his letter changes tone:

My love, all this is nice but the worries about you at home never leave me and I cannot be really happy here, which is made worse by the fact that I have not heard anything from you. May it be by God's grace that you had a nice Christmas, and that you were able to celebrate it in good health, and that I will be home with you next time.

He again wrote his wife on January 3, 1944 and said that it was hard on him not to be receiving any letters or packages from her when many of his fellow prisoners were receiving such things. At the end of the letter he told her not to send him any food because they had more

than plenty in the camp and she would need it more. On January 15, 1944, he wrote, “Here, there is no winter, nobody knows snow, and when the sun is out, it is feels like our Spring. We have a lot of rain right now. But my dear wife, I rather would be a little cold and do something useful at home with you.” Then on January 16, 1944 he wrote another letter and included a photograph of himself because the prisoners had been permitted to take photographs in the camp. He requested that Maria write him back soon and include a picture if possible of herself and their son, Otto.

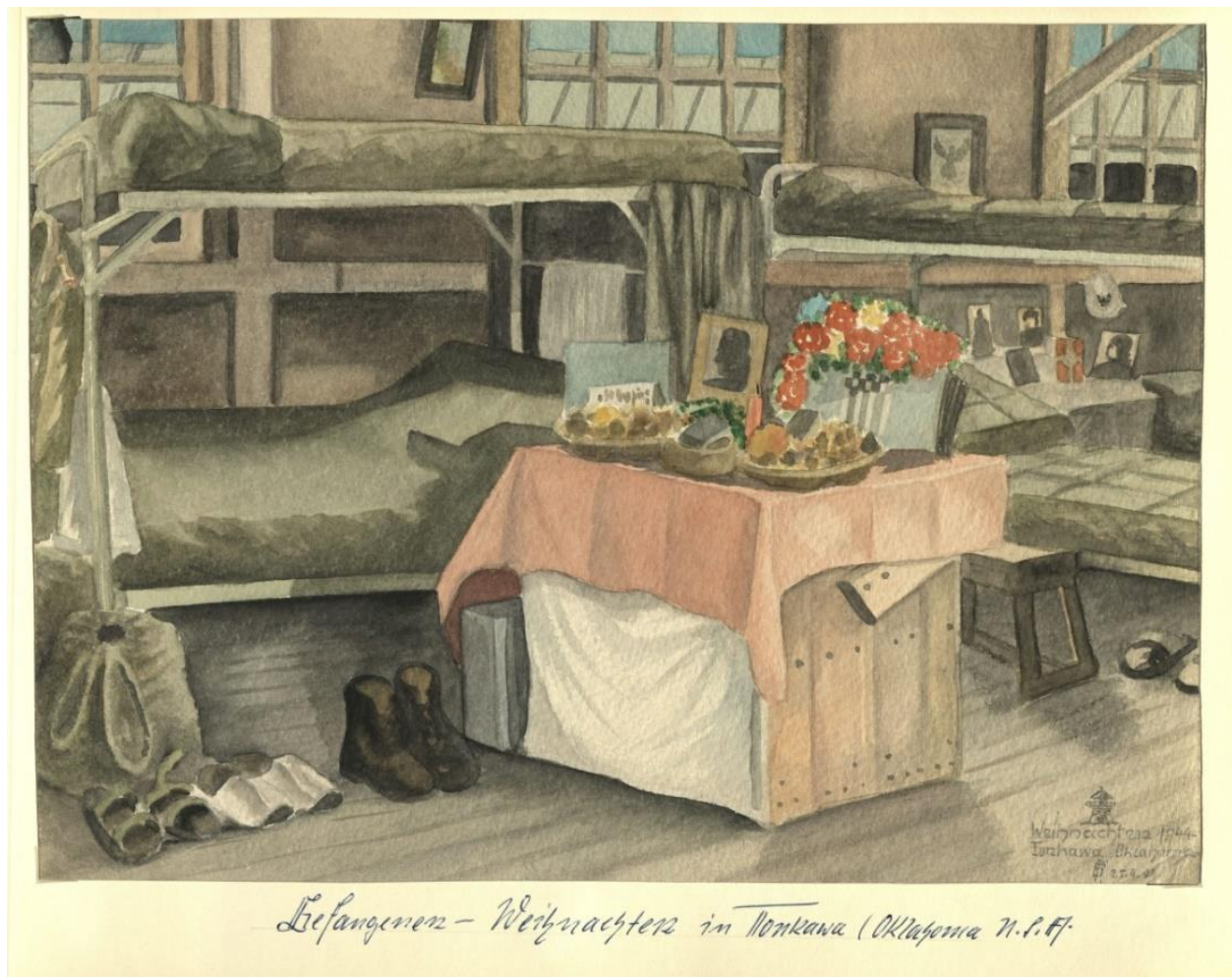


Figure 9. Füssli's depiction of the POW barracks in Tonkawa, Oklahoma at Christmas time.

January 30, 1944, is described as the anniversary of the day of the “Nazi seizure of power” on which the prisoners received belated Christmas presents from the Führer, Adolf

Hitler. These packages included chocolate, other candies, cigarettes, almonds, sardines, biscuits, peas, and bacon. The package had a Christmas branch on it which was inscribed with, "The best Christmas wishes from the Führer and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces."

On February 2, 1944, George Kellermann wrote to his wife that he had finally received her first letter which included a pack of cigarettes and a cookie. He was extremely relieved to finally have news of her and the family and insisted that she need not send him anything edible because the prisoners had more than enough food in the American camps. He also states that he has kept the Christmas branch from the Führer as a special momentum and still holds out hope that Hitler will be able to bring the POWs back home in the near future. This is a testament to the strength of the German nationalistic spirit that George Kellermann still had hope that Germany would win the war or at least conclude it on favorable terms despite the fall of North Africa and his own imprisonment in the United States.

In his diary, he described January to March of 1944 as having many bad storms and very little snow. The prisoners received winter clothes, but he wrote that they hardly used them because it never got cold. Many of the older and sick prisoners were being transferred to Compound 1 during this time period in order to facilitate their access to the hospital complex. On March 3, 1944, he wrote to his wife that he had now received many letters from home including a photograph that she had sent before he had asked for one in his January letter. He framed the photograph of his family and hung it over his bed in the barracks. On March 8, 1944, he wrote that one of his comrades, Corporal Stief-Tauch, had died due to typhoid and subsequent onset of pneumonia. The prisoners held a funeral on March 9, 1944 and sang songs in his memory.

On the March 14, 1944, Kellermann was transferred from Barrack 548 in Compound 3 to Barrack 348 in Compound 1 presumably because of his age. On Monday, March 27, 1944, he

celebrated his 43<sup>rd</sup> birthday and reflected on the fact that one year prior in North Africa he could not have anticipated that he would spend his next birthday imprisoned in Texas. He wrote longingly of the desire to be fighting for the defense of his fatherland alongside his comrades and of the monotony of life behind barbed wire.

On April 20, 1944, Kellermann wrote in his diary that it was the birthday of the Führer. He also writes that they had a funeral for one of his comrades in 3<sup>rd</sup> Company on that day. The diary detailing the sermon schedule of the camp indicates that Galatians 6:1-2 was read at the funeral of this fellow POW. Galatians 6:1-2 reads: "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." George wrote that the comrade had received bad news from home and walked away from the camp in the evening when he was supposed to return after work. The Americans found him ten days later and he had taken his own life by hanging himself from a tree. The priest seems to have chosen this passage from Galatians in order to make the POWs aware of one another's private sufferings and reinforce a sense of unity amongst them as fellow German prisoners.

In late April and early May, 1944, George wrote that many of his friends in the barracks were being shifted to different camps. On May 1, 1944, Kellermann was instructed to prepare for departure from Camp Huntsville to California. On Friday May 5, 1944, Kellermann was marched along with the rest of his company to the railway station where they had arrived from Africa almost a year prior. They passed through El Paso, Texas, into New Mexico on the morning of May 6, 1944 and continued their journey without stopping until they arrived in Stockton, CA on the morning of May 8, 1944. He noted that the scenery was very different from that of Texas and the deserts that surrounded them for most of their journey across the Southwest United



States. The most striking difference to him was the fresh air and the proximity of the Pacific Ocean.

On Friday, May 12, 1944, Kellermann and most of his company were assigned to work on the fruit orchards near Stockton. He notes also that this was the year anniversary of when they were captured in North Africa. George worked several odd jobs throughout June and July including digging a drainage ditch and working in an American kitchen. On July 20, 1944, he writes that there are rumors of an assassination attempt by Colonel von Stauffenberg against the Führer. On August 21, 1944, he wrote to Maria that it is hard for him to hear of the deaths of young people that he knew due to the war. He was also astonished in his letter that his son, Otto, had grown so big in such a short period of time.

George Füssl notes on July 13, 1944 that was transferred to Camp Gruber, Oklahoma from Camp Tonkawa. By August 31, 1944, he was housed in a gym at Camp Haskell which was a branch camp for Camp Gruber. Throughout this time he received letters and packages from his family and friends in Germany almost weekly. By October 17, 1944, he had been transferred back to Camp Tonkawa. Around the Christmas season he noted that he had a lot of work preparing for the Christmas parties at the camp and painting the theater for various plays.

George Kellermann's odd jobs in California continued into early November 1944 and he wrote that the weather continued to be warm and healthy as opposed to his experiences with the unhealthy and humid air of Huntsville, Texas, just a year prior. After this, Kellermann's diary entries became sporadic and contained only major events until the end of the war. On December 5, 1944 he wrote to Maria to wish her a happy holiday and express hope that "Peace on Earth" will soon be achievable so that they could be reunited. He also writes that he constantly looked forward to the weekly sermons in order to bolster his spirit for the concerns of the coming week.

On December 26, 1944 George Kellermann writes his wife again to tell her of the Christmas festivities in Camp Stockton. The prisoners received packages from the Red Cross and the Americans and had a feast. They were also able to listen to the camp band on Christmas Day. He also wrote that he had been especially emotional that Christmas because he had just received letters from Maria that informed him of his mother's passing in September 1944. On February 6, 1945 he wrote to his brother, Leonard Hohenstein, in order to ask for his forgiveness for ignoring his needs for many years.

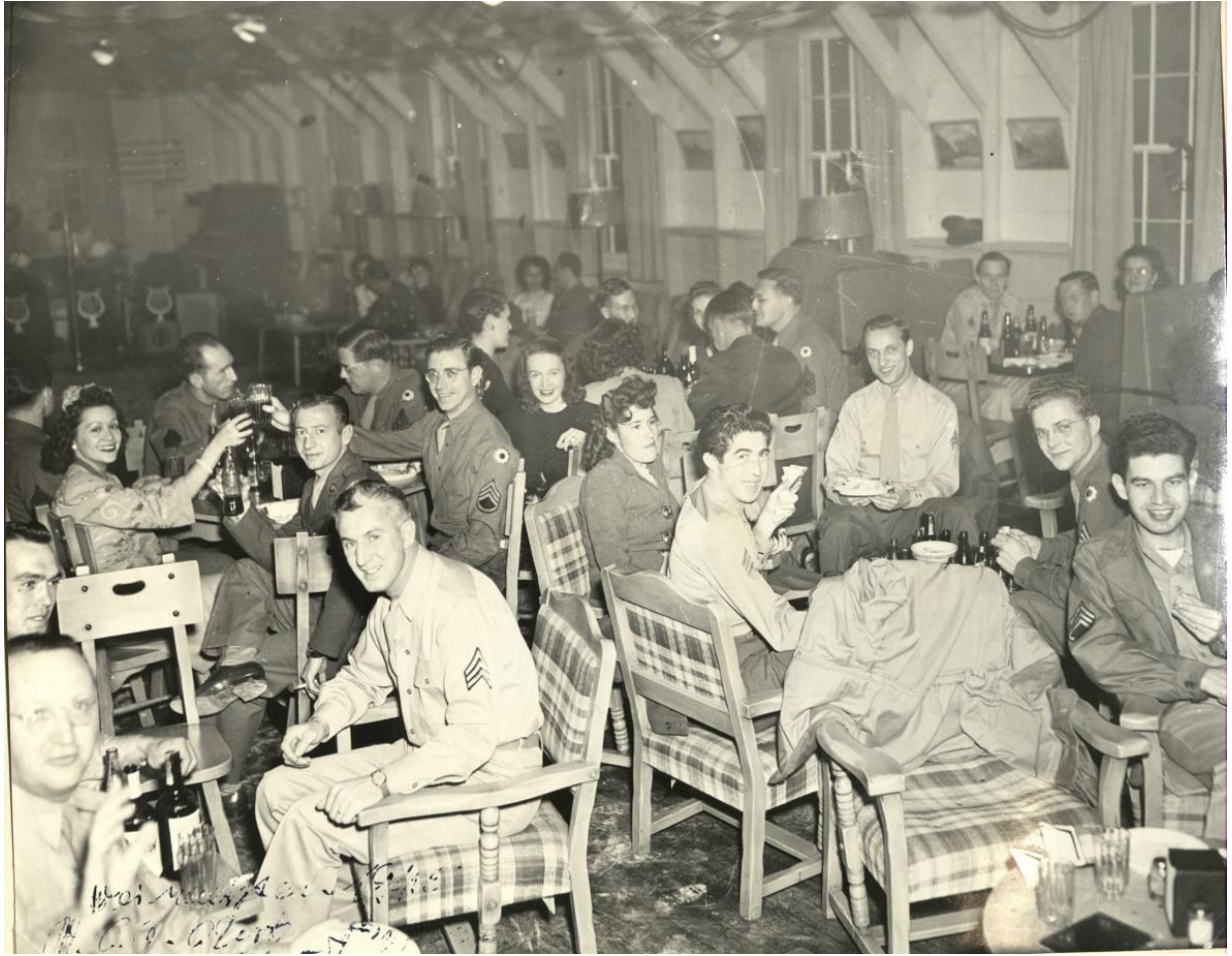
On February 25, 1945 George Kellermann noted in his diary that he had given up smoking. He also noted that he had his birthday off from work, but that the prisoners had to work on Good Friday. On April 1, 1945 he noted that he and his comrades had celebrated Easter in the barracks and that some light-hearted plays were performed in honor of the holiday. However, he notes that the mood of the prisoners was generally not good because they had received news that the American Army had come close to the German border. It was difficult for him not to receive letters during this time period because he was particularly worried about the safety of his family in this critical moment of the war. On April 12, 1945 he notes that President Roosevelt had passed away and the funeral was two days later. The next diary entry on April 28, 1945 is short but somber, "Berlin is fallen."

On April 15, 1945, George Füssl was transferred by Pullman train from Camp Tonkawa, Oklahoma across Texas and New Mexico to Camp Florence, Arizona. It is likely that he spent some time in El Paso, Texas, because the journey should not have lasted over a month. He arrived on May 20, 1945 and began pencil drawings of his surroundings until he was volunteered to work at the American N.C.O. club as a painter (Figure 10). On March 19, 1946, he noted that he had finished his fifty-fourth painting as a prisoner of the Americans. On April 13, 1946 the

Florence N.C.O. club was closed and he began the journey to Camp Shanks, New York, on May 2, 1946. During his journey, he turned 24 years old on May 4 as they passed over the Mississippi River and several American towns such as El Paso left an impression on him. He arrived at Camp Shanks on May 6, 1946 and by May 8 he had left the United States on a ship destined for Britain. George Füssl had spent nearly 3 years of his life as a prisoner of war in the United States. He made it home to his parents in Germany on March 15, 1947.

For the rest of 1945, Kellermann's diary entries are sporadic and only give specific details about the different work assignments that he received. On July 9, 1945, he noted that he witnessed a solar eclipse which he describes as, "something at the sun". He did not receive any letters from home during this time period and was very worried for the safety of his family. After the war ended on May 5, 1945 the first letter he received from home to confirm that his family was still alive came from Maria on January 5, 1946. His diary ends on February 20, 1946 where he wrote that he was waiting for transport back to his homeland.

Kellermann's secondary diary notes that on December 6, 1945 two of his comrades had a fatal accident due to a storm. On February 24, 1946, he notes in this diary that by this time he is on the ship headed back to Europe. On March 22, 1946, his entry states that he had his first bible study in England at Camp Colchester. The last sermon that he has written is on October 13, 1946 at Camp Munster in Germany. The last letter to Maria in the collection is dated October 11, 1946 and states that George Kellermann had at last arrived healthy back on German soil. Gefrieter George Kellermann had been a POW in the United States for nearly 3 years and in Britain for 8 months after that.



*Figure 10. The American NCO Club at Camp Florence, Arizona where George Füssl volunteered as an artist.*

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Over the course of this paper, I have endeavored to show how a small collection of personal writings can provide researchers with a unique perspective the personal experiences of people involved in a larger historical context. The letters and diaries of two German POWs, George Kellermann and George Füssl, certainly do not represent the experiences of all German POWs incarcerated in the United States during World War II, but do support the conclusions of historic texts on German prisoner experience.

The purpose of this project was to show that a focused study of just a few German POWs and their wartime experiences through their personal writings can provide historians with a unique perspective on the daily operation and effectiveness of the American POW Camp system. Once the letters and diaries had been translated, they could be analyzed for topical trends. George Füssl and George Kellermann were chosen out of the translated sample because the majority of the written samples were from them and their backgrounds made them distinct from one another.

Füssl had been in the German Army for two years prior to being captured in North Africa in 1943. During this time, he had fought on the eastern front against the Russians and attained the non-commissioned officer rank of Unteroffizier by the age of 21. George Kellermann on the other hand was drafted at the age of 41 into the Germany Army in 1942 and deployed to the North African theater immediately after his training had concluded. He also never gained a rank past Gefrierer which put him below George Füssl in terms of military authority despite being 20 years older than Füssl. This made the prospect of comparing and contrasting their experiences as

prisoners in America very intriguing.

Over the course of this paper, their letters and diaries show how they responded to the different pressures of being a prisoner on foreign soil for nearly three years each. Füssl was not required to work according to the Geneva Conventions and seems to have had better luck in keeping in continuous contact with his family back in Germany. George Kellermann on the other hand had a harder time adapting to the challenges of being a prisoner of war. Letters from home did not begin to arrive until he had already been in America for more than six months. During this time, he expressed constant worry for the safety of his family and tried to remain positive through his strong sense of faith. Kellermann also seems to have had to deal with adapting to the American climate more than Füssl did because he was required to work in the agricultural industry of Texas and California during his time in America unlike Füssl who spent much of his time continuing to make art for leisure.

At the time of his capture, George Füssl was not yet married and his translated diary reveals that the majority of the letters that he received were from his parents and his girlfriend, Maria. After the war, George married Maria but whether or not they had any children is unknown. Many years later my advisor for this project, Dr. Michael Waters, met with Maria Füssl in a Houston airport to receive George Füssl's sketchbook from the war. By this time, she was a widow but it is unknown when exactly George Füssl passed away. Since that meeting, Maria has also passed away.

None of George Füssl's personal wartime letters could be found for this project but they likely possessed a drastically different tone from that of George Kellermann's letters. George Kellermann wrote primarily to his wife and son throughout the war as a middle-aged man. While George Füssl would have likely been concerned for the safety of his parents and girlfriend Maria



in his letters, his tone would also likely have been quite different from that of an imprisoned father concerned about wife and child. Another significant difference between the two men is that George Kellermann constantly cites his Catholic faith as a source of hope throughout the war. George Füssl on the other hand rarely mentioned anything to do with his faith in his diary.



*Figure 11. George Füssl's depiction of a bored POW laying on his bunk in the barracks.*

Overall, the American POW camp system treated the German soldiers according to the Geneva Conventions. The same could not necessarily be said of German POW camps that held American soldiers. Germans in the “Fritz Ritz” had opportunities for wage-earning work, a balanced diet, and a wide variety of leisure activities available to them during the time they spent

incarcerated in the United States. George Füssl took full advantage of this leisure time to improve his artistic capabilities and interact with American soldiers at the on-site NCO club in Camp Florence. George Kellermann was able to earn wages through agricultural work that he was able to spend at the Camp PX on a variety of items including stationary and stamps to send extra letters to his wife and son back in Germany. This is not to say that prisoner life was easy for the Germans, but rather that life in an American POW camp was better on average than life in a German POW camp during the war (Figure 11).<sup>58</sup>

The postal system was the most important connection between the German POWs and their loved ones in Germany while they were incarcerated in the United States. It is clear from the letters and diaries of both Kellermann and Füssl that the international postal system was a crucial factor in maintaining their mental and emotional state of wellbeing while they were prisoners of war. Had this connection been severed, they would have lost all contact with their loved ones for several years. This would have placed enormous emotional stress on a man like George Kellermann who was so obsessed with ensuring the wellbeing of his wife and son that he spent his hard-earned labor coupons in order to be able to send them extra weekly letters.

Occasionally this system was also detrimental to the wellbeing of the prisoners as was the case in George Kellermann's diary with the man who wandered away from Camp Huntsville and committed suicide because he had received discouraging news from Germany. Such instances seem rarer, however, than the cases in which the postal system helped to alleviate the stresses that affected the POWs sense of wellbeing. Without the postal system, men like George Kellermann would likely have had an even more difficult time maintaining their emotional sense of wellbeing over the course of their imprisonment in the United States.

There are many books that discuss oral histories of camp life and general structure of the



American POW camps during the Second World War. The purpose of this project was to demonstrate that the personal writings of German prisoners can provide another dimension to our understanding of life in the American POW camps. Future work based on this project could examine more POW letters and diaries or even other types of personal documentation generated by the German prisoners during their time of incarceration in the mid-1940s. It would also be interesting to compare and contrast the experiences of German prisoners with their American guard counterparts in the POW camps. A concerted effort will have to be made by researchers in order to translate these types of documents before the older German generations have passed away. Without them, it will be much more difficult to translate these types of documents and increase our collective body of knowledge about life in the WWII POW camp system.

Analysis of George Kellermann and George Füssl's written documents has provided a unique perspective on life in the Afrika Korps and the American POW Camp system during the Second World War. While it is relatively easy for a historian to define major themes and motivations of a group of people it can be more difficult to go beyond these general assumptions and examine the individuals with their own motivations that make up the group in question. In the case of this project, it would have been relatively easy to simply view Gefrierter Kellermann and Unteroffizier Füssl as Nazi soldiers sworn to defend the Third Reich. As a researcher, the challenge of this project lay in setting aside one's own preconceptions about German soldiers during the Second World War in order to attempt to understand Kellermann and Füssl's experiences in the POW camps from their own point of view.

As POWs, they grieved for the time that they could not spend with their loved ones in Germany and their worry increased as the Allied armies drew closer to their homeland. In some cases they struggled to adapt to American culture and climate in the camps and in other cases

they seamlessly transitioned into the culture such as is the case with the agricultural work that was required of them according to the Geneva Conventions. Many of their experiences were recorded in the letters they wrote home to their families in Germany and in the personal diaries they kept while incarcerated in the United States. Personal documents such as letters and diaries from these German POWs possess a great deal of potential to teach us about the individual experiences of German soldiers in the POW camp system of the United States. Despite popular stereotypes of German soldiers during WWII, the letters and diaries of POWs are filled with relatable stories of loss, discovery, and perseverance.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> George G. Lewis and John Mewha, *DA Pamphlet 20-213: History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army, 1776 - 1945* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army, 1955), 90-91; Arnold P. Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (New York: Scarborough House, 1979), 256.

<sup>2</sup> David Fielder, *The Enemy Among Us: POWs in Missouri During World War II* (Saint Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2003), 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, xiv.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold P. Krammer, "German Prisoners of War in the United States," *Military Affairs* 40 No. 2 (1976): 72.

<sup>5</sup> Michael R. Waters, *Lone Star Stalag: German Prisoners of War at Camp Hearne* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Waters, *Lone Star Stalag*, 51.

<sup>7</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 28.

<sup>8</sup> Waters, *Lone Star Stalag*, 27-51.

<sup>9</sup> Ron Robin, *The Barbed-Wire College: Reeducating German POWs in the United States during World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Jeffery L. Littlejohn and Charles H. Ford, *The Enemy Within Never Did Without: German and Japanese Prisoners of War at Camp Huntsville, 1942-1945* (Huntsville: Texas Review Press, 2015), 37-38.

<sup>11</sup> William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 57-59.

<sup>12</sup> R.A.C. Parker, *The Second World War: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 5-6.

<sup>13</sup> Robin, *The Barbed-Wire College*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 66-69.

<sup>15</sup> James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War II* (New York: Harper Collins, 1980), 140-41.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 217.

<sup>18</sup> Parker, *The Second World War: A Short History*, 118.

<sup>19</sup> Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War II*, 217-231; B.H. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War* (Old Saybrook, CT: Konecky & Konecky, 1970), 171.

<sup>20</sup> Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 446; Allan R. Millett, Peter Maslowski, and William B. Feis, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States from 1607 to 2012* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 401.

<sup>21</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Antonio Thompson, *Men in German Uniform: POWs in America during World War II* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 21.

<sup>23</sup> Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War II*, 223-231.

<sup>24</sup> Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 443.

<sup>25</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 4-14.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 13-15.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Fielder, *The Enemy Among Us*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Lewis and Mewha, *DA Pamphlet 20-213*, 78.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>33</sup> Littlejohn and Ford, *The Enemy Within Never Did Without*, 5-6.

<sup>34</sup> Lewis and Mewha, *DA Pamphlet 20-213*, 77.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>36</sup> Littlejohn and Ford, *The Enemy Within Never Did Without*, 10-11.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 8.

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- <sup>38</sup> Ibid, 8.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid, 36-37.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid, 19.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid, 8.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid, 35-36.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid, 8.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid, 35.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid, 81.
- <sup>46</sup> Waters, *Lone Star Stalag*, 9; Fielder, *The Enemy Among Us*, 12.
- <sup>47</sup> Waters, *Lone Star Stalag*, 7.
- <sup>48</sup> Lewis and Mewha, *DA Pamphlet 20-213*, 126.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid, 77-78.
- <sup>50</sup> Littlejohn and Ford, *The Enemy Within Never Did Without*, 6.
- <sup>51</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 258.
- <sup>52</sup> Barbara Schmitter Heisler, "Returning to America: German Prisoners of War and the American Experience," *German Studies Review* 31 No. 3 (Oct. 2008): 540.
- <sup>53</sup> Waters, *Lone Star Stalag*, 41.
- <sup>54</sup> Littlejohn and Ford, *The Enemy Within Never Did Without*, 51.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid, 51-52.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid, 53.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid, 53.
- <sup>58</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 258.

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## APPENDIX A

Table 1. Data Sheet for George Kellermann and George Füssl.

<u>George Kellermann</u>	<u>George Füssl</u>
63 Page Diary (1/15/1942 – 2/20/1946) 34 Page Diary (7/4/1943 – 10/13/1946) 43 Letters (9/3/1939 – 10/11/1946)	46 Page Diary (12/24/1942 – 3/15/1947) Sketchbook
Birthdate: October 27, 1901	Birthdate: May 4, 1922
Date of Capture: May 12, 1943	Date of Capture: May 10, 1943
Age at time of Capture: 41	Age at time of Capture: 21
Rank: Gefrieter (Private First Class)	Rank: Unteroffizier (Sergeant)
Port of Entry: Norfolk, VA	Port of Entry: Norfolk, VA
First POW Camp: Huntsville, TX	First POW Camp: Tonkawa, OK
Dates in U.S.A: 6/26/1943 - 2/20/1946	Dates in U.S.A: 8/28/1943 - 5/8/1946
American POW #: 8WG-15518	American POW #: 8WG-49140

Table 2. List of Camps that Kellermann and Füssl were held in during the war.

<u>George Kellermann</u>	<u>George Füssl</u>
Camp Huntsville, Texas (6/30/1943 – 5/5/1944)	Camp Tonkawa, Oklahoma (8/30/1943 – 7/13/1944)
Camp Stockton, California (5/8/1944 – 2/20/1946)	Camp Gruber, Oklahoma (7/13/1944 -8/31/1944)
Camp Colchester, England (3/22/1946 – 10/4/1946)	Camp Haskel, Oklahoma (8/31/1944 – 10/17/1944)
Camp Munster, Germany (10/13/1946 - ?)	Camp Tonkawa, Oklahoma (10/17/1944 – 4/15/1945)
	Camp Florence, Arizona (4/15/1945 - 5/2/1946)
	Camp Shanks, New York (5/6/1946 – 5/8/1946)
	Lodge Moor Camp, Sheffield, England (5/16/1946 – 5/28/1946)
	Inchdrewer House Camp, Edinburgh, Scotland (5/28/1946 – 11/2/1946)
	Usselby Camp, Market Rasen, England (11/2/1946 – 11/10/1946)
	Camp Donna Nook, North Somercotes, England (11/10/1946 – 7/29/1947)
	Camp Munster, Germany (8/14/1947-8/16/1947)

## APPENDIX B

Table 3. List of selected letters from the Kellermann collection.

<b>Sender</b>	<b>Recipient</b>	<b>Date</b>
Maria Kellermannn (Wife)	George Kellermann	4/26/1943
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	6/26/1943
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	10/4/1943
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	11/26/1943
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	12/26/1943
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	1/16/1944
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	12/10/1943
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	1/3/1944
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	1/15/1944
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	1/28/1944
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	2/18/1944
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	3/8/1944
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	4/8/1944
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	6/22/1944
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	8/21/1944
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	9/11/1944
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	12/5/1944
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	12/26/1944
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	1/9/1945
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	1/30/1945
George Kellermann	Leonheird Hohenstein (Brother)	2/6/1945
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	3/20/1945
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	4/17/1945
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	12/28/1945
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	7/22/1946
Otto Kellermannn (Son)	George Kellermann	8/12/1946
George Kellermann	Maria Kellermann	10/11/1946



## **APPENDIX C**

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The information for this project was obtained from fifty letters, three diaries, and a sketchbook from two German POWs incarcerated in the United States during World War II. The diaries have a combined total of 143 pages. The fifty letters were all associated with George Kellermann and the sketchbook was kept by George Füssl. The letters did not display any evidence of having been physically censored by either the American or German governments during the Second World War.

Translation of the letters and diaries was carried out by two native Germans that live in the vicinity of College Station, Texas and volunteered their time for this project. Translation of the materials used in this project took place over a period of roughly six months in 2016. Examination and evaluation of these documents was conducted by me once the translated documents were transmitted via email. I attempted to find and communicate with the living descendants of George Kellermann and George Füssl, but I was unsuccessful.

Digital scans of the letters and diary entries utilized in this project are kept in the Camp Hearne collection at the Anthropology Department of Texas A&M University. The collection also includes digital copies of the translated versions of the documents. George Kellermann's letters belong to a private collector in Dallas, Texas. George Füssl's diary and sketchbook are kept in the Camp Hearne collection at the Anthropology Department of Texas A&M University.