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Axis prisoners of war in Iowa, 1943-1946 : harvesting fields of dreams

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**Axis prisoners of war in Iowa, 1943-1946: Harvesting fields
of dreams**

by

Chad William Timm

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: History

Program of Study Committee:
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Ames, Iowa

2003

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Graduate College
Iowa State University

This is to certify that the master's thesis of
Chad William Timm
has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy

For Bailey, Kelley, and Stoney

"We don't have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world."
-Gandhi 1889

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INTRODUCTION

In 1942 successful Allied campaigns against Adolf Hitler's Wehrmacht in North Africa led to widespread captures of Axis prisoners. The British landscape could not accommodate the increasing number of prisoners, forcing them to call upon the United States to aid in prisoner of war (POW) internment. The number of POWs in the United States grew from fewer than 5,000 in April 1943 to more than 130,000 by mid-August. At the conclusion of the Second World War, the United States had interned more than 400,000 Axis prisoners of war in more than 400 camps across the United States. In late 1942 and early 1943 the government constructed numerous camps in isolated areas of the southern and southwestern regions of the United States. As the number of POWs on American soil increased, the federal government established camps beyond the South and Southwest. The United States Army, split into nine regional service commands, supervised the prison camps. Additionally, the Allied leadership shifted its stance from merely providing a secure environment for POWs to utilizing them in aiding the domestic war effort.¹

¹George Lewis and John Mewha, *History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army, 1776-1945* (Washington, D C.: Department of the Army, 1955), 90; Terry Paul Wilson, "The Afrika

In 1929, the Geneva Prisoner of War Convention allowed enemy prisoners of war to ameliorate considerable labor shortages in specified industries. These areas included agricultural labor, lumbering, mining, construction, food processing, and other non-governmental work not directly related to the war effort. The decision to employ Axis prisoners served a practical purpose because some areas of the United States experienced severe civilian labor shortages by mid-1943.²

Prisoner-of-war camps provided civilian employers with desperately needed laborers, prompting the establishment of camps in locations that needed them most. In northern Iowa the Kossuth County town of Algona and the Page County town of Clarinda in southwest Iowa experienced the construction of such camps. Building prisoner-of-war camps near Algona and Clarinda placed the citizens of these communities in an uneasy position. Faced with an acute shortage of laborers, these Iowans turned to enemies for help. Camp officials deliberately and systematically engineered a relationship between the camps and the local communities that emphasized

Korps in Oklahoma: Fort Reno's Prisoner of War Compound," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 52 (Fall 1974): 362.

²Lewis and Mewha, *History of Prisoner of War Utilization*, 90.

cooperation. This relationship fostered both the acceptance and employment of the enemy prisoners and contributed to the success of the camp's labor program. Acceptance for many community members did not mean an unquestioning fondness or affection for the prisoners, but rather an understanding that acceptance meant remaining loyal and contributing to the war effort. Although not always economically profitable, prisoner of war labor allowed local canneries, hemp plants, nurseries, and area farmers to meet their wartime production goals, permitting Iowans to help the war effort.

This thesis will examine the concerted effort by camp officials to create a relationship with the surrounding communities that proved mutually beneficial while discussing the success of Camp Algona's and Camp Clarinda's prisoner-of-war labor program from 1943-1946.

CHAPTER 1

CONSTRUCTION AND ARRIVAL

"[They] were in a happy and singing mood."

In many respects the United States and Great Britain attempted to fight the Second World War independent of one another. Each nation had its own philosophy regarding strategic and administrative matters, and their relationship was frequently far from amiable.¹ Policy agreements between the United States and Great Britain often came as the result of protracted debate, and the issue of POW internment was no different. Once the United States agreed to establish a POW internment program little time passed before hundreds of camps had been erected to house the enemy prisoners of war.

The United States did not become involved in Axis prisoner-of-war internment until after the successful Allied North African campaign of 1942. Great Britain's early involvement in the war meant that prior to November 1942 the majority of Axis POWs were detained in England and Northern Ireland, while early in 1942 the United States housed only 431 prisoners. The Allied victories in North Africa dramatically increased the number of Axis prisoners in need of housing and

¹ Arnold Kramer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), 1-2.

created a severe POW internment problem for Britain. As a result, Britain pressed the United States to help detain Axis POWs. The decision to house POWs in the United States also made logistical sense because American ships delivering supplies to the European war zone had been returning home with empty hulls. A change in American policy would allow enemy prisoners of war to be transported to the United States on these vessels.² After repeated British requests and months of protracted debate, the United States agreed to formulate a POW internment policy. The United States' final decision rested heavily on the belief that if Britain's inability to house increasing numbers of Axis POWs led to their poor treatment, American prisoners in enemy camps could be subjected to similar handling.³

The federal government had little time to develop its POW internment policy because enemy prisoners soon arrived on American shores. Subsequently, in order to reduce confusion the United States Army initially took sole control of POW internment. More agencies, however, eventually became involved to exert control over specific areas, which led to divisions

² Ibid., 2; Maxwell S. McKnight, "The Employment of Prisoners of War in the United States," *International Labour Review* 50 (July 1944): 47-64; Charles A. Slavens, Thomas P. Slavens, and Peter H. Curtis, "Memories of a POW," *Palimpsest* 65, no.2 (1984): 53-67.

³ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 2.

that in many respects hindered the overall progress of the prisoner-of-war program. Some of the agencies included the Military Police, the Quartermaster's Office, the commanding general of the Port of Embarkation, the Chief of Transportation, railroad officials, as well as the Director of the Intelligence Division.⁴ The government's lack of experience in dealing with POW internment meant that policies were implemented and evaluated as necessary throughout the remaining years of the war.

Before the first Axis POWs arrived on American soil government officials confronted the problem of camp establishment. The government was inexperienced in setting up POW camps, so an emphasis on security became the principal concern and foundation of the program. The War Department avoided building prisoner-of-war camps within 170 miles of coastal areas or within 150 miles of the Canadian and Mexican borders, because these locations dramatically increased security risks. Consequently the vast majority of the POWs would be housed in the South and Southwest. Initial concerns regarding the security of vital war industries prevented internment in the Midwest. In August 1942, however, the first significant shipment of prisoners arrived on American soil and

⁴ Ibid., 17-18.

by the summer of 1943 between 10,000 and 20,000 prisoners arrived per month. The burgeoning POW population in the United States eventually led to the establishment of midwestern internment camps, such as those in Iowa.⁵

Axis prisoners of war came to Iowa as a direct result of the efforts of local Chamber of Commerce officials lobbying Iowa Senator Guy M. Gillette, a subcommittee chairman of the Senate Agricultural Committee.⁶ Officials, such as Hans Morgan of Clarinda and C. A. Phillips of Algona, believed their communities would benefit economically from the construction of a camp because it would stimulate the local economy with the influx of thousands of newcomers and possibly provide a source for agricultural labor. On 22 July 1943 government representatives arrived in Algona to inspect possible sites for a prisoner-of-war camp and on 19 August 1943, the Seventh Service Command, responsible for POW operations in the Midwest, authorized the construction of a prisoner-of-war camp. Citizens of Clarinda, Iowa, received notice two days later on 23 August 1943 that a similar camp

⁵ Ibid., 2-36.

⁶ Evidence of this lobbying is not documented, although this was the policy generally undertaken nationally. See Joseph T. Butler Jr., "Prisoner of War Labor in the Sugar Cane Fields of Lafourche Parish, Louisiana: 1943-1944," *Louisiana History* 14 (Summer 1973): 283-296.

would be built near their town. Senator Guy M. Gillette announced that the Army Corps of Engineers, operating out of Omaha, Nebraska, anticipated completion of the camps within two to six months.⁷ Almost overnight the war came directly into the heartland.

Construction of both camps began in much the same manner, as the Army Corps of Engineers called for new camps to be built in accordance with a standard design plan. Construction of Camp Algona on 287 acres two miles west of town and just north of the Milwaukee Railroad began in late September 1943, while Camp Clarinda, begun a month earlier, was located on 273 acres of land one and one-half miles southwest of Clarinda. The Army Corps of Engineers estimated that construction of the new camps would each cost approximately \$1,000,000.

Subsequently Lenci-Lenci, England and H. L. Staun, of Montgomery, Minnesota, received a contract for \$1,000,000 to build the camp in Algona, while Olsen-Assemnacher-Rokahr, of Lincoln, Nebraska, received a contract of slightly less than \$1,000,000 for construct Camp Clarinda. Camp Algona lagged behind Clarinda because contract letting had been postponed several times due to difficulty acquiring the land. The government acquired the land by first condemning the property

⁷ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 22 July and 19 August 1943; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 23 August 1943.

and then paying compensation to the former owners. In Clarinda, for example, several farms were condemned by the government in order to accommodate the camp, with compensation totaling \$37,750. Many of the property owners did not want to sell the land, and eventually one of the landowners, Francis Youngmark, filed a lawsuit.⁸

These companies set up offices in Clarinda and Algona, and an estimated 400 to 500-man crew per camp was needed for construction to begin. In addition to the camp, the Clarinda city waterworks needed enlargement in order to provide water for the camp, and a 100-foot wide crushed shale road was also built. The cities let the contracts and provided water, with payments made by the government for the water at a set rate.⁹

The United States Employment Office undertook the job of hiring workers for the construction companies. Algona's Labor estimates called for 250 carpenters, 200 laborers, and 225 other workers for miscellaneous construction. In addition to the encampment, Camp Algona required a spur from the Milwaukee Railroad to be extended to the site, allowing for supply and POW transport. Payment for construction work was often better

⁸ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 19 August 1943; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 2, 13, and 20 September, and 6 December 1943; See Slavens, Slavens, and Curtis, "Memories of a POW Camp" for an explanation on the difficulties involved in land acquisition.

⁹ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 9 September 1943.

than that for farm labor and on 16 September 1943, due to the diminishing supply of agricultural laborers, local men classified as agricultural laborers with the county extension offices had to secure clearance from their extension agent before they could qualify for construction work.¹⁰ With an already depleted local labor pool, the challenge of supplying this labor became difficult.

As construction of the camps began, Algona and Clarinda swarmed with new faces. With hundreds of carpenters, plumbers, and rail workers, apartments and restaurants filled bringing both economic prosperity and a housing shortage. Local citizens were asked to rent their spare rooms and apartments to laborers, although the supply never fully met the demand. In Algona, the housing shortage forced most of the workers to be quartered in a tent community at the local fairgrounds. At the height of construction, Camp Algona employed nearly 700 men although the average number monthly ranged between 250 and 300. The limited number of laborers slowed Algona's construction, but even though the construction of Camp Algona began first, Clarinda's POW camp opened earlier.¹¹

¹⁰ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 19 August 1943; *Kossuth County Advance*, 21 September 1943.

¹¹ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 19 August, and 16 December 1943.

Construction of Camp Clarinda began in September 1943 and the community of Clarinda faced some of the same dilemmas as Algona, especially that of an adequate labor force. The *Clarinda Herald Journal* ran advertisements offering payment of seventy cents per hour with time and a half over eight hours, which was about twenty to thirty cents more than local farm workers received. The region surrounding Clarinda, including Taylor, Page, Fremont, and Montgomery Counties supplied most of the labor, while Camp Algona's construction relied primarily on workers from Kossuth County. At the height of construction, Camp Clarinda employed nearly 750 men.¹²

Captain L. W. Wingett, the officer in charge of construction at Camp Clarinda, anticipated completion of the camp by the end of the year, provided the availability of an adequate work force of "laborers and mechanics."¹³ On 11 October 1943, Lt. L. D. Howard replaced Captain Wingett as officer in charge of construction, after supervising the construction of a similar camp in Atlanta, Nebraska. Despite the shortage of workers, Lieutenant Howard believed that the camp's construction progress met expectations, and he later

¹² *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 4, 7, and 11 October, and 8 November 1943.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4 October 1943.

announced the completion date to be 15 December 1943.¹⁴ While the construction continued, the workers provided considerable business for Algona and Clarinda.

Once completed the camps had the capability of nearly doubling the local populations. Architectural designs permitted 3,000 POWs and 500 American soldiers to live in approximately 186 buildings. These buildings were set on concrete foundations and composed of wood frames covered by composition siding and roofing, with interior walls made of plasterboard. The camps consisted of four compounds, three for prisoners and the fourth for the American garrison. Barbed-wire fence with machine-gun manned towers at each corner separated the three prisoner compounds with twenty frame barracks each housing fifty men. Additionally, the camps included a post theatre, church, fire station, icehouse, machine shop, barn, hospital, electric distribution system, and water and sewage facilities.¹⁵

Camp construction followed the Geneva Convention to the letter. The Geneva Convention specified that prisoners-of-war and the guards of the captive nation be provided with the same accommodations. Therefore, American troops lived in an

¹⁴ Ibid., 18 October, 8 November, and 13 December 1943.

¹⁵ *Kossuth County Advance*, 21 September 1943; *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 18 January 1944; *Des Moines Register*, 26 January 1944.

identical compound outside the barbed wire that enclosed the three prisoner compounds. This American compound included ten barracks for fifty men each, four mess halls, four lavatories, four company storehouses, four officer quarters, administration buildings, and a medical detail building. Unmarried soldiers were required to reside in the camp while married soldiers generally lived in town.¹⁶

On 2 December 1943 the *Clarinda Herald Journal* announced to the public the first information regarding enemy prisoners coming to Camp Clarinda. Initial reports suggested that the prisoners would be German. Confirmation of that information came on 15 December when the camp commander, Lieutenant Colonel Lobdell, announced that the first groups of Germans were expected soon after 1 January. The camp wasted no time in reassuring the community that security was of utmost importance. In order to secure against escapes local newspapers printed pictures showing the general character of the prisoner uniforms. The blue POW uniform had a large "PW" stenciled on the back, and various circulars informed the citizens how to react in case of an escape. The *Clarinda Herald Journal* expressed that the purpose of the camp could not be released, but reminded local citizens about the Italian

¹⁶ *Kossuth County Advance*, 21 September 1943; *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 18 January 1944.

POWs that worked the previous summer as farm laborers at a former Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp near Shenandoah. This article implied that providing useful labor could be a valuable function performed by the camp.¹⁷ The community waited with eager anticipation for the camp's first enemy arrivals.

With little warning, the first POW's arrived at Camp Algona on 22 January 1944, and three days later at Camp Clarinda, both groups coming by train. With thousands of enemy prisoners expected to arrive soon, these two contingents were work details expected to aid in making final camp preparations. Although both prisoner groups had traveled from Camp Clarke, Missouri, the Algona prisoners were Italian and Clarinda's prisoners were German. The Italian POWs had spent the last month working in a temporary camp near Eldora, Iowa, and according to several hundred of Algona's citizens, they were in a happy and singing mood upon their arrival. On 25 January 1944 an additional 250 Italian POWs arrived and over the course of the next ten months the small community of Algona steadily grew in population. By October 1944, due to the presence of approximately 500 American guards under the

¹⁷*Clarinda Herald Journal*, 8 November, 2 December, and 15 December 1943.

command of Col. Joseph Church in addition to 2,600 enemy prisoners, Algona had grown in population by nearly 50 percent.¹⁸

The status of the Italian prisoners of war in the United States had changed prior to their arrival at Camp Algona. On 25 July 1943, the Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini, was deposed. On 8 September 1943 an armistice with the Allies was signed and Italy's involvement in the war ended. A few weeks later Italy declared war on its former Axis ally, Germany, and the United States was placed in a precarious position. At the time of Italy's surrender more than 50,000 Italians were imprisoned on United States' soil. In order to resolve this possibly embarrassing situation of the incarceration of "Allied" prisoners, Italian POWs were named "cobelligerents" and given the choice to join what became known as Italian Service Units (ISUs). Since the Italians and the Allies remained skeptical of one another, the United States decided not to immediately free the Italians. Those Italian POWs who pledged allegiance to the Allies, however, were allowed to join ISUs, where they would be granted more freedom and be

¹⁸ *Des Moines Register*, 22 January 1944; *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 18 and 25 January 1944; Office of the Provost Marshal General, "Weekly Report on Prisoners of War, as of 23 October 1944," World War Two file, Iowa State Historical Library, Des Moines. For a detailed account of the reaction to POW arrivals, see Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 44-45.

able to perform jobs that were otherwise prohibited to German and Japanese prisoners. By 28 March 1944 news reports stated that the Italian prisoners at Camp Algona had pledged their allegiance to the United States, and they were assigned to service in military industries across the country. The Italians at Camp Algona were then sent back to Missouri as the first main contingent of German POWs arrived in April.¹⁹

Citizens in Clarinda did not witness the arrival of the German work detail on 25 January 1944, comprised of 250 prisoners, because the train dropped the Germans off directly at the camp. Clarindans did not have access to the camp since officials sternly warned the community to stay away after a number of local youths were apprehended when they attempted to get through the wire perimeter enclosure. Guards manning machine guns in the watchtowers could not distinguish whether the youths' clothing had the characteristic "PW" stenciled on them. Almost two months passed before the next contingent of POWs appeared in Clarinda. On 30 March 1944, approximately 500 Germans arrived from a camp in Atlanta, Nebraska, and by

¹⁹ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 25 January and 28 March 1944; For more information on Italian POWs, see Louis Keefer, "Enemies Turned Allies: Italian POWs in Ohio," *Timeline* 50 (March-April 1993): 47-55; Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 283, note 43.

October Camp Clarinda housed nearly 2,500.²⁰ The first Germans to arrive were members of Hitler's vaunted Afrika Korps. They appeared good-looking, well fed, happy, friendly, energetic, and typically between twenty-one and twenty-five years old. As time passed, more POWs arrived from action in the European Theater. Some POWs came directly from overseas, whereas others came from various locations in the Seventh Service Command.²¹

Once the United States agreed to establish a POW internment program little time passed before this country was packed with enemy prisoners of war. Fewer than seventeen months had passed between the initial appearance of Axis prisoners in the United States and the first arrivals in Algona and Clarinda. Such a short period of time meant that Axis POWs interned in Iowa had to quickly learn to reorder their lives as prisoners of war, a process that depended heavily upon their daily lives in the camps.

²⁰ *Des Moines Tribune*, 22 January 1944; *Des Moines Register*, 30 March 1944; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 24, 31 January, and 30 March 1944; Office of the Provost Marshal General, "Weekly Report."

²¹ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 13 July, 21 and 28 September, and 2 November 1944; *Des Moines Register*, 23 April 1944 and 2 October 1945.

CHAPTER 2

LIFE IN A POW CAMP

"These tales are absolutely false. There hasn't been one escape."

While the United States developed much of its prisoner-of-war (POW) management program through trial and error, the enemy POWs themselves had to learn to reorder their lives as prisoners of war. Camp officials in Iowa deliberately and successfully created a relationship between the prisoners and their captors that ensured both a safe and productive environment. This same effort was made with the host community, thereby establishing a stable framework by which a successful POW labor program could be launched.

At Camp Algona and Camp Clarinda, treatment of prisoners of war adhered strictly to the Geneva Prisoner of War Convention. The Geneva Convention was held during the spring and early summer of 1929, where representatives from major world nations met to modify international laws pertaining to the treatment of prisoners of war. This meeting resulted in the creation of the Geneva Prisoner of War Convention.¹ The

¹ For a detailed description of the Geneva Convention and its various articles, see George Lewis and John Mewha, *History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army, 1776-1945*, (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army, 1955), 66.

United States signed the treaty in 1929 and the Senate ratified it in 1932. As a signatory the United States undertook the responsibility to provide that enemy prisoners on American soil received treatment according to the Conventions bylaws.

According to the Geneva Convention the POWs received vaccinations and physical exams. They were fingerprinted, photographed, and checked for typhus carrying lice. In Iowa, depending upon the number of prisoners arriving at any given time, this practice took from a few days to a several weeks. The new arrivals were isolated during processing, as camp officials attempted to prevent the exchange of information between old and new prisoners.² With processing complete POWs settled into typical daily routines.

Prisoner camps across the country followed similar daily schedules. The prisoners awoke to the sound of reveille at 5:30 a.m., and they had their beds made and breakfast eaten by 6:30 a.m. The prisoners then marched from the mess hall back to their barracks, where they showered and cleaned up in preparation for the days work projects. These projects took place both inside and outside the camp. Those POWs contracted

² *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 21 September 1944; *Des Moines Register*, 1 and 2 October 1945; Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, (New York: Stein and Day, 1979) 46.

by civilians for labor following the establishment of a national work program in January 1943, were loaded on to trucks by 7:30 a.m. and taken to the work site. Lunch was provided to the prisoners at noon, and after three more hours of work the trucks were loaded for transferal back to camp. Once the POWs returned to camp they ate dinner between 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. after which they had the remainder of the evening as free time.³

Camp officials followed the Geneva Convention closely. One particular bylaw of the Geneva Convention required that officers and enlisted men be segregated into separate commands. Consequently if officers and enlisted men were interned in the same camp, each group would be led separately from within its own ranks. In order to simplify such a situation, both the United States and Britain generally maintained separate camps for enemy officers and enlisted men. At Camp Clarinda and Camp Algona, POWs lived under the strict military discipline of their own non-commissioned officers (NCOs), because no German officers were ever present at either Camp Algona or Camp Clarinda. POW leaders answered directly

³ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 48; Major General Arthur L. Lerch, "The Army Reports on Prisoners of War," *American Mercury*, May 1945, 541-42.

to the administrative staff of the camp, and helped facilitate the smooth running of daily activities.⁴

Food was particularly important to the daily life of a German prisoner in Iowa. Food and certain other items would be rationed in times of scarcity but, in general, prisoners interned within the barbed wire confines ate well since Article Eleven of the Geneva Convention required the comparable feeding of enemy POWs and the captor nations' own enlisted men. German prisoners cooked their own meals, three times a day, in their own mess halls, and most Germans preferred meat, potatoes, vegetables, bread, and pudding. Camp administrators went to painstaking lengths to provide food that the German POWs found appetizing. German soldiers from northern Germany liked a black type of rye bread similar to pumpernickel, while prisoners from southern Germany preferred white bread. Prisoners often enjoyed eating raw bacon between slices of these two types of bread.⁵

According to Camp Algona's commanding officer, Lt. Col. Arthur T. Lobdell, who replaced Colonel Joseph Church as commanding officer in June 1944, in 1943 and early 1944 the

⁴ *Des Moines Register*, 23 April 1944; Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 33.

⁵ *Des Moines Register*, 2 October 1945; *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 9 May 1944; Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War In America*, 49.

Germans were fed the same food as the Americans. When food became scarce in 1944, Colonel Lobdell stated "Grade A beef, butter and fresh vegetables were harder to get. Someone conceived the idea that quality would be equal if the food was pure and the quantity would be equal if the food contained the same number of calories as the American soldiers received." This policy took effect in 1944, and although fresh beef and vegetables continued to be shipped to the camp, they were fed to the American garrison. Lieutenant Colonel Lobdell remarked, "POWs got brains, intestines, fish and bones to an amount of 15 lbs. per 100 POWs per day. Their principal food was dark bread baked by Germans in our camp, then in addition macaroni, noodles, spaghetti, soy beans, peas, beans and other non-rationed food. Clerical workers got from 2500 to 3000 calories per day, and POWs on hard labor got 3700 calories per day, which [sic] cost not to exceed \$.25 per POW per day." On 2 October 1945 the *Des Moines Register* announced that Algona's POWs were especially excited about a carp fest because the State Conservation Commission had donated two tons of carp seined from the Des Moines River.⁶

⁶ Arthur Lobdell, "Report from A. T. Lobdell to Governor Dwight Griswold 9 January 1947," Algona POW camp vertical file, Algona Public Library; *Des Moines Register*, 2 October 1945.

Prisoners purchased items from a facility in their compound, known as the Post Exchange, using canteen coupons. In 1941, based roughly on the twenty-one dollars per month earned by an American private, prisoners of war were paid 80 cents per day for work outside of the camp, while soldiers who worked within the camp made 10 cents per day. According to Maj. Maxwell S. McKnight, chief of the Administrative Section of POW Camp Operations, "If the prisoner so elects, his allowance, in whole or in part, may be credited to a trust fund account, against which he may draw either for the issue of canteen coupons or to make purchases outside the prisoner of war camp if approved by the camp commander." By placing this money in a credit account, the prisoners could redeem the money after the war. Conversely, most prisoners chose to receive wages in the form of canteen coupons, redeemable at the PX. One Camp Algona officer stated, "They aren't interested in saving the money they earn. It doesn't mean anything to them as prisoners. They like real things that they can see and feel and use." According to Lieutenant Colonel Lobdell, at first the POWs had no confidence in any banking system and spent all they earned in the PX. In 1945 they began saving and "when they left Algona in the winter of

1946 each averaged about \$135 in American money in the form of a treasury check."⁷

Some of the items available at the prisoner canteens included money belts, razors, toilet articles, combs, brushes, tobacco, candy, soft drinks, classic literature, and radios. Name brand cigarette makers discouraged the selling of their cigarettes to POWs and the prisoners resorted to rolling their own. The reasoning behind this request rested on the fact that cigarette manufacturers could barely meet the demand of the American soldiers, let alone America's POW population. Prisoner canteens also provided beer for the POWs. Prisoners could buy two pints of beer per day once the POWs had returned to the compound for the night. This beer contained 3.2 percent alcohol, the standard for Iowa. The prisoners believed this beer to be "too soft" because they were accustomed to 8-14 percent alcohol in Germany. This did not discourage the drinking of beer, but German prisoners often resorted to the fermentation of raisins, grapes, peaches, and other fruits in home made stills. The Army used profits from camp canteens to purchase inventory and to improve the

⁷ First quote in Maxwell S. McKnight, "The Employment of Prisoners of War in the United States," *International Labour Review* 50 (July 1944): 47; Second quote in *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 10 October 1944; Final quote in Lobdell, "Report to Governor Dwight Griswold."

prisoner quarters or for entertainment, such as games, athletic equipment and wood for woodworking and musical instruments. The canteen at Camp Algona raised enough money to purchase a fifteen-piece orchestra and a second hand piano.⁸

Recreational activities for German POWs helped pass the time. Routine, monotony, and idle time challenged the camp's safe and secure environment. Combating boredom called for the engagement in various recreational activities to help pass the time. Some of these activities included choral groups, plays and theatre, while arts and crafts played an integral role in the daily life of German prisoners and gave the POWs a chance to express themselves. For example, the prisoners engaged in impressive painting and woodworking activities. At Camp Algona, German POW Edward Kaib and five of his cohorts created a notable example of prisoner woodworking. In November 1945 the Christmas season brought the unveiling of a POW-made nativity scene at the camp. Throughout the course of a year

⁸ *Des Moines Register*, 30 March, 23 April, and 2 and 8 October 1944; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 30 March 1944; *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 10 October 1944; *Kossuth County Advance*, 23 November 1944; Corinne and Wilbur Goecker, interview with the author, 21 March 2000, Clarinda, Iowa. Mrs. (Noland) Goecker was the private secretary for Camp Clarinda's commanders, Lobdell and Ball, prior to her marriage late in 1944. The information regarding fermentation of alcohol applies directly to Camp Clarinda, but the German prisoners at Algona also may have distilled liquor.

the prisoners carved and built the nativity scene with more than sixty half-life-size wooden figures. It remains on display year-round at the Kossuth County fairgrounds.⁹

The prisoners at Camp Clarinda also engaged in impressive painting and woodworking activities. On one occasion Maj. Gen. C. H. Danielson, Commanding General of the Seventh Service Command, visited the camp. American officers at the camp presented Major General Danielson with a portrait of himself painted by a German POW as a birthday gift. Creating the portrait in his off-hours from a photo, the POW used materials provided by the American officers. The *Omaha World Herald* eventually published the portrait on 13 August 1944.¹⁰ Periodically prisoners of war sold or traded their works with guards, and on some occasions civilians ended up owning POW arts and crafts.

The prisoners also became involved in religious activities. Initially the prisoners petitioned to have a religious program established within the camp, and local ministers provided services. Eventually the POWs received their own chaplain. Most of the Germans within the camps were either Roman Catholics or Lutherans. Colonel Earl Weed, Chief

⁹ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 29 November 1945.

¹⁰ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 21 August 1944.

of Chaplains of the Seventh Service Command, commented on the good will of the citizens of Clarinda and Algona in helping to meet the religious needs of the prisoners.¹¹

Undoubtedly a popular, labor intensive, recreational activity at Camp Algona and Camp Clarinda involved gardening. Camp Algona utilized seventy acres of land surrounding the compound for food production. A cold frame 100 feet long was planted with peppers, cabbage, tomato and celery. Winter provisions were also planted for storage, such as potatoes and squash. One hundred and twenty acres of land surrounding Camp Clarinda's compound grew food for all its inhabitants. The prisoners planted potatoes in most of the garden, with approximately five acres each set aside for peas, green beans, carrots, tomatoes, radishes, spinach, beets, onions, and cucumbers. Corn, however, did not appeal to the German prisoners at either camp. According to the POWs, corn was slop for hogs, although they planted ten acres of sweet corn for the American garrison. German POWs cultivated the garden using horse-drawn equipment, albeit completion of the work came mostly by hand. Flowers were planted in the extra sections, and they reserved thirty to forty acres for hay. The POWs also canned the vegetables for winter use and with

¹¹ *Des Moines Register*, 1 October 1945; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 10 February 1944.

favorable conditions Camp Algona's harvested crops reached an estimated value of \$50,000 per year.¹²

Prisoner-of-war camps in the United States provided safe and secure environments, although the issue of POW escapes still arose. The Army not only expected enemy prisoners to attempt to escape, but it also recognized escape as legal. Unlike civilian prisoners, Axis POWs were not criminals and the Geneva Convention guaranteed escape as a privilege. This international policy encouraged escapes in American camps because prisoners were obligated as soldiers to attempt to escape. Prisoners of war also attempted to escape due to temptation, the reduction of guard details as the war waged on, and by available opportunity. Although the government recognized escape as a prisoner's right, POWs escapees still faced possible punishment and risked death. In order to reduce escapes, those POWs caught escaping usually were courts-martialed and in rare circumstances shot. On one occasion at Camp Concordia, Kansas, a prisoner was shot while trying to retrieve a soccer ball that had been kicked over a guardrail near the main fence. Similarly, two POWs were shot

¹² *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 21 February 1944; *Des Moines Register*, 23 April 1944; *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 29 February 1943, and 3 and 9 May 1944; *Kossuth County Advance*, 10 July 1945; *Des Moines Register*, 23 April 1944.

at Fort Knox, Kentucky, after refusing to move away from the main fence. Occurrences such as these, however, were rare. Despite numerous opportunities to escape, Maj. Gen. Arthur Lerch, Provost Marshal General, said the POW escape rate differed little from that of convicts held in American federal penitentiaries. In mid-April 1945 nearly 400,000 POWs lived in 490 bases and smaller branch camps in the United States. Reports indicated since the inception of the POW program in 1943 that there had been just 1,583 escape attempts, with only twenty-two POWs still at large.¹³ Camp Clarinda did not experience an escape during its two operational years, although escape attempts occurred at smaller branch camps under the direct administrative leadership of Camp Clarinda.

Distance often hindered the effective transportation of POWs to locations in need of essential laborers, prompting the construction of temporary branch, or side camps, usually located at former Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) sites or in temporary tent communities. While in operation, Clarinda supported approximately ten such camps in Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas. One such camp near Orrick, Missouri, experienced a prisoner escape on 8 August 1944. A German POW, Kurt Koch,

¹³ Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War In America*, 115-16, 126; John Hammond Moore, "The Wehrmacht in Virginia: 1943-1946," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 85 (July 1977): 262-63.

escaped fleeing south towards the Mexican border. He first stole a civilian truck and then abandoned it for a Ford sedan. Koch also pilfered clothing but a woman near Excelsior Springs, Missouri, noticed and reported him to the local sheriff's department. Following his return to Camp Clarinda, Koch stood trial before a special courts-martial hearing. After the delivery of a guilty verdict, Koch found himself "sentenced to six months at hard labor in the camp stockade with the additional forfeiture of all pay." With 90 percent of all POW courts-martials being escape related, escapees across the country could expect the same punishment.¹⁴

The only other escape attempt from a Camp Clarinda branch camp occurred 2 November 1944 near Marston, Missouri. While performing contract labor in a cotton field some 600 miles from Clarinda, two German POWs escaped, but little time passed before their capture. Due to the lack of effective deterrents, such as machine gun-manned watchtowers and barbed-wire fences, more escapes occurred at branch camps. But prisoners of war simply had nowhere to go, with the vast size of the United States being more than they had imagined. Moreover, life as a POW had more appeal than that of a soldier

¹⁴ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 14 August 1944; *Kansas City Star*, 11 August 1944; quote in Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 144.

risking his life in Europe. Lastly, Camp Clarinda did everything in its power to prevent effective escapes. The *Clarinda Herald Journal* repeatedly reassured local citizens that if an escape occurred, immediate announcement from the media would help assure a rapid capture. Such announcements often came at times when false reports of escapes spread throughout the community. On one such occasion Lt. Col. William Ball, who replaced Lieutenant Colonel Lobdell as camp commander in July 1944, stated, "These tales are absolutely false. There hasn't been one escape, if so they'll be made public." Recent sightings of prowlers in the Clarinda area undoubtedly prompted the rumors.¹⁵

Despite a few scattered difficulties, German prisoners of war in Clarinda's branch camps caused little trouble for their American captors. The most troublesome POWs, such as hard-core Nazis, were shipped to camps in Oklahoma, Colorado, and Arizona in order to isolate them. The only evidence supporting a Nazi presence at Camp Clarinda involved a funeral and the celebration of Adolf Hitler's birthday. On 12 August 1944 a prisoner died at a branch camp near Hannibal, Missouri. The prisoner received a full funeral on a plot north of

¹⁵ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 26 October, 2 November, and 27 January 1944.

Clarinda that included the draping of a Nazi flag bearing a swastika over his coffin. Additionally, Nazi flags and pictures of Hitler adorned the POW barracks. On another occasion, the German prisoners at Camp Clarinda requested permission to celebrate Hitler's birthday, despite permission being denied, some of the prisoners celebrated anyway and they were punished.¹⁶

Flare-ups occasionally occurred, especially as the war reached its final stages. Due to recent war news and shortages of POW rations, cut 25 percent due to a lack of supply, a labor detail of eleven Germans refused to work because the weather was too cold. These prisoners lived on bread and water diets until they decided to work. In a similar situation, C. C. Archer, superintendent of the Fort Hays Kansas Experimental Station, charged the War Department with reducing POW food supply. Evidently prisoners at a nearby branch camp had lost ten to twelve pounds and could not perform the tasks they had been hired to do. Situations such

¹⁶ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 12 October 1944; Corinne and Wilbur Goecker, interview with the author, 21 March 2000.

as these were abnormal, and a good captor-captive relationship developed at Camp Clarinda.¹⁷

Conversely, Camp Algona battled prisoner escapes in the first year of its operation. Lieutenant Colonel Arthur T. Lobdell replaced Colonel Church as Algona's commanding officer in June 1944 to help secure the camp. Two German prisoners had cut a hole in the compound fence and escaped early on a rainy Sunday morning, 30 May 1944. According to the *Algona Upper Des Moines*, due to "an acute shortage of guards" the camp failed to detect the POW's escape until an hour later. The two Germans made it as far as West Bend, where, according to the *Algona Upper Des Moines*, residents gathered and "seemingly held a field day in honor of the 2 POWs."¹⁸ Another German escape at Camp Algona was reported on 1 June 1944 but the German prisoner turned himself into the sheriff the morning after his escape. The *Kossuth County Advance* noted that the POW, Alois Stephen, attempted to "make the home guards 'lose face' with home people since they [prisoners] don't even try to get out of vicinity and turn themselves in right away." One month later on 6 July 1944 a farmer and his

¹⁷ John Hammond Moore, "Wehrmacht in Virginia," 272; *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel*, 7 March and 17 April 1945; *Des Moines Register*, 1 October 1945.

¹⁸ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 30 May 1944.

son captured two escaped Algona POWs in their cornfield. The father and son were armed, with shotguns, and waited for officers from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and camp security to arrive. Three German prisoners of war escaped from an Algona branch camp near Owatonna, Minnesota, a year later in September 1945. These prisoners went to the Steele County fair, where they were discovered enjoying the activities. Once they were apprehended, Lieutenant Colonel Lobdell placed them on a bread and water diet for ten to fourteen days.¹⁹

Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Lobdell explained that during his years of intensive training, the German soldier was given instructions to continue the war effort even if taken prisoner. Additionally, "The P.W.'s on being sent out to work generally tried to pass out propaganda sheets and talk to anyone they could regarding their Nazi plans." Local law enforcement agencies occasionally received phone calls regarding leaflets or flyers that were found promising German victory and containing crude drawings of swastikas. German POWs that were sent out to work in the surrounding community often attempted to distribute propaganda. One such leaflet discovered in June 1944 was made with pencils and colored

¹⁹ Ibid., 27 September 1945; *Kossuth County Advance*, 1 June and 6 July 1944.

crayons, promising victory for Rommel. Local law enforcement officials worried that some local citizens might attribute the leaflet to a neighbor and start a witch hunt. Another handbill found near Mason City stated "Americans! Quit the War! You gain nothing but blood, sweat and tears!" This evidence supports the argument that a small contingent of hard-core Nazi's lived at Camp Algona.²⁰

Some of the trouble with escapes at Camp Algona may be attributed to the influence of Nazism among the German prisoners. Nationally, the Army considered approximately 8 to 10 percent of German POWs fanatical Nazis, while nearly 30 percent sympathized with Nazi ideology. American officials did not understand the depth of Nazi political ideology. They assumed that all German prisoners were Nazis. This ignorance, demonstrated by the fact that anti-Nazis were not segregated from Nazis upon arrival, led to small contingents of Nazis exerting internal control over most camps through intimidation.²¹

²⁰ Arthur Lobdell, "Report Governor Dwight Griswold." For other reports pertaining to Algona prisoner escapes see *Kossuth County Advance*, 1, 22, and 26 June, and 6 July 1944; *Waverly Independent Republican*, 28 June 1944; *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 30 May 1944 and 27 September 1945; McKnight, "The Employment of Prisoners of War," 55.

²¹ Thomas Buecker, "Nazi Influence at the Fort Robinson POW Camp During World War II," *Nebraska History* 73 (Spring 1992), 32-41.

According to Lieutenant Colonel Lobdell a group of POWs arrived in January 1944 that included ninety-one S.S. troops. Lobdell stated, "Most of these had been tattooed under their right arm pit. This tattoo was their mark of authority over other German prisoners. The tattoo gave their individual blood type and assured them the first treatment if they were wounded." These men commented they had been "mated" to S.S. women in order to bear S.S. children for the Third Reich. Lobdell said that these Nazi's were "insolent, insubordinate, and it was evident that our camp feared the new arrivals." Since the Nazi S.S. prisoners violated camp policy and refused to work, Lobdell instituted a "no work, no eat" policy, where the POWs were placed on a bread and water diet. After this policy began, ten Nazis came out to work on the second day, twelve on the seventh day, twenty-three on the ninth day, thirty-five on the tenth day, six on the twenty-sixth day, and four on the twenty-eighth day. The last four S.S. men were required to work eight hours putting asphalt on roofs before they were given food. Lobdell remarked that these S.S. men told him "that they had gone longer periods in the open on the Russian front living on leaves, roots, and vegetables they could find. On bread and water the first three days are the

worst, the eleventh and thirteenth days are bad, then there is no great change as the stomach has shrunk."²²

As a result of the Nazi presence at Camp Algona, in July 1944 Lieutenant Colonel Lobdell was approached by a German prisoner who claimed to be anti-Nazi. This POW informed Lobdell of three other anti-Nazis, and eventually the number reached forty-five. These forty-five anti-Nazis, and eventually one hundred more by the winter of 1944, were sent to Camp Campbell, Kentucky. Camp officials assumed all German POWs were Nazis, and those who proclaimed to be anti-Nazi were transferred immediately to avoid harassment. No specific documentation of harassment has been discovered involving Camp Algona, but nation-wide this harassment generally included scrutinizing personal conversations to spot anti-Nazis, then beating and sometimes killing them. One German POW stated, "I know of two instances where men were killed in the latrines and thrown in the toilets. No part of them was ever found. They were victims of die heilige Geist [the Holy Ghost], which meant the Nazis running the camp had murdered them because they suspected them of having collaborated with the

²² Lobdell, "Report to Governor Dwight Griswold."

Americans."²³ In order to fight the effects of Nazi propaganda, the government eventually instituted a prisoner re-education program.

By 1944 the political make-up of post-war Germany concerned Americans. The destruction of fascism seemed inevitable but government officials feared another form of authoritarianism could replace it. A new policy of re-education was implemented on 6 September 1944, one that would expose German prisoners to political democracy. Officials felt this exposure would ensure, upon return to Germany, the foundations of a democratic Germany. In order to aid in the "Americanization" of German POWs, camps across the United States instituted these re-education programs. The goal of the programs was to inform the POWs about the fallacies imbedded in the anti-democratic propaganda of the Third Reich. Achievement of this goal rested primarily on the use of films disproving the Nazi claims that "America is decadent, inefficient, and corrupt," in addition to anti-Nazi camp

²³ Ibid.; Buecker, "Nazi Influence at Fort Robinson," 35; Quoted in Lewis H. Carlson, *We Were Each Others Prisoners: An Oral History of World War II American and German Prisoners of War*, (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), 155.

newspapers and "self-education opportunities in democracy, history, civics and the English language."²⁴

Information describing Camp Algona's and Camp Clarinda's re-education programs does not exist except for a 4 July 1945 article in the *Des Moines Register*, explaining that German POWs at Camp Clarinda viewed a special screening of an atrocities film, depicting the "Nazi treatment of captives at Buchenwald." Nationally, the entire re-education effort remained a secret due to the government's fear that exposing the program would put Americans in German camps in jeopardy, because critics of re-education referred to it as "brainwashing."²⁵ The government's secrecy stemmed from the fact that according to the Geneva Convention Axis prisoners were to receive regular visits from international delegates representing their nations.

Article eighty-eight of the Geneva Convention guaranteed unrestricted access of POW camps by neutral organizations and authorized them to inspect and bring certain supplies to the camps. Periodically throughout Camp Clarinda's and Camp Algona's existence the Swiss and Spanish Legations,

²⁴ Quote in Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 198.

²⁵ *Kossuth County Advance*, 23 November 1944; Quote in *Des Moines Register*, 4 July 1945. For more on re-education see Curt Bondy, "Observation and Re-education of German POWs," *Harvard Educational Review* 14 (January 1946): 12-17.

representing both the United States and Germany, made visits to Iowa. The Swiss visited camps within the United States as well as Germany. International representatives from the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the International Red Cross Committee also paid visits to both camps, as did medical commissions that checked POWs to determine the eligibility of certain sick and wounded for repatriation.²⁶

These visits were of paramount importance because any findings of American mistreatment of Axis prisoners could have a dire impact on American POWs in Axis camps. Therefore, the prisoner-spokesmen from the camps who met with these organizations had the hypothetical ability to negatively affect thousands of American lives overseas. Visits, however, generally went smoothly at both Iowa camps. For instance, regarding the eating habits of German POWs in American camps, prisoners asked the German Red Cross through the Swiss representatives to keep food and tobacco in Germany because they were getting all that they needed.²⁷ The positive treatment of Axis prisoners and the safe environment would help to ensure the safety of American prisoners in Axis camps.

²⁶ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 15 June and 27 July 1944.

²⁷ *Krammer, Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 49.

Safety records for both the military and industries using POW labor were remarkably good. Far more dangerous than work related injuries were the possibilities of traffic accidents on route between camp and work site. On one such occasion involving Camp Clarinda, three German prisoners died in a collision on 8 August 1945 when the truck they were traveling in crashed. Seven other POWs were also injured. Another accident on 7 August 1944 four miles south of St. Joseph, Missouri, resulted in a broken leg for a German prisoner.²⁸ The only other death reported among German POWs within Camp Clarinda's control took place on 12 August 1944 when a prisoner died of an apparent heart attack at a branch camp near Hannibal, Missouri.²⁹

Fair treatment of German prisoners of war came with hopes of inspiring more Germans to surrender. Captain Clyde Herring, a former POW himself, reported that German speaking American soldiers overheard German civilians talking about the fair treatment their relatives received in the United States. German soldiers, hearing of the treatment their comrades received in American as opposed to Soviet camps, were more

²⁸Ibid., 282; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 7 August 1944 and 16 August 1945. See also "15 Nazi Prisoners Killed, 9 Others Hurt When Train Hits Truck in Michigan," *New York Times*, 1 November 1945.

²⁹ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 12 October 1944.

likely to surrender to American troops. This in turn led to mass surrenders.³⁰ News such as this had a tremendous affect on the citizens of Clarinda and their acceptance of its German inhabitants, since a number of Page County soldiers had become occupants of European prison camps.

The establishment of prisoner-of-war camps in Iowa occurred quickly. Despite the speed of the process, Camp officials in Iowa deliberately and successfully created a relationship between the prisoners and their captors that fostered a safe and productive environment. This same effort was made with the host community, thereby establishing a stable framework by which a successful POW labor program could be launched. An effort such as this proved necessary because locating prisoner-of-war camps outside of Algona and Clarinda placed the citizens of these communities in an uneasy position. By 1942 Iowans had begun to feel the pains of a dwindling supply of agricultural workers. Faced with such an acute shortage of laborers, Iowans near Algona and Clarinda were forced to turn to their enemies for help.

³⁰ Terry Paul Wilson, "The Afrika Korps in Oklahoma: Fort Reno's POW Compound," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 52 (Fall 1974): 367; *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel*, 26 June 1945.

CHAPTER 3

PRISONER-OF-WAR LABOR

"The only possible way we know for supplying adequate labor for your farming needs is to help make prison labor available for you."

By the end of 1942 Iowa began to suffer from a labor shortage because many of the state's workers had joined the armed services. In February 1941, the local National Guard unit, an anti-tank unit of the 168th Infantry Regiment in Clarinda, received its mobilization orders. The departure of the 168th Infantry Regiment depleted the community of 2,000 potential laborers. In early 1942 the United States Employment Service appointed volunteers to approximately 1,000 stations in Iowa for the purpose of informing the state labor office of the employment situation in every community. In April 1942, the *Clarinda Herald Journal* reported no signs of a farm labor shortage. This statement was misleading since the farm labor supply in Iowa was 71 percent of normal, down 15 percent from 1941.¹

With thousands of hungry soldiers being shipped overseas daily, key agricultural states such as Iowa increased food production. In March 1942 the *Algona Upper Des Moines* asked

¹ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 25 June, 23 April, and 19 November 1942.

Kossuth County farmers to raise more sugar beets in order to keep the two state sugar beet plants at full operation. The fear of an inadequate labor supply caused hesitation among local farmers. Additionally, Kossuth County farmers were requested to increase hog and egg production and to raise their soybean and flax crops by 5,000 acres each. In north central Iowa the United States Employment Service representative John Gish noted the probable farm labor emergency for the coming season and called on everyone to help.² Concern among farmers grew by August 1942 and the *Algona Upper Des Moines* noted that the 4,245 farm families in Kossuth County found the job of increasing production difficult due to a falling labor supply, higher farm wages, and the limited availability of machinery and supplies. The last county census showed only 848 hired hands in the county and since that count available labor had decreased from 28 percent to 59 percent in some areas. Drafting and high wages paid by government industries drained the farms of their manpower and the *Algona Upper Des Moines* remarked, "It begins to look like the army boys may have to fight on empty stomachs."³

² *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 24 March and 14 April 1942.

³ *Ibid.*, 28 July and quote in 13 October 1942.

The labor situation in north central Iowa became even more complicated when the federal government announced plans to build a \$335,000 hemp plant near Algona. During the 1943 season farmers within a 15-mile radius of Algona were encouraged to plant hemp, with the minimum contract being ten acres for a countywide total of 4,000 acres. The chairman of the state Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) stated that fifteen counties in north central Iowa had been asked to raise hemp, a crop he thought midwestern farmers should produce. Hemp could grow on soil suited for corn, and the War Food Administration considered northern Iowa to have some of the best corn soil in the world. Shortages of rope for merchants and the United States Navy had become an acute problem. Prior to Pearl Harbor 98 percent of America's hemp was imported from the Philippines, which was now in Japanese control. Kossuth County could grow under ordinary and favorable conditions from three to three and one-half tons of hemp per acre, which processed into 900-1600 pounds of fiber. The government provided the seed to the contracting farmer, which cost between twelve and fourteen dollars per acre. That charge was deducted once the crop was delivered. Around 1 September the government would send a hemp harvesting machine and provide an operator to be paid for by the farmer at the

time of settlement. Local farmers would receive ninety dollars per acre of revenue from the AAA, good compared to other crops.⁴ Some farmers, fearful of the future, began to anticipate possible labor shortages.

Early in 1943 farm leaders in Kossuth and Page counties began to prepare for a possible reduction in the number of farm workers. Local farmers in Page County established the Page County Emergency Farm Labor Organization to aid the recruitment and placement of farm laborers within the area. Shenandoah, on the western border of Page County, established a farm labor office to help resolve neighboring Fremont County's farm labor shortage. Concerns about the insufficient supply of farm labor were real; wartime production goals necessitated that 110,000 acres of corn be planted in Page County in 1943, with approximately 6,000 acres of hybrid seed corn alone surrounding Shenandoah.⁵ In Kossuth County, local leaders established the Kossuth County Emergency Farm Labor Organization. Due to increased wartime production goals more than 200,000 acres of corn, 60,000 acres of soybeans, 14,000

⁴ Ibid., 24 November 1942; 7 January 1943.

⁵ *Annual Narrative Reports, Page County Extension Office, 1943*, 3-7. For a descriptive account of wartime agricultural production in Iowa, see Dorothy Schweider, *Iowa: The Middle Land*, (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996), 276-77; Annual Narrative Reports compiled by county extension agents are found in the special collections department of Parks Library at Iowa State University.

acres of flax (which was nearly twice the harvest in 1942), and 4,000 acres of hemp had been planted in Kossuth County for the 1943 season, including a few thousand acres of hybrid seed corn surrounding Algona. The soybean and corn production goals were the largest in the state of Iowa.⁶

In north central Iowa, the *Algona Upper Des Moines* stated in a July article titled "Kossuth Situation Serious," that 300 workers were needed to detassel 1,000 acres of corn. Insufficient labor supplies would jeopardize the 1943 seed corn crop unless it was detasseled at the right time. Additionally, early winter weather in November delayed the hemp harvest, and made binding and shocking the hemp with machines difficult due to ground conditions. For that reason many acres had to be bound and shocked by hand.⁷ Despite labor shortages, Kossuth County Extension Director A. L. Brown considered the 1943 Kossuth County harvest season an overall success. This success was due in large part to the organizational efforts of Brown and because 75 percent of the labor requests were for seasonal help, in which many farmers met each other's needs. According to Brown, although there

⁶ *Annual Narrative Reports, Kossuth County Extension Office, 1943, 7.*

⁷ *Algona Upper Des Moines, 8 July 1943.*

was little surplus labor available only a small percentage of farmers had to curtail production.⁸

In the fall of 1943 with the harvest season ahead, the farm labor problem in Page County became acute. The farm extension office reported that labor demands were exceeded by the supply of available workers. In September 1943, 76 percent of Page County farmers reported that they would need help at corn shucking time, although the largest demand was for year-round help. Without outside labor, most Page County farmers turned to each other to help harvest their crops. One such dairy farmer near Clarinda called on five farmers whose ages ranged from forty-three to eighty-three to help shuck fourteen acres of corn.⁹ While local farmers had to find ways to harvest their crops, the labor programs at Camp Algona and Camp Clarinda were getting under way. The success of the camps' labor programs depended on the availability of POWs as well as the civilian employers' willingness to use them.

According to international law the captor nation had to provide medical attention, food, shelter, and clothing to the POWs. Despite these burdens, during the Second World War both

⁸ *Annual Narrative Reports, Kossuth County Extension Office, 1943, 6.*

⁹ *Clarinda Herald Journal, 30 September, 25 October, and 25 November 1943.*

the Allies and the Axis considered POWs as a potential source of labor. Throughout the Second World War the federal government carried out negotiations with Axis nations, through neutral nations, with reference to the labor, pay, treatment, exchange, and repatriation of prisoners of war. The Geneva Convention prohibited work directly related to military operations. Exceptions were labor that was necessary for food, shelter, and clothing although the military might benefit from it. Prisoners could work in agriculture, including food processing and in clothing plants although combat soldiers directly benefited. In 1942, the War Department set forth guidelines regarding POW pay and established two classes of prisoner-of-war labor. The Convention required that all prisoners below the rank of sergeant must work either inside or outside the camp when instructed, while non-commissioned officers and officers could request work. Prisoner-of-war labor was divided into classes. Class I included labor required to maintain prison camps, while Class II involved all other types of labor not directly connected with military operations. In most instances the factor that determined where POWs were employed rested on the Geneva Convention and how the War Department interpreted it.¹⁰

¹⁰ Lewis and Mewha, *History of Prisoner of War Utilization*,

Iowans, namely those residing in Kossuth, Page, and the surrounding counties, cared most about Class II labor and its possible use for farm labor.

Axis prisoners of war began arriving in Iowa in late 1943, when Page County farmers experienced the beginning of a severe farm labor shortage. The DeKalb Agricultural Association of Shenandoah, producers of hybrid seed corn, anticipated an inadequate supply of laborers for summer detasseling work. Representatives from DeKalb contacted the county extension agents in Page and Fremont Counties, hoping to locate approximately 500 detassellers. The prospect for finding summer workers to detassel looked bleak. Due to the lack of available local help and taking into consideration the large number of workers needed, the county extension agents affirmed the definite need for POW labor. DeKalb then contracted with the United States Army for the establishment of a temporary side camp, under the administration of a larger main camp, to house POWs that would be located at the old Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp near Shenandoah. During the months of July and August 1943, Camp Weingarten,

(Washington D.C.: Department of the Army, 1955), 76-78, 362; Edward J. Pluth, "Prisoner of War Employment in Minnesota During World War II," *Minnesota History*, 44 (Winter 1975): 302; Arthur Lobdell, "Report from A.T. Lobdell to Governor Dwight Griswold 9 January 1947," Algona POW camp vertical file, Algona Public Library.

Missouri, sent approximately 300 Italian POWs to Shenandoah. These POWs handled the major share of DeKalb's detasseling work, which freed many local laborers for employment by other hybrid seed producers in the area.¹¹

In 1943 Italian POWs were also employed on the Adams ranch near Odebolt in Sac County, Iowa. Comprised of 6,400 acres, the Adams ranch was the largest farm in the state. This farm had 2,800 acres of corn, 270 acres of flax, 685 acres of oats, 1,065 acres in tame hay, 1,040 acres of red clover, and 10 acres of potatoes with the remaining acres in pasture. According to the Sac County Extension Director, Kenneth Littlefield, several attempts had failed to get labor from a conscientious objector camp. The Italian POWs shocked and threshed 2,100 acres of grain on the Adams ranch which otherwise would have rotted in the fields. Finally, 200 Italian prisoners of war worked in a hemp plant for two months near Eldora, Iowa, in late 1943.¹² Although local farmers had solved their labor problems the farm labor emergency in Iowa was just beginning.

¹¹*Annual Narrative Reports, Page County Extension Office, 1943, 7; Clarinda Herald Journal, 9 August 1943.*

¹²*Annual Narrative Reports, Page County Extension Office, 1943, 3-7; Annual Narrative Reports, Sac County Extension Office, 1943, 9; Algona Upper Des Moines, 29 July 1943; Eldora Ledger Herald, 6 December 1945.*

The future of Iowa's agricultural contribution to the war effort depended on the availability and acquisition of a reliable local supply of labor. Large farm operations and businesses like DeKalb and the Adams ranch annually utilized large numbers of workers. These workers often included migrants shipped from Mexico. Subsequently, large operations gained experience in finding alternative supplies of farm workers. Farmers with average size operations, however, struggled to find alternatives. Although enemy prisoners of war appeared to be perfect candidates to relieve the farm labor shortage, bureaucratic guidelines would initially make their use nearly impossible.

In February 1944, soon after the opening of the Algona and Clarinda encampments, camp officials made announcements regarding prisoner-of-war employment. Additionally, the War Manpower Commission declared that POWs could only be employed through the local United States Employment Service office. Therefore, employers had to place a legitimate order for the workers needed with their local employment office to make sure that labor was not available. Farmer requests for agricultural laborers were then placed with the local extension office, or in some cases with local emergency labor associations. If either office determined that local labor

could not fulfill the labor need, a certificate of need for POW employment was issued, which then required approval by the Regional Director of the War Manpower Commission. Eventually wage hearings were held regarding the payment of the prisoners used in farm, nursery, and industrial work.¹³

Employment of POW workers required that no local labor existed and payment needed to be comparable to that of the going rate for local labor, generally fifty to sixty cents per hour for POWs employed in agricultural labor and approximately eight cents more for nursery work. The farmers then paid the federal government for the use of their labor, and the government in turn paid the prisoners. Hoping that this labor would be available for spring farm work in southwestern Iowa and northwestern Missouri, by April 1944 nearly thirty applications from farmers had been received by the Page County extension agent's office.¹⁴ Obtaining the prisoner labor, however, soon became nearly impossible. Farmers had to contact the county extension office, which contacted the War Manpower Commission, which contacted the camp commander who then approved of the labor request. Farmers eagerly

¹³ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 22 February 1944.

¹⁴ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 10 April and 1 June 1944.

anticipating shipments of German POWs quickly became discouraged.

Intricate and languid procurement procedures forced the War Department to institute an easier method to obtain POW labor. In March 1944, the War Department allowed the Agricultural Extension Service to act as the official arbiter between farmers and POW camp authorities. Page County extension agent Merril Langfitt wasted little time putting this decision to good use. On 20 April 1944, the *Clarinda Herald Journal* announced the creation of the Page County Agricultural Emergency Labor Association headed by Langfitt. This association expedited the procurement of prisoners of war for farm labor near Clarinda. The organization assumed all bureaucratic formalities required in POW hiring, so that individual farmers in need of immediate help could make their needs known without doing the paperwork and waiting for clearance through the Labor Supply Office of the Army, County Extension Service, and War Labor Board. The Page County Agricultural Emergency Labor Association signed a contract with the camp for a certain number of "man days," or the eight-hour working day of a prisoner. By purchasing "man days" ahead of time, they established a reservoir of labor available to local farmers upon demand. When in need of

agricultural labor, the farmer applied to the Agricultural Emergency Labor Association, signed regulation agreements, traveled to the camp to pick up the POWs and paid the government later. As farmers and camp officials alike became more familiar with the process, farmers would call the camp a day in advance announcing their labor needs for the following day. To quell objections from local labor leaders, regulations stated that proof be shown that no local labor existed, such as bringing a copy of an advertisement placed in a local paper requesting help.¹⁵

Despite the new War Department procedures, considerable planning and effort went into POW procurement. Initially, Kossuth County farmers often had to give the county extension agent, A. L. Brown, notice of need thirty days in advance. In September 1944, in order to prevent such delays, Lieutenant Colonel Lobdell encouraged farmers to form associations with neighbors, similar to that created by Page County farmers earlier that April. In these farmer associations, one farmer would procure a large number of POWs and then share them with

¹⁵ Terry Paul Wilson, "The Afrika Korps in Oklahoma: Fort Reno's POW Compound," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 52 (Fall 1974): 363-64; Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 89; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 2 February, 13 March, 6, 10, and 20 April, 1 June, and 3 July 1944; *Annual Narrative Reports, Page County Extension Office*, 1944, 7.

his neighbors, allowing labor to be available when needed. Furthermore, in early 1945 the Kossuth County Farm Bureau entered into a contract as employer, making procurement easier.¹⁶

The majority of POW labor requests occurred when no local labor existed and farmers could organize to apply for at least ten prisoners. Groups of ten or more prisoners could be divided as long as they were kept within a three-mile radius of each other and could be seen by a guard every hour. Regulations required farmer-employers to provide transportation for the guard enabling him to check on the POWs. Rules such as these eventually disappeared as a consistent routine developed between the camp, prisoners, and the farmer-employers. Dorothy Johnson, who helped her husband farm 1,215 acres of tillable land approximately three miles northeast of Clarinda, stated that after a relatively short period of time the guard drove his own jeep, checking on the POWs only periodically. Farmers transported the prisoners to and from camp in all cases, although they received credit of one cent per mile by the United States government for each POW

¹⁶ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 24 October 1944; *Annual Narrative Reports, Kossuth County Extension Office*, 1945, 6.

transported.¹⁷ These policies shed light on the working relationship that developed between local farmers and the enemy POWs since the Germans received the treatment of hired hands as opposed to prisoners. During the 1944 season, prisoner-of-war labor performed many farm tasks throughout Iowa.

The first German POWs contracted for work outside their camp in Iowa labored in the nurseries of Shenandoah, cultivating plants, grass, trees, shrubs, and flowers for transplanting. Adverse weather conditions in the early spring and an insufficient supply of free labor slowed fieldwork for the Mount Arbor and Shenandoah nurseries, prompting the nurseries to contract for POW labor. Throughout 1944, nurseries in Shenandoah employed between twenty and seventy German prisoners per day during their spring busy season, with Camp Clarinda supplying both meals and guards for the POWs.¹⁸ Prisoner-of-war labor, during the 1944 season, however, entailed more than nursery work.

¹⁷ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 3 July 1944; *Des Moines Register*, 8 October 1944; Dorothy Johnson, interview with the author, Clarinda, Iowa, 21 March 2000.

¹⁸ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 20 and 27 April 1944, and 8 February 1945.

Prisoner-of-war labor would prove to be invaluable because the War Food Administration set high food production goals for 1944. The Kossuth County extension office set goals of 239,000 acres of corn, 78,000 acres of soybeans, 11,000 acres of flax, and 120,300 acres of oats.¹⁹ Kossuth County farmers used German POWs for general farm labor, such as tractor driving, utilizing teams of horses, hauling, silo filling, harvesting seed corn, and working in potato fields in addition to nursery work. Near Algona, farmers used POW labor exclusively for haying, harvesting, corn detasseling, and silo filling. Farmers generally used German POWs in groups of five to ten, although the Sherman Nursery near Charles City employed fifty German prisoners daily. During the month of August 1944, thirty-eight Kossuth County farmers employed German prisoners of war, including 174 POWs that pulled weeds near Humboldt in August.²⁰

Contract work in Page County included clearing roots and stumps from hedgerows, tile ditch digging, laying out of tile ditch surveys, hauling manure, fence building, and tree

¹⁹ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 9 December 1943.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12 September and 24 September 1944; *Kossuth County Advance*, 2 November 1944; Provost Marshal General's Inspection Report, G, 7-9 September 1944, copies provided to author by Mr. George Lobdell, Lt. Col. Arthur Lobdell's nephew; *Annual Narrative Reports, Humboldt County Extension Office*, 1944, 12.

planting. Prisoners also labored in hay harvest, corn detasseling, and other miscellaneous farm jobs. In May 1944, directly west of Page County, Fremont County growers used POWs to help harvest more than 400 acres of asparagus. Fremont County farmers used more POW labor to assist in pea and sweet corn harvest, in addition to corn detasseling. Due to the distance from the camp, Fremont County farmers used the POWs for only six and one-half to seven hours per day, since regulations allowed the prisoners to work no longer than eight hours daily including transportation. Due to the lack of available German POWs, prisoner labor filled approximately 10 percent of the labor shortage in Fremont County. Harley Walker, the Fremont County extension service agent, said that these men were "mostly young, sturdy fellows, who worked best if supervised by one foreman from their group."²¹

German prisoners of war engaged in more than farm labor activities outside the camps, they also combated natural disasters. Between April and June 1944, German POW work details averted flooding along the Missouri River in southwest Iowa. The first flood crisis that summoned POW labor took place near McPaul. In April 1944, prisoner-of-war details

²¹ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 4 May and 3 July 1944; *Annual Narrative Reports, Page County Extension Office, 1944, 2*; Quote in *Annual Narrative Reports, Fremont County Extension Office, 1944, 15*.

were sent out from Clarinda in six-hour shifts to repair a dike on the Missouri near Nebraska City. An even greater crisis occurred in June 1944 near Hamburg, Iowa, when POWs assisted the Army Corps of Engineers in closing a 200-foot breach in one of thirteen levees along the river. Twelve-hour shifts with 100 German prisoners in each shift worked for seven hours, which is all that regulations would allow, leaving five hours for transportation to and from the site. Two American officers, a group of NCOs, an interpreter, and medical personnel, including two German medical technicians serving as first aid men, accompanied the POWs. Railroad men at Hamburg stated that the flood, which carried away 200 feet of mainline Burlington track, was the most devastating the area had seen. With the situation under control, the Army engineers commented that POW labor saved 12,800 acres of farmland and the entire town of Percival.²²

Storm damage in May 1944 brought about the formation of the Pocahontas County Storm Emergency Association. The Association contracted with Camp Algona for the use of twenty German prisoners for thirty-four farmers to clean up storm damage. In September Camp Algona had a contract with the Concrete Tile Company in Humboldt where the POWs laid tile.

²² *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 20 April, 12 June, and 19 June 1944.

They were transported to and from the camp fifty miles every day. German prisoners were also employed in Algona's hemp plant. The Algona hemp plant's labor crisis became acute in October 1944 when school opened and the labor supply dwindled. Under mill and guard supervision the POWs worked the night shift. The *Kossuth County Advance* announced that prisoners would not work at the same time as civilians, and employer payment for the prisoner labor would be sixty cents per hour. The POWs played a vital role in this industry because the local hemp crop averaged three tons of hemp per acre. The processed hemp was issued by the government in thousands of yards to battleships for anchorage and towing purposes. The tensile strength of this hemp rope was greater than sisal rope, it was easier to handle, and had greater resiliency. Provost Marshal General bi-weekly reports for 1944 indicate twelve contractors employing POWs for industrial work from September 1944 to January 1945.²³

Industrial employment contrasted agricultural employment in a few key areas. Industrial employers were required to pay social security and unemployment taxes in addition to carrying

²³ *Annual Narrative Reports, Pocahontas County Extension Office, 1944, 12; Kossuth County Advance, 26 October and 16 November 1944; Provost Marshal General's Inspection Report, Tab G, 15 August, 15 September, and 15 January 1944, copies provided to author by Mr. George Lobdell, Lt. Col. Arthur Lobdell's nephew.*

disability compensation for American workmen. Industrial employers were also required to pay the equivalent amount to the government for prisoner-of-war labor. The prevailing wage was generally fifty to sixty cents per day, plus 12.3 percent to cover these expenses.²⁴ Camp officials took great care not to offend local union leaders. Therefore, German POWs were only employed in industries and locations with relatively weak union support. Locations with strong union support were avoided. John W. Rath of Rath Packing Company in Waterloo wanted to discuss using POWs to alleviate the critical labor shortage in his plant. Unfortunately camp officials were hesitant to use POWs due to strong labor unions in that city. Lieutenant Colonel Lobdell's hesitation stemmed from intense union objections to the use of German POWs at Camp Algona branch camps in several industries in northern Minnesota.²⁵

To supply prisoner-of-war labor to locations that needed the workers most sometimes required the establishment of temporary branch camps. In February 1944, the War Department adopted a "calculated risk" policy that permitted the movement

²⁴ *Des Moines Register*, 8 October 1944.

²⁵ Lyle T. Lawson, Field Liaison Officer, "Report to Prisoner of War Base Camp, Algona, Iowa," September 1944, Algona Prisoner of War Camp Vertical File, Algona Public Library, 7-9. For a detailed account of labor protest to Algona Branch Camps in Minnesota, see Edward J. Pluth, "Prisoner of War Employment in Minnesota."

of POWs from large base camps to smaller, less secure branch camps. Branch camps under the administration of Camp Clarinda operated in Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska during 1944.

Lieutenant Colonel Ball, the second and final commander of Camp Clarinda, estimated in October 1944 that from 150 to 225 German prisoners were engaged in farm work in small groups. In Hannibal, Missouri, two hundred prisoners sorted used army boots for distribution to liberated countries, 125 dehydrated alfalfa in Liberty, Missouri, 200 constructed a veterans hospital in Wadsworth, Kansas, 20 canned corn in Wapello, Iowa, and 80 did construction work in Audubon, Iowa. Branch camps functioned effectively in Orrick and Independence, Missouri, Clinton, Iowa, and West Point, Nebraska.²⁶

Throughout 1944 and 1945 Camp Algona administered thirty-four branch camps in four states: Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Iowa.²⁷ The number of branch camps operating at one time in Iowa ranged from two camps in September 1944 to eleven camps by mid-1945. Although branch camps generally employed German prisoners in relatively small numbers, ranging

²⁶ Merrill R. Pritchett and William Shea, "Afrika Korps in Arkansas, 1943-1946," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 37 (Spring 1978): 32; *Des Moines Register*, 8 October 1944; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 19 June and 13 November 1944.

²⁷ Prisoner of War Camp, Algona, Iowa, Post Engineer's Office, "Branch Camps; Operations and Activities Map," November 1945.

from forty-nine to more than two hundred, establishing branch camps allowed valuable labor to be utilized where it was needed the most.

During the 1944 farm season Algona branch camps were erected in Eldora, Waverly, and Charles City, Iowa. Charles City's branch camp was relatively small, with between forty-nine and fifty-eight POWs performing work for the Sherman Nursery Company. The branch camp established in Hardin County, near Eldora 113 miles from Algona, housed between 161 and 175 POWs beginning in August 1944. The Marshall Canning Company made arrangements with the Army and the president of the County Fair Association, Henry Janssen, to use the fairgrounds and former CCC buildings to house 175 German POWs. According to Walter B. Eyre, Hardin County Extension Director, the 1944 farm season would experience a labor shortage, which would be "the most serious in the history of the county." These prisoners worked in the company's canning factories in Marshalltown, Ackley, Hampton, Grundy Center, and Reinbeck. Labor also included canning for Western Grocery Company, hemp processing for both the Hemp Growers Co-op and War Hemp Industries, and farm work for the Grundy Elevator. According to Harold Shaw, a sergeant at the Eldora branch camp, "The men do any work that is required. . . . If we want an electrician,

the clerk looks over his roll and goes out and summons his man." Moreover, prisoners of war in Eldora constructed a local rural electrification line.²⁸

The Iowa town of Waverly, 120 miles from Algona in Bremer County, also benefited from the establishment of a branch camp in 1944. Beginning 15 August 1944 and ending 25 October 1944 the Waverly branch camp housed an average of eighty-three German prisoners of war. German POWs were housed in the YWCA camp lodge near Janesville, five miles south of Waverly. A six-foot barbed wire fence surrounded fourteen tents. The Marshall Canning Company employed German POWs at their canning plant in Waverly and the Waverly Independent Republican reported on 16 August 1944 that in seven and one-half hours German prisoners aided in the canning of 5,000 cases of corn. Prisoners of war also performed miscellaneous work for a number of local farmers, especially J. Roach and Sons.

²⁸ *Charles City Press*, 14 October 1944; Henry Janssen Quote in *Annual Narrative Reports, Hardin County Extension Office*, 1944, 21; *Eldora Herald Ledger* 10, 17, and 31 August, and 7 September 1944; *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 10 October 1944; "Bi-monthly Algona Prisoner of War Camp Labor Reports," August-December 1944, copies provided to author by Mr. George Lobdell, Lt. Col. Arthur Lobdell's nephew.

Reports indicated that the "men did good work and [the program] was a success."²⁹

Merril Langfitt, with the help of the Page County Farm Labor Office, coordinated the 1944 agricultural labor program for southwest Iowa while A. L. Brown and the Kossuth County Farm Labor Committee coordinated north central Iowa. The farm labor offices could not meet the demand for farm laborers throughout 1944. Langfitt added, "The amount of civilian help available this past summer amounted to practically nothing, and with the exception of the help used for our one large seasonal crop, hybrid seed corn, civilian labor recruited and placed during the 1944 season was so small that its effect on the total labor situation in the county was so small that it could be eliminated entirely."³⁰ Prisoner-of-war labor proved to be especially valuable for short term or seasonal work, as these POWs helped harvest and process a record crop for Kossuth County. According to Brown, regarding the use of foreign labor, one hundred Mexican nationals were used for the sugar beet harvest. Unfortunately these foreign workers

²⁹ *Waverly Independent Republican*, 9, 16, and 30 August, and 6 September 1944; "Bi-monthly Algona Prisoner of War Camp Labor Reports," August-December 1944.

³⁰ *Annual Narrative Reports, Page County Extension Office, 1944*, 8.

arrived too late in the season to adequately remedy the labor shortage. For the 1945 harvest season, Iowa's farmers would rely even more heavily on prisoner-of-war labor.³¹

Although difficulties existed, the Iowa POW labor program in 1944 was a success. Early in the season procurement proved difficult, and only farmers within a radius of fifteen to thirty miles of the camp benefited from the labor. Due to rationed gasoline, rubber tires, and the relative lack of branch camps in 1944, merely 60 percent of POWs were employed nationally through February. Nonetheless, in the months of June, July, and August 1944, 963 farm labor placements were made in Page County, accounting for 12,491 man-days of prisoner labor used by sixty farmer-employers. Of the total man-days of prisoner labor used in agriculture, 5,158 man-days were used by hybrid seed companies for detasseling seed corn, with the remaining 7,333 man-days used in agricultural work in nurseries and general operations on individual farms.³² In Kossuth County alone, more than 100 farmers used German POWs during the 1944 season. The local numbers would gradually increase with the creation of additional branch camps and

³¹ *Annual Narrative Reports, Kossuth County Extension Office, 1944, 6.*

³² *Annual Narrative Reports, Page County Extension Office, 1944, 2-9.*

familiarity with the procurement process. Through May 1944 the number of employed POWs had grown to 72.8 percent of all POWs nationally, and to 91.3 percent by April 1945.³³ The lack of civilian help may have had a devastating effect on the county's economy had prisoner-of-war labor not been available.

In the spring of 1945 more farm workers were needed in northern Iowa than a year earlier. On 25 January 1945 the *Algona Upper Des Moines* announced that the state AAA set a 2,000-acre quota for Kossuth County sugar beet growers. According to AAA officials, Kossuth County had the best sugar beet soil in Iowa. Out of a 5,000-acre total for Iowa, Kossuth planned for 2,000 acres. Due to the unavailability of sugar beet labor, Kossuth County only grew 400 acres in 1944. The yield averaged ten tons per acre, and in 1944 there were 337 pounds of raw sugar per ton of beets. Prior to 1945, the county extension director noted that Mexican nationals harvested the crop, but according to the state AAA their labor "has been undependable and has arrived too late and left too early."³⁴ Additionally, Mexican labor proved available only for large-scale growers. Since the AAA feared that a shortage

³³Lewis and Mewha, *History of Prisoner of War Utilization*, 125; *Annual Narrative Reports, Kossuth County Extension Office*, 1944, 6.

³⁴ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 25 January 1945.

of labor would deter sugar beet growers, the Crystal Sugar Company of Mason City, the chairman of the State Sugar Beet Growers Association, and the Kossuth chairman of the AAA called on Lieutenant Colonel Lobdell concerning the possible use of German prisoners of war. Lobdell declared that providing adequate German POWs would be no problem, and remarked, "Many of the PWs are from sections of Germany where sugar beets are the principle [sic] crop, and are experienced."³⁵ Increased production goals forced local farmers to contemplate the use of POW labor to ensure a successful farm season.

Because the employment of German prisoners during the 1944 season proved successful, POW labor again was utilized when needed during the 1945 season. In January 1945 900 acres of hemp remained unharvested near Eldora. The local hemp plant had contracted POW labor through the spring, and German POWs could be seen loading and unloading hemp in knee-deep snow. In addition, the Kossuth County AAA had set a flax production goal at 9,000 acres for 1945. In March the *Algona Upper Des Moines* reported that the flax goal was short by 4,000 acres. In some areas the lack of labor had led to serious delays in harvest, therefore flax producers feared the

³⁵ Ibid.

labor shortage and were hesitant to plant the necessary acreage.³⁶ As in the case of sugar beets, farmers employed prisoner-of-war labor to help ease this predicament.

The spring of 1945 witnessed POW workers hauling manure, tiling, and making hay into the summer. Kossuth County's Farm Bureau once more entered into a contract as employer in order to establish a labor pool for local farmers, eliminating some of the bureaucracy in the procurement process. Kossuth farmers continued to utilize prisoner-of-war labor in the sugar beet harvest during the 1945 season. L. A. Nitz, for example, drove to Algona each morning and hauled twenty-six German POWs to assist with his sugar beet crop. A September 1945 article in the *Fort Dodge Messenger* reported additional work completed by German POWs from Camp Algona. According to this report POWs engaged in clearing trees and brush from roadsides where roadwork was being conducted in addition to gathering wood as a coal conservation method.³⁷ Favorable local acceptance and a more efficient procurement process encouraged the establishment of additional branch camps

³⁶ *Eldora Ledger Herald*, 25 January 1945; *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 22 March 1945.

³⁷ *Annual Narrative Reports, Kossuth County Extension Office*, 1945, 6; *Fort Dodge Messenger*, 21 July 1945; *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 25 October 1945.

throughout Iowa in 1945 to aid in the alleviation of labor shortages.

Camp Algona served as the administrative headquarters to eight more branch camps in various Iowa locations during 1945. Branch camps were established to serve labor requirements in Shenandoah and Tabor, located in southwest Iowa. These side camps were eventually placed under Camp Clarinda's control. Camp Algona's side camps were located near Clinton, Muscatine, Onawa, Storm Lake, and Toledo while branch camps near Eldora, Waverly, and Charles City continued to function as they had in 1944.³⁸

Clinton's branch camp, 285 miles from Algona in eastern Iowa, began operation in February 1945. In the fall of 1944 prisoners of war worked in Clinton when Italian POWs from Camp Weingarten, Missouri, performed post maintenance at Shick General Hospital before being sent back to Missouri. Sixty-five German prisoners of war arrived in Clinton to establish a temporary branch camp and work in the Pillsbury Feed Mill, where they were employed until September. According to the *Clinton Herald*, "They do not engage in any Heil Hitler's while

³⁸ "Branch Camps; Operations and Activities Map," November 1945; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 19 September 1945.

they are POWs. They are a quiet and subdued lot, but are kept under careful guard 24 hours a day."³⁹

The H. J. Heinz Company of Muscatine employed 237 German laborers beginning in April and continuing through the peak of the detasseling season, warranting the establishment of a side camp. An average of seventy-five POWs were employed by the Heinz Co. through the remainder of the summer and fall months in food processing. In western Iowa, 158 miles from Algona near Onawa, another branch camp formed. In April between 80 and 100 Germans began performing flood control along the Missouri River, and remained through September. An additional 123 German POWs set up camp in Toledo, Iowa, 160 miles southeast of Algona where they worked in the local canning plant. Erection of the last "new" Algona branch camp took place in August eighty-two miles west of Algona in Storm Lake. One hundred and thirty eight Germans were located in Storm Lake, seventy-five of them used for picking snap beans, canning in the plant, and pulling weeds by the Atlantic Canning Company. The remaining German prisoners worked for the Sac City Canning Corporation and again at the Adams Ranch near Odebolt during the threshing season and in the shelling of old corn at the ranch. Sixty POWs pulled cockleburs and

³⁹ *Clinton Herald*, 15 October 1945.

weeds in groups of approximately fifteen on sixteen Sac County farms. Employers paid the government sixty cents per hour for POW labor in detasseling, while picking snap beans, potatoes, and snapping sweet corn cost two cents per pound, eight cents per bushel and three dollars per ton respectively. According to officials from the Sac City Canning Company, the POWs gave "very satisfactory service."⁴⁰

Valuable work continued at Algona's three other branch camps in Charles City, Waverly, and Eldora. Floyd County Extension Director, W. H. Brown, noted that most requests for help could not be met. Brown coordinated the use of forty German POWs from the Charles City camp to help four local snap bean growers. These German laborers worked for 4,304 man-hours, picking 77,017 pounds of beans. Floyd County farmers, according to Brown, "were well satisfied with their work and preferred this source of labor to the boys and girls who required more supervision." Bremer County's branch camp at Waverly continued to utilize POW labor. Sixty German prisoners were employed on three or four occasions to help

⁴⁰ *Prisoner of War Labor Report, 7th Service Command, Army Service Forces, 21 July and 15 September 1945; Annual Narrative Reports, Muscatine County Extension Office, 1945, 6; Onawa Weekly Democrat, 12 July 1945; Toledo Chronicle, 16 and 30 August 1945; Annual Narrative Reports, Buena Vista County Extension Office, 1945, 6-7; Quote in Annual Narrative Reports, Sac County Extension Office, 1945, 39-40.*

pick beans, and the Marshall Canning Company continued to employ between 100 and 110 laborers. Although the canning plant employed just sixty POWs in 1944, all of them in the plant itself, this season approximately eighty worked in the plant and thirty more labored in the canning company's fields.⁴¹

Finally, according to E. I. Rosenberger, Harding County Extension Director, despite some disappointment with the complicated procurement procedures, the German prisoner-of-war camp at Eldora provided "valuable assistance to the farm labor program during 1945." Eldora made 300 POWs available, while an average of 85 were employed at any given time. At the peak of the sweet corn harvesting season, the Marshall Canning Company used 75 Germans. Several Hardin County farmers employed prisoners during July to help with the harvest and other seasonal work. Prisoners of war labored near the Hardin County towns of Hubbard, New Providence, Radcliffe and Iowa Falls. For example, three farmers used POWs to shock oats and three others used them for weeding on their farms. An

⁴¹ *Annual Narrative Reports, Floyd County Extension Office, 1945, 1-11; Waverly Independent Republican, 11 July and 8 August 1945; Annual Narrative Reports, Bremer County Extension Office, 1945, 25-26.*

additional eight German laborers were supplied to the county fairgrounds to help get ready for the 1945 county fair.⁴²

Camp Algona's labor program continued to be successful throughout the 1945 season. Local acceptance as well as familiarity with the procurement procedures allowed the labor program to grow and reach to nearly all corners of the state. According to Kossuth County Extension Director, A. L. Brown, no farmer had to let any crops go unharvested, and "POW labor was used almost exclusively in filling orders for adult workers." While 100 Kossuth County farmers employed German POWs in 1944, more than 200 employed them in 1945. Brown remarked that their "work was most satisfactory and farmers found that they rather liked the idea of having a greater number of men for a few days, rather than one man for several days."⁴³

Commanding Officer Lt. Col. Arthur Lobdell summarized the success of Camp Algona's labor program by saying, "The work done by these prisoners increases production and helps shorten the war." The number of prisoners at Camp Algona varied given the rate of turnover between camps was often high. In twenty-

⁴² *Annual Narrative Reports, Hardin County Extension Office, 1945, 6-8; Eldora Ledger Herald, 19 April, 2, August, 27 September, 25 October, and 6 December 1945.*

⁴³ First quote in Brown, *Annual Narrative Reports, Kossuth County Extension Office, 1945, 6-11; Second quote Ibid., 1944, 6.*

eight months, Camp Algona and its branch camps housed 10,000 Germans, averaging 3,261 per month. The types of work performed in the twenty-eight months were: logging 15 percent; agriculture 20 percent; factory 35 percent; government work at Sioux Falls Air Base, Missouri River, and other camps 30 percent. From June 1944 to February 1945, main and branch camp prisoners of war completed 105,000 man-days of labor, and Camp Algona received \$504,000. The POWs received a total of \$680,000 in coupons for their work. The amount paid to the federal government for their labor was considerable, payment that otherwise would have been given to civilian laborers. According to Lobdell, "The value of the labor to the men hiring them was \$3,506,000, made up of \$2,406,000 from private employees and \$1,100,000 from the government." Lobdell estimated that the wholesale value of the food and other products "handled" that otherwise would not have been was \$101,000,000.⁴⁴

Farmers reported their satisfaction with the quality of labor they received from German prisoners, and believed the POWs could turn out a good days work. Prisoners performed best on jobs that required a minimum of training and skills. Eventually the prisoners arrived at local farms and were

⁴⁴ First quote in *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 3 May 1945; Lobdell, "Report to Governor Dwight Griswold."

viewed more like common laborers than prisoners of war. Dick Norton, whose father employed German POWs on his farm, noted, "My father had hired a group of them to pull the cockleburs in the bean fields. The guard, I discovered when I took some cold soft drinks out to them, was asleep between the bean rows." Algona's Camp commander, Lt. Col. Arthur Lobdell, stated, "most of the Germans preferred hard, routine manual labor 10 to 12 hours a day. In many places we worked around the clock, two shifts 12 hours each."⁴⁵ One farmer who neglected to instruct the POWs found them pulling soybeans instead of weeds because they did not know the difference. Eventually local farmers picked up the German laborers at the camp without guards, and upon arrival the prisoners often drove the farmer's vehicle to specific work locations. Vera Wellhausen, who farmed with her husband approximately eight miles southwest of Clarinda, commented that the POWs rarely caused problems. If the German prisoners ever complained they were told they could always be sent back to camp, a suggestion the prisoners invariably declined. Albert Wellhausen said,

⁴⁵Lewis and Mewha, *History of Prisoner of War Utilization*, 128; First quote in "A Collection of Memories of the Algona Prisoner of War Camp, 1943-1946," Vertical File, Algona Public Library, December 1994; Second quote in Lobdell, "Report Governor Dwight Griswold."

"they were mostly good workers," and he considered one in particular the best laborer he had ever employed.⁴⁶

Like American labor, some German prisoner-of-war workers performed well and some did not, depending upon experience. Mike Loss of Algona, who farmed on a large scale, observed that although his last group lacked experience many of them were among his best workers. According to Loss, some of the Germans he hired had no money to buy tobacco when they first came to work for him so he bought them each a corncob pipe and a pouch of tobacco. Walt Bosworth, also of Algona, used some POWs for silo filling and said they were "good workers and had no problems with them." Algonan Jim Fitzpatrick, a camp guard who went out on many work details, commented, "The prisoners were easy to handle and caused us no trouble. They were happy to be here as they were treated well and had good living conditions and good food."⁴⁷

Farmers commonly employed the same German prisoners and some developed lasting relationships with them. Not only did these farmers need POW labor, they depended upon the Germans.

⁴⁶ *Des Moines Register*, 8 October 1944; Vera Wellhausen, interview with the author, Clarinda, Iowa 21 March 2000.

⁴⁷ First quote in "A Collection of Memories of the Algona Prisoner of War Camp, 1943-1946"; Lobdell, "Report to Governor Dwight Griswold"; *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 10 October 1944; *Des Moines Register*, 8 October 1944.

This dependence often turned into friendship. Gerald Haas, twelve years old when his parents employed POWs near Algona, remarked, "Farm labor was short during this period. My family hired some prisoners to pull and cut weeds on our land. They had a guard with them, but mostly he sat on the end of the field waiting for them to finish the job. My mom always cooked and fed them their noon meal and as a result they worked very well for us."⁴⁸ Dorothy Johnson recalls an occasion when her husband was forced to leave home and tend to a sick relative, and rather than fear for the welfare of his farm, he said, "Bruno will know what to do." Bruno was a German POW who spent the better part of a year working for the Johnson's.⁴⁹

Prisoners played with farmer's children, brought them food and candy and told stories of their own children back home. German laborers even ate at the same table as the farmer's family and became quite fond of American farm cooking. So fond that the POWs began telling the guards which farmers they wished to labor for. One Page County farmer lost

⁴⁸ "A Collection of Memories of the Algona Prisoner of War Camp, 1943-1946," Vertical File, Algona Public Library, December 1994.

⁴⁹ Dorothy Johnson, interview with the author, Clarinda, Iowa, 21 March 2000.

the ability to contract POW labor after he took two German prisoners to lunch in a restaurant on the square in Clarinda, a violation of camp regulations.⁵⁰ Such a unique relationship developed between farmers and their captive laborers that at times it became difficult to tell they were enemies. One Page County farmer remembers the German prisoners employed on her farm returning from the fields with reports about all the rabbits and pheasant they had seen. Her husband promptly told these German soldiers to use the old shotgun he kept in his truck the next time they saw game, and the POWs hunted while the American guard knew and allowed it.⁵¹

On one occasion a few Germans were brought to Constance Jergenson's farm to clean up her garden. Terrified, she discovered her three-year-old daughter in the midst of them. According to Jergenson, "They were boyish looking young men laughing and chattering in German and seemed delighted to be near a small child. Becky was in glory with the attention. When I ran to get her I realized they were harmless."⁵²

⁵⁰ Corinne and Wilbur Goecker, personal interview, 21 March 2000; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 30 April 1945.

⁵¹ Dorothy Johnson, personal interview, 21 March 2000.

⁵² "A Collection of Memories of the Algona Prisoner of War Camp, 1943-1946," Vertical File, Algona Public Library, December 1994.

Jean Balgeman Shey remarked, "Five prisoners worked for my father during the summer. They enjoyed coming to my parent's farm and to eat my mother's big meals at noon." Balgeman's father became close to two of the Germans, and kept in touch with them after they returned to Germany. When one of the German POWs, Wilhelm Schittges, was repatriated in 1946, her father pulled him aside and told him to write whenever he had hunger back in Germany. Balgeman's father ended up sending ten packages, and when she traveled to Germany to visit Schittges and his family in 1988, he told her that the packages "saved their lives."⁵³

In September 1945 a reporter for the *Algona Upper Des Moines* interviewed a camp guard who spoke about the POW's opinions of America. He commented, "One, who could speak English fluently, still can't believe there can be so rich and wonderful a country as America. This former Nazi is trying his best to stay here, and says he never wants to return to the Reich." Lieutenant J. Beorlage, commander of the Toledo branch camp, noted, "German POWs have little desire to escape

⁵³ Ibid.

and lend themselves well to discipline."⁵⁴ The development of positive relationships aided the success of the labor program.

Not all employers readily accepted the German prisoners. Those not able to accept the German POWs either were not happy with the quality of labor or could not see beyond one glaring fact, these men were the enemy. Herman Strathe, of Hubbard in Hardin County, employed twenty Germans for seed corn detasseling. He used them for only two days then cancelled the contract because the men were not thorough enough. Lieutenant Ted Chrischilles, an Algona native serving in France, wrote an article for *Algona Upper Des Moines* in which he criticized recent reports of German prisoners swimming in Algona's \$30,000 pool. According to Lt. Chrichilles, "To me it doesn't make sense-i.e. a Nazi kills 20 of our boys and then gives up and goes to the United States to be treated like some American fighting man with a few privileges taken away."⁵⁵ Wayland Hopley, president of the Iowa Beef Producers Association, contacted the War Department with his concerns. Hopley had recently attempted to use ten German POWs from Camp Clarinda on his Atlantic farm. He found the prisoners "surly,

⁵⁴ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 20 September 1945; *Toledo Chronicle*, 30 August 1945.

⁵⁵ *Annual Narrative Reports, Hardin County Extension Office*, 1945, 6-8; *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 15 August 1944; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 19 October 1944.

fostering their Nazi philosophy and uncooperative." Hopley sent them back to the camp, although he still needed the help. Reactions such as these were uncommon, yet they represent the understandable anti-German sentiment many Americans fostered. Hopley, for example, had just lost his son in the European Theater and to him the attitude of the German POWs meant that they had learned nothing, and American soldiers such as his son had died in vain. Despite scattered opposition, Major General Danielson deemed the farm labor program at Camp Clarinda a success, and stated that POW labor problems were "infinitesimal compared to the amount of work obtained."⁵⁶

Although Camp Algona's 1945 farm labor program ended with a successful farming season, new information regarding Camp Clarinda's prisoners jeopardized the success of their farm labor program and the 1945 season. Early in 1945 news arrived that Japanese prisoners would be replacing Camp Clarinda's German occupants.

⁵⁶ *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel*, 29 September 1944; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 19 October 1944.

CHAPTER 4

JAPANESE POWS AT CAMP CLARINDA

"Prisoner labor was a lifesaver for farmers this past season. Many farms would not have been run without their help.

While more than 426,000 Axis prisoners of war lived in captivity in the United States during World War Two, fewer than 6,000 were Japanese. Only two camps housed Japanese soldiers in the United States, one at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin and the other at Camp Clarinda, Iowa, due to the relatively small number of Japanese soldiers taken captive in the Pacific Theater. Although Camp Clarinda successfully housed German prisoners, the internment of Japanese POWs posed problems. These Japanese prisoners replaced German prisoners who had been widely accepted by southwest Iowans. Although these Iowans knew about the vicious reputation of Japanese soldiers, they needed Japanese POWs to fill the void in the local agricultural labor force. Although they felt the brunt of racism, the Japanese at Camp Clarinda were treated remarkably well, and they aided in the attainment of war production goals for the surrounding community.

The German prisoners lived within the confines of Camp Clarinda from January 1944 until January 1945, when the citizens of Clarinda received notification that Japanese

prisoners would replace Camp Clarinda's German occupants. Prior to the Japanese arrival the Germans labored successfully in the surrounding community, as the depleted local labor supply could not fulfill Clarinda's farm needs. The arrival of Japanese prisoners jeopardized the success of the camp's farm labor program because the surrounding community hesitated to employ the enemy who had led the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor.

On 1 January 1945 the citizens of Clarinda learned about the arrival of Japanese POWs from the *Clarinda Herald Journal*. The Seventh Service Command announced the transfer of the Germans to other camps to make room for the Japanese arriving from receiving stations on the West Coast. These Japanese POWs arrived in an environment already hostile to those of Japanese descent. In April 1942, according to the *Algona Upper Des Moines*, several young Japanese-American men in Shenandoah were attacked and run out of town by a "mob who demanded they be sent to a concentration camp." These young men were recent graduates of Iowa State College, and the *Upper Des Moines* noted that one of them had bought a bond "to help his country." As a result of community sentiment, camp officials declared that the first 250 Japanese prisoners would not be used for labor outside the camp since media propaganda

regarding the cruelty of the Japanese soldiers had helped enflame the community. While local citizens expressed concern and with camp security heightened, the Seventh Service Command announced, "Cognizance has been taken of the agricultural labor situation in the Iowa area," and declared that the removal of the German prisoners would not affect the availability of the German captives for such work.¹ Concern spread among Clarinda-area farmers, the nearest camp with available POW labor was hours away at Camp Algona.

Some controversy surrounds the number of Japanese soldiers interned in the United States. Arnold Krammer's findings are the most convincing. He concluded that only 5,424 Japanese POWs arrived on American shores. Factors contributing to such a small number of Japanese prisoners are cultural in origin. Japanese samurai had a lengthy tradition as warriors, and the samurai spirit pervaded among many contemporary Japanese soldiers. The Japanese Military Field Code commanded each Japanese soldier to remember the shame of capture and that soldiers should die to avoid leaving a dishonorable name. Soldiers were encouraged to charge enemy positions or save their last round of ammunition to commit suicide. American troops, well aware of such policies, feared

¹ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 1 February 1945; *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 14 April 1942; *Des Moines Register*, 2 February 1945.

the Japanese and exhibited hesitation in taking them prisoner. During the Burma Campaign, for example, 17,166 Japanese soldiers died while only 142 succumbed to capture. If captured, the Japanese prisoners held fast to their honor code. One such prisoner stated, "We wanted to die, yet we couldn't die. We wanted to kill ourselves and we could not." Thousands of Japanese-Americans (Nisei) had already been placed in internment camps soon after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, and news of the Japanese atrocities during the Bataan Death March in 1942 had reached the small southwestern Iowa community. Early in the Second World War the Japanese captured approximately 25,000 American soldiers and within four years all but 15,000 had died or been killed. Many of those deaths were attributed "premeditated, vicious, and inhuman acts" by Japanese soldiers.² This reputation, one filled with visions of brutality, preceded the Japanese POW arrival at Camp Clarinda.

While Japanese prisoners arrived in Clarinda, the German POWs were shipped out. Late in January 1945, numerous

² Arnold Krammer, "Japanese Prisoners of War in America," *Pacific Historical Review* 52 (February 1983): 67-70 quote on 80; Terry Paul Wilson, "The Afrika Korps in Oklahoma: Fort Reno's POW Compound," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 52 (Fall 1974): 362; Robert LaForte, Ronald Marcello, and Richard Himmel, eds., *With Only The Will To Live: Accounts of Americans in Japanese Prison Camps, 1941-1945*, (Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1994), XXIX-79.

truckloads of Germans left Camp Clarinda for Camp Algona. Less than a week later, the first Japanese prisoners of war arrived. With processing complete the Japanese took their place behind the barbed wire enclosures. Most of the Japanese appeared to be between twenty and forty-five years old, and one-third of them were "gunzoku", or civilians attached to and under the rules and regulations of the army. Camp commander Lieutenant Colonel George Ball stated, "They were a sorry lot when they arrived. Some were recovering from wounds. Some were carrying shrapnel. They'd just come from a long duty in the field and they were dirty and wild as animals. We pounded the rudiments of sanitation into their heads, after a little effort, and broke up some of their child-like habits."³ With processing complete POWs settled into typical daily routines.

The Japanese prisoners, like their German predecessors, ate well while at Camp Clarinda. Despite the Japanese refusal to sign the Geneva Convention, the United States upheld its obligations to feed their prisoners as well as its own enlisted men. The Japanese cooked their own meals, which initially included carp, mullet, and special rolls containing lima beans. Lieutenant Ball described how the Japanese ate when he stated, "They're eating fish and rice, for a basic

³ *Des Moines Register*, 8 April and 23 September 1945.

diet, with plain bread, a cup of coffee a day, some damn weak tea and a few cheap vegetables once in a while. For the most part these days, the Japanese are having mullets for their fish, and they cost us between five and six cents a pound. We're hoping to get squid and shark meat in the near future. For a while we used to give them carp, but carp was too good for them so we got mullets. They like them all right, so well in fact they eat the tails and heads to boot."⁴ Some of the food the Japanese consumed came from the 120-acre garden they farmed surrounding the camp compound. The working POW ate 3700 calories per day, which cost the United States government approximately \$.18 per POW per day.⁵ Japanese prisoners were also able to purchase items from the Post Exchange (PX).

Inside the camp, the Japanese prisoners were not allowed the same benefits that the Germans had been given. Each Japanese prisoner received the mandatory payment of ten cents per day, with only twenty to thirty additional cents per day for certain types of work. Since the Japanese government had not signed the Geneva Treaty, the United States government chose not to pay the Japanese the eighty cents per day that

⁴ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 9 April 1945; *Des Moines Register*, 8 April 1945.

⁵ *Des Moines Register*, 23 September 1945.

German POWs received. Some items available at the prisoner canteen included low-grade tobacco for pipes and making cigarettes, candy, toilet articles, combs, and brushes. Lieutenant Colonel Ball commented that somehow the Japanese have discovered from seeing an occasional newspaper map of the Pacific that they are losing ground. "Do we ever discuss the trend of the war with them? Hell no. We don't care what they think."⁶

Lieutenant Colonel Ball wasted no time establishing his authority over the Japanese POWs. Little time passed before problems arose. Since Japan had not signed the Geneva Treaty, Ball made it clear that the Japanese would not receive the same treatment as the Germans had. Ball commented, "With Japanese, non-signers of the pact, we comply with the rules, alright, and then make them apply to the lower standard of living the Japanese have known." Additionally, the American garrison stationed at Camp Clarinda included veterans of South Pacific combat who harbored contempt for the Japanese prisoners. Yet Ball did not allow any physical punishment even when the Japanese stepped out of line. Ball remarked, "If they break any rules they go to the brig. There's no trial. Standard punishment is thirty days in the can,

⁶ Ibid., 8 December 1945.

fourteen of them on bread and water, we don't get any repeat offenders."⁷ Violation of the Geneva Convention, despite the Japanese refusal to sign, could have prompted retaliation against American POWs by the Japanese. Although Lieutenant Colonel Ball's policies remained within the bounds of the Convention, the dispensing of discipline occurred swiftly and sometimes harshly.

One such altercation took place early in the Japanese internment. The Japanese arrived on a particularly cold winter day, with plenty of ice and snow on the ground, and they received orders to go out and shovel. Upon the Japanese refusal to work in the cold weather, Lieutenant Colonel Ball quickly took action. According to Ball, "We sent back word to the effect that no work meant no food. Still they refused. So we got out the military police, clubs and tear gas and marched inside to clean out every ounce of food and every piece of cooking equipment. As we went in they tore out of the barracks like so many monkeys. Some were only half-dressed, but we made them stand out in the cold while we counted them off. They shivered like rats, but they wouldn't work. Next morning, after no food at all for twenty-four hours, they sent up word they were ready to go back to work,

⁷ *Des Moines Register*, 8 April and 23 September 1945.

if we'd feed them first." The Japanese did not receive food until later that night when they had finished their work.⁸

The American garrison encountered few other difficulties with their captives, and camp life for the Japanese closely resembled that of the Germans. As of 19 April 1945, approximately 500 Japanese prisoners lived in Camp Clarinda, along with nearly 200 Germans who were members of a specialist detail, carpenters, cooks, waiters, and electricians. No Japanese officers lived among the prisoners at Camp Clarinda, as all Japanese officers resided at Camp McCoy. The Japanese at first expected horrible treatment or death, and they seemed mystified and even happy with their situation. Scant Japanese arrivals left the three prisoner compounds relatively empty, and every barracks had a Japanese leader for the unit. Lieutenant Colonel Ball and his staff appointed leaders for each compound, and conversations between Japanese and Americans took place through Japanese-American soldiers who served as interpreters. Showing his concern regarding the loyalty of Japanese-American soldiers Ball said that these soldiers' "loyalty to America has been fully tested." These Nisei interpreters belonged to the 422 Combat Infantry Regiment, and Ball correctly assessed their loyalty. At the

⁸ Ibid., 8 April 1945.

conclusion of the Second World War the 422nd emerged with more decorations than any division in American military history.⁹

Well-ingrained prejudices and preconceptions guided the development of policies regarding the Japanese prisoners. Subsequently, the Japanese endured a particularly racist stereotyped image. According to Lieutenant Colonel Ball, "Because the Jap is a notorious bargainer we use a policy of not giving a damn what he wants. The answer is always no to every request. Then if we think some changes should be made, we make them later, voluntarily." Preconceptions would also affect the people of Clarinda, and articles littered local newspapers discussing the characteristics of the Japanese soldier, depicted as being tricky, torturous, and liking to kill their victims slowly. Before the Japanese arrival in Clarinda, the local press displayed contempt for anything Japanese. The *Herald Journal*, commenting on a United States government program to transplant Nisei to new locations, remarked, "as long as it's not here!" Upon hearing rumors regarding how the Japanese POWs were considered dead in their homeland for surrendering, the *Herald Journal's* editor stated, "These Japs sure are queer babies!" Racist stereotypes were compounded by newspaper warnings of Japanese balloons carrying

⁹ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 13 December 1943 and 9 April 1945; *Des Moines Register*, 8 April 1945.

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⁹ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 13 December 1943 and 9 April 1945; *Des Moines Register*, 8 April 1945.

incendiary bombs expected to arrive on the West Coast. Iowans were warned not to touch these bombs if they were seen in the area.¹⁰ Stereotypes and administrative hesitance to employ Japanese POWs seriously threatened the success of the camp's labor program.

The spring 1945 farming season arrived with southwest Iowa in need of more farm laborers than the previous season. Fremont County had not experienced much of a labor shortage in 1944 but prospects for the coming season concerned local farmers. Fremont County had the largest War Food Administration goals for canning crops in Iowa, with more than 450 acres of asparagus to cut, the largest asparagus crop of any county in the Midwest. In addition, Fremont County farmers planted 1,500 acres of peas and 4,900 acres of sweet corn, 39.5 percent and 9.5 percent respectively of the state totals for those crops. Harley Walker, Fremont County extension agent, estimated that it would take 170 POWs weeks in favorable weather to harvest the asparagus crop alone. The Page County extension office estimated that 75 percent of local farmers would not be able to find needed help. Page

¹⁰ First quotation in *Des Moines Register*, 8 April 1945. See Ron Robin, *The Barbed-Wire College: Reeducating German POWs in the United States During World War II* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Second quotation in *Des Moines Register*, 8 April 1945; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 13 December 1943, 28 May, 2 August, and 19 July 1945.

County extension agent Merrill Langfitt remarked, "the only possible way we know for supplying adequate labor for your farming needs is to help make prison labor available for you."¹¹ With all but 200 German POWs sent to Camp Algona and administrators reluctant to employ Japanese prisoners outside the compound, meeting these labor needs likely would not happen.

For Page and Fremont Counties to have successful farm seasons they needed agricultural workers. Merrill Langfitt took immediate steps to remedy the situation. Langfitt called an emergency farm meeting on 8 February 1945 for Page and Fremont County farmers to discuss the issue. Langfitt stated that two county meetings were held, revealing that he expected a labor shortage for the coming season. Langfitt presented the farmers at the 8 February meeting with four choices to solve the labor shortage. Farmers could share labor among themselves, attempt to get laborers from surrounding towns, request foreign (Mexican) labor, or attempt to get additional POW help. Prisoner-of war-labor seemed the most practical because most farmers in attendance had already successfully employed them. Access to sufficient supplies, however, seemed unlikely. Camp Clarina had a sufficient supply of Japanese

¹¹ *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel*, 23 February, 7 March, and 8 May 1945.

prisoners, but farmers demonstrated no interest in utilizing them. Consequently, Langfitt informed the farmers in attendance that if they were going to have additional POW labor this season they needed to take immediate action. Establishing a branch camp to supply the needed labor was an option, which required that a request be filed with the Seventh Service Command. In this request Langfitt had to tally the number of farmers requesting the labor, and 25 percent of the labor cost needed to be paid when making the formal application. Discussions regarding the employment of Japanese POWs arose again, assuming the camp would release them for employment, but farmers generally responded negatively. Subsequently farmers established a committee of five to assess the number of laborers needed, and on 19 February 1945 Langfitt requested aid from the Seventh Service Command.¹²

The Seventh Service Command announced the possible establishment of a side camp in Page County if certain requirements were met. Prisoner-of-war labor would be made available for farmers who requested at least fifty workers, as long as they intended to employ them for up to ninety days. Because farmers showed a sufficient amount of interest in POW

¹² *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 8 and 19 February 1945.

labor the Seventh Service Command established branch camps at Shenandoah in western Page County, and at Tabor, in northern Fremont County. These camps initially fell under the command of Camp Algona and housed German POWs, but within four months were placed under the direct command of Camp Clarinda. Lieutenant Colonel Ball asserted that no Japanese POWs would be housed in Shenandoah or Tabor because the thought of Japanese prisoners living in their communities had the local citizens concerned.¹³ The number of German prisoners at the branch camps in Tabor and Shenandoah would not satisfy the labor needs of Fremont and Page County farmers. Therefore, it would be necessary to employ Japanese prisoners to ensure the success of southwest Iowa's 1945 farming season.

The hesitation to employ Japanese POWs outside their camps, mainly attributable to misconceptions and stereotypes, prevented Japanese labor from being utilized to its fullest. To overcome this hesitance and employ Japanese POW labor to its fullest, General Wilhelm D. Styery, Commander of the United States Army in the Western Pacific, declared, "We must overcome the psychology that you cannot do this or that. I want to see these prisoners work like piss ants! If they do

¹³ Ibid., 8, 12, 19 and 27 February, 15 March, and 12 July 1945; *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel*, 28 February, 5 March, and 23 July 1945.

not work, put them on bread and water!"¹⁴ Lieutenant Colonel Ball took this announcement seriously, and the Japanese at Camp Clarinda were soon contracted for outside work, labor that proved extremely valuable.

Japanese POWs toiled in nurseries and on farms, and these prisoners preferred to work together in groups and their output lagged if separated. Subsequently, the Japanese were sent out in work details always accompanied by an American guard and a "war-dog." In the spring of 1944 the War Department and the War Manpower Commission established a system of incentive pay due to concerns regarding Japanese labor. Some of these concerns included POW labor being less efficient than free labor in certain situations, racist stereotypes characterizing the Japanese as poor workers, and because employers did not like to pay on a man-day or man-hour basis. The Japanese were compensated according to the number of "units completed," such as bushels of corn shucked, up to a maximum of \$1.20 per day. Because the POWs would be paid according to the amount of work done, and not simply for the hours worked, this system rewarded hard workers and punished slow workers. On some occasions camp commanders implemented a

¹⁴ Quote in George Lewis and John Mewha, *History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army, 1776-1945*, (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army, 1955), 253-54.

task system, where each POW or detail had a specific amount of work to complete within a certain period of time. In these instances camp officials chose the amount of work to be completed in such a way that, if accomplished, each POW received the eighty cents per day guaranteed by the Geneva Convention. Because negative stereotypes concerning the Japanese prisoner's competence led camp officials to believe that they would be of little value picking corn, a group contracted by a local farmer, Elmer Hodson of Tarkio Township, set out to work on the task system with output expected to be less than that of German labor.¹⁵

On most occasions, German prisoners acted as foremen on Japanese work patrols, and on 29 March 1945, a Japanese leader with little or no experience picking corn took charge. The Japanese laborers worked at a rapid pace that the American guards assumed would quickly wear out the prisoners. After the eight-hour day had ended, the POWs were still going strong. A dozen Japanese POWs shucked 600-700 bushels the first day, averaging fifty-two to fifty-three bushels per man. According to Lieutenant Colonel Ball, "The first time we used the task rate we took a dozen of these monkeys over to a farmer to help him shuck corn. We had it figured out they

¹⁵ Ibid., 120-21; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 29 March, 9 April, and 7 May 1945.

could get no more than fifty or sixty cents of corn husked in their eight hours. But, can you imagine it, the men averaged between fifty-two and fifty-three bushels of corn that day. They finished up the day with more than a dollar apiece. We had to make some changes after that."¹⁶

Following the work at the Hodson farm, forty Japanese prisoners were brought to a farm in Ringgold County to pick corn. On this occasion, the Japanese received ten cents per bushel, decreasing the amount they could earn in a days work. During the summer detasseling season, the Berry Seed Company employed 1,091 man-days of Japanese labor. Discovering that many Japanese soldiers had been former rice farmers, Lieutenant Colonel Ball remarked, "They're good at anything to do with agriculture. They're built so close to the ground they can get down easier."¹⁷ Having developed a reputation as experts in horticulture, the Japanese were quickly contracted to help ease a labor shortage in the busy nurseries of Shenandoah.

Swamped with orders, nearby nurseries contracted Japanese POW labor. Early in March 1945 one unit of twenty-five

¹⁶ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 29 March 1945. Quotation in *Des Moines Register*, 8 April 1945.

¹⁷ *Annual Narrative Reports, Page County Extension Office, 1945, 9; Quote in Des Moines Register, 23 September 1945; Lewis and Mewha, Prisoner of War Utilization, 148-49.*

Japanese prisoners worked in the Shenandoah nurseries, assigned to apple tree slip planting. Tying burlap around their knees, they quickly went to work. The nursery operators reported that the Japanese prisoners did more and better work than the former German prisoners. Nursery operators told Lieutenant Colonel Ball that they were "well pleased" at the "good job" performed by the Japanese. From May to August 1945 the Shenandoah nurseries employed 9,609 man-days of Japanese labor while employing 6,750 man-days of German labor.¹⁸

Successful employment of Japanese prisoners in this area allowed nursery operators to meet consumer demand and helped to encourage their employment in other work outside the camp.

The arrival of Japanese prisoners in Clarinda threatened the success of the 1945-farming season. Racism and stereotypes fostered local hesitation to employ Japanese laborers. Reluctance eventually eroded by March 1945 due in part to the War Department's pressure to employ as many POWs as possible. In addition, those employers who hired Japanese POWs were pleased with their performance.

In Page County, farmers banded together to employ POW labor. Farmers were kept informed about the labor situation

¹⁸ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 9 April 1945; *Des Moines Register*, 8 April 1945; *Annual Narrative Reports, Page County Extension Office*, 1945, 8.

through newspaper publicity and letters from the county labor office. German and Japanese prisoners of war were employed in Page County for 24,623 man-days through the labor office. Figuring an average of eight hours per day at fifty cents per hour, the total amount paid by employers for labor from May to August 1945 was \$98,492. This figure represented only POW labor. Although expensive, the labor had to be performed.¹⁹

Fremont County benefited from German and Japanese POW labor as well and employed a considerable number of prisoners. During the 1945 season, the Page County Farm Labor office placed 609 workers with 184 farmers, while Fremont County placed 7,407 workers with 320 farmers, for a total cost of \$70,183.86. Ninety percent of those employed in Fremont County labored as short-term help in harvesting truck crops. Between 22 March and 30 November 1945, 121,667 man-hours of POW labor were used. Prisoner-of-war labor in Fremont County harvested peas, put up hay, cut weeds out of corn, hauled manure, fed cattle, built fence and cut 199,767 pounds of asparagus. Harley Walker commented that the "amount of POW help would be equivalent to every farmer in Fremont County using one POW for a period of about ten days." Branch camps had provided more accessibility to POW labor, increasing the

¹⁹ Langfitt, *Annual Narrative Reports, Page County Extension Office*, 1945, 8-9.

number of farmers able to use it. The *Herald Journal* reported that in Page and Fremont Counties "prisoner labor was a lifesaver for farmers this past season. Many farms would not have been run without their help."²⁰

²⁰*Annual Narrative Reports, Fremont County Extension Office, 1945, 2-13. Prisoners could be placed on more than one occasion, which accounts for the large number of placements in Fremont County; Clarinda Herald Journal, 3 September 1945.*

CHAPTER 5

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

"A number of Algona folks didn't like the idea of a camp here, but now that it is here we must do our best to cooperate."

In order to provide a secure environment for their prisoners and successfully employ them as agricultural laborers, officials at Camp Algona and Camp Clarinda deliberately and systematically engineered a relationship between the camps and the local communities that emphasized cooperation. The people of Iowa cooperated with the camps and their occupants out of concern for American men overseas and for the vital role that the prisoners would play in supplying essential labor. Furthermore, garrisons of American soldiers brought substantial military payrolls that were spent in town thus stimulating the local economy. This relationship, however, would be difficult to obtain for the POW camps in small Iowa communities because the POWs often encountered an array of stereotypes and preconceived notions. Throughout the time Axis prisoners were interned in Iowa, frequent contact and experience with both the American contingents and POWs ensured a cooperative relationship in addition to a successful labor program.

Local newspapers expressed the hesitation of Iowans to accept the camps. An editorial in the *Algona Upper Des Moines* remarked that a number of people in the community considered the camp to be a great detriment to the life of the city. According to the editor, "In places like Douglas, Wyoming, all the Army and working men increased drunkenness and immorality and received no added business. We do not understand just who it was that suggested Algona to the government as a good place for a prison camp but we have heard very little favorable comment."¹ In the face of mounting opposition in Algona, the secretary of the Algona Chamber of Commerce, C. A. Phillips, contacted the Scottsbluff, Nebraska, Chamber of Commerce inquiring about the effect of the POW camp there on the community. Phillips reported that the Scottsbluff community had experienced no difficulties with the POWs, they were being employed effectively in agricultural work, and that camp had proven to be an asset to the community. Phillips then scheduled an opportunity for the public to visit the camp on 16 December 1943. Below zero temperatures discouraged all but 300 visitors and the visitation proved to be less successful than anticipated. Visits from three hundred Algonans to the

¹ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 5 August 1943.

camp was a far cry from the 4,000 that came out to inspect Algona's sister camp in Clarinda the following January.²

The Algona Chamber of Commerce made another attempt to garner support in March 1944, inviting 200 members of the Algona, Fort Dodge, and Emmetsburg Chambers of Commerce to a dinner and dance. These visitors were entertained by a program in the post theatre in addition to getting a tour of the camp. Italian prisoners prepared a typical military menu, and subsequently performed a vocal and musical program for the guests. Community displeasure arose quickly, although the disapproval was not with the camp itself. A letter to the editor from Algonan Edward Capesius complained that the community had been promised access to the camp but that it had not been allowed. Capesius commented that the citizens of Algona were paying for a camp that they could not see. According to Capesius, ill-feelings had been created by the camp, intensified by the recent article in the *Algona Upper Des Moines* regarding the Chamber of Commerce dinner and dance at the camp. According to Capesius, "If this isn't going to be a POW camp maybe we should change the name. Farmers feel if they toil sun up to sun down they should be given the same privilege [as the Chamber of Commerce]." Less than a week

² Ibid., 14 October, and 16 December 1943; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 10 January 1944.

passed before the *Upper Des Moines* announced another inspection open to the community that would take place on 26 March 1944.³

Clarindans received their first chance to see the finished camp when commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur E. Lobdell, invited the public to inspect the facilities on 9 January 1944. Lobdell had announced a few weeks earlier that the administration and operations staffs were now functioning at the camp. Lobdell's announcement could not have come at a more opportune time, as a considerable level of concern permeated the community. Clarinda, a small midwestern town, was understandably hesitant at the thought of thousands of men, some friend and some foe, entering their community. Some Clarindans feared for their daughters, because "fast-talking" soldiers from both coasts would be arriving soon.⁴ The public greeted the decision to open the camp with hesitant anticipation, and the editor of the *Herald Journal* commented "for weeks we have been 'dying to know' what it's all about."⁵ During construction the

³ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 14 March 1944.

⁴ Corinne and Wilbur Goecker, interview with the author, Clarinda, Iowa, 21 March 2000.

⁵ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 20 December 1943, 6, and 10 January 1944.

community was not permitted to view the camp closely, except for those civilians employed for labor. On the afternoon of 9 January 1944, military escorts accompanied more than 850 cars for the one-half hour drive around the camp, which included tours on foot led by camp soldiers. When the visit ended 4,000 civilians had visited the camp. While both Iowa camps made conscious efforts to appease public scrutiny, the *Upper Des Moines* remarked, "A number of Algona folks didn't like the idea of a camp here, but now that it is here we must do our best to cooperate."⁶ This statement expressed the future development of community-camp relations in Iowa, since the communities learned, albeit slowly, to cooperate and accept the camps. In order to develop a relationship based on cooperation between the camps and the local communities, a skillful public relations campaign would be necessary.

Although Camp Clarinda's and Camp Algona's creation had economic motivations, the economic success of the camps depended largely on the reaction of the local community. Aided by Lieutenant Colonel Lobdell's public relations skills, utilized first in Clarinda then Algona, community acceptance

⁶Ibid., 10 January 1944; *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 28 March 1944.

of the camps and their inhabitants began early in their existence and continued throughout their operating years.

Camp administrations sought to employ local citizens for various tasks within the camp itself. The camp's post exchanges needed managers, barbers, bookkeepers, clerical and sales people as well as individuals with restaurant experience. Additionally, the camp required stenographers, typists and clerks to work in the headquarters and carpenters, firemen, plumbers, engineers, laborers, nurses, truck drivers, blacksmiths and equipment operators to perform various other necessary tasks. These individuals had to pass civil service exams prior to employment.⁷

Local citizens engaged in various activities in order to educate the community about the camp. A myriad of local groups and organizations paid visits to the camp during their existence, including police officers and highway patrolmen, rural eighth-graders on citizenship day, and the district convention of the Seventh Service District of Legionnaires. The communities also engaged in bond drives to raise money for the war effort, and camp garrisons gave army show tours to the neighboring communities. Mrs. A. T. Lobdell, Lieutenant Colonel Lobdell's wife, headed a local volunteer service

⁷ Ibid., 20 December 1943.

committee of women in the Clarinda vicinity. This committee attempted to alleviate stress-related problems of the families of men who were serving overseas. The *Herald Journal* stated that "no problem [is] too large and no problem is too small" for this committee.⁸

Community members also had the opportunity to interact with the camp through athletic events. For example Camp Clarinda had three ball diamonds, two softball and one baseball, two volleyball and two horseshoe courts, two clay tennis and two basketball courts as well as a football field. Softball tournaments held at the camp were open to the community, and civilian teams often took the field against teams of American guards. Sporting events became such an integral facet of the camp-community relationship that the *Herald Journal* began publishing a regular column titled "POW Sports Shorts," where descriptions of the athletic happenings at the camp could be found. Civilian softball teams did not fare well, however, when they faced the camp softball team. The Clarinda "PW" team, comprised of American soldiers, won two consecutive state softball titles and also won the Seventh

⁸ Ibid., 20 March, 24 April, 29 May, 19 June 1944, and 15 January 1945.

Service Command Tournament in 1944.⁹ The success of the camp's athletic program allowed local citizens to view the American garrison not only as soldiers, but also as regular people.

Local acceptance of POW camps in their communities was not a foregone conclusion. The citizens of Hannibal, Missouri, upon the arrival of 200 German POWs from Camp Clarinda who were sent to establish a branch camp, protested the encampment of the prisoners at the local baseball park. Hannibal community leaders held numerous meetings regarding the presence of the camp in their town, causing the POW's stay to be shorter than expected.¹⁰ Some negative relationships developed between the American garrison and local citizens that challenged community acceptance. In an attempt by camp officials to clean up moral conditions involving Camp Clarinda and the local community, especially suspected adulterous affairs, two married women were sentenced by a local judge to six months detention at Rockwell City, Iowa, for lewdness and indecent exposure. Apparently the women met with German POWs from a branch camp in Shenandoah on Saturday nights, when

⁹ Ibid., 22 May, 5 June, 7 September 1944, and 30 August 1945.

¹⁰ 16-18 September 1944, newspaper not listed, World War II clipping file State Historical Library, Des Moines, Iowa.

guards were lax in their supervision. Additionally, a camp clerk, Nicholas Berry, of Shambaugh, Iowa, stole 1,000 cigarette boxes, and a United States Army sergeant was court-martialed for an alcohol-induced fight at Johnson Brothers Recreation Hall in Clarinda.¹¹ Negative encounters such as these involving the garrison and the civilian population were infrequent. Although negative interactions challenged community acceptance they did not inhibit the development of a cooperative relationship in which the camps and local citizens worked together for mutual benefit.

Iowans slowly accepted the presence of an enemy prison camp in their communities. This acceptance was due in part to the fact that thousands of Iowans, more than 2,000 Page County men alone, served overseas during the war.¹² By cooperating with the camps the people of Iowa could actively aid in the waging of the war that took their young men so far from home. The garrisons at Camp Clarinda and Camp Algona became temporary Iowans themselves, and the local communities wanted them to feel welcome. The Axis prisoners received similar treatment.

¹¹ *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel*, 12 October 1944 and 4 January 1945; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 3 August 1944, and 12 July and 20 August 1945.

¹² *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 10 May 1945.

Despite scattered opposition, the German internees found acceptance among the community. Lieutenant Arthur M. Simpson, officer in charge of Algona's branch camp in Waverly, reaffirmed that the German prisoners were treated according to the Geneva Convention. The *Algona Upper Des Moines* consistently reminded its readers that as of July 1944 five Algona boys and five Kossuth County boys were being held prisoner in German POW camps. Fair treatment of American soldiers in German camps could be aided by fair treatment to German prisoners in camps like Algona's. Moreover, German soldiers, hearing of the treatment their comrades received in American camps as opposed to Soviet camps, were more likely to surrender to American troops. Captain Clyde Herring, son of a former senator and a former POW himself reported that German speaking American soldiers overheard German civilians talking about the fair treatment their relatives received in the United States. This in turn led to mass surrenders, and to fair treatment of American POWs. A June 1944 editorial in the *Algona Upper Des Moines* noted a new arrival of Germans, "Mostly very young, weary and disillusioned. Many had their dogs with them." According to the editorial, it pleased many Algonans to see that "these victims of a Hitlerized youth were allowed to keep their pets . . . [and] we hope that our

prisoners over there are also allowed a few small, decent favors."¹³ News such as this had a tremendous influence on Iowans and acted as a constant reminder of their boys overseas.

By 8 May 1945, the citizens of Page County could say that sixty-nine of their boys were captives in European prison camps and five in camps in the Pacific. Editorials in local newspapers reminded their readers "Those of us having boys in German prison camps will be interested in seeing that fair treatment is given to German or other prisoners here." The citizens of Clarinda received evidence of fair treatment of American POWs on 6 July 1944, when news arrived from a Dr. Colton, a YMCA worker who brought first-hand information from camps in Europe. Dr. Colton reported that the Germans were upholding the terms of the Geneva Convention in the same manner that the Americans were, although American prisoners did not eat as well because the Germans could not feed their own soldiers adequately.¹⁴ Reports such as this influenced a significant portion of the community about how they perceived

¹³ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 27 June and 18 July 1944; Terry Paul Wilson, "The Afrika Korps in Oklahoma: Fort Reno's POW Compound," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 52 (Fall 1974): 367; *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel*, 26 June 1945.

¹⁴ *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel*, 8 May 1945; Quote in *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 8 November 1943, and 7 July 1944.

the camps and their German inhabitants. Technical Sergeant Patrick Smith stated at a local library forum that if the German POW did not have his uniform on "he would be no different than you." The secretary of the Clarinda Chamber of Commerce, Hans Morgan, said that the camp had been "favorably received by the citizens of Clarinda and the surrounding area."¹⁵ The local communities often referred to the German prisoners as "our POWs," but not everyone in Iowa accepted the camps. Accepting enemy prisoners of war was at times a difficult task.

Those people who could not accept the presence of German soldiers in their community could not overcome the glaring fact that these men were the enemy. Tensions rose between some citizens of Algona and the camp's inhabitants when the German prisoners were allowed to swim in Algona's \$30,000 pool. After paying like civilians, eighty POWs were permitted to swim in the pool. In the ensuing days numerous citizens of Algona filed objections to the city council, which then denied further use of the pool to POWs. Objections included statements that the Germans "were unclean, physically unfit, and [Algonans] shouldn't be contaminated by the Nazis." Lieutenant Ted Chrischilles, an Algona native serving in

¹⁵ First quote in *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 17 January 1944; Second quote in *Des Moines Register*, 23 April 1944.

France, wrote an article for *Algona Upper Des Moines* in which he criticized recent reports of German prisoners swimming in Algona's pool. According to Lieutenant Chrichilles, "To me it doesn't make sense-i.e. a Nazi kills 20 of our boys and then gives up and goes to the United States to be treated like some American fighting man with a few privileges taken away." Chrichilles also believed "they [Germans] should be treated like prisoners and remember they could have killed an Algona boy."¹⁶

As of 31 July 1944, ten Clarinda men had been reported killed in action. This news encouraged angry outbursts, such as an editorial in the *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel* by W. D. Archie. Archie, referring to both the Germans and Japanese, stated "These arrogant peoples inspire me to deep hatred. I would have little compunction in shooting them. They stand for everything I hate." Comments like this certainly did not help prisoner-community relations.¹⁷

The most vehement opposition to the German POWs after the funeral held for the only German prisoner to die in a Clarinda branch camp on 1 October 1944. In protest of the funeral held for the German POW, an article in the public forum section of

¹⁶*Algona Upper Des Moines*, 18 July and 15 August 1944.

¹⁷ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 31 July 1944, and 20 August 1945; Quote in *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel*, 27 February 1945.

the *Des Moines Register* submitted by Mrs. J. O. McMath of Diagonal, Iowa, stated that "The picture in the October *Register*, showing the burial rites of a Nazi prisoner of war, whose casket was draped with the Nazi flag, with huge bouquets of flowers, with our own people gathered around in mourning, demonstrates very clearly why the Nazi thought the Americans very soft and easy victims of their plans." Mrs. McMath, referring to the possible coddling of German prisoners, added, "The Americans are soft to allow such a burial. Why display the Nazi flag and allow the Hitlerite uniform to be worn? Why pamper and coddle these depraved murderers with the best of everything? Why should boys die and the country become burdened with debt to fight this war if we are going to allow the Nazi flag to be displayed and the Nazi rites to be practiced over here? Have all our dead, our tortured, been sacrificed in vain. . . . Wait and see what our returned soldiers think of such treachery." *Des Moines Register* editors responded by stating that decent treatment of the POWs may give them a more profound respect for democracy and perhaps make them susceptible to a change of heart regarding what is right and wrong. Additionally, the editors assumed

that the treatment fell within the requirements of the Geneva Convention that the United States promised to uphold.¹⁸

Reports of a possible problem with malaria at Camp Clarinda also dampened public relations. Seventy-one cases of malaria among German POWs and two among American soldiers brought some concern to the community, although camp officials did not view it as a serious threat. With no deaths attributed to the outbreak, camp authorities warned the public not to fish near the camp, and encouraged farmers to drain any mosquito infested standing or stagnant pools of water that may have contributed to the outbreak.¹⁹ Despite minor community resistance, those Iowans directly affected by the camps accepted them.

Inhabitants of communities where branch camps were located took an interest in the camps. In September 1944 rumors circulated throughout Waverly, where more than one hundred Germans worked for the Marshall Canning Company. These rumors accused camp officials of feeding the German POWs nothing more than bread and water. As a result of the accusations camp officials invited the editor of the *Waverly*

¹⁸ *Des Moines Register*, 26 October 1944.

¹⁹ *Annual Narrative Reports, Page County Extension Office*, 1943, 3; *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 29 May 1944; *Des Moines Register*, 28 May 1944.

Independent Republican to take a tour of the camp to dispel the rumors. Not only were the prisoners eating bread and water, but they were also eating ham and bacon, roast beef, cheese, potatoes, cold vegetables, butter, sugar bread, coffee, chocolate milk, and cake on birthdays. The editor's report described the branch camp's thirteen tents, surrounded by six-foot barbed wire fences. German prisoners of war wrote letters, laughed and sang, and cleared brush around the perimeter for canteen coupons. Many of the men wore decorations and insignia's of rank, with Iron Crosses on some, and ranks from corporal to master sergeant on others. No evidence of mistreatment was apparent, and the report ended with the editor commenting, "No one stared at him unduly like the members of this community stare at them [prisoners], wasting gas and tires by driving past the plant."²⁰

As the initial shock passed, Iowans began the process of developing a cooperative relationship with the camps. Acceptance would be due, in part, to the fact that thousands of Iowan men would be serving their country overseas. Thus, the people of Iowa were able to actively aid in the waging of the war that took their young men far from home. In addition, the camp would bring economic prosperity and a possible supply

²⁰ *Waverly Independent Republican*, 30 August and 6 September 1944.

of additional farm laborers. As the Second World War came to an end, however, the process of prisoner repatriation began.

CHAPTER 6

REPATRIATION AND CAMP CLOSINGS

"When the Germans left they drove them around the square, we all waved and some of us cried."

The war in Europe ended in May 1945, followed by victory in the Pacific in August. The end of the war necessitated the process of prisoner repatriation. In August 1945 with wet conditions preventing Camp Clarinda's Japanese prisoners from working in the fields, translators listened to a radio in each compound to keep the POWs informed about the fall of their homeland. The prisoners learned of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and on 16 August 1945 received news of the Japanese capitulation. Lieutenant Colonel Ball described some of the Japanese as having poker faces with the announcement of the news, some reacted with surprise, and others felt that it was propaganda, because they had expected nothing less than complete victory. Although several POWs reacted with depression in the following days, there was no demonstrating, agitating, or striking following Japan's defeat.¹ After the Japanese capitulation, some of the POWs at Camp Clarinda changed their minds about returning home.

¹ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 13 and 16 August 1945; *Des Moines Register*, 23 September 1945.

Initially Japanese prisoners preferred death to surrender and felt that returning home would be impossible, since they had disgraced their families. With the entire country's surrender the prisoners wanted to return home as quickly as possible to help in the rebuilding process.²

In August 1945 local newspapers announced that the Japanese prisoners were being shipped to the San Joachin Valley in California to help raise vegetables. From there, the Japanese lived in holding camps in California while awaiting their shipment home. By October 1945 Camp Clarinda lost its remaining POW population, and it finally closed on 1 December 1945.³ Lieutenant Colonel Ball left to command a camp near Atlanta, Nebraska, and the War Department declared Camp Clarinda surplus, auctioning it off piece by piece. On 9 August 1945 the last of the local soldiers returned home from POW camps in Europe.⁴

According to Lieutenant Colonel Lobdell, when victory in Europe was announced at Camp Algona seven German POWs went insane. Straight jackets were placed on all seven, and they

² *Des Moines Register*, 23 September 1945.

³ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 16 August and 4 October 1945; *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel*, 9 May 1945.

⁴ *Clarinda Herald Journal*, 9 August and 4, 18, and 22 October 1945.

were brought in from the branch camps to Algona's base hospital, where three recovered and four were immediately shipped back to Germany. Soon thereafter 378 German prisoners arrived in Algona, with an estimated 90 percent wounded. Additionally, thirty scurvy-ridden POWs comprised this group along with seventy-five fourteen-year olds who weighed an average of sixty pounds each. Lobdell observed, "It was very apparent that Germany had scraped the bottom of the barrel of their manpower," as an additional sixty Germans were more than fifty years old and forty-two had double hernias.⁵

Of the 10,000 prisoners that passed through Algona and its branch camps, Lieutenant Colonel Lobdell was confident that they left Algona in better physical condition than when they arrived. Mentally, only the hard-core Nazi's (about 10 percent of the population) remained unchanged. Lobdell believed that many of the Germans returned to Germany with the ability to actively participate in the creation of a German Democratic government.

Although the German prisoners may have been ready to create a German democracy, repatriation did not proceed quickly for POWs at Camp Algona. During the summer of 1945

⁵ Arthur Lobdell, "Report from A.T. Lobdell to Governor Dwight Griswold 9 January 1947," Algona POW camp vertical file, Algona Public Library.

the prisoners learned that they would be used as farm laborers until the Japanese were defeated. With Germany politically unstable and the allies vying to solidify control of their respective zones, camp commanders used their discretion to decide when their POWs should be sent to the nearest Port of Embarkation. German prisoners resented being kept in captivity and their frustration grew when the War Department announced in November 1945 that many of them would be sent to France and placed in labor battalions to help rebuild that country. Critics of this policy claimed that the German prisoners were being sold into slave labor and the effects may have been to diminish the POWs appreciation for American democracy.⁶

Late in 1945 Algona's branch camps began to close one by one, the last being Onawa in November. Algona's German prisoners began leaving in early October, when nearly 1,000 prisoners traveled to Greeley, Colorado, to fill labor needs in the beet fields. In November an additional 2,000 German POWs headed for the East Coast, where they would then be sent to France. Finally on 22 January 1946, 600 more POWs left for Fort Cook, Nebraska, where they would be prepared for shipment to Europe. The remaining 100 prisoners remained at the camp

⁶ Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), 242-43.

until its official closing in February 1946, nine months after the war in Europe ended. Camp Algona was then declared surplus and the majority was sold off piece by piece.⁷

A final statement prepared by the German POWs in Algona reflecting their views on the end of the war read as follows:

We Germans may be glad for two reasons, first the frightful massacre of the last decade has come to an end and the world is moving again. . . . Second, the United States will get a fabulous prosperity in the next few years and therefore, will be able to economically support the destroyed Europe. Germany has lost the war, irrevocably and definitely having understood this hard fact and having seen the chance of a total world victory by the Nazi system collapse we may call ourselves lucky finding the powers of the universe in the hands of the democracies, for only these are the guarantees that the immense energies will not be applied for world destroying conquests. Our lives depend upon that. All Germans feeling freedom of fear the most precious of the four freedoms will agree with our statement. Germany has lost the war, but it had to lose it to clear the way to closed resources of the German spirit and German inwardness. If this will give the German people a respect of others' rights we shall be able to establish a German kind of democracy, but the way there is stony and long."⁸

By 1945, the Iowans had realized that the economic value of the POW was so great that any real objection was nullified. In Algona alone the camp spent an estimated \$4000 per month on supplies for its mess halls. Additionally, employment of POW labor in both nursery and farm work was of important economic

⁷ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 4 October, 22 November 1945, and 22 January 1946.

⁸ Quoted in Lobdell, "Report to Governor Dwight Griswold."

value. Edward J. Pluth, in his analysis of the significance of the POW labor program in Minnesota, asserted, "It was not the intent of the program that employers profit by using prisoners rather than other labor. But in the absence of other workers, the prisoners helped prevent economically damaging timber and crop losses." The evidence indicates that this was certainly true in Iowa. Prisoner-of-war labor may not have always been economically profitable, nor was it always as efficient as civilian labor. Iowa farmers were required to provide transportation in a time when gasoline was rationed and the POWs proved less efficient than civilian labor on tasks that required training such as detasseling corn. Nevertheless, POW labor prevented crop loss and helped farmers meet increased production demands made by the War Food Administration. Despite limited use in corn detasseling, the Page County farm labor office stated that POWs detasseling 5 acres produces 50,000 bushels of corn. Page County extension agent Merrill Langfitt, assessing the success of the POW labor program, commented that the prisoner of war "assistance and cooperation greatly assisted in solving the major labor problems in the county."⁹

⁹ First quotation in Edward J. Pluth, "Prisoner of War Employment in Minnesota During World War II," *Minnesota History* 44 (Winter 1975): 301-02; Second quotation in *Clarinda Herald Journal*,

In time Iowa communities accepted the camps and their own role in waging the war. Not everyone approved of the camp, or developed a personal relationship with its inhabitants. When news spread that a camp would come to Algona, many doubted that it would be an asset to the community. Most of the community's inhabitants, however, realized the camp's existence was necessary for the war effort. Citizens of Algona were pleased to see that these "victims" of a "Hitlerized youth" were going to indirectly aid in the American war effort. Jean Leaneagh Fausnaugh of Algona expressed a typical and crucial observation when she explained, "I remember watching the long train arrive, and looking hard at the windows, looking for a monster. I looked right in the eyes of one of them-and to my surprise the POW looked like everyone else-one of us."¹⁰

Southwest Iowans knew that the camps' existence was necessary for the war effort. Dorothy Johnson, remembering the German prisoners who worked on her farm, said, "We really got acquainted with them. If my son was over there, I hoped

6 July 1944; Third quotation in *Annual Narrative Reports, Page County Extension Office, 1944, 8*; *Des Moines Register*, 10 November 1945.

¹⁰ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 14 October 1943 and 6 and 27 June 1944; "A Collection of Memories of the Algona Prisoner of War Camp, 1943-1946," Vertical File, Algona Public Library.

someone would treat him as well. When the Germans left they drove them around the square, we all waved and some of us cried."¹¹ Local farmers sent care packages to their German laborers well after they had been repatriated, and one farmer sent a loan of \$500 to a former German POW who had worked on his farm, no questions asked. The farmer eventually received payment. Some local farmers even received visits by their old laborers years later, and naturally, the Germans stayed in their homes.¹²

In spite of feeling the brunt of racism, the Japanese at Camp Clarinda were treated according to the Geneva Convention and aided in the attainment of war production goals for the surrounding community. The greatest effect captivity had on the Japanese POW, according to Arnold Krammer, was their exposure to democracy, which, no doubt, affected some of them for the rest of their lives.¹³ While the Japanese gained familiarity with democracy (whether they wanted it or not) the people of southwest Iowa gained exposure to a culture that few

¹¹ Dorothy Johnson, interview with the author, Clarinda, Iowa, 21 March 2000.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Arnold Krammer, "Japanese Prisoners of War in America," *Pacific Historical Review* 52 (February 1983): 89-90.

of them knew much about, as well as the opportunity to benefit from Japanese labor.

Albeit not war related, southwest Iowans are again faced with the presence of the Japanese in their community.

Japanese prisoners helped the southwest Iowa farm economy in 1945, and today two Japanese-owned corporations employ nearly 500 Clarindans, more than any other businesses in the community.¹⁴ Japanese citizens are again calling Clarinda home, and although still not welcomed by all, their presence is still accepted as necessary to the success of the economy and the town. The people of Algona still feel the camp's presence as well. In November 1945 the Christmas season brought the unveiling of a nativity scene at the prisoner-of-war camp. The nativity scene remains on display at the Kossuth County fairgrounds.¹⁵

The topic of POWs in Iowa is still emotionally charged, something that has not changed since 1945. In September 2002, a nonprofit group located in Mason City, Iowa, conducted a tour of the Midwest in which a group of German ex-prisoners and their families were reunited with some of their former captors. A conference held in early October, in Muscatine,

¹⁴ *Des Moines Register*, 4 December 1991.

¹⁵ *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 29 November 1945.

Iowa, led some Iowans to criticize the tour. According to Michael Liuck-Thrams, the tour's organizer, "We're being accused of basically collaborating with the enemy. And that's for a war that's been over for six decades." Kurt Butzlaff, one of the former German POWs in Iowa for the tour, expressed sentiment that was more commonly heard in 1945 than in 2002. Butzlaff remarked "We're not enemies, man to man." When asked about his time as a POW in Iowa, Butzlaff recalled harvesting oats and said, "That was good work. At home, my father was a farmer."¹⁶

From the initial construction of the camps in 1943 to their final closings in 1946, camp officials carried out a conscious and determined effort to engineer a relationship based on cooperation between the camps and the local communities. Establishing POW camps in Iowa proved beneficial both for the government and for Iowans. Iowa was a safe and secure environment for POW internment and the camps became assets to the local communities. Demonstrating their willingness to employ enemy workers, Iowans helped the camps operate successful labor programs. Without available POW labor, crops would have rotted in the fields and farmers would not have met wartime production goals, preventing them from

¹⁶ *Des Moines Register*, 26 September 2002.

feeding American soldiers over seas. An unsuccessful labor program would have been financially devastating to local nurseries, canneries, and hemp plants. Instead, the camps brought substantial military payrolls that stimulated the local economies and provided essential workers. Confronted with the enemy, Iowans realized that these prisoners were indeed human and in demonstrating their acceptance not only fulfilled their sense of duty and helped win the war, they encouraged similar treatment of their loved ones in enemy POW camps. Acceptance for many community members did not mean an unquestioning fondness for the prisoners, but rather an understanding that acceptance meant remaining loyal and contributing to the war effort. Some of these enemies not only helped to solve the critical shortage of labor, but also in a relatively brief period often developed relationships that would last a lifetime.

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