

Notes for the POW Camp 202 Presentation at the July 2009 Poudre Learning Center Walking tour were taken from the following document written by Peggy Ford Waldo, City of Greeley Museums. For more information, contact the City of Greeley Museums, 714 8th Street, Greeley, CO 80631, 970.350.9220.

FAQs about Greeley's P. A. S. T. (People, Activities, Sites, Treasures)

Topic: POW Camp 202

Significance: During WWII, Camp #202 was a prisoner of war (POW) compound located eight miles west of Greeley on 320 acres on the north side of US Highway 34 (Business Route). Personnel under the auspices of the 9th Division of the Army with headquarters at Omaha, NE, operated it from December 1943 to January 1946.

In mid-March 1944, 4,000 Germans and Austrians were brought to Camp #202. Over 1,500 remained here and the rest were transferred to Camp Hale near Leadville, CO (also the training site of the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division, a.k.a. "the ski troops") or to other locations in Weld or neighboring counties. The majority of Camp #202 prisoners were captured during General Rommel's African Campaign. One prisoner was Rommel's personal mechanic.

Weld County's first POWs arrived in the fall of 1943. The *Greeley Tribune* in a September article reported that 200 German POWs and 55 guards from Camp Carson arrived by train at Greeley and were sent to Eaton and housed in the Great Western Sugar Company's warehouse and dorms. In Ault, 150 prisoners helped with the potato harvest and were housed in the high school gymnasium.

Camp #202 was not the first POW facility in Greeley. On Oct. 4, 1943, 143 Italian prisoners arrived and were housed in the vacant 1906 Horace Mann School located at 11th Ave. and 12th St. The *Greeley Tribune* reported in its Nov. 13th edition that Weld County's POWs had left after the harvest. In the fall of 1943 there were 285 Italian prisoners at Greeley, 234 at Ft. Lupton and 112 at Gilcrest. There were also 200 German prisoners at Greeley and 150 at Ault.

English was spoken by approximately 25% of the German prisoners at Camp 202. Their abilities and professions were taken into consideration when they were placed in jobs, but most worked on farms or in forests, cutting timber. WWII created a shortage of agricultural laborers in Colorado and prisoners solved the farm labor problem. In Weld County they worked in the sugar beet, onion, potato, and cabbage fields. Farmers paid an hourly wage to the U.S. government for each POW laborer employed, and the prisoners were in turn paid 80 cents per day. Forty cents of this wage was withheld by the U.S. government as a part of a savings plan which provided cash for the POWs when they were deported to their native countries after the war.

At Camp 202, 14' high double hog wire fences with barb wire strung along the tops surrounded the camp. Attack dogs patrolled the 12' wide open area between the fences. A machine gun, siren, electric heater, and a searchlight were installed in the camp's three strategically-placed guard towers. Within the double fence there were three compounds designed for 1000 men. There were four companies with 250 prisoners each per compound. Each stove-heated barracks had cots for 50 men.

Prior to the construction of the camp in the fall of 1943, the site was Roy Abbott's wheat field. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers supervised the construction of Camp 202. The general contractors were Maxey and Leftwich of Lubbock, TX. Four-hundred men were employed in its construction. Completed on Dec. 10, 1943, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers transferred the camp to Lt. Col. Charles C. Griffin on Dec. 15th. Griffin was stationed at Camp Hale before coming to Greeley. The public was invited to tour the camp on Sunday afternoon, Dec. 13th. Approximately 8,000 people visited the camp, but for security reasons, cameras were banned. The cost of the facility was about \$1,500,000.

Camp 202 could accommodate 3,600 people, and as a small city, it had electricity, street lights, water and sewer service and its own sewage treatment plant. The fire station was built first and had two pumper units. Other buildings included an officer's club, bakery, laundry, motor pool, filling station, stables, kennels for 20 dogs, a quartermaster's unit and warehouses, a 300-seat theater, library, classrooms, guardhouse, 60 barracks for prisoners, 16 barracks for U.S. Army personnel (12 for soldiers and four for officers), a filling station, refrigerated storage area with loading docks, water tower, jail, post exchange, shop buildings, administrative offices, nurses quarters, and a 150-bed hospital. The hospital, with covered runways which connected it to the administration building, had oak floors, operating rooms, X-ray rooms, a dental clinic and laboratories.

The camp staff consisted of 560 soldiers and 40 officers and 150-200 administrative personnel. A guard was in charge of 50 men at a time. Greeleyites took government exams for over 100 40-hour per week civilian positions, with annual salaries of \$1,260 for stenographers and \$1,620 for typists.

Few prisoners attempted to escape. In one instance, a German had stolen an American uniform but his escape was foiled when he was stopped for not wearing a cap. A scrap of paper with the name of a local farmer written on it was confiscated from another prisoner. The farmer was apparently going to hide him. Most prisoners were well satisfied with their treatment and guards faced court martial if any POWs were abused.

When the camp closed, prisoners returned to Germany. The camp was quickly dismantled and the buildings sold. Some of the frame barracks were moved to Colorado Teachers College (now the University of Northern Colorado) and used for

married student housing until they were razed in 1974. Some were cut in half and moved to the NW corner of 9th St. and 23rd Ave. in Greeley, for use as rentals. More doors and larger windows have changed the appearance of these former barracks, but they are still used as apartments. A “comfort station” at Greeley’s Island Grove Park was created from one of the buildings, and the camp’s officers club was moved to Windsor and converted into an American Legion Post.

Today a large dairy farm is located at the site of Camp 202. Two stone sentinels, once the entrance gate for the camp are all that remain. They are on the north side of the highway and have interpretive plaques installed by the Centennial State Chapter of the USDAR.

From August of 1942 until the end of WWII, over 425,000 prisoners were interred in POW camps throughout the U.S. There were 48 POW camps in Colorado. POW base camps in Colorado were Camp (later “Fort”) Carson at Colorado Springs, Camp Hale near Leadville, and Camp 202 at Greeley. The other camps were mostly agricultural branch camps. Camp 202, centrally located in Colorado’s prime agricultural area, distributed prisoners to the branch camps it administered within a 100-mile radius. These included camps at Ault, Eaton, Johnstown, Kersey, Fort Lupton, Brush, Wiggins, Fort Collins and Longmont.

Resources: Additional information about Camp 202 may be found in the documentary and photo files in the Hazel E. Johnson Research Center and Archives, Greeley History Museum, City of Greeley Museums, 714 8th Street, Greeley, CO 80631. Hours are 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday through Friday, and 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. on Saturday. Call (970) 350-9220.

FAQs About Greeley's P.A.S.T. (People, Activities, Sites, Treasures)

Topic: Recollections of a German Prisoner of War at Greeley's Camp 202

Erich Geissler of Fichtelberg, Germany, sent the Greeley Museums his recollections of life as a Prisoner of War in Camp 202 at Greeley, Colorado. In the spring of 2004, Jennifer Eidswick, a student in Professor Peter Kastner's German 413 class at the University of Northern Colorado, translated Mr. Geissler's letter from German into English as a class project. Her translation of Mr. Geissler's October 13, 2003 letter follows:

Recollections of the POW-Camp Greeley/Colorado/USA

During the last World War from October of 1941 to the 29 of January 1947, I too had to serve as a civil service worker, a soldier, and a war prisoner. The greatest portion as a prisoner. I would like to compose what is still left over in my mind from the time of January 1944 to May of 1945 into writing.

On the 3rd of March 1943 (during the African War), while in the vicinity of El Bathan, I was seriously wounded. On the 5th of March, I arrived at the military hospital 650 Carthage that was set up in a section of a monastery. The 8th of May 1943 brought a premature end to the war for those of us who were injured. It was then that English troops took hold of Carthage, and thereby also the military hospital. This day was also simultaneously the end of the entire African field train.

After more months, we wounded were separated into smaller groups of about 25 - 40 men and sent westward into different military hospital camps. It was during this process that I came upon others in the vicinity of Tiber and ultimately on to the border of Tanzania and Algeria. There we were handed over to American soldiers and taken to a small military hospital tent near Oran (no house, no bushes, only naked hills and sand). At the end of the year, 1943, we were transported from Oran to the harbor, where we boarded a "Liberty Ship" and were kept in the lowest storage hold. This freighter was a single-walled ship, built in a short time, barely sea worthy and only meant to transport materials overseas. After about four weeks at sea, with only one hour daily of fresh air above deck, we finally landed in Norfolk, Virginia. This world travel continued with an approximately two-day train ride that ended in Greeley, Colorado.

A giant war cam awaited us in Greeley. Beyond the enclosed barracks—administration buildings, team rooms, garages, etc., for the Americans— the prisoner portion was separated into three compounds with four companies per compound. Every company decreed over five housing barracks: a kitchen, a barrack for materials, a laundry facility, a bathroom, a shower, etc. Fifty prisoners were placed in each of the housing barracks. The fifty beds were provided with white-coated mattresses, allotted a quilt and white sheets. Our barrack had a shield hanging on the wall with handmade wood letters that said, "Goetz von Berlichingen." This was the name given to our barrack thereafter. We

ourselves were at this point newly dressed and provided with adequate laundry. Every article of clothing that was to be worn on the outside was labeled with crackly white letters that said PW (Prisoner of War) on the back.

Every Company was designated as the charge and responsibility of a US officer. The director of the entire camp was a Colonel by the name of Griffin. Oddly enough, an extremely fair and humanly officer.

In case of illness there was a sickbay, run by a staff doctor and his nurses.

Hobbyists could access a workroom with many tools displayed, basically for cabinetmakers. I myself also supervised this room for many months.

For “our safety” and that of the Americans, a mesh-wire fence (about three meters high, and above that, about one meter of barbed-wire) was erected parallel in distance from a second similar fence. Between them (the fences) were guards with dogs posted in trestles. At approximately every 100 meters, there was a watchtower equipped with two spotlights, so that everything could be well supervised by day and night.

Almost all of the prisoners were constantly on labor assignment at the different farms in the surrounding areas. The main crops were sugar beets, potatoes, and onions. The earnings per month were about twenty-four (dollars)—in warehouse charges. This money could be spent in the camp (at the cantina).

A very small group, including myself as well (as a result of the war), did not want to work for the enemy. I, myself, had, as a result of my injury, total stiffness in my ankle. I used that to my advantage. The non-workers were given only three dollars. That didn't bother me, personally. I organized myself at the oven with an iron, freelancing and ironing clothing for the fellow prisoners (pants, ten cents; shirt, ten cents, jacket, thirty cents; etc.).

The food, until the end of the war, was unimaginably good and rich. Those in our company who were competent in the kitchen were managed by a young cook, who back home in Germany had done his apprenticeship in a first class hotel, and was allowed to practice his culinary arts for us. Lunch and dinner were always plausible, but adequate and very tasty. Occasionally, if accurately timed, the head chef would gladly fulfill special requests. One example was breakfast. Daily assortments included: coffee, hot cocoa, milk, white bread, marmalade, sugar, and cake. On Sundays we could have an additional large piece of cake. Who out of us could have afforded this at home? Overall, the kitchen staff was composed of German prisoners. I myself worked for a part of the time in the kitchen peeling potatoes.

Sports were also very popular. In the early part of the year 1944, a group of athletes persuaded the camp management to build a sports field. A short time later, American

pioneers came with motorized crawlers, excavators, and other miscellaneous vehicles. They leveled an adjacent area, built a new fence, and in a few weeks, we had a soccer field with a 400-meter track and a 100-meter track.

Every one of the twelve companies organized from among themselves a team of eleven. The jerseys were made from undershirts that the kitchen staff had dyed with the help of their products or leftovers from the sink (red beets, onions, green vegetables, etc). For the game action we used game plans, similar to back home. So it was that the games were carried out, the head of the compound and lastly the respective head of the camp calculated. For the three thousand prisoners, as well as interested Americans, this was always suspenseful entertainment.

At about the same time a Christian organization (the name of which I don't know anymore, but they were similar to the CVJM) donated numerous forms of musical instruments to us. In no time, 20 - 25 highly talented hobby musicians from the camp formed a brilliant orchestra, that for us, and also the Americans, arranged concerts for our entertainment. It should be noted, that the musicians were not allowed to take their instruments home.

Among the three thousand prisoners there were also many teachers. One of them founded, together with the camp management, a night school. They wanted to keep themselves and those interested prisoners mentally up to date. The subjects taught were math, German, and English.

The 8th of May, 1945, ended the war for everyone in the world—except Japan. What I found out later from my former fellow prisoners was that the German prisoners in Greeley were in good hands up until their discharge. At the end of May, I, myself, was placed with a group of about one hundred men in a camp in the vicinity of the U.S. Camp Carson—an army city. The city of Colorado Springs was not far away. Afterwards we came to a branch-camp. What awaited us there was something completely different. Hard work in the farming industry from early (e.g. in the morning) until into the night, with extremely less food. Though it was nearby, Greeley had nothing to do with this.

Briefly now, a picture of the trip back home. At the end of 1945, a large group of prisoners were shipped off together, myself included. The railroad took us through New Mexico and Arizona to Los Angeles, where we boarded on the 12000 BRT US-Troop transporter "General R. House." Upon this ship we were allowed to move freely. The almost three week long boat trip went through the Pacific, the Panama Canal, and the Atlantic towards Liverpool to a one-year hold-over in England. Finally, on the 29th of January, 1947, we arrived back at home.

In retrospect, the time in Greeley seems akin to a dream-like experience and I thank God frequently, that I was able to spend a portion of that dreadful war, that played itself

out in Europe and Africa, unintentionally away from home, in Colorado, 2000 meters above sea level and in the foothills of 4000 meter high mountains, in the wonderful countryside. The winters with their powdery snow, the summers with their beautiful, sunny days, blue skies, and their agreeable climates.

So it was for me, all in all, even as a prisoner, a part of my life that will always continue to be a good memory for me. Thank You, Greeley.

Note: The Municipal Archives at the City of Greeley Museums has documentary and photo files, plus numerous other reference materials about Camp 202, including Erich Geissler's original letter (in German!). Hours are 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday through Friday, and 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. on Saturday. Located at 714 8th Street, the Archives are located at the Greeley History Museum.

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