

MEETING FARM LABOR NEEDS

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After investigating all possible agricultural labor sources in the principal agricultural counties of New Mexico, and also considering the possibility of meeting the farm labor needs from various areas in the state, it has been determined that a shortage of labor would exist. The possibility of getting out-of-state labor was considered but it has been found that most states adjacent to New Mexico are also harvesting crops at the same time. All states are naturally interested in supplying their own needs first and after this is done, there is very little farm labor, if any, available for other states. There is expected to be some voluntary migration of agricultural labor between states, but the amount will be negligible compared to prior years. Foreign labor also entered into the picture but the demand in other states exceeds the supply. The question is partly answered in the employment of prisoners of war as agricultural workers. If present plans materialize, this type of labor will play a very important part in harvesting agricultural products in this state. Due to the impossibility of all farmers employing prisoner-of-war labor and owing to the fact that the number of workers is limited to the availability of suitable housing facilities, the farm labor problem will not be entirely solved.

It is anticipated that Italian prisoner-of-war labor will be used in Hidalgo, Dona Ana, Otero, and Bernalillo counties. Hidalgo county is fortunate in having the main camp located within the county and thus does not have to deal with the problem of establishing temporary camps. Dona Ana county is planning on the establishment of three temporary internment camps; two in Las Cruces, using the facilities of former CCC camps and another camp a few miles north of Hatch. The workers will be used in picking both the short and long staple cotton crops. Otero County is planning on the establishment of one temporary internment camp in the vicinity of High Rolls. The workers in this area are to be used in helping to harvest the fruit and vegetable crop. Bernalillo county plans to establish a camp in the vicinity of Albuquerque for the purpose of aiding in harvesting the bean crop in that county.

Plans are being developed to use prisoner-of-war labor in Chaves, Eddy, Quay, and Curry coun-

ties. The largest number of these workers will be used in Chaves county, primarily because the main camp is located within the county, eliminating the necessity of establishing a temporary camp. Eddy county plans on establishing two temporary camps. One in the northern section of the county, near Artesia, and the other near Carlsbad. The workers in this county will be used to harvest the cotton crop. Quay and Curry counties are also planning on the establishment of a temporary internment camp in each county. One will be in the vicinity of Tucumcari, and the other near Melrose. These workers will be used in aiding to harvest the broom-corn and grain sorghum crops.

One of the main obstacles to overcome in the establishment of temporary internment camps is meeting the War Department's regulations on the housing of prisoners of war. Certain provisions as to floor space, ventilation, sanitation facilities, and other details must be met and many times it is impossible to comply with these regulations, which tend to delay or limit the possibility of using this type of labor. Furthermore, it should be clearly understood that prisoner-of-war labor is considered emergency labor and as such, cannot be used until all local sources of free labor have been exhausted. The War Manpower Commission has approved the need and prevailing wages for the use of prisoner-of-war labor in all of the areas mentioned, but in many of these areas the problem of meeting the War Department's regulations on housing still exist. Assuming that the housing regulations can be complied with, it can be said that prisoner-of-war labor will be used in several areas of the state to help in harvesting important agricultural products.

State Wheat Goal for 1944

State wheat acreage goals for 1944, representing an apportionment of the National Goal of 68 million acres—26% above this year's seedings—have been announced by the WFA. The New Mexico goal is set at 400,000 acres as compared to the estimated 1943 planted acreage of 350,000.

According to Mr. Fred L. O'Cheskey, Chairman of the State USDA War Board, 400,000 acres is the maximum acreage which can be planted in New Mexico without departing from sound farming practices such as the breaking out of native sod and without using land needed for other urgently needed crops.

Article from the *New Mexico Extension News* discussing possible Prisoner of War labor for the harvest.

August Reger: Prisoner of War in New Mexico

Written by August Reger; Translated¹ by Cassie McClure, translation aid by Dr. Richard Rundell

Early in summer 2009, a reference request came to the New Mexico State University Archives and Special Collections Department for a search by a daughter of a German prisoner of war held in New Mexico. Due to the failing health of her father and his wishes for more information, Ilona Bräuninger had been trying to contact institutions that might have more to describe the conditions and happenings to German prisoners of war in New Mexico. Although our holdings had nothing relating to her father August Reger, Ms. Bräuninger continued to correspond with me and sent me a document her father had written documenting his time in America.

August Reger was born on November 21, 1921, in the city of Öhringen, in the southern German state of Baden-Württemberg. Only son of a wine barrel maker, Reger was expected to take over the family business after a three year apprenticeship. From correspondence with Ms. Bräuninger: "As the war broke out on the September 1, 1939 my father was on a big bicycle tour of Germany. He had to come back right away and was pulled into the work service of the military. In 1941 he had to enter the war as a soldier."



Beginning of July 1943 the whole troop was, with their cars, again loaded onto the trains and brought down along the French and Italian Riviera, across Marseilles, Genoa, and Rome to southern Italy. From Reggio we started off by ship toward Messina to Sicily. Both the ship in front of us and the ship behind ours were sunk by enemy airplanes. After we landed it

was back off to the front. En route there were continual attacks from planes and surprise fire fights on the sea with American cruisers. Many casualties were reported.

On August 8, we blew up a road bridge over a

dry riverbed. However in the previous night, an American troop had already landed behind the front. Luckily the whole division had been postponed a few hours earlier so in our heated situation there were only the night commandos and our demolition team. Since only one road traveled along the northern coast of the island, and land was steep on the cliffs, reinforcements coming through were no longer a possibility. Plus, the steep cliffs were already occupied with enemy soldiers.



After being hunted like rabbits, and whereby many comrades died, I tried to seek cover behind

a small hill – and found myself in the middle of the American camp.

That's where the war ended for me.

However, on the same day we almost became victims of an air raid by our own aircraft. After three days we were transported from Palermo and then kept captive in a courtyard. The next day it was off on an American landing craft, which brought us to Africa where we landed in the port of Bizerta. We were marched for two kilometers where we built a prisoner's camp on a hill. Here we had an excellent view of the harbor where a convoy of twenty American ships had just pulled in.

During the night German bombers attacked the harbor and hit an ammunition ship. After a few days, all prisoners were transported further by train – and kept in the coal wagon - to Camp Souk Ahras, then to Constantine and then to the port in Oran.

The food in all camps was sadly very meager.

¹ Translator's Note:

Translating his writing, peppered with euphemisms and exclamations of his generation, I have tried to keep the voice as accurate to Reger's own in German, thus a bit more passive voice than how is normally written in English. I'd like to give many thanks to Dr. Richard Rundell, department head and professor of German at New Mexico State University, who quickly and enthusiastically helped review my work for inaccuracies.

In Oran we were once again very thoroughly searched and then at 4 p.m. we got on the 27,000 GRT troop transport that was to take us to America. The next day we left through the straits of Gibraltar to the Atlantic. Our convoy consisted of thirty-six ships – oil tankers, troop, and freight transporters. The escort was a heavy cruiser and four torpedo boats. The crossing took twelve days during which time we endured an airborne attack and an attack from a U-boat. Both yielded no hits. The Americans retaliated with water bombs and heavy fire. I heard later that a U-boat was had been sunk.

The food on the ship was good and plentiful. The problem, however, was the weather. Two long days of wind speed eight and nearly ninety percent of the soldiers became seasick. Thankfully, I wasn't affected even though I thought that the ship would rise twenty-five feet and in two seconds fall back down twenty-five feet. Fortunately we were allowed to go above deck to break up some of the boredom.

The closer we got to dry land the more the discussion turned to what would be awaiting us in America. What did the land look like? How were the people? Suddenly we heard, "land ho!" and it came toward us quickly. A Navy dirigible guided us in the Manhattan harbor, passed the Statue of Liberty and saw the sky scrapers with the highest building in the world, the Empire State Building. We couldn't believe our eyes; we could have never imagined it being so amazing.

After we left the ship, we were immediately deloused; our clothing packed in bags and we were given numbers. Our bags were then steam treated and we needed to pick out our individual bags from a large stack of bags. We were watched continually by the military police. The local train in New York took us to the D train and then we took our involuntary trip to Dallas, Texas, by way of Philadelphia, Washington, and Memphis.

We traveled first class by train. It was an old Pullman D train which had wagons with upholstered seating and per section there were eighty people sitting in groups of four. Unfortunately, the windows had been nailed closed and we could only crack them open. Every two hours all the prisoners were made to stand up to get some circulation in their legs, but between those two hours it was absolutely forbidden to stand up. If you needed to go to the bathroom, you needed to raise your finger and would be taken by a guard to the restroom and watched as you did your business.

Military police guards, armed and ready, were posted in the front and back of the train. If there would have been any incident he would have immediately shot but we were all so happy to have escaped the inferno of the war that we wanted to abide by all the rules.

Mexia, a small town outside Dallas, was our end station. As we got off the train we couldn't believe it – there were nearly as many military police as there were prisoners. Ultimately, we were marched on, with high security, on toward the prisoner camp. The first questions we asked of those already there was how the food was, but we shouldn't have worried, the food was good and everyone was healthy. For a prisoner, one of the most important things is food.

The camp consists of wooden barracks that were separated by rank, one for soldiers, one for non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and one for officers. All three were separated by barbed wire fences. In my area there were three companies with 250 men each. The food was plenty of food and it was good. In each camp there was also a canteen where one could buy, aside from alcohol, all sorts of drinks such as Coca Cola, Seven-Up, and other juices. Along with that they had all sorts of fruit, grapes, oranges, grapefruit and also sweets, even gold jewelry. This is where I bought both of my wedding rings that we then wore for twenty-five years.

Everything was very cheap, though we still didn't have very much money.

Work could be done willingly. All three camps had both a soccer field and handball court and we made plenty of use of them to stave off the boredom. For that reason too, I took to washing my clothes every day since they would dry in the heat in a matter of ten minutes. Mental development was also offered and so I decided to take algebra, German, and English.

To keep myself in shape, I also took part in physical education twice a week. Those who did not work got an allowance of three dollars a week (camp money), and for that you could not buy much, so I said to myself, 'I need to find a job.'

There were few positions available, the best of these being an orderly in the American officer's quarters. This was my dream but getting there was extremely difficult. Thirty-five men already worked there and there was little turnover, only when people changed camps or got sick. Still, I was lucky enough to get a spot there.

The officers lived in barracks which had four

of them sharing a living room and a bedroom. It was furnished with chairs, table, couch, and dressers. I had to look after eight officers which meant making their beds, cleaning their shoes, sweeping the living room and dusting. The job began at eight in the morning when all of the officers were already “out of the house”. They were at vocational training in various disciplines, went to conferences, to sports games, to the movies, to the theater, or to other forms of distractions.



Recalling family lore, Ms. Bräuninger: “My parents knew each other [before August left] but tragically my mother Amalie decided to end the relationship. As soon as she put the goodbye letter in the mailbox, she realized that she would only marry this man. My father received the letter the day he was to leave to Sicily in 1943. He was declared missing for six months and my grandfather even received notice that my father died in the war. A half year later they got a personal writing from him out of the American prisoner of war camp. The relationship of my parents developed over the thousands of miles by writing daily letters. This development led to the wish on both sides to marry.” Reger returned home on Dec. 15, 1947 and the engagement was announced on Dec. 26. They were married over 60 years.

I was in their camp all day, even though I was done with work by noon. I could eat there and took advantage of other creature comforts that were afforded to me. I was lead back and locked into my camp at night. For this “demanding” work we were paid thirty dollars a month and with that I could afford many more luxuries: a carton of cigarettes cost for example ninety cents, one Cola was five cents, and a pound of very good tobacco was fifty cents. The exchange rate for the dollar was four marks forty.

I decided, with my friend and bunkmate Hans Hildebrand, that we should buy an accordion for about 120 dollars. We made an arrangement that whenever one of us would get out first, we would draw straws on who would get to keep the instrument. Unfortunately, before the accordion could get delivered, Hans was moved so we decided to cancel our purchase. In hindsight I was lucky because with the saved money I was able

and the other I sewed to the inside of my pants. This ring ended up fitting my wife perfectly.

Hans Hildebrand was a boxer who “boxed” himself up the ranks of competitions we had in the camp. Therefore I always called him champ and that’s how he was known all around. His home was in East Prussia and after he was moved I never heard from him again. I wonder if he’s still alive.



Every morning and evening in the camps there were counts made of the prisoners to see if anyone had escaped. Sometimes it took up to a half hour to do this. Before breakfast, all prisoners had to step up to the camp street in rows of three and the Americans would pass by and count, three or four times, until those in headquarters were sure that no one had really left. When it was over the camp siren would come on signaling the end of the headcount. We would continue onto breakfast where everyone already had their usual spot. There was very good coffee, a pint of cold milk, white bread or breakfast rolls, marmalade, honey, and cheese; everything in abundance just like paradise. Those whose birthday it was found a cake for them on their table. I found one for myself as well once, but handed it out quickly to my friends. To take anything back to the barracks was highly forbidden, the reason being that we would get a horde of ants in short order.

As butlers we were given one free day every week. One of these days I decided to get back into bed after breakfast. Because in Texas it would climb into the hundreds of degrees even in the shade right after the sun came up, I did not cover myself. Suddenly I woke up and was freezing and I thought to myself that I had come down with a cold. Then I started shaking with chills, enough to shake the bed, and no covers could help me. After about fifteen minutes the chills had stopped but I noticed that I had a high fever. I had such a bad headache that I thought my head would explode when someone walked by the bed. Even the smallest movements hurt me. I couldn’t stand up for lunch because I immediately got sick. My mattress and sheets were completely drenched with sweat and I could not explain what had happened to me. The others were very worried

to purchase my wedding rings, fourteen carat gold, that I managed to keep through all the searches. I wore one

about me. At six o'clock they did another prisoner count and I tried again to stand, lo and behold, I could. I felt like nothing had happened. Even the food tasted good to me. My friends shared in my happiness.

The next day I was able to go to work. The day after, as I was sweeping the room, I was again hit by the chills. Coincidentally an officer walked into the room. He asked me what was wrong and I told him I had the same thing happened to me two days previously. "That is malaria," was his quick reply. "You have to immediately go to the infirmary or sick bay."

"Oh God," I thought, and lay on the couch until the attack was over. The next day I called in sick.

After I detailed my symptoms, the doctor on call sent me to get a blood test right away at the sick bay: suspicion of malaria! One hour later it came back from the laboratory: I had malaria. . . .

I was kept in the hospital and given a bed with a large mosquito net and I needed to start swallowing pills. After three weeks they did another blood test: result positive. I needed to stay another three weeks. Thankfully, I did not have any other malaria attacks after that. Time was passed by the sick in that we read, played cards, or played ping pong.

Finally after six weeks I was able to leave the hospital as a healthy man. Malaria didn't bother me again for thirty years. My friends were all happy to see my return to the barracks.

As a side note, I was here with Georg Stubenitzky and with Alfred Wand; both had previously lived in the eastern part of Germany. Even a man from Öhringen named Jakob Haefle was in the camp.

I was hardly a few days back from the hospital when new movement of prisoners was read out and I was a part of it. The guessing game by all: where would we be going? All suggestions were expressed, but just an hour later the guessing was over, and we went south.

We were transported to a small work camp outside of El Paso, Texas (Fort Bliss, by the city of Hatch in New Mexico). There were 150 prisoners with fifteen guards. We were then split into work groups of fifteen prisoners for every guard. I went to the farm of Mr. Mundy who harvested cotton. The farm was about 1500 acres and was directly on the Rio Grande that at this point had the same size as the Upper Rhine. We were picked up every day by the farmer with a platform truck and were driven about twenty kilometers to the work and brought



Photo of prisoners of war taken in Texas, as noted in an album by August Reger.

back at night.

All the cotton fields were watered through main and side canals of the river; if they hadn't, nothing else would have grown there on its own. The flattened fields were watered every third day by opening the sluices on the canals; the rain in this area was completely non-existent. The climate on the fields was like a greenhouse: during the day it was 110 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade, the ground wet and damp, and it "cooled off" to about seventy to seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit at night.

Every day we worked on the cotton field as cotton pickers. The sun burned without mercy and stood almost vertically in the sky. All of us workers wore a hat with so wide a brim that when we stood up straight, we stood almost completely in shade. Unfortunately, we worked bent over and, thus, nearly broke our backs.

The cotton plants itself varied in size from two-three feet high. The cotton itself was in capsules that opened when the cotton was ready to be harvested.

Every worker dragged along a ten-foot sack behind him where he stuffed the cotton in like batting. First it was that we needed to collect 120 pounds, then 150, then finally 175. You really needed to work hard to collect that amount.

A full sack of cotton weighed just about sixty pounds because the stuff was as light as a feather. The sack was brought to a truck where it was weighed by a Mexican, recorded, and then shaken out into the truck. I had picked my quota at about 3 p.m. I did help those who couldn't quite make their quotas. The picking quickly became routine for me, but we needed to stay on the field until the amount demanded was picked. Thus, after work I could often lay myself between rows and sleep for one or two hours.

Once, this luxury nearly became my doom. I woke up because I kept hearing the name “Reger” being yelled out over and over. Man, I had overslept! Quickly I stood up and cried, “Here!” And a reply came, “Thank God, there you are. We thought you had taken off!” The most happy was the guard who would have gotten in the most trouble had I left; he probably would have been thrown into solitary for a time. Before we went back to camp, they did one more head count and no one was missing so that we just came back a bit later.

Since our camp was directly on the Rio Grande some of us used our free time to take great baths in the cooling waters of the river. The river was nearly 300 meters wide at this area. Once I swam to the other side but was taken downstream nearly 100 meters. The swimming there was not without risks.

Before the end of the harvest I was promoted to tractor driving because our farmer needed someone that had a driver’s license. After I had signed up, the son of the farmer, Bill Mundy, drove me to town to do my tractor license test. I didn’t have any problems so after an hour-long practical and theoretical test, I was handed an American tractor license. From then on I drove the tractor on the farm and it even became my hobby. I had figured out how to play the game.

The tractor was a “Giant Drum” – an eight cylinder gas engine with 100 horsepower. The back tires were larger than I was and the usage of gas for this beast was about fifty gallons a day. The gas was super cheap for the farmer. One gallon was about nine cents. That was about thirty-six *pfennig* at the time.

Now I had to plow the harvested fields: first, in a twelve-foot circle a blade cut the cotton stalks into pieces of ten to twelve inches which were then plowed into the soil. During the winter these could decay and then fertilize the field.

Chemical fertilizers were not used, and since the fields were watered as well by the river, that carried enough fertilizers with it. For weeks I drove the tractor day in and day out across the harvested cotton fields. Two times a day seventy-year-old Mundy senior rode up to me to check and make sure that everything was okay. We talked a few minutes each time as best as we could. Often he suggested that I continue on with him, but this was beyond imagining for me.

One day Mundy’s fifteen year-old nephew came to visit. The farmer gave him a horse for him to have

fun with and so that he could let off steam. I liked him very much and talked a lot with him. At some point, he tried to convince me to let me drive my tractor while I would ride his horse. I finally gave in but not without giving him a lot of pointers on how to drive the tractor. Then I got on the horse. I was barely on top of it when it shot out like the devil. ‘Oh God,’ I thought, ‘If only this had brakes like my tractor.’ I brought him to a stop about a kilometer later. Next came the difficult task of encouraging him to bring me back to the farm and I succeed only with a lot of luck and lot of kind words. The return was much easier. Just when we came to an irrigation canal did he start to whinny and reared up. I managed to hang on or else I would have fallen into the canal. After the horse calmed, he trotted quietly back to the tractor where the boy was waiting. He had watched my whole experience and was smiling at me wryly. Never again did I want to ride his horse. Thankfully the farmer never found out about this.

Another day I watched an airplane come closer quickly and which was losing altitude. I couldn’t explain its behavior because it was a twin-engine crop duster. He flew thundering by at only twenty feet off the ground, climbed into the air a bit, turned and flew back, came back down again to the point where I feared he would crash. He repeated this maneuver three times. The explanation only came later when the farmer came out to visit: “Did you see that plane?” he asked. As I said yes, he proudly explained that it was his nephew and that it was his first visit. I wonder if that had been allowed.

The son of the farmer was named Bill, twenty-seven years old, married and father of two kids. He was a wiry fellow – a real cowboy who was barely interested in the farm work. He was more interested in pursuing his hobbies, above all the cowboy games and training for the rodeo in El Paso. We watched him often because he was the best in roping.

In fifteen seconds on horseback he managed to chase down a bull and to throw a lasso around his neck while in full gallop – the horse then came to a full halt – where he jumped down, threw the bull to the ground, and to tie up all his legs. He won second place in the rider games in El Paso and that was a great accomplishment. He tried to get three of us prisoners, myself included, to come watch him ride in El Paso at the competition, but it was denied at the last minute. It was too bad because that would have been a great experience.

Every now and then, Bill Mundy and his friends went up to the nearby Rocky Mountains to round up wild horses. Those captured were driven down by truck and placed in a pen that was built out of huge logs. The horses bucked wild and would bite. It took a good deal of time before became even a little tame. A few of these he rode himself and others he sold as riding horses.



Photo of Reger taken at Ft. Bliss.

On the morning of July 16, 1945, at about 5:40 a.m., we heard a very distant roll of thunder that was constant for a few minutes. The hum

was quite different than the sound of an aircraft, but we didn't really think too much more about it. Only later did we find out that this was the first testing of the atom bomb in America in New Mexico about fifty kilometers away from us.

One day the farmer told us that he bought a portion of desert land that he wanted to cultivate and use for harvesting. The size was about 250 acres and was uneven and filled with weeds and bushes. To be able to make use of the land and in order to water it, we had to level it. This was done with a Scraper, a machine with a large shovel that was hung onto the tractor that dragged it. The shovel was then lowered with the pull of the rope and the dirt was then picked up. With another pull of the rope, the shovel lifted and with a final pull the shovel tipped and pulled the dirt up ten centimeters where there was a dip in the ground. In this way I drove months long next to a Mexican named Alfonso, who had the same machine that I did, across the field. Every now and then they flooded the field to see where exactly there were uneven areas.

On the farm was a private airstrip of a sixty-eight-year-old plumber. His "runway" was a cow pasture. It was from there that this plumber flew out with his two-seater high wing plane to neighboring farms to do repair work or install new plumbing. We saw him often as he took off or landed and once he whirled up such a dust storm while doing it that we worried about our own

lives. Finally, after a couple of attempts, he managed to come back down to earth.

At one point I started having a bad toothache that kept worsening and finally my cheek grew swollen. I was then driven with a comrade of mine in a Jeep alongside the Rio Grande to a military doctor in Fort Bliss. The base was enormous. Even with my tooth pain I was able to recognize on the airstrip the B-29 super fortress bomber which was then the largest long-range bomber in world. This huge giant was only used against Japan and at that time had a range of roughly 5000 miles. We saw it only from a distance of 100 yards and even though my teeth were pulled later that day, the day still was a good memory for me even with the pain.

It was in this camp that I watched the end of the war. From that point on, a lot changed. It was explained to us that Germany had lost the war and that changed attitudes toward us. Our camp commander was very anti-German and we all started to feel it. The canteen was cleared out and we could only get the most needed things. The food rations were cut to the point that I lost thirty pounds in sixty days. I weighed just fifty kilograms and at a height of 1.80 meters.

Our work camp was closed October 1945 and we went by train to an unknown endpoint. After a two day drive our train stopped, we were in the state of Virginia, near Richmond. The prisoner camp held about 500 men. Our camp was next to a huge military camp and supply depot. Each of the halls, of which there were at least twenty, was half the size of a football field. One could barely believe the size. The hall I was placed in was filled to the rafters with canned meat and sausage rations. They had been stored here for years. Our job was to open the cardboard cartons, check each can for rust, separate them and throw them in respective bins. Those cans that were rusted were then taken to the dump by trucks. After three days the four of us on the loading dock had gathered at least a 1000 that went into the trash.

We rode with the truck to the dump and in the cab rode the driver, a guard, and a female lieutenant. We drove on. Halfway to the dump we came upon a group of forty prisoners who were nailing boards together. Since food was pretty slim, we decided to throw our comrades some cans. The Americans in the cab must have seen this since the truck stopped and the lieutenant got out. We should not have done that, we were lectured. She held out a piece of paper and a pencil, "Your names,

please.” We told her we did not understand English but she answered in fluent German, “Write your names on this paper.” Each of us wrote his name quite illegibly and the ride continued without incident until we got to the dump where there was a big fire burning. We were made to take a sharp iron pick, puncture the cans, and then toss them into the fire. After the truck was empty we drove back to the depot.

As our truck stopped, we were already being surrounded by military police. The four of us were taken out of the truck and asked our names because our “autographs” were not legible. That was all that happened at first and we went back to work because we thought everything was over. We marched back to our camp that night and at the gate our names were called out. We answered back to the call, expecting only the worst. They took us to the headquarters and let us know that we had broken camp rules and needed to be punished. We were placed in solitary for three days on a diet of only bread and water. On the third day, a Sunday, something unexpected happened. A guard entered our tent at 6 a.m. and yelled, “Everyone up and out!” We responded only slowly but due to his energetic insistence we went outside. Together with him we marched to the kitchen barracks and walked in. We couldn’t believe our eyes when we saw the table decked out for us for a decent breakfast. We sat down and gorged ourselves. We had to go back to work at the construction afterwards, but the guard made us promise that we would tell no one and that he only did it because it was Sunday. We thanked him profusely of course. The day after we went back to our normal work; we did not throw any more cans off the truck.

On February 5, 1946, I was ordered to pack my sea bags and I went back onto the train. At about 8 p.m. we started up to the north and on February 6 we reached Camp Shanks near New York. The next day we left to get to the port at 9 a.m. and at 11 a.m. took a ferry to the main ship.

This one was only 10,000 tons, but a more comfortable trip than the first. We left port on February 8 at about 3:45 p.m. for our crossing to Europe. The food on the ship was good and plentiful. On February 9 we had a full day of rough sea, then thunderstorms, and after six days it was the sea became calmer. On February 16 we saw land – Le Havre. Onward we went by train. We got supplies for two days, were to drive through to Frankfurt. Everyone was excited!

But I didn’t trust the “peace.” The train started off in the direction of home, but we were watched by American soldiers. Just in case, I decided to discard my canned rations, even though others decided to keep theirs until they got home, knowing that the food was scarce back home and that many were hungry.

After a few hours the train stopped. As we looked out of the windows we saw that we were surrounded by French military police ready to shoot. “Everyone out, take your bags!” was called out. As we got out we were told that, far from being allowed to go home, we were going to be interned in French POW camps. This news was devastating. I had some foreboding because of an article I read in the New York Times which said that all released prisoners of war from America would have to help rebuild France.

Writes Ms. Brauniger, “This is where the report of being a prisoner of war in America ends. My father spent another one and a half years as a French POW before he was released back to Germany.” In her correspondence, Ms. Bräuninger went on to explain that as long as she could remember, her father always took September 8, the day he was taken prisoner, off from work. She continues: “After the war, [my father] went to master school for his father’s business and then worked in the firm which added a service to sell self made juices and liquors. Health complications and increased competition made it so that my father had to change careers when he was forty-five. He became employed in the finance bureau in Öbringen where he worked with land appraisals until he retired in 1984.”



August Reger had been very excited by the prospect of the publication of his writing but sadly passed away on June 23, 2009.