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## Beyond the Barbed Wire: POW Labour Projects in Canada during the Second World War

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in History

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines Canada's program to employ prisoners of war (POWs) in Canada during the Second World War as a means of understanding how labour projects and the communities and natural environment in which they occurred shaped the POWs' wartime experiences. The use of POW labourers, including civilian internees, enemy merchant seamen, and combatant prisoners, occurred in response to a nationwide labour shortage. Between May 1943 and November 1946, there were almost 300 small, isolated labour projects across the country employing, at its peak, over 14,000 POWs. Most prisoners were employed in either logging or agriculture, work that not only provided them with relative freedom, but offered prisoners unprecedented contact with Canada and its people. Work would therefore not only boost production but, it was hoped, instil in POWs Canadian mores and values through interaction with guards, civilians, and the natural environment.

Rather than attempt a narrative encompassing almost 300 labour projects, this dissertation examines POW labour through a series of five case studies. The first examines prisoners cutting fuelwood in Manitoba's Riding Mountain National Park while the second and third examine POWs cutting pulpwood in Northwestern Ontario for the Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co. and Abitibi Power & Paper Co., respectively. The fourth case study examines POWs employed by Donnell & Mudge in its tannery in New Toronto, Ontario and the fifth examines the practice of employing POWs in farm work in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec.

Through these case studies, this dissertation examines how internment officials employed remote parts of Canada as a physical boundary to prevent escape attempts, while also using it as a space to provide POWs with relative freedom as an inducement to work, and how work challenged definitions of who or what was the "enemy". With significantly more freedom than the typical internee, POWs interacted with civilians and guards on a more familiar level, resulting in illicit fraternizations and relationships between POWs and Canadians. Although such fraternization also triggered considerable protest, these interactions reveal a great deal regarding POWs' opinions of and attitudes towards Canada and its people as well as Canadian attitudes towards POWs.

## Keywords

Second World War - 1939-1945, Canada, Germany, United Kingdom, internment, prisoner of war, labour, war and society, environment, pulp and paper, bushwork, logging, agriculture, tannery.

## Summary for Lay Audience

Few Canadians know how close the Second World War came to home, that thousands of enemy soldiers spent a significant portion of the war on Canadian soil. Between 1940 and 1947, over 35,000 German Prisoners of War (POWs) – including civilian internees, enemy merchant seamen, and combatant prisoners – were interned in Canada. While they were first placed in large, traditional internment camps, the Department of Labour ultimately employed over 14,000 POWs in almost 300 low-security labour projects scattered across the country.

The primary goal of these projects was to boost the struggling agricultural and lumber industries but labour projects also offered the opportunity to instil Canadian mores and values in German POW through interactions with military guards, civilians, and the natural environment. Through a series of five case studies, this dissertation examines how work in bush camps, on farms, and in a tannery shaped prisoners' experiences in Canada while also exploring prisoners' motivations and reactions to work, the challenges faced by employers and government officials, and the overall effectiveness of POW labour. Memoirs and interviews with former prisoners often demonstrate a fondness for their time in Canada – a feeling that has seldom been expressed elsewhere by POWs towards their captors – while wartime correspondence and reports indicate that POWs enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to work, the freedoms associated with labour projects, and, most importantly, the opportunity for a life outside the barbed wire enclosures.

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## Introduction

In November 1945, Richard Beranek stepped off a train in Mafeking, Manitoba, some 400 kilometres northwest of Winnipeg. Less than a year-and-a-half earlier, the then seventeen-year-old was serving with the German 352<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division in Normandy, laying telephone lines near Bayeux. When British soldiers landed on Gold Beach on June 6, 1944, Beranek's unit was rushed to the front lines but, unable to stop the Allied advance, his regiment suffered heavy losses and he was captured. Shipped across the English Channel, Beranek spent eleven days in a Scottish internment camp before he was transferred to Canada, arriving in Halifax in July. Originally interned in Camp 132 near Medicine Hat, Alberta, with thousands of other German prisoners of war (POWs), Beranek was transferred to the Manitoba Paper Co. Camp 12 where he would spend the next seven months cutting pulpwood.<sup>1</sup> Decades later, Beranek described his time in Canada as his “greatest adventure” and the “best years of his life.”

As one of 38,000 POWs – combatants, enemy merchant seamen (EMS), and civilian internees – held in Canada from 1939 to 1947, Richard Beranek's experience in Canada was not unique. Memoirs and interviews with former prisoners often demonstrate a fondness for their time in Canada – a feeling that has seldom been expressed elsewhere by POWs towards their captors – while wartime correspondence and reports indicate that POWs enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to work, the freedoms associated with labour projects, and, most importantly, the opportunity for a life outside the barbed wire enclosures.

Internment in the Second World War is often characterized by the often-brutal treatment suffered by German POWs in the Soviet Union, Soviet POWs in Germany, and Allied POWs in Japan and, in Canada and the United States, by the internment of thousands of enemy aliens and Japanese Canadians. With the experience of POWs in Canada appearing in stark contrast to these cases, how exactly did Canada treat its POWs and what prompted Richard Beranek to describe his time in Canada as his “greatest adventure”?

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<sup>1</sup> Stoppel-Koenig, Deutsche Dienststelle to Lutz Beranek, February 11, 2014, Beranek Collection.



Canadian internment operations in the Second World War officially began in September 1939 with the arrest and subsequent internment of hundreds of enemy aliens and other individuals deemed a threat to national security. The success of German advances in Europe in May and June 1940 prompted the British government to transfer thousands of combatant prisoners, EMS, and civilian internees to Canada and the rest of the Commonwealth for safe keeping. The first of these POWs arrived in Canada in July 1940 and, over the next five years, the number of prisoners in Canadian custody would reach a total of 38,000.<sup>2</sup>

The term “Prisoner of War” or POW was – and is still – used to describe individuals who fall into a number of different categories. In Canada, the term referred to civilian internees and enemy aliens, EMS, combatants, and even a group of individuals later reclassified as refugees. Civilian internees were the first to be interned in Canada following the arrest of hundreds of individuals of German nationality deemed a threat to national security; later, Italians were detained for the same reason. The vast majority were male – only twenty-one women were interned<sup>3</sup> – and included recent immigrants, migrant labourers, established professionals, community leaders, and newspaper editors. They were soon joined by men of the German Merchant Marine who had been detained when their vessels were seized after the outbreak of war. Combatant prisoners, the largest group detained in Canada, were predominantly young men from Germany and Austria. They had been captured in the weeks following the German invasion of France, shot down during the Battle of Britain, plucked from the cold Atlantic waters, or taken by surprise during commando raids on the Norwegian coast. As the war progressed, shipments of POWs included men captured in North Africa and, following the D-Day invasion, in France and Belgium. The last prisoners to arrive in Canada were U-Boat crews who surrendered after Germany’s capitulation in May 1945.

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<sup>2</sup> The total number of individuals interned in Canada during the war was approximately 38,000 but, due to reclassifications, exchanges, and releases, the highest number of POWs interned in Canada at one time was 35,046 in October 1944. Department of National Defence, “Internment State - 1200 Hrs 21 Oct, 1944,” 621-CM-40 - Weekly Statements Re Numbers of Prisoners of War and Internees in Canada issued by Dept. of National Defence, Vol. 2774, RG25, Library and Archives Canada [henceforth LAC].

<sup>3</sup> Michelle McBride, “The Curious Case of Female Internees,” in *Enemies Within: Italian and Other Internees in Canada and Abroad*, eds. Franca Iacovetta, Roberto Perin, and Angelo Principe (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 148.

Every prisoner spent some time in at least one of twenty-eight internment camps in Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, or New Brunswick (see Appendix A).<sup>4</sup> These camps ranged from repurposed buildings, including a forestry station, an abandoned paper mill, and a sanatorium, to purpose-built facilities designed to hold over 10,000 POWs. Camps were surrounded by layers of barbed wire fences and guard towers designed to keep POWs within the enclosures and curious onlookers out. Passing the time became most prisoners' primary occupation and this was made easier thanks to supplies and equipment brought with them or provided by the Canadian government and international aid organizations. Prisoners established sporting teams, including football (soccer), hockey, gymnastics, and baseball, as well as orchestras and smaller bands. Those with teaching or work experience provided educational courses in subjects ranging from English to architecture. Some even found jobs assisting with the camp's day-to-day running, working as barbers, tailors, librarians, and the like. These opportunities remained few in number and prisoners across the country frequently requested work opportunities as a way both to earn spending money and to help fill their time.

It was not until May 1943 that they would receive their wish. The notion of employing POWs was proposed as early as 1940, but it took a nationwide labour shortage to push the Canadian government to finally take advantage of the vast potential of untapped manpower sitting idle behind barbed wire. The agricultural and forestry industries were especially affected by the labour shortage and the Canadian government believed these two industries were the best suited for POWs. Work would not only boost production but, it was hoped, instil in POWs Canadian mores and values through interaction with guards, civilians, and the natural environment. Following much deliberation, Canada approved the employment of POWs in May 1943 and the departments of Labour and National Defence quickly arranged for a series of test projects to determine their feasibility.

The first POWs began work in late May on beet fields in the Lethbridge area. Initial success prompted the expansion of prisoner of war labour to additional farms in Alberta and

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<sup>4</sup> There is some debate over the number of internment camps in Canada, with many studies suggesting twenty-six. However, as twenty-eight different locations were used (two locations re-used the same number), I consider each a separate camp.

Ontario and, in fall 1943, the Department of Labour placed its first POWs in woodcutting camps in Ontario and Manitoba. By the end of the year, some 2,700 prisoners were employed in work outside internment camps. The number of POWs employed continued to climb, so that by the end of 1946, the Department of Labour had overseen almost 300 woodcutting camps, farm hostels, and other minimal-security labour projects scattered across the country employing, at its peak, over 14,000 POWs.<sup>5</sup>

Most prisoners employed through the Department of Labour found themselves working in either Alberta, Manitoba, or Ontario while smaller operations also existed in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Quebec. The forestry industry benefitted the most by POW labour (see Appendix B), with over 8,000 POWs employed in bushwork in Northern Ontario alone. These POWs generally lived and worked in the same manner as civilian woodcutters, although by necessity with added security measures and some improvements to living conditions. The agricultural industry also benefitted significantly from POW labour, with prisoners working on farms while living in internment camps, farm hostels, or with the farmers themselves (see Appendix C). Prisoners not employed in agriculture or forestry found themselves working in tanneries, cement works, potteries, greenhouses, and fertilizer plants while others were engaged in road work, peat cutting, construction, or general maintenance (see Appendix D).

Focusing on these labour projects and the POWs, guards, and civilians involved in their operation, my dissertation addresses the question of how labour projects and the communities and natural environment in which they occurred shaped the wartime experiences of POWs in Canada. Internment officials employed remote parts of Canada as a physical boundary to prevent escape attempts while also using it as a space to provide POWs with relative freedom as an inducement to work. The natural environment had an important effect on POWs' perceptions of Canada and ultimately provided them with a significantly

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<sup>5</sup> Department of National Defence and Department of Labour records provide conflicting numbers of POWs employed. Weekly statements issued by the former indicate a peak of 14,332 POWs employed while the latter indicates a peak of 15,984. Further research indicates the Department of Labour's total included POWs employed within internment camps (including cooks, medical staff, and those employed in re-education). "Labour Projects," February 12, 1944 to September 30, 1945, 621-R-40 Employment of POWs, Vol. 2765, RG25, LAC. Major A.F. Kemble, "History of Labour Projects PW," 3, History – Major A.F. Kemble, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

different experience than those who spent the war living in an internment camp behind barbed wire. Prisoners highly valued the liberties of life in labour projects, whether it be the ability to roam around camp, canoe on nearby lakes, or raise wildlife as pets, and were therefore eager to preserve their freedom. They were therefore less likely to cause trouble or attempt escape.

Taking the focus away from traditional internment practices also allows one to explore the assumptions inherent in defining who or what is the “enemy”. With significantly more freedom than the stereotypical internee, POWs interacted with civilians and guards on a more familiar level, resulting in illicit fraternizations and relationships between POWs and Canadians. A number of these encounters produced bursts of outrage and fears of security for both civilians and military authorities, but some afforded civilians and guards an opportunity to realize that many of these POWs were not unlike themselves. Work also prompted prisoners to come to the same conclusion about Canadians as they worked for or, in some cases, alongside civilians and as their work exposed them to the Canadian ways of life. Work therefore proved one method of re-education; official attempts to re-educate POWs in internment camps were met with varied success, but direct contact with the Canadian way of life generally proved more effective to the de-Nazification of German POWs.

Internment in Canada is part of a much larger history of prisoners of war in the Second World War. Thirty-five million people became prisoners of war, the largest number ever in a single conflict. Treatment of these POWs ranged considerably depending on the detaining power, from strict adherence to the terms of the 1929 Geneva Convention to brutal conditions costing the lives of millions. Internment in the Second World War has received considerable attention by academic and popular historians alike, with much of the historiography dedicated to Allied POWs in German and Japanese captivity or German POWs in the Soviet Union. This amplified interest stems largely from a desire to document the harsher living and working conditions of those prisoners than those of Axis POWs in the care of the Western Allies.

Although more than four times as many Axis POWs were interned in Canada than Canadian POWs were interned by Axis forces, the latter group has received considerably

more attention by Canadian academic and public historians. Internment in Germany, Canada, and Great Britain are rarely considered together, but, as historian Jonathan Vance has noted, all three nations were engaged in a reciprocal relationship in regard to its prisoners.<sup>6</sup> Allied intelligence gathered from smuggled correspondence or obtained from POWs who had escaped German internment camps revealed that conditions in these camps were generally worse than those in Allied camps but Canada and Great Britain feared that any reprisal action against German POWs in Allied custody would have severe consequences for POWs in Germany. The two countries therefore remained cautious so as not to take any action or enforce any policy that could endanger Allied POWs in Germany.

Studies of internment in Canada during the Second World War, at least as it pertains to combatants and internees sent from the United Kingdom, have varied significantly in quality and scope. Most have favoured grand narratives reviewing internment operations as a whole or the happenings of a single internment camp or region and have thereby sidelined or ignored POW labour. This trend is no doubt influenced by factors including regional interest, source limitations, and the complications inherent in telling a coherent story about twenty-eight internment camps and almost three hundred labour projects scattered across the country. Added to this, many of these small, isolated bush camps, farm hostels, and other labour projects have either been forgotten or their isolation meant few Canadians knew about them. The history of the Great Lakes Paper Co., *Paper and People*, for example, states the authors found no evidence the company employed POWs when in fact the company was the third-largest employer of POW bush labour in Canada.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the relatively large number of POWs in Canada, as well as the significant resources required to feed, contain, and guard them, military histories of Canada in the Second World War rarely reference internment. Colonel C.P. Stacey, official historian of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, makes only passing references to internment in his *Six Years of War* and *Arms, Men and Governments* while, in *A Nation Forged in Fire*,

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan F. Vance, *Objects of Concern: Canadian Prisoners of War through the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 1994); Vance, "Men in Manacles: The Shackling of Prisoners of War, 1942-1943," *Journal of Military History* 59, no. 3 (July 1995): 483–504.

<sup>7</sup> R. H Piovesana et al., *Paper and People: An Illustrated History of Great Lakes Paper and Its Successors, 1919-1999* (Thunder Bay, ON: Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 1999).

J.L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton state, “the fires of war inflicted terrible sufferings on many Canadians” while creating a “stronger, surer, and more sovereign nation,” but make no mention of the thousands of POWs held on Canadian soil (nor, for that matter, the controversial act of interning Canadian civilians).<sup>8</sup>

Popular narratives have instead defined much of the historiography of Canadian internment as it relates to combatant POWs. Since they first appeared in the 1950s, accounts like Terence Robertson’s *The Golden Horseshoe*, Kendal Burt and James Leasor’s *The One That Got Away*, and Reinhart Stalmann’s *Die Ausbrecherkönige von Kanada (The Breakout Kings of Canada)* emphasize the more “exciting” aspects of POW life: escape and murder.<sup>9</sup> They have succeeded in generating interest in the subject but have gone little beyond detailing the exploits of POWs like Franz von Werra, the only POW known to have successfully escaped from Canada and returned to Germany, and Ulrich Steinhilper, one of the “Breakout Kings.” Later accounts, such as David Carter’s *POW: Behind Canadian Barbed Wire* and John Melady’s *Escape from Canada!* have followed this trend and seem to have been written largely, as the back cover of Melady’s book states, to “entertain lovers of war and adventure stories.”<sup>10</sup> Carter and Melady both make good use of interviews with former POWs but their cursory analysis of internment and their failure to reference their sources limit their usefulness.

Academic studies started to appear in the 1970s. The first general history, Helmut Wolff’s *Die Deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in Britischer Hand (The German Prisoners of War in British Hands)*, examines Canadian internment as an extension of British policy.<sup>11</sup> Part of

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<sup>8</sup> C.P. Stacey, *Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific*, vol. 1, Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War (Ottawa, ON: E. Cloutier, Queen’s printer, 1955), 151 and 397; C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945*. (Ottawa, ON: Minister of National Defence, 1970), 153; J. L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton, *A Nation Forged in Fire: Canadians and the Second World War, 1939-1945* (Toronto, ON: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Terence Robertson, *The Golden Horseshoe* (London, UK: Evans Bros., 1955); Kendal Burt and James Leasor, *The One That Got Away* (New York, NY: Random House, 1957); Reinhart Stalmann, *Die Ausbrecherkönige von Kanada* (Hamburg, DE: Verlag der Sternbücher, 1958).

<sup>10</sup> John Melady, *Escape from Canada! The Untold Story of German POWs in Canada, 1939-1945* (Toronto, ON: Macmillan of Canada, 1981); David J. Carter, *POW, behind Canadian Barbed Wire: Alien, Refugee and Prisoner of War Camps in Canada, 1914-1946* (Elkwater, AB: Eagle Butte Press, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Helmut Wolff, *Die Deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in Britischer Hand: ein Überblick, Zur Geschichte der Deutschen Kriegsgefangenen des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Bielefeld, DE: Ernst und Werner Gieseking, 1974).

a twenty-two-volume set commissioned by the West German Government to study German POWs in the Second World War, Wolff's discussion of Canada remains limited to a brief overview of internment camps and a small collection of archival material. The first extensive academic treatment came only with John Joseph Kelly's 1976 MA thesis, "The Prisoner of War Camps in Canada, 1939-1947." Kelly, focusing primarily on policy, concludes that internment in Canada was a success because the Canadian government obeyed the 1929 Geneva Convention and did the "best possible job with the materials and men available to them."<sup>12</sup> Chris Madsen's 1992 thesis, later published as *Prisoners of War in Canada and Their Artifacts*, counters Kelly's rather uncritical account and instead builds on Wolff's work. He emphasizes there is more to POWs than "escapes, murders, and Nazi ideology," and suggests historians need to consider how prisoners coped with internment.<sup>13</sup> Although primarily limiting his analysis to internment camps, he concludes that prisoners confronted internment in a manner that remained dependent on their social and military backgrounds as well as their ethnicity and ultimately created "facsimiles of the Germany they remembered."<sup>14</sup>

Madsen's account was the last grand narrative approach as historians have since shifted to studies pertaining to specific regions or individual camps. Stefania Cepuch's thesis, "Our Guests are Busy," does just that, narrowing her focus to internment camps and labour projects in Ontario. Like Kelly, Cepuch concludes that Canada had a near exemplary record in its treatment of POWs, with the exceptions of a few "mistakes," including failing to take advantage of a number of opportunities to benefit the state through POW labour. Her analysis of internment camps remains primarily limited to Camp 30 (Bowmanville, Ontario), despite it being only one of twelve camps in Ontario. In comparison, Martin Auger's *Prisoners of the Home Front* looks at internment camps throughout Southern Quebec, examining life in the camps, work, and re-education. Auger argues interment was a "home front victory" – a

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<sup>12</sup> John Joseph Kelly, "The Prisoner of War Camps in Canada, 1939-1947" (M.A. Thesis, University of Windsor, 1976), 208.

<sup>13</sup> Chris M.V. Madsen, "German Prisoners of War in Canada During the Second World War" (M.A. Thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1992), 5; Chris Madsen and R. J Henderson, *German Prisoners of War in Canada and Their Artifacts, 1940-1948* (Regina, SK: R.J. Henderson, 1993), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Madsen, "German Prisoners of War in Canada," 6.

victory emphasized by the many POWs who returned to Canada after the war because, he explains, “they firmly believed that the treatment they received in Canada was reflective of the Canadian way of life.”<sup>15</sup>

Histories of individual camps have been the preferred avenue of research taken by popular historians. Ted Jones’ two-part series about Camp 70 (Fredericton, New Brunswick), Georgia Fooks’ account of Camp 133 (Lethbridge, Alberta), and Peter Lanosky’s history of Camp 23 (Monteith, Ontario) provide insight into the operations of these camps by looking at life for POWs and guards in the camps, sports, music, recreation, medical care, administration, and escape.<sup>16</sup> However, as popular histories, they struggle to place themselves into the wider narrative of Canadian internment operations.

Historians Kirk Goodlet and the late Ernst Zimmerman argue that case studies of specific camps are still needed to better understand Canadian internment operations. Zimmerman, looking at the history of Camp R (Red Rock, Ontario), emphasizes that there has yet to be a “satisfactory, systematic, overarching study of prisoner of war camp and internment operations in Canada” and therefore argues each camp need be considered in its individual context.<sup>17</sup> Goodlet counters the oft-repeated narrative that internment in Canada was both a success and positive experience as, he argues, this would require one to assume camps operated in the same manner under the same circumstances. Using Camp 22 (New Toronto, Ontario) as an example, Goodlet argues that each camp operated under unique conditions largely dependent on those responsible for the camp’s administration and

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<sup>15</sup> Martin F. Auger, *Prisoners of the Home Front: German POWs and “Enemy Aliens” in Southern Quebec, 1940-46* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2005), 152.

<sup>16</sup> Ted Jones, *Both Sides of the Wire: The Fredericton Internment Camp*, vol. 1 and vol. 2 (Fredericton, NB: New Ireland Press, 1988 and 1989); Georgia Green Fooks and Lethbridge Historical Society, *Prairie Prisoners: POWs in Lethbridge during Two World Conflicts* (Lethbridge, AB: Lethbridge Historical Society, 2002); Peter Lanosky, *Barbed Wire, Black Flies, 55° below: The Story of the Monteith, Ontario POW Camp, 1940-1946* (Lone Butte, BC: Lanworth Creative, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Ernest Robert Zimmermann, *The Little Third Reich on Lake Superior: A History of Canadian Internment Camp R.*, eds. Michel S. Beaulieu and David K. Ratz (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2015), xxviii.



operation and asserts that historians must examine the experiences of both captors and captives to fully understand Canadian internment operations.<sup>18</sup>

Other historians have focused on specific groups of POWs. The internment of Canadian civilians, including Japanese Canadians, has received considerably more attention than other groups. Studies such as Norman Hillmer, Bohdan Kordan, and Lubomyr Luciuk's *On Guard for Thee* and Franca Iacovetta, Roberto Perin, and Angelo Principe's *Enemies Within: Italian and Other Internees in Canada and Abroad* not only demonstrate the importance of studying civilian internment but highlight the many ways historians can approach the subject.<sup>19</sup> These collections emphasize government and public attitudes towards different ethnic groups interned during the war as well as employing different approaches to internment. In *Enemies Within*, for example, the authors examine internment through the lens of social and gender history to address the question of how Canada struggled to balance the need of civil liberties for minority and majority populations. They argue that civilian internment raises the critical issue of the extent to which the state can take preventative measures against dissent.<sup>20</sup> Many of these accounts, however, have failed to place themselves into a larger context of Canadian internment operations. Although the number of Canadian civilian internees was actually smaller than the number of combatant prisoners, they have received far more scholarly attention, largely the result of the controversial nature of their internment.

Recently, cultural anthropologist Judith Kestler has shed light on a lesser-known group of internees: Enemy Merchant Seamen. One of the most in-depth accounts of internment in Canada, Kestler's *Gefangen in Kanada* uses interviews with former EMS to explore internment as a cultural practice that, to be understood, must be studied through the engagement of all actors, including EMS, guards and camp staff, representatives from

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<sup>18</sup> Kirk W. Goodlet, "Number 22 Internment Camp: German Prisoners of War and Canadian Internment Operations in Mimico, Ontario, 1940-1944," *Ontario History* CIV, no. 2 (Autumn 2012): 92-95.

<sup>19</sup> Norman Hillmer, Bohdan S Kordan, and Lubomyr Y Luciuk, *On Guard for Thee: War, Ethnicity, and the Canadian State, 1939-1945* (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1988); Iacovetta, Perin, and Principe, eds., *Enemies Within*.

<sup>20</sup> Franca Iacovetta and Roberto Perin, "Italians and Wartime Internment: Comparative Perspectives on Public Policy, Historical Memory, and Daily Life," in Iacovetta, Perin, and Principe, eds., *Enemy Within*, 5.

humanitarian aid organizations, and the Canadian public.<sup>21</sup> She argues that one must analyze this complex network of relationships to better understand how individuals comprehended and coped with their internment. Although most of her account is dedicated to internment camps, she emphasizes work had a significant impact on how EMS understood and valued Canada and its people. As work opened new “contact zones,” POWs interacted with the public and the environment on a more intimate level, interactions which led many of the former EMS she interviewed to recall fondly their time working in Canada.<sup>22</sup> However, as Kestler is more interested in how internees remember their time in Canada, her scope does not permit her to study these interactions in detail.

Kestler’s account emphasizes the language and geographical barriers inherent in studying Canadian internment. Whereas she relies heavily on interviews conducted with former POWs in Germany, these barriers have generally limited historians and authors to interviews with POWs who returned to Canada as well as narratives published in English. Yves Bernard and Caroline Bergeron’s *Trop loin de Berlin* (1995) is the sole oral history of POWs in Canada, using interviews of former POWs, guards, internment staff, and civilians.<sup>23</sup> While these interviews offer valuable insight into the POW experience and how Canadians perceived and reacted to the presence of German POWs, the account remains a popular history and focuses primarily on escapes and on POWs resisting Canadian authority.

Memoirs from former POWs remain rare: only a few have been published in English. The best-known accounts, namely Eckerhart Priebe’s *Thank you, Canada* and Ulrich Steinhilper’s three-part series, *Spitfire on My Tail*, *Ten Minutes to Buffalo*, and *Full Circle*, were written by officers.<sup>24</sup> Both authors were Luftwaffe pilots shot down during the Battle of Britain and subsequently interned in Canada. Whereas Steinhilper’s narrative focuses on his

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<sup>21</sup> Judith Kestler, *Gefangen in Kanada: Zur Internierung deutscher Handelsschiffsbesatzungen während des Zweiten Weltkriegs* (Bielefeld, DE: transcript Verlag, 2017), 497.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 288–92.

<sup>23</sup> Yves Bernard and Caroline Bergeron, *Trop loin de Berlin: des prisonniers allemands au Canada (1939-1946)* (Sillery, QC: Septentrion, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> I found only one memoir written by a former guard, Arthur Birkett’s *The Green Englishman*, but it cannot be considered a reliable source. Not only does his account suggest a Russian-Japanese conspiracy to invade Canada, he describes a fictional mass escape at Camp 132 (Medicine Hat) that resulted in the deaths of numerous POWs. Arthur Birkett, *The Green Englishman* (New York, NY: Vantage Press, 1970).

wartime career and repeated escape attempts, Priebe dedicates his account to his “Canadianization.”<sup>25</sup> In doing so, he uses his experiences as a POW and immigrant to test the question “what is a Canadian?” Priebe and Steinhilper were officers initially interned in the same camps, and they therefore shared many experiences, but they were not the norm; only 2,370 of approximately 31,000 combatants in Canada were officers.<sup>26</sup> They lived in separate camps – often with better living conditions – than enlisted men and they were exempt from compulsory work under the Geneva Convention.

Memoirs from enlisted men have been especially underused in historical study. Kurt Schoenthier’s *The German Immigrant* and Paul Mengelberg’s *From Iron Coffin to Freedom North* were both published in English, but most such memoirs exist only in German. This, added with small printing runs, have added to their obscurity. Although not well known, accounts like Johannes Lieberwirth’s *Alter Mann Und Corned Beef (Old Man and Corned Beef)*, Georg Högel’s *Zwischen Grönland und Gibraltar (Between Greenland and Gibraltar)*, and Heinrich Hengy’s *Mein himmlischer Begleiter (My Heavenly Companion)* provide crucial context in understanding the POW experience in Canada, in both internment camps and labour projects and explore important themes including motivations to work, reactions to bush or farm life, contact with civilians and wildlife, and their ideas and understandings of Canada and wilderness.

Over half of the POWs in Canada worked in at least one labour project, but the subject has failed to attract significant attention among POW historians. Popular histories are especially notorious for neglecting POW labour, with accounts such as that of David Carter and John Melady relegating the topic to the sidelines and making no attempt to determine how work may have affected prisoners’ experiences. Camp histories like that of Georgia

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<sup>25</sup> Eckehart J Priebe, *Thank You, Canada: From Messerschmitt Pilot to Canadian Citizen* (West Vancouver, BC: Condor Pub., 1990); Ulrich Steinhilper and Peter Osborne, *Spitfire on My Tail: A View from the Other Side* (Bromley, UK: Independent Books, 1990); Ulrich Steinhilper and Peter Osborne, *Ten Minutes to Buffalo: The Story of Germany’s Great Escaper* (Bromley, UK: Independent Books, 1991); Ulrich Steinhilper and Peter Osborne, *Full Circle: The Long Way Home from Canada* (Bromley, UK: Independent Books, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> Helmut Wolff, *Die Deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in Britischer Hand: ein Überblick, Zur Geschichte der Deutschen Kriegsgefangenen des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Bielefeld, DE: Ernst und Werner Gieseking, 1974), 97.

Fooks and Peter Lanosky likewise make little mention of the subject, although camps they studied, 133 and 23, provided most of the POWs for labour projects across the country.

Academic accounts have fared little better. Helmut Wolff raised the subject in 1974, emphasizing that the German High Command approved the employment of prisoners as it not only provided them with a distraction from internment but also improved physical and mental health. He admits being unable to quantify the effectiveness of POW labour, but he argues that bushwork proved more popular than farm work because the former provided POWs with greater freedom.<sup>27</sup> Wolff's account remains notable for his emphasis on work as subsequent studies often overlook its significance. John Kelly provides a brief survey of work but goes little beyond deeming it an "unqualified success" on the grounds that it generated considerable revenue.<sup>28</sup> Madsen likewise limits his focus to internment camps, making no connection between labour projects and his analysis of how POWs confronted and adapted to internment. He merely describes the employment of German POWs as a "growing source of conflict" between POWs and Canadians and concludes it "generally proved inefficient."<sup>29</sup> Even Martin Auger, who dedicates a chapter of his Quebec book to POW labour, limits his discussion to work inside camps and on farms attached to camps, neglecting to mention that POWs only worked in labour projects in the province between August 1943 and April 1944, at which time the Quebec government ordered all labour projects be closed.

Stefania Cepuch's thesis and Bill Waiser's *Park Prisoners* remain the only accounts to directly address POW labour. Cepuch's analysis remains predominantly statistical and thereby falters in her goal to explore living and working conditions as well as the experiences of individual prisoners. Like Kelly, she places emphasis on the financial benefits of POW labour, arguing that POWs contributed to the stabilization of the Ontario lumber industry while keeping costs lower and ultimately helping produce a higher annual yield than the pre-war period.<sup>30</sup> While she does criticize Canada's failure to take full advantage of POW labour

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 101–2.

<sup>28</sup> Kelly, "The Prisoner of War Camps in Canada, 1939-1947," 166.

<sup>29</sup> Madsen, "German Prisoners of War in Canada," 126–30.

<sup>30</sup> Stefania H. Cepuch, "'Our Guests Are Busy: The Internment and Labour of German Prisoners of War in Ontario, 1940-1946'" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis. Queen's University, 1992), 98.

from 1939 to 1943, she provides little discussion of the factors contributing to the approval of POW labour nor does she address the difficulties entailed with employing prisoners. Waiser uses POWs in Riding Mountain National Park as a case study to examine the relationship between labour and national parks in Western Canada. He concludes that national parks were ideal locations for unwanted labourers – including POWs – as parks required cheap labour, offered spaces to keep prisoners isolated from the public, and even offered the possibility of imparting Canadian values. Despite parks’ reputations as idyllic, natural spaces, Waiser argues internees instead experienced confinement, isolation, and toil.<sup>31</sup> But Waiser underplays the fact that prisoners in Riding Mountain were all volunteers and the majority strongly preferred life and work in the park to the alternative of remaining in an internment camp.

Histories of internment in Canada have largely failed to recognize the importance of work in shaping a prisoner’s experience in Canada. Many historians have acknowledged that work provided POWs with relative freedom and a steady income, but they have not considered crucial impact work had on the POW experience. Work brought prisoners into direct contact with Canadians – civilians and guards – and with the Canadian environment, elements that profoundly affected their perceptions of Canada. It also provided POWs with an important method of coping with their internment. As historian Martin Auger has noted, POWs constantly struggled with the effects of “barbed wire psychosis” caused by social alienation, the absence of women, and the inability to find solitude.<sup>32</sup> Prisoners and internment officials in response initiated a wide range of projects and activities to keep them occupied, including organized sports, orchestras, and handicraft production, but work was often the preferred solution. Many volunteered to escape the drudgery of camp life while some volunteered to escape harassment from their pro-Nazi comrades.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Bill Waiser, *Park Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada’s National Parks, 1915-1946* (Saskatoon, SK: Fifth House Pub., 1995), 252 and 47.

<sup>32</sup> Auger, *Prisoners on the Home Front*, 51–57.

<sup>33</sup> The term “pro-Nazi” was used by military authorities to identify POWs who were suspected or known Nazis and to distinguish them from “anti-Nazi” POWs. I have therefore elected to retain this terminology.

In the course of re-evaluating internment operations, new avenues of historical analysis seek to change the way we think about POWs and their experiences or provide new insight, especially to a study of POW labour. Historians need to consider how their predecessors have tackled the study of internment and expand their focus to include POW labour. For example, John Buffinga's profile of Hermann Boeschstein, the Director of the War Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA, emphasizes the important work done by international aid organizations in improving the living and working conditions of POWs in Canada.<sup>34</sup> Their work did not stop with internment camps. Representatives like Boeschstein made regular visits to labour projects across the country to evaluate and help meet the recreational, religious, and educational needs of POWs. This work was no less important than in work camps, for prisoners had limited opportunities and equipment for recreation and education. Re-education, a popular topic in the existing historiography, has also neglected the role of POW labour.<sup>35</sup> Official re-education programs targeted prisoners in internment camps, but labour projects proved important grounds for unofficial attempts at re-education. Christopher Kilford's chapter on re-education in Canada states that work allowed thousands of prisoners to be "indirectly... and positively exposed" to the Canadian way of life, but fails to explore the topic in any detail.<sup>36</sup> With POWs working in civilian industry and, in many cases, alongside civilian employees, work did indeed offer prisoners an intimate look at the Canadian way of life and prompted many prisoners to re-evaluate their opinions of Canada and its people. Numerous authors have emphasized that 6,000 German POWs applied to remain in Canada after the war, but, in neglecting to address POW labour, have failed to consider the impact of work in a labour project on a prisoner's decision to stay.

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<sup>34</sup> John O. Buffinga, "The War Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA and Hermann Boeschstein's Role as an Ethnic Mediator, 1943-1947," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 20, no. 2 (1988): 53-70.

<sup>35</sup> Henry Faulk, *Group Captives: The Re-Education of German Prisoners of War in Britain, 1945-1948* (London, UK: Chatto & Windus, 1977); Christopher R Kilford, *On the Way! The Military History of Lethbridge, Alberta (1914-1945) and the Untold Story of Ottawa's Plan to de-Nazify and Democratise German Prisoners of War Held in Lethbridge and Canada during the Second World War* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2004); Don Page, "Tommy Stone and Psychological Warfare in World War Two: Transforming a POW Liability into an Asset," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 16, no. 3/4 (Autumn 1981): 110-20; A. Rettig, "A De-Programming Curriculum: Allied Reeducation and the Canadian-American Psychological Warfare Program for German POWs, 1943-47," *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 593-619.

<sup>36</sup> Kilford, *On the Way!*, 165.

A focus on POWs in the Canadian “wilderness” need also consider how POWs understood and interacted with their natural surroundings. Coming from Europe, POWs had different expectations and understandings of the North American wilderness, often informed by popular perceptions of the early twentieth century. *Ein Kleines Buch (A Small Book)*, a short volume written and published by POWs in Camp 132 (Medicine Hat), provides some insight into the pre-conceived notions that German POWs brought with them to Canada. Narrating the daily life of an average POW, *Ein Kleines Buch* describes how these POWs arrived in Canada expecting it to be a wild frontier. The authors attribute this to popular German writings of the pre-war period, especially those of Karl May. Authors like May, known for his adventure novels set in the American West, appear to have had a profound influence on how POWs constructed understandings of Canada and its wilderness.<sup>37</sup>

Apart from Bill Waiser’s *Park Prisoners*, there has been little work done in regard to environment and internment in Canada, but Robert Wilson’s and Connie Chiang’s histories of the incarceration of Japanese Americans stress how the natural environment influenced internment in the United States. Wilson’s “Landscapes of Promise and Betrayal,” a case study of Japanese American internment in California’s Klamath Basin, argues that reclaimed areas and sites of Japanese American internment should be considered together because internees perceived the Klamath Basin a forbidding space. Despite the need for labour, white settlers protested against the prospect of internees nearby and took it upon themselves to ensure internees would have little choice but to leave after the war, thereby preserving the area’s “whiteness.”<sup>38</sup> Once the internees left, farmland was offered to veterans and the area reverted from “forbidding” territory to one of agrarian opportunity.<sup>39</sup> Chiang takes this idea further in *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*, examining how the natural environment influenced the incarceration of detainees and how they interacted with and transformed their surroundings. Internment, she argues, was an “environmental process, deeply embedded in the lands and waters along the coast and the camp further inland. Each step in the process

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<sup>37</sup> *Ein Kleines Buch* (Medicine Hat, AB: 1945), Author’s Collection.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Wilson, “Landscapes of Promise and Betrayal: Reclamation, Homesteading, and Japanese American Incarceration,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, no. 2 (2011): 433.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 429.

was shaped by the natural world, whether its physical properties and fluctuations or humans' shifting understandings of and interactions with it."<sup>40</sup> Through farming, hiking, swimming, gardening, and other activities, internees adapted to and transformed their surroundings from something that was “categorically oppressive and forbidding” to “a place of pleasure and even inspiration.”<sup>41</sup> Both accounts raise important questions and issues for internment in Canada and especially POW labour, including reactions and adaptations to being thrust into unfamiliar landscapes as well as how the environment shaped internees' experience of internment.

Rather than attempt a history of all 300 labour projects, I have chosen five case studies, each selected for their significance to POW labour in Canada, the degree to which they were – or were not – representative of labour projects, and availability of source material. This process allows an examination of each of these case studies in detail, looking at elements, incidents, and characteristics unique to individual companies and camps that would otherwise be lost in a grand narrative of POW labour. Through these case studies, I examine the lives of the POWs, guards, and civilians in an attempt to better understand the POW experience. In doing so, I highlight the use of the environment as a both a containment method and a recreation space – the deeper and more personal interactions with nature. Whether the POWs were carving woodcrafts in their spare time, raising pet bears, hiking in the woods, canoeing in handcrafted dugout canoes, or simply seeking solitude in a secluded clearing, nature was inescapable. With their newfound freedom, many prisoners were quick to take advantage of their situation and explore their surroundings – and a small minority set their sights on escape. Through both their work and exploration, the POWs' relative freedom also brought them into contact with civilians. Fraternization triggered new problems for internment authorities and guards, but these interactions reveal a great deal regarding POWs' opinions of and attitudes towards Canada and its people as well as Canadian attitudes towards POWs.

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<sup>40</sup> Connie Y. Chiang, *Nature behind Barbed Wire: An Environmental History of the Japanese American Incarceration* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 5.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.



Government records, specifically those of the departments of Labour and National Defence held at Library and Archives Canada, form the basis of this study. Many Department of Labour files pertaining to POWs have not survived but the Department of National Defence fortunately retained a folder for each labour project. Research conducted at local and regional archives, including the Esplanade Archives (Medicine Hat), Galt Museum & Archives (Lethbridge), Archives of Manitoba (Winnipeg), Riding Mountain National Park, Lake of the Woods Museum (Kenora), Thunder Bay Museum, Sault Ste. Marie Public Library, and City of Toronto Archives revealed an array of new sources including unpublished memoirs and correspondence from POWs, photographs, company records, and artifacts. These sources provide important context regarding each camp's operation as well as how internment and POW labour has been remembered (or forgotten) due to the geographic spread and individual nature of each camp and labour project. More general collections, including the Robert Henderson Collection at the Royal Alberta Museum (Edmonton), the Glenbow Museum (Calgary), Archives of Ontario (Toronto), Canadian War Museum (Ottawa), and Directorate of History and Heritage (Ottawa) were important in shedding light on these little known labour projects and the prisoners who lived and worked in them.

Digitizing records – either through photographing or scanning – offered significant flexibility in using this vast array of sources and has allowed for a more comprehensive study of POW labour than has ever been done. Downloading digitized rolls of microfilm – thanks to the skills learned from Western University's Digital History group – not only saved me from weeks behind a microfilm reader but allowed instant access to tens of thousands of pages of records. The History Department's Digital History Lab provided the tools to digitize texts, enabling them to be both searched, and, in the case of German language texts, translated with relative ease. Timber cutting records, maps, aerial photos, and nominal rolls were georeferenced or transcribed and then incorporated into Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software to better understand the distribution of POWs in Canada, their living and working conditions, and even how they shaped the landscape around them.

Before looking at individual labour projects, the first chapter provides a general overview of Canadian internment, first examining internment operations in the First World War to better understand how it affected policies and practices of the 1940s. Then starting with the internment of Canadian civilians in September 1939, the chapter traces the evolution

of Canadian internment operations through the Canadian government's decision to accept POWs from the United Kingdom in 1940 and the subsequent expansion of internment operations. Emphasizing the policies and practices that concluded in the approval of POW labour in May 1943, this chapter provides a general outline of Canadian internment operations with an emphasis on the factors that influenced Canadian military and government authorities to eventually employ POWs in agricultural, bush, and other work.

The next five chapters are dedicated to individual case studies. Chapter two focuses on the first – and only – large-scale (more than 200 POWs) woodcutting operation employing prisoners of war in Canada: the Riding Mountain Park Labour Project. Originally employing 440 combatant POWs in Manitoba's Riding Mountain National Park, the camp was primarily established to reduce a fuelwood shortage in the province. Over the course of its two-year operation, it served as an important testing ground for POW policies, ultimately helping determine the future of POW bush operations. This case study offers unique insight into the relationships between various government departments, including the Department of Labour, Department of National Defence, Department of Munitions and Supply, and, because of the camp's location in a national park, the Parks Bureau. This chapter also explores POW reactions to life in relative freedom, interactions and fraternization with civilians, and the constant tension in providing POWs with sufficient freedom to encourage them to work – but not enough to encourage or facilitate escape – and enforcing sufficient discipline, all while avoiding public criticism.

The next two case studies examine POWs working in the pulpwood industry in Northwestern Ontario, the first focusing on the experience of POWs and the second of the employer. Chapter three looks at the bush camps of the Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., one of the largest employers of POWs. With operations centred in the western half of Northwestern Ontario, the company employed over 1,000 POWs in fifteen camps in the Kenora and Rainy River districts. Using accounts of POWs such as Johannes Lieberwirth, this chapter focuses on the POW experience, starting with motivations to work and the prisoners' first taste of "freedom." Prisoners quickly discovered living and working in remote bush camps came with new challenges, especially in regard to demanding working conditions and access to adequate medical care. Germany's surrender in May 1945 ended the war in Europe but, as this study demonstrates, Canadian authorities and anti-Nazi POWs still

had to contend with pro-Nazi POWs and find ways to ensure optimal productivity through late 1945 and early 1946.

Chapter four examines POW labour through the experiences of the largest employer of POW bush labour, the Abitibi Power & Paper Co. Employing over 2,000 POWs in thirty-four bush camps during the war, Abitibi operations were scattered across five divisions in Northwestern Ontario and two in Manitoba. This chapter looks at the factors prompting bush companies to adopt POW labour and how they had to adapt to their new workers. Employing prisoners entailed many challenges and, with no precedent, Abitibi found itself engaged in a seemingly endless struggle to find balance between having POWs work satisfactorily while keeping them content. As company officials quickly discovered, prisoners unhappy with their working or living conditions were apt to strike, and the company and military and government authorities had to develop strategies both to prevent and to overcome strikes and other forms of protest. This chapter explores some of these strategies and how they overcame – or failed to overcome – the many challenges of employing prisoners, including providing improved living arrangements, meeting demands, and securing better medical care. Using company correspondence and internal literature in the collection of the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library, this case study sheds insight into the effectiveness of POW labour and why Abitibi continued to employ POWs through 1946 despite security concerns, escapes, and strikes.

The vast majority of labour projects were located in remote regions due to security concerns and the nature of the work, but the fourth case study – Chapter five – considers POWs living and working in an urban environment. Donnell & Mudge Ltd. employed approximately fifty enemy merchant seamen and civilian internees in their New Toronto, Ontario, tannery, not only making it one of the few employers outside of agricultural and woodcutting, but also one of a handful to employ prisoners in urban industry. This, added with Donnell & Mudge being the only tannery employing POWs, provides a unique perspective on POW labour. Tracing the origins of the company and its ultimate decision to employ prisoners, this case study explores the many challenges unique to having prisoners work alongside civilians in an urban setting as well as the considerable opposition the company faced from the public and both military and local authorities. A contentious project from the beginning, Donnell & Mudge's use of POW labour in the Greater Toronto area

sheds light on the blurring of lines between “friend” and “foe” and the risks (and rewards) of fraternization and escape.

Chapter six, the final case study, surveys the employment of POWs in the agricultural industry across Canada. With POWs working on farms in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec, farming was both the first and final type of work employing prisoners of war. This chapter thus examines prisoners’ reactions to agricultural work as well as the relationship between POWs, their employers, and the wider public. Most prisoners lived in internment camps or temporary farm hostels while they worked on farms, but hundreds were also placed directly with the farmers and their families. Like the work at Donnell & Mudge, farm labour blurred the lines between friend and foe, prompting prisoners and civilians alike to re-evaluate what they thought of the enemy. This is not to say that all Canadians approved of prisoners working on farms and the liberties the work entailed; the protests that arose from civilians, organizations, and even government officials sheds light on how Canadians were generally more supportive of POW labour if they were in direct contact with the prisoners.

In their introduction to *Enemies Within*, Franca Iacovetta and Robert Perin state their intention “to launch an informed debate on an issue that has generated much passion, but little critical analysis.”<sup>42</sup> While this statement was addressed to the subject of civilian internment, the same can be said of German POWs; though the subject has remained in the shadow of Canada’s wartime effort, the internment of German POWs was one of Canada’s most important homefront battles. Popular histories have done much to bring the subject into the light, but they have provided uncritical accounts of Canadian internment operations. While David Carter, John Joseph Kelly, and Chris Madsen have attempted to provide nationwide narratives, they have failed to address many of the important issues surrounding internment in Canada. Social microhistories, like those of Martin Auger and Kirk Goodlet, are crucial to the understanding of the shared and unique circumstances of individual internment camps and labour projects. Only with a better grasp of these conditions will historians produce a complete history of Canadian internment operations in the Second World War. By moving beyond the traditional focus on internment camps and instead

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<sup>42</sup> Iacovetta and Perin, “Italians and Wartime Internment,” 19.

studying labour projects, I examine factors that could never be found within the typical high-security camps. In these labour projects, POWs were able to interact directly with their surroundings as well as with the civilian population on a more intimate level. In many labour projects, friendships between Canadians and German POWs developed and flourished, demonstrating the delicate balance between notions of friend and foe. It is within these interactions that one can gain the greatest insight into how the two groups understood one another.

Focusing on these five case studies, my dissertation seeks to provide new insight to the question of what life was like for the thousands of German POWs who worked in labour projects across the country. Why did they choose to work for an enemy nation? What was life like in bush camps and farm hostels? How did Canadians react to the presence of POWs? Did work change POWs' perceptions of Canada and, if so, how? While adding to our understanding of Canadian internment operations in the Second World War, I intend to demonstrate the value of studying the 300 labour projects that once dotted the Canadian landscape and the thousands of POWs who worked in them. Ultimately, I hope to showcase how work in these isolated labour projects and the natural environment shaped the lives of thousands of POWs who, like Richard Beranek, unexpectedly found themselves awaiting the end of the Second World War in the Canadian backwoods.

## Chapter 1

### 1 Putting Prisoners to Work

On May 24, 1943, a group of twenty German POWs walked out the main gates of Camp 133 (Lethbridge, Alberta) escorted by six men from the Veterans' Guard of Canada. While it was not uncommon to see small groups of prisoners escorted to and from the camp, this group was different: these volunteers were the first POWs in an unprecedented and experimental scheme to determine the feasibility of POW labour in Canada.<sup>1</sup> The Lethbridge area's sugar beets crop was badly affected by the nationwide labour shortage and unless additional labour could be secured, agricultural representatives believed the crop would be lost.<sup>2</sup> With civilian workers unavailable, the Department of Labour and Department of National Defence agreed to employ POWs as agricultural labourers. Transported by trucks to the fields, the prisoners worked an eight-hour day before being returned to camp that evening without incident. With the prisoners having proven themselves satisfactory workers, the Department of Labour, by the first week of June, gradually increased the number of those employed to 210.<sup>3</sup>

The process to approve POW labour had been long and arduous. Almost three years had elapsed since the first shipment of civilian internees, enemy merchant seamen (EMS), and combatant POWs arrived from the United Kingdom – three years that thousands of POWs had sat idle. Exploring these initial years, this chapter outlines the development of internment operations in Canada during the Second World War. While many of Canada's initial policies and practices were based on its experiences in the First World War, the arrival of combatant prisoners in 1940 prompted a significant expansion and changes in internment policies and practices. By tracing the decisions made by

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<sup>1</sup> Kemble, "History of Labour Projects PW," 1.

<sup>2</sup> Brig. O.M.M. Kay, "Memorandum Telephone Conversation, Major Wood," June 11, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>3</sup> Brig. F.M.W. Harvey to Secretary, Department of National Defence, June 9, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

government and military authorities, I examine the reasoning behind employing POWs and why it took three years to approve.

Preparations for the internment of enemy aliens began long before the September 1939 outbreak of war. Two years before the German Army invaded Poland, the Canadian government was aware of the possibility of war in Europe looming on the horizon. The Department of National Defence turned its attention to reviving the dormant Canadian military, but also began considering the potential threat posed by thousands of immigrants who had entered the country since 1918. Unsure where their loyalty lay and looking back upon its experience in the First World War, the Department of National Defence recognized the likelihood of once again interning civilians deemed a threat to national security. In December 1937, the department established a subcommittee to prepare for and oversee the eventual internment of enemy aliens in Canada.<sup>4</sup>

This was not the first time Canada had embarked on such a program. When war broke out twenty-five years prior, the Canadian government initiated its first national internment program. By August 1914, there were approximately 410,000 Germans and 198,000 Austro-Hungarians living in Canada, with 15,868 Germans and 69,111 Austro-Hungarians having arrived since 1911.<sup>5</sup> With their former home nations now at war with the British Empire, the loyalty of these individuals was immediately called into question, especially because some were reservists. When Parliament adopted the War Measures Act on August 22, 1914, the Cabinet now had sweeping power to ensure national security and, turning its attention towards its own borders, began preparations for internees deemed security risks.

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<sup>4</sup> Major General E.C. Ashton, "Enemy Aliens - Internment of," December 27, 1939, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>5</sup> Bohdan S. Kordan, *No Free Man: Canada, the Great War, and the Enemy Alien Experience* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 19.

Warfare in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was in part guided by the 1907 Hague Convention, whose provisions were intended as a “general rule of conduct for the belligerents” and had been signed by both Germany and the United Kingdom. While the Hague Convention did state that the armed forces of belligerent parties could consist of both combatants and non-combatants and, if captured, both parties had the right to be treated as prisoners of war, it did not address the question of civilian internment or enemy aliens. Prisoners were to be treated humanely and the detaining power could employ them in work unrelated to the war.<sup>6</sup>

As a state at war, historian Bodhan Kordan explains, Canada was also in a “state of high anxiety.” Fear of sabotage and spies was widespread and the hundreds of Austro-Hungarian and German reservists presenting themselves at their consulates in the weeks before the war did little to mitigate these fears.<sup>7</sup> While the Canadian government emphasized Canadians should make the distinction between the German government’s militarism and the German people, the use of the term “enemy alien” to describe Germans and Austro-Hungarians in Canada cast them as the enemy.<sup>8</sup> The Proclamation published in the August 15, 1914 issue of the *Canada Gazette* announced all enemy reservists attempting to leave Canada would be arrested and detained while civilians of foreign birth would not be arrested or detained unless “engaged in espionage, or attempting to engage in acts of a hostile nature, or to give information to the enemy, or unless they otherwise contravene any law, order in council or proclamation.”<sup>9</sup> Following the Proclamation, the Cabinet passed Order in Council 2721, which authorized the detention of prisoners of war, the “supervision and control” of enemy aliens, and established a registration system in which enemy aliens had to report to police or local authorities. Some 120,000 un-naturalized residents and enemy nationals were now

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<sup>6</sup> International Peace Conference 1907, “Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and Its Annex: Regulations Concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Hague, 18 October 1907,” October 18, 1907, 3–4, International Committee of the Red Cross, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/INTRO/195>.

<sup>7</sup> Kordan, *No Free Man*, 12 and 22.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Mulvey, “A Proclamation,” *The Canada Gazette* XLVIII, no. 7 (August 15, 1914): 530.



designated “enemy aliens” and the Canadian government ordered the internment of those deemed prisoners of war as well as individuals who failed to meet the registration requirements.<sup>10</sup>

Under the direction of Major-General Sir William Otter, a sixty-nine-year-old retired veteran of the Fenian Raids, the Northwest Campaign of 1885, and the Boer War, Canada’s internment operations resulted in the internment of 8,579 enemy aliens from 1914 to 1920, 817 of whom were transferred from British territories.<sup>11</sup> This total included 6,954 Austro-Hungarians (many of them Ukrainian), 2,009 Germans, 205 Turks, ninety-nine Bulgarians, and 312 whom Major-General Otter classified as miscellaneous. Many of these men had wives and families dependent on them so families could choose to either remain at home and receive a monthly allowance or accompany them to an internment camp, an option chosen by eighty-one women and 156 children. However, of the 8,579, Major-General Otter later noted that only 3,138 of these were “correctly classed” as prisoners of war, either captured “in arms” or members of enemy reserves, while the remainder were civilians. The latter, Otter explained, were civilians “who under the Hague Regulations became liable to internment if considered to be ‘agents’ attached to the army or persons whose ‘activity is of service in the war.’”<sup>12</sup>

Originally detained in local and provincial jails, internees were placed in one of five receiving stations or nineteen internment camps scattered across the country. Sites such as Kingston’s Fort Henry and Halifax’s Citadel were chosen due to their history of interning individuals in previous conflicts, while other camps made use of repurposed government and public buildings, as in the case of Brandon’s Immigration Hall,

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<sup>10</sup> Rodolphe Boudreau, “Order in Council respecting alien enemies,” October 28, 1914 in Lubomyr Luciuk, *In Fear of the Barbed Wire Fence: Canada’s First National Internment Operations and the Ukrainian Canadians, 1914-1920* (Kingston, ON: Kashtan Press, 2001), 3–4.

<sup>11</sup> Desmond Morton, “Sir William Otter and Internment Operations in Canada during the First World War,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 55, no. 1 (1974): 38.

<sup>12</sup> Major-General Sir William Otter, “Report on Internment Operations,” 1921, in Luciuk, *In Fear of the Barbed Wire Fence*, 128–29.

Lethbridge's Exhibition Buildings, and Sault Ste. Marie's Armouries. Others, like that at Kapuskasing and Banff, were erected for the purpose of housing internees.<sup>13</sup>

Along with authorizing the internment of enemy aliens, P.C. 2721 controversially equated enemy aliens with prisoners of war and, in doing so, stipulated enemy aliens could be used as prisoner of war labour under the Hague Convention. The ambiguity of their status, Kordan emphasizes, allowed Canada to adopt a "policy of systematic exploitation." While other countries used POW labour during the First World War, Canada remained unique in that its use was not done in response to wartime conditions but was, Kordan argues, instead a "crude utilitarian measure."<sup>14</sup>

The Dominion Parks Branch was especially interested in employing internees. Parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin saw opportunity for work that was otherwise impossible during wartime, with the added benefit of being a fraction of the cost. As Kordan notes, "sent into the vast expanse of the Canadian wilderness, the enemy alien would labour under military guard with few witnesses and even fewer who cared about what was taking place."<sup>15</sup> The first camp in the Dominion Parks was a tented compound near Castle Mountain in Banff National Park, opening in July 1915, where prisoners were employed clearing a road. Road work was the primary objective of internee labour in the Dominion Parks and during the following months, other camps opened in Jasper, Yoho, and Mount Revelstoke, many of which involved clearing and building roads. However, the Parks Branch saw other opportunities to make the best use of this labour and employed internees in, among other things, expanding the Banff Springs Golf Course, improving the toboggan and ski run on Rundle Mountain, building an ice palace for Banff's winter carnival, cutting and preparing trails, making fence posts and mining props, building bridges, and making cosmetic repairs throughout Jasper.<sup>16</sup> For their work, internees

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>14</sup> Bohdan S. Kordan, *Enemy Aliens, Prisoners of War: Internment in Canada During the Great War* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 60 and 69.

<sup>15</sup> Kordan, *No Free Man*, 129.

<sup>16</sup> Kordan, *Enemy Aliens, Prisoners of War*, 111–13.

received 25¢ per day. Living and working conditions were often poor. As historian Bill Waiser notes, “The prisoners saw nothing but an empty future – endless days of heavy toil and long marches.”<sup>17</sup> With little recourse to protest their conditions, internees took to strikes and, as civilian internees could not be forced to work, internment officials reduced rations and encouraged them to resume their work.<sup>18</sup>

In April 1916, the Canadian government began discharging “non-dangerous” prisoners and transferred higher-risk individuals to centralized camps. Most camps were then closed, with only a few remaining open by the end of the war. As of December 1, 1918, there were still 2,222 prisoners interned, 1,700 of them Germans, 469 Austro-Hungarians, eleven Turks, seven Bulgarians, and fifteen others.<sup>19</sup> Most of these were soon deported and the last internment camp closed in February 1920.

When war arose again almost two decades later, a fear of enemy aliens was renewed. By June 1939, growing tensions in Europe and the Pacific suggested war with Germany, Italy, and Japan, prompting the Department of National Defence to give serious consideration to how it could identify and intern high-risk enemy aliens. As many recent immigrants of German and Italian descent had come to Canada from other foreign countries, the Department of the Secretary of State recommended the internment of most of these enemy aliens while the large number of Japanese Canadians on the West Coast, combined with negative public sentiment, necessitated the relocation or internment of the entire population.<sup>20</sup>

Expecting the Mackenzie King government to issue a proclamation in the coming months that would force enemy aliens to register with the Registrars of Enemy Aliens and authorize the arrest and internment of high-risk individuals, the Department of National Defence requested each of Canada’s eleven military districts begin preparing for

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<sup>17</sup> Waiser, *Park Prisoners*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>19</sup> Kordan, *Enemy Aliens, Prisoners of War*, 240.

<sup>20</sup> J.E. Read to Major-General L.R. LaFlèche, June 9, 1939, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

internment. While the RCMP was to assume the responsibility of identifying and arresting suspected enemy aliens, each district was to provide suitable locations for receiving stations, where internees would be transferred from police to military custody, and internment camps. Emphasis was placed upon remote sites with government-owned buildings that could be easily converted to military purposes and those distant from major transportation routes and the American border. District commanders were also to consider the availability of productive work, either of military or civilian nature, which could be conducted by internees.<sup>21</sup>

By the time German soldiers marched across the Polish border on September 1, 1939, the Department of National Defence had identified twenty-four potential receiving stations and seven internment camps.<sup>22</sup> Two days later, the Canadian government passed Order in Council P.C. 2483, granting the Minister of Justice and the Registrar-General of Enemy Aliens the power to intern individuals deemed a threat to national security, and, on the following day, the Minister of National Defence appointed Brigadier-General Edouard De Bellefeuille Panet, a senior staff officer in the First World War and the head of the CPR's Department of Investigation, as Director of Internment Operations.<sup>23</sup> Following the example of the First World War, the Internment Operations Branch operated under the administration of the Department of the Secretary of State while the Department of National Defence assumed responsibility for guarding internees and administering the receiving stations and internment camps.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Major-General H.H. Matthews, "Treatment of Enemy Aliens," June 21, 1939, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>22</sup> Major C. Vokes, "Internment Operations," n.d. HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>23</sup> Col. H.N. Streight, "Preliminary - Historical Narrative of the Directorate, Prisoners of War," 1945, 113.3P4 (D1) - DIR NARR - Dir of P.W., Directorate of History and Heritage [henceforth DHH]; "Appointment," September 4, 1939, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC; Zimmermann, *The Little Third Reich on Lake Superior*, 79.

<sup>24</sup> Lieut.-Colonel H.W. Pearson, "Narrative of the Directorate, Prisoners of War," September 14, 1946, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC; Col. H.N. Streight, "Preliminary - Historical Narrative of the Directorate, Prisoners of War," 1945, 113.3P4 (D1) - DIR NARR - Dir of P.W., DHH.

On September 4, 1939 – six days before Canada declared war – the RCMP began arresting and detaining Germans and German-Canadians.<sup>25</sup> Within a week, police had arrested 246 enemy aliens, later described in an unpublished history of the Directorate of Prisoners of War as “a menace to the safety of the State.”<sup>26</sup> All of these individuals had already been under RCMP surveillance and included known members of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (German National Socialist Party, or NSDAP) and the Deutsche Arbeitsfront, German nationals whose connections could compromise national security, and naturalized Canadians of German birth whose activities brought their loyalties into question.<sup>27</sup>

Canadian internment operations of the early months of the Second World War were modelled extremely closely on those in place twenty years prior; a memorandum forwarded to all military districts in June 1939 included excerpts originally issued in 1914.<sup>28</sup> Updated instructions were issued in September 1939, largely reflecting the regulations introduced at the *Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*, held in Geneva in July 1929 and more commonly known as the 1929 Geneva Convention. Signed by forty-seven states, including Germany, Great Britain, and Canada, the purpose of the 1929 Geneva Convention was “to mitigate as far as possible, the inevitable rigours thereof and to alleviate the condition of prisoners of war.”<sup>29</sup> From the

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<sup>25</sup> Robert H. Keyserlingk, “Breaking the Nazi Plot: Canadian Government Attitudes Towards German Canadians, 1939-1945,” in Hilmer, Kordan, and Luciuk, eds., *On Guard for Thee*, 59.

<sup>26</sup> “War Diary, Internment Operations,” September 11, 1939, Internment Operations War Diary and Notes for War Diary, Box 1, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.) Archives of Manitoba [henceforth AoM]; Col. H.N. Streight, “Preliminary - Historical Narrative of the Directorate, Prisoners of War,” 1945, 113.3P4 (D1) - DIR NARR - Dir of P.W., DHH.

<sup>27</sup> This last group included the leadership of the Deutscher Bund (Canadian Society for German Culture) who, according to military authorities, “have been most conspicuous and effective in their attempts to undermine the loyalties of Canadians of German origin.” Maj.-Gen. H.H. Matthews to DOC MD7, September 5, 1939, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC; Director of Public Information, untitled press release, January 27, 1940, 113.3P4 (D6) - DPR press releases re PW Internment Ops in Cdn, DHH.

<sup>28</sup> Maj.-Gen. H.H. Matthews to all District Officers Commanding, June 21, 1939, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>29</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, “Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 27 July 1929,” July 27, 1929, <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/FULL/305?OpenDocument>.

point of capture to repatriation, the convention's ninety-seven articles outlined the responsibilities of detaining powers and the rights of POWs, including living conditions in POW camps, food and clothing, hygiene, intellectual and moral needs, discipline, pay, work, correspondence, representation, and disciplinary punishment. While the convention attempted to ensure the well-being and fair treatment of combatants in enemy hands, it did not include the treatment of civilian internees – the fate of these men and women remained at the hands of the detaining power. Ensuring that the terms of the convention were met by the respective countries, both Britain and Germany named the Swiss government as the Protecting Power for POWs. Thereby authorized to visit POW camps and correspond with POWs, the Swiss Consul forwarded complaints and grievances to the respective countries to help ensure the well-being of all POWs.<sup>30</sup>

The 1929 Geneva Convention did not regulate the internment and treatment of enemy aliens.<sup>31</sup> After conferring with Britain and the International Red Cross, in December 1939, Canada agreed to treat interned enemy aliens – categorized as Prisoners of War, Class II to separate them from combatant prisoners (Prisoners of War, Class I) – according to the terms of the 1929 Geneva Convention, albeit with some exceptions.<sup>32</sup> These generally included articles not applicable to non-combatant prisoners, such as the wearing of rank badges, but did include a provision for the internment of female internees in civil institutions, left the availability of work to the discretion of the Director of Internment Operations, and voided articles regarding post-war repatriation.

Hesitant to make significant investments in internment operations so early in the war, the Department of National Defence preferred to convert existing facilities rather

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<sup>30</sup> Col. H.N. Streight, "Preliminary - Historical Narrative of the Directorate, Prisoners of War," 1945, 113.3P4 (D1) - DIR NARR - Dir of P.W., DHH.

<sup>31</sup> Provisions for the treatment of enemy aliens was not added until the 1949 Geneva Convention. Lt.-Col. H. Stethem, "Instructions Relating to the Maintenance of Discipline and Treatment of Enemy Aliens held as Prisoners of War in Internment Camps in Canada," September 1939, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>32</sup> Lt.-Col. H. Stethem, "Problems Relative to Prisoners of War, Civil Internees and Canadians in Belligerent Countries," March 21, 1940, HQS 7236-48 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Director of Internment Operations, C-5393, RG24, LAC.

than build new, dedicated camps.<sup>33</sup> The first Canadian internees therefore found themselves transferred from receiving stations across the country to a hastily converted forestry camp near Kananaskis, Alberta. Originally established as the Kananaskis Forest Experiment Station in 1934, the station had been immediately repurposed by the Department of National Defence as an unemployment relief camp until 1936 before being returned to its intended use.<sup>34</sup> In 1939, the commanding officer of Military District 13 deemed the site suitable for an internment camp, citing the station's remoteness, infrastructure, and availability of forestry work and, in early September, engineers erected barbed wire fences and guard towers. Designated "Camp K," the forestry station accepted its first internees on September 8, just one day after Canada's entry into the war.<sup>35</sup>

In the Eastern half of the country, receiving stations were established in Kingston's Fort Henry and the Quebec Citadel to accommodate internees before their transfer to Camp K. However, the increasing number of internees necessitated another internment camp. Military authorities settled on a government-owned forestry station on the shore of Centre Lake near Petawawa, Ontario. Like Camp K, this station made use of existing facilities and had opportunities to employ internees in forestry work.<sup>36</sup> Following the installation of fences and towers, Camp P opened in December 1939.

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<sup>33</sup> E. Lapointe to T.B. McQuesten, October 17, 1939, 1-1-5 - Canadian Employment, Vol. 6576, RG24, LAC.

<sup>34</sup> C.L. Kirby, "The Kananaskis Forest Experiment Station, Alberta" (Edmonton, AB: Northern Forest Research Centre, January 1973), 2.

<sup>35</sup> "Kananaskis Camp-Seebe, Alta., Nominal Rolls - P-W By Camp Number," n.d., HQS 7236-1-6-130, Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Returns I.O. 2s - Seebe, C-5369, RG24, LAC.

<sup>36</sup> Brigadier-General E. de B. Panet to R.D. Prettie, September 20, 1939, 5-1-6 - P/W - Canadian Internees, Work & Employment, Vol. 6588, RG24, LAC.



**Figure 1: Internees at Camp K. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Archives, V-P-HIST-03397-30.**

By May 1940, Camp K and Camp P held some 257 internees and while the two camps remained sufficient to accommodate the expected number of civilian internees, events overseas quickly expanded Canadian internment operations to an unprecedented scale.<sup>37</sup> On May 10, 1940, the German Army launched its invasion of France and the Lowlands. Pushing Allied forces back to the coast, the German attack shattered hopes for a quick end to the war. Struggling to retain a foothold on the continent, the British turned their attention to the defence of their own country. Following the evacuation of British and Allied forces at Dunkirk in early June, Britain was now Germany's next target. In an attempt to mobilize all available manpower and resources, the British government began

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<sup>37</sup> Col. H. de N. Watson, "Numbers Interned, Kananaskis Internment Camp," May 4, 1940, HQS 7236-1-10-130 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - IO8A & 8B - Correspondence Re Returns, Strengths - Seebe, C-5374, RG24, LAC; Lt.-Col. H. Stethem, "Memorandum: Italian Situation," May 6, 1940, HQS 7236-48 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens, Director of Internment Operations, C-5393, RG24, LAC.



seriously considering how it could channel personnel engaged in non-essential duties to the defence of Britain.

By late May, the British held over 9,000 civilian internees and 3,000 German combatant POWs. Feeding, housing, and guarding these men consumed valuable resources and manpower desperately needed elsewhere. Eager to divert these resources to defensive purposes, the British government looked to transfer as many internees and POWs off British soil – ideally across the Atlantic.<sup>38</sup> On May 31, 1940, the British government turned to the Commonwealth for help and inquired if the Canadian government would accept and detain British internees on Canadian soil. Citing the presence of these internees in areas that could soon become combat zones presented a “very difficult problem,” Vincent Massey, the High Commissioner for Canada, emphasized these internees placed a serious burden on the British war effort.<sup>39</sup>

The British request went unanswered for a week, so Massey repeated emphatically Great Britain’s concern. The issue was very urgent, Massey asserted: the 3,000 POWs and 9,000 internees, 2,500 of whom were pro-Nazis, presented a significant security risk in the event of a German invasion.<sup>40</sup> The Luftwaffe had already demonstrated the effectiveness of airborne assaults in the Netherlands in May 1940 and the British feared a similar attack alongside a seaborne invasion. If German paratroopers succeeded in releasing internees and POWs, internees might guide the invading forces while POWs could act as a “Fifth Column” movement, terrorizing the British countryside. This threat would only increase when Italy joined the war – a declaration

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<sup>38</sup> A Scottish staff member at Princeton University, upon reading apparent threats made by Germans against Allied prisoners, suggested that, in the event of Britain being overrun by German forces, German POWs be used as leverage. If, he suggested, German POWs were held in Canada, they could be used as hostages in the event of threats against the British populace - namely demanding the surrender of the British Navy which would have presumably relocated to Canada. A.G. MacLachlan to M.S., June 5, 1940, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>39</sup> High Commission for Canada in Great Britain to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, May 31, 1940, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>40</sup> High Commissioner for Canada in Great Britain to Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada, June 5, 1940, 621-K-40 - Transfer to Canada of Enemy Internees from United Kingdom, Vol. 1, Vol. 2761, RG25, LAC.

expected at any time now – as British authorities had earmarked 1,500 members of the Italian Fascist Party and 5,000 Italian civilians for internment. Assuring Great Britain would bear all internment costs, Massey asked if Canada could accept the 3,000 POWs and at least 4,000 civilian internees currently in British custody. It was, Massey concluded, “most essential” that these dangerous internees and POWs be removed.<sup>41</sup>

Massey’s pleas did not go unheeded. With only a relatively small internment operation and no precedent to such a request, the Canadian government assembled a committee to judge the feasibility of the request. Composed of Director of Internment Operations Brigadier-General E. de B. Panet, the RCMP Commissioner, and representatives from the Department of Justice and the Department of External Affairs, the committee concluded that the presence of British internees and POWs in Canada presented no more danger than their presence in the United Kingdom and accepting the request would serve as an important form of wartime assistance to Britain. The committee ultimately recommended Canada accept as many internees the British were willing to send so long as British internment policies did not infringe upon those enacted by the Canadian government.<sup>42</sup> Following a review of the committee’s recommendation, on June 10, 1940, the Secretary of State for External Affairs informed Massey the Canadian government was prepared to accept the 4,000 civilian internees and 3,000 POWs.<sup>43</sup> Nine days later, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King publicly announced Canada’s decision and, two days later, the *Duchess of York* left Britain for Quebec with 2,112 Category “A” civilian internees, 168 German officers, and 368 other ranks. Arriving on June 28, these became the first British internees and German POWs to step foot on Canadian soil.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Vincent Massey to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, June 7, 1940, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>42</sup> N.A. Robertson to Brigadier-General E. de B. Panet, June 6, 1940, 621-K-40 - Transfer to Canada of Enemy Internees from United Kingdom, Vol. 1, Vol. 2761, RG25, LAC.

<sup>43</sup> Secretary of State for External Affairs to High Commissioner for Canada in the United Kingdom, June 10, 1940, p. 247153, Vol. 292, MG26 J1, William Lyon Mackenzie King Papers, C-4572, LAC.

<sup>44</sup> High Commissioner for Canada in Great Britain to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, June 29, 1940, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC; Col. H.N. Streight, “Preliminary - Historical Narrative of the Directorate, Prisoners of War,” 1945, 113.3P4 (D1) - DIR NARR

While the Canadian government had been debating the feasibility of accepting internees and POWs from Great Britain, Italy entered the war on June 10. This meant thousands of Italian Canadians were also now declared enemy aliens. But the RCMP and military authorities were already prepared; along with pro-Nazi organizations and individuals in the late 1930s, the RCMP had kept surveillance of fascist activities in Canada and began arresting high-risk individuals almost immediately. These included Italians who were not Canadian residents as well as residents who were believed to be threats to national security.<sup>45</sup> By September 6, 1940, internees arrested and detained in Canada included 555 Italians, 563 Germans, and seventy-one others.<sup>46</sup>

While the Geneva Convention ensured these POWs and internees access to basic necessities, it was international aid organizations that stepped in to provide additional comforts. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the War Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA became the chief aid organizations for POWs and internees. The Red Cross focused on the living conditions of camps, conducting regular visits to internment camps, and providing relief to POWs and internees. At the onset of war, the YMCA also offered its services to countries expected to intern POWs, eventually forming the War Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA. Through this branch, the YMCA focused on the recreational, educational, and cultural needs of POWs, providing an array of items including educational material, musical instruments, films, and books.<sup>47</sup>

The arrival of the internees and German POWs from Britain forced the Department of National Defence to re-evaluate its operations. While Camp K and Camp P were sufficient to hold the relatively small number of Canadian civilian internees, the

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- Dir of P.W., DHH; Dominion of Canada, *Official Report of Debates, House of Commons*, Sixth Session-Eighteenth Parliament, vol. I (Ottawa, ON: Edmond Cloutier, 1940), 911–12.

<sup>45</sup> Luigi Bruti Liberati, "The Internment of Italian Canadians," in Iacovetta, Perin, and Principe, eds., *Enemies Within*, 83.

<sup>46</sup> This figure includes female internees (seven German and one Italian). "Internment Operations State", September 6, 1940, HQS 7236-48 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Director of Internment Operations, C-5393, RG24, LAC.

<sup>47</sup> Buffinga, "The War Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA," 57.

transfer of 7,000 internees and POWs from Britain required an expansion of existing camps or to build new ones. Returning to the sites proposed in August 1939, the Department of National Defence opted to convert facilities at four Ontario locations to internment camps: a jail in Mimico, Kingston's Fort Henry, a former sanatorium in Gravenhurst, and an abandoned pulp and paper mill in Red Rock.<sup>48</sup> Completed by July 1940, the four locations were able to accommodate the first arrivals from Britain but were nowhere near adequate for all 7,000. Scrambling, the Department of National Defence established a series of additional camps – some temporary – to meet demands. Another eight sites were converted to internment camps by mid-October: Trois-Rivières, St. Helen's Island, Cove Fields, Ile-Aux-Noix, Farnham, and Sherbrooke in Quebec; Espanola and Monteith in Ontario; and the last in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Criteria for an internment camp varied on the number and class of internees expected, but deciding factors included availability of accommodation, access to transportation routes, proximity to civilians, security features, and the availability of useful work. Looking for opportunities to employ internees in farming, land-clearing, road-building, cutting fuelwood, and reforestation, internment officials sought to take advantage of this new source of manpower.<sup>49</sup> However, security priorities and the rushed process favoured locations that could be easily converted from civilian to military purposes, often leaving little consideration to the potential of work; of the twelve sites decided upon by October 1940, few were well-suited for employment.

Before camp commandants could employ POWs, they first needed approval and this was no simple task. Unlike Britain or the United States, in Canada responsibility for POWs and their employment lay with a series of government departments. The Department of National Defence, the Department of Labour, the Department of External Affairs, and the British government all had to be consulted and agree upon POW

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<sup>48</sup> Brigadier-General E. de B. Panet to the Deputy Minister of National Defence, June 19, 1940, June 19, 1940, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>49</sup> O.A. Corkery to J.L. Ralston, June 21, 1940, 1-2-3 - Policy - U.K. re Employment, Vol. 6576, RG24, LAC.

practices. General responsibility of POWs fell to the Department of National Defence, which looked after the accommodations, well-being, and guarding of POWs while the Department of Labour was interested in how they could be best employed. Consulting with their British counterparts, the Department of External Affairs' interest remained primarily in the meeting of the terms of the Geneva Convention and that Canadian practices fell in line with those of the British and Commonwealth governments. While all four parties were, albeit to varying degrees, in favour of employing POWs, they had to come to an agreement that best suited their interests while simultaneously met security concerns and international agreements.

When a Member of Parliament raised the question of using POW labour to finish a section of the trans-Canada highway in August 1940, Mackenzie King noted that POW employment was still under consideration.<sup>50</sup> Canadian internees were cutting fuelwood at both Camp K and Camp P but, because they were civilians arrested on Canadian soil, the government could do with them as they saw fit. Employing internees and POWs from Britain entailed further restrictions; essentially the wards of Great Britain and Canada their custodian, they could not simply be put to work.<sup>51</sup> The British government remained concerned that the employment of civilian internees would prompt Germany to respond by working British civilians interned in Germany, of which there was a larger number, and possibly under harsher conditions.<sup>52</sup> Understandably hesitant to make action that could threaten the well-being of their citizens, the British government remained reluctant to employing internees and POWs.

Canada's first foray into internee labour in the Second World War was met with mixed results. The three forestry stations repurposed as internment camps – Acadia, Kananaskis, and Petawawa – all had internees felling trees and cutting wood, but

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<sup>50</sup> Dominion of Canada, *Official Report of Debates, House of Commons*, First Session-Nineteenth Parliament, vol. III (Ottawa, ON: Edmond Cloutier, 1940), 2530–31.

<sup>51</sup> H.H. Wrong to N.A. Robertson, March 27, 1942, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>52</sup> Memorandum to Dr. Skelton, August 26, 1940, 621-K-40 - Transfer to Canada of Enemy Internees from United Kingdom, Vol. 1, Vol. 2761, RG25, LAC.

Petawawa had a significantly lower output.<sup>53</sup> In March 1941, for example, 173 internees at Petawawa worked 1,024 man-days in forestry work while 135 internees in Acadia worked 3,961 man-days, and 221 internees in Kananaskis worked 3,905 man-days.<sup>54</sup> The poor performance of Canadian civilian internees was often blamed on lack of experience and their “nature.” Acadian Forest Experimental Station Superintendent E.G. Saunders stated,

The internees were not a good type of labourer; many of them were highly educated and had never done labouring of any sort; many others were the school-boy age between 16 and 18 and knew nothing about labouring. It was necessary to have them organize the work from the ground up, to teach the men the use of tools, to teach them the necessity for the work that was being done, and as far as possible to instruct them in the value of the work being planned, the obtaining of fuelwood.<sup>55</sup>

Acting Secretary of State E. Lapointe made a similar observation, noting many internees were not accustomed to heavy physical labour; he noted, “I think the police in advising as to the persons interned have very properly had more in mind people of education who have the capacity for leadership and who might therefore be more likely to be dangerous to the State.”<sup>56</sup>

Combatant prisoners presented another opportunity. While fear of reprisal affected employment of POWs and civilian internees alike, the Geneva Convention afforded POWs additional protection. Authorizing the detaining power to employ

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<sup>53</sup> D. Roy Cameron to Colonel H. Stethem, May 20, 1941, 1-1-5 - Canadian Employment, Vol. 6576, RG24, LAC.

<sup>54</sup> Monthly Employment Report, March 1941, HQS 7236-34-1-33 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Monthly Report of Employment of P/Ws for Which They Receive Pay - Petawawa, C-5379, RG24, LAC; Monthly Employment Report, March 1941, HQS 7236-34-1-70 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Monthly Report of Employment of P/Ws for Which They Receive Pay - Fredericton, C-5379, RG24, LAC; Monthly Employment Report, March 1941, HQS 7236-34-1-130 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Monthly Report of Employment of P/Ws for Which They Receive Pay - Seebe, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>55</sup> E.G. Saunders, “Report on Internee Labour, Acadian Forest Experiment Station, N.B.,” n.d., 1-1-5 - Canadian Employment, Vol. 6576, RG24, LAC.

<sup>56</sup> E. Lapointe to T.B. McQuesten, October 17, 1939, 1-1-5 - Canadian Employment, Vol. 6576, RG24, LAC.



**Figure 2: Internees from Camp K at work, 1940. Here internees clear underbrush at Kananaskis under the watchful eye of one of their guards. Author's Collection.**

physically fit prisoners, with the exception of officers, the Geneva Convention cited eight articles guiding the conditions of POW employment. The convention specified prisoners were to work the same hours as civilians employed in the same type of work and were entitled to at least one day of rest each week.<sup>57</sup> While those employed in administrative or maintenance duties were not to be paid, those employed in other work were to be paid at a rate established between the belligerent powers. Work done for the state was to be paid at a similar rate to that paid to soldiers doing the same work while those done for private individuals was to be established by military authorities.<sup>58</sup> However, the convention

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<sup>57</sup> Articles, 27, 28, 29, and 30 in International Committee of the Red Cross, "Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War."

<sup>58</sup> Article 34 in Ibid.

prohibited any work directly connected to the war effort, such as the manufacture or transport of weapons and munitions.<sup>59</sup>

Despite Britain's hesitancy to employ POWs, precedents had already been established and their employment had received approval from the German High Command. In response to inquiries from German POWs in Great Britain asking whether they could be employed in outside work and if the cutting of mine-timber was "compatible" with German interests, the German Legation in Switzerland informed British authorities,

It has repeatedly been pointed out to the German prisoners of war that remunerated work, even when this is outside the camps, is not only permitted but most desirable, provided this work does not constitute a menace to the security of their native country. The question as to whether the felling of trees for mine-timber is compatible with German interests can be answered in the affirmative, since this work does not contribute directly towards the economic interests of the State at war with Germany.

The German High Command went so far as to ask the Swiss Legation, when visiting British POW camps, to use its influence to encourage German NCOs to "avail themselves of every opportunity" of work.<sup>60</sup> Citing security concerns, the British government had no intention to employ combatant POWs in the immediate future but it did approve employment in Canada on paid, compulsory labour.<sup>61</sup> Informing the Secretary of State for External Affairs of Great Britain's decision, Vincent Massey added that Canada would "no doubt wish to avoid" employing German POWs in any work that could be deemed as furthering the Canadian war effort, "lest the German authorities should take advantage of such action to employ British prisoners of war in work of German national importance."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Articles 31 and 32 in *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Translation of letter from German Legation in Switzerland, July 8, 1940, 1-1-5 - Canadian Employment, Vol. 6576, RG24, LAC.

<sup>61</sup> Brigadier-General E. de B. Panet to District Officers Commanding Military Districts 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, and 13, September 20, 1940, 5-2-2 - Employment, Vol. 6590, RG24, LAC.

<sup>62</sup> Vincent Massey to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, September 5, 1940, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.



Receiving considerable attention in the Canadian press, the arrival of POWs from Britain caught the attention of civilians hoping to see them do work beneficial to the state. One Nova Scotia resident stated it was “foolish” to have German and Italian POWs confined behind barbed wire when they could be used to build roads or airfields. Arguing this “free labour” was soon to be a “vital necessity,” he believed employing prisoners would allow Canada to allocate valuable resources elsewhere.<sup>63</sup> The Alberta Motor Association likewise saw POW employment as an opportunity to benefit the state; suggesting they be employed in helping complete the trans-Canada highway, POWs could, the association noted, “make some contribution to the loss and damage they cause to the Dominion.”<sup>64</sup>

Civilian employers also saw an opportunity to benefit from POW labour. In October 1940, the North Shores Gold Mine inquired as to the possible employment of German POWs at its mine near Schreiber, Ontario, and farmers such as Mr. Adéodat de Champlain requested POWs as farmhands.<sup>65</sup> With labour scarce and land needing to be cleared, de Champlain proposed housing POWs on his farm and employing them for the summer months for the duration of the war.<sup>66</sup> Both requests, however, were ultimately turned down for security reasons.<sup>67</sup>

The National Parks Bureau<sup>68</sup> also expressed interest in once again employing internees in Canada’s national parks. While the superintendent of Banff National Park was against establishing an internment camp – calling the work performed by internees in

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<sup>63</sup> Lt.-Col. Stethem to Angus L. Macdonald, August 7, 1942, 1-2-3 - Policy - U.K. re Employment, Vol. 6576, RG24, LAC.

<sup>64</sup> Brigadier-General E. de B. Panet to A.B. Mackay, August 19, 1940, 5-1-6 - P/W - Canadian Internees, Work & Employment, Vol. 6588, RG24, LAC.

<sup>65</sup> Jos. S. Stauffer to T. Crear, October 9, 1940, 5-2-2 - Employment, Vol. 6590, RG24, LAC.

<sup>66</sup> Adéodat de Champlain to Minster Ralston, February 1, 1942, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>67</sup> Major-General H.F.G. Letson to Adeodat de Champlain, February 17, 1942, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>68</sup> The Dominion Parks Branch became the National Parks Bureau under the Lands, Parks, and Forests Branch as part of a government restructuring in 1936. W.F. Lothian, *A History of Canada’s National Parks*, vol. II (Ottawa, ON: Parks Canada, 1977), 18.

the First World War “unimportant” and relatively unsatisfactory – the superintendents of Jasper, Elk Island, and Prince Albert National Parks all proved favourable to the idea, with most suggesting internees perform road work. The Superintendent of Riding Mountain National Park proved less favourable but acknowledged a camp could be established if necessary.<sup>69</sup> While military authorities ultimately elected not to establish internment camps in national parks, the Parks Bureau explored the possibility of using internee labour to build camp tables, benches, community building seats, and museum showcases for parks.<sup>70</sup> Colonel Stethem, who took over as Director of Internment Operations in November 1940, initially favoured the idea, but it was dropped in favour of having internees cut fuelwood and work to improve the camps.<sup>71</sup>

Work inside the camps or in their immediate vicinity became the principal focus of POW employment. Requiring little or no additional security, working programmes took advantage of internee and POW skilled labour to aid wartime industry. Beginning as early as January 1940, the programmes included woodworking, light manufacturing, shoe repair, and machine shops, providing material for the Army and Navy Ordnance.<sup>72</sup> However, the specialized nature of this work meant that, with few exceptions, most internment in camps lacked the infrastructure to employ POWs in such work.

Little progress in regard to POW employment was made in the following months but the United Kingdom continued to transfer POWs to Canadian custody. Among those transferred were hundreds of Enemy Merchant Seamen. The British Home Office defined an EMS as:

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<sup>69</sup> Memorandum to Williamson, July 11, 1940, U165 - Universal - War File - General, Part 1, Vol. 110, T-12887, RG84 A-2-a, LAC.

<sup>70</sup> Memorandum to D. Roy Cameron, August 30, 1940, U165 - Universal - War File - General, Part 1, Vol. 110, T-12887, RG84 A-2-a, LAC; Col. H. Stethem to Commandant, Petawawa Internment Camp, December 9, 1940, 5-1-6 - P/W - Canadian Internees, Work & Employment, Vol. 6588, RG24, LAC.

<sup>71</sup> J.R.B. Coleman to M.B. Morison, September 4, 1940, 5-1-6 - P/W - Canadian Internees, Work & Employment, Vol. 6588, RG24, LAC.

<sup>72</sup> Major Barton, “Subject - Prisoner-of-War Labour Projects,” January 28, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

an enemy national who, at the time of his capture, either is a member of the crew of any ship or is proceeding abroad in accordance with an agreement to join and serve in a ship, including, in either case, a ship employed in sea-fishing or the sea-fishing service or in a lighthouse tender, lightvessel tender, or lightvessel or who has been, at any time, since 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939, a member of the crew of any ship.

The definition of an EMS was later extended to anyone who was employed or worked on a ship in any capacity, including pilots and apprentices.<sup>73</sup> As non-combatants, EMS were classified as Class II POWs along with civilian internees.

The increasing number of POWs in Canada forced the Department of National Defence to expand and reorganize. In 1941, Colonel Harvey Newton Streight replaced Colonel Stethem as Director of Internment Operations and the Department adopted a new naming system for internment camps, abandoning the letter designations in favour of numbers and based on the military district in which an internment camp was located; for example, Camp P, in Military District 3, became Camp 33 while Camp K, in Military District 13, became Camp 130. The same year, four new internment camps opened.



**Figure 3: Internment Camps in Canada, 1939-1947. Map by Author.**

<sup>73</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Director, Prisoners of War, September 6, 1944, HQS 7236-53 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Enemy Merchant Seamen, C-5394, RG24, LAC.

Camp 100 (Neys, Ontario) and Camp 101 (Angler, Ontario) became the first purpose-built internment camps, while Camp 30 (Bowmanville, Ontario) made use of a former boys' school and Camp 32 (Hull, Quebec) opened in a newly constructed jail.

Expanding Canada's internment operations also entailed a literal changing of the guard. Security had originally been in the hands of the Canadian Provost Corps and military regiments but the desire to transfer active units to Britain necessitated a new, dedicated guard force. Therefore, in June 1941, the Veterans' Guard of Canada assumed the responsibility of administering internment camps and guarding POWs. Established in May 1940, the Veterans' Guard of Canada was composed almost entirely of veterans of the First World War. When war broke out in 1939, thousands of veterans from the First World War flocked to recruiting centres to once again volunteer their services. However, most were turned away as, one officer later recalled, they were told "you are much too old, we need young men who would be better able to withstand the rigors of war."<sup>74</sup> Rather than waste their experience, the Department of National Defence established the Veterans' Guard of Canada, recruiting veterans under the age of fifty. Intended as a home defence force, the Veterans' Guard was initially tasked with guarding industrial sites and strategic points across the country before taking over internment duties. Eventually, by June 1943, the Veterans' Guard reached a peak strength of over 10,000 men on active service.<sup>75</sup>

Canada received few internees and POWs in the latter half of 1941 but Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 brought the status of thousands of Japanese Canadians into question. Anti-Japanese sentiment, combined with fears of a Japanese attack on the West coast and of Japanese spies and sabotage produced significant paranoia, but the Chiefs of Staff Committee, police, and local authorities were more

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<sup>74</sup> Maj. H. Smith, "Veterans' Guard of Canada," unpublished manuscript, 113.3P4.02 (D1) - Papers rec'd from Maj. H. Smith (Ret'd) describing the function and responsibilities of the Veteran's Guard of Canada, DHH.

<sup>75</sup> "Distribution Veterans Guard of Canada, Canada and Adjacent Territories 19 Jun 43," 158 (D2) - Stats - Veterans Guard of Cda strength & location as at 19 Jun 43 date the VGC reached its peak strength, DHH.

afraid of anti-Japanese outbreaks than any subversive activity.<sup>76</sup> Despite this, fear of a Japanese attack prompted the Canadian government to announce regulations and restrictions targeting the West coast's Japanese Canadian population in January 1942, including the impounding of fishing vessels, the employment of male enemy aliens, and the removal of enemy aliens from a yet to be defined protected area.<sup>77</sup>

In February, with British Columbians fearing an enemy attack, the Cabinet ordered the forced relocation of 22,000 Japanese Canadians living on Canada's Pacific coast. However, unlike the treatment of POWs and German and Italian internees, the relocation and resettlement of Japanese Canadians was organized by a special agency, the British Columbia Security Commission (BCSC), rather than the Department of National Defence.<sup>78</sup> Most Japanese Canadians were relocated to the interior of British Columbia while approximately 700 were interned in Camp 101 (Angler, Ontario). With the exception of those in Camp 101, the vast majority of Japanese Canadians therefore were never administered by the Directorate of Internment Operations.

By January 1942, Canada held 6,201 POWs, EMS, and civilian internees from Great Britain as well as 1,147 of its own internees.<sup>79</sup> By the end of the year, this number tripled in size due to the escalating campaign in North Africa. Italian and British forces had been engaged in Egypt and Libya since June 1940, but the campaign escalated with the arrival of the German *Afrika Korps*, under the command of Erwin Rommel, in February 1941. Despite initial setbacks, Allied forces stemmed the German-Italian advance and forced its retreat in 1942. Thousands of German and Italian POWs fell into Allied hands and the majority of POWs captured by British forces in North Africa were

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<sup>76</sup> Patricia E. Roy et al., *Mutual Hostages: Canadians and Japanese during the Second World War*. (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 79.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>78</sup> The BCSC was dissolved in February 1943 and its duties were assumed by the Department of Labour. *Ibid.*, 102–3.

<sup>79</sup> "Internment Operations, State of U.K. Prisoners of War," January 17, 1942, HQS 7236-48 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Director of Internment Operations, C-5393, RG24, LAC; "Internment Operations, State of Canadian Internees," January 17, 1942, HQS 7236-48 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Director of Internment Operations, C-5393, RG24, LAC.

initially transferred to India and Australia. Japan's entry into the war brought this practice to a halt; threatened by the presence of Japanese forces, both Australia and India informed Great Britain they could no longer accept POWs.<sup>80</sup> The United States offered to accept 150,000 POWs in British custody but the British government hoped to retain as many POWs as possible within its empire to serve as leverage to guarantee the well-being of British men in Germany.<sup>81</sup> Great Britain thus once again turned to Canada for help.

In January 1942, the Canadian government agreed to accept the POWs and British authorities warned them to expect some 24,000. With existing camps already nearing their limits, it was clear that Canadian internment operations required new camps to accommodate the expected influx. However, rather than continue the practice of repurposing existing facilities into relatively small camps, internment officials suggested closing a number of current camps and consolidating their numbers into two larger, purpose-built facilities where POWs could be guarded more effectively and receive standardized accommodations and treatment.<sup>82</sup> After reviewing the proposals, the Department of National Defence elected to build two new camps in Alberta, Camp 132 near Medicine Hat and Camp 133 near Lethbridge. Each with an expected capacity of over 12,000 men, these new camps would become the mainstay of Canadian internment operations.

Construction of both camps was to begin in summer 1942 but the imminent arrival of thousands of POWs from North Africa necessitated temporary accommodations. In Spring 1942, the Department of National Defence erected a temporary tented camp, also referred to as Camp 133, near Ozada, Alberta, in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. The first POWs arrived in May 1942 and, although there had been little time to prepare, the camp was surrounded by barbed wire fences and

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<sup>80</sup> Col. H.N. Streight, "Preliminary - Historical Narrative of the Directorate, Prisoners of War," 1945, 113.3P4 (D1) - DIR NARR - Dir of P.W., DHH.

<sup>81</sup> Vincent Massey to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, November 24, 1942, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>82</sup> "Prisoners of War," January 30, 1942, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

guard towers. As the camp was only expected to remain open during the summer, POWs and guards alike lived in bell tents – far from ideal for the Albertan foothills. One guard later recalled, “Life in tents at an elevation of over 4,000 feet with almost continuous rain or snow, with occasional sudden gale force winds blowing down the tents; all continuing to the end of November when temperatures dropped well below zero was not exactly our idea of an ideal life for men of older or middle age!”<sup>83</sup> Fortunately, the entire camp was transferred to Camp 133 (Lethbridge) by December 1942.



**Figure 4: Camp 133 at Lethbridge, Alberta. The POW enclosure was surrounded by barbed wire fences and guard towers while guard and staff accommodations and administration buildings line the perimeter. Galt Museum & Archives P19861128003.**

The new Camps 132 and 133 were a welcome change from Ozada. Each camp had a capacity of 12,500 POWs and included thirty-six barracks, two large recreation halls, mess halls, workshops, lecture halls, hospital, dental clinic, and detention barracks as well as quarters and messes for the camp staff and guards, guard room, administration building, postal hut, supply building, hospital, dental clinic, and dining hall. A warning

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<sup>83</sup> Maj. H. Smith, “Veterans’ Guard of Canada,” unpublished manuscript, 113.3P4.02 (D1) - Papers rec’d from Maj. H. Smith (Ret’d) describing the function and responsibilities of the Veteran’s Guard of Canada, DHH.

wire and two barbed-wire fences separated POWs from the outside world and POWs remained under the vigilant eye of guards posted in the twenty-two guard towers surrounding the enclosure.<sup>84</sup> In camp, POWs did their utmost to fill their time, assembling orchestras, bands, and theatrical groups; running and attending educational courses; playing soccer, hockey, and other sports; painting and building handicrafts; gardening; and writing letters home. Opportunities for work, however, remained limited to general maintenance and kitchen duties.

Little progress had been made to approve POWs for outside work in previous years but, by 1943, Canada found itself in the grip of a severe labour shortage. As thousands of Canadians donned uniforms and wartime demands burdened civilian industry, employers faced considerable difficulty to secure the required labour. The shortage particularly affected the agricultural and forestry industries despite heavy demand for food and lumber. In the Prairies and Southwestern Ontario, the shortage of agricultural labour especially affected the sugar beet industry. Unable to secure labour, the shortage prompted the closing of several plants and the subsequent loss of millions of pounds of much-needed sugar. The Department of Labour, hoping to boost sugar production, authorized the employment of Japanese Canadian internees on beet farms in 1942. Working throughout the summer, these internees saved the 1942 sugar beet crop in Manitoba and Alberta and demonstrated the potential for internee and POW labour. With predictions for the upcoming season forecasting the situation to be just as precarious, the Department of Labour began seriously considering extending employment to POWs.<sup>85</sup>

The lumber industry found itself facing a similar predicament. Companies like the Timmins-based Rudolph-McChesney Lumber Company were unable to secure bushworkers and requested government assistance; in 1941, the company employed 282

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<sup>84</sup> Military District No. 13 District Engineer Officers Branch, "Accommodation Plan - POW Camp - Medicine Hat - Alberta," December 9, 1942, HQS 7236-96-132 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Construction & Maintenance of Camps - Camp No. 132 Medicine Hat, C-5420, RG24, LAC.

<sup>85</sup> Lt.-Col. Basil B. Campbell to Colonel Currie, November 21, 1942, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC; A. MacNamara to Col. Currie, November 12, 1942, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.



men in seven camps but only employed fifty-seven men in three camps by November 1942.<sup>86</sup> The labour shortage also forced the Gillies Bros. Ltd. to suspend its log drive on the Petawawa River – for a loss of ten million board feet of lumber. However, company officials passing near Camp 33 (Petawawa) had seen “scores of physically fit German Merchant Seamen... enjoying sun baths in the warm sunshine, well fed and cared for at the expense of the Canadian Tax Payers.” Questioning why these EMS were not employed in productive work, lumberman D.A. Gillies emphasized in a letter to the Director of National Selective Service, “it is high time that prompt and drastic action be taken in the matter of the allocation and stabilization of labour for essential war work if satisfactory production is to be maintained.”<sup>87</sup>

Wasting manpower was also a concern of Under-Secretary of State E.H. Coleman who, in a letter to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, noted, “I have long felt that we were missing an opportunity of having some useful work done by having more than twenty thousand men in the prisoner of war camps and not arranging an adequate working programme.”<sup>88</sup> G.E. Trueman of the BCSC expressed a similar attitude, noting the employment of POWs was the “only wise thing” to meet the extreme shortage of labour. Addressing public concerns of POW labour, Trueman argued, “The country should not be subjected to the enormous loss from their non-use simply through the prejudice of a few. Hundreds of thousands of dollars of value each year is being lost to the fact that these men’s hands are now idle.”<sup>89</sup>

Taking note of opportunities for POW labour, internment officer Major H.W. Pearson wrote regional departments of the Ontario Department of Agriculture to gauge interest of Ontario farmers in employing Italian and German internees to assist with the

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<sup>86</sup> M. McChesney to Department of Labour, November 12, 1942, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>87</sup> D.A. Gillies to Elliot M. Little, August 25, 1942, 5-2-2 - Employment, Vol. 6590, RG24, LAC.

<sup>88</sup> E.H. Coleman to N.A. Robertson, November 12, 1942, 1-2-10 - Italians and Sugar Beets, Vol. 6577, RG24, LAC.

<sup>89</sup> G.E. Trueman to A. MacNamara, January 29, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

fall harvest or, more preferably, in year-round work.<sup>90</sup> Only days later, the Carleton County Agricultural War Committee unanimously passed a resolution to press the Canadian government to release civilian internees and EMS for farm labour and thereby reduce pressure from the ongoing labour shortage.<sup>91</sup> While Lt.-Col. Streight acknowledged internees would have to be handpicked for the task, he hoped anti-Nazis currently in Canadian custody and receiving harsh treatment at the hands of their pro-Nazi comrades would be willing to work in exchange for relative freedom.<sup>92</sup>

In October 1942, the Department of National Defence produced its first proposal to employ POWs. Major D.J. O'Donahoe, officer in charge of the Works Programme of the Internment and Refugee Operations, made several suggestions regarding the possible employment of POWs, arguing the 15,000 other ranks and 3,500 EMS in Canada – a number expected to rise – could help alleviate the labour shortage. In camps, O'Donahoe argued, POWs could assist in reducing internment expenses through manufacturing POW uniforms, repairing shoes, and building sectional huts while larger internment camps like those in Lethbridge and Medicine Hat presented good opportunities for general farm work, raising livestock, and dehydration of plants and eggs – work he believed POWs would enjoy.<sup>93</sup> If the Department of National Defence approved outside employment, O'Donahoe proposed employing POWs in coal mining, reforestation, production of pit props, or woodcutting operations.<sup>94</sup>

Responding to Major O'Donahoe's proposal, Deputy Minister of Agriculture H. Barton noted that although his department was keen to make the most of POW labour, he

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<sup>90</sup> Major H.W. Pearson to E.A. Summers, September 5, 1942, 5-2-2 - Employment, Vol. 6590, RG24, LAC.

<sup>91</sup> "Resolution Passed by Carleton County Agricultural War Committee, at Meeting held on September 8, 1942," September 8, 1942, 1-2-3 - Policy - U.K. re Employment, Vol. 6576, RG24, LAC.

<sup>92</sup> Lt.-Col. H.N. Streight to Director of National Selective Service, September 10, 1942, 1-2-3 - Policy - U.K. re Employment, Vol. 6576, RG24, LAC.

<sup>93</sup> Lt.-Col. Basil B. Campbell to Colonel Currie, November 21, 1942, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>94</sup> Maj. D.J. O'Donahoe, "Possible Employment of Prisoners of War Presently Interned in Canada," October 12, 1942, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

deemed dehydration, canning, and the raising of poultry, cattle, and sheep too specialized. However, he believed raising hogs could prove feasible with the low cost of POW labour and the availability of camp garbage. Likewise, Barton looked favourably upon POWs producing their own foodstuffs and thus recommended vegetable production and hog raising be seriously considered.<sup>95</sup> Assistant Deputy Minister of National Defence Lt.-Col. Basil Campbell was not so keen. Campbell suggested German POWs be used only for manufacturing clothing and repairing shoes and Italian POWs and Japanese Canadians be used for coal mining, bush labour, raising livestock, and agriculture. Describing Italian POWs as having a more “docile nature,” he argued the additional security required for POWs made outside work unfeasible.<sup>96</sup>

Lieutenant-Colonel Campbell was not alone in his thinking; despite the pressing need for labour, representatives from the Department of National Defence remained entrenched in the idea that German combatants were unsuited for labour. Deputy Adjutant General Brigadier-General O.M.M. Kay argued that Italian POWs would be “quite content” to remain on a farm without attempting to escape but their German counterparts were another matter. Germans, he argued, “boast that if they can get away they will get away. The number of German P.O.W., Class I, who might be placed on farms on parole I imagine is extremely small.”<sup>97</sup> Civilians interested in POW labour expressed similar sentiments; one Saskatchewan farmer stated that Italians could likely do the work but, as far as he was concerned, the Germans were “*trop astucieux* [*trop astucieux*: too wily].”<sup>98</sup>

The British welcomed proposals to employ POWs in Canada. In 1942, the British began employing Italian POWs in agricultural work, starting with 5,000

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<sup>95</sup> H. Barton to Col. H. DesRosiers, November 10, 1942, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>96</sup> Lt.-Col. Basil B. Campbell to Colonel Currie, November 21, 1942, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>97</sup> Brig. O.M.M. Kay to V.A.G., November 17, 1942, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>98</sup> Letter from G. Saive, March 18, 1942, 5-2-2 - Employment, Vol. 6590, RG24, LAC.

internees in the winter and increasing this to 20,000 the following summer. Employing Italians in year-round work, British officials believed seasonal work would negatively impact health and morale.<sup>99</sup> Although German POWs had not been employed due to security concerns, the British government felt their employment in Canada would secure critical bargaining power to improve unsatisfactory living and working conditions of Allied POWs in Germany.<sup>100</sup>

Employment in Canada was not as simple as transplanting British practices. Not only were there no Italian POWs in the country, it was unlikely Britain would relinquish any in the immediate future. Furthermore, Canadian farms were much larger, more scattered, and further from internment camps than their British counterparts. As agricultural employment generally remained seasonal, POWs would have to be transferred back to the internment camps for the winter months.<sup>101</sup>

Despite concerns from his department, Lt.-Col. H.N. Streight pressed for POW labour, noting, “to waste this reservoir of manpower appears to be a luxury Canada cannot afford, even at the expense of an occasional escape.” In December 1942, he recommended employing POWs from Camps 132 (Medicine Hat) and 133 (Lethbridge) within the camps’ immediate vicinity, providing suitable guards were available, and having prisoners sign a parole agreement which, if broken, prevented any further opportunity for work beyond the wire. As breach of parole resulted in severe disciplinary punishment in the German Army and would “cast discredit” upon the honour of fellow POWs, Streight expected few violations.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Vincent Massey to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, November 27, 1942, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>100</sup> Troopers to National Defence Headquarters, July 11, 1942, 1-2-3 - Policy - U.K. re Employment, Vol. 6576, RG24, LAC.

<sup>101</sup> Colonel H.N. Streight to D.A.G., February 22, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC; Brig. O.M.M. Kay to V.A.G., November 17, 1942, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>102</sup> Lt.-Col. H.N. Streight to Brigadier O.M.M. Kay, December 9, 1942, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

The Department of Labour was likewise interested in making use of POW labour. The successful employment of Japanese Canadian internees in 1942 prompted Deputy Minister of Labour and Director of National Selective Service Arthur MacNamara to consider the employment of POWs be both “possible and practical.” The National Selective Service was struggling to secure labourers in bushwork, coal mining, and agriculture and MacNamara believed POWs could prove a feasible solution.<sup>103</sup> Following a favourable response from the Department of National Defence, MacNamara proposed an experimental program that would employ EMS in agricultural work. His proposal came with four main arguments: the country was in the midst of a labour shortage, the British government requested Canada to employ POWs, the Geneva Convention authorized employment, and Germany currently employed Canadian and British POWs. Although there were over 21,000 POWs, EMS, and civilian internees in the country, MacNamara’s proposal called only for the employment of the 3,300 EMS. Prisoners would be transferred from the Department of National Defence to the Department of Labour’s National Selective Service, with the Department of Labour assuming responsibility for security of the POWs and guards to be obtained either from the RCMP or the Department of National Defence. Three hundred and fifty EMS from Camp 33 (Petawawa) had already expressed their willingness to volunteer and MacNamara intended to use this group for a trial program, with volunteers housed in small camps in areas where the labour shortage was most acute.<sup>104</sup> MacNamara suggested POWs be transported to work in the morning and returned to these small camps at night but, if successful, he proposed housing them with individual farmers.<sup>105</sup>

Despite the proposal calling for the Department of Labour to assume responsibility for the POWs employed, military authorities raised little, if any, resistance.

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<sup>103</sup> A. MacNamara to Colonel Currie, November 12, 1942, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>104</sup> A. MacNamara to Minister of Labour, n.d., HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>105</sup> A. MacNamara, “Memorandum re use of Prisoners of War for Farm Labour, February 1943, Prisoners of War, Labour Projects - Agriculture, File 611.1:21-1, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

Lieutenant-Colonel Streight had little reservation about employing the 3,300 German EMS but remained reluctant to expand the program to combatant POWs, an opinion shared by Minister of National Defence Col. J.L. Ralston. Streight instead preferred employing these POWs in internment camps or within camps' immediate vicinity; as far as he was concerned, unless carefully vetted, combatant POWs would provide no assistance in solving the shortage of farm labour.<sup>106</sup>

As the Department of National Defence and Department of Labour debated how to proceed, POWs, eager to busy themselves and possibly leave the confines of camp, pressed their commandants and international aid organizations for work. At Camp 31 (Fort Henry), internees were apparently "most anxious" for work while those at Camp 130 (Seebe) were willing to agree to "any reasonable type" of parole for an opportunity to work.<sup>107</sup> At Camp 23 (Monteith), spokesman Felix Biewer described the difficulties of life behind barbed wire in a letter to the Consulate General of Switzerland:

This spring, the majority of the soldiers in this camp have been imprisoned behind barbed wire for more than two years, a great number more than three years and even more than three and a half years. In spite of the generous manner in which many quarters are looking after our external interests, we believe that no outsider who comes only to the camp for a few hours can see what mental attitude 1600 adults can have if they walk around for three years and more on the same path like an animal in a cage. This year-long imprisonment is inhuman from any point of view. The only help which could solve all difficulties is a manual labour for a long time, out of sight of the camp.

Noting Allied POWs in Germany were employed, Biewer asked the same opportunity be extended to his men.<sup>108</sup> Likewise, Camp 133 spokesman Ernst Deeg asked the Consul to

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<sup>106</sup> J. J. Deutsch, "Notes on meeting to Consider Employment of Prisoners of War," February 1943, 621-R-40 - Employment of Prisoners of War in Canada - Regulations, Part I, Vol. 2764, RG24, LAC.

<sup>107</sup> Capt. F.W. Staff to Commissioner of Internment Operations, April 2, 1942, 5-2-2 - Employment, Vol. 6590, RG24, LAC; Lt-Col. H. de N. Watson to Commissioner of Internment Operations, January 18, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>108</sup> Translation of letter from Felix Biewer to Consulate General of Switzerland, February 23, 1943, translated March 3, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

assist POWs in securing work, citing newspaper articles that addressed the labour shortage. He emphasized that most of his men had been behind wire for at least two years and the “monotony of the P.O.W. existence” was causing bodily and mental harm.<sup>109</sup>

Prisoners’ appeals for work were met with varying reactions. Camp 133 (Lethbridge) Commandant Col. McCormack was reportedly “quite obviously” unfavourable to the idea – a problem considering he had some 12,000 POWs in his charge.<sup>110</sup> Camp 20 (Gravenhurst) Commandant Lt.-Col. W.J.H. Ellwood also expressed concern regarding the employment of POWs on local farms; acknowledging there was “obviously a great waste of man power” in keeping POWs behind barbed wire, he argued that a verbal word of honour was unacceptable and written parole could be broken by technicalities. While Ellwood believed pay would be a good incentive and the opportunity to work would certainly be taken up by POWs, he believed once the novelty wore off, POWs would “undoubtedly slack off” and demand pay more in line with civilian workers. Furthermore, he believed outside work increased the likelihood of escape and offered POWs opportunities to spread pro-Nazi propaganda.<sup>111</sup>

Others believed the potential of POW labour outweighed the risk of escape. Camp 100 (Neys) Commandant Lt.-Col. B.B.W. Minard recommended Canada take advantage of POW labour, arguing POWs working in isolated areas could help reduce the labour shortage while minimizing maintenance and security expenses.<sup>112</sup> Camp 130 (Seebe) Commandant Col. H. de N. Watson believed POWs could be beneficially employed in lumbering, mining, sugar beet cultivation, and general farm work, so long as precautions

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<sup>109</sup> Translation of letter from Ernst Deeg to Swiss Consul General, August 17, 1942, 5-2-2 - Employment, Vol. 6590, RG24, LAC.

<sup>110</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to A. MacNamara, June 14, 1943, Prisoners of War Labour Projects - Policy, 1943-1944, File 611.1:21-3, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>111</sup> Lt.-Col. W.J.H. Ellwood to HQ, MD2, March 4, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>112</sup> Lt.-Col. B.B.W. Minard to Commissioner of Internment Operations, February 3, 1942, 1-2-3 - Policy - U.K. re Employment, Vol. 6576, RG24, LAC.

were taken to restrict contact with civilians and prevent escapes.<sup>113</sup> Likewise, Arthur MacNamara believed it was better to make use of POWs – even at the cost of increased security measures – than it was to let them sit idle.<sup>114</sup> Jerome Davis, Director of the Canadian branch War Prisoners’ Aid of the YMCA, also supported proposals to employ POWs, noting POWs enjoyed working and would offer their services at whatever pay rate was offered. Davis believed POWs could help build new internment camps, work in the fields, or even cut much-needed fuelwood in Kootenay National Park.<sup>115</sup> Davis acknowledged that such an undertaking would have to take public opinion into consideration and would likely entail educating the public regarding the use of POWs.<sup>116</sup>

Before determining potential locations for work, military authorities emphasized the “greatest of care” be taken in choosing which POWs were to be employed.<sup>117</sup> Most favoured EMS and civilian internees. As most of these men were middle-aged, Col. Watson believed they could help suppress the younger, pro-Nazi internees. Combatant prisoners, he argued, were too dangerous to be employed without an armed guard unless employed in isolated areas such as the Alaska Highway. Both Lt.-Col. Streight and Col. Watson suggested a parole system which, if broken, would prohibit individual POWs from further work opportunities. This would then place some of the onus of escape prevention on the POWs themselves rather than solely on guards and supervisors. He explained,

There is no doubt that the privilege of ‘Working Out’, and the reasonable amount of liberty afforded, would be so valued by the Prisoners, that the above suggestion would create a spirit of Co-operation within each group, to watch for and guard against the possible ‘attempt’ of some one or two

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<sup>113</sup> H. de N. Watson to A. MacNamara, March 12, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>114</sup> A. MacNamara to Colonel H. de N. Watson, March 8, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>115</sup> J. Davis to Dr. Hugh Keenleyside, November 2, 1942, 1-2-10 - Italians and Sugar Beets, Vol. 6577, RG24, LAC.

<sup>116</sup> Jerome Davis to A. MacNamara, March 5, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>117</sup> Colonel H.N. Streight to D.A.G., March 12, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.



less dependable men within their group, and by bringing it to the attention of the Authorities, enable steps to be taken to return such individuals to the Internment Camp.<sup>118</sup>

This would not only reduce the number of guards required but, if POWs were selected carefully, guards would need only carry arms in cases of emergency.

Most of the Department of Labour's focus remained with employing POWs in agricultural work. Some consideration had been given to employing POWs in bushwork and mining, but little progress had been made. However, a nationwide fuelwood shortage – one expected to worsen during the upcoming winter – shifted priorities. Trying to improve the fuelwood supply, the Department of Munitions and Supply had granted subsidies and encouraged communities to take action, but Deputy Wood Fuel Controller D. Roy Cameron believed this was insufficient to quell demand. Instead, Cameron remained eager to explore every option and proposed using POW or internee labour to boost the country's dwindling fuelwood supplies. Acknowledging the nature of the work likely entailed breaches in security practices, he argued,

We need man power badly and the fuelwood business is only one phase. If we pay the price of a considerable increase in production we had to count on the escape of a few prisoners of war, would not this be worth while? After all, now that the United States is in the conflict, these men have nowhere to go and they will inevitably be picked up.<sup>119</sup>

Heeding Cameron's pleas, the Department of Labour began seriously considering the use of POW labour for fuelwood projects, eventually agreeing that it would divert its available resources to help stem the demand.

Despite the labour shortage, potential employers had mixed feelings about POW labour. In Ontario's Northumberland County, some farmers were willing to employ

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<sup>118</sup> H. de N. Watson to A. MacNamara, March 12, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>119</sup> D. Roy Cameron to Col. Streight, April 9, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

trustworthy internees and Italian POWs, but no farmer wanted German prisoners.<sup>120</sup> Public opinion in nearby Prince Edward County was also divided despite the thousands of tons of hay that would go unharvested without additional labour. Noting opposition was likely “fostered by prejudice and race hatred,” county representatives nonetheless asked for 1,000 Italian POWs.<sup>121</sup> In Saskatchewan, some farmers agreed to accept Japanese Canadian labourers but much of the province objected to their employment. However, those willing to employ Japanese Canadians often only asked for single men and requested they be removed once the work was done. As for German POWs, agricultural representatives expressed concern over the province’s mixed ethnicity and the potential for escape and sabotage.<sup>122</sup> On the East Coast, Deputy Minister of Agriculture for Prince Edward Island W.R. Shaw informed A. MacNamara that he was “not very enthusiastic” about having POWs on PEI farms. He believed that there would be few farmers willing to employ POWs, instead preferring POWs be used in centralized locations to produce agricultural materials including ground limestone and fertilizer.<sup>123</sup>

A Gallup Poll conducted by the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion in early 1943 shed some light into the public’s opinion towards POW employment. Polling a representative sample of Canadians whether they approved the employment of German POWs on essential war work under armed guard, the poll demonstrated opinion was divided: 42% approved, 46% disapproved, and 12% were undecided. Those who approved argued POWs would help with the labour shortage (36%), POWs could “work for their keep” (21%), and it would keep POWs busy (15%). Those who disapproved thought it too risky (28%), cited the danger of sabotage (19%), worried that POWs would

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<sup>120</sup> Ian MacLeod to Major H.W. Pearson, January 26, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>121</sup> J.P. Williams to Col. H.M. Strathely, July 24, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>122</sup> W.W. Dawson to A. MacNamara, March 1, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>123</sup> W.R. Shaw to A. MacNamara, April 21, 1943, Prisoners of War, Labour Projects - Agriculture, File 611.1:21-1, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

take jobs from Canadians (12%), were afraid of retaliation from Germany (7%), and believed it contradicted the Geneva Convention (5%).<sup>124</sup>

**Table 1: Results of Gallup Poll on POW Labour, 1943.**<sup>125</sup>

<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Approve (%)</b>	<b>Disapprove (%)</b>	<b>Undecided (%)</b>
<b>National</b>	42	46	12
<b>Maritimes</b>	46	45	9
<b>Quebec</b>	43	42	15
<b>Ontario</b>	38	54	8
<b>Prairies</b>	41	46	13
<b>B.C.</b>	55	30	15
<b>Men</b>	47	42	11
<b>Women</b>	36	50	14
<b>British</b>	41	48	11
<b>French</b>	43	43	14
<b>Other Nationality</b>	47	40	13
<b>Farm</b>	45	40	15
<b>Urban</b>	41	48	11
<b>Organized Labour</b>	40	49	11

The poll also demonstrated geographical differences. Whereas the coastal provinces were more in favour of POW labour, those in the interior (and with POW camps) were less likely to approve. One statistician suggested this may be the result of there being no internment camps in the coastal provinces whereas the presence of camps in the interior provinces had incited public fears of escape.<sup>126</sup> Jerome Davis, however, argued the poll did not accurately present the opinion of the Canadian public, citing the

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<sup>124</sup> O.J. Morris Jr. to C.J. Henry, April 3, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC; Charles Henry to Arthur MacNamara, May 5, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>125</sup> O.J. Morris Jr. to C.J. Henry, April 3, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

public did not understand that Canadian POWs were being worked in Germany, but believed education could improve the results.<sup>127</sup>

In March 1943, the Manpower Committee of the Department of Labour approved a proposal for the employment of selected POWs in labour projects and, following a review by the Department of National Defence, forwarded it to the Privy Council.<sup>128</sup> On May 10, 1943, the Canadian government approved the proposal under the authority of Order-in-Council P.C. 2326, finally authorized the employment of combatant POWs, EMS, and civilian internees in Canada. The order in council allowed the Minister of Labour to use POWs in “essential employment” in labour detachments and labour camps separate from internment camps and made the Department of Labour responsible for the employment, security, administration, and welfare of POWs employed outside internment camps.

Relieved of most of its responsibilities, the Department of National Defence was to offer consultation and advice as well as provide a maximum of six military personnel per 100 POWs “to assist in the conduct of the camp and the maintenance of discipline, and in the arrest and escort of prisoners of war.” Furthermore, the Department of Labour was also to consult with the Department of National Defence in regard to security measures and with the Department of External affairs to ensure POW labour adhered to the Geneva Convention.<sup>129</sup>

With Alberta’s sugar beet harvest in jeopardy and plenty of POWs available, the Department of Labour and Department of National Defence authorized the first work under P.C. 2326 on May 24, 1943. Twenty POWs left Camp 133 (Lethbridge) that morning for work on the beet fields near the camp and, after working throughout the day,

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<sup>127</sup> Jerome Davis to C.J. Henry, May 5, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>128</sup> Humphrey Mitchell to J.L. Ralston, March 9, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>129</sup> A.D.P. Heeney, “P.C. 2326,” May 10, 1943, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

returned that evening without incident. Over the next few weeks, authorities increased the number of POWs employed to approximately 450 by mid-June.<sup>130</sup>

With P.C. 2326 placing the administration of POW labour in the hands of the Department of Labour, Cabinet authorized the department to establish the Directorate of Labour Projects on June 2, 1943 and the department soon after appointed Lt.-Col. Reginald Sidney Walter Fordham as Director. A lawyer from Niagara Falls, Fordham had spent two years as a POW in Germany in the First World War and had served as the Commissioner of Refugee Camps in Canada since 1941. The establishment of this directorate ensured the Department of Labour was responsible for POW employment – “for better or for worse,” as the directorate’s history later noted. With various departments involved in POW labour, the directorate had to coordinate with National Defence, External Affairs, Treasury, the RCMP, the International Red Cross, the Swiss Consul, employers, and the POWs themselves. Beyond administration, the directorate had to ensure POWs received sufficient food, accommodation, clothing, medical and dental care, discipline, and supervision. More importantly, it had to make certain POW labour was successful, benefitting both civilian employers and the state, while also keeping POWs occupied and content. As one officer described, “the employers also had to be satisfied, in order to ensure the best production with the minimum amount of friction, for the benefit of the war effort.”<sup>131</sup>

Order in Council P.C. 2326 did not set a pay rate. With no international agreement dictating pay rates of POWs in Canada or Germany, it was within the power of the Canadian government to determine the rate. There was some pressure from the British and Commonwealth to adhere to a standard rate, but each country was allowed to base wage rates depending on their economic status.<sup>132</sup> While the Geneva Convention stipulated work conducted for the detaining power should be remunerated at the same

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<sup>130</sup> Camp 133 War Diary, June 11, 1943, Part 4, Vol. 15411, RG24, LAC.

<sup>131</sup> Kemble, “History of Labour Projects PW,” 6.

<sup>132</sup> Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Deputy Minister, Department of Labour, June 12, 1943, W-35 Prisoners of War and Internees, Vol. 12, RG2, LAC.

rate paid for soldiers conducting similar work, rates for other work could vary. The Department of National Defence proposed paying POWs 20¢ per day, the same amount paid for work conducted in internment camps. This rate had resulted in good work and was on par to that paid to British POWs in Germany. Any increase, military authorities argued, would likely result in demands for higher rates for work done within camps as well as prompt public criticism.<sup>133</sup>

The Department of Labour proposed a pay rate of 50¢ per day, with 30¢ made available to POWs for use in canteens and the remainder credited to a savings account accessible only after the end of the war. The inclusion of a savings account would, it was hoped, deter disciplinary infractions and escape attempts.<sup>134</sup> Justifying the higher rate, department representatives argued POWs needed a sufficient incentive to leave the superior living conditions in internment camps. While POWs were likely to transfer to labour projects for a change in scenery, authorities feared there would be no incentive for work once the novelty wore off. Furthermore, they argued the 50¢ rate per eight-hour work day was generally equivalent to the 20¢ rate currently being paid to POWs only working four or five-hour shifts in the camps.

As to paying higher rates than Germany, the Department of Labour argued its proposed rate was less than the United States was paying its POWs (80¢ per day) and it was more in line with the Geneva Convention; “the higher rate,” it was said, “will not prejudice and may be a helpful factor in treatment of our own prisoners of war in Germany.” Furthermore, “The 50¢ rate is, in terms of Canadian economy, the equivalent of the one shilling per day rate paid in Great Britain having regard for climate and living conditions for the working prisoners, and the nature of the work, all of which will be unavoidably harder in Canada.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> “Memorandum re Prisoners of War Pay,” July 7, 1943, W-35 Prisoners of War and Internees, Vol. 12, RG2, LAC.

<sup>134</sup> Humphrey Mitchell to W.L. Mackenzie King, June 9, 1943, W-35 Prisoners of War and Internees, Vol. 12, RG2, LAC.

<sup>135</sup> “Memorandum re Prisoners of War Pay,” July 7, 1943, W-35 Prisoners of War and Internees, Vol. 12, RG2, LAC.

British authorities doubted additional pay would be enough to encourage POWs to volunteer for work, but the Department of Labour argued that wages and additional spending money could prove powerful inducements. Experience with work inside camps demonstrated POWs generally quickly spent pocket money, and working pay and the potential for additional pay not only increased purchasing power but allowed POWs to save their earnings. The Department of Labour also noted some prospective employers doubted they would receive honest work with lower pay.<sup>136</sup> For example, forestry officials at Kananaskis reported internees had failed to cut sufficient fuelwood for themselves, forcing the camp to rely on fuelwood cut by conscientious objectors and prompting officials to recommend a higher wage rate to encourage production.<sup>137</sup> Military authorities still pressed for the lower rate. Minister of National Defence J.L. Ralston remained concerned with the consequences of paying German POWs more than what Canadian POWs received in Germany while Colonel Streight argued pay should remain at 20¢ per day unless Germany was also willing to increase the pay of Canadian POWs.<sup>138</sup> Despite these concerns, the Canadian government passed P.C. 5550 on July 29, 1943, establishing fixed POW wages at not more than 50¢ per eight-hour work day.<sup>139</sup>

The passing of P.C. 5550 came at the same time Canada was once again expanding its internment operations. In mid-July, the British government asked Canada to immediately accept 10,000 German POWs, with the possibility of an additional 50,000

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<sup>136</sup> Secretary of State for External Affairs to the High Commissioner for Canada in Great Britain, July 24, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>137</sup> "Memorandum re Prisoners of War Pay," July 7, 1943, W-35 Prisoners of War and Internees, Vol. 12, RG2, LAC.

<sup>138</sup> J.L. Ralston to H. Mitchell, June 26, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC; Col. H.N. Streight to Adjutant-General, June 15, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>139</sup> Order in Council P.C. 5550, July 29, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

in the near future.<sup>140</sup> In part due to the difficulties and dangers in shipping POWs from Egypt, Canada at the moment held only 25,000 POWs – less than half the number interned in each of India, South Africa, the Middle East, East Africa, and the United Kingdom.<sup>141</sup>

The Department of External Affairs believed accepting more POWs would benefit Canada. In a memorandum to the War Committee, Department of External Affairs First Secretary Alfred Rive explained, “It is felt that we should endeavor to accommodate in British countries at least as many German prisoners of war as there are British and Dominion prisoners in German hands in order to better our bargaining position with Germany with regard to the treatment of British and Dominion prisoners of war in German hands.” The Department of Labour likewise supported the request for it would provide valuable labour, especially if the British were willing to transfer Italian POWs. Ultimately concurring with Rive, the War Committee authorized the transfer and requested 6,740 German POWs, 2,600 Italians, and 660 German EMS.<sup>142</sup>

With 25,000 POWs already in Canada and 10,000 more now on the way, the next steps were to determine which categories of POWs were to be employed and where. Italian POWs were the unanimously preferred labour force but there was a problem – Canada held no Italian POWs. The British deemed Italian POWs a lesser risk than their German counterparts, something historian Bob Moore has attributed to the perception most Italian POWs were “uncommitted to fascism and pleased to be out of the war.” In

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<sup>140</sup> Memorandum to the War Committee of the Cabinet, “Acceptance of Further Prisoners of War,” July 14, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>141</sup> As of June 15, 1943, the UK held 70,145 combatants and EMS, Middle East 70,670, East Africa 59,418, India 66,911, and South Africa 50,770. “Numbers as On 15<sup>th</sup> June, 1943 of Enemy Prisoners of War Originally Captured by Imperial Forces,” June 15, 1943, HQS 9050-30-2 - Statistics, Distribution of enemy P/W, throughout the British Empire, 1942-1945, C-5342, RG24, LAC; Memorandum to the War Committee of the Cabinet, “Acceptance of Further Prisoners of War,” July 14, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>142</sup> A. Rive, “Memorandum to the War Committee of the Cabinet,” July 14, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC; A. MacNamara to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 13, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.



British eyes, the Germans were hostile and the Italians docile.<sup>143</sup> The British had therefore been successfully employing thousands of Italian POWs while dispatching the higher-risk Germans to Canada.<sup>144</sup> The Department of Labour requested a few thousand Italian POWs be secured from Great Britain as soon as possible but the British remained unwilling to relinquish any.<sup>145</sup> Turning to POWs and internees already in the country, Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham suggested it was preferable to begin with the employment of non-combatant POWs, namely EMS and civilian internees. Most of these men, Fordham explained, had been in Canada for almost three years, were older on average than the combatant POWs, and were “much less inclined to seek their freedom.” Combatant POWs, especially those who had only recently arrived in the country, entailed additional security risks that Fordham believed made their employment unfeasible.<sup>146</sup>

With little precedent for POW labour, the Department of National Defence and Department of Labour agreed only a selected few projects be opened and run on an experimental basis to judge the feasibility and effectiveness of POW labour. Having received numerous requests for labour from civilian employers across the country, the two departments drafted a process to determine who could and would receive POW labour. Upon receiving a request from a potential employer, representatives from the Department of Labour reviewed each application to determine whether the work was essential, living accommodations were adequate, and the project would meet the terms of the Geneva Convention. This required department authorities to inspect each prospective camp to ensure it had adequate quarters, medical supplies, hygiene, and recreational

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<sup>143</sup> Bob Moore, “Enforced Diaspora: The Fate of Italian Prisoners of War during the Second World War,” *War in History* 22, no. 2 (2015): 176; Bob Moore, “Turning Liabilities into Assets: British Government Policy towards German and Italian Prisoners of War during the Second World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no. 1 (1997): 124–25.

<sup>144</sup> Deputy Minister to R. Gardiner, August 2, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>145</sup> “Memorandum to the War Committee of the Cabinet,” July 14, 1943, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>146</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham, “Memorandum Regarding Proposed Employment of Prisoners-of-War in Canada,” June 4, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

equipment. If approved, the department forwarded the proposal to the RCMP who then reviewed it and the potential work locations to determine whether the presence of POWs would be a security risk. Once the RCMP deemed there were no security objections, the application was forwarded to the Department of National Defence and, if they had no objection, the Director of Prisoners of War arranged for the transfer of POWs from an internment camp to the labour project.<sup>147</sup> Employers then signed a contract with the Canadian government and agreed to pay the Department of Labour \$2.50 per day per POW, with \$0.50 going directly to the POW's pay and deducting \$1.00 per day for the POW's board. If, at any point, a proposed project failed to meet the established requirements, the Department of Labour either refused the application or postponed it until the employer rectified the problems.<sup>148</sup>

The first of these experimental camps opened in the summer of 1943. Testing the feasibility of employing POWs in woodcutting operations, the Department of Labour transferred ninety-two Italian internees from Camp 43 (St. Helen's Island) to a woodcutting camp run by the Standard Chemical Company near South River, Ontario. By August 2, 1943, civilian companies in Ontario and Quebec had requested 2,840 POWs but both the Department of Labour and Department of National Defence struggled to meet the heavy demand.<sup>149</sup> In the first half of August, the Department of Labour began placing POWs on individual farms near Metcalfe, Ontario, and Brooks, Alberta, and started expanding woodcutting operations as well. Despite some initial setbacks, the Standard Chemical Company requested more POWs to open another two camps. The Department of Labour approved the request and transferred 100 EMS and internees in mid-August, enough for the company to staff new additional camps. The department also approved new projects in the latter half of the month, transferring EMS to a peat-cutting operation run by the Erie Peat Co. near Welland, Ontario; another woodcutting camp run

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<sup>147</sup> Major Barton, "Subject - Prisoner-of-War Labour Projects," January 28, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>148</sup> Kemble, "History of Labour Projects PW," 2.

<sup>149</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to A. MacNamara, August 2, 1943, Prisoners of War, Labour Projects - Agriculture, File 611.1:21-1, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

by the Standard Chemical Co. at Harcourt, Ontario; and a woodcutting camp run by the Singer Manufacturing Co. near Thurso, Quebec.

By mid-September, the Department of Labour had ten labour projects in operation, all employing EMS and civilian internees, as well as POWs working from Camp 133 (Lethbridge) and another three planned to open by the end of the month. The sudden expansion meant that by September 11, all Class II POWs – EMS and civilian internees – with the exception of 947 who refused to volunteer, were already employed in various projects. Arthur H. Brown, the Executive Assistant to the Deputy Minister of Labour, described the number of Merchant Seamen volunteering for labour as “disappointing” but expressed doubt regarding the extent to which internment authorities had tried to encourage these men to volunteer.<sup>150</sup> Regardless of their availability, unable to provide additional EMS or internees for the Department of Labour’s proposed labour projects, the Department of Defence turned to its next available source: Class I – or combatant – POWs.<sup>151</sup>

This decision was met with mixed reactions. Many government and military authorities and the public strongly preferred German combatant POWs to remain safe behind barbed wire and instead asked Italian POWs be made available for work. There were, however, no Italian combatants in Canada and although MacNamara believed Italians would be more effective workers, Arthur Brown was unconvinced.<sup>152</sup> With Italy having surrendered and no longer at war, Brown felt Italian POWs would be no more effective than German POWs, arguing, “they may expect more freedom and feel less

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<sup>150</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to A. MacNamara, September 7, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>151</sup> Colonel H.N. Streight to V.A.G., September 11, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>152</sup> By September 1943, there were only 60 Italian EMS and 100 Italian civilian internees held for Great Britain in Canada, most of which were soon to be employed with the CNR and CPR. Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to A. MacNamara, September 17, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

disposed to work than the Germans.”<sup>153</sup> Regardless, no Italian POWs were coming and, with an estimated 12,000 German POWs suitable for bushwork by September 1943, the Department of Labour and the Department of National Defence began preparations to employ Class I POWs.

The primary concern with employing combatant POWs was security. The arrangements outlined in P.C. 2326 had not given serious consideration to employing Class I POWs, but rather was drafted with the employment of EMS and civilian internees in mind. Even these terms were an issue for the Department of Labour. In a letter to Arthur MacNamara, Arthur Brown explained, “Even with respect to this class of prisoners, the Department of Labour agreed to the provision limiting the number of guard personnel to be supplied by the Department of National Defence under protest and only because this seemed necessary in order to make a start in the use of prisoners on the work projects.” Up until this point, the Department of Labour had hired civilian guards, as Class II POWs were deemed a lower security threat who could be guarded more leniently. Now that combatants were involved, Brown was “more strongly convinced than ever” these POWs should be guarded by military personnel, emphasizing the presence of military personnel and civilian guards simply did not make sense. Emphasizing the potential threat posed by Class I POWs, Brown argued, “the public have the right to expect that when prisoners are working on projects, they shall be properly guarded by military personnel.”<sup>154</sup>

Like Brown, the Department of National Defence believed a trained and disciplined armed guard force was necessary to guard Class I POWs but providing sufficient guards could not be done without enlarging the Veterans’ Guard. If guards could not be secured, MacNamara noted his department would have no choice but to

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<sup>153</sup> A.H. Brown to A. MacNamara, October 21, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>154</sup> A.H. Brown to A. MacNamara, September 20, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

have the POWs remain in internment camps – a conclusion he hoped to avoid.<sup>155</sup> Looking into the possibility of an armed civilian guard corps, Lt.-Col. Fordham estimated a 500-man force would cost approximately \$890,000 per year, most of which, he believed, could be recovered by the department's earnings. With a "sufficiently smart" uniform, reasonable pay, easy working conditions, and work near their homes, Fordham believed he could build a guard force suitable for the task.<sup>156</sup> Labour Minister Humphrey Mitchell believed it impractical to establish a civilian guard force large enough for the proposed expansion of POW labour. Mitchell thus pressed Minister of National Defence James Ralston to reconsider the possibility of having the Veterans' Guard of Canada assume the responsibility of guarding labour projects.<sup>157</sup> As one officer later remarked, the guards were not there so much as to prevent POWs from escaping but more for protection against bears.<sup>158</sup>

In the meantime, military authorities suggested approximately 3,000 Class I POWs – all carefully screened – could be quickly employed under the supervision of civilian guards.<sup>159</sup> Following a request from the Nipigon Lake Timber Co. for 200 men to cut fuelwood near McKirdy, Ontario, the Department of Labour authorized the employment of 200 combatant POWs – the first Class I POWs to be employed in work separate from an internment camp.<sup>160</sup> The Department of Labour continued to expand the employment of POWs in the coming months so that by the end of 1943, it had opened

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<sup>155</sup> Major-General H.F.G. Letson to the Minister of National Defence, September 14, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC; A. MacNamara to Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham, September 21, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>156</sup> Lt. Col. R.S.W. Fordham to A. MacNamara, September 24, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>157</sup> Humphrey Mitchell to J.L. Ralston, October 4, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

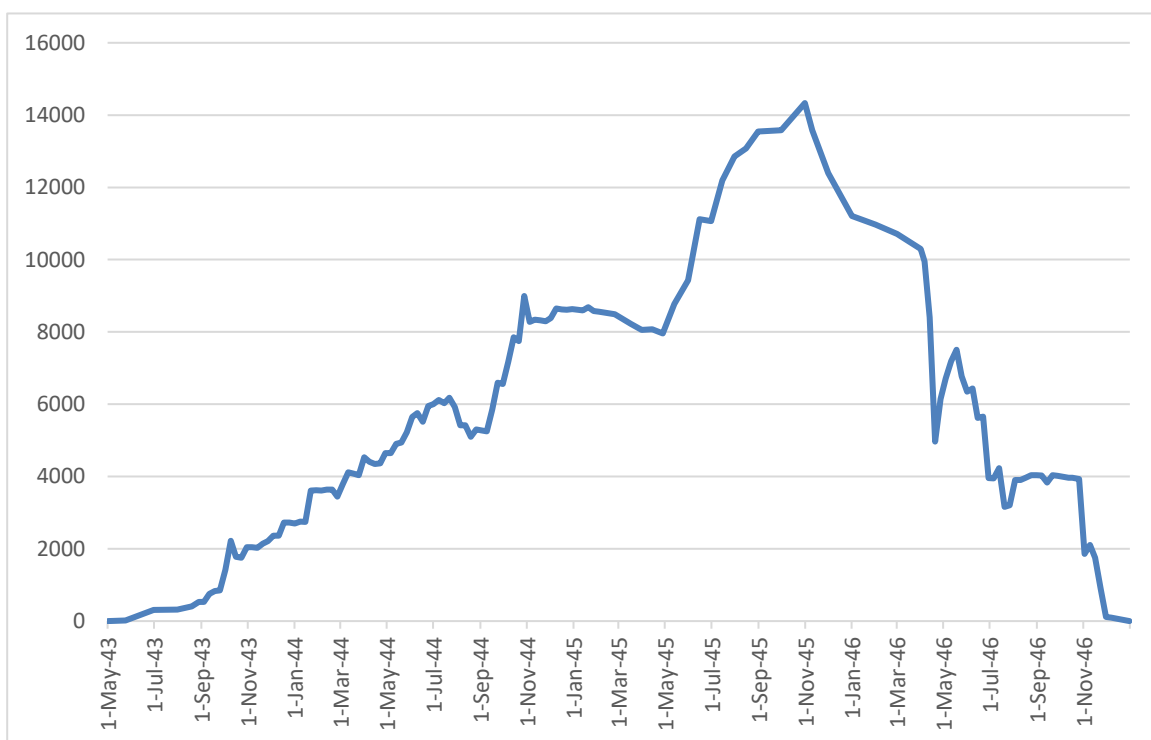
<sup>158</sup> Maj. H. Smith, "'P.' - Notes on P.O.W. Work" 113.3P4.02 (D1) - Papers rec'd from Maj. H. Smith (Ret'd) describing the function and responsibilities of the Veteran's Guard of Canada, DHH.

<sup>159</sup> Major-General H.F.G. Letson to the Minister of National Defence, September 14, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>160</sup> Major-General H.F.G. Letson to DOCs MD2 and MD10, September 30, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-18 - T.E.A. Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Nipigon Lake Timber Co. - Port Arthur, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

twenty-eight labour projects and, although three had subsequently been abandoned, the remaining twenty-five employed approximately 2,400 POWs.<sup>161</sup>

The number of prisoners employed continued to grow through 1944 as did the total number of prisoners in Canada. The successful D-Day landings and the subsequent advance towards Germany resulted in the capture of hundreds of thousands of German soldiers. The British transferred over 10,000 combatants to Canada between July and October 1944, bringing the total number of POWs in Canada to 35,046 combatants, and, in November, the British asked Canada to accept another 50,000 POWs. After careful review, the Canadian government determined it lacked facilities and the manpower

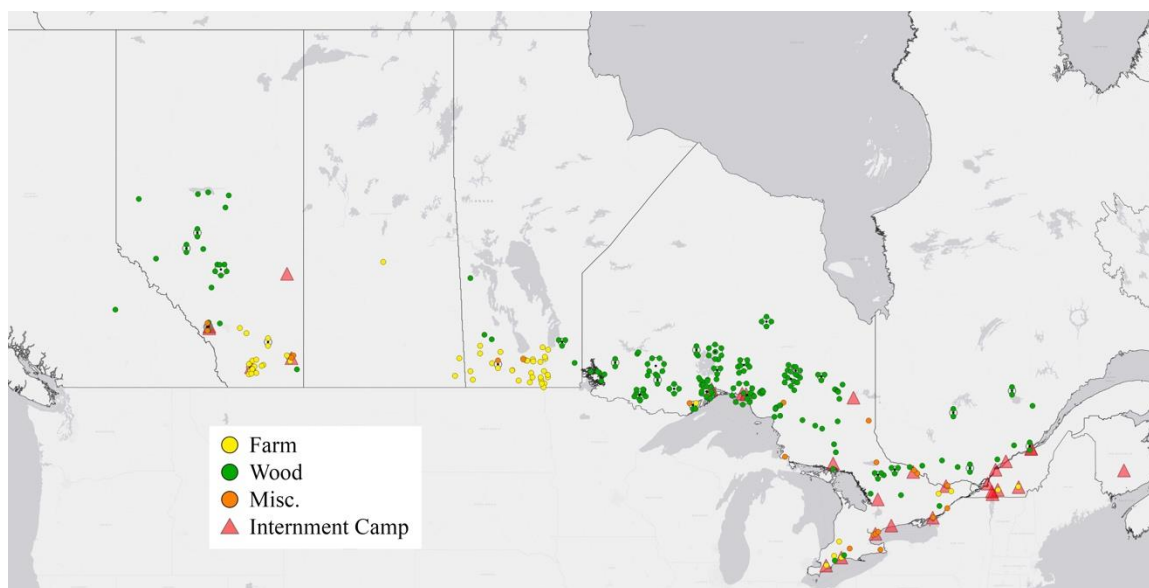


**Figure 5: Prisoners of War employed on Labour Projects, May 1943 to December 1946. Compiled from *Employment of POWs, Volumes 2764 and 2765, RG25, LAC*.**

<sup>161</sup> The three abandoned camps included one run by the Price Bros. near Chicoutimi, Quebec following security concerns from the Department of Justice and the RCMP; one run by the Corporation of the City of Kingston near Chantry, Ontario, due to poor living conditions; and a camp run by the Consolidated Paper Corp. near Perthuis, Quebec, at the company's request. Kemble, "History of Labour Projects PW," 16; Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to A. MacNamara, December 8, 1943, Prisoners of War Labour Projects - Policy, 1943-1944, File 611.1:21-3, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

required to house and guard such numbers and informed the British they were unable to agree to the request. The decision, Vincent Massey reported, proved a “great disappointment” to the United Kingdom as Canadian troops had captured 66,000 POWs in Northwestern Europe since D-Day, almost twice as many as Canada was currently holding.<sup>162</sup> Canada, however, refused to budge and, with the exception of some U-Boat crews who surrendered after May 1945 and were subsequently interned in Canada, the country would accept no more prisoners.<sup>163</sup>

The employment of POWs remained a constantly evolving process. From 1943 to 1946, the Departments of Labour and National Defence were continuously engaged in a struggle to maximize production while simultaneously avoiding labour disputes and maintaining security. Despite many challenges, the Department of Labour continued to expand its POW labour program through 1946 and, by the time the last POWs left Canada, the Department of Labour had provided prisoners to almost 300 different bush



**Figure 6: Labour Projects and Internment Camps in Canada, 1939-1947. Map by Author.**

<sup>162</sup> High Commissioner for Canada in Great Britain to Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada, January 18, 1945, 621-K-40 - Transfer to Canada of Enemy Internees from United Kingdom, Vol. 9, Vol. 2762, RG25, LAC.

<sup>163</sup> Col. H.N. Streight, “Preliminary - Historical Narrative of the Directorate, Prisoners of War,” 1945, 113.3P4 (D1) - DIR NARR - Dir of P.W., DHH.

camps, farm hostels, and other labour projects. In the next five chapters, I explore a series of these POW labour projects to better understand how prisoners reacted to their work in relative freedom, how the Department of Labour and Department of National Defence adapted their policies and practices to meet the ever-changing demands, the interactions between POWs and the natural environment, and the relationships that developed between POWs and Canadians.



## Chapter 2

### 2 Prisoners in a National Park: The Riding Mountain Park Labour Project

On October 26, 1943, the quiet backcountry of Riding Mountain National Park was interrupted by the arrival of 440 German prisoners of war. Most had been captured in North Africa in 1941 and 1942 and had spent as much as two years interned in Alberta and Ontario. Now, they were to live in a brand-new camp on the shore of Whitewater Lake and cut fuelwood to help relieve a province-wide shortage. This new camp had some significant differences from the ones they were used to, most notably in that there were no barbed-wire fences or guard towers. Instead, only kilometres of dense forest surrounded the camp. Built in response to a shortage of fuelwood in Manitoba, the Riding Mountain Park Labour Project was an experimental project initiated by the Department of Labour to help determine the feasibility of employing POWs. Over the course of the next two years, POWs at Riding Mountain helped shaped the future of POW labour in Canada.

Canada's national parks had been home to internment and labour camps during the First World War, so when war broke out again in 1939 parks were once again considered to house internees. In early September 1939, when the search was on for sites suitable for internment camps, Deputy Minister of Mines and Resources Charles Camsell suggested establishing internment camps in Jasper, Banff, Yoho, Waterton Lakes, Elk Island, and Cape Breton Highlands National Parks – all of which, he believed, also presented opportunities for work.<sup>1</sup> Camsell's proposal was turned down in favour of Kananaskis and Petawawa but Assistant Dominion Forester D.A. MacDonald hoped national parks could once again benefit from internee labour. There was some doubt as to the effectiveness of internee labour, but experiences with it in the First World War had demonstrated that internees were certainly capable of useful work. More recently, internees at the Kananaskis Forestry Station had been employed in road construction,

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Camsell to Brig.-Gen. E. de B. Panet, September 9, 1939, File 49638 - Internment Operations at National Parks and Forest Experiment Stations, 1937-1944, Vol. 33, RG39, LAC.

thinning bush, firefighting, and the manufacture of “useful and attractive” furniture, while those in Petawawa repaired roads and loaded gravel trucks. MacDonald thus recommended Jasper, Elk Island, and Prince Albert National Parks as suitable locations for 600-man camps, noting camps would have to remain isolated from the public so that “prisoners would not be an object of curiosity.” Although camps could be placed in any suitable location, MacDonald argued it would be in the national interest if they were in areas where useful work could be found. As for combatant POWs, MacDonald assumed the “real Nazi” would be a “wolf to handle” and believed their usefulness would depend on how discipline was enforced.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the potential for work, the Department of National Defence only began considering establishing camps in national parks as it prepared to accept thousands of POWs from North Africa in 1942. Military authorities wanted to establish three internment camps, each able to hold 10,000 POWs, in dominion-controlled areas; possible sites included Buffalo Park at Wainwright, Nemiskam Antelope Park near Foremost, the Foothills Meadows at the entrance to Waterton Lakes Park, Cooking Lake near Elk Island Park, the area near Henry House in Jasper Park, the bison enclosure in Riding Mountain Park, New Brunswick’s Acadia Forest Experimental Station, Alberta’s Kananaskis Forest Experimental Station, the Indian Reserve between Seebe and Kananaskis Forest Experimental Station, and the Indian Reserve at Kamloops.<sup>3</sup> However, Land, Parks, and Forests Branch Director Roy Alexander Gibson did not believe POWs could be relied upon for any “useful work” and stated that, unless absolutely necessary, there was “little excuse” for an internment camp in a national park if more suitable locations could be found.<sup>4</sup> Canada’s national parks were thus passed over in favour of

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<sup>2</sup> D.A. MacDonald to R.A. Gibson, July 18, 1940, File 49638 - Internment Operations at National Parks and Forest Experiment Stations, 1937-1944, Vol. 33, RG39, LAC.

<sup>3</sup> R.A. Gibson to Smart, January 23, 1942, File 49638 - Internment Operations at National Parks and Forest Experiment Stations, 1937-1944, Vol. 33, RG39, LAC.

<sup>4</sup> R.A. Gibson to Lt.-Col. Gibson, January 23, 1942, File 49638 - Internment Operations at National Parks and Forest Experiment Stations, 1937-1944, Vol. 33, RG39, LAC.

more suitable sites for internment camps – although in 1943 demand for fuelwood would once again raise interest in employing POWs within parks.

In 1942, Canada was under threat from a serious shortage of fuelwood. Average annual fuelwood production in the pre-war period was 10,000,000 cords (one cord measures 4'x4'x8'), with almost ninety percent cut by farmers or small operators during the winter months, and Canadians consumed an average of 9,000,000 cords per year. The nationwide shortage of labour now meant farmers and operators were unable to secure additional labour resulted in a drop of fuelwood production to only 8,612,037 cords in 1941 and 8,720,573 in 1942.<sup>5</sup> With almost half of Canadian households reliant on fuelwood for heat, the shortage prompted serious concern.

Firewood was generally cut the year before it was needed to allow the wood to season but a cold winter in 1942-1943 exhausted supplies of seasoned fuelwood and forced some areas to burn the green wood intended for the following winter. By February 1943, Deputy Wood Fuel Controller D. Roy Cameron estimated a shortage of 175,000 cords in Quebec, 100,000 in Ontario, 75,000 in British Columbia, and 25,000 in each of Saskatchewan and New Brunswick while accounts had not yet been tabulated for the other provinces.<sup>6</sup> By March, this increased to an estimated shortage of 300,000 cords in Quebec and 100,000 cords in southwestern Manitoba and “definite shortages” were emerging in Nova Scotia. The *Winnipeg Tribune*, quoting a Department of Munitions and Supply statement in March 1943, emphasized, “Canada faces a wood-fuel famine so serious that, unless immediate action is taken, many thousands may be unable to heat their houses adequately next winter; families may be forced to vacate their homes and the health of others may be adversely affected.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *The Canada Year Book, 1943-44* (Ottawa, ON: Edmond Cloutier, 1944), 255; Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *The Canada Year Book, 1945* (Ottawa, ON: Edmond Cloutier, 1945), 254.

<sup>6</sup> D.R. Cameron to Gibson, May 17, 1943, File 44962 - Use of Prisoners of War, Vol. 463, RG39, LAC.

<sup>7</sup> “Ottawa Moves to Counter Wood-Fuel Famine Threat,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 5, 1943.

In March 1943, the Department of Munitions and Supply tried to increase production by introducing subsidies, deferring military service to those engaged in fuelwood cutting, and encouraging communities to take action. Roy Cameron, however, doubted the crisis could be solved without additional labour. Learning the Department of Labour was in the midst of exploring the possibility of employing POWs in essential work, Cameron proposed using POWs to cut fuelwood. Cameron, aware traditional security measures would have to be dropped, argued that ensuring Canadians had access to sufficient fuelwood was well worth the risk of a few POW escapes.<sup>8</sup>

By 1943, Manitoba's fuelwood supply was running dangerously low. On average, the province produced 600,000 cords per year, 325,000 of which were cut by residents for their own or local consumption and the remaining 275,000 sold to urban centres. Winnipeg consumed the bulk of this, requiring 250,000 cords per year, but the city had already been short 50,000 cords in the winter of 1942-1943 and the supply of wood sold on the open market was estimated at only 150,000 to 175,000 cords – a shortage of 100,000 to 125,000 cords.<sup>9</sup> Members of Parliament representing the areas surrounding Riding Mountain National Park urged the government to take advantage of the park's abundant natural resources and employ Alternative Service Workers (ASWs) to cut fuelwood within park boundaries.<sup>10</sup> This plan was quickly quashed as all available ASWs were either already employed or unavailable. Instead, in early June 1943, Minister of Munitions and Supply C.D. Howe heeded Cameron's advice and proposed using 400 German POWs to cut 100,000 cords of fuelwood in Riding Mountain National Park.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> D. Roy Cameron to Col. Streight, April 9, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>9</sup> "City Acts to Avert Wood Famine," *Winnipeg Tribune*, July 22, 1943; "Fuel Wood Famine Appears Certain," *Winnipeg Tribune*, November 5, 1943.

<sup>10</sup> "War Prisoners in Riding Mountain to Cut Fuel Wood," *Dauphin Herald*, November 4, 1943; "Assistance Asked for Cutting Fuel at Riding Mountain Park," *Minnedosa Tribune*, February 4, 1943; R.A. Gibson to Spero, June 8, 1943, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC; D.R. Cameron to Gibson, May 17, 1943, File 44962 - Use of Prisoners of War, Vol. 463, RG39, LAC.

<sup>11</sup> C.D. Howe to T.A. Crerar, June 8, 1943, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.

Riding Mountain National Park covers 3,000 km<sup>2</sup> of boreal forest, aspen parkland, and fescue prairie along the Manitoba Escarpment. The traditional territory of the Assiniboine and Cree, the area was explored by white settlers in the late eighteenth century and expeditions in the 1850s reported the surrounding area suitable for agriculture and settlement. As settlers established their homesteads on the surrounding plains, Riding Mountain became a source for timber and food.<sup>12</sup> In 1895, almost 4,200 km<sup>2</sup> of land in the area was designated the Riding Mountain Timber Reserve, which became the Riding Mountain Forest Reserve in 1906 under the Dominion Forest Reserves Act.<sup>13</sup> Under these regulations, local residents and operators could continue to harvest timber under permit but restrictions were enforced.

In the late 1920s, interest in establishing a national park in Manitoba prompted proposals to convert the entire Riding Mountain Forest Reserve into a park. The reserve offered attractive lakes, an existing townsite established on the shore of Clear Lake, and an abundance of wild game. It already attracted visitors from across the province. After much consideration of sites throughout the province, on December 28, 1929, the Canadian government authorized the establishment of Riding Mountain National Park.<sup>14</sup> The park officially opened in 1933 and saw significant development in the following years, thanks in part to the work of unemployed relief workers. Improvements to infrastructure, building of roads, development of a campground and golf course, and the expansion of the townsite, now named “Wasagaming,” allowed the park to achieve its goal of becoming a “summer playground.”<sup>15</sup>

Riding Mountain’s new status as a national park significantly affected woodcutting operations. Forest Reserves were administered to ensure the “maintenance,

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<sup>12</sup> Helen Bazillion, Connie Braun, and R. C Rounds, *Human Intervention in the Clear Lake Basin of Riding Mountain National Park: Visitor Services* (Brandon, MB: Rural Development Institute, Brandon University, 1992), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Marilyn K. Peckett, “Anishnabe Homeland History: Traditional Land and Resource Use of Riding Mountain, Manitoba” (Master of Natural Resources Management, University of Manitoba, 1999), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Lothian, *A History of Canada’s National Parks*, vol. I, 71–72.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, I:74.

protection and reproduction of timber,” which was then sold, but the National Parks Act emphasized the conservation of all resources. Cutting was now primarily restricted to only dead or diseased timber. Residents reliant on timber cut in the park protested the new change, prompting the Parks Bureau to continue issuing permits to residents cutting timber for their own use while commercial cutting was gradually discontinued. An aerial survey of the park was completed in 1937 and a forest management plan introduced to ensure sustainable harvesting.<sup>16</sup> Regulated cutting continued in burned-over areas in the following years, but the fuelwood shortage of the early 1940s prompted a renewed interest in the park’s natural resources.

Local communities began requesting permits for harvesting fuelwood in the park and, in 1941, the Canadian government authorized the employment of Alternative Service Workers in Riding Mountain. The first ASWs – or conscientious objectors – arrived at Riding Mountain in June 1941. Predominantly Mennonite men from Southern Manitoba, these ASWs refused to serve in the armed forces on religious grounds and were therefore ordered to participate in organized labour in lieu of military service.<sup>17</sup> The Park Bureau, historian Bill Waiser argues, missed the cheap labour provided by relief workers of 1930s and tended to look upon ASWs as another cheap labour force, putting them to work where relief workers had left off.<sup>18</sup> At Riding Mountain, ASWs were put to work clearing and building roads, performing general maintenance work around the townsite of Wasagaming and, during the winter, ASWs cut fuelwood and lumber. Their work remained limited as there were never more than fifty men in each camp and there were never enough to meet the demand for fuelwood.<sup>19</sup>

For this reason, Minister of Mines and Resources T.A. Crerar responded favourably to the proposal to have POWs cut the much-needed fuelwood in Riding

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<sup>16</sup> The only exception were two licensed timber berths acquired by a civilian operator in the late 1880s. “Timber Administration, Riding Mountain National Park,” July 18, 1946, RM200 - Riding Mountain National Park - Timber, Part 7, Vol. 1908, T-15507, RG84, LAC.

<sup>17</sup> Waiser, *Park Prisoners*, 134–35.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 136–37.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 151 and 162.

Mountain National Park, stating there was sufficient poplar in the western half of the park alone to relieve the province's fuelwood shortage.<sup>20</sup> Director of Land, Parks, and Forest Branch Roy Alexander Gibson felt differently, expressing concern with the presence of POWs in a national park. He explained,

It is now proposed to put German prisoners of war in a valuable national park upon which substantial amounts of public funds have been expended. The number of guards will be reduced to a small fraction of the number heretofore in charge of these prisoners, and the prisoners will not be housed in a flood-lighted barb wire compound. They will be working in the bush where it will be difficult to guard them and where it will be easy for them to start a disastrous fire.

This, Gibson argued, combined with the experiences employing civilian internees in the First World War and the difficulties encountered while employing internees at Kananaskis more recently, prompted Gibson to argue POWs could simply not be relied upon. Instead, he recommended the park secure additional ASWs to cut fuelwood, arguing 200 such men would cut just as much as 400 POWs with the added benefit of not requiring armed guards.<sup>21</sup>

Despite Gibson's concerns, the Department of Labour approved the employment of POWs in Riding Mountain National Park and preparations began immediately. The nature of the project, to provide fuelwood within a national park, meant multiple government departments would be involved. The Department of Labour remained responsible for the POWs and security, the Department of Munitions and Supply to build and administer the project, the Department of Mines and Resources (that is, its Parks Bureau) to supervise production, and the Department of National Defence to enforce discipline.<sup>22</sup>

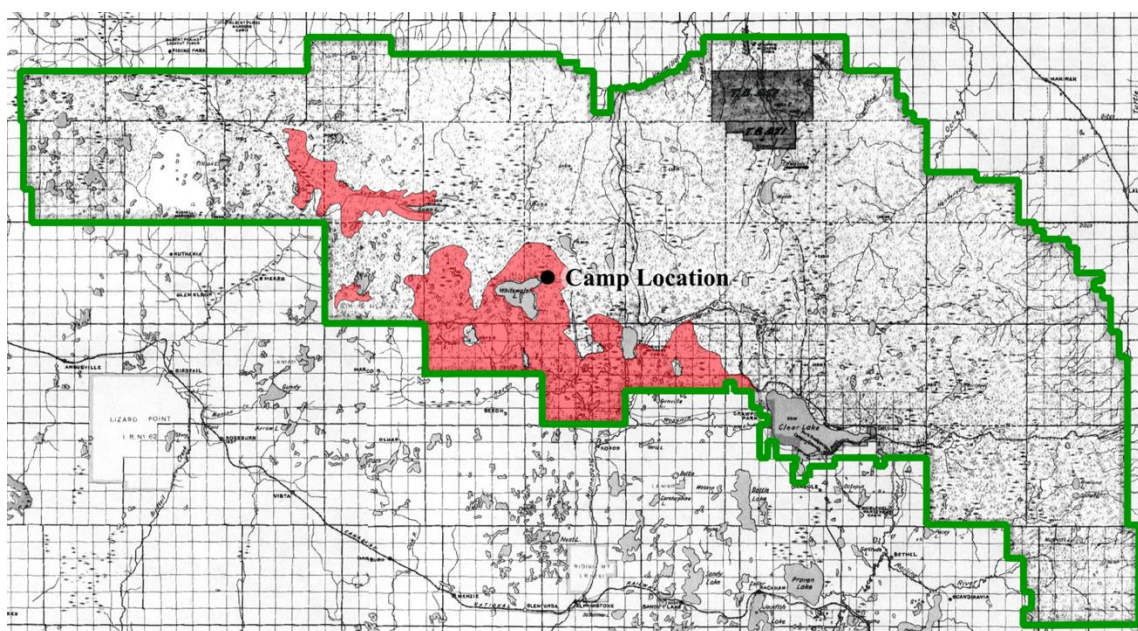
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<sup>20</sup> T.A.C.[Crerar] to C.D. Howe, June 10, 1943, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.

<sup>21</sup> R.A. Gibson to Spero, June 8, 1943, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.

<sup>22</sup> R.A. Gibson to Cameron, June 10, 1943, File 44962 - Use of Prisoners of War, Vol. 463, RG39, LAC.

With no suitable existing facilities within the park, the project required the construction of a new, dedicated woodcutting camp. To ensure the project adhered to the National Parks Act and Regulations, the Parks Bureau remained responsible for selecting appropriate locations for the proposed camp, any roads required, and the woodcutting areas. The Department of Labour and Department of Munitions and Supplies began planning the layout and operation of the project while Riding Mountain National Park superintendent Otto Heaslip promised the full support of his staff to determine locations that were both remote and offered sufficient fuelwood.<sup>23</sup> Dry firewood was needed immediately so the search was restricted to areas in the park that had recently experienced fires, leaving large amounts of standing and dry deadwood. Only one location proved suitable: in 1940, a large fire had swept through the southcentral part of



**Figure 7: Riding Mountain National Park, 1943. This map shows the park borders (in green), recent burn areas (red), and the woodcutting camp's location. Map adapted from Department of the Interior, "National Parks of Canada, Riding Mountain Park, Manitoba," 1932, RM206 - Riding Mountain National Park - License - Timber Berths, Vol. 1910, T-15971 RG84, LAC.**

<sup>23</sup> Otto E. Heaslip to J.E. Spero, June 21, 1943, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.



the park, leaving behind large thousands of cords of standing, fire-killed poplar.<sup>24</sup> The Parks Bureau wanted to establish the camp on the shore of Lake Audy but the Timber Controller settled on a site on the northeast shore of Whitewater Lake. This site was well within the burn area and was within working distance of an estimated 200,000 cords of fire-killed timber (compared to only 20,000 near Lake Audy), ensuring the POWs would have plenty of work.<sup>25</sup>

The next step was to determine the camp's security arrangements. The proposed woodcutting area was well-isolated from the tourist population in and around the townsite of Wasagaming (thirty kilometres distant), but there was still significant concern with the potential of fraternization between POWs and civilians and the camp's impact on summer tourist traffic to the park. Before the project was approved, Minister T.A. Crerar emphasized there would have to be a "definite understanding" that POWs could not freely roam throughout the park but were instead confined to the camp and the woodcutting area.<sup>26</sup> This was also emphasized by Director Gibson who, in a letter to Parks Assistant Controller J.E. Spero, explained,

It should not be forgotten that a large number of people living around Riding Mountain National Park are of foreign birth or parentage. Moreover, a great many Manitoba people and their friends bring their families into Riding Mountain Park for holidays and leave them there for several weeks without many of the men of the household around. This feature must be safeguarded.

The settlements of Seech, Marco, Olha, and Horod were of particular concern as they were all within twenty-five kilometres of Whitewater Lake and populated primarily by Ukrainian immigrants. Gibson questioned the allegiance of these immigrants to the Canadian war effort and feared they could prove sympathetic to German POWs and their

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<sup>24</sup> T.A. Crerar to C.D. Howe, June 10, 1943, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC; Otto E. Heaslip to James Smart, October 26, 1943, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.

<sup>25</sup> R.A. Gibson to J.S. Whalley, June 23, 1943, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.

<sup>26</sup> T.A. Crerar to C.D. Howe, June 10, 1943, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.

cause. He therefore recommended the public be prohibited from entering the cutting and camp areas and POWs be prevented from travelling to any other area of the park.<sup>27</sup>

The selection of Whitewater Lake as the location of the camp reflected these security concerns, selected both for its proximity to the woodcutting area and for its remoteness. Rather than rely upon traditional security measures such as guard towers or barbed wire fences, the camp was surrounded only by dense forest. Authorities believed that this would prevent even the most curious of POWs from attempting an escape while also inducing them to work harder. Prisoners had not had any taste of freedom, having spent months or years living behind barbed wire, so internment authorities believed POWs would not risk causing trouble or attempting to escape – both would result in a transfer to an internment camp. With the additional presence of armed guards, authorities believed the minimum of ten kilometres of dense bush in every direction meant no POWs would attempt an escape, let alone make contact with civilians.<sup>28</sup> Camp bounds were also marked with red blazes or flags to ensure POWs did not wander too far.<sup>29</sup> The Department of Labour was satisfied with these arrangements, but authorities agreed security measures would be heightened if they proved inadequate.<sup>30</sup>

By the time Cabinet passed Order in Council P.C. 6180, officially authorizing the establishment of camps to house POWs or other labour to cut fuelwood in Riding Mountain National Park, work was already well underway.<sup>31</sup> In July, workers began reinforcing an existing road between Lake Audy and Whitewater Lake before beginning construction on the camp itself. Over the course of the next two months, contractors

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<sup>27</sup> R.A. Gibson to Spero, June 8, 1943, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.

<sup>28</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to A. MacNamara, October 4, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>29</sup> Major S.H. Muton, "Standing Orders for V.G.C. Details, Labour Projects, M.D. 10," no date, Standing Orders for Personnel of POW Projects, Vol. 966, RG27, LAC.

<sup>30</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to A. MacNamara, October 4, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>31</sup> A.D.P. Heeney, "Order in Council authorizing establishment of camps for the housing of persons producing wood fuel, P.C. 6180," August 3, 1943, RM200 - Riding Mountain National Park - Timber, Part 7, Vol. 1908, T-15507, RG84, LAC.

cleared an area and erected fifteen buildings on the lake's north-eastern shore.<sup>32</sup> These included separate bunkhouses for the POWs, camp staff, and guards, a mess hall and kitchen, an administration building, a barn, a garage, workshops, a powerhouse, a recreation hall, and a small hospital. The camp also included running water, electricity, and sewage disposal, prompting one forestry employee to note the living conditions there were better than those provided by the Department of Mines and Resources to its own employees.<sup>33</sup> Construction cost approximately \$225,000, making it, as the *Dauphin Herald* reported, Canada's largest and most expensive POW labour project yet constructed – a title it still holds.<sup>34</sup>

The Department of Labour hoped to avoid responsibility for the camp's overall operation and the Department of Munitions and Supply searched for a suitable organization to take over.<sup>35</sup> Rather unexpectedly, Wartime Housing Ltd. agreed to run the project after Managing Director Victor T. Goggin happened to be in Wood Fuel Controller Whalley's office when the subject was raised in passing. A crown corporation, Wartime Housing Ltd. was established in February 1941 under the umbrella of the Department of Munitions and Supply. The corporation was created in response to a shortage of affordable rental housing exacerbated by the urban labour demands of wartime industry and dedicated itself to building and renting housing units.<sup>36</sup> Goggin and

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<sup>32</sup> R.A. Gibson to Spero, July 12, 1943, File 44962 - Use of Prisoners of War, Vol. 463, RG39, LAC.

<sup>33</sup> Controller to Gibson, October 13, 1943, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC; "War Prisoners in Riding Mountain to Cut Fuel Wood," *Dauphin Herald*, November 4, 1943; G. Tunstell to the Dominion Forester, June 29, 1944, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.

<sup>34</sup> Colonel H.N. Streight to Commandant, Medicine Hat, September 29, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; "War Prisoners in Riding Mountain to Cut Fuel Wood," *Dauphin Herald*, November 4, 1943.

<sup>35</sup> R.A. Gibson to Spero, June 8, 1943, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.

<sup>36</sup> Leonard J. Evenden, "Wartime Housing as Cultural Landscape, National Creation and Personal Creativity," *Urban History Review* 25, no. 2 (March 1997): 42.

his corporation had no experience with POWs and his decision to take over the administration of the labour project in Riding Mountain was entirely unpremeditated.<sup>37</sup>

Wartime Housing Ltd. delegated administration of the camp to Captain Christopher H.L. Knuth, a veteran of the First World War and recent retiree from the Royal Canadian Engineers.<sup>38</sup> Under his charge were some 175 military and civilian personnel, including accountants, clerks, instructors and supervisors, mechanics, carpenters, caretakers, teamsters, and road-workers. The Parks Bureau's role in the project remained minimal although, at its request, a warden was stationed at the camp to ensure fuelwood production met its regulations.<sup>39</sup>

The Department of Labour, responsible for security, hired forty-five civilian guards to ensure POWs remained within the camp boundaries and to supervise POWs in camp and while working. Organized under a chief guard, many of these men were local veterans of the First World War seeking additional employment during the winter months.<sup>40</sup> This force was supplemented by a smaller detachment from the Veterans' Guard of Canada. At a peak strength of one officer and twenty-four other ranks, the Veterans' Guard was not, despite its name, a guard force; rather, their responsibilities included the policing of unruly POWs, maintaining discipline, handling POW mail, conducting roll calls twice daily, and escorting POWs back to the base camp or those requiring medical attention. Security remained the responsibility of the civilian guards, but the Veterans' Guard were to provide assistance if called upon.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to A. MacNamara, November 30, 1943, Prisoners of War Labour Projects - Policy, 1943-1944, File 611.1:21-3, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>38</sup> "'Cease Fire' Order Sounds for Twenty-Three M.D. 2 Officers" *The Bullet, Military District No. 2 Weekly Newspaper* 3, no. 28 (August 14, 1943), James, Reginald Heber, Vol. 3, MG30 E 263, LAC.

<sup>39</sup> J.D. Payne to Colonel H.N. Streight, December 11, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; "Summary of Pay-Roll as of 12 May, 1944," Statements, Vol. 959, RG27, LAC.

<sup>40</sup> Chief Guard W. Taylor to Col. R.S.W. Fordham, December 26, 1943, Instructions to Civilian Guards and other Civilian Employees, Vol. 966, RG27, LAC; Lt. Col. R.S.W. Fordham, "Instructions governing Civilian Guards in Labour Camps," n.d., Instructions to Civilian Guards and other Civilian Employees, Vol. 966, RG27, LAC.

<sup>41</sup> Col. R. James to V.T. Goggin, November 5, 1943, Orders and Inspections Concerning POW Procedure, Vol. 966, RG27, LAC; T. Hislop to Brigadier R.A. MacFarlane, D.S.O., September 15, 1943, HQS 7236-

As the camp neared completion, the next step was to secure the POWs. Initial proposals called for between 400 and 500 men and there was some confusion over the nature of these POWs. The *Minnedosa Tribune* reported the camp would employ 400 civilian internees while the Parks Bureau was under the impression the prisoners would be EMS.<sup>42</sup> The Departments concerned and the Parks Bureau strongly preferred the employment of either group, considering they were deemed a lesser security risk than their combatant counterparts, but there were none available. As of September 1943, EMS and civilian internees in Canada were already employed or had refused to volunteer, forcing the Department of Labour to issue a request for combatant POWs. Director of POWs Colonel Streight forwarded the request to the Commandant of Camp 132 (Medicine Hat) and instructed him to issue a call for volunteers.

Camp 132 (Medicine Hat) was a new internment camp, having only opened earlier in the year. With a capacity of over 12,000 POWs, the camp was surrounded by barbed wire fences and guard towers, and held other-rank (individuals below the rank of a commissioned officer) combatant POWs from all three branches of the German armed forces – navy, air force, and army. Some prisoners had been captured early in the war and interned in Canada as early as 1940 while others were recent arrivals from North Africa. Prisoners busied themselves with sports, art, handicraft, music, and educational classes, but the monotony of life in an internment camp weighed heavily on them. Added to this, Camp 132 was not the most forgiving of places; one POW described in an outgoing letter:

The land here shows no signs of Spring. Not a tree or shrub is visible; no Canadian forests. We are on the prairie. In brief, it is a dried-out plain with dried-out small cactuses and a lot of dust and dirt. All this is enclosed with ugly barbed wire fences and wooden watch-towers. At nights we are bothered by the glaring lights, which are placed as close as organ pipes along the fence.<sup>43</sup>

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34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>42</sup> “Civilian Prisoners Will Cut Wood at National Park,” *Minnedosa Tribune*, July 22, 1943.

<sup>43</sup> Lt. J.J. Zubick, “Intelligence Report, Internment Camp 132,” June 30, 1943, HQS 7236-94-6-132 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Medicine Hat, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

Some Afrika Korps veterans went so far as to compare Medicine Hat to the North African desert they had only recently left behind, something they had not expected to see.

Most prisoners arrived in Canada with idealized conceptions of vast wilderness covering the country from coast to coast. Very few POWs had spent any time in Canada before the war, so their understandings of the country were heavily influenced by popular writings and culture, especially adventure stories of the North American frontier. Translated copies of James Fenimore Cooper's stories had become exceptionally popular in Europe in the nineteenth century and paved the way for German authors like Karl May to build upon heavily romanticized depictions of frontier life. Despite never setting foot in the places he wrote of, Karl May is best known for his adventure stories set in the American frontier. His books, written in the late nineteenth century, proved extremely popular with young readers and his work continued to gain in popularity following his death in 1912. May's romanticized vision of frontier life popularized the North American "Cowboy and Indian" narrative in Germany, so POWs coming to Canada and the United States expected to see scenes straight out of books such as *Winnetou* and *Old Surehand*.<sup>44</sup> Characters like German-born Wild West hero Old Shatterhand, writer Frederic Morton argues, gave his readers what they wanted: "an epos of the German conquistador bestriding the world at large."<sup>45</sup> In some ways, prisoners expected to live out their own version of May's stories.

As historian Jonathan Wagner explains, Canada was seen as "a uniquely unspoiled and natural land, wild and beautiful, mysterious and spiritual" with endless forests, untapped mineral wealth, abundant wild animals, and untamed and uncharted wilderness.<sup>46</sup> These conceptions persisted through the inter-war period and, although pro-

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<sup>44</sup> Karl May, *Winnetou*, trans. David Koblick (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1999); Marion Ames Taggart and Karl May, *Winnetou, the Apache Knight* (New York, NY: Benziger Brothers, 1898); Karl May, *Old Surehand Reiseerzählung* (Dresden, DE: Karl May Verl., 1894).

<sup>45</sup> Frederic Morton, "Tales of the Grand Teutons: Karl May Among the Indians," *The New York Times*, January 4, 1987, sec. Books, <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/01/04/books/tales-of-the-grand-teutons-karl-may-among-the-indians.html>.

<sup>46</sup> Jonathan F. Wagner, *A History of Migration from Germany to Canada, 1850-1939* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2006), 28–32.

Nazi propaganda of the 1930s portrayed Canada as “foreign, inhospitable, and estranging,” POWs sent to Canada still expected to see – and experience – vast spaces of untapped wilderness.<sup>47</sup> For many POWs, they were rewarded with a train trip across Quebec and Ontario that not only fulfilled romanticized depictions of Canada, but also reminded them of parts of Germany. Afrika Korps veteran Hieronymus Hirschle recalled his journey across Northwestern Ontario in 1942:

For the first time we saw forest. I was thrilled, forest, real coniferous forest, dense and obscure, it accompanied us the evening, the night and the next day on our way... The whole next day we went through forest, forest and again forest. The wonderful resin and pine scent awakened a feeling of homeliness in me and I felt transported back to the forests of my Swabian homeland. Of course, this forest was not comparable to the swept clean forests at home, but the jungle seemed to me all the more beautiful. Here were fallen, old stems criss-cross, half-decayed between undergrowth and young trees. Here, big old firs changed with groups of oaks, birches or alders. Here stood stumps of lightning-struck fir trees or wind-cracked poplars over thick hazel bushes, and here and there were scattered groups of birches or maples between heather, blueberries, and mossy stone, like ours in the Lüneburger Heath. Then again, there was an endless stretch of glorious woodland just waiting to be cut down and processed. Here I could have gotten off, here I liked it, here I breathed home air.<sup>48</sup>

Once the trains crossed into Manitoba and the forests opened to prairie and farms, prisoners realized the rest of the country was not necessarily what they had envisioned – or hoped for.

Despite being in an unfamiliar land thousands of kilometres from Germany, faith of a German victory persisted within the “walls” of Camp 132 and pro-Nazi elements exerted significant control. This influence was bolstered by known-troublemakers transferred from Lethbridge who, the Camp intelligence officer noted, arrived with the idea of “running the show” and who opposed the spokesman, Richard Eisterman – the POW who served as a representative for the others in camp and who also organized the internal operations of the camp – and his cooperative attitude towards the Canadian

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>48</sup> Hieronymus Hirschle and Angelika Schneider, *Von Afrika nach Kanada Aufzeichnungen über Krieg und Gefangenschaft 1941 bis 1946* (Ulm, DE: Süddt. Verl.-Ges., 2011), 220–21.

authorities.<sup>49</sup> Tensions escalated between pro- and anti-Nazi factions, culminating in the murder of POW August Plaszek in July 1943. Plaszek, a former member of the French Foreign Legion and suspected communist, had spoken out against pro-Nazi elements in camp and was subsequently strangled by fellow POWs.<sup>50</sup> The same pro-Nazi elements had opposed proposals of POW employment, arguing any POW who volunteered for work was not only releasing manpower for the Canadian war effort but directly helping the enemy.<sup>51</sup> Their influence over the rest of the POWs remained limited thanks in part to the spokesman's cooperation with Canadian authorities and reports of their internal censorship of mail and of them withholding and distorting news.<sup>52</sup> Most prisoners welcomed the opportunity for work outside camp.

The Department of Labour's request for 400 volunteers specified only army personnel be selected to avoid any tension between the services. Those considered for employment had to have been well-behaved in Camp 132, be physically fit, and have clean conduct records. Any applications from those suspected of subversive activity, who were likely to cause trouble or escape, and those who were involved with or who lived in the same hut as August Plaszek were to be refused.<sup>53</sup> The Department of Labour also

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<sup>49</sup> Lt. J.J. Zubick, "Intelligence Report, Internment Camp 132," May 31, 1943, HQS 7236-94-6-132 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Medicine Hat, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>50</sup> The camp leadership suspected a number of former Legionnaires, including Plaszek, were planning to overthrow them so the spokesman arranged for the suspected leaders to be interrogated, with the intention of having them transferred to another camp. The interrogations drew a mob of pro-Nazi POWs around the interrogation hut, but Legionnaire Christian Schultz succeeded in running to the fence and alerting the guards. As the guards took Schultz into protective custody, the mob stormed the interrogation hut and seized August Plaszek. He was severely beaten before being dragged into the recreation hall and hung by his fellow POWs. After a substantial investigation, the RCMP charged and arrested three POWs in connection with the murder in 1945; one was found not guilty, another was sentenced to life imprisonment, while Werner Schwalb was found guilty and hung in June 1946. Daniel Duda, "Ideological Battles in Medicine Hat: The Deaths of August Plaszek and Karl Lehmann," in *For King and Country: Alberta in the Second World War* (Edmonton, AB: Provincial Museum of Alberta, 1995), 303.

<sup>51</sup> Lt. J.J. Zubick, "Intelligence Report, Internment Camp 132," June 30, 1943, HQS 7236-94-6-132 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Medicine Hat, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>52</sup> Lt. J.J. Zubick, "Intelligence Report, Internment Camp 132," July 31, 1943, HQS 7236-94-6-132 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Medicine Hat, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>53</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Commandant, Medicine Hat, September 18, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.



requested an additional forty “tradesmen,” including cooks, electricians, carpenters, and medical personnel, be added to the group to help with the camp’s day-to-day operation.<sup>54</sup>

To assist in the selection of these men, the Camp Commandant enlisted the POW spokesman’s help in late September. Eistermann responded “most favourably” to the proposed project and was apparently “most anxious” to cooperate, assuring the camp staff he would select only those he trusted to work satisfactorily. By October 1, Eistermann had not made the news public for fear he would be “flooded” with applications but assured the commandant he would only select those he trusted not to raise trouble.<sup>55</sup> Despite the delay, when he issued the call for volunteers, hundreds of POWs applied, eager for the chance to work and leave the confines of Camp 132.

By the time Colonel Streight arrived at Camp 132 in mid-October, the spokesman had assembled a list of volunteers. The vast majority were combatant veterans of the North African campaign, many having arrived in Canada within the last year. With the assistance of the Camp Commandant, the Scout Officer, the Interpreter Officer, and other officers whose duties required them to interact closely with POWs, Streight carefully scrutinized the list to determine the best candidates. He compiled a final list of 440 POWs who were well-behaved, physically fit, had clean conduct records, and were unlikely to cause trouble. Streight then conducted personal interviews with English-speaking volunteers and the project’s new spokesman. Through these interviews, Streight learned the primary motive to volunteer for work was the opportunity “to live in surroundings not enclosed by barbed wire.” Emphasizing he would not tolerate any misconduct, Streight threatened that any offenders would be immediately returned to Camp 132 and denied any later opportunities to work outside the camp. The work, he explained, was part of an experiment and the success of this project would help determine whether similar projects would be approved across the country. This appeared to make a “strong impression” on

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<sup>54</sup> Col. H.N. Streight, “Visit to Camps 133 and 132,” 26 October 1943, POW - Corresp, Reports, Notes, Misc Papers, Directives, 1942-1945, Vol. 1, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM.

<sup>55</sup> Maj. H. Hedley to Director, Prisoners of War, October 1, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

the POWs, and prompted the spokesman to inform his men that, as Streight noted, “if they did anything to prejudice the chances of further work parties being sent out, he would consider it a serious breach of discipline.”<sup>56</sup>

With the list of POWs finalized, Streight proceeded to Riding Mountain to help prepare for the arrival of the POWs, adding in his report that no one at Medicine Hat seemed to know the camp’s actual location. Following his arrival at Dauphin, he discovered that it was not thirty kilometres to the camp by truck, as he had initially been told, but eighty. Streight reported,

The camp has an attractive location in the close vicinity of a small lake. The country surrounding the camp is densely wooded and the nearest habitated country is 35 to 40 miles distant. The roads leading out of the camp are few in number and easily patrolled. To go across country would require a very determined effort, so that from the point of view of security the danger of this, while not entirely removed, is slight, as the country is not only densely wooded but broken with very steep hills, gullies and muskeg.

The camp itself was in a “well-advanced” state and Streight believed the buildings would be ready by October 26. Most were complete but the small hospital was still under construction, with the foundations only being laid when Streight arrived. The POWs were to be housed in three standard military H-Huts, each with their own washrooms and able



**Figure 8: Riding Mountain Park Labour Project. Riding Mountain National Park (RMNP) Collection.**

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<sup>56</sup> Col. H.N. Streight, “Visit to Camps 133 and 132,” 26 October 1943, POW - Corresp, Reports, Notes, Misc Papers, Directives, 1942-1945, Vol. 1, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM.

to sleep seventy-two men, while the Civilian Guard and the camp staff were to be housed in another H-Hut, all of which were heated by wood stoves. Streight reported, “Altogether the camp makes a splendid impression, and I feel satisfied that the accommodation is considerably superior to that which the P.O.W. have enjoyed in the Medicine Hat camp and that they should be quite satisfied and contented in these surroundings.”<sup>57</sup>

Although each POW had been carefully vetted, it did not mean authorities trusted them. The POWs were still enemy soldiers and experience demonstrated some were willing to take advantage of any opportunity for escape, no matter how slight. Riding Mountain was no different, so when civilian contractors were still working at the Riding Mountain camp, the potential for escape was elevated. The POWs were originally scheduled to leave Camp 132 on October 15, but the plumbing at the Riding Mountain was not yet completed. Prisoners in other internment camps had successfully escaped using clothing stolen from or left behind by civilian workers and the Department of Labour feared the presence of civilian plumbers at Riding Mountain would present an opportunity for POWs to obtain civilian clothing and attempt to escape.<sup>58</sup> The day before the scheduled transfer, the department rescheduled the move to October 25.<sup>59</sup>

Ten days later, the POWs assembled at the gates of Camp 132 and boarded a waiting train. On the morning of October 26, 1943, the 440 POWs and their guard detail arrived outside Dauphin and were driven to the camp by truck. The prisoners had no idea what to expect but, upon arriving at their new camp, the lack of guard towers and barbed wire fences produced the desired effect. With only forest surrounding the camp and red blazes on trees marking the camp bounds, POW Karl-Heinrich Landmann later recalled his immediate thought upon seeing the camp was “freedom.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> For example, in April 1942, POWs Peter Krug and Erich Boehle escaped from Camp 30 (Bowmanville) after dressing in coveralls and posing as civilian painters. Melady, *Escape from Canada!*, 146.

<sup>59</sup> Lt. Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Director, Prisoners of War, October 14, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>60</sup> Correspondence with Karl-Heinrich Landmann, July 29, 2012.

As the POWs settled into their new accommodations, they soon received their work assignments. Four hundred of the 440 men were assigned to woodcutting duties. The average day began with a 7:00 a.m. reveille, followed shortly after by roll call and breakfast. The POWs left the camp at 8:00 a.m. and worked until 4:45 p.m., with the exception of a one-hour midday break for lunch. Before supper was served at 6:00 p.m., the guards conducted another roll call and lights out was 10:30 p.m.<sup>61</sup> Woodcutters were organized into working gangs of twenty-five men, each led by a POW, and were assigned specific areas to cut. As few, if any, had woodcutting experience, Wartime Housing hired fourteen experienced civilian woodcutters to teach prisoners their trade and supervise them until they gained enough experience. Each POW was expected to cut and stack three-quarters of a cord per-man per-day, a task that required felling a tree, removing the



**Figure 9: Prisoners of War in Riding Mountain National Park. Cappel Collection.**

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<sup>61</sup> E.L. Maag, "Riding Mountain Camp: Visité par M. E.L. Maag, le 28 avril 1944," Archives du CICR, Comité international de la Croix-Rouge.

branches, cutting the logs to eight-foot lengths, hauling the cut logs to the roadside if necessary, and then stacking them. In the winter, POWs would help load and haul the wood by truck, wagon, or sleigh either back to the camp or to nearby rail lines.<sup>62</sup>

The remaining forty POWs worked in occupations to assist in the camp's day-to-day operation, as clerks, translators, medical orderlies, cooks, and tradesmen. Among these men was the camp spokesman, Stabsfeldwebel (equivalent to a Regimental Sergeant-Major) Leo Manuel, the highest-ranking non-commissioned officer. As spokesman, Manuel negotiated with camp authorities and maintained communication with the Swiss General Consul, international aid organizations, and the Camp 132 spokesman.<sup>63</sup> He and a small staff operated the administration building's orderly room, from which they coordinated woodcutting operations. As very few, if any, had experience in woodcutting, injuries were expected and the Department of National Defence agreed to include a POW doctor, Oberarzt Fritjof Gress, in the contingent as well as four medical orderlies.<sup>64</sup> Tradesmen, including electricians, plumbers, blacksmiths, welders, mechanics, and carpenters, kept the camp running while mechanics maintained the camp's vehicles and power plant. Feeding 440 POWs and the 175 military and civilian personnel was no small task so, in addition to civilian staff, Wartime Housing also employed prisoners as cooks, bakers, and waiters.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to their normal duties, the prisoners also helped the park fight forest fires. In November 1943, the park received permission from the Department of Labour

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<sup>62</sup> R.H. Candy, "Report on Riding Mountain Prisoner-of-War Camp, Manitoba," U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.

<sup>63</sup> Translation of letter from Camp 132 Leader to the Camp Leader, Riding Mountain Logging Camp, December 1, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>64</sup> In 1946, Department of Labour Inspector Captain W.H. Mortlock reported that Gress was, in his opinion, "one of the best, if not the best [Protected Personnel] doctor employed on Labour Projects." Capt. W.H. Mortlock to Major G. Forbes, July 2, 1946, Correspondence Re Medical Service for POWs, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>65</sup> Lt. Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Director, Prisoners of War, September 29, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; POW Pay-Roll, Ration and Strength Statements, from 1 to 17 June, 1944, Statements, Vol. 959, RG27, LAC.

and Department of National Defence for the POWs to help park staff in fire-fighting activities if need be. The approval proved beneficial for, in April 1944, prisoners helped fight three fires in the park. Two were spot fires within the working area of the camp – later attributed to carelessness with matches or cigarettes – and both were extinguished by POWs. The third was a more serious fire southwest of Whitewater Lake that threatened the woodcutting area, stockpiles, and the camp. Twenty-two POWs worked for the next thirty-nine hours almost without break to put out the fire.<sup>66</sup> Parks Controller Smart expressed his gratitude to the Department of Labour as the use of POWs allowed for an almost immediate response, adding, “I might say that we feel we are absolutely dependent on the prisoners-of-war for our firefighting this year.”<sup>67</sup>

For their work, whether it be in the bush or in camp, prisoners received 50¢ per day, with 30¢ of this wage going to them directly in the form of paper chits or tickets and the remaining 20¢ deposited in a savings account back at Camp 132. With their wages, POWs could purchase non-essential goods from the camp canteen (the operation of which they took over in December 1943) such as tobacco, toiletries, and soda. They occasionally also had access to the Eaton’s mail-order catalogue, which offered a far greater variety.<sup>68</sup> Prisoners ordered lighters, ash trays, scissors, shoe laces, ear muffs, pen holders, playing cards, scarves, pyjamas, nail files, chewing gum, pickles, apples, German-English dictionaries, matches, as well as Christmas decorations including gold paint, artificial snow, and decorative garlands.<sup>69</sup> Prisoner George Förster even took advantage of the opportunity to order wedding rings for himself and his future bride-to-be, whom he had yet to meet.<sup>70</sup> The practice, however, was short-lived; when Colonel

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<sup>66</sup> O.E. Heaslip to J. Smart, May 5, 1944, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.

<sup>67</sup> J. Smart to Col. Fordham, May 24, 1944, Prisoners of War Labour Projects - Policy, 1943-1944, File 611.1:21-3, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>68</sup> Lt. Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Colonel H.N. Streight, December 8, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>69</sup> T. Eaton Co., Limited to Wartime Housing Limited, December 5, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-4 - Dept. of Labour - Work Projects, South River, Ont., C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>70</sup> Ludwig Carbyn, “Interview with Mr. George Foerster,” April 1985, Riding Mountain National Park (RMNP) Collection

Streight learned Wartime Housing permitted these orders, he ordered them ceased at once, explaining POWs in Germany had no such luxury, there was a shortage of goods in Canada, and the orders presented significant security concerns. The latter, Streight emphasized, was particularly important in that POWs could easily purchase goods to attempt escapes.<sup>71</sup>

The prisoners worked eight-hour days, six days a week, so they still had a considerable portion of their days to themselves. To help fill the time and to prevent POWs from becoming too restless and contemplate escape, POWs were allowed and encouraged to bring personal belongings, namely their uniforms, mail, photographs, and items purchased in internment camp canteens, as well as musical instruments, recreational and educational material, and books.<sup>72</sup> Wartime Housing and the Department of Labour also provided sources of recreation and entertainment but it was the War Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA that provided the bulk of the camp's recreational equipment. Focusing on the recreational, educational, and cultural needs of POWs, the War Prisoners' Aid provided POWs at Riding Mountain with, among other things, three accordions, a microscope, a turntable, a gramophone, two violins, four guitars, and twenty-three pairs of skates.<sup>73</sup> With the musical instruments, the POWs assembled a small band that put on regular concerts for both the POWs and camp staff. In addition to instruments, the YMCA also supplied the camp with a film projector and a screen and placed the camp on a regular film distribution list, allowing the POWs to see a film at least once a week.<sup>74</sup> In the camp's recreation hall, POWs also had access to a radio,

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<sup>71</sup> Colonel H.N. Streight to Wartime Housing Limited, December 9, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-4 - Dept. of Labour - Work Projects, South River, Ont., C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>72</sup> Col. H.N. Streight, "Visit to Camps 133 and 132," 26 October 1943, POW - Corresp, Reports, Notes, Misc Papers, Directives, 1942-1945, Vol. 1, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM.

<sup>73</sup> H. Boeschstein to Alan Symes, September 25, 1945, POW Trust Account, Vol. 964, RG27, LAC.

<sup>74</sup> "Riding Mountain Camp," no date, Conditions of Employment of POWs, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC; Translation of letter from Spokesman, Riding Mountain to Dr. Boeschstein, March 1, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

piano, ping-pong tables, dart boards, card tables, and writing tables.<sup>75</sup> Josef Gabski recalled how he and his comrades intently listened to the radio for the latest news of the war, with English-speaking POWs translating for their comrades.<sup>76</sup> The recreation hall featured a small stage where POWs put on theatrical and musical performances for the enjoyment of fellow POWs and staff. While Doctor Gress quickly established himself as the best piano player in camp, he was not alone in regard to musical talent.<sup>77</sup>

Other POWs used their free time to unwind. Hans Schmitz often spent his evenings reading, writing, studying, or playing while POWs like Herbert Kunze improved their craftsmanship skills. In a letter, Kunze described,

It is very lonely here but it is quite a good life. After the day's work in the woods we spend the evenings in handicraft and other things. For example, many (models of) ships are made: U-boats, speed-boats, cruisers, battle ships, etc., out of birch bark, picture frames and trinket-boxes albums are made and sold. While here I finished writing my second book and am now spending more time on pencil-pen and water-colour drawing.<sup>78</sup>

With an improvised arts and craft workshop, prisoners spent countless hours carving handicrafts from both wood and antler as generous supplies of both could easily be found in the bush.<sup>79</sup> Some POWs continued their education at Riding Mountain, either with the help of their comrades or using material sent from Medicine Hat. Many took the opportunity to learn English and at least one POW, Herbert Kurda, took a course in Russian.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> "Riding Mountain Camp," no date, Conditions of Employment of POWs, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>76</sup> Ludwig Carbyn, "Interview with Mr. George Foerster," April 1985, RMNP Collection.

<sup>77</sup> Translation of letter from Leo Manuel to Spokesman, Camp 132, no date, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>78</sup> Canadian Postal Censorship, "Report on Prisoner of War Lumber Camps," July 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>79</sup> E.L. Maag, "Riding Mountain Camp: Visité par M. E.L. Maag, le 28 avril 1944," Archives du CICR, Comité International de la Croix-Rouge.

<sup>80</sup> Canadian Postal Censorship, "Report on Prisoner of War Lumber Camps," July 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.



Sports were also a popular pastime and handball and soccer quickly became the most popular.<sup>81</sup> Equipment was sent from Camp 132 or the War Prisoners' Aid and was in constant demand, with POWs requesting soccer balls, hand balls, medicine balls, javelins, sports shirts, tennis equipment, and instructional books.<sup>82</sup> Whitewater Lake also lent itself as a suitable site for swimming, although the POWs were only able to do this under guard supervision.<sup>83</sup> Prisoners also turned their attention to making canoes to traverse the expanses of Whitewater Lake, having seen a birch-bark canoe featured on the cover of a magazine circulating through camp. Lacking the tools and experience required for birch-bark canoes, they instead tried their hand at dugout canoes carved from large spruce logs. The canoes were carved by hand and paddled around the lake, although the



**Figure 10: Prisoner in a dugout canoe in the creek adjacent to camp. Author's Collection.**

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<sup>81</sup> Celes Davar, "POW Interview with Josef Gabski," RMNP Collection.

<sup>82</sup> E.L. Maag, "Riding Mountain Camp: Visité par M. E.L. Maag, le 28 avril 1944," Archives du CICR, Comité international de la Croix-Rouge.

<sup>83</sup> Lt. E.A.C. to Camp Leader, July 6, 1944, Orders and Inspections Concerning POW Procedure, Vol. 966, RG27, LAC.

guards placed the shoreline off-limits to prevent anyone from wandering too far. In the winter months, part of the lake was cleared to make a skating rink.<sup>84</sup>

With the help of civilian employees and the park warden, several stray dogs and cats found their way into the camp. Eagerly adopted by the POWs, these pets provided a constant source of entertainment and were prominently featured in group photographs. The number of pets reached such an extent that, in early 1945, the Administrator ordered no more dogs or cats were to be brought into the camp.<sup>85</sup> By far the most notable pet was a black bear cub. In Spring 1944, forty POWs managed to capture the cub while out hiking, chasing away the mother bear and a second cub, and smuggled it back into camp. The bear was dubbed “Mutz” and soon became the camp mascot, and was



**Figure 11: The pet bear, “Mutz,” with the camp interpreter and a civilian guard. Author's Collection.**

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<sup>84</sup> Teresa Tabulenas, “Whitewater Lake Prisoner of War Camp RMNP Supplement Report,” 1978, RMNP Collection; “Information obtained from Diary - written by P/W Uffz. Konstantin Schwartz No. 36444 - at Riding Mountain Park,” June 16, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; Major J.H. Keane to Camp Spokesman, September 7, 1944, Orders and Inspections Concerning POW Procedure, Vol. 966, RG27, LAC; Canadian Postal Censorship, “Report on Prisoner of War Lumber Camps,” July 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>85</sup> Major J.H. Keane to Camp Spokesman, March 10, 1945, Orders and Inspections Concerning POW Procedure, Vol. 966, RG27, LAC.

not only popular with the POWs, one of whom fondly referred to it in a letter as “our good and faithful camp-bear,” but with the guards and camp staff as well.<sup>86</sup>

As the story of the camp bear suggests, the camp’s surroundings offered abundant opportunities for those interested in the park’s natural features. Shortly after his arrival at Riding Mountain, Karl Cappel described his transfer from Camp 132 in a letter to his parents: “I left the camp down in the prairie and arrived at a small camp somewhere in the endless huge Canadian forest close to a lake. No sandstorm lies down on our lungs anymore and darkens the sun. Dense nearly impenetrable virgin forest surrounds our camp. You can see a lot of deer, elk, bears, and even wolves.” Cappel’s interest in the forest seems to have only grown for, in a later letter, he wrote his family,

The golden bright sun came from the azur blue sky, the same sun that shines for you hitting me on a small clearing surrounded by fir trees somewhere in the huge forest near our camp. Only a narrow path leads to this point through nearly impenetrable forest and perhaps not a single man’s eye has ever seen that piece of untouched nature. Wolves and bears say good night to each other and there you can hear the roaring cry of stags during the rutting season. Uncountable birds are twittering in the trees and sing their songs into the blue day. Smartly smelling violets and there was the herb aroma of lilies of the valley in the air.<sup>87</sup>

Cappel was not alone in exploring his new surroundings. Hiking and exploring became popular pastimes, with hundreds of small game trails and pre-war logging trails scattered throughout the area, not to mention the diverse wildlife. Erich Lamer, in a letter to his family in Germany, stated, “I often take walks to spy on the many wild animals, for such a sight is not offered to every European.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Celes Davar, “POW Interview with Josef Gabski,” September 11, 1991, RMNP Collection; Censorship summary of letter from Ober Gefreiter Gerhard Ribbe to family of Ernst Ribbe, August 25, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; “Statement of Major J.H. Keane, Camp Administrator,” no date, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>87</sup> Karl Cappel to Cappel Family, May 9, 1944, Cappel Collection; Karl Cappel to Cappel Family, November 5, 1943, Cappel Collection.

<sup>88</sup> Canadian Postal Censorship, “Report on Prisoner of War Lumber Camps,” July 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

One hiking expedition caused quite a stir. On Sunday, October 31, 1943 – only five days after their arrival at Riding Mountain – Karl-Heinrich Landmann, Karl Keller, Fritz Berner, and sixteen other POWs used their first day off as an opportunity to go hiking and explore their new surroundings. Later that afternoon, snow began to fall, and the men failed to return before the evening roll call. The civilian guards finally realized the men were missing and scrambled to search the camp. Unable to find the men, the guards notified the nearby Dauphin RCMP detachment and began organizing a search with the cooperation of camp staff and the Veterans' Guard. Believing the men had followed the game or logging trails outside the camp boundaries, the guards' search was hampered by snow, which had now increased to a small blizzard and obliterated all traces of the missing POWs.<sup>89</sup> As RCMP officers from Dauphin raced to the camp, they notified the other detachments surrounding the park as well as the Border Police manning the Canada-US border, Railway Police, Provost Corps, Brandon City Police, and local airports to remain alert.<sup>90</sup> When the RCMP arrived, mixed patrols of police, Veterans' Guards, civilian guards, and park wardens began patrolling throughout the area and a full-scale search was scheduled for the morning. The patrols found no trace of the missing POWs.

The nineteen prisoners were quite simply lost. For most of the day, they had followed the many game trails and old logging roads that dotted the area around camp, but the onset of snow eventually covered their tracks. Unable to find their way back, they elected to hunker down for the night rather than continue wandering blindly. In the morning, the POWs split up into small groups and tried making their way back to camp. Shortly after nine a.m., Karl-Heinrich Landmann and Hanz Schneider were the first to arrive back, cold and hungry. By 3:00 p.m., most had returned by their own steam and the

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<sup>89</sup> Sergt. F.H. Bebb, "Karl Keller et al - German Prisoners of War - Internment Camp - Whitewater Lake, Riding Mountain National Park, Manitoba, Alleged Escapes," November 3, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>90</sup> Cst. C.H. Stuart, "P.W. Keller, et al; German Prisoners of War: Escape from the Riding Mountain Prisoner of War Camp," November 3, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

final two were picked up by a patrol five miles from camp. Captain Knuth ordered the nineteen men to be taken to the guardhouse to be interrogated by the RCMP and camp staff. Each POW adamantly denied accusations of escape, stating they had merely gone hiking and lost their bearings when snow covered the trails.<sup>91</sup>

After careful review, Colonel James and his staff agreed there was no motive to escape and, following the spokesman's assurances that no prisoner would leave the camp boundaries again, released the nineteen POWs.<sup>92</sup> Not everyone was convinced: RCMP Sergeant Bebb believed the POWs had purposefully explored the area to determine the best route for a future escape, a narrative emphasized by local press. The *Winnipeg Tribune* announced the "escape" as the second largest in Canada, superseded only by the escape of twenty-eight POWs from Camp 101 (Angler, Ontario) in April 1941, while the *Globe and Mail* reported the winter proved too much for the POWs and thwarted their escape.<sup>93</sup>

Regardless of the motive, the ease with which POWs were able to leave the camp re-emphasized concerns of security. From the first proposals for POW labour, military and government authorities recognized the increased risk of escape from camps without traditional security measures, but most believed the reward outweighed the risk. The "escape" emphasized the struggle between providing POWs with freedom while maintaining security. The RCMP believed the likelihood of escape would only increase, especially when the weather improved, unless security was tightened. If the guards were unable to ensure POWs remained within camp bounds, the investigating RCMP officer questioned, how would they prevent a mass escape?<sup>94</sup> However, camp staff and labour

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<sup>91</sup> Bebb, "Karl Keller et al.," November 3, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>92</sup> "Officials Deny Prisoner Break at Lake Audy," *Minnedosa Tribune*, November 4, 1943; Lieut. B. Shewfelt to Director, Prisoners of War, November 2, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>93</sup> "19 Nazis Back After Escape," *Winnipeg Tribune*, November 1, 1943; "Manitoba Snow Too Severe, 19 Germans Return to Camp," *Globe and Mail*, November 2, 1943.

<sup>94</sup> Coincidentally, soldiers from the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion, the Winnipeg Grenadiers were conducting training maneuvers the same day in the Pine Ridge area with at least one exercise focusing on capturing escaped POWs. "Grenadiers' Scheme Was Like Real Thing," *Winnipeg Tribune*, November 1, 1943; Sub-

authorities believed that tightening security through measures like barbed wire fences or strict control of POW movements would reduce the incentive for POWs to work. This, in turn, would likely reduce the number of POWs willing to volunteer for work projects and thereby threaten the entire enterprise.

As this was the first offense, authorities elected not to increase security but to instead hold the spokesman and the POWs to their promise not to leave camp bounds. The POWs then took it upon themselves to demonstrate their commitment. Shortly after the nineteen POWs returned to camp, the Canadian interpreter stationed at the camp, Staff Sergeant Dahm, reported,

In my opinion nothing has been so great a factor in creating the proper morale as the lesson taught the 19 who were lost. For some time these were actually outcasts. On the night when all had returned to camp I found out that they were actually booked for a hiding by their fellow P/W, thinking that by so doing they would appease the anger of Medicine Hat and Ottawa. After more or less bargaining in their council, I made them realize how misguided such action would be. At the same time I had in mind the nucleus of trouble such action would cause.<sup>95</sup>

Dahm's actions saved the nineteen prisoners from a serious beating. Vigilante justice had been employed by POWs in a number of internment camps, although it was generally employed by pro-Nazis targeting those who spoke out against Adolf Hitler and the Nazi cause. Beatings to sway the favour of Canadians was unheard of but this demonstrated the value many POWs placed upon their newfound freedom.

While the incident of October 31 may have suggested to some that POWs were already looking for opportunities to escape, outgoing mail suggested most genuinely appreciated the opportunity to live and work in relative freedom. Prisoners were permitted to send two letters and four postcards every month, all of which were censored by Canadian postal censors to ensure POWs were not transmitting information that could

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Insp. J.M. Bella, to the O.C. "D" Div., RCMP, November 3, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC,

<sup>95</sup> Lieut. J.J. Zubick, "Intelligence Report: Mood and Morale," November 30, 1943, HQS 7236-94-6-132 - Intelligence reports. Medicine Hat, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

either endanger the Canadian war effort or result in retaliatory action against Canadian POWs in Germany. The size of the Riding Mountain camp prompted military authorities to post an interpreter, Staff Sergeant Dahm, whose duties included reading POW mail to determine the attitude and morale of the POWs. During the first month of the camp's operation, Dahm reported outgoing mail suggested the prisoners greatly appreciated living outside Camp 132. As one POW suggested, time behind barbed wire had been taking its toll: "Things are much better for us here... There is no barbed wire around our camp, and what that means can only be appreciated only by one who has spent two years behind it."<sup>96</sup> Camp Doctor Gress stated, "The camp is situated in the bush, beside a lake, the barbed wire is replaced by marked trees, which are a real treat for the eyes. The comrades work hard, in order to bring their bodies into form again. So far only minor accidents have occurred, so we can all be content."<sup>97</sup> One POW, welcoming the change in scenery, declared, "You cannot imagine how I felt when after three years I saw a forest again. To wander through the woods and to once again have real work before me was something divine." Another, describing life at Riding Mountain as "bearable," wrote, "Woods, water, fresh air and healthy work with my comrades and a certain freedom in the midst of nature, that is what I have wanted. Now you need not worry so much." Regretting he could not convince his friend to come from Medicine Hat, he added, "Well, a year behind the wire and he will be raging."<sup>98</sup>

Even work was appreciated and both work and the resulting improvement of physical health proved popular themes in their letters. Prisoners regularly complained of the repetitive routine of life in internment camps but work at Riding Mountain gave them new purpose and helped pass time. Although there had been some minor injuries, Doctor Gress noted the men were working hard to get themselves back into shape.<sup>99</sup> "Time here

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Canadian Postal Censorship, "Report on Prisoner of War Lumber Camps," July 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>98</sup> Lieut. J.J. Zubick, "Intelligence Report: Mood and Morale," November 30, 1943, HQS 7236-94-6-132 - Intelligence reports. Medicine Hat, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>99</sup> Canadian Postal Censorship, "Report on Prisoner of War Lumber Camps," July 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

passes like the wind,” one POW described. “It is fun to work in the fresh air of the woods.” Another stated, “It is nicer here than in the old camp. We are working as woodcutters. It is no light work, but it is fun and we are in the woods all day. We fell the trees and cut them into firewood. That makes muscles and is good for the body; also, one does not have so much time for brooding and the day passes more quickly [sic].” One POW, comparing Riding Mountain to Camp 132, wrote, “Although one gets to see nothing but wild game, I like it much better here than in the old camp. Above all, it is not so tedious here. One comes back tired at nights and does not brood so much, so that one can sleep well.” In a letter home to his family, one POW stated,

You may be sure that it is not easy for me with healthy bones to loaf about here when I would be so much better off with you. For this reason I have found that which can help me over these times, namely, work. Here knowledge alone is not decisive, but the man himself. Apart from this, too much of intellectual athletics allows melancholy to creep in. That would be the finish of me.<sup>100</sup>

“Barbed-wire psychosis” – which historian Andrew Rettig describes as a “psychological depression tied to long captivity, homesickness, and increased anxiety” – took a heavy toll on some who spent years behind barbed wire.<sup>101</sup> Life in an internment camp was a life of confinement; POWs interacted with the same people in the same places with little or no chance of escape and little privacy. Riding Mountain helped reduce some of these effects in providing POWs with relative freedom. While still confined to a specific area, the boundaries were defined by the natural environment rather than barbed wire, POWs could leave the camp and find solitude, and the camp offered plenty of recreational activities. Overall, Riding Mountain provided the greatest sense of freedom the POWs had experienced since their capture.

December 1943 brought some changes to the camp, most notably the arrival of Lieutenant-Colonel Reginald Heber James, who replaced Captain Knuth as the camp

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<sup>100</sup> Lieut. J.J. Zubick, “Intelligence Report: Mood and Morale,” November 30, 1943, HQS 7236-94-6-132 - Intelligence reports. Medicine Hat, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>101</sup> Rettig, “A De-Programming Curriculum: Allied Reeducation and the Canadian-American Psychological Warfare Program for German POWs, 1943-47,” 603.



administrator. A veteran of the First World War and a retired recruiting officer, James' appointment produced, according to Park Superintendent Otto Heaslip, a "decided improvement in the conduct and operation" of the camp.<sup>102</sup> Shortly after his arrival, James was put to the test when a dispute emerged amongst the POWs.

On December 15, 1943, POWs Fritz Dornseif and Otto Ecker turned themselves into the camp guard and requested protective custody. The pair were among a number of POWs who had volunteered for work at Riding Mountain in order to escape the pressure and actions of pro-Nazi POWs in Medicine Hat. They revealed that fellow prisoners Peter Fergen and Paul Nowack were also supposed to have sought protection but had failed to join them as previously agreed. Colonel James met with spokesman Leo Manuel and asked him whether any POWs were missing. After a quick search, Manuel stated three or four men, including Dornseif and Ecker, were absent but Manuel quickly renounced responsibility for them. Manuel then denounced the missing men as traitors and refused to accept them if they returned. Colonel James ordered a search for Fergen and Nowack, but it ultimately proved unsuccessful. James then informed police and military authorities of what appeared to be an escape but, shortly after, the camp received a call from a warden stationed seventeen miles from camp who had apprehended the two missing POWs. The warden escorted the two exhausted POWs back to camp and all four were turned over to the RCMP for interrogation.<sup>103</sup>

The stories told by the four POWs revealed an extreme divide between two factions at Riding Mountain. Dornseif, Ecker, Fergen, and Nowack explained they were being victimized by the pro-Nazi POWs in camp as the four had all served with the French Foreign Legion before the war. They had all heeded calls to return to Germany in

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<sup>102</sup> Peter Broughton, "James Family History," Broughton Collection; "'Cease Fire' Order Sounds For Twenty-Three M.D. 2 Officers" *The Bullet, Military District No. 2 Weekly Newspaper* 3, no. 28 (August 14, 1943), James, Reginald Heber, Vol. 3, MG30 E 263, LAC; O. E. Heaslip to J. Smart, November 9, 1943, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.

<sup>103</sup> R.H. James, "Report of Escape of Two Prisoners of War from Riding Mountain camp, Man., 15 Dec. 1943," December 17, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

the 1930s but, after their arrival, they had all faced harassment at the hands of the Gestapo. Arrested, detained for varying periods of time, and prevented from finding jobs, the four were among hundreds of former Legionnaires suspected of being traitors. After war broke out, the four were drafted in the 361<sup>st</sup> Regiment, an infantry unit composed almost entirely of former Legionnaires, and transferred to Northern Africa where the unit saw heavy action and suffered many casualties. “We did our duty,” Dornseif stated, “but it was hopeless because we had to face impossible odds in front and were driven by revolvers from behind.”<sup>104</sup>

Captured by British forces, the former Legionnaires hoped their torment was now over, but they were wrong. They tried to remain anonymous once in Canada, but pro-Nazis targeted the Legionnaires, believing them to have forfeited their honour by serving with the French. Between thirty to forty volunteers, eager to avoid trouble in Camp 132, volunteered for work in the hope they could free themselves from their oppressors. Their harassment continued at Riding Mountain and, the four revealed, their situation became more precarious as some of their comrades tried to reassert their loyalty to Germany by acting as “spotters and stooges” for the pro-Nazis. These men threatened bodily harm and, on more than one occasion, a hanging.<sup>105</sup> Rather than speak with spokesman Manuel, who they doubted could ensure their safety, the Legionnaires deemed it safer to turn themselves into the guards and RCMP for protection.<sup>106</sup>

There were no detention facilities at Riding Mountain so, with the lives of the four Legionnaires at risk, Colonel James placed the men under guard in the guard quarters. Because they did not come to him first, spokesman Manuel continued to

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<sup>104</sup> Despite their experience in desert warfare, these men were assigned the same status as convicts and could only be transferred to a normal unit if they performed “daring” deeds. D/Cpl L.R. Atkins, “Sdt. Fritz Dornseif, 24315, et al., Escaped Prisoners from Lake Audy P.O.W. Camp, Riding Mountain National Park, Manitoba,” December 17, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; Steinhilper and Osborne, *Full Circle*, 170.

<sup>105</sup> Atkins, “Sdt. Fritz Dornseif, 24315, et al.,” December 17, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>106</sup> Bebb, “Sdt. Fritz Dornseif, 24315 et al.,” December 20, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

denounce the four as traitors and informed James he could not guarantee their safety.<sup>107</sup> Unsure what Manuel was insinuating, the RCMP and guards feared the pro-Nazis might attempt to storm the guard quarters to reclaim and harm the Legionnaires.<sup>108</sup> As the RCMP believed the Legionnaires' continued presence would only be a "menace" to camp security, and eager to continue the close cooperation between camp staff and the POWs, military authorities transferred four of the Legionnaires to an internment camp in Quebec.<sup>109</sup>

The problem of the Legionnaires was not over. On December 21, 1943, RCMP officers arrested prisoner Wilhelm Schnackenberg thirty-five kilometres north of the camp. Also a former Legionnaire, Schnackenberg stated he left camp as he feared for his life. Despite his belief that he had served Germany in a loyal and honourable manner, his pre-war service had followed him to Riding Mountain. As he explained,

Since arrival at this camp I have been mentally tormented by various overheard threats. It is a known fact that the Nazi here have taken it upon themselves to make life miserable for me. I do not want to go back to my hut, for if I do, I will do something which will cause the guards trouble, even if they have to put a bullet in my back while escaping. I did not go over the Veteran Guards to give myself up, as I was constantly watched every time I left the hut. I heard a prisoner named MUELLER say 'the guards are a bunch of old men, and it would not take long to finish them off, but they would not soil their hands.'

Schnackenberg described his tormentors as having "nothing human about them at all" and that they delighted in tormenting people. Schnackenberg did confer with spokesman

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Sub-Insp. J.E. Bella to the O/C "D" Div., RCMP, December 22, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>109</sup> Colonel R.O. Bull to Director, Prisoners of War, December 30, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; Bebb, "Sdt. Fritz Dornseif, 24315 et al.," December 20, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; Major General H.F.C. Letson to District Officer Commanding, Military Districts 10 and 3, January 21, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; R.H. James, "Report of Escape of Two Prisoners of War From Riding Mountain camp, Man., 15 Dec. 1943," December 17, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

Manuel but, doubting Manuel's abilities, instead sought police protection. It was for this reason alone that Manuel offered to protect Schnackenberg from any harm if he rescinded his request for protective custody.<sup>110</sup> Fearing he would be labelled as a traitor, Schnackenberg agreed to remain at the camp.

The incidents involving the Legionnaires raised a number of concerns. The RCMP continued to cast doubt over the effectiveness of the civilian guards to prevent the pro-Nazis attacking former Legionnaires or the guards themselves. Believing the pro-Nazis fanatical, the RCMP emphasized Schnackenberg's safety could not be guaranteed when he returned to his barracks.<sup>111</sup> The Legionnaires also stated their work gang leaders had ordered them not to work to their full potential, suggesting not all POWs were open to the idea of work. Opposition to work often came from pro-Nazis protesting the notion of working for the enemy. Any work, they believed, aided the enemy – even if it was not directly related to the war effort – as it boosted the economy and released workers for military service or work in war industries. Pro-Nazis in Camp 132 had already opposed opportunities for work and, while military authorities were aware of the influence of pro-Nazis and their Gestapo-like censorship, surveillance, and harassment in internment camps, they had hoped the vetting process used to select POWs to work at Riding Mountain would prevent them from gaining power there. Testimonies of the five Legionnaires suggested otherwise, revealing pro-Nazis exercised some degree of power at Riding Mountain and were apparently willing to cause physical harm to those they deemed traitors. This was particularly troublesome considering pro-Nazis at Camp 132 had already demonstrated they were willing to go so far as to murder a fellow POW. While camp staff were still unaware of the full extent of the power exerted by pro-Nazis in Riding Mountain, the incident suggested the need for a more comprehensive process to determine which prisoners were eligible to work. The fact that Schnackenberg apparently

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<sup>110</sup> Sergt. P.H. Bebb, "Sold. Wilhelm Schnackenberg - ME024422 - Escaped prisoner from Lake Audy P.O.W. Camp, Riding Mountain National Park, Manitoba," December 23, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>111</sup> Sub-Inspr. J.M. Bella to O.C., "D" Div., RCMP, no date, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

returned to his comrades unharmed and did not request protective custody or escape again demonstrated that Manuel and Dr. Gress still retained some degree of control over their charges.<sup>112</sup> On the other hand, Wartime Housing's authority remained questionable.

By November, Wartime Housing was already interested in divesting itself from the Riding Mountain camp and hoped the Department of Labour would assume responsibility for its administration. Colonel James's appointment as camp administrator was a decided improvement but Director of POW Labour Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham described Wartime Housing Managing Director V.T. Goggin as "very explosive" in his opinions regarding the running of the camp.<sup>113</sup> Deputy Minister of Labour Arthur MacNamara, acknowledging Wartime Housing had saved the Department of Labour some trouble, believed there was no reason for Wartime Housing to run a fuelwood project and instead recommended the Department of Labour should make a "clean sweep" and take over.<sup>114</sup>

Adding to the pressure for the Department of Labour to assume control was the failure of the POWs to meet their quotas. Wood Fuel Controller J.S. Whalley visited the camp in December to inspect the operation and observed POWs were only producing 2/3 of a cord per man per day rather than the full ¾ cord quota. Whalley, pointing out civilian cutters could produce two cords per man per day, believed there was no excuse for the low rates. Part of the low production was likely due to the inexperience of the POWs, but camp staff hoped that after a month of working in the bush the POWs would be reaching

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<sup>112</sup> In February 1946, Schnackenberg, while working for Abitibi Power & Paper Co., at Minnipuka, Ontario, was requested to serve as a witness in the murder trial of August Plaszek. Col. R.H. James to Col. H.N. Streight, January 17, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; Major General E.G. Weeks to District Officers Commanding Military Districts Nos. 2, 10 and 13, January 11, 1946, Correspondence, Vol. 964, RG27, LAC.

<sup>113</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to A. MacNamara, November 23, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>114</sup> A. MacNamara to Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham, November 24, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC; A. MacNamara to Brown, November 26, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

their quota. Whalley attributed some of this to ineffective civilian guards. In his report, Whalley stated,

Prisoners of war go out in groups of 25 or 30 men to the place in the woods where they are to operate. I don't know whether it is part of their function to insist on some military precision in gathering together their squads, taking them out that way and bringing them back likewise, but to an uninitiated layman, there is a casualness that is certainly not conducive to mass production. The fact that the day I was there these guards started arriving back at the camp for lunch about twenty minutes to twelve and they had come in some one and one-half to two miles, would certainly lead prisoners of war to think that they were not working on a time clock schedule. In the woods the prisoners of war are the ultimate in slow motion, once again I question whether this can be laid at the door of the civic guards but I do say that these guards are first as ornament and the very casualness of their demeanor which they probably cannot do anything about, is reflected in the attitude of the prisoners to the whole job.<sup>115</sup>

Whalley thus recommended the civilian guards be dismissed and replaced by twelve additional men from the Veterans' Guard. Military guards, he believed, would have a far greater psychological effect and would provide the discipline required to increase production. Like Whalley, Colonel James and Department of Labour official A.H. Brown agreed there were far too many guards and Lt.-Col. Fordham recommended civilian guards be dismissed and replaced by additional men from the Veterans' Guard – an idea also favoured by Streight.<sup>116</sup> This, Fordham argued, would provide a more effective guard force, save the Department over \$4,000 per month, and help reduce friction.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> J.S. Whalley to J.G. Fogo, January 26, 1944, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>116</sup> A.H. Brown to A. MacNamara, January 14, 1944, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>117</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to A. MacNamara, January 11, 1944, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC; A.H. Brown to MacNamara, November 25, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC; R.H. James, "Report of Escape of Two Prisoners of War From Riding Mountain camp, Man., 15 Dec. 1943," December 17, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

Whalley's visit also raised questions about the project's viability. The camp's location had originally been chosen for its proximity to a recent burn area expected to yield thousands of cords of dry, fire-killed timber but, once cutting operations began, POWs and camp staff discovered much of the supposed fire-killed trees were still very much alive. Green wood was often seasoned for a year before sold so camp staff instructed POWs to cut the dry pockets and leave the green wood standing until it could be cut at a later date. Park superintendent Otto Heaslip reported that if the camp was to continue operating, green wood would ultimately have to be cut. Considering the fuelwood shortage, Heaslip recommended the cutting of green wood as needed, noting they should take advantage of POW labour. Civilian cutters, Heaslip explained, would have refused to work in a burn area producing both dry and green wood as they paid fees according to the amount of cords cut and it was therefore in their own interest to cut the



**Figure 12: Work site showing piled cords. Note the large number of standing live (green) poplar trees. ICRC V-P-HIST-03382-36.**

best wood. As prisoners were paid a set daily wage, they could be employed however need be, allowing the removal of less desirable timber.<sup>118</sup>

As authorities debated the future of the Riding Mountain camp, Colonel James ordered the POWs to meet their 300-cord daily quota in early January. In response, spokesman Manuel made six “requirements” that, if met, he would then “be in the position to give [James] the required quota.” Among the demands were the removal of twenty-seven “malcontents and misfits” who were hindering production and their replacement by men from Camp 132, the replacement of the four “deserters” (Legionnaires) by men from Camp 132, and the use of transports or other means to reduce the time required to get to the cutting areas.<sup>119</sup>

It was in the interest of camp staff and the Department of Labour to maintain a close working relationship with the spokesman and the rest of the POWs to ensure they continued working and did not cause trouble. However, Canadian authorities had to prove that they and not the POWs were in charge. Maintaining this balance proved precarious and a wrong move could jeopardize the success of the camp, if not the success of POW labour. Prisoners at Riding Mountain had little recourse to protest real or perceived injustices, but they could refuse to work. Strikes at Riding Mountain proved rare but did occur. For example, in late 1943, Colonel James authorized the POWs to submit a bulk catalogue order of pyjamas for Christmas. However, when the order failed to arrive weeks after Christmas, the prisoners threatened to go on strike, forcing Commandant Colonel James to investigate.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> O.E. Healsip to J. Smart, n.d., RM200 - Riding Mountain National Park - Timber, Part 7, Vol. 1908, T-15507, RG84, LAC; Forest Working Plan Report, Riding Mountain National Park, Cutting Season of 1943-44,” n.d., RM200 - Riding Mountain National Park - Timber, Part 7, Vol. 1908, T-15507, RG84, LAC.

<sup>119</sup> Col. R.H. James to Col. H.N. Streight, January 17, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; Manuel to Administration, January 14, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>120</sup> Carbyn, “Interview with Mr. George Foerster,” RMNP Collection; Waiser, *Park Prisoners*, 233.



Preventing or stopping strikes was in the immediate interest of camp staff, seeing that no work would be done, but it had larger implications as well. If news reached Camp 132 and the other internment camps that the POWs were apparently being mistreated, authorities feared POWs would refuse to volunteer for future work opportunities. Colonel James therefore did not meet all of Manuel's requests, an act that demonstrated Manuel's authority remained limited. James did transfer thirteen prisoners – most of whom were on Manuel's list – to Camp 132. Among those transferred was Walter Wolf, a known pro-Nazi and troublemaker in the camp who would later be convicted and hung for his role in the murder of another POW in Medicine Hat in September 1944.<sup>121</sup>

The transfer of thirteen troublemakers ultimately did little to boost production and the POWs continued to cut below their quota. In February 1944, Wood Fuel Control Production Officer R.H. Candy visited the camp to address three issues: a low supply of dry cut wood, the increasing distance between wood-cutting operations and camp, and the possibility of developing more cost-effective logging methods. Overall, Candy was unimpressed with the situation at Riding Mountain. In his report, he described logging methods here as being conducted in a “most primitive and uneconomical manner” and recommended radical changes. He first recommended the camp abandon the practice of cutting the pockets of dry wood and instead cut both dry and green wood, as dry pockets were proving increasingly difficult to find and the practice interfered with regular woodcutting operations. Other problems that Candy noted were due to the employment of POWs, which made it difficult to adopt new methods. Prisoners were focused on meeting their quota so when a POW cut down a tree, they immediately cut the log into four- or eight-foot lengths and piled them in their own stacks so guards could keep track of their work. However, this meant teamsters had to haul each of these scattered piles to the roadside – an act that wasted precious time – before the wood could be loaded onto sleighs or trucks and hauled to the camp or to a rail line. All of this was done under the

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<sup>121</sup> In September 1944, Walter Wolf and three comrades murdered fellow POW Karl Lehmann. The four POWs were tried, found guilty, and hung in December 1946. Commanding Ten to National Defence Headquarters, January 28, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

“supervision” of the civilian guards who, Candy observed, spent most of their day sitting around a fire and inspired only indolence and laziness.<sup>122</sup>

Adding to production problems was the fact there were simply too many prisoners. Woodcutting camps in Ontario and Quebec employed an average of fifty to 100 POWs but the camp at Riding Mountain was much larger and more elaborate. Colonel James found 440 to be an unruly number and struggled to find cutting areas within walking distance from camp. As the POWs cut the areas closest to camp, the distance to the working areas increased every day and there were insufficient motor and horse-drawn transport to take the POWs to areas further away. This, combined with the fact that the camp could not be moved, proved labour projects of more than 100 or 200 men were not feasible. The Department of Labour later noted they would have never established such a large camp had they known this sooner.<sup>123</sup>

Trying to improve production, Candy suggested a new strategy that would save both time and money. He proposed building a series of logging roads every half mile so that in the winter, logs could be hauled directly to these roads, thereby reducing the distance for hauling to a maximum of a quarter mile. Once at the road, logs could then be cut in four-foot lengths, split, piled, and, in the winter, hauled. If the new practice could be slowly introduced by one or two gangs, Candy hoped the rest would be willing to adopt the new program. Candy discussed the matter with the spokesman and the POW interpreter who expressed such interest that Candy offered to provide a lecture on elementary forest practice and how it applied to their work. For two hours, Candy spoke to twelve leading POWs, explaining how they could improve bush operations. The POWs expressed great interest and, although Candy was impressed with their enthusiasm,

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<sup>122</sup> R.H. Candy, “Report on Riding Mountain Prisoner of War Camp. Manitoba.” February 29, 1944, File 44962 - Use of Prisoners of War, Vol. 463, RG39, LAC.

<sup>123</sup> “Meeting of Thunder Bay District Woods Operators Employing Prisoners-of-War or Expecting to Employ Prisoners-of-War,” 24, 7 February 1944, Minutes of Meetings Re: POW’s, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

Assistant Dominion Forester D.A. MacDonald remained doubtful, noting on his copy of Candy's report, "Why not it killed time?"<sup>124</sup>

Production remained only one problem facing camp in early 1944. Throughout January, rumours reached camp that small groups of prisoners were roaming outside park boundaries and fraternizing with residents along the park's southern border. On January 14, 1944, these rumours were confirmed when two POWs went missing from evening roll call. The guards notified the RCMP and, following a tip that POWs had been seen at a Seech district farm, the RCMP interviewed the farmer's wife. The woman insisted no POWs had been there, but a neighbour confirmed the RCMP's suspicions, informing them that groups of up to fourteen POWs had travelled through her yard. Further interviews revealed residents frequently saw groups of POWs roaming up to five miles south of the park. When the RCMP informed camp staff of this illicit fraternization, Colonel James admitted he was aware of the situation and was taking preventative steps.<sup>125</sup> One concerned RCMP officer noted prisoners may find sympathetic audiences among the Eastern European immigrants living in the area and warned of the possibility they could provide POWs with clothing, food, and maps to help them escape.<sup>126</sup>

The reports of POWs beyond the park border suggested the prisoners left camp after the Saturday evening roll call on foot or with aid from civilians waiting with horses or vehicles outside the camp bounds. The extent of the relationships with civilians was unknown but reports suggested some POWs were becoming fast friends with locals. A few POWs even attended a private party held by a farmer celebrating his son's enlistment. Others used money obtained from the illicit sale of woodcrafts to civilians and guards to pay admission to dances where they spent the remainder of the night. After

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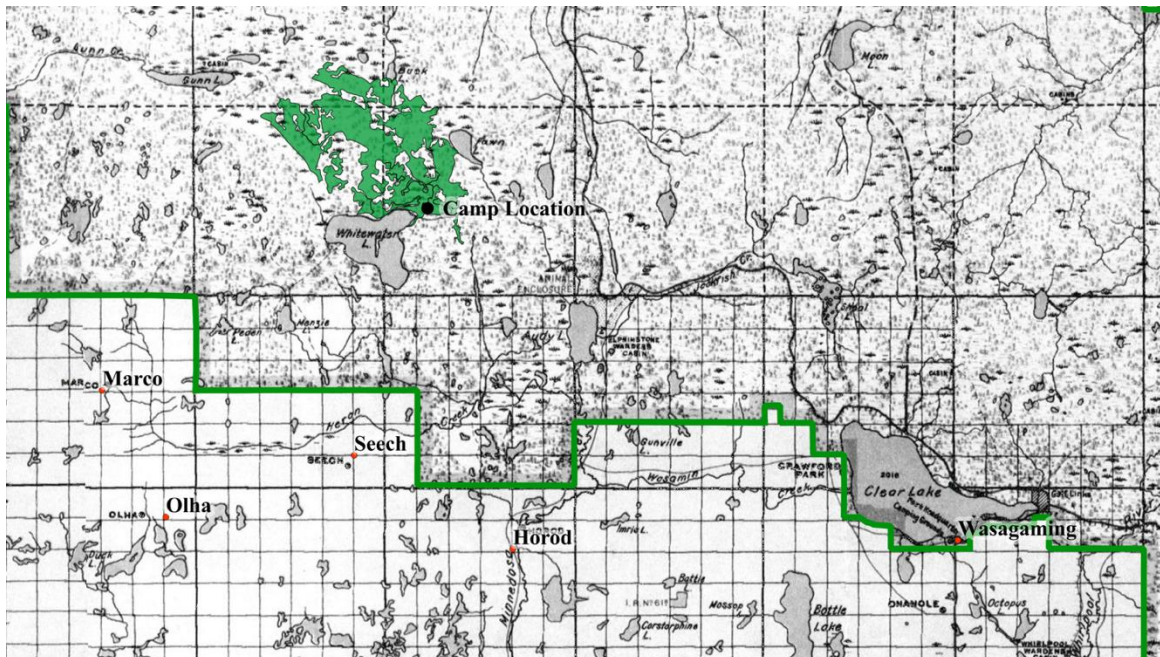
<sup>124</sup> R.H. Candy, "Report on Riding Mountain Prisoner of War Camp. Manitoba." February 29, 1944, File 44962 - Use of Prisoners of War, Vol. 463, RG39, LAC.

<sup>125</sup> D/Cpl. L.R. Atkins, Royal Canadian Mounted Police Report, "Gefr. Toellner, Rudi (Willi) & O/Sdt. Witzel, Willi - alleged escaped prisoners from P.O.W. camp at Lake Audy, Riding Mtn. Nat. Park, Man.," January 17, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>126</sup> Sub-Insp. J.M. Bella to O.C. "D" Div., RCMP, no date, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

the dances ended, POWs made their way back to camp, returning before morning roll call, and, as they did not work on Sundays, could spend the day resting.<sup>127</sup>

Colonel James promptly instructed Lieutenant Colin Mann, the officer in charge of the Veterans' Guard, to lead a patrol of the area south of the park and apprehend any POWs he found.<sup>128</sup> These patrols quickly proved worthwhile for, on February 19, Mann and his men discovered two POWs in a farmhouse near Seech working on a jigsaw puzzle with a teacher, Catherine Chastko. After taking the POWs into custody, Mann learned from Chastko that the POWs had previously visited the Zaporozha School where she taught.<sup>129</sup> Hoping to question the family that Chastko was boarding with, Mann



**Figure 13: Map of the area surrounding the Riding Mountain Park Labour Project. Cutting areas are shaded in green and note the locations of communities south of the park. Map adapted from Department of the Interior, “National Parks of Canada, Riding Mountain Park, Manitoba,” 1932, RM206 - Riding Mountain National Park - License - Timber Berths, Vol. 1910, T-15971 RG84, LAC.**

<sup>127</sup> Colonel R.H. James, “Report on traffic of Prisoners-of-War, with Ukrainian Civilians,” February 21, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>128</sup> Sgt. G. Williams to O.C., “D” Div., RCMP, February 17, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>129</sup> Bill Waiser, “Riding Mountain POWs: The Teacher’s Tale,” *Manitoba History* 61 (Fall 2009): 32.

visited a wedding dance they were attending. While attempting to question the farmer, he was threatened by a number of guests and forced to leave. However, his efforts did not go unrewarded as he apprehended another five POWs later that night.

Mann's return with seven POWs in tow prompted spokesman Manuel to cover for his men, arguing recent changes of camp boundaries had left POWs unaware of their present location. He was forced to admit fraternization with civilians directly contradicted his orders.<sup>130</sup> Rather than punish the offenders, camp staff elected not to transfer first offenders back to Camp 132 but threatened any further trouble would result in a transfer. Most POWs caught in February 1944 thus agreed to remain within camp bounds in the future, or at least managed to evade capture from patrols roaming the park's southern boundary.

Colonel James' attitude towards prisoners leaving camp bounds prompted significant concern from the RCMP. The police promised their assistance in apprehending missing POWs but could only assist if staff reported a POW missing.<sup>131</sup> Camp authorities for their part elected not to report POWs missing unless they had been absent for an extended period of time. For example, guards found two POWs missing from camp in March 1944 and Manuel insisted the POWs had not taken any provisions and would return. Rather than organize a search, James decided the prisoners would not be treated as escapees unless they were still missing the following morning. Although the POWs did indeed return by the morning, the RCMP believed James' leniency granted future escapees a twenty-four-hour head start.<sup>132</sup> This proved troublesome in that the

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<sup>130</sup> Colonel R.H. James, "Report on traffic of Prisoners-of-War, with Ukrainian Civilians," February 21, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>131</sup> R. Armitage to Director, Prisoners of War, February 25, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>132</sup> Seg. Tisdale, "Soldat - Keorber Waldemar & Gefr. - Adolf Schlesinger, Prisoners of War, Reported Missing from Lake Audy Prisoner-of-war Camp, Riding Mountain National Park, Manitoba," March 7, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; Supt. P.H. Tucker to the Commissioner, R.C.M.P., March 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

Department of Labour may have been responsible for the POWs but it was the RCMP that would be called in the event of a serious incident.

Colonel James did introduce new regulations to restrict POW movements. Anticipating POWs would increase settlement visits in the summer, James redefined camp boundaries to the wood-cutting area, thereby eliminating any ambiguity, and warned any POWs found outside these bounds were liable for punishment.<sup>133</sup> James also recognized the likelihood of increased civilian traffic from summer tourists wanting a glimpse at the enemy and also ordered guards to post men at the entrance to the road leading to camp, warning signs be posted along the road, and a guardhouse be built at the camp entrance to turn away unwanted visitors.<sup>134</sup>

Despite the added precautions, the discovery in June 1944 of a diary from Riding Mountain, hidden amongst exercise books returned to Camp 132 (Medicine Hat) suggested that not all POWs heeded the warnings. The diary belonged to Konstantin Schwarz, a self-identified Nazi who regularly visited farms and communities outside the park. Camp 132 Commandant Colonel R.O. Bull and Colonel Streight initially dismissed the diary as mostly fictitious but, after comparing the contents with their records, the Dauphin RCMP deemed the diary to contain more truth than initially believed.<sup>135</sup> Providing some of the first real insight into the actions and mindset of POWs at Riding Mountain, the diary raised significant concern regarding the attitudes of the POWs and the freedoms afforded to them.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Wartime Housing Ltd., "Camp Boundaries," April 24, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>134</sup> Brigadier R.A. Macfarlane to Secretary, Department of National Defence, May 3, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>135</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Commissioner, R.C.M. Police, June 20, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; Sub-Insp. J.M. Bella to O.C. "D" Div., RCMP, July 17, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>136</sup> Col. R.O. Bull to the Director, Prisoners of War, June 16, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

Schwarz's diary revealed how he and his comrades, after hearing rumours of settlements south of the park, explored the area using homemade compasses in hopes of making contact with the civilian population. Making their way south, the POWs discovered their first farmhouse and, Schwarz recounted, the POWs were surprised to be welcomed inside by a Ukrainian farmer. Schwarz and his comrades quickly learned that many farmers had little sympathy for Canadian and British-born residents after receiving poor jobs and land. After gaining the farmers' trust, Schwarz remarked he and his comrades discredited Canadian propaganda and convinced their new friends of German power, apparently prompting one farmer to state he wanted to return to the Ukraine once Germany won the war.<sup>137</sup>

Schwarz's diary suggested the real threat lay not with a mass escape but with POWs fraternizing with civilians. Referring to the guards as "old daddies," as the guards were in their late forties or early fifties and the POWs often in their twenties and thirties, Schwarz's diary described the guards' failed raids on dance halls and stated that civilians were willing to defend their POW friends. Fully aware of the consequences of his actions, he revealed in the diary that if the guards attempted to remove him from the camp, he would be sure to go on an "excursion." Resistance towards Canadian authority could be expected from a POW, but Schwarz also criticized the internal POW administration for its close relationship with Canadian staff. He stated,

Our leadership prohibits everything, the visits to farms during the day or night, even during weekends and punishes ruthlessly. We take no notice and go visiting as before. This means very much to us, and we will not allow anyone to interfere. I believe they want to make a barracks of our camp. I consider that they agree too much to the requests of the Tommies.<sup>138</sup>

Schwarz's disapproval of the spokesman was not uncommon as spokesmen in internment camps around the county frequently received criticism from their fellow POWs for

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<sup>137</sup> "Information obtained from Diary - written by P/W Uffz. Konstantin Schwartz No. 36444 - at Riding Mountain Park," June 16, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

collaborating with the enemy. Schwarz's account not only confirmed suspicions of the nature of farm visits, but also cast doubt over the camp staff's and the spokesman's control over the POWs at Riding Mountain.

With prisoners roaming the countryside and guards telling friends and families of the camp's workings while on leave, it came as little surprise when concerned civilians began criticizing and protesting what they believed was exceptionally favourable treatment given to POWs at Riding Mountain. Some local residents opposed the presence of POWs, as the park was a popular summer destination, and they believed POWs posed a threat. Others had family members serving in the Canadian armed forces and disliked how POWs were being treated while Canadians were fighting Germans in Europe. Residents such as the editor of the *Dauphin Herald*, who had recently lost a son overseas, took every opportunity to criticize the operation for they believed prisoners were being treated far too leniently. They believed the freedom and the living and arrangements at Riding Mountain were far too good considering the prisoners were still enemy soldiers and Canadian soldiers interned in Germany were facing far harsher treatment.<sup>139</sup> Many suspected the POWs would take advantage of the freedom they had to escape, with one concerned resident remarking on the possibility of POWs stealing all the camp vehicles and leaving the guards with only a bicycle to give chase. Some also raised the issue of rationing: Canadian civilians were subject to wartime rationing but, under the Geneva Convention, POWs were not subject to the same conditions. Opposition to POWs in Riding Mountain even affected the Victory Loan Drive, with several Dauphin residents complaining of the camp's operation to canvassers before subscribing.<sup>140</sup>

Summarizing local residents' concerns, the *Dauphin Herald* published an editorial aptly entitled "Protest." The article cited specific incidents in which POWs were taken to

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<sup>139</sup> Sub-Insp. J.M. Bella to O.C. "D" Div., RCMP, July 17, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; Sub-Insp. J.M. Bella to O.C. "D" Div., RCMP, no date, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>140</sup> Cpl. R.J.M. Dobson to O.C. Dauphin RCMP, no date, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.



Dauphin for medical treatment. The camp hospital had limited facilities so more serious medical and dental cases occasionally required prisoners to be brought to the nearest civilian or military facility. In January and February, POW Doctor Gress had accompanied at least two prisoners to receive treatment in Dauphin escorted under what the author referred to as “very loose courtesy custody” by a guard. The author, noting their son was serving overseas, revealed Gress and one POW were escorted to the dental clinic at Dauphin’s No. 10 Service Flying Training School “with a full view of everything.” This, the author argued, was no way to treat an enemy soldier and questioned why a German officer “with his eyes wide open” was allowed near, let alone toured around, a Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) training centre. Arguing this presented an unnecessary and dangerous threat to Canadian servicemen, the author stated, “In the name of the parents of Dauphin whose boys at this very moment are fighting for their lives in Italy, we protest against this preferred treatment.” The next time a POW was seen in Dauphin, the author threatened, they would publish the story in 3-inch headlines and submit the article to every newspaper in Canada.<sup>141</sup>

“Protest” was picked up by local and provincial newspapers and the article eventually reached the House of Commons. On March 20, 1944, Souris MP James Arthur Ross described the incident as an insult to the families of those presently serving. Having visited the camp following its completion, Ross stated it was the most “up-to-date” camp he had seen and featured “conveniences and comforts” that many locals were unable to afford. Acknowledging that POWs deserved proper treatment, Ross emphasized this did not exclude the need for proper guarding as well. Minister of National Defence J.L. Ralston stated he was not aware of any problems at Riding Mountain but emphasized POWs working in labour projects across the country had done a “great deal of work with little trouble to the citizens.”<sup>142</sup> He explained Canada remained committed to treat POWs in accordance with the terms of the Geneva Convention and failure to adhere to these

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<sup>141</sup> “Protest,” *Dauphin Herald*, February 3, 1944.

<sup>142</sup> Dominion of Canada, *Official Report of Debates, House of Commons*, Fourth Session-Nineteenth Parliament, vol. I (Ottawa, ON: Edmond Cloutier, 1943), 1685–88.

terms would likely result in severe repercussions for Canadian POWs overseas.<sup>143</sup>

Ralston assured all precautions were taken to ensure POWs were restricted to medical facilities and posed no risk to Canadian servicemen at home or abroad.<sup>144</sup>

As authorities looked for ways to ensure the camp had adequate security measures, tension between camp staff and the POWs continued to grow, especially after national Director of POW Labour Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham inspected the camp in mid-March. On a particularly cold and windy morning, spokesman Manuel ordered his men to turn out for work at 11:30 a.m. rather than the usual 8:00 a.m., deeming the weather that morning too severe for work. Fordham met with Manuel, who informed him it was too cold for work and, without conferring with James, had instructed his men to remain indoors until the weather improved. Deeming the weather normal, Fordham informed Manuel his actions were “highly irregular” and suggested such an act made it appear as though he was trying to run the camp. Fordham promptly ordered the POWs to work and threatened that if the POWs failed to turn out by 10:00 a.m., he would close the canteen, cease showing films, cancel the evening’s dessert, and replace Manuel and his staff.<sup>145</sup> Manuel reluctantly ordered his men to work.

The prisoners began their day’s work, but the cold weather and wind quickly took its toll. One froze his nose and fingers, and another injured his eye when his axe slipped from his cold hands. Worse, three men were seriously injured by falling trees which, Manuel later argued, was the result of hurried work when forced to produce a larger quota.<sup>146</sup> One of these men, Max Neugebauer, was knocked unconscious after he was

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<sup>143</sup> C.H. Higginbotham, “Rap Treatment of Prisoners,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 31, 1944.

<sup>144</sup> Minister of National Defence to J.D. Sim, no date, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>145</sup> Translation of letter from Spokesman Manuel to Caston Jaccard, March 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; Lt. Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Colonel H.N. Streight, April 11, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>146</sup> Translation of letter from Spokesman, Riding Mountain to Consul General of Switzerland, March 3, 1944, Translated March 23, 1944, 621-CA-40 Vol. 18 - Letters and Complaints, Vol. 2772, RG25, LAC.

struck on the head by a falling branch. He never regained consciousness and died in the Dauphin hospital on March 16.<sup>147</sup>

Citing the numerous injuries and the death of one of his men, Manuel complained to the Swiss General Consul. He argued that he had found the weather made it inadvisable to work and had thus postponed the day's work. Manuel stated he and his men fully intended to meet the day's quota and, noting prior cooperation from Colonel James, argued that Fordham's demands were unreasonable. Because the POWs never intended on striking and remained willing to work, Manuel argued Fordham's order violated the terms of the Geneva Convention.<sup>148</sup> Fordham, in return, reported Manuel had been belligerent and unwilling to cooperate.<sup>149</sup>

The following month, Consul General of Switzerland representatives A.F. Somm and Max Hauri and International Committee of the Red Cross Delegate E.L. Maag visited Riding Mountain to inspect the camp and ensure the POWs were being treated appropriately. While the visit was in part to address the issues of the previous month, the Swiss Consul and ICRC conducted regular visits of internment camps and labour projects to review living and working conditions and meet with POWs in person. Maag reported the lack of barbed wire fences had an excellent influence on morale and that the fresh air proved very beneficial to health. Impressed with the "fine set-up" and treatment provided to the POWs, Somm expressed surprise with the low production rates. In January, POWs produced only 0.59 cords per man per day and despite an increase to 0.716 cords in February, it had since dropped to 0.68 cords in March and to 0.52 cords by the time of

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<sup>147</sup> A select group of POWs, under escort, held a small service in Dauphin for Neugebauer, who was buried with full military honours at the Dauphin Riverside Cemetery on March 18, 1944. Translation of letter from Spokesman, Riding Mountain Camp to Swiss Consul General, March 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; Cst. C.C. Kaleekly, "M.E. 074803, Sdt. Neugebauer, Mar - German P.O.W. - Lake Audy, Manitoba - Riding Mountain National Park, Sudden Death of," March 17, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>148</sup> Translation of letter from Spokesman Manuel to Caston Jaccard, March 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>149</sup> Lt. Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Colonel H.N. Streight, April 11, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC..

their visit.<sup>150</sup> Somm reminded the POWs they possessed no bargaining powers and that it was in everyone's interest to cooperate with camp staff, adding that both the Swiss Consul and German Government expected them to work satisfactorily. Leo Manuel attributed some of the problems in camp to the presence of troublemakers in the camp, including six men who refused to work and claimed they wanted to return to the base camp to continue their studies, and Somm acknowledged that their removal would help increase production. Impressed with Somm's attitude, Manuel agreed to instruct his men to immediately improve production.<sup>151</sup> In his report, Maag expressed hope Manuel would



**Figure 14: Mr. Somm's visit to Riding Mountain in April 1944. Left to Right: Somm, the interpreter, Leo Manuel, and Dr. Gress. ICRC V-P-HIST-03383-25.**

<sup>150</sup> E.L. Maag, "Riding Mountain Camp: Visité par M. E.L. Maag, le 28 avril 1944," Archives du CICR, Comité international de la Croix-Rouge.

<sup>151</sup> R.H. James, "Report on Visit to Riding Mountain Project," April 30, 1944, Correspondence Re POW Employment, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

hold to his word and the POWs would improve their performance so that the experiment of POW labour could continue.<sup>152</sup>

Nevertheless, Manuel resigned his position as spokesman shortly after the inspection in protest of Lt.-Col. Fordham's actions. His replacement, Gustav Treiber, proved less cooperative. After camp staff re-emphasized the  $\frac{3}{4}$  cord per man per day quota, eighty POWs decided they had had enough and requested transfers to Camp 132. Some claimed they wanted to finish their studies while others stated their half-year term was up, the work was too much, or they were no longer interested. Treiber hoped the eighty men could be transferred back to the base camp, noting he was unable to force his men to work. He did express hope that the camp would remain open so that those still willing to stay could continue to work.<sup>153</sup>

With POWs refusing to work and production below quota, District Forest Officer George Tunstell inspected the camp in June 1944. He reported that POWs had cut approximately 33,000 cords between October 1943 and May 1944, with daily rates ranging from half to almost three-quarters of a cord per man per day. The prisoners, he noted, were well-organized and capable, leaving him to believe low production was the result of a lack of incentives. As POWs received the same pay regardless of how much wood they cut, Tunstell recommended switching to a piecework pay system in which POWs were paid in accordance with the amount of wood cut. This, he believed, would increase production while making both camp staff and POWs happier.<sup>154</sup>

Tunstall's visit also raised further concerns about the civilian guard force. In his report, he argued the civilian guards failed to demonstrate they had any control over their charges and he had observed them frequently fraternizing with the prisoners. This had

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<sup>152</sup> E.L. Maag, "Riding Mountain Camp: Visité par M. E.L. Maag, le 28 avril 1944," Archives du CICR, Comité international de la Croix-Rouge.

<sup>153</sup> Translation of letter from Gustav Treiber to Consul General of Switzerland, May 12, 1944, 621-CA-40 Vol. 21 - Letters and Complaints, Vol. 2772, RG25, LAC.

<sup>154</sup> G. Tunstell to Dominion Forester, June 29, 1944, File 44962 - Use of Prisoners of War, Vol. 463, RG39, LAC.

prompted the POWs to exhibit a “truculent” manner to authority.<sup>155</sup> Military authorities were aware of this, having already prohibited fraternization, but the orders went unheeded.<sup>156</sup> Colonel Streight, describing the civilian guards as “very lax” and too friendly with POWs, emphasized additional measures should be taken to ensure adequate security at the camp as summer was quickly approaching and he expected POWs would increase their activity beyond camp bounds.<sup>157</sup>

The many issues at the Riding Mountain camp prompted a change in administration. Wartime Housing Ltd. had expressed interest in divesting itself of the project as early as November 1943 and Deputy Minister of Labour Arthur MacNamara had then recommended the Department of Labour take over. Six months later, problems were only increasing, and the Department of Labour elected to take matters into its own hands and assume complete responsibility for the camp. In preparation, the camp was downsized from 418 men to a more manageable 200. Prisoners were offered the choice of whether or not to continue working, with seventy-five POWs returning to Camp 132 by choice and a further twenty removed for medical or disciplinary reasons. Another 123 POWs were transferred to bush camps belonging to the Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co. in Northwestern Ontario.<sup>158</sup>

The Department of Labour officially took control of the camp on June 17, 1944 and Department of Labour Inspector Major Joseph H. Keane replaced Colonel James as camp administrator. Keane, recently returned from active service with the Canadian Forestry Corps in Scotland, brought with him a lifetime of experience in the forestry

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Brigadier R.A. Macfarlane to Secretary, Department of National Defence, May 3, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>157</sup> Lt. Col. A.W. Hunt to Secretary, Department of National Defence, April 15, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; Colonel H.N. Streight to Lieut. Colonel R.S.W. Fordham, April 21, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>158</sup> “PS.O.W. to be Transferred From Riding Mountain to Camp No. 132,” no date, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; “PS.O.W. to be Transferred From Riding Mountain Park to Kenora, Ontario,” no date, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

industry and his role of inspector had provided valuable experience in dealing with POWs. Adamant to put an end to POWs leaving camp bounds, Keane immediately introduced daily afternoon counts of POWs not employed in the bush and random night counts to catch those missing from their bunks.<sup>159</sup> The Department of Labour's takeover also brought about a much-needed change of the guard as the Veterans' Guard assumed complete responsibility for security from the civilian guards, the vast majority of whom were dismissed.

Woodcutting operations were also re-evaluated. From October 26, 1943 to June 17, 1944, POWs had cut an estimated 13,639 cords of dry wood and 21,285 cords of green wood for a total of 34,924 cords. A total of 18,219 had been stockpiled or drawn, leaving 16,705 cords in the bush, and, of this, 1,739 cords had been consumed in camp while 9,334 cords had been delivered and shipped.<sup>160</sup> This wood had come at significant cost: as of April 30, Wartime Housing reported the cost just to cut a single cord of wood was \$6.77 but, factoring the camp's operating costs as well as stockpiling and delivery, each cord cost \$13.92.<sup>161</sup> Once in Winnipeg, the wood was subsidized and sold for \$5.15 per cord.<sup>162</sup>

Drawing upon his forestry background, Keane reorganized woodcutting operations and introduced methods similar to those employed in civilian woodcutting operations to increase efficiency and reduce operating costs. Wartime Housing reported 16,705 cords stockpiled in the bush, so Keane ordered the POWs to focus on hauling. Keane placed the camp's two lorry trucks, two dump trucks, two horse teams, and single tractor on twenty-four-hour shifts and hired additional teams to help. By late August, the

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<sup>159</sup> Major J.H. Keane to Camp Spokesman, September 4, 1944, Orders and Inspections Concerning POW Procedure, Vol. 966, RG27, LAC; Major J.H. Keane to Camp Spokesman, September 7, 1944, Orders and Inspections Concerning POW Procedure, Vol. 966, RG27, LAC; Major J.H. Keane to Camp Spokesman, October 23, 1944, Orders and Inspections Concerning POW Procedure, Vol. 966, RG27, LAC.

<sup>160</sup> Wartime Housing Ltd., "Summary of Cordwood Operations at Riding Mountain Camp, Manitoba from 26 October, 1943 to 17 June, 1944," n.d., 10. General Correspondence - POW, Vol. 964, RG27-N-3, LAC.

<sup>161</sup> Wartime Housing Ltd., "Statements of Production Costs from Commencement of Operations to 30 April, 1944," n.d., 10. General Correspondence - POW, Vol. 964, RG27-N-3, LAC.

<sup>162</sup> "Wet Fuel Charge Burns Up Howe," *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 24, 1944.

POWs had moved 11,593 cords to the roadside or stockpiles. In the process Keane discovered Wartime Housing overestimated the amount of wood cut by 4,000 cords – a mistake he deemed “excessive.”<sup>163</sup>



**Figure 15: Prisoners preparing for hauling operations at Riding Mountain. Author's Collection.**

By early September, POWs had completed hauling and Keane introduced a revised cutting program, assuming 300 POWs could cut and stack 150 cords per day, requiring each POW to cut and stack half a cord per day, which would produce 3,300 cords per month. If he could maintain this and reduce excess costs, Keane estimated the total cost per cord could be brought down to \$5.34.<sup>164</sup> To simplify hauling, Keane ordered POWs to cut trees in the bush and then haul them to the roadside where they would be cut and stockpiled for easier hauling. Keane set the initial quota of a group average of half a cord per man per day; this meant a gang of ten cutters and two teamsters would have to cut six cords per day, even though the teamsters were not employed in

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<sup>163</sup> Maj. J.H. Keane to Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham, August 21, 1944, 10. General Correspondence - POW, Vol. 964, RG27-N-3, LAC.

<sup>164</sup> Maj. J.H. Keane, “Estimate of Costs-Riding Mountain Camp,” August 18, 1944, 10. General Correspondence - POW, Vol. 964, RG27-N-3, LAC.



cutting. After a week, he increased the quota to the full  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a cord.<sup>165</sup> Any wood cut beyond the daily quota would be credited to the gang that cut it and receive a bonus. Gangs failing to cut their quota would only be paid according to the amount they cut.<sup>166</sup> There was some concern on behalf of the POWs that if they regularly exceeded their quota, camp staff would then increase the quota in the winter months. Keane reassured them the quota would remain the same and that those exceeding the quota would be paid for extra wood cut.<sup>167</sup>

The new methods quickly produced results. Returning to the camp in October, District Forest Officer Tunstell reported significant improvements since his last visit. POWs were now producing just over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a cord per man per day and, taking some of his earlier recommendations, had vastly increased their efficiency. The camp was now running in a similar fashion as those operating at Forestry Stations, but Tunstell reported the POWs at Riding Mountain had a much better attitude towards work.<sup>168</sup>

The prisoners initially proved receptive to the new methods but, in the late summer, they suddenly and drastically reduced production. Treiber then requested that he, his staff, and all of the POWs at Riding Mountain be immediately transferred to Camp 132. The decrease came shortly after the receipt of mail from Camp 132, making Keane suspect the prisoners were acting under orders from the Camp 132 spokesman. Informants revealed that most POWs in camp remained willing to work but the spokesman and some of the senior NCOs in camp had threatened any POW who followed Keane's orders would be branded as traitors and their families in Germany would suffer. Such threats were not uncommon for those refusing to obey orders of pro-Nazis in internment camps and they were often taken quite seriously. Secret messages were

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<sup>165</sup> Major J.H. Keane to Camp Spokesman, September 12, 1944, Orders and Inspections Concerning POW Procedure, Vol. 966, RG27, LAC.

<sup>166</sup> Major J.H. Keane, "Cutting and Hauling," n.d., Orders and Inspections Concerning POW Procedure, Vol. 966, RG27, LAC.

<sup>167</sup> Major J.H. Keane to Camp Spokesman, September 21, 1944, Orders and Inspections Concerning POW Procedure, Vol. 966, RG27, LAC.

<sup>168</sup> D.A.M. to Smart, July 4, 1944, File 44962 - Use of Prisoners of War, Vol. 463, RG39, LAC.

known to be encoded in correspondence sent to Germany so POWs remained hesitant to commit any act that could give the Gestapo reason to threaten or harm their family. As pro-Nazis refused to believe anything other than Germany emerging victorious, they kept records as to who these “traitors” were so they could be tried and appropriately punished after the war. Keane refused to give in to Treiber’s demand and instead arranged for Treiber and his twenty-five senior NCO’s to be transferred back to Camp 132 where they could no longer interfere with those still willing to work.<sup>169</sup>

The incident involving Treiber and his associates came at the same time as the Canadian government approved new regulations regarding POW labour. On August 18, 1944, the Cabinet passed Order in Council P.C. 6495, authorizing the employment of combatant POWs in mandatory work, with the exception of NCOs and officers. Prior to this, only volunteers had been considered for work. The order in council came in response to an increased number of POWs requesting transfers back to their base camps and guards struggling to enforce discipline. The new regulations thus included measures to allow guards to order prisoners to work. Any POW who refused these orders would now be sent to a detention facility for a disciplinary sentence of up to twenty-eight days, rather than be transferred back to the base camp, which was often their desire.

Among the first prisoners from Riding Mountain to be sent to the new detention facilities was Hans Weis. Weis first caught the attention of camp staff in October 1944 when he was absent from the morning roll call. A search of his belongings showed no indication of an escape but instead revealed two letters from local residents. The first was written by sixteen-year-old Rosie Rupa, who invited Weis and his friends to visit her at Seech, and the second, signed by “Bill and Mary,” promised him a radio. When Weis returned to the camp later that afternoon, the guards took him into custody and notified the police. Concerned about the implications of the letters, the RCMP tracked down and interrogated Rupa as well as William and Mary Nowosad, all residents of Seech. Rupa admitted she wrote the letter after Weis told her he wanted a deeper relationship, but she

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<sup>169</sup> Lt. Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Colonel H.N. Streight, September 5, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

only wanted to remain friends. Mary Nowosad likewise confessed the POWs used to visit her farm and had asked her to purchase a radio. She tried justifying her actions by stating she intended on keeping the radio and only allowing the POWs to listen to it when they visited but the investigating officer doubted this.<sup>170</sup> The RCMP, looking to send a message to locals fraternizing with POWs, fined Mrs. Nowosad \$25.00 and camp staff, sending a message to the other POWs, transferred Weis to the detention center at Port Arthur's Current River Barracks for twenty-eight days.<sup>171</sup>

Weis returned to the camp in late November and, while his sentence may have sent a message to other POWs, it failed to deter him. Guards discovered Weis was missing from camp on November 22 and, suspecting he was attempting to escape, notified the RCMP. Police began patrolling the area and, in the course of their search, visited the farm of Nick Matiowsky. The officers were surprised to find Matiowsky wearing a pair of POW trousers and a quick search of the property also revealed a POW jacket. Matiowsky admitted to police he had seen Weis three days earlier and also confessed he had traded food and civilian clothing for the POW uniform. Police arrested Matiowsky and he later received a six-month jail sentence for possession of government property, a sentence the RCMP hoped would serve as a strong message to civilians fraternizing with prisoners.<sup>172</sup>

Weis' freedom remained short-lived. Using money obtained from the illicit sale of woodcrafts to camp employees and civilians, Weis purchased a train ticket to Winnipeg, where he was apprehended by police on November 26. Once again, Weis was transferred

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<sup>170</sup> Mary (Mrs. William) NOWOSAD, Seech, P.O. District, Manitoba, Section 23 - Defence of Canada Regulations," November 6, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>171</sup> It is unknown what action was taken against Rosie Rupa, who was a minor at the time, for fraternizing with Weis. Inspector J. Leopold to Director, Prisoners of War, January 3, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; "Mary (Mrs. William) NOWOSAD," November 6, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>172</sup> Cst. Furray, "Nick Matiowsky, Seech P.O. Man., Unlawful possession of Public Stores 431 CC," November 26, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC; Supt. P.H. Tucker to the Commissioner, RCMP, December 2, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

to the detention barracks at Port Arthur for a twenty-eight-day sentence. Colonel Streight believed the disciplinary punishment there was likely insufficient to deter Weis from making future attempts but recommended Weis not be transferred back to Camp 132 lest it encourage other POWs to follow his example.<sup>173</sup> Weis therefore returned to Riding Mountain in late December.

Weis did not give up. On January 1, 1945, he stole a truck from the camp and drove to Dauphin with the intention of boarding a train to Winnipeg. Sometime after abandoning the truck outside the liquor store, Weis entered the Dauphin Hostess Club where he was recognized by two guards on leave and taken into custody. He revealed little in his subsequent interrogation but did admit he had hoped to reach relatives in New York. Weis had already demonstrated his willingness to escape, despite facing a disciplinary sentence, so the RCMP recommended his punishment be severe enough to deter future attempts.<sup>174</sup> Military authorities and Major Keane agreed, and Keane recommended the RCMP press charges against Weis for auto theft. If Weis could be tried and charged in a civil court, Keane believed it would set a strong example for any POWs willing to attempt a similar escape.<sup>175</sup> Military authorities and the RCMP agreed to pursue charges. The Geneva Convention deemed POWs subject to the “laws, regulations, and orders in force in the armed forces of the detaining Power,” meaning POWs could be tried and punished to the same extent as a Canadian soldier committing the same crime.<sup>176</sup> Weis remained in custody at Riding Mountain to await his trial and, in April, he

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<sup>173</sup> Colonel H.N. Streight to Director of Labour Projects PW, Department of Labour, December 29, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Department of Labour Work Project, Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>174</sup> Cst. A.G. Boncey, “Hans Weis P.O.W. from the Riding Mountain National Park P.O.W. Camp,” January 2, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>175</sup> Insp. J.M. Bella, “Hans Weis, #032311, Prisoner of War, Riding Mountain National Park Prisoner of War Camp - Section 377, C.O. Theft of Motor Car,” January 18, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>176</sup> Article 45 in International Committee of the Red Cross, “Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War.”

appeared in court in Dauphin. For his crime, Weis received a fourteen-day sentence in the Dauphin jail, after which he was transferred back to Camp 132.<sup>177</sup>

Weis' escape was only one problem facing camp staff in early January. At the same time as Weis disappeared, spokesman Heinrich Weiler ordered his men to cease working on the grounds they lacked proper winter clothing. Weiler, a known pro-Nazi troublemaker and regular farm visitor had, due to his superior rank, assumed the role of spokesman after Gustav Treiber's transfer in September 1944. The timing of this order was no coincidence as Major Keane was absent from camp on an inspection tour of other labour projects. On January 4, RCMP officers arrested three POWs in the Keld district north of the park and were surprised to discover the prisoners were among the best workers in camp. The prisoners informed police they had left camp to escape the trouble brewing there and had intended to be picked up by the RCMP. The POWs explained they wanted to receive twenty-eight days' discipline in the hope that, by the time they returned, the trouble in camp would have passed.<sup>178</sup>

With fewer than fifteen guards at the camp, the acting administrator was unable to force the roughly 170 POWs to turn out for work and requested assistance from the No. 10 Service Flying Training School at Dauphin. On January 6, fifteen armed airmen from the school arrived at the camp and, with the help of the guards, regained control of the camp.<sup>179</sup> The prisoners returned to work the following day and Major Keane, after he

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<sup>177</sup> Major General A.E. Walford to District Officers Commanding, Military Districts Nos. 10 and 13, May 9, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>178</sup> Cpl. B. Dowling, "Bernhard Wasser - #ME-24551 - et al. Escape of from Ps.O.W. Labor Project, Lake Audy, R.M.N.Park, Man.," January 5, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>179</sup> Cst. D.W. Mortimer, "056472 Gefr. Hans Hauschildt. Escaped Prisoner of War, Riding Mountain National Park Prisoner of War Camp," January 8, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

returned, promptly transferred Weiler and four senior NCOs to the high-security facility at Camp 100 (Neys).<sup>180</sup>

Pro-Nazi POWs such as Weiler could be found in almost every labour project in the country and they proved constant problems for Canadian authorities. The Department of Defence, facing similar problems with Nazis in internment camps, had attempted to introduce screening methods to determine prisoners' political leanings but these were met with varied success. In May 1944, the Minister of National Defence approved the establishment of MI7, a subunit within the Directorate of Military Intelligence dedicated to the political classification, segregation, special investigation, and re-education of POWs. MI7 began preliminary classifications that summer, relying primarily on censorship and personnel files and, by December of that year, these classifications suggested that of the approximately 35,000 POWs in Canada, 341 were pro-democratic, 9,030 passive, 23,073 mild Nazis, and 1,360 ardent Nazis. As intelligence personnel believed many POWs could be susceptible to re-education, MI7 embarked on an ambitious classification and re-education program with the objective to identify and segregate POWs based on their political attitudes as well as determine their suitability for labour. This, military authorities believed, would break up any secret Gestapo control or pro-Nazi organization and result in leaders being transferred to camps designated for pro-Nazis.<sup>181</sup>

Classification required the interrogation of every POW in Canada, with the results determining the "PHERUDA" profile of each prisoner. The program produced a numerical score based on questions relating to a prisoner's (P)olitical outlook, attitude towards (H)itler, (E)ducation, (R)eligious beliefs, (U)sefulness, (D)ependability, and attitude toward the (A)llies. A prisoner's score classified them into three main categories: Black for pro-Nazis, White for anti-Nazis, and Grey for those in between, although the

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<sup>180</sup> Lt. E. Davidson, "Report on Visit to Riding Mountain Camp, Manitoba," February 15, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>181</sup> Lt.-Col. A.G. Wygard, "History of the Organization, Functions, and Operations of MI 7," 28 February 1946, HQS-S9139-7 - P/W Classification - M.I. 7 Policy, C-8437, RG24, LAC.

Department of National Defence later expanded this to include light and dark Grey.<sup>182</sup> By January 1945, PHERUDA was ready to be evaluated and intelligence staff selected the Riding Mountain camp for testing.

Riding Mountain's selection as the testing ground for classifications was not coincidental. Riding Mountain presented a number of advantages over other locations, first and foremost its size. With only 160 POWs, the entire camp could be interrogated relatively quickly and easily but it provided military authorities with a larger and more representative sample than the smaller woodcutting camps presently operating elsewhere. Furthermore, the selection of POWs for work at Riding Mountain had been done while classifications and selections were still in their infancy, which resulted in POWs there having a wide variety of political allegiances, ranging from pro-Nazi to anti-Nazi, and attitudes towards Canada and work. The Department of Labour also supported the classification of POWs there as it expected to finish woodcutting operations in the coming months and was considering the employment of POWs on local farms, something Major Keane strongly supported.

On January 30, 1945, MI7 interrogators Lt. E. Davidson and A/C.S.M. P. Thiessen arrived at Riding Mountain to begin PHERUDA classifications. Davidson believed a secretive approach would likely harm their interrogations and therefore made sure camp staff, spokesman Wilhelm Schmidt (who had replaced Weiler), and Doctor Gress knew the purpose of his visit. His precautions were soon rewarded when a POW suggested to a Canadian employee that Davidson was here to spy on the POWs and the manager was able to explain the true nature of his visit. Davidson enlisted the help of spokesman Schmidt and some of the anti-Nazis in camp to identify troublemakers and pro-Nazis, explaining it was in the best interest of those who wanted to remain employed. The anti-Nazis, including Wendelin Geiger and Catholic priest Oscar Wahler, happily criticized and revealed the camp's "rabid" Nazis.

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<sup>182</sup> Kilford, *On the Way!*, 142–43.

Both Geiger and Wahler proved especially important informants and their experiences in Canada revealed the dangers to which anti-Nazi POWs were subject. Since arriving in Canada in 1942, Geiger had taken an active role in anti-Nazi activities, including helping protect Roman Catholic priests such as Oscar Wahler from attacks by fanatical pro-Nazis at Ozada and then at Lethbridge and Medicine Hat. As his activities endangered his safety, Geiger was sent to Riding Mountain, but he continued to show his “unrelenting and uncompromising” attitude towards Nazism. Working with former Social Democrats, leftist men from the working class, former French Legionnaires, and other like-minded men, Geiger and Wahler used books and contact with guards and civilian employees to learn the “Canadian democratic way of life” and counter pro-Nazi influence.<sup>183</sup> Wahler explained,

Our purpose was to make impossible every attempt of striking and sabotage ordered or insinuated by some people, we wanted to stay in the labour camp. Also against the secret of the German NCOs, we made vain some times the attempt of [illegible] of terror methods of beating etc. We told to everybody the plans of the Camp Gestapo and warned the fellows. In order to clean the Camp from the Nazis, these men were reported to the authorities.<sup>184</sup>

Geiger became Wahler’s “right hand,” smuggling messages between Wahler and the guards and doing his part to identify pro-Nazis. One intelligence officer later reported, “Time and again [Geiger’s] life was threatened, but he always preferred to stick it out in the camp and break up the Nazi organization than to seek safety in Protective Custody.”<sup>185</sup> Wahler later stated, “In a time, where it was very inopportune and dangerous to be an Anti-Nazi, Wendel Geiger tried to work against the injustice of the Nazis in the POW Camps.”<sup>186</sup> Geiger himself described,

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<sup>183</sup> Wendel Geiger, Untitled Statement, 26 December 1945, S.9139-G-25 - P-W Classification - Whites - Geiger. Wendelin P-W 36329 Sold., C-8437, RG24, LAC.

<sup>184</sup> Oscar Wahler, “Testimony of the activity of Wendel Geiger,” 26 December 1945, S.9139-G-25 - P-W Classification - Whites - Geiger. Wendelin P-W 36329 Sold., C-8437, RG24, LAC.

<sup>185</sup> Lt. M.C. Harrington, “No. 36329: Geiger, Wendelin, n.d., S.9139-G-25 - P-W Classification - Whites - Geiger. Wendelin P-W 36329 Sold., C-8437, RG24, LAC.

<sup>186</sup> Oscar Wahler, “Testimony of the activity of Wendel Geiger,” 26 December 1945, S.9139-G-25 - P-W Classification - Whites - Geiger. Wendelin P-W 36329 Sold., C-8437, RG24, LAC.



In this camp the members of the Anti Nazi circle of Medicine Hat built up some small similar circles. We worked against every kind of terror and strikes and tried to learn the Canadian democratic way of life by books and the people over there. In order to make larger our circles we persuaded many fellows to realize democracy in the camp. We were forced some times to report the strongest Nazi-supporters to the Canadian Authorities because it was the only way to avoid beating or lynching like Medicine Hat. Twice I was suspected to be a “traitor” and only by the intervention of father Wahler and the German Medical officer I was able to go through this trouble. When Comm. Davidson spent some time in our camp to clean it from Nazis I did my best to help him and to avoid some terror actions of the Nazis that time.<sup>187</sup>

One intelligence officer later attributed the success of the classifications at Riding Mountain to Geiger’s “strength of character, sincerity and courage.” This cooperation not only demonstrated a simple and effective method of identifying troublemakers and Nazis, but also revealed Nazis who may have otherwise been missed by intelligence officers and emphasized to MI7 that they should take every advantage of enlisting the help of anti-Nazi POWs in classification and re-education programs. For his tireless work first in Alberta and then at Riding Mountain, Geiger was eventually transferred to Sorel to assist in re-education programs and as an “Outstanding anti-Nazi,” was one of only four combatant POWs permitted to remain in Canada after the war.<sup>188</sup>

The MI7 interrogations did not uncover any “Gestapo-like” activity but Lt. Davidson was able to identify sixteen “Black” Nazis among those at Riding Mountain. Of these, six were among the original forty tradesmen hand-picked for work at Riding Mountain, suggesting the possibility that the Camp 132 POW staff had selected them to ensure Nazi values remained prevalent at Riding Mountain. Davidson observed the “Whites” and “Greys” in camps were able to balance their influence but he ultimately recommended their transfer, citing concern over how they would react in the event of Germany’s capitulation.

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<sup>187</sup> Wendel Geiger, Untitled Statement, 26 December 1945, S.9139-G-25 - P-W Classification - Whites - Geiger. Wendelin P-W 36329 Sold., C-8437, RG24, LAC.

<sup>188</sup> Lt. M.C. Harrington, “No. 36329: Geiger, Wendelin, n.d., S.9139-G-25 - P-W Classification - Whites - Geiger. Wendelin P-W 36329 Sold., C-8437, RG24, LAC.

Through information provided by Geiger, Wahler, and other informants, Davidson learned that previous spokesmen had secretly communicated with the Camp 132 spokesman using coded messages hidden in correspondence. Using codes determined before the POWs left Camp 132, the spokesman and his staff were apparently able to communicate through intercamp mail without the knowledge of Canadian censors. The extent to which this illicit communication was employed is unknown but was most likely the cause of the isolated incidents in which POWs suddenly reduced their production or ceased working entirely. As for the Whites and Greys, Davidson observed they enjoyed the privileges at Riding Mountain and did not want to be transferred to Camp 132. He noted,

Practically all of them were satisfied with their treatment. They have all facilities for comfortable living, and it is hard to imagine that there is another lumber camp in the country which could offer them the same comforts. Such comforts include running water, water closet, showers, recreation hall, well stocked canteen and shows twice a week. They have a resident doctor and dentist who prevent very efficiently any malingering.

However, after working in the bush for a year-and-a-half, many welcomed the possibility of farm work.<sup>189</sup>

Military authorities deemed the interrogation and classification of POWs at Riding Mountain a success and MI7 proceeded to introduce PHERUDA classifications in other camps. There were still a number of issues to be worked out. For example, Colonel Streight did not receive Davidson's report until late March 1945 so the sixteen pro-Nazis remained at Riding Mountain until they were finally transferred to Camp 100 (Neys) in April. Personnel shortages also hampered MI7 interrogations and the PHERUDA system was temporarily abandoned at Camps 132 and Camp 133. Instead, intelligence officers at these camps based their classifications on information obtained from camp staff, scouts,

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<sup>189</sup> Lt. E. Davidson, "Report on Visit to Riding Mountain Camp, Manitoba," February 15, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

guards, and, like Riding Mountain, reliable POWs.<sup>190</sup> Prisoners deemed ardent Nazis or “Blacks” were transferred to Camp 20 (Gravenhurst), Camp 130 (Seebe), and Camp 100 (Neys) with the hope that, of those remaining, the more democratically-inclined “White” POWs would influence the “Greys.” Labour projects presented an issue. Thousands of POWs were presently employed in camps across the country but Colonel R.H. Davidson – having replaced Lt.-Col. Fordham as Director of POW Labour Projects – believed interrogations of POWs on labour projects would have a “very unsettling and adverse effect,” an opinion shared by the Directorate of Prisoners of War.<sup>191</sup> As such, MI7 elected not to begin interrogating those already employed.

Part of the reasoning behind selecting Riding Mountain as the location for MI7’s preliminary interrogations was that the Department of Labour was starting to look for different work for the POWs. When the department took over the camp in June 1944, it agreed to a 10,000-cord contract and, by early 1945, Keane expected to fill this by the end of March. Milder-than-expected winters and increased fuelwood production throughout the province had left Manitoba with sufficient supplies for the coming year and the POWs were no longer required. In February, Keane explored the possibility of employing the remaining POWs on local farms, noting he had already received applications from approximately twenty local farmers.<sup>192</sup> Provincial authorities liked the idea of placing groups of ten to twenty prisoners in specific areas but remained hesitant to accept responsibility for POWs placed on individual farms.<sup>193</sup> As the War Committee of

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<sup>190</sup> Lt.-Col. A.G. Wygard, “History of the Organization, Functions, and Operations of MI 7,” 28 February 1946, HQS-S9139-7 - P/W Classification - M.I. 7 Policy, C-8437, RG24, LAC.

<sup>191</sup> “Interrogation of P/W on Works Projects,” August 2, 1945, HQS-S9139-7 - P/W Classification - M.I. 7 Policy, C-8437, RG24, LAC.

<sup>192</sup> W. Duncan to Major J. Keane, February 22, 1945, Rules and Regulations - POW, Vol. 964, RG27, LAC; Lt. Col. R.H. Davidson to Colonel H.N. Streight, March 5, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>193</sup> W. Duncan to Major J. Keane, February 21, 1945, Rules and Regulations - POW, Vol. 964, RG27, LAC.

the Cabinet had yet to authorize the employment of Class I (combatant) POWs on individual farms, Colonel Streight remained unable to approve such work.<sup>194</sup>

In the meantime, rather than abandon the already costly venture, the Department of Labour elected to establish a clothing depot in the camp. The increasing number of POWs employed across the country was causing some problems with the Department of Labour's supply chains. Prisoners required suitable attire for bushwork and the department was responsible for supplying winter and summer trousers, jackets, shirts, undergarments, and socks to every labour project. However, the department was experiencing a high turnover of clothing, prompting the director of POW labour to report,

it appears that both the employer, the prisoners-of-war and inspectors think that this directorate is a fairy godmother in supplying clothing to prisoners-of-war and from the requests coming in for replacements from the various camps, it is definitely apparent that no instructions have been given as to the care and handling of our clothing, which is one of the most expensive items we have.<sup>195</sup>

As department inspectors reminded employers and POWs to take more diligent care of issue clothing, the Department of Labour elected to repurpose part of the Riding Mountain camp to serve as a depot from which it could repair and issue POW clothing. With available space, prisoners willing to work, and its central location between projects in Alberta and those in Northern Ontario, the Riding Mountain camp began operating in this capacity in February 1945.

Major Keane continued to look for additional work opportunities, meeting with park superintendent Otto Heaslip in late March to discuss the potential of POWs working for the park. The Department of Labour, Keane explained, was likely going to transfer most of the POWs in the coming months but it was willing to leave as many men as the park wanted for work. The catch was that the park would have to pay the standard rate of

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<sup>194</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Director of Labour Projects PW, March 13, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>195</sup> Lt.-Col. R.H. Davidson To Major G. Forbes, February 15, 1945, Instructions Concerning POW Clothing, Vol. 966, RG27-N-3, LAC.

\$2.50 per man per day. Heaslip expressed interest in the possibility of employing POWs on road work near the camp, as other types of work were too far away, but noted the park lacked the required funds.<sup>196</sup> The park was only interested in employing POWs if they could do so without additional expense but not everyone was on board with the proposal; when asked for his opinion, the ASW supervisor stated the park would rather have the POWs placed on farms than have them near the park's civilian population.<sup>197</sup>

Woodcutting operations officially ceased at Riding Mountain on March 31, 1945, at which point POWs had cut 11,951 cords of fuelwood since mid-June of the previous year.<sup>198</sup> The POWs busied themselves with cleanup operations and hauling but, facing requests from bush companies in Northern Ontario for bushworkers, especially experienced ones, the Department of Labour agreed to transfer most of the POWs at Riding Mountain to staff new camps in Ontario. One hundred and eight POWs went to camps operated by Abitibi Power & Paper Co. in Northern Ontario, with sixty-eight going to Camp 29 at Minnipuka in early April and the remaining forty to Camp 30 at Magpie in May.<sup>199</sup> This left only forty POWs in camp.

Germany's surrender in May 1945 brought little change in the camp, but new work soon presented itself. In April 1945, the Parks Bureau had agreed to a request from the Department of National Defence to establish a summer cadet camp on the northeastern shore of Clear Lake. Cadets were to be housed in tents, but military authorities wanted to erect a series of permanent buildings including a mess hall, orderly room, and quartermaster stores.<sup>200</sup> In mid-May, twenty-seven POWs arrived at the cadet

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<sup>196</sup> O.E. Heaslip to J. Smart, March 28, 1945, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.

<sup>197</sup> J. Smart to Superintendent, RMNP, April 5, 1945, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.

<sup>198</sup> Binkley, "Dept of Labor POW Camp, Subdivision 25-21-22, April 1945," *Riding Mountain National Park - Cutting Record by Working Circles, 1937-1948*, RMNP Collection.

<sup>199</sup> C.R. McCord to H.A. Black, June 1, 1945, General Correspondence, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>200</sup> Department of National Defence, "Proposed Roads Clear Lake Cadet Camp," July 21, 1945, RM16-30 - Riding Mountain National Park - Administration of Lands Outside Townsite - Application for Site at Clear Lake - RMNP/DND Cadet Camp - Campsite and Water Rights, Vol. 1848, T9772, RG84, LAC.

camp and assisted military engineers in clearing the proposed camp area, building roads, and erecting buildings. These POWs were joined by an additional twenty from Camp 132 in mid-June.<sup>201</sup> The remaining ten prisoners remained at the main camp to run the clothing depot, but this proved short-lived. Despite its central location, the camp was too far from rail lines and was therefore ill-suited for the task. The Department of Labour relocated the depot to Port Arthur in early June.<sup>202</sup> The ten POWs remained at the camp to keep it in operation while the rest of the prisoners continued working at the cadet camp through the summer months.

By late August, work at the cadet camp was winding down and the Department of Labour elected to close the main camp. The Parks Bureau deemed the buildings too remote for its use and was therefore not interested in salvaging them. The Department of Labour turned the project over to the War Assets Corporation for termination. The POWs employed at the cadet camp were transferred to farm hostels in the Winnipeg area in mid-September and the remaining ten POWs began preparations to close the camp. Salvageable material was sold at public auction in Dauphin while a Winnipeg wrecking company purchased the camp's fifteen buildings for approximately \$8,000. With the assistance of the remaining prisoners, demolition of the camp began on October 1.<sup>203</sup> Nine days later, the last ten POWs left Riding Mountain National Park.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> "Pay List, 21 May - 30 June 1945," n.d., POW Pay Lists, Vol. 959, RG27, LAC; "Nominal Roll PW to Work Project - Clear Lake, Man.," n.d., HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>202</sup> W.A. Delahey, "Summary of Discussions at Meeting at Prince Arthur Hotel, Port Arthur, Monday, May 14th, Re Employment of German Prisoners-of-War," 3, May 21, 1945, Minutes of Meetings concerning Procedures Regarding POW's, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>203</sup> At least one building was purchased by a civilian and relocated from the camp. O.E. Heaslip to J. Smart, December 4, 1945, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC; Controller to Gibson, November 29, 1945, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC; "For Sale, By Tender Crown Assets," *Winnipeg Free Press*, September 10, 1945.

<sup>204</sup> Brigadier R.O.G. Morton to Secretary, Department of National Defence, October 11, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

From 1943 to 1945, the Riding Mountain Park Labour Project tried and tested the Department of Labour and Department of National Defence and provided both with important lessons that helped shape POW labour policies and practices. The Riding Mountain camp thus served its purpose as an experimental project and military and government authorities met each issue as it arose, altering existing or creating new regulations, passing orders in councils, or simply transferring POWs to other camps. The camp did demonstrate a labour project could in fact be too large, too costly, and too complicated. The project raised questions of the feasibility of involving so many government departments in a project's operation and emphasized the need for the involvement of fewer departments and better inter-department communication.

Problems with the internal workings of the camp emphasized the divide between anti-Nazi and pro-Nazi POWs, especially during the incidents involving the former Legionnaires. The trouble that emerged between these two groups demonstrated the need for a selection process that more effectively weeded out pro-Nazis and troublemakers. Pro-Nazis at Riding Mountain proved to be the instigators of a number of strikes and other forms of trouble, including visits to nearby communities and ignoring of guards' orders. Some of the problems were attributed to the ineffectiveness of the civilian guard force, something not unique to Riding Mountain, which prompted the takeover of security by the Veterans' Guard. By the time the troublemakers were weeded out, the civilian guards removed, and operations reorganized, the camp demonstrated POW labour was feasible.

The overall success of the woodcutting operations remains questionable. In all, POWs cut approximately 45,000 cords of fuelwood, wood that helped reduce the province's fuelwood shortage. However, this was far below the 100,000 cords Minister of Munitions and Supply C.D. Howe had proposed the POWs cut in the park. Had the 400 woodcutters met their quota every day, the camp could have produced roughly 94,000 cords per year, almost enough to fill southwestern Manitoba's entire fuelwood shortage. The low production was initially attributed to inexperienced POWs, but the camp continued to encounter obstacles as prisoners refused to work, the cutting area had significantly more green wood than expected, and woodcutting operations proved

inefficient. The Department of Labour's takeover improved efficiency significantly but, even by June 1944, the camp's future was in question. A milder than expected winter and increased woodcutting throughout the province helped reduce demands for fuelwood and thereby reduced the need for such a camp.

The camp also proved an extremely costly venture and the Department of Labour and Department of Munitions and Supply never recovered their investments. Fuelwood cut under Wartime Housing's administration was cut for almost \$14 a cord but sold in Winnipeg for a little over \$5. Under Major Keane, operating costs were significantly reduced but, from mid-June 1944 to April 1945, the project still cost the Department of Labour \$116,086.19 while only generating \$69,935.70 – a difference of over \$46,000.<sup>205</sup> This did not even take into account the cost of the camp – an estimated \$225,000 – nor the additional operating costs from October 1943 to June 1944. In all, Riding Mountain camp was the largest, most expensive, and least profitable labour project in the country.

The operating costs and administrative struggles emphasized to the Department of Labour the value in having civilian companies run POW labour projects. The Riding Mountain camp was the only woodcutting operation administered by a government entity. Despite having no experience in managing POWs or woodcutting operations, Wartime Housing Ltd. agreed to run the camp. This was short-lived and the Department of Labour was forced to take over in the absence of any suitable replacements. Ideally, the Department of Labour wanted to provide civilian employers with POWs, as it did with civilian labour through the national selective service, and have the employers use them however needed. This not only reduced the department's involvement but also its expenditures.

Civilian employers could make use of their own accommodations and facilities, which were already tailored to the type of work, and remained responsible to build new ones if required. As the Riding Mountain camp had been built at such a high cost, it

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<sup>205</sup> Department of Labour, Statement showing total receipts and Disbursements for Prisoners of War Labour Projects for period of operations from Start of each Project to April 30, 1945," Statements Showing Total Receipts and Disbursements for POW Projects, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.



emphasized the problem of building a permanent camp for temporary work. In March 1944, Parks Controller James Smart stated he was “quite astounded” at both the type of buildings erected and the camp’s excessive cost, having expected the camp would consist of temporary buildings more in line with civilian cutting operations. He explained,

The type of camp and the cost, of course, are entirely out of line with provisions for any cordwood operation and now that the urgency for cordwood has passed and a great surplus is being built up there could be considered quite a financial loss unless the camp was to be continued simply as a detention camp for prisoners-of-war without the necessity of providing work for them.<sup>206</sup>

Little consideration had been given to the availability of future work or at least future use of the camp so, when the war was over, nobody wanted the camp. The two-year-old buildings were subsequently scrapped. By comparison, civilian employers made use of existing camps but also took advantage of small, low-cost camps with buildings that could either be abandoned or could be easily moved once cutting finished in the area.

For the park, the project was born out of necessity rather than opportunity. In the face of a growing conservation movement, the park had already curtailed cutting operations in the 1930s, so it remained unconventional to establish a large woodcutting camp in a national park. The park did receive some benefit from the presence of the POWs. Prisoners cut over 45,000 cords of fuelwood, amounting to roughly half of all fuelwood cut in the park from 1943 to 1945.<sup>207</sup> For every cord of poplar cut, the park received \$0.25 and, from 1943 to 1945, POW labour generated a revenue of over \$11,300.<sup>208</sup> Outside of woodcutting, the park also called upon POWs to help clear windfall after a major storm, repair broken telephone lines, and fight forest fires. Despite

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<sup>206</sup> Controller to Gibson, March 20, 1944, U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.

<sup>207</sup> Forest Working Plan Report, Riding Mountain National Park, Cutting Season of 1943-44,” n.d., RM200 - Riding Mountain National Park - Timber, Part 7, Vol. 1908, T-15507, RG84, LAC; Forest Working Plan Report, Riding Mountain National Park, Cutting Season of 1944-45,” n.d., RM200 - Riding Mountain National Park - Timber, Part 7, Vol. 1908, T-15507, RG84, LAC.

<sup>208</sup> See receipts, October 1943 to March 1945 in General Correspondence concerning POW's, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC and U165-7 - Riding Mountain National Park - Prisoners of War, 1943-1948, Vol. 165, T-12923, RG84, LAC.

this, the bureau's national office often looked upon POW labour with disdain, fixating on the project's low production, high cost, and general inefficiency, and this attitude helped shape the future of POWs in national parks.

In June 1944, Jasper National Park was unable to secure conscientious objectors or civilian labourers to help with general maintenance and fire-fighting, so park superintendent J.A. Wood inquired whether the park could employ fifty POWs during the summer months.<sup>209</sup> The Department of Labour approved this but Parks Controller Smart noted the bureau was "inclined not to agree with the use of prisoners-of-war or Jap internees in National Parks," instead preferring the employment of ASWs.<sup>210</sup> Smart noted that, in the absence of sufficient ASWs, the Parks Bureau would consider Woods' proposal but the Bureau remained insistent against employing POWs if other labour was available. Assistant Controller J.E. Spero cited George Tunstell's report of the Riding Mountain camp to emphasize the inefficiency of POW labour, arguing the bureau was not receiving a 50% return in work for the project's expenditure. As the employment of POWs in Jasper would cost \$30,000 plus the cost of a new camp, Spero argued the bureau could not justify establishing a POW camp in the park.<sup>211</sup> Wood once again inquired about POW labour in August 1945 but Smart remained firm in his earlier decision; in his response to Wood, he explained,

I might say that we do not look very favourably on the idea of having Prisoners of War located in National Parks if there is any other alternative. From our experience with the Prisoner of War Camp which was established a few years ago in Riding Mountain National Park it is apparent

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<sup>209</sup> Superintendent Wood to the Controller, National Parks Bureau, June 7, 1944, File J165-7 Pt 1 - Jasper National Park - Prisoners of War, 1944-1945, Vol. 147, T-12908, RG84, LAC.

<sup>210</sup> Controller, National Parks Bureau to Gibson, June 9, 1944, File J165-7 Pt 1 - Jasper National Park - Prisoners of War, 1944-1945, Vol. 147, T-12908, RG84, LAC.

<sup>211</sup> Assistant Controller to Superintendent, Jasper National Park, July 10, 1944, File J165-7 Pt 1 - Jasper National Park - Prisoners of War, 1944-1945, Vol. 147, T-12908, RG84; Spero to Gibson, July 5, 1944, File J165-7 Pt 1 - Jasper National Park - Prisoners of War, 1944-1945, Vol. 147, T-12908, RG84, LAC; MacFarlane to Spero, July 5, 1944, File J165-7 Pt 1 - Jasper National Park - Prisoners of War, 1944-1945, Vol. 147, T-12908, RG84, LAC.

that the work returned from this type of labour is extremely low and hardly worth while considering.<sup>212</sup>

Riding Mountain was thus the only Canadian national park to have a Second World War POW labour project.

Most prisoners appreciated their new lives at Riding Mountain and the relative freedom they enjoyed. While some POWs requested transfers back to the base camp or left camp bounds with the intention of being transferred, they remained in the minority. Most saw work at Riding Mountain much preferable to living behind the barbed wire fences of Camp 132 and they demonstrated their desire to remain. When the nineteen POWs went missing in October 1943, their comrades wanted to beat them to appease Canadian authorities and thereby ensure they remained in Riding Mountain National Park. Even many of those who broke regulations and left camp bounds and fraternized with civilians still wanted to remain there. The only way these activities could continue was if they returned to camp before their absence was noticed and, while these activities may have been guided by self-interest, they still preferred life at Riding Mountain to that of an internment camp.

Prisoners embraced the wilderness of Riding Mountain National Park. They did not see the seeming endless forest as a forbidding space but rather they embraced the wild. Coming from internment camps surrounded by barbed wire, the POWs saw the forest as inviting, beautiful, and natural. The forest was a place where they could find solitude and escape – at least temporarily – from the war, the camp, and, from being a prisoner. The forest did not enclose them but provided them with opportunities for recreation – they hiked, canoed, swam, skated, and adopted a bear cub. In many ways, the Whitewater Lake area became a “summer playground,” much like the central portion of the park was originally intended for – only this was for POWs rather than tourists. The

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<sup>212</sup> Controller, to Superintendent Wood, August 8, 1945, File J165-7 Pt 1 - Jasper National Park - Prisoners of War, 1944-1945, Vol. 147, T-12908, RG84, LAC.

prisoners certainly enjoyed their free time in what Leo Manuel described as “the midst of the Canadian bush.”<sup>213</sup>

Freedoms came with consequences as camp staff and guards soon discovered. Prisoners roaming beyond park boundaries remained cause for concern through 1945 and there were few options for camp staff but to transfer offenders elsewhere. The public saw such activities as an insult to Canadians and demanded action. These critics, however, failed to recognize Canada’s commitment to the 1929 Geneva Convention nor did they consider the reciprocal relationship of wartime internment; the Canadian government feared any mistreatment – real or perceived – of POWs in Canada could have harsh repercussions on Canadian POWs in Germany. Furthermore, prisoners were presented with numerous opportunities for sabotage, whether it be stealing camp vehicles or starting a forest fire, but no such attempts were ever reported.<sup>214</sup>

Although the camp may not have been as successful as C.D. Howe and T.A. Crerar had hoped, the employment of POWs in Riding Mountain National Park had a significant impact on policies adopted by both the departments of Labour and National Defence. While the Parks Bureau remained uninterested in employing any more POWs in its parks, other employers readily adopted prisoners in their own operations and, as the following chapters suggest, even after the camp closed in October 1945, lessons learned at the Riding Mountain Park Labour Project would continue to help shape POW labour in the months to come.

Now, almost seventy-five years after the POWs left, little remains of the Riding Mountain Park Labour Project. All buildings and salvageable material were removed in 1946 and the site was allowed to return to its natural state. New growth quickly appeared,

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<sup>213</sup> Translation of letter from Leo Manuel to Spokesman, Camp 132, n.d., HQS 7236-34-3-9 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Department of Labour - Work Project - Riding Mountain Park, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>214</sup> Warden David Binkley reported that on one occasion, one POW took a fine wire and grounded the telephone system, leaving the camp without outside communication. Binkley reported that the incident caused “some trouble” but the wire was eventually found, and the lines repaired. Lorne A. Misanchuk & Robert J. Chalaturnyk, “Transcript of Taped Interviews Made by Season Naturalists,” Summer 1973, RMNP Collection.

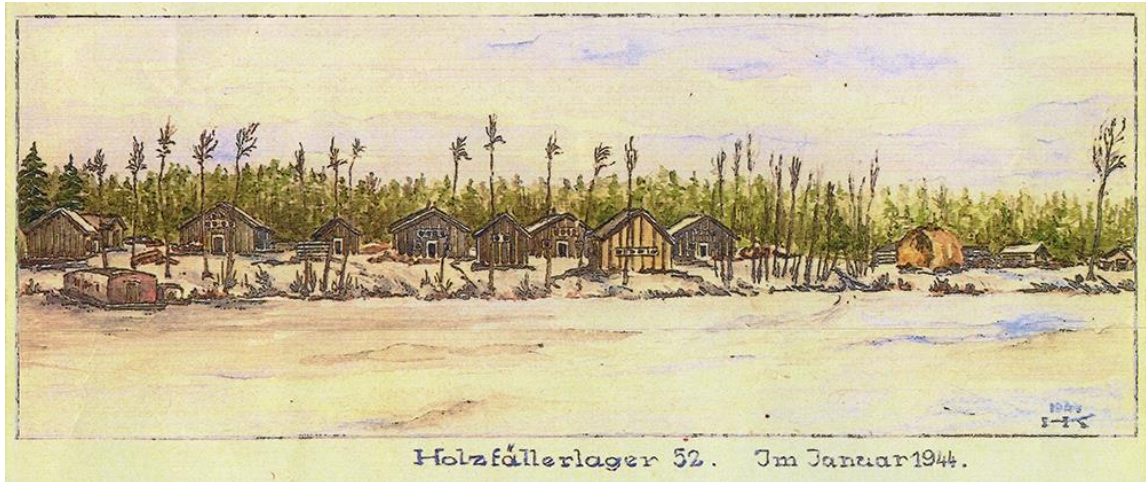
and trees have steadily encroached on the site, leaving a small clearing, some crumbling foundations, remains of dugout canoes, earthen berms, and peonies planted by prisoners as some of the only visible reminders of the site's past. The cutting areas eventually recovered as well, leaving behind little trace of the almost two years of fuelwood cutting on the north shore of Whitewater Lake. Spruce trees left standing by orders from District Forest Officer George Tunstell had some success in seed regeneration as aerial photographs suggests there exists a higher density of spruce compared to the pre-war period. As Tunstell predicted in 1944, poplar has remained a dominant species and these trees now cover much of the former cutting area. In the decades following the end of the war, a handful of former POWs returned to Riding Mountain National Park as tourists, eager to show their families where they once lived and worked. For them, Riding Mountain was a place of relative freedom.



**Figure 16: Aerial view of the site of the Riding Mountain Park Labour Project, 2011. The camp occupied the clearing in the centre of this photograph but the forest has reclaimed much of the site. Foundations and earthen berms are some of the only remaining signs that 440 German POWs lived and worked in the park.  
Author's Photo.**

## Chapter 3

### 3 Bears, Blackflies, and Bush: POWs and the Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co.



**Figure 17: Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co. Camp 52 by Johann Krakhofer, January 1944. Thunder Bay Museum.**

In late April 1944, Johannes Lieberwirth and a number of fellow POWs marched through the main gates of Camp 133 (Lethbridge, Alberta) and boarded a waiting train. Drafted at the age of eighteen, Lieberwirth had served in an anti-tank unit before British soldiers captured him near Tobruk, Libya in November 1941.<sup>1</sup> With no idea of their final destination, he and his POW comrades had all volunteered for the opportunity to work outside the confines of an internment camp, exchanging barbed wire fences for relative freedom. Two days and 1400 kilometres later, the train stopped at Kenora, Ontario – a place none of the prisoners had heard of – and the POWs disembarked. They jumped aboard trucks which drove them as far as Witch Bay, fifty kilometres away, after which they were ordered to walk the rest of the way on the frozen lake. They arrived at the Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Company's Camp 52 nine kilometres later, cold, wet,

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef: Kriegsgefangenschaft in Afrika und Kanada von 1941 bis 1946: ein deutscher Prisoner of War (PoW) erzählt anhand authentischer Unterlagen* (Emmelshausen, DE: Condo-Verlag, 1999), 40 and 55.

and exhausted. But, Lieberwirth recalled, they were treated to a sunset unlike any they had ever seen and soon forgot their discomfort.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter explores the lives of POWs who, like Lieberwirth, worked for the Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co. between 1943 and 1946. One of the largest employers of POW labour in Canada, the company employed over 1,000 POWs in fifteen fuelwood and pulpwood camps in the Kenora and Rainy River districts. With limited company records available, this chapter examines the POW experience rather than the experience of a bush company, which is the focus of Chapter 4. Narrowing the emphasis to POWs offers an opportunity to explore the POW experience in bush camps in greater detail and thus better understand the circumstances in which thousands of POWs in Canada found themselves living and working. Prisoners volunteered for work, despite the risk of being labelled as traitors or deserters by their pro-Nazi comrades, and generally enjoyed and valued the opportunity to work because it granted them considerably more freedom than they had been entitled to in an internment camp. They arrived in the bush relatively unprepared and were forced to adapt to their new surroundings and work, which they quickly and effectively did. Work became something that was valued by many POWs because it came with an opportunity to live in relative freedom and to gain some sense of normalcy. But prisoners were not willing to simply accept all aspects of bush life. As this chapter emphasizes, they continuously adapted and negotiated to improve living and working conditions and it was generally only when they had exhausted all other options that they caused considerable protest, engaged in strikes, or, in extreme cases, escaped. This chapter also reveals that Germany's surrender did not end Nazi influence in POW camps in Canada as pro-Nazis in many of the company's camps clung to power in the weeks following VE-Day and continued to threaten and harass POWs they deemed traitors to the Nazi cause. However, as the latter part of this chapter reveals, anti-Nazis in the company's camps resisted these efforts and, thanks largely in part to the efforts of an anti-Nazi POW doctor, steps were taken to limit pro-Nazi

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 186–88; Lori Nelson, “Temporary Enemies, Permanent Friends: Prisoners of War on Lake of the Woods,” *Lake of the Woods Area News* 35, no. 4 (July 2005): 24.

influence. From the arrival of the company's first POWs in 1943 to the departure of the last in 1946, prisoners in the employ of Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper were constantly adapting to bush life.

When the Department of Labour approved POW labour in 1943 to assist the struggling woodcutting industry, the primary motivation was to increase pulpwood production. Yet it was not demand for pulpwood that first drew POW labour to northwestern Ontario. Instead, fuelwood brought POWs to Ontario bush camps. Ontario had not been spared from the nation-wide fuelwood shortage and the province had an estimated 100,000 cords less than it needed in May 1943.<sup>3</sup> The shortage prompted a meeting between pulp and paper executives and government officials in Toronto in mid-1943. The parties reached an agreement in which pulp operators would begin cutting fuelwood on their limits – the areas in which companies had permission to harvest timber. Fuelwood cutting was to begin throughout Northern Ontario and Quebec, with operators in the Fort William and Port Arthur district expected to produce 150,000 cords.<sup>4</sup> Once the shortage was over, companies would resume normal operations. Many of these companies lacked the manpower for such work, so government officials agreed to secure additional labour in the form of German prisoners of war. Among the applications for POW labour was a request from the Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co. for 100 POWs to cut fuelwood near Kenora.

The Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co. was a new company, having only been established in March 1941. It was an amalgamation of the Kenora Paper Mills, the

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<sup>3</sup> Despite the growing use of coal, natural gas, and hydroelectricity as a primary source of heat, many Canadians remained heavily dependent on fuelwood through the mid-twentieth century. This, historian Josh MacFadyen argues, was the result of demand brought on by a colder climate and an accessible supply. Josh MacFadyen, "Hewers of Wood: A History of Wood Energy in Canada," in *Powering up Canada: A History of Power, Fuel, and Energy from 1600*, ed. Ruth W Sandwell (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 129–61. D.R. Cameron to Gibson, May 17, 1943, File 44962 - Use of Prisoners of War, Vol. 463, RG39, LAC.

<sup>4</sup> "Pulpwood Companies to Cut Fuelwood," *Canada Lumberman* 63, no. 12 (June 15, 1943): 30.



Keewatin Power Co., the Keewatin Lumber Co., the Fort Frances Pulp and Paper Co., and the Ontario-Minnesota Power Co., and was the primary Canadian subsidiary of the U.S.-based Minnesota and Ontario Paper Co., more commonly known as MANDO.<sup>5</sup> Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper ran two mills, one in Kenora and the other in Fort Frances, and thus organized its operations into two divisions, with each supplying one of the company's mills. The company secured cutting limits in both its Kenora and Fort Frances districts, which were predicted to provide sufficient pulpwood for the next forty years, but the manpower shortage stalled the company's operations.<sup>6</sup> With approximately three hundred of its Canadian employees already in uniform, its parent company MANDO was prompted by the shortage to cease timber production and instead focus on pulpwood operations.<sup>7</sup>

Hoping to increase production of fuelwood, the company requested 100 POWs to work on the company's limits in the Lake of the Woods area. A Department of Labour inspection found the proposed accommodation, one of the company's camps southeast of Kenora, satisfactory in terms of both security and the availability of work. Hoping to combat the fuelwood shortage immediately, the Deputy Minister of Labour was "particularly anxious" to provide the company with POWs as soon as possible.<sup>8</sup> As was the case when considering POWs for Riding Mountain, there were no EMS available for work, so the Department of Labour informed the company to expect combatant prisoners and begin hiring civilian guards to provide security. But the company was unable to secure sufficient men suitable for guard duties. Although some company officials believed an armed civilian guard force would be adequate to maintain security, most

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<sup>5</sup> "Reorganization of Local Paper Mill is Announced," *Fort Frances Times*, May 1, 1941.

<sup>6</sup> Minnesota and Ontario Paper Company, "Annual Report of the Minnesota and Ontario Paper Company for the Year Ended December 31, 1942," 1943, 3-4, Mergent Archives, [www.mergent.com](http://www.mergent.com).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 5; Minnesota and Ontario Paper Company, "Annual Report of the Minnesota and Ontario Paper Company for the Year Ended December 31, 1943," 1944, 4, Mergent Archives, [www.mergent.com](http://www.mergent.com).

<sup>8</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to V.A.G., October 9, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

envisioned repeated escape attempts and instead preferred military personnel.<sup>9</sup> The Vice Adjutant General's office concurred and subsequently deemed it necessary to employ military guards, prompting military authorities to arrange for men from the Veterans' Guard of Canada to accompany the POWs to Kenora.<sup>10</sup>

One hundred POWs arrived at Keewatin, five kilometres west of Kenora, from Camp 23 (Monteith). Escorted by one officer and twenty-four men from the Veterans' Guard, the POWs were transported to their new accommodations by boat. Camp 1, later renamed Camp 52, was located on the shore of Red Cliff Bay, twenty-five kilometres southeast of Kenora and was Ontario's first woodcutting camp west of Port Arthur to employ POWs. A reduced need for fuelwood by 1944 meant the company switched its POWs to pulpwood cutting and, over the next three years, expanded its operations, requesting additional POWs to staff both existing and new camps. By 1946, the company had opened five camps near Kenora (Camps 43, 52, 56, 60, and 61), two near Vermilion Bay (44B and 66), six near Flanders (103, 103A, 104, 105, 106, and Pearson's Camp), and two near Hudson (62 and 63). At its peak, Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper employed over 1,200 POWs in fifteen camps. With two exceptions, all POWs were drawn from either Camp 23 (Monteith), Camp 132 (Medicine Hat), or Camp 133 (Lethbridge). Those working in Camp 103A were drawn from men already employed in nearby camps and those in Camp 62 came from the downsizing of the Riding Mountain camp in June 1944.<sup>11</sup>

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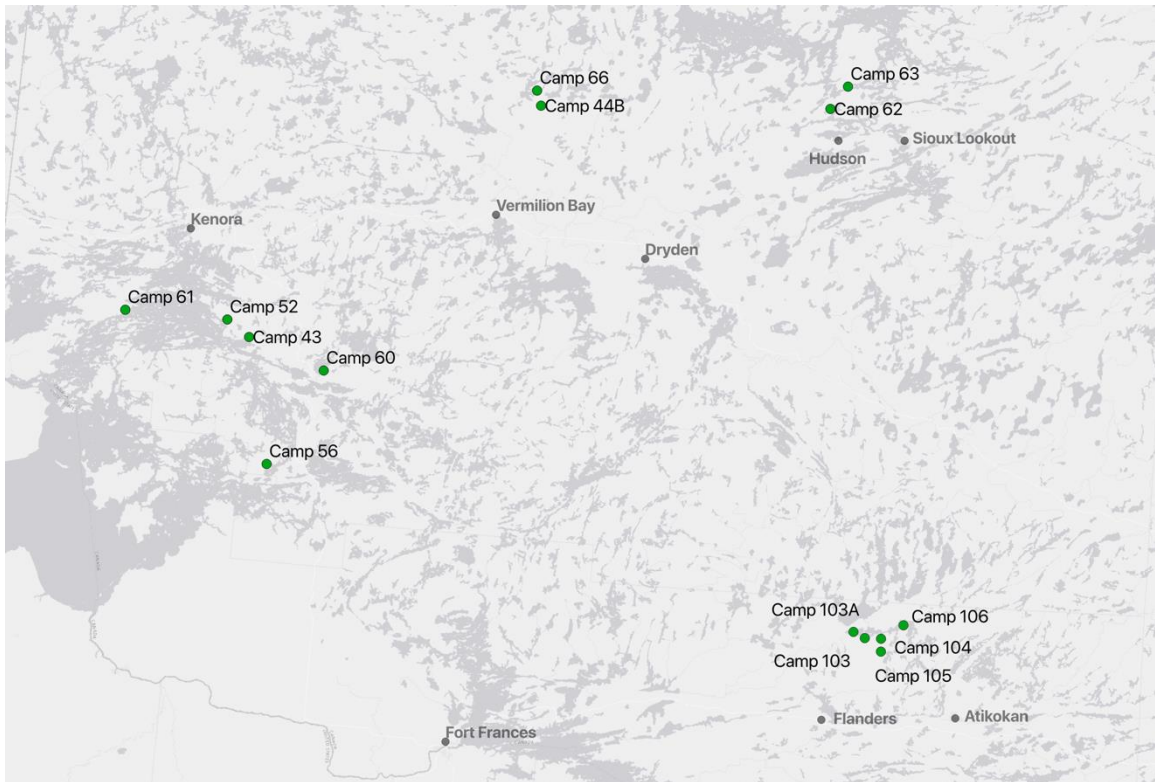
<sup>9</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to V.A.G., October 20, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>10</sup> V.A.G. to D/P.O.W., October 20, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>11</sup> Maj.-Gen. H.F.G. Letson to District Officers Commanding, MDs 10 and 13, June 6, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-66 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Hudson, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

**Table 2: Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co. Camps Employing POWs.**

Location	Camp No.	Opened	Closed	No. of POWs
Kenora	Camp 43	09-Nov-44	26-Jun-46	50
Kenora	Camp 52	27-Oct-43	14-Jul-46	100
Kenora	Camp 56	16-Jan-44	20-May-46	50
Kenora	Camp 60	27-Apr-44	26-Jun-46	100
Kenora	Camp 61	12-Nov-43	20-May-46	100
Vermilion Bay	Camp 44B	16-Jan-44	09-Apr-46	100
Vermilion Bay	Camp 66	19-Oct-45	18-Apr-46	100
Flanders	Camp 103	09-Jun-44	15-Jun-46	100
Flanders	Camp 103A	21-Oct-45	18-Apr-46	50
Flanders	Camp 104	29-Oct-44	15-Jun-46	100
Flanders	Camp 105	09-Nov-44	15-Jun-46	100
Flanders	Camp 106	29-Sep-45	13-Jul-46	40
Flanders	Pearson's Camp	30-Jul-45	16-Mar-46	35
Hudson	Camp 62	18-Jun-44	29-Mar-46	100
Hudson	Camp 63	09-Nov-44	15-Mar-46	100



**Figure 18: Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co. camps employing POWs. The location of Pearson's Camp near Flanders is unknown. Map by Author.**

The bush camps of Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper were, to put it mildly, rustic. In most cases, companies employed POWs in camps that had been intended for or vacated by civilian employees, with some minor upgrades to ensure living arrangements met the terms of the Geneva Convention. Rather than build expensive road or rail systems in the bush, woods operators built rough and temporary camps from which bushworkers could walk to the constantly changing cutting areas. These camps remained small, with a capacity ranging from thirty to 100 men, to avoid depleting an area's timber too quickly and thereby require the construction of another camp. Taking advantage of nature to help reduce costs, companies built these camps along lakeshores and riverbanks so that logs could be more easily floated to the nearest mill.<sup>12</sup> This meant camps were often well-isolated from civilian contact and featured few luxuries. The camps themselves followed a similar structure, often consisting of three POW bunkhouses, a bunkhouse for the Veterans' Guard, a kitchen and mess, storage shed or warehouse, workshop, washrooms, camp boss's cabin and office, canteen, a doctor's shack, stables, and a recreational hall.<sup>13</sup> Living quarters remained quite simple, with little or no insulation and wood stoves for heat.<sup>14</sup> The company's Flanders-area camps, however, were brand new. Designed for long-term cutting operations on the company's Seine River limits, the camps were built on the shores of Turtle, Gull, and Bridge Lakes and used buildings erected from prefabricated sections. Camp 104 foreman Fred Alexander described his camp as "a new departure in comfort, cleanliness and generally healthful conditions for pulpwood cutters." In a visit to the Flanders camps, a *Fort Frances Times* reporter claimed the average person would never imagine such conditions existing in remote areas for the camps were "clean and inviting," the food "clean and wholesome," and the accommodations "warm, comfortable, and well ventilated."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ian Walter Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 26.

<sup>13</sup> Nelson, "Temporary Enemies, Permanent Friends," 26.

<sup>14</sup> Sioux Narrows - Nestor Falls, "'German Prisoners of War (POW) Camps,'" accessed February 6, 2010, <http://www.siouxnarrows-nestorfalls.ca/municipal-government/community-profile/history/german-prisoner-of-war-pow-camps>.

<sup>15</sup> "O-M New Pulpwood Camps Now Built and Operating," *Fort Frances Times*, December 7, 1944.



**Figure 19: Layout of Camp 52 near Kenora. Figure adapted from aerial photo, 1949-R19-4925-186, RG 1-429-7, Archives of Ontario**

A small detachment from the Veterans' Guard, generally numbering one guard per ten POWs and under the command of a Corporal or Sergeant, remained responsible for security at both the camp and the working areas. Their roles included setting camp boundaries, supervising POWs, visiting working parties, ensuring buildings remained clean, taking roll call in the morning and evening, ensuring prisoners were in their quarters by 2230 hrs., and collecting and distributing POW mail. They also made sure POWs did not wear civilian clothing, receive money or gifts, have contact with civilians outside of work, or send mail through unofficial channels.<sup>16</sup> The guards tended to be middle-aged or older, and with many of the POWs the same age as their children, they were generally pleasant and friendly towards their charges.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Maj.-Gen. H.F.G. Letson, "Transfer Ps.O.W. Camp No. 23, Monteith," October 21, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>17</sup> Nelson, "Temporary Enemies, Permanent Friends," 27.

Woodcutting operations remained in the hands of a skeleton civilian crew. A foreman or camp boss oversaw production while additional civilians were employed in administrative, instructional, or skilled work. For example, civilian staff at Camp 52 included a foreman, crew boss, camp clerk, cook, assistant cook, walking boss, blacksmith, mechanic, and handyman.<sup>18</sup> Together, these men ensured each of the company's camps operated in the same general manner as those employing civilians. However, as POWs gained experience in bushwork, some of them would later replace civilian employees and worked as cooks, mechanics, and blacksmiths.

The Department of Labour sent inspectors to visit each camp about once a month to ensure the company, work, and living conditions adhered to both its regulations and the terms of the Geneva Convention. These visits also allowed POWs an opportunity to make official complaints regarding their employment and the employing company as well as to make requests for recreational material. Occasionally, representatives from the Swiss General Consul (which served as the Protecting Power), the War Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) also visited the camps to meet with POWs, discuss grievances, and arrange for the distribution of recreational and educational supplies.

The arrival of hundreds of POWs at Kenora, Flanders, Vermilion Bay, and Hudson produced mixed results, but most expressed a positive attitude towards leaving their barbed-wire confines behind. Veterans of the Afrika Korps captured in North Africa, sailors plucked from the Atlantic, airmen shot down over Great Britain, and at least one crewman from the famed *Bismarck* all found themselves working in the bush. Some had spent less than a year in Canada, others three or four before finally granted an opportunity to work. Their transfer to the relative freedom of bushwork was most welcome.

Hans Kaiser, a former crewman aboard the *Esso Hamburg*, a German supply ship captured by the British in 1941, had spent most of his war in Camp 23 (Monteith) and

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 26.

seized the opportunity to work despite not knowing where he was going or what he would be doing. Preferring the thought of work, which would keep his mind clear, to the alternative of remaining at Monteith with 2,000 other POWs, Kaiser ended up working at Camp 61.<sup>19</sup> Johannes Lieberwirth, a veteran of the North African campaign, was transferred to Camp 52 as a replacement in April 1944 and expressed a similar attitude. Arriving in Canada in May 1942, Lieberwirth spent time at Ozada and Lethbridge but found that the monotony of camp life and the pro-Nazis in power in the camp made life increasingly intolerable. Many prisoners found life in a Canadian internment camp to be a suffocating and miserable existence.

One of the primary problems for a POW was to find a way to pass the time. Spending days, months, and years behind barbed wire took a psychological toll and Canadian authorities thus encouraged recreational activities, including the establishment of theatrical groups, orchestras, educational classes, and sports teams, to help break the monotony of POW life. However, despite their efforts, at the end of the day they were still prisoners confined to camp. The opportunity for work helped relieve some of this burden as it would provide POWs with a way to help pass the time and a chance to live without the confines of barbed wire fences. Yet, not all prisoners approved. Pro-Nazi forces proved staunch opponents to work, claiming that despite what the Canadians said, any work was ultimately helping Canada's war effort. Prisoners who volunteered were then deemed traitors to the German cause and harassed for their apparent willingness to aid the enemy. Some POWs bowed to this pressure and elected not to volunteer. But when Lieberwirth received a "most welcome" opportunity for work in March 1944, he risked being labelled a saboteur, crook, and traitor and volunteered.<sup>20</sup>

Having spent a year on what he called the "momentous" Albertan plains, Lieberwirth would later recall becoming fascinated by the nature of Northwestern Ontario: "by the forest, the wild animals, the lake, and – last but not least – by the

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<sup>19</sup> Jacqueline Louie, "Remembering Camp 60," *Our Community Magazine (Kenora)*, Summer 1993, 35.

<sup>20</sup> Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 182.

excellent food. No fence, no crowds, no commands. The myriads of mosquitoes were not able to impair my new feeling of life.”<sup>21</sup> At nearby Camp 60, Otto Härtl described a similar scene: “it is very romantic. There is a great deal of wild life here... There are a great many fish in the lake and we have already caught many. Therefore you can see, there are many diversions here.” The guards permitted POWs to swim in the lake which, according to Haertl, provided a “splendid opportunity” for bathing.<sup>22</sup>

Even those who appreciated bush life found some drawbacks. Hans Kaiser described Camp 61 as “paradise” with only one exception: there were no women.<sup>23</sup> This was no coincidence. Bushwork was traditionally a male-dominated environment, but many pulpwood companies in Northern Ontario employed women as cooks. According to historian Ian Radforth, Finnish women were among the most celebrated cooks in Ontario bush camps, noted for their delicious food and exceptionally clean kitchens. Female employees lived in separate quarters and Radforth noted bushworkers likely adapted to their presence easily for they were doing work traditionally done by women.<sup>24</sup> But the Department of Labour believed that when it came to employing prisoners, the presence of women in camps was a security concern and so recommended female employees be transferred to civilian camps and replaced by male employees.<sup>25</sup> The lack of women was not something new. Internment camps were predominantly masculine spaces and the only contact with women came through correspondence or, in the rare cases when prisoners were transferred to outside hospitals, with nurses. Prisoners had to content themselves with letters from home, pinning photos of loved ones and pin-up girls on their barrack

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<sup>21</sup> Sioux Narrows Historical Committee, *Beyond the Bridge: Sioux Narrows* (Sioux Narrows, ON: Sioux Narrows Historical Committee, 1985), 237.

<sup>22</sup> Translation of letter from Otto Härtl to Hermann Schroth, June 5, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>23</sup> Jake MacDonald, “Prisoners on the Lake,” *Lake of the Woods Area News* 26, no. 3 (May 1996): 12.

<sup>24</sup> Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 101–2.

<sup>25</sup> Some exceptions were made in cases where male cooks were unavailable, and the Department of Labour reported no trouble in these camps. Maj.-Gen. A.E. Walford to DOC MD2, December 15, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-78 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Driftwood Lands and Timber Ltd., Delray, Ont, C-5386, RG24, LAC.



walls, cutting out pictures from magazines and pasting them in scrapbooks, or carving female figures from blocks of wood.

Work assignments were divided between bushwork and camp duties. Most POWs were assigned to bushwork, either in woodcutting or hauling gangs, while the remaining assisted in the camp's day-to-day operation. Depending on the size of the camp, the company employed between six to ten POWs in the kitchen, two or three hut orderlies, one or two horse orderlies, and two to five POWs for filing saws and other work.<sup>26</sup> Each camp had its own POW spokesman and translator. The spokesman was responsible for the POWs, maintained contact with the base camp, corresponded with international aid organizations, and was the primary contact between the POWs and the company, guards, and Department of Labour.

For those employed in the bush, the day began with reveille at 5:45 a.m. and breakfast at 6:45. By 7:15, the prisoners were off to the worksite, a few minutes to an hour walk away.<sup>27</sup> Civilian cutters would be expected to cut up to three cords a day but Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper set the quota for POWs at a single cord per man per day. Few, if any, POWs had any experience in bushwork, so the company allowed for a transition period in which civilian instructors demonstrated and supervised proper techniques and safety protocols. During this period, POWs were assigned to cut only  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a cord per day.

The transitional period was designed to allow POWs to learn proper techniques and adjust to their new work. Prisoners were divided into work gangs of ten to fifteen POWs and an experienced civilian cutter was assigned to each gang to serve as an instructor. With its informative illustrations, a German translation of the Canadian Pulp

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<sup>26</sup> A.F. Somm, "Report on visits to PW Labour Projects in Canadian Lumber Camps," Translation from German, 19 September 1944, POW Labour Projects - Reports, Notes, Corresp, Misc Papers, 1944-1945, Vol. 2, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM.

<sup>27</sup> The Swiss Consul reported POWs in Northern Ontario walked an average of thirty-five minutes to their sites. A.F. Somm, "Report on visits to PW Labour Projects in Canadian Lumber Camps," Translation from German, 19 September 1944, POW Labour Projects - Reports, Notes, Corresp, Misc Papers, 1944-1945, Vol. 2, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM.

and Paper Association's *Woodcutter's Handbook* was provided to POWs to guide them in their new work. Armed with an axe, Swede saw (saw with a frame in the shape of a bow, also known as a bow saw), and eight-foot measuring stick, the POWs set to work. Prisoners were divided into groups and assigned a "strip," or section to work in. Separating prisoners into their own strips allowed them to keep track of the work and reduce the risk of POWs felling trees onto their comrades. At least one group set itself to clearing a road in the middle of these strips from which logs could be hauled from the bush.<sup>28</sup> Hans Kaiser recalled that while three-quarters of the men at Camp 61 cut pulpwood, the remainder built roads – "There was nothing there, just wilderness. It all had to be built."<sup>29</sup>

In chopping down trees, POWs began with an undercut of the axe, an angled cut at the base of the tree designed to have it fall in a specific direction, before making a horizontal felling cut with a saw (see Figure 20). Once the tree was down, cutters removed branches with an axe before measuring and bucking the logs into four- or eight-foot lengths. Logs were then dragged closer to the roads or, in the case of four-foot operations, stacked in skids.<sup>30</sup> Prisoners or civilians assigned hauling duties then came in with a team and used horses to drag logs from the bush before loading them on wagons or sleighs. Horse teams, tractors, and trucks then hauled the wood to and dumped it on the frozen lakes. When the ice thawed, the logs were collected in large booms and towed to the nearest mill.

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<sup>28</sup> Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 190–91.

<sup>29</sup> Louie, "Remembering Camp 60," 35.

<sup>30</sup> For those working in four-foot operations, woodcutters generally branched, measured, and then bucked one four-foot length at a time while log cutters measured and bucked a log at a time, initially only removing the branches interfering with bucking and then completing branching after bucking. A. Koroleff, *Woodcutter's Handbook: How to Cut More Pulpwood Safely without Greater Effort* (Montreal, QC: Woodlands Section, Canadian Pulp and Paper Association, 1942), 6–16.



**Figure 20: POWs demonstrating cutting methods at Camp 61. Two prisoners are making an undercut with axe while another, with a saw over his shoulder, waits to make the horizontal felling cut. Author's Collection.**

Prisoners worked until noon, when they took an hour break for lunch. They resumed work and continued until they had put in their eight hours or when they had met their quota. Some could produce a cord in four hours, but others failed to do so in eight. This, the Swiss Consul noted, depended on the forest density, the size of the trees, weather, and the individual's energy.<sup>31</sup> For example, small trees meant POWs at Camp 52 needed 120 pieces of wood for a single cord while those at Camp 60 needed ninety to 100 pieces per cord. Production at Camp 60 was further complicated by the fact the trunks were so slim there it took three trees to produce a single eight-foot section. At Camp 56, POWs argued the one cord quota was impractical for the trees they cut were of poor quality and spread out, leading them to believe the area had already been cut by civilian

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<sup>31</sup> A.F. Somm, "Report on visits to PW Labour Projects in Canadian Lumber Camps," Translation from German, 19 September 1944, POW Labour Projects - Reports, Notes, Corresp, Misc Papers, 1944-1945, Vol. 2, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM.

piece workers some time earlier.<sup>32</sup> However, the Swiss Consul believed the quota satisfactory and, so long as the POW was physically suited for it, the work was “well suited to preserve and promote the corporal activity of PW.”<sup>33</sup>

Bushwork did not make for an easy life and prisoners struggled to adjust to it after the months or years of a relatively sedentary lifestyle in an internment camp. Nine days after arriving at Camp 103 near Flanders, Karl-Heinz Örtel wrote his mother to inform her that he disliked bushwork and hoped to return to the base camp. The bush, he stated, was “very large, almost endless. But there are flies, more than enough. They almost sting you to death. There are also bears, porcupines, and skunks of which you have to be careful.” Complaining of poor-quality cabins with cardboard walls which let the rain seep through, he ended his observations with mentions of dirty blankets and a poorly stocked yet expensive canteen.<sup>34</sup> Despite his feelings about his new life in the bush, he remained at Flanders for the next two years.

Each season brought its own challenges and, although many POWs had already experienced a Canadian winter, working in the bitter cold and deep snow proved a challenge. The Department of Labour and the company provided POWs with winter clothing, which offered protection from the elements, but the men continued to sweat and attempts to dry their damp clothing after a day’s work produced what Lieberwirth referred to as a “wintry typical woodcutter bouquet” – a combination of the smell of sweaty clothing and feet.<sup>35</sup> Summer provided relief from the cold but also brought with it mosquitoes, blackflies, and oppressive heat. While one could add more layers in the

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<sup>32</sup> Consulate General of Switzerland in Canada, Untitled Report, 1944, POW - Swiss Consul/External Affairs Reports - Corresp, 1942-1945, Vol. 1, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM.

<sup>33</sup> A.F. Somm, “Report on visits to PW Labour Projects in Canadian Lumber Camps,” Translation from German, 19 September 1944, POW Labour Projects - Reports, Notes, Corresp, Misc Papers, 1944-1945, Vol. 2, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM.

<sup>34</sup> Translation of letter from Karl-Heinz Oertel to Emma Oertel, June 18, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>35</sup> Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 222.

winter, fighting bugs amid the summer heat proved more difficult. Blackflies, no-see-ums, and mosquitoes, Lieberwirth recalled, all “diminished the joys” of bush life. Attempts to use turpentine, “Deep Woods,” or cedar oil to keep the bugs at bay proved somewhat effective for a few hours until sweat washed them away.<sup>36</sup>

Work was not without reward. Each man received 50¢ per working day and although POWs initially received 30¢ of their daily wage, with the remaining 20¢ going to a savings account at the base camp, in February 1944 pulpwood companies voted in favour of allowing POWs full access to their wages, a request granted by the Department of Labour in May.<sup>37</sup> Hoping to boost production, these companies also approved bonus incentives for those exceeding quota. Bonus credit came directly from the employers, rather than the Department of Labour, and remained dependent on the entire camp’s weekly production. Bonuses were paid at 30¢ per quarter-cord cut in excess of the week’s total production and rather than paid directly, became a recreation fund at the Camp Leader’s disposal.<sup>38</sup>

Some complained the “few cents” they received was not enough to live off – a reference to being unable to purchase all the goods they wanted, as the company already provided them with clothing, room, and board – but others were happy to be earning a wage. Under the Geneva Convention, prisoners were able to receive monthly allowances to offset the hardships of internment. The detaining power paid officers according to their ranks while the prisoners’ governments paid NCOs \$11.00 and other ranks \$6.60 every month, with payments forwarded through the Swiss Consul. Working pay brought additional purchasing power not available to those who remained in the base camps, a privilege that became more important when the German government ceased issuing

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>37</sup> “Minutes of a Meeting Called by Lt. Col. R.S.W. Fordham, Director of Labor Projects, P. of W., Held in the Prince Arthur Hotel, Port Arthur, Ontario, On Monday, May 15th, 1944, Commencing at Ten A.M.,” 4, May 15, 1944, Minutes of Meetings Re: POW’s, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>38</sup> “Meeting of Port Arthur District Woods Operators Employing Prisoners of War Held at Prince Arthur Hotel, Port Arthur, 2.30 PM,” February 6, 1944, Minutes of Meetings Re: POW’s, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

monthly allowances to POWs in September 1944.<sup>39</sup> Every camp had a small canteen and, although their stocks varied, POWs could purchase articles not only necessary for bush life but also those to improve living conditions. At the Flanders camps, for example, POWs could purchase soft drinks, fruit, peanuts, gum, candy, soap, face lotion, hair tonic, cigars, cigarettes, tobacco, and playing cards.<sup>40</sup> Most camps also allowed POWs to make collective orders from mail-order catalogues, assuming they did not order any illicit goods that could aid in escape.

Stocking the canteen as well as supplying the camps with equipment, food, and mail remained the employer's responsibility. The Kenora camps, all situated along the shoreline of Lake of the Woods, received their supplies from Kenora via boat every week during the summer months and by truck or sleigh during the winter.<sup>41</sup> Supplying the more-isolated Flanders camps entailed additional challenges. Supplies were first delivered by train to the district warehouse at the Flanders siding, driven by truck three miles to Calm Lake, loaded onto barges and taken across the lake, and then driven to the camps.<sup>42</sup> These supply trips were the only real contact POWs had with the outside world, so deliveries were highly anticipated. During the spring break-up and fall freeze-up periods, the camps were often completely cut off from outside contact as the ice was too thick for boats and too thin for trucks or sleighs. Ensuring camps were well-stocked in this period was essential.

Once delivered to camp, food was prepared by a civilian cook and his POW helpers.<sup>43</sup> Feeding the POWs, guards, and civilian employees was no mean task. A study

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<sup>39</sup> J.C. Kaufmann to Spokesman, Work Camp, August 31, 1945, HQS 7236-83-7-14 - T.E.A. W. Matters - International Red Cross - At Work Projects, C-5402, RG24, LAC.

<sup>40</sup> "O-M Looks to Long Time Pulpwood Cutting Program, Company Will Base Logging Operations on Survey Results," *Fort Frances Times*, December 21, 1944.

<sup>41</sup> Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 196.

<sup>42</sup> "O-M Looks to Long Time Pulpwood Cutting Program, Company Will Base Logging Operations on Survey Results," *Fort Frances Times*, December 21, 1944.

<sup>43</sup> Historian Joseph Conlin argues the cook was among the most important men in logging camps, second only to the foreman. Joseph R. Conlin, "Old Boy, Did You Get Enough of Pie? A Social History of Food in Logging Camps," *Journal of Forest History* 23, no. 4 (October 1979): 175–76.

of bushworkers in Eastern Canada in 1931 found the average worker consumed 7,250 calories every day, but fortunately food in Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper camps was available in generous quantities.<sup>44</sup> However, the Swiss Consul did report a lack of fruits and vegetables, and of variety generally. Prisoners employed as assistant cooks helped prepare food, washed dishes, waited on tables, and cleaned up after meals three times a day. Breakfast and supper were served in camp and lunches were either taken with the POWs or delivered to the worksites. On his first day in camp, Johannes Lieberwirth recalled his amazement at the food that awaited them: sausages, corned beef, porridge, scrambled eggs, bacon, bread, cheese, pies, coffee, and tea.<sup>45</sup> The average breakfast at Camp 61 consisted of pancakes, bread, marmalade, butter, and cakes while POWs carried sandwiches to the worksites to be eaten for lunch. Suppers often consisted of potatoes, meat, vegetables, bread, butter, cakes, and pudding. Butter and sugar were the only items rationed, but the Swiss Consul reported the supply of even these items was quite liberal and POWs rarely lost weight. Eating, according to the Swiss Consul, was the POWs' principal occupation during evenings and weekends.<sup>46</sup> Providing prisoners with sufficient food in terms of both quantity and quality was important. Employers knew that when it came to civilian labour, good meals would attract and keep workers.<sup>47</sup> While the company did not have to attract POWs, it did have to keep them well fed and content to ensure they did not refuse to work.

One concern amongst POWs was the supply of alcohol. Prisoners in internment camps were authorized to purchase and consume beer but the provisions of the Liquor Control Act of Ontario ruled beer could only be consumed at either authorized premises or in a residence, and neither bush dormitories or bunkhouses qualified.<sup>48</sup> Military

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<sup>44</sup> Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 97.

<sup>45</sup> Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 189.

<sup>46</sup> A.F. Somm, "Report on visits to PW Labour Projects in Canadian Lumber Camps," Translation from German, 19 September 1944, POW Labour Projects - Reports, Notes, Corresp, Misc Papers, 1944-1945, Vol. 2, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM.

<sup>47</sup> Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 101.

<sup>48</sup> Comptroller to Col. H.N. Streight, December 24, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

authorities recognized this might dissuade POWs from volunteering for bushwork so Colonel Streight proposed amending regulations to authorize the sale of beer in bush camps. The Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) refused.<sup>49</sup> Officially, POWs were not to have access to alcohol but at least one camp boss apparently provided POWs with the occasional treat of homebrew. At most camps, POWs produced their own alcohol. At Camp 52, POWs used the skills they had honed building secret stills in internment camps and, with scrap material and camp workshops, assembled a rudimentary still. Hidden under the floorboards, the still was supplied with raisins, apples, plums, and potatoes by kitchen helpers. Lieberwirth recalled that guards either took no interest or, as they were also deprived of liquor, received a portion as a peace offering.<sup>50</sup>

Distilling illicit liquor was only one of many pastimes taken up by POWs. Once the workday was over, prisoners had their evenings free to themselves and many were inspired to take advantage of their surroundings. Swimming, bathing, and boating in the lakes became popular summer activities. Prisoners at Camp 52 erected a three-metre high diving tower equipped with a flexible cedar springboard.<sup>51</sup> Among the favourite activities was boating. At Camp 60, the company made small boats available to POWs but in most camps enterprising prisoners set themselves to carving their own dugout canoes.<sup>52</sup> At Camp 52, Lieberwirth and a comrade cut down a large tree for their vessel and, within two weeks, had carved the makings of a five-metre canoe. They quickly discovered the canoe was extremely prone to rolling over, a problem rectified by nailing a spruce keel to the underside. Fitting the canoe with seats and hand-carved paddles, the POWs christened their boat with a bottle of beer (obtained through illicit trade) and set forth on the lake.<sup>53</sup> Others followed their example, eventually building eight canoes in the bay; three POWs

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<sup>49</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Commandant, Monteith, December 21, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>50</sup> Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 196; MacDonald, "Prisoners on the Lake," 12.

<sup>51</sup> Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 196.

<sup>52</sup> Translation of letter from Otto Haertl to Hermann Schroth, June 5, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>53</sup> Sioux Narrows Historical Committee, *Beyond the Bridge: Sioux Narrows*, 239.



even ordered folding boats from the Eaton's and Sears catalogues.<sup>54</sup>

Some prisoners saw canoeing as not only good exercise, but as an archetypally Canadian experience, one associated with the indigenous populations they had read about as children in stories of the frontier. Canoeing also provided POWs with more freedom than they were used to – even in bush camps – as they were free from the supervision of the guards and there were no marked boundaries to limit their explorations. This taste of freedom, Lieberwirth recalled, only helped further their desires to explore their surroundings. Prisoners paddled to nearby bays and islands and POWs at Camp 52 came across American tourists as well as an elderly couple who threatened them with a shotgun. Boating also offered opportunities for fishing and POWs caught pike, perch, and



**Figure 21: “Segelboot” at Camp 52 by Johann Krakhofer. Robert Henderson Collection, Royal Alberta Museum.**

<sup>54</sup> Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 208–9.

walleye from their canoes to supplement their diets.<sup>55</sup> As Hans Kaiser later recalled, “There was always something to do, it was never boring.”<sup>56</sup>

However, inexperience and unstable craft took its toll. Shortly after his transfer from Riding Mountain in June 1944, Karl Karg was canoeing on the lake near Camp 62 when his boat overturned and he disappeared under the water. His comrades recovered his body the following week.<sup>57</sup> Karg was one of four POWs who died in drowning accidents between May and July 1944, accidents which prompted Military District 10 to prohibit POWs from swimming and ban the use of boats, canoes, and rafts. Military authorities later lifted the swimming ban to allow POWs to swim in groups under supervision.<sup>58</sup> The ban on boating posed a problem for Lt.-Col. Fordham, who believed the ban would likely result in “very undesirable effects” and possibly escalate to POWs refusing to work. He argued – rather callously – that “a single drowning is of small consequence, of course, compared to what the result would be if many of the camps were to have strikes and a cessation of work.”<sup>59</sup>

Fordham may have overestimated the prisoners’ response, but he was correct in assuming they would protest the order. As many POWs had spent the early summer months carving or building new boats, they were unsurprisingly frustrated with the ban. Camp 52 spokesman Erich Petereit argued that drownings were impossible there as they had taken adequate safety measures to ensure their well-being. Hoping the prohibition could be overturned, Petereit restricted the use of boats to good swimmers and had them sign a document acknowledging they were familiar with the boats and had agreed to his

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 208–10.

<sup>56</sup> Louie, “Remembering Camp 60,” 35.

<sup>57</sup> Barbier to Frau Karg, July 1, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-66 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Hudson, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC; Willi Barbier to Wilh. Wendt, July 7, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-66 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Hudson, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>58</sup> Maj.-Gen. H.F.G. Letson to DOC MD10, July 6, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>59</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Col. H.N. Streight, July 7, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

safety measures.<sup>60</sup> Fordham's request and the threat to production prompted military authorities to lift the ban on recreation boating so long as it was approved by the employing company and done under guard supervision. Companies were also instructed to keep boats in a central location, count them regularly, and not allow any more to be built.<sup>61</sup> Guards at Camp 52 thus restricted the use of the canoes within a one-mile radius of camp, but, Lieberwirth recalled, some POWs conveniently claimed they were unable to gauge how far out they were once on the water.<sup>62</sup>

Most camps also had a recreation hut where POWs could spend free time reading, writing, or playing games. Yet, compared to the wide range of recreational opportunities they left behind at the base camps, some POWs found little to do during their free time. For example, prisoners in internment camps regularly played football (soccer) but the dense forest and uneven terrain surrounding bush camps generally prevented POWs from doing so. The winter months added further problems as POWs were no longer able to go boating and deep snow limited opportunities for hiking. At Camp 106, the spokesman reported, "It is quite clear, that in a new camp there is scarcely any possibility of recreation,"<sup>63</sup> an attitude not unique to this camp. Explaining their situation to the YMCA, the Camp 104 spokesman likewise noted, "The large Canadian bush has taken in one hundred German prisoners of war for an uncertain time. Far off from all civilization we have to bear our hard fate. The time of rest and the holidays are not yet filled up, as here there are no books and musical instruments."

Providing POWs with recreational opportunities was in the interests of the Department of Labour and the employers. The Geneva Convention specified that detaining powers should encourage the "organization of intellectual and sporting

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<sup>60</sup> Translation of letter from Erich Petereit, July 8, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>61</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to All Employers of Prisoners of War, July 22, 1944, Circulars Re POW Employment, Vol. 966, RG27, LAC.

<sup>62</sup> Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 209.

<sup>63</sup> Heinz Kronen to Dr. Bechensteiner [sic], October 10, 1945, HQS 7236-83-6-14 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Welfare Matters - Y.M.C.A. - At Work Projects, C-5401, RG24, LAC.

pursuits,” but the Department of Labour’s interest in the matter went beyond simply meeting this requirement.<sup>64</sup> If POWs were unhappy, they were more likely to cease working and demand their return to the base camps, something all parties hoped to avoid. Relative freedom and pay were major factors inducing prisoners to leave the base camp for work, but the Department of Labour had to ensure bush camps had adequate living arrangements and opportunities for recreation in order to keep the POWs content in the rougher living conditions associated with bushwork.

Hoping to, as the Camp 104 spokesman put it, “make pleasant the long dark evenings of winter” and fill the monotony of bush life, the POWs turned to the War Prisoners’ Aid of the YMCA and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for help.<sup>65</sup> Prisoners requested a vast array of items, including entertainment and educational books, oil paints, paint brushes, drawing paper, trombones, saxophones, drum sets, accordions, guitars, violins, mouth organs, music, gramophones, records, Christmas decorations, footballs, handballs, table tennis sets, boxing gloves, skates, hockey equipment, typewriters, games, and theatrical supplies. Although not always able to provide every item, the organizations did their best to improve the lives of POWs. Whatever they could send was, as one spokesman described, “gratefully and joyously received.”<sup>66</sup> With the help of the War Prisoners’ Aid, the POWs at Camp 52 had a recreation hut with a fireplace, rug, hanging lamp, and hand-made ornaments, prompting spokesman Erick Meisterzock to report they no longer feared the long winter evenings.<sup>67</sup> Table tennis became an exceptionally popular sport in bush camps, especially in the cold winter months when outdoor activities remained limited, and table tennis balls were in

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<sup>64</sup> Article 17 in International Committee of the Red Cross, “Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War.”

<sup>65</sup> Rudi Schuergers to International YMCA, November 24, 1944, HQS 7236-83-6-14 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Welfare Matters - Y.M.C.A. - At Work Projects, C-5401, RG24, LAC.

<sup>66</sup> Georg Rau to H. Boeschenstein, October 24, 1944, HQS 7236-83-6-14 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Welfare Matters - Y.M.C.A. - At Work Projects, C-5401, RG24, LAC.

<sup>67</sup> Translation of letter from Erich Meisterzock to Camp 133 Spokesman, October 15, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

constant demand.<sup>68</sup> When the weather allowed, the prisoners also made good use of the frozen lakes and rivers to play hockey, described by one spokesman as a “real good winter sport.”<sup>69</sup>

Many POWs also turned to handicrafts to pass the time, using materials purchased from canteens, sent by aid organizations, or scavenged from scrap. Some built model ships and ships in bottles which they illicitly sold or traded to guards, camp staff, and tourists.<sup>70</sup> Taking advantage of a large tourist population in the area and local interest in the presence of enemy soldiers, at least one POW melted fishing sinkers and recast them as Iron Crosses. The famed German military decoration and symbol were highly sought souvenirs on the battlefields of both the First and Second World War and although trade between civilians and POWs was prohibited, some trade of handicraft and souvenirs existed. The fake medals here were apparently passed on to the guards who then sold them to tourists and locals when they visited local communities on work duties or while on leave.<sup>71</sup>

Knitting and sewing also became popular activities and although they were identified as “women’s work,” Lieberwirth noted that POWs enjoyed such activities. Knitting and sewing required both skill and patience and POWs produced various articles of clothing including scarves, sweaters, and hats. These proved quite popular, Lieberwirth recalled, because they were civilian in appearance and not “disfigured” by the red markings identifying the men as POWs.<sup>72</sup> Normally, prisoners wore government-issued shirts and jackets marked with a large red circles on the reverse and trousers with a red stripe down the left leg. (On special occasions, they wore their military uniforms.)

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<sup>68</sup> R. Kolhoff to Prof. Dr. H. Boeschenstein, March 23, 1945, HQS 7236-83-6-14 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Welfare Matters - Y.M.C.A. - At Work Projects, C-5401, RG24, LAC.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Usadel to Dr. H. Boeschenstein, November 14, 1944, HQS 7236-83-6-14 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Welfare Matters - Y.M.C.A. - At Work Projects, C-5401, RG24, LAC.

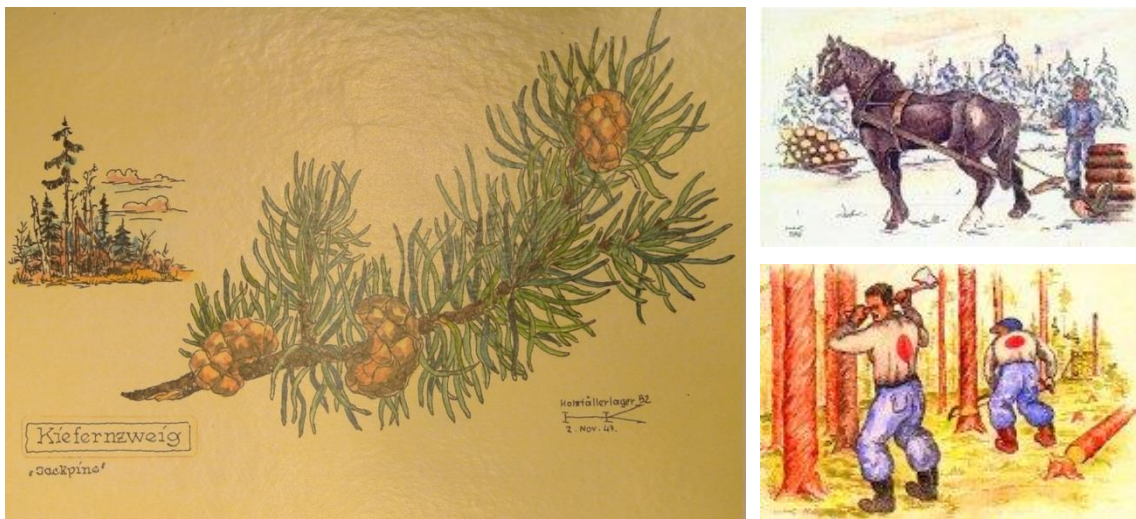
<sup>70</sup> Interview with Johannes (Hans) Lieberwirth by Lori Nelson, June 14, 1990, Lake of the Woods Museum.

<sup>71</sup> MacDonald, “Prisoners on the Lake,” 12.

<sup>72</sup> Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 176.

Civilian clothing was normally prohibited to prevent escape attempts, but homemade clothing allowed POWs a sense of normalcy, a temporary escape from being prisoners.

A few POWs turned to art. Austrian-born Hans Krakhofer had been a crewman aboard the *Pinguin*, a German auxiliary cruiser sunk by the British in the Indian Ocean in May 1941. A gifted artist, Krakhofer had documented his wartime career through art, but lost all of his paintings with the *Pinguin's* sinking. He was eventually transferred to Canada and interned in Camp 23 (Monteith) where he produced numerous portraits of his comrades and depictions of everyday life in camp. He continued painting when he was transferred to Camp 52 in October 1943, his works showing POWs engaged in woodcutting and hauling and general views of the camp. He looked to his surroundings for inspiration, and his detailed studies of individual tree species suggest a keen interest in the Canadian environment. Krakhofer suffered a setback, however, when someone stole hundreds of drawings from his suitcase, but he returned to the hobby and continued to document bush life at Camp 52.<sup>73</sup>



**Figure 22: Examples of Krakhofer's paintings from his time in the bush. These images show detail of jack pine branch and POWs engaged in hauling and woodcutting. Royal Alberta Museum and Thunder Bay Museum.**

<sup>73</sup> "War Survivor Became Gifted Artist," *Great Lakes Paper* Dec 1984 (December 1984).



Pets were also an important part of bush life. Pet dogs were not uncommon in internment camps, and some prisoners brought them with them to bush camps. Others acquired dogs from civilian employees or, in camps close to towns, found them in the bush. As Lieberwirth recalled, this occasionally led to surprises: one POW in Camp 52 found what he assumed to be a puppy in the bush and raised it only to later discover it was not a dog but a wolf.<sup>74</sup> Whether in the base camp or bush camp, dogs quickly became cherished companions and helped POWs cope with their internment. When the Camp 61 spokesman's dog, brought from Medicine Hat, died, the Camp 132 spokesman gave his deepest sympathy and wrote, "It is a comfort... to know that he left heirs and everybody will hope his noble behaviour and other qualities will live forever in his pups."<sup>75</sup> Dogs also proved valuable additions to bushwork. Lieberwirth recalled that near the end of one workday, his axe slipped and struck him in the knee. Bleeding and unable to move, he tried calling for help, but only one of the camp dogs appeared. The dog soon ran off and, as Lieberwirth tried making his way out of the bush on improvised crutches, returned with two POWs who helped him back to camp.<sup>76</sup>

The prisoners were in contact with other animals besides dogs. Bears, deer, moose, beaver, wolves, and coyotes were among the many species POWs interacted with in the bush and, although initially unaware of how to deal with them, the prisoners quickly learned which ones to avoid. It was not the larger animals that proved the most problematic for the POWs at Camp 52, but the skunk. After a day's work, Lieberwirth and his comrades returned to their hut only to be overwhelmed by a prisoner with a rather pungent smell. The POW in question had found a skunk under the hut but when he caught it with a boathook, he promptly received a spraying. The man was ordered to bury the skunk and bathe in the lake fully clothed. Although the rest of the men tried burning spruce to remove the smell, it lingered for several days.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Johannes (Hans) Lieberwirth by Lori Nelson.

<sup>75</sup> Translation of letter from Wilhelm Wendt to Emil Jung, July 28, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-50 - Dept. of Labour - Ont. Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Vermilion Bay, Ont, C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>76</sup> Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 203.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 193-94.

POWs were interested in all forms of wildlife, but there was a notable fascination with bears. Germany's last reported bear had been shot in Bavaria in 1835 so nearly all prisoners were coming from regions where their only chance to see a bear was in a zoo.<sup>78</sup> Canada had been marketed in Europe as a place of "untapped natural wealth" throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, something authors like Karl May had built on in his best-selling adventure stories set in the North American frontier.<sup>79</sup> Prisoners thus came to Canada with heavily romanticized conceptions of life and wildlife in North America, envisioning uncharted wilderness and an abundance of bears, wolves, and moose. In the bush, prisoners were now unexpectedly living and working in places where contact with bears was not uncommon; as Camp 44B prisoner Hans Seefeld noted in his diary, "I never dared to expect that my childhood dreams would become reality... to observe Indians and grizzly bears in unspoiled nature."<sup>80</sup>

Bear encounters were new and exciting experiences. Initially terrified of these animals, prisoners soon discovered the bears were more interested in the contents of their lunch boxes than the POWs themselves. For example, prisoners at Camp 52 brought their lunches to the cutting areas in wooden lunch boxes and they often placed these with their coffee cups on nearby tree stumps or wood piles before beginning work. The bears took advantage of this oversight and made quick work of the lunches, leaving only a mess of empty boxes and broken cups behind. Some POWs, unaware of the strength or speed of these bears, tried chasing them away. Soon, POWs hung their supplies from smaller trees unable to support the bears' weight.<sup>81</sup> At Flanders Camp 103, a POW wrote, "The bears of course have a very bad habit, they steal the food from the supply cases. But otherwise

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<sup>78</sup> Deutsche Welle, "Brown Bears Expected to Return to Germany," DW.COM, accessed November 25, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/brown-bears-expected-to-return-to-germany/a-44050570>.

<sup>79</sup> George Colpitts, *Game in the Garden: A Human History of Wildlife in Western Canada to 1940* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2008), 107–8.

<sup>80</sup> MacDonald, "Prisoners on the Lake," 11.

<sup>81</sup> Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 191–92.



they are not so dangerous. They practically eat out of one's hand. You will think I am joking but it is a fact."<sup>82</sup> However, as one POW noted in a letter to his girlfriend in June 1945, he did not recommend "caressing" them.<sup>83</sup>

As at Riding Mountain, prisoners at Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper camps "adopted" bear cubs. Prisoners at Flanders Camp 104 obtained one and raised it as a pet. However, whereas cubs were small and suitable for adoption, adult bears proved very different. Drawn in by smells of food and garbage, bears became regular visitors in some bush camps. Canadian bushworkers generally treated these bears as either nuisances or threats to one's security. The Ontario government adopted a bounty system for black bears in 1942, thereby encouraging the eradication of these animals.<sup>84</sup> At Camp 52, increasingly brazen bears succeeded in breaking into the storehouse, an act that prompted



**Figure 23: Pet bear cub and two POWs at Camp 104. This demonstrates the stark difference in attitude towards juvenile and adult bears. The cub (seen here on a leash with two POWs) has been adopted while an adult bear, deemed a nuisance or threat, has been killed and its hide taken as a souvenir. Atikokan Museum.**

<sup>82</sup> Translation of letter from Karl-Heinz Oertel to Emma Oertel, June 18, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>83</sup> "Excerpts from German Army Personnel Mail, 1945, HQS 9139-4-133 - P/W - Classification - Camp Intelligence - Lethbridge, RG24, C-5365, LAC.

<sup>84</sup> Mike Commito, "'Our Society Lacks Consistently Defined Attitudes Towards the Black Bear': The History of Black Bear Hunting and Management in Ontario, 1912-1987" (Doctoral Thesis, McMaster University, 2015), 29.

company employees to ask the guards to shoot the offenders. The guards then enlisted the help of the POWs, who chased the bears to the end of the peninsula on which the camp was located and up into a large poplar tree. The bears made for easy targets for the guards. The claws and teeth were taken by POWs as souvenirs.<sup>85</sup>

Cooperating to chase nuisance bears was not the only example of POWs working with their guards. At some camps, guards and prisoners developed good working relationships and, after spending months in the bush together, some developed a sort of mutual trust. At Camp 52, for example, the relationship between the two parties became more relaxed and, after a few months of roll call, the NCO in charge of the guard simply deferred to asking the interpreter if all the men were in rather than taking the full count.<sup>86</sup> At Camp 61, Hans Lügen recalled that guards took some POWs hunting, whereas at Camp 44B, POWs even borrowed rifles from guards or camp staff to hunt the occasional duck or deer.<sup>87</sup>

Despite the freedom and privileges of bushwork, many prisoners missed elements of life in base camps not found in the bush, such as sports, educational courses, theatre, live music, and beer. During visits to lumber camps in 1944, Somm of the Swiss Consul reported,

With the exception of rare occurrences, such as encountering bears and other game, as well as more freedom, the lumber camp offers comparatively little variety and becomes in the long run very monotonous. On the other hand, the PW is protected from the curiosity of the civilian population. Most of all he is away from the harmful influence of a crowded camp behind barbed wire.<sup>88</sup>

As Somm suggests, the comparative merit of working in the bush or remaining in an internment camp were not always clear. Most POWs greatly enjoyed the freedom of

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<sup>85</sup> Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 188–89.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>87</sup> Nelson, “Temporary Enemies, Permanent Friends,” 27; MacDonald, “Prisoners on the Lake,” 12–13.

<sup>88</sup> A.F. Somm, “Report on visits to PW Labour Projects in Canadian Lumber Camps,” Translation from German, 19 September 1944, POW Labour Projects - Reports, Notes, Corresp, Misc Papers, 1944-1945, Vol. 2, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM.

bushwork and were relieved to leave the enclosures of the base camps behind. The question of whether this freedom was worth leaving behind the benefits that internment camps offered was ultimately up to each POW.

Although there were hundreds of POWs who wanted to be working and outside barbed wire, there were those who were less than enthusiastic about bushwork, especially after having worked at it for an extended period. In mid-1945, forty-three men from Camp 63 and seven from Camp 104 asked to work on a farm during the summer months. The Camp 104 spokesman explained that they had volunteered for bushwork as a relief from depression in Camp 132 and had worked satisfactorily for the last year. But nearing the end of their third year as a POW, the monotony and solitude of bushwork was weighing upon them.<sup>89</sup> Likewise, Camp 56 spokesman Georg Rau inquired as to whether there was a regulation specifying the amount of time they were required to perform bushwork. After living with the difficulties of the work – namely the heat, mosquitoes, flies, “temporary spoiled meat and so on” – some of his men hoped for other duties.<sup>90</sup> The Directorate for Military Intelligence (DMI) recommended Rau’s request be granted, stating they considered six months of bushwork the maximum for health and human reasons. As these men had spent over twice this time in the bush, DMI recommended considering them for other work.<sup>91</sup> Most would remain in the bush for the next year.

Others protested work before they even began. When the Department of Labour issued a request for 100 POWs for Camp 103 near Flanders, trouble erupted before the POWs left the base camp. The Camp 133 spokesman refused to provide the required men on the grounds that POW labour aided the allied war effort and demanded confirmation from the highest-ranking POW in Canada to ensure the German High Command

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<sup>89</sup> G. Grunwald to Director Prisoners of War, May 25, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-66 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Hudson, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC; Eduard Caesar to Director of Prisoners of War, August 16, 1945, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>90</sup> Georg Rau to Department of Labour, March 6, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>91</sup> DMI to DPW, May 11, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

approved their labour.<sup>92</sup> Refusing to bend to the will of the spokesman, military authorities issued an order for compulsory work, an act authorized by the Geneva Convention, and the POWs left for Flanders under “enforced compliance.”<sup>93</sup>

Arriving at Camp 103 in June, the new spokesman at Flanders, Robert Schiffbauer, complained their employment contradicted the Geneva Convention in that wood cut by POWs enabled the manufacture of munitions and was thereby detrimental to Germany. Demanding that he and his men be returned to Lethbridge, Schiffbauer complained that Camp 103 was infested by gnats and black flies, lacked sufficient medical care, and was generally unbearable. After reportedly discovering dirty and stained mattresses, missing pillows, torn and stained blankets, mirrors missing from the washroom, insufficient tables and benches in the recreation room, toilets that did not flush, insufficient food, and the absence of beer, Schiffbauer forbade his men to work.<sup>94</sup>

Colonel Streight dismissed Schiffbauer’s complaints and assured the Department of External Affairs the camp and work were in accordance with the Geneva Convention.<sup>95</sup> As Schiffbauer appeared to have no intention of encouraging his men to work, the Department of Labour requested his transfer. Schiffbauer was promptly sent back to Camp 133 but, rather than begin work, the ninety-seven POWs at Camp 103 went on strike in protest.<sup>96</sup> The new spokesman, Friedrich Seib, declared the strike would

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<sup>92</sup> MD13 to Col. Streight, June 4, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>93</sup> Adjutant General to DOC MD13, June 5, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC; Commanding Thirteen to Secretary, Department of National Defence, June 6, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>94</sup> Translation of letter from Obfw. Schiffbauer to Consul General of Switzerland, June 13, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>95</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Department of External Affairs, August 17, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>96</sup> Lt.-Col. W.J.H. Ellwood to Internment Staff Officer, June 21, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC; A. Robertson, “Transfer of Prisoners of War from Internment Camps to Labour Project, Flanders, Ontario (Turtle Lake Camp),” June 19, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

continue unless an explanation for Schiffbauer's removal was provided and his complaints resolved. Adding to this, Seib complained of "growing difficulties" between the POWs and some of the camp's civilian staff. The civilian cook in particular had apparently insulted the POWs working in the kitchen repeatedly and Seib responded by forbidding the POWs to work there. Claiming his men were being "seized" by "increasing excitement," Seib warned he would likely lose control if the problems were not addressed or if they were not all returned to Camp 133.<sup>97</sup>

Department of Labour Inspector Major Forbes proceeded to Camp 103 in an attempt to quell the growing trouble. Observing all buildings were clean and in "splendid repair," he reported the POWs failed to produce evidence of their complaints and concluded Seib was "obviously imbued" with sabotaging the camp. He therefore recommended the transfer of Seib and twenty-six troublemakers.<sup>98</sup> But on July 3, before they could be transferred, two of the twenty-six escaped. Attempts to identify the missing men were hampered by Seib, who repeatedly falsified the roll call and interfered with the count. Eventually, guards identified the missing men as Tout Wallnor, a close friend of Seib's, and Alexander Treu. Their escape was of particular concern as Treu spoke English fluently and had lived in Winnipeg for two years.<sup>99</sup> As guards launched a search for the missing men, Seib was transferred back to Camp 133.<sup>100</sup>

Tout Wallnor and Alexander Treu were apprehended in Fort Frances the following week, at which time the problems at Camp 103 were slowly diminishing.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Translation of letter from Acting Group Leader Fw. Seib to Sgt. Of the Guard, June 16, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC; Translation of letter from Sgt. Seib to Col. Streight, June 19, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>98</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Col. H.N. Streight, September 8, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>99</sup> NCO i/c Guard Detail, Camp 103 to Director POW, July 4, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>100</sup> Translation of letter from Wilhelm Müller to H. Schroth, July 13, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>101</sup> Commanding Ten to Secty, DND, July 10, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC; Brig. R.A. Macfarlane to Secretary, DND, July 17, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp

Although Schiffbauer had been transferred back to Camp 133 and prevented from further employment opportunities, he continued his tirade against POW labour.<sup>102</sup> Disappointed with the Consul General's lack of action, Schiffbauer informed him that, as German soldiers, they could not carry out work contrary to the interests of their country.<sup>103</sup> He also accused Seib's replacement, Wilhelm Müller, of betraying his country and deeming the men at Camp 103 traitors bereft of honour.<sup>104</sup>

Whereas most of the problems at Camp 103 were solved by transferring troublemakers, issues in other camps proved more trying. By mid-June 1944, thirty-six POWs from Camp 44B requested transfer back to the base camp, complaining of injuries, difficult work, excessive heat, plagues of insects, or disagreeable foremen. With most of his men refusing to work, Camp 44B spokesman Bruno Rehbein declared the camp on strike. When Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) Constable Eady visited on June 21, 1944, he found ten men refusing to work, instead spending their time fishing and swimming. Both the logging superintendent and foreman described the camp as a "tourist center" for POWs rather than a work camp. Although Rehbein expressed little interest in forcing his men to work, some continued to do so, even when he cancelled work on the pretext it was raining.<sup>105</sup>

The Department of Labour agreed to remove the thirty-six striking POWs in the hopes the remaining ones would resume production, but this ultimately proved futile. The company quickly requested the removal of an additional twenty-two men but, within two weeks, the remaining forty POWs all refused to work. As the POWs continued to

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& Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>102</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Department of External Affairs, August 17, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>103</sup> Translation of letter from Obfw. Schiffbauer to Consul General of Switzerland, August 8, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>104</sup> Translation of letter from O.Gefr. Mueller to Hfw. Schroth, September 14, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>105</sup> Const. A. Eady, "Prisoner of War Camp, Quibell, Ontario, June 22, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-50 - Dept. of Labour - Ont. Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Vermilion Bay, Ont, C-5385, RG24, LAC.

challenge authority, the company requested all the POWs at Camp 44B be removed and replaced with a new group as soon as possible.<sup>106</sup> The Department of Labour had tried avoiding transferring entire camps lest it encourage POWs at other camps to attempt similar measures to return to base camps. Camp 44B was different than most camps as it was composed entirely of senior NCOs. Many senior NCOs interned in Canada were career soldiers who had risen through the ranks at the height of Nazi power and were therefore less inclined to bend to the enemy's will or engage in any work they deemed beneficial to an enemy state. There were no clear ringleaders at Camp 44B instigating the trouble so, with the camp only at half its capacity, the Department of Labour elected to transfer all the POWs back to the base camp and replace them with an entirely new contingent.<sup>107</sup> This was one of the only instances in which an entire camp was replaced by new POWs.

The experiences at Flanders and Vermilion Bay ushered in changes to Department of Labour policy. As all the POWs at Camp 44B and many of the troublemakers at Camp 103 were senior NCOs, the Department of Labour requested that no further senior NCOs be sent to labour projects as they caused too much trouble and routinely hampered work. Military authorities also agreed to abandon the practice of designating a senior NCO as labour camp spokesman in favour of having the POWs select their own spokesman from the ranks of junior NCOs, as this had been demonstrated to reduce friction and improve production in other camps.<sup>108</sup> The need for improved disciplinary measures also brought the introduction of Order in Council P.C. 6495 on August 18, 1944. The new order authorized the employment of combatant POWs in mandatory work in an attempt to reduce the number of transfers and provide military authorities with new measures to

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<sup>106</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Col. H.N. Streight, August 17, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-50 - Dept. of Labour - Ont. Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Vermilion Bay, Ont, C-5385, RG24, LAC; Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Col. H.N. Streight, August 30, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-50 - Dept. of Labour - Ont. Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Vermilion Bay, Ont, C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>107</sup> Maj. L.M. Doering to Director, Prisoners of War, September 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-50 - Dept. of Labour - Ont. Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Vermilion Bay, Ont, C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>108</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Commandant, Lethbridge, July 17, 1944, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

enforce discipline. Prisoners were no longer able to request a transfer to the base camp and their time in the bush was now at the discretion of the Department of Labour and the employer. Unless they were physically unsuited for the work or repeatedly instigated trouble, they would remain in the bush as needed.

The new Order in Council was quickly put to use. On August 10, 1944, ninety-three POWs at Camp 61 ceased working, protesting the Department of Labour's recent removal of their spokesman. The replacement spokesman, Walter Miesler, declined to order his men to work, despite the Swiss Consul's recommendation to do so, and requested they all be returned to the base camp.<sup>109</sup> Major Barton of the Directorate of POW arrived at Camp 61 on August 30 and, under the authorization of P.C. 6495, ordered Miesler and his men back to work. The POWs complied – apparently without significant complaint – and Miesler, in a letter to the Camp 132 spokesman, stated that had he received the order earlier, most of the trouble could have been avoided.<sup>110</sup> While orders to return to work were not always successful as they were at Camp 61, the threat of a disciplinary sentence was sufficient to deter some POWs from causing trouble.

Over the next few months, the Department of Labour continued to use the new disciplinary powers to force the POWs back to work. In December, prisoners at Camp 60 gradually slowed production, with work falling well below quota. As many as thirty-six men claimed to be sick on a single day, but the company doctor found only three or four of them were sick enough to deserve being laid off – even the spokesman admitted the complaints were trivial. The doctor called for a sick parade but every man in camp paraded sick. Reviewing several POWs, the doctor discovered they were all in good health and refused to see the rest. As the POWs were deliberating impeding work, the Department of Labour took disciplinary action. Rather than send the POWs to Port

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<sup>109</sup> Translation of letter from W. Miesler to Consul General, August 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>110</sup> Translation of letter from W. Miesler to Camp 132 Spokesman, September 3, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.



Arthur for punishment, the Department declared the entire camp a detention camp for fourteen days, an act authorized under P.C. 6495.

The primary goal of temporarily classifying a camp as a detention camp was to get the POWs to resume work. Additional guards were dispatched to prevent trouble and the POWs lost all privileges. This meant they were confined to their quarters during their free time and prevented from having tobacco, books, magazines, or any games. The guards then ordered the prisoners to resume their work. If the POWs refused, the guards could then place them on a reduced punishment diet until they agreed to work. Trouble in bush camps was often the result of a small number of POWs and Camp 60 was no different. Concluding that the spokesman and two others were responsible for the trouble, authorities transferred them to Port Arthur for a disciplinary sentence and then to the high-security Camp 100 (Neys).<sup>111</sup> Once the three men were gone, the rest of the POWs agreed to resume their work.

Military authorities never uncovered why the prisoners at Camp 60 reduced their work but reasons for deliberate slowdowns varied from orders to disrupt work that were received through hidden messages sent by pro-Nazis in the base camps to mistreatment – real or perceived – by the employer. At Camp 52, for example, POWs initiated a deliberate slowdown over unfulfilled promises of a hot lunch. Prior to Christmas, the camp foreman promised spokesman Erick Meisterzock that hot lunches would be delivered to working parties in the bush, but the foreman failed to follow up on his promise several times. When the foreman finally sent a lunch sled, there was only enough hot food for one of the two working groups; the other group's lunch was frozen. Despite their orders to remain at the worksite, the second group elected to return to camp. The company then observed a definite slowdown over the next few days, with POWs

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<sup>111</sup> Brig. R.O.G. Morton to Secretary, Department of National Defence, March 31, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC; Commanding MD10 to Secretary, Department of National Defence, January 25, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC; Commanding MD10 to Secretary, Department of National Defence, January 27, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

performing only a half-day's work.<sup>112</sup> As the company believed Meisterzock responsible, military authorities transferred him and eight others to join the POWs at Camp 60 for fourteen days' detention. Meisterzock later complained to the Swiss Consul, arguing, "I must assume that in Canada the Geneva Convention is put in a second place. The interests of civil-persons (Company we work for) are put in first place."<sup>113</sup> The consul sided with the military authorities and explained the detention was appropriate punishment.<sup>114</sup>

Other problems arose from concerns regarding medical care. Unlike the Riding Mountain camp, Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper camps had no hospital or dedicated medical facilities. Instead, they relied on limited medical treatment administered by their comrades while more serious cases were transferred to the hospitals at Kenora, Sioux Lookout, and Fort Frances. Isolation and the limited means of transportation meant injured POWs had to wait hours before receiving medical care and therefore one of the principal grievances of spokesmen was the lack of quick and adequate medical treatment. As most POWs working for the company had no experience in bushwork, injuries were not uncommon. In February 1945, for example, fifty-two POWs received work-related injuries requiring them to miss at least one day of work. These included being struck by falling trees or pieces of pulpwood, being stepped on or kicked by a horse, getting their hands or feet cut, sustaining back or knee injuries, falling over stumps, and accidentally cutting off a toe. Injuries were not solely confined to the bush either; in the same month, two prisoners working in the Camp 62 kitchens were badly burned while another at Camp 104 seriously cut his hand with a knife.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Brig. R.O.G. Morton to Secretary, Department of National Defence, March 31, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>113</sup> Erick Meisterzock to Consul General of Switzerland, January 28, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>114</sup> Consul General of Switzerland to Erich Meisterzock, March 6, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>115</sup> See Compensation Lists, February 1945, 16. Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co. Compensation for POWs, Vol. 953, RG27, LAC.

Some camps threatened to cease work until the company and Department of Labour agreed to provide better access to medical care in the case of serious injury. At Camp 61, for example, Johan Lührssen cut his foot badly while felling a tree. The camp's horses were already employed in hauling, forcing Lührssen and his escort to make the six-hour journey to Kenora on foot, with Lührssen in a sled. As the POWs recognized a serious incident would be met with the same result, they refused to work unless the situation was rectified. The company promised a fast horse at the spokesman's disposal to transport injured men to hospital.<sup>116</sup>

The nature of bushwork meant injury or even death was always a risk for POW and civilian cutters alike. In 1944, for example, there were 132 recorded fatal incidents in the logging industry, 11.34% of the total fatal industrial accidents in Canada. The primary causes of death in logging were falling objects (47%) and vehicle-related accidents (20%).<sup>117</sup> Fifty-two of the 150 POWs who died in Canada during the war were employed in a labour project. Twenty-nine of these deaths were accidental, with fifteen POWs listed as having drowned and fourteen in work-related incidents. Sixteen died of medical issues or ailments, five by suicide, and two succumbing to the elements. Six POWs died while in the employ of Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper, but only one man, Wilhelm Gregorious, died of work-related injuries. In May 1946, the twenty-four-year-old was struck by a falling tree while working from Camp 60.<sup>118</sup> Prior to that, Erwin Stöckl and Wolfgang Bergter had succumbed to the elements, Karl Karg had drowned when his canoe overturned, and Karl Zarnitz had died of tuberculosis. Johann Wagus was found unconscious in the Camp 105 stable in the morning of April 14, 1945, and attempts to revive him proved unsuccessful; the official cause of death was deemed coronary

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<sup>116</sup> Summary of letter from Stabs/Ob/Masch. Jung to Stabs/Ob/Masch. Biewer, February 14, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>117</sup> Department of Labour, Canada, *The Labour Gazette: January to June 1945*, vol. XLV (I) (Ottawa, ON: Edmond Cloutier, 1946), 430.

<sup>118</sup> Major E.H.J. Barber, "Prisoners of War Who Died While Under Canadian Control," n.d., 382.013 (D1) Internment Ops - Cda - Memoir on Internment OPS in Cda during Second World War by Major EHJ Barber, DHH.

thrombosis.<sup>119</sup> Stöckl and Bergter were buried in Kenora, Karg in Sioux Lookout, and Gregorious, Zarnitz, and Wagus in Thunder Bay.<sup>120</sup>

Because POWs needing professional medical attention required a military escort, some guards began taking advantage of the trip into town. Suspicions were raised at Camp 52 when three guards escorted a single POW with a leg injury in November 1943 and the Department of Labour concluded the guards saw the trip as an opportunity to spend a Saturday evening in town.<sup>121</sup> In another case, two guards accompanied two POWs to Kenora for dental care but, after ordering the POWs to go to the dentist on their own, proceeded to the local hotel for a drink. By the time the POWs returned from their appointment, both guards were so inebriated that the POWs had to carry them and their rifles back to the boat. Johannes Lieberwirth recalled that both parties agreed not to mention the incident so long as the guards provided the POWs with some beer.<sup>122</sup>

Despite the freedoms prisoners enjoyed in the bush, few attempted escape. The isolated nature of bushwork discouraged escape attempts, a factor later emphasized by Lieberwirth: “There was no reason for it. We had nowhere to go.”<sup>123</sup> All of the company’s camps were well-isolated from urban centres. The camps near Hudson, the closest ones to a town or city, were still over twenty kilometres away from Sioux Lookout but this was no easy journey. Only the Vermilion Bay camps were accessible by road, with some of the others being accessible by a combination of road and boat or only by boat. For POWs contemplating an escape, they had to traverse through kilometres of dense bush and through myriad lakes, rivers, and streams. The winter allowed POWs to more easily traverse the frozen lakes and rivers, but they now had to deal with deep snow

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<sup>119</sup> “Prisoner-of-War Dies,” *Fort Frances Times*, April 19, 1943.

<sup>120</sup> As part of an effort to centralize POW graves, their remains were exhumed in the 1970s and reinterred in the Woodland Cemetery in Kitchener, Ontario.

<sup>121</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Col. H.N. Streight, November 17, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>122</sup> Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 200.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Johannes (Hans) Lieberwirth by Lori Nelson.

and the bitter cold. Most decided they were better off in camp than wandering aimlessly through the bush.

Some ambitious POWs did attempt to escape. At Camp 52, for example, prisoners made a break for freedom in early 1944. After witnessing a civilian employee leave his supply truck unattended in camp, a handful of POWs succeeded in hotwiring the vehicle. Sixteen POWs jumped aboard but their bid for freedom was short-lived: unfamiliar with the truck, they flooded the engine and were quickly stopped by guards. The sixteen prisoners were promptly transferred back to Medicine Hat.<sup>124</sup> Later that summer, Joseph Pätzelt made a break from Camp 61 but he too was unsuccessful. Taking one of the camp canoes, he began paddling his way towards the U.S. border with the goal of reaching Minnesota.<sup>125</sup> Navigating with a lake chart, Pätzelt was believed to have stayed briefly in an abandoned freezer plant and have stolen civilian clothing from an unattended clothesline. He stopped at Haas Island and asked locals for food before moving on. He remained on the run for six days before finally being captured by the crew of a fishing boat near Warroad, Minnesota.<sup>126</sup> Pätzelt explained that he had known he was likely to be captured, but was so tired of working in the bush he had been willing to risk twenty-eight days' detention.<sup>127</sup>

The most "successful" attempt from an Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper camp came in early 1945. On February 21, twenty-four-year-old Franz Beck and twenty-four-year-old Xaver Oswald walked away from Camp 44B. The two men succeeded in evading capture for the next two weeks until Robert Brown of the Bay City Hotel in Vermilion Bay, thirty kilometres from the camp, informed police he had seen a man

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<sup>124</sup> Author unknown, "German Prisoners of War - Kenora Ontario - Attempted Escape - From Camp 52, Yellowgirl, Ont.," February 25, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>125</sup> Sgt Scott to Director, Prisoners of War, August 22, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>126</sup> Nelson, "Temporary Enemies, Permanent Friends: Prisoners of War on Lake of the Woods," 27-28.; "Escaped German Prisoner Captured," *Baudette Region*, 1 September 1944.

<sup>127</sup> "Escaped German Prisoner Captured," *Baudette Region*, 1 September 1944.

sneaking behind cottages near the hotel. Thinking they were children skipping school, Brown gave the matter little thought until learning of the two missing POWs and he then promptly informed the police.

Local police officers followed up on the tip and, in the early morning of March 8, found Beck and Oswald near the Vermilion Bay CPR station. The POWs told police they had walked through the bush and had lived off porcupines but, as both men were well-groomed and clean shaven, the police suspected otherwise. A search of local cottages revealed a food container and coffee grounds on the floor of a cottage, suggesting they had spent at least one night there. Police were unable to determine where they spent the rest of their time but believed they had received help from a civilian.<sup>128</sup>

Escape attempts like those at Camp 52 and Camp 44B remained rare, but prisoners repeatedly tested the limits of camp bounds. In the winter of 1943-1944, police and company officials received complaints from local fishermen of POWs visiting their camps. One fisherman discovered someone had attempted to hotwire a car that he had left outside his camp and suspected POWs were responsible.<sup>129</sup> These visits were especially concerning as fishermen often left their shacks unattended and the police believed POWs could easily steal any clothing and equipment left behind for use in a future escape. Both police and guards struggled to prevent POWs from leaving camp bounds. For example, on Sunday, February 27, 1944, four POWs from Camp 61 ignored warning signs and their orders not to leave camp bounds and went for a walk on the frozen Lake of the Woods. A fisherman spotted the POWs some nine miles from Kenora and informed the RCMP. Police officers and a company employee embarked on a patrol to catch them and discovered their tracks at Whisky Island, fourteen kilometres south of Kenora. Following the POWs' tracks, the patrol later came across a civilian who had talked to four men who

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<sup>128</sup> Cst. W. Munnoch, "Franz Beck. P.O.W. #042475 'et al' Camp 44B., Vermilion Bay, Ont., Escaped. P.O.W.S.," March 19, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-50 - Dept. of Labour - Ont. Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Vermilion Bay, Ont, C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>129</sup> Author unknown, "German Prisoners of War - Camp 61. Kenora, Ontario.," February 28, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

had identified themselves as POWs. They were on their way to Whisky Island at the time, and he later saw them on their way back to camp. The four POWs beat the patrol back to Camp 61, and the officers, unable to identify them, could not take action against them.

The police questioned the chief guard, who explained that POWs were permitted to travel five miles from camp for exercise, a distance agreed upon by the Department of Labour, but confided he believed this distance too great – an opinion shared by the RCMP. The guards made no daytime counts on Sundays so many POWs elected to go for long walks. The police also questioned the spokesman, but he stated he was unable to take appropriate action as the Department of Labour and company officials had failed to heed his recommendations to transfer troublemakers. Returning to Kenora, the RCMP recommended the company tighten restrictions on POW movements to prevent future incidents.<sup>130</sup>

The company and Department of Labour remained hesitant to further restrict movements for they feared the POWs would cease working in protest. Regardless, any restrictions and warnings only proved useful if POWs heeded them, and this was not always the case. For example, in the morning of November 12, 1944, POWs Wolfgang Bergter and Erwin Stöckl left Camp 43, presumably on a hike. Bergter, nineteen, and Stöckl, twenty-two, had only just arrived at camp from Medicine Hat three days prior so, when the pair failed to return at lunch, their comrades assumed they had gotten lost in the bush as they had not brought sufficient supplies or winter gear for an escape.<sup>131</sup> When the two POWs did not return that evening, the guards prepared a search for the following morning.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> DOC MD10 to Secretary of National Defence, November 14, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>132</sup> “Wolfgang Bergter, Escaped Prisoner of War,” January 6, 1945, S163.009 (D7) - PsW - Escapes from camps corresp, repts, posters etc., DHH; “Erwin Stoeckl, Escaped Prisoner of War,” January 6, 1945, S163.009 (D7) - PsW - Escapes from camps corresp, repts, posters etc., DHH; Cpl. Mitivier to Director POW, November 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

Searches on land and water revealed no trace of the missing men. Authorities concluded the pair had gotten lost rather than attempt to escape.<sup>133</sup> One RCMP constable, noting the dense bush interspersed with partially-frozen swamps and lakes, doubted the POWs ever left the bush.<sup>134</sup> Hopes were raised a few days later with news of the capture of a POW near Sudbury, and again in January 1945, with reports of Stöckl's capture near Camp Borden, but both proved false; the former turned out to be another missing POW and the latter was a deserter from the RCAF.<sup>135</sup> It was not until late May 1945 that the mystery was solved. Ted Coak was captaining a "Gator" or "Alligator Boat" – an amphibious vessel that used a winch to haul itself across land – and picking up pulpwood near Bear Bay, four miles west of Camp 43, when he noticed scraps of POW clothing in the bush along the shoreline. Exploring further, he stumbled upon Bergter and Stöckl's remains. The bodies were later recovered and the official cause of death deemed "misadventure and exposure" shortly after their disappearance.<sup>136</sup> The pair were later buried in Kenora.

Prisoners at Hudson also kept guards and police busy in late 1944. The prisoners had been warned not to venture more than two miles from camp and warning signs in German had been placed along the roads leading from the camp, but POWs were repeatedly found outside these bounds. On December 16, five POWs left Camp 63 to go on a walk and, ignoring their orders not to go beyond camp bounds, went to Hudson. The

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<sup>133</sup> Cpl. Graves, "562439 Wolfgang Bergter and 14258 Erwin Stoeckl, Escaped P's O.W., Camp 43, Kenora, Ontario," November 21, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>134</sup> RCMP Report, "562439 Wolfgang Bergter and 14258 Erwin Stoeckl, Escaped P.O.W.S., Camp 43, Yellow Girl, Ontario," November 22, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>135</sup> DOC MD10 to Secretary of National Defence, November 14, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC; CMDC Two to Secretary Ottawa, January 5, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC; Col. H.N. Streight to Commandant, Medicine Hat, April 11, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>136</sup> Constable F. Richardson, "Bodies of two persons found in bush, believed to be those of two P.O.W's missing from Camp #43 Kenora District since November 12, 1944," May 30, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.



camp superintendent spotted the group in Hudson and, rather than take them into custody himself, notified police so as to make an example of the group.<sup>137</sup> The four POWs each received twenty-eight days discipline at Port Arthur.<sup>138</sup>

A week later, Helmut Rexhause left camp bounds without permission and headed towards Hudson. He had previously spent a week there during the freeze-up period while waiting for the ice to be thick enough to travel on and had attended a service at the United Church. This time, he proceeded to the Grandview Hotel to inquire about worship services during the Christmas season. Unfortunately for Rexhause, the proprietor, Raymond Gastmeier, was not particularly keen about POWs in his hotel and notified the OPP.<sup>139</sup>

When the police took Rexhause into custody, Gastmeier took the opportunity to complain about one of the Veterans' Guards who had brought four POWs into the hotel earlier that evening. The guard had demanded beer for himself and the POWs but when Gastmeier refused to serve the group and asked them to leave, the guard became verbally abusive. Gastmeier observed the man was so intoxicated he needed the POWs' assistance to help him leave. Although the POWs were not drunk, Gastmeier suspected they had been drinking before arriving at the hotel. The police searched the area and discovered the four POWs in a nearby boarding house. The proprietor informed police that the guard, nowhere to be found, had been removed from the premises not long after he arrived with the POWs. The police notified the company to arrange for the POWs to be escorted back to camp. While such incidents were rare, the police noted there had been a number of complaints from Sioux Lookout and Hudson residents about intoxicated guards. The YMCA and local hotels informed authorities they no longer wanted to house guards

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<sup>137</sup> Lt. J.P. Colson to D.A.A.G., M.D. 10, January 16, 1945, HQS 31-10 - Prisoners of War - Security - Military District 10, C-8249, RG24, LAC.

<sup>138</sup> "Return of Prisoners of War sentenced to Detention," December 23, 1944, HQS-7236-85-3 - treatment of Enemy Aliens - Punishment Records - U.K. Prisoners, C-5406, RG24, LAC.

<sup>139</sup> Const. L.A. Heaney, "Prisoner of War at Large, Hudson, Ontario," December 27, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-66 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Hudson, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

escorting POWs. The OPP believed the POWs were too much in the public eye and had been given far more freedom than they deserved.<sup>140</sup>

Rexhause received twenty-eight days' discipline at Port Arthur but the company's decision to transfer those found out of bounds appears to have had little effect. On January 9, another five POWs left Camp 63 (Hudson) on a walk and also left camp bounds. The six were later apprehended in Hudson and sentenced to twenty-eight days in Port Arthur.<sup>141</sup> Then, on January 14, 1945, a CNR section man saw three POWs at Webster, a siding twelve kilometres west of Hudson, and notified police. By the time police arrived, the POWs had left, setting out on the frozen lake on skis. As Webster was quite isolated and ten miles from the camp, OPP Constable Heaney believed the POWs would not tempt the trek in the cold weather without ulterior motives. Heaney questioned the section man, John Humeniuk, who reluctantly admitted that he had entertained POWs during the night of December 31 and, although the POWs had planned on returning on January 7, had not visited until that evening. Humeniuk stated the POWs were familiar with the area and had a map showing the locations of the camp, the lake, the town of Hudson, CNR lines, and the Webster siding. The prisoners had told Humeniuk they were tired of bushwork and wanted to "get out."<sup>142</sup>

The police caught up to the three POWs ten miles south-east of the camp. The POWs, still on skis, were identified as Wolfgang Gnan, Ernst Ruehl, and Konstantin Schwarz. All three had been transferred from Riding Mountain and it was the same Schwarz who had visited and befriended civilians living outside the park bounds. Gnan and Ruehl later admitted visiting Humeniuk's shack during the night of December 31, 1944, explaining it had been the only place they had seen a light. Humeniuk had

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<sup>140</sup> Const. L.A. Heaney, "Pte. Jorgenson - Jake. 22 Coy. V.G.C.," December 25, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-66 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Hudson, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>141</sup> Cpt. C.F. Howard to MI3, January 15, 1945, HQS 31-10 - Prisoners of War - Security - Military District 10, C-8249, RG24, LAC.

<sup>142</sup> Const. L.A. Heaney, "Prisoners of war out of bounds, Webster, Ontario," January 20, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-66 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Hudson, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

apparently given them a lunch and invited them to return as he wanted to see them in their uniforms. Humeniuk later confirmed the identities of the POWs and admitted giving Gnan his address so they could correspond after the war. Constable Heaney, describing Humeniuk as a “big simple overgrown boy,” believed the POWs had seen him as an easy mark and useful contact for a future escape. One CNR employee recommended Humeniuk be fired or relocated, but he instead only received a severe reprimand – a punishment Constable Heaney deemed sufficient.<sup>143</sup> The prisoners received twenty-eight days in Port Arthur.

While detained in Port Arthur, Gnan, Ruehl, and Schwarz attempted to smuggle a letter back to camp with the help of Rexhause, who was being released. The POWs enclosed money and provided instructions on how to spend it but, more concerning, also added pro-Nazi messages. Gnan instructed the camp follow “without fail” the orders of Generalleutnant Artur Schmitt, one of the highest-ranking officers interned in Canada and who was presently in Camp 30 (Bowmanville, Ontario). Believing POWs should work only if compelled to do so, Schmitt was known to have issued orders to various camps through secret channels forbidding spokesman from sending POWs out to work.<sup>144</sup> Schwarz enclosed a similar message, instructing his comrades, “Do not get any work done! Everything for ourselves, nothing for the enemy.”<sup>145</sup> Constable Heaney recommended Gnan and Schwarz be transferred to the base camp, especially considering Schwarz’s activities at Riding Mountain and his involvement in the theft of a canoe from Hudson the previous summer. Heaney, conferring with some of the other POWs in camp, learned that the rest of the camp believed the three were troublemakers and agreed with his recommendation to transfer them.<sup>146</sup> Military authorities agreed and transferred Gnan

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> F/L. A.P. Wiedmann, Camp 133 Intelligence Report for November 1945, December 3, 1945, HQS 7236-94-6-133 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Lethbridge, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>145</sup> Translation of letter from Helmut Rexhause to Ogefr. Blum, n.d., HQS 7236-34-3-66 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Hudson, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>146</sup> Const. L.A. Heaney, “Prisoners of war out of bounds, Webster, Ontario,” January 20, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-66 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Hudson, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

to Medicine Hat and Schwarz to Neys while Ruehl was allowed to return to Camp 63 following his twenty-eight-day sentence.<sup>147</sup>

Pro-Nazis like Schwarz could be found in nearly every internment camp and labour project in Canada. Extremely loyal to Hitler and the Nazi cause, they quickly established control in internment camps and used fear and intimidation to consolidate and retain power and to ensure the survival of Nazi ideals. Canada's lack of an official program to classify POWs according to their political standings until the PHERUDA system in 1945 meant that pro-Nazis were sent out to labour projects as well. The Geneva Convention placed POWs subject to the "laws, regulations and orders" of the armed forces of the detaining power, which meant POWs were subject to Canadian military and civil law – not German military law.<sup>148</sup> Yet many pro-Nazi POWs refused to cede to Canadian authority and held improvised kangaroo courts in the camps. Without legal means to enforce punishment, they resorted to ostracizing offenders, verbal harassment, beatings, or, in extreme cases, murder.<sup>149</sup> These were exceptionally rare, with only two confirmed cases (both in Medicine Hat) but rumours persisted that some fatal drowning accidents were not accidents at all but instead the work of pro-Nazis. Investigations into these deaths were never conclusive.

The influence of pro-Nazi POWs varied from camp-to-camp. Wolfgang Gnan and Konstantin Schwarz's comments emphasized that not all POWs were willing to work to their full potential but the fact that the POWs remaining in camp also recommended Gnan and Schwarz to be transferred suggests the pair's attitude was not universal. The other POWs in camp were content to continue working. In some of the company's other camps, pro-Nazis had far greater influence. As 1945 progressed, military authorities hoped that the news of Hitler's death and Germany's subsequent surrender would diminish Nazi

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<sup>147</sup> "Return of Prisoners of War sentenced to Detention," January 22, 1945, HQS-7236-85-3 - treatment of Enemy Aliens - Punishment Records - U.K. Prisoners, C-5406, RG24, LAC.

<sup>148</sup> Article 45 in International Committee of the Red Cross, "Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War."

<sup>149</sup> Madsen and Henderson, *German Prisoners of War in Canada*, 78.

power in the camps. There are few records indicating exactly how POWs received this news, but it was received without significant incident. At Camp 52, pro-Nazi POWs held a memorial service for Hitler, removing his portrait from the wall, burning it, and scattering the ashes across the lake. A visiting Department of Labour inspector added in his report, "it is not known whether the fish died nor not."<sup>150</sup> But pockets of Nazism did persist, as it did in internment camps, although Canadian authorities now had greater opportunities to reduce Nazi power.

Before Germany's surrender, intelligence authorities remained hesitant to embark on a widespread re-education program lest it result in repercussion for Canadian POWs in Germany but, now that the war in Europe was over, they initiated programs and policies designed to identify pro-Nazi factions in internment camps and re-educate POWs to become better democratic citizens in a denazified Germany. The introduction of the PHERUDA system was a significant boost to identify pro-Nazis, but labour projects lacked the intelligence apparatus and the re-education programs that were present in internment camps, making identification and re-education of pro-Nazis more difficult. Intelligence authorities, eager to know just how deep Nazi roots ran in these small camps, had to use different methods. The result was that the Department of National Defence and the Department of Labour enlisted the help of a German doctor, Major Wilhelm Gross, to help evaluate the political standings of POWs in the company's camps.

In the months following the D-Day landings, between ten and twelve German doctors had arrived in Canada as POWs. The Department of Labour and Department of National Defence used their experience, employing Dr. Fritjoff Gress at Riding Mountain, who had proven himself quite useful not only in providing medical attention to both POWs and civilian employees but also in enforcing order. The federal ministries elected to transfer some of these newly-arrived POW doctors to strategically located bush

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<sup>150</sup> Cpt. Mortlock, "Camp #52," June 5, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

camps.<sup>151</sup> Placed in central camps, German medical officers would provide quick and efficient medical care to all surrounding camps while reducing costs and preventing malingering.<sup>152</sup> Adequate medical care had been a concern for POWs working for Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper since they had arrived, so the company requested a doctor in May 1945. Placed in Camp 52, the doctor would service the company's Kenora, Flanders, and Vermilion Bay camps.<sup>153</sup> The company hoped a POW doctor, in addition to providing medical care, could help solve problems with absenteeism whereby many POWs were suspected of using visits to nearby medical facilities as holidays and subsequently reducing production.<sup>154</sup>

Doctor Wilhelm Gross arrived at Camp 52 on May 29, 1945. A thirty-six year-old Austrian anti-Nazi, Dr. Gross had previously worked in the Camp 133 (Lethbridge) hospital, where he had given "outstanding co-operation." Pro-Nazi POWs there had threatened to hang him for his anti-Nazi views and cooperation with the Canadians, so he was removed from the enclosure and placed in protective custody.<sup>155</sup> At Kenora, Dr. Gross was primarily responsible for providing medical care but he provided another important service: investigating and reporting on pro-Nazi activities for military intelligence.<sup>156</sup> Wherever possible, Dr. Gross was to identify and consult with anti-Nazi POWs to gauge the influence and power of pro-Nazis in each camp.

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<sup>151</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to All Companies Employing P.O.W., October 27, 1944, 16. Correspondence re: German Medical Officers, Vol. 955, RG27, LAC.

<sup>152</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Director Labour Projects PW, April 25, 1945, 16. Correspondence re: German Medical Officers, Vol. 955, RG27, LAC.

<sup>153</sup> J.A. Ryan to Maj. George Forbes, May 15, 1945, 16. Correspondence re: German Medical Officers, Vol. 955, RG27, LAC; Maj. George Forbes to Director of Labour Projects PW, May 17, 1945, 16. Correspondence re: German Medical Officers, Vol. 955, RG27, LAC.

<sup>154</sup> Lt.-Col. R.H. Davidson to Maj. G. Forbes, May 26, 1945, 15. Correspondence concerning German Medical Officers, Vol. 955, RG27, LAC; Capt. E.G. Gerridzen, "Supplement to Interrogation Report PP 038620 Dr. Wilhelm Gross," June 6, 1945, 31-15-2 - Security - Liaison with D. POW - Labour Project Reports, C-8250, RG24, LAC.

<sup>155</sup> Lt.-Col. F.H. Wilkes to Jas. A. Ryan, May 22, 1945, 16. Correspondence re: German Medical Officers, Vol. 955, RG27, LAC; Lieut. J.P. Colson to Maj. G.R. Forbes, June 29, 1946, 15. Correspondence concerning German Medical Officers, Vol. 955, RG27, LAC.

<sup>156</sup> Col. E.D.B. Kippen to Headquarters, MD13, June 21, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

Shortly after his arrival at Camp 52, Dr. Gross reported that “unmitigated Nazi-terror reigned.” According to Dr. Gross, spokesman Erick Meisterzock and translator Heinz Hegemann forbade the men from reading newspapers, suppressed free speech, ordered an “ostentatious” display of portraits of Hitler and Nazi imagery, and assembled an improvised police force to monitor and threaten anti-Nazis. Egon Saiko, a medical student Dr. Gross had known in Camp 133, informed him of “terroristic conditions” prevailing in camp and feared pro-Nazis were after him. Doctor Gross warned Meisterzock that his actions were of a criminal nature and recommended he accept the unconditional surrender of Germany, but, Dr. Gross reported, Meisterzock proved “absolutely obstinate” and staunchly pro-Nazi.<sup>157</sup>



**Figure 24: Interior of one of the Kenora camps’ recreation room. Note the German eagle and the text on the wall, which reads “Gedenke dass du eine Deutscher bist!” (Remember that you are a German!) and “Gelobt sei was hart macht” (Praise be what makes hard). Lake of the Woods Museum.**

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<sup>157</sup> Translation of Dr. Wilhelm Gross, “Reports Concerning the Situation Within Lumber Camps Nos. 43, 52, 56, 60, 61,” June 12, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

Strife within Camp 52 came to the forefront when Saiko and another POW, Rudolf Groenwald, fled the camp. American tourist Logan Harbican discovered the two POWs hitchhiking along the highway to Kenora. They promptly informed him they were anti-Nazi POWs and, fearing for their lives, asked to be delivered to police. In Kenora, the POWs told police officers that Meisterzock and Hegemann were “dyed in the wool Nazis” and political agitators who harassed all those who did not share their political opinions. At a meeting two days earlier, Meisterzock and Hegemann had separated the eighty pro-Nazis and the twenty-four anti-Nazis in camp and informed the latter they would be punished following their return to Germany. Ordering the anti-Nazis to leave the building, the remaining men swore their loyalty to Hitler and Germany.<sup>158</sup> Saiko and Groenwald, fearing for their safety, decided their best option was to flee and turn themselves into the police for protection.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Corporal Graves and Department of Labour Inspector Captain Mortlock proceeded to Camp 52 to investigate. The foreman informed the pair that trouble between pro- and anti-Nazi factions had been brewing for some time and that he suspected the spokesman and interpreter to be the perpetrators. Graves and Mortlock interviewed Meisterzock, who subsequently demanded that sixteen “troublemakers” interfering with production be transferred back to the base camp. However, upon closer inspection, Graves and Mortlock discovered the sixteen men were good workers and the only trouble they had caused was disagreeing with Meisterzock’s political leanings. Concluding that Meisterzock and Hegemann were indeed the cause of the trouble, Captain Mortlock placed the two POWs under arrest and arranged for their transfer to the base camp. He also recommended the removal of six other pro-Nazis in camp who he believed would try to gain control of the camp following Meisterzock’s

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<sup>158</sup> Cpl. F.P. Graves, POW # ME 43345 Saiko, Egon and #20816 Groenwald, Rudolf, Escaped 4-6-45, Kenora, Ontario, June 7, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC; Cpt. Mortlock, “Camp #52,” June 5, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.



transfer.<sup>159</sup> Because Saiko and Groenwald had left camp bounds only to seek protective custody, they were transferred to Camp 56 and allowed to continue working.<sup>160</sup>

The Department of Labour hoped Meisterzock and Hegemann's transfer would alleviate some of the problems at Camp 52, but Dr. Gross reported nine fanatical pro-Nazis remained. Four anti-Nazis and thirteen other POWs, including two Austrians, an Italian, a former Argentinian, and a former Peruvian openly opposed the Nazi terror, but the situation had quickly deteriorated to the point where Dr. Gross reported he faced the same danger he had at Lethbridge.<sup>161</sup> After pro-Nazis threatened other POWs in camp, many anti-Nazis believed they were in danger and no longer felt safe without an axe by their side. Prisoners such as Paul Tuerks, Kurt Noack, Josef Neus, Heinrich Neuss, and Josef Werheid all made sure to remain close together at the worksites and in the camp. At night, they barricaded themselves into their own section of the bunkhouse, with axes close at hand, and took turns standing guard.<sup>162</sup>

Kenora's Camp 52 was clearly in the hands of pro-Nazis but not all of the company's camps were. In his tour of the company's camps, Dr. Gross reported conditions varied in each camp depending on what he referred to as the "prevailing political conditions." Camp 60 was composed almost entirely of fanatical Nazis and Dr. Gross was unable to make any anti-Nazi contacts. Camp 61 had a "purely military atmosphere" and Dr. Gross found no evidence of political terror, noting that the spokesman seemed uninterested in politics. Although he had abolished the Nazi salute, the spokesman was waiting for orders from the base camp before destroying Hitler's

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<sup>159</sup> Cpl. F.P. Graves, POW # ME 43345 Saiko, Egon and #20816 Groenwald, Rudolf, Escaped 4-6-45, Kenora, Ontario, June 7, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>160</sup> Brig. R.O.G. Morton to Secretary, DND, November 6, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>161</sup> Translation of Dr. Wilhelm Gross, "Reports Concerning the Situation Within Lumber Camps Nos. 43, 52, 56, 60, 61," June 12, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>162</sup> Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 228.

picture and Nazi imagery.<sup>163</sup> In contrast, the foreman at Camp 43 identified six anti-Nazis, including the spokesman, and reported there were no fanatical Nazis nor had there been any “terroristic actions.” Camp 56 likewise made a “fine” impression with Dr. Gross, who reported there was no political pressure in camp, and he believed the spokesman was anti-Nazi. Re-education efforts were already underway in camps run by anti-Nazi spokesmen and Dr. Gross reported the morale in these camps was much higher than those run by pro-Nazis. Doctor Gross did, however, recommend that military authorities ensure future replacements were anti-Nazis as he noted that most recent arrivals consisted almost entirely of fanatical Nazis and had thereby contributed to a significant decline in morale.<sup>164</sup>

Department of Labour and military authorities relied heavily on Dr. Gross and his reports to better understand the influence of pro-Nazis in the company’s bush camps. His motivations to help Canadian authorities are unknown, but his reports of the Kenora camps confirmed the suspicions and reports of guards and Department of Labour inspectors while also helping to identify the source of trouble in the camps. As to his character and reliability, Department of Labour Inspector Major F. Drayton reported he believed Dr. Gross to be “distinctly” anti-Nazi and, he added, “He has always performed his duties conscientiously at all times, and co-operated 100%, both with the Company and the Dept. of Labour.”<sup>165</sup>

Two weeks after his initial report, Dr. Gross revealed that pro-Nazis still exhibited considerable control in the company’s camps. Having now spent more time in the camps, Dr. Gross rescinded some of his earlier observations about some of the spokesmen’s

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<sup>163</sup> Such imagery was standard – and expected – in most internment camps and labour projects as a reminder of and way of showing their allegiance to Nazi Germany. Some prisoners removed this imagery voluntarily after Germany’s surrender, but Canadian authorities increased pressure for POWs to remove all Nazi imagery through 1945.

<sup>164</sup> Translation of Dr. Wilhelm Gross, “Reports Concerning the Situation Within Lumber Camps Nos. 43, 52, 56, 60, 61,” June 12, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>165</sup> Maj. F. Drayton to Maj. G. Forbes, June 12, 1946, 15. Correspondence concerning German Medical Officers, Vol. 955, RG27, LAC.

political leanings. He believed Camp 43 spokesman Karl Schmidt only pretended to be unpolitical but was truly a Nazi “in the depth of his soul.” Schmidt did run the camp efficiently and his men had a high output. Gross likewise believed Camp 61 spokesman Walter Miesler was a Nazi who kept his camp “strong Nazi-minded” with Nazi imagery displayed throughout camp. More concerning, Dr. Gross reported Miesler illicitly censored outgoing mail and pressured his men against exceeding their quota, an act often seen as a form of resistance against Canadian authority. Camp 52 spokesman Walter Heyer, who had replaced Meisterzock following his transfer, was, Dr. Gross noted, a “Gestapo man” who was rumoured to have served in the SS. Although Dr. Gross reported Heyer was gradually losing influence in camp, he had threatened to beat the camp’s anti-Nazis and apparently “instigated the other boys” against Dr. Gross. At Camp 60, Dr. Gross confirmed Rudolf Blitz was a Nazi but, he noted, Blitz responded to warnings and proved more cooperative than the other spokesman.<sup>166</sup>

Anti-Nazis, despite Germany’s surrender almost two months prior, still found themselves in a precarious position. Many still feared the pro-Nazis, who were often in leadership positions and who continued to enforce their views on the rest of the camp. Doctor Gross gained the trust of a number of these anti-Nazis, whose information proved invaluable in identifying pro-Nazis and gauging the extent of their power. For example, Richard Bermpohl, an anti-Nazi at Camp 43, informed Dr. Gross that a pro-Nazi in camp had threatened to hang him. Bermpohl later confronted the man and nothing came of the matter. Others were not so lucky. Heinrich Morgenroth, also at Camp 43, revealed he had almost been killed when a POW from Camp 52 apparently intentionally drove a “Gator” into his log raft. The boat crushed the raft, forcing Morgenroth into the lake and under the steamboat. Fortunately, he was able to escape harm and make it back to shore.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> W.L. Gross, “Report of Dr. Gross PW 038620, regarding political incidents in Lumber Camps 52, 43, 61, and 60,” June 28, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>167</sup> DMI to DPOW, July 11, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

Doctor Gross's reports and the testimonies of anti-Nazis made it abundantly clear that a minority of POWs remained staunchly pro-Nazi and still wielded significant power in a number of internment camps. With limited means available to tackle re-education in labour projects, the intelligence officers recommended breaking up Camp 52's "Nazi clique" and transferring the leaders to a Black internment camp.<sup>168</sup> The Directorate of POWs instead elected to keep all troublemakers in Camp 52.

The problem was not unique to the company's camps. Military authorities had received requests from a number of POWs who, despite their willingness to work, wished to transfer to the base camp due to threats from pro-Nazis. Colonel Streight believed granting such requests would not only strengthen Nazi power in these camps but also deprive those who were willing to cooperate and work of the opportunity to earn money. Streight emphasized a "definite and strong stand" had to be taken against Nazi power and noted the preferable options were to either remove pro-Nazis from labour projects or to concentrate them in selected camps. This, Streight hoped, would keep both pro-Nazis and anti-Nazis working.<sup>169</sup> The Department of Labour and Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper officials agreed to the proposal, allowing the pro-Nazi troublemakers to remain at Camp 52.

Despite the Department of Defence's decision not to transfer troublemakers, Nazi control slowly weakened in most of the company's camps, allowing more anti-Nazis to be willing to identify or even stand up to their oppressors. At Camp 43 in October 1945, for example, Joachim Gensch informed military authorities that spokesman Karl Schmidt, who Dr. Gross had identified as a Nazi, had assembled a group of other pro-Nazis and began oppressing POWs who opposed his views. Most of the POWs in camp were "politically sound," Dr. Gross believed, but Schmidt prohibited all outside news sources and ordered all outgoing mail to be delivered to him for internal censorship. All mail deemed by the pro-Nazis to be non-complaint, namely that speaking against the Nazi

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Director of Labour Projects PW, July 16, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

cause or considered to be pro-Allied, was destroyed.<sup>170</sup> Military authorities acted on Gensch's tip and promptly ordered the POWs to deliver their mail directly to the NCO of the guard and also began distributing approved publications throughout the camp.<sup>171</sup> By November, the guards reported a "harmonious spirit" existed in the camp and that no POWs had submitted complaints of discrimination or maltreatment.<sup>172</sup>

No further complaints came from the company's Kenora camps, but conflict emerged in Flanders in January 1946, not between the POWs and the company but rather the POWs and the guards. In late 1945, prisoners at Camp 104, with the company's approval, erected six shacks near the camp to be used for studying, music, or other activities requiring more privacy than found in a bunkhouse. On the morning of January 20, a POW discovered someone had smashed his hut's stove, slashed hand-made upholstery, torn curtains, scattered books, and trampled his Christmas tree. Others discovered that two more shacks had been ransacked. As news spread through camp, a POW revealed he had seen two guards unsuccessfully trying to break the pen of the camp's pet bear three days prior and, although the guards had left when he approached, he found the pen open the following morning. The POWs were unable to prove the guards were the perpetrators until Hans Holz overheard a conversation between the civilian cook and some of the guards. One of the guards admitted ransacking the shacks but asked the cook not to tell anyone as it could net him months in jail.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Translation of letter from Joachim Gensch to QMS Hetteema, October 30, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>171</sup> Maj.-Gen. A.E. Walfrod to District Officer Commanding MD10, November 16, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>172</sup> Brig. R.O.G. Morton to Secretary, DND, December 28, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>173</sup> K. Knuth to Col. Pearson, January 20, 1946, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

An investigation concluded the vandals were men from the Veterans' Guard. One of the guards at Flanders informed Major Drayton that some of the other guards were indeed responsible for the damages to the shacks and for tearing down the bear pen and releasing the bear. He had reported the incident to Corporal Bauks, the NCO in charge, but Bauks denied any knowledge of either incident. Major Drayton observed that Bauks had no control over his men and expressed little interest in his duties. Most of the guards involved were young replacements fresh from training who, with the war over, were not needed for overseas service and were instead transferred to Veterans' Guard companies to replace the older men. As evident from the Flanders incident, the difference in age and experience between the older guards and their replacements occasionally proved problematic. At Camp 23 (Monteith), for example, the war diarist noted some replacements were "rather strenuous and inclined to be boisterous" and lacked the "Esprit de Corps" and respect for others shown by the original veterans.<sup>174</sup> One intelligence



**Figure 25: Three young guards at Camp 56, 1945-1946. Alvin Zimmerman (right) was only twenty-one-years-old when he was transferred to the camp to replace older men from the Veterans' Guard. Lake of the Woods Museum.**

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<sup>174</sup> Camp 23 War Diary, August 9, 1945, Camp 23 War Diary, Vol. 15393, RG24, LAC; Camp 23 War Diary, April 16, 1946, Camp 23 War Diary, Vol. 15393, RG24, LAC.

officer reported the young soldiers did not have the same “sense of responsibility” towards handling of POWs as their older counterparts, something he attributed to the latter’s First World War service.<sup>175</sup> Younger guards were also more likely to make their feelings public.

The issue for the guards at Flanders was how Canada was treating German POWs. These guards – often only eighteen or nineteen years of age – had spent their formative years in a time of war and yet only now were coming into contact with the enemy for the first time. When Major Drayton met with company superintendent Mr. Anderson, one of the guards burst into the office and demanded to know why “These ----- Huns were being treated better than Canadian soldiers.” Major Drayton informed the private that was no way to conduct himself in the presence of an officer, but the man responded, “A hell of a fine officer you are if you don’t do something about it.” The guard then invited Drayton to take his coat off and “come outside,” after which Drayton told his corporal to arrest Bury. The corporal refused, prompting Drayton to fill out a charge sheet with instructions for it to be handed over to his Commanding officer.<sup>176</sup>

The guards’ complaint was that they had not received sugar, cakes, pastries, and butter for their lunches, and yet the POWs received such food when they returned from the bush. As boys, these guards had grown up under wartime rationing, so the quantity of food and the “luxury” items POWs received proved significant sources of discontent. Drayton observed the guards were not restricted from any food, but they had been using the kitchen as a club room. The foreman and the cook thus prohibited the guards from entering the kitchen but continued to allow the POWs to enter the kitchen to get snacks after returning from the bush. One of the guards protested this by cutting down the cook’s clothesline and trampling his clothes. Drayton went to the guards to advise them of their duties but reported he was met with “a chorus of vituperation” against the POW cook and

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<sup>175</sup> Department of Labour, “Consolidated Instructions for Employers of German Prisoners-of-War at Labour Camps in Canada,” December 1944, pg. 2, 382.013 (D6) - Instrs, orders, regs, etc re empl of PW on labour projects in Cda, DHH.

<sup>176</sup> Major F. Drayton to Major G. Forbes, January 30, 1946, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

camp staff. Drayton noted that Bauks had no control over his men but instead feared them and let them do as they pleased. Concluding that Corporal Bauks was “totally unfit” for command, and, as the company was considering police involvement for the destruction of company property, Drayton recommended immediately removing the guard detachment or else the company would close the camp.<sup>177</sup> Military authorities acted quickly, and, after sending replacements, placed the guards under open arrest and arranged for a court of inquiry.<sup>178</sup> However, the damage had already been done as Drayton reported the incident caused “considerable ill-feeling” on behalf of POWs. He thus recommended all young reinforcements replacing veterans be properly instructed in their duties and responsibilities.<sup>179</sup>

In February 1946, the Canadian government began transferring German POWs in its custody to the United Kingdom and, facing pressure from civilian industry, the Department of Labour began preparations to close its POW labour projects. Pulp and paper industry representatives at a meeting of the Trades and Labor Councils of the Lakehead, Kenora, and Fort Frances Districts in December 1945 had called for the removal of POWs in the area, arguing that they were taking jobs from Canadians. They stated that unemployed persons at national employment offices exceeded the number of available jobs by 13,000 and that this number would only increase following the return of demobilized servicemen. For this reason, they called for the removal of the thousands of German POWs depriving Canadians of the already small chance of gaining employment. Demanding POWs be replaced by civilian labour, preferably ex-servicemen, representatives recommended POWs instead be sent back to Europe to repair the damage caused by the German war machine’s “fiendish aggression.”<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Maj. G. Forbes to Director of Labour Projects, February 1, 1946, 7236-34-3-67 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Coy., Seine, Rouen, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>179</sup> Memorandum to Major Forbes, February 10, 1946, Minutes of Meetings, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>180</sup> “Resolution No. 1: Removal of Prisoners of War from Industries, n.d., HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5381, RG24, LAC.



The Department of Labour, rather than demand the complete shutdown of POW operations, issued orders for the gradual closing of the company's camps between March and July 1946. Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper had already begun attempts to acquire civilian bushworkers to fill the void when the over 1,000 POWs in the company's employ left for Europe. Almost 200 of the company's civilian workers had returned to work by early 1946 and more were expected to return as Canadian soldiers demobilized.<sup>181</sup> The Hudson camps were the first to close and the POWs were transferred to Camp 23 in March in preparation for their eventual repatriation. The Department of Labour failed to consider regional climate so, when they asked to close some of the Kenora camps, company representatives informed the Department this was impossible until navigation opened in mid-May.<sup>182</sup> Despite the hiccup, once the ice melted and waterways opened, more and more of the company's camps closed. With the closure of the Flanders and Kenora camps, the last POWs left the area in July 1946.

The results of Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper's use of POW labour had varied significantly from camp-to-camp. Production varied between camps, dependent on numerous factors including the desire on behalf of the POWs to work, the relationship between POWs and the company, and how long the camp operated. The Department of Labour reported that most of the Flanders camps had initially proven relatively unsatisfactory due to inefficient administration and unsuitable staff. However, once the company made "drastic" changes to the camp staff and personnel, the camps were brought to a satisfactory level. In February 1946, Inspector Major Drayton reported the Vermilion Bay camps were "100% satisfactory" and the Kenora camps satisfactory.

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<sup>181</sup> Minnesota and Ontario Paper Company, "Annual Report of the Minnesota and Ontario Paper Company for the Year Ended December 31, 1945," 1946, 4, Mergent Archives, [www.mergent.com](http://www.mergent.com).

<sup>182</sup> Brig. R.O.G. Morton to Secretary, DND, April 24, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-26 - Dept of Labour Work Project - Ont-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., Kenora, Ontario, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

“Good will and cooperation,” he added, existed in all but the Flanders camps, primarily due to the fair and reasonable treatment by the company.<sup>183</sup>

Bears, black flies, and the bush contributed to problems in these camps, but internal strife proved more problematic. Despite attempts to determine the suitability of POWs for bushwork, it is evident that, as at Riding Mountain, a significant number of pro-Nazi troublemakers were included in the ranks of those sent to work in the Lake of the Woods area. These individuals provoked dissent amongst the ranks, interrupted work, hampered the guards in fulfilling their duties, and even possessed sufficient power to pressure an entire camp to cease work. Fortunately for the company and the Department of Labour, “fanatical” Nazis appeared to be in the minority, so transferring troublemakers often solved the problem. This was not a complete solution as pro-Nazis remained in the camps right up until the camps closed in mid-1946. These pro-Nazis forced the Department of Labour and the Department of National Defence to adapt, resulting in new measures to combat Nazi influence. The company’s experience, especially at Flanders, also demonstrated the importance of having a cooperative spokesman as these individuals exerted considerable control over their charges.

Arguably the most effective means of combatting pro-Nazis and malingering was the transfer of Dr. Wilhelm Gross to Kenora. As an anti-Nazi, Dr. Gross made contacts with likeminded prisoners in most of the Kenora camps, providing military intelligence with insight into the inner workings of pro-Nazi administrations and the plight of anti-Nazis. As classification and re-education programs generally remained limited to internment camps, Dr. Gross became an extremely valuable resource to military authorities. Furthermore, by eliminating the need for repeated visits from civilian physicians, regular visits by Dr. Gross reduced man days lost from sickness or malingering by 60 to 70 per cent.<sup>184</sup> Regardless of their political views, most POWs respected his rank and obeyed orders.

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<sup>183</sup> Memorandum to Major Forbes, February 10, 1946, Minutes of Meetings, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>184</sup> Maj. F. Drayton to Maj. G. Forbes, June 12, 1946, 15. Correspondence concerning German Medical Officers, Vol. 955, RG27, LAC.

The importance of international aid organizations must also be mentioned. Like those in the camps scattered across the country, POWs employed in the area were extremely thankful to the International Red Cross and the War Prisoners' Aid. The close relationship between these organizations and the men they helped became quite evident when a War Prisoners' Aid representative visited Camp 61 in May 1946 as the POWs were preparing for their transfer to Europe. In appreciation of the services the organization had provided, spokesman Walter Miesler presented ten POW-built canoes to be used at the closest YMCA boys' camp. The War Prisoners' Aid thanked Miesler and his men for their generosity.<sup>185</sup>

The hundreds of POWs employed at Kenora, Flanders, Hudson, and Vermilion Bay were all transferred to the United Kingdom in 1946 and over the coming years, Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper slowly shut down or relocated its camps, removing many of the buildings from the Kenora camps by the late 1940s. The company continued to use the camps situated in prime woodcutting areas for the coming years, filling them with civilian woodcutters and their families. Canoes and folding boats, once common sights on the waters near the camps, were left behind to suffer their fate at the hands of the elements or locals.<sup>186</sup>

The prisoners never forgot their time in Northwestern Ontario. Hans Kaiser, the sailor who had volunteered for work without knowing the location or type of work and who described Camp 61 as a "paradise," returned to Germany in 1947. However, his return was bittersweet, for he felt there was something missing: "No lake, no water, no nothing."<sup>187</sup> In 1950, the Canadian government lifted its restrictions on immigration from former enemy states, prompting a small wave of former POWs returning to Canada as immigrants. Many returned to the places they had worked, this time as tourists or as

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<sup>185</sup> Bengt Hoffman to Walter Miesler, May 13, 1946, HQS 7236-83-6-14 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Welfare Matters - Y.M.C.A. - At Work Projects, C-5401, RG24, LAC.

<sup>186</sup> Lieberwirth noted one resident had a canoe in their cottage while another half of a canoe was once on display in a Sioux Narrows' store. Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 231–32.

<sup>187</sup> MacDonald, "Prisoners on the Lake," 13.

immigrants hoping to start a new life in the areas where they had spent an important part of their youth. Two of Kaiser's former comrades had returned to Kenora so he decided to return as well. He no longer had to worry about a lack of female company for he emigrated to Canada with his new wife in 1953. He picked up the work he had left behind in 1946, working as a carpenter and woodcutter, and stayed in Kenora for the rest of his life.<sup>188</sup>

Johannes Lieberwirth returned to his home in Dresden, Germany in 1947. The veteran of the North African campaign, who claimed that not even the "myriad of mosquitoes" could dampen his love for life in Camp 52, had only spent seven months working in the bush but it was enough to draw him back to Canada as well. He returned in 1977 – this time as a tourist – with his wife. Falling in love with Lake of the Woods once more, he and his wife purchased a summer home in Sioux Narrows and returned every year thereafter.<sup>189</sup> He penned his memoirs, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, to shed light on his life as a POW in Canada but also as a way of thanking Canadians for the treatment they provided him and the rest of the POWs in the country.<sup>190</sup>

Kaiser and Lieberwirth were not alone; Hans Seefeld considered his time in Canada, especially at Camp 44B, some of the "most enjoyable experiences of his youth."<sup>191</sup> He brought his wife with him when he returned to Canada, eventually settling in Minaki, and lived the remainder of his life there. Hans Krakhofer, the artist who documented his time at Camp 52 through numerous paintings and sketches returned to Austria in 1947 but missed his time working in the bush. He returned to Canada in 1954, settling in Thunder Bay, and first worked for the Abitibi Power & Paper Co. before working as a draftsman, illustrator, and map maker for Great Lakes Forest Products. Before he died in 1997, he donated a large number of his sketches, paintings, carvings,

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<sup>188</sup> Louie, "Remembering Camp 60," 35.

<sup>189</sup> Nelson, "Temporary Enemies, Permanent Friends," 28.

<sup>190</sup> Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 257.

<sup>191</sup> MacDonald, "Prisoners on the Lake," 14.

and sculptures to the Thunder Bay Museum.<sup>192</sup> Others returned to Kenora as tourists, with their spouses or in groups. In 1986, Kurt Wickart, formerly of Camp 60, reunited with three other former POWs to remember their time on Lake of the Woods. He recalled, “We had a helluva good time here. If there had been any girls, we would never have left.”<sup>193</sup> Hans Luengen likewise recalled his time at Camp 61 as among the best years of his life.<sup>194</sup>

Now, just over seventy years since the last POW left the Lake of the Woods area, most of the camp sites have been reclaimed by nature, with only a few foundations and scrap metal giving any hint to their former purpose. A more lasting memory of this part of the area’s history came with the renaming in 1976 of the bay on which Camp 52 was situated as “P.O.W. Bay”. But most traces have disappeared.<sup>195</sup> For prisoners like Johannes Lieberwirth and Kurt Wickart, those who returned to the Lake of the Woods expressed a sincere thanks for the treatment they had received by the guards, employers, and civilians they encountered while working for Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper. As Johannes Lieberwirth stated in a 2005 interview, “We came as temporary enemies in war and we left as permanent friends in peace.”<sup>196</sup> However, the story of POWs at Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper was often more complicated, with camps rocked by internal strife, pro-Nazis threatening their comrades and refusing to work, conflict between POWs and guards. Yet despite these many challenges, most POWs quickly adapted to their new life and work and came to enjoy their time in the bush.

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<sup>192</sup> “War Survivor Became Gifted Artist.”

<sup>193</sup> Brian McDonald, “German prisoners of war reunited on visit to old Kenora-area camp,” *Toronto Star*, August 13, 1986.

<sup>194</sup> MacDonald, “Prisoners on the Lake,” 14.

<sup>195</sup> Natural Resources Canada, “P.O.W. Bay,” Natural Resources Canada, accessed August 15, 2017, <http://www4.nrcan.gc.ca/search-place-names/unique/FCIGH>.

<sup>196</sup> Nelson, “Temporary Enemies, Permanent Friends,” 28.

## Chapter 4

### 4 “We do not believe in pampering Ps.O.W”: Abitibi Power & Paper Co. and POW Labour

In the late hours of December 2, 1943, a representative from the Department of Labour and employees of the Abitibi Power & Paper Co. waited along Minataree, a remote siding some 200 kilometres northwest of Port Arthur and the home of the forest company’s Port Arthur division headquarters. The winter night was interrupted by the arrival of a passenger train carrying 150 German prisoners of war and their escorts. As the train stopped, guards quickly established a screen guard around the train and 100 POWs disembarked and were loaded onto waiting trucks. After the Department of Labour signed for the POWs, the trucks drove off into the night towards their next destination: Abitibi Power & Paper Co.’s Camp 10.

These 100 were the first cohort of over 2,000 POWs employed by Abitibi Power & Paper Co. during the Second World War. The company was one of the largest pulp and paper companies in Canada in terms of assets, mills, and newsprint production, but by 1943 was struggling to secure much-needed labour to meet its wartime demands. Thus, when the Canadian government approved the use of POW labour, the company readily sought it to meet the demand for manpower. By the end of the war, the company and its subsidiary, the Manitoba Paper Company, would be the single largest employer of prisoner of war labour in Canada. Between 1943 and 1946, the company had a total of thirty-four POW woodcutting camps, employing at its peak over 2,200 combatants and enemy merchant seamen.<sup>1</sup>

The company’s heavy reliance on POWs in its Port Arthur, Sault Ste. Marie, Smooth Rock Falls, and Manitoba divisions helped shape government policy towards POW labour and Canada’s wartime logging industry. Using Abitibi as the focus of this

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<sup>1</sup> Abitibi owned controlling shares in the Provincial Paper Co., but the latter continued operating as its own entity.

case study, this chapter explores the experiences of pulp and paper companies in employing POWs, specifically looking at why one of the leading pulp and paper companies in the country elected to use POWs. Company correspondence and internal literature in the collection of the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library reveals that Abitibi was engaged in a constant struggle to ensure its POWs were working satisfactorily. With no precedent to employing POWs, the company and government authorities had to adapt to POW bush labour, especially when dealing with strikes and other forms of protests. Exploring how the company dealt with the challenges entailed with employing prisoners, this case study examines Abitibi's successes and failures and why it remained willing to continue expanding its POW operations through 1946.

Abitibi Power & Paper Co. was originally established as the Abitibi Pulp and Paper Mills Ltd., at Iroquois Falls, Ontario in 1912. Over the next fifteen years, the company grew rapidly and in 1928 acquired five other regional paper companies, making it one of the top three newsprint producers in Canada.<sup>2</sup> The acquisition added 90,000 square kilometres of timber concessions in Ontario, Manitoba, and Quebec and the company established or took over mills at Iroquois Falls, Smooth Rock Falls, Sturgeon Falls, Espanola, Sault Ste. Marie, Fort William, Port Arthur, Pine Falls (Manitoba), and Beaupré (Quebec), as well as three Provincial Paper Co. Mills.<sup>3</sup> The company's early success was short-lived and a sharp decline in newsprint prices during the Great Depression forced the company into receivership in 1932.<sup>4</sup>

As much as the company struggled during the 1930s, the outbreak of war in 1939 brought heavy demand for paper. Pulp and paper products were essential to the Canadian

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<sup>2</sup> Darren Karn, "From Anson's Folly to Bowater's Blunder: A History of Abitibi Paper, 1912-2011," Unpublished Report (Toronto, ON: Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, 2011), 19 and 4.

<sup>3</sup> Wilbur J. Smithson, "Abitibi Power and Paper Company, Ltd." (Unpublished B.A. Thesis, McMaster University, 1942), 15.

<sup>4</sup> The company remained in receivership until 1946. Karn, "From Anson's Folly to Bowater's Blunder," 5.

war effort, with fibreboard and paperboard required for packing, newsprint for newspapers and propaganda, and paperboard for army huts.<sup>5</sup> Abitibi focused on its paper production, shipping 3.4 million tons of newsprint throughout Canada and to the United States and overseas markets in 1941, 3.2 million in 1942, and 3.0 million in 1943.<sup>6</sup> By 1943, pulpwood cutting had dropped significantly in the face of the manpower shortage, forcing the company to rely on its reserves to maintain capacity.<sup>7</sup> With its reserves running precariously low, the company had to either secure additional bushworkers or be forced to begin closing its mills.

Abitibi was not alone. Pulp and paper companies throughout Ontario were struggling to secure the much-needed manpower to meet wartime demands. Over 31,000 employees lived in bush camps during the 1941-1942 season, but this number dropped to 20,711 by the 1943-1944 season.<sup>8</sup> The result was an expected shortage of between 1,250,000 and 1,750,000 cords. Companies and industry representatives began urging the government to release 20,000 men – internees, POWs, conscientious objectors, and general and unskilled labour – for bushwork to help boost production. The Corporation of the City of Fort William, for example, asked the Department of Labour to consider employing POWs in an attempt to relieve the labour shortage presently plaguing the district’s pulp and paper industry. The situation was so dire that, the council argued, “the entire industry would be impaired to an alarming extent, if immediate steps were not taken to relieve the situation.”<sup>9</sup> *The Canada Lumberman*, one of the industry’s leading magazines, believed the issue required immediate attention, arguing the labour shortage could have “far reaching and long lasting economic and social consequences for

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<sup>5</sup> Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *The Canada Year Book, 1943-44*, 264.

<sup>6</sup> Abitibi Power & Paper Company, Limited, “Twelfth Report of Receiver and Manager,” May 27, 1944, 1, Mergent Archives, [www.mergent.com](http://www.mergent.com).

<sup>7</sup> “Shortage of Pulpwood Curtails Paper Output,” *Canada Lumberman* 63, no. 12 (June 15, 1943): 29.

<sup>8</sup> Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 250–51.

<sup>9</sup> A. McNaughton to Director, Prisoners of War, November 25, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.



Canada.”<sup>10</sup> The Pulpwood Committee of the Pulp and Paper Industry of Canada likewise requested the Canadian government consider employing POWs in woods operations, estimating that up to 20,000 POWs could be employed in “interior, inaccessible parts of the country.” The committee, deeming this an “excellent opportunity” to relieve the woods labour shortage, argued the isolated nature of bushwork was ideal for POWs and encouraged members to apply for as many POWs as they could employ.<sup>11</sup>

The Department of Labour, facing increasing pressure to provide labourers, agreed to release POWs who had been prioritized for fuelwood operations, for pulpwood cutting instead. For Abitibi, the decision came at a pivotal point. The company’s attempts to secure civilian bushworkers were largely unsuccessful. By mid-October, Abitibi’s Sault Ste. Marie division had only 300 men in the bush, less than half of what it had employed the previous year, and needed up to 2,000 more to resume full production.<sup>12</sup> Not long after the Department of Labour’s announcement, Abitibi applied for its first 100 POWs.

Companies seeking POW labour agreed to enter a contract with the federal government that stipulated their responsibilities. Under this contract, employers agreed to provide appropriate living arrangements, clean water, and “adequate” sanitary arrangements as well as to help ensure POWs remained within camp bounds, did not fraternize with civilians, or enter towns or villages.<sup>13</sup> For each POW employed, companies paid the Department of Labour \$2.50 per day, but they could deduct \$1.00 from this for board and lodging provided to the prisoners. Of the remaining \$1.50 paid to the Department of Labour, 50¢ went to the POWs’ daily wage. Employers also had to provide board and lodging for military guards (separate from that given to POWs) and

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<sup>10</sup> “Want War Prisoners to Cut Pulpwood,” *Canada Lumberman* 63, no. 16 (August 15, 1943): 21.

<sup>11</sup> W.A.E. Pepler to F.E. Hall, July 2, 1943, P.O.W. Labor Data 1945-1946 from Mr. Munro's Office, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, Sault Ste. Marie Public Library [henceforth SSMPL].

<sup>12</sup> “Edgings,” *Canada Lumberman* 63, no. 20 (October 15, 1943): 42–43.

<sup>13</sup> Agreement between Abitibi Power & Paper Company, Limited and His Majesty the King, January 4, 1944, P.O.W. Labor Data 1945-1946 from Mr. Munro's Office, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

they could deduct \$1.00 per guard per day from the amount owed the Department of Labour.

For employers, the \$2.50 per POW per day was generally less than it paid civilian cutters. Average daily earnings depended on the employer and district, but a survey conducted by the Ontario Forest Industries Association in the 1943-1944 season stated those employed in pulpwood cutting (mostly piecework) earned an average of \$3.90 per day in the Soo (Sault Ste. Marie) District and \$4.55 in the Port Arthur District.<sup>14</sup> In the 1941-1942 season, Abitibi paid its Sault Ste. Marie division pieceworkers \$2.47 per 4' cord and \$2.20 per 8' cord, with the average man cutting 1.25 cords per day for 4' cord and 1.59 cords for 8' cords. After deducting board, the average pieceworker earned \$2.27 per day. In comparison, foremen averaged \$4.95 per day, tractor drivers \$4.00, cooks \$3.75, teamsters \$2.45, and kitchen assistants \$1.80.<sup>15</sup>

While the POWs' low wages may appear a significant incentive to employing them, employers could not expect the same results from POWs as they could from experienced civilian bushworkers. Most civilian cutters were paid on a piecework basis, according to the amount they cut in a single day, and wages thus depended heavily on their skill and the type and quality of forest. The average daily quota for a POW cutting pulpwood was one cord per man per day, but the top cutters in a mid-1930s study cut an average of 2.67 cords per day and the top producer in the Soo district in 1943-1944 earned \$10.00 per day.<sup>16</sup> Despite a risk of lower production, companies like Abitibi needed the men and were willing to take the chance on POW labour.

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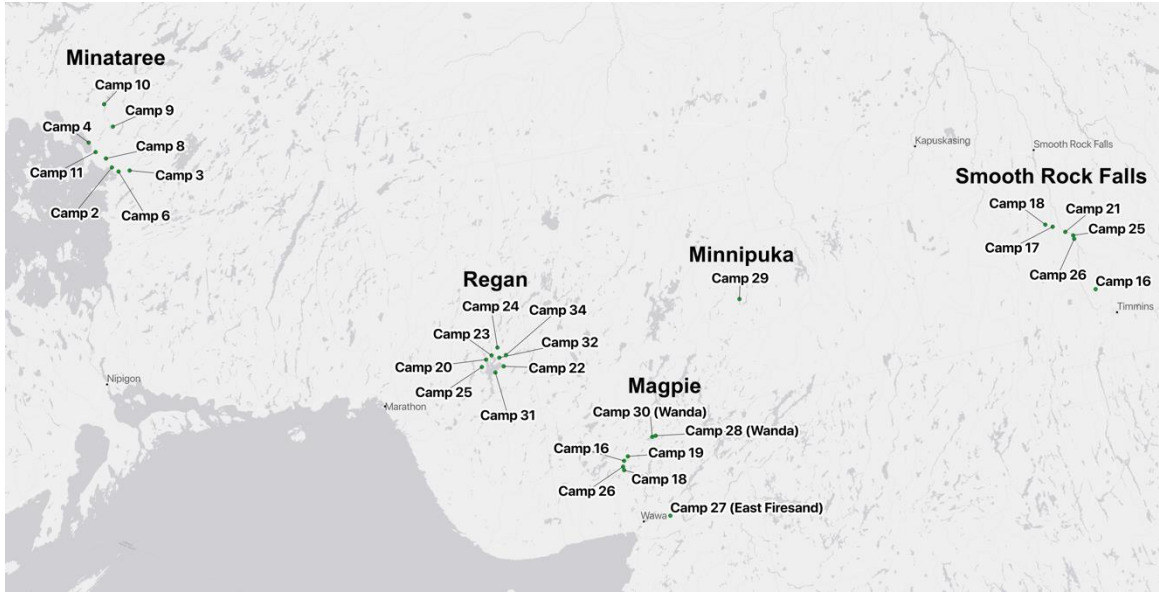
<sup>14</sup> Ontario Forest Industries Association to Minister of Labour, May 11, 1944, O-1-3-1 M Ontario Forest Industries - Post War Reconstruction 1944, WM 40-46 Box 3 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>15</sup> "Questionnaire Re Pyament of Men, Season 1940-1941," n.d., R-1-58 (M) Questionnaire Re Payment Men, WM-8 Box 2 of 3, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

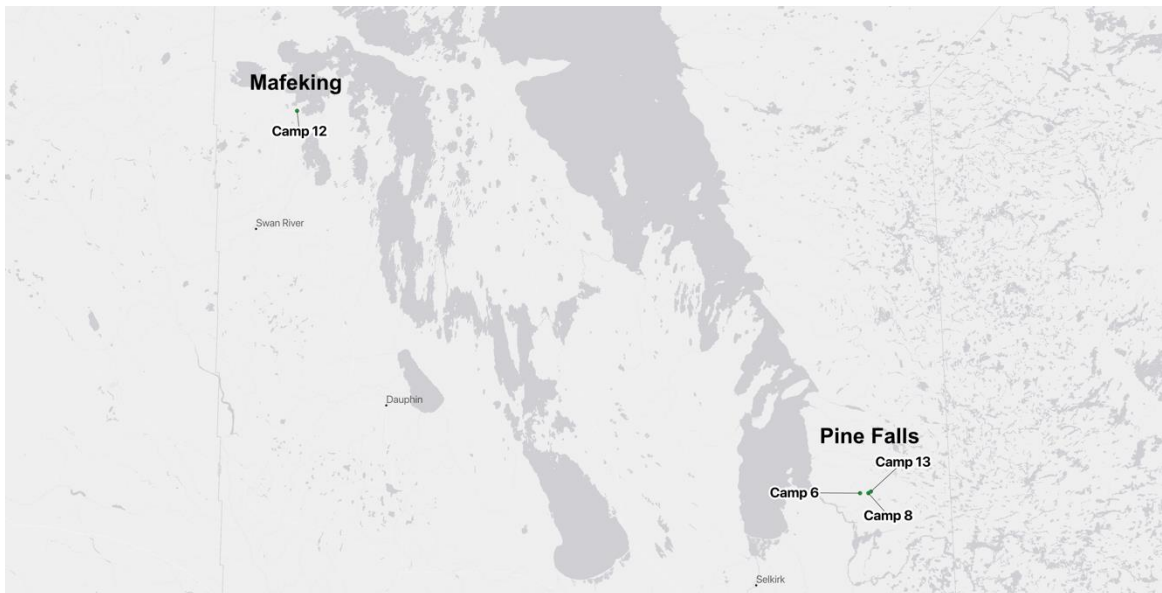
<sup>16</sup> Ontario Forest Industries Association to Minister of Labour, May 11, 1944, O-1-3-1 M Ontario Forest Industries - Post War Reconstruction 1944, WM 40-46 Box 3 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL; Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 41.

**Table 3: Abitibi Power & Paper Co. camps employing POWs.**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Camp No.</b>	<b>Opened</b>	<b>Closed</b>	<b>POWs</b>
Magpie	Camp 16	01-Feb-45	17-Apr-46	107
Magpie	Camp 18	17-Jan-44	24-Apr-46	124
Magpie	Camp 19	06-Mar-44	24-May-46	75
Magpie	Camp 26	Jul-45	20-Jan-46	50
Magpie	Camp 27	Oct-44	27-Mar-46	75
Magpie	Camp 28	27-Mar-46	15-Jun-46	75
Magpie	Camp 30	Apr-45	17-Apr-46	40
Minataree	Camp 10	02-Dec-43	8-Jun-46	100
Minataree	Camp 11	Oct-44	22-Jun-46	100
Minataree	Camp 2	6-May-46	27-Jun-46	75
Minataree	Camp 3	26-Apr-46	22-Jun-46	100
Minataree	Camp 4	Oct-44	16-Mar-45	100
Minataree	Camp 6	28-Feb-44	26-Apr-46	100
Minataree	Camp 8	21-Jan-44	27-Jun-46	100
Minataree	Camp 9	16-Mar-45	6-May-46	100
Minnipuka	Camp 29	04-Apr-45	23-May-46	66
Regan	Camp 20	02-Nov-44	29-Mar-46	60
Regan	Camp 22	17-Jan-44	29-Mar-46	100
Regan	Camp 23	01-Apr-44	18-Jul-46	200
Regan	Camp 24	06-Mar-44	14-Jul-46	100
Regan	Camp 25	07-Oct-44	24-Jun-46	100
Regan	Camp 31	Apr-45	16-Jul-46	100
Regan	Camp 32	29-Mar-46	18-Jul-46	100
Regan	Camp 34	Jan-46	16-Jul-46	60
Smooth Rock Falls	Camp 17	11-Oct-44	14-Jun-46	120
Smooth Rock Falls	Camp 18	21-Jan-44	05-May-46	150
Smooth Rock Falls	Camp 21	05-May-45	Sep-45	80
Smooth Rock Falls	Camp 25	12-Jul-45	06-May-46	90
Smooth Rock Falls	Camp 26	Sep-45	13-Jun-46	80
Timmins	Camp 16	30-Nov-45	09-Apr-46	80
Mafeking, MB	Camp 12	09-Nov-44	19-Apr-46	100
Pine Falls, MB	Camp 13	Apr-45	15-Jun-46	50
Pine Falls, MB	Camp 6	09-Nov-44	Apr-45	100
Pine Falls, MB	Camp 8	09-Nov-44	11-Jul-46	100



**Figure 26: Abitibi Power & Paper Co. camps employing POWs in Ontario, 1943-1946. Map by Author.**



**Figure 27: Abitibi Power & Paper Co. (Manitoba Paper Co.) camps employing POWs in Manitoba, 1944-1946. Map by Author.**

The federal departments of Labour and National Defence approved Abitibi's request for POW labour, which brought the prisoners to Minataree. Satisfied with the initial performance of POWs, the company continued to request more men so that within two months, the company had 500 POWs in its employ.<sup>17</sup> By April 1944, the company had nine camps staffed by POWs and, hoping to bring production back up to full capacity, opened an additional nine camps by the end of 1944, including three in its Manitoba district. By the time the last POWs left the bush in mid-1946, the company had employed over 2,000 POWs in thirty-four different camps. Not all these camps were operating at the same time, because the company relocated POWs to new or existing camps in the same district when cutting operations finished or when civilian labour became available.<sup>18</sup>

Bushwork of the era remained heavily dependent on lakes and rivers to move logs, which helped significantly to reduce transportation costs, so employers established temporary camps and crude roads throughout Northwestern Ontario.<sup>19</sup> Camps were located deep in the bush, so access varied by season. In the company's Soo District, for instance, camps in the Magpie area (see Figure 26) were generally accessible by rail year-round while those in the Regan area relied on boat access during the summer and on winter roads in winter. This meant that the majority of camps remained completely isolated during the spring break-up and winter freezing periods as boat traffic was restricted and roads too soft for vehicle traffic. Camps near rail lines could be easily supplied, but they entailed additional restrictions; for example, the Department of National Defence only approved the company's Minnipuka Camp 29, less than 150 feet

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<sup>17</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to V.A.G., December 15, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-43 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Smooth Rock Falls, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC; Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to V.A.G., January 3, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>18</sup> Most POWs only moved once, if at all, but some Regan-area POWs worked in three different camps between 1944 and 1946.

<sup>19</sup> Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 26.

from a major transcontinental line, on the grounds that strictly “White” POWs (that is, anti-Nazis) be employed.<sup>20</sup>

The structure and construction of Abitibi POW camps varied because the pulpwood industry was transitioning in this era from traditional log buildings to relocatable panel buildings. Traditionally, cutters walked to the worksites, requiring companies to build small networks of camps within the working areas, each a short distance away from merchantable timber. Companies generally only worked an area for a few years before cutters cleared all available timber and relocated cutting operations, so most opted for log buildings with an expected lifespan of four to five years. This style of camp was popular as the company began operations in the Regan area in 1942, with most camps there consisting of log buildings with unpeeled log walls, roofs of sawn lumber or logs covered with tar paper, inside walls covered with insulating paper, and sawn lumber doors and floors.<sup>21</sup> However, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, companies began experimenting with frame or panel-built buildings that could be easily dismantled once



**Figure 28: Views of Minataree Camp 8 and Regan Camp 24. Note the difference in type of buildings, with panel buildings at Minataree (left) and log buildings at Regan (right). Author's Collection and ICRC Audiovisual Archives, V-P-HIST-03073-27.**

<sup>20</sup> Seventy-one POWs arrived at Minnipuka from Riding Mountain Park Project in April 1945. Lt.-Col. F.H. Wilkes to Director Prisoners of War, February 27, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-92 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Minnipuka, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC; DMO & P to DPW, March 6, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-92 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Minnipuka, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>21</sup> J.D. Buchan, “Logging of the Black & White Watersheds: The Pre-Mechanization Era 1890-1950,” 1972, 26, Forest History Society of Ontario, [www.ontarioforesthistor.ca](http://www.ontarioforesthistor.ca).

cutting operations finished, relocated, and then reassembled at a new location. When the company built its Minataree-area camps between 1940 and 1942, it relied chiefly on panel buildings and began phasing out its log counterparts.<sup>22</sup>

Despite varying in size and construction, most camps included a standard assortment of buildings, including bunkhouses for POWs, guards, and civilians, camp office and canteen, kitchen and mess hall, meat house, washroom, privy, blacksmith's shop, and barn. With many Scandinavians employed in the Northern Ontario lumber industry, camps typically had steam baths or saunas rather than showers.<sup>23</sup> Prisoners and guards shared the same saunas, often at the same time; it was, one guard recalled, an



**Figure 29: Camp 27 Layout. Note the camp's proximity to the water and the log booms (top left) designed to stop logs from floating downriver. Adapted from sketch map drawn by Heinz Friess, Author's Collection; 1949-R3-4743-25, RG 1-429-7, Archives of Ontario.**

<sup>22</sup> After building its last log camp in 1947, the company replaced all of its camps with the frame models. *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

“unusual set of circumstances.”<sup>24</sup> Most camps were already well-established by the time POWs arrived and had already housed civilian cutters, but the company also used POW labour to build new camps. For example, the company employed fifty POWs to build Regan Camp 25, with the men living in tents before moving into their new quarters.<sup>25</sup>

Security fell to men of the Veterans’ Guard of Canada, at a ratio of one guard for every ten POWs. The natural environment also provided security, of course. Although most camps remained well-isolated from the public, the Pine Falls camps prompted security concerns as they were only twenty kilometres from Winnipeg Electric Co.’s Great Falls Plant. The company had established its own security force shortly after the war began and spent thousands of dollars over the previous five years to guard the plants. Although the plant supervisor remained “obsessed” with the possibility of sabotage, the company realized this was extremely unlikely and had recently withdrawn its own security force. Now that the plant was without guards and POWs were within walking distance, the company was unsurprisingly concerned.<sup>26</sup> Department of Labour inspector Major Keane therefore ensured camp guards took adequate safety measures. However, he noted the POWs had shown no interest in wandering – they apparently had a “great fear” of getting lost – and so he believed sabotage was highly unlikely.<sup>27</sup>

Each camp had a small civilian staff, including a foreman, clerk, cook, and several instructors, but the rest of the camp consisted chiefly of POWs. Camps ranged in size from fifty to 200 men, but most employed 100 POWs. On average, the company detailed seventy POWs for woodcutting, seven for cutting fuelwood, ten for road cutting

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<sup>24</sup> R. J Henderson, *Ephemera of German Prisoners of War in Canada and the Veterans’ Guard of Canada* (Regina, SK: R.J. Henderson, 2009), 89.

<sup>25</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Col. H.N. Streight, September 18, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>26</sup> Maj. J.H. Keane to Lt.-Col. R.H. Davidson, December 4, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>27</sup> Maj. J.H. Keane, “Manitoba Paper Company Limited, n.d., HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.



and maintenance, and the rest for the day-to-day maintenance of the camp.<sup>28</sup> A cook prepared food with the assistance of his assistant cook and kitchen helpers, who also washed dishes, waited on tables, and cleaned after meals. Three chore boys carried wood and water, attended fires, maintained lamps, and cleaned, while a night watchman maintained stoves, filled water barrels, checked on horses, woke the cook, and watched for fires. Some camps also employed POWs as barn bosses, responsible for cleaning stables and taking care of horses, and as blacksmiths to maintain all necessary equipment.<sup>29</sup>

Although Abitibi initially took any POWs the Department of Labour was willing to provide, by August 1944 company officials had established criteria for selecting POWs they believed the best suited for work. The company specified each camp was to include two non-commissioned officers (NCOs) to serve as spokesman and assistant spokesman and the former was to be a “regular army man” unconnected to Gestapo-activity and preferably Prussian. The company requested the rest of the men were all to be volunteers, privates in the Army (not Air Force or Navy), and preferably Bavarians or Saxons. The company provided no reasoning behind the preferences for POWs from specific states but was likely relying on the common stereotypes that these individuals were disciplined, efficient, and, in the case of the Prussians, strong leaders. The company also preferred POWs who had already spent a period of time in an internment camp, rather than recent arrivals. As the company representative explained, the latter “might not yet appreciate the freedom allowed prisoners on a work project.” In the hope of finding more loyal workers, the company made one more request and recommended that the POWs be informed that those who volunteered for work would be first to be repatriated.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> D.J. Munro, “Notes re Handling Prisoners of War,” February 29, 1944, P.O.W. Labor Data 1945-1946 from Mr. Munro's Office, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>29</sup> R.A. Kenshol, “Notes re Prisoners of War,” January 12, 1944, P.O.W. Labor Data 1945-1946 from Mr. Munro's Office, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>30</sup> W. Kishbaugh to Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham, August 11, 1944, L-1-9 Labour Training Program, WM 40-46 Box 3 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

One of the most important incentives for POWs to volunteer for work was pay. Prisoners worked eight-hour days and received 50¢ per day. Initially, POWs received 30¢ of their pay in the form of paper chits and the remaining 20¢ deposited in their account back at the base camp. Many prisoners voiced their dissatisfaction with this, complaining they were being denied access to their full pay and arguing that their 20¢ could be put to better use in purchasing articles from camp canteens than sitting in their accounts. The Department of Labour relented in May 1944, granting POWs access to their full pay, so long as the entire working group met its daily quota. If it failed to meet quota, the entire group – including those not employed in the bush – only received 30¢ per day.<sup>31</sup> This, the Department of Labour hoped, would provide POWs with sufficient incentive to meet their daily quota.

Pay could either be spent at the canteen to purchase a variety of goods including cigarette papers, chocolate bars, pencils, chewing gum, writing ink, matches, mitts, needles, pipes, razors, shaving cream, sun glasses, tobacco, toothbrushes, and thread, or, with the company's permission, on orders through the Eaton's and Simpson's mail-order catalogues.<sup>32</sup> As company officials rarely restricted catalogue orders, POWs placed sizeable orders for a vast array of goods, with a single order from one camp totalling \$2,000.<sup>33</sup>

Prisoners could also use their pay to support comrades back in the base camps. After the German government ceased forwarding monthly allowances to POWs in Canada in September 1944, donations from the charitable organizations helped mitigate the effect of losing this income. However, after VE-Day, the German Red Cross was

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<sup>31</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to All Employers of Prisoners-of-War, May 6, 1944, P.O.W. Labor Data 1945-1946 from Mr. Munro's Office, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>32</sup> R.A. Kenshol, "Notes re Prisoners of War," January 12, 1944, P.O.W. Labor Data 1945-1946 from Mr. Munro's Office, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>33</sup> This was not unique to Abitibi camps. At a meeting between POW employers and the Dept. of Labour in February 1944, it was revealed 513 POWs had ordered \$12,000 worth of goods from the Eaton's and Simpson's mail-order catalogues. "Meeting of Thunder Bay District Woods Operators Employing Prisoners-of-War or Expecting to Employ Prisoners-of-War," February 7, 1944, Minutes of Meetings Re: POW's, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

unable to provide gifts or money to POWs, leaving many unable to purchase basic comforts like shaving soap, tooth powder, and razor blades. In August 1945, the ICRC asked those employed in labour projects to consider donating one day's pay every month to a collective fund to help their comrades in the base camps.<sup>34</sup> Reactions varied, with some camps wholeheartedly supporting the program, some proposing forwarding money or gifts to individual POWs, some completely refusing, and many remained divided, as in the case of Minnipuka Camp 29. Here, thirty-one of sixty-three POWs declined, arguing they had been harassed, abused, and considered "renegades" by fellow POWs when they volunteered for work in 1943 and they were unwilling to forget this.<sup>35</sup> However, many bush camps agreed and, by March 1946, had raised over \$7,800 to provide thousands of POWs with toiletries.<sup>36</sup>

The POWs who did volunteer for work came from internment camps throughout Alberta and Ontario. They generally arrived at a company depot by rail or boat before being transferred to their respective bush camps. At the depots, the company issued them working clothing before taking them to camp by boat, wagon, truck, or on foot. Once in camp, the POWs were shown to their quarters while the guard conferred with camp staff to review instructions and set bounds. Guards and camp staff then provided the spokesman with general instructions and rules before allowing the POWs the remainder of the day and the following day to rest and settle in.<sup>37</sup>

The transition from an internment camp to the company's bush camps was significant to say the least. Thrust into an unfamiliar landscape, the POWs did their best to adapt to their new surroundings. Prisoner Horst Knauth, a veteran of North Africa who

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<sup>34</sup> J.C. Kaufmann to Spokesman, Work Camp, August 31, 1945, HQS 7236-83-7-14 - T.E.A. - W. Matters - International Red Cross - At Work Projects, C-5402, RG24, LAC.

<sup>35</sup> Wilhelm Schmidt to Ernest Maag, September 9, 1945, HQS 7236-83-7-14 - T.E.A. - W. Matters - International Red Cross - At Work Projects, C-5402, RG24, LAC.

<sup>36</sup> Lt.-Col. H.W. Pearson to Information Division, June 15, 1946, HQS 7236-83-7-14 - T.E.A. - W. Matters - International Red Cross - At Work Projects, C-5402, RG24, LAC.

<sup>37</sup> D.J. Munro, "Notes re Handling Prisoners of War," February 29, 1944, P.O.W. Labor Data 1945-1946 from Mr. Munro's Office, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.



**Figure 30: Camp 27 (East Firesand). Horst Knauth described this scene as “eine Mondlandschaft” – a “lunar landscape.” Author's Collection.**

was transferred from Camp 132 (Medicine Hat) to the bush in 1944, described the area around Camp 27 (East Firesand) as “eine Mondlandschaft” – a “lunar landscape.”<sup>38</sup> The bush was a foreign environment, remote and unforgiving. Yet, regardless in which camp they found themselves, the early reactions of POWs emphasized the freedom they now enjoyed in the bush. After arriving at Minataree Camp 6, Reihnold Trögel wrote in a letter home, “You can’t imagine how nice it is to no longer have a barbed-wire fence continually before one’s eyes, and to be able to sleep well at night, after having worked all day long in the fresh air.”<sup>39</sup> The opportunity to work and the freedom of bush life was highly valued despite many POWs arriving in the middle of winter and temperatures

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<sup>38</sup> Horst Knauth, *Sehr nüchtern wirkt das Lager Limer (1945), die Umgebung wie eine Mondlandschaft*, photograph, Author’s Collection.

<sup>39</sup> Canadian postal authorities censored all incoming and outgoing mail to ensure POWs did not leak sensitive information and mail also offered intelligence officers insight into POW morale and, in this case, reactions to work. Canadian Postal Censorship, “Report on Prisoner of War Lumber Camps,” July 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

dipping below -50°C. In a letter home, Eilert Deters noted his appreciation of being able to work in Regan Camp 22:

I don't find the time as long here as in the camp, and it is very beneficial for our bodies too. One feels much better when one works every day and the forest air does one good. The pale colour in my face has disappeared already. Right now a snowstorm is raging outside[;] thank Heaven, that today is Sunday and we don't have to go out. I can tell you that we shall be able to stay here for the duration of the war, which has been my wish from the very first day as we have had to stay behind barbed wire long enough. At any event, we have more freedom here, though we are deep in the woods. We can move about freely within a radius of 1½ miles. In the summer, the time should pass still more quickly, for we shall be able to swim in the lake after work. Even if we have to work every day it is already a relief, for the monotonous life behind wire is over.<sup>40</sup>

Likewise, after arriving at Magpie Camp 16, Martin Meuer wrote to his parents, "On account of our work we are very much in the open area and that agrees with me excellently."<sup>41</sup> Looking forward to the summer when they could take full advantage of their surroundings, POWs generally viewed their new life in the bush as an improvement over life behind barbed wire and an opportunity to improve both their physical and mental health.

Bush camps had few amenities but companies like Abitibi did what they could to improve living standards. When it came to civilian employees, companies had to first attract potential bushworkers and then retain them. Abitibi believed the most important factors in retaining labour were, in order of importance, the class of foremen, food, home facilities, cleanliness, sleeping comfort, working conditions, canteen variety and prices, and recreation facilities.<sup>42</sup> Unsatisfied civilian workers could simply quit and seek out work with other employers but POWs did not have that luxury. Regardless, Abitibi

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<sup>40</sup> Canadian Postal Censorship, "Report on Prisoner of War Lumber Camps," July 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>41</sup> Censorship report of letter from Martin Meuer to Joh. Meuer, March 5, 1945, translated April 6, 1945, HQS 8118-32 - Interceptions Prisoners of War Mail, C-5130, RG24, LAC.

<sup>42</sup> "Wood Managers' Meeting - Port Arthur, April 14-15, 1944," n.d., Administration - Management Committee - Woods Managers - Reports of Meetings 1950-1951, WM-51A Box 1 of 4, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

recognized that content workers would be more likely to work harder and, although they did not have to worry about competitive wages, the quality of accommodations and food remained important factors in ensuring POWs worked satisfactorily.

With POWs coming from modern facilities at Camp 23 (Monteith), Camp 132 (Medicine Hat), or Camp 133 (Lethbridge), bush camps were, by comparison, primitive. Internment camps had modern amenities such as hot and cold running water and electricity, as well as ample sources of recreation, educational classes, orchestras, theatre programs, and organized sports. Bush camps did not. The majority of bush camps had no electricity or running water, instead relying on gas lamps for light during the night and water drawn from rivers or lakes for cooking and washing. Yet most POWs gladly traded the lack of modern amenities for relative freedom and the opportunity to work. As Wilhelm Cross stated while at Minataree Camp 6, “it is all rather primitive, but quite nice.”<sup>43</sup>

The primitive nature of bush camps was even embraced by some POWs and they set out to make their surroundings more comfortable. One POW compared his camp’s log buildings to German ski-huts while others used more romanticized imagery. At Regan Camp 22, a POW described his new surroundings:

I have now turned to a new form of sport, tree-felling. Deep in the midst of the snow-bedecked, fairy-tale wilderness of the Canadian forest primeval, miles from the nearest human habitation, lies our little log-hut-camp. Weekdays it is ‘hard-going’, but after four years of dullness work and fresh air do us good. On Sundays we go fishing or trapping on Indian snowshoes (not skis). In the evening there is a steam-bath in the ‘Sauna’ so I can experience Löhndorff and Karl May once more.<sup>44</sup>

POWs now had a chance to live their own versions of the adventure stories written by popular German authors Ernst Friedrich Löhndorff and Karl May.

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<sup>43</sup> Canadian Postal Censorship, “Report on Prisoner of War Lumber Camps,” July 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Some POWs also felt the need to justify their decision to work in the bush. Seemingly frustrated with having to waste his youth behind barbed wire, Heinrich Thelemann explained to a friend in Germany his decision to volunteer;

Should you be discontented then think of me, who with his 30 years is a prisoner and has to work in the woods or on the farm for 30c to 50c. Aside from that I haven't a trade yet and don't know yet what I am going to be. It all depends too much on the future. Certainly, everyone is the maker of his own destiny, but the best preparations are nullified by fate. Therefore I let the future come to me... I am now in a wood cutters' camp to pass captivity as quickly as possible and to get something out of life at the same time. When I was behind barbed wire, while others were at working camps and had more freedom I always felt that I missed something. Perhaps you believe the opposite. Those behind barbed wire have time to study and read while I spent this valuable time enriching a company or farmer. But this way I had an opportunity to see something of the country and people of Canada. Now I would enjoy studying languages, but my distaste for the milling crowd of the Base Camp is too great.<sup>45</sup>

It was not uncommon for POWs employed in Canada to express guilt for helping an enemy nation, but the lure of freedom that bush camps provided helped offset this. Work also offered POWs a chance to learn a new trade, one that could be of use when they eventually returned to Germany or in the slim chance they would be allowed to stay in Canada after the war. Many POWs, especially the younger ones, had little experience with any work beyond soldiering. Few had backgrounds in forestry or logging but, after a year in the bush, POWs could easily be considered skilled bushworkers. Furthermore, bushwork also offered jobs for those with experience with horses, as well as individuals with backgrounds in blacksmithing, first aid, and cooking.

Those assigned cooking or kitchen duty worked tirelessly to keep their comrades well fed in camp and at the worksites. Food was, according to Abitibi, the second most important factor in retaining bush labour and the company strove to provide its workers with good and varied food. Under the Geneva Convention, POWs were only entitled to the same amount of food as a Canadian serviceman but, in order to meet the physical

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<sup>45</sup> Lt.-Col. C.G. Carruthers, "Monthly Intelligence Report, April 1945," May 1, 1945, HQS 7236-94-6-20 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Gravenhurst, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

demands of bushwork, food was rarely lacking in quantity. Each POW was to receive 16 lbs milk (canned), 1 lb of milk (stock), 2 lbs of coffee, 0.2 lbs of tea, 4.5 lbs of lard or shortening, 46 lbs of meat and fish (not including fowl), and three dozen eggs per month. To encourage production, the company also provided an additional case of milk, 20 lbs of coffee, and two cases of fruit per month to camps with “good records.”<sup>46</sup> A Canadian civilian cook generally remained in charge of the kitchen while an assistant cook and six kitchen helpers were drawn from the ranks of the POWs. Walter Feldt, assistant cook at Regan Camp 24, described his duties in a letter home:

There is plenty of work and good food. As far as the food is concerned, I can tell you that I prepare it myself. I work here in the kitchen with a Canadian Civilian cook. He makes only cakes and bread, and I cook everything else. I have a nice little room here with two beds close to the kitchen! What do you think, that would be fine life for us, wouldn't it? I have a great deal to do in the kitchen, often I work as many as fifteen hours, but that does not matter to me, I always try to make the meals as good as possible for my comrades.”<sup>47</sup>

The food at Abitibi camps, one Canadian officer wrote, was “plentiful but not for gourmands.” Complaints were rare.<sup>48</sup> At Minataree Camp 6, Walter Kautz wrote his family that the food was “good and plentiful” while, at Magpie, Wolfgang Hellfeld assured his family he was well fed, with hot meals three times a day and cake with every meal.<sup>49</sup> Even one of the guards later recalled one of the perks of guarding bush camps was the quality and quantity of food.<sup>50</sup> The company did have to remain mindful of the quantity of food it provided to POWs, advising that rationing in POW camps was to be done on the same basis as its civilian camps. Abitibi warned its employees that the

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<sup>46</sup> R.A. Kenshol to Camp Clerks, November 1944, P.O.W. Labor Data 1945 - 46 From Mr. Munro's Office, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>47</sup> Canadian Postal Censorship, “Report on Prisoner of War Lumber Camps,” July 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>48</sup> Lt.-Col. W.F. Morgan to HQ MD2, January 15, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>49</sup> Canadian Postal Censorship, “Report on Prisoner of War Lumber Camps,” July 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>50</sup> Lt. Andrew Stevenson, untitled memoir, Vol. 1, p. 8-9, H13.22.412, Robert H. Henderson Collection, Royal Alberta Museum [henceforth RAM].



company would face public criticism if the POWs received too much food – and yet not providing enough could lead to harmful retaliatory measures on POWs in Germany.<sup>51</sup>



**Figure 31: Dinner time at one of the Regan camps. Note the murals added by POW artists. ICRC Audiovisual Archives, V-P-HIST-03384-04.**

When not at work, POWs were expected to find their own ways to pass the time. Prisoners generally spent their free time in the mess hall when it was otherwise not in use. However, so long as the POWs worked satisfactorily, the company generally provided a recreation hut or the materials for POWs to build their own – a feature not found in traditional civilian bush camps. Companies traditionally gave recreation little thought in civilian bush camps and, as Canadian Pulp and Paper Association Forester Alex Koroleff noted, some companies even considered recreation in logging camps as a “folly.”<sup>52</sup> More progressive companies began providing radios, newspapers, and magazines to its employees and Abitibi extended this to POW camps, providing a small

<sup>51</sup> R.A. Kenshol, “Notes re Prisoners of War,” January 12, 1944, P.O.W. Labor Data 1945-1946 from Mr. Munro's Office, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>52</sup> A. Koroleff, “Manpower and Efficiency in Woods Operations,” *Pulp and Paper Magazine of Canada* 43 (October 1942).

assortment of games, cards, magazines, newspapers, and a radio. Apart from interactions with civilian employees and mail, these remained the primary contacts with the outside world. Regulations prohibited short-wave radios, which could pick up foreign broadcasts, but the company mistakenly issued two Minataree-area camps with them. Guards eventually caught on after POWs were found listening to broadcasts from Lisbon and Mexico City and promptly replaced them with long-wave radios.<sup>53</sup> Radios were also supplemented with gramophones, usually brought with them from the base camps, purchased from mail-order catalogues, or provided by the War Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA.

Civilian bushworkers appear to have made little use of their natural surroundings for recreation, but this was not the case with POWs. Having spent months or years behind barbed wire, POWs made quick use of their newfound freedom and turned to their surroundings to help pass their free time. Forest and uneven terrain limited sporting opportunities, but POWs used lakes and rivers to their advantage. Swimming and canoeing became popular summertime activities while soccer and hockey were played during the winter. But as these sports remained dependent on the weather, table tennis became one of the most popular sports, especially in landlocked camps. Shortages of ping pong balls thus became serious concerns and, as one camp called it their "only kind of recreation," they asked Col. Streight to investigate when their shipment from the YMCA never arrived.<sup>54</sup> Hiking and exploring were also popular year-round activities but, unfamiliar with the bush, it was not uncommon for POWs to get lost while exploring their new surroundings. Three weeks after arriving in November 1944, Willi Manycz and Erich Lang left Regan Camp 23 to explore but got lost in the bush during the day and did

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<sup>53</sup> Cpl. Russell to Col. H.N. Streight, April 6, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-32 - Dept. of Labour Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co., Minataree Ont. Project, C-5383, RG24, LAC; Cpl. B. Hadley to Col. H.N. Streight, April 6, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-32 - Dept. of Labour Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co., Minataree Ont. Project, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>54</sup> Camp 8 Spokesman to Col. Streight, August 30, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-32 - Dept. of Labour Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co., Minataree Ont. Project, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

not find their way back until the next day.<sup>55</sup> (It was not only the POWs who got lost: in the morning of December 20, 1945, Private Ronald Berry, a twenty-year-old replacement attached to the Veterans' Guard, left Smooth Rock Falls Camp 26, likely to go hunting, and failed to return.<sup>56</sup> With temperatures reaching -40C, two police constables and fourteen POWs set out to find Berry, following his trail through the bush for twelve miles. After six hours of searching, the search finally found Berry's body with signs showing he had died of exposure.)<sup>57</sup>

For other sources of entertainment, POWs relied on international aid organizations like the ICRC, the German Red Cross, and the War Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA to provide aid, necessities and comforts.<sup>58</sup> Once notified that a new labour camp was being established, the War Prisoners' Aid generally sent stringed instruments, sporting gear, and educational material. Greatly appreciated, these articles were usually followed by a thank you and a request for more.<sup>59</sup> Prisoners employed in Abitibi camps requested a variety of articles, including instruments, gramophones, records, playing cards, Christmas ornaments, books, magazines, and sporting equipment. The YMCA also committed itself to visit bush camps and personally meet with POWs to discuss their living conditions and needs. However, representatives soon discovered it was no easy feat to access these camps. Describing one such trek in the latter months of 1944, Dale Brown of the World Student Relief reported,

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<sup>55</sup> Commanding Ten to Secty DND, November 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>56</sup> Lt.-Col. H.W. Pearson to Director of Labour Projects, PW, February 26, HQS 7236-34-3-43 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Smooth Rock Falls, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>57</sup> "Nazi Prisoners Help Find Soldier's Body," *Toronto Daily Star*, December 24, 1945

<sup>58</sup> In addition to the German Red Cross, other foreign organizations also sent aid. For example, in November 1945, POWs at Pine Falls received knee-warmers, gloves, head-warmers, wrist-warmers, stomach warmers, chest-warmers, earmuffs, and mufflers from the German Ladies Division of the Argentina Red Cross. Werner Ranacher to Ernest L. Maag, November 7, 1945, HQS 7236-83-7-14 - T.E.A. - W. Matters - International Red Cross - At Work Projects, C-5402, RG24, LAC.

<sup>59</sup> Dr. H. Boeschstein, "Report of Work in the Canadian Internment Camps during the Months of October, November and December, 1944," n.d., 621-J-40C - Visits by Swiss Consul General to Internment Camps in Canada, Pt. 4, Vol. 2760, RG25, LAC.

On one trip during which I visited three different groups in three days, I rode 25 miles over the roughest railway I ever hope to meet, in a half open speeder, and in the ensuing days walked at least 35 miles over trails which were muddy, full of chuck holes and rocks. Incidentally, while I was at one of these camps, a bear that had been prowling around for several nights was shot in the middle of the night.

Despite the difficulties entailed with visiting them, after meeting with POWs in eight labour projects over the course of three months, Brown observed,

In many ways they are more fortunate than their comrades who are still behind wire – primarily because they are kept busy and they enjoy a certain degree of freedom. For those who appreciate the isolation of the forests, the hills and the streams, it is an experience they will not soon forget; but for those who do not appreciate these things, it can become almost as boring and monotonous as life behind barbed wire. On the whole, it seems to me that those who accept the work and the primitive life of these camps will return to Germany more healthy, physically, mentally and spiritually, than those returning from the camps.<sup>60</sup>

Although the YMCA was unable to provide POWs with everything they asked for, the POWs were always grateful they had not been forgotten in their “wilderness retreats.”<sup>61</sup>

Work occupied much of the POWs’ time, with prisoners working eight-hour days, six days a week. But before POWs set out into the bush, the company had to train their new bushworkers. As the *Pulp and Paper Magazine of Canada* noted, “You can’t make a clockmaker from Cologne into a woodcutter merely by waving a magic wand.”<sup>62</sup> Prisoners thus underwent a two-week instructional period in which they would learn the techniques of woodcutting and “harden up” after spending months or years behind barbed wire. The company detailed one experienced civilian cutter to serve as an instructor for

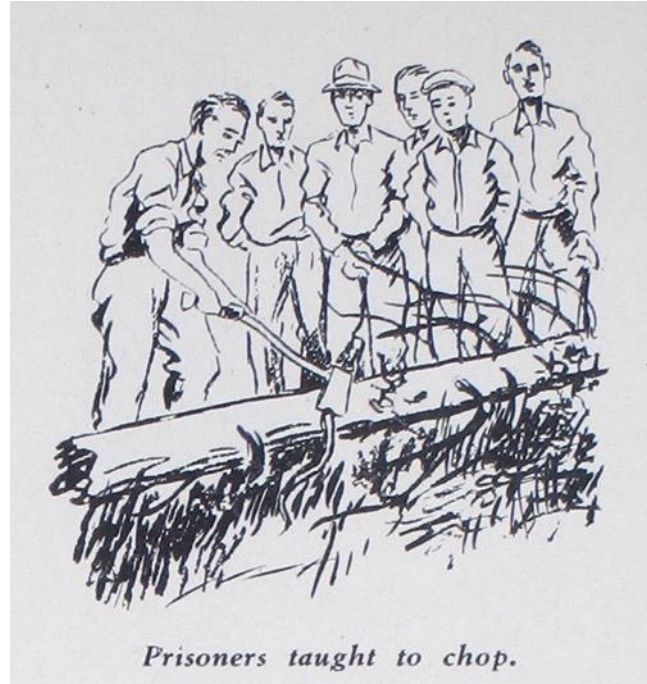
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<sup>60</sup> Dale D. Brown, “Report on Educational Activities in Canadian Prisoner of War Camps, October 1 to December 31, 1944,” n.d., 621-J-40C - Visits by Swiss Consul General to Internment Camps in Canada, Pt. 4, Vol. 2760, RG25, LAC.

<sup>61</sup> Dale D. Brown, “Report of Educational Work in Prisoner of War Camps in Canada, October 1 to December 31, 1944,” n.d., B1984-0014/001 (11) - Reports 1944, Hermann Boeschstein Fonds, University of Toronto Archives.

<sup>62</sup> “The Second Front of the Pulp and Paper Companies of Canada,” *Pulp and Paper Magazine of Canada* 44 (October 1943): 796.

each gang of ten to fifteen POWs. As few POWs, if any, had woodcutting experience, they had no bad methods or techniques to unlearn and the company therefore emphasized fostering proper technique from the beginning. With its informative illustrations, a German translation of the Canadian Pulp and Paper Association's *Woodcutter's Handbook* became the basis of cutting instruction and the company recommended instructors show diagrams of the proper methods of cutting, piling, skidding, and hauling before beginning demonstrations.



**Figure 32: “Prisoners taught to chop.” *Pulp and Paper Magazine of Canada* 44 (October 1943), 796.**

The company emphasized training by example, in part to overcome the language barrier, so instructors began with group instruction before working with each individual to teach them how to properly and safely cut wood. However, the company cautioned instructors about getting too chummy with the POWs. The key to producing loyal cutters who took pride in their work was, the company explained,

be polite and really considerate, be helpful and kind, but always remember that you are the boss and on a level of authority over them. Do not put yourself right at their level, just to make a good fellow of yourself, and do not ever tolerate anything but the very best effort and workmanship and a full day's task. If you do this, without fail and without being over-bearing or sarcastic, you will hold their respect and handle them easily. Once respect is lost, the only cure is a new instructor.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> “General Procedure for Training German Prisoners to be Pulpcutters & Bushmen,” n.d., P.O.W. Labor Data 1945-1946 from Mr. Munro's Office, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

Abitibi officials also warned that POWs, coming into considerable freedom, would likely make their best effort, at least in the beginning. The company believed that once the novelty wore off, POWs would make additional demands and therefore recommended instructors remain impersonal and avoid fraternization. Furthermore, the company reminded instructors to avoid any unnecessary hardships that could have adverse effects on Canadian POWs in Germany.<sup>64</sup>



**Figure 33: POW woodcutters and haulers at one of the Abitibi's Regan camps. Note the assortment of tools used. ICRC Audiovisual Archives V-P-HIST-03381-19A.**

The company expected that after two weeks the POWs would begin to meet their quota, which ranged from  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 cord per man per day depending on where they were working. Cutting black spruce, white spruce, balsam fir, and jack pine, Abitibi operated operations with wood cut in either 4' or 8' lengths.<sup>65</sup> The distance to the working areas ranged from camp to camp, but most were not far, and the POWs walked to their cutting

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<sup>64</sup> R.A. Kenshol, "Notes re Prisoners of War," January 12, 1944, P.O.W. Labor Data 1945-1946 from Mr. Munro's Office, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>65</sup> 1944 marked the first time Abitibi succeeded in using jack pine to produce newsprint in its Sault Ste. Marie mill. Ontario Department of Lands and Forests, *A History of Sault Ste. Marie Forest District*. (Toronto, ON: Ontario, Dept. of Lands and Forests, 1963), 117.



sites. Cutting was done much in the same manner as at Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper civilian camps, with POWs following the instructions of the *Woodcutter's Handbook*. Hauling operations increased in the winter months, when the frozen ground allowed tractors and horse-drawn sleighs to drag heavy loads from the bush, and the company re-assigned most of its POWs from cutting to hauling to ensure the season's cut was removed from the bush.<sup>66</sup> Teams of horses dragged smaller loads from the bush to the roadside, whereupon the logs were loaded on sleighs and taken to a central marshalling area. Here, a "jammer" (a simple crane) loaded smaller loads onto large sleighs and four



**Figure 34: Hauling operations at one of Abitibi's Minataree camps. Here, a small horse-drawn load is transferred to a tractor-drawn sleigh by a log jammer (crane). The tractor would then tow the sleighs to a nearby lake or river and dump the logs on the ice. Author's Collection.**

<sup>66</sup> Hauling quotas depended on the distance, number of horses, and number of men. For hauling half a mile, a quota ranged from nine cords (two men with single horse, hauling and loading and unloading) to fifteen (haul-only team with dedicated loading/unloading crew). D.J. Munro to G.E. Ball, December 17, 1945, L-1-2 Labour - POW December 1945, WM 40-46 Box 2 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

to eight of these sleighs were hauled by truck or tractor to a frozen river or lake and dumped on the ice (see Figure 34).<sup>67</sup>

Frozen lakes and rivers were essential parts of Abitibi's woods operations. All of its camps were located near lakes and rivers. As the lake ice melted, the logs fell into the water and were driven down rivers. Prisoners often worked on these drives, standing along the rivers armed with pike poles to break up and prevent jams.<sup>68</sup> Once logs reached a large lake or central point along a river, logs were boomed (collected) and towed by tug to the nearest mill.

Mid-twentieth century bushwork was seasonal. Once hauling was completed, civilian cutters generally returned to agricultural or other work for the summer and came back to the bush once harvest was over, thereby avoiding the heat and insects that hampered mid-summer work. However, the Department of Labour believed it was better to have POWs employed in year-round work and employers like Abitibi were keen to take advantage of this, continuing cutting operations throughout the summer as a way to boost production. Furthermore, because POWs were paid a set daily wage, employers could use them to clear lower-yield or difficult-to-access areas that would be too expensive to have civilian cutters clear – or in conditions civilian cutters would have refused to work. At Magpie, for example, Abitibi employed POWs in an area heavily affected by spruce budworm, which the company were unable to convince civilian cutters to cut.<sup>69</sup> Civilian cutters also refused to walk long distances to the working sites as it chewed into their cutting times and thereby their earnings, but POWs had less incentive to remain close to camp.

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<sup>67</sup> The Department of National Defence authorized POWs to operate trucks in the bush but not on provincial or local highways. Col. H.N. Streight to Cpl. B. Hedley, May 18, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-32 - Dept. of Labour Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co., Minataree Ont. Project, C-5383, RG24, LAC; Buchan, "Logging of the Black & White Watersheds," 19.

<sup>68</sup> Lt.-Col. E.H. Wilkes to Col. H.N. Streight, February 22, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-49 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Magpie, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC; Ontario Forest Industries Association, "Report on Meeting at Port Arthur Re Employment of P.O.W.," February 7, 1944, Minutes of Meetings Re: POW's, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>69</sup> D.J. Munro to C.B. Davis, December 12, 1945, L-1-2 Labour - POW December 1945, WM 40-46 Box 2 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.



Although careful instruction helped reduce injuries, the nature of bushwork meant injuries were not uncommon. Despite the dangers, access to medical care remained limited. Local civilian physicians or a company doctor made regular medical inspections but as the Department of Labour paid these men at a set rate, generally lower than the rate physicians normally charged, and as POWs often faked illnesses, many doctors were not particularly keen to examine POWs. In the bush, POWs treated their own minor injuries, with former medics often resuming their old occupations. In addition to woodcutting, former medic Herman Lübbert took on first aid duties at Regan Camp 22 as an “obligation to his comrades.” However, lacking instruments and with no doctor within twelve miles, he asked his family to send scissors, forceps, a thermometer, and a tourniquet as soon as possible.<sup>70</sup>

Serious incidents required medics to improvise until a doctor arrived or the patient could be transferred to a civilian hospital. However, as this could take hours or days, access to medical care became a common complaint. For example, it took fifty-five hours for a POW at Regan to receive care after cutting his foot, and twenty-four hours and a long journey in a sleigh in the middle of January for a POW who had suffered a stroke at Minataree.<sup>71</sup> While serious cases remained rare, seven POWs died while in the company’s employ: two were killed in work-related incidents, three drowned, one died of complications from a burst appendix, and one committed suicide.

With employers relying on hospitals in larger centres like Port Arthur or Sault Ste. Marie for treatment of more serious cases, POWs took advantage of the system by requesting hospital care by faking or exaggerating their injuries or ailments in an attempt to obtain a furlough from work. When the Department of Labour authorized the placement of POW doctors in bush camps in an effort to reduce costs and malingering,

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<sup>70</sup> Canadian Postal Censorship, “Report on Prisoner of War Lumber Camps,” July 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>71</sup> Cpl. A.W. Williams to Director, Prisoners of War, February 24, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC; Guenther Kluckow to Consul General, January 21, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-32 - Dept. of Labour Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co., Minataree Ont. Project, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

Abitibi requested three. Arriving in early 1945, Lt. Sigmund Mayer-Rosa and Hptmn. Jurgen Pfeil looked after the Smooth Rock Falls and Regan-area camps. Doctors Lt. Elmer Meinke, working for the Pulpwood Supply Co. at Longlac, and Hptmn. Eduard Morsheuser, with the Nipigon Lake Timber Co. at McKirdy looked after Abitibi's Minataree-area camps.<sup>72</sup> While three of these four proved themselves competent physicians and valuable assets to the company, Pfeil frequently clashed with guards and company officials, and excused POWs from work on trivial excuses. One inspecting officer suspected Pfeil showed favouritism to pro-Nazis and believed him responsible for much of the trouble caused by POWs at Regan. When Pfeil requested a transfer after reporting a lack of cooperation on behalf of the company, he was replaced by POW Hptmn. Von Rauch, a capable and energetic doctor formerly employed by the Great Lakes Paper Co. The transfer proved advantageous, producing a marked change in the number of POWs excused from work. Because Von Rauch did not support Nazism, he tried introducing democratic ideas to the Regan camps.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the dangers, initial reactions to work were positive, with POWs excited to live and work outside of an internment camp. Many embraced the active lifestyle that bushwork entailed. However, the years behind barbed wire had left POWs unready for the physical demands of bushwork. Although happy with his new work at Regan, Willy Rolm noted, "This forest-work is really a recreation for me, though I had a little muscle-aching at first." Albin Selzem likewise reported he and his comrades were unaccustomed to the work at first but hoped they would soon adjust and then be ready to work once they returned to Germany.<sup>74</sup> Others simply appreciated the transfer from the base camp. In one case, bushwork even reunited a pair of brothers: Hans Haskamp had been interned at Camp 133 (Lethbridge) and his brother Clemens at Camp 33 (Petawawa) but, after

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<sup>72</sup> Maj. George Forbes to Director of Labour Projects, March 29, 1945, 16. Correspondence re: German Medical Officers, Vol. 955, RG27, LAC.

<sup>73</sup> Lieut. J.P. Colson to Maj. G. Forbes, June 22, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>74</sup> Canadian Postal Censorship, "Report on Prisoner of War Lumber Camps," July 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.



**Figure 35: Reunited at last – brothers Hans and Clemens Haskamp at Regan Camp 22. ICRC Audiovisual Archives, V-P-HIST-03381-17A.**

submitting requests and with some help of the Red Cross, the pair were reunited at Regan Camp 22.

The work also improved prisoners' physical and mental health. In a letter to Germany, Regan Camp 22 POW Heinrich Ableing wrote that one became "quite a different person" when working in the bush: "We work 8 hours a day and when we come home in the evening we are beautifully tired, and can sleep wonderfully well. A person learns to do everything now. At home I worked with wood, and here I fell the wood. There is also the wonderful forest air here too." Paul Raum, at Minataree Camp 6, described his work driving two horses not only kept him busy – something he enjoyed – but improved his appetite as well. Working in the same camp as Raum, Kurt Hartmann wrote in a letter home, "In the evening we reached our living quarters (sort of log-cabins)

and there our hunger... was satisfied by a good meal, then, dog-tired, we fell into our camp beds.”<sup>75</sup>

Others found the transition from the relatively sedentary lifestyle in an internment camp to bushwork more taxing. At Regan, Ludwig Harf described in a letter,

After 4 years of idleness the work is very hard on us. I am always tired to death and all my bones ache. I do not know how long this weariness will last but it has not improved after 6 weeks. My job is to look after the horses. I have 18 draught horses to care for. My day begins at 6.30 am. And ends at 7.30 p.m. with a stop, however, at dinner time, you can't imagine what it is like here: there is no electric lighting: it is still done by stable lanterns, also there are no pumps – these would always be frozen. I fetch all the water from a nearby lake. You cannot imagine the great amount of snow here.<sup>76</sup>

Few POWs complained of the cold winters, but one guard did complain after travelling eighteen miles from Magpie to camp in an open sleigh, a five-and-a-half hour trip in sub-zero temperatures.<sup>77</sup> However, as one POW at Regan noted, despite the “very rigorous winter,” their winter clothing protected them from the elements and, as another pointed out, if a single pair of underwear was insufficient, one could always wear a second pair.<sup>78</sup>

Others found the summer months more trying. When a new spokesman arrived at Regan Camp 23 from the base camp in June 1944, he reported the flies and heat made the work much more difficult so that, he noted, “it can only be performed with risk to the health of the individual.”<sup>79</sup> He later remarked that he and his comrades had hoped bushwork would improve their health, but the “unendurable summer months” proved the opposite. A visiting doctor found thirty-six of ninety POWs unfit for work and

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Maj.-Gen. A.E. Potts to Secretary, DND, January 24, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-49 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Magpie, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>78</sup> Canadian Postal Censorship, “Report on Prisoner of War Lumber Camps,” July 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>79</sup> Ernst Katzmarksi to Sgt. Maj. Schroth, July 1, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

recommended their transfer.<sup>80</sup> Excessive heat and “plagues” of insects proved common themes in the summer months and these two factors were among the reasons bushwork generally remained seasonal in civilian operations.

Attitudes towards work could also depend on whether the POWs had worked elsewhere. While all of the company’s initial camps employed a mix of Air Force, Navy, and Army combatant POWs, the company also employed Enemy Merchant Seamen in some of its Regan and Smooth Rock Falls camps. Having returned from working on farms in Southern Ontario during the previous summer, the EMS arrived in the bush in November 1944 and, after spending the winter in the bush, were to be transferred back to farms in the summer. However, the EMS quickly realized they strongly preferred farm work. In a letter to a friend in Camp 23 (Monteith), Wolfgang Katz stated he and his comrades hoped to be transferred elsewhere for “better work and better conditions” but acknowledged they still preferred the work at Smooth Rock Falls to being back at Monteith.<sup>81</sup> Seaman Heinrich Thelemann described his new work hauling wood at Smooth Rock Falls in a letter home:

From morning till night I have to do with my horses and myself. The loading of the tree trunks demands much perspiration. Often it is necessary to lift with two men first one end of the log and then the other. Sometime the sleigh gets stuck and then it is necessary to take the logs off again. We have to haul at least 250 logs per day[,] 1 log equal to ½ tree, otherwise we receive only 30c per day instead of 50c. With 30c a smoker cannot get along. If only one doesn’t fulfil his quota the whole camp receives only 30c. These arrangements have been wisely kept quiet, when we offered ourselves for bush work, otherwise not many would have gone. Let us hope we soon get some work on a farm again. The little farmers have not fleeced us like the large paper mill.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Translation of letter from Katzmarksi to Consul General of Switzerland, September 24, 1944, translated October 2, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>81</sup> Lt.-Col. C.G. Carruthers, “Monthly Intelligence Report, April 1945,” May 1, 1945, HQS 7236-94-6-20 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Gravenhurst, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>82</sup> Lt. C.T.G. van Taack, “Monthly Intelligence Report, February 1945,” March 1, 1945, HQS 7236-94-6-23 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Monteith, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

Thelemann's criticism was both misdirected and incorrect. Abitibi was only responsible for setting the quota and it was in fact Department of Labour policy to only pay the full 50¢ if the group – not an individual's – quota was met. It was in Abitibi's interest to have the POWs meet the quota for the company paid the Department of Labour \$2.50 per POW per day (not including board) regardless of whether or not the POWs met their quota.

Problems and complaints were inevitable given the untested nature of employing POWs in bushwork and the Department of Labour was willing to adapt its policies as needed. After giving the companies and POWs some time to settle, the Department of Labour and Department of National Defence arranged a meeting with representatives from employers of POW labour in February 1944 to evaluate the program and, where needed, propose amendments to existing rules and regulations. Lt.-Col. Fordham, noting that prisoners were not an ideal labour force and instead merely a substitute, explained POW labour came with its own challenges:

The prisoner of war is a funny creature. While he is in the internment camp, with barbed wire, his only idea is to escape. If this man is in camp and there is no wire, he will be all right – so he is taken out of camp and put into a labour camp, but after he is there a time the novelty of being away from barbed wire disappears, and he plans all kinds of things. He begins to think he is in camp miles away from anywhere, no barbed wire, cannot see moving pictures, no recreation – cannot get all the money he wants, cannot buy all the things he wants, and generally speaking life is hell for him. That is the attitude he develops, and in an incredibly short time. Not everybody likes snow, and there is a great deal of snow in lumber camps. When spring comes some of the camps are beautifully situated – which some of the prisoners who have arrived in the winter have trouble visualizing until the season changes. But, for those who are grouching, you have to try and find some remedy.

This was also the first time that employers had ever dealt with employees that could not quit and could not be fired. Fordham recommended fair, firm, and kind treatment. This, he believed, should result in little trouble for, he explained, the average POW was a

soldier who wanted to be viewed as a good soldier, “and if you look on him as that he will try and be one and work.”<sup>83</sup>

Abitibi followed Fordham’s advice and reported few problems with the POWs in their employ through the spring of 1944. However, in May nine POWs at Minataree Camp 6 refused to work and six left bounds to visit friends at a nearby camp. The spokesman reported that the rest of the men were enjoying their work and freedom and therefore asked the nine be returned to the base camp.<sup>84</sup> As the company believed their behaviour and attitude would have an adverse effect on the other POWs, the Department of National Defence transferred the nine in June.<sup>85</sup>

Trouble escalated in June when POWs at Minataree Camps 8 and 10 went on strike. The Camp 8 spokesman explained that suffering from the heat and struggling to produce their quota, they also faced a “big plague of mosquitoes and black flies.” He noted, “The little freedom we have is therefore very dearly bought.”<sup>86</sup> The POWs at Camp 10, also struggling to produce their quota, requested the company reduce it. The company refused, prompting the spokesman to request their return. In a letter to the Camp 132 spokesman, he stated he regretted having to leave the “beautiful” country and its many distractions but saw no other choice.<sup>87</sup> The Department of Labour, fearing trouble if the POWs remained, transferred all POWs from both camps and later replaced them with new and more willing volunteers.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> “Meeting of Thunder Bay District Woods Operators Employing Prisoners-of-War or Expecting to Employ Prisoners-of-War,” 26, February 7, 1944, Minutes of Meetings Re: POW’s, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>84</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Col. H.N. Streight, May 31, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-32 - Dept. of Labour Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co., Minataree Ont. Project, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>85</sup> Message from Commanding Ten, June 9, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-32 - Dept. of Labour Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co., Minataree Ont. Project, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>86</sup> Translation of letter from Stbs.Fw. F. Neuber to Hauptfw. H. Schroth, June 6, 1944, translated June 21, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-32 - Dept. of Labour Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co., Minataree Ont. Project, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>87</sup> Translation of letter from Camp 10 Spokesman to Camp 132 Spokesman, June 19, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-32 - Dept. of Labour Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co., Minataree Ont. Project, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>88</sup> Commandant, Medicine Hat to Director, Prisoners of War, June 26, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-32 - Dept. of Labour Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co., Minataree Ont. Project, C-5383, RG24, LAC; Maj.-

Working conditions were also causing problems in the company's Smooth Rock Falls divisions, with two POWs even attempting escape as a result. In mid-1944, Abitibi officials deemed POWs Karl Gluth and Heinz Linka unsatisfactory workers and requested their transfer to the base camp. Before they could be transferred, the pair simply walked out of camp and disappeared into the bush. After a three-day struggle to escape the bush, the pair emerged near Jacksonboro, thirty-five kilometres away, at which point Linka decided to return to camp and turn himself in. Gluth pressed on, following rail lines and highways, briefly stopping to get a "good look" at Camp 23 (Monteith) before finally reaching Kirkland Lake on August 11 with the help of two passing drivers. Gluth briefly posed as a Polish refugee and wandered around town before he was apprehended by a suspicious RCMP officer. He claimed poor working conditions and a lack of clean water had prompted his decision to escape. He and his comrades, he explained, had been ordered to work in tree stands with dense underbrush that made it more difficult for the POWs to reach their quota. Civilian workers had already refused working in these stands and, while he and his comrades wanted work, these conditions prompted some to rethink their decision to volunteer.<sup>89</sup> Abitibi knew that it could employ POWs in lower-yield areas where civilian pieceworkers refused but, as this incident suggested, the company still had to tread carefully to avoid trouble.

At the same time, it could not yield to every demand. At Magpie Camp 18, for example, the spokesman made a series of requests from Abitibi officials. The POWs argued that considering they were working for a Canadian company, they should be treated as civilians and thereby exempt from wearing POW uniforms, allowed to roam free on Sundays, and only be inspected by officers.<sup>90</sup> Both Abitibi and the Department of Labour rejected the demands as unreasonable but, in June, the spokesman reported his

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Gen. H.F.G. Letson to DOCs MDs 10 and 13, July 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-32 - Dept. of Labour Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co., Minataree Ont. Project, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>89</sup> Lt. J.J. Zubick to HQ MD2, August 12, 1944, 158.4C23009 (D4) - Int reports on PWs in 23 Internment Camp, DHH.

<sup>90</sup> Cpl. Paterson to Director, Prisoners of War, January 29, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-49 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Magpie, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.



group was falling apart and requested the removal of three POWs for medical reasons and twenty-five who complained the work was too heavy and the insects too bad.<sup>91</sup> Although these men were removed, the rest of the camp nevertheless ceased work in late August after seeing an article published in *Reader's Digest* describing pulpwood as an essential war industry material. The spokesman informed the company that until the Camp 133 spokesman (his superior) or the German government issued a statement explaining that cutting pulpwood was not against German interests, his men refused to resume work.<sup>92</sup> The German government had already approved the employment of POWs in pulpwood operations in Canada and the Swiss Consul deemed the article had no bearing on POWs, so military authorities had the Camp 133 spokesman issue written orders to Camp 18 instructing the POWs to resume their work.<sup>93</sup> The men ignored the order and, as all were NCOs and therefore could not be forced to work, military authorities transferred them back to Camp 133.<sup>94</sup>

Prisoners at Magpie were not the only ones to complain of excessive heat and insects throughout the summer of 1944. The Regan Camp 24 spokesman informed the Camp 133 spokesman that the summer months were the worst to be in the bush and that he and his men had been subjected to a “mosquito plague” that left many with infected sores.<sup>95</sup> Likewise, POWs at Smooth Rock Falls Camp 18 were facing a “plague of insects” and their only respite, the spokesman explained, came at night when they could sleep under mosquito nets.<sup>96</sup> The conditions at Regan Camp 23 prompted seventy-seven

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<sup>91</sup> Censorship report of letter from Hugo Koehnke to Herman Schroth, July 4, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-49 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Magpie, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>92</sup> Hugo Koehnke to Abitibi Power & Paper Co., August 25, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-49 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Magpie, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>93</sup> G.T. Clarkson to Col. H.N. Streight, September 6, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-49 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Magpie, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>94</sup> Commandant, Lethbridge to Director PW, October 21, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-49 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Magpie, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>95</sup> Translation of letter from Rosenkranz to Camp 133 Leader, November 23, 1944 HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>96</sup> Censorship report of letter from Karl-Emil Klatt to H. Schroth dated June 3, 1944, translated July 24, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-43 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Smooth Rock Falls, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

POWs to request their return to the base camp in mid-July. The POWs complained of health risks from their working conditions, a twenty-hour delay for medical aid, and a threat from the company to reduce rations after the POWs failed to meet quota.<sup>97</sup> Lt-Col. Fordham, likening the POWs' actions to those of children, dismissed the complaints and ordered the POWs back to work.<sup>98</sup> Some POWs protested Fordham's actions and broke into the blacksmith's shop, cut up a saw to make knives, stole bars of soap, broke lamps, killed three pigs, and maimed a fourth.<sup>99</sup> The prime suspect, assistant spokesman Guenther Voigt, promptly disappeared from camp along with Erich Liebig, Johann Bachfischer, and Guenther Thom.<sup>100</sup> As guards searched for the missing POWs, the company requested all POWs be removed from Camp 23 and neighbouring Camp 22, with the exception of twenty willing to continue working. The Department of Labour, reluctant to transfer another labour camp – let alone two – back to the base camp, dispatched an inspector to quell the trouble. Railway police later apprehended Voigt and Liebig near Heron Bay but Bachfischer and Thom remained on the run for the next two months, eventually surrendering themselves near Neys on October 12. All four were sent to Port Arthur for twenty-eight days of discipline.<sup>101</sup>

Despite the trouble posed by POWs, Abitibi was satisfied with them as labourers. The company remained willing to sacrifice lower production rates for a slightly cheaper and, more importantly, available labour force. By mid-July, the company had eight camps

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<sup>97</sup> Translation of letter from Günter Voigt to Col. Streight, July 13, 1944, translated July 18, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>98</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Col. H.N. Streight, July 20, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>99</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Col. H.N. Streight, August 19, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>100</sup> Director, Prisoners of War to H.R. Landis, August 18, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>101</sup> Thom unsuccessfully attempted escape in November 1944, served another detention, and returned to Regan.

DOC MD10 to Secty DND, August 21, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC; Commanding Ten to Secty DND, October 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

(and another awaiting replacements) employing almost 800 POWs – 20% of the POWs employed in Northern Ontario. Abitibi, however, still lacked sufficient men to bring the company closer to full production. The Department of Labour, trying to deal with a national labour shortage, had prohibited the employment of civilian cutters until the end of September in an attempt to provide labour for other industries, particularly agriculture. The decision left woods companies without the men they desperately needed. Following a July 18 meeting between timber companies employing POWs, Abitibi and nine other companies petitioned the Department of Labour to release an additional 6,000 POWs for bushwork, arguing the success of both POW labour and the pulpwood industry depended on it.<sup>102</sup> The Department of Labour, recognizing the industry's desperate need for workers, relented and agreed to make more POWs available in the coming months.

As Abitibi prepared to expand its POW operations, staff continued their efforts to solve the trouble already present in its camps and the new problems that inevitably arose. The trouble in the Magpie and Regan camps emphasized the need for more effective ways to deal with POWs refusing to work or demanding their return to the base camps. In September 1944, Sault Ste. Marie Division manager D.J. Munro complained to his superiors at Abitibi that relying on the guard to issue military orders was proving ineffective and usually just created new problems. Some of the difficulty lay with the division of authority between the departments of Labour and National Defence. For example, Munro explained, Department of Labour inspectors lacked the authority to issue orders to the military guards and had instead only made suggestions in the hopes the guard would carry them out. Military authorities, including Colonel Streight, had issued verbal orders but Munro was not aware of any instance in which the guard had carried out or enforced them. Unless inspectors were able to issue orders to guards, or military authorities issued written orders, Munro believed the situation would not improve. If

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<sup>102</sup> A.G. Pounsford to Hon. C.D. Howe, July 18, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

POWs could ignore military orders and no action was taken to enforce them, Munro believed they had no reason to follow future orders or to continue working.<sup>103</sup>

Unwilling to let POWs gain the upper hand, military authorities agreed that disciplinary action had to be swift and effective if POW labour was to succeed. Colonel Streight believed the key to maintaining order fell to the guards and a reliance on military orders. German soldiers were considered militarized men who followed orders so any disobedience should result in severe disciplinary action. Streight believed that by extending military orders to include work, POWs would be more likely to follow the instructions of the guards rather than Department of Labour inspectors or civilian employees. During a visit to Abitibi's Smooth Rock Falls camps, Streight observed a tendency on the part of some civilian work bosses to ignore an NCO's authority. These bosses were traditionally the sole authorities in the bush and they felt that relying on a guard adversely reflected on their ability to run the camp. Streight explained that POWs had to be treated differently than civilians because a wood boss could not simply fire an insolent POW or "knock his block off." Prisoners could only be punished if they disobeyed a military order, so Streight recommended wood bosses take full advantage of the guards' authority. Even one of the spokesmen agreed: he explained that if he instructed his men to follow an order to work issued by the NCO, they would follow it. However, if the order came from a civilian, his men would accuse him of being a traitor and having "sold out to the company."<sup>104</sup>

Relying on guards to issue orders and instructions rather than the working bosses was an adjustment from the traditional operations but it did not solve the problem of how to punish POWs who continued to refuse work. Abitibi was only one of a number of employers that had POW "employees", ranging from small groups to entire camps, refusing to work. The Department of Labour had previously transferred offenders back to

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<sup>103</sup> D.J. Munro to Abitibi Power & Paper Co., September 22, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-49 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Magpie, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>104</sup> Lt.-Col. H.N. Streight, "Report on Visit to Labour Work Projects (9<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> October), POW Labour Projects - Reports, Notes, Corresp, Misc Papers, 1944-1945, Vol. 2, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM.

the base camp, but reducing the number of workers did not help employers meet their quotas. Military authorities recognized this and, on August 18, 1944, the Canadian government passed Order in Council P.C. 6495. The order in council authorized guards to force other-rank POWs (those below the rank of an officer) to work and introduced new methods to punish those who refused military orders. If a POW or group of POWs refused work or caused other trouble (escape, sabotage, destruction of property, etc.), they would be transferred to a detention centre at Hearst or Port Arthur for a disciplinary sentence ranging from fourteen to twenty-eight days. More serious offences would result in a transfer to the base camp. If an entire camp refused an order to work, the company was to notify military authorities who would dispatch additional guards and then declare the camp a detention camp for at least fourteen days. Prisoners then lost all of their privileges, namely in that they were confined to their quarters when not working – with the exception of one hour of exercise – and denied tobacco, books, magazines, and games. If POWs continued to refuse work, they received a reduced diet (No. 1 Punishment Diet).<sup>105</sup>

Having already arranged for the transfer of three entire camps back to the base camp and requested another two be transferred, Abitibi hoped the new policy would allow it to maintain productivity and reduce trouble in its POW camps. When a group of POWs at Minataree Camp 8 ceased working in November 1944, the company was able to test the new policy. Trouble began when a seven-man fuelwood gang was detained for repeatedly failing to make its quota and the rest of the camp went on strike in protest. The POWs argued that having a one cord quota for both fuelwood and pulpwood was unfair, for fuelwood cutters had to work harder than their comrades cutting pulpwood. Whereas those cutting pulpwood cut logs into eight-foot lengths, fuelwood cutters had to cut and split logs into three-foot lengths before piling. The extra work meant fuelwood cutters typically produced only half or three-quarters of their one cord quota.<sup>106</sup> The

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<sup>105</sup> Lt.-Col. W.F. Morgan to HQ MD2, January 15, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>106</sup> Spokesman Reinsch to Director, POW, November 29, 1944, 621-CA-40 Vol. 26 - Letters and Complaints, Vol. 2772, RG25, LAC; Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Department of

investigating officer suspected the seven fuelwood cutters were jealous of their comrades and subsequently dismissed their claims. The entire camp received fourteen days' detention for refusing to work.<sup>107</sup> Although the POWs were unhappy with the outcome, they reluctantly agreed to resume their work following their detention.

The initial success of P.C. 6495 proved promising, but the threat of detention did not always dissuade POWs from refusing work. In January 1945, Abitibi discovered some of its camps were experiencing a higher rate of damaged and lost tools. A study of twenty-one bush companies revealed an average of thirty-eight axe handles were used per 1,000 cords, with a minimum of eighteen and a maximum of seventy-two.<sup>108</sup> The company had allowed for a higher rate of damaged tools due to the POWs' lack of experience but the rates at Magpie Camps 18 and 19 were significantly higher than the other camps, leading company officials to suspect POWs were damaging their tools either intentionally or through carelessness. Company officials therefore announced tools were now allocated on a quota, allowing for one saw blade per seventeen cords, one saw frame per 200 cords, one axe handle per forty cords, and one axe per 100 cords. Anyone who exceeded the quota through breakages would have the cost of the equipment deducted from their pay.

The prisoners were unimpressed with having to pay for replacing tools they claimed were damaged or lost through their normal duties. Protesting this and an introduction of a ten-hour workday, POWs at Camps 18 and 19 refused to work. In a letter to his parents, one POW complained,

After we had been working approximately 8 months in the Canadian bush, our employer surprised us at the turn of the year not with good wishes, which we did not expect, but which would have been understandable, but

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National Defence, January 31, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-32 - Dept. of Labour Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co., Minataree Ont. Project, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>107</sup> Lt. H.E. Runwald to Headquarters, MD10, January 1, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-32 - Dept. of Labour Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co., Minataree Ont. Project, C-5383, RG24, LAC.

<sup>108</sup> "Record of Axe Handles Consumption Per 1,000 Cords of Pulpwood Cut Based on Reports from Thirty Divisions of Twenty-One Companies," June 7, 1945, A-2-1(M) Admin: Circulars and Letters to local staff & field staff, WM-40-46 Box 1 of 4, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

with a friendly letter saying that from now on we ourselves must pay in part for the tools broken at work. Furthermore the ‘worthy gentlemen’ announced a ten-hour work day and other nice little things. Although we like to work and would gladly remain here, thus doing full justice to the wish and orders of our protecting power, we have gone on strike because of the above mentioned orders, which only express the ungratefulness of our company.<sup>109</sup>

The protecting power, the Swiss Consul, had no objection to the new policy but the POWs remained determined. Arguing that their low wages left them unable to afford the cost of broken tools, they refused orders to resume work. Military authorities subsequently declared the camp a detention camp and the POWs received fourteen days detention.<sup>110</sup>

Placing a camp under detention generally solved most of the trouble but some were still willing to risk detention to prove a point. In a letter to a comrade, Karl-Heinz Allerding, an EMS at Regan Camp 20, complained that he had given up hope of returning to Monteith as anyone who refused work was arrested, confined for twenty-eight days, and returned to the lumber camp.<sup>111</sup> That did not stop him from refusing to follow an order, an act for which he received twenty-eight days’ detention. In a letter to his mother, he reassured her, stating that it was no cause for alarm and that he was taking things “in stride.” As he explained, “I only wanted to show them that I can have my own way, too, if I want to. Besides it is their loss as they are losing a good worker.”<sup>112</sup> Whether Allerding’s absence was missed is unknown but, after his detention, he remained at Regan throughout the rest of the winter.

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<sup>109</sup> Censorship report of letter from Werner Heinrich to Gotthold Heinrich, January 24, 1945, translated February 26, 1945, HQS 8118-32 - Interceptions Prisoners of War Mail, C-5130, RG24, LAC.

<sup>110</sup> Lt.-Col. W.F. Morgan to HQ MD2, January 15, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC..

<sup>111</sup> Censorship report of letter from Karl-Heinz Allerding to G. Kuehling, December 31, 1944, translated February January 15, 1945, HQS 8118-32 - Interceptions Prisoners of War Mail, C-5130, RG24, LAC.

<sup>112</sup> Censorship report of letter from Karl-Heinz Allerding to Martha Allerding, January 26, 1945, translated February 14, 1945, HQS 8118-32 - Interceptions Prisoners of War Mail, C-5130, RG24, LAC.

In some cases, the company and Department of Labour had to both place camps under detention and transfer troublemakers back to the base camp. In December 1944, for example, the company noticed a slowdown in production in its Smooth Rock Falls camps that continued into the new year. An average of forty men were idle in each of its two camps but it was not for lack of trying on behalf of the company. Smooth Rock Falls District Woods Manager James Hundevad reported, “the foremen are getting tired of walking from bunk to bunk daily asking a prisoner why he is not working only to receive a grunt for an answer or some lame excuse often accompanied by a triumphant grin.”<sup>113</sup>

The company was unsure why the POWs were slowing production, but POWs at Smooth Rock Falls Camp 18 complained that the company had failed to rescale the number of logs needed to make a single cord. The POWs had previously worked in an area that required thirty-eight logs per cord, but, since moving into an area with strong timber, the quota had not been rescaled. This meant POWs were forced to cut thirty-eight logs, which now measured up to one-and-a-half cords, without any compensation for the extra work. The increased work also meant the group failed to meet their quota and the company subsequently reduced their pay to the minimum 30¢. Some POWs, claiming they were being mistreated, refused to work for Abitibi and asked for a transfer to another company.<sup>114</sup> Director of POW Labour Projects Lt.-Col. R.H. Davidson dismissed the POWs’ claims, describing the camp as a “festering sore” due to the prisoners’ lack of cooperation, and dispatched an inspector to the camp.<sup>115</sup> Upon arrival, the inspector found forty POWs – all of whom had claimed to be too sick for work – playing football. He assigned the camp fourteen days’ detention.<sup>116</sup> Most returned to work after their

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<sup>113</sup> J. Hundevad to W. Kishbaugh, January 3, 1945, “Regulations and Information for Prisoner of War Labour Project Leader, n.d., P.O.W. Labor Data 1945-1946 from Mr. Munro's Office, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>114</sup> Translation of letter from J. Mahrt to Consulate General of Switzerland, January 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-43 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Smooth Rock Falls, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>115</sup> Lt.-Col. R.H. Davidson to Col. H.N. Streight, February 5, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-43 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Smooth Rock Falls, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>116</sup> Maj. Forbes to Director of Labour Projects, PW, April 26, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-43 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Smooth Rock Falls, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.



detention but twenty “hopelessly useless malingerers” refused. They all received fourteen more days’ detention at the Hearst Detention Barracks, after which they agreed to return to work.<sup>117</sup>

Prisoners in Abitibi’s Manitoba Paper Co. division also went on strike, with POWs at Mafeking vandalizing some of the camp buildings in the process. Additional guards were immediately dispatched to confine the POWs to their barracks and order them to work. The detention officer at Mafeking, Lt. Andrew Stevenson, found no reason for the strike and reminded the POWs of the freedoms they enjoyed there:

I find you have the very best of equipment, your clothes are the best I have [seen], sheets on beds is unheard of in most camps, and you are blessed with good beds and soft mattresses. I can only say this about your food. I do not understand how the Manitoba Paper Company can even procure such food it is the best food that I have had in any wood camp and I have visited most in the last fourteen months. Wake up to the fact that you are so well treated. Do not spoil an opportunity. Otherwise I will recommend that you will be sent elsewhere.<sup>118</sup>

Eventually one of the POWs apologized for the behaviour of the group and asked to resume work, a request Stevenson agreed to so long as the POWs agreed to pay for damages and make up for lost time.<sup>119</sup>

At Pine Falls, hints of trouble emerged after a guard discovered a drawing depicting a POW hanging the walking boss, “Mecki” (see Figure 36). Prisoners and some civilian staff did not always get along with one another, but threats against camp staff were exceptionally rare. The POWs took no physical action against “Mecki,” apparently using the drawing to voice their dissatisfaction with the walking boss. The POWs went on strike shortly after the image was discovered as they refused to meet their quota. The entire camp was placed under detention and, after three days’ confinement to barracks

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<sup>117</sup> Brig. A.C. Spencer to DOC MD2, March 3, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-43 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Smooth Rock Falls, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

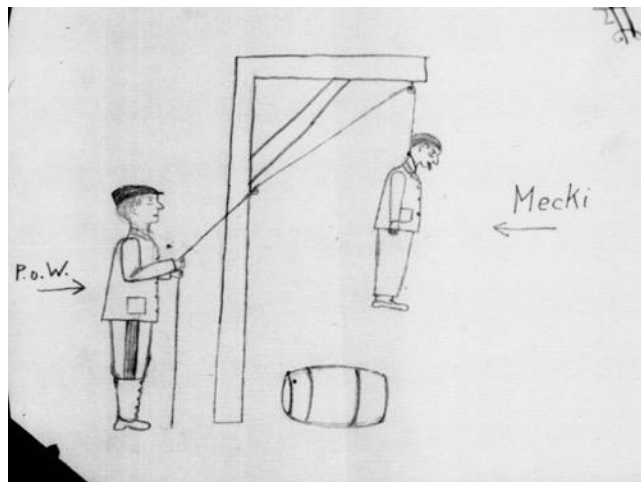
<sup>118</sup> Lt. A. Stevenson, Orders given at Mafeking, n.d., H13.22.363, Robert H. Henderson Collection, RAM.

<sup>119</sup> Lt. Andrew Stevenson, untitled memoir, Vol. 1, p. 10-12, H13.22.412, Robert H. Henderson Collection, RAM.

followed by four days of work without pay, the POWs unanimously chose to resume work.<sup>120</sup>

The timing of these events was not a coincidence nor was trouble limited to Abitibi's camps. Throughout late December 1944 and January 1945, the Department of Labour and Department of National Defence observed an increased number of strikes in POW labour projects. The cause was believed to

be a new German offensive in Belgium. On December 16, 1944, German forces launched what would be their last major offensive of the war, taking Allied forces in the Ardennes region by surprise. News of the offensive reached POWs in Canada through radio broadcasts and newspapers and gave some POWs a renewed hope in a German victory. The news of the offensive significantly raised morale and, in some camps, pro-Nazis used the news to strengthen their control. According to the Camp 133 intelligence officer, it allowed them to "persuade the more neutral PW to come back into line."<sup>121</sup> In labour projects, some pro-Nazis employed slowdowns or strikes in an attempt to use up men and resources that Canadians would otherwise be directing to the war effort. These attempts ultimately had little impact on the Canadian war effort and the eventual failure of the German offensive resulted in a decline in widespread trouble and in morale for those hoping for a German victory.



**Figure 36: Drawing of POW hanging "Mecki". n.d., 31-15-2 - Security - Liaison with D. POW - Labour Project Reports, C-8250, RG24, LAC.**

<sup>120</sup> Lt.-Col. F.H. Wilkes to Col. H.N. Streight, March 8, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-81 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Pine Falls, Man., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>121</sup> Capt. H. Smith, "Mood and Morale Within the Enclosure, Camp 133," January 15, 1944, HQS 7236-94-6-133 - Intelligence Reports - Lethbridge, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

The war in Europe was only one factor. Abitibi Manager of Woodlands C.B. Davis believed a lack of proper liaison between the departments of National Defence and Labour had resulted in guards receiving conflicting instructions. This, combined with insufficient guards in terms of both quality and quantity, had led to the guards failing to enforce order and discipline in the camp. The result was that POWs in many of the company's camps realized they could tell the Canadian government what they were willing to do and what they were not. Davis argued that Germans only understood force and called for a concerted effort from the departments of National Defence and Labour to improve communication and methods to enforce discipline. POWs, he argued, were "dangerous, cunning men, who have, to date, in some degree at least, proved themselves smarter than any of those attempting to control them."<sup>122</sup>

Although it was the employer, Abitibi remained dependent on the departments of Labour and National Defence. Abitibi fed the POWs and decided where the POWs were working, but little else. Foremen and working bosses had to issue instructions to the guards who, in turn, ordered the POWs to work. This was a drastic change from civilian operations where foremen and bosses had been the sole authorities in bush operations. Incompetent foremen and bosses simply were not tolerated, so the company struggled having to deal with guards who either lacked the proper authority or were simply not fully informed of their duties.

The Department of Labour adapted to meet the challenges of POW labour, but the process was slow. In December 1944, the department issued its "Consolidated Instructions for Employers of German Prisoners-of-War at Labour Camps in Canada." The instructions were the result of a year's experience and, as the name suggests, consolidated previous orders in an attempt to standardize policies relating to the employment of POWs. Above all, the Department of Labour reminded employers that they must "bear in mind that these men are mostly soldiers trained to live under military

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<sup>122</sup> C.B. Davis to W. Kishbaugh, January 8, 1945, P.O.W. Labor Data 1945-1946 from Mr. Munro's Office, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

discipline. They should be treated fairly but firmly.”<sup>123</sup> The Department of Labour also restructured its POW labour division, adding more inspectors to provide a faster and more effective response to POWs refusing work or causing trouble. The department initially had only one inspector but increased this to four by fall 1944 and seven by 1945.<sup>124</sup>

Despite Abitibi’s and the Department of Labour’s attempts to prevent trouble, POWs were not always willing to cooperate. In early 1945, there were isolated incidences of POWs fraternizing with civilians, straying beyond camp bounds, or escaping. Hans Kohl and Walter Strasser, for example, escaped from Magpie Camp 27 in mid-January 1945 but, after a brief taste of freedom, were apprehended by police the following week. The escape was obviously a concern, but their capture also raised concerns of fraternization after police officers discovered the men in possession of Canadian currency. Prisoners were paid in paper scrip (tickets) to prevent them from using their wages to assist in an escape attempt, which meant the money had to have come from theft or illicit sales or trade. Upon being questioned, Strasser stated they had trapped fur-bearing animals near the camp and sold the furs to the camp clerk for cash. While the clerk denied all allegations, police suspicions were only raised when the clerk offered to pay the \$30.75 fine to avoid further trouble.<sup>125</sup> Kohl and Strasser spent the next month in detention at Monteith and Hearst before being released and returned to Camp 27.<sup>126</sup>

This is not to say all civilians were willing to fraternize with POWs. In the late evening of January 15, a bootlegger near Smooth Rock Falls notified police that she presently had three POWs at her house. Police were dispatched and took the POWs into

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<sup>123</sup> Department of Labour, “Consolidated Instructions for Employers of German Prisoners-of-War at Labour Camps in Canada,” December 1944, p. 3, POW Labour Projects - Reports, Notes, Corresp, Misc Papers, 1944-1945, Box 2, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col), AoM.

<sup>124</sup> Kemble, “History of Labour Projects PW,” 3.

<sup>125</sup> Cst. L.C. Normann, “Aimo Autio, Alleged Purchase of Pelts from POWs,” February 5, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-49 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Magpie, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>126</sup> Lt.-Col. C.G. Caruthers to HQ, MD2, March 27, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-49 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Magpie, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

custody. The three had apparently shown up at the woman's doorstep asking for coffee and, as one of them spoke such good English, she had not realized they were POWs until one of the men informed her. The POWs explained they had come into town – forty kilometres from camp – for an “evening's fun” and intended to return to camp later that night.<sup>127</sup> The three POWs were taken to the Smooth Rock Falls jail before being transferred to Detention Barracks at Hearst.<sup>128</sup>

Escapes remained rare in Abitibi camps, thanks in part to the isolated nature of bushwork. Isolation did not prevent Joseph Gall and Willi Breilmann from escaping Regan Camp 24. On September 16, 1945, the pair left the camp and disappeared into the bush, with the apparent intention of remaining in Canada.<sup>129</sup> Gall had limited English but Breilmann spoke excellent English and French, skills that helped them evade capture for the next few months. Breilmann eventually made his way to Toronto and Montreal, posing as a French-Canadian, but he lacked the proper identification documents to apply for work. He made his way to Sudbury and, upon hearing POWs were being transferred overseas, turned himself into police on February 16, 1946.<sup>130</sup> Breilmann received 28 days detention at the No. 2 Detention Barracks but, instead of being transferred back to the bush, was transferred back to the base camp as authorities believed he would have been a “disturbing influence” if returned to Regan.<sup>131</sup> Gall was eventually captured at Schrieber on April 20, 1946 and transferred to the Current River Barracks at Port Arthur. Undeterred, Gall escaped from Current River Barracks at Port Arthur on May 22, 1946 but was recaptured in Toronto the following week. Following his return to Camp 23 (Monteith), escaped for the last time on July 22, 1946. His freedom was once again cut

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<sup>127</sup> J. Hundevad to Commandant, HQ, Northern Area, MD2, January 17, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-43 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Smooth Rock Falls, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>128</sup> Maj.-Gen. A.E. Potts to Secretary, DND, February 1, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-43 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Smooth Rock Falls, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>129</sup> Director, Prisoners of War to H.R. Landis, September 17, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>130</sup> “German Prisoner Gives Self Up,” *Globe and Mail*, February 18, 1946.

<sup>131</sup> Brig. R.O.G. Morton to Secretary, DND, April 2, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

short as he was arrested in Toronto in January 1947 and transferred to the UK shortly thereafter.<sup>132</sup>

There is little indication of how Abitibi POWs received the news of the end of the war in Europe, but the return of summer came with a renewed surge of complaints. The relationship between Abitibi and its POWs remained strained through 1945, particularly in the Regan camps. In June 1945, for example, the Regan Camp 24 spokesman complained to the Swiss Consul after being ordered to make up work lost through sickness: "To satisfy the 'ABITIBI,'" he stated, "requires more than just ordinary skill."<sup>133</sup> At nearby Camp 25, spokesman Heinz Hahn turned to Colonel Streight for protection against "wanton treatment" by the company. Hahn argued that he and his men had tried cooperating with the company, but the arrival of a new foreman had resulted in the reprimanding of small mistakes, pay frozen, and the group punished despite correcting their work in accordance with the foreman's orders.<sup>134</sup> At Camp 23, a marked difference in the amount of food issued compared to other camps prompted the POWs to protest the company treated camps differently. The spokesman alleged the company was prejudiced against his men, indicating a shortage of meat, potatoes, butter, milk, lard, sugar, and eggs, and attributed a decline in their physical fitness to a shortage of fresh fruits and vegetables. Writing to Col. Streight, he explained, "The working conditions in the bush are especially in summertime (heat and mosquitoes) so hard, the psychological constitutions of our men after almost three to four years behind barbed wire so burdened, that by a one-sided, vexatious treatment by the Company, we cannot avoid mostly

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<sup>132</sup> Director, Prisoners of War to H.R. Landis, February 19, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC; Maj.-Gen. E.G. Weeks, "PW Escapes," April 23, 1946, HQS 7236-44 - Escapes, RG24, LAC; Maj.-Gen. E.G. Weeks, "PW Escapes," May 30, 1946, HQS 7236-44 - Escapes, RG24, LAC; Maj. J.H. Thaw, "Escapees Apprehended," January 27, 1947, HQS 7236-44 - Escapes, RG24, LAC.

<sup>133</sup> Translation of letter from Rosenkranz to Consul-General, June 4, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>134</sup> Heinz Hahn to Col. Streight, June 19, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

disliked incidents.”<sup>135</sup> Forwarding the complaints to the Department of Labour, Colonel Streight admitted the Regan camps had been a “bug-a-boo” for both Departments and recommended a senior inspecting officer carefully investigate.<sup>136</sup>

As for Abitibi’s allegedly “vexatious” treatment, it did operate its POW camps much in the same way as its civilian ones but there were a few important differences. Prisoners generally enjoyed better living arrangements thanks to the Geneva Convention and had significantly more recreation opportunities. At a time when civilian camps rarely had a designated space to spend during their non-working hours, POWs enjoyed their own recreation hut and access to a rotating selection of books, a variety of sports, music, and all the recreation their surroundings offered. Admitting this would have been akin to treason for some POWs. That being said, prisoners’ working conditions were often worse than that of civilian woods labourers. Employed in the bush year-round, prisoners had to deal with excessive heat, blackflies, and mosquitoes in the summer months – factors that civilian cutters avoided by spending the summers working on farms. The company also took advantage of prisoners’ quota system by employing POWs in low yield or difficult terrain that civilian piecework cutters refused to work in. While some POW complaints had little warrant, others were legitimate concerns that civilian cutters would have also complained about had they been working under the same conditions. Prisoners, however, faced the alternative of being transferred to an internment camp and most realized bush was ultimately better than barbed wire.

Both the company and the POWs wanted to show they could not – and would not – be pushed around. The Canadians had the advantage. For Abitibi and the Department of Labour, the more they got accustomed to POW labour, the less inclined they were to accommodate demands. Refusing unreasonable demands also became easier after Germany’s surrender. The liberation of Canadian POW camps in Germany meant

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<sup>135</sup> Lenz to Director, Ps.O.W., June 18, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>136</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Director of Labour Projects PW, June 22, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

military authorities in Canada no longer had to worry about repercussions or reprisals. This is not to say that either the government or Abitibi took advantage of this; relatively little changed in regard to post-VE-Day policy, but Germany's surrender did relieve some of the pressure to accommodate POW requests. Other employers did make some changes with which POWs were unhappy. In the summer months of 1945, the Department of Labour and Department of National Defence had received reports that many companies had tightened living and working conditions in POW camps and that some had also stopped newspaper subscriptions. This unsurprisingly prompted unrest amongst the POWs and had resulted in guards being shoved around and inspectors not treated according to their rank and office. In a memo to Abitibi's divisions employing POWs, Assistant Manager of Woodlands Walter Kishbaugh stated the company had no desire to pamper prisoners but emphasized that it was in the company's interest to treat inspectors and guards decently and the POWs in a manner that would result in their best cooperation. He did caution against actions that could make the POWs think the company was "too soft" as this would likely result in decreased production. Kishbaugh believed the Department of Labour attributed some of these problems to foremen and other civilian employees with ties to bush unions that wanted POWs removed from the bush and were therefore adopting policies that produced unrest and encouraged POWs to demand their return to the base camp. The Department of Labour was not willing to indicate which camps and, although there was little indication Abitibi was among the suspects, Kishbaugh recommended division managers check their camps so any issues could be corrected and future trouble avoided.<sup>137</sup>

In the latter half of 1945, the Department of Labour began to encounter pressure from civilians and labour organizations to replace POWs with returning servicemen. While visiting the Magpie-area camps in September 1945, Lieutenant J. Nursall, an inspecting officer for the Department of National Defence, observed that as he travelled from camp to camp in Northern Ontario, civilians in nearby communities were

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<sup>137</sup> W. Kishbaugh to D.J. Munro et al., October 9, 1945, L-1-2 Labour - POW November 1945, WM 40-46 Box 2 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.



expressing their desire to see POWs removed. These civilians, he stated, were “making it a point to express their views regarding the employment of P/W. They are taking the stand that [Canadian] men WILL BE out of work and that the P/W should be back in Germany, etc.”<sup>138</sup>

There had been little opposition to the employment of POWs when the war was on and companies were unable to secure civilian labour. The cessation of hostilities first in Europe in May and then in the Far East in August prompted a shift that favoured replacing POWs with returning servicemen and sending the prisoners back to Germany. The Department of Labour believed there was more than enough work available to allow for companies to continue employing POWs without Canadians losing their jobs. Labour councils and unions felt differently and became the most vocal groups protesting the continued employment of POWs.

At a meeting of the Trades and Labor Councils of the Lakehead, Kenora and Fort Frances Districts in December 1945, industry representatives called for the removal of POWs from the bush. The councils stated that unemployed persons at National Employment Offices already exceeded the number of available jobs by 13,000 – a number expected to increase with the return of demobilized servicemen – and therefore argued there was no reason for thousands of POWs to deprive Canadians of the already limited employment opportunities. Rather than take jobs from Canadians, the councils recommended POWs help rebuild “the Continent which their war machine devastated through fiendish aggression.”<sup>139</sup> The Winnipeg and District Trades and Labor Council and the Fort William Trades and Labor Council – both of which represented areas in which Abitibi had limits – later seconded this and called upon Prime Minister Mackenzie

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<sup>138</sup> Lt. J. Nursall to Commandant Northern area, September 12, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>139</sup> “Resolution No. 1: Removal of Prisoners of War from Industries, n.d., HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

King to remove all POWs from Canadian industries and reminding him that POWs were taking away jobs from unemployed ex-servicemen and servicewomen.<sup>140</sup>

The Lumber and Sawmill Workers Union likewise called for the removal of POWs and charged employers with favouring POWs over civilian labour. However, the union took a different approach and protested the preferential treatment provided to POW bushworkers compared to their civilian counterparts. The union argued that civilian camps had been deemed unfit for POWs and had to be significantly improved before POWs could be employed. Improvements included cleaning and painting the camps; providing radios, laundries, recreation facilities, and canteens; and, in some cases, erecting showers – privileges not found in most civilian woods camps.<sup>141</sup> The union vice-president also noted cases in which POWs cut all wood close to camp, requiring civilians to walk a few miles for work, a “severe handicap” for piecework cutters. The union, arguing that POW labour provided wood to employers at a cost amounting to an indirect government subsidy, resolved to enlist the help of the Canadian Legion to launch an investigation and demanded the immediate removal of POWs from bush camps and mills.<sup>142</sup>

Had it been up to the POWs, some would have happily left the bush. Some POWs, having worked for Abitibi for upwards of two years, welcomed a chance to leave. In March 1946, for example, the Smooth Rock Falls Camp 18 spokesman requested he and his men be transferred to farm or other work or, if such a transfer could not be arranged, to another company. “Two years of hard work in the bush in almost the same dull surroundings without any kind of a break,” he explained, “is pretty hard on a

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<sup>140</sup> V.B. Anderson to W.L. Mackenzie King, February 14, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5381, RG24, LAC; John Currie to W.L. Mackenzie King, February 16, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>141</sup> Recreation huts only became common in the late 1940s as companies began using portable frame camps. Buchan, “Logging of the Black & White Watersheds,” 23; “Union Raps Woods Training Plan,” *News-Chronicle*, December 17, 1945.

<sup>142</sup> “Favor PW Bushmen, Union Charges,” *Port Arthur News-Chronicle*, December 15, 1945.

physical and mental condition already strained in nearly six years of imprisonment.”<sup>143</sup> Another POW wrote in a letter to his wife in Germany, “I’ve been in the forest a whole year now and in time the forest becomes more depressing than barbed wire, above all because one sees nothing else but forest and more forest. There are no diversions whatsoever.”<sup>144</sup> Enemy Merchant Seamen were the most likely group to request transfers from the bush because of their previous work experience on farms in Southern Ontario. It took little time for them to realize they preferred farm work so they either asked for transfers or simply ceased working. An investigation into their complaints revealed they had enjoyed privileges at Chatham, in the south of the province, that were simply not possible to provide in Smooth Rock Falls, in the north. Of eighty-one EMS asking for a transfer, only one asked for a transfer to another lumber camp.<sup>145</sup> As these men had agreed to work in the bush during the winter on the condition they would be returned to farm work for the summer, the Department of Labour replaced them with combatant POWs.<sup>146</sup>

Despite unions and labour councils calling on companies to cease employing POWs and requests for transfers from some of the POWs themselves, Abitibi needed the men and remained extremely reluctant to give up any of their POWs. As of February 1946, seventeen woodcutting companies employed 8,569 POWs in 106 bush camps; Abitibi alone employed 2,300.<sup>147</sup> These prisoners had proved essential in reducing the impact of the labour shortage and allowed the company to continue its operations. The company’s Sault Ste. Marie division, which included the Magpie and Regan camps,

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<sup>143</sup> Johannes Mahrt to Director of Prisoners of War, March 18, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-43 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Smooth Rock Falls, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>144</sup> Ulbricht to Marta Ulbricht, June 18, 1945, translated July 9, 1945, 724-AF - Part V, Vol. 1929, RG25, LAC.

<sup>145</sup> Lt. J. Nursall to Commandant, Northern Area MD2, January 7, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-43 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Smooth Rock Falls, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC; Zimmermann to Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham, February 1, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-43 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Smooth Rock Falls, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>146</sup> Lt. J. Nursall to Commandant Northern Area MD2, April 10, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-43 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Smooth Rock Falls, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>147</sup> “Report - Conference Held at Prince Arthur Hotel, Port Arthur, February 11th and 12th, 1946,” February 12, 1946, Minutes of Meetings, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

relied extremely heavily on POW labour, with 77% of their limit total (wood cut on company limits) in the 1945-1946 season cut by POW labour (see Table 4). The labour shortage had forced the company to consume its reserves and therefore Abitibi was among the many employers which wanted assurances from the Department of Labour that the labour it required – POW or civilian – was going to be available for the spring haul.

**Table 4: Abitibi POW (including EMS) Production by Division, 1945-1946. Total production includes limit total (wood from company limits) and purchased wood.<sup>148</sup>**

<b>Division</b>	<b>Production Total (Cords)</b>	<b>Limit Total (Cords)</b>	<b>Cords Cut by POW</b>	<b>% of Production by POW</b>	<b>% of Limit by POW</b>
<b>Smooth Rock Falls</b>	151,083	123,559	49,643	33%	40%
<b>Sault Ste. Marie</b>	168,030	165,010	127,674	76%	77%
<b>Port Arthur</b>	160,564	158,359	61,604	38%	39%
<b>Pine Falls</b>	99,941	56,062	32,081	32%	57%
<b>Total</b>	<b>579,618</b>	<b>502,990</b>	<b>271,002</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>54%</b>

The Ontario Forest Industry Association (OFIA) also wanted POWs to remain in the bush for as long as possible. The association estimated that even with POWs, there remained a 15-20% shortage of civilian labour and this was not expected to diminish anytime soon.<sup>149</sup> Instead, OFIA director W.A. Delahey believed the only hope to produce sufficient logs and pulpwood was to keep POWs working in the bush throughout the summer or until sufficient civilian labour could be found.<sup>150</sup>

Abitibi made it clear that it would begin replacing POWs with civilians as soon as the number of men exceeded the capacity of its civilian camps. “We cannot depart from this policy,” Manager of Woodlands C.B. Davis emphasized in a memo to his division managers, “since regardless of the benefits to this Company of maintaining prisoners of

<sup>148</sup> “Data Re P.O.W. & Production.” June 7, 1946, L-1-2 Labour - P.O.W. - May 1946 - June to Date, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>149</sup> “Slave Labor Unwanted,” *Globe and Mail*, February 6, 1946.

<sup>150</sup> W.A Delahey to Member Companies Employing POW, April 13, 1946, April Labor - POW - April 1946, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

war in our camps, we cannot refuse to accept Canadian labour.” “We must do, and quickly do,” he continued, “everything humanly possible to avoid finding ourselves in the position of turning away Canadian labour.” Refusing civilian labour would, he explained, provide a “great deal of useful ammunition” to those uninformed persons who believed the company should immediately cease employing POWs.<sup>151</sup>

Finding sufficient labour – in terms of both quantity and quality – was no easy task. Abitibi employed canvassers, advertised in local newspapers and industry publications, and requested help from the National Selective Service but replacing the company’s 2,300 POWs required 2,000 civilian cutters. Despite the company’s efforts to attract civilians, camps that normally employed 100 civilians now only had ten.<sup>152</sup> Throughout the pulp and paper industry in Northern Ontario, employers observed fewer men were willing to return to bush camps in the immediate post-war period and, even if they were willing, they were not necessarily experienced bushworkers. The company unsurprisingly preferred experienced workers, for unexperienced men not only required training but also had a higher turnover rate as many quickly discovered bushwork was not for them. Some of those calling for the replacement of POWs with civilians, including Mr. Sharrer of the National Employment Service, claimed that POWs were inexperienced and Abitibi should therefore not object to being provided with inexperienced labour. C.B. Davis, however, argued that the POWs in the company’s employ, having spent months or years in the bush, were often highly experienced and far more capable bushworkers than the average civilian.<sup>153</sup> Although the company had no intention of turning civilians away, Davis believed there was no point calling for the withdrawal of POWs unless sufficient

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<sup>151</sup> CBD to J. Hundevad et al, December 4, 1945, L-1-2 Labour - POW December 1945, WM 40-46 Box 2 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>152</sup> Questionnaire, n.d., Labour - POW February 1946, WM 40-46 Box 2 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL; W. Kisbaugh to T.H. Stone et al., January 11, 1946, L-1-2 M- Labor - Toronto January 1/46 to August 31/46, WM 40-46 Box 2 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL; “Meeting of Timber Operators Who are Employing PW Labour,” February 12, 1946, Minutes of Meetings, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>153</sup> C.B. Davis to T.H. Stone and J. Hundevad, January 4, 1946, L-1-2 M- Labor - Toronto January 1/46 to August 31/46, WM 40-46 Box 2 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

civilian labour could be secured.<sup>154</sup> Any such action would jeopardise both the production and supply of much-needed pulpwood.

**Table 5: Number of POWs (and EMS) and civilians employed by Abitibi's Sault Ste. Marie Division.**<sup>155</sup>

	<b>18-Oct-45</b>	<b>15-Nov-45</b>	<b>13-Dec-45</b>	<b>16-Jan-46</b>	<b>14-Feb-46</b>
<b>POWs employed</b>	1027	1021	1020	1016	980
<b>Civilians employed</b>	526	621	681	664	743
<b>Civilians Required</b>	240	250	250	250	254

Despite the need for labour, Abitibi and other woods companies remained subject to the Department of National Defence's repatriation schedule. In late 1945, the Department of Labour informed employers that repatriation was to begin in early 1946, with POWs withdrawn from the bush in March or April. The company instructed its divisions therefore to plan to have their work completed by March.<sup>156</sup> However, Sault Ste. Marie Division Manager D.J. Munro argued this was in the middle of hauling season and removing POWs at this time would force the company to leave the season's haul in the bush. This was especially problematic as replacing the division's 1,000 POWs with civilians was near impossible as most civilian labour left the bush for farm work at this time. Prisoners had produced 120,000 of the division's 165,000 cords in the 1945-1946 season and replacing POWs would require 600 men for driving and cutting between May and August, 1,500 for cutting between September and December, and 1,000 for hauling and delivery between December and April to meet the division's 200,000 cord goal during the 1946-1947 season. If the Canadian government was willing to permit POWs to stay for cutting in the summer and fall, Abitibi remained willing to retain at least 1,000 POWs even if the Department was unable to give any guarantee POWs would be

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<sup>154</sup> CBD to J. Hundevad et al, December 4, 1945, L-1-2 Labour - POW December 1945, WM 40-46 Box 2 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>155</sup> Questionnaire, n.d., Labour - POW February 1946, WM 40-46 Box 2 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>156</sup> W. Kishbaugh to J. Hundevad et al., November 30, 1945, L-1-2 Labour - POW December 1945, WM 40-46 Box 2 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.



**Figure 37: “Ice Landing” near Minataree. Logs hauled from Minataree-area camps were dumped here on the ice of Lake Nipigon’s Humboldt Bay. Without POWs, the company feared most of the 1945-1946 season’s cut would remain stuck in the bush. Author’s Collection.**

available for hauling.<sup>157</sup> As the Department of Labour, Department of National Defence, and employers negotiated the repatriation schedule, Munro instructed his district superintendents to use remaining POW labour to cut wood if they were unable to hire sufficient civilians to do it.<sup>158</sup>

The Department of Labour, bombarded with requests for employers to let them keep POWs for the spring, announced it would delay transferring POWs from the bush until the hauls and river drives were completed. Prisoners would be transferred from the bush in three main shipments between mid-April and mid-May 1946 and a fourth

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<sup>157</sup> Questionnaire, n.d., Labour - POW February 1946, WM 40-46 Box 2 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>158</sup> D.J. Munro to A. Kenshol et al., March 25, 1946, Labour - POW March 1946, WM 40-46 Box 2 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

shipment in mid-June to allow for companies to finish the spring work and acquire civilian replacements.<sup>159</sup>

As the company prepared to wind down its POW operations, the Department of Labour emphasized that employers still had to tread carefully when it came to enforcing discipline. At a meeting with inspecting officers in February, Inspector Major Forbes cautioned,

We are entering a period in the history of this operation when great care should be observed in disciplinary action. The PW may feel that they can do the balance of the time they are to be held here standing on their heads, as it were. We may now experience a sympathetic strike or slow down of work or a general awkwardness on the part of the PW where one or more of the group are being punished. It would be a serious loss to the employing company to have a general strike or any delay in the haul, as the period of the year suitable for hauling purposes is now very short.<sup>160</sup>

The Department of Labour also expressed concerns that the news of pending repatriation would prompt POWs to escape. Despite applications from POWs to remain in the country, the Canadian government had decided – at least for the time – that all POWs in Canadian custody would be transferred to the UK for their eventual repatriation to Germany. For prisoners hoping to remain in Canada, escape was the only real means of staying and avoiding repatriation.

The Department of Labour's warning was not unwarranted. At Regan Camp 25 in late 1945, POWs had begun slowing production to the point that they were short 1,000 cords by January 1946. Military authorities arrived there in early February and declared the camp a detention camp. Authorities informed the POWs that they were better off working in Canada and threatened that if they did not resume work, they would be transferred to the UK to clean up rubble for 6¢ a day. Seventy-one of the ninety-six POWs refused orders and were subsequently transferred to detention and then to the base

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<sup>159</sup> D.J. Munro to D.C. Abbott, June 7, 1946, L-1-2 Labour - P.O.W. - May 1946 - June to Date, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>160</sup> Major George Forbes, "Conference - Director of Labour Projects and Inspecting Officers Held at the Prince Arthur Hotel - Port Arthur - Feb 11th-12th 1946," 3, February 12, 1946, Minutes of Meetings, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.



camp. The twenty-five satisfactory workers resumed the work but, in order to complete the necessary cutting and hauling, the company had to transfer additional POWs from Camp 34.<sup>161</sup>

In late March 1946, Abitibi received its first notice to begin closing the first of its camps employing POWs. The Department of Labour had merely selected these camps from a list but, in order to maximize efficiency and reduce the impact to production, Abitibi forwarded a list specifying the preferred order in which camps were to be closed. The Department of Labour, recognizing the company's struggle to find civilian replacements and the pressure to complete hauling operations, took Abitibi's request into consideration as it progressed with the closing of POW labour projects. However, in at least one case, the Department of Labour requested the closure of a camp that Abitibi was unwilling to close and Abitibi was able to substitute it for another.<sup>162</sup> In other cases, the spring thaw meant some camps were simply inaccessible and Abitibi and the Department of Labour had no recourse but to wait for navigation to open.

Although many POWs looked forward to going home, Abitibi continued to encounter some trouble as it began closing down its POW operations in the spring of 1946. In April, ninety prisoners at Smooth Rock Falls went on strike and were then placed in detention. Military authorities hoped to transfer the POWs to the base camp, but frozen rivers prohibited boat traffic and the roads were too soft for vehicles. As the Camp 23 War Diarist noted, "they are simply cut off and we cannot do much about it."<sup>163</sup> Not far away, two POWs from Camp 26 and nine from Camp 17 escaped from their camp to avoid the transfer. Their attempts proved unsuccessful as they were all recaptured within the week.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Brig. R.O.G. Morton to Secretary, DND, February 19, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-48 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper Co. - Regan, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>162</sup> W. Kishbaugh to D.J. Munro, June 7, 1946, L-1-2 Labour - P.O.W. - May 1946 - June to Date, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>163</sup> Camp 23 War Diary, April 22, 1946, Part 4, Vol. 15393, RG24, LAC.

<sup>164</sup> Cst. A. McEwan, "P.O.W. #206757, Gerke, Rudio and P.O.W. #206674, Lauer, Otto," May 20, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-43 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Smooth Rock Falls, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC; Commandant, Monteith to Director Prisoners of War, June 11, 1946, HQS 7236-34-

Over the next few months, Abitibi gradually transferred its POWs back to the base camp. By June, only 4,000 POWs remained in Ontario and the Department of Labour hoped to transfer 2,500 of them back to the base camp by the middle of the month and the rest by July 1. Abitibi, still struggling to find sufficient civilian replacements, was among the many employers which urged government officials to reconsider. Despite the many troubles Abitibi had faced with POW labour, the company wanted to postpone the transfer of its final POWs until the fall.<sup>165</sup> Sault Ste. Marie Woods Manager D.J. Munro wrote both the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Labour to warn them of the consequences of withdrawing POWs so early, saying that it would reduce cutting from 3,200 cords per week to only 1,100, threatening both the operation of the district's mill and the export of newsprint and sulphite pulp.<sup>166</sup>

Munro found little help from the federal government. Minister of Reconstruction C.D. Howe informed Munro that POWs in Canada were the responsibility of the British Government and the British wanted to transfer them from Canada as soon as possible. He therefore was unable to intervene. Likewise, Minister of Labour Humphrey Mitchell explained that the Canadian government had already delayed transferring POWs until the last possible date and that any further delay would mean there would be no transport ships available. Mitchell assured Munro his department would cooperate with lumber companies to secure civilian labour in the coming weeks.<sup>167</sup> The last POWs left the Minataree, Magpie, and Smooth Rock Falls camps in June and the last ones in Manitoba and Regan in July. The last POWs left Abitibi camps on July 18, 1946.<sup>168</sup>

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3-43 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Smooth Rock Falls, Ont., C-5384, RG24, LAC.

<sup>165</sup> Letter to Munro, June 7, 1946, L-1-2 Labour - P.O.W. - May 1946 - June to Date, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>166</sup> W. Kishbaugh to J. Hundevad et al., May 2, 1946, L-1-2 Labour - P.O.W. - May 1946 - June to Date, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>167</sup> D.J. Munro to W. Kishbaugh, June 10, 1946, L-1-2 Labour - P.O.W. - May 1946 - June to Date, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>168</sup> Maj. George Forbes to All Employing Companies., June 12, 1946, L-1-2 Labour - P.O.W. - May 1946 - June to Date, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

Abitibi's gamble on employing POWs had proven successful. From the prisoners' arrival in December 1943 to their departure in July 1946, the company had continued to expand its POW operations through the latter war years, eventually employing over 2,300 of them, making it the largest single employer of POW labour in Canada during the Second World War. While POWs may have arrived in the bush inexperienced and "soft," the company was generally satisfied with its POW labour. Having a year-round dedicated workforce allowed Abitibi to continue cutting in the summer, a time when most civilians returned to farms. The company took advantage of the quota system to clear low-yield or difficult to access timber that civilian piecework cutters refused to cut. Prisoners at Magpie, for example, worked in areas heavily affected by spruce budworms while those at Regan often worked in stands further away from the camp; both circumstances would have reduced a piecework cutter's earnings.

Historian Ian Radforth argues that Northern Ontario bushworkers were not "woods labour by choice... woods labour is woods labour by force of circumstances."<sup>169</sup> Radforth was referring to civilians but the same could be said for POWs. Prisoners who volunteered for work did so in order to have the opportunity for work and gain some sense of freedom while those sent to the bush after Canada approved P.C. 6495 had little say in the matter. In some ways, having POWs and civilians as bush labour were similar as both groups protested working in poor-quality stands and complained about plagues of insects and excessive heat. But employing POWs came with its own challenges. The company quickly learned that the policies it applied to civilian cutters did not always apply to POWs and it was repeatedly forced to adapt to its new labour force. Prisoners were not motivated to work to their full potential like civilian piecework cutters but were instead often motivated by relative freedom, the sheer opportunity to work, and a steady income. The company had to provide POWs with suitable working conditions, good and varied food, and sufficient opportunities for recreation while managing a delicate balance

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<sup>169</sup> Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 44.

between treating POWs with respect and not letting POWs think they were in control. Failure to do so could – and did – lead to trouble, most often in the form of strikes or refusals to work. Foremen and working bosses had to adapt to issuing orders through military guards, as they could not simply strike a POW who refused to listen, and the company could not simply fire someone who refused orders. Yet charged by POWs with unfair treatment, poor living and working conditions, and a smattering of lesser complaints, Abitibi overcame protests, strikes, escapes, and other forms of trouble and continued to remain committed to keeping its POWs – now experienced bushworkers – for as long as it could.

Despite the many trials and tribulations, POW labour allowed Abitibi to increase its production levels from an early war slump to meet the heavy wartime demand for paper. With the help of POWs, the company increased its newsprint production from 438,705 tons in 1944 to 610,683 tons by 1946 – the highest in the company’s history to date and almost 15% of all newsprint produced in Canada.<sup>170</sup> Prisoners employed by Abitibi cut a total of 436,346 cords of pulpwood from 1943 to 1946 (see Table 6). In the 1945-1946 season alone, POWs cut 271,002 cords, amounting to 54% of the wood cut on company limits by the company’s four POW-employing divisions and 30% of the company’s entire production. The company relied most heavily on POWs in the Sault Ste. Marie district, where they produced 127,624 cords or 76% of the district’s total in the 1945-1946 season. Prisoners helped provide the labour necessary for the company to maintain wartime production, increase profits, and thus help the company pull itself out

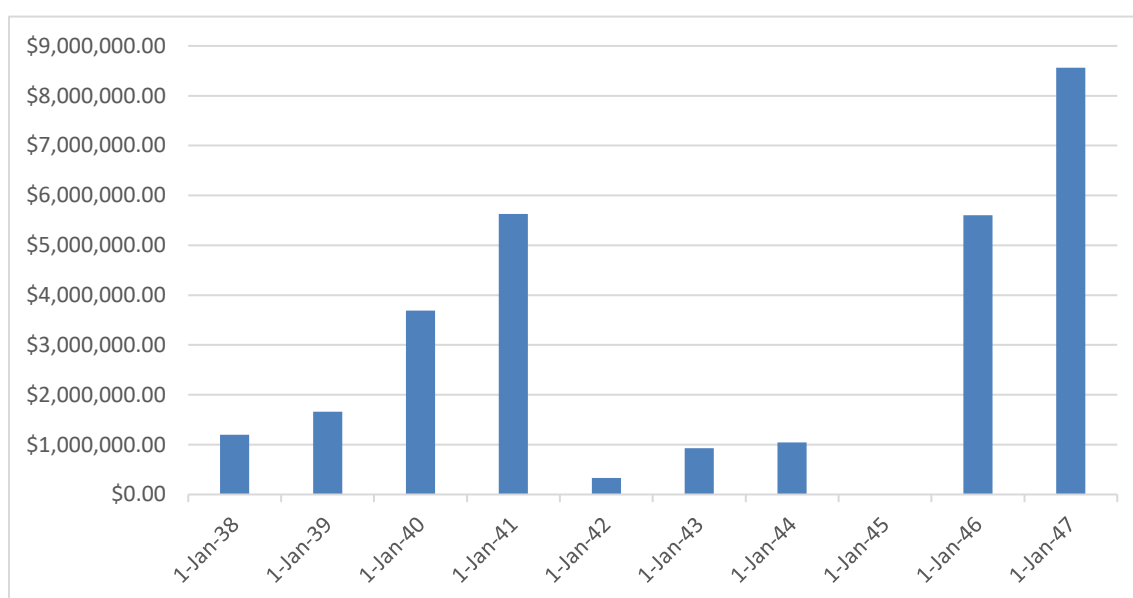
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<sup>170</sup> Abitibi Power & Paper Company, Limited, “Annual Report for the Period Ending December 31, 1946,” 1947, 11 and 3, Mergent Archives, [www.mergent.com](http://www.mergent.com).

of receivership, which it achieved on May 1, 1946. Without the 2,300 POWs it employed as of early 1946, the company's future would have likely been quite different.

**Table 6: Wood cut by POWs (including EMS) as of July 29, 1946 (89ft<sup>3</sup> cords).<sup>171</sup>**

Season	Smooth Rock	Soo	Port Arthur	Pine Falls	Total
<b>1943-1944</b>	862	4,213	4,242	–	<b>9,317</b>
<b>1944-1945</b>	12,819	42,657	23,275	6,435	<b>85,186</b>
<b>1945-1946</b>	49,643	127,674	61,604	32,081	<b>271,002</b>
<b>1946-1947</b>	10,786	33,621	21,735	4,699	<b>70,841</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>74,110</b>	<b>208,165</b>	<b>110,856</b>	<b>43,215</b>	<b>436,346</b>



**Figure 38: Abitibi Power & Paper Co. Profits, 1938-1947. Profits prior to May 1946 were used to pay off existing debt. Note: 1945 figures not available.**

Abitibi invested significant time and resources into training, feeding, and supplying POWs so it was unsurprisingly reluctant to give up this now experienced labour force in favour of inexperienced civilians. But facing pressure from the public and knowing that to choose the recent enemy over Canadians would have been corporate suicide, the company had little choice but to find replacements. Adding to this pressure

<sup>171</sup> W. Kishbaugh to J. Hundevad et al., July 31, 1946, L-1-2 Labour - P.O.W. - May 1946 - June to Date, WM 40-46 Box 1 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

was the desire of military and government authorities to transfer POWs to the United Kingdom for work and their eventual repatriation.

By the time the last POWs left Abitibi camps in July 1946, the company was still scrambling to secure sufficient civilians to fill the void left by the more than 2,000 POWs it once employed. Slowly, the company managed to attract sufficient numbers and, with the help of mechanization and changing technologies and practices, the company was able to remain one of the most prominent pulpwood companies in the post-war era. Within a few years following the departure of POWs from the bush, the camps that once employed hundreds of German soldiers, sailors, and airmen were either abandoned or dismantled and relocated. The prisoners themselves were transferred from Canada by the end of 1946 and, after working in the United Kingdom for a year or two, finally returned to Germany. Many struggled to readjust to living in post-war Germany. Recalling their time in Canada, some were determined to return. Taking advantage of the months or years they spent living and working in the bush, some sought out the help of their former employer to help sponsor their return to Canada. In 1950, Canada lifted its immigrant ban on German residents, and within a year twelve former POWs were already on their way back or planning their return to the Sault Ste. Marie district to work for Abitibi.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> List of Immigrants, July 25, 1951, L-1-2 Labour Toronto 1950-1951, WM 51B Box 4 of 4, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

## Chapter 5

### 5 Labour and Leather: POWs and Donnell & Mudge Ltd.

In the late evening of June 22, 1945, two German prisoners of war walking the streets of Etobicoke were outed by two teenage boys and captured by a police officer whom one of the POWs had met at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. But what were these POWs doing in Etobicoke? Working nearby for Donnell & Mudge Ltd., the pair were two of approximately fifty German enemy merchant seamen and civilian internees living and working in the company's New Toronto tannery immediately south of Etobicoke.

Struggling to secure sufficient labour to meet heavy wartime demand, Donnell & Mudge Ltd. had begun employing POWs – specifically EMS and civilian internees – in August 1943. The Department of National Defence had, in 1940, established an internment camp, Camp “M” (later Camp 22), nearby so the presence of EMS and internees in the area was not unheard of. The company's tannery, less than a three-kilometre drive from Camp 22, was a convenient location for employing POWs who volunteered for work. The company thus became the first to employ POWs in an urban setting in Canada and the first of twenty to employ POWs in work other than agriculture or logging.<sup>1</sup> Using Donnell & Mudge as a case study, this chapter explores the employment of EMS and civilian internees in urban industry in New Toronto. Whereas agricultural and logging work generally employed POWs in remote areas, Donnell & Mudge was less than fifteen kilometres from downtown Toronto and was surrounded by civilian industries, many of which were engaged in important war work. The project proved controversial right from the beginning and opposition from civilians and military authorities reveals that Canadians were not always willing to accept POWs working in the immediate vicinity. As prisoners worked alongside and fraternized with civilians at the tannery, left camp bounds, and attempted to escape, this case study not only emphasizes the challenges the Department of Labour and Department of National

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<sup>1</sup> Other projects included construction, roadwork, and peat cutting, as well as work in a pottery, greenhouses, cement works, and a fertilizer plant.

Defence faced in supervising POWs in urban industry but reveals that Donnell & Mudge was apparently willing to overlook breaches in discipline in order to retain its POWs and maintain production.

Donnell & Mudge Limited was originally established by William A. Donnell, Eugene M. Carman, and Harding P. Mudge in 1917 as Donnell, Carman & Mudge. The company was headquartered in Boston, with its original factory in nearby Peabody, Massachusetts, but the company opened a 71,000ft<sup>2</sup> tannery on the southwest corner of Eighth and Birmingham Streets in New Toronto in 1918. It continued to expand in the following years and, by 1920, had branches in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Rochester, and Cincinnati.<sup>2</sup>

Dropping the Carman name in 1927, Donnell & Mudge's Canadian branch soon established itself as a leading industry in New Toronto and, over the next twenty years, became one of the largest sheepskin tanners in Canada, turning out millions of feet of



**DONNELL, CARMAN & MUDGE**  
Canada Limited

***Sheep Skin Tanners***  
*Capacity 300 Dozen Skins Daily*

**Most Up-to-date Machinery for Making  
Shoe Leather**

**Latest Plates for Fancy Leather**

Sole Canadian Selling Representative:  
**FREDK. WHITLEY COMPANY**  
218 Lemoine St., Montreal, P.Q.

Factory:  
**NEW TORONTO**      **ONTARIO**

**Figure 39: “Donnell, Carman & Mudge”  
Advertisement. *The Globe*, April 13, 1923.**

<sup>2</sup> Charles H. McDermott, *A History of the Shoe and Leather Industries of the United States Together with Historical and Biographical Notices*, vol. 2 (Boston, MA: J.W. Denehy & Co., 1920), 422–23.



leather each year. The company specialized in producing a wide variety of sheepskin products, as the 1937 *New Toronto In Story and Picture* described:

From all corners of the world come the hides and skins used by the company. In the modern three story building equipped with the best machinery available, the evil-smelling hides are transformed into the most ornate and beautiful designs with many of the leather products eventually finding their way to milady's dressing table.<sup>3</sup>

By the 1940s, the company was, according to the *Globe and Mail*, "one of the most diversified and modern tannery plants in the industry." Employing approximately 200 people in New Toronto, the company produced articles for the clothing, shoe, handbag, toy, and novelty industries, among others.<sup>4</sup>

Donnell & Mudge was only one of many industries in the Lakeshore area, an area which encompassed Toronto's waterfront including the communities of New Toronto, Mimico, Long Branch, and Swansea. Lack of available land in Toronto prompted industries to expand to outlying areas and the Lakeshore area thus became heavily industrialized by the first half of the twentieth century. A considerable portion of this expansion came from American companies looking to establish factories in Canada and, by the late 1930s, New Toronto alone was home to factories belonging to Canadian Industries Ltd., Anaconda American Brass Co., Continental Can Co., Campbell Soup Co., and Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., among others.

The 1939 outbreak of war shifted the focus of New Toronto's industries to the war effort and Donnell & Mudge quickly busied itself with government contracts for leather products. As the war progressed, increasing numbers of civilian workers began to enlist and many companies, Donnell & Mudge included, found themselves unable to secure the workers they needed to meet both government and normal orders. By July 1943, the Lakeshore area reported over 2,000 vacant positions, requiring approximately 900 female and 1,100 male labourers. This was only expected to increase with seasonal

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<sup>3</sup> Publicity and Programme Committee, *New Toronto in Story and Picture: A Souvenir of the July First Celebration, 1937*. (New Toronto, ON., 1937), 32.

<sup>4</sup> "Donnell-Mudge shares offered at \$19 per share," *Globe and Mail*, June 26, 1947.

demands. Some companies targeted their advertising towards housewives and, as the local newspaper stated, “other women who... have never need to work before.” Hoping part-time labour could fill the void left behind by enlistees, companies promised to pay the same rate that full-time employees received and called upon residents’ patriotism to encourage them to work.<sup>5</sup> Most companies were not interested in employing POWs. Some simply preferred employing civilians as a matter of patriotism or security concerns while others, namely those working on military contracts, were unable to do so as the Geneva Convention banned prisoners from work directly related to the war effort. Donnell & Mudge, however, saw potential with POWs and fortunately, the company was well aware that there were hundreds of German civilian internees and EMS were already interned in nearby Camp 22.

Internment Camp “M” (later Camp 22) opened on June 25, 1940 on the grounds of the Ontario Reformatory (Mimico), just north of the boundary separating the town of New Toronto from Etobicoke.<sup>6</sup> Within the township of Etobicoke, both the reformatory and the nearby CN Railway Yards were erroneously referred to as being in Mimico. The reformatory itself had originally opened in 1913 to hold civilian inmates from the Toronto area and the Ontario government employed inmates in the manufacture of bricks and tiles thanks to a shale deposit adjacent to the facility.<sup>7</sup> While the site was not initially considered for an internment camp in 1939, the Canadian government’s decision to accept POWs and internees from Great Britain in mid-1940 necessitated more facilities. With Kananaskis and Petawawa unable to accommodate the expected influx of POWs,

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<sup>5</sup> “Industries Plead for Part-Time Help,” *Advertiser*, July 22, 1943.

<sup>6</sup> Nomenclature of Camp 22 was somewhat convoluted in that it was located in neither Mimico nor New Toronto. Although originally referred to as Camp “M” for “Mimico,” the camp itself was within the historic bounds of the Township of Etobicoke rather than the towns of Mimico or New Toronto. As the camp was closer to New Toronto, separated by the CNR lines to the South, the camp’s location was later re-designated New Toronto but both names were used interchangeably throughout the rest of the war. Today, the camp’s former site is within the boundaries of the neighbourhood of Mimico. Maj.-Gen. C.F. Constantine to Director of Internment Operations, December 2, 1940, HQS 7236-96-22 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Construction & Maintenance of Camps - New Toronto, C-5420, RG24, LAC.

<sup>7</sup> Denise Harris, “HISTORY CORNER: Mimico Correctional Centre Had Inmates Extracting Shale, Manufacturing Bricks,” Toronto.com, October 20, 2016, <https://www.toronto.com/community-story/6902885-history-corner-mimico-correctional-centre-had-inmates-extracting-shale-manufacturing-bricks>.

the Canadian government selected a series of potential sites for conversion to internment camps. The reformatory was quickly modified to hold POWs rather than civilian inmates and Camp “M” established with the intention of interning civilian internees and EMS. Initially under the command of Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham, who later became the Department of Labour’s Director of POW Labour Projects, the camp had a capacity of 500, the first of whom arrived on July 19, 1940.<sup>8</sup> The Camp was later renamed Camp 22 and although it was in the township of Etobicoke, the camp’s location was interchangeably given as either Mimico or New Toronto. (As the camp was closer to New Toronto, the official location was ultimately re-designated as New Toronto.)

By January 1943, there were 536 POWs – seventy-six civilian internees and 460 EMS – in Camp 22.<sup>9</sup> The internees at Camp 22 had originally been apprehended in the United Kingdom and other British territories and encompassed a variety of backgrounds, including a representative for German auto manufacturers in West Africa, the owner of a British textile factory, a professor from Oxford University, and an aircraft engineer.<sup>10</sup> Some were Nazi Party members, while others identified as anti-Nazis. Others were EMS captured in or near the United Kingdom, India, the Caribbean, South America, Mexico, or Canada when their ships were seized shortly after war broke out, after their vessels were seized on the high seas, or after they scuttled their own ships to prevent them from falling into enemy hands.

Many of the civilian internees and EMS had been interned since 1939 or 1940 and were approaching their third or fourth year behind barbed wire. Finding suitable work or recreation thus became central to avoiding “barbed wire psychosis” but, as in most internment camps, work opportunities within Camp 22 remained limited. Some POWs were occasionally employed in camp maintenance or as carpenters but one of the primary

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<sup>8</sup> Goodlet, “Number 22 Internment Camp,” 96–97.

<sup>9</sup> “Numbers Interned, Camp 22,” January 2, 1943, HQS 7236-1-10-22 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - IO 8A & 8B - Correspondence Re - Returns - Strengths - New Toronto, C-5373, RG24, LAC.

<sup>10</sup> Lt.-Col. C.G. Carruthers to HQ, MD2, June 27, 1945, HQS 7236-47 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Returns to Britain and Releases, C-5392, RG24, LAC.

complaints from the POWs was a lack of paid work.<sup>11</sup> Prisoners repeatedly requested opportunities for work outside camp bounds, so internment authorities authorized POWs to work on thirty acres of farmland adjacent to the camp, as was being done at Camp 23 (Monteith). This work allowed POWs to grow various vegetables, including tomatoes, potatoes, cabbage, carrots, beets, and onions – work that would help keep POWs occupied while also maintaining some self-sufficiency.<sup>12</sup> Once the Canadian government approved POW labour in May 1943, POWs at Camp 22 saw this as an opportunity for more work. Forty-four EMS immediately expressed interest in working in mining operations, as half of them had previously worked as miners.<sup>13</sup> The departments of Labour and of National Defence did consider POWs in mines but ultimately dismissed the idea. The Department of Labour instead asked for volunteers for woodcutting projects. Woodcutting was initially restricted solely to EMS, but the Camp 22 spokesman requested civilian internees be included, as twenty-seven of the seventy-seven civilian internees in camp also requested work.<sup>14</sup>

The Canadian government had approved the use of POW labour with the intention of employing POWs in the struggling agricultural and forestry sectors, but it was soon apparent these were not the only industries that could benefit from this new source of manpower. Urban industry, especially manufacturing materiel for the war effort, had been particularly affected by the shortage as young labourers clamoured to enlist and companies engaged in fierce competition to secure the labour they needed. Industries began employing women in significant numbers, but they were still not enough to meet

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<sup>11</sup> Col. R.S.M. White, "Report on Camp No. 22, visited on 8.6.42," n.d., POW - Corresp, Reports, Notes, Misc Papers, Directives, 1942-1945, Vol. 1, MG6E2 – Canada – National Defence – Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM.

<sup>12</sup> "POW Farm Project, Internment Camp No. 22, New Toronto," n.d., HQS 7236-34-1-22 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Monthly Report of Employment of P/Ws for Which They Receive Pay. New Toronto, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>13</sup> "Internees interested in mining work," n.d., HQS 7236-34-1-22 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Monthly Report of Employment of P/Ws for Which They Receive Pay. New Toronto, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>14</sup> "Kapt. J. Olthaus to Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeny, August 10, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1-22 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Monthly Report of Employment of P/Ws for Which They Receive Pay. New Toronto, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

demand. Most internment camps were too far away from industrial areas, but Camp 22's proximity to New Toronto's industry offered the Department of Labour a unique opportunity: prisoners could be employed in local industry and, rather than be billeted at the work site, still continue to live and eat in the camp.

Donnell & Mudge Ltd. quickly recognized the opportunity to secure additional labourers and, on June 7, 1943, company president Charles Annable wrote Director of Prisoners of War Colonel Streight to express interest in hiring ten to twenty – later increased to thirty – “selected docile” POWs for work in the tannery. The company, Annable explained, was struggling to fulfil its military contracts, let alone its civilian ones, in the face of the labour shortage. Many of its employees had already left their jobs to enlist and the company was unable to secure sufficient replacements.<sup>15</sup> Hoping POWs could help boost production, Annable proposed employing them in the tanning of shearlings, work that required them to place shearlings in a chemical solution and remove them at specified intervals.<sup>16</sup> The shearlings would then be used in the manufacture of aviators' boots and winter coats for military personnel.

With the tannery less than a five-minute drive from Camp 22, Annable offered to either build a small barracks on Donnell & Mudge property to house the POWs and guards or, if there was any objection to billeting the POWs in this manner, to pick the POWs up from Camp 22 in the morning and return them at the end of the work day.<sup>17</sup> He did, however, prefer to have the same POWs every day to avoid having constantly to train new ones. Annable assured the government that the company was willing to cover all expenses entailed with POWs as well as the cost of employing guards.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Charles H. Annable to Director of Prisoners of War, June 7, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

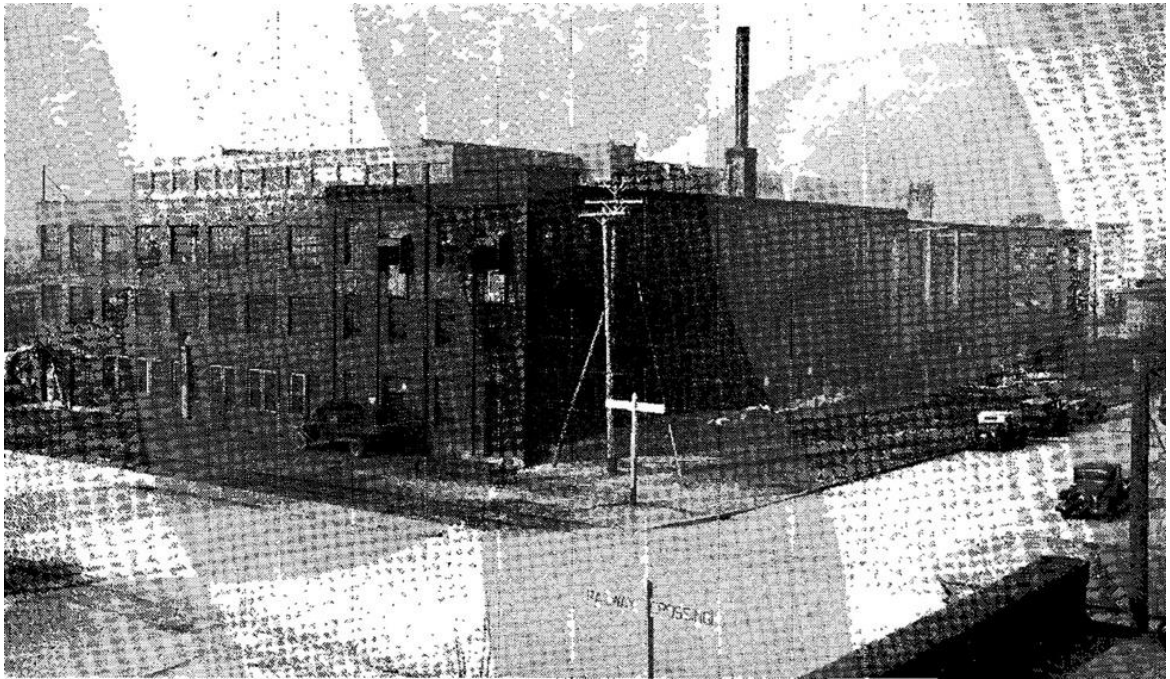
<sup>16</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Director, Prisoners of War, August 13, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Charles H. Annable to Director of Prisoners of War, June 7, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

Fortunately for Donnell & Mudge, not only was Camp 22 close to its tannery but it also held solely EMS and civilian internees, the only classes of POWs the Department of Labour was initially considering for employment. Believed to be more docile and a lesser security risk than their combatant counterparts, EMS and civilians had also generally been interned for the last three or four years and thus were expected to place higher value upon the opportunity for work and the relative freedom it entailed. Although Director of POW Labour Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham believed the work to be “not of the most pleasant character,” he saw no reason not to approve the project and forwarded the application for review.<sup>19</sup>

As the Department of National Defence and the RCMP reviewed the project and proposed security measures, the company requested permission from the New Toronto Town Council to employ POWs in its tannery and build a dormitory to house these men



**Figure 40: Donnell & Mudge Ltd. Tannery, 1937. Only a few hundred metres from Camp 22, it was conveniently located for POW labour. *New Toronto in Story and Picture*, p. 62.**

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<sup>19</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Director, Prisoners of War, August 13, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

on an adjacent lot. Despite the presence of Camp 22 less than 200 metres from the northern boundary of the town of New Toronto for the last three years, public reaction to Donnell & Mudge's proposal was overwhelmingly negative. On July 14, 1943, the New Toronto Council held a vote and declared itself unanimously and "unalterably" opposed to the proposal.<sup>20</sup> Councillor R.T. Greer, justifying the council's decision, explained to the local newspaper, *The Advertiser*, "We felt that it would not be in the interests of the war effort, labour or our citizens." Despite the company's proposal stipulating POWs were to be kept under constant supervision and either housed in dedicated barracks or remain housed in Camp 22, the council believed that the presence of POWs at the tannery would endanger nearby vital war industries and rail lines.<sup>21</sup> With opposing parties describing housing POWs on the adjacent lot as a "menace" to local industry and residents, *The Advertiser* reported the council's objection came following "vehement complaints," many from nearby war industries protesting against the presence of POWs so close to their factories.<sup>22</sup> The Council, resolving that the proposed project would only create an "additional hazard" for the town's war industries and endanger the civilian population in the case of an escape, declared that the Town of New Toronto did not want POWs "employed or housed within its limits."<sup>23</sup> Determined in its cause, the council forwarded its resolution to Ottawa along with a request for federal assistance to help cover the costs the city was bearing in providing Camp 22 with water, sewage, and services.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> New Toronto Council, "Thirteenth Session," July 14, 1943, New Toronto Council Minutes, 1943-1944, File 9, Series 677, Box 207013-1, City of Toronto Archives.

<sup>21</sup> "New Toronto Opposes Plan of Factory to Hire War Prisoners," *Advertiser*, July 22, 1943.

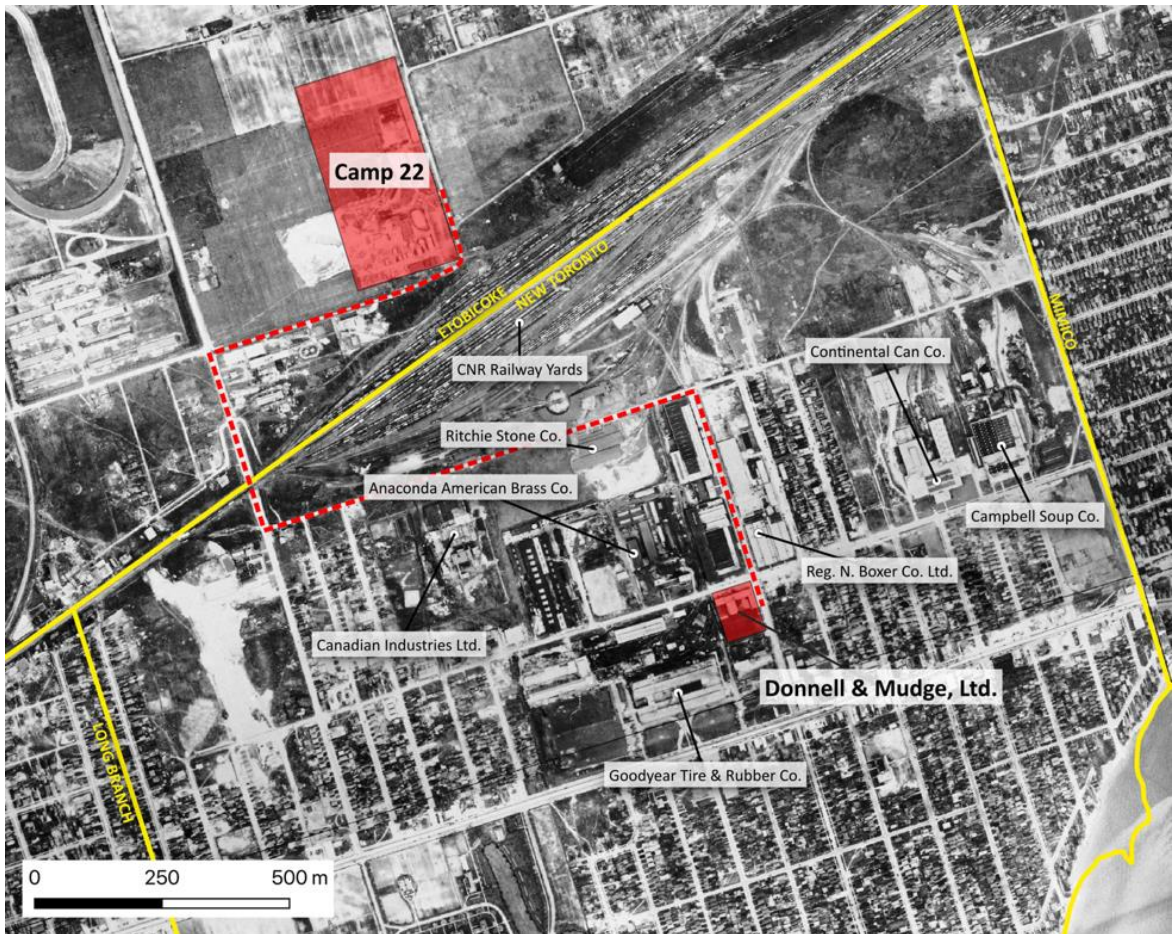
<sup>22</sup> "N.T. Council Not Reconciled to Plan for Hiring Internees," *Advertiser*, August 12, 1943; "30 Civilian Internees Arrive Monday to Work in Local Plant," *Advertiser*, August 26, 1943.

<sup>23</sup> New Toronto Council, "Thirteenth Session," July 14, 1943, New Toronto Council Minutes, 1943-1944, File 9, Series 677, Box 207013-1, City of Toronto Archives.

<sup>24</sup> "Opposes Hiring of War Prisoners," *Globe and Mail*, July 15, 1943.



There was little concern of sabotage when employing POWs in bush or farm work, apart from the possibility of setting fire, but employing POWs in civilian industry in an urban area was another matter. Camp 22 was already nearby, but it was surrounded by barbed wire fences and guard towers, and the facility's former use as a reformatory helped ease security concerns and fears of escape. Donnell & Mudge had no such security measures and the company's proposal had POWs and civilians working in close proximity. The tannery was only a block away from civilian residences, but more concerning was the tannery's proximity to other industries in New Toronto and the greater Toronto area, many of which were fulfilling essential military contracts. Donnell & Mudge was on the same block as Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.'s factory and across the



**Figure 41: Aerial View of New Toronto, 1940s. Donnell & Mudge, Ltd.'s proximity to Camp 22 made it a convenient location for POW labour (route marked in red) but the presence of industry and private residences surrounding the tannery prompted security concerns. Map by Author, aerial photos (1947) from University of Toronto Map & Data Library.**



street from Anaconda American Brass Co.'s factory, the former producing tires and the latter shell casings, instrument housings, and other equipment for the war effort. Other important factories were nearby as well: Canadian Industries Ltd., Campbell Soup Co., Continental Can Co., and Reg. N. Boxer Co. Ltd. all had factories within one kilometre of the tannery and most were engaged in military contracts. Added to this, the Mimico CNR Railway Yard – a prime target for sabotage and an easy method of escape – was only 500 metres away from the tannery.

The New Toronto Council's attitude towards POWs was not without precedent nor was the council alone in its beliefs. In 1941, it had refused a proposal for the Board of Works to employ POWs at Camp 22 to overcome the labour shortage.<sup>25</sup> In nearby Toronto, the city's Board of Control likewise refused to allow POWs inside city limits, a decision it reversed only after the war in Europe ended in May 1945.<sup>26</sup> Elements of the tannery industry were also opposed: at the annual Ontario Labour Educational Association convention in Kitchener in May 1943, members from across the province strongly protested against proposals to employ Italian POWs in Kitchener-area tanneries.<sup>27</sup> However, with 4,000 employment vacancies in the Lakeshore area alone by August 1943, companies were facing increasing pressure to secure any and all available labour.<sup>28</sup> Emphasizing this, the *Advertiser* called for the mobilization of all available manpower for homefront industry, stating, "complete utilization of Canada's manpower" was essential to victory and "no intelligent person, therefore, will be disposed to impede the government's war labor policy which is definitely shaped to that end."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "New Toronto Opposes Plan of Factory to Hire War Prisoners," *Advertiser*, July 22, 1943.

<sup>26</sup> On May 28, 1945, the City of Toronto passed a resolution to petition the Canadian government to allow Toronto-area brickyards to employ POWs and thereby boost the city's housing and construction programmes. Approximately fifty EMS eventually worked for the Toronto Brick Co. at the Don Valley Brickworks from September 1945 to January 1946. A. MacNamara to A. Ross, June 19, 1945, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC; J.W. Somers to W.L. Mackenzie King, May 29, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>27</sup> "Protests Idea of Employing War Prisoners," *Globe and Mail*, May 24, 1943.

<sup>28</sup> "N.T. Council Not Reconciled to Plan for Hiring Internees," *Advertiser*, August 12, 1943

<sup>29</sup> "The War Brought Home," *Advertiser*, August 12, 1943.

In the following weeks, Donnell & Mudge and representatives from the departments of Labour and National Defence continued to push for POW labour, eventually proposing to employ only civilian internees from Camp 22. Hoping to sway the New Toronto councillors' opinion, company president Charles Annable met with them in a private session on August 11, 1943 to answer questions and address concerns.<sup>30</sup> Donnell & Mudge, Annable emphasized, was trying to fulfil "essential war orders" and, unable to secure the necessary labour, the company had no choice but to turn to internees. He assured councillors that internees would remain under guard and kept separate from civilian employees. *The Advertiser* reported that many industries which had originally protested against the presence of POWs in New Toronto were believed to be much more amenable to Donnell & Mudge employing civilian internees, but the council remained adamant in its decision and refused to grant permission.<sup>31</sup> In an interview with the *Toronto Daily Star*, New Toronto Reeve W.E. MacDonald explained, "These men are dangerous to the public safety or they would not be kept in an internment camp, and it is unfair to expect loyal Britishers to work beside someone who has been aiding the enemy. Public opinion is against it, and we must obey the people. If we failed to oppose this move, every member of this council would be defeated at the next election."<sup>32</sup>

Despite the New Toronto council's fears and political motivations to oppose POW labour, the Department of Labour had different priorities. The war placed leather in high demand as the armed forces required, among other things, boots, gloves, jerkins, and flight suits. The leather industry was centred in Ontario, which was home to twenty-nine of the country's eighty establishments and 4,007 of its 4,770 (84%) employees as of 1942. In that year, Ontario companies produced leather goods valued at \$37,164,062 – 88% of all such goods in Canada.<sup>33</sup> High demand resulting from large military contracts

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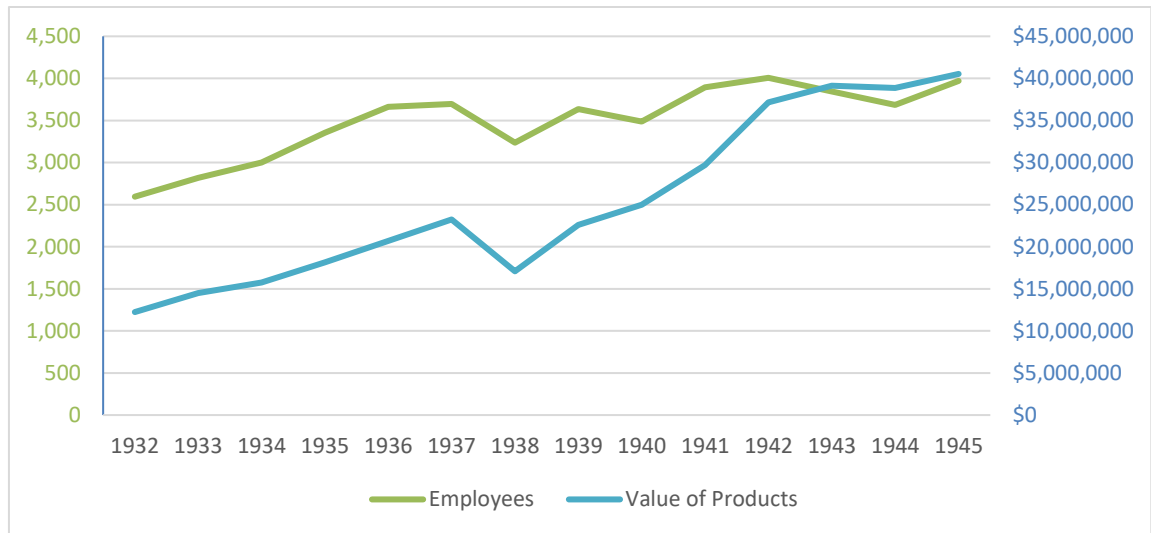
<sup>30</sup> "N.T. Council Not Reconciled to Plan for Hiring Internees," *Advertiser*, August 12, 1943

<sup>31</sup> New Toronto Council, "Fourteenth Session," August 11, 1943, New Toronto Council Minutes, 1943-1944, File 9, Series 677, Box 207013-1, City of Toronto Archives; *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> "Refuse to Let Firm Hire War Prisoners," *Toronto Daily Star*, August 13, 1943.

<sup>33</sup> Canada, Department of Trade and Commerce, *The Leather Industry, Canada, 1942* (Ottawa, ON, 1943), 6.

had prompted the Department of Munitions and Supply to begin controlling glove and garment leather and diverting production to government, rather than civilian, contracts.<sup>34</sup>



**Figure 42: Leather Industry in Ontario, 1932-1945. Ontario had the largest number of employees employed in the leather industry in Canada, but the industry struggled to attract the labour it needed to meet increased demand brought upon by wartime contracts. Canada, Department of Trade and Commerce, *The Leather Industry, 1932 to 1945*.**

The Department of Labour was committed to providing Canadian employers with the labour they needed and, with Donnell & Mudge struggling to fulfil both its military and civilian contracts, the Department considered its options. Civilian labour was the preferred choice but, as Donnell & Mudge had already found, the men and women they needed were not available. Prisoners of war, although a risk, were the next best choice. Camp 22 was conveniently nearby, thereby avoiding the need for additional accommodations and security measures, and work would occupy POWs and boost their morale. The result was that, despite opposition from the New Toronto Town Council, the Department of Labour deemed the war industry more important than local concerns and

<sup>34</sup> Department of Labour, Canada, "Prices and Price Control," *The Labour Gazette* XLIII, no. 3 (March 1943): 395–96.

approved Donnell & Mudge's proposal. On August 13, 1943, the Department of Labour forwarded a request for thirty POWs to the Department of National Defence.<sup>35</sup>

The Department of National Defence approved the project in late August and promptly forwarded a request for volunteers to Camp 22. With work at the tannery scheduled to begin on September 9, the Commandant issued a call for thirty-one volunteers. Although the camp's internees had previously shown interest in paid work opportunities outside the camp, only eleven volunteered.<sup>36</sup> This may have been partly due to the nature of the work, but was more likely because the internees would still have to live in Camp 22. Although keeping working POWs in Camp 22 had been an important factor in considering the feasibility of the project, most civilian internees hoped outside work would also entail living outside camp bounds. This became especially evident when the A.R. Clarke & Co. considered employing internees in its tannery in Eastern Toronto. When a call for volunteers was issued, no one volunteered if they had to remain in Camp 22 while twenty-six expressed interest if they were able to live outside the camp.<sup>37</sup> Word had already reached Camp 22 of the freedoms enjoyed by the EMS who had recently transferred to bush camps and internees at Camp 22 hoped for similar privileges. Civilian internees also took issue with being interned in the same camp as EMS, who had been categorized as Class I POWs in 1942 along with combatant POWs, and tensions had grown between the two parties over the last year. The civilian internees in Camp 22 had cooperated with the camp administration to an extent that had "aroused the animosity" of some of the EMS, prompting a handful of EMS to beat at least one civilian internee.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "Projects for which German prisoners-of-war have been requested by Department of Labour," September 7, 1943, Prisoners of War Labour Projects - Policy, 1943-1944, File 611.1:21-3, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>36</sup> Maj.-Gen. H.F.G. Letson to DOC MD2, September 9, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>37</sup> Camp 22 War Diary, October 19, 1943, Part 4, Vol. 15391, RG24, LAC.

<sup>38</sup> C.G. Kerr to DOC, MD2, November 5, 1942, HQS 7236-10 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Administration and Organization - Camp No. 22 New Toronto, C-5377, RG24, LAC.

Despite this, the Commandant selected twenty EMS volunteers to be added to the eleven internees to meet Donnell & Mudge's request.<sup>39</sup>

As the Camp 22 Commandant determined who would be working for the tannery, the Department of Labour focused its attention on ensuring adequate measures were taken to enforce security at the work site. As with early labour projects, the Department hired three civilian guards to escort POWs between the tannery and Camp 22 and to supervise them while working at the tannery.<sup>40</sup> Hoping to quell concerns, Charles Annable in an interview with *The Advertiser* assured the community that these guards would remain on duty at all times to supervise POWs in the tannery.<sup>41</sup> In addition to providing "reasonable supervision," guards were tasked with ensuring POWs completed a full day's work and did not fraternize with any of the company's employees. Fraternization, the Department of Labour feared, could allow POWs to obtain civilian clothing and money that could then be used to facilitate an escape. Guards were to use "sufficient force" to prevent a POW from escaping the work site but were instructed not to fire upon the POW.<sup>42</sup> If a POW succeeded in escaping from the project, guards were to notify military authorities and local police who would be responsible for apprehending the escapee.

On September 9, 1943, the thirty-one internees and EMS left Camp 22 under escort to begin their first day of work at the Donnell & Mudge tannery. The POWs worked from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with an hour break for lunch, and received 50¢ per day. The POWs were assigned manual labour, placing shearlings or other types of skins in tanks containing a chemical solution to tan them. Prisoners then removed the skins from the tanks at set intervals, after which the skins were forwarded to other parts of the

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<sup>39</sup> Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeny to Director, Prisoners of War, September 10, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>40</sup> "Nominal Roll of Civilian Guards by projects," n.d., Nominal Roll of Civilian Guards, Vol. 964, RG27-N-3, LAC.

<sup>41</sup> "30 Civilian Internees Arrive Monday to Work in Local Plant," *Advertiser*, August 26, 1943.

<sup>42</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham, "Instructions governing Civilian Guards in Labour Camps," July 30, 1943, Instructions to Civilian Guards and Other Civilian Employees, Vol. 966, RG27, LAC.

tannery for further processing.<sup>43</sup> Breakfast and supper were eaten at Camp 22, but the POWs ate their lunch in the tannery's canteen.<sup>44</sup> At the end of the work day, the prisoners were driven back to Camp 22.

Early reactions to the work were favourable on all sides. Four POWs did quit work in the first week but, as the rest of the POWs had spoken highly of the work, they were quickly replaced by another four volunteers.<sup>45</sup> The company was quite satisfied with the performance of the internees and EMS, as was the Wartime Prices and Trade Board, a government agency established to control prices and inflation. In a letter to the Department of Labour, the Administrator of the Hides and Leather division remarked,

We thought you would be pleased to hear from us that your experiment with prisoners of war in Donnell and Mudge tannery at New Toronto was working out in a most satisfactory manner.

As a result of a report received yesterday, it would appear that all the parties concerned are not only satisfied but pleased and anxious to increase the usefulness of the men in the Plant.<sup>46</sup>

Hoping to increase production, the company requested an extra ten or twenty men; having received "very satisfactory reports" from the project, the Department of National Defence granted the request. It took little time to secure volunteers and twenty additional men began work on October 1, bringing the company's total up to fifty-one. This increase in manpower not only allowed the company to assign the POWs to a single working unit but to give them a department where they worked entirely by themselves.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Director, POW, August 13, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>44</sup> E.L. Maag, "Report on visit to Camp 22," September 9, 1943, H.Q.S. 7236-92-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - I.R.C. - Reports by Delegate and Correspondence, C-5415, RG24, LAC.

<sup>45</sup> Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeny to Director, Prisoners of War, September 17, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>46</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Director, Prisoners of War, September 28, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>47</sup> Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeny to Director, Prisoners of War, September 24, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

The work offered POWs an opportunity to pass their time and to leave Camp 22, even if only for eight hours. This was especially important as many internees approached their fourth year of internment and had spent little if any time outside the camp's barbed wire confines. Internees and EMS also worked alongside civilian employees, bringing them into the first direct contact with civilians – including women – since they were interned. Contact with women had generally been restricted to glimpses through the wire, but now POWs were working in the same facility. Regular employment and contact with civilians provided POWs with some sense of normalcy and, despite fraternization being strictly forbidden, relationships soon developed, something which would become increasingly apparent as the work continued.

Work also provided POWs with an income to supplement the money received through the Swiss Consul and which they used to make purchases from the camp canteen. Although the civilian internees had hoped work would offer them the opportunity to live outside of Camp 22, their work at Donnell & Mudge allowed them to enjoy the advantages of outside employment while still living in an internment camp. They lived in the same accommodations as their friends and had access to recreational resources not normally found in bush camps, including a well-stocked library and a wide selection of educational courses, sports, movies, instruments, and music.

Not all POWs were happy with work in the tannery and, over the next few months, the company experienced a small but steady turnover of men. By February 1944, the number of POWs employed by Donnell & Mudge had dropped from fifty-one to thirty-two.<sup>48</sup> Some simply wanted to remain in Camp 22, some wanted to volunteer for other work, and others found the work too challenging; during a visit to Camp 22 in January, a representative from the Swiss Consul learned that many civilian internees had been employed in office or commercial work before the war and therefore struggled to adapt to the hard, manual labour the tannery required. If internment authorities could

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<sup>48</sup> Walter Dudley to Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham, February 14, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

provide office work, the Consul believed the internees would volunteer in large numbers.<sup>49</sup>

Camp 22 spokesman Raimund Treu, who had worked for Donnell & Mudge in October and November, also inquired whether there was other work “more suitable” for these men. Writing Colonel Streight, he explained,

Most of us have now been permanently behind barbed wire for 4 1/2 years and have suffered greatly, although we were assured that internment is not a punishment but only a preventative measure. As civilians who lived and worked within the British Empire, we have been given rather a raw deal in comparison with other Germans [sic] who accidentally resided in not so threatened surroundings, as for example in Canada, and were left therefore to follow their occupation and live a normal life under police supervision.<sup>50</sup>

Although Treu noted that he and his men had little cause for complaint in regard to the treatment they had received, living in Camp 22 for more than three-and-a-half years had become a “terrible bore” and they hoped for a change. He proposed they be allowed to live in a town or within a fixed area and provided with work more suitable to their backgrounds. With escape to Germany “quite impossible,” Treu suggested they instead report to police on a regular basis to ease security concerns. He also argued that authorities had little to fear with internees’ contact with the public as, he explained, “we have found that, wherever we came in contact with them, as for example in the tannery and in the lumber camps, they were kind and understanding and certainly showed no hostility toward us as civilians.”<sup>51</sup>

Treu, who had represented German auto manufacturers in West Africa before the war, expressed a sentiment shared by many civilian internees: that they were but incidental victims of war, unfairly interned. Some were, frankly, while internment authorities had reasonable grounds to intern others – including Treu. Treu had been an

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<sup>49</sup> “Respecting Internment Camp No. 22, Visited on January 5, 1944,” January 10, 1944, HQS 7236-91-1-22 - Visits by Representatives of Protecting Power, New Toronto, C-5413, RG24, LAC.

<sup>50</sup> R. Treu to Col. H.N. Streight, February 1, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



NSDAP member and was not just the spokesman at Camp 22 but also its political leader. He had apparently collected information regarding the political beliefs of other internees for “future use against them” and his political beliefs prompted anti-Nazi contacts to consider him a “fanatical” Nazi.<sup>52</sup>

Other internees working for Donnell & Mudge were not pro-Nazi. Wilhelm Brendel, for example, was deemed a reliable “anti-Nazi at heart” by intelligence officers, who noted that he had volunteered for work projects so as to escape Nazi politics. He had refused an earlier opportunity of repatriation to Germany as he wanted to return to the United Kingdom and his anti-Nazi views had made pro-Nazis like Treu deem him “unreliable politically.” Likewise, Fritz R. Koenekamp, a mathematician and professor at Oxford University, was an outspoken anti-Nazi and “true Anglophile,” characteristics that had prompted pro-Nazis to beat him severely in Camp 22.<sup>53</sup> However, regardless of their loyalties, Treu was mistaken to compare their situation to that of Canadian Germans, many of whom had been interned on orders from the Canadian government and subsequently released. The internees working for Donnell & Mudge were interned at the discretion of British authorities. Colonel Streight had no say in arranging their release.

Tensions between pro-Nazis and anti-Nazis were not surprising, but friction also grew between the EMS and civilian internees of Camp 22. As mentioned earlier, some EMS took issue with the considerable cooperation between some of the civilian internees and Canadian authorities and the selection of chiefly civilian internees for work in the tannery appears to have further heightened tensions. Some of the EMS and pro-Nazi internees claimed – and resented - that those who were employed were being provided with “preferred treatment.” Partly the result of being denied the opportunity to work, this group attempted to “adversely influence” the efforts of those already employed.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Lt.-Col. C.G. Carruthers to HQ, MD2, June 27, 1945, HQS 7236-47 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Returns to Britain and Releases, C-5392, RG24, LAC.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeny to Director, Prisoners of War, September 20, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

Camp 22 Commandant Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeny did everything in his power to obtain volunteers, but the discontent among POWs in camp hindered his efforts. As Sweeny explained, POWs unable or unwilling to volunteer for work were unhappy with being forced to instead do camp fatigues (including cooking, cleaning, and laundry) for the benefit of those who were getting paid and merely “using the camp as a hotel.”<sup>55</sup> Some of the trouble between civilian internees and EMS was resolved following the designation of Camp 22 as an internment camp for civilian internees in November. All EMS in Camp 22, with the exception of the thirty employed by Donnell & Mudge, were transferred to Camp 23 (Monteith) in late November and replaced by an additional forty-three civilian internees, bringing the total to 111.<sup>56</sup>

Although the vast majority of EMS had been transferred, the thirty that remained still wielded considerable power. Civilian internee and anti-Nazi Oskar W.J. Groszmann was one of those who had begun working for Donnell & Mudge on September 9. In a letter to the Swiss Consul, Groszmann explained that a small clique of EMS had employed a number of pretexts to prevent civilian internees from volunteering for work at the tannery. Despite his and his fellow civilian internees’ desire to continue working, the EMS were hampering their efforts and widening a division between the two groups. The leader of the working group, Jonny Plambeck, was an EMS and had been appointed by Camp 22 spokesman Raimund Treu. The EMS therefore wielded considerably more power than the civilian internees and went so far as to threaten company management that they would cease work if internees they did not like, including Groszmann, were selected for work. After the EMS threatened and made “slandorous” accusations against Groszmann, the Camp Commandant was called to the tannery to settle a dispute. The Adjutant, representing the Commandant, arrived instead but declined to intervene, instead leaving the decision to the spokesman. Treu, without questioning Groszmann or allowing him to defend himself at his “trial,” sided with what Groszmann called Plambeck’s

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<sup>55</sup> Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeny to Director, Prisoners of War, February 21, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>56</sup> Camp 22 War Diary, November 24, 1943, Part 4, Vol. 15391, RG24, LAC.

“incorrect and unfair practices.”<sup>57</sup> Despite Groszmann having worked satisfactorily for 130 days, Plambeck deemed him ineligible for future work in the tannery.

After remaining in Camp 22 for two months, Groszmann submitted an application to resume work. Plambeck rejected the application outright – an action Treu supported. Groszmann once again turned to the Swiss Consul, petitioning them for help and protesting Plambeck’s authority. Emphasizing Camp 22 was now designated for civilian internees, Groszmann questioned, “Is a tiny group of seamen under the leadership of Plambeck entitled to bar another civilian internee from opportunity to work, for selfish reasons, abusing his authority and applying terrorizing methods?” Lambasting Plambeck’s attitude, Groszmann requested help to arrange for a transfer to a camp where the spokesman properly carried out his duties without prejudice.<sup>58</sup>

Two weeks later, after the spokesman failed to address the issue, Groszmann once again requested help from the Swiss Consul:

What crime did I commit that warrants such treatment and not even an attempt at compromise? The Spokesman discriminates. There are apparently two types of Germans in this Camp, as far as he is concerned. It appears that he represents and supports only one of these groups, he classifies as he pleases, according to his own taste, sympathy or antipathy. I was unable to find any other explanation for his attitude throughout my case than that I do not belong to the group he favours and, that is the important part of it, for the same reason refuses to be my speaker in a case where I really need one. Who is going to represent me in the future in cases of real need?<sup>59</sup>

Groszmann never received his answer. The camp commandant advised Colonel Streight that Groszmann had not been allowed to resume work due to an alleged misuse of mail, a matter that was under investigation. Groszmann was already scheduled to be transferred

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<sup>57</sup> O.W.J. Grozsmann to Swiss Consul-General, March 27, 1944, 621-CA-40 Vol. 20 - Letters and Complaints, Vol. 2772, RG27, LAC.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> O.W.J. Grozsmann to Swiss Consul-General, April 11, 1944, 621-CA-40 Vol. 20 - Letters and Complaints, Vol. 2772, RG27, LAC.

to Camp 23 (Monteith) at the end of the month so Streight advised no action be taken regarding his request for a transfer.<sup>60</sup>

The division between civilian internees and EMS continued in the following months, but the announcement of the pending closure of Camp 22 helped reduce tensions. On March 7, 1944, the Ontario government asked the Department of National Defence to return the grounds of the former Ontario Reformatory, now Camp 22. Citing overcrowded facilities at Guelph and Burwash, the Ontario government required a more suitable facility to house short-term prisoners from the Toronto area and wanted to resume inmate production of construction materials.<sup>61</sup> With newer and more suitable internment facilities elsewhere, the Province hoped the Department of National Defence would return the site to its control.<sup>62</sup>

The contract between the Ontario government and the Department of National Defence granted the latter full use of the facility for the duration of the war and the following six months, so the Department of National Defence had elected not to close the camp during a reorganization of internment operations in 1943. Instead, the camp had remained open to provide a convenient source of labour for the employment of POWs at Donnell & Mudge's tannery as well as a peat-cutting operation near Port Colborne. The Minister of National Defence had no objection to the province's request and suggested the Department of Labour make alternative arrangements for the POWs presently employed.<sup>63</sup> Military authorities soon after announced that Camp 22 would be closed by the end of April 1944 and the POWs there relocated to Camp 23.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Department of External Affairs, April 17, 1944, 621-CA-40 Vol. 20 - Letters and Complaints, Vol. 2772, RG27, LAC.

<sup>61</sup> A shale deposit was located directly adjacent to Camp 22 and, before the camp was converted to hold POWs, civilian prisoners at the Ontario Reformatory extracted the shale and used it in the manufacture of bricks and tiles. Harris, "HISTORY CORNER."

<sup>62</sup> G.H. Dunbar to Ralston, March 7, 1944, HQS 7236-10 - Treatment of enemy aliens - Organization and administration - Camp 22, New Toronto, C-5377, RG24, LAC.

<sup>63</sup> J.L. Ralston to G.H. Dunbar, March 18, 1944, HQS 7236-10 - Treatment of enemy aliens - Organization and administration - Camp 22, New Toronto, C-5377, RG24, LAC.

<sup>64</sup> Maj.-Gen. H.F.G. Letson to DOC MD2, April 6, 1944, HQS 7236-96-22 - Construction and Maintenance of Camps - New Toronto, C-5420, RG24, LAC.

The pending closure of Camp 22 placed the Donnell & Mudge project in limbo. Colonel Streight informed the Department of Labour that unless it could make arrangements to house the POWs employed at the tannery, the project would have to close.<sup>65</sup> When informed of the possibility his POW labour would be withdrawn, Donnell & Mudge Vice-President Walter L. Dudley expressed considerable “shock and surprise.” He argued that a company could not simply lose thirty-seven men in “one crack” and then be expected to immediately replace them. Instead, he proposed retaining the POWs currently in his employ and housing them in some of Camp 22’s buildings that were not expected to be used by the provincial government. Dudley believed that if Colonel Streight was reminded of the importance of providing Canadians with adequate footwear such as that which the tannery was producing, he might be more amenable to ensuring the company retained its POWs.<sup>66</sup> Dudley told the federal government that if the POWs were withdrawn, Donnell & Mudge would have no recourse but to close the tannery.<sup>67</sup> Whether or not Dudley was exaggerating is unclear but, considering POWs were running an entire department of the tannery, immediately withdrawing them clearly would have, at the least, significantly interrupted production.

As the Department of Labour searched for suitable accommodation, Donnell & Mudge enlisted the help of local MP Rodney Adamson. In a letter to Minister of National Defence James Ralston, Adamson asked military authorities to reconsider withdrawing the POWs in Donnell & Mudge’s employ, arguing they were working very well and the company was quite satisfied. Donnell & Mudge, Adamson added, was willing to cover all costs associated with housing, feeding, and guarding the POWs.<sup>68</sup> Ralston did not respond supportively, however. Emphasizing this was ultimately a matter for the

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<sup>65</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham, April 1, 1944, HQS 7236-10 - Treatment of enemy aliens - Organization and administration - Camp 22, New Toronto, C-5377, RG24, LAC.

<sup>66</sup> Walter L. Dudley to Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham, April 5, 1944, HQS 7236-10 - Treatment of enemy aliens - Organization and administration - Camp 22, New Toronto, C-5377, RG24, LAC.

<sup>67</sup> Maj.-Gen. A.E. Potts to Secretary, DND, April 28, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>68</sup> Rodney Adamson to Col. Ralston, April 8, 1944, HQS 7236-10 - Treatment of enemy aliens - Organization and administration - Camp 22, New Toronto, C-5377, RG24, LAC.

Department of Labour to resolve, he informed Adamson that finding suitable accommodations for POWs in urban areas was extremely difficult, citing security concerns and the potential for fraternization.<sup>69</sup> Colonel Streight seconded this, arguing it was impractical to house POWs in the Toronto area anywhere other than at an internment camp.<sup>70</sup>

The Department of Labour disagreed. Recognizing the importance of POW labour to the company, it revisited Dudley's proposal to house POWs in unused buildings at Camp 22 and suggested the company billet POWs in Camp 22's former guard quarters. These quarters would provide separate sleeping huts for guards and POWs, a kitchen and mess hall, as well as a playing field, and, although accommodations were small, they met the company's requirements. Furthermore, the Department of National Defence had erected these buildings after taking over the site in 1940 so they were not expected to be immediately used by the Ontario Reformatory. The Ontario government therefore had no objection to the proposal.

When informed of the possibility of using the former guard quarters, military authorities were insistent that POWs should remain housed in an internment camp. The Headquarters of Military District 2 (HQ MD2), which oversaw military operations in north-eastern and south-central Ontario, argued that the proposed accommodations, as they were outside the barbed wire fences of what used to be Camp 22, lacked sufficient security measures to prevent escapes or fraternization with the general public. The presence of POWs behind a barbed wire enclosure so close to Toronto had already been a concern and now authorities feared what trouble POWs would get in to without the fences and guard towers to contain them. Furthermore, HQ MD2 expressed concern with POWs living directly adjacent to civilian prisoners in the Ontario Reformatory, something they believed would only invite trouble. Military authorities also questioned

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<sup>69</sup> J.L. Ralston to Rodney Adamson, April 15, 1944, HQS 7236-10 - Treatment of enemy aliens - Organization and administration - Camp 22, New Toronto, C-5377, RG24, LAC.

<sup>70</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to V.A.G., April 18, 1944, HQS 7236-10 - Treatment of enemy aliens - Organization and administration - Camp 22, New Toronto, C-5377, RG24, LAC.

the suitability of the work, citing reports that POWs were fraternizing with male and female employees in the tannery.<sup>71</sup> If POWs had already made contacts among the civilian employees, what was going to stop them from visiting their newfound friends after work hours?

Despite HQ MD2's protests, demand for labour and leather once again trumped local security concerns. The Department of National Defence authorized the Department of Labour to take over the former guard quarters to house POWs willing to continue work. Donnell & Mudge Vice-President Dudley's letter of thanks to Colonel Streight reads as ironic, given Streight's stated opposition to this decision. The work, Dudley explained, was "a very important thing to the Shoe Industry, due to shortage of labour to produce sufficient leather for Juvenile Footwear of which there is a great shortage and I know that the Hide & Leather Administrator and the Shoe Administrator appreciate greatly the efforts you have put on this project."<sup>72</sup> Donnell & Mudge continued operations as the departments of Labour and National Defence prepared Camp 22's former guard quarters for its new inhabitants.

The POWs' new living quarters differed little from their former ones, the most notable change being that they were no longer surrounded by tall barbed wire fences. New camp bounds were instead marked with only a boundary wire – described as a "farm fence" – and signs in both English and German.<sup>73</sup> Men of the Veterans' Guard of Canada became the primary security measure and military authorities detailed one officer, one sergeant, one corporal, and six privates, all armed, from the Veterans' Guard, to ensure that POWs remained within camp bounds when not at work.<sup>74</sup> This was a notable

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<sup>71</sup> Maj.-Gen. A.E. Potts to Secretary, DND, April 28, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>72</sup> Walter L. Dudley to Col. H.N. Streight, April 27, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>73</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham, May 6, 1944, HQS 7236-10 - Treatment of enemy aliens - Organization and administration - Camp 22, New Toronto, C-5377, RG24, LAC.

<sup>74</sup> Maj.-Gen. A.E. Potts to DOC, MD2, April 29, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

increase from the usual small party of one guard per ten POWs usually assigned to labour projects and also unusual in that the guards were armed. Guards in isolated bush camps left their firearms locked and under supervision in their quarters but military authorities felt the security concerns entailed with this work required armed guards.

On April 24, 1944, 101 civilian internees and EMS were transferred from Camp 22 to Camp 23 (Monteith) and Camp 22 was officially closed six days later, leaving behind only the nineteen civilian internees and eighteen EMS employed by Donnell & Mudge. The company, no longer able to easily draw upon replacement workers, needed some assurance that their POW labour force would not – and could not – all quit on the same day. The departments of National Defence and Labour therefore required the thirty-seven POWs, seven of whom were new volunteers, to sign an agreement undertaking a minimum of six months' work at the tannery. In an attempt to ease some security concerns, the contract also stipulated that POWs would follow the orders of the guard, remain within the marked bounds unless accompanied by a guard or other authorized individual, and “commit no act prejudicial to the British Empire or the United Nations.”<sup>75</sup> Anyone found in breach of these terms would face severe disciplinary action.

The transition from Camp 22 to the former guard quarters was made without incident and the civilian internees and EMS proved happy to remain working in New Toronto. Work remained unchanged, with the exception that meals – described by an ICRC official as “particularly good” – were prepared by one of the internees who had previously worked as a chef and were taken in the tannery's dining hall, so that POWs only spent their evenings, nights, and days off at their barracks. The lack of barbed wire fences there was greatly appreciated, although guards remained on duty at all times to ensure POWs did not leave camp confines. Adjacent to the barracks was a large sports area with a tennis court, a baseball diamond, and a small garden tended by an orderly whose job was to look after the barracks during the day. A kitchen and mess hall were located next to the barracks, but this was only used when the POWs were not working, on

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<sup>75</sup> Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeny to Director, Prisoners of War, April 20, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.



Saturday afternoons and Sundays. The POWs still enjoyed access to a relatively large library and many spent much of their free time engaged in sports and handicraft. With the exception of Sundays, POWs were also allowed to swim in Lake Ontario every day during the summer, with transport provided by the company.<sup>76</sup> The closure of Camp 22 did bring some negative changes, namely in the reduction or loss of educational classes, organized sports, music and theatre programs, and the supply of alcohol. While in Camp 22, each POW had been authorized a gallon of beer each month, but the camp's downsizing now meant both POWs and guards were prohibited from possessing and consuming beer or liquor, an unwelcome change for most.<sup>77</sup>

By the time ICRC Delegate Ernest L. Maag visited the project on July 12, 1944, the company employed thirty-one EMS and nineteen civilian internees. In May, the company had requested an additional thirteen POWs to "ensure the continuance of the smooth working of the Project" and thirteen volunteers were selected from a list of seventy-nine POWs in Monteith willing to work in the tannery.<sup>78</sup> The work – or at least the freedom it came with – was clearly desirable and both the company representative and the spokesman described the project as very satisfactory. Despite the plant's proximity to Toronto, there were no reports of trouble. Maag wrote, "Although this party works in a highly industrialized part of the country and in a suburb of a very large city, there has been no difficulty with regard to their contact with other employees in the plant or interference on the part of the population, with whom the prisoners by necessity have contact."<sup>79</sup> The only requests, he noted, were for boxing gloves, a piano, violin music, tennis rackets, and supplies to restring rackets. Describing the operation as an "excellent

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<sup>76</sup> E.L. Maag, "Report on visit to Work Project #5," July 25, 1944, H.Q.S. 7236-92-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - I.R.C. - Reports by Delegate and Correspondence, C-5415, RG24, LAC.

<sup>77</sup> Lt. F.R. Flook, "Standing Orders - P'sOW. Labour Project No. 5," May 1, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-2 - District Standing Orders for Work Projects in MD2, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>78</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Commandant, Monteith, May 15, 1944, H.Q.S. 7236-92-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - I.R.C. - Reports by Delegate and Correspondence, C-5415, RG24, LAC.

<sup>79</sup> "List of Ps.O.W. Willing to Work on Labour Project, Donnell & Mudge - New Toronto," May 28, 1944, H.Q.S. 7236-92-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - I.R.C. - Reports by Delegate and Correspondence, C-5415, RG24, LAC.

venture,” Maag thanked Dudley for his time and interest in the welfare of the POW employees and, concluding his report, noted he considered the project “a particularly happy solution of the problem of useful employment for prisoners of war.”<sup>80</sup>

At the same time as Maag’s visit, civilian internees saw an opportunity for their release. In mid-July, newspapers announced an agreement between the British and German governments to repatriate all civilians detained in the respective countries and territories with the exception of those wishing to remain in the country of their detention and those considered by the detaining power to be a danger to security if released.<sup>81</sup> The news prompted the leader of the civilian internees, Carl Heinz Steffens, and sixteen other civilian internees to request they be considered for repatriation to Germany. The seventeen men, former residents of Great Britain and British West Africa, had been interned in 1939 and “brought to Canada on a higher will than their own” in June 1940. As Steffens explained to the Swiss Consul, “The mental stress of being held in strictest captivity for now five years is, you may believe, such that we long for the end of this plight as soon as possible.”<sup>82</sup> However, Steffens added in a letter to Colonel Streight, he and his men would consider it a favour if they could remain at the labour project until their repatriation.<sup>83</sup> Four months later, in November 1944, nine of the civilian internees, including Steffens, were transferred to Camp 23 (Monteith) for their pending repatriation.<sup>84</sup>

While waiting for news of their possible repatriation, two civilian internees and three EMS requested they be transferred to farms for the remainder of their working

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<sup>80</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross to Donnell & Mudge Ltd., July 19, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC; E.L. Maag, “Report on visit to Work Project #5,” July 25, 1944, H.Q.S. 7236-92-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - I.R.C. - Reports by Delegate and Correspondence, C-5415, RG24, LAC.

<sup>81</sup> “Britain and Reich Agree on Exchange of Civilians,” *Globe and Mail*, July 13, 1944.

<sup>82</sup> C.H. Steffens to Consul General of Switzerland, August 10 and 20, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>83</sup> C.H. Steffens to Director of Internment Operations, July 18, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>84</sup> E. Prauss to K. Krieger, November 12, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

contract. The five men acknowledged they had agreed to work for Donnell & Mudge for six months but argued that when their comrades from Camp 22 (New Toronto) were transferred to Camp 23 (Monteith), every civilian internee had been offered farm work. The five considered it preferable to that in the tannery and claimed that working at the tannery for an extended period would not be beneficial to their health.<sup>85</sup> Although they did not say so, they were also likely attracted by the freedoms that farm work entailed: living with only the farmer, and no guards, as supervisor. As all those who remained in New Toronto had been denied the opportunity for such work, the five hoped they could also find work on individual farms. Their request was denied.

Despite favourable reports from the company and ICRC, the Donnell & Mudge project was not without its problems. The company had observed a steady turnover of men in its initial months but requiring volunteers to sign a six-month contract had significantly reduced requests for transfers. The Department of Labour soon discovered that a POW signing a contract did not guarantee his obedience. In July, the company requested the return of three EMS and a civilian internee who had become arrogant and “difficult to handle,” who tried convincing other POWs to ignore company orders and regulations, and who demanded to work specific jobs rather than those assigned to them. The company did not want such influence to spread so the Department of Labour transferred the four to Camp 23 (Monteith) and replaced them with more willing workers.<sup>86</sup>

Fraternization also became a serious concern in the latter half of 1944. Although Ernest Maag had witnessed “no difficulty” between POWs and civilians in New Toronto, evidence emerged suggesting POWs and civilian employees were developing relationships outside the tannery.<sup>87</sup> In mid-1944, Canadian postal censors intercepted a

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<sup>85</sup> Gerhard Leitzmann to Ernest L. Maag, August 16, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>86</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Col. H.N. Streight, July 14, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>87</sup> E.L. Maag, “Report on visit to Work Project #5,” July 25, 1944, H.Q.S. 7236-92-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - I.R.C. - Reports by Delegate and Correspondence, C-5415, RG24, LAC.

letter sent from the Donnell & Mudge project by EMS Guenter Höppner to a comrade in the base camp. In the letter, Höppner described his work, explaining that he worked alone and planned his work accordingly so he had time to “walk around.” Höppner also stated that he met “Marjory” every day at noon on the first floor and that they then spent time “together undisturbed.”<sup>88</sup> Whether or not Höppner was exaggerating, POWs were working in close proximity to civilian employees, including women like Marjory, and authorities at HQ MD2 were considerably concerned with the dangers of fraternization. Donnell & Mudge either remained oblivious or simply chose to ignore any fraternization between its POWs and civilian employees and therefore failed to report any incidents to the departments of Labour or National Defence. Authorities at HQ MD2, with little evidence or authority to either investigate or crack down on fraternization, became increasingly infuriated at the breaches of discipline.

In November 1944, a civilian employee working for Donnell & Mudge reported that some POWs in the company’s employ possessed National Registration Certificates, wartime identity cards required for Canadian civilians.<sup>89</sup> Genuine certificates could allow POWs to pose as Canadian civilians during an escape attempt, so authorities and the RCMP were especially interested in the matter.<sup>90</sup> On December 10, an intelligence officer, the officer in charge of the guard, and police officers launched a surprise search at Donnell & Mudge in an attempt to seize such certificates. Going through the POWs’ possessions, the search party failed to find any genuine National Registration cards but they did find a forged card as well as a ration book, two Toronto streetcar tickets, fifty-five photographs taken in the New Toronto area, thirty pints of ale, three quarts of alcohol, six gallons of mash, parts of a still, \$34.00 in Canadian currency, and various

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<sup>88</sup> Canadian Postal Censorship, “Report on Prisoner of War Lumber Camps,” July 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>89</sup> Supt. F.A. Blake to DOC, MD2, November 23, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>90</sup> RCMP to Director, Prisoners of War, November 28, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

articles of civilian clothing including felt hats and civilian suits.<sup>91</sup> All of these items were forbidden and the POWs were well aware of this.

Most of the seized articles, including the forged registration card, streetcar tickets, \$23.26 in Canadian currency, and one felt hat, were all in the possession of a single POW, Gunter Traube; considering he was the only one to have strongly objected to the search, the intelligence officer recommended his transfer to an internment camp.<sup>92</sup> The officer also recommended the transfer of three others, including Guenter Höppner, who were found with photographs – all taken locally – in their possession. These three, the officer added, were believed to be “altogether too familiar” with both some of Donnell & Mudge’s civilian employees and civilians in the New Toronto area.<sup>93</sup> Traube and his three comrades were subsequently transferred back to the base camp.

Concluding that the POWs were “too familiar” with Donnell & Mudge employees and civilians in the area, the intelligence officer seized most of the items and all the currency.<sup>94</sup> Authorities were especially interested in the fifty-five photographs seized from the POWs for they confirmed POWs were indeed fraternizing with civilians either also employed by Donnell & Mudge or living in the New Toronto area. All of the photos had been taken locally, including some in camp, and thirty-two featured girls or women. A total of eleven of these females were identified in the photos, most were between fifteen and nineteen years of age, and, with the exception of one woman who was serving with the Canadian Women’s Auxiliary Corps (CWAC), currently or previously worked for Donnell & Mudge. Military authorities questioned each of the identified girls and women, some of whom revealed they had given their picture to the POWs voluntarily

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<sup>91</sup> “Search - P.O.W. Camp, New Toronto, Ont.,” n.d., HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>92</sup> List of Articles received from Traube, G., December 10, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>93</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Director of Labour Projects, January 25, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>94</sup> Maj. P.M. Winchester to Internment Operations Officer, December 12, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

while others stated the POWs had kept the photos after asking to see them. Although the investigation was unable to determine whether the relationship between these women extended beyond casual conversation, the officer noted one of the women in question had been dismissed from the company for being “too friendly” with the POWs. With the rest still employed in the tannery, the RCMP interviewed each of them and warned them of the dangers and consequences of fraternizing with the enemy.<sup>95</sup>

The photographs were not the only items of concern. The presence of a significant amount of clothing, including three-piece suits, jackets, suit coats, trousers, and felt hats, emphasized the potential for POWs to escape or leave camp bounds for a “night on the town.” As POWs’ uniforms were well-marked with a red circle on the back of jackets and a red stripe on trousers, civilian clothing allowed POWs to easily blend in or disappear. The question remained: how did POWs obtain this clothing? One answer came when the intelligence officer seized a blue three-piece suit from POW Alfons Heissner. The suit bore a tailor’s label with the name “Sager” and a purchase date of October 23, 1944. Upon questioning, Heissner confessed he asked Sager, a civilian employee at the camp, to purchase a suit for him. Sager had agreed and delivered the suit two weeks later in exchange for cigarettes, souvenir ships-in-bottles, and approximately \$10.00 cash, which Heissner had obtained while working in a bush camp prior to his transfer to New Toronto. Heissner was unaware of the suit’s origin but suspected Sager brought it from home. As for the purpose, Heissner argued he never intended to escape. Escape, he believed, was a “senseless undertaking,” as the chance of evading capture and returning to Germany or the United Kingdom or simply disappearing in Canada was extremely small. If caught, POWs would also likely be denied future work opportunities and thus remain in an internment camp for the rest of the war, an option most POWs who had enjoyed the relative freedom of a labour project hoped to avoid. The suit, Heissner

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<sup>95</sup> Cst. J. Dean, RCMP Report, “Prisoners of War Employed at Donnell & Mudge Leather Works Ltd. (Poss. Nat. Reg. Certs.), New Toronto - Ontario, March 8, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-10 - Department of Labour Work Project, Welland, Ontario, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

explained, was for him to wear when he was eventually repatriated.<sup>96</sup> As Heissner had proven himself a good worker, had never caused trouble, and wished to remain working at the tannery until his repatriation, the investigating officer believed him to be an honest man with no intentions of escape.<sup>97</sup>

As for the alcohol seized in the search, POWs were forbidden from possessing or manufacturing alcohol so the beer, liquor, and still components were confiscated and the fermenting mash destroyed.<sup>98</sup> The beer was believed to be left over from Camp 22 stock, but the alcohol and mash clearly demonstrated POWs were producing their own alcohol. Unfortunately for Canadian authorities, the search failed to reveal the still's location. Authorities hoped the search would make POWs think twice about producing further alcohol, but a letter intercepted by postal censors suggested otherwise. Writing his wife in December 1944, EMS Hermann Flemming claimed that some of the EMS recently transferred from Camp 23 (Monteith) were causing trouble at Donnell & Mudge. The fifty-three-year-old EMS officer had worked for Donnell & Mudge since September 16, 1943 and was one of the few POWs from the original groups left at the project. In the letter, he explained,

I think I have been in this work-gang long enough, because some of the vices from Monteith have taken root here. This has come about through the transfer of internees from Monteith here. I still keep myself strictly reserved as before... The worst vice among the internees (stokers and sailors) is alcohol which they make themselves and its results follow accordingly. Unfortunately the guards disregard this evil, and many more besides.

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<sup>96</sup> "Translation of Statement Given by P/W No. 13032 Heissner, Alfons," translated by Lt. H.O. Stahl, May 11, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-10 - Department of Labour Work Project, Welland, Ontario, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>97</sup> Lt. H.O. Stahl to HA, MD2, May 11, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-10 - Department of Labour Work Project, Welland, Ontario, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>98</sup> Maj. P.M. Winchester to Internment Operations Officer, December 12, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

Flemming did not provide more details but, fully aware that postal censors would read his mail, went so far as to include a footnote to explain that he was writing openly about the matter so that it could be addressed by the proper authorities.<sup>99</sup>

Canadian authorities acted quickly on Flemming's tip and launched another search of the POW quarters in February 1945. Although guards had confiscated still components in their previous search, the POWs had apparently continued alcohol production as the officer in charge of the guard discovered a fifteen-gallon jug of mash (a mixture of ingredients that are heated to separate the sugars used in fermentation) and a bottle of pure alcohol hidden in the potato bin.<sup>100</sup> As the containers were of the same type used at the tannery, intelligence officers suspected the alcohol was being produced there rather than at the POW quarters. Authorities conducted another search of the tannery shortly after, but they were unable to find any evidence of alcohol production.<sup>101</sup>

The results of the search only increased the frustration of authorities in HQ MD2. Previous searches had clearly demonstrated that POWs were fraternizing with civilians in and outside the workplace. Authorities at HQ MD2 blamed the company and Lt.-Col. I.M.R. Sinclair stated in a letter to the Secretary of National Defence that the company had failed to cooperate with the Department of National Defence and its regulations. The company's failure to prevent or report fraternization had led to security breaches and HQ MD2 feared problems would only increase now that the POWs knew what they could – and could not – get away with. However, as the company was satisfied with the performance of its POWs, it had remained hesitant to crack down on anything that could

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<sup>99</sup> Censorship report of letter from Hermann Flemming to Elisabeth Flemming, January 4, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>100</sup> Lt. F.C. Rodgman to Maj. M.J. O'Brien, February 6, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>101</sup> Maj.-Gen. A.E. Potts to Secretary, DND, February 22, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.



hamper production and had gone so far as to criticize attempts by military authorities to enforce regulations.<sup>102</sup>

Donnell & Mudge may have been satisfied with its POWs but the company requested the transfer of six POWs in January 1945. All six had either been absent from work or were not working satisfactorily.<sup>103</sup> The Department of Labour was opposed to transferring the POWs to Monteith as it feared requests for returns would only increase as the summer approached and the POWs hoped for farm work. Instead, Lt.-Col. Fordham suggested the POWs be instructed that if it went through with their request for a transfer, they would be blacklisted from future work and remain in the camp.<sup>104</sup> However, once the company informed the department that the POWs were using the expiration of their six-month contract as the basis for their return, the department decided it could not force the POWs to work and, despite suspecting they were still hoping to work on farms, recommended their return to Monteith.<sup>105</sup> But days before their transfer, one of those slated to go to Monteith, Jacob Reuss, escaped.<sup>106</sup>

Reuss's escape was the first since POW work had begun at Donnell & Mudge. On February 10, 1945, the thirty-three-year-old EMS slipped away from his barracks, crossed the warning fences, and disappeared. Guards notified authorities and the RCMP as soon as his absence was noted and a search was launched. When police were unable to find Reuss in the New Toronto area, they suspected he was going to enter the United States on foot by crossing somewhere along the Niagara River and warned the Buffalo

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<sup>102</sup> Lt.-Col. I.M.R. Sinclair to Secretary, DND, February 8, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>103</sup> Walter L. Dudley to Director of Labour Projects, January 24, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>104</sup> Lt.-Col. R.H. Davidson, January 25, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>105</sup> Lt.-Col. R.H. Davidson to Col. H.N. Streight, February 8, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>106</sup> Maj. M.J. O'Brien to HQ, MD2, February 12, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

FBI to remain on the alert.<sup>107</sup> Five days after his escape as he prepared to cross into the United States on foot, police caught up to Reuss and apprehended him at Lacolle, Quebec, a small town south of Montreal and 500km from New Toronto.<sup>108</sup> He was subsequently transferred back to Camp 23 (Monteith) for twenty-eight days of detention.<sup>109</sup>

Reuss's escape attempt may have been the first for Donnell & Mudge but it was not the last. Perhaps emboldened by Reuss's experience, EMS Otto Kern disappeared from the labour project in the morning of April 12, 1945. Born in Germany, Kern had lived in England for fifteen years prior to the war, working as a fisherman aboard Danish trawlers. He was arrested as an enemy alien in 1939 and transferred to Canada in 1940. Quiet and unassuming, Kern was reported to have been very despondent at the time of his disappearance, leading to suspicions of suicide. A search of the area surrounding the barracks failed to reveal a body, so guards and police changed their focus and treated his disappearance as an escape.<sup>110</sup>

For the next ten months, police were unable to find any trace of Kern, but his bid for freedom ended in February 1946. In an attempt to locate POWs still at large in Canada, the RCMP published photographs and descriptions of missing POWs, including Kern, in newspapers across the country. On February 22, a Montreal resident recognized Kern's photo and notified police, who apprehended Kern working in a restaurant. Assuming a false identity under the name Bob Petersen, Kern told police he had worked in restaurants and farms since his escape.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> "Border Watched for Fleeing Nazi," *Globe and Mail*, February 13, 1945.

<sup>108</sup> Commanding 4 to DOC MD2, February 15, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>109</sup> Camp 23 War Diary, February 19, 1945, Part 3, Vol. 15392, RG24, LAC.

<sup>110</sup> "PW 11006 - Kern, Otto," n.d., C11-19-4-2 Vol. 3 - Escapes from Internment Camps, Vol. 3566, RG18, LAC.

<sup>111</sup> "Photo of German Leads to Arrest," *Globe and Mail*, February 23, 1946.

A month after Kern's escape from camp, twenty-one-year-old Heinrich Stoerk also went missing. Stoerk left the camp during the night of May 12, 1945, and guards noticed his absence at roll call the following morning. They quickly notified police and military authorities, who scoured the surrounding area. Stoerk, an apprentice seaman captured at the age of sixteen and interned in Canada since 1941, was likely motivated to escape because of Germany's surrender just days earlier. The end of the war in Europe prompted rumours of repatriation to Germany, but not all POWs were willing to leave. Some tried requesting permission to remain while others saw escape as a more viable option. Despite being described as having a "frail appearance" and little English, Stoerk succeeded in evading capture for the next year (see Figure 43, bottom left).<sup>112</sup> On June 27, 1946, police apprehended Stoerk in downtown Toronto while washing a car. He later admitted that since his escape, he had worked a number of different jobs and had lived in various rooming houses in the area. With help of a false identification card, no one had ever questioned his identity.<sup>113</sup>



**Figure 43: “Nazi Prisoners Still at Large,” 1946. The *Montreal Gazette* and *Montreal Daily Star* published these images on February 21, 1946, leading to Kern's capture the following day. “Nazi Prisoners Still at Large,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 21, 1946.**

<sup>112</sup> Director, Prisoners of War to H.R. Landis, May 14, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC; “PW No. 14085 Stoerk, Heinrich,” n.d., C11-19-4-2 Vol. 3 - Escapes from Internment Camps, Vol. 3566, RG18, LAC.

<sup>113</sup> “Nazi POW Found Washing Auto,” *Globe and Mail*, June 29, 1946.

Although the guards were unable to prevent the three POWs from escaping, they did find success in cracking down on illicit alcohol production. Repeated searches had failed to reveal the location of the POWs' rumoured still but, on May 14, the officer in charge of the guard, Lieutenant R.C. Hayes, searched a room next to the POW kitchen and discovered two eight-gallon cookers of mash as well as a pail and glass jar containing about 14 gallons of mash hidden on a high shelf. Hayes believed the mash had been made with raisins and prunes and, in the presence of the RCMP, he had it destroyed.<sup>114</sup> Hayes was unable to identify the POWs responsible.

Fed up with repeated escapes, fraternization, and violations of security measures at Donnell & Mudge, in May 1945 the commanding officer of MD2, Major-General A.E. Potts, requested the Department of National Defence grant him authority to close work projects under his jurisdiction that continued to violate regulations. Security in MD2 labour projects, Potts argued, "have been considerably impaired by attitude and actions of employers, as well as their employees, of PW labour, and also by limited or token guard provided for these projects." Potts believed employers who permitted fraternization between workers and civilians were largely to blame and requested additional guards be made available for other labour projects in the district in order to ensure regulations were enforced.<sup>115</sup> Adjutant-General Major-General A.E. Walford informed Potts that National Defence lacked the authority to shut down labour projects, as this was the responsibility of the Department of Labour, but noted he would recommend to Labour that projects be closed when a company violated the terms of its contract. In regard to the request for more guards, a shortage of personnel had left the department unable to increase the number of guards in labour projects. Instead, Walford suggested the district Internment Operations Officer and Intelligence Officer frequently inspect labour projects in the district and ensure that disciplinary action was immediately taken against any offenders. He also recommended spokesmen be informed that despite many previous offences going

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<sup>114</sup> Lt. R.C. Hayes to Internment Operations, MD2, May 14, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>115</sup> Maj.-Gen. A.E. Potts to Secretary, Department of National Defence, May 15, 1945, 31-15-2 - Security - Liaison with D. PoW - Labour Project Reports, C-8250, RG24, LAC.

unpunished, future ones would result in disciplinary action and, in severe cases, offenders would be prevented from further employment opportunities or even face delayed repatriation.<sup>116</sup>

Major-General Walford's suggestions met with mixed results. In mid-June, the Department of Labour requested the transfer of three of Donnell & Mudge's POWs. All three had claimed on dubious grounds that they were sick on numerous occasions, which had encouraged more men to malingering. This had a noticeable domino effect on morale. Although the Department of Labour had been hesitant to transfer malingering POWs, authorities hoped the transfer of the three troublemakers would encourage those remaining at the project to resume work. As the transfer was being negotiated, guards discovered that Walter Radau, one of the three men, was missing from the camp. Unlike preceding escape attempts, Radau's freedom was short-lived, as he was recaptured in New Toronto the following evening and transferred to Camp 23 (Monteith).<sup>117</sup>

It was one week later, on the evening of June 22, that fifteen-year-old Fred Hale and Thomas Moore noticed two "German-looking" men in civilian clothing board a streetcar not far from the POW barracks. As both teenagers worked part-time for Donnell & Mudge, they recognized the pair as POWs and quickly notified police. Two constables caught up to the streetcar and, although the two men claimed to have left their registration cards at home, the officers discovered the pair were both EMS employed in the tannery. The POWs, Hans Pohl and Fritz Britzwein, were escorted from the streetcar. In a strange coincidence, Pohl recognized one of the arresting officers, Constable McNair, whom he had met at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin where McNair had competed on the Canadian boxing team and he had worked as a steward.<sup>118</sup> Unfortunately for Pohl, the coincidence

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<sup>116</sup> Maj.-Gen. A.E. Walford to DOC, MD2, May 22, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>117</sup> Lt.-Col. F.H. Wilkes to Col. H.N. Streight, June 18, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC; CMDG 2 to Secretary DND, June 17, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>118</sup> "Sharp-Eyed Youths Help Catch Germans Feeling on Street Car," *Toronto Daily Star*, June 25, 1945; "Recapture 2 Prisoners on Tip from Alert Boys," *Globe and Mail*, June 25, 1945.

had no effect on the result of his capture and the two POWs were escorted back to camp. As both men had been present at the evening roll call, the guards were unaware of their absence until the officers returned them. The guards later discovered that shortly after roll call, the POWs had changed into civilian clothing in a nearby field and made their escape. The pair were sent for trial at Monteith before proceeding to Hearst to receive twenty-eight days' detention.<sup>119</sup>

Because Pohl and Britzwein had been wearing civilian clothing at the time of their escape, authorities at HQ MD2 ordered another search of the POW barracks for contraband articles. Intelligence officers only discovered three neckties but, upon questioning, Pohl and Britzwein admitted that this was not the first time they had left camp in civilian clothing. They also stated that they had lent their clothing to some of their comrades so they too could leave the camp.<sup>120</sup> Rather than escape, these POWs were leaving camp bounds after roll call, roaming free in the New Toronto and Toronto area, and then returning later in the night.

This unsurprisingly prompted significant concern at HQ MD2. Authorities quickly set out to determine how and from where the POWs acquired civilian clothing. Markings found in both Pohl and Britzwein's suits soon revealed the clothing had been purchased from Samuels, a used clothing store on Queen Street in Toronto. Intelligence officers proceeded to the store and interrogated the proprietor, Mr. Winemaker. He and his brother were able to identify one of the suits and informed officers that Walter Radau had come to the store sometime within the last three months and purchased the suit for \$19.50. Winemaker recalled Radau as having been accompanied by another man who also purchased a suit, but he was unable to recall the individual or suit. Winemaker informed the officers that he had been unaware the two men were POWs and, explaining that he was Jewish, stated that had he known he would have never allowed the transaction

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<sup>119</sup> Maj.-Gen. A.E. Potts to Secretary, DND, June 25, 1945 and June 28, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>120</sup> Lt. D.F. MacDonald to Maj. M.J. O'Brien, June 25, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

to take place. However, as cleaner's marks on the suits matched those found on clothing seized from the POWs in December, HQ MD2 believed the POWs had been making purchases from Samuels store for some time.<sup>121</sup>

Although one investigating officer did not blame the guards, instead arguing that poor lighting around the prisoners' quarters allowed them to easily slip away, Potts believed the number of guards was inadequate to enforce reasonable security measures. The result was considerable fraternization between POWs and civilians. During the course of their investigation, intelligence personnel had visited several houses and found POW-made souvenirs, including ships in bottles and model ships made by the EMS, which suggested significant trafficking of souvenirs. As the guards on duty at the time of the escapes had since been rotated to other projects and replaced with new men, Potts felt that little could be done but hoped their replacements would remain more vigilant.<sup>122</sup>

The rest of the summer remained relatively calm at Donnell & Mudge but, like Germany's surrender in May 1945, the surrender of Japan and the subsequent end of the war appears to have prompted a handful more POWs to escape. Realizing this could be one of their only chances to remain in Canada, Hermann Thiele and Raimond Albrecht left their living quarters during the evening of September 26. Although the pair were recaptured later that night, it did not stop Rolf Bender and Herbert Hasselkuss, the latter having only arrived from Monteith the month prior, from also trying to escape. They too were captured the same night and all four were transferred to Hearst Detention Barracks for twenty-eight days' detention.<sup>123</sup>

The end of the war meant increasing numbers of Canadian servicemen and women were returning to Canada, many of them returning to the jobs they had left

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<sup>121</sup> Maj.-Gen. A.E. Potts to Secretary, DND, July 17, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>122</sup> Maj.-Gen. A.E. Potts to Secretary, DND, August 24, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>123</sup> CMDG 2 to Secretary, DND, September 27 and September 29, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

behind. By October 1945, Donnell & Mudge was able to secure a sufficient number of civilians to replace the POWs in its employ and therefore notified the Department of Labour they desired to wind down the company's POW operations by November 15.<sup>124</sup> The Department of National Defence prepared to transfer the forty-five EMS to an internment camp.

Not all POWs were willing to leave. On November 6, 1945, guards discovered that thirty-three-year-old Richard Diemke was missing. Diemke, a former crewman aboard the *SS Hermonthis*, had been captured on April 1, 1941 and had spent the last four-and-a-half years a POW.<sup>125</sup> Despite his internment, he was determined to remain in Canada rather than be transferred to the United Kingdom or Germany. Aware that he was about to be transferred to a higher-security internment camp from which escape would be much more difficult, Diemke slipped out of camp bounds and disappeared.

Diemke succeeded in evading police and military authorities but his escape did not affect the closing of the Donnell & Mudge project. On November 15, the Department of Labour closed the project and transferred the remaining forty-four EMS to Camp 42 (Sherbrooke).<sup>126</sup> Only four of these men were among the original thirty-one POWs who started work at Donnell & Mudge on September 9, 1943.<sup>127</sup> Over the course of two years and two months, the company had employed a total of almost 150 civilian internees and EMS. Many found the work too challenging or uninteresting and requested transfers while others were transferred in preparation for repatriation, were deemed unsatisfactory workers, were removed for disciplinary reasons, or had escaped. As of November 15, three POWs remained on the run. Otto Kern and Heinrich Stoerk were captured in

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<sup>124</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Director, Prisoners of War, October 22, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>125</sup> Director, Prisoners of War to H.R. Landis, November 7, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

<sup>126</sup> Commandant to Director POW, November 7, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.

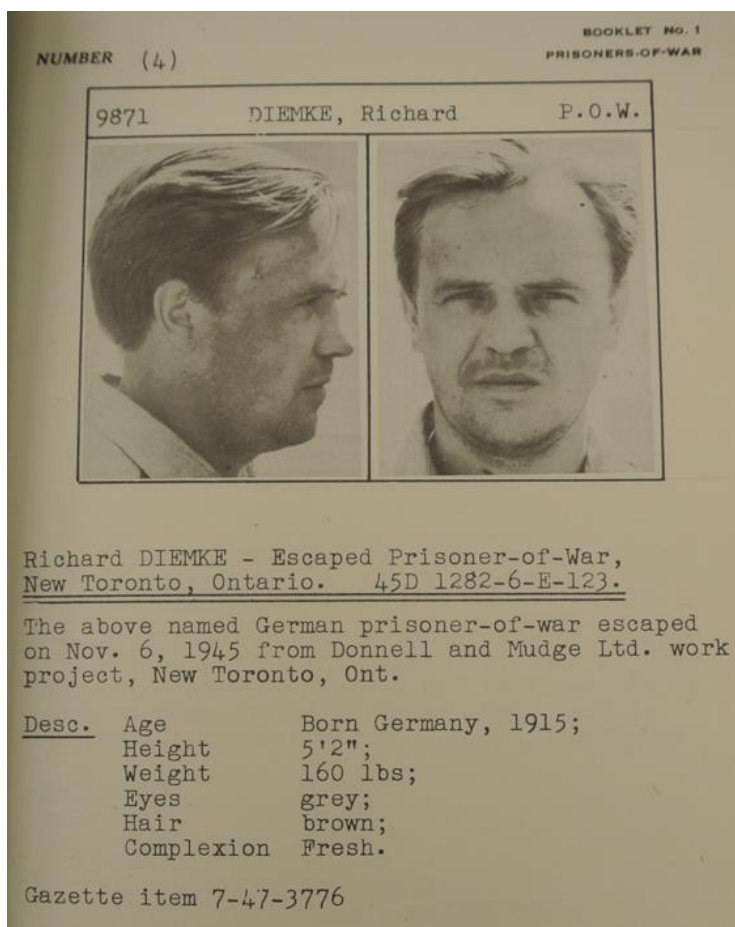
<sup>127</sup> "Nominal Roll - P/W. Donnell & Mudge Project, N. Toronto Transferred from Camp 23 Monteith, Ont. To Camp 42 Sherbrooke, Que.," November 15, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-11 - Department of Labour Work Project, New Toronto, Ont, C-5382, RG24, LAC.



February and June 1946, respectively, and were subsequently transferred to the United Kingdom shortly thereafter. Richard Diemke's whereabouts remained unknown.

A fluent English speaker, Richard Diemke had travelled extensively as a seaman and authorities believed he could likely blend in quite easily. With experience in a number of semi-skilled trades, police suspected he was working in the Toronto area.<sup>128</sup> He remained a free man for fifteen months, but police finally caught up to him in February 1947. Diemke had found a job in Toronto and, although he believed himself safe, a co-worker recognized his picture published in a Toronto newspaper and notified police. The RCMP captured Diemke and he was transferred to Camp 32 (Hull)

to await his fate. Only a few medical cases and fellow escapees were all that remained of the 34,000 POWs interned in Canada, but the Canadian government elected to transfer him to the United Kingdom. After spending a few weeks at Camp 32 (Hull), Diemke was



**Figure 44: RCMP description of Richard Diemke. Copies were forwarded to detachments across the country. "Diemke, Richard" in Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Prisoners of War, Wanted, n.d., C11-19-4-3 Volume 4 - Escapes from Internment Camps, RG18, LAC.**

<sup>128</sup> "BK 745 Diemke, Richard," n.d., C11-19-4-2 Vol. 3 - Escapes from Internment Camps, Vol. 3566, RG18, LAC.

transferred to the UK aboard the *Aquitania*, departing Halifax on April 13, 1947, making him the last POW repatriated to the United Kingdom from Canada.<sup>129</sup>

From September 1943 to November 1945, Donnell & Mudge Ltd. relied significantly on POW labour, with more than a quarter of its workforce composed of civilian internees and EMS. Although the company may have considered employing POWs a last resort, the gamble paid off: Donnell & Mudge stayed open for the duration of the war and fulfilled all of its military and civilian contracts. Thanks in part to POWs, the company reported annual net earnings averaging \$106,000 between 1941 and 1947.<sup>130</sup>



**Figure 45: The Donnell & Mudge factory in 1955. Toronto Public Library, T33861.**

Donnell & Mudge was one of the few companies employing POWs in an urban environment and the first of three to employ POWs in the Toronto area. Following the experience of Donnell & Mudge, the Cooksville Brick Co. started employing POWs in September 1944 and the Toronto Brick Co. in September 1945. All three companies employed civilian internees and EMS and, although these individuals were deemed lesser

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<sup>129</sup> Adjutant General to HQ, Eastern Command, April 9, 1947, HQS 7236-47-7 - Postwar Returns to UK. Policy. C-5392, RG24, LAC.

<sup>130</sup> "Donnell-Mudge shares offered at \$19 per share," *Globe and Mail*, June 26, 1947.

security risks than their combatant counterparts, Canadians were not particularly keen on their presence.

The project was not without its problems, proving to be controversial right from the beginning. The presence of POWs in a populated area with high concentrations of industries engaged in wartime contracts raised significant concern; whereas isolated bush camps provided an increased sense of security, there was nothing but city blocks separating Donnell & Mudge from New Toronto residents. The result was that the New Toronto Council immediately opposed the employment of POWs following the company's proposal and denounced the project as a threat to both local industry and residents. This opposition would continue in the following months.

Some military authorities were no more pleased with Donnell & Mudge's use of POW labour than the New Toronto council. After the POWs began work, Donnell & Mudge received repeated criticism from military authorities at HQ MD2 for its seemingly lax attitude to its POWs, even prompting the District Officer Commanding MD2 to request authority to close the project. Despite this, there is no evidence the company ever changed its policies. The company needed the men and was apparently willing to overlook fraternization and security breaches in order to maintain production.

In the face of protests, resolutions, complaints, and security breaches, Donnell & Mudge was permitted to continue employing POWs for as long as it needed. The project thus clearly emphasizes the differing – and often contrasting – priorities of the Department of Labour, the Department of Defence's Ottawa headquarters, and authorities at HQ MD2. With leather in high demand and labour in short supply, the Donnell & Mudge project demonstrated that wartime industry demands could and did trump concerns from both local and military authorities as the Department of Labour and the Department of National Defence overrode or dismissed protests and resolutions of the New Toronto Council and the public as well as complaints and concerns from HQ MD2. The latter posed an especially contentious issue for HQ MD2 which often felt the immediate effects from any problems experienced in labour projects in its district and were unable to act upon them.

Employing POWs may even have led in a small way to improved working conditions for Canadian industrial workers in the Toronto area. In May 1944, the Toronto Labour Council used the example of POWs at Donnell & Mudge to support the decision of Ford workers to strike at the Windsor plant. The *Globe and Mail* reported, “Delegate Pearl Weedrow declared a plant in New Toronto was employing war prisoners and giving them preferred treatment. ‘Our workers eat at their machines,’ she declared, ‘while German prisoners eat in separate rooms and have showers.’”<sup>131</sup> There is no indication as to what degree POWs may have influenced the situation but POWs were clearly being used as leverage to improve working conditions. Furthermore, the International Fur and Leather Workers’ Union reached a collective agreement with Donnell & Mudge in mid-1944, guaranteeing, among other things, a forty-eight hour week – the same that POWs worked.<sup>132</sup>

The POWs employed by Donnell & Mudge had proven to be no real danger to New Toronto’s wartime industry or its residents. Some prisoners may have repeatedly left camp bounds, fraternized with civilians, and even escaped, but there were no cases of sabotage. The handful of prisoners willing to risk leaving camp bounds were instead quite content to slip into civilian clothes, hop on a nearby streetcar, and head into Toronto for the night before returning to camp by the morning roll call. A select few did attempt escape but even the three most successful in their attempt were ultimately unsuccessful in their bids for freedom.

The degree to which POWs fraternized with civilians is unknown, but the evidence suggested by internment and intelligence authorities suggest it was significant. Prisoners working in bush camps were often too isolated to have significant contact with civilians and POWs employed on individual farms are the only group likely to have had regular contact with civilians. But at Donnell & Mudge, POWs fraternized with both civilian employees in the tannery as well as civilians in the New Toronto and Toronto

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<sup>131</sup> “Vote Support in Ford Strike,” *Globe and Mail*, May 9, 1944.

<sup>132</sup> “Agreement Signed,” *Globe and Mail*, June 23, 1944.

area. In an interview with cultural anthropologist Judith Kestler, Seaman Franz Renner, who worked for Donnell & Mudge between June 1944 and November 1945, recounted close relationships with civilians at the tannery. He recalled knowing more people in Toronto than in Bremen. Renner also corresponded with a woman who worked in the tannery and even convinced her to subscribe to *Time* magazine for him.<sup>133</sup> Renner supported the notion that the company supported its POW labourers, stating that the Canadians came to appreciate and value efficient workers. Because of this social recognition, Kestler argues the tannery was a space of inclusion.<sup>134</sup>

Regardless of the challenges and problems of POW labour, Donnell & Mudge remained satisfied with its POWs and only replaced them when sufficient civilian labour became available. The company continued to thrive in the immediate post-war years, employing approximately 200 people and processing and manufacturing fancy and embossed leathers, “glazed, crushed, and slipper kid leathers,” shoe linings, shearlings, and lamb and mouton fur. The *Globe and Mail* referred to it as one of the “most diversified and modern tannery plants in the industry.”<sup>135</sup> Its success proved short-lived. Donnell & Mudge went public in 1947: despite production at full capacity and products in high demand, reduced sales, falling markets, and foreign competition took their toll. The company reported losses of \$70,574 in 1949, \$342,227 in 1951, and \$258,905 in 1952.<sup>136</sup> In March 1955, the company ceased operations and, over the next year, disposed of its assets and equipment.<sup>137</sup> The company survived as a corporate shell and eventually transitioned to the media industry, negotiating distribution rights for TV programs in Canada. After a number of changes in name and management it became Seven Arts

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<sup>133</sup> Kestler, *Gefangen in Kanada*, 315.

<sup>134</sup> Kestler, however, bases her analysis of Donnell & Mudge solely on Kenner’s perspective and does not examine what the New Toronto Council, the public, or military authorities thought of the project. *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>135</sup> “Donnell-Mudge shares offered at \$19 per share,” *Globe and Mail*, June 26, 1947.

<sup>136</sup> “Donnell and Mudge Have \$70,574 Loss,” *Globe and Mail*, February 14, 1950; “Donnell, Mudge Have Hard Year; Loss is \$277,227,” *Globe and Mail*, March 5, 1952; “Donnell and Mudge Net Loss \$258,905,” *Globe and Mail*, March 20, 1953.

<sup>137</sup> “Donnell & Mudge,” *Globe and Mail*, September 16, 1955.

Productions Ltd. The company later acquired and merged with Warner Bros. Pictures Inc. in 1967, rebranding itself as Warner Bros.-Seven Arts Ltd., before it too was acquired and renamed Warner Bros. Pictures.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> “Seven Arts asks TSE to delist it,” *Globe and Mail*, December 29, 1965; “Why they’re moving,” *Financial Post*, July 22, 1967.

## Chapter 6

### 6 Friend or Foe: POWs and Farm Work

In the latter half of 1946, Paul Mengelberg spent a few days working on the farm of Cameron McTaggart not far from the small community of Glencoe in Southwestern Ontario. McTaggart took a special interest in Mengelberg, who had proven himself a satisfactory worker and an adept tractor operator, and asked for his name and address, adding that if Mengelberg was ever interested in returning to Canada, he was willing to help. Thirty years old, Paul Mengelberg had spent the majority of the war as a POW after he was plucked from the cold Atlantic waters when his submarine was sunk by the British in July 1940. He had been transferred to Canada in January 1941 and was interned in three different camps before working in the bush for two years for Pulpwood Supply Co. near Longlac, Ontario. He was one of over 4,000 POWs who volunteered to remain in Canada and work on farms for the duration of the summer of the 1946 and was subsequently transferred to the Glencoe hostel. Although Mengelberg did not know it at the time, working for and befriending Cameron McTaggart would prove instrumental to him returning to Canada as a free man seven years later.

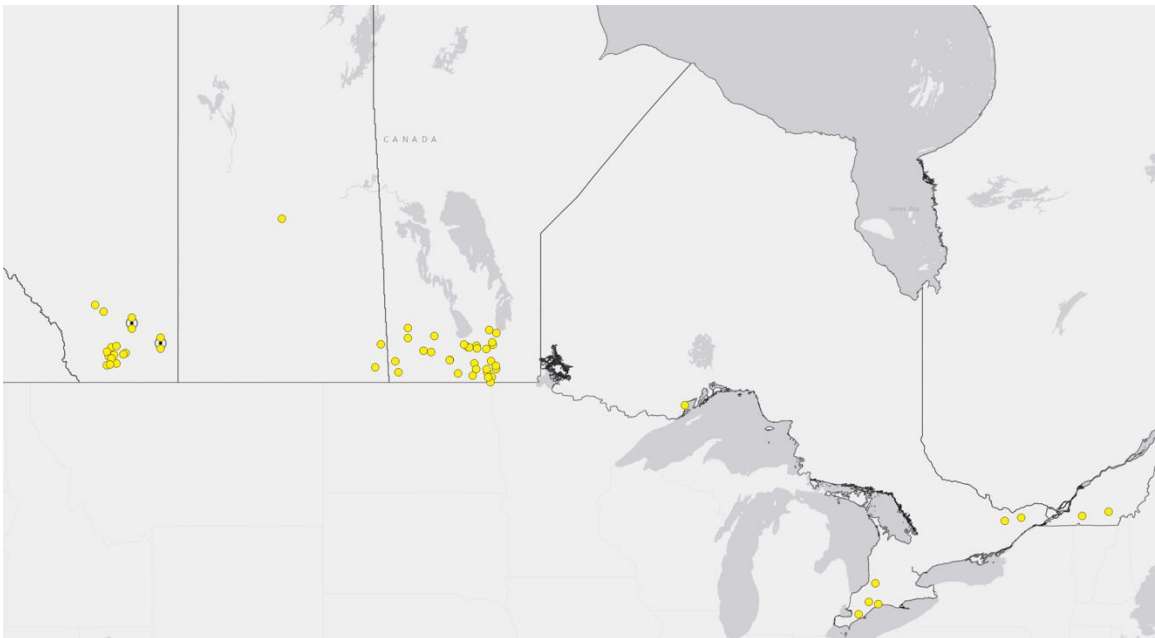
This chapter examines POWs employed in agricultural work, focusing on projects organized through the Department of Labour. Farm work was the first type of POW labour approved by the department and from 1943 to 1946, it supervised POWs living either on farms, in farm hostels, or in internment camps.<sup>1</sup> First introduced on a very small scale in Ontario and Alberta in mid-1943, POW farming operations were eventually expanded in both these provinces and extended to Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Quebec. Prisoners became skilled and valued workers, helping save sugar beet crops and assisting with general harvesting on the Prairies and in Ontario. Farming offered POWs both unprecedented freedom and unprecedented contact with the Canadian public. Tracing the

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<sup>1</sup> Some internment camps, including Camp 132 (Medicine Hat) and Camp 44 (Grande Ligne), also had their own small farms where POWs were encouraged to grow vegetables both for their own use and to sell excess produce. Administered by internment camp staff and the POWs themselves, these farms were not associated with the Department of Labour and therefore will not be examined in great detail in this chapter.

evolution of POW farm work from its origins, this chapter will focus on the reactions of POWs to farm work, the reaction of the civilian population, and the relationship that developed between the two groups. Over the course of their employment, prisoners became skilled and valued workers who succeeded in helping to save valuable crops. Their work not only brought them into contact with Canadians but exposed them to the Canadian way of life. Hundreds of POWs employed on farms in Canada subsequently applied to stay after the war, some with the support of their employers. Yet farm work was also marked by numerous problems: some prisoners took advantage of minimal security measures to escape while others engaged in illicit fraternization. The result was that employing POWs on farms proved to be a contentious issue that drew protest from across the country and ultimately shaped whether POWs would be allowed to stay in Canada after the war.

This chapter begins by exploring the early origins of POW farm labour in 1943, as it quickly moved from an experimental program that employed POWs from Camp 133 (Lethbridge) to one that employed hundreds of POWs throughout the Prairies and Ontario. I then outline the policies and practices put into place by the departments of



**Figure 46: Labour Projects employing POWs in agricultural work, 1943-1946.  
Map by Author.**



Labour and National Defence over the next three years before exploring in detail farm life from the perspective of the POWs and Canadian civilians.

Even before the Department of Labour approved POW labour in May 1943, some internment camp commandants had authorized prisoners in their charge to work on small farms on or adjacent to their camps. Often working on parole – promising not to cause trouble or attempt escape – these POWs were granted relative freedom. These farms granted POWs some degree of self-sufficiency but also helped keep them occupied and pass the time. Seeing this example, some authorities believed POWs had significant potential as farm labourers and argued the work should be expanded. In 1941, for example, Colonel R.O. Bull, then commandant of Camp “M” (New Toronto), pushed for the employment of POWs in the agriculture sector, noting, “It is the writer’s opinion that with farmers dangerously short-handed and rough labourers at a premium, a work programme could be instituted without appreciable lowering of security.”<sup>2</sup>

Colonel Bull’s suggestion made little headway in the following months. But the arrival of thousands of German POWs in 1942 prompted individuals, communities, and organizations to request the government release these prisoners for farm work to help reduce pressure from the ongoing labour shortage. The Carleton County (Ontario) Agricultural War Committee, for example, strongly supported POW employment and unanimously passed a resolution to press the Canadian government to release civilian internees and EMS for farm labour.<sup>3</sup> One Manitoba farmer even went so far as to offer to donate a half-section of land in a “very productive” farming district in Saskatchewan on the condition it serve as an internment camp to provide POW farm labour (and he be allowed to purchase its buildings after the war).<sup>4</sup> The Directorate of Internment

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<sup>2</sup> Major R.O. Bull, “Appreciation of the Treatment of German P/W in Internment Camps,” August 26, 1941, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>3</sup> “Resolution Passed by Carleton County Agricultural War Committee, at Meeting held on September 8, 1942,” September 8, 1942, 1-2-3 - Policy - U.K. re Employment, Vol. 6576, RG24, LAC.

<sup>4</sup> F. Miller to J.G. Gardiner, March 21, 1942, 5-2-2 - Employment, Vol. 6590, RG24, LAC.

Operations hoped anti-Nazis would be willing to accept the work as many were being victimized at the hands of their pro-Nazi comrades and had either requested protective custody or transfers to other camps. Transfer to a farm would provide them safety and an opportunity for work. There was, however, no government approval for such an undertaking and all requests were subsequently denied.<sup>5</sup> Using such requests to gauge interest in POW labour, the Department of National Defence and Department of Labour began seriously considering a program to employ POWs on farms and, in September 1942, asked the Ontario Department of Agriculture to determine whether there was sufficient interest among farmers to employ Italian and German civilian internees for the fall harvest or, more preferably, year-round work.<sup>6</sup>

Ultimately, it was the precarious nature of the sugar beet industry that prompted the Department of Labour to press for POW labour for the 1943 season. Most beet workers had either enlisted or taken up industrial work, leaving farmers without the labour they desperately needed to maintain and harvest their crops. Sugar beets were exceptionally labour-intensive, requiring regular thinning and weeding before they were harvested – work all done by hand. The nation-wide labour shortage had already resulted in the closure of sugar beet processing plants across the country and a subsequent loss of millions of pounds of much-needed sugar. As the Canada and Dominion Sugar Company emphasized, “no labour means no sugar.”<sup>7</sup>

The Department of Labour responded by employing Japanese Canadian internees. Forced from their homes in British Columbia, over 4,000 internees found themselves working on sugar beet farms in Alberta, Manitoba, and Southwestern Ontario. Japanese Canadians were instrumental in saving the 1942 sugar crops, but increased demand for

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<sup>5</sup> Lt.-Col. H.N. Streight to Director of National Selective Service, September 10, 1942, 1-2-3 - Policy - U.K. re Employment, Vol. 6576, RG24, LAC.

<sup>6</sup> Major H.W. Pearson to E.A. Summers, September 5, 1942, 5-2-2 - Employment, Vol. 6590, RG24, LAC.

<sup>7</sup> A. MacNamara to Col. G.S. Currie, November 12, 1942, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

sugar in 1943 required even more labour.<sup>8</sup> If the Department of Labour and sugar producers could not provide to farmers the labour needed, farmers would have little choice but to plant less labour-intensive crops.

The Department of Labour's experience with employing Japanese Canadians prompted Deputy Minister Arthur MacNamara to consider it both "possible and practical" to employ POWs on sugar beet farms.<sup>9</sup> Nearly all of Canada's beets were grown in Alberta, Manitoba, and Southwestern Ontario, and early inquiries to employ POWs in these regions were favourable. Proposals to employ POWs on farms elsewhere were met with a less favourable response. In Prince Edward Island, for example, Deputy Minister of Agriculture (and future Premier) W.R. Shaw was not particularly enthused with the possibility of POWs on Island farms and believed few farmers would be interested.<sup>10</sup> The Department of Labour thus decided to confine its initial employment of POWs to a single location: Alberta.

The Department had no experience employing POWs in large-scale farming operations and looked to Great Britain for guidance. The British had found great success in employing Italian POWs and had increased farming operations from 5,000 to 20,000 POWs by mid-1942. British methods could not simply be transplanted in Canada. Canada had no Italian POWs and, despite rumours of their imminent arrival, they never materialized.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Canadian agriculture differed vastly from that of Great Britain; not only did the Canadian climate make it more difficult to secure year-round work for POWs, a factor internment officials believed necessary to maintain health and morale, Canadian farms were generally larger and more scattered than their British

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<sup>8</sup> Lt.-Col. Basil B. Campbell to Colonel Currie, November 21, 1942, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>9</sup> A. MacNamara to Col. G.S. Currie, November 12, 1942, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>10</sup> W.R. Shaw to A. MacNamara, April 21, 1943, Prisoners of War, Labour Projects - Agriculture, File 611.1:21-1, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>11</sup> "Memorandum to the War Committee of the Cabinet," July 14, 1943, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

counterparts, complicating security, supervision, and transportation. There were also no internment camps in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, or Southwestern Ontario, the three regions primarily suited for agricultural work, so housing and transporting POWs remained a primary concern. Adding to these difficulties, POWs in Great Britain were primarily employed in draining land for conversion to agriculture while those in Canada were expected to harvest sugar beets, a task Italian POWs in Britain had found “distasteful.”<sup>12</sup>

Lacking Italian POWs, the Department of Labour instead proposed employing 3,300 Enemy Merchant Seamen. Colonel Streight had no reservations about employing EMS on farms, either housing them in central camps or with individual farmers, but also suggested employing civilian internees and some of the 700 Japanese Canadians interned in Northern Ontario. Streight believed combatant POWs would provide no assistance in solving the farm labour shortage, arguing they could not be relied on and entailed a greater security risk.<sup>13</sup> With civilian internees and EMS the preferred labour force, MacNamara proposed housing 350 EMS from Camp 33 (Petawawa) in small camps or hostels in areas with acute labour shortages and escorting them to and from work each day. If successful, the program would be expanded and consideration given to placing EMS with individual farmers, which had the added benefit that farmers could serve as “semi-official guards” at no additional expense.<sup>14</sup>

With the passage of P.C. 2326 on May 10, 1943, the departments of Labour and National Defence narrowed down their choices for the first farm projects employing POWs. Rather than follow MacNamara’s recommendation to employ Camp 33 (Petawawa) POWs, heavy demand for labour on Lethbridge-area beet fields shifted Labour’s priorities. So, on May 24, the first party of twenty volunteers left Camp 133

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<sup>12</sup> Vincent Massey to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, November 27, 1942, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>13</sup> J. J. Deutsch, “Notes on meeting to Consider Employment of Prisoners of War,” February 1943, 621-R-40 - Employment of Prisoners of War in Canada - Regulations, Part I, Vol. 2764, RG24, LAC.

<sup>14</sup> A. MacNamara, “Memorandum re use of Prisoners of War for Farm Labour, February 1943, Prisoners of War, Labour Projects - Agriculture, File 611.1:21-1, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC; Col. H.N. Streight to V.A.G., July 20, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

(Lethbridge) for work with their escort of six armed guards. The work was done in cooperation with the Canadian Sugar Factory, Ltd., based in Raymond, Alberta, with farmers applying to the company for labour and the company organizing the placement of POWs on the respective farms. Farmers picked up the POWs from the camp with their own vehicles and brought them to the farms. The twenty prisoners worked through the day without incident and were escorted back to the camp that evening. The first day was considered a success and plans to expand the program were immediately put into action. Over the course of the following weeks, the number of POWs employed was steadily increased so that by the first week of June, Camp 133 had 446 POWs employed over an area of sixty miles.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the program's early success, authorities encountered problems. The Headquarters of Military District No. 13 (HQ MD13), which oversaw military operations in Alberta, was only informed of the program a week after it began and Commanding Officer Brigadier F.M.W. Harvey expressed significant concern that he and his staff had not been made aware of the matter, especially considering he was responsible for security in the province.<sup>16</sup> When Harvey learned that the program had increased from twenty POWs to almost 500, he ordered it be stopped immediately as there was no authority for more than twenty POWs. The additional groups were withdrawn on June 8, but HQ MD13 provided authorization for the employment of up to 100 POWs the following day.<sup>17</sup>

Military authorities may have been satisfied with the new arrangement, but sugar beet growers were not. The sugar situation in the Lethbridge area was so dire that beet growers stated they needed 750 labourers and argued the crop would be lost if the labour was not secured. Security remained a primary factor in determining the number of POWs

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<sup>15</sup> Camp 133 War Diary, June 11, 1943, Part 4, Vol. 15411, RG24, LAC.

<sup>16</sup> Maj.-Gen. H.F.G. Letson to Secretary, DND, June 1, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>17</sup> Brig. F.M.W. Harvey to Secretary, DND, June 9, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

who would be made available. Maintaining a ratio of three guards to ten POWs required 225 guards but these men were simply not available. The camp spokesman informed authorities his men were willing to work but they refused to give their word not to attempt to escape or commit sabotage, leaving authorities hesitant to reduce the POW-guard ratio.<sup>18</sup> Local farmers instead proposed providing forty armed civilian guards, but this proposal was refused following concerns of arming inexperienced men. Instead, authorities agreed to make 350 POWs available June 14 to meet immediate demands and an additional 150 by June 16, but noted the final number remained dependent on the number of guards available.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the initial setbacks, the POWs were made available for work in the beet fields and the farmers were extremely grateful for the labour. The prisoners too were quite satisfied with the work. On June 29, the Camp 133 intelligence officer reported,

The employment of P/W on work on the farms, i.e., in the beet fields, has made a great difference, and it is noticed from their outgoing letters that this work is having very good results. Parties are appointed to work for one week at a time and are then changed so that the work is spread over as many P/W as possible, and the men all look forward to coming out of the enclosure and spending a few hours out of sight of the barbed wire, or as most of them put it, they appreciate being able to eat even one meal a day right away from the camp, and to realize that they are not in the enclosure and can see other human beings.<sup>20</sup>

Authorities had little difficulty in securing volunteers, as prisoners were most anxious to escape the confines of Camp 133, even if only for eight or nine hours. Some had been confined in Canada since 1940 while others had only arrived a few months prior, but all appreciated this new freedom, however brief.

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<sup>18</sup> Brig. O.M.M. Kay, "Memorandum Telephone Conversation, Major Wood," June 11, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>19</sup> Deputy Minister of Labour to Maj.-Gen. H.F.G. Letson, June 12, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>20</sup> Capt. H. Smith, "Intelligence Report, Lethbridge, Alberta," June 29, 1943, HQS 7236-94-6-132 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Medicine Hat, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

It was not just prisoners who were satisfied with the work: MacNamara reported that all parties involved were “very pleased” and that there had been no “unfavourable incidents.”<sup>21</sup> Farmers were especially appreciative of the much-needed labour and some requested POWs be made available for general farm work after beet thinning was completed. Steve H.G. Houlton, President of Southern Alberta Potato Growers Association, argued that work on the beet fields “amply demonstrated” the effectiveness of POW labour and stated that he and fellow farmers had sufficient work to keep POWs employed in steady work for the next two months. The departments of Labour and National Defence agreed with Houlton and authorized up to 500 POWs for work on hay, potato, and hoe crops as of July 21.<sup>22</sup> Military authorities also agreed to reduce the guard-to-POW ratio from 3:10 to 1:5, a ratio Fordham believed too high but nonetheless an improvement.<sup>23</sup>

The practice of having new POWs going into the fields was beneficial to the POWs, but it meant farmers had to instruct new groups every day and it prevented POWs from becoming experienced workers. Looking to improve the program, the Department made two suggestions: the same POWs be considered for work every day and the program be converted to a hostel. The latter entailed having one or more small, tented camps that would be more centrally located to local labour needs, thereby reducing transportation costs and providing farmers with what would eventually be experienced workers.<sup>24</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Fordham recommended such hostels be considered in the future but doubted the suitability of combatant prisoners. Instead, he preferred civilian internees who, he explained, “have been in Canada much longer and are safer to handle,

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<sup>21</sup> A. MacNamara to Col. Currie, July 15, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>22</sup> Brig. A.E. Nash to D/POW, July 21, 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>23</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Lt.-Col. E.S. Doughty, July 22, 1943, 15. General Correspondence concerning POW's, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>24</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Lt.-Col. E.S. Doughty, June 21, 1943, 15. General Correspondence concerning POW's, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

as by now they are thoroughly tired of being in captivity.” Combatants, he believed, still had “escaping ideas in their minds.”<sup>25</sup>

With the lessons learned from the Lethbridge project, the departments of Labour and National Defence turned their attention to expanding farm labour in Alberta and introducing it to Ontario. Rather than have POWs work from internment camps, the Department of Labour elected to adopt two new programs: the establishment of a 100-man hostel at Brooks, Alberta, to provide labour to the Eastern Irrigation District and, second, the placing of selected anti-Nazis on farms in the Metcalfe area, thirty kilometres south of Ottawa. Military authorities remained opposed to employing combatants so the Department of Labour requested 100 volunteers from the EMS and civilian internees at Camp 130 (Seebe) for the Brooks hostel and thirty-eight anti-Nazis from Camp 32 (Hull).<sup>26</sup> The existing regulations under P.C. 2326 limited work to POWs drawn from hostels and internment but the Metcalfe project would entail POWs be employed and billeted with individual farmers. As such, the Minister of Labour requested authorization for the new program and, on July 24, 1943, the Canadian government passed P.C. 5864 which allowed for the employment of POWs on individual farms.<sup>27</sup>

Thirty-eight anti-Nazi POWs arrived at Metcalfe on August 9, 1943. All of these men had been carefully vetted and many had requested protection from Canadian authorities in the face of threats or attacks by their pro-Nazi comrades. Their anti-Nazi classification meant they did not require armed guards, but this did not mean they were free men. Farmers employing these prisoners all signed contracts with the Canadian government which stipulated they were responsible for the safe custody of the POWs in

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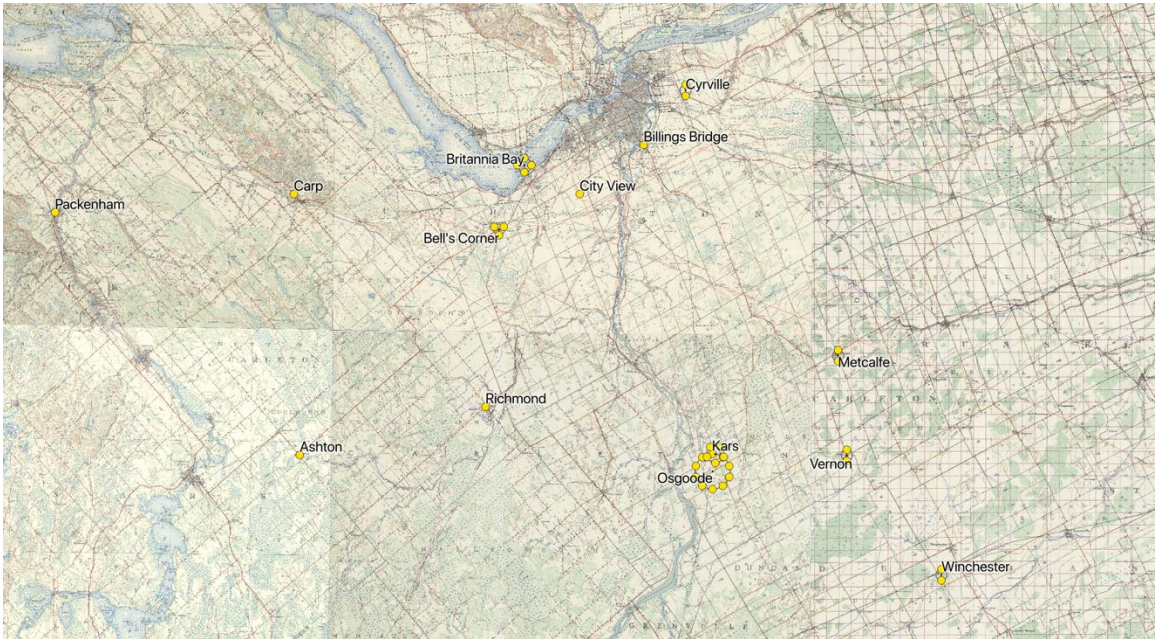
<sup>25</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to A.E. Russell, July 14, 1943, 15. General Correspondence concerning POW's, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>26</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to D.A.G., June 22, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC; Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to D.A.G., July 1, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-5 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Metcalfe, Ont., C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>27</sup> Minister of Labour to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 20, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC; “Instructions for the Guidance of District Officers Commanding re Employment of Prisoners of War on Labour Projects undertaken under P.C. 2326”, April 1944, Prisoners of War Labour Projects - Policy, 1943-1944, File 611.1:21-3, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.



their charge. Farmers were thus unofficial guards and had to ensure their prisoners remained on the farms, did not enter towns or villages, or fraternize with the public.<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 47: Communities in the Metcalfe, Ontario area with farms employing POWs in 1943. Base maps from Ontario Council of University Libraries’ “Historical Topographic Map Digitization Project” ([www.ocul.on.ca/topomaps](http://www.ocul.on.ca/topomaps)), adapted by Author.**

The volunteers from Camp 130 arrived at Brooks on August 13 and were put to work almost immediately. Farmers travelled up to forty miles to Brooks to hire POWs and it took little time before farmers and Department of Labour representatives discovered the inefficiency of having farmers pick up and drop off POWs every day from Brooks. Instead, officials offered farmers the opportunity to house POWs on their individual farms for \$45.00 a month. As at the Metcalfe project, farmers would remain responsible for supervision and security. Farmers readily adopted this method and hired all POWs available, prompting requests for more volunteers.<sup>29</sup> However, unlike the

<sup>28</sup> E.S. Doughty, “Notice to Farmers Employing Prisoners of War,” April 14, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>29</sup> “Extracts from a Personal Letter,” August 20, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

POWs at Metcalfe, the POWs at Brooks still required some supervision and military authorities elected to place guards at satellite hostels in Duchess, Rosemary, Gem, Tilley, Rainier, and Scandia. From here, guards travelled to individual farms to inspect working and living conditions as well as to collect and distribute mail.<sup>30</sup>

Demand for POWs continued as initials reports from farmers, POWs, and Department of Labour representatives proved extremely favourable at both Brooks and Metcalfe. In a report to the Camp 130 spokesman, Brooks hostel spokesman Captain Joseph Schormair stated,

So far not a bad word nor a wry look has fallen from the side of the population. Already on the first day 65 men in groups from 10 to 20 men were hired (sent) out to remote localities. There and here, the men are being distributed to farmers in accordance with the demand. Almost exclusively only one man is getting to each farmer, and only in two cases there are three men (per farmer). Two men, Edelskaemper and Kulisch, are working here in the town in an Auto Garage. Today we are already completely "sold out." The Reports which I have received so far are more than good. In almost all cases the men are being treated as members of the families; on the other hand, farmers are full of praise and many will keep 'their boy' for the duration of the war. I had an opportunity to talk with the majority of the farmers, and I have received the best possible impression.<sup>31</sup>

Eastern Irrigation District general manager B.C. Charlesworth likewise reported the Brooks project had been met with "even better success" than expected and farmers had already expressed interest in retaining POWs through the winter. The only complaints, he noted, were from farmers not yet provided with POWs and he cautioned dissatisfaction amongst these farmers would only increase if they did not receive one.<sup>32</sup> At Metcalfe, Carleton County Agricultural Representative W.M. Croskery acknowledged that there

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<sup>30</sup> "War Prisoners Arrive to Work on E.I.D. Farms," *Calgary Herald*, August 17, 1945.

<sup>31</sup> J. Schormair to Capt. O. Scharf, August 17, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>32</sup> B.C. Charlesworth to A. MacNamara, August 18, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

had been some returns to the base camp but the twenty-five new applications for POW labour on his desk suggested the POWs were making good impressions.<sup>33</sup>

Despite its success, the practice of employing POWs on Brooks-area farms was cut short after military authorities received complaints of POWs roaming the town's streets, including one incident in which a POW had lunch with an RCAF serviceman.<sup>34</sup> Authorities at HQ MD13 realized that although P.C. 5864 authorized POWs to be employed on individual farms, the Brooks Hostel employed POWs under the terms of P.C. 2326, which did not. Prisoners at Brooks had not received security clearance required to work on individual farms. Vice Adjutant-General Brigadier A.E. Nash expressed "great indignation" that the POWs were apparently "running wild" throughout the Brooks area and were "literally at large."<sup>35</sup> The Department of Defence, responsible for security, promptly ordered all POWs on individual farms to be returned to the hostels.

Opinion about whether or not to allow POWs to live and work on individual farms remained divided. Farmers strongly preferred having POWs living on the farms and protested the hostel system as it wasted significant time and gasoline driving to and from work. But some residents felt otherwise. Defending as "perfectly right" the decisions of the military authorities to withdraw POWs and keep them under guard, the *Calgary Herald* claimed POWs "pretty well had the run of the district," visiting towns, attending movies, and eating in restaurants, and had almost the same freedom as civilians.<sup>36</sup> This opinion was shared by Camp 130 Commandant Lt.-Col. H. de N. Watson, who claimed that ninety-four of the 100 POWs had declared themselves "out and out Nazis." He therefore believed nearly all could not be trusted and in a letter to HQ MD13 argued,

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<sup>33</sup> W.M. Croskery to Col. H.N. Streight, October 20, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-5 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Metcalfe, Ont., C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>34</sup> Col. H.C. Greer to Secretary, DND," September 2, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>35</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Lt.-Col. E.S. Doughty, August 30, 1943, 15. General Correspondence concerning POW's, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>36</sup> "Taking No Chances with German Prisoners," *Calgary Herald*, September 3, 1943.

the majority of these men have been P.O.W. behind the wire in most cases for three years and over, now they have been suddenly granted almost complete freedom with unlimited opportunity of contact with women, and the chances are, that the majority of these P.O.W. being 'Nazis Germans' will have no compunction in making advances towards women with whom they have been suddenly placed in close contact. The repercussion from even one such case, might be exceedingly embarrassing.<sup>37</sup>

Many commandants wanted improved opportunities for outside work but Watson had always preferred keeping POWs within close proximity to camp where they could be closely supervised. This, he believed, would not only reduce the number of escape attempts but also eliminate opportunities for POWs to fraternize with the public.

The Department of Labour did not share Watson's concerns, citing the fact that all of those employed had excellent records. Minister of Agriculture D.B. MacMillan sided with the Department of Labour and requested the Department of National Defence give consideration to allowing POWs to return to the farms.<sup>38</sup> An investigation by HQ MD13 also suggested the POWs had worked well and opposition to their work did not come from the farmers. As authorities explained, "Naturally this expression of resentment came from that portion of the population not directly and immediately benefitting from the labour of the Prisoners of War, the ex-servicemen and those who have relatives in the forces being most vociferous, and in one case at least calling a protest meeting in the Legion Hall at Brooks."<sup>39</sup> Protests from those not feeling the immediate benefits of POW labour was to become a common theme with POW labour in the coming years.

Heeding farmers' desire to continue employing POWs, military authorities reviewed each of the POWs at Brooks for work on individual farms and, after the RCMP and Department of Labour approved each farm, Labour placed each POW, at a cost to the

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<sup>37</sup> Lt.-Col. H. de N. Watson to HQ MD13, September 11, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>38</sup> D.B. MacMillan to J.L. Ralston, August 31, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>39</sup> Col. H.C. Greer to Secretary, Department of National Defence, September 2, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

farmer of between \$20.00 and \$45.00 per month depending on the season and region.<sup>40</sup> The first POWs were placed on September 10 and were soon working on farms over an area covering some 15,000 square kilometres.<sup>41</sup> While HQ MD13 believed the success of this experiment depended largely on how the Department of Labour enforced regulations, authorities remained optimistic there would be little public protest so long as POWs remained on the farms and out of the towns.<sup>42</sup>

At Lethbridge, farmers continued to employ POWs from Camp 133 in the harvest season, picking them up every day from Camp 133 and returning them each evening. Employing an average of 500 POWs throughout the summer, by September 30 the program employed thirty-two parties totalling 555 POWs.<sup>43</sup> The experiment met with mixed results, as work was hampered by inexperience, an inclination to be “soft” from extended periods behind barbed wire, and the time wasted in conveying POWs to and from farms.<sup>44</sup> Although farm parties continued their work until they were discontinued for the season on November 15, it was clear to authorities that improvements were required to make better use of POW labour.<sup>45</sup> The Department of National Defence did authorize the employment of POWs in Protective Custody at both Camps 132 and 133 on individual farms. Already removed from the camp compounds for their own protection, most of these POWs were adamant anti-Nazis threatened or attacked by fellow POWs for speaking out against Hitler or the Nazi cause. Recognizing that these men were not security threats and could be put to useful work, the Department of National Defence

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<sup>40</sup> Maj.-Gen. H.F.G. Letson to D.B. MacMillan, September 1, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC; Kemble, “History of Labour Projects PW,” 20.

<sup>41</sup> Maj. T.O’B. Gore-Hickman to Col. Doughty, September 11, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC; J. Schormair to Capt. O. Scharf, September 14, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>42</sup> Brig. F.M.W. Harvey to Secretary, DND, September 13, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>43</sup> Camp 133 War Diary, September 30, 1943, Part 4, Vol. 15412, RG24, LAC.

<sup>44</sup> Kemble, “History of Labour Projects PW,” 12.

<sup>45</sup> Camp 133 War Diary, November 15, 1943, Part 4, Vol. 15412, RG24, LAC.

arranged for their employment on farms in Alberta and Saskatchewan, with the first POWs leaving the camps in November.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the mixed results of POWs in agricultural work, the experimental programs did prove there was significant potential. In November 1943, the *Globe and Mail* announced a 5,000-man “cosmopolitan army of Canadians, British, Americans, Scandinavians, native Indians, Chinese, Japanese and some 500 prisoners of war” had completed the fastest beet harvest in the Southern Alberta sugar industry’s twenty-five-year history. Having helped harvest 29,300 acres of beets worth an estimated \$6,000,000, POWs had, the paper reported, started off “green at the game” but quickly became efficient labourers.<sup>47</sup> The Brooks hostel closed at the end of the harvest, but some farmers elected to retain their new farmhands for the winter. Major-General H.F.G. Letson reported these POWs were quite content to remain:

The food, relative freedom and association with fellow men in a useful effort for which they receive pay has been commented on in many letters to Germany. Employment of the more trusted prisoners, singly or in pairs, on farms has also been successful and is appreciated by the men (usually young) who, with few exceptions, have fully justified the confidence placed in them.<sup>48</sup>

Likewise, those in Carleton County proved satisfactory workers and, despite initial administrative headaches resulting from POWs refusing to work or dissatisfied farmers, Lt.-Col. Fordham believed the POWs had served a “highly useful purpose.” As his department had continued to adjust their policies and practices to meet new challenges or overcome obstacles, he believed most problems had been rectified and the program would continue for the foreseeable future.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Camp 133 War Diary, November 24-25, 1943, Part 4, Vol. 15412, RG24, LAC.

<sup>47</sup> “Prisoners, Internees Aid in Beet Harvest,” *Globe and Mail*, November 2, 1943.

<sup>48</sup> Major-General H.F.G. Letson, “Intelligence Report for February, 1944,” P.O.W. Corresp, Notes, Reports, Directives, Misc Papers, 1940-1945, Vol. 1, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM.

<sup>49</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to A. MacNamara, December 8, 1943, Prisoners of War Labour Projects - Policy, 1943-1944, File 611.1:21-3, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

During the winter months, 150 POWs remained employed on individual farms while the departments of Labour and National Defence looked to expand and make better use of POWs for the 1944 farming season. Demand for agricultural labourers was expected to be particularly high, with an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 POWs needed in Alberta alone, so the Department of Labour reopened the Brooks hostel in April 1944 and established a second hostel at Strathmore to serve the Western Irrigation District.<sup>50</sup> Authorities remained reluctant to place combatant POWs on individual farms, emphasizing a lack of experience as well as the district's large German population.<sup>51</sup> They instead elected to employ EMS volunteers as these men were "of an entirely different character" than their combatant counterparts and had already proven themselves satisfactory workers.<sup>52</sup> Two hundred EMS and civilian internees from Camp 23 (Monteith) were placed on farms throughout the Strathmore area.<sup>53</sup> It took little time for reports to come in of POWs being spotted in local communities escorted by their employers, but Brigadier Harvey reported the public was getting used to their presence and that things were working satisfactorily.<sup>54</sup>

But not all farmers and agriculture representatives were satisfied. Eastern Irrigation District manager L.C. Charlesworth believed too few POWs were being made available and argued this would result in a loss for both farmers and Canada. The 1,200 farmers in the district had already seen the effectiveness of POW labour and the farmers, he argued, "need them and want them. If they are to be unreasonably denied they are not going to be quiet about it." Some farmers, Charlesworth added, were so committed to

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<sup>50</sup> Brig. F.M.W. Harvey to Secretary, DND, April 18, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>51</sup> Maj.-Gen. H.F.G. Letson to DOC MD13, April 13, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC; Brig. F.M.W. Harvey to Secretary, DND, April 18, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>52</sup> Brig. F.M.W. Harvey to Secretary, DND, April 18, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>53</sup> Officer i/c Escort to Director, Prisoners of War, May 20, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>54</sup> Brig. F.M.W. Harvey to Secretary, DND, June 9, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

hiring POWs that they had gone out of their way to make farm life more comfortable.<sup>55</sup> The Department of Labour had little recourse as all suitable EMS volunteers from Camp 130 were already employed.

Despite a reluctance to employ POWs on individual farms, authorities proved more amenable to having combatant POWs work from farm hostels. In addition to offering Lethbridge-area farmers the opportunity to employ POWs from Camp 133 on a daily basis, the Department of Labour established farm hostels at Barnwell, Iron Springs (Picture Butte), Magrath (Raymond), and Stirling to better serve farmers further from camp. One hundred and seven volunteers from Camp 133 were transferred to each hostel in the first two weeks of June and were immediately made available to local farmers.<sup>56</sup>

The success of POW farm labour in 1943 and a heavy demand for workers also brought POWs to Southwestern Ontario. In December 1943, the Canadian government called for increased production for 1944 with an emphasis on soybeans, white beans, and burley tobacco – all grown exclusively in Essex, Kent, Lambton, Middlesex, and Huron counties – as well as corn, tomatoes, and sugar beets. While the latter three crops were not exclusive to the province, Southwestern Ontario grew all of Canada's sugar beets east of Manitoba and most of the country's husking corn and tomatoes. Farmers lacked the labour they needed to grow, maintain, and harvest these crops. In 1940, the region had employed approximately 3,500 skilled workers but this had dropped to fewer than 800 by 1943, resulting in a subsequent decline in production from 100 million pounds of refined sugar to only 19 million.<sup>57</sup> The most optimistic predictions stated Canada would only “get by” in 1944. Agriculturalists stated full production required 40,000 acres of sugar beets, producing 100,000,000 pounds of refined sugar, and providing 4,000,000 Canadians their

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<sup>55</sup> L.C. Charlesworth to Brig. A.E. Nash, May 4, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>56</sup> Maj.-Gen. A.F.G. Letson to DOC MD13, May 6, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-100 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - P/W Hostels in Alberta, C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>57</sup> “Good Beet Crop in 1944 is Essential,” *Globe and Mail*, January 24, 1944.



full sugar ration for twelve months.<sup>58</sup> With farmers considering planting grains and other low-maintenance crops, agricultural representatives met with local MPs, farmers, sugar company officials, and federal and provincial government representatives to secure the much-needed labour.

The suggestion to employ POWs in Southwestern Ontario was met with mixed response. Department of Labour representative A.H. Brown recommended POWs not be used, citing high costs, complications with daily transportation, and the potential for escape. Brown suggested 400 military personnel be used instead, a labour force he believed (on no evidence) would do twice as much work as 800 POWs.<sup>59</sup> The farmers were divided, as was evident from correspondence from the Canada and Dominion Sugar Company Ltd.:

There is quite a difference of opinion on the subject and at the present time, no one seems to want to commit himself very definitely on bringing in prisoners of war. It is difficult to sum up the feeling in a few words, but the best summary I can give is that the German prisoners of war would be considered better than nothing. Some of the farmers say that they will not bother with sugar beets if they have to have German prisoners of war to work them. Other says, 'Fill up the camps with the prisoners of war. We can keep them busy all season on sugar beets, tobacco, tomatoes and other crops.'<sup>60</sup>

Support from local communities was essential as the future of POW farm labour in Ontario remained dependent on the attitudes of local residents; if town councils protested POWs as they had with proposals to employ Japanese Canadians, the Department of Labour emphasized POWs would not be made available for work.<sup>61</sup> With spring imminent and no clear solution to the labour crisis, sugar producers believed POWs their

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<sup>58</sup> "Farm Labour Situation in Southwestern Ontario," March 28, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>59</sup> Memorandum from A.H. Brown, April 4, 1944, Prisoners of War, Labour Projects - Agriculture, File 611.1:21-1, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>60</sup> A.W. McIntyre to A. MacNamara, December 29, 1943, Prisoners of War, Labour Projects - Agriculture, File 611.1:21-1, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>61</sup> A. MacNamara to A.H. Brown, April 1, 1944, Prisoners of War, Labour Projects - Agriculture, File 611.1:21-1, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

best option and, in April 1944, agricultural representatives and local officials, including the Chairman of the Kent Tomato Growers and the mayors of Wallaceburg and Chatham, called upon the Department of Labour to secure POWs for the upcoming season.<sup>62</sup>

The departments of Labour and National Defence quickly set out to determine the best locations to place POWs. The presence of essential war industries, ordnance depots, RCAF training schools, and army camps scattered throughout the area – not to mention those in the nearby United States – prompted significant security concerns. RCMP Superintendent F.W. Schutz described the presence of 1,000 POWs in the area as a “decided menace and danger to the safety of the State.”<sup>63</sup> The departments of Labour and National Defence initially proposed a 200-man tented internment camp near Dresden, twenty kilometres north of Chatham, but this met with immediate opposition. The Ontario Sugar Beet Growers Marketing Board, Ontario Burling Tobacco Marketing Board, Dominion Sugar Company, and the Kent County Tomato Growers Association all argued that a camp near Dresden would only provide labour to farms within a four-mile radius and leave areas desperately short of labour without the men they required.<sup>64</sup> With guards available for only one camp, the Department of Labour called upon agricultural representatives to submit a more suitable location, whereupon they selected Chatham.<sup>65</sup>

Within a month, engineers had installed water and lighting and erected bell and marquee tents, kitchens, latrines, showers, four guard towers, and a two-and-a-half metre barbed-wire fence around a compound five-and-a-half kilometres southeast of Chatham.<sup>66</sup> The first 125 POWs arrived at Camp 10 (Chatham) from Camp 23 (Monteith) in mid-

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<sup>62</sup> Charles Baker to A. MacNamara, April 3, 1944, Prisoners of War, Labour Projects - Agriculture, File 611.1:21-1, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC; C.L. Goddard to W.J. McGregor, April 4, 1944, Prisoners of War, Labour Projects - Agriculture, File 611.1:21-1, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>63</sup> Supt. F.W. Schutz to RCMP Commissioner, April 1, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>64</sup> Eugene King et al. to A. MacNamara, April 6, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>65</sup> A. MacNamara to Eugene King, April 6, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>66</sup> Col. H.A. McKay to POW, April 18, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

May and were followed by an additional 200 in early June. With twenty-five POWs assigned work in the camp, the remaining 300 were put to work almost immediately at local farms and the Wallaceburg sugar refinery.

With POW labour well-established in Alberta and Ontario by mid-1944, proposals to use prisoners in other provinces were met with mixed results. When Department of Agriculture representative L.D. McClintock proposed employing POWs on beet fields in Quebec's Brome County, the Department of Labour expressed concern with employing combatant POWs so close to the American border. As such an undertaking required a temporary internment camp as well as significant numbers of armed guards, MacNamara believed it should only be considered as a last resort.<sup>67</sup> On the Prairies, the idea of POW labourers in Saskatchewan had public opinion divided. Most residents already objected to the employment of Japanese Canadians, and even most of those in favour wanted them removed immediately after the work was finished. However, they were more amenable to the idea of POWs.<sup>68</sup> The preference for white enemy soldiers over Japanese Canadian citizens clearly indicates race and racial stereotypes played a significant factor for many farmers in selecting their labourers. Despite some protest regarding the central European origins of many of the province's residents, the province and Department of Labour agreed to establish two POW hostels, one five kilometres northwest of Alida (Wauchope) and another fifteen kilometres southeast of Moosimin (Fairlight).

The hostels closed in November and the POWs returned to their base camps. In Southern Alberta, POWs had proven extremely effective, contributing to an estimated yield of 300,000 to 350,000 tons of sugar beets for an estimated 100,000,000 pounds of sugar. The Camp 133 war diary reported POWs were an asset to local farmers and the *Globe and Mail* credited POWs with saving the harvest, stating they were "the difference

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<sup>67</sup> A. MacNamara to L.D. McClintock, April 17, 1944, Prisoners of War, Labour Projects - Agriculture, File 611.1:21-1, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

<sup>68</sup> W.W. Dawson to A. MacNamara, March 1, 1943, Prisoners of War - General Correspondence, 1942-1944, File 611.1:21, Pts. 1-2, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

between a 100 per cent harvest and something considerably less.”<sup>69</sup> Likewise, in Southwestern Ontario, the Canada and Dominion Sugar Co. produced 39,489,400 pounds of sugar compared to the 18,657,550 produced in 1943. The boost was attributed to a government subsidy as well as the help from POW labourers, who ensured no fields were lost due to the labour shortage.<sup>70</sup>

Farm hostels had proven successful in providing seasonal labour, but many farmers requested POWs also be made available for year-round work. Civilian internees and EMS were already employed on individual farms so, in December 1944, MacNamara requested approval to employ combatant POWs in the same manner. The placement of combatant POWs on individual farms, MacNamara argued, no longer carried the same stigma it had only two years prior. As he explained,

Since the use of prisoners of war on work projects outside internment camps was first initiated in 1943, public opinion has been educated to such use of prisoners and the matter of temporary escapes of prisoners so employed does not exercise the public mind in nearly the same measure as was formerly the case. In the same way, farmers in a number of parts of Western Canada and Ontario have become accustomed to the use of prisoners of war or to seeing them used on farms.<sup>71</sup>

The Directorate of Prisoners of War agreed and suggested all candidates be carefully selected and vetted for the work, with a preference for those who had already spent at least twelve months working satisfactorily in the bush.<sup>72</sup>

The Department of Labour continued to build upon its farming operations in 1945, opening a series of new hostels. In Alberta, the department reopened its Brooks, Strathmore, Barnwell, Iron Springs, Magrath, and Stirling hostels while establishing new

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<sup>69</sup> Camp 133 War Diary, December 31, 1944, Part 5, Vol. 15412, RG24, LAC; “Sugar Beet Harvest Looks Good in Alberta,” *Globe and Mail*, October 17, 1944.

<sup>70</sup> “Sugar-Beet Crop Looks Promising,” *Globe and Mail*, April 27, 1945.

<sup>71</sup> A. MacNamara to A. Ross, December 21, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>72</sup> Colonel H.N. Streight to VAG, February 2, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

ones at Park Lake, Coaldale, Whiteside (White School), Welling, and Turing. The Saskatchewan hostels were not reopened but, in cooperation with the Manitoba Sugar Co. and the Manitoba Government, the Department of Labour opened six new hostels at Curtis, Grassmere, St. Eustache, St. Agathe, St. Jean, and La Rochelle. The Manitoba hostels proved quite successful and the number of POWs – all combatants – was increased from almost 900 in June 1945 to over 1,100 during the harvest months.<sup>73</sup> When not needed for beet thinning or harvesting, 500 of these POWs were transferred to satellite hostels at Hamiota, Neepawa, Melita, Holland, and Manitou to help stook grain.<sup>74</sup> Minister of National Defence A.G.L. McNaughton also suggested placing 500 POWs on individual farms in Nova Scotia, arguing every province had an equal right to the benefits of POW labour.<sup>75</sup> Arthur MacNamara doubted the proposal's feasibility as he believed farmers in Ontario and Western Canada already had experience with POWs, making them more amenable to combatants on individual farms whereas farmers outside these areas would oppose the practice.<sup>76</sup> McNaughton relented and no POWs worked on individual farms in the Atlantic provinces.

**Table 7: Prisoner of War Farm Hostels, 1943-1946.**

Hostel Location	Prov.	Season(s) Operating			
		1943	1944	1945	1946
Barnwell	AB		X	X	X
Brooks	AB	X	X	X	X
Coaldale	AB			X	X
Iron Springs (Picture Butte)	AB		X	X	X
Magrath (Raymond)	AB		X	X	X
Park Lake	AB			X	X
Stirling	AB		X	X	X
Turin	AB			X	X
Welling	AB			X	X

<sup>73</sup> Kemble, "History of Labour Projects PW," 14.

<sup>74</sup> "500 Nazi Prisoners to Help at Harvest," *Winnipeg Tribune*, July 30, 1945.

<sup>75</sup> A.G.L. McNaughton to Humphrey Mitchell, March 14, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>76</sup> A.G.L. McNaughton to Humphrey Mitchell, April 4, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<b>Hostel Location (cont'd)</b>	<b>Prov.</b>	<b>1943</b>	<b>1944</b>	<b>1945</b>	<b>1946</b>
Whiteside	AB			X	X
Blackdale	MB				X
Brandon	MB				X
Curtis (Newton)	MB			X	X
Dominion City	MB				X
Elie	MB				X
Emerson	MB				X
Grassmere	MB			X	
Hamiota	MB			X	X
Headingly	MB				X
Holland	MB			X	X
Homewood	MB				X
Kane	MB				X
La Rochelle	MB				X
Letellier	MB				X
Manitou	MB			X	X
Melita	MB			X	X
Morris	MB			X	X
Neepawa	MB			X	X
Reston	MB				X
Shilo	MB				X
Shoal Lake	MB				X
St. Agathe	MB			X	
St. Eustache	MB			X	
St. Jean	MB			X	
St. Pierre	MB				X
Teulon	MB			X	
Winkler	MB				X
Wishart <sup>77</sup>	MB				X
Centralia	ON			X	X
Chatham	ON		X	X	X
Fingal	ON			X	X
Glencoe	ON			X	X
Fairlight	SK		X		
Wauchope	SK		X		

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<sup>77</sup> Wishart is believed to be the name of the land owner as there is no community in Manitoba by this name.

Demand for labour even prompted Quebec to resume employing POWs. The province had closed all its POW labour projects by May 1944, but a shortage of labourers forced the provincial government to reconsider its decision. The government approved the employment of POWs for “emergency operations” – namely harvesting – in September 1945.<sup>78</sup> A group of officers at Camp 40 (Farnham) volunteered its services in order to, as the Camp Commandant explained, “contribute their share to relieve distressed conditions in Europe, created by war.”<sup>79</sup> Director of Labour Projects Lt.-Col. R.H. Davidson recommended all POWs be “very carefully judged” to prevent any repercussions, noting, “we have never received any encouragement from that Government to place PW labour in that Province since they definitely asserted they did not want any.”<sup>80</sup> Hand-picked prisoners were placed on individual farms in the Farnham area and, following initial success, farmers continued to request more. Despite being earmarked for transfer to the United Kingdom in May 1946, requests from farmers to retain these men prompted the Department of National Defence to allow 120 to remain on the farms for the rest of the summer.<sup>81</sup>

In Southwestern Ontario, farmers remained hesitant to plant labour-intensive sugar beets so the Canada and Dominion Sugar Company, Ltd. ran a series of advertisements in local newspapers, emphasizing fixed prices and subsidies for sugar beets and confirming there would be at least 500 POWs available for Southwestern Ontario beet crops.<sup>82</sup> Committed to providing POWs, the departments of Labour and National Defence reopened Camp 10 (Chatham) as a temporary internment camp.

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<sup>78</sup> Lt.-Col. R.H. Davidson to Commandant, Farnham, September 18, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-118 - Dept. of Labour - Work Proj. - PW Employed on Individual Farms in MD4, C-5387, RG24, LAC.

<sup>79</sup> Lt.-Col. A.W. De Wolf to District Officer Commanding MD4, May 25, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>80</sup> Lt.-Col. R.H. Davidson to Director, Prisoners of War, October 5, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-118 - Dept. of Labour - Work Proj. - PW Employed on Individual Farms in MD4, C-5387, RG24, LAC.

<sup>81</sup> Maj.-Gen. E.G. Weks to DOC MD4, May 13, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-118 - Dept. of Labour - Work Proj. - PW Employed on Individual Farms in MD4, C-5387, RG24, LAC.

<sup>82</sup> Hoping to attract farmers, the Ontario government granted a subsidy of \$1.55 per ton up to a maximum of \$225,000, for a total of 145,161, while the Canada and Dominion Sugar Company committed to paying the subsidy for beets over that amount. “Labor for Sugar-Beet Crop,” *Globe and Mail*, March 31, 1945; “Sugar Beet Prices Fixed for 1945,” *Globe and Mail*, March 24, 1945.

Heeding concerns that a single camp only served farms within a few miles, the Department of Labour also opened 107-man hostels at Fingal, Glencoe, and Centralia to better serve the region's farmers.<sup>83</sup> These hostels operated in a similar manner as those in Alberta but security concerns prompted the Department of National Defence to install barbed wire fences, floodlights, and guard towers.

In Northwestern Ontario, the Department of Labour placed EMS volunteers, all of whom were bushworkers who agreed to work on farms in the summer and return to the bush in the winter, with twenty-four farmers in the Port Arthur area in spring 1945.<sup>84</sup> These men quickly demonstrated their worth and prompted local farmers to request more men. With insufficient EMS available, the Department of Labour instead

**Sugar-Beet Contracts Now Ready**

**Labor for Sugar-Beet Crop**

This year there will be at least 325 prisoners of war in the Chatham camp, at least 100 in a new camp at Glencoe and at least 100 in another new camp at Centralia. There will be still another camp in Kent County if needed. The assured total of 325 extra workers is 75 per cent more than were available last year. If needed, there will be others — more than double the number that were on hand last year.

These workers will be on hand when the beets are ready for thinning, we are assured by the authorities.

This labor program for work on the expected great sugar-beet crop in 1945 is arranged through joint action of the Dominion and Ontario governments.

As announced last week, prices for sugar beets are the same as last year. Even after paying for hired labor, farmers' NET returns were over \$75.00 per acre. Beet labor prices for 1945 are the same as last year.

Average price last year was \$12.52 per ton. Farmers' returns per acre were \$112.50 for factory-delivered beets and \$105.75 per ton at outside points. This was the average; many growers made much more.

Floor Price for Sugar Beets is Guaranteed.  
A Sure Cash Market for Every Sugar-Beet You Grow!

**LABOR PROSPECT GOOD**

*Published in the interest of greater wartime production of sugar by*

Canada and Dominion Sugar Company, Limited

Chatham
Wallaceburg

**Figure 48: Advertisement for Sugar-Beet Labour. The Canada and Dominion Sugar Company ran advertisements in newspapers throughout southern Ontario to inform farmers that they would have the labour they needed to maintain and harvest their sugar beet crops. Globe and Mail, March 31, 1945.**

<sup>83</sup> While Glencoe and Centralia were tented hostels, the Fingal hostel was located on the site of the recently closed RCAF station and used buildings recently vacated by the RCAF.

<sup>84</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to Col. H.N. Streight, April 14, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-108 - Dept. of Labour Work Projects - PW Employed on Individual Farms - Port Arthur Area, C-5387, RG24, LAC.



transferred thirty “White” POWs who had been in protective custody at Camp 132 (Medicine Hat) in August.<sup>85</sup>

With the Ontario hostels expected to close in November, agricultural representatives had received over 100 applications for individual POWs and, with “absolutely no chance” of having sufficient civilian labourers to meet demand, recommended POWs be retained through the winter.<sup>86</sup> The Department of Labour thus opened applications for farmers to employ POWs on individual farms near Chatham, Glencoe, Centralia, and Fingal as of November 1.<sup>87</sup> When the hostels closed in November 1945 and the POWs returned to internment camps or bush camps, the Department of Labour made two important changes in its Southwestern Ontario operations, authorizing the employment of POWs – in this case EMS – on individual farms and moving Camp 10 from Chatham to the recently-vacated RCAF training school at Fingal, thereby allowing POW farming operations to continue year-round. In accordance with the Dominion-Provincial Farm Agreement, the first EMS were placed on individual farms in Southwestern Ontario in mid-November. Continuing to receive requests for POWs, the Department of Labour eventually made a total of over 775 placements by November 1946.<sup>88</sup>

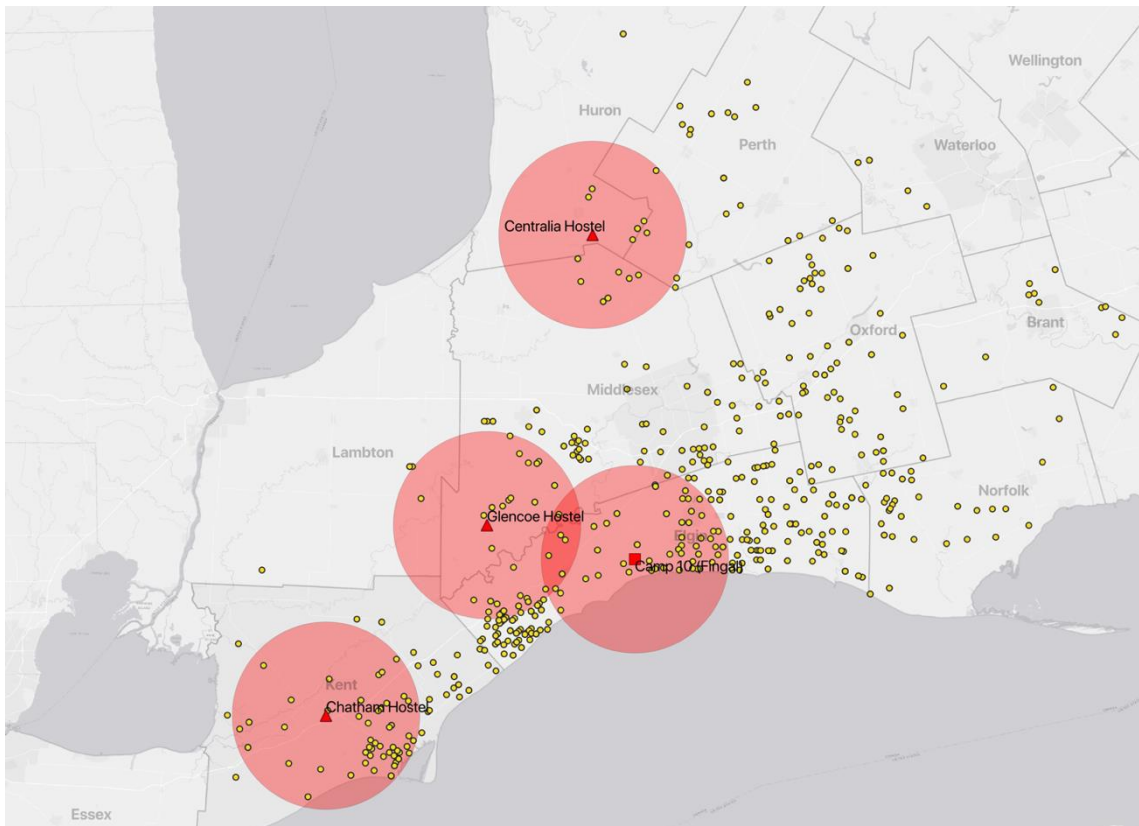
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<sup>85</sup> Brig. R.O.G. Morton to Secretary, DND, August 3, 1945, December 4, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-108 - Dept. of Labour Work Projects - PW Employed on Individual Farms - Port Arthur Area, C-5387, RG24, LAC.

<sup>86</sup> Lt.-Col. R.H. Davidson to Director, Prisoners of War, October 24, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>87</sup> J.A. Garner to Camp Commandant, Chatham, October 17, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>88</sup> See POW placements, November 1945 to November 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.



**Figure 49: Map showing the location of the four farm hostels and the individual farms employing POWs in Southwestern Ontario between 1945 and 1946. Each hostel served farmers within a radius of approximately forty kilometres (seen here in red). Map by Author.**

In December 1945, the Minister of Agriculture recommended a 150% increase in sugar beet production, increasing the national acreage from 60,000 to 90,000. This consisted of 9,700 acres in Quebec, 35,000 in Ontario, 15,000 in Manitoba, and 30,300 in Alberta.<sup>89</sup> Despite increasing numbers of returned servicemen in late 1945 and early 1946, there was still insufficient labour to meet demand. Requests for additional POWs for farm work continued through the winter and spring and many agricultural representatives called for POWs to be retained as long as possible. In Alberta, for example, Director of Experimental Farms E.S. Archibald emphasized that 18-19,000 acres of the 20,000 total acres of sugar beets grown in Alberta in 1945 had been

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<sup>89</sup> John T. Hackett to Douglas Abbott, June 4, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

harvested by POWs and Japanese Canadians.<sup>90</sup> Now expected to grow 30,000 acres in 1946, Alberta farmers needed this labour force to meet demand but, with twenty per cent of Japanese Canadians scheduled for repatriation to Japan, they estimated they would need an additional 1,000 German POWs on top of the 2,000 employed in 1945.<sup>91</sup>

Despite pressure to retain POWs, the Canadian government began transferring POWs in its custody to Great Britain in early 1946. The Department of Labour, hoping to avoid any claims of favouritism, emphasized that the future employment of POWs remained dependent on local factors and they would only be available if there were insufficient civilian labourers.<sup>92</sup> In March 1946, the Department of Labour requested Cabinet grant permission to retain 3,595 POWs for the 1946 farming season, earmarking 1,650 POWs for Alberta, 705 for Manitoba, 233 for Eastern Ontario, 901 for Southwestern Ontario, and 106 for Quebec.<sup>93</sup> Cabinet approved the request on June 6, assuring 4,000 POWs for the remainder of the farming season.<sup>94</sup>

The Department of Labour quickly set about transferring POWs where they could best be employed. Authorities in Alberta continued with the Brooks and Strathmore hostels, re-opened all nine Lethbridge-area hostels, but ceased allowing farmers to pick up POWs from Camp 133 as the repatriation of POWs had left the camp at minimum strength.<sup>95</sup> In Manitoba, the hostel program was increased to include thirteen hostels as well as series of satellite hostels to house POWs helping stook grain.<sup>96</sup> However, demand

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<sup>90</sup> E.S. Archibald to Lt.-Col. H.W. Pearson, January 23, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>91</sup> A.E. Palmer to Director, Experimental Farms, January 21, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>92</sup> Lt.-Col. H.W. Pearson to A.M. Shaw, February 6, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>93</sup> Lt.-Col. R.H. Davidson to Lt.-Col. H.W. Pearson, March 29, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5381, RG24, LAC; Adjutant-General to Minister of National Defence, March 28, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>94</sup> Col. M.S. to Adjutant-General, June 8, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>95</sup> Camp 133 War Diary, April 30, 1946, Part 7, Vol. 15413, RG24, LAC.

<sup>96</sup> The main hostels were located at Blackdale, Curtis, Dominion, Elie, Emerson, Hoemwood, Kane, Letellier, Morris, St. Pierre, Holland, Winkler, and "Wishart" (believed to be the name of a family farm),

for labour in the harvest season prompted the temporary placement of 600 POWs on individual farms throughout the province.<sup>97</sup> The four hostels in Ontario also re-opened and the practice of employing POWs on individual farms continued uninterrupted.

Thousands of combatant POWs, EMS, and civilian internees were employed on Canadian farms from 1943 to 1946. Their experiences varied depending on whether they worked on individual farms or from hostels and internment camps, but there were many similarities in their experiences of and reactions to Canadian farm life. Prisoners' immediate reactions to farm work often expressed the satisfaction of leaving the confines of a barbed-wire enclosure for an opportunity to work and live in relative freedom. Many POWs volunteered for farm work to escape the monotony of life in an internment camp and to find a way to fill their time as they awaited the war's end.

Most hostels had minimal security measures and were often only surrounded by farm fencing. As with its policies concerning bush camps, the Department of Labour believed that prisoners would appreciate the lack of barbed wire fences and guard towers and therefore not risk an escape in fear of being prevented from future work opportunities. Although minimal, the security measures generally worked. Camp 133 staff expected little trouble for the POWs were eager for the opportunity to live and work beyond the confines of a barbed wire enclosure and few, if any, were willing to risk any action that might send them back to "enforced captivity."<sup>98</sup> Prisoners at the Alida, Saskatchewan, hostel likewise informed the commanding officer that they greatly

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and satellite hostels were at Brandon, Carman, Hamiota, Headingly, Melita, Neepawa, Reston, Shilo, and Shoal Lake.

<sup>97</sup> "Schedule A" in Manitoba Department of Agriculture and Immigration, *Manitoba Department of Agriculture and Immigration Annual Report*, vol. 1946–1947 (Winnipeg, MB, 1947).

<sup>98</sup> Camp 133 War Diary, May 28, 1945, Part 5, Vol. 15412, RG24, LAC; Camp 133 War Diary, May 25, 1946, Part 7, Vol. 15413, RG24, LAC.

appreciated their relative freedom and had no desire to lose the new privileges of farm work.<sup>99</sup>

Living arrangements likewise ranged depending on the location. Prisoners employed from internment camps such as Camp 132 (Medicine Hat) and Camp 133 (Lethbridge) continued to enjoy the amenities of a large base camp in their free time, including educational courses, organized sports, and flush toilets, while those living in hostels or individual farms often exchanged these amenities for slightly more freedom. As farm hostels were temporary solutions to the labour shortage, they were often small and relied on tented accommodations. The Iron Springs hostel near Lethbridge, for example, housed 107 POWs – including a spokesman and six cooks and kitchen helpers –



**Figure 50: Farm hostel near Lethbridge. Most hostels, such as this one, consisted entirely of tented accommodations and lacked the traditional security measures of internment camps. Instead, perimeters were often marked by a simple farm fence. Galt Museum & Archives, P19752908026.**

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<sup>99</sup> Const. S.F. Cunnington, “Prisoner of War Temporary Camp (German), Aldina District, Sask.,” August 23, 1944, 168.009 (D87) - Corresp, instrs, plans, reports, etc re empl of PW's on Saskatchewan Farms, DHH; Cpl. J.F. Klassen, “Prisoner of War (Labour) Camp - Moosomin District, Sask.,” August 23, 1944, 168.009 (D87) - Corresp, instrs, plans, reports, etc re empl of PW's on Saskatchewan Farms, DHH.

and their guards entirely in tents. The hostel consisted of a 500-yard perimeter surrounded only by farmland, marquee tents housing POWs and guards, marquee tents for a kitchen and mess hall, and a house on the property serving as the guard kitchen and mess as well as the officer's quarters. With no fences, thirty guards provided security at both the hostel and its associated farms.<sup>100</sup> A few hostels, such as those at Centralia, Ontario, and Grassmere, Manitoba, had permanent structures but these were generally occupied by the guards or commanding officers. Living in tents did result in some complaints, but most POWs had no desire to exchange them for the base camp.<sup>101</sup>

While not at work, prisoners filled their time with a variety of recreation. The departments of Labour and National Defence and aid organizations such as the War Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA extended their services to provide recreational equipment to farm hostels, but the quantity and variety of articles often paled in comparison to what base camps offered. In hostels, many POWs dedicated their free time to handicrafts and illicitly sold or traded their creations with local farmers and guards. Ships in bottles, letter openers, and other small handicrafts were especially popular at the Barnwell hostel, with the *Lethbridge Herald* commenting on the "remarkable skill" of the POWs, whereas prisoners in Manitoba hostels spent their days off doing laundry or making small valises and boxes for various uses.<sup>102</sup>

Camp 10 (Chatham), initially a temporary, tented internment camp, was itself a hybrid between a farm hostel and internment camp, a factor which meant POWs there still enjoyed some of the privileges typically found in larger camps. By 1945, POWs could enjoy a biweekly movie, take in a concert of the camp's small orchestra, build ships in bottles and other handicrafts, knit, or play with their pets. The camp also featured a sports field adjacent to the compound where POWs played football, ran, boxed, and

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<sup>100</sup> Lt.-Col. B.B.W. Minard to Commandant, Lethbridge, July 12, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-100 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - P/W Hostels in Alberta, C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>101</sup> QMS Macfarlane, "Intelligence Summary," June 1944, HQS 7236-94-6-10, T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Chatham, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>102</sup> "Closing P.O.W. Hostel at Barnwell Sees End of Bounteous Harvest," *Lethbridge Herald*, December 5, 1945; "Sugar Beet Fields Here Keep German War Prisoners Busy," *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 2, 1945.

threw discus. POWs also received permission to swim in Lake Erie at the nearby Cedar Springs Range, under the watchful eyes of their guards.<sup>103</sup> As an internment camp, the camp was surrounded by fences and guard towers. This resulted in some complaints from POWs who had been under the impression there was to be no such enclosure, as hostels in Alberta had no fences.<sup>104</sup> While the POWs were not happy with the barbed wire, it also served another, albeit somewhat unintentional, purpose: it prevented curious onlookers from getting too close. The camp's proximity to Chatham invited public curiosity and the camp became an attraction for local sightseers who frequently drove down the road adjacent to camp on Sundays hoping to get a glimpse at the "enemy."<sup>105</sup>

Recreation on individual farms was limited. Some POWs spent their free time on handicrafts while others simply enjoyed the relative freedom by exploring the farm, taking care of animals, and working odd jobs. With POWs scattered on farms relatively close to each other and security at a minimum, inter-farm visits between POWs were not uncommon and were, as POW Paul Ruck informed his girlfriend in Germany, one of the only perks of farm life. Since leaving Camp 23 in July 1944, Ruck complained he had not seen a movie and his only diversion was walking two kilometres to visit another POW on a nearby farm.<sup>106</sup> Lukas Weierts, working with an apiarist, wrote that he often went to Brooks and saw "many acquaintances" there, while another POW noted that he often rode over to the next farm to visit comrades there after work or on Sundays – "a great pleasure" as he enjoyed riding horses.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> QMS Macfarlane, "Intelligence Summary," June 1944, HQS 7236-94-6-10, T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Chatham, C-5416, RG24, LAC; Major Bruce Thompson, "Information and Intelligence Summary," July 1945, HQS 7236-94-6-10, T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Chatham, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>104</sup> "Intelligence Report Supplementary," May 1944, HQS 7236-94-6-10, T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Chatham, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>105</sup> Camp 10 War Diary, June 15, 1944, Part 1, Vol. 15387, RG24, LAC.

<sup>106</sup> Censorship report of letter from Paul Ruck to Haldtraut Kertscher, February 28, 1945, translated March 27, 1945, HQS 8118-32 - Interceptions Prisoners of War Mail, C-5130, RG24, LAC.

<sup>107</sup> Censorship report of letters from Lukas Weierts to Joh. Weigand and Otto Lenk, translated May 17, 1945, HQS 8118-32 - Interceptions Prisoners of War Mail, C-5130, RG24, LAC; Major-General H.F.G. Letson, "Information Summary for March, 1944," n.d., POW - Corresp, Reports, Notes, Misc Papers, Directives, 1943-1945, Vol. 2, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM.

Regardless of location, there was an immediate change in morale once POWs left the confines of the base camps behind. When the Brooks hostel first opened in 1943, spokesman Joseph Schormair described his men's reactions to their new work:

they do not object to working overtime, for which the farmer compensates the P/W with tobacco, etc. The treatment on the farms is very good, the sleeping quarters are quite comfortable, and the meals are very good. The behavior of the P/Ws on the farms is very good, and the farmers appreciate their cleanliness, also their willingness to work.<sup>108</sup>

Similar sentiments were expressed in letters sent from POWs living on farms or in hostels to family and friends in Germany. One POW asked to be addressed as “Cowboy Fritz SCHWERTHOFER” while another wrote, “I am doing my best to make myself useful. Get lots of work and lots of fun, Fate instead of giving me a life of leisure as it originally



**Figure 51: Three POW “cowboys” on a farm in Alberta. Galt Museum & Archives P19981057003.**

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<sup>108</sup> J. Schormair to Capt. O. Scharf, September 14, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.



had promised, furnishes me instead with the rather unusual however the most interesting experiences, which I should not like to miss.”<sup>109</sup> Despite better accommodation and entertainment at the base camp, even Schormair himself preferred to remain at Brooks; as he explained in a letter to his wife; “You will understand me when I say that owing to my present work I consider myself again as a useful human being.”<sup>110</sup>

As the Department of Labour opened more hostels, POWs continued to emphasize the importance of work in letters to family in Germany. At Strathmore, Rudolf Grolmus remarked, “Time passes quickly and one week is nothing. I have come to the conclusion, that work is the best medicine.” Another POW described, “Since I left the camp to work on a farm, I am ever so much happier. As you can imagine, the time goes so much quicker and that makes imprisonment easier to bear.”<sup>111</sup> Likewise, Oskar Rueter informed his family that he liked it “much better” on a farm than in the base camp and explained he had a lot of work, received good treatment, and ate just as well as the family he worked for.<sup>112</sup> At Chatham, one POW described his new work in a letter to his wife: “I am very happy here, and have plenty to eat and drink. I only wish that you and the children were here to enjoy them with me. I enjoy my work with the farmer, better than on our own farms. I am very pleased with it all.”<sup>113</sup> Some men enjoyed their first month of work so much that they expressed interest in staying and working through the winter.<sup>114</sup> Similar attitudes could be found in the Lethbridge hostels in October 1945,

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<sup>109</sup> Major-General H.F.G. Letson, “Intelligence Report for November, 1943,” P.O.W. Corresp, Notes, Reports, Directives, Misc Papers, 1940-1945, Vol. 1, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM; “Copies of Letters from POW detailed to farmwork at the Eastern Irrigation District at Brooks, Alta.” 1943, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>110</sup> Captain Josef Schormair to Edith Schormair, January 22, 1944, HQS 7236-34-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Employment - United Kingdom Prisoners, C-5379, RG24, LAC.

<sup>111</sup> Department of National Defence, “Information Summary for June 44,” n.d., 31-15-3 - P/W. Security - Liaison with D. POW - Intelligence Reports, C-8250, RG24, LAC.

<sup>112</sup> Lt. C.T.G. van Taack, “Monthly Intelligence Report, January 1945,” February 1, 1946, HQS 7236-94-6-23 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Monteith, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>113</sup> QMS Macfarlane, “Intelligence Summary,” July 1944, HQS 7236-94-6-10, T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Chatham, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>114</sup> QMS Macfarlane, “Intelligence Summary,” June 1944, HQS 7236-94-6-10, T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Chatham, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

with the *Lethbridge Herald* reporting that POWs there were happy to be working and hoped to continue doing so; as one POW explained, “We feel like new men away from the camp and wish we would not have to spend any more of our captivity in the camp. You know yourself that a man feels better when he was working.”<sup>115</sup>

Work was almost universally considered a better alternative than remaining idle in the base camp, but some prisoners also saw work as their salvation from harassment or strife within the camps. Pro-Nazis had entrenched themselves in the internal administration of most internment camps and used Gestapo techniques to harass or harm anyone who opposed their views. Some anti-Nazis had been placed in protective custody at their own request, which meant they lived in barracks often located outside the main enclosure, and, because of their anti-Nazi views, were often among the first to be placed on individual farms. This was, as one POW noted, greatly appreciated: “On the sheep farm is lots of work but the life at camp was made unbearable by our own comrades. Here it is very nice and food and treatment very good.”<sup>116</sup> Another POW, working from a Lethbridge-area hostel, remarked, “We have freedom here and can speak as we please without being afraid of the Gestapo or fanatical Nazis.”<sup>117</sup>

Work was appreciated but it often proved difficult and entailed long hours. Prisoners worked eight-hour days, six days a week in all types of weather. The type of work varied depending on location but most POWs working from hostels or internment camps in Alberta, Manitoba, and Southwestern Ontario were employed on beet fields. Trucked to farms or picked up by the farmers, POWs spent long hours under the watchful eyes of their guards before returning to the hostel or camp in the evening. One POW at Chatham explained farm life in a letter to a friend in Germany:

In the morning at 7:45, we go away to work and come back in the evening about eight or eight-thirty. We work in groups of from 5 to 20 men. At the moment the harvest is the greatest need. But the tobacco harvest is also

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<sup>115</sup> “Prisoners are Anxious to Work Out of Camp,” *Lethbridge Herald*, October 18, 1945.

<sup>116</sup> Department of National Defence, “Information Summary for June 44,” n.d., 31-15-3 - P/W. Security - Liaison with D. POW - Intelligence Reports, C-8250, RG24, LAC.

<sup>117</sup> “Prisoners are Anxious to Work Out of Camp,” *Lethbridge Herald*, October 18, 1945.

begin [sic]. Some groups are steady workers in the sugar factories and in Libby's. These are naturally good jobs. But still the field work is quite alright. One gets from most farmers his meals at noon. We take for our noon-day bite just bread and eat our main meal in the evening in camp. We go back and forth to work in a truck. In this way, one has quite long trips to make. We have been in fields that are often 70 miles away from camp. We drive through the towns and see once again something different. It makes the day go faster and the black thoughts that come with the way the war is going to-day are sometimes forgotten in work. That is the worst part of it and you will know how I am, to have these black thoughts. I rather like the work here though and I am glad I am here.<sup>118</sup>

Willi Bolz, working from a Lethbridge-area hostel described a similar scene, although he acknowledged the difficulty of farm work:

For two weeks I've been in a farm camp with a hundred other comrades, it's beautiful here! We live in tents and work here with the farmers. Every morning, if it does not rain, as it does today, the farmers pick us by car, often we have to drive far, once 50 miles a drive. At the moment we are chopping sugar beet. Of course it does hurt your back at the beginning. But working does not hurt and you can sleep well. So you see, I'm still alive and kicking.<sup>119</sup>

As Bolz suggested, sugar beet work was especially labour-intensive and entailed back-breaking hours in all types of weather throughout the summer months. Beets grew in a bunch which required POWs to spend the summer "thinning and blocking," in which they repeatedly thinned each bunch until only a single, healthy plant remained, and then weeded as needed. In the fall, POWs returned to the beet fields to harvest the crop by hand. Using a machete-like beet knife with a hook at the end of the blade, POWs pulled

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<sup>118</sup> "Translation," August 28, 1944, S.9139-4-10 - P/W - Classification - Camp Intelligence - Chatham, C-5365, RG24, LAC.

<sup>119</sup> "Excerpts from German Army Personnel Mail," June 22, 1945, HQS 9139-4-133 - P/W - Classification - Camp Intelligence - Lethbridge, RG24, C-5365, LAC.



**Figure 52: Prisoners from Camp 133 working on beet fields near Lethbridge. Beet work was done almost entirely by hand and prisoners worked in all types of weather. Note the machete-like sugar beet knives being used by the POWs. A hook on the end of the blade allowed them to pull the beets from the ground, after which the beets were topped. Galt Museum & Archives, P19752908017.**

each beet out individually before removing excess dirt and topping the beet by removing the crown and leaves. Beets were then shipped to nearby sugar factories for processing.<sup>120</sup>

The majority of POWs worked on sugar beet operations, but many found additional work depending on the region and the farms where they were working. For example, when not needed on beet operations, POWs in southwestern Ontario were also employed working on corn, tobacco, and tomato fields; picking apples and peaches; canning tomatoes; and a small party worked at the Wallaceburg Sugar Refinery.<sup>121</sup> Rather than remain idle during the period between beet thinning and harvesting, prisoners in

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<sup>120</sup> John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager, “Workers, Growers and Monopolists: The ‘Labour Problem’ in the Alberta Beet Sugar Industry During the 1930s,” *Labour/Le Travail* 3 (1978): 154.

<sup>121</sup> Camp 10 War Diary, September 30, 1945, Part 1, Vol. 15387, RG24, LAC.

Manitoba helped with general farm work and grain stooking while POWs in Alberta hostels worked on corn, pumpkin, and pea-vine fields and also assisted in helping erect a barn, building root cellars and water ponds, and other “handy jobs.”<sup>122</sup>

Prisoners working on individual farms likewise found themselves engaged in varied work. Although they may have enjoyed greater freedom than those living in a hostel or internment camp, it did come at a cost. In a letter home, Karl Hasse described work on his Strathmore-area farm:

I like it here very well, better than at the camp. I have a nice room with a fine bed, cabinet, dresser, 2 tables, 1 easy chair, running cold and warm water and a daily shower bath. But all this luxury doesn't compensate for my liberty. I have enough to do. I have to feed in the morning and evening 34 calves, 7 cows, 2 horses, 40 pigs and 200 chickens and have to milk 2 cows. There are beside that 30 horses and 30 cows in the field.<sup>123</sup>

Haase was employed on a farm with significant livestock but this was not universal. Work on individual farms varied greatly depending on the region and nature of the farm. Also working near Strathmore, Rudolf Grolmuss was one of two men cultivating a 1,400-acre farm and also helped with dairying and raising cattle and pigs while Emil Tiedje, working near Brooks, found himself working on a farm with “very extended land holdings” and helped care for sixty horses, “very much cattle,” 3,500 sheep and “uncountable” numbers of poultry.<sup>124</sup> Though, as one Strathmore-area POW described, the work was often enjoyed: “There is plenty of everything here. The work is not hard. It is just so that I am always occupied. I get a great deal of pleasure from the animals. My best friends in this country are the little pigs. I have lots of fun with them. I have to look

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<sup>122</sup> “Closing P.O.W. Hostel at Barnwell Sees End of Bounteous Harvest,” *Lethbridge Herald*, December 5, 1945.

<sup>123</sup> Lt. C.T.G. van Taack, “Monthly Intelligence Report, January 1945,” February 1, 1946, HQS 7236-94-6-23 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Monteith, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>124</sup> Lt.-Col. C.G. Carruthers, “Monthly Intelligence Report, April 1945,” May 1, 1945, HQS 7236-94-6-20 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Gravenhurst, C-5416, RG24, LAC; Emil Tiedje to Dr. Warkentine, October 3, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

after about 150. If I am able to avoid it, I won't go back to Camp. We have winter here but it is not very cold."<sup>125</sup>

Prisoners like Haase and Grolmuss had only glimpsed Canada through barred train windows or barbed wire fences and their transfer to farm work marked the first time many set foot in the country outside an internment camp. First impressions of Canada often focused on the size of the country and this did not change once POWs were placed on farms. Prisoners were now working on farms that could measure thousands of acres, dwarfing their German counterparts. After returning to Germany in 1947, one prisoner who had worked at Magrath remarked, "it is so narrow here in Europe – there is no room to move. In our province for example about 300 people are living where in Canada 1 man lives. You can hardly take breath."<sup>126</sup> Farm work and contact with the civilian population also emphasized the stark differences between the food shortages in Germany that POWs read about in newspapers and the mail, and the apparent plentiful supply here. Canadians were rationed and there were shortages of some articles, but it remained clear that Canada was in a much better position.

The hard work shattered some misconceived perceptions that life on a farm would not be difficult, but most prisoners quickly adjusted.<sup>127</sup> As one POW at Chatham described, "The work was, at the start, no fun. The hoeing turnips was fierce. I couldn't get away from the back-ache but now, everything is in order."<sup>128</sup> Once harvest was over, POW working parties ceased and those working from hostels returned to the base camp, often to the disappointment of many POWs. Having enjoyed relative freedom in the

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<sup>125</sup> Lt. C.T.G. van Taack, "Monthly Intelligence Report, January 1945," February 1, 1946, HQS 7236-94-6-23 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Monteith, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>126</sup> Eric to Mr. and Mrs. W.W. Austin, July 10, 1947 in Magrath Trading Co. Ltd., *Magrath Store News*, August 29, 1947, Southern Alberta Community News Collection, University of Lethbridge, <https://digital.library.uleth.ca/digital/collection/sanl>.

<sup>127</sup> J. Schormair to Capt. O. Scharf, October 9, 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>128</sup> "Translation," n.d., S.9139-4-10 - P/W - Classification - Camp Intelligence - Chatham, C-5365, RG24, LAC.

summer months, many found the readjustment to internment camp life quite difficult.<sup>129</sup> With no work programs in the winter, POWs did their best to fill their time while waiting for the following summer. Prisoners employed on individual farms had an advantage in that most farmers retained them through the winter months and some, like Hans Frahm, were even able to relax a little. In a letter to his family, Frahm noted, “During the harvest I hadn’t time for anything else. When I returned from the field I took my bath and went to bed.” Now, with harvest over, “we don’t get up before 0800 hrs and I have finished with feeding at 1830 and have then a free evening. After supper we sit in the living room and listen to the radio. I mostly read, write my mail, or mend my socks.”<sup>130</sup>

It was not just POWs in internment camps who hoped for farm work; many prisoners employed in logging operations dreamed of working on farms after working in the bush for months or years. They imagined it was easier work as well as a respite from plagues of insects and oppressive heat. As early as 1943, the Department of Labour noticed that volunteers for bushwork dropped dramatically when word got out that more POWs were to be made available for farm work. This, Lt.-Col. Fordham believed, did not come from any farming experience but from certain privileges and freedoms that bush life was unable to provide: the potential for more freedom, better living conditions, and seasonal work.<sup>131</sup>

Requests for transfers from the bush were often denied, but this changed when the Department of Labour began closing POWs bush camps in 1946. On return to the base camps, prisoners were offered the chance to spend their summer working on farms. Many prisoners volunteered in order to delay their departure temporarily or, in the case of Paul Mengelberg, hopefully permanently. Mengelberg, the U-Boat crewman captured in 1940, had worked for the Pulpwood Supply Co. near Longlac, Ontario, and his time in the bush

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<sup>129</sup> Capt. A.R. Lendi, “Monthly Information Summary,” December 3, 1945, HQS 7236-94-6-132 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Medicine Hat, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>130</sup> Lt. C.T.G. van Taack, “Monthly Intelligence Report, February 1945,” March 1, 1946, HQS 7236-94-6-23 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Monteith, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>131</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to A. MacNamara, February 16, 1944, Prisoners of War, Labour Projects - Agriculture, File 611.1:21-1, Vol. 156, T-10128, LAC.

had already convinced him that he wanted to settle in Canada after the war. When offered the chance to stay and work on a farm for the summer, he volunteered and was subsequently transferred to the Glencoe farm hostel.<sup>132</sup>

Freedom remained relative and transfers to farms from the bush did not always meet expectations. Having dreamed of the freedom of farm work, some POWs were disappointed when transferred to farm hostels ringed with barbed wire. Prisoner Franz Szutara, for example, was one of sixty-two POWs who had previously worked at the Riding Mountain Park Labour Project and then for Abitibi Power & Paper Co. at Minnipuka. The group requested a transfer for other work in March 1946, arguing “permanent bushwork” was “depressing.” When the camp closed in May, the POWs were offered the opportunity for farm work.<sup>133</sup> Each prisoner volunteered and the Department of Labour requested they all be placed on individual farms considering their work history and anti-Nazi views. Military authorities transferred the group to the Glencoe hostel and the POWs were understandably dismayed to learn that, after almost three years of relative freedom in the bush, they were now to once again live behind barbed wire and work under armed guard. The transition, Szutara complained, almost completely destroyed their morale.<sup>134</sup> In another case, two POWs even declared their transfer from the freedom of a bush camp to the confinement of a farm hostel prompted their decision to escape. Karl Schwarz and Carl Conradi unsuccessfully tried to escape from a Blenheim-area onion farm and, after they were apprehended by police, claimed “wire-sickness” prompted them to escape. Both men had been transferred from bush camps, and Conradi stated he had never tried to escape before. In the bush, he explained, “they had freedom

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<sup>132</sup> Paul Mengelberg, *From Iron Coffin to Freedom North: A Prisoner of War Story* (Geraldton, ON: Times Star c/o Pietsch group, 2015), 80.

<sup>133</sup> Wilhelm Schmidt to Director, POW, March 17, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-92 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Minnipuka, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>134</sup> Franz Szutara to Lt. H.O. Stall, June 18, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-92 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Minnipuka, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.



to wander through the woods and take long boat rides without escort.”<sup>135</sup> Denied such freedom at Chatham, the pair believed escape their next best option.

As for the farmers, the Department of Labour did not know how they would react to POW labour. Farmers in the prairies and southwestern Ontario had found success employing Japanese Canadians but the introduction of POWs raised concerns that race would prompt farmers to choose Germans over Japanese Canadians, leaving the latter without work. Some farmers had already refused to hire Japanese Canadians, but MacNamara emphasized that POWs would not receive any preferential treatment. He issued the following statement:

The welfare and interest of the Japanese will at all times take priority over prisoner of war labour and prisoner of war labour will not be supplied to farmers to displace Japanese labour except where the Japanese are leaving employment of their own accord. Further, prisoner of war labour will not be hired out on terms which will provide unfair competition either to Japanese or other labour in the area.<sup>136</sup>

In Alberta, Japanese Canadians remained the preferred labour source of the Canadian Sugar Factory Ltd as employing POWs, at least initially, entailed additional challenges: they were inexperienced, they required guards, and some groups were only doing a quarter of the work of Japanese Canadians. The company oversaw placement of both POWs and Japanese Canadians so there was no competition but Department of Labour representative Col. Doughty believed no one would give up Japanese Canadian labourers without good reason.<sup>137</sup> With insufficient numbers of Japanese Canadians to meet demand, farmers had little choice but to accept the labour they could get.

In spite of difficult work and long hours, many POWs – especially those employed on individual farms – quickly established good relationships with their

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<sup>135</sup> Lieut. J.J. Zubick to Headquarters, MD2, August 16, 1944, 158.4C23009 (D4) - Int reports on PWs in 23 Internment Camp, DHH.

<sup>136</sup> A. MacNamara to Col. E.S. Doughty, August 28, 1943, 15. General Correspondence concerning POW's, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>137</sup> J.D. Brown to Col. E.S. Doughty, December 31, 1944, 15. General Correspondence concerning POW's, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

employers. Many farmers were happy to have the labour they required, regardless of their backgrounds, and expressed their satisfaction to POWs who worked well. When the Saskatchewan hostels closed in 1944, some of the farmers in the Alida area provided the POWs there with a turkey dinner on the last night of work in appreciation of the help they provided, while one Kent County farmer gave his POWs a bag of cabbage and a dozen oranges in appreciation of their work.<sup>138</sup> Rewarding POWs like this prompted many to work harder. For example, one Lethbridge-area farmer and his wife, pleased with the work the POWs had done that day, gave their POWs ice cream and cake. The prisoners thanked the couple and promised they would work harder the next day, a promise they fulfilled.<sup>139</sup>

Treating POWs well did encourage them to work harder, but authorities worried about farmers crossing the line between a work relationship and fraternization. One inspecting officer at Brooks reported that some farmers were treating POWs not as potential enemies, but as friends.<sup>140</sup> Often working with farmers who were as old as their parents, some POWs were even treated like family. In December 1943, one POW wrote home that he enjoyed his new work, which made the time go by “unbelievably fast.” He explained, “New impressions, new interests, fresh and untouched people give one an amazing impulse and make me forget my former concern that I will lose contact with the normal world in the course of the years. I am working for nice, efficient and considerable people.”<sup>141</sup> One farmer even insisted the POW he had been employing spend Christmas with him and his family and picked him up from the hostel, prompting the POW to write

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<sup>138</sup> QMS Macfarlane, “Intelligence Summary,” July 1944, HQS 7236-94-6-10, T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Chatham, C-5416, RG24, LAC; A.M. Crowle to Dr. F.H. Auld, October 13, 1944, 168.009 (D87) - Corresp, instrs, plans, reports, etc re empl of PW's on Saskatchewan Farms, DHH.

<sup>139</sup> E.S.D. to Col. R.S.W. Fordham, August 4, 1943, 15. General Correspondence concerning POW's, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>140</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham, August 11, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Abitibi Power & Paper - Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>141</sup> Major-General H.F.G. Letson, “Intelligence Report for December, 1943,” P.O.W. Corresp, Notes, Reports, Directives, Misc Papers, 1940-1945, Vol. 1, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM.



**Figure 53: Prisoner Karl Schüppel and the family he worked for in Manitoba. Schüppel (fourth from left) was one of two POWs who lived with and worked for a German family south of Neepawa in 1946. He developed a close relationship with the family, evident in the numerous pictures he kept. His time working in Canada prompted him to apply for permission to stay, but his request was ultimately denied. Author's Collection.**

in a letter home, "They are really wonderfully nice people."<sup>142</sup> Relaxed security restrictions after Germany's surrender also allowed relationships to grow, especially when farmers were permitted to employ POWs from hostels without a guard. Paul Mengelberg, a former U-Boat crewman, was placed in the Glencoe hostel in 1946 and would later recall,

The whole setup was a bit comical because we made friends with the people from Glencoe, that came out in the evenings to see what we looked like, there were many questions, so we felt great. Every morning we had to assemble outside the gate and were sent in groups of four to six, dumped off on various farms to work the field, the farmer had to serve us lunch, this was fantastic, not only did we feel free in a sense we had also the opportunity to learn [sic] more about Canadian way of life and customs. I have worked in sugar beets, in corn and tobacco. It was interesting to see

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<sup>142</sup> Censorship report of letter from F.G. Boehringer to Karte Boehringer, December 1944, translated January 18, 1945, HQS 8118-32 - Interceptions Prisoners of War Mail, C-5130, RG24, LAC.

how each farmer reacted towards us. Some were very cautious, others came as if we had met before, there were some that came from the old country via German where they had been used during the war in different types of work, it was written all over them and a dislike was felt, I can't blame them, in some cases they could not have POW help because of their behavior.

While at Glencoe, Mengelberg worked first for a Hungarian tobacco farmer whose daughter Mengelberg corresponded with after the war, and then on the farm of Mr. McTaggart, a cattle farmer who also grew corn. Impressed with Mengelberg's work, McTaggart offered to help him return to Canada after the war if he so desired.<sup>143</sup>

A handful of POWs, including Gottfried Scriba, even received the rare opportunity to work for relatives in Canada. Transferred to work on his uncle's farm in the Peace River, Alberta, district in December 1945, Scriba spent the next year living and working for family.<sup>144</sup> He later recalled that letters from his uncle "had moved my mind already when I was a boy and it was a dream of mine to spend one year at least on his farm to learn what life there in the Far West (or Northwest) was like. It really sounds like a fairy-tale that this dream was to become true." The next year, he later wrote, was filled with "good and interesting impressions" that he was very glad not to have missed and he remained extremely grateful to those who made the opportunity possible.<sup>145</sup> Despite extremely favourable reactions from the POWs and their families, this practice was discontinued in late December 1945 due to the difficulties in placing and supervising POWs on farms often great distances from internment camps or hostels.

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<sup>143</sup> Mengelberg was transferred to the UK in November 1946 and, after seven years as a POW, he was finally reunited with his family in May 1947. He never gave up on his dreams of returning to Canada and, in September 1951, returned a free man. With the help of the McTaggart family, he and his wife settled in the Glencoe area.

Paul K. Mengelberg, "My PoW Story", unpublished memoir, April 1, 2005, Robert H. Henderson Collection, RAM; Mengelberg, *From Iron Coffin to Freedom North*, 80–83.

<sup>144</sup> Maj.-Gen. A.E. Walford to DOC MD13, December 21, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>145</sup> Gottfried Scriba to David Carter, April 16, 1978, M8072 Behind Canadian Barbed Wire Research Files, Glenbow Museum and Archives.

Fraternization between POWs and their guards was expressly forbidden but some guards and POWs could not escape human nature. In June 1946, for example, a Canadian officer from the Chatham hostel helped arrange a POW to visit his sister, who had come from Chicago, and went so far as to loan the POW one of his own uniforms to wear. When discovered, the officer stated he arranged the meeting “because he had a heart” but admitted his actions could have serious consequences if made public.<sup>146</sup> In another case, after their guard collapsed on a farm near Chatham, the work party of five POWs quickly intervened and brought the guard back to the farmhouse to receive medical attention, with two POWs carrying the guard and another carrying the rifle.<sup>147</sup>

Some farmers saw their POWs as little different from Canadian farm hands, as was demonstrated in April 1944 when an Ottawa-area farmer brought his POW to a bar. It was demonstrated again in September when a Gleichen, Alberta, farmer trusted his POW so much that he left the man alone and completely in charge of the farm while he went on an out-of-province two-week holiday!<sup>148</sup> One farmer in Southern Ontario even gave his POW a shotgun to control woodchucks that were damaging draining tiles. Authorities did allow him to keep the POW, but he was warned not to provide the prisoner with a firearm again.<sup>149</sup> Serious breaches of regulations could mean POWs would be withdrawn from farms but, despite warnings, they continued until the last POWs left Canadian farms. In November 1946, for example, military authorities discovered two POWs from the Barnwell hostel in a civilian’s house in Lethbridge and then learned farmers had occasionally brought POWs into their houses for a beer.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Cst. A.B. Spencer, “Prisoner of War Camp, Chatham, Ontario,” July 26, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>147</sup> Camp 10 War Diary, July 13, 1945, Part 1, Vol. 15387, RG24, LAC.

<sup>148</sup> “Nazi Prisoner Gets No Beer in Tavern When Soldier, ex-Soldier Lodge Protest,” *Globe and Mail*, April 20, 1944; Letter to Secretary DND, August 1, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>149</sup> Sgt. W.J. Dickson, “Henry Thomas Carter,” August 14, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>150</sup> “Military Raps ‘Fraternizing’,” *Lethbridge Herald*, November 4, 1946.

Fraternization and an increasing friendliness between POWs and farmers did give rise to concern, and, after two POWs escaped from farms in Southwestern Ontario in mid-1946, the RCMP questioned the “general laxity” of farmers’ control over POWs. An investigating officer attributed this laxity to two factors: first, authorities responsible for security had failed to properly inform farmers of the regulations stipulated in their contract and thus farmers only had a faint understanding of their responsibilities; and second, farmers had an economic motivation for treating POWs well. Employing a POW cost the average farmer between \$80 or \$90 per month (including \$35 paid to government plus board, room, and laundry) but POWs were generally only working to pay for tobacco and some necessities, factors which the officer believed rarely motivated POWs to work to their fullest extent. Trying to get the most work from their POW and thereby protecting their investment, many farmers afforded POWs privileges contrary to their contract.<sup>151</sup>

More concerning was fraternization between POWs and Canadian women. Internment camps were masculine spaces; a very small number of women had been interned during the war and they had been kept separate from their male counterparts. Once placed behind barbed wire, POWs only had contact with women through the mail. Work brought prisoners into direct contact with women for the first time in years and it took little time before prisoners made inappropriate or unwanted advances. At Brooks, for example, police received reports of POWs harassing teenage girls “by hugging and wanting to kiss them,” including one case where a POW hugged a young woman and suggested they have a child together.<sup>152</sup> Another prisoner, Alexander Scharnitzky, managed to mail a letter to a woman he had seen at a picnic held on the Strathmore-area farm he was working on. Hoping to get to know her better, his letter tried to explain his current state:

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<sup>151</sup> Cst J.D. Dunbar, “POW 13678 Lund, Otto, and 43403, Lund H.,” July 25, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>152</sup> Cpl. C. Rausthorpe, “Compl. Of George J. Maddill - Rolling Hills, Alta.,” February 15, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

Can you understand what it means to me to be free after so many horrible years and then meet such a nice lady as you are? I don't feel ashamed to admit that I had a sleepless night last night. I like your appearance, your voice, I like anything of you very much. When I am writing to you now tonight, I am asking whether I may be permitted to enter into correspondence with you.

Scharnitzky suggested they meet at a movie theatre, but his hopes were dashed when she reported the matter to police.<sup>153</sup> As fraternization was strictly forbidden, prisoners caught making contact with women were transferred back to the base camp.

Scharnitzky's advances were unwanted, but some Canadians proved more amenable to fraternization with the enemy. After POWs Karl Schwartz and Karl Conradi made an unsuccessful escape from a Blenheim, Ontario-area farm in August 1944, the investigating officer discovered the POWs had befriended the farmer's wife and daughter, with whom the POWs had exchanged photographs, as well as with three other eighteen-year-old girls. The farmer's wife informed the officer she provided the POWs with salads, cakes, milk, coffee, and "other comforts," as, she explained, "They are nice boys and I told them that if they worked I would call them all my stepsons."<sup>154</sup> Another Chatham-area farmer admitted that he and his family had befriended POW Willie Diekhoener, who they had employed in the summer, and his wife had corresponded with the POW throughout the summer. Letters had been mailed through civilian channels and, thanks to laxity on behalf of the guards, Diekhoener and his comrades were able to regularly meet with civilians. Diekhoener's letters suggested an innocent relationship existed between him and the family and that he was simply happy for an opportunity to live outside an internment camp. A letter sent to the family after they considered employing him in the winter sheds some light on this:

I must say that I was really excited to learn that there is a possibility of my staying there with you for a couple of months even if it seems to be somewhat difficult. Dear Mrs. Vsetula I think I need not assure you that I

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<sup>153</sup> Const. C.T. Ross, "Civilian War Prisoners - Rockyford, Alberta," July 24, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>154</sup> Lt. F.M. Christie to Camp Commandant, Chatham, August 10, 1944, S.9139-4-10 - P/W - Classification - Camp Intelligence - Chatham, C-5365, RG24, LAC.

wouldn't make any trouble at all if I could only get a chance to get out of the wire-fence. For more than four years I have been waiting for a chance to live again and without wire-fence, guards and camp regulations even if it could be only for a few weeks or days you simply can't imagine how a man feels who has not for a long time been able to catch a glimpse of normal life. There is one thing I want you to know. I would rather hang myself than run out on you if you can manage to get me for a few months. I wouldn't mind at all have one of you (you or your husband) watching me on the contrary I'd even like it; As long as it does not bother you it's ok with me.<sup>155</sup>

Diekhoener never received his wish for he and his comrades were transferred when Camp 10 closed in November and there was no further correspondence with the family. The police reported the family was "very repentant" and "very upset" and were trying to make amends for their actions.<sup>156</sup> No further action was taken against the family, and they were even allowed to employ another POW on their farm in 1946.

Other relationships proved more serious. In 1944, guards spotted a Ridgeway woman and her daughter approach the fence surrounding Camp 10 (Chatham) and wave to the POWs. The guard threatened to report the woman, whereupon she became "very insulting" and said she "did'nt [sic] care about any mounties and would do as she damned well pleased as she was paying partly for the road."<sup>157</sup> A police investigation subsequently revealed the mother and daughter had fraternized with POWs at "every opportunity." The investigating officer reported,

These people I am informed have been following the Prisoners from work project to work project and have been seen talking to and in some cases have left the fields with the Prisoners and remained away for an hour or so, the general opinion is that the women are only following the prisoners

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<sup>155</sup> Willie to Mrs. Vsetula, October 20, 1944, HQS 7236-94-5 - Correspondence with RCMP re Canadian civilians, C-5415, RG24, LAC.

<sup>156</sup> A/Cpl. S.W. Greent, "Mrs. Tony Vsetula, Blenheim, Ont.," November 14, 1944, HQS 7236-94-5 - Correspondence with RCMP re Canadian civilians, C-5415, RG24, LAC.

<sup>157</sup> QMS Macfarlane, "Intelligence Summary for October," November 1, 1944, HQS 7236-94-6-10, T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Chatham, C-5416, RG24, LAC.



around for the purpose of sex relationship. Some of the Guards I might say appear to be very lax in their duties in this respect.<sup>158</sup>

The investigating officer recommended the local detachment keep a “close check” on the family. The Chatham camp closed before significant action could be taken but one of the women continued to correspond with POWs after they were transferred to an Abitibi Power & Paper Co. camp. One prisoner even asked military authorities for permission to write her, as he intended to marry her. Permission was denied.<sup>159</sup>

Despite warnings, fraternization continued in the following years. In October 1945, one woman made repeated attempts – almost every day for a week – to contact POWs working in Blenheim but was prevented from doing so by the guards.<sup>160</sup> Police were able to identify the woman, who was twenty-one and married, and discovered two letters from POWs in her car which, the police described, were “very amorous type full of affection and silly nonsense.” One POW had written, “I know that we belong together for all times... My dearest darling we’ll be the happiest couple in the world as long as we live.” She later admitted having met with the POWs while working on nearby fields that summer. Claiming it was “just a silly love affair,” she promised it would cease.<sup>161</sup> In his autobiography, Heinrich Hengy claimed to have had a brief relationship with his employer, a young widow who made excuses for them to be alone and even lent him her car. But the relationship was interrupted by his transfer to the UK.<sup>162</sup> While it is difficult to determine the extent of POW relationships, there were a number of reported

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<sup>158</sup>A/Cpl. S.W. Green, “Mrs Mary VanNeck et al., Blenheim, Ont., Defence of Canada Regulations,” October 30, 1944, HQS 7236-94-5 - Correspondence with RCMP re Canadian civilians, C-5415, RG24, LAC.

<sup>159</sup> HQS 7236-94-5 - Correspondence with RCMP re Canadian civilians, C-5415, RG24, LAC.

<sup>160</sup> Cst. D.B. McCannell, “Unknown Person Attempting to Contact German Prisoners of War,” October 26, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>161</sup> Cpl. S.W. Green, “Unknown Person Attempting to Contact German PW,” November 12, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>162</sup> Heinrich Hengy, *Mein himmlischer Begleiter: aus dem Leben eines Obergefreiten des Afrikacorps im II. Weltkrieg* (Norderstedt, DE: Books on Demand GmbH, 2008), 134–36.

pregnancies. For example, the Strathmore Legion protested that two local girls had relations with POWs and were now pregnant.<sup>163</sup>

This is not to say every POW had such favourable relationships with civilians or even their employers. One prisoner requested a transfer after he discovered he was not religious enough to satisfy his employer and complained his hard work went unappreciated.<sup>164</sup> Another encountered problems after he was placed with a Mennonite couple living in a two-room farm house, with rooms divided only by a curtain. As the intelligence officer noted, “PW became embarrassed by certain sounds he could not help overhearing during the night.”<sup>165</sup> Working near Cyrville, Ontario one POW complained after being told to go to the toilet in the open or behind the barn or shed. There was only one small wash basin for the entire family, bedsheets and coverlets were dirty and in tatters, and he was working between fourteen and sixteen hours a day. As the farmer and his family were used to the poor living conditions, he asked the complaints not be shared with them and hurt their feelings; he just requested transfer to another farm.<sup>166</sup> The Department of Labour often arranged for these POWs to be relocated to farms with more suitable accommodations, but some POWs were simply unwilling to wait for official intervention. After a Balzac-area farmer requested the transfer of his two POWs back to the Strathmore hostel in June 1944, the POWs, rather than wait for an escort, made their way back to Strathmore of their own accord. Police later discovered the pair hitching a ride with a civilian, whereupon the POWs explained they left on account of poor food,

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<sup>163</sup> RCMP Report, “Labour Project - Strathmore, Alberta,” March 5, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC; Lieberwirth, *Alter Mann und Corned Beef*, 216.

<sup>164</sup> Lt. C.T.G. van Taack, “Monthly Intelligence Report, February 1945,” March 1, 1945, HQS 7236-94-6-23 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Monteith, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>165</sup> The prisoner also complained that the farmer did not approve of smoking and did not serve meat or coffee. Capt. A.R. Lendi, “Monthly Information Summary,” June 6, 1944, HQS 7236-94-6-132 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Medicine Hat, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>166</sup> Wolfram Hierba to Commandant, Camp 32, July 29, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-5 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Metcalfe, Ont., C-5381, RG24, LAC.

long hours, no toilet facilities, and poor accommodations. Emphasizing they had no desire to escape, the POWs hoped to arrange work on another farm.<sup>167</sup>

Some prisoners even retaliated against injustices, real or imagined. Heinrich Hengy was one of a group of POWs working on a farm near Chatham in 1946 and trouble began when the farmer refused to provide the men with a lunch. His comrades suggested they quit work and inform the spokesman, but Hengy felt a stronger message was needed. Hengy suggested they properly hoe the first twenty metres of each row, so it appeared as though the work was done correctly, but, for the remainder of each row, remove the beets and leave only weeds behind.<sup>168</sup> Whether Hengy faced repercussion for his actions is unknown, but the farmer no doubt received the message.

Complaints from POWs working on farms were remarkably rare, especially considering the number received from those employed in the bush. The chief complaint regarding farm work only came with a reduction of POW rations in mid-1945. With heavy emphasis on food production for war-torn Europe, the Department of National Defence authorized a subsequent reduction in rations for POWs on July 16. Three days after the new ration scale went into effect, Camp 10 (Chatham) staff noted “considerable worry” on behalf of the POWs and the spokesman reported increasing numbers of men unable to continue working due to feeling feeble or sick.<sup>169</sup> The spokesman emphasized his men wanted to work and asked for farmers to be allowed to provide POWs with a midday meal and POWs be allowed to purchase food articles available at local markets.<sup>170</sup> Likewise, at Centralia, Günter Traube complained of the reduced rations, arguing he and his comrades had volunteered to improve their position through work but

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<sup>167</sup> Cst. T.A. horn, “POW No 13266 Karl Wolak and POW No 000089, Fred Zietz,” June 14, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>168</sup> Hengy, *Mein himmlischer Begleiter*, 132–33.

<sup>169</sup> Camp 10 War Diary, July 16-19, 1945, Part 1, Vol. 15387, RG24, LAC.

<sup>170</sup> E. Hahn to Director of Prisoners of War, July 30, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

now did not have enough food to sustain them working eight-hour days.<sup>171</sup> Military authorities, recognizing that continuing with the reduced ration scale would only invite further trouble, agreed to increase rations for those working.<sup>172</sup>

A second wave of complaints came in 1946 as Canada began transferring POWs to the United Kingdom. Many EMS in Alberta and Ontario were dismayed to find that their comrades who had stayed in the base camps were being repatriated but they had to stay and work. As these EMS had volunteered for work with the understanding that those who worked well would be among the first to return home, they were not surprisingly upset with having to stay in Canada. The Camp 23 spokesman, noting that some had been POWs for almost seven years, reported, “their former willingness to cooperate with the Canadian authorities is now the cause of punishment, i.e. the delay of their repatriation,” and therefore requested they be considered for immediate repatriation.<sup>173</sup> Military authorities eventually relented and transferred those no longer willing to return to the base camp to await repatriation.<sup>174</sup>

The Department of Labour did receive complaints from farmers, generally regarding unsatisfactory workers, but these also appear to have been few in number. A few complaints were received in 1946 after the Department of Labour began allowing POWs to work on farms in Ontario without guards. These prisoners saw the lack of supervision as an opportunity to slow or cease work unless the farmer provided them with

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<sup>171</sup> Traube stated they received porridge and bread with 1/3 ounce of butter or sometimes marmalade or syrup for breakfast; four or five slices of bread, some cheese, or a small piece of meat at dinner; and three or four potatoes, beans or other vegetables, a small piece of meat, and a bowl of soup for supper. Günter Traube to Col. Fordham, July 18, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>172</sup> Maj.-Gen. H.A. Young to D.M. (Army), July 23, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>173</sup> Max Wenzlawski to Director, Prisoners of War, June 20, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>174</sup> “Nominal Roll of PW returned from Strathmore, Alta to Camp 23 Montieth, Ont.,” July 11, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

extra food or supplies.<sup>175</sup> Unsatisfactory POWs – or in this case blackmailing ones – were transferred back to the hostel or base camp and, in serious cases, blacklisted from future work opportunities. The Department of Labour investigated all complaints but discovered some were unfounded. For example, one Lethbridge-area farmer complained of unsatisfactory workers, but an investigation revealed this was an attempt to hire the POWs at a lower rate.<sup>176</sup>

Farmers were generally content to have labourers, regardless of where they came from, but not all Canadians were so accepting of POW employment. The departments of Labour and National Defence received numerous complaints from individuals and organizations, ranging from calls for increased security to the complete removal of POWs from Canada. The placement of POWs on individual farms, for example, prompted a wave of protest throughout Southwestern Ontario. The Canadian Legion condemned the decision to place POWs on farms without military guards, citing concerns of escape and threat to public safety. The Corporation of the City of Chatham adopted a resolution supporting the Legion's stance and the City of London and the City of Hamilton soon followed suit, adopting their own resolutions to support Chatham and forwarding them to their Members of Parliament.<sup>177</sup> Local, provincial, and federal governments determined the availability of POW labour, but, as potential employers, local producers often had a determining vote in the future of POWs in their region. In March 1945, for example, the Department of Labour and provincial officials approved four 150-man hostels in

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<sup>175</sup> DOC MD1 to Defensor, August 21, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>176</sup> Another farmer at Chatham complained of unsatisfactory POWs, but an inspection of his farm revealed the farmer's cows had been eating the beet tops, thereby preventing POWs from easily – and quickly – harvesting them. E.S.D. to Col. R.S.W. Fordham, August 4, 1943, 15. General Correspondence concerning POW's, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC; Camp 10 War Diary, October 31, 1945, Part 1, Vol. 15387, RG24, LAC.

<sup>177</sup> Nora Toll to P. Manross, December 13, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC; J.P. Berry to W.L. Mackenzie King, February 4, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

Ontario's Norfolk County.<sup>178</sup> Farmers there voted overwhelmingly against the decision, and the proposed hostels were abandoned.<sup>179</sup> After three POWs escaped from Kent County farms that summer, the *Simcoe Reformer* reported Norfolk residents were glad they had turned down POW labour and remained confident POWs were neither needed nor wanted as, the article noted, "Norfolk's sons" were expected to return the following season.<sup>180</sup> Yet, despite this opposition, over forty POWs were placed on individual farms in Norfolk County in 1946.<sup>181</sup>

On the Prairies, the Alberta Federation of Labour also passed a resolution protesting the Canadian government giving POWs jobs that should be given to Canadians, especially returned service personnel, while the Winnipeg and District Trades and Labor Council called for the removal of German POWs.<sup>182</sup> The latter claimed there were thousands of Canadians looking for work and the continued employment of POWs would only "aggravate an already serious situation."<sup>183</sup> Specifically referring to the use of POWs on Manitoba sugar beet fields, the council argued it would be "rather ironical" for returning servicemen to discover German POWs working in "slave labor battalions" employed on work that should be given to Canadians.<sup>184</sup> Authorities did take these complaints into consideration but, despite claims to the contrary, Canada remained locked in a labour shortage. Prisoners were here to stay – at least for the time being.

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<sup>178</sup> The hostels were to be located at Yarmouth Centre, Langdon, Windham Centre, and Courtland. A. MacNamara to A. Ross, March 17, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-93 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens-Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Norfolk County, C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>179</sup> Maj.-Gen. A.E. Walford to DOC MD2, May 9, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-93 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens-Dept. of Labour - Work Project - Norfolk County, C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>180</sup> "Can Harvest Crops Without Nazi Help," *Globe and Mail*, September 8, 1945.

<sup>181</sup> See POW placements, November 1945 to November 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>182</sup> "Labor Protests Use Prisoners of War," *Lethbridge Herald*, November 21, 1945.

<sup>183</sup> V.B. Anderson to W.L. MacKenzie King, February 14, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>184</sup> V.B. Anderson to H.P Crabb, February 13, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

The departments of Labour and National Defence rarely gave in to public pressure but individual farmers employing POWs and companies supplying POW camps felt the effects of these complaints more strongly. At Camp 10, for example, camp staff sought out a local dairy to supply ice cream shortly after the camp opened. The Borden Company refused the request, giving no reason, but the London-based Silverwood Company not only agreed to provide ice cream but also to install an “electric container” in the camp. However, within days of Silverwood’s first delivery, word spread through the area that POWs were receiving ice cream and the response was not favourable. On June 5, 1944, the *Windsor Star* published an interview with a Kent County merchant who stated he was unable to meet demand for ice cream due to low quotas. “There’s nothing,” the merchant stated, “that makes one feel worse than to have a little kiddie come into your store with a nickel... and you have to tell him that you have no cones or frostbites.” Despite this, he continued, a local dairy was providing a “brand new ice cream cabinet” to the POW camp and supplying “our guests” with “all the ice cream they may order!” The newspaper, declaring the POWs had been “coddled too darned much,” concluded,

‘It’s not our desire to get more ice cream for ourselves if there is a genuine scarcity of necessary materials, but we feel our own people should be given preference,’ was [the merchant’s] parting shot. ‘Especially over these fellows who only a few months ago were only too willing to take the life of your father or ours, or to stick a dagger in the back of either our son or yours.’ Wonder how hot it was at Stalag So-and-so yesterday – and how much ice cream our Canadian, British and American boys had?<sup>185</sup>

The “ice-cream-for-Nazis” story spread rapidly and, according to the paper, prompted “snorts of indignation from here, there, and everywhere.” But the mother of a Canadian serviceman interned in Germany felt differently. In a letter to the paper, she argued Canada was fighting to “make a better world for future generations to live in. To teach our enemies to hold brotherly love toward other nations. To help them realize that we must all have kindly tolerance towards all men.” As long as POWs were not depriving ice cream from Canadian children, she believed Canada must teach by example.<sup>186</sup> But her

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<sup>185</sup> R.M. Harrison, “Now,” *Windsor Star*, June 5, 1944.

<sup>186</sup> R.M. Harrison, “Now,” *Windsor Star*, June 13, 1944.

opinion fell on deaf ears. In the face of “vicious” rumours that children were being denied ice cream on account of the POWs, the Silverwood Company informed Camp 10 they were no longer able to supply ice cream, adding they believed the slander campaign originated from disgruntled Borden Co. employees.<sup>187</sup>

Like the ice cream incident, most complaints centred on the apparent liberties – real or exaggerated – that POWs enjoyed while working on farm projects, especially on individual farms. Complaints increased as prisoners were spotted in local communities, sometimes escorted by the farmers but more often not. Prisoners working on farms near Brooks and Carleton County were especially notorious for visiting local communities and dances, much to the chagrin of local residents. Prisoners had clear instructions not to leave their farm without being escorted by their employer, but some either ignored their orders or attended these dances alongside their employers, who also often provided them with civilian clothing.<sup>188</sup> At Osgoode, for example, police discovered POWs attending a dance in September 1944 and, after interviewing residents, learned that POWs also frequented the local ice cream parlour, wore civilian clothing, visited other farms, and spent Sundays swimming and boating at the local beach.<sup>189</sup> Once aware of the matter, police and military authorities kept a closer watch on these POWs and transferred offenders back to the base camp. Employers also began keeping a closer watch on their POWs as they did not want to lose their farm hands.

At Brooks, residents had complained of POW visits to the town since their arrival in 1943 and, despite the best efforts of military authorities to curtail them, the visits persisted. Most proved harmless, but, in February 1945, Brooks RCMP detachment received notice of two prisoners spotted wearing civilian clothing, attending shows,

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<sup>187</sup> “Chatham Internment Camp,” June 19, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC; Letter from Consul General, July 5, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>188</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham, October 19, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-5 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Metcalfe, Ont., C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>189</sup> Cst. J.F. Smith, “German Prisoners of War, Osgoode, Ont.,” September 18, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-5 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Metcalfe, Ont., C-5381, RG24, LAC.



drinking alcohol, and being “a little too friendly” with locals. As the area had been predominantly settled by Germans, the investigating officer concluded that such liberties were to be expected when POWs were working for German families.<sup>190</sup>

Prisoners at Strathmore were just as troublesome. Consider the number and wide range of POW-related incidents the Strathmore RCMP had to deal with in the summer of 1944 alone: a farmer leaving his POW alone for two weeks, a POW visiting Strathmore in his Merchant Navy uniform, Hutterite farmers bringing POWs to a beer parlour in civilian clothing, POWs roaming through town and associating with young women, POWs attending Hutterite weddings at Rosebud where they sang and drank with civilians, unsatisfactory POW workers billeted in the Strathmore Chinese food restaurant without adequate supervision, two POWs stealing a truck, one POW offering two others in police custody a drink of scotch from a bottle in his possession, POWs meeting without approval, POWs attending movies in civilian clothing, POWs wearing civilian clothing, one POW attending a stampede, and POWs visiting each other’s farms.<sup>191</sup> Residents were, according to labour Supervisor J.D. Brown, “not too well pleased” and the local Legion was “definitely opposed” to the prisoners’ presence. Brown argued much of the opposition had come from unfounded rumours but District Officer Commanding MD13 Brigadier Harvey believed the situation was “out of hand.”<sup>192</sup> He criticized equally farmers for failing to fulfil their contracts and the Department of Labour for not enforcing these contracts. The town of Strathmore considered placing the town off-limits to POWs, a decision supported by the Legion, and town residents signed a petition and forwarded it to the Department of Labour.<sup>193</sup> In the meantime, the *Strathmore Standard* warned farmers to heed regulations and, citing farmers who were

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<sup>190</sup> Cst. E.F. Lewis, “German Prisoners of War - Beiseker District,” February 12, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>191</sup> “List of Instances of Misconduct,” n.d., HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>192</sup> J.D. Brown to Col. E.S. Doughty, December 31, 1944, 15. General Correspondence concerning POW's, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>193</sup> Brig. F.M.W. Harvey to Secretary, DND, August 16, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

“turning their prisoners of war loose” and providing them with civilian clothing, threatened pressure would be brought not on the POWs but the farmers themselves. The article also announced a “responsible party” would begin patrolling Strathmore streets to prevent POW visits.<sup>194</sup> Despite prisoners irking residents, authorities remained hesitant to introduce stricter regulations so as not to endanger the success of the project. Department of Labour official Col. Doughty recommended that, as long as farmers remained happy, regulations remain unchanged.<sup>195</sup>

Not all farmers were so content with POWs leaving the farm. When two POWs working on farms in Southwestern Ontario planned a farewell party for themselves in London in October 1946, their employers refused to give permission for them to attend. When the POWs ignored these orders, both were apprehended and transferred.<sup>196</sup> While in this case the POWs were disciplined by military authorities, in other cases farmers took matters in their own hands. When two POWs working on Port Arthur-area farms attended a dance held in honour of a returned serviceman in August 1945, one local resident, unsurprisingly perturbed by their presence, reported the matter to local RCMP. The police took no action as the officers learned the employers of both POWs had strongly reprimanded the POWs for attending.<sup>197</sup> In another case in Southern Ontario, a farmer simply requested his POW be returned to Fingal after the prisoner ignored his order to remain on the farm and instead visited a nearby town.<sup>198</sup>

Despite POW contact with civilians and access to alcohol, violence was uncommon. A rare incident occurred in July 1944 when a group of POWs and a civilian

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<sup>194</sup> “Warning to Employers of War Labour,” *Strathmore Standard*, August 10, 1944.

<sup>195</sup> LG.S. Doughty to Maj. T.O.’B. Gore-Hickman, February 12, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>196</sup> Cst. S.N. Ritchie, “Andrew Bilty, RR No. 3, Rodney, Ontario,” November 1, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>197</sup> Cst. A.W. Frances, “Employment of Prisoners of War on Farms,” September 4, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-108 - Dept. of Labour Work Projects - PW Employed on Individual Farms - Port Arthur Area, C-5387, RG24, LAC.

<sup>198</sup> W. Ellison to Internment Camp, Fingal, December 12, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

farmer were involved in a drunken bout near Strathmore, Alberta. The three POWs, in varying states of intoxication, had overheard the fourth, a forty-seven-year-old civilian internee, mention he was an anti-Nazi and later jumped and beat him. After the POWs threatened to hang the man, a farmer attempted to stop the fight, but the three POWs beat him as well. Military authorities promptly arrested the three POWs and transferred them to Monteith to face punishment.<sup>199</sup>

Violence targeting POWs was extremely rare but did occur. For example, following the Japanese surrender in August 1945, a work group was being driven through Chatham when a POW was struck in the face by a bottle thrown by a reveller.<sup>200</sup> Not long after, guards at Glencoe reported five shots fired at POWs working on tobacco fields by an unknown person or persons, prompting a police investigation.<sup>201</sup> Returning servicemen were also a source of contention. As some farmers had allowed POWs to visit local communities without escort, municipal authorities at Rodney and West Lorne, Ontario, believed the presence of POWs would invite trouble when servicemen returned home.<sup>202</sup> The concern was not without basis. In mid-1945, an inebriated serviceman on leave approached POWs on a farm near Orford, Ontario, and ignored the guard's orders to leave. The man attempted to climb a fence separating him from the POWs and then intimated that he was going to strike the guard with a beer bottle. The guard then loaded a round into his rifle and once again ordered the man to leave, at which point the man's companions intervened, escorting him back to their car and driving away.<sup>203</sup> An investigation revealed the serviceman had recently returned from four years' service overseas, where he had witnessed "many shocking scenes" and, the investigating officer

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<sup>199</sup> "Statement of #362, Prisoner of War (Civilian Internee) Fritz Rudolph Konekamp, Age 47," July 24, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>200</sup> Camp 10 War Diary, August 14, 1945, Part 1, Vol. 15387, RG24, LAC.

<sup>201</sup> Camp 10 War Diary, September 3, 1945, Part 1, Vol. 15387, RG24, LAC.

<sup>202</sup> Maj. K.A. Stewart to Director, Prisoners of War, April 17, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>203</sup> Cpl. S.W. Green, "Interfering with German Prisoners of War," July 23, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

described, “the sight of the German prisoners enjoying peaceful livelihood in Canada had provoked him at the time.”<sup>204</sup>

Interactions like that at Orford were exceptionally rare and authorities remained far more concerned that contact between POWs and civilians would help facilitate prisoners’ attempts to escape. Police and military authorities believed some POWs had ulterior motives in befriending Canadians, namely in obtaining clothing and other supplies to effect an escape. The widespread nature of farm projects complicated attempts to ensure POWs remained on the farms and in uniform. For example, when guards searched the baggage of T.H. Maehl during his return to Monteith from Strathmore, they found a picture of him and another prisoner in Calgary in civilian clothing. The other POW admitted that Maehl’s employer had brought the pair to Calgary, whereupon they roamed the city throughout the day without escort and later took in a movie.<sup>205</sup> Cracking down on POWs in possession of civilian clothing and currency, guards conducted surprise inspections of POW belongings, transferring POWs found with illicit goods back to the base camp and barring their employers from hiring further POWs. In May 1945, a raid of the Brooks hostel found twelve POWs in possession of almost \$200 – one individual possessed \$93.77 – and many articles of civilian clothing.<sup>206</sup> A search of individual farms also revealed significant amounts of civilian work clothing, but farmers argued they were necessary as the Department of Labour had failed to replace worn-out articles. The farmers, however, were unable to explain the dress shoes, fancy jackets and pants, multi-coloured socks, straw hats, felt hats, sports jackets, and civilian suits also found in the POWs’ possession.<sup>207</sup> A similar search in Ontario revealed one POW had

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<sup>204</sup> Cpl. L.F. Wilson, “Interfering with German Prisoners of War,” August 4, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>205</sup> Capt. L.B. Yule to Secretary, DND, August 28, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>206</sup> Capt. G.A. Kitchen to HQ MD13, May 5, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>207</sup> Capt. G.A. Kitchen to DOC MD13, May 25, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-6 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Brooks, Alberta, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

purchased a suit in Windsor with his employer's permission and had worn it to the movies and church services in Tilbury. The farmer confessed he felt sorry for the prisoner and did not like him attending church in his POW uniform. Nonetheless, authorities seized the suit and returned the POW to Camp 10 (Fingal).<sup>208</sup>

The reduced security measures of farm labour granted POWs numerous opportunities for escape, but no mass escape attempts occurred. Escapes were instead limited to isolated incidents, often involving one or two prisoners. Most were unsuccessful. The first such recorded escape attempt only came in 1944 when Fritz Fuchs left a farm near Wallaceburg, Ontario, in June but police arrested him in Detroit the next day.<sup>209</sup> Not long after, Horst Kurdass and Adolf Becker cut a hole through the barbed wire fence of Camp 10 (Chatham) and took off, but they too were captured in Detroit soon after.<sup>210</sup> This small surge in escapes from Southwestern Ontario prompted an investigation of the screening process used in selecting POWs for farm work at Chatham and it quickly revealed the process was far from perfect: fifteen prisoners at Chatham had attempted an escape within the previous eighteen months.<sup>211</sup> Attempts continued, and the most successful of the year came in late July when Helmuth Hack, Hans Eultgem, and Friedrich Potrick escaped from a Chatham-area corn field. Eultgem and Potrick proceeded east and, posing as Swiss nationals, found work on a tobacco farm before moving on to Toronto where they spent most of their money on "wine and women." Hack proved more ambitious, eventually making his way to Vancouver. However, a nationwide newspaper campaign in November 1944 featuring the photos of wanted POWs proved the end of their freedom as the trio were arrested within twenty-four hours of each other.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Cst. S.W. Green, "Angus Stowe," January 5, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>209</sup> Camp 10 War Diary, June 2, 1944, Part 1, Vol. 15387, RG24, LAC.

<sup>210</sup> Camp 10 War Diary, June 15, 1944, Part 1, Vol. 15387, RG24, LAC.

<sup>211</sup> Col. H.N. Streight to Commandant, Monteith, June 16, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>212</sup> Hack was recognized by the proprietor of the hotel he was staying in while one of Potrick's coworkers recognized his photo and notified police. Cst. W.C. Wallace, "Helmut Francis Hack," November 14, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC; Cspl. H.R. Jenkins, "Hans Eultgem, Helmut Hack, and Frederick

Most prisoners made their escapes while working away from camp, often slipping away unnoticed into a neighbouring field, but a group in Chatham attempted a more traditional escape. Prisoners there dug a tunnel underneath one of the tents leading towards the fence, but guards caught on after they noticed loose earth in the enclosure. A search soon revealed an 8-foot tunnel as well as digging tools, an electric cable and light bulb, and assorted clothing. The six POWs occupying the tent were promptly returned to Monteith.<sup>213</sup> Transfer to base camp was the most common form of punishment but prisoners could also be liable for criminal charges. August Kaehler and Otto Stolski stole a truck during their escape attempt from Strathmore and, following their capture, the pair were charged with theft and break and enter. They subsequently received twelve and fifteen months of hard labour at the Lethbridge Provincial Gaol.<sup>214</sup>

Escape attempts from farms were relatively rare in 1944, but there was a marked increase following Germany's surrender in May 1945. This can partly be attributed to an increased number of POWs employed, but many of these attempts were strongly motivated by a desire to remain in Canada, or at least the Americas. Parts of Germany were in ruins and half the country occupied by Soviet forces, so some POWs hoped to begin a new life in Canada. In August 1945, for example, five POWs escaped from farms in Southwestern Ontario; all of them were recaptured. Each admitted they had no intention of returning to Germany and had escaped in an attempt to remain in the Americas.<sup>215</sup>

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Patrick," November 20, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>213</sup> QMS Macfarlane, "Intelligence Summary for August 1944," August 1944, HQS 7236-94-6-10, T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Chatham, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>214</sup> Col. H.C. Greer to Secretary, DND, August 10, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC; Commanding 13 to Secretary, DND, August 10, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC; Col. H.N. Streight to W.J. Cantewell, October 6, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3-58 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Strathmore, Alta., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

<sup>215</sup> Major Bruce Thompson, "Information and Intelligence Summary," August 1945, HQS 7236-94-6-10, T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Chatham, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

Anti-Nazi prisoners were especially interested in staying in Canada. Harassed by their pro-Nazi comrades, many had been placed in protective custody and were among the first placed on individual farms. Their work and interactions with the public had convinced many to try and stay in Canada to begin anew. As all POWs working near Metcalfe, Ontario, were anti-Nazis, escapes from this region were strongly motivated by the desire not to return to Germany. Anti-Nazis George Cross and Karl Linke left their respective farms at Britannia Bay and Bells Corners on August 31, 1945 with the intention of avoiding repatriation. The pair made it all the way to New York City via bicycle, rowboat, and train, but, after two days in the city, they ran out of money and turned themselves in.<sup>216</sup>

Many prisoners clung to rumours that the Canadian government would permit selected individuals to remain in the country and work. Hope dwindled when Canada began transferring POWs to the United Kingdom in 1946, prompting more to escape in a final bid for freedom. Among them were brothers Otto and Henry Lund, both EMS working on farms in Southwestern Ontario. Having lost his wife and son in the war, Henry had no desire to return to Germany and, after learning he was to be repatriated soon, sought out his brother and attempted to escape. Although the pair succeeded in crossing into Michigan, police apprehended them soon after.<sup>217</sup>

Other attempts proved more successful. On June 2, 1946, Wolfgang Vrieslander disappeared from a farm near Embro, Ontario. The twenty-nine-year-old succeeded in evading capture for months but was eventually apprehended in Cloverdale, British Columbia, in January 1947 and transferred to the UK shortly after.<sup>218</sup> Perhaps

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<sup>216</sup> Director, Criminal Investigation to Director, Prisoners of War, September 11, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-5 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Metcalfe, Ont., C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>217</sup> D/Cpl. R.L. Woodhouse, "POW 13678 Hund, Otto and 43403 Lund, H.," July 10, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC.

<sup>218</sup> Director, Prisoners of War to H.R. Landis, June 3, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-55 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Dept. of Labour Project - Farming Operations - Dresden, ONT., C-5385, RG24, LAC; Adjutant-General to HQ, Western Command et al., January 31, 1947, HQS 7236-44 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Escape Plans and Correspondence, C-5389, RG24, LAC.

emboldened by Vrieslander's success, EMS Emil Bauchstadt also chose escape. Once a professional boxer, Bauchstadt had joined an anti-fascist organization in Germany and lost his license after refusing to join the NSDAP Sports' Association. The war had claimed his brother, who had died in a concentration camp, as well as his mother and sister, both dying in an air raid, while his marriage had collapsed as his wife and in-laws were members of the Nazi party.<sup>219</sup> With little left to lose, Bauchstadt and another POW, Johannes Buss, left their farms near Hurdsman's Bridge, Ontario, on June 16. While Buss was recaptured three days later, Bauchstadt succeeded in evading capture. Suspected of living in the United States, Bauchstadt was never apprehended.<sup>220</sup> On the other side of Southern Ontario, Erhard Schwartz, Otto Schultz, and Anton Martin took advantage of the distraction caused by a nearby tornado to cut through the barbed wire fence surrounding the Chatham hostel and escape. Police apprehended Martin shortly after he crossed into the United States, but Schwartz and Schultz successfully disappeared.<sup>221</sup>

As the farming season closed, many prisoners recognized their chance of remaining in Canada was becoming increasingly slim, prompting a spike in the number of escape attempts. Most escapees were captured within a few days, but some managed to evade their pursuers for a month or two. Only a select few succeeded. Erwin Beier, for example, escaped from a St. Thomas, Ontario, farm in September in hopes of avoiding his return to Germany. He found work at a peach farm and then at a factory in St. Catharines before he was recognized and apprehended in January 1947. Beier was transferred to the UK in early February, but he never gave up his dream of being a free man in Canada. With the sponsorship of the farmer he worked for – and escaped from – Beier returned to Canada with his family in 1951. The *Toronto Star* later reported, “Until

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<sup>219</sup> “Interrogation Report, 001830 Bauchstadt, Emil, M.S.,” October 28, 1944, 5. P/W Classification - Whites - Bauchstadt, Emil P/W 001830,C-8437, RG24, LAC.

<sup>220</sup> Maj. J.H. Thaw to Director, Prisoners of War, June 18, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-5 - Dept. of Labour - Work Project, Metcalfe, Ont., C-5381, RG24, LAC; Maj-Gen. E.G. Weeks to Mailing List “A”, June 20, 1946, HQS 7236-44 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Escape Plans and Correspondence, C-5389, RG24, LAC.

<sup>221</sup> Maj-Gen. E.G. Weeks to Mailing List “A”, June 21, 1946, HQS 7236-44 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Escape Plans and Correspondence, C-5389, RG24, LAC; Insp. C.W.J. Goldsmith to Glenn H. Bethel, November 6, 1953, C11-19-4-3 Vol. 4 - Escapes from Internment Camps, Vol. 3566, RG18, LAC.



his enforced emigration, he'd figured on following the sea. A stretch on the Carter farm, where he was ordered for nearly a year late in the war, changed his mind. Now he's a farmer and loves it."<sup>222</sup>

Like Beier, escapees Ulrich Haas and Wolfgang Vriesland were also captured in January 1947 and transferred to the United Kingdom. Willi Paezel, who had escaped from a farm near West Lorne, Ontario, surrendered in Fort William in January 1948 after revealing too much about his past in a drunken confession. He was transferred to the United Kingdom shortly after.<sup>223</sup> Willy Gottschalk was the next to be found, apprehended while working at a Montreal chemical plant in March 1949. Gottschalk faced a transfer to Soviet-occupied East Germany, something he hoped to avoid, and his case received considerable public support. His co-workers petitioned authorities to allow him to stay and a Montreal real estate broker even offered him an apartment in return for friendship from a man who had "shown himself to be a good prospective Canadian by doing an honest job and living an honest life" since his escape.<sup>224</sup> Authorities eventually agreed to allow Gottschalk to stay in Canada, setting an important precedent. Otto Albrecht, an escapee from a farm near Delhi, Ontario, followed this precedent and surrendered himself to authorities in Calgary in May 1950, as did Walter Braedt after he was apprehended in Longlac, Ontario in September 1953.

Seven prisoners – Emil Bauchstadt, Herbert Balzer, Helmut Kraemer-Sanson, Egon Rosel, Otto Schultz, and Erhard Schwartz – were still at large as of 1955. The RCMP kept these cases open through the 1950s and officers continued to follow leads. Kraemer-Sanson was reported to be living under an alias in Manitoba as of 1950 while Rosel, Schultz, and Schwartz were all suspected to be living in the United States. Herbert Balzer, the last POW to successfully escape from a farm project, had managed to disappear from Camp 10 (Fingal) on November 3, 1946, only days before his scheduled

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<sup>222</sup> "'Seen Enough,' P.O.W. Returns as Immigrant," *Toronto Star*, July 17, 1951.

<sup>223</sup> "Liquor, Woman's Tongue Land Escaped POW Back in Custody," *Globe and Mail*, January 7, 1948.

<sup>224</sup> "'Let Collaborators Stay,' Offers Home to Nazi P.O.W.," *Toronto Star*, March 11, 1949; "Former P.O.W.'s Dream Realized; Works in Canada," *Lethbridge Herald*, April 20, 1949.

transfer. Balzer had been aboard the German *SS Cap Norte* when it was captured by the Royal Navy in October 1939. Despite claiming he was only a passenger and a citizen of the Free State of Danzig, rather than a German citizen, he was detained and subsequently interned. He informed authorities he was a marine engineer employed by the Panama Transport Company of New York and had a fiancée in New York, to whom he was engaged before the war.<sup>225</sup> He made a number of applications for his release, but these had proven unsuccessful and, faced with an imminent transfer to the United Kingdom, decided to escape instead. He made his way to Mexico by 1947 and then enlisted the help of a Toronto-based lawyer whom he had contacted before his escape to help arrange his release. In a letter to the lawyer, Balzer wrote,

I should like to apologize for having disturbed your work by my sudden departure, but I never thought much of the outcome and preferred to take matters in my own hands. To keep my reputation clear though, I should like to state that I only gave you my word to stay till Nov. 1<sup>st</sup> and I departed on the third!

Balzer was no longer interested in gaining his release. Instead, he inquired whether the lawyer would claim the two suitcases, books, and other “irreplaceable things of great personal value” he had left behind after his escape.<sup>226</sup> Prisoners like Balzer had come to Canada with few, if any, personal possessions but the clothing on the backs. Now, having lived in Canada for upwards of five years, these individuals had accumulated an assortment of personal effects including letters and photographs mailed from their friends and families, books and instruments donated by international aid organizations, ships in bottles and carvings made by fellow POWs, paintings, and clothing purchased at the camp canteens or through mail-order catalogues. Balzer never did regain his possessions, but after British authorities decided it was not worth the effort to recapture him, he immigrated to the United States and married his fiancée.

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<sup>225</sup> Herbert Balzer to Director of Prisoners of War, February 6, 1946, C1026 - Balzer, Herbert, Vol. 1589, RG24, LAC.

<sup>226</sup> Herbert Balzer to Louis Herman, March 1, 1947, C1026 - Balzer, Herbert, Vol. 1589, RG24, LAC.

Thousands took a more lawful approach to try and stay in Canada. As early as 1943, one prisoner informed his family that he was “becoming pretty well Canadianized” while working on an Alberta farm and more and more prisoners expressed their desire to stay in the following years. At Chatham, for example, several POWs openly stated they had no desire to return to Germany after the war while one POW at Strathmore stated he enjoyed farm work so much that he hoped to either obtain permission to remain in Canada after the war or return after the war and become a farmer.<sup>227</sup> Few prisoners had expressed interest in staying in Canada in the early war years as these men had spent all of their time confined behind barbed wire and had little or no contact with Canada or its people. Added to this, expressing a desire to stay would also be considered treasonous and risk harassment or physical harm from their pro-Nazi comrades. However, once POWs began working outside the camps and interacting with Canadians and with their surroundings, some prisoners started to consider the possibility of staying. This idea became increasingly attractive as it became clear that Germany was losing the war and its economic and political future uncertain.

Prisoners began officially applying to stay in Canada after Germany surrendered in May 1945, and the number of applications grew significantly over the next year and a half. Before Japan’s surrender, some EMS even applied to work on ships in the war against Japan.<sup>228</sup> At Brooks, spokesman Jupp Kassel estimated up to half of the 156 POWs classified as “Whites” and sixty-two EMS under his command hoped to remain in Canada and apply for citizenship. With rumours causing “unnecessary excitement and speculation” at Brooks, Kassel explained why his men should be considered:

You know best how the P/W and EMS have handled their jobs in the bush and on farms for years now under the most trying conditions. Take the

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<sup>227</sup> Major-General H.F.G. Letson, “Intelligence Report for November, 1943,” P.O.W. Corresp, Notes, Reports, Directives, Misc Papers, 1940-1945, Vol. 1, MG6E2 - Canada - National Defence - Streight, Harvey N. (Col.), AoM; QMS Macfarlane, “Intelligence Summary for August 1944,” August 1944, HQS 7236-94-6-10, T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Chatham, C-5416, RG24, LAC; Lt. C.T.G. van Taack, “Monthly Intelligence Report, February 1945,” March 1, 1946, HQS 7236-94-6-23 - T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Monteith, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

<sup>228</sup> Major Bruce Thompson, “Information and Intelligence Summary,” July 1945, HQS 7236-94-6-10, T.E.A. - Intelligence Reports - Chatham, C-5416, RG24, LAC.

Brooks Project, for instance, which is one of the first projects employing P/W labour. There has never been any trouble here and the farmers as well as other employers are fully satisfied with the work we do and should like to see us as settlers in this country. Especially the soldiers and EMS who are now working in the Eastern Irrigation District for nearly three years know everything about farming and in many cases do a better job than a hired man.

Kassel may have glossed over incidents involving POWs in Brooks and opposition from some residents, but he was not exaggerating about their experience. Many were now experienced farmhands who had the support of their employers and, as far as he was concerned, Kassel believed his men would become “first-class citizens faithfully obeying the laws of this country.”<sup>229</sup>

Prisoners could submit individual applications, but many came as groups. Authorities received over 140 applications from six of the Manitoba hostels, with prisoners expressing their desire to continue farm or bushwork. Most, if not all, were prepared to do whatever necessary to become Canadian citizens but also noted that if their request was denied and they were returned to Germany, they hoped they would be considered for an expedited immigration process. Three POWs at the Blackdale hostel even went so far as to enlist legal help from a Winnipeg law firm to boost their bid to stay in Canada.<sup>230</sup>

In Quebec, sixty-nine German officers formerly employed on farms near Farnham wrote to Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King and Governor-General Lord Viscount Alexander as a last effort to stay. The first of these men had arrived in Canada in July 1940 and they therefore argued many had spent more of their adult lives in Canada than in Germany, a fact that accounted for “a strong influence in their way of thinking,” namely due to the influence of the press, radio, and “last not least by the people during

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<sup>229</sup> Jupp Kassel to Director POW, June 18, 1946, HQS 7236-47-3 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Releases in Canada, C-5392, RG24, LAC.

<sup>230</sup> Kennedy & Kennedy to Department of National Defence, November 12, 1946 HQS 7236-47-3 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Releases in Canada, C-5392, RG24, LAC.

our stay on farms.”<sup>231</sup> Many had lost their homes during the war and they argued would likely face unemployment upon return. “After a long time of depressive inactivity in internment camps,” they argued, “we have just restored confidence in our working capacity. We hope to have done some useful work and it is our principal desire to stay useful.” They continued,

All of us have reason to hope that our efforts to enter into the spirit of the country and its people will be successful. Our knowledge of both languages spoken in this country may do for the beginning and the general level of our education will greatly facilitate a quick advance in their mastering. The records from our military superiors as to political inclinations and character seem to be clear. The judgement of our employers pronounces throughout our sustainability to become good Canadian citizens. All of us are in the possession of a declaration certifying that we have work, board and living for at least one year on our former farmer’s place; and we are ready to bind ourselves to work on farms or in lumber-camps for the customary length of time.

The officers stated they would most likely be among the first German immigrants to Canada if their request was refused but added this would only waste time and money. Stating they were willing to forgo any right of the Geneva Convention that bound the detaining power to return them to Germany, they asked only that they be released in Canada as soon as possible, their working status be modified to allow them to choose their own employment, and the right for ordinary pay.<sup>232</sup> The sixty-nine POWs were forwarded for consideration as, with one exception, all had worked satisfactorily in the Farnham-area for the past few months. The exception, Leutnant E. Arens, was considered on the request of one resident whose daughter hoped to marry him.<sup>233</sup>

Prisoners were not the only ones making requests – their employers were also submitting letters to the Department of Labour. One Farnham-area farmer described the

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<sup>231</sup> Hptmn Baron von Schlotheim to W.L. Mackenzie King, November 29, 1946, HQS 7236-47-3 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Releases in Canada, C-5392, RG24, LAC.

<sup>232</sup> Hptmn Baron von Schlotheim to Lord Viscount Alexander, November 29, 1946, HQS 7236-47-3 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Releases in Canada, C-5392, RG24, LAC.

<sup>233</sup> Col. H.M. Cathcart to AG, December 5, 1946, HQS 7236-47-3 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Releases in Canada, C-5392, RG24, LAC.

POW in his employ as a good and devoted worker who was “absolument indispensable” while another described how it was “certainly a blessing” when POWs “came to their rescue.”<sup>234</sup> Monsieur M.H. Hudon argued that prisoners had become “key men” on the farms and their transfer would be a significant loss. As he explained in a letter to the Department of Labour,

These young men were sober, trustworthy, interested in their work and workers. They have become accustomed to our ways and methods. They are ready to forsake anything, even the Geneva Convention, in order to remain in this country. While it may not be possible to do so at this time, it is felt that if some delay were granted, there is a possibility that the Immigration Laws might be brought up to date in order to permit this experienced labour to remain rather than start over again with Polish men inexperienced in our ways and customs.<sup>235</sup>

The Polish men Hudon referred to were demobilized soldiers being brought to Canada in part to replace POW labour. Farmers like Hudon argued there was no point getting rid of what were now experienced workers.

Despite pleas from POWs, farmers, and civilians, the Department of Labour closed its hostels and recalled all POWs from individual farms in November 1946. Over the coming weeks, prisoners were transferred to Camp 23 (Monteith) and Camp 32 (Hull) to prepare for repatriation. The Cabinet did consider permitting hand-selected POWs to remain in Canada to work but, as will be discussed in the Conclusion, protest from numerous individuals and organizations won out. With the exception of some hospitalized POWs, escapees, and a smattering of special cases, the last POWs left Canada on January 1, 1947.

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<sup>234</sup> Cyril P. Morin to Director, Work Projects, October 3, 1946, HQS 7236-47-3 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Releases in Canada, C-5392, RG24, LAC; Harry Baker to Director Labour Projects, October 2, 1946, HQS 7236-47-3 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Releases in Canada, C-5392, RG24, LAC.

<sup>235</sup> W.H. Hudson to Lt.-Col. R.H. Davidson, November 2, 1946, HQS 7236-34-3-118 - Dept. of Labour - Work Proj. - PW Employed on Individual Farms in MD4, C-5387, RG24, LAC.

By the time the last POWs left Canada, more than five thousand German prisoners of war had worked on farms in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec. They had provided Canada with work desperately needed to meet the heavy demands of wartime food production. In his brief history of POW labour projects, Major A.F. Kemble reported work on beet fields in 1943 proved “not very satisfactory” as significant time was lost conveying POWs between the farms and the hostels or camp every day. Also, the prisoners were inexperienced in the “hard tedious work of topping and thinning beets,” a factor made more difficult by POWs being “soft” from years behind barbed wire.<sup>236</sup> But production increased as more prisoners were placed on farms and they gained valuable experience. In Alberta, for example, POWs harvested 18,344 tons in 1944 but increased this to 66,816 in 1945, the latter yielding almost 23,000,000 pounds of sugar. The following year, POWs in Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario together harvested 106,276 tons of beets, yielding 33,525,000 lbs of sugar.<sup>237</sup> The 1945 harvest was the largest in Canadian history and POWs netted the Dominion Treasury over \$540,000. But the monetary value of POW labour was only one indication of its worth. The Minister of Labour credited POWs and Japanese Canadians with saving Alberta and Manitoba’s crops and many worked as general farm labourers while not harvesting beets.<sup>238</sup> This was work which, one Department of Labour representative argued, could not be measured in dollars and cents “but undoubtedly contributed tremendously to the general farm output of the localities in which they operated.”<sup>239</sup>

Prisoner of war farm labour did not only benefit Canada and its farmers, but also the prisoners themselves. It provided them with a valuable and, for many, a hitherto unavailable opportunity to fill their hours with productive work. As the *Winnipeg Tribune* noted in an article describing Manitoba farm hostels in August 1945, “Psychologically, the worst dread of German war prisoners is to get put behind barb wire in base

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<sup>236</sup> Kemble, “History of Labour Projects PW,” 12.

<sup>237</sup> “War Prisoners Save Beets,” *Globe and Mail*, November 14, 1945.

<sup>238</sup> “Minister of Labour Reviews Work of Department During War Years,” *The Labour Gazette* XLV, no. 12 (December 1945): 1762.

<sup>239</sup> Kemble, “History of Labour Projects PW,” 13 and 22.

concentration camps with no work to do. Inactivity is the most disrupting role for breaking down a cheerful attitude.”<sup>240</sup> Farm work offered POWs an opportunity to escape the confines of barbed wire and spend their days working, earning money, and living in relative freedom. While those working from internment camps and hostels did not enjoy the same privileges as those employed on individual farms, even the ability to leave the camp for most of their day and earn a wage while doing so was greatly appreciated. Despite long hours of back-breaking work in beet fields, complaints were remarkably few in number, especially in comparison to those received from POWs working in bush camps.

Overall, farmers employing POWs and agricultural representatives were satisfied with and appreciative of the extra help. In Manitoba, for example, one agricultural representative stated POWs had been of a “very great service” and that “their work both in quality and quantity was very satisfactory and their conduct has been exemplary.”<sup>241</sup> Farmers willing to try employing POWs were often quite satisfied with their performance, especially those employing prisoners on individual farms. Unsatisfactory workers were often quickly returned to the base camp but, rather than give up on POW labour, most farmers immediately requested a replacement. Farmers also discovered that prisoners were more likely to work harder if they were treated well, whether it be providing POWs with a lunch, ice cream, or a turkey dinner. The majority of farmers employing POWs quickly realized that many of these men were little different from Canadians and wanted to continue employing them for as long as possible – even if it meant keeping them after the war. A letter from farmer Harry Woodburn of Cyrville, Ontario, near Ottawa, written to show his support of POW labour, shows the degree to which farmers valued these men. Having employed a POW for over two years, Woodburn stated,

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<sup>240</sup> L.F. Earl, “Nazi Prisoners Homesick,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, August 22, 1945.

<sup>241</sup> R.H. Davidson to A. MacNamara, September 29, 1945, 621-AE-40 - Payment of Claims with Respect to the Operation of Internment Camps in Canada for Prisoners of War Transferred from the United Kingdom, Vol. 2766, RG25, LAC.



I never had a better worker, a more civil, clean or honest man in my employ. He has worked with other men, one of whom was a Canadian soldier who served five years in the army in this country. I wouldn't give my POW's little finger for a dozen like him.

In my opinion these POW's (who by the way worked voluntarily for they could have remained in camp), rendered as much a service to this country as persons exempted from military service for farm or industrial work.

Until our so-called citizens of this country are big enough to realize that a man is a man be he of any race or creed, this will never be a truly great country.<sup>242</sup>

The work and the relationships between POWs and their employers prompted hundreds, if not thousands, of POWs to apply to remain in Canada. With only a few exceptions, these applications were ultimately denied, but they demonstrate the value POWs placed upon their time working on farms across the country.

Besides its intended purpose, farm work provided POWs with the opportunity to interact with the Canadian civilian population – in and outside of work – on a scale not seen elsewhere during the war. Prisoners, especially those living on individual farms, were provided with significantly more freedom than they had ever received since their capture. Whether living directly with farmers and their families or working under the guidance of a farmer, many prisoners began to learn what it meant to be Canadian. Some formed close friendships with their employers and were even treated like friends or family. The freedom of farm work invited opportunities for fraternization and it took little time before POWs were spotted in local communities, interacting with people outside of work, and attending dances and movies. Prisoners also came into direct contact with women for the first time in years and, although many POWs' interests were undoubtedly unreciprocated, illicit relationships did develop.

Unsurprisingly, not all Canadians supported the freedoms these POWs enjoyed. The departments of Labour and National Defence regularly received complaints of POWs wandering through communities without escort or fraternizing with civilians and most

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<sup>242</sup> Harry Woodburn, "German POW Workers," unknown newspaper, December 11, 1946, HQS 7236-47-3 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Releases in Canada, C-5392, RG24, LAC.

emphasized the freedoms POWs enjoyed while employed on local farms. Reactions from the civilian population varied significantly but the more one interacted with and benefitted from POW labour, the more one approved of them. Farmers desperately short of labour were much more likely to support POW labour and once they realised the POWs in their charge were little different from themselves, were more amenable to their continued presence. Resistance generally came from urban centres, where residents only saw prisoners enjoying far more freedom than they believed appropriate. These residents did not equate the presence and employment of POWs with increased sugar, wheat, or tomato production; they only saw enemy soldiers far too close to home. Resistance towards POWs was also more likely to come from individuals who had served in the military or who had family members serving overseas. Branches of the Canadian Legion were thus among the most vocal opponents of POW labour, repeatedly submitting complaints and resolutions.

Public complaints had relatively little impact on the Department of Labour's policy once POWs were placed on farms. Local, provincial, and federal governments ultimately decided the availability of POW labour, but public opinion could have a powerful effect on determining where POWs were placed. As potential employers, local producers often had a determining vote in deciding the future of POW farm labour in their region, as was the case in Norfolk County – at least initially. Complaints received after POWs had been placed generally involved the tightening of security measures and reminders to farmers to closely supervise their POWs but, for the most part, POW labour continued uninterrupted. Once again, labour priorities trumped local security concerns.

The relative freedom of farm work inevitably came with increased escape attempts. Numerous prisoners took advantage of reduced security measures and tried to escape from individual farms and farm hostels. Escape attempts were relatively rare in the first years of POW farm labour, but they increased in 1945 after Germany's surrender and then again in 1946 as it became less likely prisoners were going to be allowed to stay in Canada. Escape was the best chance to avoid repatriation and to stay in Canada and although most attempts were unsuccessful, a few did succeed. As of January 1947, thirteen of the twenty-one POWs still at large had escaped from farms or farm hostels,

compared to only three who escaped from Toronto-area industries and one from a bush camp (who was presumed drowned).

For many POWs, their transfer from the farms to the base camps in November 1946 was bittersweet. All of them had expressed desires to stay in Canada but, following considerable discussion, the Canadian government had elected to transfer all remaining POWs to the United Kingdom. Their work had not gone unnoticed: prisoners of war had proved pivotal in Canada avoiding a sugar shortage as well as supplying much-needed food to Canadian and overseas markets. As the Camp 133 war diarist noted, “The employment of these PW has undoubtedly solved a serious labour shortage and though there may be critics who think the PW are taking labour away from Canadians, the fact remains that without the PW working on this job the farmers would have had a serious problem on their hands.”<sup>243</sup> As for prisoners like Erwin Beier and Paul Mengelberg, they left Canada for the United Kingdom in November and December 1946 but were already making plans for their return.

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<sup>243</sup> Camp 133 War Diary, October 5, 1945, Part 6, Vol. 15413, RG24, LAC.

## Conclusion

When Germany surrendered in May 1945, repatriation was immediately on the minds of POWs, but most would have another year to wait. The Geneva Convention stipulated prisoners should be repatriated “as soon as possible after the conclusion of peace” but it was not until January 1946 that the British government was prepared to accept POWs from Canada.<sup>1</sup> The British War Office requested other ranks be transferred first so they could be put to work immediately, but the Canadian government had another plan in mind; facing pressure from the Department of Labour and employers to retain POWs for the time being, Canada proposed transferring non-working POWs first, thereby allowing employers to wrap up their POW operations and secure civilian replacements, and the remainder gradually over the following months.<sup>2</sup> The British agreed.

The end of the war and rumours of repatriation brought forth a surge of applications from POWs hoping to remain in Canada, as well as some from their employers. Department of National Defence files indicate the ministry received over 4,370 applications between December 1945 and December 1946 – 3,000 of which came from Camp 133 alone. Intelligence officer Major E.H.J. Barber estimated over 6,000 prisoners either requested to remain in Canada or wanted to return in the near future – evidence, Barber believed, of the good treatment POWs received here.<sup>3</sup> Many of those

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<sup>1</sup> Article 75 in International Committee of the Red Cross, “Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War.”

<sup>2</sup> High Commissioner for Canada in the United Kingdom to Secretary of State for External Affairs, January 3, 1946, HQS 7236-47-7 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Postwar Returns to UK - Policy, C-5392, RG24, LAC; Secretary of State for External Affairs to High Commissioner for Canada in the United Kingdom, January 10, 1946, HQS 7236-47-7 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Postwar Returns to UK - Policy, C-5392, RG24, LAC.

<sup>3</sup> It is unclear how many of these applications came from labour projects for, as of December 29, 1945, the population of Camp 133 numbered 13,378 POWs, 3,929 of which were employed on labour projects. See applications to remain in Canada in HQS 7236-47-3 - Release in Canada, C-5392, RG24, LAC; Col. E.D.B. Kippen, Weekly State as at 1200 hours, Saturday December 29,” December 29, 1945, IO8A and IO8B Correspondence Re Returns, Strengths - Lethbridge, C-5375, RG24, LAC; Col. E.D.B. Kippen, “State of PW Employed on Work Projects,” December 29, 1945, IO8A and IO8B Correspondence Re Returns, Strengths - Lethbridge, C-5375, RG24, LAC; Major E.H.J. Barber, “Memorandum on Internment

who applied did so because of their time working in the bush, on farms, or in urban industry and interacting with Canadians.

Canada had a significant German population and although immigration from Germany had dropped considerably in the 1930s, thousands of Germans migrated in the inter-war period. Demand for labour – especially agriculture, which had attracted many immigrants from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century – was still high and Germans were a traditionally attractive group for immigration. The problem was Canada had no policy or precedent for allowing prisoners to stay. With the exception of individuals detained in Canada, the POWs were being held on behalf of the United Kingdom and, as such, were to be transferred there when conditions permitted. The significant number of applications to remain in Canada did prompt the Cabinet to consider admitting some POWs, but it concluded that applications from POWs, apart from “exceptional cases,” would be refused.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, only four such cases were approved, including that of Wendelin Geiger, a former woodcutter in Riding Mountain National Park who had risked his life throughout his time in Canada to reveal pro-Nazi elements, and Joseph Redling, a naturalized British subject who had worked on a farm near Cyrville, Ontario.<sup>5</sup> This did not dissuade prisoners from continuing to submit applications in the following months.

As the Department of Labour notified employers that they would soon lose their POWs, Canada began transferring prisoners to the United Kingdom. Some 19,000 sailed from Halifax in February and March 1946 and authorities planned to have the remaining 15,000 transferred by the end of June. This was not to be the case. Bush companies and farmers were still struggling to secure sufficient replacements for POWs, so Minister of

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Operations in Canada during the Second World War, 1939-1947,” p.32-33, n.d., 382.013 (D1) Internment Ops - Cda - Memoir on Internment OPS in Cda during Second World War by Major EHJ Barber, DHH.

<sup>4</sup> Department of External Affairs, “Memorandum to Cabinet,” February 6, 1946, W-35-2 Prisoners of War, Vol. 120, RG2, LAC; A.D.P. Heeney, “Cabinet Conclusions,” February 14, 1946, Vol. 2637, T-2364, Series A-5-a, RG2, LAC.

<sup>5</sup> Lt.-Col. A.G. Wygard, “History of the Organization, Functions, and Operations of MI 7,” 28 February 1946, HQS-S9139-7 - P/W Classification - M.I. 7 Policy, C-8437, RG24, LAC.

Labour Humphrey Mitchell suggested delaying the transfer schedule, gradually withdrawing the 9,000 POWs in the bush and leaving the 1,100 POWs on individual farms until the end of the season. Mitchell, citing pressure to produce much-needed sugar, also recommended retaining 2,500 POWs – later increased to 4,000 – for summer farm work, but added he did not believe it advisable this should receive general publicity.<sup>6</sup> The prisoners would, under the Geneva Convention, all have to volunteer to stay for the summer but there was little doubt of a shortage of volunteers.<sup>7</sup> The British government agreed, guaranteeing Canada 4,000 farm labourers for the summer.<sup>8</sup>

As spring progressed, the Department of Labour began closing bush camps, transferring POWs back to the base camps. Closures were gradual – only a few camps from each employer at a time – so as not to completely disrupt operations and allow employers sufficient time to find replacement labourers. Approximately half of the camps closed between March and May and the remaining in the following two months, with the last POWs leaving the bush in mid-July. Departure from the bush proved bittersweet for prisoners, but those who were hoping to remain in Canada for the time being soon received their chance. Once back at the base camp, prisoners classified as “White” or “Grey” were offered the opportunity to work on farms for the summer months, a choice many opted for.

The employment of POWs on farms was only temporary and Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs N.A. Robertson therefore proposed replacing POWs with demobilized Polish soldiers.<sup>9</sup> Thousands of Polish soldiers had fought their way through Europe alongside Western Allied forces, and, after the Soviet liberation of Poland, many refused to return to their now communist-controlled homeland. Accepting these men

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<sup>6</sup> Humphrey Mitchell to A.D.P. Heeney, March 26, 1946, W-35-2 Prisoners of War, Vol. 120, RG2, LAC.

<sup>7</sup> A.D.P. Heeney, “Cabinet Conclusions,” April 4, 1946, Vol. 2637, T-2364, Series A-5-a, RG2, LAC; A.D.P. Heeney, “Cabinet Conclusions,” April 5, 1946, Vol. 2637, T-2364, Series A-5-a, RG2, LAC.

<sup>8</sup> A.D.P. Heeney, “Memorandum to the Cabinet,” June 4, 1946, W-35-2 Prisoners of War, Vol. 120, RG2, LAC; A.D.P. Heeney, “Cabinet Conclusions,” June 6, 1946, Vol. 2638, T-2364, Series A-5-a, RG2, LAC.

<sup>9</sup> N.A.R., “Memorandum for the Prime Minister, May 9, 1946, W-35-2 Prisoners of War, Vol. 120, RG2, LAC.



**Figure 54: Prisoners returning from the bush, 1946. Thousands of German prisoners of war were withdrawn from pulpwood camps in Northern Ontario in spring 1946, including these men being transferred from a camp in the Long Lac area. Some would be transferred to the United Kingdom and others to farms in Southwestern Ontario or Manitoba. *Toronto Star* Photograph Archive, tspa\_0019128f, Toronto Public Library.**

would not only solve the problem of what to do with them but provide much-needed labour so, in May 1946, the Cabinet agreed Canada would accept 4,000 men. Each man would have to agree to agricultural or other work for a two-year period, after which they would be considered for citizenship.<sup>10</sup> There was only one problem: they were not expected until November.

With Polish soldiers unavailable for the summer, the POW transfer schedule was once again called into question. Authorities hoped to withdraw the remaining POWs in late October or early November, but they once again failed to consider the consequences of withdrawing prisoners before the end of the season. Agricultural representatives in

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<sup>10</sup> A.D.P. Heeny, "Cabinet Conclusions," July 16, 1946, Vol. 2638, T-2364, Series A-5-a, RG2, LAC.

Alberta and Ontario stated POWs were needed to ensure satisfactory production while Manitoba's Minister of Agriculture and Immigration D.L. Campbell argued the loss of POW labour would prove "detrimental" to Manitoba's sugar beet crop and emphasized they were needed until October 26 at the earliest.<sup>11</sup> The Co-ordinator of the Foods Administration Branch of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board K.W. Taylor likewise recommended the transfer be postponed, emphasizing the removal of POWs from "highly important" sugar beet production before the end of harvest would "verge on the catastrophic."<sup>12</sup>

The pleas of farmers and agricultural representatives prompted authorities to reschedule sailing dates to late November and December, but some employers and some government officials questioned why Canada should transfer the POWs when there was work for them here. In September, the Minister of Reconstruction and Supply enquired as to the feasibility of allowing carefully selected POWs to remain and work in Canada on similar grounds as those extended to Polish soldiers.<sup>13</sup> A committee consisting of representatives from the departments of National Defence, External Affairs, and Labour, the Immigration Branch (Department of Mines and Resources), and the Directorate of POW determined that approximately 60% of the 4,207 POWs in Canada wanted to stay and, if the Polish soldiers were relegated to agricultural work, prisoners could provide much-needed – and already experienced – bush labour. Once again there was a problem: there were 30,000 civilians from Allied countries waiting to immigrate, and prioritizing former enemies would undoubtedly produce considerable opposition.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, the

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<sup>11</sup> A. MacNamara to Alex Ross, HQS 7236-47-7 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Postwar Returns to UK - Policy, C-5392, RG24, LAC; .S. Duncan to Arthur MacNamara, August 22, 1946, HQS 7236-47-7 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Postwar Returns to UK - Policy, C-5392, RG24, LAC; D.L. Campbell to A. MacNamara, August 22, 1946, HQS 7236-47-7 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Postwar Returns to UK - Policy, C-5392, RG24, LAC.

<sup>12</sup> K.W. Taylor to Alex Ross, September 19, 1946, HQS 7236-47-7 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Postwar Returns to UK - Policy, C-5392, RG24, LAC.

<sup>13</sup> A.D.P. Heeney, "Cabinet Conclusions," September 10, 1946, Vol. 2638, T-2364, Series A-5-a, RG2, LAC.

<sup>14</sup> Raymond Ranger, "Minutes of meeting held under the Chairmanship of Mr. A.J. MacNamara, Deputy Minister of Labour, at 2:30 p.m., Thursday, September 12, 1946, in Room 148 Confederation Building, Ottawa," September 16, 1946, W-35-2 Prisoners of War, Vol. 120, RG2, LAC.



consequences of admitting former enemies before allies, a practice which the Minister of Labour deemed “unwise,” pressured the Cabinet to continue with the planned repatriation schedule.<sup>15</sup>

The Cabinet’s decision was a blow to bush companies. Unfilled vacancies continued to increase as employers lost their POWs and were unable to attract sufficient workers. Demand for bushworkers fluctuated seasonally at the best of times, but the withdrawal of POWs had, *The Labour Gazette* reported, “considerably aggravated” the situation.<sup>16</sup> The Department of Labour reported a shortage of 20,000 bushworkers by August 1946, compared to 7,500 in August 1945, and this would increase to 48,000 by October.<sup>17</sup> Prisoners were only part of the problem as the shortage was further increased by a general reluctance of young Canadians and ex-servicemen to take up bushwork, especially in the summer months. Whereas prisoners had worked in the bush year-round, most civilian cutters were seasonal labourers who often worked on farms during the summer and in the bush during the winter.

Support for retaining POWs remained mixed. The *Ottawa Citizen*, emphasizing that prisoners had become skilled workers over the course of their “enforced stay,” argued 3,000 POWs had spent the last five years in Canada and were thereby “acclimatized.”<sup>18</sup> The *Ottawa Journal* likewise questioned why Canada was transferring POWs despite the desperate need for labourers and stated POWs would not take jobs away from Canadians or immigrants from Allied countries – “They would merely be doing a job for us that needs to be done.” As other Allied countries were taking in German scientists and technicians to further their own interests, the paper concluded that

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<sup>15</sup> A.D.P. Heeney, “Cabinet Conclusions,” September 17, 1946, Vol. 2638, T-2364, Series A-5-a, RG2, LAC.

<sup>16</sup> “Report on Employment Conditions, May 1946,” *The Labour Gazette* XLVI, no. 6 (June 1946): 810.

<sup>17</sup> “Report on Employment Conditions, August 1946,” *The Labour Gazette* XLVI, no. 9 (September 1946): 1486; “Report on Employment Conditions, August 1945,” *The Labour Gazette* XLV, no. 9 (September 1945): 1373; “Report on Employment Conditions, October 1946,” *The Labour Gazette* XLVI, no. 11 (November 1946): 1625.

<sup>18</sup> “PW’s and Man Power,” *Ottawa Citizen*, November 16, 1946.

transferring all its POWs would only result in Canada “cutting off her nose to spite her face.”<sup>19</sup> An editorial in the *Globe and Mail* argued POW labour was now, “to all intents and purposes,” slave labour, considering the war was over and POWs still received meagre pay. The author stated that the thousands of displaced persons awaiting entry to Canada should have priority over enemy soldiers and the solution to Canada’s labour shortage was a working immigrant policy, not the “indenture” of POWs; if prisoners wanted to return to Canada, they could do so as “free immigrants” rather than “helpless slaves.”<sup>20</sup>

The end of the harvest season brought with it the transfer of remaining POWs to the base camps. Prisoners working on farms in Ontario and Alberta were the first to be transferred, sailing from Halifax in late November. The remaining 2,000 were scheduled for transfer in mid-December but calls to retain selected POWs once again prompted a re-evaluation of Canadian policy. Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs Lester B. Pearson, citing support from employers and the press, suggested the Prime Minister reconsider removing all POWs from Canada and instead allow up to 200 anti-Nazis to stay. Each prisoner would be carefully selected to include only those deemed politically sound and of “prospective utility.”<sup>21</sup> On December 3, the Cabinet agreed to move forward with Pearson’s proposal, proposing those considered potentially “valuable citizens” would be allowed to stay in Canada on similar conditions as the demobilized Polish soldiers.<sup>22</sup>

Staff from the departments of Labour and National Defence immediately began reviewing potential candidates and, within the week, produced a preliminary list of 738 POWs. Each prisoner had proven himself a satisfactory worker. Director of POW Labour Lt.-Col. R.H. Davidson therefore recommended the Cabinet raise the quota to 800 POWs.

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<sup>19</sup> “Cutting Off Our Noses?,” *Ottawa Journal*, November 16, 1946.

<sup>20</sup> “No Slave Labor,” *Globe and Mail*, November 20, 1946.

<sup>21</sup> L.B.P., “Memorandum for the Prime Minister,” November 30, 1946, W-35-2 Prisoners of War, Vol. 120, RG2, LAC.

<sup>22</sup> A.D.P. Heeney, “Cabinet Conclusions,” December 3, 1946, Vol. 2639, T-2364, Series A-5-a, RG2, LAC.

Canada was, Davidson argued, “in a position to retain in this country a body of men available for employment where the need is greatest and who are willing to continue at this type of work so long as you see fit and under terms which you dictate.”<sup>23</sup> Despite support from the Departments of Labour and External Affairs, the Cabinet, after “considerable discussion,” refrained from increasing the quota.<sup>24</sup>

The Cabinet had intentionally kept this discussion of potentially retaining POWs behind closed doors, but an officer leaked the news to the press in early December without prior authorization. Newspapers across the country announced Canada was considering allowing POWs to stay, but, without an official statement or press release, the news remained speculative. Newspapers like *The Calgary Herald* reported selected POWs would likely undergo a careful screening process to ensure they were anti-Nazis who would become good citizens, but the news was met with a barrage of opposition.<sup>25</sup> A *Winnipeg Tribune* editorial claimed most Canadians believed it was a “bad decision”; the author explained,

Government officials have for long been telling Canadians that these same young and arrogant disciples of Hitler, who fought our own boys on land and sea and in the air, are incurable Nazis; that they cannot be made to see the error of their ways. Some of them who realize the state in which war has left their country now, no doubt, profess that they see the light and want to stay in a land of freedom and comparative wealth. But it will take a lot of talking to convince ex-servicemen that there is any real repentance.

The editorial claimed that of the former German soldiers who immigrated to Canada after the First World War, some proved valuable citizens, but many proved “troublesome and undesirable residents” who were subsequently interned in 1939. Strongly preferring the immigration of civilians from Allied nations, the author concluded, “There is... no good argument in favor of allowing known Nazis to remain here.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> R.H. Davidson to A. MacNamara, December 9, 1946, W-35-2 Prisoners of War, Vol. 120, RG2, LAC.

<sup>24</sup> A.D.P. Heeney, “Cabinet Conclusions,” December 10, 1946, Vol. 2639, T-2364, Series A-5-a, RG2, LAC.

<sup>25</sup> “200 German Prisoners of War to Stay Here,” *Calgary Herald*, December 14, 1946.

<sup>26</sup> “Canada no Place for Nazis,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, December 19, 1946.

As expected, Canadian Legion and other veterans' organizations were staunchly opposed. The Secretary of the Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario Command, outraged by the proposition, likewise claimed – without evidence – that POWs who had been allowed to stay in Canada after the First World War turned against Canadians as soon as war broke out in 1939. Secretary-Manager of No. 1 Branch, Canadian Legion J.W. Russel likewise expressed opposition, stating, “It seems a pity... we have to send our boys over to fight and die to keep Hitler and his Nazis from our country and then turn around and take them to our bosom when it’s over.”<sup>27</sup> The Brooks, Alberta, branch, which had frequently protested against POWs working on farms in the area, even lodged its own protest at a meeting to welcome Polish veterans to the district.<sup>28</sup>

The supposed prioritization of POWs over European immigrants drew significant criticism. Alberta Premier E.C. Manning, supporting the Canadian Legion’s stance, stated his government was gravely concerned with the proposal to prioritize the immigration of former enemies over “desired old country stock.” Questioning why Canada was so willing to accept POWs before “much more desirable immigrants,” Manning claimed it was now apparently more difficult for British citizens to immigrate than it was for POWs.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, in letters to the *Winnipeg Tribune* and *Winnipeg Free Press*, President of the Federation of Polish Societies in Canada P.T. Andree noted his surprise that those who had been party to “such horrible crimes” would be admitted into Canada, considering the thousands of displaced persons unable to enter Canada. He instead recommended replacing POWs with demobilized Polish soldiers who fought alongside Canadians, were willing to work, and whose Canadian relatives were willing to cover travel expenses. Andree beseeched the Prime Minister to rethink the decision, explaining, “In the interest of Canada and in fairness to these brave soldiers we appeal to you that

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<sup>27</sup> “Nazi Prisoners Should Go Home, Legionaire Says,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, December 16, 1946.

<sup>28</sup> “Brooks Legion Names Officers,” *Calgary Herald*, December 17, 1946.

<sup>29</sup> “Manning Urges British Settlers Instead of German War Prisoners,” unknown Newspaper, December 1946, HQS 7236-47-3 - Release in Canada, C-5392, RG24, LAC.

they will be given preference to men who have contributed so much to loss of lives, misery and distress in the world.”<sup>30</sup>

The barrage of opposition emphasized the effect of misinformation. In the absence of an official announcement, opposing parties gave little consideration to what kind of POWs would be admitted and thereby falsely assumed they were all Nazis. The Cabinet never had any intention to admit known Nazis, especially considering nearly all had already been transferred to the United Kingdom. Trying to alleviate concerns, *The Calgary Herald* published two editorials on December 19 supporting the Cabinet’s decision. In “They Were Nazis – Once,” the author argued Canada’s treatment of POWs had significantly contributed to their re-education:

As the tide of war began to flow strongly to the Allied side, as the Hitler salute was abolished in the camps, as the fundamental fairness of the treatment by their Canadian guards, and their invariably correct attitude towards them began to penetrate even the deepest Fascist hide, the old ideas and beliefs, however deeply ingrained, began to vanish. The disillusionment, when they left, was practically complete. Stiff-necked, high-ranking officers said as much, not to one but to several commanders of the camps as they thanked them, both personally and by collectively signed letters for the fairness, humanity, and generally admirable way in which the camps had been conducted. Our enemies had been converted.<sup>31</sup>

The paper, acknowledging the attitudes of veterans who believed these men were enemies and had been or were associated with Nazism, emphasized that the POWs to be retained were all carefully selected individuals with democratic ideals and perfect records. Many prisoners interned in Alberta would have stayed if allowed, preferring to “thrive on the air of freedom,” rather than return to Germany. If given a chance to stay, the paper argued, prisoners would not take jobs away from Canadians, as there was always a demand for agricultural labour and prisoners had the added benefit of experience – the farmers knew these men, knew what they are capable of, and were sad to see them go. “They have proved their worth,” the paper explained, “and have become

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<sup>30</sup> P.T. Andree, “German War Prisoners,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, December 21, 1946; P.T. Andree, “Retention of German Prisoners Opposed,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 28, 1946.

<sup>31</sup> “They Were Nazis - Once,” *Calgary Herald*, December 19, 1946.

acquainted with Canadian ways. A farm laborer on the farm is worth several hundred on the other side of Canada's iron curtain."<sup>32</sup>

The early and unauthorized news release prompted the Cabinet to meet again on December 18. The Acting Minister of Labour presented a list of 220 combatants, EMS, and civilian internees deemed suitable for work and as future citizens. The POWs ranged in age from twenty-one to fifty-eight (the average age was twenty-eight) and included seamen, machinists, blacksmiths, mechanics, cabinet makers, carpenters, electricians, foresters, and farmers. All had proven themselves satisfactory workers while employed on farms in Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario and many had experience in bushwork as well. Three had worked in Riding Mountain National Park, twenty-seven for Abitibi Power & Paper Co., seventeen for Ontario & Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co., and two for Donnell & Mudge Ltd. while the remaining had worked for other companies such as the Pigeon Timber Co., the Cooksville Brick Co., and the Pulpwood Supply Co. The decision to retain POWs came after Canada had transferred most "White" POWs to the United Kingdom so the final list of 220 POWs included "Whites" and "Greys." The Camp 23 (Monteith) Commandant Lt.-Col. G.F. Armstrong assured all "Greys" had been carefully selected for "political soundness, medical fitness and a sincere desire to really become useful Canadian citizens."<sup>33</sup>

On December 19, the Cabinet made its decision: all remaining POWs in Canada would be transferred to the United Kingdom in the coming weeks. The "unauthorized publicity" and resulting uproar had helped shaped the decision, but the official reason was that accepting only 220 men was not worth the trouble.<sup>34</sup> As MacNamara noted, there was "considerable merit" in retaining 4,000 POWs, but 220 would ultimately make

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<sup>32</sup> "Let the Germans Stay," *Calgary Herald*, December 19, 1946.

<sup>33</sup> Directorate of Military Intelligence, "Nominal Roll of PW Recommended for Retention in Canada," December 19, 1946, HQS 7236-47-3 - Release in Canada, C-5392, RG24, LAC; Lt-Col. G.F. Armstrong to D.M.I., December 17, 1946, HQS 7236-47-3 - Release in Canada, C-5392, RG24, LAC.

<sup>34</sup> A.D.P. Heeney, "Cabinet Conclusions," December 18, 1946, Vol. 2639, T-2364, Series A-5-a, RG2, LAC.

little difference to the labour shortage.<sup>35</sup> The Cabinet did agree to consider individual cases on compassionate or other sufficient grounds, but the 2,100 POWs still in Canada were to leave by New Year's.<sup>36</sup>

The decision prompted criticism of Canada wasting valuable manpower. Charging the government with bowing to pressure from labour organizations and the Canadian Legion, *The Calgary Herald* reported,

They have expelled 200 excellent farm workers, without assuming the obligation to replace them. The farmers may go without help, or may be saddled with incompetent native-born help – just so long as they do not obtain, from ex-enemy ranks, the kind of help they badly want and need.

...Chalk up another triumph for chauvinism in Canada – another triumph for the advocates of racial purity and stonewall exclusiveness. With the collaboration – sometimes reluctant, sometimes enthusiastic – of the King government, they are strengthening and solidifying the stiff-necked intolerance that will yet prove the ruination of this Dominion.<sup>37</sup>

Others criticized Alberta Premier Manning's claim that Canada was favouring enemy soldiers over "desired old country stock." *The Macleod Gazette*, for example, argued discrimination against individuals who were willing to become lawful and loyal Canadians was not in accord with Canadian values. "Because these men fought against us," the paper stated, "is a poor reason why they should not have been permitted to stay. They were just cogs in a military machine; they had to obey the same as young men in our country had to take up arms, however distasteful it may have been to many who had no desire to kill."<sup>38</sup> *The Montreal Star* likewise suggested Manning had gone "a bit too far" and charged the government with yielding to "ill-considered pressure." The paper continued,

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<sup>35</sup> A. MacNamara to Paul Martin, December 19, 1946, W-35-2 Prisoners of War, Vol. 120, RG2, LAC.

<sup>36</sup> A.D.P. Heeney, "Cabinet Conclusions," December 19, 1946, Vol. 2639, T-2365, Series A-5-a, RG2, LAC.

<sup>37</sup> "Chalk Up Another Triumph for Chauvinism," *Calgary Herald*, December 23, 1946.

<sup>38</sup> "Those Germans," originally published in *The Macleod Gazette*, republished in the *Calgary Herald*, January 8, 1947.

True, they are Germans and German soldiers at that. But the conscript army of a police state includes many elements which serve only because they must; and it does not do to permit our justified hatred of the Nazi regime to degenerate into indiscriminate racial persecution. The Nazis thrived on that detestable prejudice; and it should be a matter of pride to Canada to reject such foul doctrine with every ounce of energy we possess.

Emphasizing that POWs would have been carefully screened to ensure only anti-Nazi and pro-democratic individuals would be considered, the author argued selected POWs would have likely made “admirable” citizens and argued that keeping them in Canada was not indicative of a priority system preferring them over British immigrants. The prisoners were already here and would have quickly provided much-needed labour.<sup>39</sup>

Despite this new wave of support, the Cabinet refused to reverse its decision. On December 22, 2,123 POWs sailed from Halifax for the United Kingdom and another forty-nine left on January 1, 1947. Thirty-nine prisoners remained in Canada as of January 11: twenty-one escapees still at large, twelve awaiting transfer to other countries, five medical cases, and one in jail.<sup>40</sup> Only three of those who had not escaped would be later considered special cases and released in Canada.<sup>41</sup> As for the thousands of POWs transferred to the United Kingdom in 1946, their captivity was not over. They were quickly added to the 400,000 other prisoners already on British soil and many were employed in agricultural and clean-up work. Most would not return to Germany until 1947.

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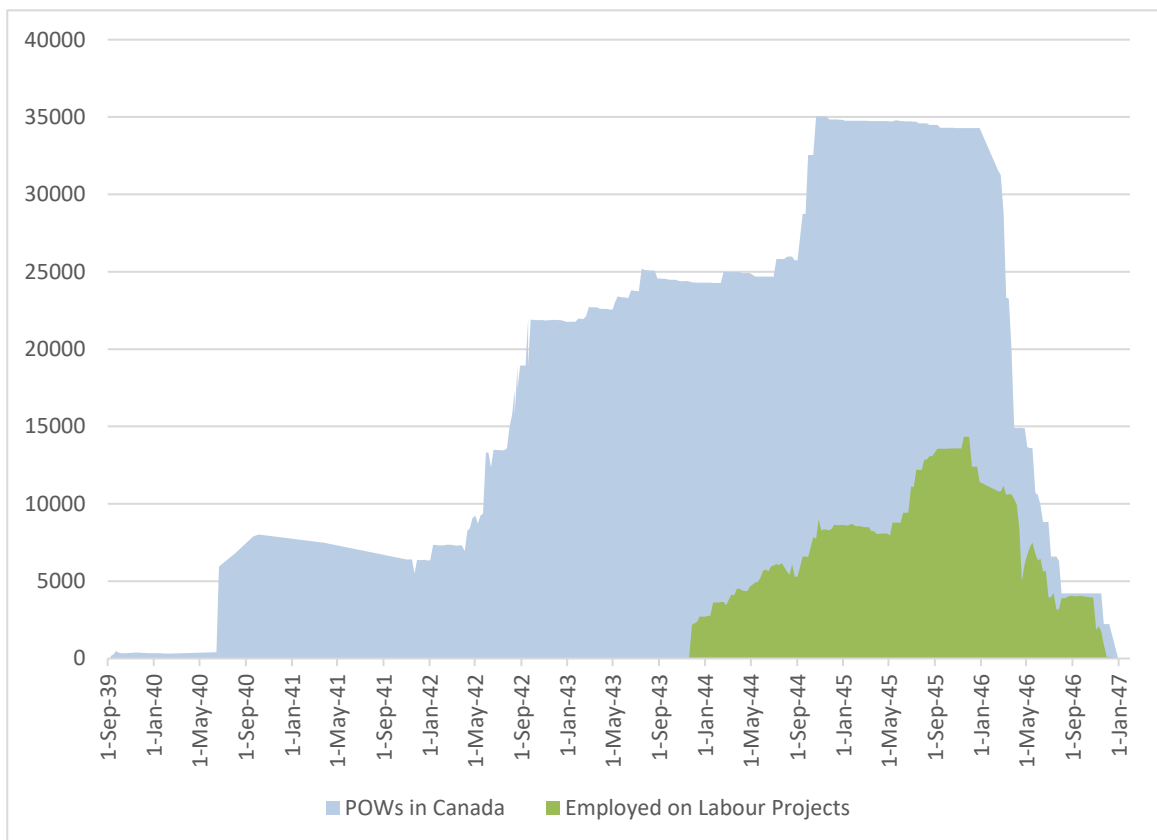
<sup>39</sup> “The German Prisoners,” originally published in the *Montreal Star* republished in the *Calgary Herald*, December 27, 1946.

<sup>40</sup> “Nominal Roll of Persons Held in Internment Camps in Canada,” January 11, 1947, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>41</sup> Bernhard Floercke and Friedrich Niemann had been waiting for transfer to the United States and Brazil, respectively, but were released under temporary status subject to their “continued good conduct” in 1948. Niemann’s fate is unknown but Floercke remained in Ontario. Keune, paralyzed from the waist down in an accident while working for the Nipigon Lake Timber Co. near Longlac in 1946, spent the immediate post-war years in hospital before he was granted citizenship in 1952. A. Ross to A.L. Jolliffe, June 24, 1948, HQS 7236-47-7 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - Post War Returns to U.K. - Policy, C-5392, RG24, LAC; Madsen and Henderson, *German Prisoners of War in Canada*, Revisions.



By the time the last main shipment of POWs left Canada in early 1947, thousands of prisoners had lived and worked in labour projects scattered across the country. Working in the bush, on farms, and in miscellaneous industries, prisoners not only found themselves enjoying greater freedom, but came into direct contact with Canada and its people. But getting to this point was not easy; it took almost four years after Canada interned its first civilians for military and government officials to approve the employment of POWs in outside work. Hesitant to embark on any official employment program in fear of repercussions against Allied POWs in Germany, the Canadian government only changed its stance on POW labour when Germany and the United Kingdom began employing POWs and as the country struggled with a nationwide labour shortage.



**Figure 55: POWs in Canada and POWs Employed on Labour Projects, 1939-1947.** Note that this does not reflect the total number of POWs employed during the war as the peak in October 1945 does not account for prisoners who were previously employed and then transferred back to the base camp. Compiled from “Weekly Reports” and “Employment of POWs,” Volumes 2764, 2765, and 2774, RG25, LAC.

Early proposals had favoured employing POWs in agriculture and logging, with both industries suffering as their traditional labour force enlisted or opted for work in essential war industries, and the two industries thus benefited the most from POW labour. Logging was the largest benefactor of POW labour, employing, at its peak, over 9,000 prisoners. In bush camps scattered across Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec, most POWs cut pulpwood, but those early woodcutting camps, including that in Riding Mountain National Park, also cut fuelwood. Characterized by the absence of traditional security measures, these camps were generally quite isolated and often accessible only by rail, boat, or winter roads. Agriculture also heavily benefitted, with thousands of POWs working from approximately sixty farm hostels and farm-related projects and hundreds more employed on individual farms. Heavy demand for sugar meant sugar beets remained the dominant crop requiring POW labourers, but prisoners also worked as general farm hands and harvested grain, tobacco, tomatoes, onions, and other crops. Prisoners boosted many smaller industries as well. Donnell & Mudge Ltd. was one of twenty-four companies employing POWs in miscellaneous work that included railway maintenance, brick and tile manufacturing, construction, peat cutting, pottery manufacturing, and roadbuilding. Regardless of the industry, prisoners performed valuable work, helping their employers maintain operations in the face of wartime demands and a persistent labour shortage while releasing civilian labourers for military service and work in essential war industries.

Canada now had thousands of potential labourers who could be assigned as needed and work kept POWs occupied, thereby increasing morale and lessening the likelihood of trouble or escape. Working for an enemy state may seem unorthodox, but in the months and years leading up to Canada's approval of POW labour, many prisoners requested opportunities for work. Both the German High Command and the Geneva Convention authorized the employment of POWs, the latter stipulating they could not be engaged in work directly related to the war effort, factors that helped assuage the guilt some POWs may have felt while working for the enemy. Some prisoners continued to refuse work throughout the war, but they remained in the minority. For those who did volunteer, motivations varied considerably. Work opportunities were limited to occupations assisting with the day-to-day and internal workings of the camps. Some

found work as administrative staff, orderlies, hairdressers, tailors, mechanics, electricians, and even gardeners, but the majority were unemployed. They instead buried themselves in sport, music, theatre, and educational courses, but even this could not spare many from the monotony of internment camp life.

A chance for work – in the bush, on a farm, or in a factory – offered prisoners a chance to leave the barbed wire confines of their internment camps, even if only for a day at a time. Above all, prisoners wanted to be free and work gave them a taste of relative freedom. But work had other benefits as well; with it came pay, a set schedule, and a purpose. This meant their days were filled with a productive activity, thereby providing POWs with a coping mechanism for internment and helping prisoners regain some sense of normalcy. Although they only received 50¢ a day, it more than doubled the monthly income that combatant other ranks (below the rank of an NCO) received from Germany and prisoners could choose to either save their earnings or spend them on a vast array of goods to help them make internment more comfortable. Pay became increasingly important after Germany ceased forwarding monthly allowances to POWs in September 1944.

Work not only brought an escape from confinement but, for some, an escape from their oppression. Hundreds of POWs identified as anti-Nazis and faced harassment, beatings, and death threats from pro-Nazi POWs. This prompted many to request protected status from Canadian authorities, an act that required them to renounce Germany, relinquish their status, and, as historian Paul Jackson notes, place themselves “in the arms of the enemy.” However, volunteering for work in an isolated labour project, hopefully far from their oppressors, offered POWs a chance to live without fear or harassment while not forcing them to rely upon help from the enemy or to renounce Germany.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Paul Jackson, “The Enemy Within the Enemy Within: The Canadian Army and Internment Operations during the Second World War,” *Left History* 9, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2004): 74.

This is not to say all prisoners volunteered or were eligible for work. Under the Geneva Convention, officers were exempt from this compulsory work and Canada did not actively seek out officers willing to work. That being said, a small minority of officers did volunteer and were employed on farms in Quebec. Many pro-Nazi POWs opposed work, as they believed it was against German interests, and others harassed and threatened fellow prisoners who volunteered. The approval of Order in Council P.C. 6495 in August 1944 meant authorities could force POWs to work. Rather than rely on volunteers, authorities could simply order any POW to work and those who refused were liable to disciplinary action. Despite the forced work, only a small minority refused work or caused significant trouble, suggesting they too came to appreciate the opportunity for outside work.

Most prisoners, unaware of where they were going or for how long they would be gone, boarded trains and moved once again across the country to one of the many isolated and low-security labour projects. There was often a sense of trepidation, and many knew little of what to expect, as evident from one intelligence report:

[a] P/W carried a small painting which showed an old wood-cutter with a long beard, an axe over his shoulder, standing among numerous mountains which were completely bare (apparently all trees had been cut) In one corner there was a little tree and some bush to be seen. The Painting was named "The Last Wood Cutter in 1976" ...P/W received this from his comrades who apparently were kidding him about being sent out to a Logging camp.

Another POW, a gardener in civilian life, brought a bright red flower in a pot, a gift from his friends, with him to the bush in the hope it would help him feel at home when he arrived at the logging camp.<sup>43</sup>

For those transferred to a bush camp, prisoners were no longer confined by barbed wire fences. Most, having lived in internment camps for months or even years, did not see the bush as a forbidding or imposing space but one of unprecedented freedom. Initial

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<sup>43</sup> "Sentiments of P/W transferred to Logging Camps from No. 132 Camp on May 13, 1945," n.d., HQS 9139-4-132 - P/W - Classification - Camp Intelligence - Medicine Hat, RG24, C-5365, LAC.

reactions to the Canadian “wilderness” remained primarily positive, with many POWs praising their new surroundings and commenting on the natural beauty in letters home. “According to letters received from prisoners working in these camps,” Red Cross representative E.L. Maag reported in September 1943, “the comparative freedom seems to have a very beneficial influence on the morale and I sincerely hope that the inauguration of this system will help to overcome in part the mentality which usually develops after years behind barbed wire.”<sup>44</sup> Having grown up on adventure stories of the North American frontier, some saw their new lives in the bush or on farms as an opportunity to live their own version of one of Karl May’s frontier adventures. Even those transferred to hostels or urban industry enjoyed greater freedom than they had in the base camps. Although some of these labour projects still had barbed wire fences around living quarters, the prisoners left their enclosures every day and were permitted to work in a similar manner as civilian labourers.

Accommodations in labour projects were often quite simple. The Riding Mountain Park Labour Project was an exception as, compared to the often-modern accommodations prisoners left behind at the base camps, most labour projects featured few amenities. Prisoners at farm hostels generally lived in tents while those in bush camps lived in log buildings or “pre-fabs.” Standard amenities in base camps like hot and cold running water and electricity were now rare luxuries. Most POWs were willing to sacrifice these in the name of some measure of freedom, but some struggled to adjust to the simplicity of bush or farm life.

After months or years spent idle behind barbed wire, prisoners were inclined to be “soft” and the demanding nature of farm, bush, and other work proved a significant challenge. Some POWs found work in administrative, medical, or kitchen duties but most worked long hours in jobs requiring considerable physical exertion. Those on individual farms enjoyed year-round employment, working full days, six days a week, as general farm hands and were still responsible for chores on their days off. Prisoners working

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<sup>44</sup> E.L. Maag, “Report on Camp and Hospital Visits,” September 15, 1943, H.Q.S. 7236-92-1 - Treatment of Enemy Aliens - I.R.C. - Reports by Delegate and Correspondence, C-5415, RG24, LAC.

from hostels and internment camps remained seasonal labourers, first helping plant crops and then returning later to block and thin sugar beets, stook grain, help with other crops, and finally harvest beets before returning to their base camp to await spring's arrival. Beet farming was especially arduous and labour intensive, requiring hours of back-breaking work spent blocking and thinning, picking, and topping beets – work done entirely by hand.

Bushwork employed prisoners year-round, but the season dictated the type of work. Woods operations traditionally began in the late summer, with the construction of bush camps and hauling roads, and cutting followed soon after. Cutting was done entirely by axe and saw and, unlike their civilian counterparts, POW woodcutters spent the summer months cutting as well. Cutting continued through the winter, whereupon many prisoners were assigned to hauling logs from the bush in preparation for the spring drive. Although trucks and tractors were becoming more popular in the bush, horses remained the primary movers and teamsters busied themselves hauling and stacking logs. Once the rivers and lakes thawed in the spring, prisoners helped run river drives before once again taking up their axes and saws.

Free from the confines of barbed wire, work brought prisoners into direct contact with the Canadian “wilderness,” something they had really only glimpsed through the barred train windows. Outside working hours, POWs turned to their surroundings for recreation. Prisoners lacked the resources to recreate the organized sports, educational classes, workshops, music, and theatre they left behind at their base camps, but they quickly adapted to their new surroundings. Limited space and rough terrain meant popular sports like football (soccer) was usually not feasible, so prisoners instead took up hiking and exploring – activities traditionally prohibited to POWs. Diverse wildlife kept many POWs entertained and amazed, and an array of animals were captured and kept as pets or mascots. Prisoners also took advantage of their proximity to lakes and rivers, a result of the logging industry's reliance on waterpower, to take up swimming, canoeing, and boating, relying primarily on hand-built vessels. In the winter, prisoners depended heavily on sporting equipment, reading material, and music sent by international aid organizations like the War Prisoners' Aid and ICRC. Frozen lakes were cleared of snow

for skating and hockey while skis and snowshoes purchased from camp staff or mail-order catalogues allowed POWs to continue their wandering in the winter months, the snow and ice allowing many to traverse through otherwise inaccessible marsh and rough terrain.

Work in an unfamiliar and often unforgiving climate proved a challenge to many prisoners. Prisoners worked in all weather conditions. In the bush, deep snow impeded cutting and hauling and bitter cold cost some prisoners their fingers and toes. Summer brought its own challenges. Cutting was done in the midst of swarms of black flies, mosquitoes, and other insects as well as in oppressive heat. Those on farms found themselves engaged in back-breaking work under the hot sun.

Despite the work's difficulties, prisoners were eager to be beyond the confines of internment camps, and letters sent to friends and family in Germany indicate that they appreciated the work. Many saw work as an opportunity to better themselves and to help fill their time, thereby staving off "barbed-wire psychosis." The freedom of bush camps was praised as prisoners expressed elation at the opportunity to wander and explore the areas surrounding their camps as well as the numerous recreational opportunities their surroundings offered. Friends and family in Germany were less sure of the advantages of work. Intercepted correspondence indicated the news of work was met with mixed feelings. Some were glad prisoners received the chance to work and live in relative freedom while others expressed concerns of the dangers – or at least the perceived dangers – of working in Canada, namely the country's cold climate and dangerous wildlife.

Bushwork did entail some danger but for some prisoners, their comrades presented a greater risk than their work. Those hoping to escape Nazism by volunteering for work were often disappointed, as the lack of a political classification system until 1945 meant that pro-Nazis and anti-Nazis were sent to the same labour projects. Pro-Nazis imbedded in the internment camp administrations ensured fellow Nazis were sent out to work camps, hand-picked to ensure that Nazi ideals were maintained. Anti-Nazis such as Wendelin Geiger, who risked his life to resist pro-Nazis in Ozada, Lethbridge,

and Riding Mountain, continued their efforts to identify Nazis and those impeding work in labour projects, efforts that proved invaluable to Canadian authorities. Reports from anti-Nazi POWs and the introduction of the PHERUDA classification program in 1945 significantly increased authorities' abilities to identify known Nazis and prevent them from future work opportunities, but hundreds of these men were already embedded within labour projects across the country. These individuals were often the source of strikes and other trouble and, when possible, authorities arranged for their transfer to detention centres or internment camps where they could be closely supervised.

Work brought prisoners into direct contact with cold winters, bears, and blackflies, but it also brought them into unprecedented contact with Canadians. The absence of traditional barbed wire fences separating them from the outside world broke both physical and psychological boundaries. Relationships established with guards, employers, co-workers, and the general public significantly defined prisoners' experiences of internment in Canada. Prisoners in internment camps had very little contact with guards or other military personnel, as only a select few were permitted within the enclosure, but labour projects had no such divisions. Guards were still prohibited from fraternizing with POWs in labour projects, but the absence of physical boundaries allowed for a more intimate relationship between the two parties, one that challenged pre-conceived notions of the enemy. Guards were often of a similar age to prisoners' fathers and, although isolated incidents between POWs and guards like that at one Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper camp did occur, the relationship between the two parties generally remained professional.

Instructors, skeleton crews, cooks, foremen, and farmers became the first civilians most POWs directly interacted with for months or even years. Companies like Abitibi Power & Paper Co. and Donnell & Mudge Ltd. cautioned their civilian employees to maintain their distance from POWs and only interact with them when work required, but many of these employees fraternized with POWs and, in some cases, became friends. Most relationships remained relatively harmless, but some POWs were able to enlist the help of their new friends to obtain illicit goods, send and receive mail through unofficial channels, enter romantic relationships, and, in rare cases, assist in escape. Prisoners



employed from farm hostels and internment camps were limited in their contact with civilians but those on individual farms lived in the same house as their employer and their family. Eventually, some of these POWs were even considered part of the family and remained in contact with each other in the years to come. In rare cases, POWs were actually family, as a very select few received the opportunity to work for and live with their Canadian relatives.

Internment camps were occupied, staffed, and guarded entirely by men, so, for the vast majority of POWs, contact with women was only through mail. Labour projects changed this. The Department of Labour, attempting to prevent trouble, instructed woods operators to remove female employees – almost exclusively cooks and kitchen helpers – from camps employing POWs.<sup>45</sup> This succeeded in reducing prisoners' contact with women, but POWs who left camp bounds and visited local communities repeatedly fraternized with the opposite sex. Farming operations and urban industry offered more opportunities for fraternization, as POWs worked alongside female employees at companies like Donnell & Mudge Ltd. and interacted with their employers and their families. Romantic relationships remained rare but did occur.

Fraternization between POWs and civilians was only one of the many challenges of POW labour. Canada had some experience with the employment of civilian internees in the First World War but the type and extent of the work in the Second World War was unprecedented. The departments of Labour and National Defence borrowed policies and strategies learned from their experiences thirty years prior, but quickly discovered these required significant changes. Canadian authorities, engaged in a constant struggle to preserve the balance between providing sufficient freedom so as to encourage POWs to work – but not escape – as well as enforcing discipline, did their utmost to quickly and effectively overcome existing challenges and prepare for new ones. Some problems arose

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<sup>45</sup> The Department of Labour did, however, recognize that employers often struggled to find sufficient male cooks and therefore made a small number of exceptions. In these camps, guards were instructed to keep a “close watch” for fraternization and immediately report any incidents. A.E. Walford to DOC MD2, December 15, 1945, HQS 7236-34-3-78- Department of Labour Work Project- Driftwood Lands and Timber Ltd., Delray, Ont., C-5386, RG24, LAC.

from the departments of Labour and National Defence both being responsible for POW labour, and each department having its own interests, concerns, and motivations. Problems only increased as other departments, including External Affairs and the Parks Bureau, also became involved. As Department of Labour Inspector Major Forbes noted, the program that developed on a trial-and-error basis ultimately resulted in minimal error but considerable trial.<sup>46</sup> Early labour projects not only helped determine the feasibility of POW labour but heavily shaped existing policies and practices as well as the nature of future projects. The woodcutting camp in Riding Mountain National Park, for example, demonstrated the importance of employers with experience in the industry in which they were employing POWs – something Wartime Housing Ltd. lacked – as well as the importance of an effective administration and guard force. Initial production was far below expectations, but the Department of Labour's takeover in June 1944, which brought about the Veterans' Guard assuming responsibility for security, a change in command, and the transfer of half the POWs, produced significant improvements in production, efficiency, and security.

Prisoners employed in woodcutting camps proved especially influential in shaping policy. In the case of disputes, medical issues, disliking work, or simply being unhappy with bush life, POWs could initially request transfers back to the base camp. Many requests were accommodated, but the administrative headaches and subsequent abuse of this policy prompted the Department of Labour to cease the practice. Unable to quit and return home like civilians would, POWs followed the example of civilian woodcutters and went on strike. Increasing numbers of POWs refusing to work prompted the passing of Order in Council P.C. 6495 in August 1944, authorizing guards to force POWs to work and introducing new disciplinary measures. The new regulations succeeded in reducing trouble but failed to prevent POWs from striking. The Department of Labour was forced to reconsider how it supervised POWs and, engaged in a constant struggle to ensure maximum productivity and efficiency, the department's Directorate of

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<sup>46</sup> Major George Forbes, "Conference - Director of Labour Projects and Inspecting Officers Held at the Prince Arthur Hotel - Port Arthur - Feb 11th-12th 1946," 3, February 1946, Minutes of Meetings, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

Labour Projects expanded from a single director in June 1943 to include a director, a labour officer, an assistant labour officer, an accounts officer, seven inspectors, and five clerical staff by 1945.<sup>47</sup> Inspectors proved crucial in quelling trouble in individual camps and were carefully selected from those with backgrounds in the logging industry. Visiting each project at least once a month, inspectors reviewed living and working conditions, eliminated trouble, and dealt with complaints to ensure work continued without interruption.

The Department of National Defence also made its own changes. In a summary of POW labour, Major A.F. Kemble explained that authorities lacked an effective method of deterring POWs from slowing production. Prisoners were, he argued, “our enemies, who had been ordered to work and it was well known to the authorities that the self-styled ‘camp Gestapo’ was insidiously influencing them against working too hard.”<sup>48</sup> The introduction of P.C. 6495 and the Veterans’ Guard assuming security responsibilities in the latter half of 1944 proved important changes. In the case of trouble, groups of fifteen guards were sent out to immediately deal with strikes or troublesome POWs and, if needed, place selected POWs or the entire camp in detention. Frequent strikes led to the establishment of detention centres, or as Major Kemble described, “‘training camps’ where the fundamentals of woodcraft could be taught.”<sup>49</sup> These higher-security facilities were designed to convince POWs to cooperate in order to maintain the privileges and freedom they enjoyed in bush camps and those who refused to do so were sent back to the base camps and denied future work opportunities. Although detention centres proved especially useful in eliminating trouble, they were not completely successful; with little recourse to protest perceived injustices or make demands, prisoners continued to strike through the spring of 1946.

Prisoners also presented new challenges for employers. Bushworkers, Ian Radforth argues, played a central role in shaping the evolution of logging in Ontario and

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<sup>47</sup> Kemble, “History of Labour Projects PW,” 3.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

the same can be said for prisoners. Experienced woods operators like Abitibi Power & Paper Co. were unable to simply transition from civilian to POW labour as they now had to ensure working and living conditions adhered to the requirements set out by the Department of Labour and the Geneva Convention. This often resulted in POWs enjoying better living conditions than civilian bushworkers. Prisoners also took it upon themselves to “fix up” their year-round camps, adding elements such as hand-built furniture, gardens, and murals, and even building their own recreation facilities and showers – work that civilian cutters had never done.<sup>50</sup>

With no precedent to employing POWs, woods operators found themselves engaged in a seemingly endless struggle to find balance between having POWs work satisfactorily while keeping them content. As Abitibi Power & Paper Co. discovered, POWs were apt to strike when they believed they were being mistreated. Department of Labour inspectors, guards, and company officials had to develop strategies to both prevent and overcome strikes. The arrival of the POWs, and their subsequent complaints, forced both employers and the Department of Labour to arrange for a number of improvements, especially in regard to medical care. Following the example set in Riding Mountain National Park, the Department of Labour began employing POW doctors in bush camps, a change that not only provided better medical care to isolated camps but also practically eliminated malingering and many other problems.

The departure of POWs from the bush also proved an important impetus for significant changes in the lumbering industry in the post-war era. Civilian bushworkers used the concessions and improvements that employers granted to POWs as leverage to improve their own living and working conditions; if the “enemy” received more recreational opportunities or better living conditions than themselves, civilian labours questioned why POWs were being favoured and demanded improvements. The Ontario Forest Industries Association was, as Radforth notes, therefore “compelled” to look into

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<sup>50</sup> C.B. Davis to T.H. Stone and J. Hundevad, January 4, 1946, L-1-2 M- Labor - Toronto January 1/46 to August 31/46, WM 40-46 Box 2 of 5, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

better housing for civilian bushworkers.<sup>51</sup> The reluctance of Canadians to take up bushwork in the post-war period also forced employers to adopt new methods and technologies, namely trucks, tractors, and chainsaws, resulting in a shift from seasonal workers to skilled workers working year-round operations – something employers were even more interested in achieving after employing POWs.

Prisoners did not start out as skilled bushworkers. Employers were glad to secure much-needed labour but POWs, at least initially, were less effective than civilians. Civilian cutters generally worked on a piecework basis, earning more money the more they cut, whereas POWs received a set 50¢ per day and thereby lacked incentive to work to their full potential. With the Department of Labour's approval, employers later agreed POWs would only receive their full pay if the entire camp met its quota and, combined with bonuses awarded to camps that exceeded their quota, POWs began to increase production. The set pay did offer employers some advantages. Employers often used POWs to cut in low-yield stands and difficult terrain – areas in which civilians refused to work. Furthermore, traditional woods labour remained seasonal, with employers relying heavily on farmers looking for winter work, but the year-round employment of POWs allowed bush operations to continue through the summer months despite swarms of insects and oppressive heat. Regardless of the challenges, many prisoners became skilled bushworkers who could compete with their civilian counterparts, prompting employers to press the Department of Labour to allow POWs to remain in the bush as long as possible.

The degree to which civilians had contact with POWs proved extremely influential in determining their attitude towards POWs. Canadians had no problem when POWs were kept distant, but they were more likely to raise concern or protest if POWs were nearby. However, direct contact with prisoners challenged perceptions of the enemy and the barriers between friend and foe, prompting those in contact with POWs to be more likely to appreciate and value POWs as good workers and, in some cases, even friends. Some of this may be attributed to them benefitting financially from POW labour,

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<sup>51</sup> Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 105.

but contact through work forced both employers and POWs to realize they were often not so different from one another. This was especially evident with those employed on individual farms, where POWs lived with their employers and were treated no different than civilian labourers. In some cases, POWs were treated like friends or even family.

Most employers proved quite satisfied with their prisoners, but Canadian support for POWs remained divided throughout the war. Internment camps kept prisoners separated from the public but work, especially farm work, meant prisoners were now in the public eye for the first time. The departments of Labour and National Defence thus attempted to avoid any action or work that would trigger criticism and the easiest way to do so was to keep POWs away from the public whenever possible. The isolation of bushwork meant the public was either little concerned or simply unaware of the presence of POWs in remote camps. So long as POWs remained isolated and posed no danger, there was little opposition. Trouble most often arose when POWs were brought into communities, either for medical or dental treatment or as they were passing through under escort. Despite the presence of escorts, once POWs were spotted roaming the streets of communities like Dauphin, Kenora, or Sioux Lookout, some civilians called upon and questioned the freedom and liberties granted to POWs while Canadians were serving overseas or suffering in German internment camps. These individuals, not regularly interacting with or benefitting from POW labour, were thus much more likely to oppose their presence.

The use of POWs on farms and in urban industry received considerable criticism as these prisoners were much more in the public eye. The City of New Toronto had protested the presence of POWs long before Donnell & Mudge started employing them and continued to protest throughout their employment. Trouble only escalated as POWs took advantage of the project's limited security measures and fraternized with civilians or left camp bounds to roam the streets. Some POWs working on individual farms likewise took advantage of their relative freedom and regularly visited communities like Brooks and Osgoode, irritating residents and prompting calls for increased security or for POWs to be returned to internment camps. The continued employment of POWs prompted claims that POWs were taking jobs away from Canadians, especially returning veterans.

The Department of Labour encountered little opposition to employing POWs while the war was on, but the end of the war prompted trade unions and labour organizations to demand the immediate withdrawal of POWs, claiming they were stealing much-needed jobs from Canadians. Despite such claims, the predicted surge of Canadian labourers never appeared. Donnell & Mudge Ltd. was among the lucky few companies able to secure sufficient civilians to replace its POWs, but many others, especially bush companies, were unable to do so.

Despite public criticism and the apparent risks, few communities or regions banned the employment of POWs. Security concerns prompted the Department of National Defence to prohibit the employment of POWs in the Atlantic provinces and much of British Columbia. Quebec was the only province to take an official stance against POW labour. The province had a number of internment camps but only briefly experimented with POW labour. Eight companies opened thirteen woodcutting camps employing POWs between August 1943 and January 1944, but, in March 1944, the Quebec Forest Industries Association resolved that all POWs should be removed from the province's forestry operations during the summer season, citing an increased risk of fire.<sup>52</sup> This ruling, combined with a number of security breaches, prompted the provincial government to close all POW labour projects and the last camp closed in May 1944. Employers like Price Bros. & Co. had no say in the matter and expressed regret at being "virtually compelled" by the province to remove their POWs.<sup>53</sup> The province would later approve the employment of POWs in emergency agriculture work in the summers of 1945 and 1946, but no more than 110 were ever employed.

Veterans organizations, especially the Canadian Legion, were also the source of frequent criticism of POW labour, especially in 1946 as increasing numbers of Canadian servicemen and servicewomen returned home. Veterans of either the First or Second

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<sup>52</sup> W.A.E. Pepler to Henri Kieffer and Col. R. Fordham, March 23, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

<sup>53</sup> Lt.-Col. R.S.W. Fordham to A. MacNamara, May 23, 1944, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5380, RG24, LAC.

World Wars rarely saw these men as anything but the enemy, and thus questioned why they should be allowed to live and work in relative freedom when Canadian soldiers were fighting and dying overseas or were living in poor conditions in German internment camps.

Despite claims suggesting otherwise, the Canadian government was well aware of how Canadian POWs were treated in Germany and Canada's treatment of POWs reflected this. The treatment of Allied POWs in Germany was strongly tied to the Allies' treatment of German POWs and Canada therefore remained extremely cautious to implement any policies or practices that could result in reprisals against Canadian and other Allied POWs in Germany. This was one of the reasons it took so long for Canada to approve the employment of POWs and why the policy was repeatedly and carefully reviewed. Canada thus tried taking the high ground in the hopes that Germany would improve – or at least maintain – the living and working conditions of POWs. It is worth noting that men of the Veterans' Guard, nearly all veterans of the First World War, took issue with public criticism of Canada's treatment of POWs. The authors of the Camp 132 newspaper *P.O.W. WOW* stated in November 1945,

A good deal of criticism has at one time or another been levelled against the treatment accorded German prisoners of war in Canada. It is said that the guards are too lenient, the PWs are housed and fed too well. Why pamper them when our own boys in Germany got hell and a starvation diet? Generally speaking, those who so freely voice their opinion are people who know nothing of internment camp work, either in Canada or Germany, and only enlarge on little snatches of information and hearsay.

The facts are, of course, that the German PWs in Canada were never pampered but treated as soldiers - just like we hoped our own boys in Germany would be treated. It would not improve the situation if the Canadians imitated the degrading example of the Germans throughout Europe. Two wrongs do not make a right. These critics do not seem to understand that an internment camp is not a place for punishment or retaliation. The Vets did their guard duty, unmoved by either sympathy or hatred, even though some of them had tasted the miseries of German prison camps. It is important that this correct attitude continue.

Beating and starving German prisoners is not the way to teach them democracy. We believe in right and wrong in this world and the only way



to demonstrate it is by example. The policy regarding prisoners of war in Canada has paid and is continuing to pay dividends.<sup>54</sup>

As Jonathan Vance has noted, Canada's fair treatment of POWs did result in some improvements in living conditions of POWs in Germany, but the effect was relatively limited.<sup>55</sup> The treatment of POWs in Canada meant Germany had no reason to enact reprisals against Canadian POWs in Germany. The perceived "pampering" of POWs continued to prompt considerable public backlash throughout the war and immediate post-war period, but it did prove effective in changing how POWs perceived Canada.

Concerns of how POWs were being treated were to be expected, especially with regard to security at labour projects. From the beginning, authorities recognized the reduced security measures inherent with POW labour would undoubtedly result in escape attempts. And they were not wrong. There were, however, no mass escape attempts. (Nineteen prisoners did go missing from Riding Mountain and were initially suspected of escape, but the evidence suggested they simply got lost while exploring their new surroundings.) In all, prisoners interned in Canada made approximately 600 escape attempts, many of which were from labour projects, between 1939 and 1946, but these were nearly all unsuccessful.<sup>56</sup> Early escape attempts were often made with the intention of returning to Germany, a feat only one soldier succeeded in, but this became much more difficult when the United States entered the war in 1941. Others simply wanted to cause trouble or go on an adventure, while most were simply tired of captivity and hoped to gain some measure of freedom, if only for a few days. As the war progressed and turned in the Allies' favour, the motive for escapes shifted: prisoners wanted to stay in Canada. Denied the possibility of voluntarily remaining in the country, many POWs saw

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<sup>54</sup> "Stand Easy," *P.O.W. WOW* 2:3, November 12, 1945 in Jerry Glasgo Fonds, Esplanade Archives.

<sup>55</sup> Jonathan F. Vance, *Objects of Concern: Canadian Prisoners of War through the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 1994), 133.

<sup>56</sup> In comparison, there were 2,222 escape attempts from the approximately 425,000 POWs interned in the United States between 1942 and 1946. J. Malcolm Garcia, "German POWs on the American Homefront," *Smithsonian.com*, September 15, 2009, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/german-pows-on-the-american-homefront-141009996>. Major E.H.J. Barber, "Memorandum on Internment Operations in Canada during the Second World War, 1939-1947," n.d., 28, 382.013 (D1) Internment Ops - Cda - Memoir on Internment OPS in Cda during Second World War by Major EHJ Barber, DHH.

escape as their only option to avoid repatriation to war-torn occupied Germany. These escape attempts therefore continued right up to transfer to the UK, with the last recorded attempt occurring on December 29, 1946 – only days before the last POWs' scheduled departure.<sup>57</sup>

Of those who did try to escape, most were recaptured within a matter of days while others managed to evade capture for months. Twenty-one individuals were still at large as of January 11, 1947.<sup>58</sup> Seven were recaptured within the next six months and one surrendered in 1948, and all were then transferred to the United Kingdom. One POW surrendered in 1949 and another three in 1953 but these individuals were all allowed to stay in Canada. The remaining seven were never recaptured.<sup>59</sup>

Critics frequently commented on the potential for escape but they rarely considered the usefulness of POW labour. This failure remains evident in the historiography. Popular and academic historians have fixated on whether internment in Canada was “successful,” but most have neglected to consider how POW labour fits into this. Over half of POWs in Canada worked in a labour project at some point, not only freeing up Canadians for wartime service or work but helping sustain Canadian industry until civilian labour was once again available. In his brief history, Major Kemble stated that, everything considered, the employment of POWs was an “outstanding success,” evident by the constant demand for POWs until civilian labour was once again available. Citing letters received from provincial governments and employing companies, all of which expressed their satisfaction with and appreciation of POW labour, Kemble claimed that to some industries the program was “a veritable life-giving plasma enabling them to revive and continue their vigorous contribution to the Nation’s war effort.” Kemble

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<sup>57</sup> After escaping from Camp 32 (Hull), Artur Scheffler was recaptured on February 6, 1947 and transferred to the UK. Scheffler had previously worked for Chisholm Saw Mills and had spent the summer of 1946 working on farms in Alberta. “Scheffler, Artur,” POW Pay Records, T7037, RG24, LAC.

<sup>58</sup> This does not include Franz von Werra, who escaped from a train in 1941 and successfully returned to Germany. “Nominal Roll of Persons Held in Internment Camps in Canada,” January 11, 1947, HQS 7236-34-3 - Department of Labour. Work Projects Policy, C-5381, RG24, LAC.

<sup>59</sup> The RCMP continued to follow leads into the mid-1950s, but, by this point, the British government was no longer interested in recapturing and repatriating these escapees.

reported that in the seven months POWs were employed in 1943, the net annual income resulting from POW labour was \$155,948.15 and this increased to \$675,108.47 in 1944 and \$2,427,123.81 in 1945.<sup>60</sup>

The Department of Labour profited, but not every POW labour project proved a financial success. As of April 1945, the Department reported profits of \$918,709.58 against losses totalling \$160,445.20 – \$46,150.49 of which came with the Department of Labour's takeover of the Riding Mountain Camp.<sup>61</sup> This profit did not take into account the cost of guarding the POWs, borne by the Department of National Defence. Director of Prisoners of War Lt.-Col. H.W. Pearson noted that because the Department of National Defence remained responsible for the discipline, security, and transfer of POWs, it had to absorb these costs while the Department of Labour “reaped the financial benefits from the sale of such labour.”<sup>62</sup> The result was that, by December 31, 1945, POW labour had cost over \$10.6 million and had brought in \$8.6 million – a deficit of \$2.0 million. Prisoner of war labour did result in saving the Canadian government – and thereby the British government, which was responsible for paying the cost of internment – approximately \$5 million for guarding, feeding, and boarding prisoners in internment camps.<sup>63</sup> One could thus argue that POW labour was a net benefit to the Canadian economy.

But the effectiveness of POW labour went beyond its monetary value. In October 1945, Humphrey Mitchell claimed its value was “impossible of computation,” but nonetheless “huge.” “At a time when no other labour was available,” he explained, “work performed by prisoners of war materially assisted in maintaining Canadian home

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<sup>60</sup> Figures are unavailable for 1946. Kemble, “History of Labour Projects PW,” 23-24.

<sup>61</sup> Department of Labour, “Statement Showing total Receipts and Disbursements for Prisoners of War Labour Projects for period of operations from Start of each Project to April 30, 1945,” Statements Showing Receipts and Disbursement for POW Projects, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>62</sup> Lieut.-Colonel H.W. Pearson, “Narrative of the Directorate, Prisoners of War,” September 14, 1946, HQS 7236 - Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368, RG24, LAC.

<sup>63</sup> C.L. Read, “Memorandum on Net Returns from Prisoner-of-War Labour Projects in Canada,” February 27, 1946, 621-AE-40 - Payment of Claims with Respect to the Operation of Internment Camps in Canada for Prisoners of War Transferred from the United Kingdom, Vol. 2766, RG25, LAC.

production in vital fields.”<sup>64</sup> The state of Canadian agriculture and logging would have been much different without POWs, considering they provided almost 15,000 labourers at their peak. Over 8,000 of these were working in Northern Ontario – a third of the total number of bushworkers in the province – allowing pulp and paper companies and mills to maintain production levels impossible to achieve without the additional help. Companies like Abitibi Power & Paper Co. stated that employing POWs had prevented them from being forced to close some of their mills, an act which would have also cost the jobs of many Canadians. As Major Kemble explained, the employment of POWs in bushwork had far-reaching effects:

Thousands of Canadians will benefit directly in 1946 and 1947 through lucrative employment in the pulp and paper mills in such centres as Fort Francis, Kenora, Fort William, Port Arthur, Nipigon, Marathon, Sault Ste. Marie, Kapuskasing, Smooth Rock Falls, etc. Additional hundreds employed by railway and steamship companies will benefit through the employment that will be involved in the movement of the finished products from the pulp and paper plants. Many additional thousands in the towns and cities, where pulp mills are located, will benefit indirectly through the purchasing power that will be released from the mills and transportation system payrolls. Canadian economy will benefit directly from the millions of dollars of U.S. credits from the sale of manufactured products in the U.S.A.<sup>65</sup>

Thanks in part to POW labour, companies did not need to rely on pulpwood reserves as an increase in pulpwood cutting in the 1945-1946 season produced nearly 6.5 million tons of wood-pulp, 16% more than the 1944-1945 season.<sup>66</sup>

Sugar production was also significantly boosted by POW labour. The Department of Labour credited Japanese Canadian internees and POWs with saving the beet crops, thereby preventing the closure of sugar refineries and an otherwise inevitable sugar shortage. Prisoners blocked, thinned, picked, and topped thousands of tons of sugar beets,

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<sup>64</sup> “Draft News Release - Prisoners of War Save Canada a Million and a Half Dollars,” October 17, 1945, 15. General Correspondence concerning POW's, Vol. 965, RG27, LAC.

<sup>65</sup> Kemble, “History of Labour Projects PW,” 18.

<sup>66</sup> Wartime Prices and Trade Board, *Report of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board: January 1, 1946 to December 31, 1946* (Ottawa, ON: Edmond Cloutier, 1947), 37.

which were later processed into millions of pounds of much-needed sugar. Yet, Major Kemble argued, farm work could not simply be measured in dollars and cents; while not employed on sugar beet farms, those working from hostels and internment camps were also employed as general farm labourers, work Kemble believed “undoubtedly contributed tremendously to the general farm output of the localities in which they operated.”<sup>67</sup>

Perhaps the greatest success was in terms of re-education or getting POWs to re-evaluate their perceptions of Canada and its people as well as their own values. Direct contact with the natural environment and with Canadians prompted many POWs to reconsider what they thought of this enemy state and many completely changed their views. In a post-war report, intelligence officer Major E.H. Barber argued, “While it was not considered strictly part of the Psychological warfare, the operation which contributed more than any other to the change of attitude of the prisoners of war was their employment in works projects throughout the country.” It was the proper treatment of POWs at the hands of both military authorities and civilians, Barber argued, that significantly influenced POWs in favour of the detaining power and prompted more than 6,000 POWs to apply to stay in Canada. He therefore concluded that, in the event of a future conflict, the employment of POWs be initiated and developed immediately, regardless of the financial results.<sup>68</sup>

Canadian authorities did not track the POWs once they were transferred to the United Kingdom, but most prisoners spent the next year working before finally being repatriated to Germany in 1947 and 1948. In his history of MI7, the British intelligence branch responsible for classifying and re-educating POWs, Lt.-Col. A.G. Wygard noted,

As can be gathered from letters received from our former ‘charges’, they are shocked by the state of devastation and economic conditions in their homeland. Once they recover from this initial shock, and also with the

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<sup>67</sup> Kemble, “History of Labour Projects PW,” 13 and 22.

<sup>68</sup> Major E.H.J. Barber, “Memorandum on Internment Operations in Canada during the Second World War, 1939-1947,” n.d., 382.013 (D1) Internment Ops - Cda - Memoir on Internment OPS in Cda during Second World War by Major EHJ Barber, DHH.

eventual improvement in the food situation (which will allow them to think in terms other than pangs of hunger), it is fair to expect that this small nucleus of 'democratized' Germans, together with those from the U.K. and the U.S.A., will emerge as adherents of Western philosophy and ideals.<sup>69</sup>

Returning to Germany by 1948, many former POWs were forced to rebuild, with their families displaced, missing, or dead. As they began to pick up the pieces and resume their pre-war lives, many remained hopeful they would once again return to Canada – this time as free men. Canada continued to receive applications from former POWs requesting permission to immigrate in the immediate post-war years. Each application received the same answer: “No.”

But in September 1950, the Cabinet removed German nationals from the category of prohibited enemy aliens, allowing them to be considered in the same manner as other prospective immigrants, and German immigrants began arriving soon after.<sup>70</sup> For some former POWs, it was too late. George Förester, had dreamed of returning to Canada, but since returning to Germany, he had gotten married – finally making use of the wedding rings he had purchased from the Eaton's Catalogue while working in Riding Mountain National Park – and settled down to start a family. He and his wife returned to Canada as tourists in 1976 to see the places where he had once lived and worked. Förester was not alone. There are no statistics available regarding the immigration of former POWs, but it is believed that most of those who applied to stay or hoped to return to Canada never did. Richard Beranek, the sixteen-year-old who had been captured at D-Day and later worked at Mafeking for the Manitoba Paper Co., passed away before he was able to return to Canada, but he never forgot his time here. Honouring their father's memory, his two children visited Canada in September 2015 to see the places their father had described with such fondness – the places of his “greatest adventure.”

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<sup>69</sup> Lt.-Col. A.G. Wygard, “History of the Organization, Functions, and Operations of MI 7,” 28 February 1946, HQS-S9139-7 - P/W Classification - M.I. 7 Policy, C-8437, RG24, LAC.

<sup>70</sup> N.A. Robertson, “Cabinet Conclusions,” September 1, 1950, Vol. 2646, T-2367, Series A-5-a, RG2, LAC.

Some prisoners never did give up on their dream to return and there was a slow but steady stream of POWs who returned to Canada in the 1950s, either alone or with families in tow. Now skilled bushworkers and farm hands from their time in Canada, many former POWs returned to the areas they had formerly worked – now as free men – and often with the help of their former employers. Abitibi Power & Paper Co., for example, helped sponsor eleven POWs to return to Canada as of July 1951, including Günther Thom, who had attempted to escape while working for the company.<sup>71</sup> Some of the farmers who had hosted POWs also sponsored them to return. Erwin Beier, who had escaped from his St. Thomas-area farm in 1946, returned to Canada with his wife and child in 1951 with the help of Tom Carter, the farmer he had worked for – and escaped from – five years prior.<sup>72</sup> Paul Mengelberg also enlisted the help of his former employer, Cameron McTaggart, and was able to return to Canada in 1951, this time with his new wife. They first settled in Glencoe, where he had spent the summer of 1946, before later moving to Longlac, a place he had had fallen in love with while cutting pulpwood for the Pulp-Wood Supply Co.<sup>73</sup> Johannes Lieberwirth, who had worked for the Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co. near Kenora, returned to the area in 1977 with his wife and, enjoying his return so much, purchased a cottage near Sioux Narrows to which he returned every summer for the next thirty years.<sup>74</sup> Appreciative of the treatment they had received, prisoners like Paul Mengelberg and Johannes Lieberwirth had left Canada in 1946 different men than when they had arrived. Whether or not POWs were able to return, their time in Canada had left a lasting impression.

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<sup>71</sup> List of Immigrants, July 25, 1951, L-1-2 Labour Toronto 1950-1951, WM 51B Box 4 of 4, Historical Forestry Database, SSMPL.

<sup>72</sup> “‘Seen Enough,’ P.O.W. Returns as Immigrant,” *Toronto Star*, July 17, 1951.

<sup>73</sup> Mengelberg, *From Iron Coffin to Freedom North*, 92.

<sup>74</sup> Nelson, “Temporary Enemies, Permanent Friends,” 28.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Internment Camps in Canada, 1939-1947.

No.	Letter	City	Province	Opened	Closed
-	-	Quebec	Quebec	13-Sep-39	07-Dec-39
-	R	Red Rock	Ontario	02-Jul-40	23-Oct-41
-	L	Cove Fields	Quebec	13-Jul-40	Nov-40
-	T	Trois-Rivières	Quebec	Jul-40	12-Aug-40
10	-	Chatham	Ontario	15-May-44	14-Nov-46
10	-	Fingal	Ontario	01-Dec-45	14-Nov-46
20	C	Gravenhurst	Ontario	30-Jun-40	30-Jun-46
21	E	Espanola	Ontario	07-Jul-40	31-Jan-44
22	M	New Toronto	Ontario	25-Jun-40	30-Apr-44
23	Q	Monteith	Ontario	14-Jul-40	01-Dec-46
30	-	Bowmanville	Ontario	19-Nov-41	30-Apr-45
31	F	Kingston	Ontario	29-Jun-40	15-Dec-43
32	-	Hull	Quebec	09-Aug-41	20-Mar-47
33	P	Petawawa	Ontario	23-Sep-39	10-Apr-46
40	A	Farnham	Quebec	11-Oct-40	31-May-46
41	I	Ile-Aux-Noix	Quebec	15-Jul-40	31-Jan-44
42	N	Sherbrooke	Quebec	15-Oct-40	15-Jul-46
43	S	St. Helen's Island	Quebec	03-Jul-40	31-Jan-44
44	-	Grande Ligne	Quebec	15-Jan-43	30-Apr-46
45	-	Sorel	Quebec	09-May-45	14-Apr-46
70	B	Fredericton	New Brunswick	12-Aug-40	14-Oct-45
100	W	Neys	Ontario	13-Jan-41	01-May-46
101	X	Angler	Ontario	10-Jan-41	31-Jul-46
130	K	Seebe (Kananaskis)	Alberta	06-Sep-39	30-Jun-46
132	-	Medicine Hat	Alberta	01-Jan-43	15-May-46
133	-	Lethbridge	Alberta	24-Nov-42	19-Dec-46
133	-	Ozada	Alberta	06-May-42	02-Dec-42
135	-	Wainwright	Alberta	01-Dec-44	14-Jun-46

**Appendix B: POW Labour Projects – Logging and Related Work.<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Employer</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Prov.</b>	<b>Camp No.</b>
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Magpie	ON	Camp 16
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Magpie	ON	Camp 18
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Magpie	ON	Camp 19
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Magpie	ON	Camp 26
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Magpie	ON	Camp 27
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Magpie	ON	Camp 28
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Magpie	ON	Camp 30
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Minataree	ON	Camp 10 (Main)
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Minataree	ON	Camp 11
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Minataree	ON	Camp 2
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Minataree	ON	Camp 3
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Minataree	ON	Camp 4
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Minataree	ON	Camp 6
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Minataree	ON	Camp 8
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Minataree	ON	Camp 9
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Minnipuka	ON	Camp 29
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Regan	ON	Camp 20
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Regan	ON	Camp 22 (Main)
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Regan	ON	Camp 23
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Regan	ON	Camp 24
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Regan	ON	Camp 25
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Regan	ON	Camp 31
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Regan	ON	Camp 32
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Regan	ON	Camp 34
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Smooth Rock Falls	ON	Camp 17
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Smooth Rock Falls	ON	Camp 18 (Main)
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Smooth Rock Falls	ON	Camp 21
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Smooth Rock Falls	ON	Camp 25
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Smooth Rock Falls	ON	Camp 26
Abitibi Power & Paper Co.	Timmins	ON	Camp 16

<sup>1</sup> Appendices B, C, and D were compiled by author from records of the Department of Labour (Volumes 951 to 966, RG25, LAC) and Department of National Defence (Reels C-5380 to C-5387, RG24, LAC).

<b>Employer (continued)</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Prov.</b>	<b>Camp No.</b>
Anglo-Canadian Pulp & Paper Mills, Ltd.	Charlesbourg	QC	Camp 158A
Anglo-Canadian Pulp & Paper Mills, Ltd.	Charlesbourg	QC	Camp 158B
Armour & Graham Ltd. (originally G.L. Magann & Co.)	Chapleau	ON	-
Arrow Land & Logging Co.	Calstock	ON	-
Atlas Lumber Co., Ltd.	Rocky Mountain House	AB	-
Brompton Pulp & Paper Co.,	Beardmore	ON	Camp 20
Brompton Pulp & Paper Co.,	Beardmore	ON	Camp 21
Brompton Pulp & Paper Co.,	Beardmore	ON	Camp 31
Canada Woods Products Ltd.	Rodney	ON	-
Canadian International Paper Co.	Clova	QC	Chouart Depot Camp
Canadian International Paper Co.	Clova	QC	Lake Travers Camp
Carroll Bros. Lumber Co.	Winfield	AB	-
Chisholm Saw Mills, Ltd.	Chisholm Mills	AB	-
Chisholm Saw Mills, Ltd.	Smith	AB	-
Consolidated Paper Corporation	Perthuis	QC	-
Corporation of the City of Kingston	Chantry	ON	-
D.R. Fraser & Co. Ltd.	Breton	AB	-
Dept. of Labour	Riding Mountain Park	MB	Clear Lake Cadet Camp
Driftwood Lands & Timber	Delray	ON	Camp 1
Driftwood Lands & Timber	Delray	ON	Camp 3
Driftwood Lands & Timber	Hunta	ON	Camp 4
Eau Claire Sawmills	Seebe	AB	-
Etter-McDougall Co. Ltd.	Brule	AB	-
Etter-McDougall Saw Mills Ltd.	Winfield	AB	Camp 1
Etter-McDougall Saw Mills Ltd.	Winfield	AB	Camp 6
Etter-McDougall Saw Mills Ltd.	Winfield	AB	Camp 8
Etter-McDougall Saw Mills Ltd.	Winfield	AB	Camp 9
Gillies Bros. & Co.	Brent	ON	Camp 2
Gillies Bros. & Co.	Brent	ON	Camp 3
Gillies Bros. & Co.	Brent	ON	Camp 4
Gillies Bros. Ltd.,	Schyan	ON	-
Great Lakes Lumber & Shipping Co.	Fort William	ON	Mill Project
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Hurkett	ON	Camp 11

<b>Employer (continued)</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Prov.</b>	<b>Camp No.</b>
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Hurkett	ON	Camp 12
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Hurkett	ON	Camp 14
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Hurkett	ON	Camp 15
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Hurkett	ON	Camp 16
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Hurkett	ON	Camp 17
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Hurkett	ON	Camp 7
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Ignace	ON	Camp 2
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Martin	ON	Camp 400
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Martin	ON	Camp 404
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Savanne	ON	-
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Savanne	ON	Camp 103
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Savanne	ON	Camp 108
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Savanne	ON	Camp 114
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Valora	ON	Camp 300
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Valora	ON	Camp 301
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Valora	ON	Camp 303
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Valora	ON	Camp 305
Great Lakes Paper Co.	Valora	ON	Camp 307
Hales H. Ross & Sons	Grand Prairie	AB	-
Hales H. Ross & Sons	Grand Prairie	AB	-
International Paper Co.	Maniwaki	QC	-
International Paper Co.	St. Faustin	QC	Rouge (1)
International Paper Co.	St. Faustin	QC	Rouge (2)
J.A. Mathieu, Ltd.	Flanders	ON	Camp 1
J.A. Mathieu, Ltd.	Flanders	ON	Camp 2
J.A. Mathieu, Ltd.	Flanders	ON	Camp 3
J.A. Mathieu, Ltd.	Flanders	ON	Camp 4
J.R. Booth, Ltd.	Moor Lake	ON	-
J.T. & G.R. Kendrew	Seebe	AB	-
John Devlin Timber Co.	Rennie	MB	
Kalamazoo Vegetable Parchment Co.	Cartier	ON	Camp 101
Kalamazoo Vegetable Parchment Co.	Ramsey	ON	Camp 501
Kalamazoo Vegetable Parchment Co.	Sheahan (Wye)	ON	Camp 103
Kalamazoo Vegetable Parchment Co.	Sultan	ON	Camp 503
Keeling, Markle & Burns, Co.	MacTier	ON	-

<b>Employer (continued)</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Prov.</b>	<b>Camp No.</b>
Longlac Pulp & Paper Co. Ltd./Pulp-Wood Supply Co. Ltd.	Longlac	ON	Camp 15
Manitoba Paper Co.	Pine Falls	MB	Camp 13
Manitoba Paper Co.	Pine Falls	MB	Camp 6
Manitoba Paper Co.	Pine Falls	MB	Camp 8
Manitoba Paper Co. (Abitibi)	Mafeking	MB	Camp 12
Marathon Paper Mills	Peninsula (Marathon)	ON	Camp 34
Marathon Paper Mills	Peninsula (Marathon)	ON	Camp 35
Marathon Paper Mills	Peninsula (Marathon)	ON	Camp 37
McRae Lumber Company	Canyon Creek	AB	-
McRae Lumber Company	Faust	AB	-
Mr. C. Jolley	St. Thomas	ON	-
N.R. Shaw Lumber Company	Cochrane	AB	-
Newago Timber Co.	Mead	ON	Camp 69
Newago Timber Co.	Mead	ON	Camp 70
Newago Timber Co.	Mead	ON	Camp 74
Newago Timber Co.	Mead	ON	Camp 75
Newago Timber Co.	Mead	ON	Camp 77
Newago Timber Co.	Mead	ON	Camp 78
Newago Timber Co.	Pie Island	ON	Camp 18 (Camp 3)
Newago Timber Co. Ltd.	Shesheeb Bay	ON	Camp 3
Nipigon Lake Timber Co.	Armstrong	ON	Camp 51
Nipigon Lake Timber Co.	Armstrong	ON	Camp 56
Nipigon Lake Timber Co.	Armstrong	ON	Camp 58
Nipigon Lake Timber Co.	McKirdy	ON	Camp 19
Nipigon Lake Timber Co.	McKirdy	ON	Camp 29
Nipigon Lake Timber Co.	McKirdy	ON	Camp 33
Nipigon Lake Timber Co.	McKirdy	ON	Camp 34
Nipigon Lake Timber Co.	McKirdy	ON	Camp 41
Nipigon Lake Timber Co.	Valora	ON	Camp 20
Nipigon Lake Timber Co.	Valora	ON	Camp 39
North Shore Timber Co.	Little Current	ON	
Northern Paper Mills	Hansen	ON	Camp 10
Northern Paper Mills	Hansen	ON	Camp 3
Northern Paper Mills	Hansen	ON	Camp 4
Northern Paper Mills	Hansen	ON	Camp 5

<b>Employer (continued)</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Prov.</b>	<b>Camp No.</b>
Northern Paper Mills	Hansen	ON	Camp 6 (Main)
Northern Paper Mills	Hansen	ON	Camp 8
Northern Paper Mills	Michipicoten Harbour	ON	-
Ontario Paper Co. Ltd.	Hemlo	ON	Camp 2
Ontario Paper Co. Ltd.	Heron Bay	ON	Camp 1
Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co.	Flanders	ON	Camp 103
Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co.	Flanders	ON	Camp 103A
Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co.	Flanders	ON	Camp 104
Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co.	Flanders	ON	Camp 105
Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co.	Flanders	ON	Camp 106
Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co.	Flanders	ON	Pearson's Camp
Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co.	Hudson	ON	Camp 62
Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co.	Hudson	ON	Camp 63
Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co.	Kenora	ON	Camp 43
Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co.	Kenora	ON	Camp 52 (Camp 1)
Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co.	Kenora	ON	Camp 56
Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co.	Kenora	ON	Camp 60
Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co.	Kenora	ON	Camp 61 (Camp 2)
Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co.	Vermilion Bay	ON	Camp 44B
Ontario-Minnesota Pulp & Paper Co.	Vermilion Bay	ON	Camp 66
Pigeon Timber Co.	Hurkett	ON	Camp 10
Pigeon Timber Co.	Hurkett	ON	Camp 11
Pigeon Timber Co.	Hurkett	ON	Camp 7
Pigeon Timber Co.	Hurkett	ON	Camp 8
Pigeon Timber Co.	Neys	ON	-
Pigeon Timber Co.	Neys	ON	Camp 67
Pigeon Timber Co.	Neys	ON	Camp 72
Pigeon Timber Co.	Neys	ON	Camp 73
Pigeon Timber Co.	Neys	ON	Camp 74
Pigeon Timber Co.	Neys	ON	Camp 76
Pigeon Timber Co.	Neys	ON	Camp 77
Pigeon Timber Co.	Neys	ON	Camp 90
Pigeon Timber Co.	Neys	ON	Camp 93
Price Bros. & Co. Ltd.,	Chicoutimi	QC	-
Price Bros. & Co. Ltd.,	Dolbeau	QC	Camp 142
Price Bros. & Co. Ltd.,	Dolbeau	QC	Camp 143
Provincial Paper Co.	Hurkett	ON	Camp 10



<b>Employer (continued)</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Prov.</b>	<b>Camp No.</b>
Provincial Paper Co.	Hurkett	ON	Camp 5
Provincial Paper Co.	Hurkett	ON	Camp 6A
Provincial Paper Co.	Hurkett	ON	Camp 7
Provincial Paper Co.	Hurkett	ON	Camp 8
Pulp-Wood Supply Co. Ltd.	Longlac	ON	Camp 22
Pulp-Wood Supply Co. Ltd.	Longlac	ON	Camp 23
Pulp-Wood Supply Co. Ltd.	Longlac	ON	Camp 26
Pulp-Wood Supply Co. Ltd.	Longlac	ON	Camp 27
Pulp-Wood Supply Co. Ltd.	Longlac	ON	Camp 8 (Main)
Pulp-Wood Supply Co. Ltd	Longlac	ON	Camp 21
R.D. Moon	Wolf Creek	AB	-
Rudolph McChesney Lumber Co.	Mattagami	ON	-
Singer Mfg. Company	Thurso	QC	-
Spruce Falls Pulp & Paper Co.	Kapuskasing	ON	Camp 36
Spruce Falls Pulp & Paper Co.	Kapuskasing	ON	Camp 37 (Main)
Spruce Falls Pulp & Paper Co.	Kapuskasing	ON	Camp 43
St. Lawrence Paper Mills	St. Paulin	QC	-
Standard Chemical Co.	Harcourt	ON	Mumford
Standard Chemical Co.	South River	ON	Camp 10
Standard Chemical Co.	South River	ON	Camp 11
Standard Chemical Co.	South River	ON	Camp 12
Standard Chemical Co.	South River	ON	Camp 14
Swanson Lumber Co.	Clearwater	BC	-
Swanson Lumber Co.	Granada	AB	-
Unknown	Cypress Hills	AB	-
Urho Aho (Great Lakes Paper Co.)	Kabiagon	ON	Camp 9
Wartime Housing Ltd. and Department of Labour	Riding Mountain Park	MB	-
Western Construction & Lumber Co.	Whitecourt	AB	Camp 4
Western Construction & Lumber Co.	Whitecourt	AB	-

**Appendix C: POW Labour Projects – Agriculture**

<b>Employer</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Province</b>
Canada Land & Irrigation Co.	Gleichen	AB
Canada Land & Irrigation Co.	Taber	AB
Farm Hostel	Barnwell	AB
Farm Hostel	Blackdale	MB
Farm Hostel	Brandon	MB
Farm Hostel	Brooks	AB
Farm Hostel	Centralia	ON
Farm Hostel	Chatham	ON
Farm Hostel	Coaldale	AB
Farm Hostel	Curtis	MB
Farm Hostel	Curtis (Newton)	MB
Farm Hostel	Dominion City	MB
Farm Hostel	Elie	MB
Farm Hostel	Emerson	MB
Farm Hostel	Fairlight	SK
Farm Hostel	Fingal	ON
Farm Hostel	Glencoe	ON
Farm Hostel	Grassmere	MB
Farm Hostel	Hamiota	MB
Farm Hostel	Hamiota	MB
Farm Hostel	Headingly	MB
Farm Hostel	Holland	MB
Farm Hostel	Holland	MB
Farm Hostel	Homewood	MB
Farm Hostel	Iron Springs (Picture Butte)	AB
Farm Hostel	Kane	MB
Farm Hostel	La Rochelle	MB
Farm Hostel	Letellier	MB
Farm Hostel	Magrath (Raymond)	AB
Farm Hostel	Manitou	MB
Farm Hostel	Manitou	MB
Farm Hostel	Melita	MB
Farm Hostel	Melita	MB
Farm Hostel	Morris	MB
Farm Hostel	Morris	MB
Farm Hostel	Neepawa	MB
Farm Hostel	Neepawa	MB

<b>Employer</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Province</b>
Farm Hostel	Park Lake	AB
Farm Hostel	Reston	MB
Farm Hostel	Shilo	MB
Farm Hostel	Shoal Lake	MB
Farm Hostel	St. Agathe	MB
Farm Hostel	St. Eustache	MB
Farm Hostel	St. Jean	MB
Farm Hostel	St. Pierre	MB
Farm Hostel	Stirling	AB
Farm Hostel	Teulon	MB
Farm Hostel	Turin	AB
Farm Hostel	Wauchope	SK
Farm Hostel	Welling	AB
Farm Hostel	Whiteside	AB
Farm Hostel	Winkler	MB
Farm Hostel	Wishart	MB
Individual Farmers	Brooks	AB
Individual Farmers	Carleton County	ON
Individual Farmers	Farnham	QC
Individual Farmers	Lethbridge	AB
Individual Farmers	Medicine Hat	AB
Individual Farmers	Metcalf	ON
Individual Farmers	Port Arthur	ON
Individual Farmers	Prince Albert	SK
Individual Farmers	Sherbrooke	QC
Individual Farmers	Southwest Ontario	ON
Individual Farmers	Strathmore	AB
Individual Farmers	-	MB
Medicine Hat Greenhouses	Medicine Hat	AB
Mr. S. Trossi	Petersfield	MB

**Appendix D: POW Labour Projects – Miscellaneous.**

<b>Employer</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Prov.</b>	<b>Type of Work</b>
Algoma Central Railway	Franz	ON	Maintenance
Algoma Central Railway	Sault Ste. Marie	ON	Maintenance
Alsip Brick & Tile Co.	Portage La Prairie	MB	Brickworks
Calgary Power Company	Kananaskis	AB	Power Dam
Canadian National Railway	Brockville	ON	Maintenance
Chalk River Building Project (Fraser Brace Ltd)	Chalk River	ON	Construction
Cooksville Brick Co.	Cooksville	ON	Brickyard
Dept. of Labour	Port Arthur	ON	Clothes Depot
Dept. of National Defence Shilo Military Camp	Shilo	MB	Road Building
Dept. of National Defence A-7 CSTC (Vimy Barracks)	Kingston	ON	Camp Maintenance
Donnell & Mudge, Ltd.	New Toronto	ON	Tannery
Erie Peat Company	Welland	ON	Peat cutting
Harry Hayley	Ottawa	ON	Cement Works
Housing Construction	Lethbridge	AB	Construction
Hydro Electric Power Co.	Petawawa	ON	Constructing Power Line
Loder's Lime Co.	Kananaskis	AB	Other
Medalta Potteries Ltd.	Medicine Hat	AB	Pottery
Medicine Hat Brick & Tile	Medicine Hat	AB	Brickyard
R. Wallace & Sons	North Bay	ON	Brickworks
RCMP Barracks	Rockcliffe	ON	Other
T. & N.O. Railway	Englehart	ON	Maintenance
T. & N.O. Railway	Englehart	ON	Maintenance
Toronto Brick Co.,	Swansea	ON	Brickworks
William H. Stone & Sons	Ingersoll	ON	Fertilizer plant

## Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Michael O'Hagan

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** University of Manitoba  
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2006-2011 B.A. (Honours)

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Alan MacEachern, The University of Western Ontario  
2018-2019

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The University of Western Ontario  
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NiCHE and Alan MacEachern, The University of Western Ontario  
2014-2016

Teaching Assistant  
The University of Western Ontario  
2013-2014

Research Assistant  
Colleen O'Brien, The University of Western Ontario  
2012

**Publications:**

“Freedom in the Midst of Nature’: German Prisoners of War in Riding Mountain National Park”. *Forest History Today* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 56–62.

“The View from Behind the Wire: Prisoner of War Art in Canada during the Second World War”. In *Behind the Lines: Canada’s Home Front During the First and Second World Wars*, 235–49. London, ON: McIntosh Gallery, 2017.

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