

POW found U.S. prison preferable to German army

Near the end of World War II, an internment camp for German prisoners of war occupied a section of Eaton. It was not a large camp and did not remain in operation for more than a year or so.

During that era, POW camps for German soldiers existed in all parts of the United States. Glenn Thompson wrote an account of these camps in Nebraska, *Prisoners on the Plains*.

One of the most outstanding stories in the book came from William Oberdieck. Captured in North Africa where he had been assigned as an interpreter for German Gen. Rommel, Oberdieck recalled thinking that whatever lay in store for him from the enemy, it couldn't be worse than being a soldier in the German army.

"By that time in the war, Germany could not afford to feed its own men," he said in the



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book. "We'd get one stale and moldy cheese sandwich a day."

From Africa, the Allied forces transported the POWs to Scotland to be deloused and clothed in POW dungarees. Oberdieck was among the prisoners transported to the America on the Queen Mary, which, due its speed, was used regularly during the war effort.

Oberdieck recalled rumors among the prisoners about the possibility of being assigned to Camp Atlanta.

"We were thrilled, those of us who knew the geography of

America," he said in *Prisoners on the Plains*. "We thought we'd be picking peaches in Georgia where it was warm and sunny."

Instead, Oberdieck ended up in the Camp Atlanta located on the wintry plains of western Nebraska.

Treatment of the POWs was much better than they had received in their own country's military, Oberdieck said in the book.

"We ate the same rations as the American guards," he recounted. "In fact, the meat ration was more in one day than an entire week's ration in Germany. We asked to have less meat and more starches, like potatoes."

Not that their internment meant a free ride. The POWs replaced the labor of the American men who had left the farms to fight, according to *Prisoners on the Plains*. Each day, trucks left the camp loaded

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**William Oberdieck
German soldier
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WWII**

with men to be dropped off at area farms to do chores and, in season, plant and help with the harvest.

Oberdieck remembered that each POW brought a sack lunch from the camp that usually got eaten before noon.

"So the farm owner's women got in the habit of feeding us," he recalled, "just like they would feed American field hands."

Oberdieck's story has the happiest of endings, as recounted in *Prisoners on the Plains*.

After the war, he spent five years in Germany being "de-Nazi-fied." Then, Oberdieck, his wife and their young daughter returned to the United States to work at the Kimmel Orchards in Nebraska City. When old man Kimmel retired, Oberdieck bought the orchard and ran it until he retired.

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