

Sunday, April 29, 1945

Do We Coddle German War Prisoners? Not at Fort Dix



German prisoners of war are *not coddled* at the Fort Dix camp. The PWs are not mistreated, but neither is any kindness shown them. The officers supervising them are not cruel or lenient; they adhere strictly to the letter of the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners. We base our conclusions on these facts:

We got to Fort Dix at noon and reported to Maj. G. B. Paul, chief of the Intelligence Branch and Public Relations officer at Fort Dix, who took us to the office of Lt. Col. G. McKinley Triesch, commanding officer of Prisoner of War Camp 1262 SCU (Service Command Unit).

The colonel told us that a new batch of prisoners just had arrived and we could see them through the "processing" stage.

With the help of the Colonel, Maj. Paul, Capt. Riewerts, executive officer of the PW camp; Lt. Frieder, PW labor control officer, and Lt. Hort, mess officer of the PW camp, we got this picture of what happens to prisoners arriving at Dix:

No Work, No Eat

The Germans march three to four miles from the rail spur to the camp. They are searched thoroughly for any weapons they may have picked up on the march. Everything is taken from them and an inventory made. Any money they may have is picked up and held in trust.

Then Capt. Riewerts "lays down the law" to the prisoners. We asked the captain to give us a reasonable facsimile. This, he said, is what he tells the newly arrived PWs:

"We want no trouble from you men. Anyone causing any trouble will be punished severely. You are soldiers, and as such must obey all orders. Conduct yourselves in a military manner. As privates, you are expected to work. No work, no eats. Obey all orders without question. If you have any complaints, make them through your spokesman. You may name your own spokesman, but he will have to be approved by the camp's commanding officer."

We asked the colonel what "no work, no eats" meant specifically, and he answered that anyone refusing to work is thrown into prison, where he stays 14 days on a bread-and-water diet.

Prisoner-of-War Camp at Fort Dix



One of the newly arrived PWs is being interviewed at the classification center. He seems glad to be out of the war.

Lt. Frieder added that if any prisoners still are recalcitrant after the 14-day "softening-up" period, they are forced to go on a hard labor detail for 16 days—at no pay. This usually does the trick. From the figures on the board, we noticed that a little more than 1 per cent of the PWs were in the guardhouse.

The colonel stressed the fact that prisoners do not replace civilians. Where civilians are available, they are used. When civilian help is unobtainable, PWs are used.

The type of work PWs do is divided into three priorities by the War Dept., depending on the necessity. Under Priority 1 are listed laundry, combined maintenance shop (where vehicles are repaired), tailoring, ordnance, KP, bakery, clothing and equipment salvage, commissary, post stables sanitation, Signal Corps (where routine Signal Corps photos are developed and printed), dispensary, Tilton General Hospital, post engineers (maintenance of post) and railroad maintenance.

The colonel said PWs are not allowed to handle motors in the maintenance shop, or mix any food or dough in the mess kitchen and bakeries, and that they do not handle any weapons in ordnance, but merely crate and help ship articles.

Under the heading of commissary comes the unloading of freight cars, trucks, and vehicles of food case goods. In the post stables the PWs shoe the horses and mules fix harnesses and clean up. In the Signal Corps lab they mix the solution used in developing and printing. In the dispensary they take care of their own comrades. The PWs clean and help keep the grounds in shape at the Tilton General Hospital, and their work with the post engineers consist of repairing roads, digging drains and sewers, plumbing trenches, hauling materials, etc.

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Here are some of Hitler's supermen. No matter how young they looked, they all gave the age as 18, unless they actually were older. These new PWs don't seem particularly depressed.

The men work constantly under supervision and armed guard.

Contract Labor

Under Priority 2 comes all contract labor. The PWs are sent outside the Fort to work in canneries, wood pulp factories, dairies, farms, etc., where there is a shortage of civilian help. The contractors pay the government for use of the PW labor at the prevailing wage as certified by the War Manpower Commission and the War Food Administration. The prisoner, however, the colonel pointed out, gets paid at the rate of 80 cents a day. This is in addition to the \$3 a month all prisoners get, regardless of whether they can or cannot work.

The PWs, we were told, are paid in coupons which are redeemable at the canteen. The canteen hires as many PWs as it needs, at the rate of 80 cents a day. This is the procedure followed throughout the camp in any instance where funds have not been appropriated by the government to maintain an installation.

The canteen is maintained by the profits it makes in selling to the PWs. From these profits, also, comes the money to buy athletic equipment and books which the U. S. chaplain at the camp recommends to the post exchange officer to buy. The only athletic equipment at camp we saw were one soccer goal post on the "athletic" field in the compound, and one soccer ball, which two PWs were kicking around.

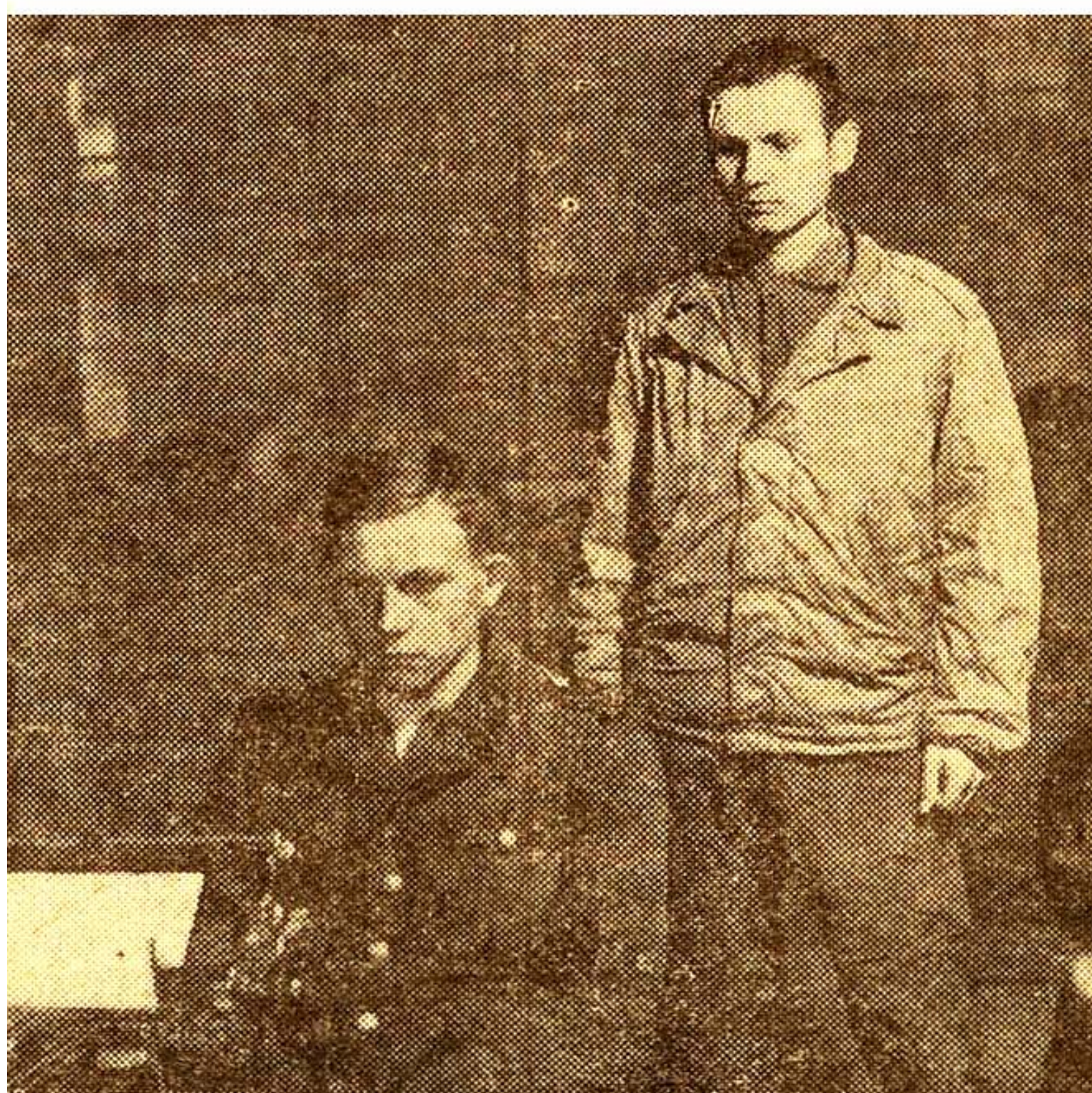
PWs can save their "money." According to Capt. Riewerts, about 20 per cent of the men deposit their savings in a trust fund supervised by the Provost Marshal General. The PWs have a passbook in which their deposits are entered. Capt. Riewerts said the percentage of men saving has risen considerably in recent months.

There was no work listed under Priority 3, and the colonel explained that all the prisoners were engaged in doing Priority 1 and 2 work at present.

After getting all these preliminary details, we entered the PW camp to see for ourselves.

On the way to the "processing" station where the newly arrived PWs were being questioned we passed a long line of Germans waiting their turn. One of the men spotted the officers and yelled:

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This younger Nazi is sullen, almost defiant, as he is questioned at the classification center.

"Achtung!" (Attention). The men reacted too slowly to suit Capt. Riewerts, who strode over and shouted: "When a man yells 'attention,' snap to attention."

PWs were giving either the "Hitler" straightarm salute or the right-hand salute similar to our own. Our escorts told us that German PWs are required to give the salute that they used in the German army and that, apparently, both salutes were used in the Wehrmacht.

In the classification office we saw about 30 GIs sitting at desks facing the new PWs. Fifteen of the GIs were interpreters who questioned the Germans, the other 15 sat by their side and typed out forms containing the answers given by PWs.

We sat down next to one meek-looking German youth of 20. He was wearing a GI field jacket that had several big tears in it. The jacket, one officer explained, had been issued abroad and was what he called Class X, clothes that otherwise would have been thrown away. The boy was asked his name, rank, serial number, address of people he wanted to write to, his age, religion, civilian occupation, where captured, by whom, his health record and whether he had any distinguishing marks on his body. These facts were put down on a sheet of paper that contained



Not all prisoners used the "Hitler" salute. Some would give the regular military salute. This was a common sight.

Prisoner-of-War Camp at Fort Dix



These men giving our officers the "Hitler" salute are some of the older PWs. The straight-arm salute now is barred by War Dept.

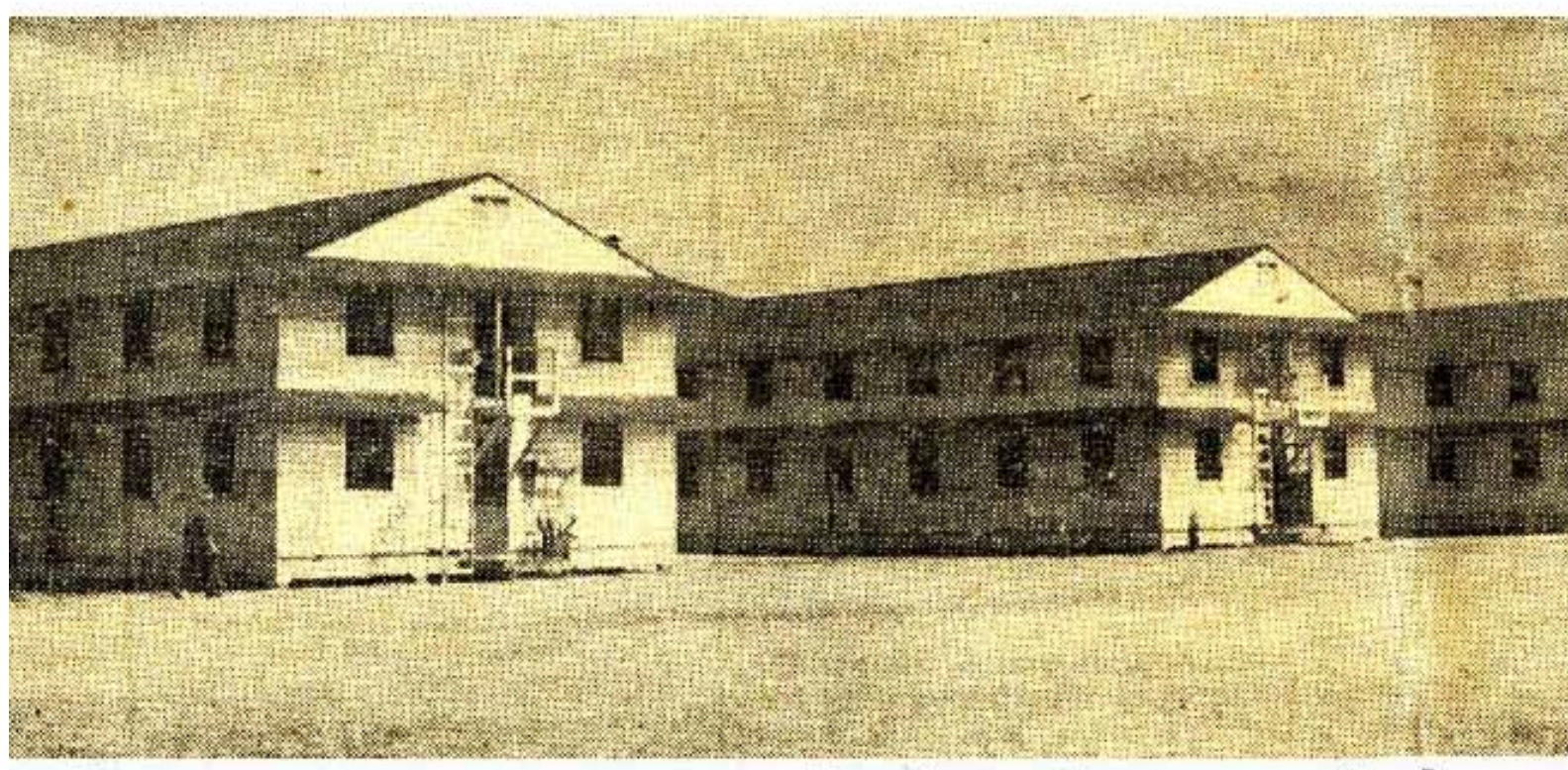
his fingerprints, as well as space for his photo. Then the prisoner was sent to a "master classifier," who carefully checked the form and quizzed the prisoner again.

The majority of the prisoners were young. Most of the boys whom we thought were kids of 14 or 15 said they were 18. Our officers told us, "That's what these kids always say. We think they're younger."

Their clothes were pretty bad. Most of them wore green German field jackets. Many wore old GI pants; some had GI boots. Their clothes, which had been deloused before they had entrained for Fort Dix, looked as if they had been slept in for weeks. But their spirits did not match their clothes. Not one of them appeared—to us, at least—disconsolate, depressed, or homesick. Among the new PWs the younger ones seemed more quick to laugh. The older ones looked more thoughtful.

The older PWs also were more talkative. Capt. Riewerts, at our request, spoke to one German who wore a pair of felt slippers in lieu of boots. He said that he was 51 and that he had been captured also in World War I by the British. He told the captain he had been pretty sick on the boat coming over, but that he was feeling fine now.

JACK SHAFER



These are some of the barrackforming one of the compounds. In all cases, existing facilities are used to house the prisoners of war.

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