
GERMAN POWS IN ALABAMA

In 1943, the campaign in North Africa ended, and the Allied forces were left with 275,000 German and Italian prisoners of war (POWs). The US military decided to build camps around the United States to house the POWs, and during 1942 to 1943 two camps were constructed in Alabama: Camp Aliceville and Camp Opelika. Later, Fort McClellan and Fort Rucker each established one camp. An estimated 16,000 German POWs were held across Alabama's 24 camps.

The prisoners held within Alabama's camps were treated extremely well. Their time was divided between working for local farms and businesses, for which they received some pay, and free time. Prisoners played soccer, created their own newspapers, assembled orchestras, and created camp colleges. In many instances the German POWs became friends with the Alabamians they worked alongside.

The German POWs returned to their home country at the end of the war in Europe. While adjusting to life in their war-torn home, some of the former POWs asked the Alabamians they knew for aid, which the Alabamians sent. Over the following decades a portion of the former POWs came back to Alabama, and reunions have been held to reconnect those involved with the camps. All of Alabama's POW camps were dismantled by 1947.

While the POW camps no longer exist, the Aliceville Museum and Cultural Center and the Museum of East Alabama contain exhibits dedicated to the history of the German POWs in Alabama.



(PICTURE CREDIT: ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY)